



SID-0006X0001MO

Date: 12 December 2013
Interviewer: Benjamin Williams
Respondent: Kartar Singh Sandhu

Okay, it's the 12th of December 2013. This is Ben Williams interviewing...

Kartar Singh Sandhu. My, you know, spellings are K A R T A R; Singh – S I N G H; Sandhu is my surname – S A N D H U.

Okay, thank you Mr Sandhu. The interview's taking place in Paisley as part of the Stepping Into Diversity project. Mr Sandhu, could you start by telling us where and when you were born, please?

I was born in India in a province called Punjab. It's in the north-west of India. And in Punjab there is a small village called Sunduwah and there I was born in 1928.

Thank you. And what are some of your earliest memories of the place where you were born and grew up?

My earliest memories are that we moved into a city called Delhi, that now it is the capital of India. And there I started going to school with my friend... and my neighbour were Muslims and we used to be together in our primary school. And I remember that Ramadan came – this is the festival of Islam – but they had to go on fast the whole day, and this was my friend, with whom I used to go to school. So, their Mum and Dad, they asked us, early in the morning to come because they were preparing the food. They had to eat food early in the morning, then whole day they don't, you know, eat anything. And they used to call us also to have the early meal with them, so they are my early memories of my childhood – how the neighbours you lived with, they were from a different faith, but that we didn't bother about that at that time, or didn't know much about that there are different faiths in the world.

So, there was a lot of interaction, then, between different faith groups?

That's right, yeah. Living very, very amicably. Also the other event I remember is the Diwali. This is called the Festival of Lights. This is a Hindu festival, and at that time I remember that in our own homes we used to have the clay sort of lamps, and we used to put cotton wool with the oil in it, and we used to put it on our house, and then in the... at night we used to light them. And this was a very common sort of festival. Though it was a Hindu festival, but all of us, we used to celebrate, and we used to have sweets at that time, new clothing and things like that. And we used to hear the stories of Rama and Lakshmana and his wife Sita and so many things about it. But, as I said, we grew up and we never realised that these distinctions when we grew up, you know, older, that there are different faiths and different distinctions and different people worship different gods,



SID-0006X0001MO

goddesses and things like that. But at that time for us it was just different sorts of festival. We used to get together whether they were Muslims or the Hindus or the Sikhs. It doesn't matter.

It sounds as though festivals were quite an important part of your childhood then.

Very true. Very true.

Could you tell us a little bit about the festivals in your own faith as well?

Yes, for example, there used to be in the month of April, and it was called Vaisakhi and it is still called Vaisakhi. Now, this was the creation of the Khalsa when the tenth guru, you know, baptised the Sikhs and gave them five Ks and gave them a discipline of life, that you have to live a disciplined life so that you can fulfil your aim and duties, the responsibility to yourself and to the society. And so I remember, you know, my Mum and Dad used to tell us these stories about the tenth guru, how he baptised the five people. They offered their heads to the gurus, and how he changed their dress, how he changed their code of conduct and things like that. And we used to go to the gurdwara and have special feast over there and celebrations, hear all these sermon and the stories in the gurdwara. So, that was very interesting, to grow up in our own faith and also the other faith, other festivals that the people were celebrating. And we used to get together, all of us, you know. So, in India as I grew up, as a little boy, and then I remember that at that time we didn't realise that there are different people. And we used to get together, as I said, whether it was Mohammed (00:05:30) festival of fasts and all that, whether it was the Diwali or whether it was the Vaisakhi. So all of us we used to get together, celebrate, enjoy ourselves [laughs].

And can you remember some of the games that you played as children when you came together?

Yes. You know, the most popular game, naturally, at that time, was kabbadi. It is called kabbadi, you know. We used to get together, or it was mainly... it was the wrestling, for example, the young boys, you know, when I used to go to my village. And the people, you know, my age group, we used to get together and we used to have a bit of a wrestling match. We used to have kabbadi. It was, you know, between the two little teams that they were playing, you know, things like that. There was also another game I remember; it was called guli dinda. It was like a stake and it was a little like, you know, cricket – we have got a little ball or something like this. So, little games there used to be. There was another game, which I remember was called pitthu., So, we used put stone together, one over the other higher one, and we used to kick... actually hit it with the ball, a little ball, and if you have thrown those stones from that pillar sort of thing, you know, then you have won. So, little, little games, but very enjoyable. They were very... you grew up with those sorts of games which are gone now, you know.

And was music also an important part of your...?

Music, you know, yes. You know, mainly it was, for example, the religious music which we used to go and hear in the gurdwara, but along with this also the Punjabi songs. And also, as you have mentioned, you know, that there used to be the festival, for example. And when these festivals were there... and there were a lot of shops and sweets and



SID-0006X0001MO

balloons and other things, you know, in those festivals but, at the same time, in those festivals there was a lot of singing Punjabi songs. And along with that also there was the famous, you know, dance to go with that, and that was called bhangra. It is still surviving over here in the west also now; we have got bhangra. It's a dance, and it's more, actually, like the Scottish dance, you know – jumping with the legs and with the hand, with the arms and things like that; you know, more like this. And the beat; it's a quite fast beat; you know, but very rhythmical. Very interesting, you know, songs and the dances at those times.

And could you describe the place where you grew up – the surroundings?

Yeah, the surroundings... mainly, at that time, for example, I moved from the village when I was a little boy. There were different games and different sort of atmosphere, which was very peaceful, very... but when we moved in the city, the life was fast, much more faster and the people were living on their own, you know. It was not that neighbourhood sort of thing which we saw... because the village was a community itself. They were together; they cared for each other; they want you to know all the time, you know. But in the city the people were so busy that they were living on their own. But we used to meet at the weekend or at the time of festival and things like that, but the atmosphere at that time, I must say, very harmonious. People did care for each other and people did not bother much about the distinctions or the divisions among them or anything else like that.

When did you notice that beginning to change?

Yes, I did, especially near about, say, 1947 when the Partition came, and I was studying in Lahore, in the college. And at that time in our college... so, all sort of nationalities and all sorts of the community, the religious community and the social community, they were living together and we never noticed that... who is a Muslim, who is a Sikh, who is a Hindu. And we used to get together; we used to dine together; we used to play together and all that. So, all of a sudden... so, something happened that this Partition came, and people started dividing themselves into these groups, that the Hindus and the Sikhs and the Muslims, and we are separate. And this was a very, very alarming sort of situation. Which we couldn't believe also, that 'til yesterday we were all together in our schools, college, university, then socially we used to mix with each other at festivals and get-togethers and all that, so what has happened? So, later on, we realised that it is a some sort of hatred among the people which is now developing or might have been developing for some time, but it busted – it busted out at that time. And it was amazing that how these divisions... and naturally there were rumours also going on at the same time. I think also that people misinterpreted their relationships or their religions, or that their religion is not actually divisions but, you know, but people wanted to be separate. It was more politics, I think, than perhaps religion or social life or anything.

Where were you living at the time of Partition?

At that time I was living... now it is in Pakistan. It is called Lahore. It was the capital of the Punjab and it was also a very educational sort of centre. This is why there were so many colleges, universities... and I was studying at that time in my college. It was my last year of my graduation. And so the Partition came, and all those very people who were neighbourly living for centuries... and they were forced to leave their homes and (00:12:16), you know. So, the Sikhs and the Hindus who were living in Pakistan at that



SID-0006X0001MO

time where the division came, and the boundary was put in between India and Pakistan. And the people were forced to leave from the so-called Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs, and they were forced to leave their homes and (00:12:38) and lands, while the Muslims who were living in India – and especially the Punjab, because there are a lot of Muslims still living in India – much more, I think, which I was told. And now Muslims live in India, then in Pakistan. But it was mainly Punjab which I experienced myself, that the people, the Muslim people, were forced from the so-called India Punjab into the Western Punjab. So, millions of people, they migrated from both sides, you know. East to the west, west to the east, unfortunately.

And did you leave Lahore at that time, or were you able to stay?

I did leave because, you know, I was living on the eastern side of Pakistan, and now Punjab and now India, in India, so my parents were on this side, so I had to go. I had to leave, you know, that part. And there were a lot of killings going on and all that, so just... I wanted to save myself. My parents wanted me to come to them. Yes, I noticed all this, which was horrible; which was really very disturbing. Very, very disturbing.

What are some of your memories of that time?

