A Sikh-inspired vision for learning:

the discursive production of an ethos by members of the GNNET education trust

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MRes Dissertation

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June 2009

Abstract

This qualitative case study considers the formation of a vision for learning by members of a Sikh education trust called GNNET, established in the Midlands, UK, in 2001. Four participant interviews are analysed to build a picture of the meanings, values and life experiences which underpin their endeavours to articulate an ethos. These bring together a range of understandings, personal stances and communicative repertoires, generating common themes as well as highlighting distinct approaches and orientations.

Sikh identity pertains to a shared religion, ethnicity and culture, originating five centuries ago in the Punjab region of northern India. This tends to be researched as a subject of study rather than a basis for exploring approaches to learning itself. Associated with the Punjabi words *sikhna* ('to learn') and *sikhya* ('learning'), the tradition is rich in educational concepts, arising from its sacred text and resulting discourses and practices passed down through oral tradition. GNNET seeks to identify, apply and share these concepts, emphasising that education should help one to develop spiritually as well as prepare one for work and life in society. Thus, this study also hopes to prompt further research contributing Sikh perspectives to the field of children's 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development'.

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List of Appendices

Below is a list of Sikh terms which recur in the main text. (Other terms whose appearance is more localised are explained as they appear within the text).

gurbani	the teachings of Sikh sacred text, uttered or approved for inclusion by the Sikh Gurus
gurdwara	(also sometimes spelt *gurudwara*); the Sikh place of worship or 'abode of the Guru'.
Guru	a word used by Sikhs specifically, as a title with a capital 'G', to denote the 'ten Gurus', the historical personalities who founded their faith, and the volume of sacred text which embodies and preserves their teachings. Traditionally associated with enlightenment – one who dispels darkness ('*gu*') by bringing light ('*ru*) - 'Guru' is also used by Sikhs in praise of the Creator, *Vaheguru* or Wonderful Guru.
Guru Granth Sahib	the body of sacred text which Sikhs revered as a perpetual or 'Living' Guru; the title 'Guru' is followed by 'Granth' meaning volume of text, and 'Sahib' which denotes respect. (NB: academic scholarship is accustomed to using the term *Adi Granth*, a name given to the original compilation before it was extended and formally 'canonised' as Guru)
kirtan	the musical tradition of singing verses from *gurbani*
kirat	work or the earning of one's livelihood, done with sincerity, honesty and in remembrance of the divine presence; it is part of the central, threefold motto - 'pray, work and share' - which underpins Sikh life
seva	(also sometimes spelt *sewa*) the concept of serving others selflessly. Sikh tradition holds that this must go hand in hand with *simran*, or meditation

Abbreviations

GNNET	'Guru Nanak Nishkam Education Trust'
GNNSJ	GNNET's parent organisation,' Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha' (a *jatha* (organisation) inspired to do *seva* (serving others) in the spirit of *nishkamta* (selflessness) in the name of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak
GGS	'Guru Granth Sahib' (this abbreviation identifies extracts of verse quoted in the main text)
RE	'Religious Education' – a curriculum subject in the UK
SMSC	'Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development'

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

This study allows me to explore a number of issues of relevance to my doctoral research in the field of children's 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' or SMSC[i]. In particular, I seek to identify Sikh perspectives on SMSC, allowing me to build upon my existing knowledge as a practising Sikh of Punjabi descent, raised in the UK, with a broad exposure to diversity existing with the tradition, and a special interest in SMSC-related knowledge which may be accessed through both the sacred text and those, particularly practitioners of the faith, who engage reflectively with its teachings.

Ahluwalia *et al.* (2005) characterise the multidisciplinary field of Sikh Studies as polarised by traditionalist 'normative theology' and a highly 'secular', objective area studies approach. Where it crucially lags behind, they argue, 'is in admitting that the ontological ground of Sikh Studies, namely the kind of subjectivity that accrues to being 'Sikh', or more simply stated, what it means to be a Sikh, continues to be foreclosed.' Like Smith (1989) who, instead of looking at something called 'Buddhism', prefers to 'look at the world, so far as possible through Buddhist eyes', I am interested in exploring what it means to be a Sikh when one is purposefully engaged with the pedagogy of Sikh scriptural teaching, whilst embedded in a range of wider discourses about education acquired through social exposure as well as professional training. I am also conscious of the role of oral tradition in sharing, interpreting and seeking to apply knowledge from Sikh sacred text, a mode of learning which academic studies on Sikh tradition have yet to substantially capture.

There is some resonance here with Jackson's (1997, 2007) ethnographically-led 'interpretive' approach[ii], exemplified, for example, by Nesbitt (2000, 2004), who examines 'what it means' to be a Sikh with reference to a participant group defined by age (children and young people) and their inheritance of a common religious/cultural identity. This present study examines a participant group with an interested and informed (as opposed to casual and cursory) awareness of Sikh teachings in relation to the theme of education. All are members of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Education Trust (GNNET) and their shared focus is my point of reference for researching 'what it means' to be a Sikh and how this meaning might inform a vision for learning.

Likewise, GNNET is selected, not randomly to exemplify how Sikhs as a minority have mobilized themselves with regards to education in the UK. Primarily, it fulfils my research criteria by showing evidence of: a phase of active discursive production of a distinctive Sikh ethos where SMSC features strongly; reflexivity about the translation of this ethos into current and future practice; an aspiration to contribute towards shared perspectives on education in the wider social context; commitment to and investment in its vision.

GNNET is also known to me as a local Sikh organization; since moving to Birmingham in 2001, I have participated in some of the trust's activities (as a teacher of Sikh Studies to adults; as a Sikh representative for the revision of Birmingham's Locally Agreed Syllabus for RE; as a parent, making use of its playgroup services). This represents substantial exposure to its team of volunteers and culture of work. Over and above my linguistic and cultural affinity with Sikh tradition in general, my ethnographic knowledge of the research site has grown through participant observation. This insight also demands reflexivity from me as a researcher, a point further discussed in Chapter 3.

This case study can also be viewed as a form of academic intervention to support a community organization in its process of self-understanding, identity-building and self-projection. The research seeks to interpret everyday discourse in the context of widely circulated social discourses, and specialized, lesser known, discourses arising, in this case, from the teachings of Sikh sacred text. It also aims to highlight what can be gained through harnessing a minority's institutional capacity to stimulate inward and outward conversations and contribute to public discourses on education, drawing on Appiah's (2006) notion of 'conversation' as a metaphor for the meaningful engagement with the ideas and experiences of others. It sheds light on an endeavour to bring together dominant and marginal systems of learning, echoing the work of Cleary and Peacock (1998) in examining approaches to Native American education in the United States, integrating a marginalised learning tradition which is 'almost crumpled' with another which is 'barely dented'.

My hope is that such research may contribute useful knowledge to pedagogical and policy developments linked to SMSC and to increasingly important discourses about how education can support individual and collective wellbeing and facilitate meaningful co-existence in societies marked by diversity.

1.2 Key aims and research questions

The study aims to identify the meanings, values, motivations and life experiences which underpin and commit GNNET members to co-construct their vision for learning, as well as the distinct role of Sikh heritage as a cohesive source of inspiration and guidance. In so doing it highlights how the trust's institutional framework supports the confluence of knowledge, skills and aspirations from individuals who, albeit socialized and educated in different ways, are held together by shared experiences and values, as well as a common vision and purpose. It also sheds light on the distinctive perspectives of participants and how this links to the positioning of their roles in relation to GNNET's enterprise, underlining the agency of individuals in shaping and taking forward the roles which they acquire. The key research questions are as follows: 1) what common themes arise from the discourses of the four participants?', and 2) how to participants talk and what do their discourses reveal?

1.3 Dissertation overview

The next chapter presents the socio-cultural context for this research, including the evolution of Sikh tradition in the Punjab, Sikh migration to and settlement in the UK. It then offers a broadly historical overview of cultural frameworks for learning which are pertinent to this case study. Chapter 3 introduces the research site and participants; chapter 4 outlines the research design and methods. A detailed analysis of each interview comprises chapter 5, whilst chapter 6 correlates these findings to the overall research questions, highlighting the constraints on this study and offering recommendations for future research.

Notes

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[i] This is a term used in Ofsted's Framework for Inspection (Ofsted, 1994), prompted by the wording of 1992 Education Act (the requirement for schools to incorporate this aspect of learning was first articulated in the 1988 Education Reform Act, albeit with the slightly different terminology of 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development'). This applies to education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

[ii] This provides a theoretical basis for the work of the Warwick Religions and Educational Research Unit (WRERU), where research findings from qualitative ethnographic studies of religious communities (the perceptions and lives of children and young people in particular) are applied to relevant curriculum areas.

2. SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

2.1   Sikhs: religion, culture, ethnicity, migration

The Sikh tradition originated in 15th century Punjab, a region divided today by the India-Pakistan border (the 1947 partition triggered mass migration of Sikhs out of Pakistani Punjab to become Indian nationals). Ranked as the fifth largest world religion, it is not a proselytizing faith, hence its estimated 23 million 'followers' tend to be those who have inherited their tradition through birth, which maintains close ties with the Punjabi culture of its origin (Nesbitt, 2005). Sikh identity, therefore, pertains to a shared language, culture of origin and ethnicity as well as religion (Shackle *et al.*, 2001; Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2005).

This is reflected in a degree of official ambiguity of the status of Sikhs in the UK. Following a historic court case in 1983[1], Sikhs, like Jews, were defined as a race, allowing discrimination to be claimed in accordance with the Race Relations Act, 1976, whilst census data limited categorization according to ethnic or national identities. The 2001 National Census introduced categorization by religious identity, enabling a picture of the Sikh presence in the UK to be gleaned. It counted 336,000 Sikhs, amounting to about 0.6% of the total population, set against a figure of almost 8% consisting of 'minority ethnic communities'[2].

Grewal (1990) gives a detailed historical overview of the emergence and development of Sikh tradition in the Punjab[3]. With a long tradition of agriculture, it is site to one of the earliest human civilizations and is associated with the origins of the Vedas, or scriptures underpinning Hindu tradition. Over the centuries, the Punjab was ruled by a succession of external imperial powers, linked to Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian faith traditions (as well as experiencing, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a period of indigenous Sikh rule). Whilst the Punjabi language has long featured as a shared vernacular across religious divides in the region, the emergence of Sikh tradition stimulated its status as a scriptural and enduring literary language[4].

Early Sikh tradition was founded and shaped by ten successive Sikh Gurus, between 1469 and 1708, paralleling the rise and fall of the Mughal empire in India. Sikhs reserve the title 'Guru' for these founders as well as the volume of sacred text which is today revered as 'Living Guru'[5]. Central to its teaching is the opening statement *Ik Oankar*[6], proclaiming the oneness of the Creator and creation and calling upon humanity to recognize this unity, against a social backdrop of prejudice and intolerance between those of different faiths and social groupings[7]. A popular three-fold motto 'Meditate, work and share' (*naam japo, kirat karo, vand ke chhako*) is the basis of Sikh ethics, by which life is to be lived 'meditatively, industriously and generously' (Nesbitt 2005). Notions of spiritual development are thus grounded in daily life with commitments to work, family and wider society. Active engagement with other faiths is reflected in both the history of the Guruships and the inter-textual nature of *gurbani*[8] (the verses of Sikh scripture) where compositions of the Sikh Gurus incorporate, allude and respond to those of saintly figures from Hindu and Muslim traditions (Singh, P., 2003).

Nesbitt (2005) highlights key practices and institutions through which Sikhs are highly visible today. The *gurdwara* or place of worship, open to visitors of all backgrounds, includes the *langar* or Guru's kitchen where food is prepared and served to all to practice the principles of hospitality, egalitarianism and interdependence. The *Khalsa* is the order of (both male and female) initiated practitioners of the faith who, whilst a minority amongst those claiming Sikh identity, represent a measure for the ideal Sikh way of life as outlined in the Rehat Maryada or Sikh 'code of conduct', a document formalized by Sikh scholars in the early 20th century. Diversity amongst Sikhs may be on the grounds of interpretation and practice of the teachings[9], affiliation to groups (*jathas*) with distinct histories and cultures of practice, or social and cultural differences engendered by family lineage (*jaat*) linked to occupational background or region of origin. However, as a relatively young faith, there are no formal denominations as such that compare with those of Christianity or Islam.

Grewal (1990) outlines key phases in the history of the Sikh people, including: the early shaping of a community over the period of the ten Gurus, which saw a shift in Mughal policy towards Sikhs, from one of tolerance to that of open hostility; an intensification of persecution and Sikh resistance during the eighteenth century; political sovereignty in the early nineteenth century when Punjab came under the 'secular' (in the sense, non-theocratic and religiously plural) rule of its first and last Sikh and indigenous Punjabi ruler from 1801 – 1839; subsequent absorption of the Punjab into the British Empire until Indian Independence; intense upheaval during the 1947 partition, dividing Punjab between the new nations of India and Pakistan. The impact of British rule in India on the shaping of modern Sikh identity, and the dominant paradigms through which the tradition has been studied, has been much debated by contemporary scholars (Oberoi, 1994; Grewal, 1998; Mandair, 2001; Singh and Barrier (eds.), 2001; Nesbitt, 2005; Ballantyne, 2006).

Sikh migration to the Far East, East Africa, Europe and North America began in the late nineteenth century, at times resulting in permanent settlement overseas.   Building on early studies (e.g. Ballard, 1994), Singh and Tatla (2005) describe the experience of post-war migration and settlement in the UK of Sikhs from the Indian subcontinent, followed by 'twice migrant' Sikhs born and raised in East Africa. Others arrived due to the intensification of problems in the Indian State of Punjab during the 1980s which awakened Sikh religious and political consciousness globally (Tatla, 1999). Recent years have seen Sikh migration from Afghanistan where they have long existed as a religious minority.

The history of mobilisation by Sikhs in 'multicultural Britain' has tended to focus on matters concerning homeland politics and upholding religious identity, exemplified by the turban and kirpan cases, as discussed by Singh and Tatla (2005).   Such reporting tends to be conducted through the lens of minority studies; for example, a chapter 'Employment and Education' discusses statistics and social trends, but is silent on the central Sikh concepts of *kirat* ('work') and *sikhya* (learning). It is this conceptual understanding of religious traditions (an approach explored by Nesbitt, 2003), which this present study hopes to contribute towards.

2.2   Cultural Frameworks for Learning

A key context for this study is the co-existence of different cultural frameworks for learning and the interaction between them. I will refer to these frameworks very loosely as 'Sikh' and 'British', although in no way is it presumed, as will become apparent, that conceptual and institutional developments within each broad framework take place in isolation[10]. The idea of a 'Sikh' cultural framework for learning draws on concepts of learning from Sikh scripture, on teaching and learning practices from Sikh and the wider Indic culture of its origins. Whilst comparison could have been made with 'Christian' or 'English' concepts of learning, the term 'British' is used to denote the secular, multifaith and historically Christian nature of the wider educational culture which surrounds this study, as well as to evoke wider historical conditions such as colonialism and its enduring educational legacy in the international context.

Since both frameworks share links, conceptually and historically, I start by introducing Sikh concepts of learning before outlining early institutional frameworks for the transmission of Sikh heritage in India. I then consider the impact of British colonial history on such frameworks, before examining subsequent educational developments which were set in motion closer to home, in England and Wales. A discussion of discourses and frameworks for the fostering of SMSC and provision of religious education (RE) in recent decades will be followed by an overview of efforts of Sikhs to transmit their religious and spiritual heritage since migration to the UK.

