REF2021

Institution: University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: 31 – Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: *'Sikh Radicalisation' in Diaspora: Reframing Policy, Influencing Media, Engaging Publics*		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): **Dr Jasjit Singh**	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):** Associate Professor	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:** 09.2012 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Since 2017, **Dr Jasjit Singh's** ESRC/CREST-funded research has been central to re-framing the terms of public debate and understanding – regionally, nationally and internationally – regarding Sikh activism in the UK and beyond. This research provides new historical narratives and analyses leading to three main impacts:

1. Shaping policy and practice relating to Sikhs at various levels of governance in the UK, including the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), counter-extremism agencies, and broadcast regulators, such as the Office for Communications (OFCOM);
2. Re-framing media debate and understandings of 'Sikh extremism' in diaspora, particularly in the UK, India and Canada;
3. Empowering Sikh communities and organisations by providing prominent open access resources and facilitating open dialogue community events that foster greater community cohesion and education.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

In 2015, headlines in the British and Indian media drew attention to the risk of the radicalisation of factions within the British Sikh community that would be a threat to both countries. Responding to the dearth of academic literature on the subject, **Dr Jasjit Singh's** 2017 ESRC/CREST-funded open access report *The Idea, Context, Framing and Realities of 'Sikh Radicalisation' in Britain* (**4, Grant I**) provides the first empirical examination of so-called 'Sikh radicalisation' in diaspora. **Singh** explores the historical framing of 'Sikh extremism' (a term used interchangeably with 'Sikh radicalisation'), the context of reported incidents, the key narratives and issues leading to these incidents and an analysis of the various channels through which these narratives are transmitted. His research into contemporary Sikh activism in diaspora unpacks and de-mythologises claims about 'Sikh radicalisation,' presenting fresh insights in five key areas:

1. **Framing Sikh activism in Britain** – Providing the first in-depth analysis of the framing of 'Sikh extremism' (**2**), **Singh's** research analyses the persistence of concerns about Sikh extremism, particularly given the general non-violent nature of 'Sikh militancy' (Wallace 2011). He argues that these concerns are impacted by (a) the racialisation of religious minorities, (b) a specific type of 'Indian secularism' which frames Indian legislation and media reporting, and (c) the post 9/11 securitisation and increased surveillance of Sikh bodies as part of the 'War on Terror' with its concerns about 'religious violence' and the necessity of the secular nation state to ensure that any such violence is suitably policed (**2**).
2. **Narratives and issues** – By presenting an account of the narratives and issues which contribute to Sikh protests and incidents based on historical analyses and ethnographic research (**1** and **2**), **Singh** has elucidated the relationships between narratives, incidents and flashpoints and how the framing of these various incidents impacts on policy and media discourse around Sikhs in diaspora (**2** and **4**).
3. **Transmission of narratives** – Building on his previous work on religious transmission among Sikhs in diaspora (**5**), **Singh's** analysis of the transmission of Sikh narratives through families and institutions (**6**), music, clothing, art (**Grant II**) and

online through Sikh media/social media (**4** and **5**) has provided significant detail around the role and impact of these methods of transmission.

4. **Types of Sikh activism** – Through an innovative typology of Sikh activism, **Singh** (**1** and **4**) has provided an analysis of who participates in Sikh issues and why. This typology presents a framework of how the various narratives and issues contribute to different types of Sikh activism, beyond the simplistic labelling of these issues as 'extremist'.

5. **Impact of Sikh activism in Diaspora** – By highlighting that the main threat to community relations is from individual or group vigilantism resulting from internal Sikh issues/disputes or from the exploitation of local inter-community tensions, **Singh** has uncovered the socio-political drivers behind these types of issue (**4**), presenting an analysis of the different impacts of Sikh activism in Diaspora around Sedgwick's (2010: 479) model of the different contexts and agendas concerned with 'radical' activity: 1) the security agenda, 2) the integration agenda, 3) the foreign policy agenda and 4) religious community agendas (**4**).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1) **Singh**, J. (2020) 'Narratives in Action: Modelling the Types and Drivers of Sikh Activism in Diaspora,' *Religions*, 11(10), 539. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100539
2) **Singh**, J. (2019) 'Racialization, "religious violence" and radicalisation: The persistence of narratives of "Sikh extremism" in the West,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(15). https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1623018
3) **Singh**, J. (2018) 'Sikh activism in Britain: Narratives and Issues'. Guide produced for media and policy makers. https://crestresearch.ac.uk/news/sikh-activism-britain/
4) **Singh**, J. (2017) *The idea, context, framing and realities of Sikh radicalisation in Britain*. Open access research report. https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/sikh-radicalisation-full-report/
5) **Singh**, J. (2014) 'Sikh-ing online: The role of the Internet in the religious lives of young British Sikhs,' *Contemporary South Asia,* 22(1), pp. 82-97. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09584935.2013.870974
6) **Singh**, J. (2012) 'Keeping the Faith: Reflections on religious nurture among young British Sikhs,' *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 33(3), pp. 369-83. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13617672.2012.732817