Yes, you know, my main memory is that... and it was, as I said, you know, very, very sad. Very, very sad and very upsetting also, that I saw with my own eyes a lot of stabbing going on, burning of the houses going on. Even when I was in Lahore, it started over there round about my college, round about us. People were attacking us, you know, in the college itself. You know, people used to come in hundreds and all that, but we were safe, you know, in the buildings. And the same thing as when I saw all these sort of scene in Pakistan, while the Hindus' and the Sikhs' houses were burned and the killing was going on. And when I came to on this side of the Punjab, which is in India now, I saw the same thing over here also – the Sikhs, you know, killing the Muslims and all that, and forcing them to leave their homes and their villages and all that, so it was very, very sad. Very upsetting, it was. And still, as you said, those harsh memories are still in my mind, and from time to time I think about those sorts of scenes. It's like a dream, you know, coming back, which are really very, very sad. Yesterday we were living together and brotherly and neighbourly and everything, so what has happened?

And it's interesting, also connected with that very thing – I loved so much of my college days in Lahore, where I was studying, and the religious places connected with the Sikh religion, they've left behind in Pakistan. So, I... from here, from England, I went to Pakistan in 1997 just to visit Lahore, you know, my college, university, and also the religious places connected with my religion – (00:16:06), you know, things like that. And the Sikhs ruled for 50 years or so somewhere before 1839 or so; it was a Sikh kingdom in the Punjab at that time. And there was a maharajah belonged to... his birthplace is in Pakistan, so I went to visit his birthplace. And I saw people of Pakistan talking to us when we visited these places we were going around, they were very friendly and they were quite warm people, and they would not let us spend money. For example, if we wanted food or something and they will say, 'No, no, you are our guests,' [laughs]. So, in these 50, 60 years, a lot of change has come in the mind of people in Pakistan as well as in India also, over here. But, as I said, you know, those sad memories still live in my mind.

And what was it that brought you over to England and...?



SID-0006X0001MO

Yeah, that's interesting, you know. After finishing my graduation, so I wanted to have a job, you know, what to do now. So I came to Delhi where my brother, elder brother used to live, so I was, you know, with him. And then... so, I got a job in the Army to teach, because geography and economics were my special subjects in my graduation. So, I started teaching geography, map-reading and things like that, to the... in the Army for two-and-a-half years, so I was teaching. Then one of my officers said 'Look, you know, you are graduate. There is not much promotion in the Education Corps of the Indian Army, so you'd better go out and get your teaching degree and then you can be better off in your life. You can be a teacher in schools.' So, this is what I did. So, I came out from the Army and I went for my teacher's degree. So, I got my teacher's degree and I came back to Delhi and start teaching there. So, I taught for about six years in one public school, and after that then I came to a better job in another public school, so I got a job there as Head of the Geography Department. So, while I was teaching there for six years, now I was teaching in another school, a public school with a boarding-house and I was the house-master; I had a house over there on the campus itself.

So, one of the parent came one day and he said, 'Oh, you teach geography to my children. Have you been to abroad somewhere, to...?' I said, 'No, never. Never even thought about going abroad. I am one of the senior masters in my school over here. I am a house-master, you know, I have got my house, my wife – by that time, you know, I was also married – and my wife.' And he said, 'No, no, you should go abroad, see the world, you know.' I said, 'Oho, I never thought about it.' He said, 'Go to the British Embassy. They need teachers.' So, British Embassy was near about my school so I went there, got the form, fill it up. And he said, 'Give to me, you know, and the rest of the form I will do.' So, then I sent that form to the Department of Education and Science, because they were the people who will recognise my degrees and all that. So, my application came over here to London Education Department. They checked that my degrees – by that time I had done also my MA Master's degree in Geography. And it's also interesting – I did my Master's degree from a Muslim university. It's near Delhi, about 150 miles or so. It's called Aligarh Muslim University. It's a very interesting experience it was, so...[laughs]. And my childhood was revived, that I used to go with my Muslim, you know, friends in my schools and now I'm doing my Master's degree from a Muslim university. So, I was teaching there, and after six months... And they checked up my... you know, the Department of Education and Science, so they checked up all my three degrees: BA from Punjab; B.Ed I did from Rajasthan, one of the provinces, Aligarh University I did my MA, then teaching over there, 14, 15 years in Delhi. So, the Department of Education and Science, they checked up all my degrees that it is genuine degrees that, you know, he is a qualified person with teaching experience in a public school. And they sent me the voucher: Teacher's Employment Voucher, so I came, with my wife, on Teacher's Voucher.

But I had to apply, when I come over here, for a job. So, I was in London, so I applied to the London Education Authority. They selected me immediately, that, 'Yes, you are qualified teacher, you know, for us, and we will allot you a school.' I came in July 1966 and I wanted a grammar school, because I was teaching in a public school in Delhi, so my headmaster also advised me that, 'When you go there, it is better for you to teach in a grammar school.' So, and I started throwing my application. I got an interview from Leicester. It was at Leicester Grammar School, and I came for interview, and they selected. But it was very interesting experience again, you know. I never knew when I wrote my application and sent it, because it was written only 'Evington Hall Grammar



SID-0006X0001MO

School', but it turned to be a Roman Catholic Grammar school. Great experience. So, when I came and the nun is standing in front of me and she said, 'You are most welcome, Mr Sandhu. It is a grammar school run by the Roman Catholic order. But the board, the interview board, is waiting for you. You please come, and come inside.' So, when I went to the board, and they asked me a few questions, and they said, 'You are the right person for us. We are looking for a Head of the Geography Department, and you are the right person for us, and we give you a job. And so, any question?' I said, 'It's only my... I never knew when I, you know, applied for the job, that it's a Roman Catholic school. Your faith is different from my faith, so will I be allowed to keep my faith as it is, and my identity, everything?' They said, 'Yes, no problem. Because your faith is your faith and our faith is our faith, but we don't interfere. We don't compel anyone to worship, you know. You being a teacher, naturally, you will be with your class when we have Mass, so the children are coming... you just sit with them. We won't ask you to pray or do anything or any compulsion.' You will not believe, I taught in that very school, and this is what co-existence... for the first time I experienced in my life that religions as I used to grow up in my childhood with the Muslims, with the Hindus and with the other faiths, no problem at all, and now I see I can also see with other faiths and teaching over here. And so... and I... 26 years, they won't let me go. The parents were so nice, the boys and the girls of the school; very disciplined, you know. And the parents were wonderful, and so...

And I... And not only that, but also they encouraged... because there was a lot of demand then, outside in the society, at that time, those '70s, '80s and all that, that they wanted to know – the society wanted to know – they didn't know much, because there were not many people who had come; not many people who were also educated, who could deliver about their faith, who could explain to them, who are you? From where are you coming? What is your faith, or what is your food? Why you are wearing a turban, or what sort of things you are having of your faith? – all of that. It was a wonderful experience, and this is how my school used to let me go outside, if the people wanted me, to different schools, colleges, universities, if they want to invite me. And the same way was Director of Education, that was so nice and so kind, that they saw in me that here is a person who can deliver the goods, who can bring better understanding between different people different people different faiths and different communities and said, 'Yes, let him go.' So they used to encourage me. They used to release me to go to the other places.

And not only that, but also, for the first time I experienced, you know, when I started in the very initial sort of stages of my teaching geography, they won't let me teach geography. Rather, the schools wanted me... every class I used to have... the period in the very beginning, they would ask me, 'Who are you? What is your name? Why you are wearing the turban? What is your faith, actually? What do you believe in?' And also, 'How many languages you can speak?' So, when I told them that I can speak four, five languages, they were wonderstruck, because they were speaking only English or, at the most, they were offering one or two other languages like Italian, like German, like Polish, as option of their... And when they saw... and I told them that Indian child is learning three languages right from the very beginning, in the same way I learnt. I learnt Punjabi, I learnt Hindi, I learnt Urdu in my school, and this is how three or four languages I can speak, and I can... And they were encouraged to start learning different languages also. So it was like ambassador for me. It's not only teaching geography in my school or outside in society, but it was also religion – the faith. And then I saw the value of having your own faith. The people respect you. The people have got really great value for you



SID-0006X0001MO

that, yes, if you are sticking to your faith. And because all these faiths, they teach love, affection, tolerance, peace and everything, all these religions, then the people do find there are a lot of common things between us. So, this is what I said. So, the Roman Catholics and myself, so 26 years we lived together very amicably and respectfully, and I got all sorts of honours later on of this very thing.

