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Formations of the Sikh Community in Ireland

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Thesis is submitted for fulfilment of the award
of Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice
(CTMP)

Dublin Institute of Technology

Supervised by:
Dr. Rashmi Sawhney

October, 2013

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Master of Philosophy degree (MPhil), is entirely my own work and has not been taken from work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate studies by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other institute.

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Signature.....Date.....
(Candidate)

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A substantial part of Chapters Two and Four are published jointly with Glenn Jordan, specifically: Jordan, G & Singh, S (2011) The Sikh Diaspora in Ireland: A short history, in Knut A. Jacobsen & Kristina Myrvold, (eds) *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities, and Representation*, Ashgate Publishers and Jordan, G & Singh, S (2011) On an Island without Sun: Coping Strategies of Sikhs in Ireland, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 32(4): 407-32.

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Sandeep Kaur, who very bravely carried on with the challenges of life in my absence and remained supportive of my work. I also would like to thank my parents and family in India, who have been a constant source of support and unconditional love.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the formation of the Sikh community in Ireland by providing a brief historical account of the migration of Sikhs to Ireland, as well as by offering a discussion of the key challenges faced in Ireland by Sikh migrants along with their responses to these particular socio-cultural and political contexts in attempting to forge a 'community' in Ireland. The research draws extensively upon an oral history and photography project entitled *A Sikh Face in Ireland* that was commissioned by, and carried out through, the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) between 2007-2010. The interviews I conducted during this project as research assistant to Dr Glenn Jordan, who created the photographic exhibit, form a substantial methodological component towards the analysis and insights developed throughout this dissertation. In addition to the interviews, the discussions here are grounded in long-term and sustained participant observation in the Dublin *gurdwara* over the last three years, which constitutes the major field site for this research. This dissertation offers a particularly located and ground-level perspective on the many issues around migration, multiculturalism, and questions of diversity that have been central to Irish public life over the last two decades, informed by the life experiences of a community that has suffered widespread racial abuse for sporting external signifiers like beards and turbans identified with Muslims in an increasingly Islamophobic European, indeed Irish context. Through this research I hope to present the Sikh communities' experiences and perspectives of migration as insights that might productively influence the depth and range of sensibilities towards migration and migrants in Ireland and outside, both among the general public as well as at policy level. The dissertation also offers Sikh community a documented account of their presence in Ireland and their contribution to Irish society by highlighting the proactive role that migrant-led community organisations (such as ISC) can play in civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and towards establishing migrant support networks. The dissertation consists of four chapters: Chapter One outlines the methodological approach to the research and locates the main theoretical concerns within relevant literature; Chapter Two offers an outline of the history of Sikh migration to Ireland; Chapter Three is a discussion of the key challenges faced by Sikh migrants in Ireland; and Chapter Four is a analysis of the strategies employed by the community in coping with and adapting to life in a foreign land. The focus of the thesis is the formations of the Sikh community. It does not directly address broader questions, such as racialization of non-white bodies, though these issues do figure in the analyses. While the dissertation includes several photographs that were taken during the research for *A Sikh Face in Ireland* along with archival photographs from family albums shared by the research participants, these are used in an illustrative capacity to vivify issues under discussion.

Introduction

The Sikhs are a “mobile people” (McLeod, 1997, 251) and their migration has its own place in the contemporary phenomenon of global migration. Historically, Sikhs originate from the Punjab region, a part of what is today’s northern Indian State of Punjab,¹ which they consider their homeland – real or imaginary. The Sikhs, Singh and Tatla (2006, 31) point out, are people “permanently on the move” with a history and culture characterised by willingness to travel, adventure, and adjustability. Currently, the global Sikh population is estimated at between 23 and 25 million people, of which approximately 1.5 million live outside India, scattered around the world. Within a European context, the number is estimated at around half a million people, with the largest and oldest settlements in Britain, and growing communities in many countries throughout Europe. The origins of the Sikh diaspora lie in service to the British Empire – as soldiers, civil servants, and skilled labourers. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, a significant Sikh population has made Europe their new home, adding to the growing ethnic and religious diversity in their respective countries of settlement.

In the last two decades, Ireland has joined the league of multicultural societies as the result of its populations’ diversified religious, ethnic and linguistic composition. The economic prosperity of the 1990s led to a rapid growth in employment opportunities, leading to an unprecedented growth of immigrants within the country. Between 1999 and 2008 the immigrant population increased by 18 per cent – the highest rate among the 27 countries comprising the European Union (Loyal, 2011). According to the

¹ The Punjab – the ‘land of five rivers’ originally covered far more area than sum of Indian and Pakistani Punjab.

Central Statistical Office (CSO) 2006 census, nearly 10 percent of the total population of Ireland consisted of non-Irish nationals – with immigrants from 188 countries.

The representation of this ethnic and religious diversity in mainstream social and political life has been hindered by the lack of credible research on ‘new’ communities. This lack of knowledge and awareness about the diverse life experiences of immigrants seriously undermines any meaningful effort aimed at intercultural understanding, and immigrant ‘integration’ into the Irish society. The scenario is similar in other European countries where a sizable Sikh population currently resides, as their presence and demographic statistics have broadly escaped academic attention. Until recently, there have been few academic studies exploring the Sikh presence in other European countries.² Much of this research has been published in European languages other than English, limiting its scope and readership (Jacobsen and Myrvold, 2011).

The United Kingdom, being the home of the oldest and largest Sikh settlement, has attracted considerable academic interest and research focused on the British context. These efforts have resulted in a vast body of literature concerning Sikh culture, religion, and history in the UK.³ For the purpose of this analysis, I draw on some of this literature here.

Some of the key texts that have informed my analysis include Parminder Bhachu’s *Twice Migrants* (1985) – an ethnographic study of East African Sikhs; Rogar Ballard’s (1989) account of the experience of successive waves of Sikh immigrants and

² In order to bridge the gap, 2010, Lund University, Sweden organised a conference ‘Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identity and Translocal Practices’ inviting established and emerging researchers working on Sikh community in Europe to present their work and conference resulted in an edited volume on Sikhs in Europe.

³ See Myrvold, K (2008) ‘Bibliography of Studies on Sikhs and Punjabis in Europe’, available at: http://www.sikhs-in-europe.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=55

‘differentiation and disjunctions’ among Sikhs. Other important studies include Darshan Singh Tatla (2005; 1999), and Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla (2006), which provide a more detailed account of diverse phases of Sikh migration and settlement. Their work also explores the role traumatic events such as the partition of India and Pakistan and ‘Operation Blue Star’⁴ played in the formation of the Sikh diaspora.

Additionally, much needed literature concerning immigration, legislation and settlement has begun to emerge in Ireland. Various NGOs including the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), and Integrating Ireland, either through independent research or in collaboration with academic institutions,⁵ have published reports which primarily highlight challenges confronted by immigrants in the country, and propose policy changes. Publications such as Fanning (2007; 2002) and Loyal (2011) provide more in-depth analysis of the multi-faceted changes that have taken place within Irish society. Others (for example, Flynn, 2006; Mutwarasibo, 2002; Ugba, 2003) have focused on individual ethnic communities, documenting the process of migration, settlement and institution building.

Sikhs are among the ‘new’ communities, whose numbers increased significantly in the last decade, but their presence and migration experience has received primarily anecdotal attention in media outlets, and only when they were impacted by certain unpleasant circumstances, such as racist attacks post 9/11, and the Gardai turban controversy⁶.

⁴ Operation Blue Star is code name Indian Govt has given to army attack on the Golden Temple of Amritsar, Punjab - the holiest Shrine of Sikhism - on the pretext to flushing out ‘militants’. More detail in chapter 2, on page 57.

⁵ A work done by FOMACS (Forum on Migration and Communications) since 2007 is a good example of collaboration between NGOs and academic institutions.

⁶ Following chapters provide a detailed account of Sikh migration experience in Ireland.

This dissertation - based on the collaborative public-media project *A Sikh Face in Ireland* - is an endeavour to address this shortcoming by documenting and presenting the history of Sikh migration to Ireland along with the real and everyday challenges faced by Sikhs, and the strategies employed to cope with these challenges.

Chapter One establishes the rationale as to why a study on Sikh migrants in Ireland was required, and outlines the socio-political factors which prompted this research. It also introduces the methodological framework adopted in this dissertation based on extensive fieldwork carried out during *A Sikh Face in Ireland* project, which took place over a period of two years and involved over 90 participants. It offers a discussion of related methodological issues, including the negotiation of the dual position of being a researcher and a community member during the research process.

Chapter Two provides a broad historical account of international patterns of Sikh migration to Ireland. Data gathered from life history interviews throws light on the distinct phases of Sikh migration to Ireland from the 1930s. It also helps to outline factors such as the motivation for migration, and the demographics in terms of population, age, gender and geographical distribution of Sikhs in Ireland.

Chapter three is more substantially based on the oral history interviews, and details the various difficulties, and issues that Sikh immigrants confront as they move from one country to another. Following on from the problems identified in Chapter Three, Chapter Four addresses the coping strategies employed by Sikh immigrants in Ireland. It examines whether immigrants predominantly turn to the host society and its redressal apparatus for their resolutions, devise their own strategies to deal with challenges, or

make recourse to a combination of both. This chapter also delves more deeply into the cultural, social and political role of the Sikh temple as a response to a hostile/alien culture.

Throughout the dissertation I use photographs taken either by Glenn Jordan or myself during the fieldwork research towards 'A Sikh Face in Ireland: photographic and Life History Project' in an illustrative capacity to vivify the issues and ideas under discussion. In order to retain the original voice of the participants I have not edited at all, or only minimally edited the interview transcripts to make them grammatically correct.

Chapter 1: Photography and Oral History: Research Context and Methodology

1.1 The Journey to Ireland

18th October, 2003 - the day I arrived in Dublin - marked the beginning of my migration journey to Ireland. Since childhood I had heard that the UK, United States, and Canada were considered ‘promising destinations’⁷, but Ireland was a relatively unfamiliar name among the Sikh community in the Kapurthala district where I grew up in the Punjab. Only a few months earlier a friend who lived in Dublin had told me in an email that Ireland was now ‘a very good place to work and study’. The succinct email didn’t provide any information about the ongoing economic transformations within the country, but the news of Ireland being a promising destination came as a pleasant surprise. Ireland was (and probably still is) comparatively unheard of in many Punjabi regions, as generations of Punjabi migrants have historically chosen the United Kingdom, Canada, or the United States of America as their preferred destinations. However, global migration patterns are continuously evolving and changing and in the last two decades, Ireland may still find its place among the mythical ‘West’ as a haven for migration from the East.

According to Massey et. al (1993), in countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, the volume of immigration has grown and its composition has shifted decisively away from Europe - the historically dominant source - towards Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Europe, countries which for centuries had been sending out

⁷ By ‘promising destination’ I mean countries such as UK, Canada, and United States which are widely regarded as economically affluent and are sought after migration destinations among Punjabi migrants due to several factors, including their reputation as ‘*amir mulak*’ (rich countries), well recognised centres of education, historical migration links, and favourable immigration laws.

migrants were suddenly transformed into immigrant-receiving societies. By the 1980s countries in southern Europe - Italy, Spain, and Portugal - which only a decade earlier had been sending migrants to wealthier countries in the north, began to import workers from Africa, Asia and the Middle East (ibid, 431). In the following decade, Ireland - with its booming economy and jobs available across industrial and service sectors, its rising standard of living and competitive educational institutions - found itself transitioning from an emigrant nation to a favourite destination for immigrants from all over the world. This unprecedented economic boom attracted migrants to the country for the first time since the 1970s. As a result, there were a total of 420,000 non-Irish nationals⁸ living in Ireland in April 2006, representing 188 different countries. Even though the majority of these people were from a very small number of countries - 82 per cent from just 10 countries (CSO, 2006) - inward migration, consisting of economic migrants, returning Irish emigrants, asylum seekers, and international students from around the world, contributed to the increasing religious, cultural and linguistic diversity within Ireland.

The large number of new immigrants also included Sikhs who started coming to the country in increasing numbers in the 1990s. An increased Sikh presence in Ireland naturally resulted in greater interaction between Sikhs and various government bodies, NGO's, schools, hospitals and the wider Irish community at large. The period of economic boom in Ireland coincided with the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. These attacks by the Al-Qaeda led to an increase in violence against ethnic

⁸ However there is evidence that the actual number of immigrants is much higher than the reported figure, partly because many immigrants didn't fill out the census forms, and those who have acquired Irish citizenship would have registered as Irish nationals. In addition, there are also a number of undocumented migrants. See *Number of immigrants in Ireland is out by least 85,000, admits CSO*. <http://www.tribune.ie/archive/article/2007/dec/02/number-of-immigrants-in-ireland-is-out-by-least-85/>

communities in the United States and other western countries, especially those who looked ‘Muslim’. This included Sikhs, who came under attack from the general public who misconstrued them as ‘followers of Osama Bin Laden’ because of their turbans and beards (Gohil and Sidhu, 2008). This was the case in Ireland too. Many Sikhs suffered verbal abuse and some were threatened with physical attack (Breslin, 2005; Grennan, 2001). Such negative association with terrorism and the threat of physical violence forced Sikhs to approach the Garda Síochána⁹ as well as media outlets to redress this problem of violence and mistaken identity.

My stay in Dublin as an international student gave me first-hand experience of the difficulties facing ‘visible migrants.’ Being a migrant in Ireland had its own share of challenges, and as a Sikh with a turban and beard whose ‘foreignness’ was visibly marked, these challenges were more pronounced. Particularly so, since the ‘markers of visibility’ were viewed negatively or with hostility by members of the ‘host society’.¹⁰ As a consequence, routine activities such as going to college or work, travelling in public transport, walking on streets, going to shops, cinemas, or playgrounds attracted attention, stares, shouts, and racist comments created a source of considerable anxiety and psychological stress. Due to the tragic events of the 9/11 and 7/7 bombings, those Sikhs who wore turbans like I did, frequently felt outrage or even revulsion in the face of being ascribed the label of ‘terrorist’ or ‘Muslim’, both terms used interchangeably as racist slurs.

My first years in Ireland were full of emotional conflict and uncertainty, where I constantly struggled between ‘fitting-in’ and ‘standing-out’. Many Sikh people opted to ‘fit-in’ and become less conspicuous, while others sought more long term solutions to

⁹ Garda Síochána is the National Police Service of Ireland.

¹⁰ By host society I mean a white, predominantly Catholic population native to Ireland.

address the ignorance about Sikhism in Irish society by actively engaging with it and by forming the Irish Sikh Council (ISC)¹¹. While attending college, I also began working with the ISC in 2005 and gradually got involved in developing anti-racist and intercultural events, organising educational outreach activities and acting as a media spokesperson. These outreach and educational initiatives provided opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogues with the general public and policy makers and also highlighted the dearth of sensibilities and resources in dealing with ‘new arrivals’ including Sikhs. Questions regarding migration history, population statistics – age, number, gender, educational levels, and geographical settlement were difficult to answer in the absence of any credible research on the Sikh community in Ireland. In such a vacuum, enquiries were often directed to the ISC, which also felt under-resourced to effectively address such enquiries.

During 2005 to 2007, one of the ISC’s main engagements was working with the Garda Síochána in relation to racist incidents against members of the Sikh community in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7 attacks. Additionally, the ISC requested that Garda Síochána consider Sikh students who were legally resident in Ireland for recruitment in their police forces as a part of an on-going programme to reach out to a wider range of ethnic and immigrant communities in Ireland. In August 2007 the Garda Síochána refused to grant a place to a Sikh Garda reserve, citing his use of the turban.¹² This refusal caused a major setback to the ISC’s efforts which held the view that recruitment of Sikhs into the law enforcement body would function as an effective deterrent to the misconstrued

¹¹ The Irish Sikh Council was established in Dublin in August 2004 by a group of young Sikh professionals and students, who came to Ireland shortly before or after “9/11”. The organisation was developed to address the problems that many Sikhs have faced due to their misidentification by local Irish as “Bin Laden,” “Muslim terrorists”, etc. For a more detailed discussion, see page no 89.

¹² It’s noteworthy to mention that the Sikh reserve Garda successfully completed his selection exams and interviews and first two training stages while wearing his turban. He was issued a Garda uniform to complete his last stage of training where he was supposed to work with regular Garda in a designated Garda Station. It was at this stage that he was informed that he could not wear his turban.

association of Sikhs with terrorism post 9/11. The controversial decision also brought the Sikh community into the limelight of the Irish media,¹³ particularly within the context of the debate on integration. The nature of the questions and the level of public discourse in newspapers, and on radio stations and internet discussion forums revealed a lack of awareness about Sikhs and Sikh customs among Irish people. At the same time, there was a dearth of resources that could inform Irish society about Sikhs in Ireland.

1.2 FOMACS and the Start of the Photography and Oral History Project

In March 2007 when I was registered in the Graduate Business School at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) for a Masters degree, I was invited to attend the launch of the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) at my college, DIT Angier Street. FOMACS had been conceptualised as a collaborative public media project, to produce film, photographic, digital, radio, animation, and print stories on the topic of immigration and integration in Ireland, with the aim of reaching and engaging diverse audiences.¹⁴ Its central objective was listed as the amplification of voices and personal stories previously sensationalised or marginalised in dominant media representations of immigration. Glenn Jordan's exhibition of large portrait photographs and life stories, *Somali Elders: Portraits from Wales*¹⁵, was shown at the launch of FOMACS. I was moved by the power and impact that such photographs could have on viewers. The portraits of Somali elders and their accompanying stories presented many potential levels at which I could relate to the images. After seeing the exhibition, along with some

¹³ All the main newspapers - *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Examiner*, *Sunday Tribune*, radio stations, - Newstalk, *RTÉ* radio, *BBC* radio Northern Ireland, community radios, Television channels - *RTÉ*, *BBC world Service*, *TV3* news covered the story. The issue was debated on internet chat forums. *RTÉ* broadcasted special 'Prime Time' report on the turban controversy. I personally spoke on many radio programmes which were very interested in having some member of community to share their perspective.

¹⁴ <http://www.fomacs.org/index.php>

¹⁵ See Jordan et. al., *Somali Elders: Portraits from Wales / Odeyada Soomaalida: Muuqaalo ka yimid Welishka* (2004). The book is bilingual in English and Somali.

of my Sikh friends, I approached Glenn Jordan and asked if he would be willing to do such a project on Sikhs in Ireland. His reply was, ‘Why not?’ Ours was a spontaneous request in response to Glenn Jordan’s work¹⁶, but it also illustrated our collective desire to be fully represented in Irish society, and to counter the stereotypical depictions of Sikh communities post 9/11, which we were confronting on a daily basis. His answer to my question was positive, but it was unclear to me at the time how our collaboration would materialise.



Figure: 1. Meeting Glenn Jordan during the launch of FOMACS, March 2007. Photograph: Veronica Vierin.

Though accidental, my encounter with Glenn Jordan during the opening ceremony of FOMACS presented an opportunity to create an educational and cultural resource, and an academic study about Sikhs in Ireland. With financial assistance from Community Foundation of Ireland (CFI), and the Irish Sikh Council’s interest in and support

¹⁶ Singh, S (2009) A Sikh Face in Ireland, Available at; http://www.sikhchic.com/art/a_sikh_face_in_ireland

towards this project, FOMACS commissioned a comprehensive study of the Sikh presence in Ireland. In order to conduct fieldwork and assist Glenn Jordan in photographing and interviewing research subjects, I applied for a transfer from the Graduate Business School to an MPhil programme at the Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice (CTMP) and started working as research assistant to Glenn Jordan.

The project was tentatively titled as '*A Sikh Face in Ireland*', a name that held good unto its completion. In the preliminary stages of *A Sikh Face in Ireland*, various rounds of discussion took place between FOMACS, Glenn Jordan and the ISC to define the scope of the study. The project was conceived as a collaborative effort where a specialist academic would team to work with a community organisation to undertake research within the community. The project was conceived in terms of outcomes¹⁷, such as a photo exhibition, website, resources for primary and secondary school children, and publications, all aiming to counter the stereotypical depictions of Sikhs in the post 9/11 world, and to provide credible data on Sikhs in Ireland. The preliminary discussions envisioned 50 life-size portrait photographs of Sikhs in Ireland accompanied by their life stories; however the actual number of portraits and interviews far exceeded the original estimate. There was some consensus concerning the final products and methodological approach, but it was exploratory in the sense that the study was the first of its kind in Ireland.

¹⁷ 'Outcomes' was the original term used, but a more appropriate description of the body of work is offered by 'modes of presentation' such as exhibition, website, education material for primary and secondary schools, and publications etc.

This MPhil dissertation draws on the research undertaken during *A Sikh Face in Ireland* along with long term participant observation conducted in the *gurdwara*¹⁸ in Dublin. From autumn 2007 to spring 2010, Glenn and I spent hundreds of hours travelling together throughout Ireland and discussing photography, oral history, representation, identity, and migration in relation to the Sikh community. During this time, in addition to establishing contact with Sikh community members and leaders and assisting Glenn with the photographic interactions, I interviewed a total of 93 research subjects and subsequently transcribed and translated 10 of these interactions. The rest of the interviews were transcribed in India by a firm offering professional services in translation and transcription. The following sections broadly address the methodological approach adopted during the study.

1.3 Situating the Research

‘No research can be understood in a vacuum’ asserts McRobbie (1982, cited in Wright et al, 2010, 543). Hence the people located in this research project must be understood in a wider social context. With this in mind, I will outline the circumstances that led to the commissioning of the first systematic exploration of the Sikh presence in Ireland and the characteristics that have come to define the project. First, the contextual element as previously outlined in this chapter were the charges of terrorism, and a general ignorance of Sikh culture that Sikhs experienced post 9/11 and 7/7. The research project responded to these barriers to integration and a felt need within the Irish Sikh Community and ISC to address them. From the onset, it was conceived as a collaborative effort, involving, in particular, FOMACS (Forum on Migration and Communications), the ISC and the *gurdwaras* in Dublin and the North of Ireland. The

¹⁸ Gurdwara is a Sikh Place of Worship. There is one *gurdwara* in Republic of Ireland and two in the Northern Ireland - one each in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Formal name of Dublin *gurdwara* is Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar, but for sake of ease, I refer to it as Dublin *gurdwara*.

ISC saw the project as an opportunity to educate the general Irish public about Sikhs. The main mode of engagement with this work was and continues to be through exhibitions and a website (www.formacs.org, www.formacsretrospective.org). Additionally, educational outreach has been considered, and pedagogical materials for schools are also being produced from the work by the FOMACS team in collaboration with Chester Beatty Library and ISC. Based on these characteristics, the study can be classified as action research. The term *action research* traces its roots to the action research school developed by social psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s. It refers to a mode of social research that is intended to have immediate practical outcomes – e.g., to improve the effectiveness of a community-based organisation or the services offered by an NGO or to find a solution to a problem. Action research projects tend to be initiated by organisations, rather than by academic institutions. Also the outcomes are varied in a sense that output is not primarily or exclusively for academic journals or books but may also include other outlets like TV, radio, educational brochures, and/or an exhibitions. Action research is also collaborative in nature, bringing different, sometimes unlikely stakeholders or organisations together to work on a given problem or issue at hand.

In such a research scenario, most pertinent is the fulfillment of what Jacobsen and Landau (2003) identify as the ‘dual imperative’, that is to satisfy rigorous academic research standards while also ensuring that the knowledge and understanding generated by research be used to fulfill a given cause, in this case, to counter the stereotypical depictions of Sikh communities, and to enhance their representation in contemporary Irish society. Involvement of academic and community stakeholders (FOMACS, Irish Sikh Council, Glenn Jordan, and Post-graduate research student) in the study and

subsequent production/hosting of *A Sikh Face In Ireland: Photographic and Life History Exhibition* are indicative of a ‘dual imperative’.

Since this work started as a direct response to an exhibition on *Somali Elders: Portraits from Multi-ethnic Wales* which was on display in DIT, the project drew upon the methodological and aesthetic framework favored by Glenn Jordan in his previous work, while modifying them as required in the light of the particular demands of the Irish context, availability of funding and resources, the collaborative nature of the project and the expectations of the Sikh community, as outlined in the following sections of the chapter.

1.4 Methodological Considerations: Subjects / Sample / Representation

The research focused on people currently living in Ireland (i.e., the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) whose families are originally from the Punjab and followed the Sikh religion. In the Republic, we photographed and interviewed people in the counties of Dublin, Clare, Kildare, Mayo, Meath, Limerick and Kilkenny, and the cities of Cork, Galway. In the North, we photographed and interviewed people in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Omagh, Strabane and Ballymoney. According to the 2001 UK Census there were 219 Sikhs in Northern Ireland, but no comparable data is available in the south as ‘Sikh’ is not a category in the Irish Census. Given this lack of data, the preliminary stage of the research involved mapping out the Sikh population and preparing an extensive list of Sikhs living in and outside Dublin with inputs from early Sikh migrant families, members of the Dublin *gurdwara*, and the ISC. (The ISC

estimates that the total number of Sikhs in Ireland is approximately 1,200 with more than half of them being students¹⁹).

