

Exploring the Concept of *Seva* in Sikhism: A Case Study of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikhin Punjab

Thesis submitted to the Central University of Punjab

For the Award of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Sociology

By

Anoop Singh

Supervisor

Dr.SumedhaDutta

Assistant Professor



Department of Sociology

Central University of Punjab, Bathinda

March, 2024

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “Exploring the Concept of *Seva* in Sikhism: A Case Study of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh in Punjab” has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Sumedha Dutta, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Central University of Punjab. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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I certify that ANOOP SINGH has prepared this thesis entitled “Exploring the Concept of *Sevain* Sikhism: A Case Study of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh in Punjab”, for the award of PhDdegree of the Central University of Punjab, under my guidance. He has carried out this work at the Department of Sociology, Central University of Punjab.

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List of Abbreviations

NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CE	Common Era
UN	United Nation
SCORE	Sikh Council on Religion and Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
RNGO	Religious Non-Governmental Organisation
SGPC	ShiromaniGurdwaraParbhadak Committee
DSGMC	Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee
PA	Per Annum
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019.
MC	Municipal Counsellor
ARC	Alliance of Religions and Conservation
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
PPCB	Punjab Pollution Control Board

List of Punjabi words

<i>Shabad</i>	Spiritual words
<i>Gurbani</i>	Hymns of Guru Granth Sahib
<i>Bhagats</i>	Spiritual Personalities
<i>Langar</i>	Free food
<i>Dasvand</i>	The tenth part of income donated to charitable causes
<i>Sarbat da Bhala</i>	Welfare of all
<i>Ikonkar</i>	One God
<i>Gurmukh</i>	God-centred
<i>Sangat</i>	Congregation
<i>Pangat</i>	A row of <i>Sangat</i> sitting to have <i>Langar</i>
<i>Gurmat</i>	Following the teachings of Guru
<i>Ardas</i>	Prayer in Sikhism
<i>Daan</i>	Donation
<i>Sevak</i>	One who performs <i>Seva</i>
<i>Udasis</i>	Travels of Guru Nanak
<i>Nishan Sahib</i>	Sikh flag
<i>RehatMaryada</i>	Sikh code of conduct
<i>Hukam</i>	Cosmic Will
<i>Halimi Raj</i>	Ideal rule

*The translation of Shabads from Gurbani has been provided with the respective *Shabads*.

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF SEVA IN SIKHISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE KHALSA AID AND THE ECOSIKH IN PUNJAB

Name of Student : Anoop Singh
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This study commences by addressing the historical imposition of 'religion' by colonial modernity in India, prompting a reexamination of the Sikh concept of '*Seva*.' It explores the significance and impact of *Seva* within Sikhism and beyond, shedding light on the unexplored realm of Sikh NGOs, notably Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh. A comprehensive literature review identifies gaps in the understanding of *Seva* within Sikhism. The research problem, objectives, and questions are outlined to unravel the motivations driving individuals and organizations to engage in *Seva*, contributing to a deeper understanding of *Seva's* relevance in contemporary life. The profound significance of *Seva* in Sikhism as an expression of love, compassion, and humility, transcending social barriers, is drawn from Gurbani of the Guru Granth Sahib, and from expert interviews. The study was conducted in the Indian state of Punjab, encompassing the Majha, Malwa and Doaba regions. The study was qualitative in nature, with the application of the phenomenological constructivist and interpretivist perspectives.

The study also highlights the lived religion approach, and Khalsa Aid's role in blurring the sacred-profane boundaries. Interviews with Khalsa Aid's stakeholders reveal its inclusive approach and hope generation during crises. On the other hand, EcoSikh's environmental activism also aligns *Seva* with ecological balance and ethical behaviour, showcasing how *Seva* combats environmental degradation. Interviews with EcoSikh stakeholders demonstrate its

success in rallying community and government support for environmental conservation. Ultimately, this study offers insights into the enduring relevance of *Seva* in Sikhism and its transformative power in humanitarian and environmental contexts, also highlighting the contributions of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh for social welfare. This research also provides recommendations for policy enhancements, such as enriching educational curricula with a broader range of perspectives, integrating faith-based environmental advocacy into policy development, fostering interfaith cooperation in social welfare projects, and establishing crisis response frameworks that could involve organizations like Khalsa Aid.

Chapter I

Introduction

1. Introduction:

This introductory chapter serves as the gateway to the study 'Exploring the Concept of *Seva* in Sikhism: A Case Study of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh in Punjab.' It begins by exploring the intricate impact of colonial modernity in India, which imposed the construct of 'Religion' and reshaped religious dynamics. This historical backdrop underscores the imperative need to reevaluate the profound concept of *Seva* within Sikhism. The chapter underscores the significance and far-reaching influence of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, both within the Sikh community and beyond. Although numerous NGOs engage in social welfare, Sikh NGOs have remained relatively unexamined in scholarly discourse. Khalsa Aid, initiated by Ravinder Singh in 1999 to assist refugees in the Balkans war, now extends its services across various domains, including disaster relief, education, and health. Conversely, EcoSikh focuses on environmental concerns, reflecting the evolving global priorities. The chapter offers a comprehensive literature review, encompassing key topics such as Sikhism, the philosophical underpinnings of *Seva*, and the roles of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in altruistic endeavours. This review reveals gaps in the current understanding of *Seva* within the Sikh context, laying the foundation for the study's contribution. The chapter articulates the research problem, delineates the study's objectives, and formulates research questions to guide the investigation. Ultimately, this study aspires to deepen our understanding of *Seva* in Sikhism and its contemporary relevance, shedding light on the broader significance of the Sikh concept of *Seva* in everyday life.

The word "religion" has its origins in the Latin word "*religio*". This term was explained by Cicero, a philosopher from the pre-Christian era, as being related to "*relegere*", signifying the act of revisiting or rereading. Thus, "*religio*" involves the act of returning to the traditions and rituals of one's ancestors. As there are numerous traditions, there cannot be a single religion but rather a multiplicity of "*religio*"(s). In the third century CE, the Christian writer Lactantius explicitly rejected Cicero's etymology and argued that "*religio*" derives from "*re-ligare*", which means to bind together or link. This suggests that

the comparative study of religion is based on a theological and Christian framework. The Christian heritage of Western culture influences the modern study of religion. Thus, the seemingly secular nature of religious studies is not a "position from nowhere". When studying any "religious" traditions, there are two fundamental issues. The first is that scholars of religion attempt to legitimise their work by establishing methodologies that claim to follow objective and natural science methods based on rational analysis and empirical investigation. This is an attempt to avoid subjective biases and the favouring of predictable phenomena (such as rituals) that can be repeated, analysed, and classified. The second issue is Eurocentrism and the propagation of Orientalist discourses (King 35-40).

The case of the Sikhs was not different either, "unable to place the Sikhs into a category of their own", early Western scholars set an academic 'culture' of treating Sikhs as per their Eurocentric theoretical framework. First and foremost, Ernst Trumpp tried to impose a 'semblance of systematic unity and principles of speculative philosophy, which the Adi Granth apparently lacked' (Mandair 186). Such a conclusion led to producing statements on the Sikh religion routed via rational thinking grounds. It was caused by the 'displacement of the discursive field of translation and interpretation of the Adi Granth into an order of things governed by oppositions such as theism/atheism and chaos/order.' With all this, Trumpp brought Sikh scriptures and traditions to the purview of Western intellectual and religious tradition. For a long time, both Sikh and Western scholars were not able to recognise the separate existence of *Sikhi* from the Western sense and conceptualisation of Religion. They missed how it had a broader vision for organising life that spanned every sphere of life. In the end, it was established that the idea of religion exists in all cultures, and it is generally translatable as a concept. During 'India's transition to modernity', and with the secular humanist framework of the modern university, Indian forms of thinking were displaced into the domain of European conceptuality. A large part of it has been made possible with 'the constitution of Indian subject through the enunciation of "religion"' (Mandair 17). Because of the "generalised translation" of *Sikhi* as a religion in the Western Christian theological sense, the scholar is compelled to 'accept without resistance the translatability of the term "religion", and at the same time must resist what is encompassed by the term "religion"'.

Interestingly, societal structures emanating from *Sikhi* offer powerful motivation and systems to counter chaos. Emile Durkheim, a prominent sociologist, viewed religion as a fundamental aspect of society and humanity. He believed that religion was the cornerstone

of all social institutions and had the potential to elevate individuals to an "extraordinary" state of energy, which they shared collectively through a common belief system. This collective energy found expression in rituals performed repeatedly by the community, creating a tangible, objectified force that bound them together. In this context, *Seva*, the selfless service performed by the Sikh community, can be seen as a ritual, solidifying their connection with their faith and conceptual belongingness. The story of Sikhism and its engagement with Western notions of religion, not just highlights the complexity and beauty of cultural exchange and the evolving understanding of spirituality in a changing world but also the continued struggle for recognition of identity.

Seva has been one of the principal pillars of the Sikh faith. The term "Sikh" has its roots in the Sanskrit word "*shishh*," which means disciple. Translated literally into English, the word "Sikh" suggests a person who seeks new knowledge and is always learning, following the guidance of a Guru. This journey aims to discover and realise the timeless (Sahota et al. 21-34). The Sikhs are a group of people who follow the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev. In order to continue the work started by him, Guru Nanak gave the authority of Guruship to Bhai Lehna, who became known as Guru Angad Dev. There were eight more Gurus after him before Guru Gobind Singh bestowed the Guruship upon the scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. The Guru Granth Sahib is a collection of '*shabads*' composed by the Gurus and Bhagats to guide Sikhs in their worldly and spiritual affairs (Sahota et al. 21-34). The Sri Guru Granth Sahib presents a comprehensive worldview that provides a set of values and a code of conduct that can be applied in everyday life. Its primary message is aimed at promoting the welfare of all humans, regardless of their caste, colour, creed, culture, or religion. The Sikh religion is the youngest of all major world religions (Singh AIHOTS)

Seva denotes selfless service and civic virtue in the organisation and within society. Today, the term is "dedication to others" and can be found in various contexts (Schlecker et al. 181). In fact, every religion has stressed welfare and charity for the needy through different acts within their defined frameworks. These concepts are part of a broader worldview of their religious belief system and carry their own meanings to the practising individuals. There are individuals and organisations who may have social concerns that do not stem from religion. It is possible to exhibit qualities such as kindness, empathy, and social awareness without subscribing to a particular faith or deity. Religion still holds sway over the majority of people and has a proven track record of inspiring social good. It can

work alongside secular institutions and the state to promote social development. This approach could also promote a more universal and inclusive humanism within religion, rather than one that leads to division and conflict (Nadkarni 1845).

Hindu ethics are based on the Law of Karma, a moral code that emphasises social responsibility. This law does not require the presence of a divine being but rather operates automatically. It differs from destiny or fate by suggesting that our actions have consequences for others and ourselves. In essence, we reap what we sow.

Suppose one witnesses a person in pain and chooses not to help, attributing it to that person's karma. In that case, they incur bad karma for missing the opportunity to provide assistance and failing in their moral duty or 'dharma.' One should offer help as a moral obligation and leave the results to the individual's karma. Hindu scriptures are explicit that our good deeds, known as 'punya,' contribute to the Law of Karma, and performing good deeds entails accepting social responsibility.

Another philosophical basis for the ethics of social concern was established in Hinduism before the medieval age. This philosophy revolves around the concept of a transcendent and immanent deity in the world, making all life sacred. Humanity is seen as a manifestation of the 'chit' aspect (consciousness or intelligence with free will) of this deity, in addition to 'sat' (existence) and 'aananda' (happiness or bliss), which other beings also share. All life is to be respected, even animals, as seen in Hindu epics and puranas where animals are attributed with 'chit.' The human body is particularly considered a dwelling place of the deity, as reflected in the verse: "The body is a temple, and its dweller is no less than God - the one who is free from all blemish." Serving only oneself on this basis is seen as hypocrisy and selfishness, while serving others, especially those in need, is serving God, as God is believed to dwell within all. God is seen as the redeemer of the fallen and the friend of the meek, often preferring to work through humans. Social commitment is seen as part of 'dharma,' a central ethical concept in Hinduism that emphasizes moral duty. Dharma includes rules of ethical conduct to ensure all security and well-being. It focuses on doctrinal beliefs ('vichaara') and practical actions ('aachaara'), which involve living a truthful, non-violent, compassionate life, treating others equally and selflessly serving society.