Grants

I) *The Idea, Context, Framing and Realities of 'Sikh Radicalisation' in Britain*, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (ES/N009614/1) (Sept 2016 – Mar 2017, **£61,846**)
II) *(r)agency: Lived practices of anger*, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) (AH/M009114/1) (Feb 2015 – Jan 2016, **£2,398.44**)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Building on earlier work on British Sikh communities (**5** and **6**), **Dr Jasjit Singh's** ESRC/CREST-funded report (**4**) has had significant traction both nationally and internationally particularly in the UK, Canada and India (**A**; cited 31 times in media across 5 countries/regions and 3 continents), whilst subsequent publications have broadened the scope to consider different types of Sikh activism in general (**1**) alongside an analysis of the framing and reporting of 'Sikh extremism' (**2**).

Impact 1: Shaping Policy and Practice in UK Government and Agencies

Singh's report has been recognised as a crucial resource for bolstering British government and agencies' understanding of the contexts and issues affecting Sikh communities in the UK. The Chair of the Home Office Sikh Association (HOSA) observed that the report:

> *has been of tremendous use within Government. [...] I have already referred the report to various departments within the Home Office, security colleagues and wider Civil Service. Having robust and credible research has been of great benefit to*

> *facilitate the report to a number of Government departments in the increasing understandings of Sikh issues* (**B**)

Deemed *"ground-breaking research"* by the Team Leader of Faith Engagement, MHCLG, *"which clearly outlines the main internal and external issues facing the Sikh community in Britain"* (**C**), **Singh's** report was also recognised by the British government for its 'outstanding contributions to challenging community narratives' during its Vaisakhi Event 2018 held at 10 Downing Street where **Singh** was invited to meet and present his report to the Prime Minister. As a member of the MHCLG 'Sikh Roundtable' (2017-2019) **Singh** is regularly invited to contribute to discussions around government policy regarding Sikhs. This had life-changing effects in summer 2018 in the context of the ongoing persecution of Sikhs by the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Home Office updated its *Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs* document (Version 4.0, July 2018) following recommendation by **Singh** concerning the languages spoken by Afghan Sikhs. **Singh** has also provided expert testimony on Afghan Sikh asylum cases for use by Legal Justice Solicitors and No.5 Chambers, as evidenced in Immigration and Asylum Appeal PA/03980/2017 (**D**).

As part of OFCOM's role in policing incitement and hate speech, **Singh's** research was directly cited in Broadcast Bulletin 373 (25.02.2019), in which it was used to assess whether or not a Sikh television station had breached regulatory guidelines (**E**). In the context of the UK government's various counter-extremism strategies, **Singh's** research was also cited in a 2019 report published by the Commission for Countering Extremism about Sikh activism in Britain (**F**), indicating the ongoing relevance of his research for national governance agencies in the UK. Indeed, Singh has become a go-to expert for policymakers to understand the context and dynamics of the Sikh community in Britain, most recently, for example, presenting oral evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Religion in the Media (May 2020).

Impact 2: Re-framing media debate and understandings of Sikh activism in diaspora

As the first report to provide an analysis of claims about 'Sikh extremism' in the context of diasporic communities (in this case in the UK) during a period of heightened anxiety and media coverage about radicalisation in the UK and India, Singh's report was immediately taken up at national level in both the UK and Canada. The report received coverage in mainstream British and Indian national news media and current affairs programmes upon publication in November 2017, including *BBC Radio 4 Sunday*, *BBC Asian Network's Big Debate* and the *Times of India* (Dec 2017). The report was immediately referenced by commentators in India, who reported how *"the Leeds research found no evidence – or rather substance – in allegations or complaints"* about Sikh extremism (**A**).