So, it sounds as though when you first arrived in England that the reception was one of interest and lots of questions.

But, at the same time, I also saw, when I, you know, came, my wife and myself, we came, there were a lot of prejudice. There were a lot of prejudice; there were a lot of discrimination also, but what I found – this is why it became interesting later on and this is how I became, like, an ambassador of my faith and culture and things like that, because they valued those sorts of thing. But in the beginning, then I found it's all ignorance because they have never seen an Indian living next door to them. They had never experienced an Indian or a Sikh working with them and all that, and they didn't know much about their faith and, you know, who are they, their culture, their values of life, you know, all that sort of thing. So, at that time, in '70s, you know, I am saying, '70s, '80s, you know, that's when the period was, that a lot of communities were coming from Asia, Africa, Europe and all that. So, slowly and slowly, the people start living together, near about each other and all that, and then they started asking questions and all sorts of things, and trying to know about each other. So, those very prejudices, and this is why I noticed that in those times, at that time, it was not easy. I was very lucky to get this sort of job. Other people used to tell me that there are a lot of prejudice, a lot of discrimination. They were not... people were not getting their jobs easily because of their different identity or different culture, different religions or something like this. But, as I said, slowly and slowly, with the work I was doing... And it was not only me, people like me, wherever they were working, you know, they were talking to each other and all that. Slowly and slowly, that ignorance started going away, the same way this prejudice also started breaking down, and slowly and slowly. I remember, you know, one incident for example, if I relate to you, that my wife and myself, after settling about two years or so, by that time we were start getting salary. My wife started working in a school; I was working; I started getting salary and money. And then we were told that you can get mortgage and you can have your own house. By that time we were living for two years in rented accommodation, and then we started looking for a house. So, when we used to go round our neighbourhood, and we used to ask of someone that can we have a house, they used to tell me, 'Your food smell garlic so, sorry, we can't, you know, because you smell and my neighbour don't like it,' and all that that sort of thing at that time. Or they used to tell us, 'Sorry, I can't sell the house to the Asian or to the coloured people, because my neighbours will object and the value of my house will go down.'

And you can now see, after a few years, those barriers, they broke down and those very people who were saying that, 'Your food smell garlic,' and all that, they started going to the Indian restaurants [laughs] and they started eating that very food. And they used to say, 'Oh, this chicken curry, you know, is very good, very lovely,' you know. Even in my staff, people used to go, 'You tell me which restaurant, Indian restaurant I should go. I love, you know, Indian food.' So, very good.' So, those very break... you know, this is what I notice. Another experience of mine was that when the people come together near about each other, all those prejudices and all sorts of things, they slowly and slowly break down. It's the dialogue. It is the dialogue; it's the mixing of the people, getting together,



SID-0006X0001MO

which does help, you know, to , you know, smash these barriers, the walls in between, of ignorance, prejudice and all sorts of things.

Can you describe some of your feelings at that time when you arrived in a new country and were aware of some of these prejudices?

You know, you say, as you asked me, it is very interesting. It came like a shock to me, because I never expected... when we came in London, though in London we lived only about a month or so, we didn't experience anything. But when we came to Leicester, and when... outside, though – as far as my job is concerned... When I used to meet other people and they used to... they were working, for example – very educated people – they used to work in the transport, for example – buses and all that, and they were working in the post office; they were working in the factories and all that. And they used to tell me... they were clean-shaven, right? They got rid of their hair and all that, you know, which were sacred to the Sikh, you know, and this was their identity . And they used to tell me that they had to get rid of all these identity things and all that because they had to get the job. So, that was shocking to me. I could not believe it, really, at that time. And I used to talk to my wife, and my wife used to talk to me, and my wife used to tell me, 'Why the hell we have come over here, in this sort of a society, where the society...' Because, in India, we never felt that sort of thing, but in India there were different community like the Muslims, like the Hindu and the Sikhs and so many other community, so many other small religious groups. But I had never noticed this sort of very naked prejudice and discrimination.

So, when we... this was like a shock to me, and I think this is why, the reason that I was dragged into that sort of area. Because there were people in the British society also who were already working about this, and they were encouraging me. They were taking me along – British people – and they were saying, 'Yes, come along, you know, we are already engaged with this sort of thing. We want to break these barriers of prejudice and discrimination and all that, and if we are together then we can go to these meetings, conferences and things like that, and then you can talk.' And this is how ,as you said very rightly ,it came like a shock. And there was a time, perhaps, you know, in our thinking ,that we were saying, 'No, no, we should go back.' And my wife used to talk to me. I said, 'Look, let's see. Let's see. Live over here for some time; let's see how... But, if the things don't improve...' Though, as I said, in my work or in my work together, you know, we were not experiencing that sort of thing. But, from time to time, like I have given you the example of the house and all that sort of thing, but after that, then it became like a challenge to me. That, look, you know, if I go away, if I run away from this because people have got prejudices and discrimination in this society, then who is going to do better, make them better? I am educated person, I am a teacher also, right? So, it is my duty. And it came from, I think, somewhere outside to my mind that, look, along with teaching geography, along with your job as a teacher, right, also there is another job for you, right? You should, you know, do this also.

And this is how I became so much involved in this sort of work, locally as well as nationally, because the Department of Education and Science took me on different sorts of committees. For example, I give you example. The Education Department, of Education and Science, they set up a Committee under Lord Swann, and Mrs Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister at that time. So, the people throughout the country, they made a presentation to the Prime Minister that our children, the African children, Asian children, ethnic minority children, they are not doing so well in our schools. What is



SID-0006X0001MO

happening? She set up the Committee under Lord Swann and someone recommended my name from Leicester. So, then I went on this Committee and we were required to go to the schools, different sorts of schools up and down the country. So, we visited schools – a lot of schools – in the whole country, and we went to see... And they asked me, the Committee asked me, 'Right, your references that you look in teaching geography. Also along with this, also you look into teaching of religions in the schools, right? Along with this also you also look into teaching of languages, right?' So, it was a great experience, and then this is what (00:37:00) yeah, it's a great, you know, job for me to work on this sort of Committee nationally and bring it all these things. And this is how the work expanded beyond my school, beyond my school boundary, then beyond teaching geography, and I became involved nationally as well as locally. And this is how the teaching of religions came into being in the whole of England, and I became involved in a lot of... later on also, along with this.

And is there a particular memory you have of a time when you just really felt that a difference had been made through this work? Is there something that stands out?

Yeah, interesting. It's good that you ask me this question. I remember that we were visiting... We used to be a team, so were asked to go to Bradford – Bradford in Yorkshire, in the north. So, the headmaster was told that we, the team, are coming and we are visiting, and they want to see in these different sorts of areas. So, when we went there and, personally, as I told you, that I had this brief to look into these three areas. So, when I met... these were sixth-formers – girls. These was girls, sixth-formers, whom I met, about 30, 40 girls. So, I was sitting with them and I was asking them questions. I said, 'Along with this, right, religion is not yet taught.' They were saying that it's a very elementary sort of thing. They do mention it's mainly Christian worship, you know. 'We are having Christian assembly, we are having... but it's only reference is given Islam or Hindu religion or Sikhism. Not in detail, or something, we don't study.' And I said, 'How about the languages?' And it was amazing; it was very pleasant experience for me myself. All these girls, they told me they were learning Urdu. It was great experience, and I was so happy and so thrilled about it. Look, that very (00:39:14) as you mentioned to me, that I was delighted that, look, you know, it is working. These very girls, that they were all 100% English girls, but because the opportunity was given to them, because the society round about them in Bradford, there are more Muslims over here, and they thought that, why not? Because when they are talking to their neighbour, they can't. They can't talk to each other because the Muslim languages are Urdu, while... especially the uneducated people. And these girls, they thought it's very good to learn Urdu, their language, so that they can communicate with each other. And they were telling me they were very happy. They like this language. Well, it's a beautiful language, Urdu, and they are learning it. So that was great experience.

And are there any particular challenges that you can remember that you had to overcome to carry on this work?

Yes. The challenges were, for example, like language itself, for example. When we visited London, for example, or even the Midlands or something, we found that there are so many languages. It's not just a few languages, or one or two or four or five main languages.