A key verse from the Bhagavad-gita emphasises equality and social justice, stating that the highest yogi is one who judges pleasure and pain in others by the same standard as

they apply to themselves. This calls for recognising that others have the same rights and deserve not to be exploited or harassed - a fundamental aspect of dharma. Non-violence ('ahimsa') is considered the highest dharma, extending beyond non-killing or tolerance to encompass compassion, forgiveness, selfless assistance, and promoting peace and harmony.

Hinduism distinguishes between '*saamaanya dharma*' (common to all) and '*svadharmā*' (relative and including, among other things, one's occupational duties). The former takes precedence over the latter, and if there's a conflict between the two, the former prevails. In cases of moral dilemmas arising from conflicts within '*saamaanya dharma*,' the Mahabharata suggests that the ultimate truth promotes the welfare of all beings. The essence of morality is what benefits all, not just the decision-maker.

The daily prayer, "*Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah Sarve Santu Niraamayaah | Sarve Bhadraanni Pashyantū Maa Kashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet | Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||*" underscores the desire for the well-being and freedom from suffering for all, emphasising the importance of the collective. Freedom is highly valued, not just in an individual sense but for the entire community, as reflected in a verse from the Rigveda that prays for freedom in various aspects of life, including freedom from deprivation (Nadkarni 1846).

According to the Bhagavad Gita 17:20, the act of giving without expecting anything in return, without any underlying thought or feeling of return, is considered the purest form of giving. The verse states, "*Datavyamiti Yaddanam Deeyatenupa Karine Deshe Kale cha Patrecha Taddanam Sattvikam Smarutam*". It also emphasises that such gifts should be given to a deserving person at the right place and time and that they are the most sacred and noble gifts.

On the other hand, Christian charity has deep historical roots and is influenced by various factors, including ancient cultural traditions, Roman society, and the Bible's Old Testament. The concept of charity is a central tenet of Christianity, and the Old Testament elevated it to a profound and sacred act. The Old Testament emphasises the duty to help the needy, support impoverished relatives, care for beggars, and even show kindness to enemies. It underscored the importance of feeding the hungry, reconciling with adversaries, and aiding prisoners, promising forgiveness of sins as a reward for charitable acts.

These foundational principles evolved and were elaborated upon in the New Testament, Epistles, and early Christian writings like the Didascalia Apostolorum. They formed a comprehensive system of social service within the Church. One significant principle was the call to voluntary poverty, following Christ's teachings on the challenges of wealth in entering Heaven. Early Christians often gave up their riches to aid fellow believers, but as the community diversified, the Apostle Paul emphasised equitable distribution of resources to meet everyone's needs.

Voluntary, sincere, and enthusiastic giving became core virtues in this evolving charity system. Apostle Paul stressed the importance of cheerful and willing generosity, not just the act itself. John Chrysostom further highlighted that dedication mattered more than the quantity given. Christianity's principles embody the faith's values and serve as a means to invite people into the Christian community and convert pagans. Early Christians exemplified these principles through charitable deeds that helped spread the Gospel's message. Christian charity acted both as a crucial support and a central tool for the propagation and expansion of the Christian faith (Faherty 110-119).

Generosity is an important aspect of Buddhist culture and is known as 'Dāna'. It is considered a path towards enlightenment and is practised by giving various essentials like money, food, land, medicines, and clothing to those who are in need. This act of giving is seen as a means to transcend material attachments, among other Pāramitās, and is considered an integral part of the Buddhist way of life. A true Buddhist practitioner strives to perfect Dāna Pāramitā, which involves transcending material attachments and cultivating the virtues of generosity, compassion, and wisdom. Therefore, Dāna is closely linked to the liberation from worldly desires and attaining inner peace and contentment. (Findly 521)

In Islam, Zakat is a mandatory form of giving calculated based on wealth and annual income. It applies only to individuals who reach a minimum income or wealth threshold. The Quran often mentions almsgiving alongside prayer, known as "salat wa-zakat," and fulfilling these two obligations is fundamental to demonstrating faith and taking action. The Quran states, "Only those who believe in God and the Last Day, perform the prayer, pay alms, and fear only God shall inhabit His places of worship" (Sura 9:18). The term "zakat" stems from an Aramaic root meaning "to purify," and zakat payments are essential in purifying legitimately earned wealth and seeking forgiveness for the giver's sins. During Muhammad's lifetime, the obligation to pay zakat was established and was considered a

strong indication of one's acceptance of Islam and commitment to the growing Muslim community. The Quran and hadith provide detailed guidance on zakat payment and the severe consequences for those disregarding this duty.

Zakat differs from voluntary charity in that it is a divine commandment imposed by God. Thus, paying zakat primarily signifies belief in and obedience to God rather than being solely an act of benevolence toward others. Nevertheless, popular understanding often views zakat payments as acts of kindness or charity. Notably, zakat is the only one of the Five Pillars of Islam that necessitates interaction with fellow human beings and requires a community; the other pillars are individual acts. In fact, a hadith regarding zakat encourages believers to fulfil this obligation promptly, as delaying it might result in no eligible recipients remaining.

According to Quranic specifications, zakat is meant to benefit the poor, zakat collectors, those needing reconciliation with Islam, slaves seeking freedom, debtors, and those "in God's way" (which initially included volunteers in spreading Islam but later expanded to include teachers and students of Islamic studies), and travellers who may lack resources and community support due to their distance from home.

From a social perspective, both obligatory zakat and voluntary sadaqa contribute to the cohesion of the Muslim community (umma) and aim to strengthen individual communities and their collective well-being (maslaha). However, early Muslim practice established a distinction between the two. This is reflected in the Quranic passage that describes true piety as believing in God, giving to relatives, orphans, the needy, travellers, beggars, and slaves, and performing prayer and paying alms (Qur'an, Sura 2:177). In Islam, the beneficiaries shifted from a loyalty group to the poor, who were considered to have a just claim (haqq) to a portion of wealth.

Islam encourages its followers to not only fulfil their obligatory zakat but also to voluntarily donate sadaqa. The recipients of sadaqa include those eligible for zakat and close family members who are not eligible but require support. Voluntary giving holds religious significance as it can expiate sins and increase the likelihood of attaining Paradise. Additionally, sadaqa can replace other obligatory practices such as fasting for those who are ill or pregnant or certain rituals specified in Qur'an Sura 2:184,196 (Singer 343-356).

The etymology of *Seva* comes from the Sanskrit word *Sev*, meaning to serve, submit, trust or pray. Mahan Kosh (271) by Kahan Singh Nabha defines it as service, contemplation, meditation, prayer, worship, and veneration. However, in Sikhism, *Seva* is defined as voluntary service without any expectation of anything in return for the welfare of others. “..... the modes of *Seva* sanctioned in Sikh tradition include *Seva* rendered through one’s body (*tan*), *Seva* rendered through one’s mind (*man*), and *Seva* rendered through giving of one’s material wealth (*dhan*). While all three forms of *Seva* are considered equally important, the Sikh Gurus stressed that all *Seva* should be a labour of love performed without desire (*nishkam*), without intention (*nishkapat*), and with humility (*nimarta*)” (Virdee). *Langar* served at Gurdwaras and outside of their premises is a powerful example of acts of *Seva*. The Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, began the requirement of giving a tithe (*Dasvand*) of earnings by Sikhs as a tax system to support acts of *Seva* (Nesbitt). “It would not be an exaggeration to say, that today, a Sikh is identified with his acts of *Sewa* – service to the humanity – and *Langar*, which has been taken out of the four walls of a Gurudwara to the doorstep of those who are in need.” (Dhali et. al. 291)

Guru Nanak Dev's teachings on charity are reflected in numerous writings, and *Var Asa* stands out as a composition where he delves into topics directly relevant to daily human life. In *Var Asa*, Guru Nanak Dev greatly emphasises serving God and fellow human beings, shedding light on the true nature of charity while exposing its false manifestations. Notably, he underscores the importance of sharing honest earnings with others. Guru Nanak Dev unequivocally rejects performing good works and deeds solely as ritualistic practices to attain salvation. He perceives such acts as superficial and insincere. Instead, he emphasises the significance of genuine charity, rooted in selflessness and compassion. Sharing one's hard-earned wealth with those in need is a fundamental principle he champions. Angad Dev, the second Guru, further elucidates the concept of *Seva*, asserting that true honour and respect can only be earned through self-sacrifice and dedicated service. According to Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, a devout follower of Guru Nanak Dev, should embody the spirit of "servant of servants," emphasising humility and selflessness in all endeavours. Bhai Gurdas highlights three golden principles that govern Sikh life: earning through honest labour, engaging in *Seva*, and adhering to the teachings of the Guru. *Seva* holds immense importance in the Sikh faith, and it transcends societal divisions such as caste, religious affiliation, or any other discriminatory factors. Guru

Nanak Dev's teachings emphasise the genuine practice of charity and selfless service. He encourages individuals to share their earnings with others, reject superficial rituals, and embrace a spirit of equality and compassion while serving humanity. These principles resonate throughout Sikh scripture and underline the essence of Guru Nanak Dev's teachings (Massey 54).

There are four fundamental social ethics in Sikhism: social equality, universal brotherhood, altruism(*Sarbat da Bhala*) and *Seva*. They are interlinked and define the relations of individual Sikhs with others. *Sarbat da Bhala* and *Seva* are practical measures to achieve social equality and universal brotherhood. The source of social equality in Sikhism comes from the spiritual understanding of oneness among all(*Ikonkar*)(Singh ACGTS). Some Sikhs even find “community involvement, helping others, equality and following the Sikh teachings such as *Sewa*”(Kaur 44) as part of their being as a Sikh.

Free food or *Langar*, sometimes called community kitchen or free kitchen, is the most visible example of *Seva*, which is served at every Gurudwara. Sikhs also serve it during relief works in different crisis situations. Preparing and serving *Langar* is a communal act performed collectively. In the words of James Massey,

“Sikh giving in the form of *daswand*, supports langar. It is also an open expression of *vand chhako*. Therefore *daswand*, *vand chhako* and langar are the practical expressions of the life of a *gurmukh*. These depend on the charity practices of Sikh religion. Along with langar, the other two important concepts connected are *pangat* which means a group of people sitting in a row, and *deg* and *tegh*, which means a big cooking pot and a sword. To begin with, *langar* was started by the first Guru Nanak Devji as a token of human brotherhood or sisterhood and to help those who are in need. Angad Devji, the second Guru continued to follow this practice, but the third Guru Amar Dasji institutionalized the same. The tenth Guru Gobind Singhji even ordered his followers to start or practise at a personal level, so that nobody may go hungry. The sharing of food in a langar always is taken while sitting in a *pangat*. Guru Amar Dasji even ordered his followers that they first serve food to the congregation and then should assemble for prayers. He said: *Pahle pangat piche sangat*, i.e. 'first sitting and eating together and then take part in the fellowship'. *Pangat* today has become a synonym for langar. At present, this practice has been made a part of Sikh service in every Sikh temple or gurdwara.

Langar is the direct corporate responsibility of the Sikh community as a whole. It does not depend on givings of outsiders or others. Langar besides being the practical expression of social equality and integration, is a place of training voluntary service and the practice of philanthropy and equality. Service is involved in the collection of fuel and rations, cutting vegetables, cooking of food, distribution of meals, serving of drinking water, washing of utensils and dishes, and the cleaning of dining halls. It is a practical demonstration of hospitality and love of human beings.(45)”

The practice of langar also serves as a means of social integration between different social classes, including the monarch and commoners, within Sikhism. Langar's rules dictate that everyone, regardless of their social status, should sit together and share the same food without any distinctions. The principle of equality and social integration by aiding the needy is emphasised in various life rules and teachings of Sikhism. The idea is to promote an ideal

Figure 1.1 Langar Seva



Source: Hindustan Times

integration based on equality through simple yet effective moral precepts, encouraging mutual assistance. The langar system also acts as a continuous reminder of social equality

and serves to counteract the immoral practice of untouchability, which arises from the caste system. Sikhism also advocates for assistance to the needy through Gurdwara collections. However, this assistance is not viewed as charity but as mutual help, considering the common spiritual origin of all beings and the belief in the unity of humanity. Sikhism emphasises the realisation of social equality and human dignity through voluntary and unrestricted aid to those in need, promoting a sense of unity and harmony among all individuals (Singh ACGTS).