2.2.1   *An introduction to Sikh concepts of learning*

The word 'Sikh' is associated with the words *sikhna* (Punjabi, 'to learn') and *sikhya* (Punjabi, 'that which is learnt'). Etymologically, it is derived from the Sanskrit *shishya*, one who learns through discipleship under a 'guru' or 'enlightener'[11]. This tradition of learning in India gives primacy to the role of a mentor or model who embodies the knowledge or attributes sought. Learning is engendered not simply through practical and intellectual exercise, but through the quality of the teacher-learner relationship and the values and dispositions embedded in it.

Sikhs reserve the title 'Guru' for the ten historic founders of the faith and, uniquely, for the volume of sacred text which they revere not only for its capacity to impart knowledge, but to inspire, move, guide, transform and 'bless' the listener as its lyrical verses or teachings (*gurbani*) are recalled, recited or sung[12]. The notion of learning through models and mentors is extended through association with *sadh sangat*[13], the company (*sangat*) of those who have 'mastered the self' (*sadhus*) and the community of disciples on the Guru's path. Sikhs may thus refer to their religious tradition as *Gurmat* (the Guru's wise teaching) or *Sikhi* (the path of learning). The traditions, institutions and practices resulting from the historical development of Sikh tradition can be seen as a 'school' with a distinct purpose for learning, linked to the purpose of human life, as well as a distinct culture.

Human life is seen as an opportunity to recognize one's ultimate identity or essence as an embodiment of the divine ('*man tu jot saroop hai, aapna mool pachaan*'; 'Oh my mind, you are an embodiment of the divine light; recognize your true essence'- Guru Granth Sahib[14] p. 441). The obstacle to this recognition is *haumai*, the selfish ego. Whilst part of our chemistry and necessary for survival, it may prevent us from acknowledging our relatedness to 'Creator' and 'creation' which are seen to be inextricably linked[15]. We must therefore learn to manage *haumai* and develop spiritual attributes such as '*daya, sat, santokh*' ('compassion, purity and contentment'), awakening our potential to live as 'one who becomes the very image of God' ('*so moorat bhagvaan*'- GGS p. 1427). What we learn about and pursue in the world around us, during the formative years of childhood and later, can serve to either enrich this identity or make us forgetful of it.

The motto attributed to Guru Nanak, '*naam japo, kirat karo, vand ke chhako*' (see p. 6) suggests that education should foster three things: spiritual development, an ability to work and be self-sufficient, and an impulse to contribute to society. Key imagery from *gurbani* (such as the lotus flower, with its roots in the muddy waters and petals blossoming above) and emblems of Sikh identity (such as the *khanda* with its two swords representing worldly, (*miri*) and spiritual (*piri*) strength) serve as reminders that spiritual development must connect with and guide our wider development in the world - and that the two can be mutually enhancing.

The word *kamai* ('earnings') associated with working life is also used by Sikhs in a sublimated sense, as the fruit of one's spiritual as well as material labour. It highlights the importance given to marrying theory with practice; as in Kolb's learning cycle, conceptual understanding is part of a wider developmental process involving practical experience, reflectivity and ongoing experimentation in the light of new understanding.[16] The notion of sharing (*vand ke chhako* above) extends to the sharing of wisdom as well as material wealth, exemplified by the communicative skills and cultural insights of the Gurus, whose teachings are expressed in a range of linguistic, poetic and musical styles and conveyed through everyday imagery drawn from the lives of people from diverse backgrounds.

Gurbani explores themes of children's education and scholarliness, critiquing their potential for narrowing horizons and fuelling the ego, and calling instead for inspired spiritual learning. Bhagat Kabir depicts the 'child-saint' Prahlad[17] exclaiming to his teacher: '*mo kau kaha parhaavas aal jaal, meri patiaa likh dehu sri gopal*' – 'why are you teaching me this and that, going no further than the entanglements of the world? Please, write the name of the Lord on my writing tablet' (GGS p. 1194). Guru Nanak's 'Poem of the Alphabet' (*Pattee Likhee*, GGS p. 432), associates letters he would have learnt at school to spiritual concepts instead of everyday objects. In *Asa Ki Vaar*, he paints a picture of the hollow nature of learning, when driven by the ego and bereft of spiritual understanding: '*parhee-ai jeti aarja, parhee-ai jete saas, Nanak lekhai ik gal, hor haumai jhakhna jhaak*' – '…you may read multitudes of books all your life, with each and every breath; says Nanak, only one thing is of any account, all else is the babble of the ego' (GGS p. 467).

This critique includes religious scholarship and the superficial study and recitation of prayers: '*Pandit parheh, saad na paaveh*'; 'the religious scholars read, without tasting the essence.' (GGS p. 116), and proclaims that 'both the educated and uneducated may achieve the state of liberation' – '*parhiaa, an-parhiaa param gat paavai*' (GGS p. 197). Ultimately, education is valued in so far as it may help one develop spiritually; like scholarliness, it is susceptible to become, as with all ritual, an end in itself, or an instrument of power for its own sake.

2.2.2   *Early Sikh institutional frameworks for learning*

Whilst further research is required to ascertain how the evolving Sikh heritage was transmitted during the time of the Gurus, popular paintings and accounts of their lives (*janam sakhis*) offer pictures of various learning environments, such as Guru Nanak's interactions with his village teacher highlighted above. Following the second Guru's drive to teach literacy to ordinary people (in the Gurmukhi script he had systematized to record Sikh teachings) the third Guru set up educational centres with specially appointed teachers, including women. From the third Guruship, all Gurus were related by family ties, and are depicted as young children, learning in the laps of their parents or grandparents, and receiving training by revered Sikhs closely associated with the Gurus[18]. Some acquired the Guruship as youngsters, whilst the eighth Guru was a child aged five years old, contributing to a tradition where the wisdom of the young has been respected alongside that of the old.

From the fact that *gurbani* was composed in a vernacular 'mother tongue' rather than the language of an elite class, we can presume that the teachings were readily transmitted through home education, with some degree of formal support, and that, with time, local Sikh village teachers emerged to join those of Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, and Gurmukhi joined Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic as a both subject and medium of study.

Over the century that followed the end of the ten Guruships in 1708, Khalsa members were outlawed by the state, living as a resistance force whose 'homes were their saddles' (Cole and Sambhi, 1995). Formal transmission of elements of Sikh heritage remained amongst those groups, such as the *Nirmalas* who, not wholly subscribing to the Khalsa identity and trained in Hindu as well as Sikh scholarship, remained free from persecution. Their influence on Sikh institutions continued, once relative peace was established for forty years under the indigenous rule of a Sikh Maharaja.

His is viewed as a 'paternal' rule (Grewal, 1990), instinctively in tune with the shared Punjabi identity of his multi-religious kingdom. The fluid nature of Sikh identity during this era was later contested by Sikh reformists under a new, highly administrative British empire, prompting a more exacting codification of beliefs and demarcation of identity which has become a subject of scholarly debate (Oberoi, 1994; Grewal, 1998; Mandair, 2001). Shortly after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the British annexed the Punjab, introducing a new culture and language, grounded in the scientific and the theological world-view of Europe and Christian Britain. It was the British who identified Sikh tradition as a 'world faith' and created the first Punjabi dictionary (for the purposes of missionary translation). British scholars who studied the Sikhs, intrigued initially by their once resilient kingdom, were later followed by Sikh scholars who had received a colonial, English-medium education.

2.2.3   *The impact of British colonial rule*

Literature examining the history of education in India before, during and after British rule, originates largely from accounts and surveys recorded by Europeans. Extensive documentary material is brought together by Nurullah and Naik (1951) who argue that opportunities were missed to incorporate India's pre-existing and rich educational heritage into new systems of colonial education, as attempts to imaginatively *'create'* new and more appropriate forms of education were overtaken by an acceptance to *'imitate'* a system generated in an altogether different socio-cultural context. Allendar (2004, 2006), for example, traces the political dynamics and bureaucratic constraints which stunted the development of an inspired, state-run model for education in North India (including the Punjab region) through integrating an existing and extensive indigenous framework for elementary village schooling.

Dharampal (1983) reinforces a sense of loss in viewing India's post-colonial educational landscape, including extracts from G. W. Leitner's 1882 survey of indigenous education in the Punjab (see appendix 1), whose extensive work on Islamic and South Asian cultures regularly critiqued contemporary, colonial representations of them (pre-empting the work of Said, 1979). Leitner depicts widespread respect and community support for learning in the Punjab, with every place of worship having a school attached as well as 'secular schools' attended by pupils of all three main faiths. He is bold in stating that through British rule, opportunities for the 'healthy revival and development' of this pre-existing system of education were 'either neglected or perverted,' and that 'our system stands convicted of worse than official failure.'

Nurullah and Naik (1951), close their study with a retrospective on the educational impact of the British administration, acknowledging that its contributions included the introduction of: English language and literature as well as scientific, social and political thought of the West; a tradition of critical analysis of cultural heritage as opposed to its 'uncritical preservation'; the compilation of grammars and dictionaries of Indian languages; the rediscovery of Indian arts and their preservation; the awakening and extension of humanitarian work; an acquaintance with Europe's modern democratic institutions, systems of law and medicine, as well as the 'auxiliary tools of popular education' such as the press, cinema, radio, library and museum.

Langohr (2005) considers the impact of colonialism on religious education in India. In the pre-British context, 'even in inter-confessional forms of learning… religious stories and texts permeated the curriculum,' with standards usually set by a teacher's own knowledge, acquired through one's lineage or discipleship. Systematic standardization by the British resulted in the 'extraction of religious material from every subject other than "religion"' [19]. Religion became marginalized by its optional status in an otherwise full curriculum and, as a stand-alone 'subject', it focussed on the observance of ritual (which suggests the role of Indian classical texts in developing literacy, metaphorical and conceptual thinking was diminished). Traditional teachers either resisted new teacher training, or yielded to one outside their area of expertise.

The enforcement of Urdu language and script as the standard medium of instruction – especially in the Punjab with its mosaic of linguistic, cultural and religious traditions - no doubt contributed to the destabilizing effect. Leitner (1882) notes that 'formerly the mother could teach the child Punjabi. Now, wherever the child learns Urdu, the teaching power of the mother is lost'. The result of the 1947 Partition in 1947 was a Punjab divided in two, resulting in Punjabi becoming, eventually, a state language in Indian Punjab[20]. Building on Sikh reform movements earlier in the century, Sikh educational institutions were established or strengthened, creating some scope for formal study and transmission of the tradition, although this has been constrained by subsequent political, economic, environmental problems and tensions affecting the Punjab.

2.2.4   *Historical foundations of schooling in England*

Allender notes (2004) that experiments to support mass education in the Punjab pre-dated Forster's Education Act of 1870 (which established a framework for schooling all children between 5 and 13 years of age in England and Wales). Despite extensive missionary activity in India, overt proselytizing through state education was avoided by the administration, whilst, in England, mass education had been made possible through the established church, through extensive voluntary charity schools. By the late nineteenth century, official indifference or hostility to the notion of mass education (be it to maintain the class-based status quo, or to retain child labour for economic survival) gave way to a new interest in its potential to educate a workforce to build national prosperity in a competitive, industrial age. In contrast to India, educational provision in England was thus progressively built on an existing framework of voluntary, church-led schooling (with non-denominational schools being added to this pool).

2.2.5   *Ideologies of education in England, with reference to RE and SMSC*

In his pioneering work aligning religious education to concepts of human development,

Grimmitt (1987) considers key ideologies influencing education in England, from Classical subject-centred to Romantic child-centred approaches, amongst a spectrum of theories which move from viewing education as a means to impart externally formulated knowledge to a one whose prime role is to stimulate individual learning from within. This leads Grimmitt to propose that religious education may encourage pupils to both to 'learn about' religious traditions (acquiring, processing and evaluating objective information) as well as to 'learn from' them (stimulating personal knowledge and development, self-awareness and self-evaluation).

This distinction has been integral to the substantial development of academic discourse since the 1960s about the identity of RE as a subject, as reviewed by Jackson and O'Grady (2007), Jackson (2004) and Teece (2008); it also underpins the current non-statutory framework for RE, offering guidance to the formulation of locally agreed syllabi for the subject. The absence, to date, of a national curriculum for RE, has given scope for conceptualizing the subject in a range of ways for a range of purposes[21]. Moran (1989), offers a North American perspective on debates about distinguishing RE as a distinctive subject from the other humanities[22]. Eaude (2006), Best (2000) and Erricker, Ota and Erricker (2001) bring together a diversity of perspectives on the incorporation of SMSC within and beyond the subject of RE.

Despite a richness of methodological paradigms which have been developed around RE and SMSC, Sikhism resources remain underdeveloped in reflecting these, partly because RE in schools has been little affected by developments in academic discourse, or because an articulation of Sikh perspectives on key themes such as human development has been lacking[23].

2.2.6   *Transmitting Sikh heritage: from postwar Britain to the present day*

The Indian Workers Association (IWA) was the first organization representing South Asian migrants to the UK, who were mainly Punjabi and mostly Sikh, with strong Communist leanings. With an emphatically secular philosophy (to which Sikh values of egalitarianism and

the welfare of all were, nevertheless, suited) it mobilized on issues of immigration, racism and workers' rights. Industrial recession saw its demise, as members changed their lines of work, settled and established families, contrary to their original intentions of returning to India. Subsequently, family and community structures eventually came into place, creating a both a need and a base for educational endeavours to transmit Sikh heritage. In contrast, the later wave of Sikh migrants to the UK from East Africa, brought with them prior experience of establishing such frameworks, as a minority settled outside of India for at least two generations.

The 1980s saw a 'cultural turn', where cultural identity, rather than economics and class, became the locus for political struggle and the understanding of social relations (Jameson, 1998). 'Multicultural education' was supported in the early eighties by government policy and the powers given to local authorities (Mirza, 2007). Two key, Sikh-driven organizations who picked up the IWA's work on the language debate, were the *National Council of Panjabi Teaching* and the *Panjabi Language Development Board*. They arranged teacher training, produced newsletters and language publications and organised conferences, inviting the participation of university academics and education officers from the mainstream sector (Sacha, 2004, and Kalra, 2004), an effort to develop knowledge and pedagogy across a range of educational sectors which has not since been repeated.

The large scale standardization introduced by the National Curriculum in 1988 halted developments in mainstream multicultural education, supporting a rationale for minority organizations to provide specialized linguistic, cultural and religious education. A growing network of Sikh gurdwaras provided ready environments to offer such provision, though they encountered many of the problems characterstic of minority supplementary institutions such as inadequately trained staff, poor facilities and resources and approaches which were poor in motivating learners. Sikh supplementary schools in the present day may tell a somewhat different story to that of earlier decades, since teachers now tend to include second-generation Sikhs, engaging with youngsters in an age where resources can be accessed through a range of media. It is also the age of a more established Sikh community in the UK, no longer

preoccupied with the immediate concerns of settling in a new country.

Challenges, however, still remain. Research on Punjabi supplementary schools (Sagoo, 2004), suggest that younger Sikh parents and teachers feel their generation lacked opportunities and means for quality education in their language, culture and faith, as well as conditions which inspired them to learn. Limits in their own knowledge are exacerbated by a lack of individuals, teams, networks or institutions who are able to develop pedagogies and approaches to transmit the tradition. Moreover, the demands of daily life test one's ability to harness the time, energy and sheer dedication needed to sustain and grow supplementary school initiatives. Sikhs are also a minority, both in India and the UK, and their faith is a young one, just over five hundred years old. From one century to another, they have experienced significant socio-political upheaval and change, thus the development of their centres of learning do not compare to those of other faith traditions with longer histories and in positions of relative power in the socio-cultural contexts in which they have found themselves.

