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Chapter 9

Global Sikh-ers: Transnational Learning Practices of Young British Sikhs

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My clearest memory of learning about Sikhism as a young Sikh growing up in Bradford in the 1970s is not from attending the gurdwara, or being formally taught about Sikhism in a classroom, but from reading comic books depicting the lives of the Sikh gurus. These comics, produced in India by Amar Chitra Katha and the Punjab Sind Bank presented the lives of the gurus in a simple and interesting format but most importantly for me, the stories presented were in English (see Amarchitrakatha, n.d.). Reading these stories ignited my interest in Sikhism and led me to study other books and pamphlets on Sikhism also written in English but this time produced by the Sikh Missionary Society, UK.[1] The fact that I had access to these comics and books was a result of my parents ensuring that the bookshelves in the house were well stocked with materials on Sikhism and also because those producing these publications felt that it was important that young Sikhs were receiving parchaar (propagation) about the Sikh tradition.

On reflection, this early exposure has clearly led to an ongoing interest in Sikhism and into Sikhs themselves. This chapter presents an analysis of data gathered as part of a research project on religious transmission among young British Sikhs during which useful information on learning practices was gathered through interviews with young British Sikhs and also via an online survey.[2] The survey which ran between November 2009 and July 2011 was advertised to British Sikhs between the ages of 18 and 30 on Internet forums and on

Facebook, and in total elicited 645 respondents. The survey did not seek to be representative of young British Sikhs as a whole, but sought to gather the views of individuals to highlight possible trends. This larger research project itself followed on from an investigation into the relationship between young British Sikhs and their Hair and Turbans (Singh J, 2010). As part of this early research I attended a Sikh youth camp held in the UK in August 2007, which first brought to my attention the huge efforts which were being made by young British Sikhs to learn about the Sikh tradition. As well as attending this camp, I had also begun to notice increasing numbers of young Sikhs wearing bana, the traditional Khalsa uniform along with the dumallah, a particularly tall, tight round style of turban. These observations immediately raised a number of questions relating to the methods being used by young British Sikhs to learn about the Sikh identity and about the Sikh tradition.

[A] Religious Learning among Young British Sikhs

An examination of the literature relating to religious learning among British young adult Sikhs demonstrates that few studies have been undertaken on this particular group to date. Indeed, scholars writing about Sikhs in Britain have highlighted the dearth of research on British young adult Sikhs, with Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla noting that:

> Sikh youth today clearly continue to identify with the religious tradition, but this identification is far more complex and ambiguous than hitherto ...In the absence of more detailed, systematic and comprehensive research in this extremely important area, all conclusions must remain tentative. The culture of young British Sikhs today remains an area of darkness for the community and a testing ground for its uncertain futures (Singh and Tatla, 2006, p. 207).

Most studies of young British Sikhs have focused on Sikh children (James, 1974; Nesbitt 1991, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2004) with fewer studies on Sikh adolescents (Drury, 1991; Hall, 2002). Unlike these previous studies, this chapter will focus on religious learning among young Sikhs in the phase of 'emerging adulthood' a period of life which falls between the ages of 18 and 30, and which according to Jeffrey Arnett, has recently emerged in industrialized societies (Arnett, 2000, p.473). As Christian Smith explains, the phase of 'emerging adulthood' has evolved in the late twentieth century due to four key social factors (Smith, 2009, pp. 4-6), the first being the increase in the number of young adults in higher education (see BBC, 2008). As fewer young people leave school at 18 and often continue their education into their mid-20s, this has resulted in the second crucial social change which is the delay of marriage among emerging adults. Compared to previous generations of South Asians, particularly women, many of whom would live at home until marriage (Nayar, 2004, p. 93) many people now face almost a decade between the end of university and marriage in which to examine their lives and beliefs.

The third factor which has led to the development of 'emerging adulthood' is the change from careers being 'for life' to careers becoming less secure and requiring ongoing training, leading many young people to feel a general orientation of maximizing options and postponing commitments and thinking nothing of continually learning and developing (Smith, 2009, p. 5). Fourth, young emerging adults enjoy the support of their parents for much longer than previous generations, with many living with their parents until marriage. Although this may not be a change in behavior for many young Sikhs who would live with their parents until marriage anyway (Johnston, 2005, p.1079), it appears that young adults as a whole are generally living with their parents well into their twenties, allowing them more time to explore their ideas, and offering them increased resources within which they are able to examine their identities as emerging adults. Although there have been no studies of

emerging adult Sikhs to date, in a recent volume examining the religious and spiritual lives of young Americans, Smith presents a list of six 'types' of emerging adult defined by their relationship with religion, ranging from 'committed traditionalists' whose faith is a significant part of their identity and who consequently attach themselves to a religious group, to 'irreligious' emerging adults who hold skeptical attitudes about religion (Smith, 2009, pp. 167-168). As this chapter is focusing on religious learning among young British Sikhs who wish to learn about Sikhism, only those Sikh emerging adults who are actually engaging with Sikhism will be examined.

According to Brandon Vaidyanathan, 'studies on religious socialization usually take into account four agents: parents, church, religious education, and peers' (Vaidyanathan, 2011). Although the role of the family in religious socialization is clear with parents sharing their religious ideas with their children and other members of the family reinforcing these ideas (Uecker, 2009), this chapter will examine the role of peers and mentors focusing on how young British Sikhs both teach and learn from other members of the Sikh Diaspora living outside Britain. Following Steven Vertovec, transnationalism will be defined as 'the actual, ongoing exchanges of information, money and resources – as well as regular travel and communication – that members of a diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalized ethnic community'(Vertovec, 2009, p.137). Transnational religious learning will be defined as that which takes places when young British Sikhs make a conscious decision to interact with members of the Sikh Diaspora outside the UK to exchange information about the Sikh tradition. Consequently the focus of this chapter will be on the transnational exchanges which young British Sikhs take part in through Sikh camps and the Internet.