It has been argued that the socialist promise of equality and liberation has failed (Friedman), and so has the promise of freedom by capitalism. Climate change is real and knocking on our doors. In this context, the significance of Sikhism has been argued to lie in the fact that it does not teach a lesson of detachment and renunciation but liberation in life through family life and participation in daily life, with the thought of serving everyone seeking help (Madan 76-95). *Seva* can provide a new way of looking at the world. Habermas (16) argues that modernity no longer implies the march towards secularism. Hence, it would be a cultural and intellectual error to reject dialogue with religion, and in a democracy, the secular mentality should be open to the religious influence of believing citizens.

Historically, Sikhs have performed *Seva* individually or as part of a larger community. Today, apart from individual Sikhs and the collective Sikh communities, there are many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) claiming to be working under the notion of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. They quote different *Shabds* from Guru Granth Sahib and ask for donations under the concept of *Dasvand*. NGOs working in this area are under scepticism for their operational procedure, funding, motivations, and various other factors. So, there was a need to scrutinise how they actually performed *Seva*. NGOs have also been questioned on their own effectiveness, accountability, and legitimacy.

According to a report published in The Times of India in 2023, 33 lakh NGOs were operating in India. This number represents one-third of all NGOs worldwide. In response to the changing political landscape and the decline of state power, a diverse range of groups has emerged under the banner of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). These groups engage in a wide variety of activities, such as implementing grassroots development initiatives, advocating for human rights and social justice, protesting environmental degradation, and pursuing other objectives that were previously

overlooked or left to governmental agencies (Fisher 440). NGOs have also been shown as an instrument of mainstreaming and regulating agents for the relations between the state and society (Chazan 305). There is no single accepted definition of Non-Government organisations worldwide. They have been defined and governed by the local legal framework in individual countries (Salomon).

With the introduction of Article 71 of the United Nations charter, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have, however, been given more expansive political and social space (Berger). Non-governmental organisations have been seen as a creation of the capitalistic-conservative governments in the West (especially the regimes of Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher) (Harvey 1-25). Their purpose was to reduce the responsibility of the state via the creation of a voluntary sector. Only thereafter it became a trend across the world (Solomon). Some NGOs define themselves as religious organisations. These are those whose identity and mission are consciously derived from the teachings of one or more religious or spiritual traditions and which operate on a non-profit, independent, voluntary basis to promote and realise collectively articulated ideas about the public good at the national or international level (Martens 1-22).

There are a number of Sikh non-governmental organisations working with different objectives in the field of social welfare. Khalsa Aid is one of the most famous Sikh non-governmental organisations, running internationally across different continents. There has been a good deal of traditional and social media coverage for them, which inspired this researcher to study this organisation. The Indian Express reported as to how several Sikh organisations like Khalsa Aid, Langar Aid, Midland Langar Seva Society, and others are now branching out to other countries where *langar* is used to provide nutritious meals to the undernourished. One such initiative is ‘Zero Hunger With Langar’, which works in two African countries — Malawi and Kenya — which are among the countries with the highest malnutrition rates among children and feature in the UN’s target list. The hype built on social media about the Khalsa Aid is so big that it attracts thousands of volunteers and funding for its activities.

Khalsa Aid was started by Ravi (Ravinder) Singh, a UK-based Sikh. Initially, he was inclined to help refugees stuck in Albania, affected by the Balkan war in the year 1999. It was also the year to mark 300 years of initiation of the *Khalsa Panth* (1699-1999). Ravi Singh thought of Khalsa Aid as a non-profit Sikh organisation helping those in need. The

organisation uses a community funding mechanism to fund its activities worldwide.

The activities of Khalsa Aid can be categorised into two broader categories: firstly, providing help and support to the persons affected by natural and man-made calamities (refugee crisis, flood, hurricane and other victims), and secondly, long-term programs aimed at sustainable solutions to community problems. Khalsa Aid has its headquarters in London, England. India head office of Khalsa Aid is situated at Patiala, Punjab, which also acts as the headquarters for the whole of South and Southeast Asia.

Khalsa Aid is running a long-term programme named *Focus Punjab*, where they are looking to provide long-term support in the region. The Langar aid programme of the organisation is another dedicated initiative to provide food and water supplies in disaster and war zones. According to Khalsa Aid, they derive their inspiration from the Sikh principle of “recognize the whole human race as one.” The source of funding for Khalsa Aid is donations, the most part of which comes from the Sikh community. The physical presence of Khalsa Aid is supplemented by a major social media presence, i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc. Their activities are thus very well highlighted on social media. With a targeted approach and millions of online followers, just seconds are enough to reach the desired audience.

Long-sustained programs include educational help, medical assistance, family pensions, wedding aid, and housing aid. Families who are not able to pay for the education of their children or are unable to pay for medical expenses come to the organisation for help. The organisation enquires about their actual financial and family condition through different sources. The researcher could see such cases while being on a pilot study. After the verification process is completed, money is directly paid to the concerned institution, i.e. hospital, school, college or university, etc. The researcher saw houses built by the organisation for poor families at Malerkotla, a small city in the Sangrur district of Punjab. The researcher also met a family who had received financial aid from the organisation at the marriage of their daughter. These activities provide a firm grounding to the organisation, which is necessary to gain local support and sustenance.

EcoSikh is different from Khalsa Aid in one aspect they have a single arena of work, that is, the environment. Their tagline is ‘Sikh response to climate change’ (EcoSikh). They describe themselves as working solely for the cause of ecology and

related challenges. EcoSikh is the most prominent Sikh organisation working on environmental issues globally. Although much of its work is in Punjab, EcoSikh has an explicitly global emphasis and has done an impressive amount of work in building a network worldwide for environment-focused Sikh activities and fostering the promotion of green gurdwaras. Their projects include an attempt to create 'green' gurdwaras by reducing the usage of disposable plates during *langar* and working towards enhancing the greenery of the areas surrounding the *Darbar sahib* in Amritsar as a part of the global Pilgrim Cities initiative of the United Nations. The organisation is best known for its campaigning for Sikh Environment Day (Sikh Vatavaran Divas), celebrated on the 14th of March, the anniversary of Guru Har Rai's ascension to the Guruship (Prill 231). EcoSikh mobilises green gurdwaras, recycling drives, tree planting efforts, and environmental education and has more recently articulated a move into organic agriculture. EcoSikh draws its directions and inspiration explicitly from the writings, principles, and lived examples of the Sikh Gurus and employs the same in its public statements and community engagement efforts. *Seva* is a foundational motivation for EcoSikh's environmentalism, and the organisation seeks to change the ways in which it is practised in the gurdwara and beyond (Mooney 337).

The idea of EcoSikh was conceived by the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) when a United Nations initiative brought together representatives from all nine major religions of the world at Windsor Castle, the United Kingdom, in the year 2009. Dr Rajwant Singh of SCORE attended this meeting as one of the representatives from the Sikh community. The meeting was to discuss practical actions for the environment, and, it was a month before the major Copenhagen climate change talks were held in December 2009. At this juncture, EcoSikh was born as the 'Sikh answer to climate change', according to the organisation's representatives.

The global headquarters of EcoSikh is in Washington DC, USA. This researcher visited this organisation's India office (Ludhiana, Punjab), where the representatives told the researcher that the organisation uses advocacy and targeted initiatives to work at environment-related challenges. EcoSikh is part of the Alliance of Religion and Conservation, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiative, combining the religious message of preserving nature with modern operating procedures.

The researcher was able to see Guru Nanak Bagh (Garden) in the Moga district of Punjab,

where the organisation has planted more than 5000 trees and plants of 60 different species, mentioned in the Guru Granth Sahib. The most popular initiative by the organisation has been the plantation drive, where each village has been given 550 saplings to commemorate the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev. The government of Punjab has also adopted this program. The organisation also plants 'sacred' forests on lands donated by individuals and institutions. There are also similar projects and projects of other nature too, running in Pakistan, Europe, and North America, according to the organisation. Initially, EcoSikh was totally funded by the Norwegian government, after which the funding was partial in nature. However, now they are receiving all their funds from the Sikh community, according to the officials at EcoSikh.

It is undisputed that climate change and global warming are perhaps the single biggest challenge to the world today. Many international organisations are working on this issue. In this context, a Sikh religious organisation (although an NGO) becomes of special interest when it claims to draw its inspiration from Sikh ideals for preserving nature. Furthermore, NGOs often wield significant influence on a global scale. They challenge corporate power and government policies through advocacy and setting agendas. This power, while different from conventional political or economic power, can shape socio-political landscapes. In this context, the leadership of NGOs becomes a new form of elite, with the ability to impact governance and social discourse.

Conversely, scholars like Baviskar see NGOs as crucial intermediaries bridging the gap between states and markets. Particularly in the 1980s onward, NGOs played a pivotal role in development, stepping in where states fell short and fostering a vibrant civil society. This dynamic highlights the intertwined relationship between civil society and NGOs, wherein the latter's influence contributes to the legitimacy of the former.

The NGO status of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh places them within the realm of civil society actors addressing critical issues. Their commitment to *Seva*, driven by Sikh values with the intentionality of justice, connects their work to a broader purpose. Nevertheless, their claim to being true *Sevak* necessitates unwavering dedication to selflessness, holistic well-being, and a clear alignment with the principles they espouse. In the complex landscape of NGOs, challenges like centralisation and accountability persist, but their potential for positive change and influence remains substantial, impacting societies, policies, and perceptions.

Religion can be a very important motivational factor for the masses, even with regard to issues such as the preservation of nature. Jordan Peterson argues, “The philosophical study of the morality of right and wrong is ethics. Even older and deeper than ethics is religion. Religion concerns itself not with mere right and wrong but with the good and evil themselves with the archetypes of right and wrong. Religion concerns itself with the domain of value, the ultimate value” (Peterson). When combined with religion, the value of nature (ecology) can become the ultimate value for humans, which, however, shall only remain a consumable resource, if understood merely from the rational perspective.

Being Sikh is not defined by outward religious symbols but rather by the practice of religious values and teachings, such as *Seva*. Sikhs prioritise the value of community and treating others as members of the same human community. This "we" identity is strengthened by the emphasis on *Seva*, or helping others, which forms the basis of the Sikh religion. Even when outside the Sikh community, attention to *Seva* remains important. In addition, religious organisations provide opportunities for formal volunteering among Sikhs (Kaur WAAVR).

2. Review of literature:

While reviewing the literature on Sikhism and the concept of *Seva* in Sikhism, this researcher observed that Sikhism recognises the broader perspective of life where a universal understanding includes all human and non-human life alike. All are part of a ‘whole’ creation, emerging from a single omnipresent creator having a presence in all of creation. That creator is one and is called *ikonkar* in the Sikh faith. Thus, an understanding of oneness amongst every element of creation is generated, driven by an omnipresent one. From this principle, the Sikh concern for the environment and nature emerges, and “in this way, Sikh teachings, combined with the current approaches to sustainability, can lead to more resilient pathways to sustainable development” (Sahota et al., 27). “Sikhism is a revealed religion based on a definitive revelation like Semitic religions of the West, and therefore, it can be clearly distinguished from the earlier Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc., which have an anonymous mysticism as their source of validity. It is not simply a set of views or doctrines but a way of life according to a definite model, for which the Sikh Gurus have given lessons for over a period of two hundred years and themselves, led all their life exemplifying that model. Those who perfected it came to be

known as Sikhs (literally meaning the learned)” (Singh S:AI). Sikhism is a Western word that suggests a religious system based on theological and ethical principles that portray an abstractly defined entity rather than a fluid tradition, pulsing with life and difficult to pin down (Nesbitt). Guru Granth Sahib is the source of the Sikh doctrine, which is divine. The doctrine of Sikhism manifests itself through the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib. It is called *Gurmat*, which is to act in life as guided by the Guru (Singh EFTS). It stresses more on rightful actions rather than on ritualistic life, and hence a Sikh is directed to “shoulder family responsibilities, ‘trade-in truth’ and help others through the acts of ‘Seva’.....Sikhs are exhorted to provide *Seva*, for example, by serving the *langar*”. Although in institutional terms, the tradition of *langar* was started by the third Guru, Guru Amar Das, but sharing food together was integral to Guru Nanak’s Kartarpur community. The primacy of Guru Nanak’s concern with individual salvation needs hardly be emphasised; what must not be overlooked, however, is the fact that he did not teach a selfish concern for one’s own salvation alone, but rather the moral responsibility of fellow human beings as well. Guru Nanak summed up his teachings very simply: ‘*Kirt Karo, Nam Japo, Vand Chakko*’ (work for a living; abide in the meditative recitation of God’s name; share what you have with others). The self is thus seen in relation to the divine and the social, so a withdrawal from either of these relationships must spell out one’s extinction. This combination of piety and practical activity (in the form of worldly labour) is the essence of Guru Nanak’s this-worldliness. *Seva*, including other activities, makes the individual concerned for others (Madan 81).

