

# Marriage Equality in Sikh Dharma

A White Paper Issued by Sikh Dharma International

April 2021

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	3
DEFINITIONS AND NOMENCLATURE.....	3
A NOTE ON SOURCES .....	3
DISCLAIMER.....	4
EVENTS LEADING TO THIS PAPER.....	4
THE AKAL TAKHT AND THE SGPC.....	5
THE ANAND KARAJ .....	6
RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON SIKH MARRIAGE EQUALITY .....	7
HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES.....	11
CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON SIKH MARRIAGE EQUALITY .....	13
PERSPECTIVES OF THE PUNJABI SIKH DIASPORA COMMUNITY .....	16
THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM AND PERCEPTIONS OF WESTERN VALUES... 28	
THE LGBTQ EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS NON-ACCEPTANCE .....	30
WOMEN IN SIKH CULTURE.....	31
GLOBAL LEGAL STATUS OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY .....	33
GLOBAL RELIGIOUS STATUS OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY .....	34
PERSPECTIVES OF MEMBERS OF OUR ORGANIZATIONS AND SANGAT.....	42

Letter from Bhai Sahiba Bibiji Inderjit Kaur Khalsa  
Letter from Pritpal Kaur Khalsa, CEO, 3HO Foundation  
Letter from Sat Jagat Singh Khalsa, Board Member, 3HO Foundation  
Interview with Amrit Singh Khalsa, CEO, Kundalini Research Institute  
Interview with Hari Charn Kaur Khalsa, Kundalini Research Institute  
Statement by Amrit Kaur Ramos, staff member, SSSC and KRI  
Statement by DukhNiwaran Kaur Khalsa, member, Khalsa Council LGBTQ+ Task Force  
Statement by Simran Kaur Khalsa, Board Chair, Sikh Dharma Educational Institute  
Interview with Jagat Guru Singh Khalsa, Principal, Miri Piri Academy

Interview with an Officer, Constituent Organization  
Interview with a Sikh Dharma Minister of Punjabi Descent

ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES .....54

Statement by Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, Colby College  
Interview with Prabhdeep Kehal, Brown University  
Comments by Shamina Singh

APPENDICES

- Appendix A:** Statement of Action in Favor of Marriage Equality by the Administration of Guru Ram Das Ashram of Los Angeles
- Appendix B:** Rehat Maryada, Chapter 11, Article 8 – Anand Sanskar
- Appendix C:** Timeline and History of Marriage Rights in the United States
- Appendix D:** Sikh Population by Country
- Appendix E:** Letter from SGPC to Sikh Dharma, August 10, 1976
- Appendix F:** Marriage Equality Around the World
- Appendix G:** Text of the Hukamnama Issued by the Akal Takht January 1, 2005
- Appendix H:** Resources for LGBTQ Sikhs
- Appendix I:** Countries with the Largest Sikh Populations

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sikh Dharma International (SDI) has been asked to adopt a policy allowing same-sex weddings to be performed by our ministers and in our Gurudwaras. Understanding the significance of such a step, SDI would like to engage all stakeholders in our community in a respectful and reasoned discussion about the best path forward. The purpose of this paper is to provide information, context and perspective to support that discussion.

This paper does not advocate for a particular outcome. Whatever your position on this issue, we hope this paper will assist you as you consider these questions: What are the benefits, risks, and consequences of adopting, or not adopting, a policy of marriage equality? How will SDI's decision impact its own members, its sister organizations, and its constituencies? What are the options SDI may consider in addressing the issue of marriage equality?

SDI recognizes and acknowledges the strongly held views on all sides of this question and respects the diverse religious and cultural perspectives among those we serve. We seek a result that best serves our global community and our family of organizations. Our community includes LGBTQ Sikhs who expect to be treated as equals and partake in the blessings of the Anand Karaj. SDI and its constituents are also part of a global Sikh community which in general does not embrace marriage equality and whose highest authority has issued an edict against same-sex marriage. This paper is intended to inform our collective conversation as we navigate these differing perspectives.

## **DEFINITIONS AND NOMENCLATURE**

“Marriage equality” is the term that will be used whenever appropriate in referring to marriage between two people of the same gender. “Same-sex marriage” will also be used depending on the context. However, the use of “same-sex marriage” is not intended to imply that such unions are different from, or less legitimate than, the marital union of opposite-sex partners

“LGBTQIA” refers collectively to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. “LGBTQIA”, “LGBTQ”, and “LGBT” may be used depending on the source. The term “queer” when used is intended to be used respectfully as an inclusive term associated with non-binary persons.

## **A NOTE ON SOURCES**

This paper is not intended to meet standards of academic rigor. It is intended rather as an introductory overview of the various perspectives that bear on the question of Sikh marriage equality. To that end, we cite not only academic sources and individual scholars, but also news and reference sources, organizational websites, and individual voices on social media, as appropriate to the context.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The views expressed by persons interviewed for this paper and by those who submitted letters or written statements are the personal views of the speakers and authors, not the views of Sikh Dharma International, or, unless otherwise stated, of the organizations with which they are affiliated.

## **EVENTS LEADING TO THIS PAPER**

Sikh Dharma International (SDI), the Siri Singh Sahib Corporation (SSSC) and 3HO Foundation (3HO) are all facing specific demands to implement marriage equality policies. On July 29, 2020, the Administration of Guru Ram Das Ashram of Los Angeles (GRDA-LA) issued a “Statement of Action in Favor of Marriage Equality”. The statement begins: “Marriage Equality can be defined as equal acceptance of same sex as well as heterosexual marriages and is the state of having the same rights and responsibilities of marriage as others, regardless of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity.” (See Appendix A)

At the same time GRDA-LA sent a request to SDI, copying SSSC, asking what would be necessary for GRDA-LA to be allowed to perform same-sex marriages. In December of 2020 GRDA-LA added a request for a timeline of objectives that SDI would pursue toward adopting a marriage equality policy by February 14, 2022.

In January 2021, a petition on Change.org entitled “Petition in Support of Marriage Equality in 3HO Gurdwaras” stated in part:

“As LGBTQIA+ people are denied the right to be married in Sikh Gurdwaras, including those at Solstice celebrations; As the Oneness of all humanity is a core value of Sikh Dharma, as known through the teachings of Guru Nanak through Guru Gobind Singh, and is embodied in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib and that this Oneness presumes that all aspects of Sikhi, including the Anand Karaj (Sikh Marriage), are available to all who bow to the Guru ..... We, the undersigned, implore Sikh Dharma International to lift the implicit prohibition against Marriage Equality and call for immediate permission to be granted for all LGBTQIA+ people to be married in all 3HO Gurdwaras, with the same rights and responsibilities as their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.”

The petition had over 844 signatures as of March 23, 2021. <sup>1</sup>

Our organizations first began considering these issues in April 2016, when a “Motion for Advisement to Sikh Dharma International and Sikh Dharma Ministry” was submitted to the Khalsa Council asking “Sikh Dharma International and the Sikh Dharma Ministry to allow Sikh marriage ceremonies between two men or two women; that these marriage ceremonies may be performed by a Minister of Sikh Dharma in good standing; that said marriage ceremonies may be performed in Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras, in the presence of Siri Guru Granth Sahib and the Sadh Sangat.” At the September 2016 Khalsa Council meeting, an LGBTQIA+ Task Force was

---

<sup>1</sup> PD K, “Support Marriage Equality in 3HO Gurdwaras,” Change.org, n.d., <https://www.change.org/p/sikh-ministers-support-marriage-equality-in-3ho-gurdwaras>

established to consider how, as ministers and teachers, we can serve the LGBTQ+ members in the Dharma, as well as the larger LGBTQ+ community. Members of the 3HO and Sikh Dharma LGBTQIA+ community and their supporters have expressed frustration that, despite the formation of the LGBTQ Task Force, no policy has been established regarding marriage equality.

## **THE AKAL TAKHT AND THE SHIROMANI GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE**

The Akal Takht, situated in the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar, India, is the highest seat of earthly authority for the worldwide Sikh community. It was built by Guru Hargobind as a place for consideration of temporal issues and dispensing justice. The Jathedar of the Akal Takht, appointed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), is the highest authority for the global Sikh Panth. The SGPC is an elected body that manages India's historic Gurdwaras, as well as schools, hospitals, and charitable trusts.<sup>2</sup> The property utilized by Miri Piri Academy is leased from the SGPC. Under its bylaws, SDI is to "maintain respectful communication with the Jathedar of the Akal Takht and with the leadership of the SGPC." In 1976, the SGPC approved the constitution of SDI (then Sikh Dharma Brotherhood; See Appendix E.)

The Jathedar of the Akal Takht is authorized to issue Hukamnamas, edicts providing guidance on any aspect of Sikh doctrine or practice. In January 2005, the then Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib, Singh Sahib Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti issued a Hukamnama in response to a proposed move of the Government of Canada to introduce a same-sex marriage bill (See Appendix G). Singh Sahib Joginder Singh described same-sex marriage as an 'anti-Gurmat' trend that had no place in Sikhism and stated that it was not permitted under the Sikh Code of Conduct, or Rehat Maryada.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009, the Akal Takht reiterated its position on same-sex marriage after the Delhi High Court ruled that laws prohibiting same-sex relations were unconstitutional. Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh stated that gay marriages are not acceptable in Sikhism and have no place in Gurmat, and that the five Sikh high priests have issued strict directions to all gurdwaras across the globe to abide by the edict against same-sex marriage.<sup>4</sup> Same-sex marriage is not permitted in India.

In September 2020, the Akal Takht took disciplinary action against an officiant that performed a same-sex marriage in a Gurdwara in Sacramento, California. According to Sikh24.com, "the SGPC-appointed acting Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh has directed Sarabjeet Singh Neel and his wife Leela to hand over the *Saroop*<sup>5</sup> of Guru Granth Sahib to the Sikh

---

<sup>2</sup> "About SGPC," Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, n.d., <http://sgpc.net/about-sgpc/>.

<sup>3</sup> Varinder Walia, "Akal Takht Diktat Against Same-Sex Marriages," The Tribune Online Edition (Chandigarh India), January 16, 2005, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20050117/punjab1.htm#1>. See Appendix G for text of the Hukamnama.

<sup>4</sup> Yudhvir Rana, "Akal Takht Bars Gay Marriages in Gurdwaras," Times of India, July 9, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/akal-takht-bars-gay-marriages-in-gurdwaras/articleshow/4755390.cms>.

<sup>5</sup> *Saroop*, literally meaning, "beautiful" is used to refer to the physical Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

Sangat.”<sup>6</sup> The Jathedar also indicated that Sarabjeet Singh would be summoned to Amritsar to receive disciplinary measures.

While some individual Sikhs have performed same-sex marriages, to our knowledge no Sikh religious organization has adopted a position in opposition to the Akal Takht regarding same-sex marriage.

## **THE ANAND KARAJ**

The Anand Karaj (joyful act) is the universally practiced Sikh wedding ceremony. The core of the ceremony is the Laavan, a four-stanza hymn composed by Guru Ram Das. After each Laav is sung and recited, the couple circles the Siri Guru Granth Sahib and then bows to indicate their commitment to the Guru's path. The focus of the Laavan is the spiritual life of the marriage partners. The teachings of the four Laavs have been summarized as follows:

In the first stage, the beginning of the journey, one turns one's attention in earnest to the spiritual goal, through Waheguru's grace. As one begins to walk on the path, one develops a faith in that path, and that faith carries one forward.

In the second stage, one meets the True Guru, the guide on the spiritual path, without whom there can be no further progress. Through the Guru's guidance, one sheds their *Haumai* (ego), and all of the other vices within the mind begin to dissipate also. Through the Guru, one begins to realize the pervasive nature of Waheguru.

In the third stage, one reaches the state of *Bairaag*, an intense feeling of yearning to find Waheguru, as one begins to grasp the pervasive nature of Waheguru and realize their own separation from Waheguru, though he resides everywhere. It is the Sangat that carries one forward through this stage.

In the fourth stage, one reaches the goal, finding Waheguru within themselves. The mind reaches a state of *Sahej* (complete harmony and peace) and remains immersed within Waheguru at every instant from then on.<sup>7</sup>

The Anand Karaj before the Siri Guru Granth Sahib is not merely ceremonial, but is of profound spiritual significance to the participants: “The context of the Anand Karaj moves beyond worldly understandings of caste, race, or sexuality and describes a state of spiritual existence that one must strive for. The focus of the Bani recited at the time of the Anand Karaj revolves around a dual meaning of both the spiritual journey of the couple but also the journey of the being to the ultimate union with Akal Purakh.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> “Homosexual Marriage: Akal Takht Directs American Sikhs to take back holy saroop from Sarabjeet Singh Neel”, Sikh24.com, October 19, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Ramgarhia Council UK, “Anand Karaj – The Sikh Wedding Ceremony,” March 18, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190318161910/http://www.ramgarhiacounciluk.com/anand.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Harinder Singh, Parveen Kaur, and Inni Kaur, “Anand Karaj: The Sikh Marriage,” *State of the Panth*, Report 2, Sikh Research Institute, February 2018, <https://rb.gy/plcgjt>.

As noted above, the Akal Takht has declared that the Anand Karaj can only be celebrated by a man and a woman. This reflects the prevailing view that “An Anand Karaj is done so that a man and woman can join not just physically but spiritually as well. Both genders are blessed with different types of traits and virtues which complement each other. These traits and virtues are meant to pass on to their next generation which is born out of their physical union.”<sup>9</sup> Others, however, point out that there are no gender references in the Laavan, and urge a deeper interpretation: “In the four lavaa(n) of Anand Kaaraj, there is no mention that the hymns are directed to a heterosexual couple; in fact, these hymns are metaphors for the development of the relationship between the human and the divine.”<sup>10</sup>

“The principles expressed throughout the lava (interlinks or rounds) of the Sikh marriage ceremony have a multidimensional meaning. There is a worldly literal description of the union between two beings pointing to a metaphorical, genderless understanding of the human condition which would transcend across all sexual orientations and genders.”<sup>11</sup>

Or, as another writer puts it, “Marriage is a union between God and the union of two souls. In short, the Lavaan is non-gender specific. This leads me to believe there is nothing stopping homosexuals from getting married in the Gurdwara.”<sup>12</sup>

## **RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON SIKH MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

### **Siri Guru Granth Sahib**

The Siri Guru Granth Sahib does not contain any explicit reference to homosexuality or same sex marriage. Both proponents and opponents of Sikh marriage equality recognize this and cite it in support of their views.

A meeting was held in Los Angeles in 2019 with representatives of SDI, including Bhai Sahiba Bibi Inderjit Kaur, the Chairman of SDI’s board Sada Sat Simran Singh Khalsa, as well as an official of the SGPC and a member of Khalsa Council LGBTQ Task Force, to discuss the topic of same-sex marriage in Sikh Dharma. At the meeting, the SGPC official explained that the reason Sikh same-sex marriage cannot occur is that there is no place in Gurbani or the Rehit that speaks of it. Thus, it is not a matter of same-sex marriage being prohibited in Sikhi. Rather, there is simply no institutional or canonical basis for it. Similarly, the website SikhAnswers.com, states, in opposition to same-sex marriage, “Homosexuality is not mentioned in Sikh scriptures

---

<sup>9</sup> Mehtab Singh, “Same Gender Wedding in Sikhi,” Gurmat Bibek Discussion Forum, March 7, 2017, <https://gurmatbibek.com/forum/read.php?3,35600> .

<sup>10</sup> I.J. Singh, “Same Sex Unions,” SikhChic.com, February 25, 2011, <https://www.sikhchic.com/article-detail.php?id=2219> .

<sup>11</sup> Harinder Singh et al., “Sikhi and Sexuality,” *State of the Panth*, Report 6, Sikh Research Institute, September 2020, <https://rb.gy/mwljaa> .

<sup>12</sup> Gay Sikh, “Guest on BBC Asian Network About Equal Marriage,” February 5, 2013, <http://www.gaysikh.com/gay-sikh/bbc-asian-network-equal-marriage-gay-sikh/>.

and nor does any gay marriage or relationship being solemnized appear in the history of the Ten Gurus period or beyond to the present day.”<sup>13</sup>

Opponents of marriage equality assert that the reason the Gurus did not speak of homosexuality is that it did not exist during the time of the Gurus. However, there are historical references that contradict this notion. Transgender and intersex people, and eunuchs, known as Hijras were present in India at the time of the Gurus. “Hijras are officially recognized as a third gender in the Indian subcontinent, being considered neither completely male nor female. Hijras have a recorded history in the Indian subcontinent since antiquity, as suggested by the Kama Sutra.”<sup>14</sup>

Supporters of marriage equality take a different view of the Guru’s silence on LGBTQ issues. The Sikh Research Institute notes, in support of marriage equality, that “As for sexuality in regards to orientation or preference, Bani and Rahitname are mostly silent. There is no citation within Bani to condemn certain sexual orientations or preferences.”<sup>15</sup> Another writer notes that “Had the ten living Gurus believed homosexuality to be sinful, they would have addressed the subject within the Guru Granth Sahib, and the fact that it has been ignored suggests that the Gurus considered it to be inconsequential because the primary function of dharma is to unite the individual soul (which is genderless) with the supreme soul (which is also genderless).”<sup>16</sup>

Opponents of Sikh marriage equality also point to the frequent references to marriage, or *sanjog*, in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib in support of their view. Dr. Pashaura Singh, Department Chair of Sikh and Punjabi Studies at U.C. Riverside, California, says “Marriage between man and woman, *sanjog*, is from the teachings of the Guru as union for procreation. Another kind of relationship is not addressed directly in Guru Granth Sahib”. According to SikhAnswers.com, “Married life is encouraged time and time again in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Whenever marriage is mentioned, it is always in reference to a man and a woman . . . Since marriage is only mentioned as a spiritual relationship between a man and a woman in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the Sikh Rehit Maryada does not recognize nor give authority for same-sex marriages.”<sup>17</sup>

Advocates of marriage equality view it differently. In a statement provided by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Crawford Family Professor, Religious Studies, Colby College, she says:

The Guru Granth Sahib categorically states, “wife and husband are not two bodies who come together; know them as wife and husband who are one light in two bodies—*dhan pir ehi na ākhān bahan ikkaṭhe hoe ek jot due mūrṭī dhan pir kahāi soe*” (GGS: 788). Evidently, marriage is the recognition of the same light (*ek jotī*) in any two bodies; the gender of these bodies does not matter because the same light is found in the female body

---

<sup>13</sup> “What is the Sikh Attitude to Homosexuality?” SikhAnswers.com, April 12, 2010, <https://www.sikhanswers.com/modern-youth-issues/sikh-attitude-to-homosexuality/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Hijra (South Asia),” Wikipedia, page last edited March 8, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra\\_\(South\\_Asia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijra_(South_Asia)). See also, New York Times Article, “The Peculiar Position of India’s Third Gender,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/17/style/india-third-gender-hijras-transgender.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Harinder Singh et al., “Sikhi and Sexuality,” *State of the Panth*, Report 6, Sikh Research Institute, September 2020, <https://rb.gy/mw1jaa>.

<sup>16</sup> Zurich Collins, “Homosexuality and Sikhism,” Gaylaxy Magazine Online, May 26, 2011, <http://www.gaylaxymag.com/articles/queer-voices/homosexuality-and-sikhism/#gs.wezjif>.

<sup>17</sup> “What is the Sikh Attitude to Homosexuality?” SikhAnswers.com, April 12, 2010, <https://www.sikhanswers.com/modern-youth-issues/sikh-attitude-to-homosexuality/>.

and the male body, and therefore it is found in any combination of male and female bodies.

Supporters of marriage equality also note that in the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, the relationship between husband and wife is used as a metaphor in which God is the husband and the Sikh is the bride seeking union with the husband/God. The Sikh Research Institute, in a paper titled *Sikhi and Sexuality*, gives the example of this verse,

“That wife-being is genuinely beautiful who feels the company of the Husband-Being. Called to the mansion by the Mansion-Owner, that one enjoys Husband-Being’s color.”

The authors explain, “In this context, the Husband-Being is *IkOankar*, and the wife is the human being. The company is the presence, and color is love. The human being is called to the mansion of the Husband-Being, and they conjugate, engaging in love . . . This metaphor of a wife longing for her husband is commonly used to illustrate the human being’s longing for *IkOankar*. In this way, there is a common understanding of a genderless reading of Bani, such that all individuals place themselves into the role of the bride before *IkOankar*.”<sup>18</sup>

Opponents of marriage equality point to the Siri Guru Granth Sahib’s frequent warnings to refrain from lust, or *kaam*. In their view, same-sex relationships are based on lust because same-sex partners cannot procreate. In an article on the Sikh Missionary Society (U.K.) website titled ‘Sikh View About Homosexuality & Same Sex Marriages’, Gurmukh Singh OBE states, “Our concern here is with the first force, *kaam* or uncontrolled sexual desire . . . It is important to confront the naked truth and nature of *kaam* itself. More so in the context of homosexuality and the so-called same-sex unions between “consenting adults”, now aspiring towards formal “marriages”. He concludes “Only heterosexual marriage can provide a healthy environment for bringing up children and for catering for the needs of the human society.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite the asserted linkage between same-sex attraction and lust, some opponents of same-sex marriage agree that LGBTQ+ persons can receive Amrit: “Anand Karaj is only between a man and a woman. So, therefore, if you are Amrit Dhari or if you plan to take Amrit and you realize you are homosexual, then you are going to have to accept a life of celibacy. That’s the price you pay for Amrit. Other people might pay another price. The price a person who is homosexual pays is a life of celibacy.”<sup>20</sup>

Supporters of marriage equality reject the association of same-sex attraction with lust. “Some argue that queer relationships are inherently lustful, rooted in the idea that intercourse must only

---

<sup>18</sup> Harinder Singh et al., “Sikhi and Sexuality,” *State of the Panth*, Report 6, Sikh Research Institute, September 2020, <https://rb.gy/mw1jaa>.