[A] Sikh Camps

Although Sikh camps have been running in the UK since 1977, apart from my own recent examination of the role and workings of British Sikh camps they have received little scholarly attention to date (Singh, J., 2011). As Shinder Thandi notes:

> Although no critical evaluation of the impact of these camps on identity development has yet been undertaken, their popularity and more regular occurrences appears to suggest that they are increasingly playing an important role (Thandi, 1999, p. 355).

My own study highlights that many young British Sikhs attend these events as they offer them space to simply 'be Sikh', and act as arenas of revitalization for many of their attendees (Singh, J., 2011). This chapter will now examine transnational aspects of these Sikh camps by firstly focusing on <u>teaching</u>, i.e. by analyzing examples where young British Sikhs teach non-British Sikhs about Sikhism, either at events held in the UK or at events held outside the UK. The focus will then be on <u>learning</u>, presenting examples where young British Sikhs learn from non-British Sikhs, either through travelling to attend events outside the UK or by attending events where Sikhs from outside the UK travel to the UK to teach young Sikhs. The four types of transnational religious engagement which will be examined are summarized in Table 9.1.

[Insert Table 9.1. here. Caption: British Sikhs: Types of Transnational Religious Engagement]

[B] Transnational Teaching

Over the past few years four camps have run at various times for young British Sikhs, 'Khalsa Camp', 'Sikhi Camp', 'Sikh Student Camp' and 'The S.I.K.H. Camp' (Singh, J.,

2011). Although all of these camps have taken place at some stage during the summers between 2008 and 2011 only Khalsa Camp and Sikhi Camp have been held every year throughout this period. From my examination of attendees based on data gathered from the online survey I noted that both Khalsa Camp and Sikhi Camp attract an above average number of Amritdharis and attendees who self-identify as being 'religious' as compared to the attendees of 'Sikh Student Camp' and 'The S.I.K.H. Camp'. Each camp also appears to promote a particular subculture with a specific slant on Sikh beliefs, which then becomes the key identifier for this camp. Indeed, observing the history of these camps in the UK, it is clear that having an organization or group supporting a particular camp is important to ensure its continuation. For Khalsa Camp this is the Akhand Kirtani Jatha (AKJ), for Sikhi Camp this the British Organisation of Sikh Students (BOSS) who themselves follow the Damdami Taksal Maryada whereas Sikh Student Camp and 'The S.I.K.H Camp' appear to have run intermittently as they suffer from the lack of such organizational support (Singh, J., 2011).

Although there are no readily available statistics regarding the geographical background of the attendees at these camps, examining online reports it is clear that they have all attracted Sikh emerging adults from all over the world, with Sikhi camp having attracted attendees from New Zealand and Denmark, Khalsa Camp having attracted attendees from New York California and Toronto and Sikh Student Camp having attracted attendees from Toronto, Germany and Stockholm. [3] One of the main reasons why UK Sikh camps may be popular with Sikh emerging adults living in other parts of the world is that outside North America and India, only the UK hosts camps for this age group. The evolution of these camps is linked to the fact that there are now increasing numbers of British Sikh emerging adults in the UK, as outlined in Singh and Tatla's demographic breakdown of the British Sikh community. Using the 2001 census figures they calculate that of the 336,179 British Sikhs, 56.1 percent are British born, with 59.4 percent of the total population being below the age of

34 (Singh and Tatla, 2006, p. 57). As the UK Sikh community is the largest and most established in Europe, it is clear why these camps might attract young Sikhs who live in countries or areas with small Sikh populations.

As well as young Sikhs coming to the UK to learn about Sikhism, the early twenty-first century has seen increasing numbers of young British Sikhs being invited to teach Sikhism at Sikh camps held around the world. For instance Navleen Kaur from London has been regularly invited to participate in camps in France, Sweden, and Norway as has Manvir Singh, both of whom helped to established SOSS (the Swedish Organisation of Sikh Students) in December 2004.[4] Navleen Kaur first made contact with Sikhs in Paris during the time she spent in France as part of her undergraduate degree course (Interview, 6 May 2010), and appears to have since been contacted by Sikhs in other parts of Europe as a result of her involvement in the Sikh media. During the early twenty first century, both Navleen Kaur and Manvir Singh were hosts of the 'Sweet Sikhi' show; a radio program which is still broadcast on Panjab Radio every Sunday evening and which specifically targets young Sikhs. As Panjab Radio, a digital radio station based in Southall, London is easily available throughout Europe through satellite television and via the Internet it was and still is relatively easy for young Sikhs across Europe to access this one of very few media shows for young Sikhs.

Another young British Sikh attending this first camp in Sweden in 2004 was Ravinderpal Singh from London who regularly participates in Sikh Missionary Society camps held in the UK, and who has since been invited to speak at and perform kirtan at a number of European Sikh youth camps.[5] Ravinderpal was asked to participate in the Sweden 2004 camp by Navleen Kaur who at this time needed the British Sikh participants to be able to speak fluent Punjabi. As many of the European Sikh children taking part in these early camps were not confident in English, Punjabi became the primary language of discussion between the young British Sikh adults and the European Sikh children. Following on from

these Swedish camps, Ravinderpal has since been a regular contributor at camps in Oslo, having attended these camps for the past five years (Kaur, P., 2010). This commitment to attending camps in one country is important for him, as he explains that he would:

> …rather do camps in just ONE country than lots of camps in different places. I found that I built a relationship with kids in Norway - most of that generation know me ... [as it] takes time to ice break with the kids – a lot of the European kids have a lot of issues and they won't open up unless they are comfortable so its important to build and MAINTAIN relationships even on Facebook and emails (Email communication, 7 January 2012).

In addition to teaching at camps organized for Sikh children and adolescents in Europe, Ravinderpal Singh and Navleen Kaur have also taught at Sikh events further afield. Ravinderpal has taught at camps in the US, Malaysia and Frankfurt, having come into personal contact with the organizers of these camps whilst living in London. Navleen Kaur has also gone on to teach at camps in America organized by the white Sikhs of Espanola including 'Camp Miri Piri'[6] held in 2010. Other British Sikhs who have been invited to Espanola to teach include Kamalroop Singh and Sukha Singh, two young Sikhs who met Gurumustuk Singh, the webmaster of Sikhnet on his visit to Sikh student Camp in 2005.[7] All of these examples highlight the importance of networking and of the fact that most of these transnational contacts are actually made face to face although the Internet is also facilitating transnational connections, as speakers at British camps and Sikh societies are beginning to be invited to participate at events in other European countries having been seen and heard on YouTube.