Since GNNET draws in part on the experiences of twentieth century Sikh settlers in British East Africa who later joined post-war migrants to the UK (see Appendix 2), this study would have benefited from some discussion of this element in Sikh educational history. For example, as a starting point to consider 'intercultural' approaches to education, Gundara (2000) offers a personal narrative of displacement in recalling his childhood and youth, moving between rural and urban environments and straddling a series of diverse socio-cultural worlds. In the racially segregated context of schooling in British East Africa, he is disillusioned by the dominance of a highly 'Anglicised' culture of learning as well as a lack of vision amongst many Asians. GNNET offers some possible responses to his call for education to build a shared values system whilst better integrating knowledge from world traditions, as well as to his critique of religious or other groups whose agendas for 'separate schools' are based on little more than the 'politics of recognition'. It is hoped that future research might more closely examine GNNET's ethos and its aspirations to contribute towards intercultural, interfaith and value-centred education. In the meantime, it is the meanings, values, beliefs and life experiences underpinning the

formation of its ethos which the present study hopes to reveal.

Notes

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[1] This was a result of the Mandla v Dowell Lee 'turban case', where the refusal of a head teacher to allow the admission of Sikh, turban-wearing pupil to a Birmingham school was contested. After an unsuccessful Court of Appeal, the case was eventually judged as one of discrimination under the Race Relations Act, 1976, following a decision to class Sikhs as a racial group on the basis of their 'ethnic origins', defined by shared customs, beliefs, traditions and a common past although biologically they may not be distinguishable from other Punjabis.

[2] Some of the demographics arising from these census figures are discussed by Singh and Tatla (2006).

[3] The name Punjab is traditionally understood to signify the five (*panj*) rivers (*ab* meaning water), tributaries of the river Indus as it flows from the Himalayas to the Arabian Sea.

[4] Punjabi emerged from classical Sanskrit (a 'parent' language in the Indo-European family of languages) as a vernacular of Northern India, later influenced by Perso-Arabic culture as a result of Mughal rule. The Gurmukhi script which records Sikh teachings is synonymous with the modern Punjabi script used by Sikhs in the Indian state Punjab, whilst Punjabi is also written in Shah-mukhi script in Muslim Punjab, and may appear in Devanagri script associated with Hindu tradition.

[5] For devout Sikhs the entire scripture is a body of 'revealed' teachings or *dhur ki bani,* 'divinely-inspired from the heavens'. The challenges of translating this lyrical sacred text are discussed extensively by Singh (Singh, N.K., 1993; 1995) and by Shackle and Mandair (2005).

[6] *Ik Oankar* – the graphic symbol representing this concept is one of the two main emblems of the Sikh faith. Echoing the Hindu symbol 'Aum', it is preceded by the numeral '1'. This emphatically refocuses on the 'oneness' which, whilst underpinning Hindu tradition, had become obscured through its array of deities, schools of thought and social divisions. Whilst it also reflects the monotheistic thought of Islam and Christianity, the conventional description of Sikhism as monotheistic faith in the same vein as the Abrahamic faiths is problematic (Mandair, 2001).

[7] The Sikh Gurus are associated with a wider devotional tradition known as *bhakti* (Nesbitt, 2005), including saintly figures such as Ravidas, from Hindu tradition, the Muslim, Sheikh Farid, and also Kabir, who resisted religious classification, who spoke out against religious hypocrisy, social prejudices and divisions. These figures are known in Sikh tradition as *bhagats* and their verse is included and referred in the Guru Granth Sahib.

[8] The term *gurbani* refers to the actual verse or contents of the scripture, and the title *Guru Granth Sahib* is given to the single-volume compilation which is revered as a living 'sovereign' of the faith (hence, in the gurdwara, it is enthroned under a canopy and 'holds court' in the *darbar* or worship hall).

[9] The official Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct) defines a Sikh as one who believes in the Oneness of God, the ten Gurus, the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib and the tradition of Khalsa initiation. A well-known definition from gurbani which predates this code is that a Sikh is one who 'arises in the early hours and meditates on the Divine Name' (G.G.S. p. 305). A number of groups take their inspiration from Sikh scripture without acknowledging the requirement of initiation, and their labelling as 'Sikh' is thus brought into question. Hence there are those who readily subscribe to the core tradition, and others who adopt elements of it (see Nesbitt, 2000, 2004). The understanding of Sikhs both as an 'ethnic group' and one of 'religious adherents' prompts continued debate over the question 'Who is a Sikh?'

[10] This is articulated in Bhabha's (1993) particular use of the term 'hybridity', which acknowledges points of interdependence between cultural systems which influence each other as they evolve (rather than, in more simplistic terms, signifying a new 'hybrid' cultural system born of distinct 'parent' systems).

[11] In oral tradition the word 'guru' signifies one who dispels darkness ('*gu*') by bringing light ('*ru*')

[12] Expressed in a conversational style, in a vernacular 'mother-tongue', the verses of gurbani tend to exude a familiar intimacy rather than a lofty 'otherness' for those acquainted with them, whilst also engaging with philosophical discourses of their time and displaying literary sophistication.

[13] Whilst in mundane usage and text-book definitions, *sangat* denotes, in rather static terms, a 'gurdwara congregation', conceptually, its significance is more dynamic, as an interpersonal foundation for learning – through association,

dialogue and interaction with mentors and other learners.

[14] The Guru Granth Sahib is commonly referenced by scholars as the Adi Granth. This was the title given to the original compilation by the fifth Guru in 1604; an extended version was ordained as 'Guru' in 1708.

[15] Hence the twin practices of *simran* (meditative remembrance of the Creator) and *seva* (selfless service to creation).

[16] This is reflected in Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, now central to contemporary learning theory, which suggests that complete learning happens through a cyclic process, where 'concrete experience' leads to 'reflective observation' which, in turn, develops 'conceptual understanding and prompts 'ongoing experimentation' based on previous learning. This idea is reflected in gurbani's emphasis on learning as a continuous process, which is suggested both grammatically and through its imagery of people engaged in a process of work which cumulatively leads to transformation, be it the farmer cultivating his field or the patient goldsmith in his workshop. Whilst the sacred text offers concepts for learning and development, with a lyrical style which motivates change, one develops through ongoing practice where thoughts, attitudes and actions are honed through internal reflection and making sense of external sources of wisdom.

[17] Bhagat Kabir (see note 7 above regarding *bhakti* and *bhagats*) alludes to accounts about the young saintly child Prahlad who features in India's ancient religious literature (and is acknowledged as a *bhagat* by Sikhs).

[18] These revered educators include the scholar, Bhai Gurdas, who scribed the first compilation of scripture, and the wise elder, Baba Budda, who lived through six Guruships, both respectfully addressed with the term 'Ji'.

[19] There is a connection here with the experience of Religious Education in England and Wales as discussed in 2.2.5. The 1870 Education Act sought to provide both for education which took place in both church and state-funded schools, which, as well as prompting debates about denominational teaching, also enforced a view that 'religion' be seen as a separate area of the curriculum, from which, eventually (according to the 1944 Education Act) anyone could withdraw.

[20] The fate of Punjabi in Pakistan is discussed extensively by Rahman, 2001.

[21] For example, Birmingham's recently revised Agreed Syllabus for RE (Birmingham City Council, 2008), builds on earlier approaches promoted by the Birmingham team of RE scholars led by Hull and Grimmitt (Grimmitt, 1987; Bates, Durka & Schweitzer, 2006), reinforcing concern that education is obliged to foster SMSC and that the overarching aim of education as stated in law in the 'development of pupils' and the 'development of society'. A view that a focus on syllabus content diverts from creative approaches to pedagogy is addressed in the Agreed Syllabus for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton (Hampshire/Portsmouth/Southampton City Council, 2004). Dispensing with the targets of learning 'from' and 'about' religion, it sets one for 'interpreting religion in relation to human experience' (Teece, 2006).

[22] This idea links to the conceptualisation of RE in a new British India – see 2.2.3 above.

[23] My recent involvement in a review of RE resource material (Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, forthcoming) highlights how seemingly effective Sikhism material may fall short of the 'shared values and community cohesion' agenda, an issue the project seeks to address through an analysis of current resources.

3.   RESEARCH SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

3.1   The research site

This study takes place in Birmingham, West Midlands. Popularly known as the UK's 'second city', it is the next most populated after London. A key centre during England's Industrial Revolution, it is today home to the largest city council in the UK and Europe. Almost a third of the population is from a non-white background (compared with almost one tenth nationally), its percentage of under 35 year-olds greater than the national average and growing (Simpson, 2007). In round figure terms, Christians (60%), Muslims (14%) and Sikhs (3%) are the prominent religious groups[1].

The inner city suburb of Handsworth is a short drive from the city centre, with a concentration of two main minority groups: Afro-Caribbean (who first settled as a result of wartime and postwar recruitment) and Sikh/Punjabi (arriving initially to work in local foundries).   These are joined by a sizable Muslim (Pakistani/ Mirpuri/ Bangladeshi) presence. The area shows signs of both social deprivation and local regeneration[2].

Launched in 2001, GNNET stands for the Guru Nanak Nishkam Education Trust, a name which links it to its parent organization, GNNSJ or Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha - a group (*jatha*) dedicated to 'selfless service' (*nishkam seva*) in the name of Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak.   Appendix 2 outlines the origins of GNNSJ. Founded in rural Kenya by Sant Puran Singh, an acknowledged 'saint'[3] of the Sikh world, its work has continued under the direction of two successive successors addressed as 'Bhai Sahib' meaning 'brotherly leader'[4]. The organization does not claim to represent what is a very diverse Sikh 'community'; rather, it projects itself as a voice and developmental resource within it, promoting Sikh spiritual heritage, civic engagement and active volunteering (drawing on both the legacy of the Sikh Gurus, with awareness of models closer to home, such as Birmingham's 'Civic Gospel'[5])

GNNSJ operates today from a landmark gurdwara complex on Handsworth's Soho Road, a busy shopping area. It neighbours a renowned city grammar school and two churches, and is a stone's throw from the historic Soho House, associated with pioneering developments during the industrial age[6]. Built in the late seventies on the site of a Polish ex-servicemen's club, the gurdwara is a large, three-storied building, clad in white and brown granite, topped with a distinctive dome and parapets. Its fortress-like appearance is softened by the curved designs of its steel gates, baskets of hanging flowers and fountain-like water feature at its entrance. On one side is a builders merchants established by GNNSJ in the 1980s (as a self-help cooperative to generate employment during the recession); on the other is the large, circular, glass-walled structure of the newly built Nishkam Centre. With their award-winning design and construction[7], the buildings attract diverse visitors, from daily school groups, to individuals and organizations using the Nishkam Centre learning and conference facilities. Across the road two buildings (one of them listed) are being repaired and refurbished to establish a nursery and educational centre.

Although partially funded through regional and European regeneration budgets, the resourcing for these projects rests largely on donations from the congregation and a long-standing culture of volunteering, be this outside of working hours, in the form of student work experience, or 'sabbaticals' taken by professionals from their respective industries[8], whilst a child-friendly social environment encourages the participation of parents with young children.

These institutional developments are part of a vision (see Appendices 3 and 4) to establish five 'Centres For Excellence' ('for' indicating 'working towards'), promoting education, employment, civic engagement, well-being and social care, supporting by the 'spiritual hub' of the complex. GNNET builds on GNNSJ's longstanding, volunteer-led, educational work which includes the running of a supplementary school, summer schemes, workshops, overseas study tours, as well as daily gurdwara tours[9] for school and other groups. The recent nursery project is joined by other initiatives calling for greater exchange and interaction with the wider world, prompting GNNET to more formally identify and articulate its ethos.

3.2   Participants

The four participants selected for this study are all initiated, practicing Sikhs who are part of GNNET's network of volunteers. They were selected partly due to their involvement in the development of full-time, rather than supplementary school, provision, with its present focus on early years. They also offer some diversity in terms of age, gender and background, including two men (one seventy years of age; the second just over fifty) and two women (one in her late twenties; the other in her mid-seventies). The two elders were born, raised and educated in British East Africa, whilst the others were educated, at least from secondary level, in the UK, and have direct family ties with India. All were thus fluent in English, the language in which the interviews were conducted, allowing for bilingual elements.

A former Civil and Structural Engineer, Bhai Sahib is the present chairman and spiritual successor (see appendix 2) of GNNSJ who, in a full-time, voluntary capacity, directs and oversees its various local, national and international initiatives, of which GNNET is one. Following a career as a director in further education, R. Singh now volunteers in heading the day-to-day running and development of GNNET projects and the fulfillment of its strategic vision. A mother-of-two who is training as an early years professional, B. Kaur is involved in piloting and developing Sikh-inspired early years provision. Respected as a 'wise elder', the now retired K. Kaur brings experience from her varied former teaching career in East Africa and knowledge of Sikh tradition transmitted through key figures from her life.

Detailed profiles of each participant appear in Appendix 5, summarizing their life history, professional expertise, evolving relationship with Sikh identity and heritage, and the nature of their involvement with GNNET. The profiles also indicate how they are positioned differently in the overall work of GNNET, within a volunteer culture which encourages humility, flexibility and being task-focused whilst able to support and work with others who are also volunteering their time.

Notes

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[1] 2001 Census, Key Statistics for Local Authorities: *www.birmingham.gov.uk/Media?MEDIA_ID=144670*

[2] It has been the site, together with nearby Lozells, of major riots (in the early eighties and more recently, 2005). See, for example, 'A Different Reality: minority struggle in British Cities', Centre for Research for Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, at: *www.warwick.ac.uk/CRER/differentreality*

[3] Sikhs often translate into English the Punjabi word *sant* as 'saint', to denote a saintly person acknowledged as someone of spiritual elevation. In Christian tradition, of course, the status of 'saint' is given posthumously.

[4] Bhai Sahib: 'Bhai' means 'brother' and 'Sahib' denotes a leader who is greatly respected. The title 'Bhai' denotes respected Sikhs during the time of the Gurus, e.g. Bhai Mardana, who gave musical accompaniment to the teachings sung by Guru Nanak; the scholars, Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Mani Singh who scribed the first volumes of the Guru Granth Sahib; the first five members of the Khalsa order created by the tenth Guru, starting with Bhai Daya Singh. Bhai Sahib is also a title formally given to the present chairman of GNNSJ by the President and members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), an apex organisation of the Sikhs which came about as a consequence of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925.

[5] The term 'Civic Gospel' denotes new approaches to city regeneration in late nineteenth century Birmingham, promoting social well-being supported by spiritual growth, in which non-Conformist groups such as the Quakers played an instrumental role. See: *www.connectinghistories.org.uk/birminghamstories/guides/downloads/bs_rg_civic_gospels.pdf.*

[6] Home to the renowned industrialist, entrepreneur and philanthropist, Matthew Boulton, Soho House was a meeting place of the Lunar Society - informal gatherings of influential scientists, engineers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century, who inspired pioneering social and industrial developments.

[7] The design of the landmark dome of the gurdwara has been given a special commendation, as an award winner for excellence, by the Birmingham Design Initiative; the Nishkam Centre project has received a Modern Methods of Construction Award from the West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence.

