A Sikh Sighs:
An Anthropologist at the Gurdwara
NB. This is a peer review manuscript, not the presentation copy.

Gurdwaras and British Sikh identity:

The role of Anthropology (-ists) in Social Cohesion and Diversity

in a case study of London's Sikh youth

In London today, Sikhs are challenged by the concept of "super-diversity" in the process of British Sikh identity formation; this in turn affects the community's participation in civic activity. A three month-long ethnography was undertaken that analysed the role of the temple (gurdwara) within this process. Set against such a backdrop, it is this Sikh researcher's role in that ethnography that is the focus of this RAI work. It hopes to underline the challenges and satisfaction of anthropology in a non-academic application - in this case the identity politics of a minority migrant group and its charity: the gurdwara.

This paper asks and offers answers to the following questions; can socio-cultural anthropology assist Sikh temples understand their role, if any, in the formation of British Sikh identity? Can anthropology influence the fuller participation of the Sikh society in London's diverse community? Will an emic ethnologist "from within" politicise the outcome and reduce the value of the ethnography?

Can this be avoided? Should it be?

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Introduction, the case study and its methodology

The use of religion as an indication of a community's behaviour may attract both critics and fans alike; but in order to understand Sikhs, the role of Sikhism is considered essential due to the inherent overlap between culture, religion and ethnicity (Nesbitt: 2009 and 2000 and McLeod: 1989 and 2008 amongst others). These historical derived characteristics are linked to the formation and development of the Sikh identity both in religious and secular terms. These "filaments of operation" are processed and negotiated to make both the community's and the individual's identities with a strong link in what are still comparatively cohesive family units. This identity has varieties both in the country of origin; India and diaspora located in places such as London[1]. The case study was based on the hypothesis that Sikh identity plays a significant part in contemporary social relations and may contribute to the wider civic cohesion or conflict. It is whilst conducting this ethnographic review of the identity process in London's contemporary Sikh citizenry that allowed the author to explore the role of anthropology in this community, outside the circles of tutelage.

In trying to get close to the Sikh community, this study chose a location where the Sikh community celebrate and conducts many aspects of their religious and secular lives: the gurdwara[2]. The results of the study can be considered "qualitatively" representative of this community's specific and general condition of "existence and operation". Adding to this fertile field research the fact that the observer is an ethnically, culturally and religiously similar

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[1] For additional information on the history of Sikh migration and the community's evolution see Gurharpal Singh: 2006 and Fisher, Lahiri and Thandi: (2003).

[2] The Sikh temple is registered charity no. 283314 that is guided by the Charities Commission of England and Wales.

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participant observer; the case study could challenge the idea of "dispassionate" anthropology[3]. This work proposes that the case study was both innovative to the field of academic social studies and at the same time offered the community practical an infrequent cross-cultural viewpoint. A relatively untrained anthropologist Sikh studying Sikhs could assist the community, its charity and the field of anthropology. This paper also proposes that there is an important and influential place for anthropology in the pragmatic world of a charity, one that could contribute to the wider society's development in areas such as social cohesion especially with regards to migrant communities. In testing this thesis; the paper bases its critical analysis on a three month ethnographical case study of London's Sikh youth and the role of the Sikh religion's institutes (gurdwaras) that was conducted in the summer of 2011 as part of an MA Thesis.

The case study involved an uncommon and perhaps even "rare" opportunity for the author as "opportune" factors coincided to create the option to undertake this case study. The author was in the summer of 2011 carrying out a study of the Sikh youth in West London to understand the transmission of British Sikh identity and the specific role of the gurdwara in this identity process. The study started in June and ended in August of that same year and was part of a successful MA completed in 2011 in History, Culture and Belief from St Marys University College, Twickenham; London. This was complimented the fact that the author lived, studied and worked in the same Borough that this study was carried out: Hounslow. The final and most important factor is that the author is also a Sikh - both in a cultural and religious sense, giving the study had the potential to be both emic and etic. This "extraordinary" set of circumstances

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[3] By this the paper infers to the early anthropological ideas of the study of non-Western, rural dynamics of a community or "savage anthropology", e.g. Boas (1911) or Geertz in Bali (1973)

led to this paper's contribution to the panel's inquiry regarding the role of anthropologists working in migrant communities[4]. The case study interviewed over twenty Sikh youth considered "receivers" as well as ten older members of the temple's visitors, management who were classified for the case study as "transmitters" and "carriers" respectively. To this field research analytical frameworks such as Weber's "switchman" theory and Durkheim's ideas of the "sacred and the profane" were applied in order to understand the formation of Sikh identity between the three current generations of Sikhs in London. A fascinating and fulfilling study resulted with a clear "dendrochronology" of religious socialisation theories could be seen inter-generationally.

The methodology employed was as follows; qualitative research was collected using semi-structured one to one voluntary interviews carried out with twenty two youth aged 18-30 on the gurdwara premises and within the Borough of Hounslow, West London. Investigating a "top-down" transmission of identity; ten temple management, staff and parents were also interviewed as prospective "transmitters". The field research also included the attendance of management meetings, observing discussion groups on Sikhism, witnessing weekly prayer ceremonies, weddings, birth / death ceremonies and youth-only events. An example of the areas discussed amongst the interviews was the gurdwara. A sample guide question was; "If teaching your non-Sikh friends about the Sikh identity, would you bring them to the gurdwara?" An academic ethics committee vetted all questions and proposals and data access.