<sup>19</sup> Gurmukh Singh, “Sikh View about Homosexuality & Same Sex Marriage,” Sikh Missionary Society U.K.

<sup>20</sup> “What is the Sikh Attitude to Homosexuality?” SikhAnswers.com, April 12, 2010, <https://www.sikhanswers.com/modern-youth-issues/sikh-attitude-to-homosexuality/>.

be engaged in procreation . . . This belief is tied to myths about same-sex attraction being a deviance and purely sexually-motivated phenomenon.”<sup>21</sup>

The universality and inclusivity of the Gurus’ teachings is frequently cited as evidence that Gurus would not have excluded LGBTQ+ Sikhs from the blessings of the Anand Karaj: “Guru Granth Sahib, the sole Sikh sovereign, does not prescribe discrimination of any kind. The Sikh Gurus unanimously promoted equity, dignity, freedom, and justice for each and all. In our divided and polarized world, it is all the more urgent we put their progressive inclusivity into practice. It is unfortunate that over half a millennium later we still cannot imbibe their open-mindedness! How can we discriminate against same-sex weddings?” From a statement provided by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Chair of the Department and Crawford Family Professor, Religious Studies Colby College.

## **Rehat Maryada**

The Rehat Maryada is the Official Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions published by the SGPC and approved by the Akal Takht. Adopted in 1950, the Rehat Maryada provides guidelines for all Sikhs with respect to worship, conduct, and ceremonies.<sup>22</sup> Its implementation has resulted in a high level of uniformity in the religious and social practices of Sikhism.

Marriage is addressed in Chapter XI, Article XVIII of the Rehat, ‘Anand Sanskar’ (Joyful Ceremony) (See Appendix B). Same-sex marriage is not addressed. However, the Article begins, ‘a Sikh man and woman should enter wedlock...’, and the language of the Article is gender normative, assuming a marriage between a man and a woman. Thus, for example, “the officiant should then apprise the boy and girl of the duties and obligations of conjugal life according to the Guru’s tenets”; “...the girl and boy should be made to sit facing the Guru Granth Sahib”.

Based on the gender normative language of the Rehat Maryada, the prevailing view is that the Rehat mandates that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. The Sikh Council UK takes the position that “Sikhs believe in equality for all and we do not advocate discriminating against gay and lesbian people in any circumstances. However, the principles laid out within the Rehat Maryada and by the Jathedar Sahib only allow for the Anand marriage ceremony to be between a man and a woman.”<sup>23</sup> Some, however, suggest that opponents of marriage equality are reading too much into the text of the Rehat: “Though the current form of the SGPC-printed Rehat Maryada contains language that is limited to the union of a man and a woman, perhaps this language choice reflects the time period rather than explicitly the conduct for the Anand Karaj,

---

<sup>21</sup> Harinder Singh et al., “Sikhi and Sexuality,” *State of the Panth*, Report 6, Sikh Research Institute, September 2020, <https://rb.gy/mw1jaa>.

<sup>22</sup> “What is the Rehat Maryada?” Sikhs.org, n.d., <https://www.sikhs.org/rehit.htm>. Rehat Maryada, SGPC, <https://sgpcamritsar.org/rehat-maryada.php>.

<sup>23</sup> Sikh Council UK, “Sikh Council UK Issues Advice on Same Sex Marriage Law,” July 17, 2013, <http://sikhcounciluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Press-Release-SCUK-Same-Sex-Marriage-Act-28-07-20132.pdf>.

as the emphasis is not placed on the sex and/or gender of the individuals but rather in the phrasing of the ceremony details.”<sup>24</sup>

## **HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES**

According to the United Nations, “Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings - they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status.”<sup>25</sup> There is currently no consensus on whether marriage equality is a human right.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations in 1948, is recognized as a foundational document for defining global human rights. Article 16 of the UDHR states that “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.”<sup>26</sup>

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which, along with the UDHR and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, constitute the International Bill of Human Rights, contains a provision analogous to UDHR Article 16. Article 23 of the ICCPR provides: “The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognized.” In addition, Article 26 states, “the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”<sup>27</sup>

In 2002, in a case brought by two couples challenging a New Zealand law prohibiting same-sex marriage, the United Nations Human Rights Committee held that Articles 23 and 26 of the ICCPR do not confer a right for same-sex couples to wed. The Committee ruled that “Use of the term “men and women”, rather than the general terms used elsewhere in Part III of the Covenant, has been consistently and uniformly understood as indicating that the treaty obligation of States parties stemming from article 23, paragraph 2, of the Covenant is to recognize as marriage only the union between a man and a woman wishing to marry each other.”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Harinder Singh, Parveen Kaur, and Inni Kaur, “Anand Karaj: The Sikh Marriage,” *State of the Panth*, Report 2, Sikh Research Institute, February 2018, <https://rb.gy/plcgjt>.

<sup>25</sup> Office of the High Commissioner, “What Are Human Rights?” United Nations Human Rights, n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/pages/whatarehumanrights.aspx>.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

<sup>27</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” entered into force March 23, 1976, <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/ccpr.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Communication No 902/1999: New Zealand. 07/30/2002,” July 30, 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151121150042/http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/%28Symbol%29/CCPR.C.75.D.902.1999.En?Opendocument>.

However, two members of the Committee, who concurred in the decision, wrote separately noting that the state indicated that it affords same sex couples many of the legal rights provided to heterosexual couples, and that the couples had not alleged otherwise. Absent such protections, “a denial of certain rights or benefits to same-sex couples that are available to married couples may amount to discrimination prohibited under article 26, unless otherwise justified on reasonable and objective criteria.”<sup>29</sup>

The European Court of Human Rights has taken a similar position. Its decisions have repeatedly held that the European Convention on Human Rights does not require states to permit same-sex marriage. Its stance is that human rights requirements are met by “civil partnership regimes and through equality in access to entitlements such as inheritance rights and material support.”<sup>30</sup>

A more recent decision by the United Nations Human Rights Committee suggests to some that the Committee may rule differently than it did in 2002 the next time it considers marriage equality. In a 2017 case, a same-sex couple that had been married in Canada challenged a law that prohibited them from being divorced in Australia. In that case, the Human Rights Committee ruled that the prohibition violated the couple’s right to non-discrimination under Article 26 of the ICCPR.<sup>31</sup> As things currently stand, however, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights, the world’s most prominent arbiters of human rights, have not recognized marriage equality as a human right.

However, not all global human rights authorities are in alignment with those institutions. The American Convention of Human Rights has been adopted by twenty-four countries in Central and South America.<sup>32</sup> Regarding marriage, the Convention contains language similar to that found in the UDHR and the ICCPR: “The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to raise a family shall be recognized”<sup>33</sup> In 2017, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, opining that the interpretation of such language should evolve with the times, held that marriage equality was required by the Convention: “The establishment of a differentiated treatment between heterosexual couples and couples of the same sex regarding the way in which they can form a family – either by a de facto marital union or a civil marriage – does not pass the strict

---

<sup>29</sup> “Ms. Juliet Joslin et al. v. New Zealand, Communication No. 902/1999, U.N. Doc. A/57/40 at 214 (2002),” University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/undocs/902-1999.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Fowler, “Same-Sex Marriage: What Does Human Rights Law Say about Claims of Equality?” ABC News, August 31, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-01/what-does-human-rights-law-say-about-marriage-and-equality/8856552>.

<sup>31</sup> Oscar I. Roos and Anita A. Mackay, “Shift in the United Nations Human Rights Committee’s Jurisprudence on Marriage Equality?” February 08, 2019, *University of New South Wales Law Journal*, Vol. 42, 2019. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3454967>.

<sup>32</sup> “American Convention on Human Rights,” Wikipedia, last edited December 29, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Convention\\_on\\_Human\\_Rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Convention_on_Human_Rights).

<sup>33</sup> “American Convention on Human Rights: Pact of San Jose, Costa Rica (B-32),” Organization of American States, Multilateral Treaties Homepage, 2011, [https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties\\_b-32\\_american\\_convention\\_on\\_human\\_rights.pdf](https://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_b-32_american_convention_on_human_rights.pdf).

test of equality because, in the Court’s opinion, there is no purpose acceptable under the Convention for which this distinction could be considered necessary or proportionate.”<sup>34</sup>

A number of human rights organizations also take the position that marriage equality is a human right. For example, Amnesty International Australia supports marriage equality, “because we hold it to be a human right. One of many legal bases for this is Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says: ‘Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.’”<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Watch states, “The right to marry is a basic human right. Straightforward application of international protections against unequal treatment dictate that gay and lesbian couples, no less than heterosexual couples, should enjoy the right: there is no civil marriage “exception” to the reach of international anti-discrimination law.”<sup>36</sup> The Human Rights Campaign declares, “Working with our network of alumni and partners, we lift up the voices of local advocates and share tools, resources, and lessons learned to empower movements for marriage equality.”<sup>37</sup>

Finally, some legal scholars believe that the United Nations Human Rights Committee’s 2002 decision is no longer good law, and would be decided differently if presented today.<sup>38</sup> The Law Council of Australia, also takes the position that marriage equality is a human right, arguing that: “Discrimination on arbitrary grounds, including sexual orientation, is contrary to Australia’s international human rights obligations.”<sup>39</sup>

## **CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON SIKH MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

The forces of culture and ethnicity are strong influences, and they affect almost everything in our daily lives, with religion being no exception. The place of our birth and our cultural environs heavily influence our behavior. The practice of religion is inseparably tied to our cultural milieu, and the issues of women’s rights, culture, religion, and gender all intersect in marriage. Because of the national, racial and economic diversity of the global Sikh community, the debate over marriage equality in Sikh Dharma is as much cultural as it is theological. Although marriage is a cross-cultural institution, views of marriage vary widely across cultures and nations. “Marriage serves important social functions, and social norms often determine the role each spouse takes in

---

<sup>34</sup> Inter-American Court of Human Rights, “Gender Identity, and Equality and Non-Discrimination of Same-Sex Couples - Advisory Opinion OC-24/17 Requested by the Republic of Costa Rica,” November 24, 2017, [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea\\_24\\_eng.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/opiniones/seriea_24_eng.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> “Marriage Equality as a Human Right,” Amnesty International, September 8, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org.au/marriage-equality-human-right/>.

<sup>36</sup> “Non-Discrimination in Civil Marriage: Perspectives from International Human Rights Law and Practice,” Human Rights Watch, n.d., <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/lgbt/civil-marriage.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Support the Marriage Equality Act,” n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>

<sup>38</sup> Paula Gerber, Kristine Tay, and Adiva Sifris, “Marriage: A Human Right for All?” *Sydney Law Review*, 2014, Vol. 643, Issue 28, <http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/SydLawRw/2014/28.html>

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, “Marriage Equality as a Human Right,” September 8, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org.au/marriage-equality-human-right/>

a marriage. Because marriage is a social construct, cultural norms and expectations determine what a marriage is and who can marry.”<sup>40</sup>

The nature of the current discussion about marriage equality is shaped by the unique position our organizations occupy in the global Sikh community. We are a U.S.-based community, albeit with members in many countries. As Sikhs, we are part of a religious community, ninety percent of whose adherents reside in India, and have had ongoing relations with the Sikh religious authorities in Amritsar. As teachers and practitioners of Kundalini Yoga, we are also part of the global yoga community. We serve many thousands of yoga students in many countries. We also serve thousands of Sikhs of South Asian heritage who attend our Gurudwaras.

Less than six percent of the world’s Sikhs live in countries where same-sex marriage is legal. Most teachers and practitioners of Kundalini Yoga, being located primarily in North and South America, and in Western Europe, live in countries where same-sex marriage is legal.<sup>41</sup> See Human Rights Campaign Map (Appendix F).<sup>42</sup>

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center poll, 61 percent of Americans support same-sex marriage.<sup>43</sup> According to another Pew survey, an even greater percentage, 72 percent, felt that homosexuality should be accepted by society. The results were similar for Western Europe and Latin America. In contrast, only 37 percent of Indians agreed.<sup>44</sup> However, attitudes in India are changing. In 2018, India’s Supreme Court struck down a law prohibiting consensual gay sex. The court also ruled that gay Indians would be fully protected by India’s constitution.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, there is still much animosity toward the LGBTQ community. According to a writer for the American Psychological Association, “being gay in India can mean being rejected by family, being ostracized by the community and even facing violence.”<sup>46</sup> That animosity is found in the Punjabi community as well. As one gay Punjabi man reports, “Punjab is a conservative state and people can be violently against LGBTQs.”<sup>47</sup> The depth of cultural and ethnic stigma facing the queer community of India and of South Asian origin can be sensed in videos posted by Manjinder Singh Sidhu, a gay Sikh who holds a master's degree in human rights from University College of London.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Ashley Crossman, “The Definition of Marriage in Sociology,” *ThoughtCo.*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/marriage-3026396>.

<sup>41</sup> “Same-Sex Marriage,” Wikipedia, last edited March 23, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex\\_marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage).

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Marriage Equality Around the World,” n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>.

<sup>43</sup> “Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage,” Pew Research Center, May 14, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>.

<sup>44</sup> “The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists”, Pew Research Center, June 25, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/>

<sup>45</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman, Kai Schultz, and Suhasini Raj, “India Gay Sex Ban is Struck Down: ‘Indefensible’ Court Says,” *New York Times*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/06/world/asia/india-gay-sex-377.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Rebecca A. Clay, “Decriminalizing Homosexuality in India,” *American Psychological Association*, February 2019, Vol. 50, No. 2, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/02/homosexuality-india>.

<sup>47</sup> Maninder Jit Singh, “Being Gay in India: A Sikh Man Comes Out to His Father,” *Medium*, February 6, 2020, <https://medium.com/onspec/being-gay-in-india-a-sikh-man-comes-out-to-his-father-9b9621a7826c>.

<sup>48</sup> Manjinder Singh Sidhu, “Coming Out Panjabi,” YouTube, June 7, 2015, <https://youtu.be/Lndphju0HpA>.

Despite the significant lack of acceptance of marriage equality in the Sikh community, there are Sikh groups advocating marriage equality and LGBTQ acceptance. Sarbat LGBT Sikhs describes itself as “a volunteer led group addressing LGBT issues from a Sikh perspective. We empower our members to encourage discussions, tackle homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and build bridges within and beyond their communities.”<sup>49</sup> Sher Vancouver was founded in 2008 to support LGBTQ+ Sikhs and now serves as a “non-profit society for LGBTQ+ South Asians and their friends, families and allies in Metro Vancouver, B.C.”<sup>50</sup> SALGA NYC is “a social, political and support group for queer and trans people who trace their descent from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet.”<sup>51</sup>

Religious disputes in the Sikh community can result in violence. In the United Kingdom, Sikh organizations have disrupted the Anand Karajs of mixed faith couples (where one of the couple is a Sikh and the other is not). Such marriages are prohibited under the Rehat Maryada, the Sikh Code of Conduct. One such incident occurred during the marriage of a Sikh and a Jain in 2016. As reported in the Guardian, “55 men with their faces covered in black cloth flooded into the temple. The temple was held under siege and the couple who were due to marry were forced to cancel their nuptials . . . Mota Singh, a councilor and former mayor of Leamington Spa, calls the protesters “fundamentalists.” Singh, 77, says because of his moderate outlook he has received repeated threats from the group online and in person and has even had a brick thrown through his window.”<sup>52</sup> This incident was just one of a number of such disruptions occurring in the U.K around that time.<sup>53</sup>

In October 2020, religious differences sparked a brawl in a Gurdwara in Renton, Washington. Police were called to break up a fight involving 15 to 20 people. Six were injured.<sup>54</sup> In 2010, a man was stabbed in a Gurdwara in Toronto because he invited a former Jathedar of the Akal Takht to lecture. The former Jathedar had been excommunicated because of his views on the Dassam Granth.<sup>55</sup> In 2009, religious leaders of a Gurdwara in Vienna, Austria were attacked by members of a rival Gurudwara, who accused the leaders of not respecting the Siri Guru Granth Sahib. One of the leaders was killed, and fifteen people were injured.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Sarbat LGBT Sikhs, “About Us,” n.d., <http://www.sarbat.net/faqs/>.

<sup>50</sup> Sher Vancouver, “Strength & Diversity: Marching Forward with Pride Since 2008,” n.d., <https://www.shervancouver.com>.

<sup>51</sup> Salga NYC, “About,” n.d., <http://www.salganyc.org/about/>.

<sup>52</sup> Nazia Parveen, “I Never Thought I’d Be Terrorized by my Fellow Sikhs at a Wedding,” *The Guardian*, November 3, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/03/i-never-thought-id-be-terrorised-by-my-fellow-sikhs-at-a-wedding>.

<sup>53</sup> Sukhwant Dhaliwal, “Resurgent Sikh Fundamentalism in the UK: Time to Act?” *openDemocracy*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/resurgent-sikh-fundamentalism-in-uk-time-to-act/>.

<sup>54</sup> “6 injured during brawl at Sikh temple in Renton”, KOMONews.com, October 18, 2020. <https://komonews.com/news/local/renton-fire-police-responding-to-act-of-violence-at-sikh-temple>.

<sup>55</sup> “Sikhs fight pitched battle at Toronto gurudwara, NDTV, April 20, 2010”, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/sikhs-fight-pitched-battle-at-toronto-gurudwara-415822>.

<sup>56</sup> “Sikhs in Austria fight in temple”, Spokesman-Review, May 25, 2009. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2009/may/25/sikhs-in-austria-fight-in-temple/>.

## **PERSPECTIVES OF THE PUNJAB SIKH DIASPORA COMMUNITY: A Summary of Interviews with thirty-one Sikhs of Punjabi Descent**

### Introduction

For this paper, we wanted to take the pulse of Sikhs of Punjabi descent and who associate with our communities. Interviews with 31 individuals were conducted by White Paper contributors over the first quarter of 2021, with interview subjects located in Virginia, Connecticut, Ohio, Texas, California, Canada, the United Kingdom, and other areas. The interviewers were persons from our SDI community who have maintained long-standing and trusted relationships with Sikhs in their regions.<sup>57</sup>

The individuals interviewed included sevadars and Sangat members from Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras as well as Sikh community leaders, scholars and activists. Several of those interviewed had taken Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training, and a number of interview subjects were identified as long-term members of Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras whose seva and involvement encompassed decades.

The majority of interview subjects were members of the Sikh diaspora.

The majority of interview subjects were heterosexual. Some were single, some were married, some had children.

Approximately two-thirds of those interviewed were male, and one-third were female.

A large range of ages was captured, and the numbers generally skewed toward an older demographic of 50 and over.

Interview subjects represented a wide variety of employment sectors, including IT, social services, engineering, Sikh studies, healthcare, academia, activism, law enforcement, finance, and the arts.

The interviewees were asked the following questions (not all interviewees were asked all of the questions):

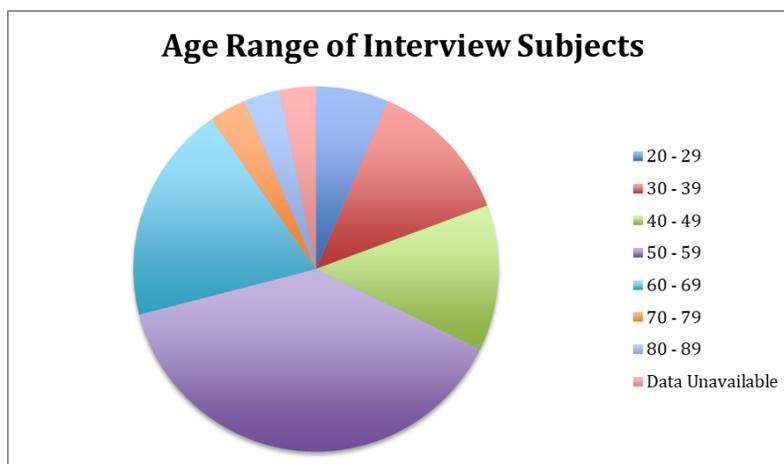
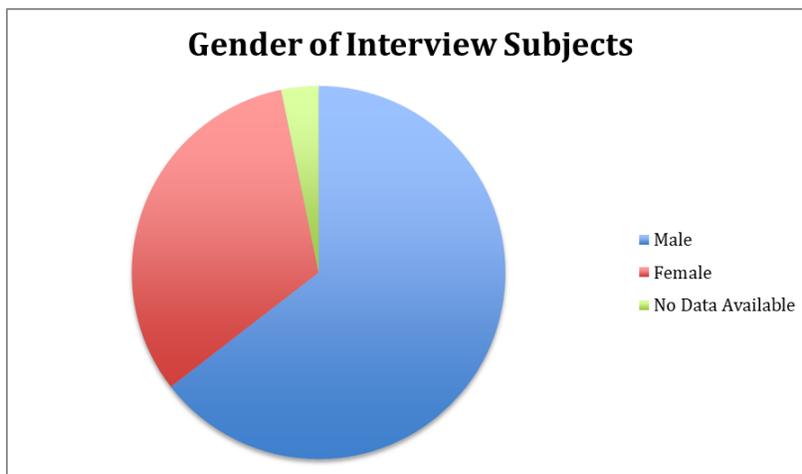
1. Do you have any references from Sikh historians since the time of the Gurus on the topic of homosexuality or transgender persons?