Efforts were conscientiously made to develop a sample that would be representative of the Sikh population at the time. A sampling technique that is particularly helpful for hidden populations that are difficult to access in the absence of concrete data is ‘Snowball Sampling’ (Marshall, 1996), which was the method adopted for this study. In this approach, study subjects recommend future subjects from their contacts. Because samples obtained through the ‘snowballing’ technique can also be inexact, and produce varied results, cross-checking information from more than one source was important to reduce the chance of a biased sampling. For example, in one instance, I asked a participant to recommend a few names of people who could be photographed and interviewed. Once the names were cross-checked with other sources, I discovered that all three recommended names turned out to be his nephews and nieces.

Throughout the project, we engaged with Sikhs from different backgrounds - including people who have lived in Ireland for a relatively long time; people from different occupational and educational backgrounds; people with different migration histories; and people from different groupings within the community. Many of the participants self-identified as Sikhs, while others did not; some identified closely with Sikhism as a religion, while others identified more with the Sikhs as a nation;²⁰ many emigrated directly from India, while others came from East Africa, England and elsewhere

¹⁹ A significant number of the Sikhs who came as students since 2001 have obtained work permits, or work visas and have invited their families and had children

²⁰ Verne A Dusenbery, ‘Nation’ or ‘World Religion’?: Master Narratives of Sikh identity’ in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, (eds), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi, 1999): 127-144. Dusenbery argues that there are two “dominant master narratives – Sikhs as a ‘nation’ and Sikhism as a ‘world religion’ – through which Sikhs have commonly represented themselves”. The life stories that we collected are consistent with this interpretation.

(including one man from Malaysia). We also included two people who are converts to Sikhism; some non-Sikhs who are married to Sikhs; and some people who are not Sikh, but who are regularly participate in Sikh community activities (most of these individuals are immigrants from the Punjab whose families are Hindu).

While selecting participants, Glenn frequently posed the question, ‘Why are we photographing this person or family?’ Or, ‘Why is he/she important?’ Glenn’s query prompted me to reflect critically on the selection criterion and to aim to be representative of the participant on a recurrent basis. ‘The researcher’ within me learned to ask, ‘Who is being included and who is being excluded?’ Throughout this process, I needed to resolve my initial dilemmas and reservations regarding the sampling criterion and learn to distance myself from the subjects in order to carry out this research. At the same time, my relationship with the community transcended my role as researcher; as an active member of the community, as an insider, I needed to be careful and conscientious in relation to my fieldwork, my research subjects, and the study design.

1. 5 Negotiating Time, Space and Place

The extent of access, apart from other things, determines in part the quantity and quality of information or data available to researchers. One of the challenges for researchers focusing on diasporic contexts is the difficult task of wearing their “academic hats” while at the same time building meaningful relationship with immigrant communities (Collet, 2008). The task may become relatively more manageable if the researcher belongs to the same community or has had a significant level of engagement with it. My ‘insider status’, and previous engagements as projector operator, secretary in the *gurdwara* and the ISC, made me visible and gave me a sense of creditability within the

local community. The field work for *A Sikh Face in Ireland* was seen as an extension of my previous activities, this time on a larger scale. My ‘positionality’ within the community helped to establish contact and negotiate time, space and place for conducting fieldwork with prospective participants, however, occasionally it proved quite difficult and required constant negotiation with the participants. The busy schedule of participants, inclement weather conditions, the time constraints on Glenn’s stay in Ireland²¹, and an emergent understanding of photography in terms of time and skills required, made the whole fieldwork process quite challenging. It was therefore very important that the project be explained to participants in a way and with language that would be accessible and meaningful to them. This is where my ‘insider status’, fluency in the native language of research participants (Punjabi), and affiliation with an academic institution (DIT) helped me introduce the project and Glenn to the community, and then subsequently work with Glenn as a team. One other benefit of being an insider, a part of the community being studied, is that I was able to identify the various groupings and factions within the community: Sikhs from different castes, older families, new arrivals, and different occupations.

I always carried with me and showed to participants Glenn’s previous published book ‘*Somali Elders: Portraits from Multi-ethnic Wales*’ and the brochure on ‘*Mothers and Daughters*’ to explain and contextualize the work. During the fieldwork, Glenn’s integrity towards the process of photography and the politics of representation, his respectful and unassuming demeanor towards men, women and children, his experience

²¹ Since Dr. Jordan is based in Cardiff where he is Reader in the Cultural Studies at the University of Glamorgan and Founding Director of Butetown History & Arts Centre (www.bhac.org), the photographic fieldwork, and to a lesser extent the oral history interviews were subject to time constraints and logistical problems.

of working with migrant communities²² further facilitated our field work. As Glenn almost always preferred to photograph participants in available sun light, this meant using all those spaces in any given house that satisfied this requirement, be it a kitchen, sitting room, bedroom, gardens or even streets outside the home. On frequent occasions, it involved shifting any neatly decorated and placed furniture or other household items that obstructed the process of creating an image. This process of dismantling required participants' approval (which came hesitantly in a few cases) in this largely collaborative approach to portraiture where it was crucial that participants perceive the long-term benefits of such an exercise as outweighing the short-term annoyance of re-arranging the sitting room, kitchen or bedroom in their homes. However occasionally, access was granted only when participants realised some personal merit in the research project. On one occasion, when I contacted a family about the project, the lady on the phone questioned why I was doing this project and why they should cooperate. The question was not unusual but the directness and straightforwardness with which it was asked was unexpected, and it required a detailed explanation on my part.

During our field work in Northern Ireland²³, I discovered that the majority of Sikh families in Derry/Londonderry²⁴ belonged to the *doaba*²⁵ region of Punjab, a region that I also come from. This sense of geographical closeness facilitated ready access and a sense of trust and support in the form of food and accommodation. In many cases

²² Since 1987, Glenn has been engaged in collaborative research, publications and exhibitions on immigrants and minorities in Wales. See, e.g., Jordan (2004), (2008) and (2010); and Jordan and Weedon (2000) and (1995).

²³ The field work of *A Sikh face in Ireland* project started in the Republic, subsequently discovering the presence of Sikhs in the North dating back to 1930s during the course of the research.

²⁴ During *A Sikh Face in Ireland* project we decided to use both the words 'Derry/Londonderry' because of the contentious nature of the political claims by both nationalist and Unionist residents in the city, but during interviews we have retained the name participants used in their conversations, as either Derry or Londonderry.

²⁵ 'Doaba' literally means 'land between two rivers' and consists of the present districts of Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala. *Doaba* is one the three geographical regions (the others being *Majha*, and *Malwa*) that the north Indian state of Punjab is known for due to its river systems.

individuals contacted other families on our behalf and introduced us and our project. A good example of this was when the president of the *gurdwara* in Derry/Londonderry made an announcement about our visit and work and requested families to cooperate. This introduction proved very helpful and substantially strengthened the bond between potential participants and us. Similarly, my on-going engagement with the *gurdwara* in Dublin proved helpful and later the *gurdwara* served as a crucial field site for the project.

1.6 The *gurdwara* as field site.



Figure: 2. Flag Changing Ceremony, Dublin *gurdwara*, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan

Located on Serpentine Avenue in Ballsbridge, a prosperous area near Dublin city centre and the sea, the Dublin *gurdwara* is the central religious and cultural institution for the people of Sikh heritage living in Ireland. Every Sunday afternoon, a congregation consisting of up to 300 people comes to participate in the religious service and

communal meal offered at the *gurdwara*. As revealed through the life stories and participant observation, the Dublin *gurdwara* - like the *gurdwaras* in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast - is a place where Sikhs in Ireland participate in a familiar shared culture; speaking their own language, wearing their Punjabi dress, eating familiar food, singing the hymns that they know from their youth. It is also a meeting place for recent Sikh immigrants to Ireland. My own informal induction to the community took place eight years ago, shortly after my arrival in Dublin, when my friends took me to the Dublin *gurdwara* on the following Sunday. Since then, my visits to the *gurdwara* have been more frequent, increasingly informal and intimate, ranging from a few hours to a few days. Over the years, my relationship to the *gurdwara* has grown in many ways but it was only recently that I began to observe the *gurdwara* closely and more critically as a part of the research project. Thinking critically about an institution, and my own deeply familiar religious practices necessitated new learning, and some unlearning. Occasionally I wondered if this 'questioning' meant 'rebellious' against my faith or being perceived to do so by other community members. This process was difficult, hard and uncomfortable at times. Slowly I learned to distance myself, and begin to notice the various religious and social activities inside the *gurdwara*, which eluded my prior understanding.



Figure: 3. Base of *Nishan Sahib* (flagpost) covered with remains of burned out candles on morning after the *Diwali* (Indian festival of lights), Dublin *gurdwara* November, 2009. Photograph: Author.

I regularly observed the proceedings and social interactions in the prayer hall, community dining hall, the kitchen, and at meetings and discussions relating to the *gurdwara* and the Sikh community. My observations revealed that the *gurdwara* was being used as a place for celebration for the birth of new babies, and routine accomplishments that made everyday life easier such as the renewal of work permits, the passing of driving tests, or family visits from India. It was also the place where people discussed and circulated information about jobs, houses, insurance, cars, fashion, etc., and developed their skills in cooking traditional food in the *gurdwara* kitchen. As a result, I began to develop a better understanding of its multi-dimensional role in my life and the life of other Sikh migrants in Ireland. All this assured me of the significance of the *gurdwara* as an ethnographic research site, helping to understand and delineate its particular role at this point in the migration history of the Irish Sikh community.

I introduced Glenn to the *gurdwara* at the earliest stage of the project, explaining to him the code of conduct within the *gurdwara*. All visitors, Sikh and non-Sikh are required to

leave shoes outside the *gurdwara* door, cover their head (scarves are provided) in case they don't wear turbans, and wash their hands before entering the main prayer hall. Alcohol, meat and tobacco products on the *gurdwara* premises are strictly prohibited. Inside the prayer hall, people are expected to sit calmly in a cross legged posture; avoid pointing their feet and turning their back toward Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scripture. Visitors are also advised not to clap in the *gurdwara*. Glenn was specifically advised to avoid certain body postures while photographing subjects in the *gurdwara*.

Working within this central religious, social and cultural institution required adaptation on his part and his multiple visits to the *gurdwara* facilitated this process while making him a somewhat familiar face in the *gurdwara* milieu. He soon sought to neutralise his presence - a tall, elderly African-American with a camera - by sitting at the back of the congregation, avoiding any significant movement, and participating in the religious service and communal meals as part of the congregation. The reverse process of being 'invisible' while making subjects 'visible' through documentary and portrait photographs was noteworthy. Because of its non-personal nature, extended opening hours, and participants' familiarity with it, the *gurdwara* proved to be a productive platform as a photographic fieldwork site. In the following section, I offer a brief account of the establishing of the *gurdwara* in Dublin as a history of my major field site.

1.6a Making the Dublin gurdwara

Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar traces its origin to weekly prayer sessions held in restaurants owned by early Sikh immigrants in the 1980s. These men who migrated to Ireland in 1972 as chefs gradually began to hold weekly prayer sessions in their

restaurant during the summer of 1984. For the next year and a half, community members continued this practice of religious and social get-togethers in restaurants. Other Indians who were known or happened to visit the restaurant for meals also attended these prayer sessions. One of these Indian visitors, Dr Narayan, a veterinary surgeon from India, suggested that Sikh community members should build a place of worship for the next generation, rather than simply meeting in restaurants. So the first meeting was held in the *Ashoka* restaurant in May 1985 to plan to build a *gurdwara*.

A month later, on 23rd June 1985, Air India Flight 182 crashed near the Irish coast killing all 329 passengers on board, many of whom were Sikhs. Since there was no *gurdwara* then, the Indian Embassy in Dublin had difficulty in finding a Sikh priest who could possibly perform the final rites for the Sikh passengers. Three days later, on 26 June 1985, community members opened a bank account in the name of “Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar” with an initial balance of £326 and continued looking for a possible place that could be used as a *gurdwara*. In December 1986, the Oscar theatre, an abandoned building in the Ballsbridge area of Dublin, was bought for £49,000 with the support of the Sikh community in London (Kuldeep Singh, interview, 14th August, 2008).

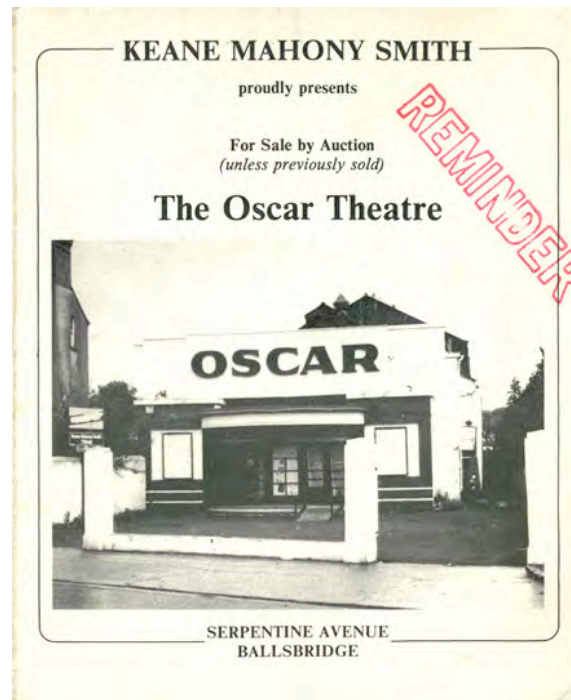


Figure: 4. Brochure advertising auction of the Oscar Theatre, 1986. Source: Mrs Kapoor's family collection.

Formerly serving generations of Dubliners as a cinema and then a theatre, the Oscar was transformed into a space with a new purpose. The transformation from the Oscar Theatre to the Dublin *gurdwara* of today occurred in three phases. Most of the work was done by members of local Sikh families. Since there were only a few families up until 2000, the work took many years to complete. The number of Sikhs in Ireland grew post 2000, which resulted in a marked increase in the number of people who regularly attend the *gurdwara*. Since there is only one *gurdwara* in the Republic of Ireland, it has become an important religious and social institution for the Sikhs living in various parts of the country.

1.7 Photography: Portrait and Documentary Photographs



Figure: 5. Phulpreet Singh with daughter Manpawan Kaur. Photograph: Glenn Jordan, 2008.

It is not uncommon for researchers to engage with documentary photography or for documentary video to be used as part of their research on immigrants and minorities (Gold, 2004). However, portrait photography is not widely used as explained by Jordan (2008), hence his insistence on the use of this form was particularly interesting. According to Jordan (2008), portrait photographs combined with life stories have a capacity to empower others and to engage the viewer-reader. ‘This mode of photographic practice shares a commitment that is unashamedly cultural-political and ethical; that seeks to combat stereotyped representations and to contest narrow notions of.... Irishness’ (Jordan, 2008). In Jordan’s view – a perspective I largely conferred with – ‘the work is grounded in the proposition that photography can help to empower people, both subjects and viewers, can help to remove barriers between people, facilitating understanding and respect between people of different social and cultural backgrounds’ (ibid).



Figure: 6. Dr Jasbir Singh Puri, Lucan.
Photograph: Glenn, Jordan, 2008.



Figure: 7. Manminder Kaur Gill, Galway.
Photograph: Glenn Jordan, 2008.

The portrait photographs for this project were mostly done in the subject's homes, but also in the Dublin and Derry *gurdwaras* and in shops and a few other places of employment. In order to take the portraits, Glenn made several trips to Ireland during 2007-2010. The trips ranged from three to nine days in length. He took nearly 30,000 photographs, using a professional digital camera (Fuji 5S pro). Sometime 3-4 hours and up to 400 shots were required in order to get a good photograph. While photographs were being taken, the participants were engaged in a meaningful dialogue, which transformed the whole exercise into a kind of team work where participants were happy to collaborate and cooperate whenever required. The range of technical and aesthetic parameters taken into consideration was vast and included aspects such as: How does light work in photography? Why is it important to take pictures with natural light? Why do photographs need to be dead in focus? Why are faces and hands important in photographs? What are the elements that humanize the photographs? What makes a good photograph? How would the images look as photographic prints?

Glenn brought to the field-site a noteworthy ability to explain the process of making images, working with the digital camera, the importance of natural light, and its impact on the final result in a simple, understandable way to the participants who were mostly novice to the art or skill of photography. The post-production work on the digital photographs was done in Cardiff, using specialist equipment at Butetown History & Arts Centre. The images produced were nearly life-sized, on 300g photo-rag digital art paper. They were displayed in such a way that they were at eye-level for most adult viewers. The idea was to make and display the photographs and life stories in such a way as to facilitate positive encounters – with the viewer-reader seeing individuals, not stereotypes or simply descriptive statements and/or statistics.

1.8 Oral History Interviewing

To reach across barriers – to embrace difference – one must practice the art of *listening* (Back 2007) and *seeing* (Jordan, 2008). ‘Practicing participant listening is an important technique employed by ethnographers, particularly among those of us who live in an ‘interview society’ (Forsey, 2010, 558). In the exhibition setting, the subject’s photograph and her or his story are intended to be seen as two co-equal modes of representation, therefore, interviewing people or ‘listening to people’ was a crucial component of our fieldwork. We wanted to know what Sikh migrants in Ireland had to say about their journeys - journeys across space (i.e., migration) and journeys across time (i.e., life experiences). Glenn and I mostly begin each interview by asking: ‘Who are you?’ Or: ‘If you had to describe yourself in a paragraph, what would you say?’ This open-ended question encouraged participants to speak their mind and thus set the stage for more probing questions.

For the purpose of conducting life story interviews, a theme sheet was prepared in consultation with Glenn. This helped to keep the dialogue pertaining to significant aspects of the subject's life in focus while providing an overall structure to the interview. The themes identified were related to life in India, migration, family life in Ireland, employment, the construction of identities, relationship within the Sikh 'community,' relations with the wider Irish 'community,' the role of communal institutions like the *gurdwara*, prejudice, discrimination, racism, etc., reflections on the future of the Sikh 'community' in Ireland, return migration, and relationship to the homeland (contacts maintained, trips, etc.). Other themes revealed themselves in the course of the conversation, such as coping strategies (e.g., dealing with racism and other difficulties), generational and gender differences, factionalism within the 'community,' personal tragedies, and complex identities.²⁶

Nearly one hundred subjects were interviewed during this study. Two-thirds of the interviews were done in English, and the remaining one-third was done in Punjabi. Glenn conducted six interviews while I conducted the remaining ninety-four. Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder in MP3 format. In a couple of cases, photographs were taken and interviews were conducted at the same time, but mostly interviews were conducted during a second visit, which also helped to establish 'intimacy that encouraged candidness' (Ritchie, 1995 p, 60). In a couple of cases where participants personally knew me, I faced the challenge of overcoming excessive familiarity and not being taken seriously and getting them to record all their stories without skipping details (they repeatedly assumed that I already knew the details!).

²⁶ By complex identities, I mean those participants in the study who expressed contempt for priests, went to nearby church, listened to Sikh prayers in the mornings, regret having cut hair but also don't wear turban, have non-Sikh wife, wanted to visit golden temple before he dies. Such individuals defied criterion for being classified as Sikh.

1.9 Power Relationships: Social Actors, Researcher and Photographer

‘*Bhaji*²⁷ where is your *dadajee*?’ my friends often joked whenever they saw me alone in the *gurdwara* during our fieldwork. ‘*Dadajee*’ is a Punjabi/Hindi language word for grandfather and is also frequently used as a respectful mode of address towards elderly gentlemen. Now, post fieldwork, when I reflect back, I realize that Glenn’s age, immigrant background, African-American ancestry, and academic affiliation were instrumental in forging a sense of rapport with participants. Our work of photographing and interviewing women and children in private, individual, and family settings necessitated trust on their part and confidentiality on our part. Our interactions with participants during photographic and interview sessions were mutually respectful and productive. The fact that the overwhelming majority of Sikhs - irrespective of the length of their stay in Ireland, profession, educational level, age, and gender - felt that Irish people were not very knowledgeable about the Sikhs and their culture, helped us to contextualize the fieldwork to participants and gave it some immediate and practical resonance. The whole exercise was perceived as a helpful and essential contribution to the cause of intercultural understanding. This trust in the ongoing work also helped in recording the oral history interviews in which participants frankly shared personal and communal experiences. Despite a generally cooperative attitude, one of the challenges we encountered was the demand for photographs (digital copies) by a few families. Explaining to them why we couldn’t possibly give them digital copies of their own photographs was difficult, especially when participants gave to us so generously of their time and cooperated with us in every possible way. Glenn and I, individually and jointly, explained to the participants that we were not entitled to give digital copies of these photographs as the project was commissioned by FOMACS which held the

²⁷ *Bhaji* is informal Punjabi term for brother.

copyright and also these photographs were taken to be printed on expensive, archival quality paper. During the photographic fieldwork, we had raised the possibility that participants would be given one 20” printed image, but due to time and budgetary constraints that promise was not fulfilled.

1.10 Modes of Presentation

1.10.1 Exhibition: For the exhibition, 50 large portraits of Sikhs in Ireland were originally conceived; however this number increased to 60 life-size portraits and 15 head-shots in order to include Sikhs from the North of Ireland. Launching *A Sikh Face in Ireland* at the prestigious Chester Beatty Library significantly added to the value of the exhibition. The Chester Beatty, often considered to be one of the best museums in Europe, is one of the most visited tourist attractions in the heart of Dublin. During the exhibition’s five-month run from 7th May until 26th September, 2010, some 30, 000 people visited the exhibition, leaving comments in the visitor book that shed retrospective light on what the project had achieved for Ireland and Sikhs in Ireland.



Figure: 8 Entrance view of *A Sikh Face in Ireland* exhibit in Chester Beatty Library, Dublin Castle, May 2010. Photograph: Veronica Vierin.

1.10.2 Website: In order to broaden the access to this work to all the potential stakeholders within and across borders, photographs and life stories are available on the FOMACS website. Plans are underway to host *A Sikh Face in Ireland: Photographic and Life History Project* on a dedicated website at a later stage. This mode of presentation would enable wider exposure and further collaborations and partnerships with other academic research communities that have an interest in Sikh diasporas in the West/Europe.

1.10.3 Video: The turban and the beard are the most visible symbols of a Sikh male. As immigrants in Ireland, my Sikh colleagues and I have had numerous random encounters with members of the general public over the years, who make remarks such as: “I like your hat (occasionally turban)”; “The colour of your hat is beautiful”; “How long does it take to put it on?”; “Can you or do you ever take it off?”; “Can I buy it?”; “Do you have long hair?”. In order to demystify the turban, the FOMACS team (Aodán Ó Coileáin and Siobhan Twomey) filmed a video titled, ‘How to tie a turban?’ The video features Gurcharan Singh, a volunteer from the community who shows the process of turban-tying. The material was edited into a ten-minute video and became part of the display in the Chester Beatty Library gallery on a projector and small kiosk.



Figure: 9. Visitors watching the *How to tie a Turban?* Video in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin. Photograph: Author, 2010.

1.10.4 Educational Material: During the run-up to the exhibition, ISC and FOMACS worked with the Chester Beatty Library Intercultural Education programme to run a series of cross-generational workshops with young Sikh adults, teenagers and children as part of *Family Day* events. To understand perspectives on a range of issues including cultural identity, the importance of accessing mainstream representation and creative arts spaces, a number of interactive and media-led workshops were organised. An in-depth group discussion with the adults was facilitated and voice recorded by Dr. Aileen Blaney, while the responses from teenagers and children were video recorded in the gallery itself by Aodán Ó Coileáin and Siobhan Twomey and edited into five short videos clips as a contribution to the intercultural education toolkit, which is a work-in-progress at the moment. May, being the month of *Bealtaine*,²⁸ two sessions of

²⁸ Started in 1995, *Bealtaine* festival celebrates creativity in an older age. It showcases the talents and creativity of both first-time and professional older artists across dance, cinema, painting, photography and theatre.

photography workshop was also organised involving participation by elderly Irish people.

In this chapter, I have discussed the socio-political scenario which led to this research, the collaborative nature of the project, the methodological approach, the history and importance of the Dublin *gurdwara*, the relationships between stakeholders and the research team, the outputs from the project, and finally the modes of presentation which lays the basis for the next chapter dealing with the history of Sikh migration to Ireland, and the demographics of Sikh geographical settlement.

Chapter 2: Sikh Migration to Ireland: A Broad Historical Overview

We were travelling on west coast of Ireland. Dr. Chopra, myself, Dr. Jindal, and three boys, and we stopped on the way. Dr. Chopra said, 'Lets have some ice cream.' So two of us got out of the car and there was only one street. It was a very tiny place and we could see people coming out because they haven't seen Sikhs before with a turban. Full street was coming out and those who didn't dare to come stood in the windows and kept looking at us...