[8] The scale of this community-led regeneration is made possible, in the words of one of the participants, R. singh, through '*the generosity rather than wealth*', of what began as a largely '*working-class*' volunteer base, joined now by a new generation including a range of professionals who contribute their time and expertise as well as income. Volunteers often remark that their efforts are fuelled by the 'spiritual engine' of continuous *simran* and *sewa* at the Gurdwara - as well as the physical nourishment of the *langar,* the communal kitchen which serves an estimated 20,000 meals per week.

[9] Recently, GNNSJ has both supported and participated in a new Faith Guiding course, training tour guides in places of worship - an initiative pioneered by Birmingham's Faith Encounter Programme which is accredited by the Institute of Tour Guiding.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

4.1 Research Design

This study is interested in how an organizational ethos is co-constructed by individuals who are key players within it, how their life experiences, the meanings drawn from them, values and aspirations are held together by common understandings and a shared vision, and why they commit themselves to this collective enterprise. A case study framework is ideal for addressing such questions of an exploratory and explanatory nature (Yin, 1994), which, in turn, shed light on under-researched areas of Sikh Studies, e.g. how the spiritual heritage is absorbed, conceived, expressed and applied in the minds of those aligned to it.

An inspiration for the design is Tony Beecher's [1] fable of the butterflies and caterpillars in the 'secret garden of the curriculum'. This small-scale, qualitative case study allows me to examine the correlation between the 'butterfly' and 'caterpillar' perspectives of the participants in relation to their involvement in GNNET, illuminating the ways in which the interactions of individuals draw upon and develop the theories and on-the-ground concerns which connect them and help to shape the organization's interface with the wider world. Focusing on four, semi-structured interviews, the design gives scope to participants to express themselves and develop their ideas, revealing both common themes and their distinct stances which provide rich data for responding to the research questions.

The selected case study examines a highly distinct, Sikh organization, readily identifiable through details of its history, culture and developments. This makes it difficult to preserve complete anonymity through the presentation of key details of the research, and it was agreed with GNNSJ that titles of publicly recognized organizations and lead figures would be used. All participants, except the chairman, are identified by initial only and the Sikh names 'Singh', pertaining to men, and 'Kaur' pertaining to women[2]. Confidentiality, where requested, of any information shared was assured.

4.2   Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection method for this study was to conduct, audio-record and transcribe four semi-structured interviews. Secondary data collection supported my ethnographic insight into the people and culture of the research site and GNNET's work to date. This included the gathering of existing documentary evidence from 'grey literature' produced by GNNET, in the form of brochures, presentation materials and any other relevant paperwork; taking notes from informal conversations with GNNET members and attendance of GNNET meetings; gathering and reviewing 'headnotes'[3] based on ongoing participant observation.

Freebody (2003) highlights the ways in which semi-structured interviewing supports research of an explorative and highly qualitative nature, as well as demanding reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Its open framework allowed me to mark out the ground to be covered in the interview (see Appendix 6), whilst anticipating that the emerging data would reveal themes and issues which could not be predetermined. Importantly, it gave participants scope to 'think aloud' and talk about their present roles and aspirations in the light of broader life experiences in ways they may have not previously done, and offered a more inclusive approach to generating data from a diverse group of interviewees, in terms of the thematic content of their responses, their communicative repertoires and relationship with me as researcher. The conversational style allowed me to build a rapport with them, posing questions in ways I felt were effective for eliciting data and conducive to our social interaction. Newly emerging data could be further probed in ways I felt were useful at the time.

In hindsight, as interviewer, I could have benefited from an exercise in more clearly formulating a series of questions over and above identifying key topics to cover. I endeavoured to be mindful of ethical considerations about the ways in which questions are posed and how this may influence or constrain interview responses and eventual research findings (Briggs, 1997). Analysis of the data will reveal to what extent this was achieved.

4.3   Data Analysis

In line with the approaches employed by Barton and Hamilton (1998), my analysis of the interview transcript data slices through it in 'vertical' and 'horizontal' directions, employing a range of approaches including thematic, interactional and narrative analysis.   Chapter 5 presents findings from a vertical examination of each of the four transcripts, commenting on the themes raised by each participant, how they talk, and what this reveals.   Chapter 6 examines the data sets horizontally, pulling together common themes, summarising differences and similarities in participant discourses and considering what this tells us about their roles within GNNET, and about GNNET's role in the wider educational landscape.

Whilst thematic analysis identifies what participants talk about, interactional analysis prioritises context over content, viewing the interview as socially situated interaction, rippling out from the immediacy of the interview encounter to the wider social processes within which participants find themselves.   Context can be understood as the circumstances which 'frame' the talk, such as the physical setting, the roles and status of the participants, the purpose of the interaction, its mood (e.g. formal or informal) or genre (e.g. highly structured or semi-structured interview), the cultural norms or expectations (which may or may not be shared by those who are co-present)[4], as well as the presence of co-text (prior and up-coming text of the interview). Context is also created by the communicative repertoires which are brought into the shared arena of the interview, through which the speakers 'each control a different complex of linguistic resources which will reflect their social being and which will actually determine what they can do with and in language' (Blommaert, 2005).

Since the four interviews are based largely on personal histories, narrative analysis is a useful tool to consider how events are reported and identities constructed through the telling of a 'story', using dramatic communicative devices to engage with an audience whilst drawing on history and personal memory and indicating one's emotional, intellectual and 'spiritual' responses to life experience.   Shifts from narrative to non-narrative modes often mark a change

in gear from recalling experience to evaluating it. This can reveal personal learning journeys, moving from the experience of events and the thoughts and feelings associated with them, to making sense and deriving meaning from them as one moves forward.

4.4 Reflexivity

In research, all data collected, analysed and discussed is mediated by a researcher positioned in a distinct ways to the participants, culture, values, knowledge and world-view which constitute the field of research. I am known socially to the participants and am attuned to their communicative repertoires, shaped by exposure to British education and society in the UK and overseas, as well as Punjabi culture and the discourses of Sikh scripture. As a co-volunteer, I broadly share their vision and value the heritage they draw upon. In my analysis, I endeavour to highlight instances where my 'insider' positioning might help to elicit data or make sense of it. Inevitably this positioning influences what is said, and what is identified and concluded from it. This is a concern for any reflexive research, even that which may be conducted by a mono-lingual English-speaking researcher in a familiar, predominantly English cultural context, linking to Blair's (1998) point about the myth of neutrality in educational research.

Notes

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[1] In his comparison of philosophical and sociological approaches to understanding knowledge, Grimmitt (1987) quotes Tony Beecher's fable of the butterflies and caterpillars in the 'secret garden of the curriculum' (Times Educational Supplement, 17th September 1976). The former look at the garden from aloft, identifying categories and creating order; the latter are concerned with 'reality at close quarters, with the day to day activities and routine transactions' which give the garden character (eventually chewing their way through the foliage, turning the neat view into an untidy wilderness).

[2] This offers a degree of anonymity and is in keeping with the culture of *nishkam sewa*, where those within the team of 'selfless volunteers' tend to resist the pursuit or receipt of public recognition.

[3] See Wolf, (1992) for a discussion comparing the value and efficacy of fieldnotes versus headnotes (in *A Thrice-Told Tale: feminism, postmodernism and ethnographic responsibility*, Stanford University Press).

[4] Hymes (1974) offers a useful mnemonic for the range of factors which constitute context, in the word SPEAKING: Setting or scene; Participants and roles; Ends or purposes; Act sequence; Key – manner or mood of communication; Instrumentalities, i.e. verbal or non/verbal channels; Norms of interaction; and Genre (*Foundations of Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania).

5.   FINDINGS

5.1   Interview with Bhai Sahib

5.1.1   *Key themes*

Roots, journeys and destinations

These emerge as recurring themes in Bhai Sahib's account, with its evaluative gaze over the past and strategic views into the future, particularly in the below extract:

'…ultimately, human nature is to go back to its roots. You find they have these programmes on TV, some of these TV personalities, they go and find out their ancestry….I mean, my birth certificate of 1939 says I am British, I am a British citizen, because my father was serving the crown. He served them for thirty-three years. So now I go back, and with hindsight I say, what have we gained, what have we lost, and what should we do for the future? And you look at the posterity now, what should we leave behind?

So, I say to myself, these are the values. That's the richest treasure that humans have. And it is easy for the Sikh ethos to understand. Our gurbani is very explicit. It says, we are travellers, we are spiritual travellers. We are like gypsies. And it is very important to know our root. It is equally important to know what you are here for, and what you should be doing, and what is your destination.. Kitthou upjai, keh rehai, ke mahi samaavai?[1] [a quote from gurbani: 'where have you come from, how are you to live, and to where will you return?] See; cardinal questions, which each faith is trying to answer throughout the ages.'

Preceded by observations about Sikh migration to the UK, the extract appears to link notions of past and future to recent socio-cultural history, weighing up losses, gains and considering prospective contributions that might be made along the way. Bhai Sahib's use of '*we*' is ambiguous, however, since it is framed by references to Sikhs as well as talk about '*humans*' and '*human nature*'. Eventually, the concept of travel across time - in terms of a community's journey, or that of society in general - is re-expressed to evoke the journey of the human spirit, as he switches language to quote directly from gurbani. This signals a subsequent shift in his English discourse from use of '*we*' to '*you*', as if turning to address an immediate listener[2], taking a broad question to a more profound and intimate level.

Likewise, Bhai Sahib's notion of roots is carried across a range of contexts. His opening comment about our instinct as humans to discover our roots is made with reference to television documentaries about researching one's ancestry. Later he stresses the importance for us, as '*spiritual travellers*' to '*know our root*'. Earlier fieldnotes[3] link Bhai Sahib's concept of 'roots' to one's '*biological, cultural or geographic origins*' and also to '*the origin of our human spirit*'[4]. This echoes another concept which surfaces in talks he has given, about the series of relative, '*concentric identities*' we take on, the human spirit being the '*ultimate identity*' which connects us.

Values, Faith and Culture in Education

Bhai Sahib's answer to his reflective question about what we should leave behind '*for posterity*' is as follows: '*So…I say to myself… these are the values. That is the richest treasure that humans have. And it is easy for the Sikh ethos to understand. Our gurbani is very explicit…*' He later describes some of the ways in which the Gurus left behind a value-rich legacy[5], one that '*we should endeavour to leave for our children… and children's, children's children.*' A certain motivation to do so is drawn from words attributed to Bertrand Russell: '*he said, "the Sikh values and their concepts are marvellous, but they [the Sikhs] will not be forgiven for not perpetuating these values". Something to that effect…Of course, they say he was a bit eccentric, but he's come up with something.*'

Bhai Sahib's discourse suggests he is concerned with preserving language and culture, not for their own sake, but for their role in accessing and making sense of the wisdom embedded in Sikh tradition: '*I mean, language: if children don't know Punjabi, they will not be able to have access to the wisdom which is encapsulated in Guru Granth Sahib Ji, for example. So language is very important.*' He observes that England has shown respect for cultural diversity in '*a very ironic way*'; whilst heritage has been readily preserved through libraries and artefacts ('*Cleopatra's needle comes to the Embankment!*') it is less easy for individuals to retain their cultural identity. He compares the ability of migrant Sikhs to retain their cultural identity through educational provision available in two different social orders, first as a new generation growing up in East Africa, and then later as a new generation in the UK.

Bhai Sahib relates the early admiration of Sikh migrants for English education: *'Private education, they said - nothing like it! They knew that private education would actually educate you, morally, socially, culturally, ethically…'* – whilst they were also *'happy generally'* with state school education. However, a saying was coined when they perceived that these *'values were being eroded'*: whilst they had made *'chandi'* or silver, in terms of material gain, they had *'lost gold'* - their children. Bhai Sahib unpacks his concept of values by underlining the importance of *'wisdom'* and *'humility'*, the ability *'to serve others'* and the need for education and human relationships to free themselves from *'exploitative'* tendencies.

He comments that, whilst *'good governance'* might provide *'external checks and controls'*, without internal checks *'you are bound to exploit'*. In this regard, spiritual traditions offer an educative role: *'spiritual codes will not make you exploitative. In fact, you want to serve others. You don't want to exploit others.'* Acknowledging that faith has been *'hijacked… because of misrepresentation, misquoting, misuse of religion'*, he offers a rationale for a Sikh-ethos based school: it will support Sikh children in knowing their heritage; a focus on value-centred heritage will give it a broad, inclusive appeal; it can offer a model for value-led education which rests on a strong principles of *'shared responsibility'* and *'partnership'*, bringing ordinary people as well as experts on board. Echoed here is the notion that: *'spirituality and secularity co-exist in life…you must fuse the two for the common good'*.

Standards and excellence

In Bhai Sahib's account, terms such as *'codes'*, *'checks and controls'* and *'standards'* work together with notions of excelling, advocating ambition and achievement which is tempered by principles, qualities or values: *'You must aim for the stars and moon, in other words, you must excel, but you should also be utterly humble, like the dirt[6].'* Reference is made to institutions known for their excellence.   Bhai Sahib mentions his spell in Mombasa school reputed to be *'one of the best run…in the commonwealth at that time'*; noting that *'all the Oxfords and Cambridges have existed, all the Kashis[7] of the Indian continent'*.

The word '*standard*' is first introduced when he picks an object from the table before him: '*You'll say, these keys are to British standards, this chair is to British standards…so, there was this standard set*'. The remark arises as he shares his positive and negative impressions of British culture encountered in Africa and the UK, and is interwoven with some nostalgia about Englishmen with '*with nice grey suits… bowler hats and …an umbrella.*' The same notion resurfaces in describing GNNSJ as a '*trendsetter*' amongst Sikh organisations, elaborating on how '*there are many firsts we have done*'.

Depicting the challenges and preoccupations facing Sikhs migrants settling in the UK, he implies there was little scope to think about, let alone develop, Sikh-inspired educational approaches, especially when the English education system was so revered and offered immediate practical benefits. Decades on, he now sees an opportunity to '*set a model*' through articulating a vision and mobilising the rich and varied human resource he sees before him.

Such mobilisation by-passes any '*culture of blame*', be it towards previous generations or the circumstances they found themselves in: '*You have to be ingenious, you have to circumvent this and say, OK, this is how we'll go about it….As a minority, …we cannot demand respect, we will have to earn our respect, and we will earn our respect if we excel, and we can excel with the rich legacy we have..*'

5.1.2   *How Bhai Sahib talks*

Bhai Sahib's discourse largely takes the form of a monologue, conducive to his role as a public speaker. In Indic traditions it is also expected that revered figures will offer listeners *bachan* – utterances or oral expositions - which are absorbed with the kind of silence that might accompany the reading of a written text (which is reflected in my understated role as interviewer). At the same time, in aural terms, Bhai Sahib's pace is measured with reflective pauses. The introspection of phrases such as, '*So…I ask myself…*' is dispersed through the wider text through a contemplative tone.

Compared to other accounts, code switching is almost absent, except for key moments when verses from *gurbani* are quoted and Sikh notions such as *kirat* is referred to.   The English language is, therefore, consistently sustained without slipping into terminology from conversational Punjabi; where Punjabi is used, it is for a specific purpose, drawing proficiently from Sikh teaching to explain a concept. Not only does this indicate his knowledge, as a faith leader, of the teachings underpinning his tradition; it also suggests that he relates to me, not so much as a fellow Punjabi speaker, but as a conduit to relay ideas to a wider non-Sikh audience.