---

<sup>57</sup> The interviewers included Siri Sevak Kaur Khalsa of Millis, MA., Guru Sangat Singh Khalsa of Herndon, VA, Shiva Singh Khalsa, Chicago, IL, Ek Ong Kaar Kaur, TX, Guru Kirn Kaur, Phoenix, AZ, Siri Pritham Kaur Khalsa, Yuba City, CA., Kirtan-Singh Khalsa, Los Angeles, CA., Guru Raj Kaur Khalsa, Vancouver, Canada.

2. Because of the differences between laws in the US and India on this topic, we are getting a lot of input that we should conduct same-sex marriages. How would you feel if we were to perform such weddings in our Gurdwara - what are your thoughts?
3. What do you think the repercussions would be:
  - a. From Akal Takhat?
  - b. From the Sadh Sangat locally or globally?
4. Would you continue to associate with our Sadh Sangat if we were to do this here or in our communities?
5. Are you interested in participating in a dialogue about this topic moving forward?

The individuals interviewed expressed a diverse range of views on the subject of conducting same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras. A summary of findings from the interviews is presented below.



## Historical References from Sikhism on the Topic of Homosexuality

Out of the 31 individuals interviewed, none provided any references from Sikh historians since the time of the Gurus on the topic of homosexuality or transgender persons.

One individual interviewed stated that a lot of narrative on the subject in the Sikh community is based on the Siri Guru Granth Sahib referring to bride and groom.

Another individual pointed to the fact that in Sikh scripture the Divine is described as “indescribable” without and beyond gender, and gender is only a physical form.

“The Siri Guru Granth Sahib clearly [contains] no issues about same-sex marriage.”

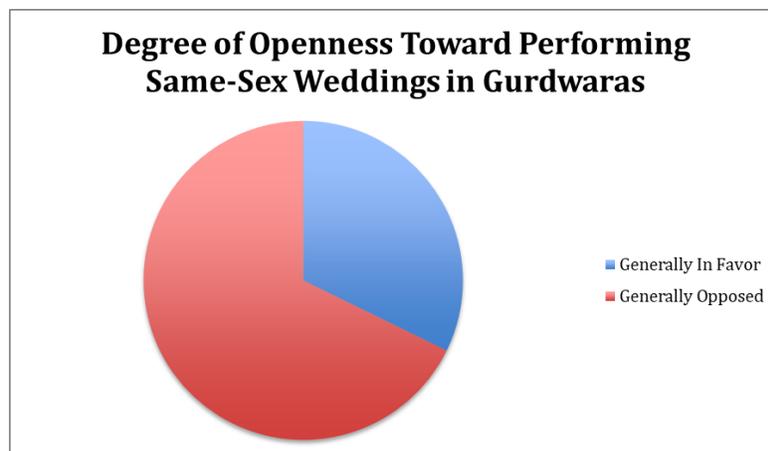
Another individual interviewed stated that at the time of the Gurus, this issue did not exist in open culture and so the Gurus did not write anything about it. They went on to state that the Rehat Maryada was created over 50 years ago, and thus reflects the people and culture at that time.

Another interviewee stated that they believed that the fact that the Sikh faith has no express or direct opinion on homosexuality can be interpreted as demonstrating that this issue was of no direct consequence to the Gurus – they knew about it, but did not single it out for an express opinion, which they did do for many other things.

Another individual interviewed expressed the view that marriage equality is a Rehat issue, and that there would be “plenty of ground” for us to challenge the Rehat – as historically it is a community document.

An activist that was interviewed stated that when they suggested re-examining the Rehit Maryada on this issue, since it dates back to 1945, they were “shut down” and silenced by the Sikh community.

## Views on Performing Same-Sex Weddings in Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras



Overall, about two-thirds of the individuals interviewed were generally opposed to performing same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras at this time, and one-third were generally in favor.

*Views in Favor:*

A number of individuals interviewed were in favor of marriage equality, and Gurdwaras performing same-sex weddings at this time.

They referenced the centrality of the value of equality in Sikhism, and stated that if Sikh Dharma made this decision it could set a courageous example for others to follow.

It was suggested that other topics related to marriage equality, most notably interfaith marriages, should also be addressed at this time.

Below are some quotations that illustrate these views in more depth:

“There is a real battle and disconnect between culture and religion, and ultimately culture seems to win out . . . What the Gurus taught and what we as people are doing or preaching are out of sync. I believe this is because people are blending Punjabi culture and religion together. I believe this is a huge problem and requires tackling through education . . . I believe tackling this issue requires boldness, leadership and alignment to a shifting Sikh consciousness that perhaps should have always allowed this, but did not for reasons of culture, male dominance, infighting and a lack of understanding of our faith.”

“In Sikhism, marriage is seen as the joining together of two separate souls as they become one. One Sikh view may be that, as human souls are beyond gender, same-sex marriages should be allowed. It is important to remember that Sikh religious teachings emphasize equality. And equality should exist regardless of race, gender, caste, or religion. In view of this, homosexual and transgender persons should be given equal treatment in the eyes of Sikhism and therefore, it should be acceptable for Gurdwaras to perform weddings for these groups.” “Science is accepting people are this way; it is a reality. The Akal Takht isn’t accepting the reality. The Akal Takht should do it.”

“All gay members of our community cannot be expected to be treated differently as a separate caste. If they are committed to Sikhi and to the ‘*Jot*,’ then don’t single people out. If we do it, it should be about doing it for the worldwide Sikh community. You have to stand up for all people in the gay community, not just our gay community. When we do something with integrity on issues [others can] find courage.”

“I cannot see how anybody can judge based on personal preferences. Discrimination based on religion, caste or color has never been done in Sikhi. Anyone who is gay or transgender can live their life based on Gurbani as they are. Who are we to say they cannot follow in the Guru’s footsteps or be part of Sikhi? Which group of people did the Gurus ever condemn for following the Sikh path or Gurbani? Today if the Gurus were around, would they not include the LGBT community? It’s not in Gurbani to exclude them.”

“Personally I think we should allow it . . . Mainly marriage is between two people and basically Guru is blessing that association. We should not prohibit and definitely allow if those two people want to get married, they have full right to take the Guru’s blessing . . . Personally I would have more respect for you if you were to do it.”

“If I were to have to put forward some of the [Sikh LGBT] couples, I’ve seen the harm that they have been done mentally. Our Gurus would not be proud.”

“Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh say we have to stand up against injustice - then you have to stand up for that. You can’t pick and choose. Wherever there is an injustice we have to stand up for it and speak out against it . . . If the Gurus were around now, they would say what a silly conversation you are having. They would say we’re all equal. That *Jot* is within all. Just like Guru ji changed and amended social practices of their time, why can’t we do it now? They challenged Sati (burning of widows), Purdah (veiling). They challenged controversial issues and made changes in society - why can’t we do it? If they knew that Sati and Purdah created harm, then if we know that harm is being created why can’t we make this change?”

#### *Views Opposed:*

There was a wide range of views expressed from those who opposed this action at this time. A number of individuals were personally in favor of conducting same-sex marriages in Gurdwaras, but were ultimately opposed to Sikh Dharma taking action at this time due to what they feared would be substantial, and perhaps even dangerous, consequences for the Sangat.

The concerns referenced by these individuals included the high probability for community division to result, the likelihood of the Akal Takht issuing an adverse Hukamnama and excommunication, the possibility that Prime Minister Modi would use the issue as ammunition to delegitimize Sikhs and target the Sikh community in India, and the potential for Sikhs with opposing views to disrupt Gurdwaras or even conduct violent acts toward individuals in Gurdwaras that perform same-sex weddings.

One individual interviewed stated that they had no personal issue with gay marriage, and were committed to the value of non-judgment, but strongly advised Sikh Dharma against taking action at this time:

“I don’t feel that this is the time for Sikh Dharma or 3HO to be taking a stand on this issue. I do think that Sikh Dharma needs help advocating for the Punjabi community members that want this [but] should not stand in front . . . I have some fears that there may be an attitude from the organization of ‘forget what anybody else says, ignore the sensitivity and mow ahead . . . I don’t think that 3HO and Sikh Dharma understand the risks.”

“Punjab is in a terrible situation with Prime Minister Modi. Modi is very anti-gay, and he will use any and all ammunition against the Sikhs ... he would love to have ‘same sex marriage in a Gurudwara’ as a lightning rod. Right now is not the time to go there. Let the others go first.”

These interviewees tended toward the view that same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras should only be done privately for the time being to prevent negative backlash and potential violence to the

community, though they were personally in favor of same-sex weddings and saw them as consistent with Sikh teachings.

One individual interviewed felt strongly that Guru Nanak would never exclude anyone and therefore it was fine to marry same-gender people in Gurdwaras, and while he felt that conducting same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras was in line with Guru Nanak's thinking, he strongly recommended that these weddings be done discreetly and stated that avoiding videos going viral in the larger community was essential.

One individual interviewed was in favor of conducting same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras, but emphasized that a strategy needs to be put in place first:

“We need to maturely recognize that we have the responsibility for the consequences and for people's safety . . . We need to first create safe spaces for respectful discussion to move folks forward. Find out what their fears are. Then create a swell of support through education.”

An activist interviewed reflected on their experience advocating for LGBT rights within the Sikh community, and advised “very strict caution” in Sikh Dharma's approach to the issue at this time:

“It would be very easy for somebody sitting in Punjab to say, ‘That's it. You're not part of the fold.’ . . . The leadership from India are from the old school, though they may be younger . . . If you go ahead and do this you will find yourself marginalized, which [would be] a sad thing.”

These individuals tended to advise Sikh Dharma against “going first” in this area, and thought it would be better if other Sikh Gurdwaras or organizations were to lead the way.

They thought that a decision to conduct same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras could put Sikh organizations, Gurdwaras and individual Sangat members in a difficult and pressurized position in terms of their relationship with the Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras and community. They observed that the political situation and perception of gay marriage in India at large is changing and suggested there might be significantly less backlash if Sikh Dharma were to wait a few more years to make a decision.

“Is it possible to keep a low profile about it? It can be very hard on an organization. Can you wait? Are you under pressure to do so? I think in a few more years even India will adapt.”

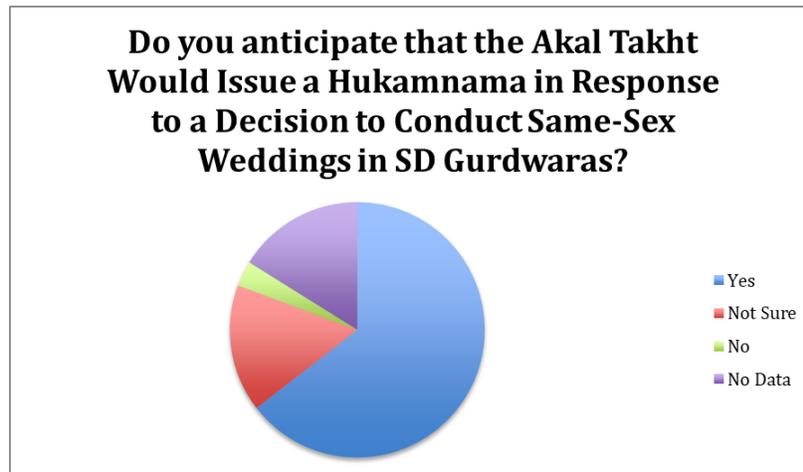
There were also a number of individuals who were opposed to conducting same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras due to their own personal beliefs, and their interpretation of Sikh teachings.

These individuals were very much against conducting same-sex marriages in Gurdwaras and said it should not happen.

“My personal belief is that this this is against the law of nature and I think it's wrong.

*Akal Purukh* is the supreme lord who made all animals and insects and everything in the universe and I see how all the animals mate and this is the natural law .....I understand that this is not allowed in our religion.”

### Potential Ramifications from the Akal Takht



Two-thirds of those interviewed anticipated an adverse Hukamnama or other negative repercussions from the Akal Takht in response to a decision to conduct same-sex weddings in Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras. The remaining one-third of interviewees weren’t sure or did not answer the question.

Only one individual interviewed did not expect there to be repercussions. This individual stated that the Akal Takht should “accept the reality” and support gay marriage in Gurdwaras. Another individual suggested that rulings from the Akal Takht were not as central to Sikhs in the diaspora as they were to those in Punjab.

Five individuals interviewed were unsure about what the response from the Akal Takht would be.

Twenty individuals interviewed anticipated negative repercussions from the Akal Takht. They stated that the Akal Takht takes this issue very seriously, and may continue to hold Gianis and Gurdwaras responsible. They thought an official decree or Hukamnama was likely, and that individuals could be excommunicated.

Some interview subjects referenced a same sex wedding performed in the presence of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib in California, where the SGPC later directed that the Saroop that was used to perform the ceremony be returned. Those who performed the ceremony were summoned to the Akal Takht and given *Tankhah* (an expiatory penalty levied upon a Sikh for breach of the Rehat).

Another potential ramification suggested by interviewees included a real risk of the Miri Piri Academy property being taken away.

Some of their views are captured below:

“We [SDI] don’t have connections at the Akal Takht and the SGPC that would support us in doing something. When you don’t have that support that makes it very difficult to do something controversial . . . the risk to the school in India is very high . . . There is also some risk of ex-communication.”

“The Akal Takht has to respond. They will strike out.”

“They will disrespect you when you come to Amritsar. It is a topic that's best left to others to go first . . . I know they are trying to ‘approve’ of Western Sikhs like you. But there are lots of [fanatic] Sikhs in Punjab [exerting pressure on the Akal Takht].”

“To me the SGPC and the Akal Takht should have been forward thinking – how do we address this? What do we need to do? But they haven’t done that and until they do I don’t think any Gurdwara or Sikh will be willing to do it first. The amount of anger and hate forthcoming will be terrible.”

“They ‘outed’ the priest who did the marriage in Sacramento, and this is what would happen to SDI if you were to do this.”

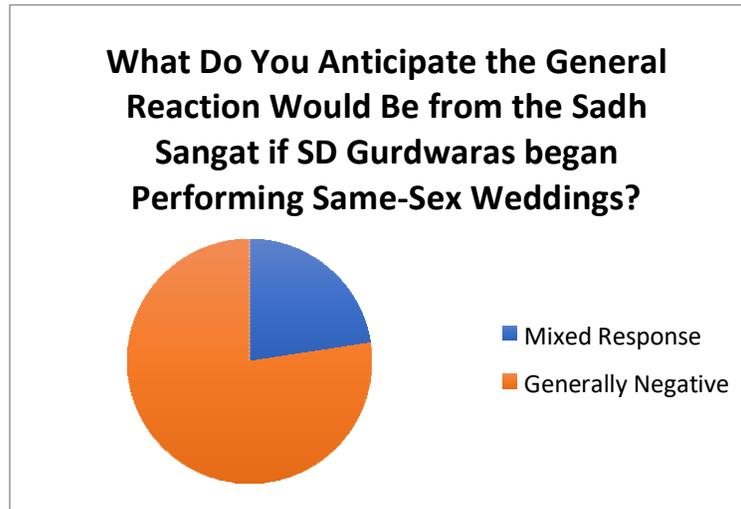
“There will be a lot of backlash, like there has been a lot of backlash in the Sikh community toward the gay community . . . It is so scary what might come from Akal Takht. You will need the Sikh community behind this. You will definitely face backlash from the Akal Takht.”

“When Canadian MPS were debating the legislation [on same-sex marriage] the Akal Takht said that if they voted in favor of the bill they would be breaking the Rehat.”

“If the Akal Takht is prohibiting it, it could create a lot of noise and have far-reaching repercussions – it could spiral into rhetoric that American Sikhs are different, with different ideologies.”

“I don’t believe the Akal Takht will ever approve it . . . They will say boycott the Ashram, they’re disgracing us. We don’t support this so the Ashram is disgracing Sikhs. They are *Gora* (white) Sikhs and doing their own religion thing.”

Potential Repercussions from the Sadh Sangat Locally and Globally



Twenty-four interviewees generally anticipated a negative reaction and backlash from the Sangat. Seven individuals interviewed anticipated a mixed response from the Sangat. A generational divide and the likelihood of violence directed at Sikh Dharma communities in the aftermath of a decision to conduct same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras was also discussed.

*Negative Reaction*

The majority of those interviewed anticipated a generally negative reaction from their local Sangat and the global Sangat.

One interviewee suggested that, “In Sikhi and the Sikh congregation there is still much taboo, fear, anxiousness, discrimination, misunderstanding and maligning of homosexual Sikhs in our tradition.”

Several interviewees believed that there would be backlash and that most of the global Sangat would be against the decision. They stated that the Sangat “would not like it,” “would feel bad,” and “would object.”

They believed that it is a very sensitive issue and is not accepted as the norm in Sikh society yet. A large number of interview subjects cautioned that if the weddings are performed, it would be important not to share videos or photos, and feared a grave backlash if these were to go “viral” in the global Sangat. “These days, one picture and the whole world knows it.”

Several individuals interviewed stated that their local Granthis and Gurdwaras would oppose the decision and make a stink, and stated that this would hurt Sikh Dharma. They thought it was likely that some individuals would organize a boycott of their local Baisakhi program. They suggested there could be financial repercussions on this program as well. “Our Gurdwara here in California would never have such a wedding – they would have a revolution on their hands.”

“These people want to find things that make them a hero. If it goes out people will protest there. Even nowadays they are just very religious people and only want to follow old stories that don’t make sense, and they are very stubborn about it.”

“There is a lot of blind Sangat who follow these religious leaders who are not spiritual, but [spread] a belief-driven ideology and unfortunately that is a large population of people in our Sikh community.”

“Forget about marriage equality. Sikhs don’t even understand marriage to begin with. There’s a huge cavern around how women are viewed. There’s no appreciation about what marriage is. Nobody wants to talk about sex at all, let alone gay sex. LGBTQ isn’t in anyone’s awareness; just the issues around women are taboo”.

### *Mixed Reaction*

About a quarter of those interviewed expected a mixed reaction in their local or global Sangat. Some of their views are captured below:

“There are going to be mixed receptions from the Sadh Sangat regardless of the location on this matter.”

“I cannot speak for the Sadh Sangat locally or globally. My guess is that it may be 50/50.”

“There wouldn’t be a backlash in the Diaspora [but there would be in India].”

“From what I have experienced in my life serving in Gurdwaras everyone’s perspective is different. I am not sure how the average person will react to same sex marriages in the Gurdwara. It has never come up. My feeling is that this issue is going to be divisive. It may be used politically in Gurdwara committees. I think initially there will be a lot of pushback but with time it may become mainstream.”

### *Generational Divide*

A large number of those interviewed referenced a generational divide in the community, and expected that the younger generation would be accepting of the decision while the older generation would likely not accept the decision and would react very negatively.

“I was 18 years old when I left India - I am 50 years old now. I didn’t even know what ‘gay’ was. People in India are NOT ready for that.”

“The younger people 35 and under would be sympathetic but people managing Gurdwaras [tend to be older] and would have negative reactions. Those persons and Gurdwaras would push back against Sikh Dharma.”

“The younger population would appreciate it. Even the new generation in the Indian community will embrace it, though a lot of the older generation will reject. It may be a 5-10 year cycle [before you could do it with less repercussions].”

“The local Gurdwara has so many Sangat members that still live in India in their minds, and others that are just not able to change on that subject. It is hard to change when you grew up in India at a certain time.”

“The younger generation would understand it. An explanation would have to be put forth [tying Gurbani into the decision]. There will be a lot of backlash, like there has been a lot of backlash in the Sikh community toward the gay community. [The Punjabi Sikh community] is where the [gay rights movement] was years ago.”

“We are more afraid of cultural things than religious things. The new generation is more accepting of this. It will take a long time for older generations to accept this. The fanatics [will never accept this].”

“There is a huge generational gap on the idea of gay marriage in Gurdwaras. I know that my parents and many of their generation will feel deeply uncomfortable at the idea of attending a gay marriage at the Gurdwara. My experience has shown me that Sikhs of my generation and younger, both here in North America and in Europe, are very open and embracing of the idea of gay marriage taking place in Gurdwaras and are confused as to why it is not happening already.”

### *Threat of Violence*

About a quarter of those interviewed believed that a threat of violence directed at Sikh Dharma Gurdwaras or individuals if the decision was made to conduct same-sex weddings in Gurdwaras was a real possibility.

They referenced fanatical Sikh elements both in India and in various Diaspora communities, and stated that these individuals can cause a lot of problems.