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[4] A note of caution should be inserted here; the author would not consider himself as a trained anthropologist, rather a novice ethnographer with a keen interest in social anthropology and theories of socialisation.

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Whilst it was the author's wish to conduct most interviews at the gurdwara, there was however a noticeable lack of open-ended and "un-refrained" dialogue due to the "sacred" nature of the setting and many interviewees felt restricted in their discussion. This included the chance to challenge any religious observances, discuss gender politics and consider secular identity manifestations. To balance this possible bias, the author also conducted interviews "off-site" and via the telephone, this helped compensate for the fact that many subjects may have been drawn from the same source. The management were all offered the chance to get interviewed and several accepted – most in anonymity. The interviews were conducted within the gurdwara building in the reception foyer using banners, flyers and the temple's programme notes to draw attention.

The length of the ethnography was three months from June to August 2011 and field research was conducted, at varying stages, during all seven days of the week. The weekend generated the most feedback as the attendee levels were at their highest. Interview times ranged from 10 minutes to one hour and consent forms with confidentiality clauses had to be signed. It was left to interviewees to volunteer for discussions, however the management did request that the personnel in charge of the youth programme were interviewed – these were offered on a voluntary basis. The data was recorded in some cases electronically with access permitted only to the dissertation tutor and the respective interviewees. All interviewees were offered the chance to withdraw at any point – none took the opportunity and all recorded interviews in this work were reported under pseudonyms.

As earlier noted, the author is a Sikh male who at that time lived in the same locale as the study group so apart from the inherent reflexivity, an "immersion" was made

possible though the knowledge of the language and culture. Triangulation techniques[5] were utilised to try and counteract any "filling in of gaps" that the researcher may have included, however the shared culture should be viewed as a prospective barrier to value-free analysis. Contrastingly, the researcher's background could also be viewed as a qualification to review and investigate the community as "insider-observer" and unearth data that may be harder to obtain by "outsider" researchers.

It should also be noted that the author had been granted permission to set up a stall within the consecrated premises of the gurdwara where worshippers could be interviewed and discussions conducted. The effect this had was to give the author a "legitimacy" and "authority" to be on sacred ground and give the impression that his line of query had been sanctioned by those that ran the temple[6]. This was almost the reverse of the author's hypothesis as many of the author's questions challenged the Sikh code of conduct; the *rahit maryada*[7], under whose edicts the London temple operated in. Before analysing the role of the reviewer, the next few sections outline the historical background of Sikhs and uses a very recent event to frame the case study and its concept of the importance of social anthropology.

Sikhs in Britain: a Brief History

Historically, Sikhs have been in Britain since the middle of the 19th century with the young Prince Dalip, the last heir to the Kingdom of Panjab, exiled to London by Queen

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[5] Wolcott: 1988.

[6] It is doubtful that a non-Sikh would have been able to gain this access to these venerated areas of a Sikh temple; it was the strict observances of religious and cultural conduct that aided the author in his "frontline" location request.

[7] This is a set of rules of conduct that are overseen by the Sikh religion's highest spiritual power the SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee) in Amritsar, Panjab, India (at the "Golden Temple). It includes the observance of the 'five K's', which are physical symbols of Orthodoxy of which unshorn hair is one (Mcleod:1989:45).

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Victoria's court. Mass migration followed the Second World War and in 2001 there were over 330,000 Sikhs in Britain or 0.6 per cent of the population (Kaur-Singh: 2010: 197). Despite this small figure, there is an awareness and presence of Sikhs that the community likes to regard as being "beyond numbers". Precedential law making maintains this perception as Sikhs were declared an "ethnicity" by the Law Lords in 1983[8]. This viewpoint of Sikhs could also be attributed to the highly visible physical appearance of Orthodox Sikhs who tend to wear unshorn hair and turbans, whilst the women wear traditional, usually colourful, Panjabi clothes.

Sikhs are prominent today in many areas of society, whether it may be centenarians running marathons (Fauja Singh) or soldiers guarding the Queen. However, 60 years after mass migration, the community on the whole continues to define itself through Sikhism and traditional memes that include centuries' old cultural practices and social rituals. Many observers have commented that integration, acculturation and social cohesion have not been key areas of focus for the Sikh community in London[9]. Once the community had succeeded in legally protecting their cultural presence they appear to have tried to remain "apart" to mainstream British society[10]. It can also be said that the have become intra-divisive with the formation of internecine sects and their respective temples that compete for followers. There are nearly 200 Sikh temples in England and Wales; nearly 50 per cent higher than the comparative figure for that of an equivalent South Asian religion: Hinduism (Peach and Gale: 2003: Table III: 479).

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[8] The case was brought against a school that had refused entry to the plaintiff's son on grounds of him wearing a turban. See *http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKHL/1982/7.html* (accessed 20th January 2012). There are several other cases of legal challenges by Sikhs to protect their distinctiveness see amongst others Fisher, Lahiri and Thandi (2007) and Beetham (1970).

[9] Field diary: July 2011: London.

[10] As an example of generalisation this is the concentration of the Sikh population in very specific areas within the West Midlands, Greater London and the South East of England (Singh and Tatla: 2006: 23).