SID-0006X0001MO

Even locally, I remember that my education authority organised a conference, a linguistic conference, it was, and there was a group coming from Wales, because in Wales by that time they had already introduced, in a school, Welsh language. And there were a lot of protagonists of this language that said, you know, 'In Wales we are very proud. We have got very rich culture and Welsh language should be taught in the schools.' So, they were, you know, naturally, pushing this at this conference. And my Director of Education, because we were also talking to our Director of Education teaching of different languages and different religions in our schools, so my Director knew about it and he said, 'Oh, Mr Sandhu, you will be one of the delegates from Leicester, and you talk about there that you are asking us, Education Authority Leicestershire, to teach Punjabi, for example.' And along with me there were other people, like Hindu, for example; they were saying that Hindi should be taught. There were Muslim people who were from my, you know, city who were saying that Urdu should be taught, you know, things like that. So we were, you know, different people. When we went there, in this conference, and we heard this delegate from Wales who were saying that Welsh language should be taught, then we saw, yes, you know, there are people... Welsh people are asking the same thing which we are asking.

And, after the conference, my Director of Education talked to the Headmaster in the County Education Authority, and there were 50% Headmasters who were saying, 'Yes, it's okay. We can, you know, we are... in principle, we accept that these languages are other... Because these children are born, brought up over here, they have got the same right as other people, so their languages should be taught; their religions should be taught. In principle, we accept it, but practically we are not sure whether it's possible or not.' 50% of the headmasters said, 'No. It's not possible. It's not.' And the same thing as I said, we experienced in other cities and towns, and that is not only a few languages. There are so many languages. Even in London, for example, we found that in one class there were about 60, 70 languages and dialects the children speak, because they were from Europe, they were Africa, yeah, you name anything. And then the Headmaster was telling us, because my Director asked me, 'Okay, now, I'm going to call the conference of the Headmaster in my whole Authority. You will come and talk to them, argue with them that you want to teach... you want to have your languages, right? Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi and all that. So, when I went there. they told me, 'Mr Sandhu, you tell me from where are you going to provide...? There are so many languages. People are... even Pakistan, for example, there were... In Pakistan, national language is Urdu, but the people in Leicester, or in any other area, there are Punjabis. For example, Luton. We went to Luton and there were Mirpuris, Kashmiri people, and they were saying, 'Our Kashmiri should be taught. Mirpuri language should be taught and not Urdu or Punjabi or anything.' So, you can imagine differently. So, these people, Headmasters and other people, and this was a challenge; this was a difficulty that, look, from where are you going to have these teachers of so many languages? And then in one class there can be so many children of different languages – how are you going to arrange the lessons, you know, things like that, and administration and all that.

So, this is why, as I said, Lord Swann's Committee had this recommendation that it's not possible; it's not practicable to teach languages.... 'Yes, religions, we accept. All these different world religions should be taught in our schools but, as far as language is concerned, it's not easy, so we leave it to the Headmasters. Let the parents... can make representation to the Headmaster for teaching their child or children the language which they want to be taught. And then, if it is feasible, if it is possible to arrange a teacher for that and the lesson within the syllabus and within the school timing, then perhaps the



SID-0006X0001MO

school might make some administration, make some arrangement. Otherwise, it's not possible and we can't make it compulsory duty.' So, these were the challenges.

And can you tell us a little bit more about Lord Swann's report and maybe some of the changes that came about after it?

Yes, it's very interesting. I will show you. I have got the report over here with me. And so, the main thing was, as I said, you know, we worked about three, four years – 1982 to '85 – so, three years we were working, all this Committee, up and down the country visiting and making their observation Committee. And there were different sorts of people from the universities, from the schools, the colleges, from the common people, different organisations – very powerful Committee, it was. And so, Lord Swann's Committee Report was submitted to the Parliament by Margaret – Mrs Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister at that time, so, as I said.

So, the main recommendation of this Committee on religious education and religious assemblies, that was accepted. The main... for example, on religion, was that as far as this is a Christian country, as far as school assembly is concerned, school worship is concerned, that should be Christian worship. As far as assembly is concerned, it can be, you know, Christian, along with, you know, day-to-day issues or whatever it is, the school decide it themselves. But if... the parents, they were given the right... if the parents don't want to attend assembly, for example, they feel that it's too religious or Christian or something, they want to withdraw, they can withdraw. So, parents were given the option to withdraw from the assembly if they think, you know, it's not their... acceptable to them and things like that. And the school was given the option to... as far as the assembly was concerned, how they are going to conduct it, but at least it was given, at least once, the school should get together – the whole school should get together – once, at least, a week or so. Then there can be small assemblies of the class and anything like that also. That was also one of the recommendations in this.

But the main recommendation about teaching of religions was that all the world religions – Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism – they should be taught. They should be provided in the school, regular school curriculum. Along with this also they recommended that there should be Advisory Council so that... which will be having teachers, which will be having educationalists, which will also have the people from, like the parents or anything of that. So it will be Advisory Committee who will supervise teaching of religion in the schools, that it's going accordingly. And every five years there should be a syllabus, and it should be revised. So, I have been connected with all that, you know, in my education authority. And it's also interesting, some time back, then we realised that there should be guidance, because all these children, now they are learning different religions, you know, and all that but, as far as the teachers were concerned, it's not essential that the teacher should be from the religion. The teacher should be as teacher who are trained as a religious education teacher, so they can be the teacher who can teach religions of different faiths in the school.

So, this recommendation to teach the world religions, did that mark a big change from what had happened before 1989?

That was, yeah, the 1944 Act, if you remember. So, 1944 Act was before that, and there was nothing, you know, about that sort of thing, so it brought a very big change. Another thing interested happened. As I was connected with Lord Swann's Committee,



SID-0006X0001MO

then later on teaching of religion in the school in my own Education Authority, so I was connected with that on Advisory Council. I have been working on teaching of religions in my area and we were seeing the different demands, the different things. Now the religion was taught in the schools and, naturally, they wanted to know... the teachers want to bring them, or the... you know, to the religious places. So, the visit to the religious places started. It was very interesting experience for the community, because they never, you know, had this experience, that the schoolchildren are coming to visit their place of worship. Now, when they are coming, what are those guidelines for them? What rules and regulations they should be accepted? For example, if they are visiting the Sikh gurdwara, then they have to take off their shoes, they have to cover their head and they should be respectful to the Holy Book and things like that. The same thing was happening, for example, in the mosque; the same thing was happening in the mandir and things like that. And they were looking at these... and not only place of worship, how they... For example, when they are going to the synagogue or the church, here are the seats for them to sit down – the benches and all that. But when they go to a mosque or the mandir or the gurdwara, they have to sit on the floor, and sit on floor cross-legged and things like that. And, as I said before, they have to take off their shoes, they have to cover their head and things like that. And in the Sikh gurdwara, for example, they might be provided with the langar, you know, the free food, you know, things like that. So, different things.

So, this is how, then, in my Education Authority, we produced the guideline for the places of worship, that when they are going to the gurdwara, what are the things which they should keep in mind before that, and previous preparation. The same with mosque, the same with mandir, you know. So, the authority produced guidelines for that – places of worship, you know. Along with this also, then we saw that it's not only, you know, going to the places of worship and all that, it was also the community. When the community is giving... showing them round. what are those things? So, it was also education for the community and organisation, how they are going to organise themselves when the schoolchildren are coming – 50, 60 or 100 sometimes, they are coming in one group because the school has to have the resources, get a coach and all that sort of thing. So, how they are all going to organise? So, it's not only one-way traffic. It was two-way traffic, from school learning about the places of worship, and the worship places, they were learning about the school – about the children are coming, how they are going to conduct them, what they are going to show them, what they are going to speak to them, explain to them, and explain to them to their level of the school. And these people who were running these temples, the gurdwara, the mosque and all that, they were not trained people. They were ordinary people from the community, so they had to learn a lot, you know, to organise themselves and things like that. This was interesting.