One individual referenced Gyani Kuldeep Singh in Virginia, who, along with several others, was the recipient of a Hukamnama and excommunication from the Akal Takht for violating the Amrit Sanchar ceremony at a Gurdwara in Virginia in 2016. Representatives from over 30 Gurdwaras and Sikh organizations across the East Coast called for an organizational and social boycott against Gyani Kuldeep Singh and others from the Gurdwara.

“If we do this our Gurdwara management will be on the hit list just like Gyani Kuldip Singh. They had demonstrations for months and death threats. People who came from New York were arrested for an attempt on his life. They followed him for a long time. The trial is still ongoing.”

More of their statements are captured below:

“If we decide to do it we have to be prepared physically and mentally. Some people talk more with their hands than their brains.”

“No good deed goes unpunished.”

“Yes, they could get violent.”

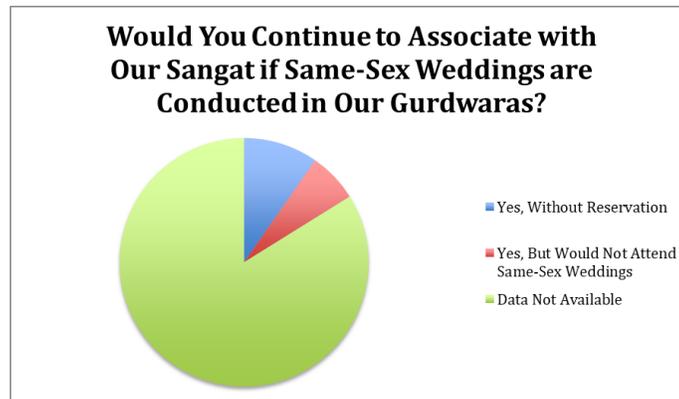
“Maybe we’ll get our fingers, our hands burnt, and even some limbs.”

“In 2012 the Sikh Channel tried to do a show on homosexuality. They started at 8 p.m. and within 5 minutes they had to shut it down because there was a threat to the station of being fire bombed.”

“If you try to have these difficult conversations, you get threats. Me as a professor and my employer get threats that are amazing.”

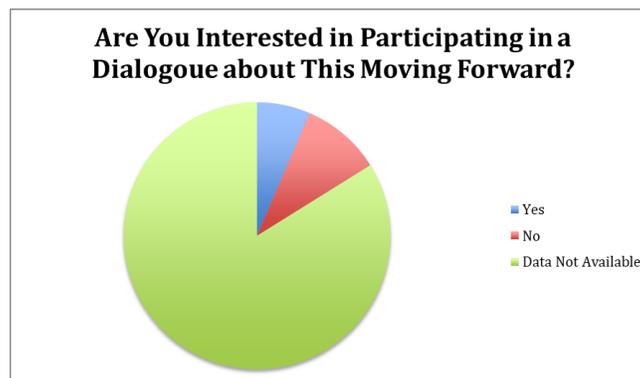
“You get vilified, you get threats as you push this conversation. If I raise a contentious issue with people and they don’t like it they go about trying to silence you so that their narrative continues and you don’t have that space.”

Would You Continue to Associate with Our Sangat if We Perform Same-Sex Weddings?



Only about one-sixth of those interviewed were asked this question. Generally, the individuals interviewed stated that they would not leave the Sangat over this issue. Three individuals said they would continue to associate with the Sadh Sangat without reservations, and two stated that while they would not leave the Sangat over the issue, they would not attend same sex weddings at the Gurdwara.

Interest in Participating in Dialogue about this Topic Moving Forward



## **THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM AND PERCEPTIONS OF WESTERN VALUES**

Any decision made by SDI regarding marriage equality would be directed to SDI ministers and the Gurdwaras and communities they serve. SDI would not purport to set standards for the global Sikh community. Nonetheless, SDI does not exist outside that community. We worship with Sikhs of Punjabi heritage in our Gurdwaras. We have been welcomed and hosted by the Sikh community in India. We have maintained relations with the SGPC and the Akal Takht. And, of course, the yogic and dharmic teachings that are the core of our lifestyle come to us from India. We therefore address some of the inter-cultural dynamics underlying the differing views of Sikh marriage equality.

Until 2018, same-sex relations were illegal in India. That year, as noted above, the Supreme Court of India struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized sex between persons of the same gender. Many have noted that Section 377 was a relic of British colonial rule. According to historian Harbans Mukhia, "The British brought their own rules to India, including Section 377 which banned homosexuality and made it a criminal act. This law was enforced by them but it didn't conform with India's attitude toward homosexuality. It was more to do with their Christian belief systems."<sup>58</sup> Homosexuality was not illegal in India until the British began enforcing Section 377 in 1861. As one scholar notes, "As the British empire grew more powerful in the Indian subcontinent in the early 19th century, so did their ideas about culture, society and law. Viewing local notions of sexuality as barbaric, British officials imposed Western, Judeo-Christian sexual norms on colonial subjects."<sup>59</sup> Historically, Indian culture was more tolerant of non-binary sexual expression.<sup>60</sup> According to historian Rana Safvi, "Whether ancient or medieval India, fluid sexuality was present in the society."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, some take the view that the conservative attitudes toward sexuality currently prevalent in India are not inherent in Indian culture, but rather are a legacy of British colonialism. As one team of researchers put it, "Victorian values stigmatized Indian sexual liberalism. The pluralism of Hinduism, and its liberal attitudes were condemned as "barbaric" and proof of inferiority of the East."<sup>62</sup> Some connect attitudes in present day India directly to the impact of Section 377: "The law book says it's illegal so that means that it has this general societal inference, changing the social normative views of gay sex."<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Vikas Pandey, "Why Legalizing Gay Sex in India is Not a Western Idea," *BBC News*, December 31, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46620242>.

<sup>59</sup> Amy Bhatt, "India's Sodomy Ban, Now Ruled Illegal, Was a British Colonial Legacy," *The Conversation*, September 12, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/indias-sodomy-ban-now-ruled-illegal-was-a-british-colonial-legacy-103052>

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Vikas Pandey, "Why Legalizing Gay Sex in India is Not a Western Idea," *BBC News*, December 31, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-46620242>.

<sup>62</sup> Kaustav Chakraborty and Rajarshi Guha Thakurata, "Indian Concepts on Sexuality," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, January 2013, Vol. 55, Supplement 2, DOI: 10.4103/0019-5545.105546. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3705691/>.

<sup>63</sup> Ben Westcott, "The Homophobic Legacy of the British Empire," *CNN*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/11/asia/british-empire-lgbt-rights-section-377-intl/index.html>.

The history of colonialism and its imposition of western values on subject cultures has given rise to criticism of LGBTQ activists from Europe and America who take the view that nations that have not adopted western standards are lagging behind the west. Having had western values imposed on them by force for many decades, they now once again find themselves criticized for failing to adopt western standards. As Stewart Chang, a professor at Whittier Law School, puts it in his paper ‘The Postcolonial Problem for Global Gay Rights’, “The use of global gay rights to legitimize the Western liberal state not only deflects attention from other human rights violations, but often redirects censure against indigenous subjectivities for which Western colonialism is actually in part responsible.”<sup>64</sup> A Professor of Sikh Studies at a U.S. University (a Punjabi Sikh woman who we do not have permission to name) said, in response to GRDA LA’s marriage equality statement: “From an intersectional feminist perspective, pro-LGBT policies have also been linked to white supremacy in the US, perpetuating forms of cultural Othering and orientalism to essentialize brown people as heterosexist”. Another scholar asserts “As gay rights have become a symbol for a multicultural and diverse society, the U.S. and other Western countries have utilized rights discourse to assert their “progressiveness.” Thus, the discourse of gay rights has emerged as a marker for the “civilized West.”<sup>65</sup>

On February 4, 2021, President Biden issued a ‘Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World’, in which he stated “It shall be the policy of the United States to pursue an end to violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, and to lead by the power of our example in the cause of advancing the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons around the world.”<sup>66</sup> The memo was hailed as an important step in the advancement of LGBTQ rights. However, one LGBTQ advocacy organization, while praising Biden’s initiative, cautioned that U.S. pronouncements are not always the solution: “One of the most effective and consistent ways of discrediting LGBTQ people and our movement is to say that they are the result of colonial and Western imposition.”<sup>67</sup>

Discussion of Sikh marriage equality within our community necessarily implicates differing national and cultural perspectives. Although, as noted above, any decision by SDI would pertain only to our ministers and Gurdwaras, many in the global Sikh community could nonetheless be resentful of a small group of mostly-Western practitioners determining what is permissible before the Guru.

---

<sup>64</sup> Stewart Chang, “The Postcolonial Problem for Global Gay Rights,” *Boston University International Law Journal*, 2014, Vol. 32, Issue 309,

<https://www.bu.edu/ilj/files/2017/10/StewartChang-ThePostcolonial-Problem-for-Global-Gay-Rights.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> Marik Xavier-Brier, “Red, White and Gay? American Identity, White Savior Complex, and Pink Policing,” Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2016, [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology\\_diss/87](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology_diss/87).

<sup>66</sup> Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Persons Around the World,” The White House, February 4, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/02/04/memorandum-advancing-the-human-rights-of-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer-and-intersex-persons-around-the-world/>.

<sup>67</sup> “Joe Biden Opens Major Push for LGBTIQ Rights Abroad,” *The Times of India*, February 7, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/up-nhm-admit-card-for-phase-ii-feb-14-exam-released-download-here/articleshow/80735627.cms>.

## **THE LGBTQ EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS NON-ACCEPTANCE**

Religious affiliation is generally viewed as having a beneficial impact on an individual's personal and family life. However, religious affiliation and participation can negatively impact LGBTQ persons. According to one researcher, "The majority of the religious groups in the United States of America believe homosexuality is a sin and religious involvement for LGBTQ people results in being faced with oppression, internalized homophobia, anxiety, loneliness and depression."<sup>68</sup> Another team of researchers notes "For LGB people growing up in non-affirming religious settings, religious teachings can be an important part of their socialization into antigay attitudes and stigma. As the LGB person continues to attend in non-affirming religious settings, these settings may continue to foster and sustain internalized homophobia, [i.e.] internalization of society's negative attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality and directing these attitudes toward one's self."<sup>69</sup>

From a sociological and medical perspective, a non-accepting religious environment is a stressor impacting the health of minority populations within that environment. "Minority stress theory" posits that "sexual minority health disparities can be explained in large part by stressors induced by a hostile, homophobic culture, which often results in a lifetime of harassment, maltreatment, discrimination and victimization and may ultimately impact access to (health) care."<sup>70</sup> "According to the minority stress model, it is almost unavoidable to develop a mental health disorder when one is living under a great amount of stress related to one's identity. In a heteronormative society, LGBTQ people experience minority stress from every direction; religion is one of them."<sup>71</sup>

The religious environments that generate these harmful impacts need not include physical violence or outright condemnation. Microaggressions, *i.e.*, indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group, can be equally damaging. In one study, LGBTQ persons "were asked to describe microaggressions that existed within their religion or spirituality. They reported that microaggressions made them feel invisible in religious and spiritual space. They also reported that microaggressions often came disguised as caring statements like: God still loves you, you are so much more than gay etc. The findings of this study show that microaggressions are extra hurtful because they come from the group where you are connected and at times, supported; or the microaggressions are delivered by leadership, the same leadership that is said to represent god."<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Anna-Sara Fire, "A Soul Without a Body: Experiences of Religious Homophobia and Transphobia," Master Thesis, Uppsala University, Fall 2020, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1470999/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> David M. Barnes and Ilan H. Meyer, "Religious Affiliation, Internalized Homophobia, and Mental Health in Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2012, Vol. 82, No. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2012.01185.x>.

<sup>70</sup> Michael P. Dentato, "The Minority Stress Perspective," *Psychology and AIDS Exchange Newsletter*, American Psychological Association, April 2012, <https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/exchange/2012/04/minority-stress>.

<sup>71</sup> Anna-Sara Fire, 2020 p. 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

Excerpts of an interview conducted for this paper with Prabhdeep Kehal (they/them/theirs), a PhD. Candidate in the Department of Sociology at Brown University, are included in the “Additional Perspectives” section of this paper. The interview highlights their experiences of being Punjabi, Sikh and gay. A common microaggression experienced by LGBTQ Sikh people is the complete denial of any sex or gender identity other than heteronormative. Family members will often deny the existence of LGBTQ identity by ignoring it or negating it completely. In Prabhdeep’s case, when they’re told to ignore, deny or made to justify their sexual identity, they say, “If my existence were against Guru ji’s hukam I wouldn’t exist; but I AM here. The other view is expressed as, ‘Prove to me that you are a Sikh’.”

Another LGBTQ Sikh reports, “Being a visibly Sikh man with a turban and a beard had led to much prejudice in itself, but being a member of the LGBT community means I’ve faced far more discrimination and racism than I would in mainstream society. ‘Coming out’ to potential partners as a dad to gay/bi men can also make dating difficult, and being a bisexual man within the Sikh community means I face yet more prejudice and homophobia.”<sup>73</sup>

## **WOMEN IN SIKH CULTURE**

The experience of women in Sikh culture provides useful context when considering the current struggles of LGBTQ Sikhs. Guru Nanak Dev spoke of women with reverence and great respect. In his words:

*Bhand jammee-ai bhand nimmee-ai, Bhand mangan vee-aaho...*

Within a woman man is conceived and born; to a woman he is engaged and married...

*So ki-o mandaa aakhee-ai, jit jammeh raajaan*

Why call her bad, who gives birth to kings?

Guru Nanak and his successors spoke against the practices of *sati* (the historical Hindu practice, in which a widow sacrifices herself by sitting atop her deceased husband's funeral pyre)<sup>74</sup> and *purdah*<sup>75</sup>, the wearing of veils by women to cover their skin, which practice also restricted women’s mobility and behavior. From the Gurus’ perspective, women were to be included in all aspects of Sikh life and worship.

Guru Gobind Singh taught against the objectification of women and instructed the Khalsa not to associate with *kanyapapi*, those who sin toward women.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, he gave women the surname Kaur, meaning princess, as a means of dignifying the presence and role of women in

---

<sup>73</sup> Deep Singh, “I’m Sikh, Bisexual and a Dad – And Still Figuring Out What it Means to be All Three,” *Huffington Post*, February 18, 2020,

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gay-dads-bisexual-sikh-role-models\\_uk\\_5e4acc69c5b64433c61a2701](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gay-dads-bisexual-sikh-role-models_uk_5e4acc69c5b64433c61a2701).

<sup>74</sup> “Sati (Practice),” Wikipedia, page last edited March 18, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati\\_\(practice\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati_(practice)).

<sup>75</sup> “Purdah,” Wikipedia, page last edited March 24, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purdah>.

<sup>76</sup> Nikky-Guninder Singh, “Birth of the Khalsa, The: A Feminist Re-Memory of Sikh Identity,” SUNY Press, p. 57, 2021. ISBN 9780791482667 and Women in Sikhism, Wikipedia, page last edited January 5, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_Sikhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Sikhism).

Sikh society. Sun Kaur, the London-based director of United Sikhs, an international NGO says, “Guru Nanak Sahib Ji raised the position of women in society at a time when the prevailing Manu (Hindu law) tradition considered women *paer di jutti* (shoes on someone’s feet). Guru Gobind Singh Ji formalized it when he created the genderless Khalsa.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite the Gurus’ teachings on the equality of women, Sikh women remain subject to unequal treatment at the Golden Temple. The SGPC has refused to allow women to perform seva or play kirtan at the Golden Temple, despite measures that have been taken to end such discrimination. The Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 contained no restrictions on women in Gurdwara management.<sup>78</sup> In 1940, a religious advisory committee established by the SGPC approved a resolution recommending that women have the same rights as men to play kirtan at the Golden Temple, but the resolution was not implemented.<sup>79</sup>

In 1996, the Akal Takht issued a hukamnama stating that:

“According to Sikh principles, men and women have been given equal status in the Guru's house. In all Sikh institutions, for the purpose of performing any religious rites, every human being is considered equal. Keeping in view the Sikh principles, the undersigned five Singh Sahibs unanimously support that every human being has the right to do seva in the morning in the precincts of the Harimander Sahib”.<sup>80</sup>

The hukamnama also required that women performing seva must be over thirty years of age and be accompanied by a male family member. The SGPC has yet to comply with the edict. As reported in India Today, “The SGPC simply ignored the directive. Even the first woman SGPC president, Bibi Jagir Kaur, found it politically expedient to keep the issue under wraps in the face of opposition by the Sant Samaj - a conglomerate of Sikh seminaries that exercises considerable sway over the SGPC electorate.”<sup>81</sup>

In 2019, the Punjab Legislative Assembly (Punjab Vidhan Sabha) passed a resolution urging the SGPC and the Akal Takht to permit women to perform Kirtan at the Golden Temple. The resolution stated, “This session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha appeals to the Jathedar of Akal

---

<sup>77</sup> Ketaki Desai, “How Sikh Women in Diaspora are Fighting for their Rights,” *Times of India*, April 14, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/how-sikh-women-in-diaspora-communities-are-fighting-for-their-rights/articleshow/75141280.cms>.

<sup>78</sup> Ramesh Vinayak, “Participation of Women in Late-Night Rights at Golden Temple Stokes Gender Bias Debate,” *India Today*, March 10, 2003, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/religion/story/20030310-participation-of-women-in-late-night-rites-at-golden-temple-stokes-gender-bias-debate-793286-2003-03-10> and “The Sikh Gurdwaras Act (Act 8) of 1925,” <https://lawsofindia.blinkvisa.com/pdf/haryana/1925/1925HR8.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Divya Goyal, “Explained: Why, Despite No Rule, Women are Not Allowed Kirtan Sewa at Golden Temple,” *The Indian Express*, November 15, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-despite-no-rule-women-not-allowed-kirtan-sewa-in-golden-temple-6120964/>.

<sup>80</sup> Sri Akal Takht Sahib, “English Translation of 1996 Hukamnama,” SikhNet, February 9, 1996, <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/s/EnglishHukam>.

<sup>81</sup> Ramesh Vinayak, “Participation of Women in Late-Night Rights at Golden Temple Stokes Gender Bias Debate,” *India Today*, March 10, 2003, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/religion/story/20030310-participation-of-women-in-late-night-rites-at-golden-temple-stokes-gender-bias-debate-793286-2003-03-10>.

Takht and the SGPC to end this discriminatory practice that violates the essence of Gurbani and allow Sikh women to perform kirtan.”<sup>82</sup> However, the resolution did not result in a change of policy. As the Times of India notes, “Despite the Punjab Assembly’s resolution allowing women to perform kirtan seva at the Golden Temple in November 2019, there has been no progress in actually enabling women to perform at the gurdwara, since the decision lies in the hands of the SGPC.”<sup>83</sup>

## **LEGAL STATUS OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

The first legal recognition of marriage equality in the United States was in 1984, when the city of Berkeley, California passed the nation’s first domestic partnership ordinance granting legal partnership rights to same-sex couples.<sup>84</sup>

In 1990, three couples in Hawaii initiated a series of lawsuits seeking a ruling that same-sex marriage was a constitutional right. The ultimate outcome was an amendment to the state constitution explicitly prohibiting same-sex marriage. However, the events in Hawaii raised fears that, under the “full faith and credit” provision of the U.S. Constitution, states could be compelled to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. The result was the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) of 1996 which “established that states would not be obligated to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and that the federal government would not recognize them at all.”<sup>85</sup>

In 2000, Vermont enacted legislation making the state the first to voluntarily offer benefits to same-sex couples. In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to legally recognize same-sex marriage. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court declared DOMA unconstitutional. (ibid)

In 2015 the Supreme Court, in the case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, ruled that marriage is a fundamental right guaranteed to all citizens, and legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, granting same-sex couples the same rights granted in the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. The opinion in *Obergefell* made it clear that religious organizations and leaders retained the freedom to refuse to perform same-sex marriages.<sup>86</sup>

In 2013, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act took effect in England and Wales. The Act allowed same sex couples to marry in civil ceremonies, and in religious ceremonies, where the religious organization has elected to conduct such ceremonies. The Act also protected religious

---

<sup>82</sup> “Allow Women to Perform Kirtan at Golden Temple,” *The Hindu*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/allow-women-to-perform-kirtan-at-golden-temple/article29926523.ece>.

<sup>83</sup> Ketaki Desai, “How Sikh Women in Diaspora are Fighting for their Rights,” *Times of India*, April 14, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/how-sikh-women-in-diaspora-communities-are-fighting-for-their-rights/articleshow/75141280.cms>.

<sup>84</sup> Tom Head, “Timeline and History of Marriage Rights,” *ThoughtCo.*, March 17, 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/marriage-rights-history-721314>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 135 S.Ct. 2071 (2015)

organizations that don't wish to conduct marriages of same sex couples from successful legal challenges.<sup>87</sup>

As of 2020, same-sex marriage was legal in only 29 of the world's 196 countries. Of those 29, all but four (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Taiwan) are in the western hemisphere or western Europe.<sup>88</sup> (See Appendix H). An additional 14 countries permit same-sex civil unions.<sup>89</sup>

## **WORLD RELIGIOUS STATUS OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

In this section we present a brief survey of the views of various religions on same-sex marriage. This summary is not intended as a complete list of the world's religions and their views, nor does it capture the significant variations of opinion within religions. Rather, it is intended to give an introductory sense of the range of attitudes and approaches among the world's religions.