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As the case study concluded, this lack of coalescence creates a disjunction between its newer members (mainly "emerging adults"[11]) and firstly the wider Sikh community and secondly the wider London community. British Sikh identity faces rigorous citizenship tests and its future has become increasingly uncertain; especially for the current youth[12]. In London particularly, Sikhs are challenged by multiculturalism though concepts such as "super-diversity" (Vervotec: 2007) in the formation of British Sikh identity; this in turn significantly affects their complete participation in civic activities and curtails their degree of involvement with local society. The older generation of Sikhs also tend to "idealise and lineate a model of Sikh" whilst at the same time not appearing to fit this profile themselves [Jakobsh (in P. Singh): 2012: 122].

Sikhs and the London summer 2011 riots

Having described the history of the Sikhs and the complex identity negotiation, a contemporary event is used in this sub-section to further "complicate" the backdrop to the examination of the role of the reviewer during the case study. During the month of August 2011, four days of wide spread rioting left London questioning the nature of social cohesion as millions of pounds of property was destroyed, communities set in conflict and riot-related crimes were committed that ranged from petty theft to manslaughter. Of all the conceptualisation and analysis that have followed the riots, no mention was made of the role of any religious motivation for any of the actions reported[13]. However the field research uncovered a development that involved the very Sikhs under review. The images below of the

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11 Jasjit Singh: Head First: Young British Sikhs, Hair, and the Turban, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 25: 2, 203 — 220, 2010.

[12] Contrastingly, this situation has arisen despite the case that the economic welfare of the community being at its most certain ever - especially for the offspring of the original migrants.

[13] For a fuller insight into the riots in London, the guardian website provides a comprehensive database and analysis: *http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/london-riots*: accessed Feb 29th 2012.

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riots have probably been seen by most the readers of this paper. From the raging violence as below:

London, Summer: August 2011

Picture I

(The guardian newspaper, *www.theguardian.co.uk,* accessed 17th April 2012).

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To the aftermath where London residents collectively assisted in the clean-up of the capital:

Clapham, London, August 2011

Picture II

(The guardian newspaper, *www.theguardian.co.uk*, accessed 17th April 2012)

Whilst these pictures above may represent the more popular, certainly better seen aspects of the London riots, at the same time other nuanced incidents took place that had as their focal point the Sikhs and Sikhism in London. The next picture is illustrative of this:

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Southall, London: August 2011

Picture III

(The guardian newspaper, *www.theguardian.co.uk,* accessed 17th April 2012)

The last picture shows Sikh males outside a gurdwara in West London, armed with weapons acting as a deterrent to potential rioters and looters who, it had been rumoured, were targeting temples and businesses in Hounslow and Southall[14]. This picture would appear to underline the significant role that Sikhism plays in contemporary Sikh identity in London. This picture also takes responsibility for provoking the question that dovetails with the RAI conference; can socio-cultural anthropology assist Sikh temples to understand their role, if any, in the formation of British Sikh identity? Could it furthermore affect social cohesion and a fuller

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[14] News websites are currently the only sources that can be cited here, these include the BBC, *http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14472484*: accessed April 2012 and the Daily Mail: *http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2024358/UK-RIOTS-2011-Sikhs-defend-temple-locals-protect-pubs-Britons-defy-rioters.html*: accessed April 2012.

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participation of Sikh society in London's diverse community? Finally and specific to this panel; will a participant reviewer politicise the outcome? Can this be avoided, and should it be?

A Sikh reviewing Sikhs: The experiences of an "Insider" Anthropologist

The paper has hopefully shown the possibilities of an anthropological study of Sikhs within London, a non-traditional setting that is non-rural, urbanised and contemporary. Hopefully the paper has so far also underlined the challenge the author would have in trying to maintain a dogma-free approach whilst conducting the study. Given that this charity aligns itself largely with the interests of the migrant community and both parties' "freighted" backgrounds; the interaction of the "observer" with the "observed" could be precedential in considering the use of social-anthropology in this particular setting. It also provides a valid challenge that should be measured alongside within the dialogue of a wider role for anthropology in the non-academic, pragmatic daily life of contemporary civic society. In this case the identity politics of a minority group and its community's religious charity.

This case-study was also an experience that compelled the author to ask further questions: is it morally questionable to stay aloof from the needs of the observed? Should we "do" or "review"? The author's experience would strongly confirm that neutrality is a challenge and it may perhaps be an insurmountable one – this was certainly the case within this field research. However for the author the more significant questions appear to be; should we stay "value-free" and was it even possible? The unequivocal answers to these questions that this paper proposes are; staying "value-free" is a concept that will be challenged in any situation such as this; a situation where the author cannot "disconnect" fully from playing a role of change. Within this case study the author had the opportunity to execute practical and

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sustainable change immediately and with little effort; making detachment difficult. In short, remaining an invisible observer was practically and psychologically difficult and further more it was "perceived" and "felt" morally "reprehensible" to try, and below is why.

To a large degree the author shared the same ideological framework with the institute and the migrant community due to the reasons described below, could be classifies as a "sympathiser". As the author lived and worked in the same social setting, he was subject to the "automatic" and "ingrained" characteristics of a community that he had grown up in. He understood the coalescence "issues" the community faced and could understand the benefit in external intervention to resolve these. The author's personal frustration and satisfaction with the contagion social environment meant that once a position of affecting change had been reached, declining the chance to assist the community was perceived as an "antithesis" both morally and culturally. All of which meant that the author was only able to control the degree of dominance and not the existence of this "insider" connection. Terms such as "umbilical cord", "foundation" and *behzti* (shame) all describe the challenge the author was facing.