– Dr Jovinder Singh Jassal, Interview, 13th December, 2008.

Dr Jassal's narrative points towards the 'visible difference' that marks Sikh men in western countries. Among all the major world religions, Sikh men are probably among the most easily identifiable by their beards and turbans which they may wear as observance of their faith. Diasporas of Sikhs to the western world began over a century ago, and today there are over a million Sikhs living outside of India. During this century-long presence, Sikhs have been categorised as a 'noble military race'²⁹, 'resourceful business members', 'militants'³⁰ and most recently, as 'terrorists' and victims of racial abuse post 9/11. From North America to Europe, from Africa to the Far East, wherever Sikhs have settled, their presence is noticeable either due to a large population, or by virtue of their demands to the right to wear the turban and carry *kirpans*.³¹ However, the Sikh presence in Ireland has remained unnoticed until very

²⁹ Because of their supposed military traditions and cultures, the Sikhs of Punjab and Gurkhas from Nepal were considered 'martial races' by the British establishment in the Indian sub-continent and thus were recruited preferentially in the imperial British Indian army. For detailed discussion see, Streets (2004) *Martial Races: the Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

³⁰ June 1984 marked the attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar and 38 other *gurdwara* by the Indian Army, in which hundreds of civilians, army men and militants died.

³¹ Kirpan – a small sword is one of five articles of faith 'the *panj kakarrs*' or the 5K's, which baptised Sikhs keep on their person at all times. The other four being the *kesh* – hair, *Kangha* – wooden comb, *kara* – iron bracelet, and *Kachhera* – cotton undershorts.

recently, mainly because of the small numbers and the absence of any systematic study of the community.

In this chapter I offer a brief overview of the history of migration among Sikhs and draw attention to the nature of the Sikh presence in Ireland over the last century. The following sections delineate the various phases of Sikh migration, beginning with an overview of Sikh diasporas around the world, including connections between Sikhs and Irish people during the colonial period in India. I draw here from insights and information generated through the interviews as well as upon secondary published literature on the subject.

2.1 The Sikh Diaspora³² : An Overview

‘Sikhs and potatoes are found everywhere’ - A popular saying in the Punjab.

With under two percent of the total population of the country, Sikhs are a small minority in India. Of the total Sikh population of around 20 million in 2001³³, nearly 76 percent live in the state of Punjab, where they are a numerical majority, making up approximately 60 percent of the total population. The remaining 24 percent of Indian Sikhs live in different parts of the country, with their major concentrations in the northwestern states of Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi (Jodhka, 2009). Though relatively small in numbers, the Sikhs are among the most mobile communities within the subcontinent and more than one million i.e., 5% of the total Sikh population are diasporic. The Sikhs have migrated and settled around the world – especially to areas of the world that were part of the former British Empire. Some migrated voluntarily;

³² The concept of a “Sikh diaspora” is now widespread in the academic literature. See, for example, Tatla (2005; 1999), Nayar (2004), Axel (2001) and Ballantyne (2006).

³³ Primary source for these figures is last Indian population census 2001.

others have been displaced or exiled, forced to move from India or other countries due to difficult circumstances such as partition, poverty and the lure of prosperity.

According to one source, Sikhs (0.38%) constitute the fifth largest religious group in the world trailing behind Buddhists (5.84%) and slightly ahead of Jews (0.23%).³⁴ However, the colourful turbans and beards worn by the majority of Sikh males, and their geographical spread make them a very visible community. For most Sikhs, Punjab - the northern Indian province where the faith was founded in the fifteenth century and the home of their most sacred shrines - remains the spiritual homeland.

After the fall of the Sikh kingdom³⁵, the Punjab came under British rule in 1849. It resulted in some profound changes and set into motion a process of gradual integration of the Punjab's economy into the colonial economic system (Tatla, 1999, 43). First, the Punjab's canal and rail network expanded rapidly facilitating increased wheat production and export potential. Secondly, the emergence of Punjab as a favourite region of recruitment for the British Indian Army as a result of the Sikh soldier's loyalty during the mutiny of 1857³⁶, provided opportunities for migration (Singh and Tatla, 2006; 15). This led to the migration of Sikhs to serve in different parts of the British Empire around the world – including East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania), Canada, Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and other countries. The origins of the Sikh diaspora lie in their service to the British Empire – as soldiers, civil servants and skilled labourers. However, during the colonial period, some early

³⁴ <http://www.sikhwomen.com/facts/population.htm>

³⁵ Sikhs ruled the undivided Punjab from 1801 till 1849. The period is generally viewed as golden period of Sikh history, when the province enjoyed prosperity as result of political stability, and communal harmony. Interestingly, there were number of Europeans who left their homelands to seek their fortunes and to enhance their careers in the political milieu of Punjab – probably the only province in the early nineteenth century that still offered any scope for military employment to a select group of foreigners. For detailed account of Europeans serving in Sikh Kingdom, see, Bansal, BS (2010).

³⁶ During the mutiny of 1857, Sikh soldiers, mostly provided by the some of Sikh princes (cis-Sutlej Sikh Rajas), helped the British in suppressing the sepoy mutiny in British India. See, Noor, (2005).

Sikh migrants went to nations that were not British colonies: for example from Malaysia, Sikhs migrated to Thailand and Indonesia; others went to Mexico and countries in South America, especially Argentina (see Tatla 1999, 28); and some went to countries in Central Asia, especially Afghanistan.

Sikh migration is principally structured as a chain migration, which results in the Sikh presence being concentrated in particular cities, towns and regions of the countries to which they migrate. For example Southall in the UK is known as ‘Little Punjab’ because of a high Sikh presence; Vancouver and Toronto in Canada similarly have pockets of Sikh neighbourhoods. Sikh migration from India accelerated after the Second World War, primarily as a result of three factors: the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan (the partition line ran through the Punjab); the backlash against Asian populations in East Africa, including the 1972 expulsion of Asians from Uganda; and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi and other parts of India, following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards as a retaliation to the army attack on the Golden Temple via Operation Blue Star. Traumatic events – displacement, violence, forced dispersal – have not been the only reason for migration. Sikhs have been attracted to the West, including the UK and Ireland, to pursue educational and employment opportunities – in medicine, engineering, retail and other fields.

2.2 The Colonial Encounter: Connection between Sikhs and Irish

The history of Sikhs in Ireland, in both the North and the Republic, has been a *hidden history*. There have been no books on Sikhs in Ireland, no exhibitions and, until very

recently, no media programmes.³⁷ Often during the field work of *A Sikh face in Ireland* and while working on the post-production and editing of stories in the UK, whenever Glenn Jordan and I mentioned that we were working on a project about Sikhs in Ireland, a common response was: “Are there Sikhs in Ireland?”

Sikh migration to Northern Ireland dates from the early 1930s; however the connection between Sikhs and Irish people dates back to the 1850s when the Punjab was annexed to British India Inc in 1849. These colonial relationships reflected the power imbalances between master and slave. Many Irish – civil servants, soldiers, missionary workers – serving during British colonial period rule were posted in the Punjab province. The Irishman most closely and directly associated with Sikhs was Max Arthur McAuliffe of county Limerick, who served in the Punjab from 1864 until 1893 in the capacity of Deputy Commissioner and divisional Judge (Singh, 2007). His interest in Sikhs and their religious traditions grew so strong that he resigned from his post to the displeasure of the British establishment and devoted his time and energy to the study and translate into English the sacred scripture of the Sikh religion, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. His work, *The Sikh Religion: it's Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* (six volumes,) was published posthumously by Oxford University Press in 1909 and to date remains a highly esteemed work about Sikhs (Singh 2007).

³⁷ There is a small literature on Indians in Ireland: see Kapur (1997). The RTÉ has occasionally broadcasted short programmes on Sikhs in Ireland since 2006. *No Place Like Home* RTÉ One's programme broadcasted on January 15th, 2006 featured a Sikh Family in Lucan. *Pobal*, RTÉ One's Regional and Community Affair programme covered Irish Sikh Council in its programme on 26th November, 2006; RTÉ report *St Patrick Festivals Highlights* covered Sikh's participation in the parade on 19th March 2007; *Capital D*, RTÉ One programme about 'Dublin, Its people and their Stories' covered a Sikh family on 6th September, 2007; *Prime Time*, RTÉ One, broadcasted a special report on Garda Turban Ban controversy on 23rd August, 2007; RTÉ broadcasted a special programme, 'A Day in Life of Irish Sikhs' in Oct 2009.

One of the most notorious involvements of Irishmen during colonial rule was that of General Reginald Dyer and Sir Michael O'Dwyer who were involved in one of the bloodiest encounters in history of the Indian Independence movement. Sir Michael O'Dwyer, born in Ireland near Tipperary, served as Lieutenant Governor of Punjab from 1913 to 1919, whereas Reginald Dyer, son of an Irish brewer born in Punjab, was Brigadier-General in 1919. On April 13, 1919 General Reginald Dyer ordered fire on a gathering of tens of thousands of unarmed civilians, including women and children, gathered at the Jallianwalla Bagh³⁸ to protest the arrest of two Congress party leaders. According to official records, the shooting left 379 dead and 1200 injured (Kapur, 1997). This incident came to be known later as the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. The incident shocked the whole of India and in June 1920, men from the Connaught Rangers³⁹ stationed in Jalandhar, Punjab revolted against British officers. The leaders of this small mutiny argued that their regiment was repressing the people of India, just as the British army was doing in Ireland.

Other notable names include Lord Johan Lawrence of Derry and John Nicholson of Dublin, who led a company of British troops and Punjabi irregulars⁴⁰ to confront mutinous soldiers in the Bengal army (Kapur, 1997). In addition, there were many Christian missionaries some of whom worked in Christian Medical College, Ludhiana and the American Presbyterian Mission, Ambala in the state of Punjab where they were looking after needy people and spreading the Christian faith (ibid). There has been thus

³⁸ Jallianwalla Bagh is a public place in the centre of Amritsar city near the historic Golden Temple, where thousands of people were gathered on the day of Vaisakhi (festival) to protest against the British. Horace Ove has made a film *The Equalizer* on Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre which was shown on BBC 2 (UK) in 1995.

³⁹ An Irish regiment of the British army which rebelled against the British in support of the Indians. James Daly who led the revolt was executed on charge of mutiny and rebel soldiers were severely punished. The outfit was disbanded on the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

⁴⁰ Irregular soldiers were part of the force in the erstwhile Sikh princely states, not actively employed by British.

a long history of contact between the Sikhs and the Irish, however, since it has been predominantly couched in the colonial encounter, the significance of this historical exchange has rarely been explored outside of a postcolonial context, and has seldom been brought to bear upon understanding the contemporary situation of migration.

2.3 Migration to Britain and Ireland

According to the 2001 UK census, there are currently 219 Sikhs in Northern Ireland and perhaps as many as 1,500 in the Republic of Ireland. Sikh migration to Britain and Ireland can be viewed as consisting of five waves.⁴¹ Between the two world wars, there was a wave of Sikh migrants to Britain and Northern Ireland that included businessmen, students and pedlars; after Partition and Indian independence in 1947 there was a second wave of immigrants – mostly, young labourers – to the UK and Ireland; the third wave of Sikh immigrants, who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, consisted of immigrants who were related to people already living in Northern Ireland; the fourth wave of Sikh immigrants did not come directly from India but from former British colonies, predominantly from East Africa, after these nations achieved independence; the fifth wave of Sikh immigrants – restaurant workers, students, IT professionals, businessmen, doctors and nurses – came to Ireland as a result of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi and other parts of India and the Celtic boom of the 1990s. Those who came in the first three waves mostly went to Northern Ireland. Thus, the story begins with the North.

2.3.1 The First Immigrants

The Sikhs were among the first group of Indian immigrants, who came to the North in the 1920s and 1930s. The first Indian immigrants - Sikhs and Punjabi Hindus - were

⁴¹ This periodisation is adapted from Bance (2007).

predominantly from the *Doaba*⁴² region of Punjab, often from the same or nearby villages, where they had family and social ties. Sikhs like other early Indian immigrants⁴³ started working as pedlars (i.e., travelling salesmen), selling clothes from door to door. Although some of them stayed, most of them did not. Rather, they moved back and forth between the ‘homeland’ and the UK, generally intending to acquire enough money to support a better lifestyle in India.

The story of the early settlers is a story of *chain migration*. The first Sikh to come to Northern Ireland was Ujagar Singh, who was from Pandori Mattoo village in the Jalandhar district of the *Doaba* region in the Punjab. He came in 1931 and lived in Derry until he returned to India, due to health problems, circa 1958. Ujagar Singh invited his cousin, Bawa Singh, and two nephews, Dalip Singh and Suchet Singh Nagra, who joined him in Derry in 1935. In 1947, and 1949 Bachint Singh Nagra and Ajit Singh Nagra, both brothers of Suchet Singh Nagra, also moved to Derry.



Figure: 10. Suchet Singh Nagra (left), Ajit Singh Nagra (Centre) and Bachint Singh Nagra (Right), 1953. Photograph: Glenn Jordan, December, 2009.

⁴² At the close of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, Sikhs of the *Doaba* were among the first to migrate to UK, Canada and the United States of America.

⁴³ Early Indian immigrants consisted of Punjabi Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims of undivided India (Kapur, 1997).

Oral history interviews reveal that until the 1950s, the journey from India to Ireland was mostly by boat. Before they boarded a ship to the UK, all of these early Sikh immigrants drove from the Jalandhar district or Hoshiar Pur districts to Bombay, or Calcutta to board a ship. On arrival in England, they were received by other Indians, Sikhs and non-Sikhs, who were mostly relatives and family members, or people from the same village. From England, they came to Northern Ireland. Sohan Singh Kular (Fig 12), who came in 1953 and subsequently became a highly successful and wealthy businessman, recalls the journey from India to the English port of Newcastle: ‘We came from Calcutta to Karachi, then from Karachi to the Middle East (we stayed there for two days), then from the Middle East to Paris and then we came here. I couldn’t eat the food on the journey. I didn’t like the food; I used to feel like vomiting whenever I saw it’ (Interview, 6th July, 2009).

These men, who were in their twenties, came with virtually no money, usually because they were not well-off in India. They lived in rented accommodations with other Indians and started working as pedlars, usually within weeks of their arrival. They sold clothes, such as t-shirts, trousers, ties, dresses, etc., in nearby towns and villages. First, they travelled on foot; later, they bought bicycles; and, as their businesses grew, they acquired cars, which enabled them to travel to nearby towns and markets, covering around 40 or 45 miles a day. Almost all of these men removed their turbans and beards either on arrival or before boarding the ship. In his book *The Irish Raj*, Narinder Kapur has written about this:

When the ship was approaching England, some of the Sikhs on board would use this opportunity to shave off their beard and cut their long hair. The beard and long hair, with the turban over the hair, would have been kept on the outward journey. However, once they were back in [the UK], the Sikhs found that this aspect of their religious tradition would sometimes be a handicap. One of the Sikh businessman from Northern Ireland, on his

journey back from India to Ireland, still kept his beard and turban. A close friend, who had already settled in Ireland a few years earlier and who had called him over to live in Northern Ireland, had decided not to write to him in India to ask him to shave his hair, since this would probably have discouraged him from coming to Ireland. Instead, he wrote a letter to him c/o his ship (Jal Jawahar). The letter in fact reached him when the ship stopped in Port Said, Egypt. In his letter, the close friend in Northern Ireland strongly advised the Sikh gentleman to cut his hair and remove his turban, since this would work against him when he was selling goods to the local Irish people, who might be scared by such an unusual appearance... (Kapur 1997, 77)

Migrant Sikhs and other Indians who were already working as pedlars found that the traditional male Sikh appearance with turban and beard was not welcomed in this part of the diaspora, so they often advised incoming Sikhs to cut their hair and remove their turbans – in order to remove these obstacles to earning a livelihood. For some of them, keeping a turban in wet weather meant extra hardship. Ajit Singh Nagra, who came to Derry in 1953, recalls that:

I used to wear a turban in India... My uncle told me, “It’s very much raining over there. If you will wear turban then it will get wet all time and you will catch cold.” So I got my hair cut in Bombay. After coming here, I used to wear a cap at the time of rain. There was no turban wearing Sikh at that time. Now there are many, but there weren’t at that time (Interview, 7th July 2009).

The pressure to conform to a ‘western look’ was also felt by most Sikh students who were coming to the UK and Belfast for professional qualifications especially from African countries where their elders had migrated to work on railway lines as part of indentured labour and later as skilled labour in the twentieth century. Most of them shaved their hair and beards as soon as they enrolled themselves in various British universities. This trend so alarmed some Sikh families back in Kenya that in one case they invited one prospective dental student - who was coming to Belfast for dentistry - to the *gurdwara* to make a pledge in front of a congregation that he wouldn’t succumb

to western pressure and would maintain his Sikh identity⁴⁴. These early Sikh immigrants, peddlers or students came as individuals (or at most a small group of related males) rather than as a part of a large group or family. As individuals, they found it hard to keep the turban and beard. They each had opportunities to make whatever adjustments were necessary to adapt to the dominant culture they encountered. Such an experience is very consistent with accounts of early Sikh migrants to Canada, who adopted a more western look as they arrived in Canada (Chadney, 1989).

One of the early immigrants to the north was an ex-army man, part of a large number of Sikhs who answered Britain's call to join the fight against fascism during World War II. By the end of the 19th century, Punjab provided almost 50 percent of the British Indian army's strength, and half of this constituted Sikhs. The height of Sikh military participation was reached during the First World War, when their number increased from 35,000 at the outbreak of hostilities to over 100,000 by the end of the World War I in 1918 (Madra and Singh, 1999).

⁴⁴ Since the inception of Sikhism, maintaining uncut hair and wearing turban are considered important aspect of Sikh identity, while their removal is considered as sacrilege or loss of faith. However in the last decade or so, an increasing number of Sikhs (both in India and throughout the diaspora) can be seen without turbans and wearing their hair short, complicating the notion of what it means to a Sikh.



Figure: 11. Swaran Singh, member of British Indian Army, 1938-47. Courtesy of his son Kulwant Singh, who lives in Galway.

But most Sikh immigrants to the north of Ireland came from farming backgrounds. During the 1950s a typical Sikh family in rural Punjab was comprised of a joint household in which several generations of family members lived together under the same roof. As in most agrarian societies, life within Punjabi villages was set within a complex system of norms and customs which regulated almost all aspects of everyday life. A family's standing was measured by its prestige and honour (*izzat*) and capacity to limit dishonour (*behzti*) (Shackle, 1985). Families gained high social status through wealth, mainly landholdings which determined their ability to find marital alliances for their children. Fear or prospects of loss of honour (*behzti*), often through continuous sub-division of landholdings, was a powerful factor driving Sikh farmers of the central Punjabi districts to seek a livelihood beyond Punjab and overseas (Singh and Tatla 2006). Thus shrinking land holdings drove many young Sikhs to look for money in western countries where some of their relatives or villagers had already gone. During the 1950s, the post-war reconstruction boom in western societies created a demand for

skilled and unskilled labour and governments increasingly turned to the former colonies to fill this gap. In Britain, recruitment from new commonwealth countries of India, Pakistan and the Caribbean region was officially encouraged to meet the labour shortages (Grewal, 1990). In these conditions, Sikhs, along with other migrants, were easily able to find employment and new workers quickly communicated this message to kith and kin at home, triggering large-scale chain migration. Early Sikh migrants had little in the way of formal qualification, as formal education was a rarity in Punjabi villages at the time. They couldn't speak any English when they came. New immigrants, men and women, mostly travelled to Britain and Ireland in the company of others - friends, family members or co-villagers, who had been to the west and learned some English. Sohan Singh Kular, who came to Derry in 1953 at the age of twenty-three, tells how he overcame his language problem as a pedlar: 'They told me, "You say to them like this: 'Buy something please; buy something please".' (Interview, 6th July 2009)



Figure: 12. Harjinder Kaur Kular and Sohan Singh Kular, 1965. Photograph: Kular's family collection.



Figure: 13. Jagir Kaur Nagra and brother-in-law Ajit Singh Nagra, Derry. Photograph: Glenn Jordan, December, 2008

Ajit Singh Nagra, who came in 1951 and was involved in the clothing business until he took retirement in 2008, said: ‘I didn’t know English, but I knew the numbers in English as well as in Punjabi. I used to write the number [i.e., the price of the item] on the label and if anybody asked me the price, I used to show them the label’ (Interview, 7th July, 2009).

As the oral history interviews revealed, these Sikh pedlars like other Indians, bought clothes from Belfast wholesalers or occasionally from Glasgow. They sold clothes to their customers on credit and collected money every week. Usually they carried a notebook with them to keep a record of the transactions and customers. Those who were illiterate requested the customers to make entries in their notebook.

The work as peddlers required more physical strength and less language skills, which suited these early immigrants from Punjabi villages. Lack of education among these immigrants partly explains their concentration in door-to-door selling business. Interview accounts also suggest that these early immigrants found people in the North fairly hospitable and helpful; they kept working despite the language barrier and hostile weather conditions. Some of them later diversified into property and hospitality business, but most did not. Their accounts reveal that these Sikh migrants were very young when they came to Northern Ireland. Those who were married were subsequently joined by their wives when they could afford a house. The unmarried one invariably returned to India to find a suitable partner in due course. Interestingly, there was no intermarrying with northern Irish women, as there was no restriction on travel to India and family unification.

The situation for early Sikh immigrants to Canada and the USA was completely different as Sikh men married local Mexican women due to the tighter immigration rules and geographical distance, which made it nearly impossible for Sikh immigrants to visit India to marry or bring their wives over (Leonard, 1989). Initially, the women in these early immigrant families did not work outside the home. Their role was mainly confined to house-keeping and child-rearing. The women like their husbands had no education and the ones who worked - usually worked in factories making shirts, collars, cuffs, and trousers - were those who had lost their husbands and needed money to survive. Until the 1970s, Sikh women in Northern Ireland wore *saris* when going outside the house, as Punjabi suits⁴⁵ were mistaken as night dresses by the local people. As there was no Indian shop in the North to buy Indian spices, lentils and other staples

⁴⁵ Punjabi suit – a dress commonly worn in the northern part of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan consisting of loose trousers, a long shirt and a scarf draped around the shoulders.

of the Sikh diet, purchases were made in Glasgow. One member of the community would go and purchase items for the various families. A few direct descendants of the early immigrants still live in Northern Ireland. Most of the members of the Derry Sikh community are relatives of these early immigrants – and they originally come from Jalandhar and Hoshiar Pur districts in the Punjab. For example, Sohan Singh Kular (Fig 12), whose elder sister was married to the Ujagar Singh, the first Sikh immigrant in the Northern Ireland.

While almost all the early Sikh immigrants in Derry/Londonderry were Jats⁴⁶, the majority of the Sikh families in Belfast are from the *Bhatra*⁴⁷ (or *Bhat*) Sikh community and migrated from Britain in the 1960s. They worked as pedlars first in the UK and then went to Belfast. They sold clothes in markets in different towns in North such as Newry, Bangor, Antrim, Ballymena and occasionally also ventured into the South. The forefathers of some of these Sikhs were also pedlars who migrated to Britain during the 1920s. They filled the vacuum created by the migration of Jewish pedlars from Europe to the USA (Bance, 2007).

2.3.2 The Second Wave

The partition of Punjab in 1947 brought havoc to millions of people, who became refugees, crossing the newly formed borders of India and Pakistan under scenes of unprecedented communal violence.

– Tatla, (1999; xxi)

Of all the factors that contributed to Sikh migration, the partition of India was perhaps the single most dramatic happening (Singh and Tatla 2006). In August 1947, India became one of the first British colonies in Africa and Asia to attain independence. At

⁴⁶ Jat or Jatt – is a majority cast among Sikhs who traditionally worked as farmers and had/still hold land.

⁴⁷ Bhatra or Bhat is a caste in Sikhs, which has a long reputation as small traders or travelling salesmen.

the same time, the nation was partitioned into India and Pakistan. Partition displaced millions of people on both sides of the divide. The Partition line ran through the Punjab, which meant that thousands of Sikhs and Hindus suddenly found themselves in a Muslim nation that was hostile to their interests (and many Muslims found themselves in an equivalent situation). As a result, millions of people migrated across the borders with unprecedented internecine bloodshed⁴⁸ and loss of property. In her ethnographic and oral history-based account of partition, *'The Other Side of Silence'*, Butalia (2000) terms partition as 'one of the great human convulsions of history' where within a few months of this division, one million people had died, 12 million had migrated and 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own. Sikhs were raped, killed, forcibly converted and deported as were Muslims and Hindus. There were even instances when all of the women of a Sikh village were killed by the men of the village to prevent their being raped by hostile Muslims (BBC, 2007; Talbot and Tatra, 2007). The partition threw the whole economy of the Punjab into turmoil, generating excessive demographic pressure on agriculture and the need to accommodate and resettle several million refugees who were often compelled to make a living for several years. Many of these refugees, particularly the urban Sikhs, moved to Delhi or other states within India. Many more saw the despair of partition as an opportunity to build lives abroad on the back of post-war reconstruction. This led to mass internal migration and external migration – and many of those who migrated overseas came to the UK and Ireland. Most were young labourers who came to work as pedlars and in factories in Britain and in Northern Ireland.