### **CHRISTIANITY**

#### **Roman Catholic**

The Catholic Church does not permit same-sex marriage. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has stated that "marriage is a faithful, exclusive and lifelong union between one man and one woman." In 2003, the conference's Administrative Committee stated that "what are called 'homosexual unions' [cannot be given the status of marriage] because they do not express full human complementarity and because they are inherently nonprocreative."<sup>90</sup> In 2015, bishops attending the Vatican's Synod on the Family stated that the Church was clear that same-sex marriage is "not even remotely analogous" to heterosexual marriage, and that there is absolutely no grounds for gay marriage.<sup>91</sup> The Vatican, in a recent statement approved by Pope Francis on March 15, 2021, stated, that the Catholic Church and its priests cannot bless same-sex unions because God 'cannot bless sin'.<sup>92</sup> Pope Francis, however, has indicated support for civil same-sex unions. In an October 2020 film he said, "Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God. You can't kick someone out of a family, nor make their life

---

<sup>87</sup> Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, Wikipedia,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage\\_\(Same\\_Sex\\_Couples\)\\_Act\\_2013](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage_(Same_Sex_Couples)_Act_2013).

<sup>88</sup> "Marriage Equality Around the World," Human Rights Campaign, n.d.,

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world>.

<sup>89</sup> "Same-Sex Marriage," Wikipedia, page last edited March 23, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex\\_marriage#cite\\_note-countries\\_and\\_states\\_legal-302](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage#cite_note-countries_and_states_legal-302).

<sup>90</sup> "Religion and Politics: Contention and Consensus (Part III)," The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, n.d., <https://web.archive.org/web/20081109194247/https://www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=29>.

<sup>91</sup> Dan Avery, "Vatican Declares There is 'No Grounds' for Gay Marriage," *NewNowNext*, October 25, 2015, <http://www.newnownext.com/vatican-declares-there-is-no-grounds-for-gay-marriage/10/2015/>.

<sup>92</sup> "Vatican, Pope Francis say Catholic Church can't bless same-sex marriages because God 'can't bless sin'," USA Today, March 15, 2021. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/03/15/vatican-says-catholic-church-cant-bless-same-sex-unions/4698628001/>.

miserable for this. What we have to have is a civil union law; that way they are legally covered.”<sup>93</sup>

### **Orthodox Christian**

Like the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Christian Church does not allow gay marriage. In 2013, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America stated that "the Orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality, firmly grounded in Holy Scripture, two millennia of Church Tradition, and Canon Law, holds that the sacrament of marriage consists in the union of a man and a woman, and that authentic marriage reflects the sacred unity that exists between Christ and His Bride, the Church".<sup>94</sup>

### **Episcopal**

The Episcopal Church permits same-sex marriage. In 2015, the Episcopal Church passed a resolution officially approving same-sex marriage. However, individual clergy members retained the right to refuse to perform same-sex ceremonies.<sup>95</sup>

### **American Baptist**

The American Baptist Church does not approve same-sex marriage. In 1992, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches passed a resolution stating, "We affirm that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."<sup>96</sup> In 2005, the Board reaffirmed its position, stating that American Baptists "submit to the teaching of Scripture that God's design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman."<sup>97</sup>

### **Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod**

The Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church does not permit same-sex marriage. In 1998, the Synod issued a resolution stating that "the Synod declares that same-sex unions are, according to the Scriptures, contrary to the will of the Creator and sin against the commandments of God".<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> "Francis Becomes 1<sup>st</sup> Pope to Endorse Same-Sex Civil Unions," *Associated Press*, October 21, 2020, <https://wtop.com/europe/2020/10/pope-endorses-same-sex-civil-unions-in-new-documentary-film/>.

<sup>94</sup> "2013 Assembly Statement on Marriage and Sexuality." Retrieved 26 April 2017.

<sup>95</sup> "Faith Positions," University of Illinois Counseling Center, Adapted from Human Rights Campaign, n.d., <http://counselingcenter.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/Kimberly%20Hays--Religious%20Stances%20on%20LGBT%20identity.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> "American Baptist Resolution on Homosexuality," October 1992, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081112015231/http://www.abc-usa.org/Resources/resol/homosex.htm>.

<sup>97</sup> Human Rights Campaign, "Stances of Faiths on LGBTQ Issues: American Baptist Churches USA," n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-american-baptist-church-usa>.

<sup>98</sup> "Legislation Regarding Same-Sex Civil Unions," The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Adopted May 2, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081109194248/http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/Same%20Sex%20Union%20Opinion%200506.pdf>.

Other Lutheran denominations, such as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod <sup>99</sup> and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod <sup>100</sup> hold views similar to the Missouri Synod.

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is more accepting of same-sex marriage than many other Lutheran denominations. In 2009, the church issued a statement that acknowledged a lack of consensus within the church, but also acknowledged that sincere church adherents could have differing views on same sex marriage, including the view that “the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage”.<sup>101</sup> At that time, the church adopted a resolution that “that the ELCA commits itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships”.<sup>102</sup> Same-sex marriages are celebrated at many ELCA churches across the U.S.<sup>103</sup>

### **United Methodist**

The United Methodist Church does not recognize same-sex marriages. According to church doctrine, “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”<sup>104</sup> However, many individual churches have chosen to celebrate same-sex marriages despite this prohibition.<sup>105</sup>

### **Seventh Day Adventist**

The Seventh Day Adventist Church does not recognize same-sex marriage. The church’s position is that ‘Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship.’<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> “WELS President Expresses Regret at ELCA Decision on Gay Clergy,” Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, August 21, 2019, <https://rb.gy/3gpxbj>.

<sup>100</sup> “Press Release: ELS Disagrees with ELCA on Homosexuality,” Evangelical Lutheran Synod, August 21, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100929120948/http://evangelicallutheransynod.org/President/news/announcements/elca-homosexuality-pr-20080821>.

<sup>101</sup> “A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 19, 2009, [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?\\_ga=2.70436496.1243932690.1610418866-383721067.1610418866](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.70436496.1243932690.1610418866-383721067.1610418866).

<sup>102</sup> “2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly,” Wikipedia, page last edited June 3, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009\\_ELCA\\_Churchwide\\_Assembly](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_ELCA_Churchwide_Assembly).

<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Stances of Faiths on LGBTQ Issues: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-america>.

<sup>104</sup> “What is the Denomination’s Position on Homosexuality?” The People of the United Methodist Church, n.d., <http://ee.umc.org/what-we-believe/what-is-the-denominations-position-on-homosexuality>.

<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Stances of Faiths on LGBTQ Issues: The United Methodist Church,” n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-united-methodist-church>.

<sup>106</sup> “Marriage and the Family,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d., <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/living/marriage-and-the-family/>.

## **Unitarian Universalist Association**

The Unitarian Universalist Association fully supports marriage equality. In 1984 the church adopted a resolution stating that it “affirms the growing practice of some of its ministers of conducting services of union of gay and lesbian couples and urges member societies to support their ministers in this important aspect of our movement's ministry to the gay and lesbian community”.<sup>107</sup> In 1996, the church issued a resolution stating that member congregations should “proclaim the worth of marriage between any two committed persons and to make this position known in their home communities.”<sup>108</sup>

## **JUDAISM**

### **Orthodox Judaism**

Orthodox Judaism does not recognize same-sex marriage. In response to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, upholding the right of same-sex couples to marry, the Union of Orthodox Congregations stated, “We reiterate the historical position of the Jewish faith, enunciated unequivocally in our Bible, Talmud and Codes, which forbids homosexual relationships and condemns the institutionalization of such relationships as marriages.”<sup>109</sup>

### **Conservative Judaism**

Conservative Judaism recognizes same-sex marriages. In response to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Conservative Judaism’s Rabbinical Assembly stated “Our Movement recognizes and celebrates marriages, whether between partners of the same sex or the opposite sex. We therefore celebrate today’s decision on gay marriage by the Supreme Court.”

<sup>110</sup> Individual synagogues are not required to adopt the policies set by the Rabbinical Assembly.<sup>111</sup>

### **Reform Judaism**

Reform Judaism recognizes and supports same-sex marriage. In 2000, Reform Judaism’s Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted a resolution stating “that the relationship of a Jewish, same gender couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual.” At the same time, the conference also adopted a resolution stating that “we recognize the diversity of

---

<sup>107</sup> “Gay and Lesbian Services of Union – 1984 Business Resolution,” Unitarian Universalist Association, 1984, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060719071331/http://www.uua.org/actions/bgl/84union.html>.

<sup>108</sup> Unitarian Universalist Association, “Support the Right to Marry for Same-Sex Couples: 1986 Resolution of Immediate Witness,” July 1, 1996, <https://www.uua.org/action/statements/support-right-marry-same-sex-couples>.

<sup>109</sup> Orthodox Union Staff, “Orthodox Union Statement on Supreme Court’s Ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*,” Orthodox Union, June 26, 2015, <https://www.ou.org/news/orthodox-union-statement-on-supreme-courts-ruling-in-obergefell-v-hodges/>.

<sup>110</sup> The Rabbinical Assembly, “RA Celebrates Supreme Court’s Rulings on Gay Marriage,” June 27, 2013, <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/ra-celebrates-supreme-court-s-rulings-gay-marriage>.

<sup>111</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Stances of Faiths on LGBTQ Issues: Conservative Judaism,” n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-conservative-judaism>.

opinions within our ranks on this issue. We support the decision of those who choose to officiate at rituals of union for same-gender couples, and we support the decision of those who do not.”<sup>112</sup>

## **ISLAM**

Same-sex marriage is not recognized in Islamic law. Under Islamic law marriage is a contract between a man and a woman and same-sex couples cannot enter into such a contract.<sup>113</sup> In both Sunni and Shi’a Islam, homosexuality is forbidden and is considered to be a moral, physical, and psychological disorder.<sup>114</sup> Same sex relations are illegal in most Muslim countries, and are punishable by death in a number of those countries.<sup>115</sup> However, there is no central governing authority over Muslim communities and same-sex marriages are performed at a small number of LGBTQ-friendly mosques.<sup>116</sup>

## **BUDDHISM**

The Buddhist religion has not taken an official stance on same-sex marriage.<sup>117</sup> Buddhism does not prescribe any specific marriage ceremonies or sacraments.<sup>118</sup> Views on homosexuality vary among and within the various schools of Buddhism.

### **Theraveda**

One monk in the Theraveda Buddhist tradition has written that there is no objection to same-sex marriage in the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>119</sup> Another source notes that the primary concern of Buddhism is the way partners treat each other, not their gender.<sup>120</sup> However, many monks in the Theraveda tradition view being born gay or lesbian as a form of karma for past misconduct.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> Central Conference of American Rabbis, “Same Gender Officiation: Resolution Adopted by the CCAR,” March 2020, <https://www.ccarnet.org/ccar-resolutions/same-gender-officiation/>.

<sup>113</sup> Jonathan AC Brown, “Muslim Scholar on How Islam Really Views Homosexuality,” *Variety*, June 30, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/voices/opinion/islam-gay-marriage-beliefs-muslim-religion-1201531047/>.

<sup>114</sup> Javaid Rehman and Eleni Polymenopoulou, “Is Green a Part of the Rainbow? Sharia, Homosexuality, and LGBT Rights in the Muslim World,” *Fordham International Law Journal*, 2013, Vol. 7, Issue 1, Article 7, <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2322&context=ilj>.

<sup>115</sup> “LGBT in Islam: Same Sex Marriage,” Wikipedia, page last edited March 20, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_in\\_Islam#Same-sex\\_marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_in_Islam#Same-sex_marriage).

<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Campaign, “Stances of Faiths on LGBTQ Issues: Islam - Sunni and Shi’a,” n.d., <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-islam>.

<sup>117</sup> “Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage,” The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, April 1, 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081109194247/https://www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=291>.

<sup>118</sup> James Ishmael Ford, “How to Have a (More) Buddhist Wedding,” *Lion’s Roar*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-have-a-more-buddhist-wedding/>.

<sup>119</sup> Mettanando Bhikkhu, “Religion and Same-Sex Marriage: Will Gay Marriage Be Allowed by Buddhists in Thailand?” *Bangkok Post*, July 13, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081006005658/http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,1429,0,0,1,0>.

<sup>120</sup> “Buddhism on Homosexuality,” *ReligionFacts.com*, Last Updated January 31, 2021, <http://www.religionfacts.com/buddhism/homosexuality>.

<sup>121</sup> Mettanando Bhikkhu, “Religion and Same-Sex Marriage: Will Gay Marriage Be Allowed by Buddhists in Thailand?” *Bangkok Post*, July 13, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081006005658/http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=70,1429,0,0,1,0>.

## Tibetan Buddhism

The Dalai Lama, leader of the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, has stated that same-sex relations are a form of sexual misconduct.<sup>122</sup> However, he has not definitively opposed same-sex relationships, stating on another occasion, with regard to non-abusive consensual same-sex relationships “I don't know. It's difficult to say.”<sup>123</sup>

## Buddhism in the West

Many Buddhist congregations in the West permit same-sex marriages. Buddhist Churches of America, practitioners of the Shin school of Mahayana Buddhism, have been performing same-sex marriages since the 1970s.<sup>124</sup> The U.S. branch of Soka Gakkai International began performing wedding ceremonies for same-sex couples in 1995.<sup>125</sup> The Nalandabodhi and Shambhala organizations state that they welcome all sexual orientations.<sup>126 127</sup>

## HINDUISM

There is no central Hindu authority to set policy on same-sex marriage and a range of views exists in the Hindu community. LGBTQ issues vary at different temples and ashrams. Vedanta scholar Swami Bodhananda Saraswati stated that “there is no official position in Hinduism . . . From a Hindu standpoint, there is nothing wrong because there is nothing against it in scripture . . . Different priests may or may not perform same-sex weddings - it is their individual choice . . .”<sup>128</sup> According to H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, “Homosexuality has never been considered a crime in Hindu culture. In fact, Lord Ayyappa was born of Hari-Hara (Vishnu & Shiva). It is not a crime in any Smriti.”<sup>129</sup> Others, however, note that there are disapproving references to same sex relations in certain ancient texts.<sup>130</sup> There is still strong cultural resistance to same-sex relations in Hindu culture.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> James Shaheen, “Gay Marriage: What Would Buddha Do?” *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, <https://rb.gy/nollch>.

<sup>123</sup> “Buddhism on Homosexuality”, ReligionFacts, <https://religionfacts.com/buddhism/homosexuality>.

<sup>124</sup> Jeff Wilson, “A Big Gay History of Same-Sex Marriage in the Sangha,” *Tricycle*, June 27, 2015, <https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/big-gay-history-same-sex-marriage-sangha/>.

<sup>125</sup> Alex Boling et al., “Courageous Freedom: SGI-USA’s LGBTQ Community,” Soka Gakkai International – USA, May 19, 2016, <https://www.sgi-usa.org/2016/05/19/courageous-freedom-sgi-usas-lgbtq-community/>.

<sup>126</sup> “About Shambhala,” Shambhala, n.d., [https://web.archive.org/web/20091129000209/http://www.shambhala.org/about\\_shambhala.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20091129000209/http://www.shambhala.org/about_shambhala.php).

<sup>127</sup> “Buddhism and Sexual Orientation,” Wikipedia, page last edited March 13, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism\\_and\\_sexual\\_orientation#cite\\_note-hearttoheart-77](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_and_sexual_orientation#cite_note-hearttoheart-77)

<sup>128</sup> Ruth Vanita, “Same-sex Weddings, Hindu Traditions and Modern India” *Feminist Review*, 2009, No. 91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40663979?seq=1>.

<sup>129</sup> “HAF Policy Brief: Hindu Teachings Inclusive of LGBT People,” Hindu American Foundation, June 16, 2016, <https://www.hinduamerican.org/press/haf-policy-brief-hindu-teachings-inclusive-lgbt-people>.

<sup>130</sup> Devdutt Pattanaik, “Homosexuality in Ancient India,” *Debonair* (Anniversary Issue), 2001, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081022073423/http://www.gaybombay.org/reading/art0001.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Brendan Koerner, “Do Hindus Decry Homosexuality?” *Slate*, June 15, 2004, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2004/06/do-hindus-condemn-homosexuality.html>.

**SUMMARY: WORLD RELIGIOUS STATUS OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY**

# Religious Views on Marriage Equality

Surveying the position of some world religions on same-sex marriage

	GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE	CENTRAL AUTHORITY STANCE	EXCEPTIONS
<b>ROMAN CATHOLIC</b>	Hierarchical - doctrine of papal supremacy	Same-sex marriage is not permitted	N/A
<b>ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN</b>	Decentralized - synodical system	Same-sex marriage is not permitted	N/A
<b>EPISCOPAL</b>	Hierarchical - bishops are chief local authorities	Same-sex marriage is permitted per 2015 resolution	N/A
<b>AMERICAN BAPTIST</b>	Congregational - autonomy for congregations	Same-sex marriage is not approved	N/A
<b>PRESBYTERIAN</b>	Polity - local churches governed by elected body of elders	Same sex marriage is permitted per 2014 measure	Ministers permitted to use their own discernment and abide by local law.
<b>LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD</b>	Central president, board and Commission on Theology	Same-sex marriage is not permitted	N/A
<b>EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA</b>	65 synods in nine regions supported by central churchwide office	Lack of consensus. Autonomy given to ministers / congregations to perform ceremonies	Debate is ongoing in the church.

	GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE	CENTRAL AUTHORITY STANCE	EXCEPTIONS
<b>UNITED METHODIST</b>	Connectional polity organized into conferences. General Conference at highest level.	Does not recognize same-sex marriage	Many individual churches have chosen to celebrate same-sex marriages despite restriction
<b>SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST</b>	General Conference at global level with 13 divisions.	Does not recognize same-sex marriage	N/A
<b>UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST</b>	voluntary association with delegates from congregations	Fully supports marriage equality	N/A
<b>ORTHODOX JUDAISM</b>	Decentralized - councils govern some groupings	Does not recognize same-sex marriage	N/A
<b>CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM</b>	Rabbinical Assembly - international association of conservative rabbis	Recognizes and celebrates same-sex marriages	Individual synagogues are not required to accept policy set by the Rabbinical Assembly
<b>REFORM JUDAISM</b>	URJ - central leadership and delegates from congregations	Recognizes and supports same-sex marriage	Accepts diversity of views among rabbis
<b>ISLAM</b>	Many nations follow Islamic law or Islamic Monarchy. Local Imams influential.	Same-sex marriage is not recognized	Same-sex marriages performed at small number of LGBTQ-friendly mosques
<b>THERAVEDA BUDDHISM</b>	Local administration at monasteries.	No central authority position	Diverse opinions expressed among scholars
<b>TIBETAN BUDDHISM</b>	Office of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama	No definitive opinion	Dalai Lama expressed different views on different occasions
<b>BUDDHISM IN THE WEST</b>	Decentralized - autonomous temples/centers.	Many congregations perform same-sex marriages	N/A
<b>HINDUISM</b>	Decentralized and local. Diverse and distinct communities and practitioners.	No central Hindu authority to set policy	Wide variance in culture, views and policies among temples/ashrams

## **PERSPECTIVES OF MEMBERS OF OUR ORGANIZATIONS AND SANGAT**

### **Letter from Bibiji Inderjit Kaur Khalsa, Bhai Sahiba of Sikh Dharma International**



20 February 2021

Mere Piari Sadh Sangat Ji,

Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa  
Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh

As Panth Rattan and Bhai Sahiba of Sikh Dharma International, as well as holding this office under the concurrent authority of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), under the supreme authority of the Akal Takht Sahib of Amritsar, it is incumbent upon me to speak with you. All of our Ministers who serve under the auspices of Sikh Dharma International and our global Sangat throughout the world hold a privileged relationship to serve that exists solely by the Grace of Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji who established the Akal Takht Sahib as the supreme authority for Sikhs throughout the world.

This is our Dharma and our responsibility, individually and as one Sikh Panth to know our history and understand how we may continue to serve our global Sangat under the blessing of the Akal Takht Sahib. Sikh Dharma International (originally known as Sikh Dharma Brotherhood) was officially recognized as a religion in the United States in 1971. In acknowledgement of the extraordinary impact of spreading the universal message of the Gurus, Sant Chanan Singh, then president of the SGPC, called Yogi Bhajan the Siri Singh Sahib, the Chief Religious and Administrative Authority for Sikhs in the Western Hemisphere. He was thereby given the responsibility to create a Sikh Ministry by the Akal Takht Sahib.

As Sikh Ministers, we recognize and honor the Akal Takht Sahib as the supreme authority for Sikhs and look to the Rehat Maryada for guidance in the care of our living Guru and in our daily lives, including the performance of birth, marriage, and death ceremonies. Article XVIII

of the Rehat Maryada provides guidance for the Anand Karaj or wedding ceremony for Sikhs. This instruction provides that only a man and a woman may be joined in matrimony in the presence of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

As Sikhs, we recognize and honor every being of every gender, every ethnic background, and every creed as sacred. As Sikh Ministers, at this time, we may choose to perform a marriage ceremony in other locations than a Gurdwara, or other than in the presence of the Siri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, for same gender couples in our Sangat.