Communities originating from Panjab have a terminology that captures "emotionally" the social, cultural and communitarian aspect of the society, these are *qaum*[15] and *biraderi*[16]. The Sikhs consider themselves a *qaum* that philosophises the importance of groupings over personal advancement. This influence is "intrinsically" built into the religious tenets as "*nam japo, vande shakho*" which transliterates into "pray, share and eat". Children are traditionally

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[15] *Qaum* is a popularised term for the Sikh peoples globally; it incorporates religious, political and communitarian facets. One translation is a people that stand together (McLeod: 1989: 133). It is also a term used by other people who have derived from Panjab such as Muslims and Hindus.

[16] *Biraderi* translates into brotherhood and family, friends and acquaintances were prioritised in their migration to Britain, this inevitable meant being of the same locale or village (Thandi: 2007: 163 and Ghuman: 1997: 23).

brought up within extended family settings where sharing resources leads to a deep-seated development of filial and parental piety. Bearing in mind that the Sikhs remain transnational; this formation of a bond via shared hardship sustains the concepts of *biraderi* and *qaum*.

This overarching shared system (between author, community and charity) of learning and behaviour that is engendered virtually from birth has been observed as being more acute in diasporic Sikh communities than they are in the land of the religion's origin (Panjab). This can be accounted for by two fairly recent aspects; firstly the British Sikhs have developed a "protective" stance having gone from key players during the British colonial period to being placed under threat in post-war British society[17]. Secondly within the physical social setting of Panjab, Sikhs share resources with other equally distinct religions that are culturally similar thereby posing less of a daily problem with identity and the practise of religious mores. In the "tauter" environment in London; the motivation for the author to detach himself; even temporarily, from other Sikhs can be considered much less than in Panjab.

All of the above added to the realisation, mid-study, that the exercise had adopted political and pragmatic aims and the maintenance of an open-ended inquiry had been compromised. The study's aims became a target and results-driven exercise with a rapidly declining return on independent cogitation. Having described the circumstance hence, it may not surprise the reader that the author had to, at the end of the three months; mentally stop himself from climbing onto the steps of the temple in Picture III to urge "his people" to disarm themselves! After the events at the temple during the riots, the field research became further politicised and the author started opposing some of the aims and actions of the temple

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[17] See Fisher, Lahiri & Thandi (2007:159).

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management; especially with regards to the charity's youth programmes. At the risk of sounding "hackneyed" there was an increased possibility of the reviewer "going native" even though (or perhaps especially as) the ethnographer was already a "native". It took an experienced dissertation tutor to instigate academic "blinkers" that initially struck the reviewer as being unnecessary but whose value was made apparent when the charity asked the author to become a trustee in order to raise funds. Suddenly the "shared cultural system of meanings" had become a barrier to the investigative study (Des Chene: 1996:1274).

Having describing the role of an anthropologist and highlighting the additional nuances of being an "insider", the next section tries to frame the merits and demerits of the reviewer's experiences. In many respects the paper may appear so far to have ideologically consigned the "subjective reflexivity" of the author and his ethnography to an error of methodology. However the experiences during the field research also showed that the following epistemological and ideological areas of the case study were could be said to have improved by being an "insider anthropologist". The subjectivity defined the nature of the ethnographical experience, it may even be considered as "being" the personal and interpersonal experience. Furthermore due to dilemma of anthropological "omniscience" being greatly reduced through the more "symmetric" power balance between the reviewer and reviewed, this have created e a positive, not pejorative situation (Just & Monaghan: 2000: 155). From whichever angle the situation is framed, the case study and its author's role would appear to provide the debates on the importance of subjectivity and its alloyed "insights" into non-Western human behaviour

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with a good test case to explore the role of anthropology in this South Asian derived migrant community[18].

The next part of the paper examines the inner workings of the research conducted by sharing with the reader the benefits and concerns of the case study, it is a section that the panel could consider as being the "practicalities and moralities" of the research.

Motivation and Interest

Sharing many of the values and characteristics of the group under study meant that the author was motivated by both the struggles and prosperity of the community and had a personal interest in the outcome of the study due to familial and communitarian links. The dual threads of the author's personal vision of a successful Sikh community forming a "wholesome" part of London diverse make-up stood to benefit from this study. As an impetus, being in a position of writing observations that could assist the author's vision sustained the groundwork and write up of the thesis long after the last interview had been conducted.

Trust and confidence

The value of bearing witness to the behaviours, utterances and actions of the subjects (both consciously and unconsciously) is rich primary source material for any ethnography, however it is always in danger of being "adapted" in the presence of an external or internal observer.[19] Whilst this paper does not suggest that this was not the case during this study, a

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[18] This paper utilises works by the likes sof Spiro (1984, 1986 and others) to challenge the notion than subjectivity can be firstly nullified and secondly is undesirable.

[19] Much like the behaviour of the Balinese villagers initially during Geertz's field research where they simply ignored the existence of the reviewer (Geertz: 1973f: 23).

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quick reminder here of the author's specific qualities may make the counter- argument clearer. The author was a Sikh male who was able to communicate in the same languages, was versed in Sikhism's ritual and custom boundaries (including male-centricity), consumed the same communal spaces and services and finally who fell "in-between" these generations of "transmitters" and "receivers". This led to a situation where the majority of the group being reviewed did not feel that were under observation or review and many felt that there was less likelihood for a dramatic exposé of the community. This "openness" allowed for valuable "serendipitous discoveries"[20] that may have not have become a "social inquiry" for other researchers.

