

<b>Institution: University of Wolverhampton</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 25 Area Studies</b>		
<b>Title of case study: British Sikhs: Enhancing Understanding, Inclusion, and Empowerment</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009 - 2018</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
<b>Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar</b>	<b>Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies and Director of Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies</b>	<b>January 2009 - Present</b>
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Takhar's ground-breaking research findings from the field of Sikh and Panjabi Studies have resulted in three distinct impacts. These have been of benefit to the Sikh community and British society more generally and are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced cultural understanding of Sikh life and experience among the general public and in public policy;</li> <li>• Improved social inclusion of Sikhs as a marginalised group in the diaspora: positively shaping values and informing public attitudes towards the Sikh community; and</li> <li>• Public and political debate about and in the Sikh community, for example on the census of England and Wales 2021 and on Gurdwara governance reform, has been shaped and informed by research, challenging established norms, modes of thought and practices.</li> </ul> <p>Together, these have led to a greater appreciation of the societal contributions of the UK's 430,000-strong Sikh Community and their achievements.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>Takhar's underpinning research on Sikh culture, community and identity has given rise to three Findings [F], which are discussed under the headings below:</p> <p><u>F1. The need for cultural understanding of diversity within, and the empowerment of, Sikh identity</u></p> <p>Takhar's research on Sikh sects [R1 &amp; R2], based on caste distinctions or differences in belief from a hegemonic definition of Sikh identity, is unique in that it highlights the problems faced when attempting to provide clear-cut definitions that encompass all followers of the Sikh way of life. This has profound implications for cultural understanding and finding solutions to problems of identity being faced by the Sikh, Ravidassia and Valmiki communities in Britain today.</p> <p><u>F2. The need to understand the evolving dynamism of identity and issues of inclusion in Sikh life in the diaspora</u></p>		

One of the most important discussions in Sikh cultural life concerns the understanding of, and navigation through, the experience of Sikh life in the diaspora [R3 & R4]. Takhar's research has identified differences that exist between Sikh teaching and actual praxis amongst the Sikhs and other Panjabi-based communities in Britain. She argues that culture cannot be disregarded when analysing issues such as gender and the role of caste amongst Sikhs.

### F3. Demands for equality and issues of representation are strongly interrelated in Sikh life

Takhar argues that there are several elements in the construction of a British Sikh identity, namely equality relating to caste and social and political activism regarding the Census that together form interrelated strands [R5 & R6]. For example, as Takhar puts it: "The lobbying of British Parliament by pro-legislation [for a caste-based Amendment to the Equality Act 2010] organisations is grounded in the determination that caste based discrimination has no place in British society" [R5]. Takhar is the first to engage systematically with these equality and representational questions as they arise within the Sikh community.

Taken together, the research findings show the centrality of culture, identity, and equality and representation in Sikh life in the UK today, and inform the three impacts in Section 4.

### **3. References to the research**

The following references have been assessed by peer review. They have been cited repeatedly by scholars and practitioners, such as Carling (2016) and Kalra & Purewal (2020).

R1. Takhar, O. K. (2014) "Sikh Sects", in Singh, P and Fenech, L.E. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 350-59.

R2. Takhar, O. K. (2014) "The Place of Scripture in the Trajectories of a Distinct Religious Identity among Ravidassias in Britain: Guru Granth Sahib or Amritbani Guru Ravidass", *Journal of Contemporary Religion*: 29(1): 105-120. ISSN: 1353-7903 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2014.864811>) (REF 2 Output).

R3. Takhar, O. K. (2014) "Sikhi(sm) and the Twenty-First Century Sikh Diaspora", in Lewis, C. and Cohn-Sherbok, D. (eds) *Sensible Religion*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

R4. Takhar, O. K. & Jaspal, R. (2016) "Caste and Identity Processes among British Sikhs in the Midlands" *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture Theory* 12(1): 1-16. ISSN: 1744-8735 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2016.1147174>) (REF 2 Output).

R5. Takhar, O. K. (2017) "British legislation against caste-based discrimination and the demand for the Sunset Clause", *Contemporary South Asia*: 25(3): 26-41 (<https://www.doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2017.1353587>).

R6. Takhar, O. K. (2018) "Social and Political Activism Amongst British Sikhs: Responses to Issues of Equality and Human Rights — a New Way Forward?" *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture Theory*: 14(3), 300-314 (<https://www.doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2018.1485375>).

### **4. Details of the impact**

As a researcher and active member of the Sikh community, Takhar has been awarded the MBE for her contribution to Sikh community research. In November 2019, Takhar was the only female to have been honoured by the Chief Minister of Panjab during his visit to the UK to mark the 550th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak (the first Guru of the Sikhs). Female Sikh scholars are unusual in a male dominated field of studies, highlighting Takhar's widely recognised impact on enabling the emergence of new discussions on taboo topics amongst Sikhs. In recognition of her research and its impact on the Sikh Community, in March 2019, Takhar was personally invited to submit her case for support to join the Sikh Roundtable at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and

Local Government (MHCLG), which has responsibility for addressing challenges and issues faced by faith communities through key policy making decisions at Government level.