Singh's report then took on transatlantic significance in the context of Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's visit to India in March 2018, when claims about Sikh extremism in Canada, and the Liberal government's complicity in it, were widely circulated across various Indian media outlets. **Singh's** report was cited in the Canadian media to question such claims, with **Singh** also commissioned by *The Conversation* (27.03.2018) to write on the subject. This piece was picked up by a number of other online outlets including: *Quartz, India* (28.03.2018), *Scroll.in* (29.03.2018), *The Wire* (28.03.2018) and *Business Standard India* (29.03.2018). As of January 2021, this article has been viewed over 59,000 times (**A**). **Singh's** report continues to act as a cornerstone of the debate.

In April 2018, **Singh,** as a recognised expert on the media framing of Sikh extremism, was invited to participate in one of the World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO) #AskCanadianSikhs events, which were organised across Canada in response to media coverage of alleged Sikh extremism in Canada. WSO's President observed:

> Dr **Singh's** research provides the community with a robust response to these allegations and established, with evidence, that allegations of rising extremism are unfounded and not reflective of the facts. Dr. **Singh's** work has been an important element in discussions on 'Sikh extremism' in the West (**G**)

Shortly afterwards, on the eve of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UK for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April 2018, **Singh's** report

was cited by the Sikh Federation in its letter to British Prime Minister Theresa May contesting claims that Sikh activism is extremism and urging May to question Modi about these allegations (**H**). Again, the research was cited in media coverage, with the online news outlet *Media Diversified*, for instance, stating about the report: *"such responses have been essential in giving voice to the Sikh community"* (19.04.18). In March 2019 **Singh** was again invited by the WSO to headline panel discussions in Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver focusing on the inclusion of 'Sikh (Khalistani) Extremism' in Public Safety Canada's 2018 'Public Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada'. These events attracted large and diverse audiences, including Parliamentarians and leading community figures.

Singh's research fed into the production of two INFORM/Department of Education guidance booklets for British schools: *Establishing the Credentials of Faith Traditions* and *Vetting External Speakers to Schools*. Researchers at the educational charity INFORM *"found Dr Singh's work invaluable"* in writing the Sikh sections of both booklets, as his report *"is the most current and relevant work on UK Sikh communities, and particularly the issues which young Sikhs face, that is available"*, concluding: *"it contributed greatly to our understanding"* (**I**). **Singh's** expertise led to an invitation from REACH PLC, the largest national and regional news publisher in the UK, to deliver training to its journalists (July 2020).

Its use as a frequent point of reference has placed **Singh's** report as the top result when 'Sikh radicalisation' is entered into Google, Bing and Yahoo search engines (22.06.2020), ensuring that his research continues to be a critical point of reference in debate and understanding of the issue.

Impact 3: Empowering Sikh communities and organisations

Singh's report provides in-depth analysis of Sikh activism in the UK and has been embraced as a key historical resource for Sikhs, promoted by Sikh media and educational organisations, including *Basics of Sikhi* and *Naujawani* and enthusiastically embraced by commentators, such as *KTV London*'s presenter:

> You've joined the dots here, and I think that's what's so great about this report, we haven't had that before […] it is quite overwhelming really to look at it and think: this is amazing, there is a huge history here to read through and not to take for granted [...] this is actually the first report [when 'Sikh radicalisation' is typed into a search engine] which is great because if anyone is writing an article they've got no excuse to get it wrong (**A**; 1,500 views via *KTV*'s Facebook channel)

Indeed, **Singh's** report was used in a complaint to Canada's National News Media Council (NNC) by the Sikh Press Association (Sikh PA) against the *Toronto Sun*. As reported in *The Indo-Canadian Voice* (06.05.2018), Sikh PA complained about the *Toronto Sun*'s factually inaccurate and prejudicial use of the term Shaheed ('martyr') in a Sikh context and *"recommended his [Singh's] research, which included an explanation of the concept of shaheed, to the* Toronto Sun *and the NNC"*. The complaint was subsequently upheld by the NNC (**A**).