Other important networking events include rainsbhais organized by the AKJ, which appear to facilitate both national and international links between young Sikhs who are inspired by the AKJ. As I noted in my study of British Sikh camps, 'many of the attendees of Khalsa Camp 2008 had recently returned from rainsbhais in Italy and Denmark held earlier on in the year' (Singh, J., 2011, p. 262). Although the presence of the AKJ has been observed in a number of European countries including Denmark (Ilkjaer, 2011, p.41), Sweden (Myrvold, 2011, p.73) and Italy (Bertolani et al., 2011, p. 145) there are few clues as to why this might be the case. On further examination it appears that the popularity of the AKJ in mainland Europe may have been influenced by the efforts of the 'Chalda Vaheer Jatha' an organization led by Bhai Rajinder Singh of Dudley, Birmingham through the late 1980s and 1990s.[8]

According to the Chalda Vaheer's website, Bhai Rajinder Singh was a young Punjab born Sikh, who moved to Dudley in the West Midlands of the UK at the age of 15 and who undertook Amrit initiation at an AKJ rainsbhai at the age of 20. From 1978-1984, Bhai Rajinder Singh was the head (jathedar) of the AKJ in the UK, after which, following the events at the Golden Temple in 1984 he formed the 'Chalda Vaheer Jatha', a small group of kirtanis which travelled all over Europe, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.[9] Indeed, Table 9.2 reproduces a document from 1987 which lists the Chalda Vaheer Jatha's itinerary for July and August, and which clearly demonstrates the efforts made by Bhai Rajinder Singh to conduct Sikh parchaar (propagation) to Sikhs living in Europe (Chaldavaheer.com, 1987).

[Insert Table 9.2. here. Chalda Vaheer Jatha 1987 European Tour]

According to the Chalda Vaheer Jatha's and AKJ's websites, Bhai Rajinder Singh was driven to conduct parchaar in Europe as he 'was conscious that the Indian government would

do whatever it could to exterminate Sikhs, the only option to counter that attack was to create more Sikhs who lived in the western countries (outside of Punjab).' Consequently, he lived in Amsterdam from 1980 to 1982 and undertook a 'world tour' in 1989 to Australia and New Zealand (Chaldavaheer.com, n.d., 1989; Akj.org, 2009). Given that the AKJ is very active in Europe and has become an important transnational movement, further research is certainly required on the impact of the Chalda Vaheer Jatha. A quick survey of kirtan from rainsbhais available on the akj.org website highlights the wide geographical spread of the AKJ in the UK and beyond (see Akj.org, 2006).

Indeed, the transnational nature of the AKJ appears to have played an important role in developing Khalsa Camp UK into a transnational event. Having run in the UK for a number of years, this camp has recently expanded internationally, running for the first time in 2010 in British Columbia (Canada) with young British speakers including Manvir Singh being involved (see Khalsa Camp BC, n.d.; Singh, M., 2010). The first 'Khalsa Camp Australia' ran from 16 to 20 January 2012 near Sydney with British Sikhs being involved in the form of Khalsa Camp UK regulars Bhai Surjit Singh and Bhai Jagjit Singh (see Khalsacamp.au, 2012). To date, of the various British Sikhs camps running for emerging adults, only Khalsa Camp has developed a transnational presence.

[B] Transnational Learning

Having examined examples of young British Sikh teaching non-British Sikhs about Sikhism, this chapter will continue with examples of contexts in which young British Sikhs learn from non-British Sikhs. Of the camps mentioned above, two in particular have invited speakers from abroad to participate in teaching young Sikhs. As I describe, between 2005 and 2008 the organizers of Sikh Student Camp invited key members of the white Sikh community to teach at the camp with Guruka Singh, the founder of Sikhnet being invited in 2006 and 2008,[10] a

connection established through the visit of Gurumustuk Singh in 2005 (Singh, J. 2011, p. 266). Guruka Singh has since been invited to teach at the City Sikhs Network and at the Sikh Retreat 2011 (see Sikhnet.com, 2011). Similarly Khalsa Camp UK has in the past hosted Canadian Sikhs from the Tapoban gurdwara in Toronto a gurdwara which appears to be inspired by the AKJ Maryada as it 'strives to maintain a strict Khalsa rehit and conducts Akhand Keertan, the collective singing of hymns in front of Sree Guru Granth Saahib jee with active participation by the Sangat'(Tapoban.org, n.d.). Other examples of Sikhs from across the world being invited to teach young British Sikhs include Harinder Singh of the Sikh Research Institute, San Antonio who has recently participated in a number of events across the UK (Sikh Research Institute, 2011).

As well as learning from non-British Sikhs at events held in the UK, an increasing but still relatively small number of British Sikhs are travelling abroad to engage with the Sikh tradition, which is demonstrated by the fact that 40 of the 645 online survey respondents stated that they had attended a Sikhism related learning event held outside the UK. The most popular destination was North America where a number of respondents stated that they had or would want to attend events held by the white Sikhs in Espanola such as the Summer solstice. The next most popular destination was India, with some respondents stating that they had or would want to learn about Sikhism at Damdami Taksal and others stating that they had or wished to attend the annual summer camp held at Baru Sahib.[11] Also known as the Akal Academy, Baru Sahib is an educational institution located in Himachal Pradesh run by the Kalgidhar Trust, which was founded in 1963 with the aim of providing education to village students (Singh, H. S, 2006). Having purchased the village Baru in 1956, the Akal Academy was established in July 1986 and since 2004 has been offering summer camps to young Diaspora Sikhs, primarily from the UK, USA and Canada (Kaur, G., 2010). An examination of the attendees of the 2008 summer camp indicates that these camps appear to be primarily

focused towards children and adolescents although some emerging adults and adults also attended.[12] Indeed, one 24 year old male survey respondent explained that he had attended the 2009 summer camp at Baru Sahib as this represented the 'the next step' in his learning about Sikhism.