The following discussion of Takhar's impact builds from enhancing cultural understanding to improving inclusion and then to shaping public and political debate.

#### 11. Enhanced cultural understanding of Sikh life and experience among the general public and in public policy

There are 27m Sikhs worldwide, of whom 430,000 live in the UK. Some 134,500 of these live in the West Midlands. Takhar's research on Sikh culture has provided a robust basis to be able to identify what makes Sikhs unique and to articulate their contribution to society, politics and commerce. As a Sikh role model herself, she is well placed to take forward the shaping and informing of public attitudes and values.

Her work is related to contemporary grassroots challenges faced by British Sikhs, and she regularly contributes to the BBC and British Asian media. For example, she is Consultant for the Sikh family scenes in the long running BBC One drama *EastEnders* [C1], and was interviewed for the BBC One documentary *Young, Sikh and Proud* (aired 28/1/20) [C2]. These cultural and societal portrayals would not have been possible without the underpinning research [F1 & F2], especially those regarding the diasporic context [R3]. She is regularly aired on the Sikh Channel, together with national and international Panjabi radio broadcasts on current topics due to her reputation amongst the international Sikh community. News of her work and activities has been published in the leading international media *Ajit*, as well as in *The Times of India*, *The Tribune* and *Panjab Times*. The *Express and Star* also regularly publishes her activities. As pathways to impact, these have considerable reach, running into the millions. Takhar is also a Consultant to the BBC on their forthcoming documentary *Being Sikh*, airing in March 2021.

Finally, Takhar is Advisor to the forthcoming short film, *The Sikh Soldier* [C3]. While the release of the film has been delayed beyond the current REF period, the impact from the longstanding research has been on the production, rather than any putative audience. The research that underpins the film is reflected in Takhar's article 'The Sikh Community's Contribution to British Society' in *The British Sikh Report (BSR)*, 2014, which referenced research R3. Indeed, the timing of the underpinning report was particularly important, as it was the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War and it enhanced public understanding and appreciation of the Sikh community. One of the achievements of the Centenary has been the highlighting of the Indian contribution and the important role of the Sikh community in it, a fact not lost on David Cameron in his foreword to the Report. In words that echo Takhar's contribution to that report, he stated that: "This year we commemorate one of the Sikh community's greatest contributions to our country. 2014 marks one hundred years since the outbreak of the First World War in which thousands of Sikhs fought - and died - for Britain and the Commonwealth in the name of freedom" [C4].

#### 12. Improved social inclusion of Sikhs as a marginalised group in the diaspora: positively shaping values and informing public attitudes towards the Sikh community

Takhar's research findings [F2] have provided a clear picture of the challenges Sikhs have faced in building lives in the UK. Using these findings, Takhar has shaped and influenced opinion, while reflecting the improved social inclusion of Sikhs as a group. Sometimes this has related to internal attitudes towards women, which have changed considerably over time, for example over driving [C5]. Other aspects relate to the turban and the Wolverhampton bus drivers dispute of the late 1960's. This took place at the time of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech and was a period of heightened tensions. The victory of Tarsem Singh Sandhu in being able to grow a beard and wear the turban at work was "so significant to the lives of Sikhs here in the UK... [and] showed religion shouldn't take a back seat". Social inclusion has continued to improve over time and, in 2018, Charanpreet Singh Lall became the first guardsman to wear a turban at an official event [F2, C6].

The outlook for Sikhs in Britain has improved considerably since bans on turbans on buses were lifted. As time has gone on, Sikh household income has increased and a high proportion of Sikhs are home owners. The majority of Sikhs see themselves as being either British Sikh or British. The main vehicle for mapping the everyday lives of Sikhs is the *British Sikh Report* (BSR), published annually. Takhar's research findings [F2] relating to Sikh identity and spiritual values in the UK have been cited there [C7] and are indicative of her impact in informing public attitudes.

BSR is also written to be used by local and national governments and has a strong statistical base for such use. Its significance is underlined by, in 2014, having been commended by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, as well as other party leaders, a trend occurring each year. An essential and important aspect of the functioning of this impact is that Sikhs have an ever greater pride in their accomplishments coupled with an ever greater belief that they can succeed.

13. Public and political debate about and in the Sikh community, for example on the census of England and Wales 2021 and on Gurdwara governance reform, has been shaped and informed by research, challenging established norms, modes of thought and practices

Takhar's contribution to Sikh community research has had a positive impact on the Sikh Community in Britain. That impact has informed public and political debate and challenged assumptions. This work, and the impact below is based firmly upon Takhar's research findings [F2 & F3].