The emergence of the industrial/capitalist/scientific machine in the West significantly impacted other cultures, especially those that were colonised or subjected to imperialism. The West claimed to be "enlightening" or "liberating" these societies, often resulting in complex territorialisation. While cybernetics and informatics allowed for labour-saving and even "paradisaal" moments, they also created the potential for severe and hyper-territorialization. However, there is an alternative horizon that offers a more positive view of the universe. This is the Sikh *Vismad*, which sees the universe as a joyous wonder and beauty connected by love and heterological mediation. Sikh culture is relatively young, but it offers a unique perspective that challenges the dominant Western narrative. We can move towards a more inclusive and harmonious society by embracing this alternative worldview. Its distinct view is elaborated by the ten Gurus and the *Bhagat* poets in their writings and life practices (Singh SAPMT). Sikh tradition places great emphasis on the

value of *Sarbat da bhala*, based on the teachings of Guru Nanak's principles of *Nam Japo*, *Kirat Karo*, and *Vand Chhako*. These principles encourage self-awareness and selfless service to society. The Sikh tradition values the recitation of Nam and dignified labour, with all forms of work given equal importance. The ultimate goal is to contribute to society's well-being while fulfilling household duties, as seen in the concept of *Vand Chhako*. *Seva*, an integral part of the Sikh religion, involves serving the congregation in the Gurudwara, helping the needy, and contributing to the *Langar*. Over time, *Seva* has expanded beyond the Gurudwara to include monetary or material contributions or services to help people worldwide. This reflects Guru Nanak's vision of eliminating traditional customs based on exploitation and inequality and promoting a society based on love and equality for all (Dhali & Kaur 302).

Serving others with a cheerful attitude is deeply cherished, and *Seva* has become an essential part of Sikh life. It may take the form of attending to the Holy Book, or sweeping and dusting the shrines, or preparing and serving food, or looking after and even cleaning the shoes of worshippers. Singh sees the *Langar*, the community kitchen, as asserting the social equality and familyhood of humanity. This is because both men and women, irrespective of race, caste, or religion, get involved in the act of *Seva* in *Langar*. Without any consideration for caste or rank, they sit in rows and take the meal. She argues that Guru Nanak established *Langar* to bond humanity together, regardless of the differences in caste, race, gender, and class, and hence, she observes that *Langar*, as an instrument of social transformation, continued to gain in importance during the time of successive gurus. She also mentions the story of Bhai Ghanaya, a Sikh of the period of Guru Gobind Singh, who was known for giving water to the Sikhs and enemies alike in the battle. He was called and questioned, and he said that he had not helped the enemy: as he went around the battlefield, he saw no friend or foe but only the Guru's face (Singh SDSS). The institution of *Langar* plays a crucial role in promoting unity and a sense of belonging among Sikhs. This institution also effectively minimises the impact of caste on the community, thereby contributing significantly to the development of a unique Sikh identity. The concept of equality before God was evident in the communal worship at Kartarpur community during Guru Nanak's times and in the shared kitchen that was supported by voluntary contributions of cash, kind, or service (Grewal TS:IIAI).

The practice of Sikh *ardas* is a powerful way to connect with the divine and achieve a state of unity with all beings. At its heart, *ardas* is about surrendering to the will of the

Lord and praying for the well-being of all. When we surrender to the Lord's will, we acknowledge that we do not control our lives. Instead, we are placing our trust in the divine and allowing ourselves to be guided by His wisdom and love. This surrender is not a sign of weakness but rather a recognition of our own limitations and the power of the divine. Through *ardas*, we also come to appreciate the joy that comes from aligning ourselves with the Lord's pleasure. When we are in harmony with the divine, we experience a deep sense of peace and contentment that transcends any material or worldly pleasures. We recognise that true happiness comes from a connection with the divine, not from pursuing wealth or power. At the same time, *ardas* reminds us of the importance of following the Lord's commandments. His will governs the universe, and when we align ourselves with that will, we are able to live in harmony with all beings. This means treating others with compassion and kindness and working to create a just and fair world. Ultimately, the practice of *ardas* is about creating a sense of unity with all beings. When Sikhs pray for the well-being of all, they acknowledge that we are all interconnected and that our actions have an impact on others. They recognise that the well-being of one is tied to the well-being of all, and that by working together, we can create a peaceful and harmonious world. It is stressed that the Sikh *ardas* is a powerful practice that can help us connect with the divine, appreciate the joy of aligning with His pleasure, and work to create a just and compassionate world for all. By surrendering to the Lord's will, we are able to tap into a source of wisdom and love that transcends all boundaries and unites us with all beings (Neki).

In contrast to philosophies that encourage world denial, the Sikh tradition affirms the reality/authenticity of the world/body. Sikhism is fundamentally ecosophical. Ecosophia is the articulation of religious and philosophical worldviews that provide a “face to face relation with Nature.” The ecosophical paradigm aims at the liberation of life that necessarily includes the liberation of Nature, women, and the underprivileged. It attempts to establish a connection with the intrinsic dignity/worth of Nature, women, and the downtrodden. It aims to establish relations in justice. Cosmic unity and biocentric equality are the two ultimate norms of ecosophia. Ecosophism essentially recognises that both human and non-human life on earth has intrinsic values. It abnegates any form of domination and subjugation. People and Nature are the core of ecosophia (ism)” (Lourdunathan 168). Its concerns towards social services, human rights, and religious freedom of the common masses have made Sikhism a unique universal world religion.

Sikh Rahitnamas is the code of conduct for life in Sikhism. These 18th-century Rahitnamas present a sense of different aspects of Sikh life. For a Sikh, communal brotherhood was more important than ties of kinship. A Sikh should always be ready to share his food, clothes, and other belongings with the needy; if he is in a position to be of any service to others, he should jump at the opportunity. A Sikh woman was to share with men their religious beliefs, practices, and formal observations (Grewal TS:11AI).

Exploring forms of civic engagement through the Sikh Gurdwara, acting as a central institution, is the main objective of Hirvi (55-68). She explores what can be documented and the factors that foster civic engagement amongst Sikhs in California. Through this case study, she draws an understanding of the relationship between civic engagement and the Sikh concept of *Seva*. She has tried to measure civic engagement by looking at the concrete practices performed by Sikhs in relation to the Gurdwara. She argues that one needs to take a closer look at the religious concept of *Seva*, which encourages Sikhs to do selfless and voluntary service for the well-being of all. She further states that the desire to do *Seva* can also motivate a Sikh to become active in the political arena to do good and give back to the community. Religion is responsible for a good deal of social service in the world, and it is a way of all-around development of life by convincing the individual to consider the whole world as his family. The topic of ethics in the practice of *Seva* is crucial. It is believed that ethical and moral responsibilities motivate individuals towards social service; however, it is not guaranteed that it will yield the same level of consistency and outcome.

The ideologies of determinism and indeterminism of fate are both extremist views, and the reality lies in the middle. In this regard, Sikh beliefs, as expressed in *Gurbani*, suggest that one can determine one's own fate by performing good deeds while conducting day-to-day activities. Different religions have unique perspectives on service, and every religion aims to promote humanity's well-being and considers every being's interests. However, the institutionalisation of religion can bring about changes to the fundamental structure of the religion (Singh GVSIDS). *Seva* can be categorised into four categories - *Seva* by means of the body, by wealth and other resources, by the mind, and the *Seva* by consciousness (Bhandari 10). Martyrdom is the highest form of *Seva* (Singh SDSS). Practising *Seva* of society is ethical and for some higher cause. Societal *Seva* is revolutionary and is a road towards freedom (Anand and Kaur 65). *Seva* can help in doing away with the egoistic attitude. Sikhism, being universal in nature, does not identify itself

with any shape or form (Singh, SDSS).

In the case of Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs), literature asserts that we should be conscious of the claims of NGOs and be aware of granting them the status of holy cow merely based on their claims. They have been accused of marketing their ‘good’ side and, at the same time, working for different vested interests (Ruano). For the critics of neo-liberal policies, it is an assumption that “the opposition mobilised outside the state apparatus and within some separate entity called ‘civil society’ is the powerhouse of oppositional politics and transformation.” The leadership of such organisations is unelected and the elite of the society or community, where there is little or no representation of the poor and minority sections of the society. An important point herein is that the accountability of these NGOs is not towards the common masses but to their funding agencies and individuals. They are seen as a tactic of state withdrawal and privatisation. For that, NGOs are serving only the propaganda part instead of doing something concrete for the people (Harvey). Non-governmental organisations are also seen working for the benefit of corporations by sometimes setting agendas in their favour. At other times, they are also seen as the product of the political liberal left. He also gives them credit for bringing the political liberal left to the fore by giving them an acceptable face. The leadership of these nonprofit organisations as the new elite is different from conventional elites in some ways, as they have no formal political or economic power. Still, at the same time, they wield power through their institutions, i.e. advocacy groups, foundations, etc. They often challenge the power of corporations and governments by setting agendas and influencing governance and operations policies (Manheim).

Religious Nongovernmental Organisations, on the other hand, base their motivational apparatus on the fundamental values of a particular religion. Having collected data from a sample of 263 United Nations-affiliated RNGOs, Berger (15-18) asserts that political, ideological, and economic factors influence the establishment of RNGOs. Religion, spirituality, and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of people, and hence moral duty rather than pure rationality works as an appealing method for building networks for the RNGOs. They are not value-based entities but rather built on the foundation of religious and spiritual institutions for driving the value and making use of cultural power in the shape of symbols, ideologies, and moral authority to effect socio-political outcomes. RNGOs take political identity by classifying themselves as NGOs. The importance of civil society organisations in tackling the ill-doings of

globalisation, which, according to Clark, are widening the gap between the rich and the poor strata of the population. This gap is multi-dimensional, from power and wealth to security. Civil society organisations pose a challenge to the existing powers and their structures. While praising these organisations, the author also reminds us of responsibilities like accountability, legitimacy, integrity, and, very importantly, representation for all. At the same time, Clarks provides us with the opposite picture of globalisation in triggering unfair practices in the world trade and finance sector. In conclusion, he finds an opportunity for civil society organisations to take on the challenges and guide globalisation in an ethical direction.

Since the 1980s, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played a crucial role in development. As nations shifted from developmentalism to a neo-liberal political economy known as market triumphalism, NGOs became intermediaries between inefficient states and efficient markets. However, their involvement in development has implications that require examination, including their relationships with state agencies, funding institutions, and other social groups. Understanding these dynamics is vital in comprehending social change and the roles of various social actors. While NGOs value openness and transparency, they may be resistant to scrutiny from external sources, especially well-established organisations. Scholars classify NGOs in various ways, including techno-managerial, reformist, and radical categories, and based on their focus areas, such as Gandhian, service delivery, professional, and mobilisation organisations. Another classification categorises NGOs into three generations based on their historical roles. Civil society and NGOs are closely intertwined, with NGOs serving as the lifeblood of a vibrant civil society (Baviskar).

A strong civil society is essential for a modern, open democratic polity, and NGOs maintain their distinct identity while interacting with the state and influencing its actions. The increasing prominence of NGOs in development is linked to the declining legitimacy of the state. The state is viewed with scepticism, seen as corrupt, oppressive, and neglectful. NGOs are perceived as more accountable, responsive, and committed to fostering social change, leading international agencies to collaborate with them in implementing projects. However, caution is necessary when generalising these trends. Some state actors with vested interests may attempt to co-opt NGOs to maintain their power and influence. Despite advocating democratic decentralisation, NGOs may have idiosyncratic internal organisational structures, with authority concentrated in the hands

of a charismatic founder and a lack of mechanisms for addressing employee grievances. NGOs may operate on the principles of voluntarism, which can obscure underlying issues of exploitation and manipulation (Baviskar).

2.1 Research gap:

The review of literature on the Sikh concept of *Seva*, the this-worldly aspects of the Sikh faith, and non-profit organisations in the public sphere has resulted in the identification of the following research gaps:-

1. The available literature on the Sikh Concept of *Seva* seldom discusses its different dimensions and transformative potential in the modern socio-cultural scenario.
2. The ideological underpinnings of the activities of non-governmental organisations were not included in any of the analysed research works.
3. The validity of the Sikh Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) and their operations, in view of the epistemological understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, was not a part of any study.