⁴⁸ Saadat Hasan Manto's extensive accounts of partition are an important archive of the general atmosphere of inhumanity during the partition of India and Pakistan.

2.3.3 *Third Wave*



Figure: 14. Sikh restaurant workers playing cards, Cork, circa 1974. Photograph: Avtar Singh Gill's family collection.

A third wave of Sikh immigrants arrived in Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s. Like most of those in the first wave, they arrived through *chain migration* – that is, they came through contacts with family and friends who were already living in Britain or Northern Ireland. Some of these immigrants came directly from India; others came after first settling in Britain. Whereas the first two waves went mainly to the North, some in the third wave settled in the Republic. The interviews revealed that the first generation of Sikhs in the Republic of Ireland initially came as restaurant workers and small businessmen during the 1970s. For example, in 1972, approximately ten people from the Jalandhar district of the Punjab came to Ireland on work permits to be employed as chefs in restaurants in Cork and Dublin owned by Mohinder Singh Gill, who was commonly known as Mark Gill. Mr. Gill, who also hailed from Jalandhar, had moved to Ireland after spending a couple of years in the UK. These restaurant workers from the

Punjab – some of them Sikh, some of them Hindu – settled permanently in Ireland, where their families still live.



Figure: 15. Rashpal Singh, Sukhdev Singh Gill and Tarlochan Singh Restaurant, Dublin, circa 1973. Photograph: Avtar Singh Gill's family collection.

These immigrants shared many characteristics with the first immigrants to the North. They came predominantly from the *Doaba* region of the Punjab, belonged to farming families, and had no significant formal education. Like those in the peddling business, these men also found it hard to diversify and continued to work as chefs and later co-owned some restaurants where they worked. During their initial years as chefs, they worked extremely hard, earned very little pay, lived frugally and sent remittances to India. After a few years, they were able to invite their families, while they continued to live together in shared accommodation often above the restaurants they ran. Their families also helped them in business, mostly in the preparation of food. They came as chefs and stayed in the restaurant business until they retired; however few made attempts to diversify but largely remained unsuccessful. Interviews also revealed that those who came to Dublin after spending a few years in the UK established small

businesses. These Sikhs worked in small businesses in the UK and also had a reasonable level of formal education. Many started with market stalls to sell clothes and gift items and gradually established shops. They bought from Indian and Pakistani wholesalers in Dublin. A typical day for Sikh businessmen who started with market stalls is narrated by Gurbir Singh Chadha, who arrived here more recently than other migrants:

We used to go very early in the morning; market starts around eight o'clock and you have to be there by seven o'clock to set up all your shop, you take everything out and set up, complete your job. For that, you have to wake up around five to reach there at half six, to start working half six, seven or half seven we set up and then we are ready for eight o'clock. So it was really, really hard work, sometimes its -1, -2 degree, standing in the cold with your kids, all the family we used to go. (Interview, 30th November, 2008)

The number of Sikhs in the Republic remained fairly small until the 1990s and increased substantially during the Celtic Tiger boom, when students and professionals in medicine, engineering, IT and other fields arrived.

2.3.4 Fourth Wave



Figure: 16. Paramjit Singh Neote's family house in Kenya, 1978. In the picture, Avtar Singh, Paramjit's cousin who was visiting from Arusha, Tanzania. Photograph: Neote's family collection.

The British Empire disintegrated in the post-war period, with territories around the world achieving independence in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Sikhs, like other Indians, became victims of indigenisation policies of some decolonised states. In east Africa, the Far East, Hong Kong, South Africa, the Caribbean and most recently, Afghanistan, small and large Sikh communities, often resident in these countries for several centuries, have increasingly relocated themselves to western states because of such policies. Sarwaan Singh, who lives in Galway, describes his family's experience in Malaysia as follows:

My parents moved to Malaysia in 1920 as my father was in the Indian cavalry. I was born in Malaysia in 1921. I remember the Japanese occupation of Malaysia in the Second World War, Indian independence in 1947 and when Malaysia got independence in 1957. My son was studying there but he couldn't go to university because he did not study Malay. After independence, came nationalisation and everybody had to study Malay, so he went to study in Australia and qualified as an engineer. (Interview, 16th December, 2008)

In this instance, the son of a Sikh immigrant family that has lived in Malaysia for three generations could not get a place at university due to state-sponsored nationalism in post-independence Malaysia. Since he could not speak Malay, he relocated to Australia and his family subsequently moved to Ireland. In many cases, this relocation has showed a natural bias towards places where the significant Sikh communities are settled already, with Britain getting many such 'twice migrants' (Bhachu, 1985).

SHANNON AIRCRAFT MOTOR WORKS

IS FLYING!



Paramjit Neote, Director of Quality Control at Shannon Aircraft Motor Works

"Quality starts with people". That is the slogan of one of Ireland's fastest growing aviation companies in what is a fast growing industry. Shannon Aircraft Motor Works has used "quality" as its by-word since it was established in 1988 and it is a policy that has helped the Clare-based company make a worldwide reputation for itself in the aviation business.

Shannon Aircraft Motor Works provides a very specialised repair service which involves the rewinding (or servicing) of aircraft motor and generator parts at the company's ultra modern facility in Shannon. The idea of "rewinding" parts, instead of replacing them is relatively new in the aviation industry but it provides a great saving to airlines, as the typical rewind costs averages about 20 - 30% of the cost of new parts.

The company's capability includes the rewinding of more than 500 different parts including amatures, fields, stators and rotors used on wide and narrow body jets, turbo props and helicopters. The company's capabilities are continually expanding to meet the demands for new parts. The work is highly technical and the workmanship needs to be of the highest

order. Shannon Aircraft Motor Works employs 53 people and has a turnover of £2.5 million with customers throughout the world.

This customer list makes some very impressive reading indeed and includes 52 airlines from many countries. Amongst them are Aer Lingus, Air France, Air India, British Airways, Japan Air Lines, KLM, Qantas, Sabena, Swissair, Korean Air, Malaysia.

Towards the end of last year Shannon Aircraft Motor Works secured two major contracts which improved its standing even further in the world aviation industry. The first of these contracts was with Vickers, who are a major original equipment manufacturer (OEM) of aircraft hydraulic systems components. This contract will not only ensure a steady flow of work from Vickers but will also encourage similar companies from other parts of the world to look towards Shannon. The contract was a new departure for Shannon Aircraft Motor Works as previously OEMs like Vickers would have considered rewind companies as their rivals. Winning the contract was a recognition by Vickers that the Shannon based company offered an excellent service in rewinding aircraft parts.

The second major contract was won in December when Shannon Aircraft Motor Works received the nod from Japanese Airlines (JAL) to carry out a wide range of maintenance work. The Shannon based company had already completed projects during the previous two years for JAL mainly in the repairing and rewinding of parts for the B747 generators used by Japan Airlines. The relationship was strengthened and under the new contract Shannon Aircraft Motor Works will also

Figure: 17. FACES, 1996, Vol 3, No 20. Feature article on Paramjit Singh Neote and Shannon Aircraft Motorworks. Photograph: Neote's family collection.

In the post-independence period, the situation of Sikhs in former British colonies in East Africa became especially fraught. Thus, the fourth wave of Sikh immigrants came predominantly from East Africa after Uganda and Kenya became independent from the British Empire in 1962 and 1963 respectively. These include people currently living in Northern Ireland, several families living in Shannon, and two families residing in Galway. These immigrants tended to be highly skilled professionals. For example, Dr Jovinder Singh Jassal, a Sikh dentist became the first Asian dentist to be employed by the Belfast Corporation in 1960s; Paramjit Singh Neote, became Director of Quality Control for an aircraft maintenance firm in Shannon. Most second-generation East

African Asians were the descendants of bricklayers, masons, carpenters, blacksmiths and train drivers who had been engaged by the British to work on the East African Railways in the early 1900s (Bhachu, 1985). During the post-war period, a number of Sikh immigrants also came directly from India to both the North and South of Ireland.

2.3.5 Fifth Wave

On 3 June 1984, in a meticulously calculated operation code-named “Bluestar”, the Indian army stormed the Golden Temple, Amritsar, along with 37 other Sikh shrines in the Punjab, with the specific aim to “remove terrorists, criminals and their weapons from sacred places of worship.” After three days of intensive fighting, hundreds lay dead on the sacred parikarma (walkabout) surrounding the pool, among them Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, Shahbeg Singh, Amrik Singh and ordinary Sikh pilgrims including women and children, whose bodies were unceremoniously disposed of in rubbish trucks and cremated... All sacred buildings sustained extensive damage, while the Akal Takhat, facing the Harimandir, almost crumbled due to heavy shelling. According to reports, the Sikh Reference Library – with its unique collection of priceless manuscripts of sacred literature, copies of the Adi Granth, letters written by gurus, commands, memorabilia and paintings – was deliberately set on fire. Almost every Sikh household in the Punjab, the rest of India and overseas reacted with anger and shock... From a self-confident religious community, the Sikhs rapidly acquired many characteristics of a persecuted minority.

– Tatla (1999; xvii)

The fifth wave of Sikh immigrants to Ireland were both exiles and economic migrants: some came as a result of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi and other parts of India, while others came due to the Celtic boom of the 1990s.



Figure: 18. Calendar in Sikh home in Dublin depicting Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale and events at the Golden Temple. Photograph: Glenn Jordan 2009.

These immigrants included IT workers, businessmen, doctors and nurses, restaurant workers (many of them chefs) and students. During the economic boom period, some of the immigrants were young men who had been undocumented workers in the UK and Europe; they came to Ireland where their labour was in greater demand. They started working with Indian and Punjabi restaurants and got work permits and/or they married Irish women and British Sikh women, which allowed them to stay. Two of the interviewees, Tarsem Singh Sahota and Kewal Singh Cheema, were students in India in 1984. In the following interview, they recall the circumstances that led to them fleeing their homeland.

I come from Bagana village in Tehsil Phagwara, which is part of the Kapurthala District... I came here on 1st November 1987. The Punjab was risky after the 1984 incident. One morning in November '84, we were attending study period and we were informed that someone had killed Indira Gandhi. (I was 19 at the time.) A public holiday was declared. There were

anti-Sikh riots; my cousin's hair was cut by rioters. Because of the atmosphere, a lot of Sikhs left India. I flew from Delhi to Shannon via Moscow. (Tarsem Singh Sahota, interview, Dublin, 2008)

My name is Kewal Singh Cheema. I belong to a Sikh family from Punjab in India. I was born in 1971 and went to school in India. At school I was an intelligent boy and wanted to be a lawyer or doctor. But when I was in secondary school, I was part of the Sikh Student Federation. This was the time of the Operation Blue Star, which was a bad time for Sikhs in India. We were under army curfew: cops used to shoot without any reason; calling those they shot "terrorists". If you wore a kesari (orange) turban, they would say, "You are a militant!" It didn't matter if you hadn't done anything wrong because if a policeman caught a "militant", they got money from the government. 70% of the young boys left Punjab at the time and my parents decided in 1987 or 1988 that leaving India would be good for me. I had a completely dark future. (Kewal Singh Cheema, interview, Dublin, 2008)

The events of 1984 - the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar by security forces and the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh body guards - had tremendous effects on Sikhs around the world. Indira Gandhi's death resulted into widespread killing of Sikhs in Delhi and throughout India in which between 12,000 and 20,000 Sikhs were killed (Singh, 2005). Tatla describes the international significance of the 1980s Sikh movement for a separate nation, 'In the 1980s, the support of overseas Sikhs for a Sikh homeland and their rallying to the defence of Punjab, besides inviting the ire of India, drew parallels with the Jews, the Palestinians, and other nonstate peoples of the world (Tatla, 2005, 273). Representations of the events of 1984 can still be found not only in oral interviews but in posters and calendars in Sikh homes and *gurdwaras* in the diaspora (see Fig. 18). The trauma of 1984 lives on in the Sikh collective memory.

2.3.5a Celtic Tiger Boom

For three hundred years, Ireland exported people to the rest of the world – the Irish diaspora is estimated to include some seventy million people while only six million live

in Ireland (Bolye and Kitchin, 2008). Since the Celtic boom of the 1990s, and the incorporation of central and eastern European countries (Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, etc.) into the European Union, migration into Ireland has massively increased. There were a total of 420,000 foreign nationals living in Ireland in April 2006, representing 188 different countries. While the majority of these people were from a very small number of countries - 82 per cent from just 10 countries and the remaining 18% from rest of the world including India (CSO, 2006).



Figure: 19. Gurbir Singh Chadha in his mobile phone shop, Dublin, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

Sikh migrants are among these new immigrants. Some of the recent Sikh immigrants are professionals – doctors, nurses, chefs, engineers, IT specialists, and construction engineers - part of a highly skilled work force from around the world that was attracted to opportunities in the Irish economy during the boom period. In order to meet a skills

need, in 2000 the Irish Government introduced a work authorisation/visa system, which issued about 12,927 visas between 2000 and 2005 (NESC 2006: 13). These fast-track visas/authorisations were introduced specifically to facilitate the recruitment of workers in specialist categories: IT, construction, and medical. Work visas were more flexible than work permits as they allowed the visa holder to move jobs within a specified sector. Unlike work permits, visas were renewable on a two year basis. People with working visas could apply for permission for their spouse and minor dependent children to join them after three months as compared to one-year time period in the case of work permits (ICI 2006: 20-21). Although the terms for obtaining, and renewing work permits and the rights to employment mobility and family unification for the permit holder were less favourable as compared to work visas, 120,000 work permits were issued between 1999 and the end of March 2007 (DETE 2007).

Because these professionals obtained work visas and work permits, they are able to bring over their families sooner or later, which increased the number of Sikh immigrants, especially women. Among migrants who have come to Ireland since 2000, a substantial number are college and university students. Most are between the ages of twenty to thirty, and are primarily single and male. The flexible student visa regime, the fact that Ireland is an English speaking country and Ireland's geographical proximity to the UK made Ireland a favourable destination among Sikh youth in India. In 2005, there were about 28,000 non-EU students registered in Ireland (ICI 2008). A year later, the Central Statistical Office (CSO, 2006b) reported that, the 'new Irish' had a strikingly different demographic profile to that of the Irish. They are young and single. The new arrivals are characterised by people in their twenties and thirties with significantly more men than women. There were few children and elderly persons among the non-Irish

nationals. The demographics of recent Sikh immigrants, especially the age and gender profile, fall in line with characteristics of the wider immigration flow during the boom period.



Figure: 20. Pavitar Kaur working with her manager, perfume shop, Liffey Valley Shopping Centre, Lucan, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

The group of Sikh migrants who came to Ireland since the 1990s has been particularly affected by the atmosphere of tension that resulted from the “9/11” bombings in the USA in 2001 and the “7/7” bombings in the UK in 2005. After the 7th July 2005 suicide bombings in London, which killed fifty-six people and injured some seven hundred, Sikhs in Ireland, in both the North and the South, became the victims of mistaken identity. They found it difficult to get accommodation and jobs – and some were physically attacked. Many of the Sikh immigrants to Ireland left, after a brief stay, for the UK where family or relatives lived. For students who desperately wanted to stay in

Ireland, housing and food became the most serious problem. Students shared accommodation in order to survive.



Figure: 21. “Stabbed Sikh Blamed for Attacks,” *Irish Examiner*, 15th July 2005. Source: Irish Sikh Council.

Additionally, unfamiliarity with Ireland, and a concern to connect with others from ‘back home’ drove most of the new arrivals to what has become an important Sikh institution in Ireland, the *gurdwara*. Since there is only one *gurdwara* in the Republic of Ireland, Sikhs from all over the country pay their visits, however frequency varies depending on where the Sikhs are settled in the country.

2.4 Geographical Distribution

Of the early Sikh migrants, the majority are settled in the city of Derry and Belfast where they first came. However there are individual Sikh families to be found in various

other towns in the North, including, Ballymoney, Omagh, Strabane, and Antrim. The number of Sikhs in the north has remained too small to form any significant residential enclave. As their financial position permitted, they bought their own houses, usually in close vicinity of other Sikh and Indian immigrants. As emerged in the interviews, their prime concern was safety and good neighbourhoods, which also reflected their growing financial status. In the south, during the initial years of their arrival, Sikh immigrants lived in urban areas usually in rented accommodation because these residences provided quick access to work, public transport and services. Whenever they were to buy houses, they took residences in suburbs. Although small in numbers, Sikhs displayed a tendency to avoid permanent settlement in inner-city areas of Dublin. Ever since the suburb of Lucan was developed, an increasing number of Sikh families have bought houses there, and recently students who had lived in and around city centre⁴⁹ have moved significant numbers to Lucan where they share housing and living expenses.

Apart from Dublin, Shannon city in county Limerick has the second largest concentration of Sikh families. The first Sikh family came in the 1980s from Malaysia and set up Shannon Aircraft Motor Parts. In subsequent years, more Sikh families settled in and around Shannon. Most of these Sikh families belong to the *Namdhari*⁵⁰ sect of Sikhism, which differs from mainstream Sikhism, mainly because of their belief in a chain of human gurus as spiritual guides as opposed to Sikh scripture which identifies Guru Granth Sahib as the spiritual guide. However, individual Sikh families are to be found in various other cities and counties - Cork, Galway, Waterford, Neenah,

⁴⁹ The few apartments in Rathmines, Dublin 6 are consistently rented by Indian students, especially Sikhs, since 2001 and now frequently referred as '*desi* building' by other migrants. The word '*desi*' being the opposite of '*foreign*'.

⁵⁰ *Namdhari* – “the bearer of the Name”; a nineteenth-century movement started by Baba Balak Singh. Its main base is near Ludhiana, in Punjab.

Newcastle west, Kiltimagh, Athlone, and Navan. This pattern of settlement is solely determined by jobs or business priorities.

The preceding sections provide an overview of the Sikh diaspora around the world, explore the imperial connection between Sikhs and Irish people, delineate various waves of Sikh migration to the north and south of Ireland, and finally, map out the geographical scope of Sikhs in Ireland. The early migrants to the north share certain characteristics; they were economic migrants who came to the west with the intention of earning enough money to go back; they were predominantly from large farming families with limited or no marketable skills; they mostly originated from specific Punjabi regions. Almost all the early Sikh immigrants were Jats, a majority caste among Sikhs. Early Sikh migrants to the South were also economic migrants. They worked as restaurants workers and small traders. In the following years, Sikhs from East-Africa, refugees, skilled workers and students from India, added to the number of Sikhs in Ireland. The history of migration thus explored, reveals some key facts that require concluding commentary.

First, the Sikh presence in Ireland has a longer history than one may imagine. It dates back to the 1930s when the first Sikhs came to the north from the *Doaba* region of the Punjab and started working as peddlers. However, their numbers stayed considerably small given their long presence in the north as compared to the south, where Sikh migration started in the 1970s and is presently estimated at 1500 people. Second, there has been very limited connection between the North and South of Ireland, partly because the North and South are viewed as two independent countries, as opposed to one geographical piece of land with free movement of people between the North and

South. Third, the Sikhs in the South more quickly established cultural and religious institutions as compared to Sikhs in the north. The first place of worship in the Republic of Ireland, the *gurdwara*, was established in 1986, whereas the establishment of *gurdwaras* in Derry and Belfast happened in 1995 and 2004 respectively.

Chapter 3: The Challenges of Migration: Sikh Perspectives

3.1 Introduction

'It's funny for you to listen. I saw the first western toilets on the aeroplane. I knew about Indian toilets – a mug, water, soap. Why paper roll and no soap? These were a few questions in my mind at that time; I spent half an hour learning about the toilet.

- (Rishbhav Bharghav, interview, 30th May, 2009)

The slightly comical case of Rishbhav Bharghav - a non-Sikh Indian student from Punjab and now part of the Sikh community in Ireland - alludes to how the unfamiliarity of air travel can be a cause of considerable anxiety. Migration journeys can be more difficult, uncertain, or stressful, if the destination is a far off country, significantly different in terms of geography, climate, religion, culture, language, food, norms of living and working, from that of the home country. Migrants are most likely to face real life situations which are simply unexpected, unfamiliar, and stressful or require new understandings or different actions or solutions, as they move from one country to another. This chapter focuses on the nature of such challenges faced by Sikhs in Ireland. The data collected from life history interviews and participant observation during fieldwork has highlighted many issues, concerns and problems which Sikhs confront at individual and communal levels.

Some of these challenges are a result of their efforts to make sense of life in Ireland, such as finding accommodation, adapting to the food, accessing transportation, understanding the different styles of communication, learning the language, and getting used to the weather which would be common to other migrants as well. Other

challenges are the result of the broader socio-political environment, such as racism, and discrimination, and some challenges are particular to the Sikh community by virtue of their cultural norms and lifestyles. The move to Ireland requires major adjustments for all family members. Many of those interviewed were unprepared for how hard they would have to struggle to make ends meet.

3.2 Journey, Settlement and Living Alone

My first journey was from New Delhi to Tashkent in Russia. I then spent three months in Moscow trying to enter Germany, but it wasn't easy to get a visa. I caught a little passenger ferry to cross the border into Poland. I stayed with a Sikh friend in Poland for a few weeks and then crossed the border into Germany. That was in 1989 and I stayed there for a couple of years. There was no Sikh community in Germany at that time. I cut my hair and shaved off my beard. I stayed in Germany for two years and then moved to the UK. I tried to go to the USA but had problems, so I came to Ireland. (Kewal Singh Cheema, interview, 15th June, 2009)

The journey of Kewal Singh Cheema, who now lives in Dublin with his British born Sikh wife and two kids, was particularly hard, long and full of uncertainty as he left his home to escape political persecution in Punjab during the 1980s. Like many others, Ireland was an unexpected destination for him. Though very few Sikhs in Ireland have had to undergo such a difficult journey, these are not unusual experiences for the millions of migrants who flee their homelands every year, either voluntarily or forcibly due to war, climate disaster, lack of economic opportunities, and persecution. Evidence from the oral history interviews show that a large numbers of Sikh migrants had very minimal or no knowledge of Ireland – of its geography, weather, economy and political situation before moving to Ireland. Many had never even heard of Ireland before arrival. Harpreet Singh, an IT professional from India who came to Ireland to take economic opportunities that became available in the aftermath of Ireland's economic success of the late 1990's-2007 recalls:

‘I had never even heard of Ireland before that (telephone interview with client in Ireland). I started inquiring from people, what is Ireland? Where is Ireland? Nobody in my family knew where this Ireland was. I remember me and my dad opening the geography atlas that night and looking at the world map for Ireland.’

He further states...

‘Even if somebody knew about Ireland, it was more about just Northern Ireland, that the IRA is there and its very violent place to go. Other people were telling me about a lot of bomb explosions and people getting killed and my mother didn’t sleep that night when she heard that I was going to go to such a place. I was not ready.’ (Interview, 25th July, 2009)

Countries, such as the UK, Canada and the United States, with large and long established Sikh communities⁵¹ had existing migrants’ networks, kinship ties with India which facilitated the migration of extended family apart from sending information and money back home which Ireland did not afford. These countries have long been established as preferred migration destinations amongst Sikhs in the Punjab, because of their image as ‘*amir mulak*’ (rich countries). Ireland lacked any such reputation or the presence of migrant support and information networks⁵². One of the consequences was a stereotype that many Sikh migrants had about Ireland as a troubled place.⁵³ In these cases, Ireland did have a reputation but it was more negatively informed.

Though Sikh men were among the first Indian immigrants to Ireland, the situation was particularly difficult for young Sikh women who came to join their husbands in Ireland.

⁵¹ There are estimated half a million Sikhs in UK, 3,50,000 & 2,50,000 in Canada and USA respectively and their presence in these countries dates back to roughly over a century now.

⁵² There are NGOs like ICI and MRCI etc but services they provide are more for immigrants living in Ireland. Support and information which comes from other migrants to kith and kin back home was rare because of less numbers.

⁵³ In one case, a Sikh student who went from Ireland to India to get married to his girlfriend faced strong opposition from the young woman’s parents as they had never heard of Ireland before. (Interview, Manjinder Singh, 11th December, 2008).

Many women expressed a sense of happiness at being united with their partners, but living away from extended family and community support systems, and surrounded by an ‘alien’ culture posed its own challenges. Kuldeep Kaur was a young college student when she got married to a Sikh doctor who was working in Northern Ireland. A year and a half later in 1978, she joined her husband. She recalls her experience of coming to Ireland with bitterness. The happiness of joining her husband was soon overshadowed by the sheer reality of life in the small town of Ballymoney in Northern Ireland.

