

The transmission of Sikhism in Britain now takes place in a variety of traditional and non-traditional ways



One of the main ways in which religion used to be transmitted was by being passed down the generations. It is often assumed that if this chain breaks, religion will die out. Investigating this issue in relation to Sikhism in Britain, Jasjit Singh, in doctoral research funded by [Religion and Society](#), found that transmission can and does now take place in a much wider variety of ways.

Having attended a Sikh camp in the UK organised for 18-30 year old Sikhs as part of his MA research on 'Young Sikhs, Hair and the Turban' (Singh 2010), Singh noted that the majority of the camp organisers and attendees were 18-30 year old British-born Sikhs, who listened to lectures and discussions presented in English. As well as camps, Singh had also observed increasing numbers of other events being organised for young Sikhs, including the formation of a number of university Sikh societies. He also noted the growing importance of the Internet in allowing young Sikhs to discuss issues related to Sikhism, to network and to find out about these events. This provoked him to look more deeply at how young British Sikhs learn about Sikhism, and which methods actually work, and to ask why young Sikhs are organising events outside gurdwaras when a number of large gurdwaras have recently been built all over the UK, and to examine how the Internet changes ideas about religious authority.

Singh was awarded a Collaborative Doctoral Award, the collaboration being between the Theology and Religious Studies department at the University of Leeds and a local community organisation, BECAS (Bradford Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs). His research finds that family background and family migration history play an important role in determining future religious transmission choices, as this impacts gurdwara attendance, group affiliation, the amount of Punjabi spoken and ideas of religious authority. The research also highlighted that gurdwaras vary considerably in terms of the religious nurture which they offer to young Sikhs. Many young Sikhs do not expect to learn about Sikhism in gurdwaras, but describe them as 'safe havens' in which they can simply 'be Sikh' and be with the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh Guru in the form of scriptures). The impact of translation software was also noted, especially in allowing young Sikhs to understand more of what is contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. For many, this strengthens their relationship with their Guru.

The research also highlighted how many young Sikhs have organised youth events at camps and university Sikh societies. Whilst both involve a significant level of direct face engagement, the Internet allows young Sikhs to engage with whichever type or aspect of the Sikh tradition they wish in a safe, non-committal way. As well as its usefulness as a networking tool which allows young Sikhs to be aware of events taking place all over the country, the data highlighted the various ways in which the Internet acts as a source of authority for young Sikhs. Far from automatically becoming a source of authority for young people, Singh found that, because the Internet provides

young Sikhs with multiple opinions on all sorts of issues, many young Sikhs continue to turn to traditional sources of authority including respected elders to ratify the answers to questions which they find online. Above all else, it is the role of families, spiritual mentors and charismatic individuals, whether online or offline, which comes to the fore. In all cases, learning from individuals who are perceived as authentically practising what they teach turn out to be the single most important factor in successful religious transmission.

Find out more...

- Visit the project's web pages: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sikhs/>
- Listen to Singh presenting the project at Programme findings conference 'Sacred Practices of Everyday Life' (May 2012, Edinburgh):
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/spel_conference_singh_singh
- Access podcasts of Singh speaking about the project on BBC Radio 2:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/pause_for_thought, and Panjab Radio: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/publications/podcasts/show/sweet_sikhi
- Look up publications from the project: 2012: Keeping the Faith: Reflections on religious nurture among young British Sikhs, *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, Volume 33 (3), pp. 369-383; 2012: Global Sikh-ers: Transnational Learning Practices of Young British Sikhs in *Sikhs Across Borders*, Knut A. Jacobsen and Kristina Myrvold (eds.) Continuum; 2011: Sikh-ing Beliefs: British Sikh Camps in the UK in *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities and Representation*, Knut A. Jacobsen and Kristina Myrvold (eds.) Ashgate; 2010: British Sikhs, Hair and the Turban in *Religion and Youth*, Sylvie Collins-Mayo and Ben P. Dandelion (eds.) Ashgate; 2010: Head First: A Study of the perspectives of young British Sikhs on Hair and the Turban, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Volume 25 (2), pp. 203 – 220.

You might also be interested in...

- The Religion in Education conference held at Warwick in July 2011, the journal special issue from which Singh has an article in:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/religion_in_education_findings_from_the_religion_and_society_programme
- The findings from another Programme project led by Jasjit Singh's doctoral supervisor Professor Kim Knott:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/traditional_practice_may_be_down_but_media_coverage_of_religion_is_up
- Reading the report from the one-day 'Young People and Religion' conference held May 2011 at King's College London at which Singh spoke:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/events/programme_events/show/young_people_and_religion_day

Project Details

Award Title

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

Team

Project Principal Investigator: Professor Kim Knott (Lancaster University)

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Award Type

Phase 2 Collaborative Studentship

Key terms

youth, Sikhism, camp, authority, Internet, gurdwara