Attending events abroad appears to provide young British Sikhs with new perspectives on Sikhism and, in the case of those attending Damdami Taksal, leads to them being regarded as religious authorities on their return to the UK. For example, Sukhraj Singh learnt santhiya (correct pronunciation of the Guru Granth Sahib) at Damdami Taksal, and now teaches this to a number of young British Sikhs in the UK as well as regularly taking on the role of head granthi at Sikhi Camp because of his in-depth knowledge of the Damdami Taksal Maryada.[13] Indeed, Sukhraj Singh and others who run the 'Sikh Inspiration' classes at my local gurdwara in Leeds are in 2012, for the first time, organizing their own transnational venture - a tour (yatra) for young British Sikhs to Hazur Sahib in India (Facebook, n.d.). For some young Sikhs therefore, India is regarded as a place where they can learn about their tradition in its original environment. Others have instead decided to visit the white Sikhs of Espanola whom they have found through the Sikhnet website. As this 30-year-old male survey respondent explains:

> I was inspired by Guruka Singh (Mr Sikhnet) and some other members of their sangat, heard about this community of white converts and was intrigued. Felt an afinity with their take on the practice and non punjabi based worship of Sikhi.

Although increasing numbers of British emerging adult Sikhs appear to be travelling abroad to learn about Sikhism, it is important however to recognize that numbers are still relatively small. Nevertheless, although many transnational connections are being made through

personal contacts, it appears that the Internet is also contributing to numbers travelling abroad, exposing young British Sikhs to a number of avenues through which they are able to explore Sikhism. Having understood the transnational aspects of Sikh events, this chapter will now examine the impact of arguably the most important recent transnational technological development, the Internet, on the learning practices of young British Sikhs.

[A] Sikhism Online

Although there have been a number of studies of the relationship between religion and the Internet (see Campell, 2011, p. 232), few have examined the online presence of Sikhism. Those that have, have focused on the impact of Internet forums on traditional authority structures (Jakobsh, 2006), the response of Sikh discussion groups to the events of partition and 1984 (Barrier, 2006), the impact of Sikh dating websites (Maclaran et al., 2008), the representation of Khalistan and of Sikh martyrs on the Internet (Axel, 2005; Sokol, 2007), a comparison of discussion forums used by European Sikhs (Singh, Chapter 7 in this volume), and the role of the Internet in contemporary identity construction within global Sikhism (Jakobsh, Chapter 8 in this volume). In order to fully understand how young British Sikhs are engaging with the Internet, it is first necessary to map the types of online engagement which are currently available. Having understood the evolution of the online presence of Sikhism, this chapter will then analyze how young British Sikhs are using the Internet to learn about their tradition.

[B] The Evolution of Sikhism Online

The beginnings of the public online presence of Sikhism are to be found among the Usenet newsgroups which developed in the early 1990s.[14] At this time there were no publically accessible Sikhism newsgroups, forums or websites with international communication being

a novel and somewhat exciting experience. Although a relatively 'late entry' into the world of online religion,[15] the online presence of Sikhism has developed exponentially since the 1990s with a Google search of 'Sikhism' carried out on 6 October 2011 producing 4,520,000 hits. Much has happened in the interim with Sikhism firmly establishing itself online in a number of different forms.

The world's first web site on Sikhism, Sikhs.org, appeared online in December 1994.[16] As well as a few websites, the mid 1990s also saw the formation of a growing number of specifically Sikhism focused discussion forums, many of which broke away from the earlier culture based forums such as the 'soc.culture.indian' newsgroup. The first of these Sikhism focused discussion groups was the 'soc.religion.sikhism' bulletin board which had arrived online on 4 July 1995and which was moderated by a group of young educated American Sikhs,[17] including Sandeep Singh Brar, the founder of Sikhs.org, and Rajwinder Singh from Boston University.[18] The rationale for this bulletin board makes interesting reading as these young American Sikhs felt a 'dire need for a newsgroup where Sikhs and others interested can exchange information & ideas and discuss issues related to Sikh religion and Sikhs'(Singh, R., 1995a). An analysis of the early posts on 'soc.culture.punjab' and 'soc.religion.sikhism' during the period 1995 to 1996 highlights the following key topics of discussion:

1. Sikhs and meat eating (Kaur, J., 1995)

2. Sikhism and caste practices (Singh, R., 1995)

3. The necessity for Sikhs to keep the 5Ks and hair and turbans (Gurpreet, 1995)

4. Difficulties for young Sikhs in finding marriage partners (Rattan, 1995)

5. The discord between the Sikh religion and Punjabi cultural practices (Singh, H. K., 1995)

6. Attacks on the Sikh religion from non-Sikh forces (Singh, P., 1996)

7. Discussion in English of quotations from the Guru Granth Sahib (Singh, R., 1996)

8. Event postings e.g. the Ontario Sikh Students Association kirtan darbar on 27 January 1996 (Singh, A. P., 1996)

9. Gender equality in Sikhism (Chewter, 1996)

10. How to keep the normative Sikh identity whilst living in the Diaspora (TandMark, 1996)

11. How Sikhism address issues raised by bio-ethics such as abortion and euthanasia (Singh, B., 1996)

12. The status of Sants within Sikhism (Manjeet,1996)

According to Gurpreet Singh posting on 'soc.religion.sikhism', there were 54 personal homepages and 23 Sikhism related websites in January 1996 (Singh, G., 1996). Although many of these were based in the USA, British Sikh websites also began to appear in the late 1990s including www.sikhspirit.com,[19] a site representing the Central gurdwara London in Shepherd's Bush and www.waheguru.demon.co.uk representing the British Organisation of Sikh Students (BOSS) (Waheguru.demon.co.uk, n.d.).