This study attempts to fill in these gaps through an understanding and analysis of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its praxis in the activities of two NGOs, namely, the EcoSikh and the Khalsa Aid.

3. Statement of the problem:

Given the pluralism of the modern world, religious principles are unlikely to be such that all the citizens of a nation-state can reasonably accept them. Modern liberalism does not allow religious principles and values to form society's foundation or be applied to political discourse about basic matters of justice and rule (Weitzman). Today's society, in which both secular and religious citizens are obliged to defend their beliefs publicly (Habermas 16), posits a new opportunity to investigate religious claims to establish a 'just' society. In this context, an analysis of the Sikh principle of *Seva*, as a sociological

collective force, could be significant. This study focuses on the transformative claims of the Sikh principle of *Seva* in the socio-cultural arena by investigating the practices of two NGOs claiming to be inspired by *Seva*, namely the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh.

4. The Rationale of the Study:

Many organisations are working in the field of *Seva* that claim to be deriving their inspiration from Sikh principles; for instance, SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhadak Committee), DSGMC (Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee), etc., are registered under different legislative acts (Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 and Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1971 respectively). There are a few studies on these organisations. On the other hand, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are a new phenomenon in the Sikh world, claiming to be performing the act of *Seva*. They use modern, efficient management techniques to deliver services to end target users. In this context, the study of the interpretation and practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva* by two such organisations from the sociocultural point of view shall be a significant contribution, which may help to fill the relative void in the available literature in this topical arena.

5. Objectives of the study:

- To explore and understand the myriad dimensions of the Sikh concept of *Seva* as depicted in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- To investigate the activities of the Khalsa Aid in Punjab, with respect to its analysis and interpretation of the Sikh concept of *Seva*.
- To scrutinise the activities of the EcoSikh in Punjab, with respect to its analysis and interpretation of the Sikh concept of *Seva*
- To analyse and unearth the applicability of the Sikh concept of *Seva* in the modern social-cultural scenario.

6. Research questions:

- What are the divergent forms of *Seva* in Sikhism as depicted in the Guru Granth Sahib?
- What is the origin and scope of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh?
- What are the contributions of the Khalsa Aid in Punjab? What are their activities, and who are the intended beneficiaries?
- What are the contributions of the EcoSikh in Punjab? What kind of activities do they engage in, and who are the intended beneficiaries?
- Is there an observable parity in the practices of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh, and the concept of *Seva* in Sikhism, with respect to their socio-cultural concerns?
- Can the functioning of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh be read as an attempt to fill in the void created by the rollback of the state, or do they have any other motivations?
- Is there any scope for the Sikh concept of *Seva* to be categorised as a transformative socio-cultural phenomenon in the modern world?

7. Research Methodology:

This research is a qualitative study based on primary data. Qualitative research is focused on establishing relationships between different variables. It can provide a way to uncover the meanings behind social and religious actions. It highlights the experiences of different social actors in day-to-day life. Whereas quantitative methods lay more emphasis on numerical data, qualitative research methods ranging from observation to interviews provide more flexibility to a researcher to study a given setting or phenomena.

Particularly for this study, the qualitative method offered a depth of understanding essential for exploring the intricate dimensions of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its socio-cultural impact through the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh. Given the complexity of this phenomenon, qualitative research allows for a nuanced exploration of participant experiences, motivations, and perspectives, delving into the cultural, religious, and social

factors that shape their actions. Additionally, the flexible nature of qualitative research permits the emergence of unexpected insights, crucial for a dynamic and evolving subject such as the impact of *Seva* initiatives. By prioritising participant's voices and personal perspectives, qualitative methods provide a platform for individuals to share their unique experiences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Furthermore, the qualitative approach enabled this researcher to capture contextual factors, subjective interpretations, and holistic influences that contribute to the socio-political implications of *Seva*. Ultimately, qualitative research is aligned perfectly with the multifaceted nature of the subject, offering a robust methodology to explore the depth and complexity of *Seva's* impact on the environment, society and the contributions of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh in promoting these principles.

The study's ontological foundation is rooted in a phenomenological constructivist perspective, acknowledging reality's subjective and socially constructed nature. It recognises that cultural, historical, and individual interpretations shape the concept of *Seva* within Sikhism and its socio-political impact (Antipina). The study's epistemological stance aligns with interpretivism, emphasising the importance of understanding participant's lived experiences and perspectives. It acknowledges that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions and aims to uncover the meanings and underlying motivations behind *Seva* practices and their effects. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research approach. The use of qualitative methods enabled the study to capture the holistic nature of *Seva*, examining individual experiences, organisational strategies, and broader societal implications. The study employs a case study design, allowing for an in-depth examination of two organisations, Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, as exemplars of *Seva* in action. This design enables a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon within its natural context while also considering the historical and cultural factors that influence *Seva* practices. The study's sampling strategy involves purposive sampling, ensuring that participants have direct experience with the organisation's *Seva* initiatives, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the concept and its impact. Through a constructivist lens, interpretive epistemology, and qualitative methodology, the study seeks to uncover the multifaceted dynamics of *Seva*, shedding light on its significance within Sikhism and its potential to drive positive change in the environmental and societal domains.

Studying human society, its institutions, actions, and thought processes with motivations

and meanings is a complex process. The *Verstehen* approach developed by Max Weber caters to the exploration of meanings attached to individual actions. Understanding of meaning is central to Weber, who notes that “we can accomplish something which is never attainable in the natural sciences, namely the subjective understanding of the action of the component individuals” (Weber 15). This study shall utilise the *Verstehen* technique for building an understanding of the meanings that actors attach to their actions.

7.1 Research Population:

The research population for the study comprised two distinct groups: believers and non-believers of the Sikh faith who benefitted from and engaged with the Sikh concept of *Seva* and Sikh NGOs who claimed to derive their inspiration from the Sikh concept of *Seva*. These two groups provided critical perspectives to comprehensively understand the *Seva* concept and its contemporary manifestations.

Believers and Non-Believers of the Sikh Faith Engaged with the Sikh Concept of Seva:

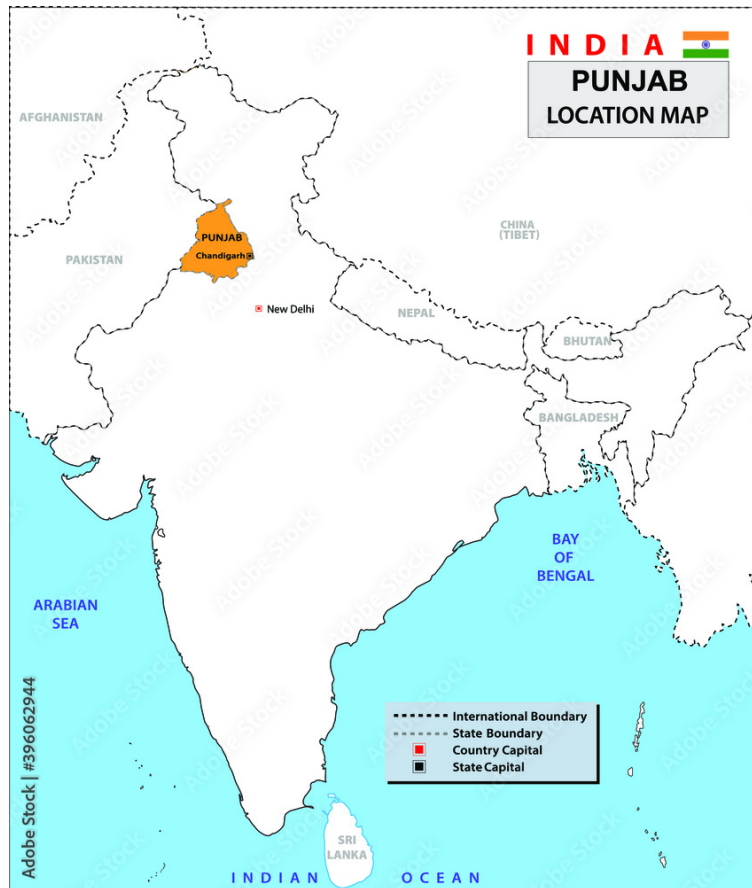
This group included individuals who identified as Sikh believers and those who may not have followed the Sikh faith but were actively involved in '*Seva*' initiatives inspired by Sikh principles. Sikhism, as a religion, emphasised the importance of '*Seva*,' and encouraged its followers to engage in acts of compassion and altruism. Sikhism's teachings transcended religious boundaries, attracting individuals from diverse backgrounds who resonated with the concept of *Seva*. Members of this group included Sikh devotees who were actively involved in various forms of *Seva*, such as community kitchens (*Langar*), offering assistance in gurdwaras, participating in humanitarian projects, and contributing to charitable causes. Additionally, individuals from different faiths or belief systems were also part of this population, who found resonance with the principle of *Seva* and actively contributed to social welfare inspired by Sikh teachings. Understanding the perspectives and experiences of both Sikh believers and non-believers engaged in *Seva* activities allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the impact and significance of *Seva* within and beyond the Sikh community. It provided insights into how the concept of *Seva* transcended religious boundaries and its impact on daily life.

Sikh NGOs Inspired by the Sikh Concept of Seva:

This group comprised Sikh non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that explicitly claimed to derive their inspiration from the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, the two prominent organisations chosen as case studies, fell within this category. These

NGOs were dedicated to carrying out philanthropic activities and social initiatives, aligning with Sikh principles of compassion, equality, and selfless service. Khalsa Aid, for instance, was known for its global humanitarian efforts, providing aid in disaster-hit regions and assisting

Figure 2. Political map of India showing Punjab



Source: MapsofIndia.com

marginalised communities worldwide. EcoSikh, on the other hand, focused on environmental conservation, advocating for sustainable practices as part of its commitment to *Seva*. By studying Sikh NGOs that were explicitly rooted in the concept of *Seva*, the research aimed to delve into the specific ways, these organisations interpreted and practised *Seva* within their operational frameworks. This included understanding the motivations behind their initiatives, their organisational structures, and the impact of their *Seva* projects on beneficiaries and the office bearers.

The selection of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh as subjects for this study was guided by a meticulous evaluation of various Sikh organisations. The criteria for their inclusion were

rooted in their alignment with Sikh values, the diversity of their impact areas, their global outreach, innovative approaches, policy influence, sustainability, and their degree of community engagement. These organisations not only displayed prominence within the Sikhs but also operated on a significant scale, thus offering a broader and more comprehensive perspective for our study. Additionally, the convenience of conducting an in-depth analysis and accessing relevant data further underscored their suitability for this research.

This comprehensive assessment involved carefully evaluating various Sikh organisations, including Seva Panthi, United Sikhs, Hemkunt Foundation, and Bhagat Pooran Singh Pingalwada. While acknowledging their commendable contributions within their respective specialised niches, it became apparent that certain limitations regarding the scale of their operations and geographical reach needed to be considered. This decision was informed by insights gained through interviews with individuals closely associated with these organisations. These interviews provided valuable context and perspective. In contrast, Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh's far-reaching impact, both in terms of their reach and their diverse areas of influence, offered a more comprehensive and insightful perspective for our research objectives.

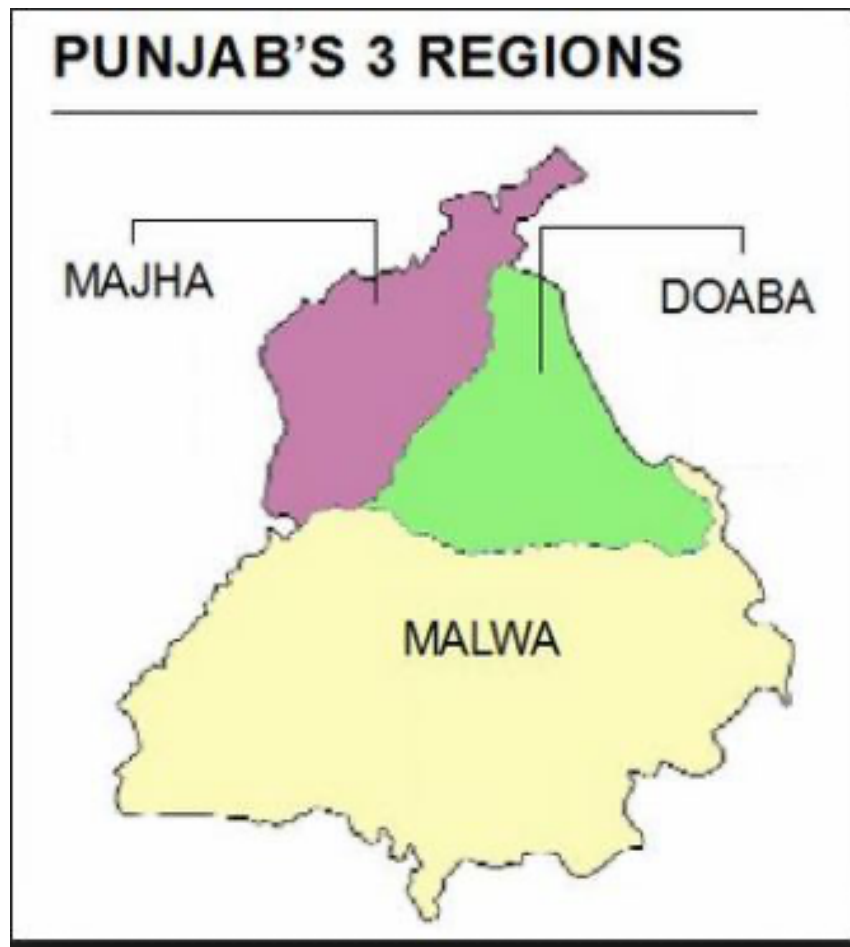
Crucially, both Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh share a common thread in their reliance on community engagement. These organisations actively involve their communities through mechanisms like volunteerism, charitable donations, and grassroots support. This community-centric approach significantly contributes to their effectiveness in realising their missions.