The other interesting thing, which I will show you the... you know, we produced in Leicester, this was the guideline that when the children are learning about these religions and all that, then there are different sorts of things which the school also should be careful about. For example, Muslim children... because we did learn when we were going round the country and all that, visiting the schools, that when we, for example, visited Bradford, we came to know... because there were a lot of Muslim children, Muslim girls, they were told, 'Okay, you go for swimming, you go for PT, you know, physical education, things like that. Now, they are wearing scarf or they are wearing the salwar kameez, you know, the tights, over here. By religion they are not required to take off, you know, the scarf, or they are not allowed to take off their dress and put a swimming garment and all that. And so, now then we felt, yes, now the Muslim community was saying, 'No, I'm



SID-0006X0001MO

never going to... I'm going to withdraw my child. My child is not going for swimming and PE all that sort of thing' – Muslim children. The same was happening with the Sikh children, for example. The Sikh children, they are having, you know, the hair, okay? Now, if they are required to go for swimming and their hair become wet and all that, who is going to now naturally time to, you know dry their hair and things like that, or, you know... Or, sometimes, there also be found that there are children who... like, the kara, for example – the bracelet, when they are going for PE, and the PE teacher is saying, 'Look, it's very dangerous, right? You are doing some exercises and all that, so take off.' And the Sikh child say, 'No. My Mum and my Dad told me I'm not going to take it off,' or something like that, okay? The same, as I said, like swimming, you know, the hair become wet and all that, what are they going to do? Or over and above that also so we... later on we found that this is also happening, that if the child has become baptised with the five Ks and he is also wearing a small, little kirpan over here, in the school there is now a code of conduct in the rules that even a Scout knife is not allowed – no weapon in the school. While a baptised a Sikh boy or a girl, they are wearing this kirpan, they were not allowed. They were saying, 'No, no; you go away from school, and you can't be in the school,' and things like that. So, this is how we felt that there should be guidelines – what the school is going to do with these sorts of things. Should the school accept or not, within limits and all sorts of things? Are the schools going to make the rules, regulations, adjustable to these sorts of things?

So, we produced – the Christian, Muslims, the Hindus and the Sikhs, all these religious groups on the school religious teaching Advisory Council – so, we all produced these guidelines for the schools. I will show you we have got in Leicester. So, that was very helpful. Very, very good. Now the schools felt very comfortable that, yes, these are the guidelines produced by the community themselves, and here we are now trying to adjust with the community and things like that. Very interesting, it was.

And if you were to be taking part in a similar report today, what would some of recommendations you would make with regards to trying to promote religious and cultural understanding amongst young people?

Yeah, surely, like this. This is what I was feeling when I moved here in Paisley, that I want to find out what is happening in our schools. I have got my grandchildren and I asked them, you know, 'Are you learning about different religions and all that?' And they told me, 'Yes.' They are learning, you know, about other religions and all that, but I want to know more about it. So, what is happening to these...? Are they going to visit these religious places and, if they are going to visit... visiting the religious places, do they have any guidelines? Both, you know... As far as the religious places are concerned, do they know what are the requirements of these children when they are coming, what sort of things they would like to know? And, naturally, are they capable people in those places, religious places, to deliver the goods to them? Because I remember, you know, when we were in Leicester, you know, then we were, you know, trained, actually, by Education Department. Our Education Department took us around and showed us how you are... Because I was one of them also. After my retirement I... you know, I was told by my gurdwara and all that, that 'Can you please help us? You have been in education, and now we get a lot of children coming to the gurdwara. Can you please take them round, show them round and all that.' And this is how the Education Department also talk to us, that 'Do you know what sort of thing you should be telling us, you know, because we are teaching these sorts of things. Stories about the religious people, religious leaders, holy books and other things, you know, and... so how are you doing it?' So, I remember, you



SID-0006X0001MO

know, we went to one of the churches and they showed us how they are going to show them round by explaining a story about Christ. So, they showed us that if you deliver... Because these children... and they are different-minded also, that the children who are coming to visit the schools, they are of different age-groups. They are from primary school, they may be secondary school, they might be grammar school, public school, you never know. So, you have to cater according to their age-groups. What are you going to explain? If you start talking very special things or intellectual things to the children who are four, five years old, they are not going to understand. They are interested in some sort of stories. For example, in the gurdwara, if I am telling them some stories about Guru Nanak or Guru Gobind Singh or something, they are interested to know. And with the, naturally, help of some Urdu rituals, things, so that, you know, I'm not talking the air or something – you know, the children become fed up very quickly, you know. So, there are different needs of this. So, this is why I will advise that there should be guidelines, you know, for the community, that when the children are coming to your place, how you are going to conduct the visit. And what sorts of things are important, they are not important, or how much of stress you are going to give to particular things and all that – how you are going to deliver, you know, things like that.

Now, the same thing is also true about the school – that when the school is teaching these religions, what are those most important things that they should bear in mind? Because, when I show you those documents, you will see it is a lot of things which we can't even think about sometimes, from the point of... For example, you know, once I had a group where they were visiting the gurdwara, and I was told by the gurdwara, 'Can you please take them round and show them round.' So... and the children told me that they are Muslim children, and their parents told them that, 'Okay, when you go to the gurdwara, they will give you some sweet. Don't take it, because it's not halal, right?' Now, this was like guidance for me also that, yes, you have to be careful, and I told my management committee of the gurdwara: 'Careful. Don't force any child to give this parshad, you know.' The parshad is given in the gurdwara. So you can't force. One of the English parent, I remember, because the gurdwara out of their enthusiasm or whatever gave this sweet to every child, and this child became sick. When she went home and she told her Mum that, 'Look, I went to gurdwara and I had this sweet thing they gave me, and I became sick.' She complained to the education authority that, 'My child, my child should be told and my child... and these temples, or whatever it is, they have to be careful. I don't... they should not force my child to have this sort of thing.' Or even the food, for example. You can't compel... you can't give everything. You never know how the children... And even allergic, for example. The children... some children are allergic to... And some of the... those guidelines, when they gave to the teachers, and they made sure they ask beforehand, that they tell us who is allergic. And when they were visiting the gurdwara they told us that, 'These are the children, they are allergic to this sort of food. They are not going to... Don't mind it. Don't, you know, feel...' So, these are the sort of things.

So, I think these are very, very useful, that the authorities over here in Glasgow and Paisley and other people and the schools, we should get together and we should produce these sorts of guidelines; all sorts of guidelines for places of worship, when you are with places of worship, what you are going to do – the same guidelines for the teachers also in the schools, when the children are over here. You are teaching religions – what sorts are there for the Muslim child, for the Hindu child, for the Christian child, for the Sikh child? What are those sorts of things you should keep it in mind? You know, they can be very sensitive. They can be very [laughs].



SID-0006X0001MO

So, it sounds as though you think it's very important that young people interact with the places of worship.

Yeah.

Could you tell us a bit about the role that these places of worship have played in your own life, both in England and in Scotland?

Pardon?

The places of worship. What role have they played in your life?

Oh, yeah. I think it's a very important.. which I found it is a complementary... It's complementary to all the teaching they are doing in the school. The teacher is teaching about different aspects of religion, right? And in every religion, for example, the religious personality itself, whether it's Mohammed, whether it's Jesus Christ or whether it's Buddha, whether it's Rama and Krishna, whether it's Guru Nanak and other gurus and all that. Along with them, so there are also the holy scriptures, so that is also very, very important. Along with this also, all the teachings, with the stories. Every religion has got the stories, and they are also very, very important. So, what I found it, that unless those children who are learning in the school, academically and all that, unless they have seen – because this is what they are reflecting – this is what they were telling me. 'Yes, Mr Sandhu, we learnt about it.' Because when I was showing them the Holy Book, for example... Now, the teacher told them that there is a Holy Book of the Sikhs, for example. It's... you know. But when they came to the gurdwara, physically they saw for the first time in their own life and experience, that... When they went to the church or when they went to the mosque, then it was put on a table or somewhere, Bible or the Koran. But when they came to the gurdwara they saw it's a platform with a canopy and all sorts of things, and under that beautiful pieces of cloth... They couldn't see when they entered the hall, but when this beautiful pieces of cloth were taken over and they were shown the Holy Book, that it is a very big volume – 1,430 pages – and what language is it written...

Now, this was a great experience for them. They can't read this one. Now, they found out that, yes, it's a different language. It's written, you know, differently and also it's a big volume. And then, it's not only that, but look at the worship they are doing. And they are asking me questions, for example, you know, behind the so-called whisker sort of thing. Every group coming, and they were asking, 'What is this?' Then, naturally, I had to explain, what is this, right? And that it is like royalty because, in the olden times, you know, there was a king sitting on the throne. And this is what they were asking, that 'Why you are putting it on a platform? Why you are putting it in a canopy? Why you are putting it under the clothes?' and all that. Not only that, but also they are experiencing – and they are experiencing over here, also – and that is, at night this Holy Book is closed. Taking it to the bed, right? I visited this Pollokshields gurdwara and I saw, you know, a lot of children – they were coming on one day, so I was also there – experience this, how the Scottish children are coming. And one of the children, you know, who were explaining – they were like the guides – and they were explaining this bed, the bed, to the group of children who were visiting. And they were telling them that the Holy Book is brought over here. And one of the child said, 'So, why you are putting the bed? Why don't you put a little table or something there and you can put...?' He said, 'No.' I also



SID-0006X0001MO

help them and the children. I said, 'Look, because the (01:07:55) is not only Holy Book. It's not a book. For us, it's a living guru. For us, it's a living guru. So, as I go to bed at night and I want to sleep, I want to have a quilt and all that. So, the same way, I feel that my guru also, right, because he's a living guru for me, and that's the difference.