Bhai Sahib's speech suggests a range of formative influences from his lifetime's social and educational exposure, from a British colonial education (a reflection on taming the mind prompts a recollection of the literary text, the *Taming of the Shrew*), from established religious, Judeo-Christian-centred discourse ('*see, this is a cardinal question, which each faith is trying to answer through the ages'*) and from contemporary socio-political discourse through use of terms such as '*social cohesion'*, '*cultural diversity'* and '*shared responsibility'* which at the same time resonate with Sikh concepts of unity, respect and interdependence. A host of other terms, such as '*wisdom'*, '*humility'* and '*roots'*, whilst expressed in English reveal his engagement with concepts from Sikh tradition, and his sense of duty to make a case for valuing and preserving his heritage which can be taken on board by others. Past experience (with the British) tells him that an ability to do so invites understanding, acceptance and support: '*they don't go by the book, if you can convince them and there is logic in your argument, they will listen to you.'*

5.2   Interview with R. Singh

5.2.1   *Key themes*

Positive and negative experiences in education

R. Singh has positive memories of his first decade of life in the Punjab, where he attended a '*westernised'*, English-medium school, which he likens to a '*prep'* school in

comparison with his later schooling experience. He also implies that the village environment played an educationally formative role in fostering a happy and adventurous childhood: *'My time outside school was filled with playing, you know, with real life. I can remember at a young age, going swimming in canals – but there, the adults were adults around me…. I was on the farm, so I was helping, I could see things growing, I was amongst animals.'*

In stark contrast he paints a grim picture of his secondary modern schooling following a move to England's industrial heartland: *'education was not the main focus of the children, nor of the teachers…I remember thinking it was more about controlling children, and a lot of the children actually, even at that secondary school, needed controlling.'* This was compounded by the narrow bureaucracy of the careers advice system; meagre provision of subjects he enjoyed such as music, singing and sport; being defined as an '*upstart*' by class peers due to his motivation and success as a newly arrived migrant; and his preoccupation with struggling - and retaliating - against racist gangs in an area which was a former neo-Nazi stronghold. Reflecting on this experience, he concludes: *'So looking back on it now, it was, for me… a poor secondary education [which], kind of, you know, disadvantages a child enormously, and poor careers advice, or un-ambitious careers advice can actually, you know, thwart your potential. .'*

This sense of disappointment continues in his career as a further education teacher, where mundane staffroom discussions would draw him into challenging casual racist remarks, instead of prompting, as he'd hoped, discussions on '*lofty ideas about how education might improve society*'. This leaves him '*very disenchanted*' and '*really, really gutted that there was nothing worthwhile other than just doing a job of work as a teacher*'. His most fruitful period of work was in directing a broad range of projects to support learners marginalised due to social class, gender or culture; students, for example, from the Workers Education Association, ethnic minority groups and women, such as young mothers re-entering the system as mature students. Such recollections, together with those of his secondary modern schooling, evoke a range of educational discourses linked to history, politics and social class in the UK.

Directing developmental initiatives is a role R. Singh has evidently embraced during his educational career, which now culminates in his present role in helping to drive forward the GNNET initiative.

An emerging philosophy of education

R. Singh's narrative reveals the evolution of his thinking about education over time, crystallising into a distinct philosophy in recent years. In rural Punjab, as in the UK, it was seen as '*a way out*' of poverty. Early on, like his family, he valued it simply '*as the right thing to do*', and something to '*excel*' in. His account reveals his personal motivation to do well and overcome institutional challenges, spurred on by behind-the-scenes support from family members and recognition from individual teachers.

He also notes his expectations that work in education would involve meaningful conversations about its wider social purpose, beyond the functionary, economic model. Experience led him to conclude that: '*what education tends to do is produce machines, who happen to be human beings. So we're training human beings to do a job of work*'. Whilst the work ethic is important in Sikh tradition, so too, he adds, is the notion that education should '*also lift you up as a person, you know, open your mind up, it should make you a more rounded person, so you are a better parent, a better human being.*'

Whilst his narrative attempts to broadly distinguish Sikh and 'western' approaches to education, elements of it evoke a range of widely circulated discourses about ideologies underpinning educational practice (e.g. classical or romantic – see 2.2.5). An emphasis that '*the model*' he envisages '*doesn't involve teaching, it involves a new language, it is based on people learning, not on being taught*' reflects a strong learner-centred philosophy, based on activating self-discovery. He also refers to humanistic models which have appealed to him from western educational discourse, about enabling pupils to '*reach their potential*', producing a '*more rounded individual…who is able to contribute to society*'.

Acknowledging popular discourses of this kind, he then adds: *'I found those are very worthy kind of ideals…I applaud them…and for me at one time they were sufficient, but what I now realise that that isn't enough. For a human there are greater things than reaching your potential.'* He talks of having *'infinite potential'* rather than a preset *'inbuilt capacity'*[8] (echoing his unease with machine-centred models for education); about having *'immense responsibility'* rather than simply being a well-rounded person who *'maybe appreciates art…music…good food, and so on.'* He stresses the need, not only to *'be self-sufficient'* but also to *'be able to serve others'*; to go beyond intellectual enquiry about the *'meaning of life'* and ask *'what is the purpose of life, to understand that, then fulfil it.'*[9]

R. Singh also stresses that the model has yet to be *'enunciated'*: *'I think it exists, but it isn't written down'*. Referring to colonialism and migration, he highlights an unquestioned acceptance of the superiority of the English educational system, and the challenges in persuading Sikhs themselves that their tradition may offer a valuable model: *'it is almost like trying to sell something to somebody that they don't know exists.'* He therefore identifies a need for the model to be developed and communicated equally well to Sikhs and well as to the wider educational community.

Openness and narrowness

R. Singh outlines a long career in widening educational participation, involving innovative thinking in terms of course design and teacher recruitment and training. A concluding comment helps to explain his shift from expanding provision in a broad social context to becoming highly focused in understanding and developing a Sikh educational approach. He does so by offering the analogy of an artist at work:

'One of those paradoxes is that, although it's very insular [his present focus on the GNNET community], it's very open…Through this narrowness I will discover things which will help me to be more open. Often you need it. An artist is a very open-minded person, but spends a lot of his or her time on their own, actually struggling with their art, if its sculpture, if its painting, and they'll discover things on their own by practising and doing. But when you meet them they're able to accept other ideas and concepts, they are not judgmental.'

5.2.2 How R. Singh talks

As a personal history, R. Singh's narrative follows a distinct cyclical pattern. Entering a life experience, he sets the scene, creating immediacy with vivid detail *('So I…used to go to school…near the sauce factory, very distinctive smell, but very distinctive, horrible, nasty, black, dark school.'*).   Each experience is coloured by the articulation of feelings associated with it (from *'that disturbed me'*, *'I wasn't happy with that idea'*, *'I soon became very disenchanted'* to use of words such as *'wonderful'*, *'amazing'* or being left with a *'happy feeling'*.) Slipping into non-narrative mode, he then evaluates his experience, presenting conclusions drawn and learning outcomes from each episode as he moves into future experiences. Much like a traditional tale, the depiction of his life journey leads to a sense of homecoming and renewed purpose in his present role: *'So it seems, now, the full circle, everything seems to have fallen into place.'*

R. Singh's utterances conferred on me a range of identities as interviewer, from representing the academic community to being a fellow Sikh volunteer. This is indicated, for example, in bilingual elements of the text. Recalling his plans to embark on a university doctorate, he adds: *'at the same time, I'd come across what we call in the Sikh community as a 'living saint', sant, hana?'* On the one hand, he offers explanatory information to non-Sikhs; on the other, his gaze is directed towards me as his immediate Sikh interlocutor, as he reformulates a word (*sant*) in Punjabi, and seeks mutual agreement on what has been said (with the word *hana*, 'isn't it?').

'You' and 'we' tend to be used interchangeably: *'What I've been taught now is that actually we have infinite potential. As a human being it's possible to have infinite achievement'* is later reiterated as: *'The model simply says that, you know, as a human being you have enormous potential'.* This use of pronouns reveals the inclusive nature of the ethos, and that, whilst endeavouring to understand cultural distinctions, his argument is removed from an overly divisive, 'them and us' paradigm.

5.3   Interview with B. Kaur

5.3.1   Key themes

Harnessing parents and community as a resource

B. Kaur's interview opens with some background to her role in '*facilitating the playgroup*' which she helped to run during 2007 (this was a very small-scale, temporary scheme located within an available, specially furnished space inside the Gurdwara complex): '*OK, well, the role started when we began sort of planning the parent-child group almost over a year ago now. We came together as mums to discuss ideas as to how we would like the provision to be…*'.

She introduces the hands-on, parent-led nature of the initiative, with mothers providing a core voice in discussing and planning the provision (alongside input from others with an interest or expertise in early years provision). She goes on to describe instances of intergenerational activities in the life of the playgroup, from visits, for example, by grandparent figures:

'Sometimes you'd get women coming across, just to give the children hugs and, you know, just make them feel loved and tell them little songs. I mean, this only happened a few times, but those few times the children do remember. Like, they remember being told stories and being told little songs, little nursery rhymes in Punjabi that us Western mums know nothing about really. But, you know, I think the elder input is really important.'

Whilst identifying a range of parental and educator roles she has played in the past, (through rearing siblings and cousins within her extended family networks, or helping out at summer schemes for Sikh children), and more recent developments in her experience (through first-hand parenting, temporary work with an Under 5's project, playgroup work and her present undertaking of a degree in early years studies), she is also explicit about extending her learning through her personal exposure to the network of people who attend or volunteer at the gurdwara:

'I mean, I don't have any knowledge, people are just luckily giving me tips that I can then pass on to parents, but only by being around them can I enrich myself.'

The capture and transmission of knowledge latent within the 'community' and its circulation and adaption to the contexts in which a new generation of Sikh parents find themselves is a process which B. Kaur wishes to stimulate and guide forward. This is reflected in her growing interest in health, parent and family support work. Several times she reiterates a key motivating factor, describing it as the '*love factor*' which underpins the sharing of knowledge across generations.

Aligning a Sikh-inspired ethos to England's early years framework

B. Kaur's interview picks up on and magnifies, as it were, a thread from previous interviews, about the need to foster self-understanding and self-development amongst Sikh families in a context where knowledge perceived as valuable from the tradition has been eroded over time and changing circumstances. This involves integrating expertise and wisdom that may be both professionally-acquired through contemporary, mainstream training as well as passed down through the generations, rooted in Sikh teaching and traditions. Notions in the first two transcripts of setting a '*model*' for wider society are not explicitly articulated in her account. Her main concern is the practical business of developing an integrated approach to provision to support Sikh children and their parents, through a prospective early years scheme.

Enthused by her own professional development as an early years practitioner, she is excited by possibilities of applying a distinct ethos to an existing national framework for learning: *'we're going to stick to the birth to three matters, you know, all the guidelines that have been set out by the DCSF, we're going to put all those into it, but we're just going to have our own ethos which works alongside it..'* - and again - *'We're giving them [young children] the tools for life but in a way that kind of supports guidelines and curriculum and everything else that is very important, but the things that are important to us, the things that we want our daughter and our sons to enrich their lives with for the rest of their lives.'*

B. Kaur offers examples of innovation that can arise from combining both approaches, transmitting knowledge of heritage whilst supporting physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. She dwells extensively on her playwork experience, highlighting her impulse to fill gaps she has observed in Sikh summer schemes where children have lacked play in their lives. She then introduces the sensory room concept, developed to help children deal with stress in later life, describing how this was applied in the playgroup space through incorporating meditative chants, so that '*instead of children just sitting there thinking, we'd put on simran, meditation, vaheguru[10] simran, and put that on.*' Meditation features as a form of experiential learning which supports human development, as well as fostering knowledge about the tradition. Reflecting as a mother on how she values this experience for her own child, she describes it as '*something that she'll carry with her for the rest of her life, it'll give her the tools*'. A repeated use of the word '*tools*' reveals how, during the interview, she is thinking educationally and relating this to Sikh heritage.

Learning from and learning about Sikh heritage

Following B. Kaur's summary of her personal history, I ask her if there was ever a point at which she became aware of Sikh concepts of childhood that might inform her work with children. Her first reaction is to recall her role in '*summer projects for children*' run by Glasgow's Sikh community:

'*Just to get the children more knowledgeable about their religion, because that's not readily available in Glasgow. So that's probably my first kind of instance of being involved in Sikh-related childhood experiences, yes, definitely. But I enjoyed doing that, that was probably from about 15, so I helped with Punjabi school there, which is about children learning Punjabi, and being in that Punjabi environment.*'

In an effort to prompt a more accurate response, I ask if she has reflected on '*what concepts we have for raising children within Sikh tradition*' (through use of '*we*' I evoke the identity I share with her as a Sikh parent, creating a more personal context to elicit a response) and if she has become more recently aware of this. This time her response is more evaluative, than descriptive:

'I do feel I've become more aware of now, because before it was kind of from books, it wasn't living the heritage, it wasn't living the Sikh way of life, it was more about reading books and seeing what, kind of, information we could give to the children rather than instilling it into our lives. I think when you have children yourself everything changes. Before having children everything's text book, isn't it? And when you have children, the nurturing part comes into you. And then it's about how to put Sikhism into your life, nurturing it at the same time, would that make sense?'

She maps out an evolution in her own understanding of how she can draw upon her heritage for educational purposes, outlining a shift in her own imperatives about the types of learning she seeks to foster. Echoed here is Grimmitt's (1985) distinction between 'learning about' and 'learning from' religious traditions. She begins by recalling her preoccupation as an educator, before her experience of parenthood, in transmitting '*information*' to children about Sikh tradition ('learning about'), subscribing to a culture where '*everything's text book*.' This is later contrasted by notions (reiterated elsewhere in the interview) about '*instilling*' the tradition in their lives or '*living the heritage*' suggesting this impacts on, not only what one knows, but how one lives ('learning from'). She grapples a little in elaborating on this ('…*would that make sense?*'), moving from mechanical concepts ('*how to put Sikhism into your life…*') to more organic imagery ('…*nurturing it at the same time')* associated with the teaching/learning process.

Interestingly, she talks about nurturing, not the learners, but nurturing '*it*', i.e. the tradition within children's lives, revealing her preoccupation with finding new ways of enabling children to relate to their tradition. In an early years context, this nurture is manifested through the practice of attributes: '*we start off by just the little things, just about being thankful, being happy, loving one another, having love within our sangat*'. Recalling the playgroup experience, she elaborates on her idea of nurture, giving primacy to the fostering of a love for learning before transmission of knowledge itself: *'You can't make a child love Sikhi….If you give them all the knowledge and no love, what good is knowledge without a passion to learn about it?'*

She reports comments made to her by parents from the playgroup that *'you're not teaching them'* adequate factual knowledge about Sikh tradition. The introduction of code switching, through repeat insertions of the word *'aapay'* ('by themselves'; 'of their own accord') evokes her positioning as a community member accustomed to engage in dialogue with parents and community members to explain this approach: '*And aapay, if they have the love inside themselves, they'll want to learn.'* This approach contrasts the more didactic forms of teaching which she associates with Sikh summer schemes experienced in her younger days.

With her focus on children's formative development, and new understandings about developmental learning which parenthood and early years training brings, she reiterates (at several points during her account) her hope to help *'equip'* both groups with *'tools'* for their development as Sikhs and in the wider sense, by integrating knowledge and skills gained through mainstream institutions as well as personal research drawing on intergenerational insights from the Sikh community.