It is important to remember that at this time access to the Internet was not easy as it is now with home access requiring a dial-up modem and website design requiring a significant amount of skill and knowledge of software technologies. For example Sikhnet, which originally began in 1986 as a private bulletin board used by members of the 3HO and Sikh Dharma International organizations, had to close between 1994 and 1996 when its technical administrator Guruka Singh was no longer able to administrate it (Sikhnet.com, n.d.b). Following its re-emergence in 1996, Sikhnet was one of the first websites to host a publically

accessible discussion forum and later developed a specifically youth focused discussion forum in 1999.[20] The early twenty-first century also saw the emergence of a number of websites offering easy access to English translations of the Guru Granth Sahib. All of these sites, including Srigranth.org, Sikhnet.com, and Gurbanifiles.org (Gurbanifiles.org, n.d.; Sikhnet.com, 2000; Srigranth.org, n.d.), used a translation by Dr. Sant Singh Khalsa and eventually led to the first version of the popular Sikhitothemax.com which arrived online in late 2000. According to Gary Bunt, the conversion of sacred texts into 'searchable objects, whose content can be rapidly mined for key words and concepts' is one of the key contributions of the online world (Bunt, 2009a, p. 709). Indeed, these websites allow Sikhs all over the world to search the Guru Granth Sahib by page number, and thanks to Sikhitothemax to be able to also search using English or Punjabi words.

As well as providing information about Sikhism, many of the early websites also hosted discussion forums. These were usually either hosted on Sikh 'portals', such as the Waheguroo network which would offer visitors a variety of services including kirtan downloads, Sikh related screensavers and articles about Sikhism,[21] or on organization specific websites such as the website run by the Tapoban gurdwara in Toronto (Tapoban.org, 2007). It is also important to note that a number of non-English language based Sikh websites and discussion forums also evolved during this time including khalsa.dk based in Denmark, and sikh.se based in Sweden (Ilkjaer, 2011; Myrvold, 2011).

The website based discussion groups such as Sikhsangat.com and Sikhawareness.com (Singh, Chapter 7 in this volume) preceded the appearance of website free discussion groups hosted on Yahoo groups and Google groups. As Randolph Hock explains, the distinction between these new discussion groups and previous discussion groups was that for the former 'you went to a Web site or a newsgroup reader to read and send messages. For the latter, messages came to you via email' (Hock, 2005, p.88). Website free discussion groups which

continue to be active include those with an international focus, such as the 'Gurmat Learning Zone'and the 'Sikh Diaspora' (Gurmat Learning Zone, n.d.; Sikh-Diaspora, n.d.), those representing particular groups like BOSS and Sikhsocs (British Organisation of Sikh Students, n.d.; Sikh Socs Inspiring the next Generation, n.d.), and those with more of a local focus such as Bangalore Sikhs, Seattle Sikhs, and leeds-bradfordsikhs (Bangalore Sikhs, n.d.; leeds-bradfordsikhs, n.d.; Seattle Sikhs, n.d.). The emergence of blogging in the late 1990s added a further type of religious interaction online with individuals being able to write web logs, or 'blogs' about their own personal religious journeys (Campbell, 2010, p.24). As the Internet primarily consisted of websites, blogs and discussion groups up until the mid-2000s, it is not surprising that most of the academic analysis of the interaction between the Internet and religion has focused on these particular technologies.

To fully appreciate how young British Sikhs currently engage with Sikhism online it is necessary to examine some of the important and relevant developments which have occurred online since 2000, beginning with the launch of Wikipedia in 2001 (Ayers et al., 2008, p.46). The format of Wikipedia, as an online encyclopedia on which articles are written by anyone with access to the site, has subsequently been used to generate a number of specialized 'wikis' dedicated to specific subjects with Sikhiwiki arriving online in 2005 and currently boasting 5821 articles on Sikhism (Sikhiwiki.org, n.d.). In 2003, the social networking phenomenon began with the emergence of Myspace followed a year later by Facebook. Although Facebook only opened itself up to the public in 2006, in January 2011 it passed Google to become the most popular website in the world (Kiss, 2011). Many Sikh organizations now have a presence on Facebook although given its relatively recent arrival there has been little analysis of the impact of Facebook on religion.

As well as wikis and social networking sites, the emergence of video hosting websites, such as Youtube, has been an important development in the presence of religion

online. The fact that videos of events held all over the world are now easily available and accessible has increased the amount of material available to young Sikhs allowing them to easily access lectures and talks that might have once been missed. As an area of analysis, Youtube is much like the rest of the Internet in constant-flux with some users and videos being added whilst others are taken down (Vis et al., 2011, p.114). The relative ease of the process of uploading videos online has led to a variety of Sikhism related videos now being readily available including videos created on specific Sikh topics and recordings of live events held at gurdwaras, camps and Sikh societies.

[B] Young British Sikhs Online

Having examined the evolution of the various online options available to young British Sikhs, this chapter will now examine how the Internet is being used for the transmission of Sikhism. Rather than assuming that young British Sikhs use the Internet in particular ways, I will use the results of the online survey to understand how the Internet is being used. The survey asked a number of questions about Internet usage, the first of which was:

Q. Do you ever use the Internet to learn about Sikhism? Yes / No

1. Which websites / forums do you visit most to explore and learn about Sikhism?
2. Of these, which ONE website do you visit the most?
3. How has the Internet helped you (or not) learn about Sikhism?
4. What kinds of questions about Sikhism have you asked online?
5. Are you a member of any online Sikh communities?

Responses to the above question provided useful data about Sikhism related Internet usage among young British Sikhs. In terms of popularity, the websites and forums most regularly mentioned in these responses have been represented in a word cloud in Figure 9.1.