So, this is great experience for these children when they come and they experience, actually, over there. So, that's the difference between the... So, that part, I think, is very, very important for all these children to visit these holy places, the worship places. And then also the people who are delivering the goods, that they are the right sort of people who are explaining to them and they are capable to explain to them. Very, very important. So, both parts are very, very important. Teaching of religion in the schools by the teachers themselves and, with that sort of knowledge, they come to the gurdwara and actually they experience what is it that they are worshipping, what they are not, what they are going through and all that. Like langar, for example, is a great experience. It's a service. And they're amazed. Some... 'Is it all free food?' You know, because people were asking, 'Can I pay something?' I said, 'No, no, you can't pay.' 'Then, from where this money is coming?' I said, 'This money you put, you know, in the front there is a box when you go. No-one is asking you to pay any money or anything. You put whatever you want to put. It's a donation.' So, out of those donations is running this free meal in the gurdwara. And those people who prepare the food, they're also volunteers. So, this is, you know, very inspiring for the children when they go to these places of worship, and they experience themselves what is happening – how these things are working.

And the langar, the food, that's a very important part of the Sikh...?

Very important, because it brings the... when they are working, they are preparing food, for example. First of all, the things that they are bringing in, the families, they are themselves saying, 'Okay,' taking on themselves, that 'We are bringing all the stuff.' Vegetables and other things, you know, and all the stuff, you know, they want to, free of charge. They are bringing it. So, also, then they are preparing it. So, it brings this, you know, experience of service – helping other people, though it was originally it was for the poor people, actually. Guru Nanak started with the poor people. That poor people, who are needy people, you know, they should be helped, and this langar is actually for them. But now, naturally, it has changed a lot in the temples and now people, you know, any people... they go on Sunday, they think, 'Okay, let's go to gurdwara and have langar over there,' you know, free meal and things like that. But the concept still is the same: service, sharing. And then sharing is another thing, you know, which is very, very important. Sharing with other people. Is the same in Christianity, same in Islam, same in Hinduism, same in Sikh religion.

So, this is another thing which... their experience, when the children, they go to these religious places, this is another thing which they find out. What are the differences, different ways of doing the things, but also there are so many things which are common, which are very, very common. And this is how they bring, as we started in the very beginning talking about, you know, these sorts of things, that those very things, to make it better person, as a citizen. Person with the tolerance, person with the... co-existing with the other people. That, yes, this person has got his faith or, you know, her faith; I've got my faith. But we have so many things which are common, so we can live together. We don't have to fight; we don't have to hit each other or, you know, have hatred against each other. We can live together. And this is how the people, you know, with these sorts of experience, when they go to worship places and all that, they are



SID-0006X0001MO

bringing actually people together, bringing them nearer to each other instead of keeping them away. Because, as I said, right in the beginning, the ignorance which I found and which was shocking to me and my wife, and that ignorance breaks down. And that ignorance is the most troublesome thing, because you then start gossiping people, and people are starting having prejudices and all that. And this is what I experienced in my life, that this is the prejudice. If we are ignorant about each other then, naturally, all sorts of things happen and then they can flare up, as it happened in the case of Pakistan and India, in riots and killing and all sorts of things. It was all ignorance; it was all a flare-up, and all the prejudices against each other are ignorance. And this can make the society better. This is what I live for. I want to live for the rest of my life, that if I can help my society, wherever I am, whichever society I'm moving, where I can contribute to help people, each other, as we're having now dialogue, you know, with each other. And I attended these meetings, conferences and all that to be nearer to each other, to understand each other. If we understand each other, then we can live amicably with each other.

It sounds as though the gurdwara is a very open and welcoming place even if there's no...

That's another interesting thing, that the gudwara I can speak of – naturally, because it's my faith and I belong to that faith – that it is open. It is open for everyone irrespective of religion, caste, creed, colour, anything at all. Anyone can go anytime one likes – doesn't have to have an invitation or anything. Then there is no bar also on anyone, right? You can go, you know, prepare food over there if you want to volunteer yourself, that you want to, or you can sit down there in the service or anything, you know, you like, as long as you want to sit down. Again, there is no compulsion or something, and there are no particular rituals or particular restrictions on something, except very general sort of thing, as I said. It's just out of respect that you take off your shoes, you cover your head, cover your head, only respecting the Holy Book, that we respect the Holy Book, that covering... when you are going. Because Guru Granth is like knowledge; understanding, so I want to know about what it is and it's a guideline. It's a guide. My guru is providing me guideline that how I should live my life. And it's not only my life, but with the other community. In this world, the creator had created this world, right, with different sorts of colours and shades and lives and religions, the human... The religion we created, isn't it? God has created us only human being. It's another interesting thing.

When we were on this so-called... SACRE, it's called, you know, Standing Advisory Council for Teaching of Religion in the Schools. And so, we had also, because, some time back, a few years back, you know, when... after every five years, so the new syllabuses are revised for every authority... you should revise your, you know... a lot of representation was from humanists. Because now we also found, locally in our own authority, and I am finding out now over here in Scotland also, there is growing number of the people who are saying that, 'Look, I don't belong to these so-called organised faiths, organised religions. I don't have any faith. I don't belong to any faith. I just believe in humanity.' Things like that. So, this humanism or humanity, you know, things like that, that's growing up in Scotland as in England. In English schools also we found the same because we used to have the figures every year from the school: how many there are Sikhs, how many, you know, Sikh children, how many Muslim children, how many Christian children, you know. So we used to see that in some of the schools there are more children now who are saying, 'I don't have any faith.' And this is how these humanist people, they approach the central government. So, I attended one conference



SID-0006X0001MO

with the Minister of Education in the centre; he was launching this Report. And in the Report it was written, along with the teaching of all the other religions, you should also take care of the people who don't belong to any religion, any faith. So, you must respect. So, in that context, on our Advisory Council in Leicester, we also had a humanist. He used to put his viewpoint that, why... all these children who don't... who are saying... they have got the equal right, as the other children of belonging to different religion. They have got the right to learn about their religion along with the other religion, the same with these humanist children. They had the same right that other children should also learn about, what is this humanism? What is this thing that they believe in? So, this is another thing also coming in, and we should be also thinking about it over here in Scotland.

And when you first arrived in Leicester, was there a gurdwara there for you to go to, or were you involved in setting that up?

Interesting thing. There was no gurdwara at that time when I came, in 1966 I came. There was no gurdwara at all, and then, so... And at that time it was also interesting... people were... because I came with my wife. The majority of the people I was meeting from my community, they were all single people. They were married back at home, but their families were back at home, not here. And they asked me this very blunt question: 'Why... your wife is with you?' I said, 'Yes. We have just come over here. We wanted to come to this country, different country.' And they said, 'But, lo, we are going back after ten years or so. We have come over here to earn money and, when we have enough pounds, we want to go back. Our families are back at home. This is why we we haven't brought our families, and we don't want to bring our families.' So, the majority of the people at that time, they were living in rented accommodation. Very few had any houses or something like this. I was also living for the first two years in rented accommodation. But, as I said, they asked me, 'Why are you abroad?' I said, 'We have come over here because, you know, some people suggested to us to come, experience this thing over here and, if we don't like it, we will go back.' They said, 'But we have come to earn money only.' I said, 'But I haven't come for money. I haven't come for money, right? I had my very good job over there in boarding-house, was house-master, senior master, good salary and everything in New Delhi, so just an adventure.' And they said, 'Okay, we are not going to have...' But, after a while, then the people starting... Because, back at home, all those families they were telling them... The majority of the people, they had not yet gone back. Some of the people, they used to write. Or, once or twice, perhaps, some people might have gone. They were telling, 'Oh, it's a beautiful land. It's very good land over there.' And you get more money than, you know, they could expect back at home. So, this is how their families started telling them that, 'If you are telling us that your life is better than over here, you are getting more money over there and all that, why can't we go over there? Why can't we see this land? You're talking land of honey, you're talking about. Why can't we?' This is how they started pressing, those families. 'Call us there. We want to come over here,' and all that.