5.3.2   *How B. Kaur talks*

B. Kaur is clear in positioning herself as a young Sikh parent engaged close-hand with the GNNET community and its early years initiative. From the beginning, her use of 'we' is grounded in this shared identity and area of interest. By extension, her use of *'our'* maintains this bounded context, i.e. 'our *children'*, *'our community'*, *'our own ethos'*. In turn, B. Kaur's use of *'you'* is highly conversational, with frequent repetitions of *'you know'* interspersed with rhetorical questions: *'because children need to play in their lives, don't they*?'. 'You' is also used to echo conversations with other Sikh parents, for example, when she reflects on their concerns about limiting children's social exposure through a Sikh-ethos nursery: *'my question to them would be, "Well, what do you do with your children outside of school time that isn't all related to Sikhism?"'* This reveals a highly people-oriented discourse, where ideas take shape through a process of conversation and interaction with both immediate and imagined interlocutors from her day-to-day lived experience.

5.4 Interview with K. Kaur

5.4.1 Key themes

Faith and modernity

This theme surfaces in K. Kaur's opening remark about her childhood in British East Africa: '*My father and mother were very religious persons, but very modern as well.*' This notion pervades her narrative, which reveals how a rootedness in her family and faith tradition supports her in engaging with new experiences in a changing world, and how skills acquired in a modern age contribute towards supporting her heritage.

She recalls her father's insistence - despite opinions of their Sikh neighbours to the contrary - on putting his girls in an English-medium, government school: '"*in the future, this will assist them all their life*."'. This was, however, with the proviso that he would '"*teach them Punjabi at home*."' As we discover, Punjabi becomes a link to broader nurture through Sikh heritage, which K. Kaur's parents were well-positioned to provide, through their extensive personal knowledge, experience and associations. On a slightly humorous and defiant note, she offers an illustration of their progressive attitudes: '*And my parents were so modern as well, because at that time girls were not allowed to show their legs, and we used to wear shorts*!'

When I comment on what appeared to be a '*good balance*' between her secular, government schooling and heritage-centred home schooling she concludes: '*My father used to say girls should be educated. They are going to be mothers of future children. If mothers or fathers are not educated, what will they teach their children in the modern world*?' The context of her response suggests that both types of education, from home and school, were valued for their benefit to future generations. Her account maps out how her home learning experience, relationship with her parents and their association with *mahatmas* (saintly people, or 'elevated souls'), contribute towards building a personal values-base. Their teachings surface through her quoting of sayings and prayers which animate her account of working in schools and hospitals.

She recalls, for example, her father's words '"*if you want to be a teacher, you must teach with seva in your mind.*"' Embarking on her work cleaning and serving tea to patients in hospital wards, she notes: '*And the first thing I used to say to myself, say the prayer "Vaheguru, mai seva bhavna'ch avaan. Ihna di seva karaan.[Oh God, may I serve these people in the spirit of seva]*"'.

Along with her newly qualified Sikh colleagues, K. Kaur decides to work in Nairobi's Sikh community school, established before her birth, next to a gurdwara - '*because we wanted to bring our community school up…because there were mostly untrained staff in Khalsa school.*' This reflects an impulse to contribute her professional expertise towards raising standards in an underdeveloped community venture. Evidently, she embraces modernity not for its own sake; it helps her to play a role in the progression of her own faith community and of others in need of support (such as the African and mixed Asian school communities she works in), whilst, in turn, her faith informs and guides her work in the wider world.

Parents and teachers: approaches to young children's nurture

Our picture of K. Kaur's values and skills as a teacher emerges through the series of stories or episodes she narrates from her home life and teaching career. Firstly, we encounter her parents as educators, especially her father. Her learning of prayers, for example, started with small chants they recited as a family. Then her father began teaching the morning prayer, '*from one paragraph to another, very slowly.*' When I ask how she managed to fit in home and school education, her response maps out her father's encouraging, yet understated, approach, edging forwards whilst remaining learner-centred, fostering habits to support their all-round well-being as well as extend their knowledge:

'It wasn't that "we have to do it". First to start with, when we had time, we used to do it…Then he would say, we'll do it later, or we will do it on weekends. Then it came to us that we have to do it every day. So, get up early in the mornings. And he said to get up early morning is very healthy for the mind and body. Not too early, but still, early… And he used to tell us to have lots of sports – skipping and all.'

The phrase '*Then it came to us*' suggests that this was an educational approach which created conditions to stimulate self-understanding, self-motivation and step by step growth. Whilst she does not make any conscious links between this and her own teaching practice, similarities are evident. She does not, for example, advocate highly structured teaching until a child's traits and inclinations have had an opportunity to unfold:

'And, there shouldn't be any time limit with a child, isn't? "You have to do…!"; "Stop it, and do this!". Because for a few months, I think, you should know the child from their… because they might be taking interest and suddenly you stop, you have to do something else. Let them carry on. Because it's just a start. It takes months for them to do what they like. Let them do it. Why should we have a strict curriculum, oh, you have to teach, you have to do like that… whereas once they are settled down with all those things, then you start.'

She talks about her observation of children's art work, and the patience with which she builds communication and trust with a child whose paintings revealed a trauma he faced at home. The word '*slowly*', with which she described her father's teaching approach, reappears, its purpose eventually expressed in more formal pedagogical terms: '*And learn [about] every child slowly. Their habits are different, what does he want, what does that one want, what is he doing, why is he acting like that, something different. This is child psychology*.' The first sentence suggests the role of teacher as learner; she instinctively asks us to '*learn [about]*'[11] about rather than 'teach' '*every child slowly*'. She is also emphatic that any teaching strategies must be squarely based on love:

'They are so used to their mother's love. And the child comes to nursery, because he has lost his environment. And there's a teacher, who should be full of love to embrace them, so that the love which I'm losing with my mother, you are providing….The first thing is love from the teacher. Because a child can feel those vibes, definitely.'

5.4.2   How K. Kaur talks

K. Kaur tends to convey her knowledge and learning through stories or accounts in which her understandings are embedded (rather than articulated in an abstract way). Once a concept is introduced (such as '*love*' or '*child psychology*') an event is recollected and described. The narrative mode thus dominates her discourse, though she may momentarily step outside of it to offer more evaluative commentary.

This is usually expressed as nuggets of advice in a highly personalised, conversational way: '*just play with them, just love them. You haven't got…time to sit, because you have to give love all the time, then you don't feel tired.*'[12]

Interestingly, when asked directly if she can identify elements from her Sikh heritage which inspired her towards her teaching career, her immediate response is to list religious elements in the organisation of the Sikh school: '*Because in Khalsa school there used to be a special lesson for Sikh religion*'. She describes the prayers the pupils recited, their special uniform with yellow scarves for the girls and turbans for the boys, noting the Queen's admiration of them on her visit to Nairobi: '*She said, "They all remind me of sunflowers."*' Realising that my question's mention of '*Sikh heritage*' prompts her to picture markers of Sikh identity, I change my approach (as I did in a similar situation with B. Kaur) and ask what she feels are the '*key ingredients*' for educating the young. One can only interpret or suggest links between her responses to this question (as discussed above) and what we may know about Sikh concepts of education. Whilst able to relay tangible information 'about' her experiences of Sikh heritage education, she seems less accustomed to talk about conceptual understandings she may have drawn 'from'[13] it when asked to make such links with her heritage in a direct way.

As narrator, K. Kaur communicates to us in a multiplicity of voices. The scenes she sketches are animated by the direct (and often bilingual) speech of the characters inhabiting them. Direct speech tends to dramatise an event, and transmit (sometimes allegorically) core messages underpinning her account. For example, at the close of the interview, admitting she may not have always fitted her own ideal of a mother, she recollects her father's words, evoking an outlook which permeates the main text and looks progressively to the future in a non-begrudging and principled way.

'It's not that all my life I was a saint….. But my father, you see, when he used to get up in the mornings, he used to open the curtains and say, 'Vah, vah, vah, navaa din chariya!' ['How wonderful, another day has dawned!] Forget about what happened yesterday. Think of new things, a new world, today is a new day.'[14]

Notes

¹ Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1193; a line from a verse by the fifth Guru, Basant Ki Vaar Mahalla 5.

² This use of 'you' echoes the style of an internal dialogue which characterises many verses of gurbani.

³ This explanation was given to young Sikh children preparing to help resource Birmingham's Agreed Syllabus for R.E., focusing on one of its twenty-four 'dispositions' entitled 'Remembering Roots.'

⁴ The word 'root' links to the expression in gurbani of '*mool*' –root or origin, e.g. one popular verse quoted on other occasions by Bhai Sahib is: '*man tu jot saroop hai, aapna **mool** pachaan*' – 'Oh my mind, you are an embodiment of the divine light; recognise your true origin' (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 441).

⁵ References are made in the transcript to Guru Nanak's humility in bowing before his disciple and successor; the ninth Guru's sacrifice of his life to protect the religious freedom of those from the Hindu faith; the tenth Guru's letter to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, critiquing his unethical tactics in politics and war, without attacking him personally, nor his Islamic faith.

⁶ The notion of 'dirt' has a particular significance in Sikh and Indic traditions; bowing to touch the 'dust of the feet' of others signifies humility. In the daily *ardas* (prayer of supplication) Sikhs pray for '*man neevan, mat uchee*', 'a humble heart and elevated mind', a rhyming concept linking wisdom to humility.

⁷ In India, the kingdom of Kashi (now in Varanasi/Benares) was renowned for its university, a prominent centre of learning and culture in the Hindu world.

⁸ This phrase was introduced by me as interviewer, seeking an explanation of 'infinite potential'.

⁹ This commentary alludes to Sikh teachings about the importance of *kirat* (earning one's livelihood) and *seva* (serving others), about the limited worth of philosophising for its own sake (a frequent theme in Sikh scripture) and the need to make one's existence *saphal* (from *phal*, fruit, i.e. fruitful or worthwhile).

¹⁰ *Vaheguru*, meaning 'Wonderful Guru/Lord' is a popular chant recited by Sikhs when doing *simran* (meditation)

¹¹ The absence of a preposition to accompany 'learn' creates ambiguity: is it what we learn 'about' a child, or what we learn 'from' him or her? The emphasis in any case is on the teacher's ability to learn.

¹² My decision to address K. Kaur with the respectful and endearing title of '*Aunty Ji*' (reflecting South Asian cultural norms) - and to maintain a degree of this relationship with her as interviewer – may have helped to encourage the free adoption of this conversational style.

¹³ Reference here is made to Grimmitt's concept of 'learning about' and 'from' R.E. (see chapter 2).

¹⁴ Some elements of this extract are presented in English, with original phrases being expressed in Punjabi.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Comparing and contrasting the transcripts

Taking stock of the data as a whole, I will now revisit the research questions: 1) what themes emerge? 2) how do participants talk about the ethos and what does their discourse reveal?

6.1.1 *Emerging Themes*

Journeys: losses, gains and contributions

Participants' personal life journeys form threads within the wider journey of Sikhs as a 'community', encountering challenges and opportunities as they cross continents and generations. These journeys are embedded, in turn, within notions of our collective journey as a society, and of our spiritual journey as individuals. The accounts reveal how journeys entail displacement, not simply from one's culture of origin, but from one's expectations or trusted ideologies (e.g. R. Singh's disenchantment with educational institutions). New experiences are observed, weighed up and selectively integrated (Bhai Sahib's reflections on Englishness and admiration of '*standards*') and previously acquired knowledge and wisdom is harnessed in new situations (e.g. the teachings recalled by K. Kaur as she embarks on new work). Ways of moving forward are conceptualized (e.g. B. Kaur's talk about integrating knowledge systems) and capacities harnessed over one journey may find new expressions in another (K. Kaur's endeavours to support a Sikh community learning initiative in Kenya are echoed in B. Kaur's present-day aspirations).

The four participant accounts reveal a strong motivation to contribute and make a difference, on a selfless basis. They serve to shed some light on the contributions faith communities can potentially make to society, which is expressed in the notion of 'faith as social capital', researched, for example, by Furbey, Dinham et al (2006).

Discourses about education

Whilst accepting that education should support one's ability to work (do *kirat*) and progress in society, participants emphasise that it must also enable one to live a purposeful existence and develop spiritually. Bhai Sahib's notion that '*spirituality and secularity co-exist in life*' is echoed in the combination of both government and home-schooling K. Kaur's parents chose for her. It is reiterated in B. Kaur's desire to provide support for Sikh parents unable to provide the kind of home education experienced by K. Kaur, without compromising on education which is necessary for life in wider society.

The need for value-centred education is highlighted, either explicitly (e.g. by Bhai Sahib) or implicitly (e.g. in B. Kaur's emphasis on fostering positive attributes and habits), a focus which informs participants' thinking about transmitting Sikh tradition to a new generation. B. Kaur recalls her early experiences of Sikh learning environments, and present-day parental expectations, which prioritise the assimilation of cultural or religious information. She calls instead for the creation of positive conditions as a foundation for fruitful learning: *'what good is knowledge without a passion to learn about it?'*

With a focus on the education of infants, K. Kaur highlights the importance of observing the young and allowing them scope for self-discovery, whilst B. Kaur encourages experiential learning (introducing meditation, for example, through a sensory room). Echoed here is an approach offered by Hull and Grimmitt (Bates, Durka & Schweitzer, 2006) which involves a 'rethinking of Christian religious education along experiential and developmental lines'. It resonates also with the Early Years Foundation Stage framework (DCSF, 2008), where the development of skills and attributes, rather than topics to be covered, directs and shapes the teaching and learning process.

In parallel with discourses on language 'learning' verses language 'acquisition', the accounts reflect an effort to explore knowledge from a tradition where socio-historical conditions have made it difficult to 'acquire' and creatively engage with knowledge from heritage, due to limited exposure and educational support. The participants talk about creating conditions conducive to rich 'acquisition' of heritage alongside formal 'teaching', both of which are enabled through opportunities to develop appropriate pedagogical discourses and practices.

Looking inwards and outwards

R. Singh offers the analogy of the artist, who engages at close quarters with his art whilst being able to step back and engage with others. This captures the process of looking inwards and outwards which characterizes all the accounts. B. Kaur keeps her eye on developments in the wider early years profession, researching knowledge that can be drawn out of the Sikh community, seeing both as mutually enhancing. She recollects how she drew on established professional guidance to support the needs of an autistic child within her playgroup, and on the knowledge of elders to support children's bilingualism as well as their physical wellbeing.

Bhai Sahib's opening call for the preservation of culture develops into an articulation of what knowledge embedded in Sikh heritage can contribute to society beyond the Sikh-specific context: *'So, I think, we have a very rich ethos. And it is a universal one'. Look at our national anthem for example, we don't salute the queen or king…: "Give me the boon I can do good things…" Anybody can adopt that. Any nation can adopt that. Any individual can adopt that. So our approach is very universal. And I am saying, that is the approach, that is the ethos we want to promote, we want to project.'* He calls for developing more inclusive, value-centred models for the study of heritage, depicting a continuum between learning which is culturally specific and '*universal*', suggesting this becomes apparent when conventional presumptions or reservations about '*faith*' are lifted: '*You have to cross that barrier, where there is this concept of…. "faith, religion, oh, take it out!"'*.