[Insert Figure 9.1. here. Caption: Word cloud answers to the survey question 'Which websites / forums do you visit most to explore and learn about Sikhism?' (NB the more popular the website, the larger the word)]

The popularity of Sikhnet above all other websites may be attributed to the fact that it offers a wide number of online facilities and is constantly providing innovative tools via its dedicated online team. As Bunt explains, 'fast-loading, high-quality, easy-to-navigate sites with attractive graphics and easy-to-read content, perhaps aimed at a particular constituency, will possibly have the ascendency on more difficult-to-read, technical and/or poorly designed material'(Bunt, 2009a, p. 196). The fact that the most popular websites are not discussion groups but a mixture of different types of websites demonstrates that young British Sikhs engage with their tradition online in a number of different ways. An analysis of the survey responses to questions about Sikhism related Internet usage reveals that young Sikhs mainly go online in order to:

1. Discuss taboo subjects

2. Obtain answers to questions about the Sikh tradition

3. Explore differing practices within the Sikh tradition

4. Access repositories of kirtan and katha

5. Examine English Translations of Sikh scriptures

6. Obtain hukam

7. Find out about Sikh events

8. Access event archives, recordings and instructional videos

9. Purchase Sikh resources including books, photographs and clothing

10. Understand the legal position of Sikh articles of faith

[C] Discuss Taboo Subjects

Many of the survey respondents noted that the Internet had allowed them to discuss issues which they felt that they would not be able to discuss with their parents and peers, or which they did not feel their immediate contacts would be knowledgeable about. For example a 23-year-old male respondent stated that 'if i have a question or thought about sikhi which i feel embarased [sic] to ask i can ask the net.' Similarly an 18-year-old male respondent felt that the Internet had 'helped me learn about things that i would have found difficult to ask say a person at the gurdwara or my parents.' The Internet also allows young Sikhs to discuss topics which they might find it difficult to discuss in their local community, as a 29-year-old female respondent explained, 'I also found it useful when researching sikh ideas on fertility treatment, to advise a patient.'

[C] Obtain Answers to Questions about the Sikh tradition

Young Sikhs are also able to find answers to questions which are not satisfactorily answered by parents or traditional authorities. As a 30-year-old male respondent explained, the Internet has 'helped very much in asking the simplest questions. ie. Why do we tie up our hair?, why do we shower every morning?, what effect does the daily bani's have on our psyche?' One 26-year-old female respondent also stated that the Internet had allowed her to find out historical information about Sikh women, and 'offered stories about strong Sikh women that i don't hear from other Sikh men who 'preach' or tell stories.'

[C] Explore Differing Practices within the Sikh Tradition

One of the most important ways in which the Internet has impacted young Sikhs is the fact that young Sikhs are now able to research aspects of Sikhism which they might not have previously been aware of. Whereas young Sikhs might be aware of diversity within the Sikh tradition growing up, they can now easily access the views of various Sikh groups as this 22-year-old Sikh female explained:

> I've found out about things which my parents haven't had an answer for (such as slaying a goat at Hazur Sahib), and it's allowed me to exploe [sic] certain aspects of Sikh history in depth. I find that some sources are very biased, and while I can see this, I do worry that less educated people would take it all at face value.

As well as highlighting the variety of ideological viewpoints, the Internet has highlighted the fact that there are a number of white Sikh converts to Punjabi Sikhs, previously unaware of this. A 26-year-old female respondent explained that:

> I haven't realised how many american white people have come into sikhi which is inspirational. If they can make the effort to learn about sikhi why can't we (the ones that are born in sikh families) why do we always seek excuses and they are able to adopt punjabi and live a full sikh life. We need to learn by their examples.

Another 26-year-old female respondent stated that she actually went online in order to examine alternative viewpoints:

> If there is an area of Sikhism I wish to investigate, then it is useful to get some other perspectives other than those explained by my family. If I want to learn

about a new area of Sikhism the Internet can often provide a way in and begin the learning process.

In this regard it can be concluded that thanks to the Internet, young Sikhs are much more aware of the diversity within Sikhism than previous generations may have been and are given the opportunity to explore these viewpoints from the safety of their own Internet browsers.

[C] Access Repositories of <u>Kirtan</u> and <u>Katha</u>

The Internet also allows young Sikhs to easily download <u>kirtan</u> (music) and <u>katha</u> (discourse) from a variety of sources. As has been discussed, <u>kirtan</u> is an important aspect of Sikh worship with particular groups having their own particular styles of <u>kirtan</u> (see Khabra, 2010). Through mp3 downloads and video hosting websites it is now possible to listen to <u>kirtan</u> recordings in any style one chooses. Indeed, as of October 2011 the Sikhnet 'Gurbani Media Center' one of the largest repositories of <u>kirtan</u> online lists over 14000 tracks sung by 544 different artists.[22] Although, the Internet may not be acting as a 'worship space' per se, in this context the fact that <u>kirtan</u> can be downloaded means that young Sikhs now have more choice than ever before of the style of <u>kirtan</u> they wish to listen to. As with <u>kirtan</u>, a variety of types of <u>katha</u> are available, primarily by professional <u>kathavacaks</u> usually trained in <u>Damdami Taksal</u>, or in the various Sikh Missionary colleges (see Myrvold, Chapter 10 this volume). The increasing availability of <u>kirtan</u> and <u>katha</u> on Youtube indicates the functional usage of the internet as a distribution mechanism of religious discourse.

[C] Examine English Translations of Sikh Scriptures

Given that Sikhitothemax, the popular Guru Granth Sahib translation software first found a home online, it is not surprising that many young Sikhs mentioned the ability to examine

English translations of the Guru Granth Sahib and other Sikh scriptures as being an important use of the Internet. As a 25-year-old female respondent explained, 'Direct english translations from the Guru Granth Sahib have enabled me to interpret the Guru's teachings for myself.'

[C] Obtain Hukams

The increased access to translations has also allowed Sikhs all over the world to receive a hukam or 'order' from the Guru Granth Sahib as and when required. Whereas Sikhs would previously have had to visit their local gurdwara to hear the daily hukam or to obtain a personal hukam, the daily 'order' from the Golden Temple in Amritsar is now presented on websites and emailed and texted all over the world. Sikhnet not only offers an English translation of this daily 'order', but also presents a daily audio explanation of the relevant composition. Furthermore, Sikhnet also allows its users to take a 'Cyber Hukam' for on the spot guidance from the Guru Granth Sahib. Many respondents stated that they read a hukam daily and noted its importance in providing 'an idea of how to face the day' and in helping 'stay connected'. It could be argued that the accessibility of hukams has allowed many Sikhs to experience a more personal relationship with the Guru Granth Sahib as those Sikhs who might not visit the gurdwara on a daily basis can now regard the scripture online as an easily accessible provider of immediate advice.