And this is how one of the communities in Leicester, the Sikh community – they were from the same sort of villages back at home – they got together, they pooled their money together and they bought one building. Old... it was a Roman Catholic School, primary school. They bought this building. They were selling the building. And this is how the first gurdwara came into being in Leicester. And this is how also, they saw in me that here is a guy, right, who is keeping his identity and his religion and all that. He is also educated. He knows a little bit about his religion. He can be very useful person for us,



SID-0006X0001MO

because they also wanted to communicate now with the host community outside, because the host community naturally was, 'Ah, you' are going to have a gurdwara, your place of worship. What is it you are worshipping ?' and all that. And this is how they hooked me, right? The first gurdwara was opened over there, and then they asked me, 'Can you please come help us. It's voluntary work, okay?' So, I became the secretary of that gurdwara, the first gurdwara opened. Then there were another community who were the so-called, they were called, actually, the Indian Workers' Association, but they were not religious people. They were actually Communist people, but they wanted a platform for themselves. So, one of the families came from Singapore. They brought the Holy Book, and they used to worship in their own home or something. And this group, the Indian Workers' Association Group, they found it. 'Ha, he has got the Holy Book.' And he was also friendly to them. And they asked him, 'If you can bring this Holy Book on Sundays in a school... We will hire, you know, the hall of a school and we can get together over there. You can put the Holy Book there and you can ask the people to come and worship, and then we can also talk to them.' So, they wanted a platform to talk to the people about their ideology, about their organisation. And they were helping also the people, no doubt about it. They used to write letters and all that sort of thing ,about... for them, or they were working for them, to help them in the jobs and things like that. So, actually, they were very helpful. They were very popular people. And so – this is after a few years – so, this group now also wanted their own gurdwara. And why not to have a building that's like the other one? That people, they have opened a gurdwara. So, the second gurdwara came up. Then, the second gurdwara also asked me and the other people in the society who were well-to-do and educated that, 'Can you help us?' So, we helped them to establish this gurdwara. The second gurdwara came. Can you believe it, today, I left over there, there were nine gurdwaras now. So, like communities also, like Christianity, like Islam and other Hindu religion, so there were divisions. You know, every religion start getting the division. So, among us also, the same thing started happening. So, other people established, they settled down and all that, then they started thinking about their own division, about their own loyalty in their own faith, and this is how the different sort of gurdwara, with different denomination, different backgrounds, you know. For example, I give you one example. The third gurdwara came up, and I was astonished completely. I said, 'I can understand, the first gurdwara came up by the one community belonging to India, Punjab, over there, that they are together and they wanted one gurdwara for their place of worship.

The second gurdwara came up because of the this Indian Workers' Association ideology, and they wanted their own. But this gurdwara, third gurdwara, where is this third gurdwara?' And they told me that, 'Mr Sandhu, we are majority of us, we are from East Africa – Kenya, Uganda and those countries over there. We used to have our own culture out there. We belong to one Sikh community who are mainly carpenters, blacksmiths, workers, and we want to have our own gurdwara, separate from those two gurdwara those people are having, right? We want to have...' The third gurdwara came. Then, politically... also, there was another gurdwara. They said, 'Politically, we don't agree with you; we want to have another gurdwara.' Nine gurdwaras today. Eight or nine. Can you believe, eight or nine temples? There was one temple, Hindu temple came up, the first one, right? And then, after one, another community, another community, and it was different because they belong... they worship different gods and goddesses. So, they started having their own gods and goddesses, different temple, Hindu temple, mosques, for example, like the Shia, the Sunni and the other... well, belonging to Saudi Arabia or something like that. So, different mosques, now, has come up. Eight or nine mosque, eight or nine temple, gurdwara, you know, you name, anything.



SID-0006X0001MO

Can you remember the name of the road where the first gurdwara was?

Yeah, that's right. The first gurdwara came up was in New Walk. It was right in the city centre and, interestingly, as you said, that because I was teaching also in the Roman Catholic school, I came to know about this one. That there was, you know, the Roman Catholic church in the city centre. Next to that they had a school, a primary school, a small building, you know, up there. And this is how... Now, they wanted to have this, you know, school somewhere else outside the city, and so they wanted to sell this building on the New Walk. You know, it was very nice walk over there, on a little road, and they wanted to sell this school. And this is how the Sikhs bought, you know, the school.

And what year was that?

Secretary.

And what year did that...?

Oh, it was 1968. 1968, the first gurdwara came up. So, very interesting. So, as I said... And the community, you know... Because, when we came in 1966, there was a small community, small Hindu community, small Muslim community, small, you know, Sikh community. But slowly and slowly, naturally, these communities grew up. And, can you believe, today, in Leicester... Because, in Leicester, the majority of the community used to be Hindu community, and they're mainly from one part of India, which is called Gujarat. They are called Gujaratis. They are very well-to-do people. All over the world – they went to USA, to Canada, Europe, England. Mainly they are business community. So, they came – and Africa, for the South Africa, you know, yeah, big community. But they are mainly business community. So, they came to Leicester, because Leicester was mainly textile industry. So, they came. And back at home also, they were working in textile industry – shops and thing like that. And in Leicester, there is one street which is about two miles long street, and it is called Golden Mile by Leicester City Council. They named it. That all these shops now, they are all Asian shops, full of gold shops and, you know, these sari shops, you know, clothing, you know, things like that. They are very well-to-do, you know, the whole of this community, and very rich community also, you know, over there. So, the Hindu community was the biggest community in Leicester – Gujarati community from... And the next was Muslim community, and then third was the Sikh community. And now the Muslim community has become more than... because a lot of migration has come from Europe – Holland, Belgium – and Muslim community has migrated. And there are more now Muslim than the Hindu, but it is for the first time, Leicester city are now is more than 50% population of the Asian community in Leicester. Very interesting.

And you taught in Leicester for 26 years?

26 years. So, I taught in that very school, as I said, a Roman Catholic school, and I retired also from that school. And later on, also, when I retired after that, I wanted to keep myself engaged, so I was involved in all sorts of things. And, as I said, I also... The BBC, in 1968, they started the first local radio station in the whole country in Leicester. So, Leicester, BBC Radio Leicester, was the first local radio station. So, when they came to know about me, that I have got a job in a grammar school and I can speak English and



SID-0006X0001MO

all that, and in one of the meetings or conferences that I had, so BBC Radio Leicester was there, perhaps. And they found in me that here is a guy who might be interesting for them. They talked to me. They asked me that, 'How many languages you can speak?' I said, 'I can speak Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, English, you know, these four...' 'Oh,' they said, 'you are the right person for us, because now the Asian community now, over here, growing up, and we want to start Asian programme from the BBC Radio Leicester. Can you help us to do?' I said, 'Okay, I am teaching my regular, you know, during the time.' They said, 'No, no; it's in the evenings. You will do half-an-hour's programme,' something like this. So, I started Asian programme with the BBC Radio Leicester in Leicester in 1972, and I did it for 15 years or so, programme. Naturally, programme started expanding, and that very programme... Then, I asked my Advisory Council of the BBC Radio Leicester that, if you can... I'm communicating with my community through my language, Urdu and Hindi and thing like that, playing music to them, having talk on telephone and thing like that. I would also like, because I was involved, as I told you before, a lot in the host community, talking and discussing and so many things. So, then I ask them if they can produce a programme in English, talking in English and all that, and playing music, Asian music, but having discussion, phone-in programme and thing like that in English. So, then they started having the other presenters who could do this programme, and now it's not only... it became a national programme. We had a manager who was very enlightened and all that. He said, 'Okay, Mr Sandhu, we can have this programme not locally – nationally.' So, first he did a national programme – this very thing which we started. Then he had this idea to make it international programme, so now it is called Asian Network which is done from London now and all over the world. It goes all over the world and it's 24-hour programme. So, Asian Network BBC Radio Leicester, BBC Asian Network it is called. So, I did that also. And then I became, as I said, you know, involved in different religious groups, different advisory groups, working with the community, Leicester community itself, and working with the Bishop of Leicester, for example. So, he had this faith leaders group or something then the other also inter-faith groups. So, a lot of... especially, I enjoyed most, was the visit of the children coming to gurdwara, and I am being invited by the schools to come to on the special festivals or something. So, involved in a lot. Very, very, interesting; very fruitful.