I was very excited and happy about moving. I came here from Jammu to Delhi by train. My mother came to see me off, along with my brother-in-law. Naturally, I being young and going away for the first time, my mother must have been concerned. We came to London Heathrow Airport. It was very miserable and very cold: I wish I had known that before. Soon all glitter vanished. We were not aware of that much when we came here. There was no Indian TV. I wanted to go back home so many times, but when we had children we were very busy. He was a local general physician, so he was very busy. I had to look after the children. We stayed (Kuldeep Kaur, Interview, 13th 2008).

Kuljeet Kaur, another young qualified Sikh woman, came to Ireland in 2008 to join her husband, Harminder Singh, who worked as a civil engineer in Dublin. In the following paragraphs, she recounts her experience of being alone and away from her family while her husband was working five days a week.

We came by taxi from airport. At home I didn’t like the tea and we ate the cakes, I didn’t like that either. Sometimes I used to go upstairs or somewhere and used to sit on the sofa and cry because I didn’t like this being alone. Before, I was with family. There was everybody - mother, father and his sister, my sister- in-law, my brother-in-law. So there was a big family. It was so much love. When I came here, I was like trying to find those faces around me that somebody will come and say why don’t you eat this or that. So I didn’t like it at all. I tried to convey this to my parents and to his parents that I am missing the family but I didn’t do it. It was only like last month, I told them I used to cry in initial days. I didn’t want to disturb them. (Interview, 10th August, 2008)

Many migrants, such as Kuldeep Kaur and Kuljeet Kaur, found it hard to fight the loneliness, as the vacuum created in their lives by the absence of immediate family and the surrounding environment was not easily replaceable. They struggled to replace or perform the activities which gave meaning to their daily lives back home. Kuldeep Kaur could not go to the *gurdwara* or visit other Sikh families, because there were none living in the area where her husband worked and lived. Kuljeet Kaur on the other hand missed the physical presence, love, and parental care of her extended family. Settlement experience for some of the Sikh and non-Sikh students paints a similarly difficult picture too. Rishabh Bharghav narrates his experience of his first month in Dublin.

When I arrived in Dublin, I faced so many problems like weather, loneliness, missing parents, new places and surroundings. In the new home where I lived, I had to face so many problems like living with older boys who were very rude, negative, awful, scolding every single time I came home, because I was new to the country. A few of them told me, “You don’t clean the toilets, you don’t know how to speak, to cook, and to live’... they asked me foolish questions all time. In 20 days I was out of my home. Nobody knew me. I was scared. I was on O’Connell Street with my luggage. (Interview, 30th May, 2009)

Such experiences were very unsettling for young people like Rishabh, who left the security and comfort of home and a family environment⁵⁴ to encounter hostile, insecure and uncertain circumstances as part of student life in Ireland. The story of Rishabh Bharghav is similar to that of another Indian student from Haryana, who had taken shelter in the *gurdwara* in 2008. This particular student lived in the *gurdwara* for over a month. When asked about his unusually long stay in the *gurdwara*, he hesitantly spoke of his fear of going back to his apartment because of the mistreatment he got from the other international students living there. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he described his condition. (Field Notes, 20th September, 2008). Another Student, Gurmeet Singh

⁵⁴ Rishabh comes from a large extended family with many siblings and cousins.

Gill, who came to Ireland in 2003, was a victim of an unscrupulous travel agent who charged high fees for sending hundreds of students to Ireland by making various unsubstantiated claims. On arrival, he found himself in a difficult situation as the private colleges where he enrolled were blacklisted by GNIB⁵⁵ officers. In the interview he said:

I was shocked when I came here because the agent had told us there were big playing fields; you could play football, basketball. I was a very good volleyball player so I was very excited about coming to Ireland and playing with the Irish people but I didn't find that here so I was really shocked. I changed colleges from Limerick to Dublin but the immigration officer would not extend my visa because the colleges were black-listed. I had to pay so many fees (€4,000 - €5,000) to colleges but the immigration people said they were all bad and would not give me a visa. (Interview, 9th December, 2008)

With the internationalisation of the Irish education sector⁵⁶, the number of international students coming to Ireland has increased substantially since 2002. According to the International Education Board Ireland (IEBI 2006), there were over 25,000 international students registered in Irish third level institutions. However, the lack of policy coherence across different government departments on important issues which impact on international students has led to undesired consequences like the exploitation of international students at the hands of unscrupulous agents and bogus education providers.⁵⁷ These issues include 1) visa and immigration regulations and procedures; 2) the right to work and access to state services such as healthcare; 3) access to education for children of international students and; 4) protection from the operation of rogue

⁵⁵ GNIB (Garda National Immigration Bureau) is division of Garda Siochana (Irish National Police Service), which carries out registration of all non-nationals who are not citizens of a member state of the European Union, the European Economic Area or Switzerland and issues registration certificate in the form of a GNIB card.

⁵⁶ According to latest Enterprise Ireland estimates, Irish international education sector is worth € 900million, which is 1% of Global International Education Sector.

⁵⁷ See., Walshe, J (2010), 'Loose rules no longer suit as economy slides', *Irish Independent*, 12th February.

educational providers (Power, 2008). During the roaring Celtic Tiger⁵⁸ economy, such important issues were accorded the least priority and the services of many bogus education providers went largely undetected.⁵⁹

3.3 Weather

Here we are a bit upset by the weather; there is no sun.

– (Phulpreet Singh and Kamaljit Kaur, Interview, 10th December, 2008)

During the field work for *A Sikh Face in Ireland* project, I asked participants (apart from the main project questions) what they disliked about living in Ireland. The most common answer was, ‘it does not stop raining here’, ‘it’s chilling’, and ‘weather here is not good’ and ‘there is no sun’. The weather conditions in Punjab - where the majority of Sikh immigrants come from - differ significantly from those in Ireland. Punjab gets one of the longest and hottest summer spells in India from March through October every year, with the average daytime temperature touching as high as 40°C in the months of June and July. On the other hand, Ireland is known for its cold and unpredictable weather conditions. Coping with the harsh weather conditions had been far more difficult for early Sikh immigrants who lived in an era devoid of modern facilities like central heating, electric heating appliances, and carpeted floors. Jagir Kaur Nagra, one of the early Sikh women immigrants to Northern Ireland who came at the age of 23 in 1953, recalls:

In the 50s or 60s, it used to snow a lot. At that time, roads weren’t clear. People used to chain the wheels of their cars, when they used to go out in towns and villages to sell clothes. They used to go door to door, and it was very tough in narrow lanes. Now-a-days, we have lots of facilities. There was no heat in cars and in the houses then. There was only one fire that kept

⁵⁸ The term ‘Celtic Tiger’ is used to describe a period of rapid economic growth in Ireland between 1995–2007.

⁵⁹Walshe, J and Brady, T (2010), ‘10,000 working here illegally on bogus foreign student visas’, *Irish Independent*, 12th February.

whole houses warm. Neither there was there any TV nor any fridge in the house. There was no such thing then.’ (Interview, 6th January, 2010)

Apart from the problems which the cold weather brings to the normal conduct of life, for many Sikh immigrants cold weather is also seen as being responsible for causing health related problems. According to Satnam Singh, “our Asian families have lot of health problems here due to cold climate”. Satnam Singh, who has suffered from a chronic headache for the last three years, had been to India several times to get his medical treatment, after his illness wasn’t cured in Ireland. He firmly believes that his health suffered due to inclement weather conditions. He even considered moving to Australia as advised by his friends and relatives who live there. One of the widely reported health related issues is loss of hair. Sikhs who have long hair have often talked about the amount of hair they have lost since they arrived in Ireland. As a member of Sikh community, and in my role as a participant observer, I have also noticed an increasing number of young people from the Sikh community going to India for medical related reasons.

Because of the weather, many Sikhs, especially women, feel that their social life is very limited. Harsh weather conditions limit outdoor activities for kids and students, visits to parks, family and friends, and force them to stay indoors even when they have free time. The situation is particularly suffocating for many visiting parents of Sikh immigrants, who feel ‘imprisoned’ inside the house because of their inability to go for a walk. During the research, it was reported that many guests leave Ireland before their planned departure⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ In June 2010, I invited my parents to attend the launch of *A Sikh Face in Ireland* exhibition. During their three week long stay in Ireland, we had to postpone our outdoor trip to the countryside and they often missed their evening and morning walks in the park due to bad weather.

3.4 Legal Barriers

One thing regarding rules here, they don't know their own rules properly.
- (Vaneet Kaur, interview, 10th September, 2008)

Ireland today, according to Kearney (2006) is among the world's most globalised states. Data released by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in 2006 shows that nationals of more than 180 states and territories had been issued with Personal Public Service (PPS) numbers since 2001. Since inward migration to Ireland was swift and large-scale, the institutional and legal mechanisms responsible for managing migration couldn't keep pace with the changing social and economic scenarios in the country. The result has been the inability of the country to respond to and address the needs and rights of the new members of Irish society (MacÉinrí, 2007).

Vaneet Kaur, a Sikh nurse working in Dublin is one of the many professionals who have been recruited by specialist agencies to meet the skills shortages during the Irish economic boom. A large number of these immigrants were young. Once arrived and settled, they went back to India on relatively short trips to get married or bring their families with them. Being on work permits or work visas, they were entitled to invite their families (wives and children) to Ireland. But due to procedural ambiguity, many such immigrants faced problems in terms of delayed family re-unification, leading to mental and physical stress. During the interviews, an increasing number of participants narrated incidents from their experience, where they had to deal with difficult immigration officials and situations. Jasbir Singh, the husband of Vaneet Kaur, narrates their ordeal to be re-united:

You know in Indian culture, we don't live together without marriage. We just see each other, chat with each other, and have a cup of tea together or something like that. We don't sleep together before marriage. After our legal, religious and social marriage, we live together. Ireland doesn't know

this. America, Canada and England know this. You know I was in London since three years and my wife was in Ireland since two and half years. We went to India for just four days after that we spent three weeks together and she came back and joined her job. After two months, I decided to come here. When I applied for my visa, they refused my visa because there is no relationship history between us. My wife asked the immigration department, 'What is the problem?' They said, "You never lived together; you never spent time together so how can you marry each other? (Interview, 10th September, 2008)

The incident narrated above highlights the inadequacies of the Irish immigration system and the lack of cultural awareness on the part of concerned officials to deal with a whole plethora of immigration matters. According to Piasras MacEinri, Ireland, along with several other peripheral EU countries, lacks the landscapes of policy, legislation, infrastructure, support organisations and experience of those European countries long used to dealing with immigration (MacEinri, 2007). Thus immigrants face unpleasant options either to withdraw temporarily or permanently or to fight for their rights, be it family re-unification, work permit renewal, change of employer, or citizenship. The interviews conducted suggest that such situations caused emotional and financial stress among Sikh immigrants while they tenaciously pursued their cases with different government departments, embassies etc. In the incident above, Jasbir Singh's wife Vaneet Kaur had to submit an unexpectedly long list⁶¹ of supporting documents to prove their marriage to a visa officer in the Irish Embassy in London.

In many cases, analysis coming from this research suggests that immigrants have suffered because of the mistakes committed by various departments dealing with work

⁶¹ 1) Marriage certificate; 2) Letter from Vaneet's employer stating that she is married to Jasbir; 3) Letter from her Principal stating that she is married to Jasbir; 4) Letter from President of *gurdwara* in Ireland; 5) Letter from Migrant Rights Centre Ireland; 6) Letter from Vaneet's uncle in UK; 7) Affidavit from her parents; 8) Affidavit from Jasbir's parents; 9) Sikh Marriage Act in a Book; 10) letter from Jasbir's college co-ordinator; 11) Letter from Jasbir's principal; 12) letter from Jasbir; 13) Tickets when she visited Jasbir; 14) Photos when Vaneet and Jasbir were together; 15) Letter from Indian Embassy in Ireland.

permits, visa renewals, and residency or passport applications. Other Sikh migrants who wanted to invite their parents to Ireland to spend time or to provide support during the birth of a baby, encountered many difficulties in obtaining a visa. Often visas were declined on flimsy grounds with no recourse to appeal. Evidence from interviews reveals a very disappointing scenario when it comes to dealing with any department concerning immigration. In such situations, many immigrants have been restricted from receiving benefits which they are fully entitled to. One example is Jaspal Singh who worked for five years as a carpenter in the construction sector and was made redundant in 2007. He honoured tax obligations while he worked, and should be fully entitled to receive support under the social welfare scheme, but he decided against it in the interest of obtaining a residency permit.

We are not getting any social welfare benefits from government because we think that if we get aid from the government, it will affect our case. Then the government will never give us residency and consider us a burden on this country. Now we are surviving here because of our savings (Interview, 13th September, 2008).

Jaspal Singh's fears are justified as Crosscare Migrant Project (CMP, 2009) has highlighted cases where citizenship applications were declined on many unstated, unjustified grounds, including accessing public funds via social welfare system. Many recent migrants, IT professionals and medical workers, were legally entitled to invite their spouses under the work permits they had, but their spouses are not allowed to work under current rules. In a majority of the cases, such spouses had high-level academic and professional qualifications and some even left their jobs before migrating to Ireland. For cultural reasons, the situation is more difficult if the person who couldn't work happened to be male (George, 2000). Gurjeet Singh Sidhu, who worked in India as an English language tutor and came to join his wife, who is a nurse, narrated his story:

So far my experience over here is not too good because I am sitting free for around the whole day, I am not able to work here, I don't have a job. So I get up early in the morning to help my wife in the household work and when she goes to a job, I always go with her and leave her near the hospital. After that I come back, read the newspaper and chat with my friends on the Internet. After that I go different places, here and there, and I visit different shopping malls. I can't say that I am enjoying it; I am just passing the time here. In the future I think that I would like to enjoy my life. (Interview, 19 Sept, 2008)

I remember asking another Sikh nurse, who was one of the prospective participants for the *Sikh Face in Ireland* project and subsequently came to see the exhibition with her daughter, why they were reluctant to come forward for photographs and interviews. After a few seconds of silence, she replied that her husband who was a government employee in Chandigarh,⁶² had been unable to work since he came here, was suffering from depression, and didn't want to talk about his life. Culturally, middle and upper class Sikh and Indian households maintain a division of labour, in which men are the primary breadwinners, working in farms, offices, and factories while women are homemakers who care for children and other domestic labour. In many cases, women working outside the home were considered disrespectful to the 'izzat' (honour or status) of the family, especially when men of the family were able and qualified to earn a wage. In the case of these Sikh nurses, husbands are thus dependant on their wives for financial assistance, which may also re-define the power relationship and family roles within the household. Since they could not work, it affects their self-esteem and social life.

⁶² Chandigarh is capital city of both Punjab and Haryana province in India. It's also one of India's planned cities, well known for its quality of life and work.

3.5 Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism

In the beginning it was very nice, everybody greeted each other, and Irish people were very welcoming. It was very refreshing coming from London where people ignore you. (Manminder Kaur Gill, interview, 16th December, 2008)

The reflection above, from a member of a Sikh family living in Galway since the 1980s, echoes the general mood of reception in Ireland in the pre-9/11 era. Early Sikh immigrants, those who migrated before 2000s, encountered Ireland as being generally welcoming, and hospitable to the people who came here in search of work. There were instances of racism or discrimination, but the number and frequency of occurrences had been few and far between. The early Sikh immigrants to the North and South gave up turbans, and shaved their beards which were considered an ‘impediment’ to their work as peddlers and adopted a ‘western look’. Nonetheless they were commonly referred to as ‘blackie’ or ‘darkie’ by the locals because of their brown or dark skin colour. Those who kept their turbans were professionally qualified and worked at white-collar jobs as doctors, engineers or businessmen. Prior to 9/11, Sikhs with turbans and beards faced problems, but these were far less inimical as compared to the period after 9/11. Based on the oral history interviews, we learned that Sikhs were seen as ‘exotic others’ by many Irish people, especially children: real-life people who reminded them of legendary characters such as ‘Santa Claus’ or ‘Aladdin’. Dr. Jasbir Singh Puri, consultant anaesthetist at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda narrated the following story:

When I came here initially, children had never seen a Sikh. They used to ask me if I was a genie. They used to say, “Are you Aladdin? Where is your carpet?” I would sit and talk to them while my wife was shopping and they would love it.’ (Interview, 11th September, 2008)

Another incident is narrated by Sarwaan Singh Gill, whose family lived in Malaysia and the UK prior to moving to Ireland during the 1980s: Once I was sitting in my car. One

child asked, 'Are you a Santa Clause?' I asked him what he wanted for Christmas. He said, 'I want a bicycle'. So I told him to write a letter! The problem came after 9/11 (Interview, 16th December, 2008). The men we interviewed saw these interpretations of Sikh beards and turbans as un-offensive and as opportunities for role-playing, and amicable interaction. Sikh immigrants, depending on their willingness, played such roles to the amusement of Irish adults and children and perhaps of Sikhs themselves

3.5.1 The Sikh Experience: Post 9/11 and 7/7

After 9/11 a lot of things have changed. It's quite different than before 9/11.

– (Arvinder Singh, interview, 21st September, 2008)

As the world continued to watch the Twin Towers crumble alongside repetitious footage of Osama Bin Laden, the general western public seemed to capture the snapshot of the 'enemy' within their minds. The image of Osama bin Laden with a turban and beard largely determined the visual image of terror and terrorists, it also reflected a 'broader anti-immigrant ethos wrapped around cultural and religious symbols that have nothing to do with terrorism' (Verma, 2005, 90). The symbolism of turbans and beards - 'sacred attire' for Sikhs, and 'exotic', 'magical' or even simply 'objects of curiosity' for Irish people - has been lost to more contemporary associations which are negative, threatening, and accusatory. Television screens increasingly projected images of 'terror' and 'evil' based on stereotypes of what a 'terrorist' looked like, and those images invariably involved beards and turbans. Those Sikhs with turbans and beards became immediate targets for revenge by 'patriot' Americans and other Westerners who regarded every man with a turban and beard a potential 'terrorist' or 'follower of Osama

bin laden⁶³. In particular, Sikhs with turbans in the United States have been murdered⁶⁴, stabbed, assaulted, verbally harassed, discriminated against in the workplace, and refused service in places of public accommodation, among other things (Gohil and Sidhu, 2008). Sikhs in the United States were the worst affected, but the situation in other western countries was also very serious, where Sikhs faced similar problems following the 9/11 and 7/7 bombings. In Ireland, many Sikh students and professionals came in 2001, shortly before or after September 11.



Figure: 22. News item highlighting the case of racial abuse due to ignorance about Sikhs and prejudice toward Muslims as a perceived threat. Cullen, C (2007) “I’m not a Suicide Bomber”, *The News of the World*, 15 April.

I left on 17th September, a few days after 9/11 in America, so my flight was cancelled. So I stayed in a hotel for 3 days. I got a new flight on 20th September. So I came here on 21st of September. (Gurvinder Singh, interview, July, 2009)

⁶³ According to one survey, “9 out of 10 educated Americans identified Sikhs with Muslims.” ‘Osama becomes a pain for American Sikhs’, *The Financial Express*, 10th July, 2006. Available at: http://www.financialexpress.com/old/latest_full_story.php?content_id=133438

⁶⁴ According to FBI, Balbir Singh Sodhi, an American Sikh became “the first murder victim of the 9/11-related hate crime backlash in America on 15th September 2001.

Gurvinder Singh was among the Sikh immigrants who came to Ireland to work or to study in 2001. Like many others, he wore a turban and had a long beard. Many Irish people, like their American counterparts were unaware of Sikhs and Sikhism, and associated ‘men with turbans and beards’ with followers of Osama Bin Laden. The young Sikhs, almost all men, faced racial abuse on the streets of Dublin city and had difficulty in finding accommodation. Interviewed exactly seven years later, Dr Jasbir Singh Puri, who was then a trustee of the Dublin *gurdwara*, narrated the ordeal of Sikh students who came shortly after 9/11.

In 2001 when the 9/11 occurred all the people were refused accommodation, and there were loads of students coming in at that time. All the students, when they were going out, everybody called them ‘Taliban.’ There was little accommodation; we provided accommodation for everyone. At that time there were more than 90-100 students living there (in Dublin *gurdwara*). So we had a task to feed all of them. Eventually when the dust settled down with 9/11 and they started giving accommodation to others and then they got it. But it did harm to lots of Sikhs because all the Sikhs, who came from India, they cut their hair and they took off their turbans, a lot of them were doing it in front of me. (Dr Jasbir Singh Puri, interview, 11 September, 2008).

An unusual concentration of young Sikh men, many of them with turbans and beards, in the Dublin *gurdwara* also scared the local neighbourhood in the Ballsbridge area which also houses the American embassy, at a distance of about 500m from the *gurdwara*. Complaints were made to local and immigration authorities and one neighbour informed the American embassy security staff about the ‘gathering of so many Muslims in the nearby mosque’. Fortunately, the person on duty happened to be the Irish husband of a Sikh lady from Ludhiana city of Punjab, and the matter did not proceed any further⁶⁵. In order to avoid racial harassment and imminent physical violence, many such immigrants changed their physical appearance, by cutting hair and removing turbans.

⁶⁵ This incident was narrated by an Irish Security guard at the American embassy himself to the *granthi* of Dublin *gurdwara*.

This strategy of escaping verbal and physical abuse gained so much popularity that one barber shop in the city centre contacted *The Irish Times* to report on this, because his business had gone up significantly as Sikh students were going to his shop to cut their hair. Alarmed by this trend, elders of the community held a press conference to inform Irish people about Sikhs. However, the Sikh community was particularly alarmed when a number of Sikhs were physically attacked in Ireland shortly after the terrorist attack in London on 07/07/2005. In one case, a young Sikh student was stabbed in Athlone. In other instances, four young Sikhs were physically beaten by local people who considered them responsible for terrorist attacks.



Figure: 23. 'I thought it was the end of my life', *Athlone Voice*, 26 July, 2005.

Oral history interviews suggest that the situation for Sikhs in Northern Ireland also deteriorated after 9/11 and 7/7. *Bhai Darshan Singh*, who is a priest in the Belfast *gurdwara*, narrated the following experience:

I am frightened while out with this flowing beard. People do not understand us and call us “Paki”. Two or three days ago I went out and they threw stones. Recently they set fire to the back door of our *gurdwara* here in Belfast. After setting fire, they wrote, “Muslims murder”. Once at night they threw red paint in front of the entry gate and on the wall. It was Sunday, the

day of religious congregation here, so I cleaned it before the people arrived so that their feet would not be stained. (Interview, 5th July, 2009).

Apart from avoiding being targets of unjustified hatred and harassment, many immigrants shaved their beards and removed their turbans in order to secure employment. Amarjit Singh, a middle-aged Sikh, who lives with large numbers of students in the Walkinstown area of Dublin, reflects on the situation faced by Sikh students:

As far as I know about students they say that they are not getting jobs in restaurants because of their turbans and hair. The work place does not accommodate them. I asked many students, 'Why have you cut your hair? They reply that they have come here after spending a lot of money and now are not getting jobs. The employer says, "Get the hair cut if you want to job here". (Interview, February, 2009)

Arvinder Singh, who works as a telecommunication engineer in Ericsson, states that, "it's very tough to get a customer oriented job being a Sikh" (interview, 21st September, 2008). Since uncut hair and turban are essential components towards practising Sikhism, such decisions were often difficult. For many devout Sikhs and their families, the cutting of the hair is a gross violation of the Sikh code of conduct and is not worth the economic and social benefits which may follow such physical transformations. Ajmer Singh, who came to Ireland in 2001, recalls the reaction of his family in India:

My father-in-law and brother-in-law both were distressed. They rebuked, 'Why did you go abroad when you have property here? Were you starving here? Have you lost being a Sikh for the sake of money?' When I went to India, the elder brother of my wife did not even talk to me. (Interview, 8th June, 2009).

Kapur (1997, 141) also narrates a case where the parents of an early Sikh immigrant to Northern Ireland considered him dead the day they came to know that their son had shaved and removed his turban. Such extreme instances are very rare but they do highlight the emotional tension or stress inherent in those situations which involve

'leaving' or 'abandoning' some part of their culture or 'identity' which immigrants or their parents consider valuable or central to their religious practice. In other cases, it also means getting sanction from elder members of the family to redress the emotional guilt or shame which cutting of the hair might bring to the family. Jagdesh Kaur, mother of Shamsheer who lives in Shannon describes the problems Shamsheer faced in school because of his hair and their family decision to allow Shamsheer to cut his hair to escape harassment at the hands of other students:

My son (Shamsheer) was harassed here for one year and after one year he decided to get his hair cut. I asked him to get permission from his grandfather (in India). Shamsheer told him his problem over the phone and then my father-in-law, who was very much attached to Shamsheer, permitted him to get his hair cut. (Interview, 8th June, 2009).