Access

Having shown that trust and confidence was accorded to the author, it then becomes corollary that the author gained contact with people and places that may have been off-limits to other observers. Like many religious communities, the most sacred ceremonies and rituals are not open to non-adherents. The Sikh baptism ceremony, *khande khi pahul* is one such ceremony that the author was able to observe behind closed doors and conduct interviews about. Other "private" events included the daily removal and placing of the Holy Scriptures; *the granth sahib* in the prayer hall. This extended the length of contact with the community due to the relationships built up through commonalities in a shared system of societal conduct and respect. This allowed the author to explain and understand processes and symbols beyond the superficial[21].

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[20] Just & Monaghan (2000: 440).

[21] One such observation was the cleaning of the temple attendees' shoes, this is a form of penance that is lost upon many Sikh youth, the "free kitchen" or *langar* is another.

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Anonymity: Accorded and Received

Academic field-research guidelines signed up to by the author ensured that anonymity was granted to every interviewee who requested it – this is a basic premise of the St Marys University College ethics committee guidelines. However, what this study's plan did not mitigate was the author being offered anonymity. The reason for this again was the commonalities between the charity, the study group and the author. In some "private" occasions, the author was offered anonymity and in many other situations; the author's anonymity was demanded. At first this proved to be a complicating as part of the study's and College's ethical conduct guidelines require the subjects to know that they are being reviewed formally by an academic.

However as a strict precondition laid out by senior members of the temple to witnessing and reviewing erstwhile "private" events the author was asked not to share his name with the subjects of the "ceremonies". Fortunately no occasion arose where the College's guidelines may have been compromised as none of the subjects requested the author's name and there was no interviewing. It did however, became clear that it was for the sake of the participants of these "closed-door" situations that may have been affected by the presence of an "outsider" formally reporting on these very personal ceremonies. Furthermore it was an outsider whose familial and social links could undermine the solemnity and privacy of the undertaking by the participants. This allowed the reviewer to get closer to the participants and the organisers for a more "root and branch" primary source analysis.   Most fulfilling of all, it was a completely unexpected methodological development during the study; even though the author's background "qualifications" may have made this a possibility.

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Sympathy

Compassion based on a shared background of struggles and advances has long been documented as a "natural" development between the anthropologist and the study group[22]. Whilst this is considered here as a positive aspect, this could equally be viewed as an ambiguous characteristic; one that could both assist and hinder an ethnographical undertaking of a community. For instance in this case study, the cultural heritage between the author and the community under inquiry may have stopped the asking of hard questions, gathering compelling case material and conducting un-freighted analytic postulating. Treating the subject with overtly and sometime misplaced sensitive consideration may lead to empathic field research that does withstand epistemological examination. This may have been the case in this project but it should also be borne in mind that the author's sympathies shifted so often between the different sub-groups that it may have in the end not had any "differentiating" effect.

Making a Practical Difference

This describes a controversial effect that the study had and whilst it may be strictly not "right" for certain schools of social inquiry, it is included here to contribute to the discussion on how to "explore the manifold ways in which anthropology in its widest sense has been influential outside academia". The author found himself in a position where the resources at his disposal allowed him to make practical and ideological differences to the community under review. A simple example is as follows; as the author was a student of higher education the organisation of the gurdwara's library was an area that he could advise on as it needed

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[22] Just and Monaghan (2000: 222) detail and comment on the story of "Fossi" and his offering left in the grotto for the Tikopian gods when no other indigenous villager actually did so. He had developed an overt sympathy that was out of touch with the current beliefs and practises of his study group.

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updating and in its present state it was unusable to all apart from a few select members. Following early interview sessions many of the youth generated feedback to the management regarding the historiography of Sikhism and the critical analysis that could be applied the tenets of the religion –both of which had been lines of questioning by the author. The seed of this knowledge pursuit had been planted in many cases by this reviewer's interaction with the youth, in this way the ethnography was affecting the behaviour of the group in situ. It was not very difficult to apply the author's experiences to the youth and in general the community charity studied.

Further change was seen in the Sikh youth that attended religious services and made use of free learning such as language schools, art classes and history exhibitions. These youth had not traditionally been tutored using critical analysis and most learning was conducted through "top-down pedagogy" with the teacher – student relationship akin to the strict piety shown towards elders that the Sikh community at large (like many other South Asian communities) operated within. The introduction of an academic researcher that used critical analysis and was furthermore seen as being an "one of us" with "permission" to question the fundamental operational conduct created a new dialogue within the temple and brought about a change whose effect can be seen today.

Expanding on the theme of critical analysis; many Sikh youth felt that the need to further understand the Sikh Gurus' teachings and the secular aspects of the Sikh community. Although the author felt that a "global" cultural cross-comparison was not a natural strength of the study[23] it was his comparison of the Sikh religion with the role of the Church during the

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[23] This was felt due to due to the "singular nature" of the association between the author and the Sikh community.

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Middle Ages with regard to the authority of the English Monarchs that provided some of the youth with the impetus to learn about those that wielded power in the name of religion. There exists today a monthly discussion group, organised in conjunction with the management who provide an information platform with tagline; "Everything you wanted to know about Sikhism but were afraid to ask"[24].