That we can do.

Today, we are facing many challenges in our communities, and to meet these challenges, it is important that we remain united in recognizing and honoring the supreme authority of the Akal Takht Sahib with our Sikh Sangat around the globe. Our Sangat is our strength and our love and our support. Let us work with them to affect changes we want to see happen.

May the blessings of Guru Ram Das bring peace and understanding to the heart and mind of every Sikh, may happiness and prosperity flow to every home, and may we be granted the expanded consciousness to serve this world with all our strength and love to uplift everyone and bring the light of the Shabad Guru to every heart.

In gratitude and love to all,

*Bibiji Inderjit Kaur Khalsa*

Bhai Sahiba Bibiji Inderjit Kaur Khalsa

### **Letter from Pritpal Kaur Khalsa, CEO of 3HO Foundation, with Board Member Statement**

February 15,

2021 Sat Nam,

I have been asked by Kirtan Singh to represent 3HO in presenting thoughts regarding holding same sex marriages in Gurdwaras held in 3HO communities around the world. First let me state that the 3HO Board of Directors has had dialogue on this issue but has not taken a vote on our stand in regards to this issue facing our community. On Thursday February 18th the 3HO Board will discuss this topic in depth with the intention of voting on whether to allow same sex marriages at Gurdwaras held at 3HO Events.

The statement I am sharing here represents opinions and statements that have been expressed by various 3HO Board Members as well as myself as CEO of 3HO.

There are two Gurdwara wedding programs currently held at 3HO events. One is Summer Solstice in New Mexico and Winter Solstice in Florida. These weddings are put on by the Solstice Gurdwara missal or team with a Sikh Dharma International Minister presiding over the ceremony.

Same-sex marriage has been legally recognized in the U.S. state of Florida since January 6, 2015. Same- sex marriage became legally recognized statewide in the U.S. state of New Mexico

through a ruling by the New Mexico Supreme Court on December 19, 2013. At all of our 3HO events, we actively work with local guidelines for all of our activities. We hire local law enforcement to provide a safe environment for attendees as well as abide by state health guidelines for all activities. State permits are obtained when required for all aspects of our events.

Not only is it legal in New Mexico and Florida, but choosing to be in a stable, long-lasting, committed relationship is a right and a choice between two people. Celebratory marriage ceremonies at our 3HO Solstices is imperative if we are truly to stand in our value of **inclusivity and diversity**.

Just to give a broader historical context...Can we all imagine going back to a time where multi-racial marriages were prohibited? They are welcomed at Solstices... and same-sex marriages are not.

Each year the 3HO Board of Directors carefully reviews our Core Purpose, mission and Values. In 2021, with the allegations that came forward about the sexual abuse by Yogi Bhajan and the reporting of harm at our programs for many youth at our India School Programs and our youth camps, 3HO recognizes that it is vital that 3HO not just state our core purpose. It is essential that we show how we are providing concrete actions that reflect this core purpose and values.

I share below 3HO's Core Purpose:

#### **CORE PURPOSE: WHY WE DO IT**

- **We believe and support personal transformation and growth of conscious community.**
- **We are welcoming and embrace people of all faiths, beliefs, genders, orientations, race, ethnicity and the many expressions of being.**
- **We courageously serve and adapt to the times.**

If 3HO does not allow same sex marriage at the Gurudwara weddings at our events then we are going back on our word and stated purpose.

#### **3HO MISSION: WHAT WE DO**

**To Inspire everyone everywhere to realize their full potential through the uplifting experience of Kundalini Yoga**

If we are going to live and work in alignment with our values, then all are welcome everywhere. If we are going to reach everyone, everywhere then everyone, everywhere should feel welcome. We cannot say that ALL are welcome, except here. That is not welcoming. There can be no exceptions.

3HO recognizes that for many members of our 3HO community, the initial connection to Sikh Dharma was through a 3HO event or through attending a Kundalini Yoga class and connecting to Shabd Guru or a Gurudwara. This is the statement from the 3HO Board's Mission and Values statement reflecting this:

## CONSTELLATION OF YB NON-PROFITS: WHERE WE FIT

- **3HO is the entry point to the sister organizations, KRI and Sikh Dharma.**

If 3HO takes the lead in embracing same sex marriage it will have a profound positive impact for our entire community. If we do not take this stand there will be a big fall out from our 3HO community over taking the wrong side of this issue. At a time when 3HO is already experiencing a loss of community members because of the Yogi Bhajan allegations this would further disengage community members.

This is not an issue which is going unnoticed. There is already a [petition](#) circulating which has received ( at the time I am writing this) 780 signatures. We must pay attention and walk the path of righteous action which is a value that is embraced by all of our Legacy Non-Profit Organizations.

I am sharing here other comments from a member of our 3HO Board:

*At the GRD Ashram in LA, they have bypassed this issue by not allowing any marriage ceremonies in the Gurdwara. To me this is a cop-out. I would say that if a Gurdwara would not allow this, it is not the Gurdwara for me or, in this case, does not fit the values of 3HO.*

*I was raised as a Sikh, went to an Indian Sikh boarding school; I spent my school breaks at the Golden Temple and at Baba Nihal Singh's village. I understand the Sikh culture in India and it can be very far off from the original ideas that formed the religion. Many of the original concepts have been lost or perverted by hypocrisy, as is the case of many religious organizations.*

*From the very beginning Guru Nanak walked miles on the path of social justice trying to spread the idea of Oneness which is the basic concept of Sikhi. His mission was of equality and he tried to bring awareness to the injustice of the caste system and the plight of women. This was then punctuated with an exclamation mark by the last Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh who declared that Sikhs had to stand for what was right, even to the extent that they should give their lives defending it.*

*There is no threat of being kicked out of the Golden Temple, that does not happen to a whole body of people. The Namdhari's are a sect of Sikhs that still have a living Guru from the original lineage of our traditions which is considered highly sacrilegious to Indian Sikhs but they are still allowed into the Golden Temple. 4 Doors open to the 4 directions so that All will be welcome....*

*This would be validated action based on another of the values we listed for ourselves and our organization:*

*"We courageously serve and adapt to the times."*

*As directors, each of us has accepted the Duty of Care to our own organization – not to any other. Not to Sikh Dharma, not to the school – only to do what is in the best interest of our organization.*

Following the 3HO Board meeting on February 18<sup>th</sup> I will send to SDI any further statement from the 3HO Board of Directors.

With prayers for the highest consciousness of justice, equality, kindness and righteousness to prevail.

Pritpal Kaur Khalsa

3HO CEO

### **Letter from Sat Jagat Singh Khalsa, 3HO Board Member**

In 3HO our mission is to inspire everyone everywhere to realize their full potential through the uplifting experience of Kundalini Yoga. We are welcoming and embrace people of all faiths, beliefs, genders, orientations, race, ethnicity, and the many expressions of being.

The lives of the Gurus, the Shabd Guru, and many aspects of Sikh culture are inextricably woven into the 3HO experience. The concept of Seva is paramount. Teachers serve their students; students serve their teachers. No one is turned away. It is a great blessing to make and serve the langar and it is a great blessing to be served. Yogis and Sikhs all come to the realization that the Guru's blessing for Seva is the opportunity to do more Seva.

Yogis are inspired by the universality of Seva and the Universality of the Guru's mission. The Golden Temple has four doors open to all. No one is turned away.

Yogis are presented with the beauty and majesty and spirit of the Guru's court in the Gurdwara at the end of Sadhana at many of our gatherings. No one is turned away.

The Anand Karaj is that unique ceremony that blends the blessings of the Guru and the blessings of the Sadh Sangat and the lifetime commitment of the couple to serve each other and serve the world.

Some Gurdwara Sevadars and SDI management have taken on the heavy karma of presuming to speak for the Guru and deny same sex couples who are humble devotees of the Guru the blessing of Anand Karaj. How can any of us deny the Guru's blessings to our brothers and sisters?

We know there are groups in India and around the world that oppose same sex marriage. I have spoken to many SDI leaders who say they are in favor of same sex marriage, but it is too risky to permit it. There could be many repercussions. Yes, let us be aware of the possible repercussions and enhance our security. But we must make the changes. 3HO can no longer be associated with a practice that discriminates against our LGBTQ brothers and sisters.

### **Notes from phone Interview with Amrit Singh Khalsa, Chief Executive Officer, Kundalini Research Institute, January 26, 2021**

*The question was asked of Amrit Singh, what does he see the ramifications to be of Sikh Dharma instituting or not instituting a marriage equality policy?*

I can only see it (a policy for marriage equality) as being a positive thing. Two persons have specifically mentioned this to me as an issue. 'How could you be so far behind the time.' I haven't heard anyone speak in favor of the opposite side (of not exercising marriage equality). I

find the KY yoga community to be open-minded. The context was, “Why should I keep working with KRI? This was a big reason (learning marriage equality is not permitted) why I might not stay as a KRI trainer”. We are dealing with KRI Teacher Trainers and the issue of the Siri Singh Sahib Corp. So many trainers raised the issue of ‘what do you mean we’re part of a religious organization?’ This was relevant to concerns about both Akal Security contracts and marriage equality.

In a recent poll we took, 84 percent of trainers said they have concerns about being associated with the Siri Singh Sahib Corporation, commenting that the SSSC was not democratic or transparent enough, and that it is a religious corporation. Some trainers have said, ‘If you don’t separate from SSSC we’re leaving’. We need to learn more about the scope of the problem and talk about possible solutions. Is it a question of communicating better, educating better, making the boards more transparent? We’re in an exploratory, listening mode for a while.

The marriage equality issue is a good example of the problem. There could be backlash, i.e., why was this an issue? It is one example of a bigger issue. How can we say we’re willing to stand for the oppressed and we’re not willing to do this (support marriage equality)?

Is the money we have invested in Miri Piri Academy more important? (regarding objections voiced by some other organizations of the risk to Miri Piri Academy if SDI were to go against the Akal Takht). I understand that there are complicated implications in taking that stance (to support marriage equality), but there should not be any question about what stand to take. SDI should be smart and strategic about how to deal with the consequences. This problem is an example of the effect of being associated with a religion.

Direct quote: “I strongly support SDI coming out in favor of marriage equality and see no downside to KRI’s constituency. I acknowledge that there probably will be downsides or consequences to some of the other entities, but I feel we need to do this anyway in order to live to our values and do the right thing.”

### **Interview with Hari Charn Kaur Khalsa, KRI, Director of Reach Out-Teach Out Promotion and Outreach, February 13, 2021**

*The question was asked of Hari Charn Kaur, what do you see the ramifications being of Sikh Dharma instituting or not instituting a marriage equality policy?*

As a sevadar of KRI for 20 plus years, I feel the only way we can be relevant as an organization is to have marriage equality. I have been heartened and inspired by the position GRDA LA has taken. I think we have to ask ourselves where we are uncomfortable and do our own work; whether it be racial or gender justice. When we talk about Khalsa having no gender it is time for us to walk our talk. Marriage equality is a no-brainer.

I am very aware of the concerns of SGPC in India. If we as Western Sikhs were to do this we might be excommunicated and we might not be able to go to the Golden Temple. I don’t want a threat to stop us from doing the right thing. I think it is time to be who we are.

It would impact my life if I couldn't go to the Golden Temple and bow. I go to India every year.

I feel it is time for us to be the leaders on this. KRI did the first work with Dukh Niwaran to get the LGBTQ task force going. I 100 percent support marriage equity and equality with open arms. To me everyone is God's children. Love is love.

### **Statement by Amrit Kaur Ramos, staff member, SSSC and KRI**

My name is Amrit Kaur Ramos (sometimes I go by Amrit Vela) and I am a daughter of this Dharma. I was raised in this community. My parents, aunt and uncle helped build this community since the 1970s. I went to MPA. I am a Lead Trainer in the Aquarian Teacher Academy. I currently work for the SSSC and KRI. I also identify as both a Sikh and a lesbian.

I was asked to write my perspective on same sex marriages in Gurdwaras as this issue has affected me personally. In 2017 I was blessed with meeting my life partner. When we were faced with the decision as to where we wanted to have our wedding ceremony there was no doubt in our minds that we wanted to get married in front of the Guru. We are both devout Sikhs and we both follow the Sikh values, lifestyle and path. But most of all, we could not imagine taking a step of a lifetime commitment to one another without what we personally consider our altar, the Siri Guru Granth Sahib.

The joy was quickly tampered when we shared this decision with our friends and family. Ministers, who we considered family at the time, were quick to point out that this was not supported by the ministry or SDI. That even though there was no official decree, it was strongly encouraged that we should NOT get married in front of the Guru. We were told all of the reasons that are outlined in this White Paper. We were instilled with the fear of GOD that if we got married in front of the Guru, life as SDI and its ministry would be over. Kids in India would be evicted from their school. Western Sikhs would not be allowed to enter the Golden Temple. Raagis from the community would not be allowed to sing in the gurdwaras in India. We were even told that violence could result if it became known that an Anand Karaj with a same sex couple was performed.

I cried. My partner cried. I started forming a plan of how to disengage from this community. A community that I love and had served in all my life. But how could I be part of a community that preaches the virtues of marriage but did not support me in mine? How could I be part of a community that preaches that we are all one and yet discriminates against others because of fear? How could I continue to work and serve these organizations if the organizations did not support me in my basic rights?

I never once questioned my love for the Guru. I never once questioned whether I should be a Sikh. Because regardless of what SDI tells me, my relationship with the Guru is exactly that. MINE. Nobody can dictate that. Not the SGPC or the Ministry and certainly not the fear and inaction that strangles it.

In the end, it was not the organizations that rose to my defense. Ironically, it was different individual members of the ministry that stepped up to defend my rights and that of my partner.

Members in the SSSC who spoke up and supported us. My boss who stepped up when I called him to quit as I cried. He inspired me to stay and try to change this with my example and with my story. It was our family members who stood by our sides and told us that, “we will take out our kirpans and stand with you, fight with you, and fight for equality”.

In the end, we did get married in front of the Guru with an Anand Karaj. It was the most impactful and beautiful moment in our life. Everybody who participated, Sikhs and non-Sikhs, cried during the whole ceremony. Ex members of this community, who left because of this reason, came up to us later and told us that during our wedding they remembered why they loved the Guru so much.

However, that moment came with a high cost. We swore our friends and family to secrecy. We took photos professionally but never shared them with anybody. We did not even take a video of our wedding. To this day I have yet to share a picture of that moment with anybody outside of my immediate family.

I share this story so that whoever reads this can understand the pain that we went through. That I still go through. I share this because I have been given a chance to give a voice to many in this community that are otherwise unheard. I share this because I know we are not the only same sex couple who has had an Anand Karaj in a Gurdwara performed by an SDI minister. I have spoken to others who have also gotten married in secret. Let me repeat that so you can understand it. They got married IN SECRET so as not to cause trouble for SDI and to give SDI time to sort out through their process.

This age and era is very simple. Live your values, live authentically, or you will become obsolete. If you are truly a Sikh and you truly believe in Guru Nanak’s words of “Ek Ong Kaur” then it is a simple choice. If you really study the sacrifices that the Gurus made for others who had no voice or basic human rights, then you understand this is a simple choice.

I know that I speak for others when I say that time is running out to make a decision on this issue. It is not a threat. It is a reality. Many have already left the ministry and this community because of lack of support on this particular issue. They have left because of the hypocrisy of preaching we are all one but only if you meet certain conditions. I also foresee that there will be couples in the future who will not care about what SDI thinks and they will get married in front of the Guru and not be secretive about it.

For myself, and for many who I have spoken to, it is just as simple as understanding Ek Ong Kaar. My relationship with the Guru and my values is non-negotiable. But my relationship to these organizations is.

## **Statement of Sardarni Sahiba DukhNiwaran Kaur Khalsa, member Khalsa Council LGBTQ+ Task Force**

I came to Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma after leaving the Catholic church. I knew as a woman and a lesbian, there was little hope that I could find a safe home in the church. After a long search, I found deep and meaningful experiences with Divine in Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma and knew that I had found my spiritual home. I was happy to see that women had leadership roles and that there was some openness in my local Kundalini Yoga community for LGBTQ+ people. I was committed from the start. By the time I went to my first Women's Camp and then Summer Solstice, my spiritual experiences deepened, and my commitment grew. For the first time in my life, I felt the longing to help build a community and create opportunities for many others to find their home here.

My love and longing pushed out the questions I had about the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people here. These questions came from the silence about LGBTQ+ people's mere existence and the explicit celebration of all things heterosexual and gender conforming. I felt as though I was the only LGBTQ+ person here and in that particular isolation, we instinctively find safety in silence. It felt familiar although uncomfortable to mask my sexuality in order to be accepted here. I grew up in a loving Catholic family who I almost lost when I came out as lesbian. I lived in a similar silence in my family in order to remain connected to them. This masking and this silence I call my "transparent closet".

I didn't lie about my sexuality, but I didn't allow my full self to live in these spaces. I was the "good daughter" with my family and the "graceful woman" in our communities but never truly my full self in either. So, when teachers I admire discouraged me from gathering with the Rainbow Sangat (the LGBTQ+ community at Solstices) I fell in line. When they told me LGBTQ+ people were being "too ego identified" and undermining our "oneness" I listened and cut off a part of myself, quieted my true voice and tried to conform to the expected roles. I knew that I would be accepted and loved and that would translate into opportunities to serve, teach and lead. I did this so quietly that sometimes I didn't even notice parts of me were gone.

Then, as my leadership roles were more solid, I began to walk toward my LGBTQ+ community. Here I began to reclaim these parts of myself and slowly live more authentically and fully. And as I reconnected these parts of myself, I began to truly feel the pain of this experience of being expected to disconnect from my full self in this community. I began to feel the heartbreak whenever there was a wedding at the Solstice Gurdwara, knowing that I could not get married here. I began to feel the hurt when I was asked, more times than I can excuse, if my "girlfriend" and I were still together when my wife and I had been married for over 30 years. When our relationships and marriages were not honored and respected, my embodied self began to feel the pain of that discrimination. I don't want anyone else to come here and feel this heartbreak. I don't want anyone else to fall in love with this path and practice only to discover they are not accepted as their full self here. This is my motivation for working for marriage equality.

I believe that full transparency is required, especially in these current times. And so, I need to supplement my story with my current experiences in working on marriage equality in our community. For about 5 years, I have been advocating for marriage equality at Khalsa Council as well as other organizations in our community. We have done work on LGBTQ+ awareness and

sensitivity training. We have identified the obstacles to marriage equality that are likely discussed in this white paper. And it has taken 5 years for this step to be taken and for a serious discussion about marriage equality to begin.

As an LGBTQ+ person in this community, this time frame is intolerable. As a Khalsa, it communicates to me that I am less than my other Khalsa siblings that are able to enjoy all aspects of Sikh life. It tells me that while I am welcomed here, I do not fully belong here. The process of the creation of this white paper also communicates this conditional belonging. This paper was not conceived of with the interests and needs of the LGBTQ+ community in mind.

Rather than the intention of the paper to be solution-focused “how do we make marriage equality happen in our community” its intention is problem-focused “what are the problems that keep us from having marriage equality”. This subtle distinction communicates the marginalization of LGBTQ+ people in this community.

Because of this, I refused an invitation to write portions of this paper. After the paper was completed and read by members of the leadership, I was asked, with 3 days’ notice, to write my personal story. While I am fine adding this to the discussion, my voice as an advocate was not invited. I was not given access to the paper and so was unable to put my story within its context or write a commentary on its contents. A key aspect to discrimination is the silencing of voices that are not aligned with those of the privileged. Often, this silencing is an unconscious action but when repeatedly done, indicates a bias in the individuals, the institutions and community that goes unquestioned and unaddressed. It is an uncomfortable process to recognize these biases, use that awareness to walk toward the “other” and build new relationships and new institutions. And it is critical work to be done.

The discomfort of the privileged is no reason to deny the humanity of the marginalized. In this process, we are weighing two things: the humanity of LGBTQ+ people and the comfort of staying true to traditions. No one’s humanity should be a discussion point to be debated. No one’s humanity should ever be compromised.

*SS DukhNiwaran Kaur Khalsa, MA is a Sikh Minister, member of Khalsa Council, Level 3 Teacher and Professional Teacher Trainer and a psychotherapist. She has been working as an advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion in our communities for over 5 years. She has served on the staff of Summer and Winter Solstices for 18 years and served the LGBTQ+ community there through gatherings and classes. She has done speaking engagements, conducted trainings and webinars on LGBTQ+ inclusion for KRI, IKYTA, Khalsa Council and individual communities. She received the 2021 KRI Outstanding Achievement Award and the Spirit of Baisakhi Award on behalf of the Sikh Community of Southern California in April of 2019 for her work for LGBTQ+ inclusion. She lives in Chicago with her wife of 32 years.*

## **Statement by Simran Kaur Khalsa, Board Chair, Sikh Dharma Educational Institute**

Personally, I am elated and grateful that we are thinking of making a statement that is in alignment with the founding principles of Sikhism, equality.