While there are cases of racism where Sikh migrants suffered at the hands of less-tolerant elements in Irish society, there are also cases of exploitation by fellow Sikhs or Indian employers. During interviews and participant observation, a number of cases were recorded where Sikh and other Indian migrant workers were forced to work long hours at below minimum pay by their co-ethnic employers⁶⁶. In its report 'Exploitation in Ireland's Restaurant Industry', Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MCRI, 2008) has documented wide spread abuse and exploitation experienced by migrant workers from twenty-two different nationalities working under Irish and non-Irish employers. The report highlighted the cases of exploitation within immigrant communities.

⁶⁶ See, one of most widely reported case of exploitation of an Indian worker. Irish Times, 'Work permit system 'leads to exploitation'. April, 14, 2010.
<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2010/0414/1224268308675.html>

3.6 Barriers to Civic Participation



Figure: 24. ‘No Turban’, Gardaí tell Sikh Recruit, *Metro Éireann*, 7th June, 2007.

“No Turban, Garda Tell Sikh Recruit”, was the front page headline in *Metro Éireann*, Ireland’s multicultural weekly, on 7th June, 2007. Two months later, on 13th August, the story was covered by the *Irish Independent* and it became a hot topic for media coverage and hence for public debate. Sikhs were thus catapulted to the centre of the debate on integration and diversity in Ireland by virtue of the public debate about secularisation of public offices in relation to the controversy caused by the Gardaí’s refusal to allow Sikh recruits to wear the turban. Apart from drawing attention to the Sikh community, the debate also unearthed broader and deeper issues of cultural and religious diversity and integration in Ireland as a result of inward migration. The resultant debate started around the importance of the turban to Sikh men and zeroed in on allowing for the diversity of different faiths by highlighting the disparity between policy and practice. Even though government policy documents stressed that ‘integration is a two-way process,’ in practice, state bodies choose to singularly place

emphasis upon, ‘immigrants understanding us’ and ‘assimilating into Irish culture.’ Further fear of diverse cultures, misinformed apprehension about the collapse of the system, dilution of ‘Irish identity’ or ‘Irishness’ underpinned most of the opposition from the general public and some of the media. The failure of multicultural policy in Britain is mostly cited as a rationale for the government’s stand on the turban issue, while keeping and maintaining ‘neutrality or impartiality’ of the police force is accorded priority over accommodation of diversity by Garda Síochána in Ireland (O’Brien, 2007). Although Sikhs with turbans and beards have been working in other economic sectors within Ireland, joining the police forces has always merited special recognition within the community and such acceptance is considered as a collective achievement. It also acts as a measure of the host society’s openness to their culture and religious heritage and vice-versa. Beginning in 2004⁶⁷, the Garda Síochána held consultation talks with representatives from diverse ethnic communities including Sikhs, and expressed its commitment ‘to adapting its uniforms to suit recruits from non-Catholic backgrounds’ (Loyal, 2007). However in 2007, it took a U-turn in policy attracting criticism from many in the field of migration studies⁶⁸, people in local politics⁶⁹ and global Sikh communities⁷⁰ who felt betrayed and feared that “a cascade of events” could follow whereby schools, workplaces and sports clubs would issue bans on religious headwear.⁷¹ During oral history interviews, participants repeatedly expressed

⁶⁷ ‘McDowell unveils plan for Garda recruitment’, *RTE News*, 14th October, 2004. Available at: <http://www.rte.ie/news/2004/1014/gardai.html>.

⁶⁸ Steven Loyal, ‘Getting our head around the reality of multiculturalism’, *The Irish Times*, 8th August, 2007. Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2007/0822/1187332306110.html>.

⁶⁹ ‘Green Party calls on gardai to rethink its ban on Sikh turban’, *The Irish Independent*, 22nd August, 2007. Available at: <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/green-party-calls-on-gardai-to-rethink-its-ban-on-sikh-turban-1063475.html>

⁷⁰ ‘Sikhs criticise Garda decision on Turbans’, *RTE News*, 21st August, 2007. available at: <http://www.rte.ie/news/2007/0821/turban.html>. ‘Common sense dictates that Sikh must wear turban on duty’, *The Tribune*, 26th August, 2007. Available at: <http://tribune.maithu.com/archive/article/2007/aug/26/common-sense-dictates-sikh-must-wear-turban-on-duty/>.

⁷¹ ‘He feels betrayed’. *Metro Éireann*, 12th March, 2009.

their unhappiness over Garda Síochána's decision and some even considered it as symbolic of the country's overall response to immigrants.

3.6.1 Soccer Vs Sikh Teenager

Glen Jordan and I began photographing scenes from every-day Sikh life on 1 March 2008. Karpreet Singh known to his friends as 'KP' was photographed while he was playing a soccer match against another team. KP, aged 14, played for the Hillcrest Football Club in Lucan and has been captain of his team on several occasions including the match we photographed.



Figure: 25. "KP" (Karpreet Singh), star of the Hillcrest Soccer Club, Lucan, County Dublin, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

His father, Surinder Singh who drives a taxi to earn a living for his family, was proud of his son's achievements and wanted him to graduate to a more professional level. Nine months later, in December, 2008 while he was playing another match in County Meath, he was sent off by the match referee for wearing 'headgear'. The referee's decision

came as a shock to 'KP', his team, his former coach who was present at the match, and his father who was cheering for KP outside the boundary.

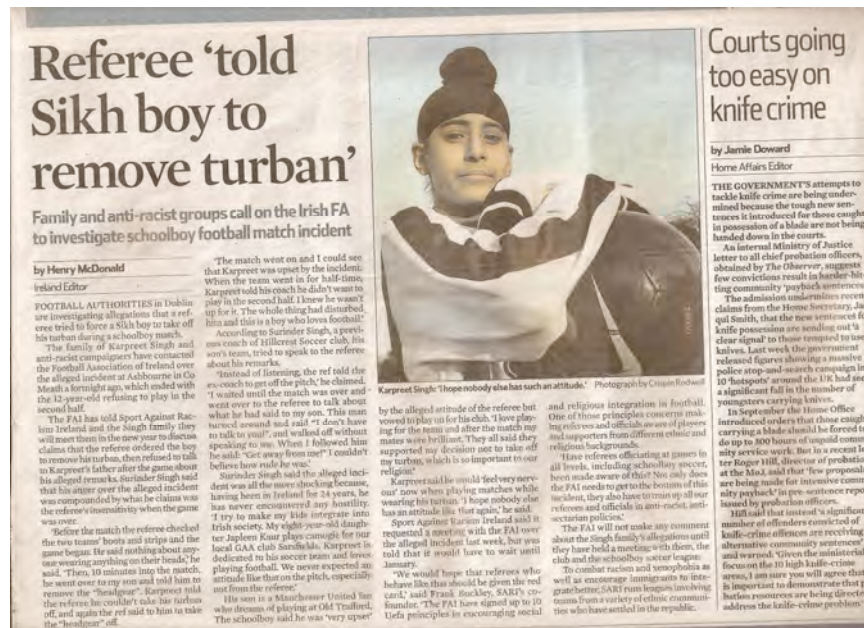


Figure: 26. Referee 'told Sikh boy to remove turban', *The Observer*, 14th December, 2008.

The incident prompted the Irish Sikh Council to formally lodge a complaint with the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) on behalf of KP's father. NGO's like Sports Against Racism Ireland (SARI)⁷² called on the FAI to 'investigate the incident and also train up all our referees and officials in anti-racist, anti-sectarian policies'.⁷³ Although the issue was resolved after assurance from the FAI that no such incident would happen in the future, it left a demoralising effect on KP's family and also attracted unwanted media attention.⁷⁴

⁷² SARI –an NGO, established in 1997 as a direct response to the growth of racist attacks in Ireland. It supports and promotes social inclusion and positive integration through sports.

⁷³ Referee 'told Sikh boy to remove turban', *The Observer*, 14th December, 2008. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2008/dec/14/ireland-football-sikh-turban>

⁷⁴ 'Irish Sikhs in Global Spotlight after turban row', *Metro Éireann*, 22nd January, 2009. Available at: <http://www.metroeireann.com/article/irish-sikhs-in-global-spotlight.1600>

3.7 Schools

According to the Economic Social Research Institute, migrant students made up 10 per cent of the total primary school population in 2007 (the most recent figure available), and over three quarters of these students were from non-English speaking backgrounds (ESRI, 2009). As a result of the recent increase in the immigrant population described earlier, the composition of students in Irish schools has changed from students with very similar cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to students with more varied, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual backgrounds. For example, there are over 160 nationalities represented in post primary schools (OECD, 2009). The schools have been slow to respond to the needs of this increasingly heterogeneous student population. One area of concern for many Sikh parents is the fact that Irish schools, despite the rapid increase of immigrant students over the last decade, remain predominantly Catholic in character and structure.

The interviews with participants suggest that many Sikh parents had difficulty in getting their children admitted to schools. Many schools have an official uniform policy which requires pupils to wear mandatory dress, shave beards and refrain from wearing jewellery. Such uniform policies framed largely with Christian pupils in mind tend to exclude pupils of other faiths who are becoming a significant part of the school population in Ireland. Sikh children, with their long hair covered with a turban or *patka*⁷⁵ and some with beards; wearing a *kara*⁷⁶ tend to ‘violate’ official school uniform rules and thus are refused admission. Rominder Kaur, mother of two teenager boys who lives in Navan, County west Meath, described how her efforts to explain her family’s faith and customs to the school authorities bore no positive result:

⁷⁵ Small turban usually worn by kids to cover their hair. Also worn by adults while playing sports.

⁷⁶ Steel bracelet which all Sikhs wear on their wrists as an article of their faith.

They told me that this is the policy of the school. As per the school policy you can't have facial hair. I said I respect the policies, the thing is, this is your human right to practice the religion and first of all when I came to your school, I explained and you agreed and now the same news coming up, so I am actually confused. They said, 'We know that the Sikh religion is like this.' I said it is not possible (to cut hair or shave beard) but once again they were saying that it was school policy. So I said it's not a fashion that my son wants to have, but that it's his culture, it's his right actually. There were no heated arguments and we just stopped our communication. (Interview, 24th February, 2009).

This incident highlights the situation where school authorities, even when aware of Sikh religious and cultural beliefs, display inflexibility and continue to adhere to the uniform rule which tends to be exclusionary. In another case, Jaskiran Kaur, who was a mathematics teacher in India before moving to Ireland, explains where her seven-year-old son becomes the victim of an insensitive and inflexible attitude of the school authorities.

Sachman used to go swimming and he has long hair. When he came out from swimming, I said I have to dry your hair but the teacher didn't allow me because it was against the rules. So I talked to the Principal and said that I needed to dry his hair after swimming because he is asthmatic, he catches cold very quickly. She said that it's a rule not to use the hair drier because there are so many boys and girls as well. But I said it's not good for my son as he has long hair, not every child has long hair. Because of my religion I have to keep his hair and I have to dry it because he cannot go with wet hair all day in class. He has to tie his turban on. Despite all my explanations, she didn't allow this and I felt very depressed. So I stopped Sachman from swimming. (Interview, 25th July, 2009).

Situations like this put Sikh parents in a very difficult situation where they are compelled to choose either their children's faith or their education. Having failed in their efforts to resolve these issues through dialogue, they feel disappointed and despondent. Sikh families who live in Dublin at least have the option of changing to schools where teachers and principals are more open to students from other cultures. Sikh families, like those of Rominder Kaur who lived in country towns in the absence of Sikh or Indian communities had more reasons to worry. Kuldeep Kaur, who lives in

Ballymoney in Northern Ireland, explains how the absence of community, coupled with a lack of awareness among the general population, can be a cause for concern:

Aman and Paul were the only two Sikh boys here for about a 60 miles radius. They were well adjusted in school. But at the back of their mind they remembered their colour was different and they had long hair. It was confusing for local children because they never saw any Sikhs on TV. (Interview, 13th December, 2008).

Sikh parents have concerns regarding the safety of their children in schools. One of the interviewees reported that she knew one case where the hair of a Sikh girl student was cut mischievously by other kids. According to recent studies on the experience of migrant children, many migrant children reported feeling different, or being marked out as different, in their interactions with Irish children or with school structures, with some reporting instances of racism or bullying from kids, both within and outside school (Darmody et al, 2011; Laoire et al, 2009).

3.8 Cultural Survival: Language, Religion and Values

It is very important for our children that they know who they are - their background, their history, their language - so that they can pass it on to the next generation because if we don't tell them, it will die, they will not pass it to their children. (Manminder Kaur Gill, Galway, interview, 16th December, 2008).

If we will teach our children about our culture and religion then they can remain attached to India and to our culture and religion, otherwise we cannot say whether our generation will be Sikh or something else. (Jagdes Kaur, Shannon, interview, 8th June, 2009).

Immigrant parents are often concerned about the survival of their culture, religion and identity. The situation becomes more serious if the community considers itself a minority. Most of the Sikh immigrants in Ireland think that the number of Sikhs in Ireland is so small that they – as individuals and as a community – lack resources which they consider necessary to maintain their Sikh culture and religious identity. The absence of schools that teach the principles of Sikhism, Punjabi language classes, Sikh

or Punjabi media, and small community numbers present a worrisome scenario for many parents who want to maintain their cultural, religious and linguistic heritage. On the other hand, where bringing up their children with Indian or Sikh values is not possible, many Sikh parents regard western culture as too liberal. Parents who themselves were brought up in joint families, with different sets of family and social norms tend to replicate the relationship they had with their parents. Kuljeet Kaur who is worried about their ability to raise kids in western society states:

I used to go to the UK and America, and the problem is that it is very difficult to control the children there so you cannot give them the values that you can give them in India. So by the time they are adults and they take their path, that's why we are little bit worried about the future generation here, how they will be. (Interview, 10th August, 2008).

Some parents, worried about the future of their kids in Ireland, have plans to relocate to the UK where there is the presence of large community numbers, Sikh community schools and other community institutions to assure them of a future that is more knowledge about Sikh culture and heritage as compared to Ireland. Satnam Singh, the father of two Irish-born Sikh children discloses: We have so many of our people in England. Every person thinks that my children should study in a Sikh community school or associate with Sikh families and that is good. There are many families here who think if they get the passport they will move to England (Interview, 16th August, 2008).

Teaching kids about Sikh culture and religion is also considered central to the possibility of maintaining ties with India. Most Sikh immigrants have left other family members behind and large numbers of relatives continue to live in India. Grandparents wish to remain in touch with their grandchildren who are born and raised in Ireland. Additionally, Sikh parents feel the necessity to teach their children the Punjabi language, and family and social values which they consider important to maintain ties

with India. Vaneet Kaur's observation points toward a broader scenario prevalent among immigrant communities: 'I have seen so many kids in *gurdwara* who don't want to talk in Punjabi. Their parents are talking in Punjabi and the kids are answering in English' (Interview, 10th September, 2008).

3.9 Factionalism within Sikh Community

A visit to the Dublin *gurdwara* on any Sunday when 200 to 300 people come together to participate in communal prayer and partake in *langar*⁷⁷ may give the impression that Sikhs in Ireland constitute a homogenous group. Since 2004, I have participated regularly in religious and communal activities in the *gurdwara* and have subsequently been an active member of *gurdwara* management committee. My role in the management committee enabled me to observe various aspects of *gurdwara* life which were previously invisible to me, especially the tension and power struggles over the control of the *gurdwara*, which constitute a major site of power enactment within the diasporic community. Harpreet Singh, former president of the Dublin *gurdwara* and co-coordinator for the Irish Sikh Council, points out the centrality of the *gurdwara* as not only a religious, but also asocial, communal and political site:

There are a lot of complicated issues in running the *gurdwara*, it's not just about the religion and the prayers, I think its more about personality clashes, a lot of people have their own personal agenda because *gurdwara* is not just a religious place as such in the Sikh community, it is place which has a very strong social and political aspect as well. So everyone knows that whoever is controlling the management of the *gurdwara* is virtually controlling the social, political, cultural and religious aspects of the community and obviously there are power struggles to gain the position of strength in the management of *gurdwara* (Interview, 25th July 2009).

⁷⁷ 'Langar' is a community kitchen in every *gurdwara* around the world where a free vegetarian meal is served to the congregation. This meal is paid and prepared by Sikhs themselves in service of congregation and their faith.

Evidence from oral history interviews suggests tensions between old and new Sikh immigrants where various factors such as age, length of stay in Ireland, legal status and family contribution to the establishment of the Dublin *gurdwara* are used to stake claim to the management of the *gurdwara*. Recent Sikh immigrants - both professionals and students who constitute a substantial part of the Sunday congregation, the voluntary workforce and monetary donations - demand a greater role in running the *gurdwara* on the basis of their contribution which is resisted by the older generation of migrants. Interestingly for students like Gurvinder Singh, entitlement to 'citizenship' does not only determine his rights vis-à-vis wider Irish society but within the Sikh community as well. When asked about reasons for disunity, he says, 'They (early Sikh migrants) have an ego like, 'we are settled here, we are citizens here.' So that's why they don't want young people to come up front and do *sewa* -voluntary work' (interview, 13th July, 2009). Divisions and polarisation within the community are more pronounced during times of elections. In order to gain support during the election of the management committee⁷⁸, contesting individuals or families generally solicit support on the basis of caste, (Jats vs Bhaphe⁷⁹) village, or city ties rather than any progressive agenda for the *gurdwara* or the community. Such polarisation has had an unfavourable impact on the effective running of the *gurdwara*, its growth, and the representation of Sikhs in general. For some Sikhs, like Ravinder Singh such a situation is quite exclusionary: 'The reason I don't go to the *gurdwara* anymore is there's too much politics. At present this is taking a lot of people away from the *gurdwara*. If I want to pray, I can pray at home. There should be no caste whatsoever in Sikhism' (Interview, 4th January, 2010).

⁷⁸ Election happens every two year since 2006 however in the absence of any approved governance model for *gurdwaras* in diaspora, management style varies from country to country.

⁷⁹ Jats were traditionally a landowning caste among Sikhs from rural areas, whereas *Bhaphe* generally worked as traders or small businessman and lived in cities or towns.

Interestingly, caste distinction or discrimination is one of most repeatedly repudiated social hierarchies in Sikh theology and community institutions⁸⁰, but in reality caste is very much pervasive among the Sikhs, especially the older Sikh generation in the diaspora (Ballard, 1989). However, the younger generation sees caste affiliation as contradictory to Sikh doctrine, but they might be less welcoming to other Sikh sects who differ with core doctrine of mainstream Sikhism⁸¹. For example, Ajmer Singh a *Namdhari*, who lives in Shannon with his wife and two teenage children, states: Recently I saw on the Internet someone criticized the *Namdhari* sect and said that this sect should not be allowed to enter in any *gurdwara*. If we ask him, ‘Is *gurdwara* your personal property? Or is it your parents?!’ It is common for all (Ajmer Singh, interview, 8th June, 2009). Hence, both cast or sect-based and age or status based factionalism continues to cast a shadow on the community’s claim to the *gurdwara*.

3.10 Education and Language Barriers

I am from India, basically an electronics engineer, working here in a restaurant, doing food business.’(Sukhvinder Singh, interview, 15th August, 2008).

Sukhvinder Singh’s predicament reflects the larger scenario, which confronts many skilled migrants in host countries. Although the majority of recent immigrants - professionals and students – has a considerably high level of formal qualifications (ICI, 2008), still there are many like Sukhvinder Singh who find it challenging to access the job market resulting in underemployment (Barrett, at el, 2005). The process of searching for a job can be particularly difficult for many immigrants (Coakley and MacEinri, 2007). The complications around accreditation of foreign degrees, the lack of

⁸⁰ Institution of *langar* (community kitchen) and common naming system for men (Singh) and women (Kaur) was introduced by founders of Sikhism to eradicate caste affiliations among Sikhs.

⁸¹ *Namdhari* still believes in human chain of Sikh gurus while Sikhs believe that Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh scripture) is the spiritual teacher after the chain of ten human gurus. In her book, *Sikh Identity: An exploration of groups among Sikhs*, Takhar (2005) illustrate specific combinations of caste differentiation and devotional distinctiveness and includes Namdharis, Ravidasis, and Valmikis.

work experience in Ireland and under-recognition of prior experience, inadequate levels of English, and isolation are recognised challenges facing many immigrants. The interviews conducted revealed that some recent Sikh immigrants are not proficient in English, especially those who came to Ireland as chefs, carpenters, or to join other family members. Reflecting on his situation, Jaspal Singh who was sourced by one construction company during the booming construction years laments: Initially we faced lot of difficulty as we did not know English. Neither was it our mother-tongue nor did we study it in school. We always missed the English class in the school as we were not interested to learn it. We were not aware that it would become our need one day (Interview, 13th September, 2008). Like the first Sikh immigrants, who came to the north in the 1930s, some recent migrants learned English while living and working in Ireland. While lack of English language proficiency created problems in the workplace for migrants, it also impacted adversely on the social life of their families. Such families felt ‘imprisoned’ inside the boundary of the house, and a loss of ‘freedom’ they enjoyed back home. Jaskiran Kaur, who was a mathematics teacher in India, could not join school because of Irish language requirements and cultural differences between the Irish and Indian schooling system. She states:

For primary level you need to learn Irish language, which was very difficult for me. I tried it but I didn’t have any success as I couldn’t talk to anyone who could speak Gaelic, even in my neighbourhood they don’t know how to speak Gaelic. So I found it hard to go with the Gaelic language. I didn’t want to go on to the secondary level because of the cultural differences (Jaskiran Kaur, Interview, 25th July, 2009).

3.11 Dealing with Death

During migration, the proportion of men and women was always unequal. Men were the pioneers to venture into new lands and women followed them. Generally men worked outside the home, while the role of women was restricted to house-keeping and

child rearing or assisting their husbands in family businesses. During the field work of *A Sikh Face in Ireland*, I came across dozens of such cases where Sikh immigrant families either lost their sole bread-winner or had various cases of serious illness. Unanticipated, untimely deaths of men who in the majority of cases were the sole bread-winners, and the subsequent absence of family support caused enormous emotional and financial distress for women who struggled to cope with such a loss, earning a livelihood, and raising children. One of the first recorded deaths of Indian settlers in Ireland was of Keher Singh, an early Sikh immigrant who came to the north in early 1930s and died in Derry/Londonderry on Monday 30th December, 1940. In his book, *The Irish Raj* Kapur recounts this incidence:

His death created a unique problem, as reported in the morning edition of the Londonderry Journal on 3rd January, 1941. Being a Sikh (but described as “Hindoos” by the Journal⁸²), his death rituals involved cremation of his body on a funeral pyre. Since there was at that time no crematorium in either Northern Ireland or the Irish republic, and the body couldn’t be taken across the sea as all the boats were in war service, a special permission was sought and subsequently granted by the Home Office to Indian immigrants to perform the funeral in some rural district outside Londonderry city (Kapur, 1997, 154).

In 1966, Jagir Kaur Nagra’s husband suffered a heart attack and died on the day of her step-daughter’s wedding. She talks about the grief, sadness, and loneliness she had to endure after his death:

At the time of my husband’s death, I was young so it stayed with me for long. I wanted to know where he had gone. I was saying, if only someone could tell me where he has gone. Whenever I was sad, I did speak to myself, to God, you could say. I asked Him, Hey God, where has my husband gone? Can I see him sometime? I was like that I won’t survive without him. I worried how our livelihood would run without him? How I would bring up the children? (Interview, 6th January 2010).

In 1995, Harminder Singh Sandhu of Derry, his two daughters and a niece all under five years of age, were returning home after a day out in the nearby Zoo. On the way back, a

⁸² Early Sikh immigrants to Canada were also termed as Hindu by newspapers of the time.

big lorry coming in the opposite direction overturned on the Volvo car, which Harminder was driving. The accident killed Harminder, his two daughters and a niece on the spot.



Figure: 27. Wreckage of Car accident in NI that killed four members of a Sikh family in 1995, including three girls aged between five and two. Photograph – Courtesy of Narinder Kapur, 1997.

A sudden, accidental, unexpected or traumatic death shattered the world for people like Jagir Kaur and Parmajit Kaur. It is often a loss that was very difficult to comprehend for families. Along with the primary loss of the family members, families and loved ones experienced emotional crises and multiple secondary losses: lost income, loss of security, increased sense of vulnerability, and in some cases, loss of social status. The role the loved one held in the family was gone. It took time for the family to reorganize. Families were left feeling in a state of perpetual disarray with a lingering sense of unease and disorientation. When Ravinder Singh Gill of Galway died in another tragic road accident, his daughter Vachn Kaur didn't want to continue her studies, her mother wanted to move to London.

The life stories of Sikh immigrants and their families recounted in this chapter point towards various challenges, difficulties, and dilemmas they face in Ireland. As they go about their daily lives, they encounter issues beyond their control, as well as situations where they might adapt or find ways to cope. The next chapter will consider ways in which Sikh immigrants negotiate and deal with some of these challenges.