As the deliberately descriptive narrative hopefully illustrates, the author may have felt that that he became "part of the solution" however that "solution" could in hindsight be viewed as self-satisfying and politically charged. The author no longer has any association for with the charity itself although he continues to attend the services. Much of the change expected by the author was turned into a token introspection and the management eschewed independent assistance. The merits of the author's impact were simply applied to a smaller section of the group than the author had envisioned.

Having looked at this paper's concept of the "merits of an "insider" reviewer the next section deals with the depreciatory effects of the author's ethnic and communitarian overlap that led to many challenges, which could in turn be seen by some as undermining a "classical" anthropological study.

The Others and Otherness

Whilst some anthropologists have found themselves "idealising"[25] the cultural lives of the group under study, this author ran into the opposite challenge. The research brought the

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[24] Website, *http://www.sikhismseekers.com/*, accessed 8th April 2012.

[25] Monaghan and Just (2000:313).

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author into contact with the management "transmitters" who were in key decision making positions when it came to influencing the charity's role in the formation of the Sikh youth's British identity. Due to the perceived lack of impetus on their part to support the youth, it became a challenge to retain objectivity as the temptation arose to "force" change. As previously noted the author had previous experience in conducting critical analysis of scriptural knowledge and Sikhism historiography that had enabled him to differentiate local ceremony being "occasioned" as religious heritage. This "knowledge" had the effect of critiquing areas that were considered "sacred" to some and may have led to a detachment away from some parts of the study, which may have obscured the holistic overview. However it was the under-resourced support services for the Sikh youth that drew the sharpest criticism from the reviewer as there was a perceived lack of focus on acculturation and integration that caused a personal conflict and reduced open an investigation significantly.

It should be recalled here that the author was putting himself into a "fulcrum" situation as he was considered to be "in between" two generations of Sikhs in London and could sympathise with and criticise both groups. In his personal vision of the future of Sikhs in London, Sikh youth required a different educational influence to the current one. One case in point was the charity's desire for a conjoined "Sikh" faith school which followed the national education curriculum but was also to focus on the Sikh religious education of youth as practised by this particular gurdwara. The author became politically active in trying to convince others of the drawbacks of such an enterprise with underpinning motivation being not to "let down" his own vision for an integrated Sikh society in London. This may have significantly undermined the results of any field-research data on the Sikhs and their religious institute in

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the formation of British Sikh identity. It did however lend a voice to certain groups as the author became a trustee for a short while.

Challenge to critically assess

Using ethnography as a methodology has the reliance on "thick description" to record and relate to the reader the interpretation by the author on the subjects' lifestyles and thoughts. This proved to be a challenge for the relatively untrained author who rather than noting simple physical observations, recorded his perception of the "actual" reason behind the subjects' behaviour. One of the reasons for this was the reduced "differentiation" between the observer and observed. In many instances the notes were self-interpreted observations without critical probing on situational nuances.

As the author had been brought up within this society and had his preconditioned "understanding" as to why actions and behaviours occurred, there was the risk of the writing reflecting his own analysis down rather than questioning the motives and intentions of those he was studying. This may have led to a lack of cross-comparison as not only was the reviewer from the same cultural environment but whilst in "participant mode" he may have filled in "observational silences" with his pre-conditioned knowledge. Without the machinations of critical analysis, the study could simply be viewed as a "tale" of thick description undermined further by epistemological shortcomings. The author's "proclivity" to sympathise with the community may have led to a lack of testing and academic neutrality. Both developments which may have jeopardised the academic and anthropological "universality" advances hoped for in the study. The challenge for the author was disengaging with the community he lived

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amongst. As the study reached the end, it became a complicated task to interview and observe the community without a predetermined "results-driven" agenda.

Analysing the Role of Anthropology

Having "thickly" narrated what the panel abstract describes as the "practicalities and morality of ideologically informed anthropological practices…" the final parts of this paper try to analyse the author's role as an anthropologist. This analysis may help the panel consider as to whether or not the case-study and the reviewer's experiences could be a direction for socio-cultural anthropology. The analysis will also consider if the case study and its findings command any value and withstand epistemological "stress testing". If the study's findings do not add value to the stakeholders' policy making within the charity, does the investigative set-up require a solution? Should perhaps the "insider anthropologist" seek measures that will guide the study into a value-free, observational record of Sikh communal behaviour? Is non-partisan reviewing really inculcated in all anthropologists?

The short answer that this paper offers is that ethnographic subjectivity is not only a considerable challenge to eliminate in a study such as this; its eradication would reduce significantly the valuable and "rare" emic research gathered. In doing so the study may not satisfactorily deliver any innovative findings on the Sikh charity. This postmodernist dilemma may make neutrality an academic wish, however the study does not claim "supreme and un-testable information"; it is narrative ethnography and should be viewed as such. As an added nuance, it should be noted that whilst the reviewer was "born" into the group's cultural system, personal differences drawn from his experiences may allow him to make impartial research findings.