In my capacity as a Sikh of the world and as SDEI Board chair, we must look at the fact that the Akal Takhat has made a statement against marriage equality.

Sikh Dharma International must take the lead on marriage equality, but we also must work with other Gurdwaras and leadership, Sikhs in India and abroad and as many others, so we can collectively call for a change in Akal Takhat's policy as it goes against the Sikh value of equality. We do need marriage equality.

Possible fallout, the SGPC can excommunicate or punish anyone associating with us, those related to/associate with this statement may not be allowed at the Golden Temple, the SGPC leases us the land Miri Piri Academy is on in Amritsar and could take it back.

In my capacity as SDEI Board Chair it is my job is to think about the safety of the students and staff of Miri Piri Academy in Amritsar. MPA is the only outpost representing 'Western Sikhs', we stand out just being foreigners and this could make us a target of any response.

## **Interview with Jagat Guru Singh, Principal of Miri Piri Academy, January 25, 2021**

*The question was asked of Jagat Guru Singh, what do you see the ramifications being of Sikh Dharma instituting or not instituting a marriage equality policy?*

I think it should be the norm. Everyone should be entitled to their way of life. Knowing the Punjabis for 25 years, though, it would be a very dangerous thing for us to do. The immediate reaction may not be just to our larger community i.e., MPA; it would affect the Cherdī Kālā Jetha playing at the Golden Temple, our community traveling around India and the many places we go....it would mean excommunication at worst and at least, not being set up with places to stay at during Gurburbs. It won't be business as usual. If you go openly as an organization against Akal Takht, that it is not a wise way to go.

We have no communication going on with SGPC presently. We know we have other parties opposed to us and they will use us taking a positive marriage equality stance against us. Some of the people I have spoken with in India are taking a 'we'll see what you do' stance with this. By doing marriage equality you would be making a decision to separate from Akal Takht. It is a cultural, deeply embedded system that they are running on.

I would look toward the Siri Singh Sahib's history of dealing with them (Sikh religious authorities). What did he do? He didn't tell the women to go and protest (for their rights to do seva, etc.), but every time he spoke with them (Sikh authorities), he spoke about seva and allowing the women to participate. In the Indian community you don't use methods to push through actions and do things just because we believe we are doing things, the right things 'our way'.

*He gave an example of an incident where our kids protested about how the parkarma was washed with buckets bringing the water from sarovar instead of hoses and they did the opposite of what the protocol was. We had to apologize profusely. I have seen our women protesting during ishnan seva, watched them go up to the sevadars and argue. We have been threatened for doing that.*

If we do anything like this (as an organization), we will have consequences to pay. For individuals to do marriages in their homes, same-sex marriages etc., we can defend against that. But if we make a public statement against Akal Takht, we're not in the position of authority to demand that we are right. Other approaches would better serve us. Better to strengthen our political ties, get more engaged with their system etc. That is more the long-term approach to survive and thrive versus separating ourselves out by making a declaration.

We lease the whole property for Miri Piri Academy from SGPC and pay a minimal amount on a 100 year lease on historic land of Guru Hargobind. It cannot be sold and must be kept within the area where Guru Hargobind was born. There is a clause in the lease that states that as long as we (MPA) are propagating Sikh Dharma and only Sikh Dharma, then we can keep the lease. If we choose to teach other than Sikh Dharma tenets, then they can break the lease.

What would excommunication look like? We are not recognized as a separate organization (that manages and has authority over the school) and that is under the authority of Board of Advisors appointed by SGPC. We would not be recognized by the Sikh organization as Sikhs.

We could never represent Sikh Dharma of the West on any stage. If we were to try to go back on that and change it, we would have to pay Tankha (punishment). Bhai Balbir Singh, a renowned Golden Temple ragi in his 90's, had a video taken of him bowing to a Hindu saint in gratitude and this guy had said something once against Akal Takht. He was banned from playing kirtan anywhere, his name was destroyed, not allowed to play at Rag Darbar which he had done for 55 years or do seva. He had to bow, apologize, do shoe seva, read Japji's etc. He never was able to recover from that. To see someone with such a heritage, linked by blood to the two who stood in Guru Arjan's court saying 'we'll sing' when ragis of Guru Arjun's court rebelled, treated this way.

Our community takes for granted how 'protected' we are in Amritsar, traveling, walking around. That would be gone plus we would face added aggravation. Cherdi Kala Jetha members would probably have to choose which organization (Akal Takht or SSSC/SDI) they would be loyal to if they wanted to continue playing kirtan at the Golden Temple.

[Baba Nihal Singh] told us, 'No one has ever been allowed to play in a Damala turban at the Golden Temple as we have... keep doing this (playing kirtan at the Golden Temple) no matter what. You can't do a higher thing. Keep up. Don't let it falter. The last person to sing in this bana (with Damala) was Akali Phulah Singh (1761-1823); after that Guru Gobind Singh's bana (with Damala turban) has never been seen.'

We can't say exactly what it would mean (if we were to go against Akal Takht in this way). For sure it separates any link we have with Akal Takht. If you drop that, maybe they will let you

back, but it will never be the same.

Yes, we should go forward with the right strategy and westerners often want to go for it, but Indians don't see it that way. I have lived in India since I was nine years old. (I know the culture)

With regard to the prospect that, now might be a good time to institute a policy on marriage equality because there is nobody at the school at this time: I disagree with that assertion.

### **Interview with Officer, Constituent Organization**

*The question was asked, what do you see the ramifications being of Sikh Dharma instituting or not instituting a marriage equality policy?*

Repercussions depend on what the context is. If this is a battle, making a political statement and making it a public thing, it will then become something of us defying. I'm all for same-sex marriages, but I don't feel it should be a political statement for us at this time. It can be at one of the communities or local gurdwaras; then it may be okay. If we make it our policy, then we are perceived as attacking them. When something is a lot more divisive, involving cultural sensitivities and people are not there yet and we don't have a Punjabi-us relationship, then we're the outliers.

In politics, people lobby behind the scenes to work the system. Organizationally if we wanted to do that that would be a better approach, not blindsiding them and they have chance to give feedback. They can make unofficial statements about what they think.

Would it be a better approach to support a movement around this issue? You need to have a coalition of people working on that, but you would need to find out if there are other organizations or people who want to promote marriage equality. It is more of a showing that you are not the only one and get signatures of people standing with you. It is more of a risk if you don't have a broad coalition standing with you.

It would be interesting to take some polls related to what the Sikh community feels about this topic. That would be good to see because it is gathering information about what people feel. The key to that is that you need to have a wide enough sampling to get a good participation to be meaningful. That can be used for support for any kind of coalition, e.g., this many people signed the petition – this is the data from the poll – making the case that people are interested. All you usually hear on these issues are the noise makers and others are quiet. If you have better data, you can have a better case.

Some of this depends on where it is; if it happens in a small town people are not going to rally there. If people, like in LA, knew in advance that it was happening people could come to protest. Announcing something like this in public would be asking for it unless you are looking to have your wedding crashed. Like stories in UK – a large group of protesters came to the Gurdwara and kept [an interfaith] marriage from proceeding. Turning it from a happy event to a chaotic scene.

## **Interview with a Sikh Dharma Minister of Punjabi Descent**

Who are we to be the arbiters of who should love whom? Who are we to say who the Guru says can and cannot love each other? The Punjabi Sikh community is extremely homophobic and extremely set in their ways. The British Victorian mindset about homosexuality got rooted into India and Pakistan. Part of this is the colonial mindset. I blame the British mostly. Their influence on those perspectives is very prudish. The Sikh community has integrated it into Sikhi. I do hope and pray that we have a chance (to change this). I don't think that will happen anytime soon. I'm pessimistic about the opportunity for the Panth to change.

If the SDI ministry goes ahead there will be repercussions. It's a dangerous time politically to pick that battle. I am happy to be part of that fight if need be. Worst case: an edict from the Akal Takhat on "excommunication." I may not always agree with their views, but I respect the seat in the Sikh political sphere. Part of the global community, whether I agree with it 100 percent or not. Best case scenario - internet trolls, keyboard cockroaches coming at us.

Western Sikh Dharma should be the ones who pick this fight. Western Sikh Dharma can push the line forward. It will be Western Sikh Dharma to help the Panth evolve. It would be a seva. But now may not be the right time to do it, because of the current controversy. We need to shore up our foundation. We are not in a politically strong position right now. Five years from now might be better.

## **ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **Statement Provided by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Department Chair and Crawford Family Professor, Religious Studies, Colby College, received January 24, 2001**

Guru Granth Sahib, the sole Sikh sovereign, does not prescribe discrimination of any kind. The Sikh Gurus unanimously promoted equity, dignity, freedom, and justice for each and all. In our divided and polarized world, it is all the more urgent we put their progressive inclusivity into practice. It is unfortunate that over half a millennium later we still cannot imbibe their open-mindedness! How can we discriminate against same-sex weddings? The Guru Granth Sahib categorically states, "wife and husband are not two bodies who come together; know them as wife and husband who are one light in two bodies—*dhan pir ehi na ākhān bahan ikkaṭhe hoe ek jot due mūrṭī dhan pir kahāi soe*" (GGS: 788). Evidently, marriage is the recognition of the same light (ek joti) in any two bodies; the gender of these bodies does not matter because the same light is found in the female body and the male body, and therefore it is found in any combination of male and female bodies. Sikhs must respect the dignity of each person, Hindu or Muslim, Brahmin or Shudra, male or female, white or black, gay or straight.

**Interview with Prabhdeep Kehal (they/them/theirs), PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, Brown University**

**Question:** What do you say about the often-expressed objection to Sikh same-sex marriage being that there was no mention by the Gurus of homosexuality or trans-sexuality?

**Prabhdeep:** We should be careful about how we characterize history because for example women were not mentioned often in Sikh history. Does that mean that women should be considered lesser? If Guruji had wanted to express against gay/queer life Guruji would have done so. The omission of prohibition is what should be focused on rather than looking for approval (of LGBTQ people). If my existence were against Guru ji's hukam I wouldn't exist; but I AM here. The other view is to 'prove to me that you are a Sikh.'

This idea of gender binarism and sex segregation is tied up with Victorian colonialism. Kinnar and hijras (terms for LGBTQ individuals of South Asia) were the known recorded (non-heteronormative) communities (historically) so they are the only names we use commonly now when talking about gender diversity in the subcontinent. This is mainly to indicate that we (LGBTQ people) have existed (over time) and our erasure is an act.

“The other aspect of this is that there's a very strong sort of Punjab nationalism; and by that I refer broadly to the Khalistan movement in its various formations. The reason I mention that is that although it is a multifaceted movement, it is not very consolidated around a position on this issue (LGBTQ rights) by any means and there are very different alliances within it. But one aspect of that community is that it builds off of the Punjabi masculine culture that became the culture after Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is absolutely Jat132 hegemony.

The land and property rights in Punjab discriminated most against hijras or other gender diverse people. Customs can change over time and were in flux with the arrival of British colonialism. Punjabi culture didn't care that the hijras were dressing up as men, the British did, even though they had been dressing with different gender expressions for ages. The people in South Asia mainly cared when social issues became connected with inheriting property. The British came in and played on that in order to make legislation ensuring that hijras could not access property, and therefore, not pass it down. They were able to do that because they sexualized everyone. They said some of them are eunuchs, the others are prostitutes, so why would they be allowed to inherit property? No one had a problem with that.

When we talk about land in Punjab, or even across the subcontinent, it is tied up in casteism because of who is allowed to own land and who has been prevented from owning land. In Punjab, this means that was tied up in Jatt hegemony, (Jatt Sikhs being able to own land and have) the control over the land. Elsewhere, those dynamics of casteism could take on more elements.

I say all of that because people coming from two broad camps tend to be the ones that say that homosexuality was brought in by the British. The two, Punjab Nationalists and Jatt hegemony, can operate under the umbrella of Sikhi and ignore deeper sources of inequality, such as casteism and patriarchy. You will come across many Sikhs these days doing this 'all lives mattering thing', when they are asked to reconsider how casteism could have benefited them. They say things like, 'we're Sikhs; we don't believe in casteism, therefore, casteism doesn't exist.'

These two are related but separate issues because of the way they come together. It is how they use Sikhi and contest the terms of Sikhi against each other. Some say, 'I have all the accurate historical information; this is the accurate Sikhi'. The others say, 'well you don't live in Punjab; you're a diaspora person. You don't know the facts.' So then you get all of this back and forth and confusion. The Sikh institutions themselves are bound up in the politics of this because they are political institutions.

I come back to the point that, if I was not meant to exist (in my own sexuality), I wouldn't be here (as a Sikh). Either they (those who negate my identity) believe that Guruji is that weak, (and cannot accept me for who I am and) that I could defy Guruji or they don't believe in Guruji (because they cannot accept that I am both gay and a Sikh).

**Question:** What would you recommend as the best approach to take to achieve the greatest success going forward with marriage equality?

**Prabhdeep:** I've always envisioned that when it came to heterosexual Sikhs fighting for making Sikhi safe for queer and trans Sikhs, it would begin by first making a safe space for us. One thing that is really hard for people is that we (LGBTQ people) are still a figment of their (Punjabi-heritage Sikhs') imagination. I will have conversations with people and they will fall into talking about queerness and trans-ness as if they don't exist, while they're talking to me.

One way to pursue this would be for Gurdwaras and sangats to make connections with their local LGBTQ center, then begin showing the relationships that they're building and using that as an experience of saying, 'Look at this, and, why aren't we addressing this', either as Sikhs who are meant to be putting ourselves forward and fighting for the betterment of humanity or in the sense that 'these people live around us; they are part of our sangat, whether they are Sikh or not,'... using that as a way to, not just educate the Sikh community, but take a stand and be a model. This is how we should be engaging with people who we don't know, by creating these relationships. Then, I imagine, most Sikhs, at least, who are younger than me, who are gay or trans, even of my age, they will be supportive.

I would say, first begin with the local community, the local Gurdwara or just the worship space and using that to not only grow support for the movement, but also to learn more about what we're fighting for. As much as we love and want to fight for marriage, how do we make this fight also about making sure that the people, who we want to be able to use this right (of getting married), are actually alive to use this right?

The U.K. Sikhs talk a lot about interfaith marriages and using Sukhmani Sahib (nitnem) instead of Guru Granth Sahib because they (the persons of the other faith) don't believe in Guru Granth Sahib. The argument goes, why would you want someone who isn't of this faith to pledge their life to this faith? And then they say, instead, do Sukhmani Sahib because they'll be with Guru Sahib, but we aren't forcing anyone to say they're a Sikh, when they don't think of themselves as a Sikh.

I could easily envision, because I've already seen people saying, queer Anand Karajs should not exist, instead they should be Sukhmani Sahibs. My issue, personally with that is, one, it doesn't do justice to the question of interfaith marriage and what that means, and (secondly) it conflates this

issue with the issue of why Sikhs don't want to talk about queer people and queer Sikhs and trans Sikhs. Then people start saying, 'Oh well, these people are different, just like these other people who are different. Let them have their Sukhmani Sahib'. I've already seen this happening in the U.K. I have never been a fan of 'separate, but equal'...it hasn't really had a good history here in the United States and that's why I'm not quite sure what an ideal solution looks like.

I think at this stage in the Sikh community, though we have been here forever, the conversation is new. Even with my parents, who are some of the most open-minded, loving people, we must

pull the casteism out of them; we have to pull the fear, the rationalizing my sexuality away...in the way they say, 'It's okay; that's just how Guru sent you.' I say, 'No, it's not okay. This is how Guruji sent me. There is no 'okay' about it. There is no qualification!' And it took almost a decade to get there. I think something like Anand Karaj, gay, homosexual marriage in Sikhi, is an important battle to fight and I don't think there's ever going to be a good or right time to fight for that battle. I think that there are only good ways of contextualizing and fighting that battle.

**Question:** What would your recommendation be?

**Prabhdeep:** I would say that the decision is to affirm the position that Sikh, gay, homosexual marriages are allowed, and they are legitimate. That we are embarking on an educational conversation, an educational campaign within our community, because we realize by the pushback that this is something that is not well understood. And as people who believe in this issue, we believe that, as we make this policy achievable, attainable, it requires a cultural shift to get us there. So, this is not only our statement of support for queer and trans Sikhs who wish to become one with the Guru, but it's also our statement of commitment that we are now formalizing programs or practices, in order to help make it so that people can actually use this service... so, that they can actually access their right (without the risk of harm). It is not helpful to have a right if I'm going to get shot on the way to access it.

**Question:** To clarify, would you recommend that we enact a policy to approve marriage equality along with a statement that we're going to use this to initiate an educational program? Or are you recommending that we make a statement that we believe this is the right thing to do but that we will start by engaging in coalition building and educational activities?

**Prabhdeep:** If you were to say this is a policy that we are adopting and people are going to come tomorrow and do it (get married), I would in that statement clarify how you would ensure safety of both the sangat and the people who are getting married.

Part of me feels it is a moment to call the community in (to the conversation). Like, it's not safe to do this for us, or for the people who deserve this right. That is a condemnation on us (in that) we have not done (so), thus far. But, to make it possible that this right is achievable, safely, for those who have the right, I would say that the statement should be explicit about what you are going to do. So, if you were going to do coalition building, I would say, 'We are partnering with these organizations to begin this.' Or if you were going to say that we do enact this policy and people can start coming, I would say, 'we will begin this policy in a year, and in that time, we are going to begin community building programs or something of that sort, to ensure that the community creates a safe (space)...that the people create a safe community for this to happen (within).

**Question:** Kind of like, get ready, get set, then go; but not just go?

**Prabhdeep:** Exactly. It is building a base; in organizing words, building capacity and base, for this to actually take off. You can talk about that from an advocacy movement, activist perspective, or you can talk about that from this Sikh-liberation perspective. I think enacting the policy, if that's what folks want to do makes sense...personally I hate delays, because why wouldn't you just do it now? But I think if it were to be framed, specifically, in 'we want to build safety structures, because it is not safe for us, potentially, or the people to do this'...you build that timeline and then you make public what kind of safeties (you have provided)...so it becomes things that people learn about, not only the (safety) issues but also learn Anand Karaj and marriages in Sikhi. So it becomes, not just a movement, but an experience, where people are brought in and build together and, hopefully as it grows, more queer and trans Sikhs will start seeing, 'Oh, Sikhi actually does have safety for us.' Maybe they won't even join your sangat in that particular area, but knowing that an institution of Sikhi is safe for them is going to do wonders for a generation. I do not even have that right now. I am someone who's almost thirty; I have to make that for myself. So, even a statement that a year from now this will be something that will be allowed and that we are building the safety network now, that activates people in a way to remember what this is about. And then it also does what you are saying...marriage is not the number one thing that's on (LGBTQ) people's needs (list) necessarily; it gets both of the balls rolling, without prioritizing one, but it also becomes an educational teaching moment...so that people who are like, 'Oh my gosh; we need to fight for Anand Karaj right now...' and you're saying, 'No, we're delaying it a year, because it's not safe to do it.' And then they now must introspect because you've given them the reasons why it's not safe to do it, for the people and for yourself. Now, everyone is learning and maybe finding their own ways to get the balls rolling along the way and marriages in Sikhi along the way.

People want to support queer rights when it is safe to support it...when the threshold and capacity is there. No one wants to help us (LGBTQ people) build the capacity for safety; and that is usually the issue.

So, even within the queer rights movement, the reason that marriage took off so much, as the movement issue, was because that is what the funders wanted. They were middle-class and upper middle-class gay people who thought they deserved the right to get married and they decided to pour their money behind marriage efforts - as opposed to all these other efforts around helplessness, around poverty, around other issues affecting our livelihoods. But marriage took off because that is where the money was. That is not to say that marriage didn't have positive impact as a result. There are people who now can live lives they only dreamed about. We, (as Sikhs) have the opportunity to build and grow, and that was a choice that was pushed aside in the queer rights movement here (in the U.S.), but that's not something that we need to do within our queer rights movement in Sikhi.

(The U.S. LGBTQ movement) focused on marriage at the expense of all the other issues. They wanted to create a very clean-cut respectable image for gays. They wanted to create an image so that Pete Buttigieg would be able to run for office. Again, good for him. Wonderful. I am glad that you now have that pathway to success. But there are plenty of people who would have much rather preferred a job guarantee; because they can get fired for being gay, still, at that time. It wasn't until last year that I'm now actually legally protected (against being fired because I'm gay). We are now going backwards to solve all these discrimination issues which were originally at the forefront of the battle, but then got pushed down because moneyed interests wanted to be able to have their little

home. My point here being, I don't think that the movement is being led by middle class, upper income folks. I think it's coming from a place of 'this is something that's good and we should do it'. I mainly draw the comparison...I name the US movement, because they intentionally submerged the other movements, to centralize support around this.

My Facebook status on the day of the (Supreme Court) marriage announcement; I was like, great! "I can get married anywhere in the U.S. now! Now to not get fired for it...onward!" That was my reaction the day it was announced (June 26, 2015). And it wasn't until last year (Supreme Court Ruling, June 15, 2020) that that came true. That is why I always try to stress engaging with people because their experiences are so not centered on marriage; and yet that becomes the centerpiece that people read us through. That is why I think it is really, really helpful in this recommendation of this two-part approach of building the safety and capacity so that you can make this policy a reality.