7.2 Field of the study:

This research study attempts to comprehend the meaning of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and analyse the alignment of the activities of two Sikh NGOs, claiming to be basing their activities on this concept. The study has been conducted in India. In India, the field site for this research encompassed the geographical divisions of Punjab, namely the Majha, Malwa, and Doaba regions, where both Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh were actively engaged in their activities related to the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Hence, the whole of Punjab was the field of study in this research. The selection of the geographical Punjab state as a field site was based on several factors:

Accessibility: The researcher chose regions where both Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh were

Figure 3. Map of Punjab with Majha, Malwa and Doaba regions



Source: Punjab Blogs

actively involved, ensuring easier access to these NGOs for data collection and observations.

Prominence and Scale of Operations: Khalsa Aid's extensive operations and media recognition in Punjab, including a Nobel Peace Prize nomination, made it a prominent and influential NGO in the area. Likewise, EcoSikh's unique focus on environmental *Seva* set it apart from other organisations and warranted an in-depth investigation.

Representation of Diversity: The selected regions represented different facets of Punjab, encompassing urban centres, historical sites, and areas with specific environmental concerns. This diversity ensured a comprehensive understanding of the concept of *Seva* in different contexts.

The field site, consisting of the Majha, Malwa, and Doaba regions of Punjab, provided an appropriate context to examine the activities aligned with the Sikh concept of *Seva* carried

out by Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh within their operational areas. By conducting interviews, observations, and data collection in these regions, the research aimed to gain valuable insights into the significance and impact of initiatives of *Seva* in the broader Sikh community and their relevance in addressing contemporary social and environmental challenges.

7.3 Field Site and its Rationale:

The research focused on two globally active organisations, Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, but the study itself was conducted in the Indian State of Punjab. Apart from the reasons described in the previous section, this decision was based on the fact that Punjab served as the primary site of focus for both Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, as they had their headquarters situated in the state. Khalsa Aid's headquarters were located in Patiala, while EcoSikh operated from Ludhiana. Given their significant presence and operations in Punjab, the state became an ideal field site for conducting the research.

Punjab, known for its rich Sikh heritage and culture, was divided into three geographical divisions - Majha, Malwa, and Doaba - separated by water bodies. The entire state of Punjab was considered the field site for this study, as both Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh were actively engaged in the acts of *Seva* throughout the state, according to information provided by their officials. By focusing on Punjab, the research could delve into the comprehensive understanding of *Seva's* implementation and impact within this specific context. By limiting the field site to Punjab, the research aimed to facilitate intensive and in-depth investigations within the available resources and time constraints. Conducting the study within Punjab allowed for a closer examination of the activities and initiatives of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, enabling the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its manifestations in this particular region.

In pursuit of conceptual clarity, the researcher visited resource persons who were experts on Sikhism and its concept of *Seva* within the country. These subject experts provided valuable insights and perspectives, enriching the study with their knowledge and understanding of Sikh philosophy and *Seva* principles. Additionally, interviews were conducted via the Internet using online video interview techniques for those subject experts residing abroad, ensuring their inclusion in the research process.

Overall, by focusing the study on the State of Punjab, the research aimed to unravel the intricacies of the Sikh concept of *Seva* as embodied by Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh. Through

interviews, observations, and data collection in the field, the study aspired to shed light on the significance and impact of *Seva* activities in this region, providing a valuable contribution to understanding *Seva* in Sikhism and its broader relevance in addressing contemporary social and environmental challenges.

7.4 Research Sample:

The sample for the study shall include the following categories:

- *Subject experts on Sikhism and the Sikh concept of Seva*
- *Office bearers and lay members of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh in Punjab*
- *Beneficiaries of the various programmes conducted by the Khalsa Aid and the Eco Sikh in Punjab*

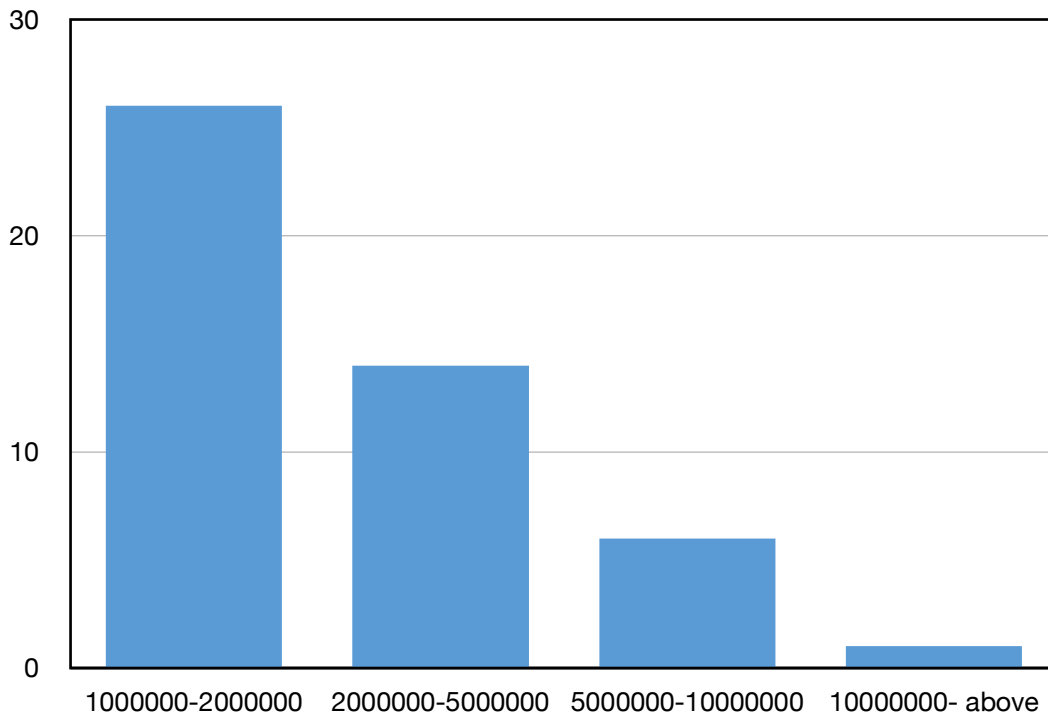
For a thorough understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, a sample of subject experts was drawn from academia and other related fields for in-depth interviews. A total of 10 experts were selected for the interviews after discussions with the research supervisor. The snowball or network sampling technique, where the selection of participants is made by means of referrals by earlier participants, was used for this purpose. Additionally, a convenient sampling technique was also employed for the selection process. Throughout the interviews, the subject experts shared their insights and experiences related to the concept of *Seva* in Sikhism, providing valuable information for the research. The snowball sampling technique allowed for the inclusion of experts who were referred by earlier participants, ensuring a network of diverse perspectives. Additionally, the convenient sampling technique facilitated the selection process, taking into account the availability of respondents.

In the case of EcoSikh, 7 office bearers and 56 beneficiaries were interviewed. The largest number, 36 beneficiaries, were from Malwa, 14 from Doaba, and 7 were from Majha region of Punjab. All the beneficiaries were male, whereas out of 7 office bearers, 2 were female. Individuals from the landed peasantry had the largest proportion of the beneficiaries of the EcoSikh, as land is the primary requirement for the plantation of a micro forest; others were institutions, village governing bodies (Panchayat) and industries. The family income distribution of beneficiaries ranges from 1000000 INR (per annum) to 20000000 INR PA. They have been categorised into 4 different groups: 1000000-2000000, 2000000-5000000, 5000000-10000000, and 10000000 and above. Out of all the beneficiaries, 26 fell in the 1000000-2000000 category, 14 in the 2000000-5000000 category, 6 in the 5000000-

10000000 category, and only 1 in the 10000000 and above category. It is to be considered that the beneficiaries themselves reported their income.

Regarding the caste profile of the EcoSikh's individual beneficiaries, 32 were Jatt Sikhs, with 2 Khatri Sikhs and one Jain. Khatri Sikh and Jain respondents, and some few Jatt Sikh respondents mentioned their caste while others chose to remain silent.

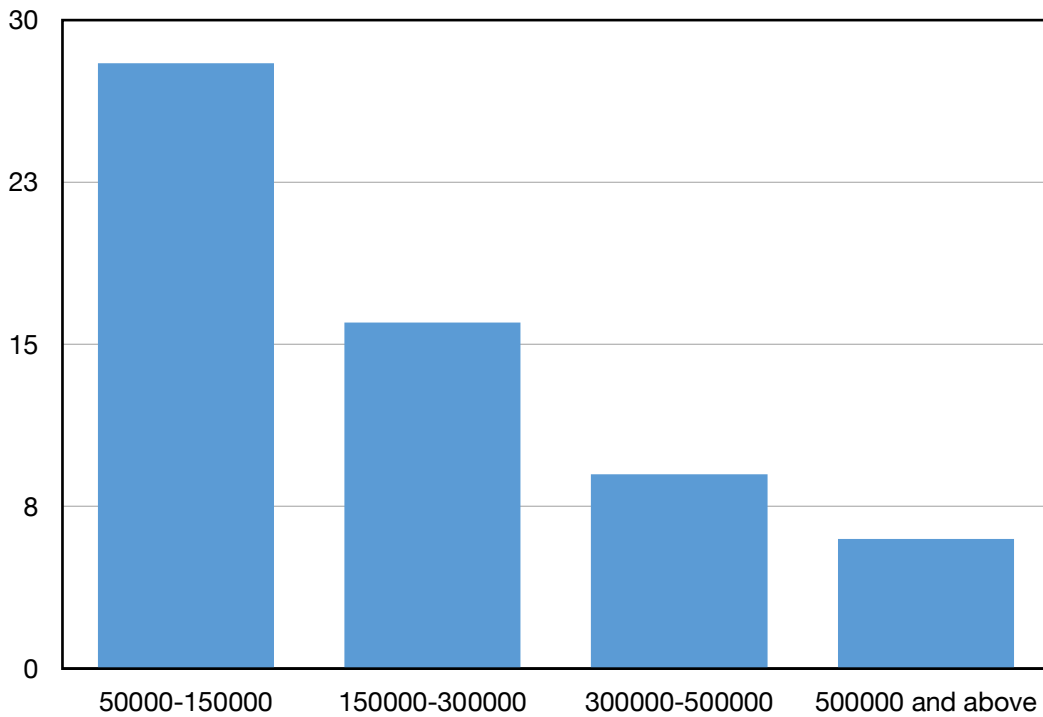
■ Chart 1. EcoSikh beneficiary Income Groups in INR (Per Annum)



For Khalsa Aid, there were 8 office bearers (6 men and 2 women) and 77 beneficiaries (42 men and 35 women). 15 beneficiaries were from Doaba, 21 were from Majha, and 41 were from Malwa. The beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid include individuals, institutions and village governing bodies (Panchayat) as well. The annual family income of individual beneficiaries has been categorised into four distinct groups, as per the available data: 50000-150000, 150000-300000, 300000-500000, 500000 and above. Out of all the beneficiaries, 28 fell in the 50000-150000 category, 16 in the 150000-300000 category, 9 in the 300000-500000 category, and only 6 in the 500000 and above category.