[C] Find out about Sikh Events

An important offline impact of the Internet is that it allows the advertising of events to interested people. Whereas previously events might have been advertised through telephone calls and/or advertisements in the Punjabi press, the evolution of discussion groups and in recent years, Facebook have made it much easier for young Sikhs to find out what is going on where. Anyone with membership of the right Facebook groups, or in contact with the right

friends will now be automatically notified about a whole host of Sikhism related events happening in the next day, week or month. Given that many young Sikhs have spoken about the importance of sangat, the fact that they are now made aware of events, such as rainsbhais, lectures, and kirtans taking place all over the country, means that they are now regularly able to physically meet other likeminded Sikhs through membership of these online 'spiritual networks'.

[C] Access Event Archives, Recordings and Instructional Videos

As well as current events, the evolution of video hosting websites has meant that video recordings of talks and lectures presented at camps and Sikh societies are now readily available. Consequently Sikhs are now able to watch and listen to lectures and to take part in events even if they are not physically present. These video hosting sites have also allowed for the viewing of videos from the late twenty-first century onwards, including the speeches of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and news footage of the events of 1984.[23] In addition, the advent of these sites has allowed for instructional information, such as turban tying videos to be viewed by young Sikhs who have no easily accessible family members to teach them.

[C] Purchase Sikh Resources Including Books, Photographs and Clothing

The Internet has also made it much easier to find and purchase previously difficult to locate items. A 28-year-old male respondent noted that 'amazon - got me the books i need, emails got me the photos i needed of old granths [books]', whereas another stated that the Internet had 'greatly eased access to rare recordings by great Sikhs, access to old granths, made it possible to read Gurbani anywhere.' Many websites now offer Sikh music and clothes for sale,[24] including Sikhism related hoodies, T-shirts, posters, books and DVDs (see G5 Sikh Media, n.d.).

[C] Understand the Legal Position of Sikh Articles of Faith

The Internet has also allowed young Sikhs easy access to information about the legal position of Sikh articles of faith, especially the wearing of the ceremonial sword (<u>kirpan</u>). The Sikh organizations Saldef, the Sikh Coalition and United Sikhs have all published legal guidance relating to the wearing of turbans and the <u>five Ks</u> and have provided legal assistance to those experiencing difficulties with wearing these articles of faith.

[A] Conclusion

This examination of transnational propagation among emerging adult British Sikhs has demonstrated that as well as engaging with Sikhism locally, many young British Sikhs are both teaching and learning about Sikhism while interacting with Sikhs all over the world. This chapter has demonstrated that young British Sikhs occupy somewhat of a privileged position among young Sikhs globally with a number of them teaching at events being run all over the world. This can partly be explained as being a result of the maturity of the British Sikh population which like those in the USA and Canada has been well established since the 1970s unlike the Sikh populations of a number of European countries which have only really become established since the beginning of the twenty first century. In addition, unlike the USA and Canada, the somewhat small size of the UK means that it is relatively easy for likeminded young British Sikh adults to congregate together regularly, and for some to gain valuable experience in teaching and in running events for their peers.

The examination of transnational aspects of British Sikh camps has demonstrated that these events have contributed in variety of ways to Sikh teaching and learning in the diaspora. As well as providing arenas for non-British Sikhs to participate in larger congregations, speakers at these camps are now being regularly invited to events being held in countries with

emerging Sikh populations. The commonality of the Punjabi and English languages allows young British Sikhs to converse with young Sikhs in other countries despite any local language barriers and appears to overcome any ideas of 'generational difference' among young Sikhs as second or third generation British Sikhs are able to converse with first or second generation European Sikhs.

This chapter has also emphasized the important role of key individuals in facilitating and contributing to transnational connections among young European Sikhs. British Sikh emerging adults, including Navleen Kaur, Ravinderpal Singh, Manvir Singh and others, have become regular contributors to these camps, allowing young first or second generation Sikhs in European countries to interact with those in Britain who already have some experience of growing up in the Sikh diaspora. This may also mean that the time span between the arrival of migrant Sikhs and the establishment of camps for young adults will be shorter for Sikhs in other European countries compared with those in the UK, as a number of experienced young British Sikh adults are readily available to assist their European peers. It will be useful to monitor the emergence of these types of events in European countries.

The role of the Chalda Vaheer Jatha in undertaking parchaar (propagation) to countries with emerging Sikh populations has been examined and presented as one possible reason as to why the AKJ has gained popularity among Sikhs in a number of European countries. One of the main conclusions of this chapter relates to the importance of face to face interactions with peers and mentors in teaching young Sikhs about their religion, and in this regard, the impact of the travels of Bhai Rajinder Singh of Dudley certainly requires further research.

Indeed, rather than emphasizing the impact of communication through virtual links, this chapter has demonstrated that many of the transnational links between young British Sikhs and the diaspora counterparts begin and build on interpersonal contacts and

relationships. It is not a coincidence that many of the young British Sikhs who are being invited abroad are based in London, in particular Southall, as Sikh students from European and North American countries who frequently attend educational establishments in the capital are more likely to interact with young British Sikhs from London than elsewhere in the UK.

However, as a networking tool, the Internet has allowed young Sikhs to be aware of events happening all over the world which they might wish to attend, or even watch and listen to online. Having examined the history of the emergence of the online presence of Sikhism, this chapter has sought to present the evolution of the wide variety of engagement options which are available to young Sikhs when going online, beyond the role of websites and discussion forums. It has also demonstrated that much has changed online since the development of early websites and discussion forums. Given the novelty factor of online engagement it is not surprising that the Internet quickly became the place to discuss previously taboo subjects. Although those regulating these arenas of discussion may have initially been regarded as authority figures, it is important to note that the sheer amount of choice in discussion groups currently available online allows young Sikhs to join and leave forums and Facebook groups as they wish.