### **Comments by Shamina Singh**

Gurdwara, by definition, is a place wherever the Guru is. Sikhs - gay or straight - will get married with a Siri Guru Granth with or without permission. The direct relationship to God is an important tenet. This is a moral imperative and a matter of justice for all. Sikhs believe in equality and justice — for everyone. Our Gurus fought and died for those values. Our faith demands that we challenge the status quo and where we see injustice, we call it out. Make the decision based on the moral imperative and justice. There are always consequences and there are also upsides that will come. Prepare for the potential risks and welcome the good. If you are worried about violence in Gurdwaras, I am sorry. But I have to believe that the Gay Sikhs who decide to get married and those who stand with them will be ready. If you are worried about relations with other parts of the organization, I am sorry - but if it isn't this issue, it will be something else that challenges the status quo. Decide when you are ready - but walk in faith not in fear. Change is the only constant: it's hard but necessary. In a time when the world is transforming, we have an opportunity to lead with open arms, minds and hearts - that is the essence of our faith. We can welcome change and also stay rooted in our values. They are not mutually exclusive.

As someone who has been happily married for 15 years to another woman, it is always my faith that guides and inspires me to live a good life and be a good wife. Our hope is that our marriage will serve as a beacon for others who are struggling. It's unconscionable that many young people still commit suicide and are persecuted. We married for love but had the ceremony and received counseling from our Minister so that we were mindful of our actions and commitments.

*Shamina Singh has held senior positions in the White House and the U.S. House of Representatives. In 2015, Shamina was appointed by President Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate to a six-year term on the Board of the Corporation for National and Community Service. She is a graduate of the Presidential Leadership Fellows program, an alum of the Young Global Leaders program of the World Economic Forum, and a Henry Crown Fellow with the Aspen Institute.*

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A



#### **Statement of Action in Favor of Marriage Equality by the Administration of Guru Ram Das Ashram of Los Angeles**

Marriage Equality can be defined as equal acceptance of same sex as well as heterosexual marriages and is the state of having the same rights and responsibilities of marriage as others, regardless of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Marriage equality is a basic human right, and is legally recognized in the United States. We are in communication with our parent organization, Sikh Dharma International, to make marriage equality our official policy. In fairness to and in solidarity with LGBTQIA+ Sikhs, we will not host weddings at Guru Ram Das Ashram until marriage equality is allowed at Guru Ram Das Ashram. This policy will be in effect for at least two years. Meanwhile, we shall actively continue to work to achieve marriage equality.

## APPENDIX B

### Article XVIII - Anand Sanskar (Lit. Joyful Ceremony: Sikh Matrimonial Convention and Ceremony)

- a. A Sikh man and woman should enter wedlock without giving thought to the prospective spouse's caste and descent.
- b. A Sikh's daughter must be married to a Sikh.
- c. A Sikh's marriage should be solemnized by Anand marriage rites.
- d. Child marriage is taboo for Sikhs.
- e. When a girl becomes marriageable, physically, emotionally and by virtue of maturity of character, a suitable Sikh match should be found and she be married to him by Anand marriage rites.
- f. Marriage may not be preceded by engagement ceremony. But if an engagement ceremony is sought to be held, a congregational gathering should be held and, after offering the Ardas before the Guru Granth Sahib, a kirpan, a steel bangle and some sweets may be tendered to the boy.
- g. Consulting horoscopes for determining which day or date is auspicious or otherwise for fixing the day of the marriage is a sacrilege. Any day that the parties find suitable by mutual consultation should be fixed.
- h. Putting on floral or gilded face ornamentation, decorative headgear or red thread bands round the wrist, worshipping of ancestors, dripping feet in mild mixed with water, cutting a berry or jandi (*Prosopis spicigera*) bushes, filling pitcher, ceremony of retirement in feigned displeasure, reciting couplets, performing havans [sacrificial fire], installing vedi (a wooden canopy or pavilion under which Hindu marriages are performed), prostitutes dances, drinking liquor, are all sacrileges.
- i. The marriage party should be as small a number of people as the girl's people desire. The two sides should greet each other singing sacred hymns and finally by the Sikh greeting of Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.
- j. For marriage, there should be a congregational gathering in the holy presence of Guru Granth Sahib. There should be hymn-singing by ragis or by the whole congregation. Then the girl and boy should be made to sit facing the Guru Granth Sahib. The girl should sit on the left side of the boy. After soliciting the congregation's permission, the master of the marriage ceremony (who may be a man or woman) should bid the boy and girl and their parents or guardians to stand and should offer the Ardas for the commencement of the Anand marriage ceremony.

The officiant should then appraise the boy and girl of the duties and obligations of conjugal life according to the Gurus tenets. He should initially give to the two an exposition of their common mutual obligations. He should tell them how to model the husband-wife relationship on the love between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul in the light of the contents of circumambulation (lavan) hymns in the Suhi measure (rag) section of the Guru Granth Sahib.

He should explain to them the notion of the state of "a single soul in two bodies" to be achieved through love and make them see how they may attain union with the Immortal Being discharging duties and obligations of the householders life. Both of them, they should be told, have to make their conjugal union a means to the fulfillment of the purpose of the journey of human existence; both have to lead clean and Guru-oriented lives through the instrumentality of their union.

He should then explain to the boy and girl individually their respective conjugal duties as husband and wife.

The bridegroom should be told that the girl's people having chosen him as the fittest match from among a whole lot, he should regard his wife as his better half, accord to her unflinching love and share with her all that he has. In all situations, he should protect her person and honour, he should be completely loyal to her and he should show as much respect and consideration for her parents and relations as for his own.

The girl should be told that she has been joined in matrimony to her man in the hallowed presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and the congregation. She should ever harbour for him deferential solicitude, regard him the lord and master of her love and trust; she should remain firm in her loyalty to him and serve him in joy and sorrow and in every clime (native or foreign) and should show the same regard and consideration to his parents and relatives as she would, to her own parents and relatives.

The boy and girl should bow before the Guru Granth Sahib to betoken their acceptance of these instructions. Thereafter, the girl's father or the principal relation should make the girl grasp one end of the sash which the boy is wearing over his shoulders and the person in attendance of the Guru Granth Sahib should recite the matrimonial circumambulation stanzas (lavan of the fourth Guru in the Suhi musical measure section of the Guru Granth). After the conclusion of the recitation of each of the stanzas, the boy, followed by the girl holding the end of the sash, should go round the Guru Granth Sahib while the ragis or the congregation sing out the recited stanza.

The boy and girl, after every circumambulation, should bow before the Guru Granth Sahib in genuflexion, lowering their forehead to touch the ground and then stand up to listen to the recitation of the next stanza. There being four matrimonial circumambulation stanzas in the concerned hymn, the proceeding will comprise four circumambulations with the incidental singing of the stanza. After the fourth circumambulation, the boy and girl should, after bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib, sit down at the appointed place and the ragis or the person who has conducted the ceremony should recite the first five and the last stanza of the Anand Sahib. Thereafter, the Ardas should be offered to mark the conclusion of the Anand marriage ceremony and the sacred pudding distributed.
- k. Persons professing faiths other than the Sikh faith cannot be joined in wedlock by the Anand Karajceremony.
- l. No Sikh should accept a match for his/her son or daughter for monetary consideration.
- m. If the girl's parents at any time or on any occasion visit their daughter's home and a meal is ready there, they should not hesitate to eat there. Abstaining from eating at the girl's home is a superstition. The Khalsa has been blessed with the boon of victuals and making others eat by the Guru and the Immortal Being. The girl's and boy's people should keep accepting each other's hospitality, because the Guru has joined them in relationship of equality.
- n. If a woman's husband has died, she may, if she so wishes, finding a match suitable for her, remarry. For a Sikh man whose wife has died, similar ordinance obtains.
- o. The remarriage may be solemnized in the same manner as the Anand marriage.
- p. Generally, no Sikh should marry a second wife if the first wife is alive.
- q. A baptized Sikh ought to get his wife baptized.

## APPENDIX C

**"Timeline and History of Marriage Rights [in United States]." Tom Head, ThoughtCo, Oct. 3, 2020, [thoughtco.com/marriage-rights-history-721314](https://www.thoughtco.com/marriage-rights-history-721314).**

**1664** - Before same-sex marriage became the hot-button marriage controversy, laws banning interracial marriage dominated the national conversation, especially in the American South. One 1664 British colonial law in Maryland declared interracial marriages between White women and Black men to be a "disgrace," and established that any White women who participate in these unions shall be declared enslaved themselves, along with their children.

**1691** - Although the 1664 law was brutal in its own way, legislators realized that it was not an especially effective threat - forcibly enslaving White women would be difficult, and the law included no penalties for White men who married Black women. Virginia's 1691 law corrected both of these issues by mandating exile (effectively a death penalty) rather than enslavement, and by imposing this penalty on all those who intermarry, regardless of gender.

**1830** - The State of Mississippi was the first state in the country to grant women the right to own property independent of their husbands. Eighteen years later, New York followed suit with the more comprehensive Married Women's Property Act.

**1879** - The U.S. government was hostile to Mormons for most of the 19th century, owing mostly to the tradition's past endorsement of polygamy. In *Reynolds v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the federal Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, which was passed specifically to prohibit Mormon polygamy; a new Mormon declaration in 1890 outlawed bigamy, and the federal government has been largely Mormon-friendly ever since.

**1883** - In *Pace v. Alabama*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Alabama's ban on interracial marriages - and, with it, similar bans in nearly all of the former Confederacy. The ruling would stand for 84 years.

**1953** - Divorce has been a recurring issue in the history of U.S. civil liberties, starting with 17th-century laws that banned divorce altogether except in documented cases of adultery. Oklahoma's 1953 law permitting no-fault divorces finally allowed couples to make the mutual decision to divorce without declaring a guilty party; most other states gradually followed suit, beginning with New York in 1970.

**1967** - The single most important marriage case in U.S. Supreme Court history was *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), which finally ended Virginia's 276-year ban on interracial marriage and explicitly declared, for the first time in U.S. history, that marriage is a civil right.

**1984** - The first U.S. government body to grant any kind of legal partnership rights to same-sex couples was the City of Berkeley, California, which passed the nation's first domestic partnership ordinance.

**1993** - The Supreme Court of Hawaii's series of rulings asked a question that, until 1993, no government body had really asked: if marriage is a civil right, how can we legally justify withholding it to same-sex couples? In 1993 the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled, in effect, that the state needed a really good reason, and challenged legislators to find one. A later Hawaii civil unions policy resolved the ruling in 1999, but the six years of *Baehr v. Miike* made same-sex marriage a viable national issue.

**1996** - The federal government's response to *Baehr v. Miike* was the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which established that states would not be obligated to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states and that the federal government would not recognize them at all. DOMA was declared unconstitutional by the First U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in May 2012, and the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013.

**2000** - Vermont became the first state to voluntarily offer benefits to same-sex couples with its civil unions law in 2000, which made Governor Howard Dean a national figure and nearly gave him the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination.

**2004** - Massachusetts became the first state to legally recognize same-sex marriage in 2004. And in 2015, with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, same sex marriage became legal in all 50 states.

## APPENDIX D

### Sikh Population by Country

<b>Sikhs and Sikhism by country</b>				
<a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_by_country">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_by_country</a>			cited 2.25.21	
<b>Region</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>No. of Sikhs</b>	<b>Sikh %</b>	<b>% of all Sikhs</b>
Central Asia	Afghanistan	3,000	0.01%	0.01%
South America	Argentina	300	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Oceania</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>125,904</b>	<b>0.54%</b>	<b>0.52%</b>
Central Europe	Austria	2,794	0.03%	0.01%
South Asia	Bangladesh	23,000	0.01%	0.01%
Western Europe	Belgium	10,000	0.09%	0.04%
<b>North America</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>468,670</b>	<b>1.40%</b>	<b>1.96%</b>
East Asia	People's Republic of China	7,500	<0.01%	0.03%
Northern Europe	Denmark	2,000	0.04%	<0.01%
Oceania	Fiji	2,577	0.30%	0.01%
Western Europe	France	10,000	0.02%	0.04%
Central Europe	Germany	10,000–20,000	0.03%	0.05–0.17%
Southern Europe	Greece	20,000	0.10%	0.07%
Western Europe	Iceland	100	0.03%	<0.01%
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>22,700,000</b>	<b>1.72%</b>	<b>90.20%</b>
Southeast Asia	Indonesia	15,000	<0.01%	<0.01%
Western Europe	Republic of Ireland	1,200	0.03%	<0.01%
Southern Europe	Italy	70,000	0.11%	0.29%
East Asia	Japan	2,000	<0.01%	<0.01%
East Asia	South Korea	2,000	<0.01%	<0.01%
Central Asia	Kazakhstan	800	<0.01%	<0.01%
East Africa	Kenya	50,000-100,000	0.64%	0.21%-0.42%
	Uganda			
	Tanzania			
Middle East	Kuwait	200,000	0.64%	0.08%
Middle East	Lebanon	3,000	0.07%	0.01%
Southern Africa	Malawi	3,000	0.02%	0.01%
Southeast Asia	Malaysia	100,000	0.37%	0.42%
Southern Africa	Mauritius	37,700	0.30%	0.16%
North America	Mexico	8,000	<0.01%	0.03%
South Asia	Nepal	5,890	0.02%	0.02%
Western Europe	Netherlands	12,000	0.07%	0.05%
Oceania	New Zealand	40,908	0.43%	0.04%
West Africa	Niger	3,000	0.02%	0.01%
Northern Europe	Norway	5,000	<0.01%	0.02%
South Asia	Pakistan	50,000	0.03%	0.08%
Southeast Asia	Philippines	50,000	0.10%	0.09%
Southeast Asia	Thailand	70,000	0.10%	0.29%
<b>Western Europe</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>853,000</b>	<b>0.68%</b>	<b>1.80%</b>
<b>North America</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>700,000</b>	<b>0.20%</b>	<b>1.05%</b>
Southern Africa	Zambia	3,000	0.03%	0.01%
<b>Total</b>		<b>25,000,000</b>		

APPENDIX E



Mahinder Singh Giani,  
Secretary,  
Shiromani G.P. Committee,  
Amritsar.

ਸੰ: { 88821  
937-14  
ਸੰਦ, ਕੇਰੀ ਕਰਮਚਾਰ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ,  
ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ।

D.O.No. 1400  
Dated: 9-10-76

The Secretary,  
Sikh Dharma Brotherhood,  
1620 Prouce Road,  
Los Angeles,  
California 90035,  
(U.S.A.)

Dear Secretary,

I am pleased to inform you that the Executive Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar in its meeting held on 11.9.76 has unaniously approved the Constitution of Sikh Dharma Brotherhood vide its Resolution No. 697. The Text of the Resolution is as under:-

"The Constitution of Sikh Dharma Brotherhood, Western Hemisphere, Los Angeles, (U.S.A.), which was kept pending by the Executive Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar vide its Resolution No.300, dated 24.6.76 for further consideration and discussion and copies of which were sent to the members of the Executive Committee vide despatch No. 20177, dated 7.4.76 in compliance to the Executive Committee's Resolution No.161, dated 24.1.76, including amendments and additions sent by Sikh Dharma Brotherhood vide their letter dated 12.4.76, were placed before the Executive Committee with Chairman's permission and approval of the House and after reading out the each article of the said Constitution, it was

Contd.....



ਫੋਨ : { 83839  
83344

ਸਕੱਤਰ, ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ,  
ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ।

- 2 -

unanimously approved and passed as under:-

SIKH DHARMA BROTHERHOOD

PRINCIPLES OF THE DHARMA

**1. QUALIFICATIONS OF A SIKH**

- A. He believes in one God, Almighty, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient.
- B. The Siri Guru Granth Sahib shall be his only Guru from his day of knowledge to his emergence into supreme light.
- C. He shall keep his form in the simple existence as God made him, thereby not removing hairs and keeping them long, intact and natural.
  - 1. The man shall tie his hair in a Rishi knot on the crown of his head to be covered by a cotton cloth known as a turban whenever in public. He will be obliged to keep a destar (small turban) when he is without his turban.
  - 2. The woman shall wear her hair on the top of her head and keep it covered with a turban or chuni when in public.
- D. He is obliged to meditate on God in the primal hours of each morning and should hold the Name of God through the day while doing righteous deeds.
- E. He shall earn through the sweat of his brow and all activities should be in conformity to the ethics and laws as a righteous person. Thereby he shall keep his dealings and activities consciously clear, living a spotless life.
- F. It will be obligatory on him to share with his Brotherhood, to help the poor and needy, to protect the weak and to be serviceful to the community and humanity in general.

Contd....

# Marriage Equality Around the World



There are currently 29 countries where same-sex marriage is legal: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

## APPENDIX G

### **Text of the Hukamnama Issued by the Akal Takht January 1, 2005**

There is a heated discussion happening in western countries about same sex marriages by governments around laws and legalization of marriages like this. For Sikhs all around the world it is well known that there is no established place in the Sikh Rehit Maryada for gay marriage. Gay Marriage is a sickness of the mind. Gay marriage is against nature, which isn't even accepted by animals or birds. Now in breaking up family relations and marriages and instead of the welfare of humanity this is a sign of wiping out humanity. Sikh Sangats should not get overzealous and have a tendency towards this and no Gurdwaras should have any gay marriages or have a connection with them with Anand Karaj or with Dharmic ceremony and no anti-Gurmat functions should be accepted. We need firm resolve to stay in the highest Sikh Dharma ideals and Sikh sangats are encouraged to stay with the ideology of the Siri Guru Granth with strength/steadfastness for the benefit of humanity hold this character/standard and be blessed with happiness by the Guru.

*Translated by Sada Sat Simran Singh Khalsa*

## APPENDIX H

### Resources for LGBTQ Sikhs

1. **Sarbat Sikhs:** Sarbat is a volunteer led group addressing LGBT issues from a Sikh perspective. <http://www.sarbat.net/>
2. **Yes We Exist India:** Instagram page dedicated to raising awareness about the LGBTQIA+ community in India. <https://www.instagram.com/yesweexistindia/?hl=en>.
3. **Queer Brown History:** A curation of south-Asian LGBTQIA+ histories <https://www.instagram.com/queerbrownhistory/?hl=en>.
4. **Gay Sikh:** A blog pertaining to homosexuality within Sikhism. <https://www.gaysikh.com>.
5. **Taraki:** Partners with Sarbat to co-facilitate a monthly support group for Punjabi LGBTQ+ folks in London and Birmingham. <https://www.taraki.co.uk/projects/social-spaces>.
6. **Gaylaxy Magazine:** Magazine and website for the South Asian LGBTQ community <https://gaylaxymag.com>
7. **Sher Vancouver:** Non-profit society for LGBTQ+ South Asians in Metro Vancouver, B.C. <https://www.shervancouver.com/>.
8. **SALGA NYC:** Organization serving the Desi queer community in the New York area <https://www.facebook.com/Salga-NYC-211460882227087/>.
9. **DesiQueer Diaspora:** A conference that aims to gather LGBTQ+ and GNC South Asian, Indo-Caribbean and folks that identify within the Desi Diaspora. <https://www.facebook.com/desiqdiaspora/>.
10. **Salzburg Global LGBT\* Forum:** Advances the human rights of LGBT people and communities around the world. <https://www.salzburgglobal.org/multi-year-series/lgbt>.
11. **Youth Kiawaaz/Gender and Sexuality:** Articles on fighting gender bias, inequality and discrimination. <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/category/gender-sexuality/>.
12. **Stonewall:** Resources for LGBT people of faith <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources-lgbt-people-faith>.

13. **Tyler Clementi Foundation:** Foundation born out of the urgent need to address bullying challenges facing vulnerable populations, especially LGBT communities and other victims of hostile social environments. <https://tylerclementi.org/resources-for-faith/>.
  
14. **Sab Rab De Bande:** Documentary film about the life stories of five “LGBTQ Sikhs” living in India. <https://www.firstpost.com/art-and-culture/with-documentary-sab-rab-de-bande-sukhdeep-singh-surveys-the-discrimination-faced-by-lgbtq-sikhs-in-india-9266991.html>.
  
15. **GLAAD/Religion, Faith & Values:** Program works to amplify the voices of LGBT-affirming communities of faith and LGBT people of faith. <https://www.glaad.org/programs/faith>.
  
16. **Power of Pride: Queer & Sikh | Logo TV:** Dialogue among LGBTQ Sikhs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viZqLpdNWMg>.

## APPENDIX I

### Countries with the Largest Sikh Populations

<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-largest-sikh-populations.html>.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Sikhs</b>	<b>Percent of Total Sikh Population</b>
1	India	22,000,000	90.2
2	Canada	468,670	1.96
3	United Kingdom	432,429	1.8
4	United States	250,000	1.05
5	Australia	125,904	0.52
6	Malaysia	100,000	0.42
7	Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania	50,000 - 100,000	0.21 - 0.42
8	Thailand	70,000	0.29
9	Italy	70,000	0.29
10	Mauritius	37,700	0.16
11	Philippines	30,000	0.09
12	Germany	10,000 - 20,000	0.05 - 0.17
13	Bangladesh	23,000	0.01
14	Greece	20,000	0.07
15	Pakistan	20,000	0.0