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The broader question inferred here may in fact be; is there a way of obtaining "non-commodious" field research that an emic study brings? Undoubtedly, by improving the quality and rigour of the field research, simple fundamentals may have been improved easily by improving the basics of the ethnography. For instance, the author only spent three months studying the group, so a prolonged exposure may induce a less concentrated period to fit in events and behaviour, a better chance at "normalised" behaviour. It may provide a better chance at "internal cross-comparison" of players and actors. This could be particularly important given that the community displays seasonal behaviour based around lunar festivals such as April's *vaisakhi* which is the most celebrated of Sikh festivals that remembers the formation of the Sikh religion's orthodox order: *khalsa*. This concern should cautiously be balanced by the fact that the ethnographer was from the community, so the period of familiarisation and understanding is greatly reduced due to the "jump-started" nature of association; this especially makes a difference in the areas of language and the "ethos" of the group (Geertz: 1973: Chapter 1).

The case-study evaluated in hindsight strikes a postmodernist chord between "expressing a reality" and hopefully adding "substantive contribution" to the field of Sikh studies (Richardson: 2000: 254). This paper does not consider that a solution to the inherent reflexivity and subjectivity need necessarily be sought, as this may be unachievable and idealistic[26]. The subjectivity in the research methodology and findings is not traded in this paper as a desirably "classic or technical" trait of the ethnography nor is it deemed to represent the "ethnographic self" (Fine: 1993: 267-294).

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[26] This paper uses works such as Spiro (1996), Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007), Thaper (1998) and Lewis (1998) for their theories of knowledge in seeking a discourse on the particulars of this case study's experiences.

Having analysed the methodological and epistemological challenges of an anthropologist working in a charity, this paper returns to the original musings of whether anthropology can work for migrants and charities. The observations and notes from the original narrative and field research recorded above should highlight this that paper's position is a strong "yes"; anthropology can be made use of and is currently being used by the Sikh migrant community in London. In this instance the study has highlighted tensions and a discord between the second and third generation of Sikhs which threatens to undermine the role of the gurdwara in firstly the formation of British Sikh identity and secondly the promotion of social cohesion in the wider society. Given the central role of the gurdwara in a Sikh's life, the study could be used by the policy makers to "treat" the situation.

The temple could create programmes for firstly the youth with regards to aspects of the Sikh religion and secondly holding age-inclusive discussions for the older "transmitter" generation to appreciate the social diversity and challenges that is involved in contemporary living in the capital. Finally the study could be used to highlight to the "carriers" (religious leaders) that Sikh youth identity has a different role for Sikhism than they currently accommodate. Whilst this may sound self-styled; the work with the Sikh "generation 3.0" showed that the anthropologist could serve a useful role as the "cultural-translator", furthermore if this was duplicated in other similar scenarios; real practical knowledge exchange could assist intra and supra community cohesion.

In summary, the role of the anthropologist and anthropology itself can be classified into two general areas:

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<u>Knowledge</u>

A simple statement can be made here; the ethnography generated a mass of knowledge that was previously unavailable and innovatively new to the Sikhs studied. The charity had not previously considered that a close scholarly study of its behaviour could be beneficial to its present challenges and help any future changes. Information gathered about the community's behaviour with regards to its members and the interaction between its religious and cultural "markers" offered the key stakeholders the chance to understand their impact on the development of the society and its cohesion both internally and externally. This information included the divide in the approach to Sikhism by the older members of the community compared to the youth. And if Sikhism is a key Sikh identity construct then its analysis should take a central role.

Furthermore its practice and particularly the differentiation between Panjabi cultural memes and Sikh religious practices significantly differ between the three generations encountered. To give an example, the case study discovered signs of a rise in Sikh religious radicalism especially in the youth due to factors that have threatened Sikh identity in the last decade or so. The field research "uprooted" this development and identified that post 9-11; certain Sikh youth felt that they had to outwardly signify their religious heritage via visible features such as unshorn hair, turbans and carrying the five "K's". Further analysis of this observation showed that some considered this as a revivalist development that could be good for the community whilst others view it as a radicalism that threatened acculturation and integration. Anthropology could assist here by providing qualitative data for a dialogue between the two positions on what is a significant development in Sikh identity in Britain as illustrated by the London riots.

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The charity had previously not considered a solution such as an introspective field research project to try and understand its community members. In a personal way it was a "meritorious" in itself that the reviewer was able to base his study within "his" community. This is due to the fact that, whilst the reviewer was aware of the challenges facing the community's with regards to social unity, finding a willing charitable Sikh institute with religious responsibilities was not going to be straightforward. The findings and the pressures that the research placed on both the reviewer and charity show that it is unlikely that this format will again be used by the charity. They may have understood the benefit of this critical analysis, but the charity now perceives the need to frame the analysis within its religious role. A role of the charity that is undergoing scrutiny after the actions of some community individuals during the summer 2011 riots as shown in Picture III. The author also perceived that his work had shown the demerits of cultural relativism within the incidents of the riots.

Practice

Introducing a (limited) cultural cross-comparison also gave assistance to another development that was not part of the scope of the case study initially[27]. Using a very basic comparison of the Sikh community's years in London and comparing these to the city's Jewry made for some very poignant and interesting comparisons in relative growth patterns. In particular contrast was the "higher" use of the resources and goods by the Jewish community as well the "fuller" participation in civic activities. All this despite the two communities counting religion as a significant component of British Jewish / Sikh identity and at the same

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[27] The author acknowledges that his lack of experience may have limited the cross-cultural comparison.

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time facing the twin challenges of European wide secularisation and popular religious "revivalism" amongst the youth of both communities[28].