You mentioned that you'd received some awards for being involved in this work?

That's right. You know, it was... Again, you know, this is what... I was talking to my wife, you know, when, as I said, in the beginning, my wife was saying she was disappointed, and the life we were having in Delhi and all that, that why the hell we have come to this sort of country where there is prejudice, discrimination and all sorts of thing. They don't like us, we should go back and all that. So, after a few years when, you know, we started the fruits of our living over here and all that, the people around about us, they were very helpful. They started helping us and they started understanding us and becoming more tolerant and all that sort of thing. And so then the establishments around about us – the churches, you know, for example, the church's contribution is great, because it is the church who involved me to start with, from the parish church, for example. They recognised me, that, yeah, here is a guy who can talk in English and all that, who is also educated person. So, they involved me in the community. This is my church; parish church. From there it started becoming... locally and, you know, nationally and things like that.



SID-0006X0001MO

So, Her Majesty the Queen, she came to Leicester. No, first of all, someone recommended my name in 1979... so, I have got a picture; I will show you. So, '79, all of a sudden, so I got an invitation from Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty the Queen would be pleased to welcome you to her Garden Party. So, my wife and myself, in 1979, so we went to Buckingham Palace to the Garden Party. And next year, 1980, Her Majesty the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, they came to Leicester and the City Council then invited me and my wife, along with the other Asian leaders, for a lunch with Her Majesty the Queen. So, we had lunch with Her Majesty the Queen in 1980 in Leicester itself and then, towards the end of 1980, I received a letter from the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. She doesn't know me; I don't know her; never became involved or anything. And my Dad had come from India at that time. He was with us as a guest, you know, staying for a while. He used to work with the British. He was a police officer under the British Empire, right? And he'd retired, so we invited him, you know, that, 'Dad, you come along. You have been working under the British people. Now I am here. I'm teaching the British children over here, and we are living over here, and you come and see this country under whom you were working.' So, my Dad was also with us.

So, in November 1980, so I received a letter from Mrs Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister, that I am recommending you for your services to the community to Her Majesty the Queen to give you a medal of this title of MBE. So, I got it, you know. I had to confirm to her, yes, I would be pleased to receive it. But that was very, very, great honour, I must say, to me. I never expected, you know... And so, in 1981, so we went to Buckingham Palace with my family. By that time we had children – one son and a daughter – so, they were about six, seven years old. And so we all went there and I was decorated with the MBE. I will show you over here. So, that was great. And then, as I told you, that I was working with Lord Swann on this Committee of Education and all that in the UK, and we worked for three, four years for that. So, '85, when this Report was submitted to the Parliament and the Parliament accepted that Report and all that, so Buckingham Palace wanted to honour all of us, the members of Lord Swann's Committee, and we were invited by Buckingham Palace to come to their Garden Party in 1985. So, these are some of the great honours, you know, beyond my expectations that, you know, this unknown person coming from India, very ordinary person, has been honoured so much by the society, the British society.

This is why I find, you know, that this society I'm living in, and now I'm in my retirement, it's a great society to live in and to work. And help, help the people who still have got some shortcomings or whatever it is, or make the society better. So, this is how I have been involved with Age Concern when I retired, because I became elderly person also myself, so I have been working with the older people locally and nationally. So, I became involved when I was a trustee of the Age Concern Leicester, and one of the members of the Age Concern UK. So, working, attending meetings and arguing with the Minister, then other people, for giving more money and looking after the older people better and all that. And, along with this, my main interest has been and it is still inter-faith, you know, work, which I have been involved there and also over here.

After you retired, when was it you moved up to Scotland?

I retired in 1992. So, from 1992 myself and my wife retired, both of us. But within a year or so, my wife developed cancer and she died '94. And, after that... so, I was living there. My son was working in a bank in the City, in London, and my daughter was also working in London, so both of them, they were there. So, I remained in Leicester itself.



SID-0006X0001MO

That was central. They used to come to visit me; I used to go over there and all that. So... and I was becoming involved so much in different walks of life. It was good, carrying on. Then my son, he became married and then his wife... because he had children and the wife said, 'No, I can't look after now these boys over here. My family's up in Paisley, Scotland, so if I can move there and you...' So, my son moved over here, but he was working still in the City, in London. So, he used to come and go like this. Then, later on, they saw that perhaps it was too much. They bought a house over here and then he also got a job here in Glasgow. And so I was still there. Now I was on my own. My daughter became married. She went to Italy and I was on my own. And this is how, then my son and my daughter-in-law, they started... And because I used to come and visit them at different timings, and then they said, 'Why don't you come over here, you know, live near to us so that we can look after you.' And so this is how I moved, this year, in April, and I live near about my son. My grandchildren are over here. I visit my daughter in Italy. So, it's better. So this is why... so I thought now, I'm still active mentally, physically, and why not become involved? So this is how, now I have become involved with the Interfaith Scotland and I started going to different meetings, conferences, events attending, you know. So, whatever I can contribute. I still love people and I still want to work with people and make the society better if... with my contribution, if I can.

Which of the gurdwaras in Glasgow have you been involved in, since you moved to Scotland?

No, I haven't become involved with the gurdwaras. I go and visit them, and they have been saying to me, that you become involved, but I have seen already that there are representative of the gurdwaras and the gurdwaras also have got a council, Council of Gurdwaras, so they are being represented already on Interfaith Scotland, so I want to be helpful to them and not become... replace, you know, those...

But you go along to worship in these places, though?

I go, oh, yes. I go both the gurdwaras, you know, Central Gurdwara in Glasgow, as we met over there on that day, and the other gurdwara in Pollokshields. So I go... actually, I go one week over there, one week the other one [laughs]. So, no, I go for fellowship and I, you know, am becoming involved with the community itself.

And what has your experience so far been of Scotland?

It's a very good experience and I am glad, you know... This is what I was complimenting to Mr... this is a doctor who is involved, Dr Multani, who is representing the Council of Gurdwaras and the gurdwara themselves on Interfaith. And I was saying to him that it's very good. I am very pleased about it that you are already contributing your share, and from the community you are representing already, community, on this sort of organisation where people are needed to get together and everything, so I'm really very pleased. And also I have found, meeting the people, you know – I've travelled on the buses; I go out shopping and all that – I've seen Scottish people are quite warm and they are very helpful also. I see also that, as compared to the Midlands – because in Midlands there are so many communities, you know, they are now living and all that – over here the ethnic minority communities are still in small numbers – they are not very big. But the people are, I've found, they're really very, very helpful. They're very tolerant people.



SID-0006X0001MO

And one day, I remember, I went to this Pollokshields gurdwara, and it was an open-door sort of day on that day, so they invited me in the gurdwara. The people, they said, 'You come along and you experience what is happening over here, because the people are coming and also you can help the groups which are coming to understand, you know, whatever we are showing them round.' So, when I went there right from morning 'til evening, my God, thousands of people, they came. Scottish people with their families, with their children, right, they came over there and they were going round and they were looking round and seeing different aspects of the gurdwara. And they were having the lungar. They were having the lungar sitting down on the floor, you know. Amazing. It was so pleasing and so... I was really very, very pleased; very glad to see all this, that Scottish people, they are really interested. On one side, I do get the impression that Scottish people are not going much now to church, you know, or not doing that much worship than in the olden times, but still I found that still people are interested in other community, other places of worship. They want to see them, what it is.

And also, interestingly, in that very context, I was with my son before going to the gurdwara. At that time I didn't have the car or anything – I'd just, you know, started settling down over here. So, one day I was with my son and one of his friend came, a Scot. And so, when my son introduced me, that here is my Dad over here, and he has come from Leicester and all that, and he knew. Immediately he said, 'Have you been to the gurdwara? The new gurdwara in Pollokshields?' I said, 'No, I haven't.' He said, 'It's a beautiful gurdwara. I have been there on the opening day.' It was so interesting to hear from one of the Scots that he was interested. He went to the opening ceremony of the gurdwara, and it was very, very pleasing to me, really.

Well, Mr Sandhu, it's been a pleasure talking with you, so thank you very much.

Thank you very much for coming and talking to me, and I am also very pleased that I could, you know, exchange my experiences with you and, through you, to the community.

Thank you.

Transcript ends 01:46:36