Chapter 4: Coping Strategies of Sikh immigrants in Ireland

4.1 Introduction

I drive a taxi at weekends. Some Sikhs cover their hair with a cap, but I don't. If someone doesn't pay, I don't argue. Because I wear a white turban, sometimes people consider me Taliban. When a person is drunk, he is in a state of madness, so why quarrel with such a person? Here we are not in our own country (Ajmer Singh, interview, 08th June, 2009).

'You have to adapt to your situation. It was a big challenge for me to come to Northern Ireland – where we had no relatives, no friends. We came as total strangers, but we made friends.' (Iqbal Kaur, interview, 15th June, 2008)

The above statements made by two of the research participants reflect the wider scenario of challenges faced by many immigrants. This chapter focuses on the myriad ways in which successive generations of Sikhs in Ireland have addressed the issues, concerns and problems confronting them as they made Ireland home. This chapter also broadly discusses the cultural, social and political role of the Sikh temple as a response to what is perceived as a hostile/alien culture.

4.2 Keeping Traditions Alive

'I think you need to wear a turban to be a Sikh. The more you understand, the more you will feel that wearing a turban is not a burden. It's a crown we have been given. We should be so proud' (Dr Kanwarjit Singh Panesar, Derry/Londonderry, interview 15th June, 2008).

How do immigrants cope when they migrate to countries with very different cultural traditions? One popular strategy is to try to preserve perceived cultural traditions from the homeland. Religion, language, dress, music, marital practices – these are elements of the traditional culture that Sikh immigrants often seek to maintain in their new places of residence.



Figure: 28. *Bhai* Darshan Singh inside the Belfast *gurdwara*, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

Darshan Singh (figure 28) is the *granthi* at the Belfast *gurdwara*. His daily routine is very much the same as it would have been in India:

I rise up at 5.00am, early in the morning. I take a bath and complete my morning *nitnem* [daily prayers] up to 6.30. Then I do yoga for one and a half hours. After that I take my meal and go outside for walking. Sometimes I go out in the evening. Sometimes I read a book and enjoy TV and news. In this way I am passing the time. In the evening I perform *rehras* [evening prayers] at 5.30 or 6.00 pm, then I do the *Sukh Asan*⁸³ (Interview, 5th July, 2009).

Few Sikhs in the diaspora cling so rigorously to traditional practices in their daily lives; most engage in more selective adherence as life in Ireland makes greater demands on their time. The overwhelming majority of the Sikh families that Glenn and I visited during the fieldwork speak Punjabi at home. For many, this is because the parents are much more comfortable speaking their native language; for others, it

⁸³ At the end of each day, the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture, is retired to a bed in a special room in the *gurdwara* that is called a Sachkhand. The Sukh Asan (or Sukhasan) is the protocol used in this daily ritual.

is a conscious choice to pass on the language to their children. Many Sikh immigrant families, who are concerned that their children's command over the Punjabi language is inadequate, have introduced a 'Punjabi only' rule in their households. For example, Buta Singh, who lives in a small town in County Limerick, where there is apparently only one other Sikh family says: 'Now we are settled here, we want our children to remain attached to our culture. We are speaking pure Punjabi in our houses' (Interview, 4th June, 2009). Iqbal Kaur, who has lived for some forty years in Northern Ireland, argues that the 'homeland language' is central to group identity, heritage and survival although, later in the interview, she and her husband felt that as parents they have not been so successful in teaching the Punjabi language to their children: 'It is important to teach our children our language because it is our heritage. We as a Sikh community should be so proud of our script called *gurmukhi*. The saying goes, "If you want to destroy a community, don't go and kill the people, destroy their language"' (Interview, 15th June, 2008).

As noted in chapter three, language classes are arranged in the *gurdwara* every Sunday and during holidays, where volunteers from the community take on the responsibility to teach the Punjabi language, Kirtan, and martial arts to children. However, such initiatives are very temporary in nature, and difficult to sustain due to the lack of professional paid teachers and teaching material for children who gain their education in a very different schooling system. For many Sikh parents, maintaining religious practices and passing them on to the next generation is as important as keeping the language alive. According to Jagdesh Kaur, a forty-year-old mother living in Shannon, 'The purpose of our gatherings is to unite our families with our Indian culture. The families speak Punjabi at home. My daughter prays every morning before going to school' (Interview, 8th June, 2009).

Tarsem Singh Sahota, a resident of Dublin, who left India as a result of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, says: 'I got married in 1999. My wife is a housewife. I have two daughters, one is seven years and the younger is nearly three. We are well settled here. We have everything. We are very happy. We go to the *gurdwara* on Sundays. We want our children to go there – to know who we are' (Interview, 1st October, 2008).



Figure: 29. Tarsem Singh Sahota and daughters Inderjeet Kaur and Harsimer Kaur at home, Rathfarnham, Dublin, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

For a number of immigrant Sikh parents, wearing the turban is an essential component of their religion and culture that must be retained, even under difficult circumstances. However, this is not an easy proposition, as suggested by the following statement by Satnam Singh, who moved from Australia to Ireland in 2001: 'My son wears his turban and I want him to keep it, though I cut my hair because of problems with immigration. I think I will slowly change because tomorrow my son may say, "you yourself are clean-

shaven and you tell me to keep hair” (Interview, 16th August, 2008). Another similar remark comes from Gurdip Singh Juneja, owner of The Corner Shop in Blarney Road in Cork, who has lived in Ireland since the late 1980s:

I was married for eight years. Now I am living with my partner. I did not get remarried but we’ve been living together for the last ten years. Our daughter’s name is Saoirse, which means freedom [in Irish], but we are Indians and we think it best for daughters not to give them too much freedom. I will not allow her to marry just anybody. I have to see who it is and I obviously prefer arranged marriage. Arranged marriage is not so backward’ (Interview, 10th June, 2009).

In the above passage, Gurdip Singh Juneja, a divorcee, former Merchant Navy seaman, who named his daughter “Freedom”, insists that as per ‘Indian’ parenting his daughter’s actions, decisions and choices should be restrained and that she should have an arranged marriage and opposes the ‘lax’ parenting prevalent in Ireland in his perception. In cases like these, immigrant parents are interested in a sentimental nostalgia, wanting their children to adhere to the values of their ‘native culture’ which they have themselves forsaken. We didn’t interview many second-generation Sikhs, as this study privileged those who were older and first-generation immigrants. However, many members of the second-generation expressed support for arranged marriage, while also sometimes pointing out that it may prove difficult in practice. When asked about marriage, Vachn Gill, in Galway, said:

Who I marry depends on my mother, but because of the mindset of people, finding someone may be difficult. When you meet a nice Indian boy and you tell him you like to shoot things and play rugby and you are rather good at it, it doesn't go down very well. So you have to find someone who can take that and is equally strong. There is a difficulty in finding a common ground, as it is a bit isolated over here (Interview, 16th December, 2008).

In this statement, Vachn Gill, who is in her mid-twenties and captain of the local archery team in Galway, indicates that she is quite prepared to let her mother decide for her. However, she suggests that acquiring a marriage partner may be difficult, especially

given that she is a strong woman and does not live in a large, multicultural city. Many first generation Sikhs in Ireland and especially those within the age group of 24-30, which is considered a 'marriageable age', go to India to find an Indian partner. Many diasporic Sikhs believe that sharing similar religious, social and cultural backgrounds is likely to be a more suitable arrangement for carrying out the responsibilities of nurturing a family.

4.3 Reliance on the Sikh Community and Gurdwara

'We have five Sikh friends in Ireland and we share all our worries. We feel comfortable in this community because our language is same; our sense of humour is same. We don't think differently. So we feel very happy in that community. My friend gave birth to baby last week so we all together helped her take care of her baby' (Harmeet Kaur Aulakh, interview, 11th Dece, 2008).

Networking or building a community enables immigrants to cope with the social and cultural isolation they experience in the host country. The most preferred way of accomplishing this is by establishing places of worship, churches, mosques, temples, synagogues and *gurdwaras* because they 'play an important role in the creation of community and as a major source of social and economic assistance for those in need' (Hirschman, 2004, 1207). Early Jewish immigrants (Miller, 2008), Africans (Ugba, 2003) Chinese, Muslims (Flynn, 2006), Filipinos and migrants from the former communist bloc countries have set up their places of worship in the Greater Dublin area (Ugba, 2007). One of the reasons for the establishment of the *gurdwara* was to provide a place for future generations of Sikhs to stay connected to each other. Since 1986, it has served as a place for social get-togethers for early Sikh immigrants and as envisioned, a place for future generations of Sikhs to meet and connect to their roots. As revealed in interviews and observed during participant observation, the *gurdwara* turns

out to be a multi-dimensional place and plays a significant role in the creation of a 'community of Sikhs migrants' in Ireland.

For many Sikhs in Ireland, the *gurdwara* whether in Dublin, Belfast or Derry/Londonderry, is a home away from home. There, on Sundays and also through the week, Sikhs participate in familiar, shared religious and cultural activities which give meaning to their lives in Ireland. Arvinder Singh, who came as a fifth-wave migrant and lives with his wife and two kids, explains how important the *gurdwara* is to them:

For every Sikh's life, the *gurdwara* is most important. I feel that it's a totally different experience when you go there and pray. It's not explainable in words: it's like going to your parents' house. We go as a family and meet other members of the Sikh community here in Ireland (Interview, 21st September, 2008).

The idea that going to the *gurdwara* is 'like going to your parents' house' - a place of comfort, security and unconditional love - is very revealing. In a place where community and extended family are lacking, a surrogate family is found in the *gurdwara*. For the many Sikh immigrants, the *gurdwara* provides an important opportunity to bridge the mental distance felt between their old and new homelands by offering them a place where they can feel at home.

A number of the people interviewed reported periods of considerable loneliness and alienation especially during the early period of their arrival in Ireland. Undoubtedly, for many of them, the *gurdwara* in particular has become a second home, a place of fellowship and community, of comfort and peace.



Figure: 30. Cooking Rice, Dublin *gurdwara*. Photograph: Glenn Jordan, 2008.



Figure: 31. Jagjit Singh Bhullar and others enjoying a communal meal, Dublin *gurdwara*, Photograph: Glenn Jordan, 2008.

Parveen Kaur Sidhu, nurse in the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital in Dublin, who like many other Sikhs experienced difficulty in the absence of home and family, narrates the joy of finding the local *gurdwara*:

‘The *gurdwara* is our base, our life – everything for us. I was so happy when I came to know that there was one *gurdwara* in the whole Ireland and that it is very near to our house...The first day I went to the *gurdwara*; I saw so many Punjabi families there. I was so surprised. I was so happy. I called my husband in India and said, “You know, today I saw a lot of Sikhs here.” And this is the first day in Ireland that I was talking to someone in Punjabi; otherwise, I was only able to speak my language on the phone to my family members. The *gurdwara* helps to make social relationships. On that first day I enjoyed my tasty Punjabi food there. Before that I was cooking in the hostel, but I was not getting the same taste. I was not really eating properly, but when I went there and got the taste there, I was so happy, really. The food is the same, the *gurdwara* is the same and people are the same as in India. That time I was not feeling “I am in the Ireland”. I was thinking, “I am in India, in the Punjab...’ (Interview, 19th September, 2008).

Going by Parveen's account the *gurdwara* is a spiritual base, a social and cultural institution, a home away from home and associates the food in the *gurdwara* with memory of home. According to Barthes (1997, 21) food constitutes 'a body of images', thus for Sikhs in Ireland, the physical environment of the *gurdwara* and the food served there can be interpreted as a concrete reminder of their life left behind in India or elsewhere. The images associated with the food stimulate a memory that helps to shorten the mental distance felt to the home they left behind in Punjab.

4.3.1 A Spiritual Hub and 'Refuelling Station'



Figure: 32. Standing in prayer, Dublin *gurdwara*, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

One of the ways Sikh immigrants deal with stress, difficulty, uncertainty, and the loss of family members is (re)posing faith in prayer or spirituality. Manjinder Singh Aulakh, who lives in Tallaght, tells us that he visits the *gurdwara* three to four times a week and tries to spent at least 15-20 hours there each week (Interview, 11th December, 2008). Aulakh would not be an exception, and during my time as community member and participant observer, I witnessed many occasions where people turned to faith in order to cope with the challenges of all kinds. Factors like death or illness in the family, difficulties with job, business, immigration status, or family relationships, push many

Sikh immigrants to seek sanctuary, support, and strength in the form of prayer. On several occasions, individual and collective prayers are said in *gurdwara* for the well being of family or community members, success of businesses, resolution of immigration or visa problems, birth of babies and so on. Many members like Aulakh who says, ‘the environment of the *gurdwara* makes our mind very calm and it gives us more strength to do work and to study’ (Interview, 11th December, 2008), feel that prayer (individual and communal) gives them more strength and stability to deal with the rigours of life in Ireland.

Many Sikh immigrants, who have spent sometime living in Dublin, have tried to re-establish their relationship with the *gurdwara* in the manner that they experienced it prior to migration to Ireland by recreating the rituals, sights, tastes, sounds and atmosphere of the homeland as embedded in the diasporic memory.

4.3.2 Networking and Communication Hub



Figure: 33. ‘Langar’ (Communal Meal) being served in the *gurdwara*. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

At the *gurdwara*, especially in the *langar* hall, where the communal meals are served, Sikh immigrants meet other people who share their cultural background: they talk, eat together, share jokes, etc. One female interviewee confessed that sometimes during the Sunday services she and her female friends look across the aisle at the young men and discuss which of them are attractive and might make good marriage partners. They also learn whether there are members of the community who are in need of financial help, housing, child minding, or some other thing. An interesting comment made by Gurvinder Singh, a university student living in Dublin who said, ‘There is also a social aspect (to the *gurdwara*) – We talk about people’s problems and if I can help them, I do. Sometimes I have problems and they help me’ (Interview, 13th July, 2009). His experience reveals that the *gurdwara* functions as a networking centre where Sikhs immigrants share information discuss problems and find resolutions. Arguably, the *gurdwara* becomes more important to Sikhs in the diaspora than to those in the homeland.

The *gurdwara* plays a very important role in a foreign country because kids get a chance to play with other kids in a spacious place and also learn about their religion. If *gurdwara* was not here, it would be very big thing. How would we tell our kids? Where can we go and bow our head if we don’t have our place here? We can solve a lot of problems by meeting and talking to people from the community (Satnam Singh, Interview, 16th August, 2008).

According to Satnam Singh, the *gurdwara* takes on a re-defined role as play school for kids while they may also learn about Sikhism. The physical environment, artefacts, activities, site and sounds are considered essential and helpful for teaching kids about their parents’ Sikh heritage.

While many Sikh immigrants and their families may go to the *gurdwara* primarily for social and cultural reasons, to see and make friends, to eat traditional food, to hear and speak Punjabi, one outcome of this activity seems to be an increase in religiosity and

cultural pride. The Sikh immigrant who regularly attends the *gurdwara* may become more religious and more proud of being a Sikh.⁸⁴ The creation of community networks within the *gurdwara* lays the basis for further ongoing relationship outside the *gurdwara* which helps members to ‘gain the confidence and skills they need to cope with the demands of the larger society’ (Ugba, 2007, 182). For example, in Dublin the numbers of Sikhs who drive taxis (both part-time and full-time) has recently increased, partly to do with government de-regulations and partly to do with internal support for aspiring taxi drivers from other members of the community who succeeded in obtaining a taxi driver’s license. This internal support from incumbent taxi drivers has included encouragement, and assistance in filling out applications, preparing for exams, obtaining references for Garda vetting, and securing financial support to purchase taxis.

4.4 Becoming Active Citizens

Faced with problems of racial abuse due to 9/11 and 7/7, one obvious option for Sikhs in Ireland was to engage the wider society into dialogue about Sikhs or to spread awareness about Sikh religious and cultural beliefs. The first major step forward was the establishment of the Irish Sikh council (ISC) in 2004. In order to inform the wider Irish society about the Sikhs community living in Ireland, ISC has taken many initiatives.

⁸⁴ During my field work in *gurdwara*, I’ve seen many people making an effort to learn more about different rituals inside the *gurdwara*, learning to read Guru Granth Sahib.



Figure: 34. Three members of Longford Women’s Link, guests of Irish Sikh Council, at Dublin *gurdwara*, 2009. Photograph: Author.

Whereas the *gurdwara* focused on the needs - spiritual, cultural and social - of the Sikh community itself, the Irish Sikh Council⁸⁵ came into being primarily to address the position of Sikhs within the larger Irish society. In the following passage, Harpreet Singh, a software engineer who came to Dublin as a “fifth wave” immigrant, reflects on how this organisation came about and how he personally became involved:

My involvement in the community started from the day I came to Ireland. Initially, I just went to the *gurdwara* and took part in prayers and singing hymns but slowly my involvement increased until on the 4th of July 2004 we formed the Irish Sikh Council. I don’t think I have got a proper eight hours of sleep since then. From 9/11 onwards my life and that of other people of the community changed a lot. It became very difficult to travel in public transport and go to public places because people kept shouting “Bin Laden!” at you. So we thought that an organisation could educate others about who we are. There were around 15 of us then, mainly, students and professionals. Now we have around 250 members (Interview, 25th July, 2009).

⁸⁵ Objectives of the Irish Sikh Council are as follows; 1) Advocate campaign and make representations on the concerns and aspirations of the Sikh population, primarily of the Republic of Ireland, on matters of education, race equality, spiritual development, community relations and other matters of relevance to the status and development of Sikhs in Ireland.
 2) Promote good relations and harmony between the Sikhs and other communities in Ireland; and inform and guide Sikhs in Ireland to contribute and participate actively in the life and development of Ireland.
 3) Promote responsible ethical and moral values in society.

The Irish Sikh Council (ISC) was established in Dublin by a group of young Sikh professionals and students, who came to Ireland shortly before or after “9/11”. The organisation was developed to address the problems that many Sikhs faced due to their misidentification by local Irish as “Bin Laden,” “Muslim terrorists”, etc. Since its inception in 2004, the ISC has represented the Sikh community at numerous seminars, talks, workshops, consultation meetings, news forums organised by various governmental and NGO’s to discuss and debate various immigration and integration related issues. Notably, the council has worked with An Garda Síochána on the investigation of racist attacks on Sikhs, and their recruitment to the Gardai forces in recent years. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in London, various Sikhs suffered a backlash in Ireland. The victims were encouraged to report these violent incidents to the Gardai, and the ISC actively followed up these cases.



Figure: 35. Kirandeep Singh, Volunteer of Irish Sikh Council at Garda College, Templemore, Co. Tipperary during open day, 11th August, 2008. Photograph: Irish Sikh Council.

In the year 2007, when a Sikh reserve's entry into the Gardai was refused, the ISC wrote letters to TDs and brought the case to the attention of the Minister for Integration, Mr Conor Lenihan, and the Garda Commissioner, Neol Conroy. In addition, the ISC made representations on the issue to the media. Unable to break the deadlock, the ISC approached the Equality Authority of Ireland and the case currently stands undecided. ISC also represents members of the Sikh community in cases of apparent discrimination or harassment. For example, in 2007 they took up the case of Sikh students working part-time as delivery persons for two local pizza shops who were asked by the area manager to remove their *karas* (iron bracelets) or risk termination. The case was taken to the Equality Authority and reported to the company headquarters in London. The Council also worked with the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and Sports Against Racism Ireland (SARI) to resolve the case of Karpreet Singh, a young Sikh footballer who was told by a referee that he could not play in a football match unless he removed his turban.

The ISC organises activities within the Irish Sikh Community: for example, with the assistance of the *gurdwara* committee, it has organised summer camps for children from Sikh families to learn Sikh history and the Punjabi language; and it has organised activities teaching them the art of tying turbans and martial art training. The Council also collaborated with FOMACS (Forum on Migration and Communications) and Dr Glenn Jordan to undertake *A Sikh Face in Ireland* project, with the aim of increasing awareness about Sikhs within Irish society.

4.5 Crossing Over, Sharing Experience



Figure: 36. Bhangra Dancers, Festival of World Cultures, Dún Laoghaire, County Dublin, July 2009. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

With the aim to create awareness and tackle the problem of mistaken identity, members of the Sikh community in Dublin have participated in the Dún Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures, an annual arts festival celebrating cultural diversity since 2007. They have also begun to participate in the annual St Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin, aiming to maximise the positive exposure of Sikhs through the public display of their culture: dress, music, dance and martial arts. Gurmeet Singh Gill, a martial arts teacher and musician, explains:

We performed martial arts and *bhangra* dancing in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in 2007 and 2008. We have also started performing every year in the Dún Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures. There is a lot of excitement because the Irish people never saw anything like that before (Interview, 9th December, 2008).

In the Dún Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures and now also Dublin's St Patrick's Day Parade, people from various cultures living in Ireland come together in celebration of their differences, i.e., in celebration of Ireland as a tolerant, vibrant, multicultural and

intercultural society. Whereas members of the general public probably view the festival as entertainment (in addition to the parade, there are concerts, markets, street performers, etc.), members of the Sikh community in Ireland tend to view such events as part of a strategy to educate the Irish public about Sikhs and Sikhism. Gurbinder Singh, a student who flew into Ireland a few days after 9/11, says:

I am... learning martial arts in the *gurdwara* and we have participated in the festival at Dún Laoghaire and in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. It is a chance to educate people – to tell them about ourselves and our religion (Interview, 13th July, 2009).

The Dún Laoghaire Festival of World Cultures and St Patrick's Day parades are annual, official celebrations organised with financial support from the State. At the same time, individuals and groups engage in intercultural activity on a regular basis in the capacity of friends and neighbours moving beyond their differences and accomplishing genuine dialogue and transcultural understanding. Consider Kuldeep Kaur of Ballymena, a long-time resident of Northern Ireland, who says:

My good Christian friend told me our teachings are very good. Sometimes I go to church with her. I read the Bible. If God wanted, I could have been born into a Christian family. As our body needs food, our soul needs a faith to be strong and honest. We are born with the Sikh faith. You are given your religion at birth by God (Interview, 13th December, 2008).

Kuldeep Kaur has pragmatically adapted to her surroundings and part of this adaptation has involved negotiating with Christianity. Similarly Prabhkar Singh Sidhu of Dublin, the son of Sikh immigrants, who has recently married a young woman from India, shares a complex relationship with Indians and Sikhism:

I have a few Indian friends but I don't have the same connection as I do with my Irish friends. But I know both cultures and I blend in. I have very little relationship with the *gurdwara*. I'm only a 40% believer. The only time we turn to God is when we're in trouble, but I don't disrespect it either. I love the Punjabi language and want to learn to read it. I'd like my children to do the same. It's best to speak both languages (Interview, 5th January, 2010).

Iqbal Kaur, an East African immigrant with a cosmopolitan lifestyle has been an active member of the local Derry/Londonderry community for many years. She states:

Both my husband and I do many things for charity. We work for the Rotary Club and the Inner Wheel Ladies' Club, collecting money for different things in the community or for outside disasters. We did a sponsored walk to raise money for the *gurdwara* – there were two or three ladies who did it and the local community helped us a lot. One of the girls from our community went looking for sponsorship and there was an Irish lady in Londonderry, who first said she didn't have any money, then she called the girl back and she gave her thirty-seven pence. She had virtually scraped the bottom of the barrel to give us that money and because of the goodwill with which that was given, that thirty-seven pence was probably one of the largest contributions (Interview, 15th June, 2009).

Apart from these initiatives, a team of Sikh students has regularly participated in Soccer Fest, a football competition organised by SARI (Sports Against Racism Ireland) to tackle the issue of racism through the medium of sports. On an individual level, second generation Sikhs, like KP, play for their local soccer club. Kuldeep, Prabhkar, Iqbal, KP, all of these individuals reach across social and cultural barriers, regularly participating in shared activities with white Irish people. At the end of the interview, Iqbal Kaur said: 'I think people should try to get along with other faiths and religions. And the Sikhs should work as one community. We will learn a lot more by doing that than by dividing people and bringing in a caste system. That is my message.'



Figure: 37. Satwinder Singh and Gurpreet Singh doing presentation on Sikhs and Sikhism to a primary school in Dublin, 2009. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

One strategy widely adopted by Sikhs in Ireland is that of sharing culture and experience with members of the dominant group. It is part of the official policy of the Irish Sikh Council to go into schools so that Irish school children can learn about Sikhs and Sikhism. Many Irish schools have already paid a visit to the Dublin *gurdwara*, where they are given a presentation on Sikhs and Sikhism, a show of martial arts, free meals in the *gurdwara* and where students are encouraged to ask questions and meet community members. Many parents have reported that they personally met the concerned schools teachers, or principals to make sure that their children do not face problem being a Sikh. Apart from schools, groups like Longford Women's Link, Springfield Belfast, journalists from New York, independent researchers, TV and newspaper reporters, college and university students have visited the *gurdwara*, hence converting a religious place into a meeting point between Sikhs and non-Sikhs.



Figure: 38. “Students in Visit to Dublin Gurdwara”, *Metro Éireann*, 2008.