Using the findings of the review the Sikh community also increased its efforts to use the social services that are available to it; this included the increased application of grants for community projects, free legal advice and the introduction of workshops by the armed forces and the immigration control agency. The charity was also able to use the feedback from the study to reorganise the library resources to suit a wider user base. It also started rethinking certain "rules" that appeared to be causing a rift between the second and latest generation of Sikhs: the strict conducting of all religious services in the Panjabi language only. They have started with experimenting by conducting certain services and communications in Panjabi and English. The temple has also installed an overhead projector in the prayer hall that displays English translations of the service taking place. This has helped increase engagement with the younger members of the Sikh community as they are usually less proficient in the Panjabi language.

Conclusion

"Reflection and criticism are imbedded in myths that human beings cannot be entirely reflective and critical about"

(Alexander: 2003: 9)

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[28] Amongst the areas discussed was the presence of people with Jewish heritage in politics, business, academics and sports. An important source of discussion was the following report; Graham, David: *European Jewish Identity at the Dawn of the 21st Century: A Working Paper*, Unpublished report, Budapest: 2004.

Anthropology can now claim another link to the Sikhs in London; its continued use could help the migrant community's religious charity to understand the evolution of its role in the future better. This is especially important for the "emerging adults" of the community who struggle to "place" the religious and cultural traditions of their predecessors, including for example Sikhism's answer to epistemic questions about theodicy and the gurdwara's role in the contagion urban socialisation process. Can the temple influence social cohesion? The youth are unsure and a socio-cultural anthropologist maybe a resource that could conduct a review in the search for possible answers.

Whilst the ethnography may have started out as a scholarly study, it became very apparent that the application of anthropology could run far deeper than the completion of the author's MA. For the reviewer, it beckoned a change of tact and practice from reviewer to "reviewer-doer", this, it has to be added, brought immense personal satisfaction and "bolder" research. For the charity, it has signalled a need to move away from inherited dogma to introducing an element of critical rigour and introspection. This could assist the community to better make use of and understand the secular sphere of the capital's services, a part of contemporary society that is significantly more prominent than it was two generation ago and hence affects the third Sikh generation more.

Returning to the aspirations of the paper, it would be a good reminder that one of this conference's aims has been to show the "manifold" ways in which anthropology is "diffused" and "used" in the wider society. Hopefully the case has been made to show that the influence of the anthropologist and this ethnographical study has given the gurdwara a chance to control its future better by understanding the needs of present day Sikh youth in West London. For the

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reviewer, anthropology offered to its subjects a personal and communitarian introspection as well as a long term awareness of London society. All of which may allow them an increased chance to navigate their futures should they wish to use the case-study's field research. These are all factors that can be considered as tentative steps to a more critical and hopefully stronger British Sikh identity formation that could help generate "compulsive" civic cohesion and the chance to maximise the community's participation in society. These are all very real and practical challenges that face the transnational Sikh community in contemporary London society.

The pursuit of objectivity within anthropology has in its field writers such as Spiro (1984, 1986, 1990 and 1996) and Rudner (1996) who contend with, amongst other schools of critique, the postmodernist idea that the "meanings" of a Western anthropologist may be "incommensurate" with non-Western "human objects" and therefore the application of anthropology will always yield "culturally relative" results. Using this concept, it would easily be theorised that the amalgamation of a non-Western anthropologist (the author) studying a non-Western human objects (the Sikhs in West London) will reduce this "relativism" and produce knowledge that is "commensurate". In this way the author in this paper may have been in the position to gain a clearer and less "interpreted" understanding of the Sikh community.

This does, however, place the author and the Sikhs in Britain in a classification that is not entirely suitable; that of non-Western. Whilst agreeing with the principle that the ideological pursuit of objectivity may actually be deficient in depth when compared to the use of subjectivity in this case study, this case study's experiences could add another nuance to the

relationship between reviewer, reviewed and subjectivity/objectivity. This is reinforced further as Spiro (1996) goes on to posit that in fact a Western anthropologist may not "ex-hypothesi" comprehend the meanings of a non-Western object of observation and the subjectivity itself maybe considered to be a "truism". As with the debates in the field of anthropology on the unscientific characteristics in ethnography, the perceived "polarity" between objectivity and subjectivity in this case study shifts "dialectically" and its findings could be relied upon as "truth" - just as with this case study (Hughes: 1995: 197).

This paper should provoke the same questions as those of the panel; is the case study used herewith "humanitarian" or at the very least "altruistic" anthropology? Despite the term being contentiously advocating and value-laden, reflexivity in research is set to continue to be a fertile area of research for many disciplines and in amongst those should be counted anthropology. Whether the field is so poised is probably best answered by other delegates but hopefully the case has been made for the important role of anthropology in the social cohesion of Sikhs in London. The paper should hopefully also have illustrated that the relationship of the reviewer to the reviewed in this case study strengthened the validity of the findings and any perceived subjectivity is a danger in all ethnographies. Anthropology can make a substantial contribution for a society's internal manifestations such as inter-generational understanding and the role of religion in an urban setting. For this researcher the rich interaction of reviewer and reviewed here is the observation, understanding, uncovering of the latent and the support of human life: it is "autobiographical anthropology" in all its subjective, interpretative and polemic glory[29].

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[29] A very convincing précis is given by Ryang (2000) on the strengths of writing in such "personal" circumstances. The use of the phrase "self-cultural anthropology" aptly captures this paper's position on the "differences and similarities between anthropology, biography and autobiography".

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