Modes of thought on the value and importance of the Sikh community have been enhanced by Takhar's research and public profile. This has taken place in an atmosphere of rising discrimination against Sikhs and false stereotypes regarding Sikh women. Takhar visited Parliament on 22 November 2017 to mark the anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak, born in 1469 CE and to deliver the Keynote Speech to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Sikhs. This was on Guru Nanak as one of the most inspiring and influential thinkers of the fifteenth century. Guru Nanak's teachings were not simply confined to the metaphysical or spiritual realm, his message was one of practical efforts that reached out to the ordinary people of society and he was a pioneer in interfaith dialogue. He was also a feminist and believed in the equality of all human beings. Takhar also spoke about the egalitarian teachings of Guru Nanak, which very much emphasise female empowerment. The response to Takhar's keynote was very positive and informed the Parliamentary debate on the Sikh contribution to the UK [C8], emphasising the role and importance of Takhar's work in countering negative modes of thought.

Takhar's research strengthened the drive to include Sikhs as an ethnic group on the 2021 Census. The last two censuses in 2001 and 2011 have included a tick box for Sikhs under the optional faith section of the questionnaire but no similar option was given under the mandatory ethnicity section. The Sikh community was undecided on the desirability of their inclusion as a separate ethnic group but there is an imperative, articulated several times in the debate at C8, to get accurate data about Sikhs in Britain. Takhar is a core member of the Sikh Network and she took a leading role in the research and its analysis of the *UK Sikh Survey*, 2016 [C9]. The *UK Sikh Survey* has a clear link to Government policy and the Cabinet Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government (now MHCLG), and the ONS were all engaged with it. In an example of impact on shaping and informing public and political debate, the impact is that the argument has been won in the Sikh community, as "93.5% of Sikhs would welcome the inclusion of a separate ethnic tick box for Sikhs in the Census 2021" (*UK Sikh Survey*, 2016). Ultimately, in mid-2020, the ONS eventually decided not to include a separate box for 'Sikh' under 'ethnicity', a point re-enforced by the High Court dismissal of the case on 6 November 2020. This, however, does not detract from the remarkable impact in consolidating the Sikh community's view of itself, as covered in *the Guardian* and *the Times* and reaching millions of readers, which has helped to cement the community spirit that Takhar has done so much to build.

Regarding Gurdwara reform, Takhar has challenged established norms, modes of thought and practices in the public debate in the Sikh community regarding optimising community cohesion and engagement. There are an estimated 350 Gurdwaras in the UK, catering to the needs of

430,000 British Sikhs. The majority of the Gurdwaras recognise that they need to respond to contemporary challenges and therefore do things differently. These challenges concern working to the Government's Community Cohesion Agenda and addressing how to engage the younger generation of British born Sikhs with the Gurdwaras.

Working closely with national and regional Sikh bodies, Takhar has developed the Gurdwara Professional Development programme which addresses challenges, as identified by the British Sikh community through her research and outreach work. Both the Council of Gurdwara Management Committee UK (CGMC) and the Council of Gurdwaras Wolverhampton have given their support for the Programme [C10a and b], which would have started in 2020 but which will now commence after the COVID-19 lockdown.

The positivity around welcoming the Programme, by both organisations, illustrates that Takhar has had an impact by challenging established norms, modes of thought and practices in public debate in the Sikh community. This has been done by addressing and highlighting the need for Gurdwara governance and the need to bring the governance of Gurdwaras in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, to ensure the flourishing of Sikh religious institutions in the hands of future generations of British Sikhs.

Impact has concerned the challenging of outmoded ways of doing things, attitudes, and beliefs and resulted in real change across public and policy debates. This has extended all the way from local Gurdwaras to the Houses of Parliament, and reflects the variety of the impact that has taken place.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. Testimonial from Eastenders Research Team, 11 February 2021.

C2. Testimonial from Producer of BBC One documentary 'Young, Sikh and Proud', 22 January 2021.

C3. Testimonial from Producer of The Sikh Soldier, 2 December 2020.

C4. David Cameron's Foreword to The British Sikh Report, 2014, (<https://britishsikhreport.org/british-sikh-report-download-2014/>) Takhar's article is from page 10.

C5. The Asian women who defied the driving taboo - BBC News - 3 June 2019 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48367181>)

C6. The turban-wearing British bus driver who changed the law - BBC News - 30 April 2019 (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47853718>)

C7. Gurbachan Singh Jandu – 'Britain's Sikhs in 2016: A Community with Society in Mind' in the *British Sikh Report, 2016*, (<https://britishsikhreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/British-Sikh-Report-2016.pdf>), pages 5 to 12.

C8. Sikhs: Contribution to the UK, Hansard Volume 659: debated on Tuesday 30 April 2019, (<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-04-30/debates/1D8A9453-C2DA-4757-9248-6F5BC3130BDF/SikhsContributionToTheUK>)

C9. The UK Sikh Survey 2016 Findings (<http://www.thesikhnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/UK-Sikh-Survey-2016-Findings-FINAL.pdf>)

C10a. Letter of support from the Council of Gurdwara Management Committees, 19 July 2019.

C10b. Letter of Support from the Council of Sikh Gurdwaras, Wolverhampton, 23 July 2019.