Many individual Sikhs take it upon themselves to inform their Irish friends and colleagues about their religion. Harpreet Kaur, a university student, was preparing to lead an educational trip to India, she states in her interview:

I’m hoping to make a special trip to India in mid-August. I’m taking four Irish girls with me. Three of them are from my class and one of them is my old friend. They have never been to India. We are planning to go to north India; we are going to cover the Punjab. Obviously, I will show them the Golden Temple and I want to show them Jaipur and Agra and then spend a week in the South. They are really excited to go and I am really excited as well. I want them to understand about India, the North and the South. India is a diverse country. I think it would be nice if they got some understanding of that. And, of course, I want them to know about my Punjabi culture. I want them to know about Sikhism (Interview, 14th July, 2009).

In another case, a recent Sikh immigrant who was experiencing some difficulty in wearing his *kara* (steel bracelet) to his workplace due to the unfavourable attitude of his manager brought back a number of ornamental *karas* from his visit to India to give each of his work colleagues. This act of sharing his culture by giving *karas* as a gift to his colleagues proved educational and his difficulty was thus resolved.

4.6 Erasing Markers of Difference

Many immigrants and persons from ethnic minority backgrounds face the question of ‘difference’ from a majoritarian ‘norm’, especially those marked by ‘visible difference’ such as skin colour, accent, clothes and hair. Confronted with this problem, one strategy is to try to *erase difference*: the immigrant seeks to blend in with the dominant group by changing their appearance, clothes, accent, religion, name, etc. Manjinder Singh Aulakh recalls the circumstances that made him to do so:

In Ireland, Sikhs are treated a little bit badly because Irish people don’t know much about the Sikhs. When I came here, I was wearing a turban on my head. When I went the first day to the college, some guys said very wrong things to me – like “Bin Laden!” They threw stones at me, so we had a little fight there. After the next day, I said to myself, “People are like this. I don’t want to fight everyday here.” So I just cut my hair. This is the thing that I don’t like. What I did was not good, it was not right. But at that time we were very small community here (Interview, 11th December, 2008).

Baljinder Singh Guram, who was born in Malaysia but has lived in Northern Ireland since 1965, has had a similar experience: ‘I cut my hair when I was twenty... Children ran behind us, teasing and insulting us... [and] we could not get jobs. There were jobs available for Indian labourers, but they would not give them to boys with turbans and beards’ (interview, 8th July, 2009). Available evidence suggest that early Sikh immigrants to the North and a substantial number of recent migrants to the South have adopted this strategy primarily for two reasons, first to increase their employability and second, to avoid instances of abuse and racism. However, removal of the turban and beard due to notions of ‘beauty’ or ‘modernity’ by others is not ruled out. Other strategies involve *partial erasure* of markers of difference. For example, there is the strategy of partial renaming: some Sikh families give their children two names, a Punjabi name and a Western name. Jagir Kaur Nagra, who has lived in Northern Ireland since 1953, has named her children thus: ‘The eldest is my daughter Rajwant; she is

Stella. My son is Jagdish; he is known as David. Younger to him is Abinash; she is called Barbara. Then Surinder; she is called Angela' (Interview, 6th January, 2010).

Jaswant/Jasmine Kaur of Maynooth has adopted a similar strategy: 'I have three children. Jivan is twenty-one (she hates to be called Rajvinder), Stephen (Samra) is sixteen and Mandeep is thirteen. We left out the "Kaur" and "Singh" in their passports.' (Interview, 28th December, 2009)

When this mother's children encounter the immigration officer, their Otherness will be at least somewhat diminished. Perhaps this partial erasing will save them from some unpleasant encounters with official power; perhaps it will not. Others parents have been more innovative in naming their children, especially those of mixed backgrounds. For example, one parent (Sikh husband and Irish wife) named their son 'Kevinpreet' thus incorporating both Irish and Sikh elements in it. While some Sikh immigrants think that an anglicised name helps integrate into Irish society better, Steven Loyal, lecturer in sociology at UCD does not believe so:

I came to Ireland from the UK twelve years ago... My parents are from the Punjab. My full name is Steven Paul Jit Singh Loyal. Before my parents migrated to England they wanted us to have English names so that the children would be able to integrate. Nowadays children have a different relationship with parents but in that generation you did what they told you. I would have preferred to have an Indian name and I don't think it made a difference to whether we integrated or not... (Interview, 8th October, 2009).

4.7 Being Smart, Being Tough

Some immigrants and their descendents decide to cope by being better than members of the dominant group, by being more intelligent, professionally more qualified, physically stronger, athletically superior, better dressed, etc. Many of the Sikhs immigrants have adopted this strategy. For example, this has been the approach taken by Dr. Kanwarjit Singh Panesar:

I have been both a practical surgeon and a medical politician who has taken part in a medical politics through the British medical association which is our trade union and also a professional body. I rose to the highest rank of being appointed the chairman of all consultants of Northern Ireland. It was great regard for me and something to be very proud of. Those things don't happen by chance, you have to earn, you have to work, there are lots of hurdles come your way, you have to deal with those hurdles (Interview, 15th June, 2009).

Another example is of Vachn Gill, the athlete, college lecturer and beauty therapist from Galway who describes her 'broader personal philosophy' (Feagin and Sikes, 1994) in the following paragraph:

Sikhism teaches us to be warriors, so it is easy for me to handle the situation in male-dominated or white-dominated society... My sister, my brother and I were the only non-white people in our classes. That didn't affect us much because we were brought up to feel that we are well capable of dealing with whatever hits us – male-dominated or white-dominated. It's easier for us because we are used to a bit of struggle. We've always been taught that we can excel at whatever we do, so we've got used to it (Interview, 16th December, 2008).



Figure: 39. Vachn Kaur Gill, Galway, 2008. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

It is noteworthy that Vachn Gill, an Irish-born Sikh, and child of diasporic parents (her father was born in Malaysia and her mother is from East Africa), adapts Sikh teachings

to guide her life despite being isolated from the larger Irish Sikh community (there was apparently only one other Sikh family in Galway).

Sikh children in the diaspora are often reminded by their parents of the Sikh warrior tradition. Immigrant Sikh mothers and fathers in Ireland still tell their children to be strong, to develop the power to resist verbal and physical assaults. Rominder Kaur, who works in a pre-school in Navan (in county Meath), says: 'I have two sons. They both go to school and they are doing good in their studies. There was some trouble with my older son in school because of his turban. Other kids tried to bully him because of the turban thing, but he has built up confidence to retaliate' (Interview, 24th February, 2009). Rominder's boys, like many Sikh youngsters, have adopted a dual strategy that of being tough *and* being smart. In many cases, parents give their own example of coping to help children to overcome and achieve success.

4.8 Downplaying Apparent Instances of Racism and Xenophobia

Vaneet Kaur, a young nurse living in Dublin, came to Ireland in 2005 because she wanted to see the world and to discover how nursing is practised in different countries.

When asked if she faced any racism in Ireland, this is what she said:

I work in a baby ward. It is good that babies don't know any language, any religion. When you are tired and they give you one smile, all your tiredness is gone. One baby was crying and I tried to make him happy. I gave him pain relief medicine also, but he was still crying. I called his mother. She came but by that time baby was happy – I don't know why – maybe because of the medicine. She told me, "Maybe he doesn't like the colour of your skin: he wanted me." I felt bad but maybe she was right when she said that the baby was not used to seeing dark skin. I told my Nurse Manager and she explained to the mother: "Baby was crying with me as well, so there is no matter of skin colour." Then, the mother came to me and said, "Sorry, I didn't mean it." This was the first and last incident of my three years' life here. I don't think it was racism (Interview, 10th September, 2008).

This is a well-established strategy among Sikhs and other brown-skinned immigrants. They develop a tolerance for what could be classified as “low level” abuse. Jagdish Kaur Kapoor, a senior member of the Irish Sikh community, commenting on the situation in Dublin in the 1980s:

At that time, the Irish didn't know about the Sikhs. But the Irish are very good people; they are Catholic and believe in God. I would stop a child stealing in my shop and he would say, “You Paki, you blackie, go back to your country”. My handbag was snatched a few times, but people are not bad (Interview, 13th August, 2008).

This, again, is very interesting discourse. Jagdish Kapoor, who was a head mistress in India before emigrating to get away from her alcoholic husband, begins by saying that the Irish have two characteristics that effect how they treat Others: on the one hand, they are ignorant about Sikhs and Sikhism; on the other, they are “very good”, deeply religious and moral people. She does not say that the Irish do not engage in instances of racism – indeed, she gives examples of racist incidents – but she still maintains that they are “not bad”.

The following comments by Buta Singh, the clean-shaven co-owner of the New Turban restaurant in Newcastle West, are typical of what a number of interviewees have said: ‘There is difficulty here but not so much. Learned people understand us, but some persons of lower grade sometimes make remarks like “Bin Laden!”.’ (Interview, 4th June, 2009).

Many Sikhs in Ireland, in both the North and the South, deal with incidents of racist and xenophobic abuse in everyday life by sticking to one of two views. The first is the “few bad apples” view, which maintains that while most Irish are good, decent people, there are some who are not, and it is those who cause the problems. The second is the “it's only the ignorant people” view, which holds that the intelligent Irish know better and

that the ignorant will undoubtedly stop being abusive once they learn more about Sikhs i.e., once they learn that Sikhs are hard-working, honest, loyal, etc., the opposite of extremists and terrorists.

However, the preferred tactic is that of ignoring and avoiding incidents and, literally, not even seeing them. One morning in December 2009, Glenn and I were standing in front of the Camden Court Hotel in Dublin. We saw a group of young boys, perhaps five or six of them, standing about twenty feet away from us. They were laughing and suddenly they were walking towards us and, as they passed by, one of them reached up and slapped the back of my turban. I didn't react and continued talking to Glenn as if nothing had happened. My response was such that Glenn asked me, "Didn't you feel that kid hit you on the head?"

My response in the above situation was pre-meditated, as over the course of time I have learned to ignore or to not see, hear or feel certain modes of behaviour as a way to reduce anger, and enhance a sense of self-control. This is not exclusive to me. Many Sikhs, by virtue of their personal experience have managed to 'stay away from people, situations, or topics of discussion' (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, 419) that are likely to be unpleasant by making small but important decisions regarding how they go about their daily lives. Avoiding crowded streets while walking; not travelling on upper deck of buses; changing street sides to avoid face-to-face confrontations with groups of kids; going for a walk or to the cinema in groups wherever possible; using private transport; wearing dresses and colours (of turbans) as to appear less visible; these are some of the day-to-day strategies that I and others have adopted.

4.9 Learning New Skills

I never make food myself in India but here I have to cook myself. First two weeks I just think about this thing. When you have to suffer, you can learn yourself. So I just try, try, try and I cook my food myself. When I tell to my mother, she was crying (Manjinder Singh, interview, 11th December, 2008).

Immigrants have to learn many new things in order to cope with life in host societies. One of most widely observed problems among male Sikh immigrants is the preparation of food. Most male immigrants come from family backgrounds, where their parents, siblings, wife, children assist them or fulfil their needs. Due to the division of labour in many eastern societies, household chores, cooking and childcare were (and predominantly still are) women's responsibility, whereas financial affairs, 'breadwinning,' and the disciplining of the children fell within the paternal realm (George, 2000).



Figure: 40. Gurpreet Singh (left) and Gurmeet Singh (right) making dough in *gurdwara* kitchen on one Sunday morning
Photograph: Glenn Jordan, 2009.



Figure: 41. A non-Sikh Indian Student Making *Jalebis* (a sugary Indian sweet) in *gurdwara* kitchen.
Photograph: Glenn Jordan, 2009.

Some men, who had lived away from home during their time in India, had some experience fending for themselves, while others like Manjinder who left the comfort and security of the family have had a hard time feeding themselves. In such a scenario, people learned by practice, took the assistance of their family over the phone regarding recipes, and some even sought to perfect their skills while visiting in India. Many recent arrivals find the *gurdwara* a place not only to eat 'home food' but also to learn culinary skills. During the week, especially on weekends, the *gurdwara* kitchen witnesses massive food preparation for Sunday congregation which averages around 300 attendants and around 500 on special days. Each week, some of those who attend the *gurdwara* also engage in communal labour - peeling and cutting fruit and vegetables, making bread, cooking, serving, washing dishes, etc. And members also donate much of the food that is consumed. Most of this work is done by volunteers: some who have already perfected the art of cooking, others who learn along the way.

Many immigrants, especially women had to learn to drive in order to meet their economic and family needs. The immigrant families with small kids have more demands on their time. Several factors such as the location of their homes, workplace, school, shopping centre, health centre, timing and availability of public transport, determine whether a family use private transport or not. Being able to drive results in more independence; increased mobility and accessibility; enhanced self-esteem to deal with the laws of the land and rigours of migrant life. Thus gaining new skills (in the above cases being able to cook and drive) becomes an absolute, indispensable necessity for many Sikh immigrants to deal with the challenges of everyday life.

4.10 Living with India

This became our country and India became a foreign country.

- (Sewa Singh, Belfast, 2009).



Figure: 42. The Sikh Channel, home of Ajit Singh Nagra, Derry/Londonderry, 2009. Photograph: Glenn Jordan.

How do Sikh immigrants in Ireland maintain contact with the land of their ancestors? What does India mean to them? There is a stark difference in the way old and new Sikh immigrants maintain contact with India. Earlier generations of Sikh immigrants had little contact with India, and visits to India were few and far between. The children of the first immigrants both in the North and the South had even less of a connection; some only visited India after 20 odd years. In the living rooms of many of homes that Glenn and I visited during field work, the television would be on usually tuned to the Sikh (Punjabi) channel. A majority of first generation Sikh immigrants have no immediate sibling left in India; yet they watch Sikh or Punjabi channels which are broadcasted either from India or the UK. They live with memories of India. However with the advent of cheaper and faster air travel, the Internet and communication technology, a visit to the 'homeland' and daily contact with family and relatives has become a reality.

Recent immigrants maintain a much more active connection with India, they live simultaneously both in Ireland and India. Advancements in communication and Internet technologies allow them to engage with their families on a daily basis. For example, the family of Hardip Singh, a young recent immigrant, and a housemate of mine, has been liaising with his parents in India to build a three-storey house over the last year. Hardip and his elder brother who lives in the UK are actively involved in the architectural design and other important planning decisions with their parents through the Internet and mobile phone communication. He uses skype and yahoo messenger video call to talk to his family, to view (review) the on-going construction work and even discuss and suggest changes. Although many Sikh immigrants may have to adapt their lives to Ireland, such real time interaction or connection with India allows them to reclaim some of their lost sense of home. Many like Hardip may never return to India, but their engagement with India also suggests that India will continue to be a part of their lives in Ireland. Apart from keeping regular contact with India, visits to India are frequent. Every year, from January to April, a large number of Sikh immigrants, especially students or those living on their own, visit India to meet family, get married, or to attend weddings of close family or friends. They also use this opportunity to buy clothes, and bring other household stuff to Ireland, which helps them decorate their homes with an Indian touch.

4.11 “God Is God”

There is only one God but many paths to Him or Her - this is the stance that some Sikh immigrants and/or their descendants take. During our fieldwork we encountered individual Sikhs and Sikh families who are living in towns or cities where there is no community of Sikhs nearby and there is no *gurdwara* in the vicinity either. In these instances when individual Sikhs and Sikh families live far from other Sikhs and Sikh

cultural and spiritual resources, they may have family-based religious services in their home, as Vachn Gill's family does in Galway. They may identify a few other Sikhs in the vicinity and meet together in a home or restaurant, as the families do in Shannon. They may pray together and read the Bible with a Christian friend, as Kuldeep Kaur does in Ballymoney. They may go to church, as Kulvinder Singh Dhillion does in Newcastle West and Kuldeep Singh does in Kiltimagh.

Sikh immigrants in the North have long lived without a *gurdwara* as *gurdwaras* were established relatively recently in Derry and Belfast in 1995 and 2004 respectively while Sikh immigrants first arrived in the 1930s and 1960s. Therefore, many in the community adopted a more pragmatic approach and visited the nearby churches. As Jagir Kaur Nagra states:

In the beginning, what I used to do....I would see, if there was no one in the church, I would go to church. I went to church many times. When my eldest daughter got ill, I then used to go to church. In my own way, as we bow down (in *gurdwara*) I bowed down, I got so much relief and peace from it that I can't tell (Interview, 6th January, 2010).

Echoing the *Koran*, the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the Sikh Holy Scripture) begins with the words "God is one". One way of adapting to life in a country where the dominant religion is different from one's own is to adopt the belief that there are many paths to God – and that they all arrive at essentially the same place. Kulvinder Singh Dhillion, co-owner of the New Turban Restaurant in Newcastle West, says:

There is no *gurdwara* here in Newcastle, so I go to a church which is in front of our restaurant. I pay my respects there, but I remember *Waheguru* (God, the Supreme Being) and recite *Japji* (prayers) whether it is morning or evening. When we came here we were afraid of not being able to go to a *gurdwara*. Then, I thought, "These white people go to pay their respect to God, too. It is mentioned in the *gurbani* (writings of Gurus) that God is one, so there is no difference." I go to church daily for ten minutes. The priest is very fine and talks to me very happily. Most of the local people like us (Interview, 4th June, 2009).

As revealed in the life stories of Sikh in Ireland, they have attempted to address some of the challenges they face in their day-to-day life in Ireland, by holding on to traditional values, networking within the community, turning to faith and keeping their Indian connection alive. In order to address issues of racism and discrimination, Sikhs in Ireland actively engaged with the wider Irish community, sharing their religious and cultural heritage, and seeking mainstream redressal mechanisms. Others see the gaining of new skills, erasing of markers of difference, and betterment in their chosen career as a way forward in life.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation is the first ethnographic study of Sikhs in Ireland undertaken collaboratively from the perspective of an active member of the Sikh community, exploring the migration history of Sikhs in Ireland, their everyday lived experiences, the specific challenges faced by Sikh migrants in Ireland, and their responses to these challenges. An additional methodological particularity of this research is that the ethnographic enquiry both contributes to and draws upon *A Sikh Face in Ireland* – a collaborative public photographic project - as an important element of the research process

This dissertation, along with the *Sikh Face in Ireland* project, is a timely contribution to the growing literature on ethnic communities in Ireland. It is made all the more urgent by the changing socio-political scenario in a recessionary Ireland and a post 9/11 world, which accentuates tensions deriving from differences in race and religion. The historical trajectory traced in Chapter Two draws attention to the colonial connections between the Irish and Sikhs, arguing that migration to the North in the 1930s is demonstrative of the migratory flows set about through the colonial framework of Empire. Although the nature of contemporary migration to Ireland differs radically from its earlier manifestation in a colonial context, it is possible to speculate that the overarching history of colonial flows and connections shapes to some extent, the expectations and experiences of Sikh migrants in 21st Century Ireland. Hence, I would like to think that this dissertation also makes some contribution – as a rich ethnographic piece – towards further development of the postcolonial framework, offering the potential to both validate its theoretical merit as well as its critical purchase in a post-colonial, and global migratory context. In addition, the study supplements a gap in Sikh

diasporic studies, which until recently have developed mainly within the UK, Canada, and the United States.

The study explores a number of tensions, difficulties and ambiguities that are important and perhaps ineliminable features of the phenomenon of migration as experienced by most migrants. However, the focus on the Sikh community in this instance, uncovers some of the less noticed challenges to ‘integration’ (and indeed inter-cultural policy) through an analysis that is grounded within a very particular socio-cultural and religious context, that has largely escaped the attention of even well-intentioned actors in the cultural and public policy sphere in Ireland. The study especially points out through substantial examples how Ireland’s lack of favourable policy, legislation, infrastructure, support organisations and the absence of the benefit of a longer history of inward migration, shapes the challenges that immigrants face. By drawing upon lived experiences as recounted by research participants/ collaborators, issues of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are fleshed out to provide a more vivid and grassroots perspective on the real implications of ‘racial discrimination’ as well as the true significance of race theory. On the other hand, the study describes the individual and communal strategies that Sikh migrants employ to address such challenges in their own way. It also highlights the proactive role that migrant-led community organisations (such as ISC) can play in civic engagement, intercultural dialogue, and towards establishing migrant support networks. Many of the Sikh immigrants consulted in this study believe that active engagement, crossing boundaries and sharing culture, sports and educational initiatives are a way forward. One needs to be cognisant of the limitations of any research activity in terms of eliciting responses under a relationship of power hierarchy between the social actor and the researcher, however the ethnographic and long-term engagement undertaken in this particular study mitigates to some extent this risk, and allows for the responses

generated through the interviews to be considered as iconic of their truth value. Therefore, one might add that the responses of the Sikh migrants represented through this study indicate strategies which other migrant communities may wish to consider within their own particular contexts as well.

I would wish to believe that this study illustrates the value of an inter-disciplinary methodological framework applied to the study of ethnic and migrant communities. Such an approach combining the use of photography, life histories and ethnographic observation can capture the depth and breadth of individual and communal experiences and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to migrant integration. A particular strength of such an inter-disciplinary approach also stems from the collaboration between academic and non-academic stakeholders which strives to honour academic rigour while at the same time respecting the specific cultural sensitivities of the community in question, which is key to the establishment of trust in such research scenarios. This project provides an alternative and public intervention in dealing with issue of racism and discrimination in society by facilitating greater intercultural understanding as well as self-expression by Sikh migrants. This is exemplified through the photographic exhibition, life stories, videos, pedagogical resources and publications which one hopes will be useful to a diverse audience including academics, policy makers, NGOs and the general Irish public.

Finally, this study and the photographic exhibit together constitute a significant historical archive on the history of Sikh migration as well as the history of migration in Ireland, and an important documentation – in the years to come – of a particular picture of Irish socio-cultural life in the early 21st century.

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Appendix

Sikhs in Ireland Project: Prompt Sheet

Re: Being a Sikh / Living in Ireland

(For the purpose of this study, “Sikhs” are people who consciously identify as “Sikhs”; people who are the descendants of Sikh migrant families.)

Possible Opening Question: *If you had to describe yourself in a paragraph, what would you say?*

1. Migration

- * Reasons for migration
 - Path of migration (Prompt: Did you live somewhere else before coming to Ireland? UK, etc.)
 - Why Ireland (Prompt: job, family connections, friends, social networks)
 - Describe the day you left; your journey;
 - Describe your arrival
 - Also: What did you expect to find? Were things as you expected them to be?
- * Tell me about your first two weeks in Ireland.

2. Life in India (if applicable)

- family / home life
- place where lived – village, town, etc.
- education

3. Relation to the “Homeland”

- Contact with back home
 - phone
 - email
 - newspapers
 - television
 - cards, letters
 - etc.

4. Living in Ireland: Work / Study

- What do you study?
- Tell me about student life in Ireland?
- Things you like or don't like as student
- Do you work as well?

- Do you work outside of the home?
- What job or jobs do you currently do?
- Previous employment in Ireland; previous employment before coming to Ireland

5. Living in Ireland: Family and Social Life

- Are you married? Where is your spouse? Where are your children (if any)?
- Do you have family members in Ireland? (Prompt: Who, how many, where they are)
- If so, when do you see them?

6. Living in Ireland: Social Relationships with Dominant Group

- How do you spend your leisure time?

7. Living In Ireland: Role of Gurdwara

- Is Gurdwara important to you? If yes why? please tell me more about Gurdwara
- How often do you go to Gurdwara?
- How do you spend your time in Gurdwara?
- Have you donated anything to Gurdwara? If yes why? If not why not?
- Do you take your children to Gurdwara? Why and why not?
- Have the frequency of going to Gurdwara increased or decreased since you came here?

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8. Living in Ireland: Prejudice, Discrimination, Racism, etc.

- Are Sikhs treated the same as White Irish people or are they treated differently? (Prompt: Elaborate)
- Do you know of any cases of serious discrimination or abuse?
- Have you personally experienced prejudice or abuse since you came to Ireland?
 - What happened?
 - Why do you think it happened? (Prompt: Because of skin colour, turban, etc.?)
- Are Sikhs treated the same as or different from other Indians in Ireland?

9. Living in Ireland: Relation to the Sikh Community

- Question: Is there a Sikh community in Ireland? If so, what is it? What does it mean to you?

10. • Living in Ireland: Going back home?

- Whether visited India since coming to live in Ireland; how frequently
- When you came, for how long did you intend to stay?
- Have you decided where you intend to live for the rest of your life? If so, why?
- Things you like or don't like about living in Ireland?

11. Living in Ireland: Future of Sikh community

- Where do you see Sikh community in next 10-20years time?
- Do you think Ireland is good country to spend rest to your life? Why and why not?

12. About 'Sikh In Ireland Photographic Project'?

- One objective of this photographic project on Sikh community is to create awareness about 'who Sikhs are?', do you think it will help in educating the non-Sikhs about Sikh community?
- Where do you think, this exhibition when completed, should go?
- Any suggestion, as to how can we spread a word about the exhibitions?