6.1.2   *How participants talk and what their discourse reveals*

In the four narratives, participants talk in distinctive ways, revealing a continuum of orientations as themes are developed. This helps to explain the nature of their roles and highlights the agency of individuals within organizations. Bilingual elements reveal how participants relate both conceptually to knowledge embedded within the tradition, as well as socially to those who share their linguistic, cultural and religious identity. They also show how life narratives connect language with memory.

Orientations and roles

B. Kaur and K. Kaur's accounts are characterized by people-oriented discourses, conveying ideas through conversations with interlocutors who feature in their narratives (e.g. children and parents) and with an interviewer who projects to them various identities, from fellow parent/volunteer to a sisterly or daughterly figure, as well as academic researcher. K. Kaur offers nuggets of advice through her evaluation of life experience ('*learn [about] every child slowly*') whilst B. Kaur conveys her ideas through conversational statements and questions ('*children need to play in their lives, don't they*?'). This is conducive to a 'hand-on' role they are able to play in early years settings, engaging directly with children as well as adults.

Whilst R. Singh's account includes traces of conversational elements (such as the bilingual use of '*hana*?'), his discourse tends to be theory-oriented, as he evaluates and generates meaning from a series of learning journeys he presents from his life, bringing shape to his ideas about what a Sikh-learning ethos might look like. Whilst calling for a need to '*articulate*' an ethos, this is a process he takes forward during the interview. This reveals an ability to be an interface between localized educational discourses within GNNET and more widely circulated ones. His talk about potential that can be harnessed from the volunteer community reflects his role in capacity-building and helping to develop and deliver a strategic vision.

Bhai Sahib's discourse, whilst highly reflective, presumes a broad audience as his gaze shifts repeatedly between the Sikh and wider world. His stances are conducive to his leadership role, as a public speaker, as a visionary and strategist who conceives ideas, is able to '*mobilise*' resources and set benchmarks and targets through promoting '*standards*' and '*excellence*'. The discourse reveals how, as a faith leader, he is guided by moral principles (for example, to '*avoid a culture of blame*'[1]) and, as a leader of a minority group engaging with mainstream culture, he endeavours to communicate GNNET's rationale in ways that are socially accessible. At the same time, references to the wider spiritual context of human endeavour reveal a focus on horizons which encompass, but go beyond, the immediate socio-political order, reflecting a concern to harness spirituality in ways that benefit and support the interaction between dominant and marginalized components of society.

Bilingual elements

Bilingual elements of Bhai Sahib's discourse draw, not from conversational Punjabi, but directly from verses of gurbani as a source of guiding knowledge, which he likens to '*the verbal advice of parents*' which '*becomes wisdom for you*'; for K. Kaur, this scriptural knowledge is mediated through her recollection of advice from her parents which is expressed in a mixture of English and Punjabi, whilst key turning points in her life are also dramatized by use of Punjabi (for example, the college principal's declaration that her teacher training fees would be waived: '"*Tere fees maaf*!"'). The younger B. Kaur reiterates single-word Punjabi concepts which are meaningful to her, such as '*pyaar*' (love) and the ability of young children to develop skills and understanding '*aapay*' (of their own accord) through child-centred learning rather than information-led teaching. In R. Singh's discourse, hints of bilingualism highlight our shared cultural background during the interview.

These bilingual elements reveal a range of participant stances, including: intimacy with scriptural verse as a source of knowledge; bonds with people who might pass down knowledge emerging from it; a recall of vivid phrases which dramatise our life stories; meaningful engagement with key concepts which are 'embodied' in Punjabi words; and,

finally, a sense of relatedness between interviewer and interviewee. This sheds light on how participants draw upon knowledge through written and oral tradition, relate in diverse ways to their heritage, and endeavour to connect with, motivate or seek reassurance from those who share their linguistic identity.

Cohesion and diversity

Whilst common themes emerge from the participant accounts, differences in content and expression tend to reveal variations in the positioning of participant roles. Both Bhai Sahib and R. Singh talk about developing an inclusive educational '*model*' which demonstrates how shared values can be drawn from a culturally distinct knowledge-base. This bird's eye perspective is contrasted by B. Kaur's on-the-ground vision of an early years setting, where she talks in more exclusive terms of supporting Sikh families. This highlights the diversity of viewpoints that exist across the spectrum of people's involvement of an organization which interfaces with the immediate Sikh community, the wider Sikh world, and a broad range of faith and secular organizations.

Instead of conventional discourses about social integration, B. Kaur introduces possibilities for the mutual integration of knowledge systems (in this case the existing early years framework and wisdom harnessed from Sikh scriptural and oral tradition), and the nurture of a distinctive approach whilst maintaining ongoing dialogue, engagement and scope for coherence with others. To an extent, K. Kaur embodies this kind of conceptual integration, and her narrative highlights that the capacity-building of a community is part of a long historical process, where confidence gained during one era in one's capacity to make a difference can be harnessed to support educational developments in another.

The aspirations and arguments presented by the participants suggest that meaningful exchange cannot take place in a 'multicultural' or 'interfaith' context unless there is scope to develop reflexive understanding of distinct traditions which underpin this diversity.

Acknowledging their place within the wider socio-political and educational order, the participants also view their efforts as part of a wider 'spiritual' matrix which connects humans and underpins their rationale which goes beyond the preservation of identity for its own sake, and is underpinned by a sense of purposefulness and responsibility. This early phase of research outlines some of the ways in which GNNET members embrace the paradox of preserving difference and generating a sense of commonality which has long characterised Sikh tradition itself.

At the time of concluding this study, various threads surfacing in the interviews can be recognized in elements of GNNET's ethos as it takes shape in preparation for the establishment of a Sikh-ethos inspired nursery. This includes a focus on: supporting children's spiritual development as well as preparing them for work and life in society; encouraging parents, grandparents and the wider community to take responsibility for raising children in partnership with established professionals; establishing a loving, intergenerational, 'extended family' environment which is mindful of cultivating values as well as skills; giving children exposure to accomplished experts in varied fields such as music, art, gardening, carpentry; harnessing children's bilingual and multilingual potential; emphasizing time spent in nature and the great outdoors; drawing on elements of Sikh heritage to support and add value to the early years foundation stage framework; affirming the Sikh principle of non-proselytization and supporting dialogue and collaboration across faiths and cultures; being aspirational and capacity-building to generate high-quality provision which is rooted in local life within the inner city.

It is hoped that the implications of this emerging ethos, and of endeavours to apply it, for discourses on childhood, civic life, shared values, community cohesion and approaches to diversity within broadly secular, multifaith societies in both local and global contexts will make GNNET's work an area of interest for future research.

6.2 Constraints on the study

Given the range of volunteers who come under the GNNET umbrella, from long-standing initiatives (e.g. supplementary school and gurdwara tours) to more recent ones, a variety of data sources was available to research this organisation. The focus for this study, however, had a leaning towards preparations for a new nursery which has prompted a need to articulate a contemporary vision which expresses a rationale for education at the founding stages of human life. On this basis, four individuals were selected and only one interview conducted with each, due to constraints of time and resources. Whilst follow-up interviews would have given scope to further probe emerging issues (as discussed by Barton and Hamilton, 1998) the accounts did, however, provided rich data. Constraints in length for this current thesis naturally limited reporting on the findings and conclusions that could be drawn. The fact that the data collection and analysis was mediated by me in particular as a researcher, no doubt brought a distinct set of insights as well as blind spots, strengths as well as limitations, to the process.

6.3   Recommendations for future research

There are several possible directions that future research might take. These include: broadening the range of participants to other GNNET volunteers and extending scope for bilingual data collection to understand more specifically how knowledge of Sikh heritage informs the development of a learning ethos; investigating the process of integrating an early years foundation stage framework with a Sikh learning ethos through the collaboration of nursery practitioners, parents, community members to inform the design and content of the nursery curriculum; investigating the incorporation of Birmingham's revised syllabus for Religious Education - which was supported by GNNET - into the nursery curriculum; comparing and contrasting the GNNET nursery initiative to other 'alternative education' models and/or settings for early years education, nationally and internationally; comparing and contrasting teacher/pupil/parent perceptions about limits and affordances of offering Sikh heritage education through extra-curricular complementary school and full-time school settings.

The present study has reinforced the philosophy of collaboration and partnership upon which GNNET's work depends, since the participants differ in how they are positioned in relation to the sources of knowledge they talk about – from their heritage, professional life and personal histories – and hence rely on drawing from each others' insights, experiences and expertise. Given that GNNET seeks to unearth knowledge which rests latent within people who absorb, reflect upon, interpret, value and seek to apply the teachings of the Sikh sacred text, academic research can play a supportive role in exploring, articulating and sharing this knowledge.

An analysis of this impulse to share knowledge follows on from work, for example, by Arweck and Nesbitt (2003), who consider how educational initiatives rooted in Indic traditions may interface with mainstream institutions to foster spirituality in late modernity. However, the wider vision (see Appendix 3) of the projects which come under the GNNSJ umbrella goes beyond a desire to share what Sikh tradition might have to offer the wider world; it seeks '*to build a future where each community….makes sacrifices for other communities to achieve an even greater degree of self-awareness*'. Such a statement encourages parallel research on educational concepts and practices in other traditions, which might offer answers to a question posed by Bhai Sahib as one of Birmingham's faith leaders: *'There are two simple facts about human life. We are born, and then we die. What sort of learning is important in between?*[2]

Notes

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[1] This concept of 'avoiding a culture of blame' is echoed in the concluding words of K. Kaur's account as she recalls her father's forward-looking nature: *'Forget about what happened yesterday. Think of new things, a new world; today is a new day….Otherwise the whole life goes in, tu mainu aha kia, mai tainu aha kia [you said this to me, I said this to you]. What's the use? forget it!'*

[2] Extract from an article appearing in the *Birmingham Mail,* 'Faiths In Our City' column, 24 November 2007, written in Bhai Sahib's capacity as a member of Birmingham's Faith Leaders Group.

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Note

Reference for extracts from gurbani: www.*srigranth.org* – an online search tool for the contents of the Guru Granth Sahib (NB: the transliterations and English translations which appear on this site have been adapted and revised for this paper).

LEITNER ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN THE PUNJAB (EXTRACTS)

[NB: all spellings reproduced as per the extract source]

GENERAL:

I am about to relate-I hope without extenuation or malice-the history of the contact of a form of European with one of Asiatic civilisation; how, in spite of the best intentions, the most public-spirited officers, and a generous Government that had the benefit of the traditions of other provinces, the true education of the Panjab was crippled, checked, and is nearly destroyed; how opportunities for Its healthy revival and development were either neglected or perverted; and how, far beyond the blame attaching to individuals, our system stands convicted of worse than official failure. Whether it is possible to rouse to renewed exertion, on behalf of its own education, the most loyal population that has ever been disappointed, is a question which the following pages will only partially attempt to answer. Much will, of course, depend on the wise adaptation of the noble principle just propounded - of "local self-government"- to a department of the Administration,- that of education, - in which, above all others, it can be introduced with perfect saf[e]ty and the greatest political advantage.

Respect for learning has always been the redeeming feature of "the East." To this the Panjab has formed no exception. Torn by invasion and civil war, it ever preserved and added to educational endowments. The most unscrupulous chief, the avaricious money-lender, and even the freebooter, vied with the small landowner in making peace with his conscience by founding schools and rewarding the learned. There was not a mosque, a temple, a dharmasala that had not a school attached to it, to which the youth flocked chiefly for religious education. There were few wealthy men who did not entertain a Maulvi Pandit, or Guru to teach their sons, and along with them the sons of friends and dependents. There were also thousands of secular schools, frequented alike by Muhammadans, Hindus and Sikhs, in which Persian or Lunde was taught. There were hundreds of learned men who gratuitously taught their co-religionists, and sometimes all-comers, for the sake of God-"Lillah." There was not a single villager who did not take a pride in devoting a portion of his produce to a respected teacher. In respectable Muhammadan families husbands taught their wives, and these their children; nor did the Sikhs prove in that respect to be unworthy of their appellation of "learners and disciples."

In short, the lowest computation gives us 3,30,000 pupils (against little more than 1,90,000 at present) in the schools of the various denominations who were acquainted with reading, writing, and some method of computation; whilst thousands of them belonged to Arabic and Sanskrit colleges, in which Oriental literature and systems of Oriental Law, Logic, Philosophy, and Medicine were taught to the highest standards. Tens of thousands also acquired a proficiency in Persian, which is now rarely reached in Government and aided schools or colleges. Through all schools there breathed a spirit of devotion to education for its own sake and for its influence on the character and on religious culture; whilst even the sons of Banyas who merely learnt what they absolutely required in order to gain a livelihood looked with respect, amounting to adoration, on their humble Pandhas, who had taught them the elements of *two "r's."*

We have changed all this. The annexation disturbed the minds of believers in Providence, and all that was respectable kept, as much as possible, aloof from the invader, - just as the best Englishman would not be the first to seek the favour of a foreign conqueror.

CLASSIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS SCHOOLS

I.   SIKH INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

1. Gurmukhi Schools.

II. MUHAMMADAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

2. Maktahs.
3. Madrasas, religious and secular.
4. Koran Schools.

III. HINDU INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

5. Chatsalas (for the trading community).
6. Patshalas (religious).
7. Patshalas (semi-religious).
8. Secular Schools of various kinds and grades.

IV. MIXED INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

9. Persian Schools.
10. Vernacular Schools.
11. Anglo-Vernacular Schools.

V. FEMALE INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

12. (a) Female Schools for Sikh girls.
   (b)   Do.   Muhammadan girls.
   (c) Instruction at Hindu homes.

With a more minute subdivision in the indeigenous schools might have been classified as follows:-

MAKTABS OR MADRASAS

1. Arabic Schools and Colleges (of various grades and specialities.)
2. Perso-Arabic Schools and Colleges (of various grades and specialities).
3. Koran Schools (where merely or chiefly the Koran is read).
4. Perso-Koran Schools.
5. Koran-Arabic Schools.
6. Perso-Koran-Arabic Schools.
7. Persian Schools.
8. Persian-Urdu Schools.
9. Persian-Urdu-Arabic Schools.
10. Arabic Medical Schools.
11. Perso-Arabic Medical Schools.