As a means of religious propagation, the Internet can be seen to be all things to all people. For those young Sikhs who are unaffiliated and who begin to engage with their tradition online, the Internet affords them a relatively 'safe' space in which they can start to explore their tradition on their own terms without feeling the need to explain why particular topics are being investigated ,or particular questions asked. For those who do affiliate to a particular ideology or point of view, the Internet can supply well-rehearsed arguments for and against these views causing some young Sikhs to continue referring to offline elders or authorities to 'check' information they find online. This offline checking can be seen to be both a coping strategy and a means of self-regulation as the increased access to differing

types of ideology online presents young Sikhs with views contrary to those taught in their offline communities. Although the Internet 'holds transformative potential for religions, in terms of representation, networking, by adherents and application as a proselytizing tool' (Bunt, 2009b, p. 705), it is important to remember that without its users, the Internet on its own does very little. Therefore, it should not be assumed that the existence of a particular website or discussion forum automatically means that it is being looked at, or is having an impact on religious propagation. Given the apparent reliance on the offline world, it appears that in terms of religious transmission the Internet is a simply a means and not an end.

The impact of transnational propagation among young British Sikhs is therefore an individual concern that depends on the geographical location of a person, his or her family socialization and interactions with peer groups and mentors among other things. Rather than presenting a picture that outlines the ways in which young British Sikhs are impacted by transnational propagation, this chapter has sought to present the variety of options that are available to them today. Above all however it is clear that transnational parchaar (propagation) in the Sikh diaspora is emerging and developing in a number of different forms, allowing Sikhs across the world both young and old to teach and learn about the Sikh tradition. As the term 'Sikh' itself is often translated as 'learner', the evolution of this transnational parchaar will hopefully present many members of the Sikh panth with new and exciting opportunities to learn and develop as Sikhs.

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[1] A full list of the Sikh Missionary Society's publications can be found at Sikh Missionary Society U.K., 2011.

[2] The interviews were conducted with 30 young Sikhs involved in Sikh Camps or University Sikh societies. For further details of the research project, see University of Leeds, 2009.

[3] References to these overseas attendees are available at: Asian Image, 2006; Khalsa Camp, 2003 (photographs of attendees from New York); Sikhsangat.com, 2006 (a discussion of a attendees from California and Toronto); Sikhstudent.org, 2006 (testimonials from attendees from these locations).

[4] For details about France, see Singh, M., 2005. For details about Sweden, see Vsingh, 2007. For details about Norway, see Singh, M., 2006.

[5] Ravinderpal has attended Frankfurt Camp in 2009 and a camp in Switzerland in 2010, see Sikh-religion.de, 2009; Youtube, 2010c.

[6] The majority of white Sikhs came to Sikhism having been inspired by Yogi Bhajan (Harbhajan Singh Yogi), the founder of the 3HO (Healthy, Happy, Holy) organization. Many are based in Espanola, US where camps are often held, including Camp Miri Piri. Navleen Kaur is listed as a teacher at Camp Miri Piri 2010, see Sikhnet.com, n.d.a.

[7] Both Sukha Singh and Kamalroop Singh are listed as attending the Jaap Sahib course held in Espanola in 2006 (Singh, Gurumustuk, 2006b). They can be seen lecturing at the course at Vimeo (Vimeo, 2006). It is also important to note that Gurumustuk Singh's airfare to the UK for his visit in 2005 was paid for by a group of 4-5 young British Sikh students who each contributed a small amount to the fare (Singh, Gurumustuk, 2006a).

[8] 'Chalda Vaheer' can be loosely translated to 'moving encampment'. For a description of the establishment of the Chalda Vaheer Jatha, see Youtube, 2010a.

[9] See Chaldavaheer.com, 1999, which shows a number of European Sikh camps that were held by the Chalda Vaheer Jatha in 1999.

[10] For an account of his experiences at Sikh Student Camp, see Singh, G., 2006. For details about Sikh Student Camp 2008, see Sikhnet.com, 2008.

[11] Baru Sahib has been running camps for UK Sikhs since 2006. For further details, see The Kalgidhar Society, n.d.a.

[12] For photographs of attendees from this camp, see The Kalgidhar Society, n.d.b.

[13] For details, see the website of Damdami Taksaal which lists all santhiya teachers in the UK (Damdami Taksaal, n.d.).

[14] For an example of an early Sikhism related post, see Sandhu, 1990.

[15] Sikhism is a relatively late arrival online, given that Jewish and Christian discussion groups existed since the mid-1980s. For further details, see Campbell, 2010, p. 22.

[16] Sikhs.org claims to be the world's first website on Sikhism (Sikhs.org, n.d.). From its registration date and from the fact that Sundeep Singh Brar was involved in other online Sikh interactions at this time, this claim is most likely true.

[17] For details, see Soc.religion.sikhism, 1995/1996, which demonstrates that the first post in this group was on 4 July 1995.

[18] This is demonstrated by Bonine, 1995.

[19] Sikh spirit took the form of a monthly online magazine, providing information about the guru's teachings, important dates in Sikh history and upcoming Sikhism related events (see Sikhspirit.com, 1995).

[20] A snapshot of the earliest posts on this forum pre 1997 can be found at Sikhnet.com, n.d.c; and after 1997 at Sikhnet.com, n.d.d. For the earliest posts on the youth focused forum, see Sikhnet.com, n.d.e.

[21] For example, Keertan.Net was hosted on the Waheguroo network, which also hosted a discussion forum. For further details, see Waheguroo Network, 2002.

[22] This has been derived from the fact that there were 25 tracks per page and 572 pages of listings at Sikhnet.com.

[23] Sant Jarnail Singh was a key personality during the storing of the Golden Temple in June 1984. He was also the head of the Damdami Taksal at this time. Many of his speeches can be found online (see e.g.Youtube, 2010b).

[24] A British example of this is DTF based in Birmingham, who offers such items as khanda key rings, stickers and pendants.