In developing his report, **Singh** undertook a series of community consultations hosted by various Sikh organisations across the UK. The Sikh Press Association hosted **Singh's** community consultation event in Southall, which, for its Press Officer *"set a standard now for how this community views academic research projects"*; the Press Officer emphasised the *"levels of transparency and the levels of interaction"* that are *"always going to put anything else that comes through under scrutiny, which is […] the right way forward for real and authentic insights into the Sikh community."* (**J**)

Singh's community consultation in Leeds led to the establishment of Sikh Alliance Yorkshire (SAY), which has gone on to hold open community consultations on a variety of topics, including mental health, hate crime and bullying, and loneliness. SAY's Co-Chair explained:

> There was an opportunity to have dialogue [...] using that same model, we thought well, let's build on that and really create our organisation, Sikh Alliance Yorkshire, to do that same kind of thing (**J**)

Since taking part in the hate crime and bullying event in February 2019, West Yorkshire Police's Strategic Engagement Officer described how he has *"been able to call on Singh's*

expertise in a number of cases when looking to understand local, national and international issues which may affect the local Sikh community." (**K**). Moreover, **Singh's** community-centric method of engagement now adopted by SAY is *"a massive benefit to Police/Community Relations, bringing Sikhs and others together from all parts of the city to talk honestly and critically about substantive issues is a remarkable plus,"* capturing how **Singh's** research has become embedded in local and regional community work in the UK, as well as shaping international dialogue and understanding of Sikh-related issues as far afield as Canada.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of ten references)

A) 'Media Reach Report, 2017-2018: Dr Jasjit Singh' (UoL, 2020), composite piece of evidence, including H. S. Singh, 'What is the truth behind alleged Sikh radicalisation: Leeds study flies in the face of Modi and Amarinder governments', *Daily O* (06.12.2017). https://www.dailyo.in/voices/leeds-research-rejects-khalistan-punjab-sikh-radicalisation-modi-amarinder-singh/story/1/20968.html (accessed 04.01.2021); *KTV London* Presenter, 'A Sikh Perspective' (live show 22.01.2018). https://www.facebook.com/ktvglobal/videos/1702214683155031 (accessed 04.01.2021); 'Canada News Council upholds Sikh Press Association complaint against Toronto Sun's "shaheed" claim' (06.05.2018). https://www.voiceonline.com/canada-news-council-upholds-sikh-press-association-complaint-against-toronto-suns-shaheed-claim/ and NNC statement (27.04.2018). https://mediacouncil.ca/decisions/2018-21-singh-vs-toronto-sun/ (both accessed 04.01.2021).

B) Chair of the Home Office Sikh Association (HOSA), email correspondence (23.05.2018).

C) *Team Leader, Faith Engagement, MHCLG, email correspondence (01.05.2018).

D) '(Immigration and Asylum Chamber) Appeal Number: PA/03980/2017'. https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5b6d6bf32c94e044df065410 (accessed 04.01.2021)

E) *OFCOM Broadcast and On-demand Bulletin*, Issue 373, pp. 15, fn 26 & 18, fn 32. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/138648/Issue-373-Broadcast-and-On-Demand-Bulletin-25-February-2019.pdf (accessed 04.01.2021)

F) Dr J. Jhutti-Johal & S. Hundal (2019, The Commission for Countering Extremism) 'The changing nature of activism amongst Sikhs in the UK today,' pp. 20, 23 & 29. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-changing-nature-of-activism-amongst-sikhs-in-the-uk-today (accessed 04.01.2021).

G) *President, World Sikh Organization of Canada, email correspondence (17.04.2018). See also, 'Overwhelming response to #AskCanadianSikh forums', *Asian Journal* (10.04.2018). https://www.asianjournal.ca/overwhelming-response-to-askcanadiansikh-forums/ (accessed 04.01.2021)

H) Sikh Federation UK, Letter to Theresa May (11.04.2018). https://sikhsiyasat.net/sikh-groups-write-letter-to-british-pm-theresa-may-ahead-of-indian-pm-narendra-modis-uk-visit-full-text-of-letter/ (accessed 04.01.2021).

I) *Senior Research Officer, INFORM, email correspondence (16.04.2018).

J) **'Research Impact - Engaging Policy, Media and Community: Dr Jasjit Singh' (UoL film, 2020, 13.44mins), composite piece of evidence including testimonies from Press Officer, Sikh Press Association and Co-Chair, Sikh Alliance Yorkshire (SAY). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYbyswbeWiU (accessed 04.01.2021)

K) Strategic Engagement Officer, West Yorkshire Police, email correspondence (18.05.2018 & 15.02.2019).