II.   GURMUKHI SCHOOLS

12. Gurmukhi Schools.
13. Gurmukhi and Lande Schools.

III.   MAHAJANI SCHOOLS

14. Lande Schools of different kinds (Chatsalas).
15. Nagari-Lande Schools (Chatsalas).
16. Perso-Lande Schools.

IV.   PATSHALAS

17. Nagari-Sanscrit Schools.
18. Sanskrit religious Schools.
19. Sanscrit secular literary Schools (cultivating various branches).
20. Sanskrit semi-secular Schools (do.   do.   do.)
21. Sanskrit Medical Schools (Cheifly).
22. Hindi-Sanscrit Schools.
23. *[illegible from appendix source]*

V.   FEMALE INDIGENOUS SCHOOLS
(classified as above).

LIST OF SANSKRIT BOOKS USED

Balbodh	Akshar dipika

I.   GRAMMAR

Saraswat	Manorama
Chandrika	Bhashya
Laghu Kaumudi	Paniniya Vyakaran
Kaumudi	Siddhant Kaudmudi
Shekhar	Prakrita Prakasa

II.   LEXICOLOGY

Amar Kosh	Malini Kosh
Halayudh	

III.   POETRY, THE DRAMA AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Raghu Vans	Mahabharat
Megh Duta	Venisanhara
Magh	Sakuntula
Kirat Arjun	Naishadha Charita
Ramayan	Mrichhakatika
Sri Mad Bhagwat and other Puranas	Kumara Sambhava

IV.   RHETORIC

Kavya Dipik	Kavya Prakash
Sahitya Darpana	Dasu Rupa
Kuvlayanund	

V.   MATHEMATICS, ASTRONOMY, AND ASTROLOGY

Siddbant Shiromani	Nil Kanthi
Mahurta Chintamani	Brihat Jatak
Shighra Bodh	Parasariya

VI.   MEDICAL SCIENCE

Sham Raj	Nighant
Susruta	Sharang Dhar
Charaka	Bhashya Parichehed
Madhava Nidan	Vagbhat

VII.   LOGIC

Nyaya Sutra Vritti	Gada dhari
Vyutpattivad	Tarkalankar
Tark Sangrah	Kari kavali

VIII.   VEDANT

Atma Bodh	Sarirak
Panch Dashi	

IX.   LAW

Manu Smriti	Parasara Smriti
Yagya Valk	Gautama
Mitakshara	

X.   PHILOSOPHY

Sankhya Tatwa Kaumudi	*Patanjali,* Sutra Britti Sutra with Bhashya
Sankhya Pravachan Bhashya	*Vedanta*, Vedantsar (see also
Yoga Sutra	above.)
Vaiseshika, Siddhant Muktavali	*Mimansa*, Sutra with Bhashya
Sutra with a commentary	Artha Sangraha

XI.   PROSODY

Srut Bodh	Vritta Ratnakar

XII.   PROSE LITERATURE

Hitopadesa	Vasavadatta
Dasa Kumara Charita	

XIII.   RELIGION

Rigveda Sanhita (rare)	Samaveda, Mantra Bhaga
Yajurveda, Shukla Yajur	Chhandasya Archika (very rare)
Vajasneyi Sanhita	

Background to GNNET's parent organization, GNNSJ

Originating amongst Sikh settlers in East Africa in the 1950s, GNNSJ formally established itself in the mid-seventies with its headquarters in Birmingham, UK, and today serves what is now reputed to be one of the largest and most frequently visited Sikh gurdwaras in Europe, with centres also in India and Africa.

The Gurdwara served by GNNSJ differs from most in the UK which are run by elected committees. The *jatha* or organization was formally established through the appointment of five trustees, of whom one is both executive chair and spiritual 'leader'. This is a permanent, unpaid and lifelong role. A successor is appointed by the predecessor, through a process of 'wise selection' rather than the casting of votes through competitive election campaigns. The current chairperson is third in line and addressed, as was his immediate predecessor, as 'Bhai Sahib[1] Ji' – a brotherly leader.

The title 'Sant'[2] is reserved for GNNSJ's founder, Sant Puran Singh, who spent his early working life in Kenya, where he inspired Sikh settlers to revive and practice their heritage, promoting spiritual regeneration alongside a life rooted in family, community and society. Living in Kericho, in the heart of Kenya's tea-plantations, he ran a carpentry workshop and contributed to municipal developments, including hospitals, schools, churches and local housing - civic achievements which led to the renaming of the town square as Sant Puran Singh Square.

He migrated in the 1970s and continued his religious work, this time giving direction to Sikh settlers in the UK. Initially, there were no plans to establish a large gurdwara in Birmingham, with gatherings taking place in spaces that local people could accommodate, be it homes, shop cellars or existing gurdwaras. Eventually a property was acquired and developed under the direction of Bhai Sahib Norang Singh, who was appointed as successor and had had significant experience in serving Sikh sangats settled in Singapore.

Appendix 2: *Background to GNNSJ*

The establishment of institutions, locally and globally, has been extended under the present leader, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh. As an organization, GNNSJ strives to run large scale public institutions whilst retaining a culture which supports individuals and families. Deep reverence for Sant Puran Singh, echoed in the great respect given to his successors, characterizes the culture of the *jatha*, and esteem is linked to *gurbani's* valuing of *sadh sangat* (see 2.2.1). In its practice of the Sikh faith, GNNSJ upholds two central institutions – the authority of the 'Guru Granth', the revered sacred text, and membership of the 'Khalsa Panth', the community of initiated practitioners of the faith, holding back-to-back *akhandpaaths* (continuous readings of the Guru Granth Sahib) and monthly *amrit sanchaars* (initiations) at its Birmingham headquarters.

Whilst distinct in its origins and loyalties, GNNSJ's work in promoting intra-faith dialogue and cooperation (within the wider community of Sikhs, representing various groups and organizations worldwide) and inter-faith understanding is extensive - at a local, national and international level. The diagram in Appendix 4 outline how these activities fit in with its vision to establish five 'Centres for Excellence ('for' indicating a movement towards 'excellence') within the Birmingham locality.

Notes

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[1] See Notes to Chapter 3 for an explanation of the title Bhai Sahib
[2] As above, see Notes to Chapter 3 for an explanation of the title 'Sant'.

Mission statement of the Nishkam Centre
(GNNSJ's centre for civic engagement)

The Vision / Mission

To connect, and engage, the Sikh and wider communities with spirituality and secularity through Centres for Excellence which operate on the basis of the Core Sikh Values of honest living, sharing and selfless service.

We will become a leading, proactive, innovative and entrepreneurial organisation created and sustained by the selfless service of the community.

By adopting this unique approach we shall become a benchmark for promoting, celebrating and providing learning, wealth creating and well being services that develop individuals, organisations and communities.

We shall work in partnership with individuals and organisations who share and subscribe to our Core Values.

The Challenge

'Our greatest challenge is to imagine and build a future where each community recognises and practices its heritage, and makes sacrifices for other communities to achieve an even greater degree of self awareness'.

*- Taken from homepage of **www.ncauk.org** (accessed May 2009)*
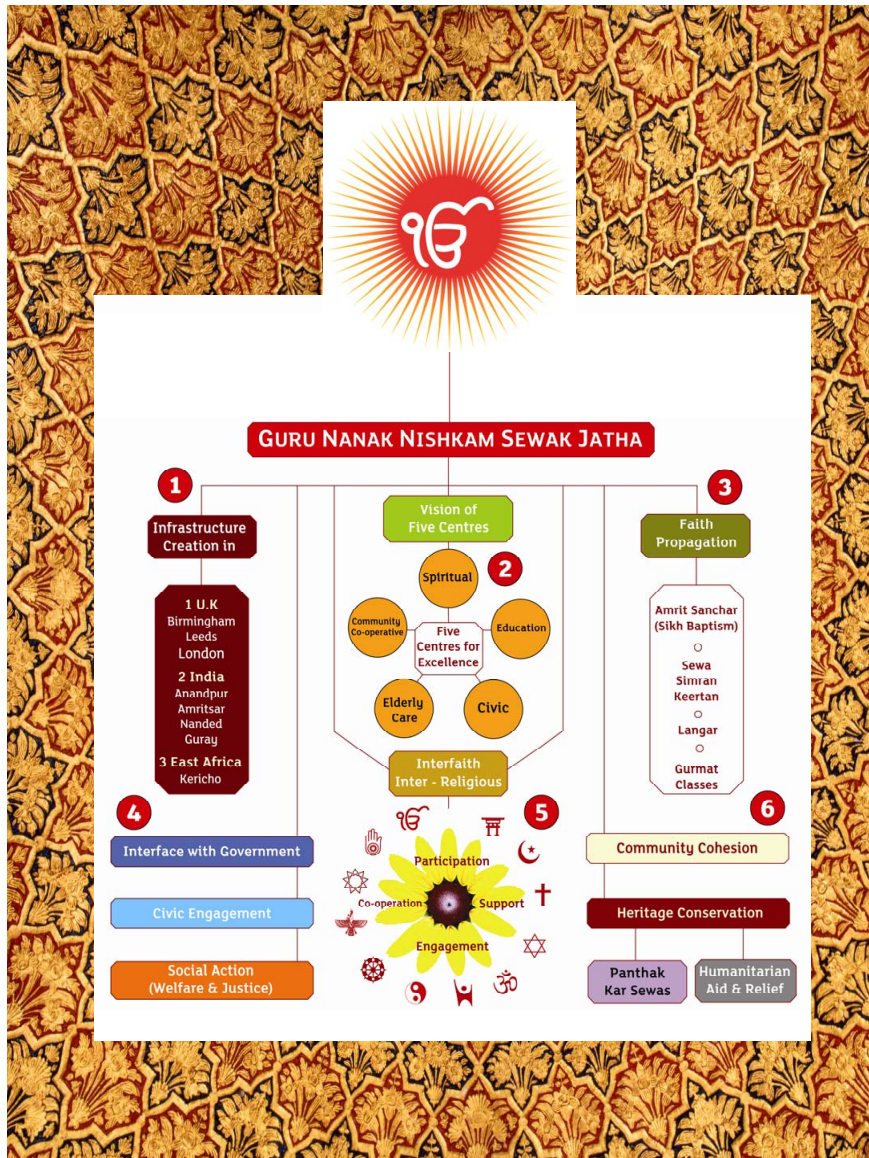
Participant Profiles

a. *Bhai Sahib (Mohinder Singh)*

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh is the one participant identified in this study by full name, as the publically recognized chairman and spiritual successor of GNNSJ. Now seventy, he was born in Uganda and completed his primary and secondary schooling in Kenya. His mother passed way when he was three and his father later remarried. Both events had a formative impact: the first triggered profound questioning about life, death and the purpose of existence; the second established a home environment providing rich nurture in Sikh heritage. Bhai Sahib went on to study Civil Engineering, followed by work for major engineering firms in Kenya, before a five year spell studying Structural Engineering and working in the UK (1964-69). He then immigrated to Zambia, working in a succession of management roles from 1970-1989 for the National Housing Authority (NHA), planning and developing housing projects for both city and rural communities.

During this time he formed a volunteer group to build a Sikh Gurdwara in Lusaka, Zambia's capital, and met several times with Sant Puran Singh. Both experiences served to deepen a religious calling to 'serve'. He took voluntary retirement from the NHA and for six years (1989-1995) volunteered his services to GNNSJ in Birmingham, contributing to projects in the UK and overseas. Following this 'spiritual apprenticeship', he was selected by his predecessor to serve as chairman of GNNSJ. The range of projects which have come under his stewardship have earned him recognition regionally (with two honorary doctorates from the Universities of Birmingham and Central England) and internationally (e.g. as a 'panthic sevadar', noted for his services (*seva*) to the worldwide Sikh community (or *panth*) by the SGPC[i], and as a recipient of the 2008 Award from the Temple of Understanding, New York, for his contributions to global interfaith work).

Bhai Sahib is married with two daughters in their thirties and a two-year old granddaughter. A nursing home which he set up with his wife (a qualified nurse) and a business partner helps to generate the family income whilst his unpaid role as chairman is round-the-clock. This includes participation in religious services, offering support and advice to ordinary individuals, advising and mobilizing volunteers, and sharing knowledge and expertise with other Sikh and non-Sikh organizations.

b.   R. Singh

R. Singh heads the day-to-day management of the education trust, a full-time voluntary role he has taken on since 2004. Born in the Punjab in 1956, at the age of nine he came to join his father who had been working in England. Fond memories of his early childhood in India, where he attended a good primary school (paid for through his father's overseas earnings) are contrasted by what he describes as an '*impoverished*' education at a secondary modern in a former stronghold of the neo-Nazi Black Shirts in Birmingham. A short spell in grammar school helped him qualify for university, where he graduated in engineering. Feeling at odds with the '*cut-throat*' nature of the industry, he left to become a teacher in a further education college. Disillusioned once more by the ethos of his work-setting, he sought work supporting community training initiatives, being later invited back by his former college to direct widening participation programmes. After a fruitful period he eventually fell out with his management, disagreeing with their uses of funds and encountering a career '*ceiling*'. His eighteen year career in further and higher education had also included volunteer work to support local Sikh and other marginalized communities.

As he initiated his next step, to combine doctoral research with developmental work in schools in rural India, he took on some local voluntary work, assisting with the construction of the Nishkam Centre. This snow-balled into a full-time volunteer role in GNNSJ's construction, education and civic engagement projects. Whilst R. Singh continues to serve GNNET in a voluntary capacity, his wife works full-time and they have two children, now graduates in their twenties.

c.   ***B. Kaur***

B. Kaur has been active in GNNET's educational initiatives for young children since moving to Birmingham in 2001. Born and raised in Glasgow and now approaching her thirties, she is the eldest of four siblings. Marriage brought her to Birmingham where she pursued a career in finance, having graduated in this field. Redundancy and subsequent parenthood opened a new chapter of evident passion for the field of childhood nurture. After her first child, she worked on an Under 5s project for the NHS. After her second child, she led a twice-weekly session for a playgroup scheme set up by GNNSJ volunteers. She has also joined other volunteers in organizing gurdwara summer schemes, revisiting a role she played in her younger days with her local Sikh community in Scotland. B. Kaur is currently taking an Open University distance learning course in Childhood Studies, and is a parent governor at a 'beacon' nursery school in the city. She is part of a core group of GNNET volunteers who are working to establish a model nursery inspired by the Sikh-ethos, and is also interested in developing initiatives to support parents and families.

d.   ***K. Kaur***

Aged seventy-four, K. Kaur is regarded as a 'wise elder' by trust members. Born and raised in Kenya, she shared a close bond with her father, who in turn was a close friend and devotee of Sant Puran Singh. Wanting to equip her with knowledge for the '*modern world*', he sent her to a government school to receive a British colonial education, whilst ensuring her nurture in Sikh heritage through an educationally rich home environment. Following his untimely death, she had to find work to support the family and starting teaching. Her skills caught the attention of school inspectors and she was offered a place on a teacher training course, the fees being waived on account of her circumstances. Together with a few other newly qualified Sikh teachers, she then decided to work for the under-resourced Sikh community school established by a Gurdwara in Nairobi, with the aim of helping to '*bring it up*' professionally. Following her husband's posting to another town, she worked in a range of schools with dominant African, Asian and white European populations.

Like her husband, K. Kaur had a British passport. Following Kenyan Independence, his job was Africanised and they moved to England and settled in Leicester. There she decided to embark on work in hospitals. Starting off as a cleaner and tea lady, she quickly progressed to become a training officer for the cleaning of hospitals. Following serious illness, she took early retirement and now focuses on being a grandmother and volunteering her time for GNNSJ, visiting the Birmingham Gurdwara for key events and thus maintaining a link with the organization that goes back to her childhood days. It is hoped that through the development of a nursery her expertise as an educated can be harnessed in more formal ways.

Notes

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i SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee), founded in 1925 to oversee the management of historic gurdwaras in India. Based in Amritsar, Punjab, it has come to function as an authoritative body for Sikhs worldwide.

Appendix 6: *Guiding framework for semi-structured interviews*

PARTICIPANT ROLES
- understanding of participant's present role in GNNET
- considering the life experiences which may have brought them here

LIFE EXPERIENCES
- Childhood and upbringing
- Education – informal and formal, home and school
- Subsequent directions taken in adult life
- Migration if applicable

MEANINGS AND VALUES
- Educational concepts and approaches – meaning and purpose of education
- Sources of these understandings and values – textual and social
- Significance of GNNET endeavours in Sikh and wider context

MOTIVATING FACTORS
- behind their interest in education
- behind their involvement in GNNET specifically

ASPIRATIONS AND CHALLENGES
- outcomes participants envisage from their endeavours
- challenges they see or face

Appendix 7: *Transcripts of interviews [not available in the digital version of this thesis]*