The caste profile of the individuals who benefited from Khalsa Aid is as follows: 15 respondents were Mazhabi Sikhs, 14 were Jatt Sikhs, 7 were Brahmins, 6 were Balmikis, 5 belonged to Ramdasia Sikhs, 4 were Muslims, and 2 respondents were Christians. Other individual respondents did not give their caste details.

■ Chart 2. Khalsa Aid beneficiary Income Groups in INR (Per Annum)



The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, was applied, where the deliberate choice of participants was made to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Different categories of people were sampled to capture different shades of view and enrich the collected data. The sample included respondents from each of the different programs run by the two organisations, Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh.

“The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant” (Etikan et al. 2).

Regarding Khalsa Aid, respondents engaged in or affected by its relief or humanitarian activities, langar aid, education aid, and medical assistance were interviewed. For EcoSikh, respondents engaged in or benefitted from its plantation drives, namely Guru Nanak Sacred Forest, were interviewed. The selection of office bearers, lay members, and beneficiaries was done per their availability.

The gathered data from the interviews with subject experts contributed to a comprehensive exploration of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its manifestations in the initiatives of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh. By including individuals engaged in or affected by various programs, such as relief activities, langar aid, education aid, medical assistance, and plantation drives, the research aimed to gain a holistic understanding of *Seva's* significance and impact in

different contexts. The purposive sampling approach was crucial in capturing the diversity of views and enriching the overall analysis.

7.5 Tools and Techniques of data collection:

This research focused on understanding the socio-political impact of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, which is a religious concept. Qualitative research was deemed more suitable for this objective as it allowed for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon within its specific context. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual background, history, and social concerns related to *Seva* in Sikhism, the researcher delved into the epistemological sense of the concept. This involved studying sacred texts, historical occurrences, and contemporary practices to develop a holistic and in-depth understanding. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with key subject experts working in academic and related fields to supplement the theoretical exploration. These interviews provided valuable insights into different perspectives and experiences related to *Seva*.

“Qualitative case study methodology enables researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of intricate phenomena within some specific context” (Rashid et al. 1).

The qualitative case study methodology was employed to carefully observe and analyse the chosen organisations, Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of their motivations and operating procedures in implementing the concept of *Seva*. The unstructured observation was utilised for first-hand data collection, enabling the researcher to flexibly observe the organisational activities in their natural settings. To facilitate more open and candid responses, interview schedules were used during the interviews with the respondents. The data collection process included maintaining field notes, audio or video recordings, and transcripts to effectively capture the textual data format type. Additionally, secondary data sources, such as published works like books, documentaries, articles (online and offline), and research papers, were also utilised to complement the primary data.

The interviews with respondents lasted between 80 and 90 minutes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences and viewpoints. All interviews were recorded with the participant's prior consent, ensuring accurate data capture. In addition to the interviews with beneficiaries, another interview schedule was created specifically for the office bearers of the organisations. This schedule included 30 questions to understand their motivations,

operating procedures, and approaches to implementing the concept of *Seva* through their respective organisations.

Phenomenology was employed as a method for studying Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, focusing on understanding the experiences of individuals involved, including both beneficiaries and office bearers. The aim was to explore the meaning they attached to these experiences. Phenomenology is a philosophy that emphasises the subjective perspective and consciousness of participants. The researcher immersed himself in the participant's world, using interview and observation techniques to gather rich and detailed descriptions of their experiences and interpretations.

7.6 Ethical Concerns

Throughout the study, the researcher ensured the ethical treatment of all participating parties, obtaining their consent before including them in the research. Adherence to professional research ethics was a priority during the study to protect the rights and privacy of the participants. Some of the key ethical considerations in this research include:

1. *Informed Consent*: Ensuring that all participants, including subject experts and individuals associated with Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, provided informed consent to participate in the study was paramount. The researcher needed to clearly explain the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and any potential risks or benefits associated with their participation.
2. *Confidentiality and Anonymity*: Maintaining the confidentiality of the participant's identities and the information shared during interviews was crucial. The researcher needed to use pseudonyms or other means to protect the privacy of individuals and organisations involved, especially when discussing sensitive topics or personal experiences.
3. *Voluntary Participation*: It was essential to ensure that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that participants were not coerced or pressured into participating. They had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences, that had been the case with the number of respondents.
4. *Fair Representation*: The researchers needed to be diligent in accurately representing the perspectives and experiences of the participants without distorting or misinterpreting their responses. Avoiding any selective reporting or bias in the analysis

was essential to maintain the integrity of the findings.

5. *Respect for Cultural Sensitivities:* To properly conduct the study on a religious concept within Sikhism, the researcher had to be mindful of the cultural beliefs and practices of the Sikh community. It was important for him to show respect for their values and traditions throughout the research process.
6. *Minimisation of Harm:* The researcher had to be mindful of the potential emotional or psychological impact on participants when discussing certain topics related to *Seva* and its implications. Adequate support and debriefing have been provided if any distress arose during the interviews.
7. *Researcher Bias:* The researcher needed to acknowledge and address any personal biases or preconceived notions that might have influenced the research process or interpretation of data. Reflexivity was essential in maintaining objectivity and credibility.
8. *Data Security:* Protecting the confidentiality and security of the data collected, including interview recordings and transcripts, was crucial to prevent unauthorised access and ensure data integrity.
9. *Compliance with Ethical Guidelines:* The researcher has adhered to the ethical guidelines and regulations set forth by the institution or relevant research bodies, ensuring that the study was conducted ethically and responsibly.

7.7 Material and Method

‘To scrutinise the activities of the EcoSikh and Khalsa Aid in Punjab, with respect to their analysis and interpretation of the Sikh concept of *Seva*’, the researcher conducted a qualitative study. The study included interview schedules for the beneficiaries and the office bearers of the Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh.

7.7.1 Study Design: It is an exploratory and qualitative study. Face-to-face interview using a semi-structured interview schedule was used in the study.

7.7.2 Interview Schedule Design: The interview schedule design process involves several steps. Initially, a detailed semi-structured interview schedule was developed, consisting of

25 questions designed to elicit the perspectives of individuals who directly benefited from Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh operations.

Given the qualitative nature of the research, the researcher developed the semi-structured interview plan with guidance from the research supervisor. The process involved multiple sessions and hours of discussion to refine the questionnaire. To identify relevant themes for the study, a review of the literature was conducted, encompassing international and national (Indian) studies. Different themes related to *Seva* were identified from the literature and incorporated into the interview schedule to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the topic. Throughout the questionnaire development process, the supervisor played a crucial role in reviewing and providing feedback on the draft, ensuring that the questions were relevant, clear, and aligned with the research objectives.

7.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study can be divided into two sections. In the first part, the data was collected to explore the Sikh concept of *Seva* from the experts in the field. When there is no pre-existing theory on a concept that needs to be derived from data, the inductive method is the appropriate technique for data analysis in such a situation. As in the case of this research, there was no specific theory on the Sikh concept of *Seva* in sociological literature. This research attempts to theorise the concept of *Seva* in the socio-political domain through the inductive method. The grounded theory analysis technique was used to formulate an understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and to analyse the practices of both organisations in accordance with the understanding of the concept. Thereafter, the framework method technique under the inductive method was utilised. It included the following steps: transcription, familiarisation, coding and developing category, developing the analytic framework, applying the analytic framework, and charting data.

The second part was to analyse the data collected from the office bearers and the beneficiaries of both organisations (EcoSikh and Khalsa Aid). Here, the researcher employed narrative analysis as part of this qualitative research, focusing on the interview schedule used to collect data. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of participant's experiences and perspectives by examining the narratives they shared during the interviews. Narrative analysis is a qualitative research technique used to analyse interview data by focusing on the narratives or stories shared by participants. In the context of an interview schedule, narrative

analysis involves examining the participant's responses in-depth, identifying recurring themes, and exploring the narrative's underlying meaning and structure. The process of analysis followed the following phases:

- **Data Collection:** After designing the interview schedule, interviews were conducted, encouraging participants to share their stories and experiences related to the research topic. The open-ended questions and prompts allowed them to express themselves freely, enabled the capture of their narratives in their own words
- **Transcription and familiarisation with Data:** Once the interviews were completed, the recorded data was transcribed verbatim, preserving the participant's spoken words, pauses, and emotional expressions. Immersing in the data, the researcher read and re-read the transcriptions to familiarise with the content and context of the interviews.
- **Identifying Themes:** Identifying recurring themes and patterns within the narratives was a crucial step in the analysis. The researcher carefully coded data segments corresponding to specific themes, organising and categorising the information systematically.
- **Coding:** During the analysis, the narrative structure of the participant's stories was explored, examining how they constructed their narratives, what elements they included or excluded, and how they shaped the overall stories.
- **Analysis of Narrative Structure and Interpretation:** Interpreting the data involves delving into the underlying meaning and significance of the narratives. The researcher considered the cultural, social, and individual factors that may have influenced the participant's stories, aiming to uncover the deeper implications of their experiences. the findings of the narrative analysis were presented in a narrative report, where the researcher detailed the themes, patterns, and interpretations derived from the participants' narratives. To illustrate the key points, the researcher included direct quotes and excerpts from the interviews.
- **Reflexivity:** Throughout the analysis process, the researcher practised reflexivity, acknowledging biases and perspectives that might have influenced the interpretation of the data. This self-awareness was essential in maintaining the rigour and credibility of the narrative analysis.

Each transcript took roughly 4-5 hours to analyse. Additionally, the researcher did not simply shift from one step to the next as the analysis progressed through these phases in a

linear manner. Instead, it required frequent back-and-forth movement between stages as needed.

7.9 Scope of the Study

This study aims to thoroughly investigate the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its socio-cultural effects, with a special emphasis on the activities of organisations: Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh. By delving into the diverse aspects of *Seva*, including its religious, cultural, environmental, and societal implications in today's world, the research seeks to provide a deep insight into the Sikh understanding of *Seva*. This involves tracing its origins from the Guru Granth Sahib, examining its philosophical foundations, and uncovering its significance within Sikh beliefs and practices.

The study intends to reveal how *Seva* is interpreted and implemented by individuals, communities, and organisations. By focusing on Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh as case studies, the research will analyse how these organisations implement *Seva* in their humanitarian and environmental initiatives. This analysis will encompass their motivations, approaches, and the broader impact of their work on the community.

Furthermore, the study explores how the practice of *Seva*, especially through EcoSikh, contributes to addressing challenges like environmental degradation and climate change. It investigates the role of *Seva* in instigating positive transformations and fostering communal harmony. Through interviews with beneficiaries and office-bearers of these organisations, the study aims to gain insights into their motivations, experiences, and viewpoints concerning *Seva*. The goal is to comprehend how *Seva* initiatives affect various stakeholders and communities.

The research also probes how *Seva* becomes ingrained in daily individual lives, influencing their behaviours, decisions, and actions beyond conventional religious contexts. While acknowledging the cultural and religious backdrop of *Seva*, the study will consider how it aligns with Sikh traditions, values, and beliefs.

It is important to acknowledge that the study primarily focuses on Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh as specific embodiments of *Seva* in practice. Although it offers valuable insights into the impact of their endeavours, it may not encompass the entire spectrum of *Seva* practices within the Sikh community or other organisations. Geographically, the study is confined to the operations of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, primarily in the Indian state of Punjab.

7.10. Delimitations of the study:

Firstly, there are many Sikh organisations working in the field of *Seva*, but the researcher had to choose only two organisations owing to research constraints. Furthermore, the chosen organisations also have their activities spread across several nation-states worldwide, but owing to the paucity of time and resources, the study was limited to only one state in India, Punjab. Finally, the Sikh concept of *Seva* is an umbrella concept, and this study shall only be limited to the interpretation and practices of two non-governmental organisations alone.

8. Implications of the Study:

- **Diverse Approaches to the Sikh Concept of *Seva*:** This aspect underscores the various ways in which the Sikh concept of *Seva* is practised and interpreted. It acknowledges that *Seva* goes beyond mere acts of charity and encompasses a wide range of activities, from humanitarian aid to environmental conservation, reflecting the adaptability and versatility of *Seva* within Sikhism.
- **Faith-Based Environmental Advocacy:** This concept highlights integrating religious beliefs and values with environmental activism. It explores how Sikh organisations like EcoSikh employ the Sikh concept of *Seva* to address contemporary environmental challenges. It underscores the role of faith-based organisations in promoting environmental stewardship and ethical behaviour.
- **Collective Support for Social Change:** Collective support for social change emphasises how the Sikh concept of *Seva* encourages community engagement and collaboration. It demonstrates how *Seva* initiatives often involve a collective effort to address societal issues, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility among Sikh communities.
- **Interconnectedness of Social Issues:** This notion emphasises that social issues are interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. It explores how *Seva* initiatives often recognise the interdependence of various societal challenges, such as poverty, education, healthcare, and environmental degradation. This holistic approach aims to create comprehensive solutions that consider the broader context.

- **Relevance of the Sikh Concept of *Seva* in Modern Society:** This concept underscores the enduring significance of *Seva* in contemporary society. It examines how the Sikh concept of *Seva* remains relevant in addressing pressing issues and challenges individuals and communities face today. It showcases the timeless and adaptable nature of *Seva* as a guiding principle in modern life, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries.

9. Policy Suggestions:

- **Augment Curriculum with Diverse Perspectives:** This study suggests incorporating diverse cultural, historical, and religious perspectives into educational curricula. Doing so aims to promote a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of different worldviews, fostering tolerance, empathy, and cultural awareness among students. In the context of Sikhism, this would involve including Sikh history, philosophy, and contributions, including the concept of *Seva*, in educational materials.
- **Incorporating Faith-Based Environmental Advocacy in Policies:** This recommendation calls for integrating faith-based environmental values and initiatives into government policies and regulations. It recognises the role that religious organisations, like EcoSikh, play in advocating for environmental stewardship and ethical behaviour. It seeks to encourage sustainable practices and responsible environmental policies by aligning policy objectives with these values.
- **Interfaith Collaboration in Social Welfare Initiatives:** This study proposal emphasises the importance of interfaith cooperation in addressing social welfare issues. It encourages religious organisations from various faiths to come together to pool resources and knowledge for the betterment of society. In the context of *Seva*, this would involve collaborative efforts among Sikh NGOs and other religious organisations to amplify their impact on social issues such as poverty, hunger, and healthcare.
- **Crisis Response Framework:** This study suggestion involves the development of a structured framework for responding to crises, whether they are natural disasters, public health emergencies, or other unforeseen events. It aims to ensure an organised and efficient response to such situations, focusing on providing immediate relief and support to affected communities. In the context of Sikhism, this may draw inspiration from the rapid crisis

response model demonstrated by organisations like Khalsa Aid, emphasising the importance of quick and effective assistance during emergencies.

10. Policy Suggestions:

- **Introduction:** The introductory chapter includes an introduction to the study, explaining the research objectives, research questions, and theoretical underpinnings while substantially elaborating on the methodology used while conducting the study.
- **The Sikh Concept of *Seva*: An Analysis:** The goal of this section is to offer an understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. This has been achieved by consulting available literature and conducting unstructured conversations with ten subject experts on Sikhism.
- **The Khalsa Aid in Punjab: A Case Study:** The chapter focuses on the organisation and functioning of the Khalsa Aid, in the context of its socio-cultural activities, with the help of data gathered through fieldwork.
- **The EcoSikh in Punjab: A Case Study:** This chapter analyses the organisation and functioning of the EcoSikh, in the socio-cultural context, with the help of data collected through fieldwork.
- **Conclusion:** The findings obtained through the analysis of the functioning of the two organisations under study in relation to the concept of *Seva* is summarised in the concluding chapter.

11. Summary

This chapter introduces the study titled 'Exploring the Concept of '*Seva*' in Sikhism: A Case Study of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh in Punjab.' It commences by delving into the complex issue of the imposition of the concept of 'Religion' by colonial modernity in India. The colonial era brought about significant changes in religious practices and understandings, leading to a need to re-examine the notion of '*Seva*' in the context of Sikhism. The chapter sheds light on the significance and impact of the Sikh concept of *Seva* activities within the Sikh community and beyond. Today, many NGOs are working for social welfare. Although there has been a discussion on the negatives and positives of NGOs, Sikh NGOs were never

been the subject of these discussions. Khalsa Aid, which was started by Ravinder Singh in 1999 to help Albanian refugees, is today providing its services in a number of domains like disaster relief, education, health etc. EcoSikh, on the other hand, is working on environmental issues. Its creation was the result of a discussion of practical actions for the environment by a number of different international agencies.

A thorough review of existing literature is presented, encompassing key topics such as Sikhism, the philosophical underpinnings of '*Seva*,' and the roles of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in carrying out altruistic endeavours. This literature review identifies gaps in the current understanding of '*Seva*' within the context of Sikhism, which this study aims to address.

The chapter articulates the research problem, outlining the study's objectives and framing research questions to guide the investigation. It seeks to unravel the motivations and beliefs that drive individuals and organisations to engage in '*Seva*'. The study endeavours to contribute to a deeper understanding of '*Seva*' in Sikhism and its relevance in the contemporary world, shedding light on the broader significance of such acts of *Seva* in daily life.

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The Sikh Concept of Seva: An Analysis

1. Introduction

This chapter thoroughly explores the profound essence of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its paramount significance within Sikhism. *Seva* transcends mere acts of charity; it is deeply rooted in the Sikh faith as both a fundamental duty and a manifestation of devotion to the Divine. This chapter draws its insights from the teachings of *Gurbani* in the Guru Granth Sahib and interviews with ten Sikhism experts. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, laid the foundation for *Seva* by emphasising unity and the dissolution of otherness through selfless service. Subsequent Sikh Gurus further solidified the importance of *Seva*, making it an integral facet of Sikh life. Whether it's serving food in the communal kitchen (*langar*), contributing to social welfare through *dasvand*, or upholding the collective welfare principle of *Sarbat da Bhala* (the welfare of all), Sikhs actively engage in diverse acts of *Seva* to benefit others and enhance societal well-being. By engaging in *Seva*, Sikhs believe they nurture qualities like humility, compassion, and detachment from ego, ultimately drawing them closer to the Divine and illuminating their spiritual path.

The etymology of the word 'religion' takes us to its Latin origin as *relegere* or *religare*, which means to bind or to bring together. As a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things" (Durkheim 129), in social terms, religion serves as a collective force to bring humans together and form a society by creating a sense of collective conscience. Durkheim has recognised religion as a social institution, it is clearly reflected by him while describing religion as a fundamental building block of society, at the same time it is a reflection of the power of society. He insisted that religion is a basic fundamental building block, as all other social institutions are born from it from time to time. Durkheim locates the power of religion to take an individual to the ideal state, where he is not a common regular man but someone unique and filled with 'extraordinary' energy. This energy is realised in the collective form. This 'extraordinary' state is shared with other individuals subscribing to a similar belief system. The visible form of religion is in its objectified force in the societal realm. This objectified force is reflected through the collective energy.

Collective energy is the power of the community. After bringing together, religion's second function is to bind together by setting out discipline and moral systems of conducting life on a daily basis. The motivation and whole systems of structure it provides can stand against chaos (Peterson); it is the very part of our culture, so every comprehension of society must include an understanding of religion because it serves a significant function of social stability. It is the priceless inheritance of the men (Singh SOTS). It is what provides for "right dogmas, symbols and emotionally potent oversimplifications" (Niebuhr), hence "Despite the predictions of secular modernity, recent years have witnessed a global and "machinelike" return of religion from the periphery to the centre of debates on the future of democracy, multiculturalism, and globalisation." (Mandair, 2) Guru Nanak Dev in *Japji Sahib*, recognised religion as a force for upholding and maintaining the order. He uses religion (*Dharma*) as a metaphor for truthfulness, emanating from compassion (*Daya*) to maintain life balance.

ਧੈਲੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਾ ਪੁਤੁ॥ (SGGS, Ang 03)

"The mythical bull is Dharma, the son of compassion;"

2. "Dwelling" in the world and lived religion

Martin Heidegger (BAT) finds man deeply connected to and affected by the world around them. This suggests that how we experience and understand the world shapes our existence. Heidegger believes that humans are "thrown" into the world and must find a way to make sense of their existence. For him, human beings are always in a state of being in the world, and the world shapes their being. It highlights the idea that human experience is not separate from the world but constantly connected to it.

Religious experience is essential and gives meaning to the being in the world. All humans have an innate desire for a meaningful being in the world, which Heidegger (WIM) calls dwelling in the world. Religious beliefs, practices and other aspects of it are not just abstract theoretical frameworks, but they carry entrenched meaning in people's experiences in practising their particular religion. Different acts of religious practices give their 'dwelling' in the world a meaning and purpose for living.

The belongingness of a man with the world is set through religious understanding and practices. Language and symbols of religion are also essential aspects of forming the layers of experience one has of one's religion and the world. A person connects through language

and symbols while doing prayers and other rituals. Their utility is not limited to the practice of religion but also their dwelling in the world. Language and symbols used in religious practice act as mediums of connection and communication with fellow practitioners. This enforces the view that religious and metaphysical knowledge have a permanent ground in life that solidifies through different religious practices or rituals practised by the believers of a particular religious belief system. These practices may also be realised for societal transformation. Religious beliefs are part of the societal sub-structure and influence societal conditions.

It has been observed that society and religion have been appropriated as singular entities, ignoring their contextual realities. As Heidegger found, individuals are influenced by their surroundings; similarly, contextual realities have shaped the lifeworld of particular societies. Different religions may have their own universal ideals, but they still carry their own particularities.

In reference to every individual, the societal practice of religion by different societies is best marked by the lived religion approach to studying religion. It focuses on daily acts by the followers of a religious tradition. Heidegger was also interested in the *being* of the individual. He identified that being is something that makes things or phenomena appear in the world. Human mode of being was termed *Dasein* by him. Lived religion is something that is a response to particular spatial conditions. It is how religion appears to others. It is the practice that is fundamental.

The scope and adequacy of religious activities are not confined to designated religious space, but the practical objectivity of these acts has been widened in the lived religion approach. This has problematise the conceptual dichotomy of sacred and profane. Yet, belief is pivotal in the practice of lived religion. To preserve the subjective reality of religion, one needs the social backing of societal systems. A clear relationship between practice and belief is discovered due to this process of establishing practices to represent religious belief.

The contemporary field of Sociology, especially its sociology of religion branch, is more inclined towards 'lived religion' (Nyhagen 495-511). Lived religion has a keen interest in the teachings and practices of any particular religious tradition (McGuire 117-120). It is more important to discuss acts of religion in everyday life rather than a theoretical framework, lived religion approach believes. "On the contrary, religion is always linked to the social and relational contexts in which individuals live and act, giving its adherents a sense of belonging" (Bertolani 7).

3. Religion and Society

Scheler has asserted that religious and metaphysical knowledge have a permanent ground in life, just as scientific and technological knowledge have co-existed in every age and always will continue to. Both these knowledge systems have been carried by entirely different human types, i.e. homo religiosus, sage, scientist and technician. They apply entirely different methods.

The metaphysical one with a belief in one single *ikonkar* is the foundational base of *Sikhi*, according to Dr Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh,¹ that solves the problem of the inferiority of group morality to the individual morality by introducing a cohesive ethical authority over the collective psyche. It is achieved through enforcing revelatory ethical structure on the collective egoism, which is compounded by the egoistic impulses of individuals that result in a more vivid expression and a more cumulative effect when they are united in a common impulse than when they express themselves separately and discreetly. Collective power carries a tendency to exploit weaknesses (Niebuhr).

ਸਮਸਰਿ ਵਰਸੈ ਸ੍ਰਾਂਤ ਬੁੰਦ ਜਿਉ ਸਭਨੀ ਥਾਈ।

ਜਲ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਜਲੁ ਹੋਇ ਮਿਲੈ ਧਰਤੀ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਈ।

ਕਿਰਖ ਬਿਰਖ ਰਸ ਕਸ ਘਣੇ, ਫਲੁ ਫਲੁ ਸੁਹਾਈ।

ਕੇਲੇ ਵਿਚਿ ਕਪੂਰੁ ਹੋਇ, ਸੀਤਲੁ ਸੁਖਦਾਈ।

ਮੇਤੀ ਹੋਵੈ ਸਿਪ ਮੁਹਿ, ਬਹੁ ਮੇਲ ਮੁਲਾਈ।

ਬਿਸੀਅਰ ਦੇ ਮੁਹਿ ਕਾਲਕੂਟ, ਚਿਤਵੈ ਬੁਰਿਆਈ।

ਆਪੇ ਆਪਿ ਵਰਤਦਾ, ਸਤਿਸੰਗਿ ਸੁਭਾਈ ॥੫॥ (Bhai Gurdas ji, vaar 2)

“Bhai Gurdas ji, in above mentioned verses, utters that basically there is a single light among everyone. He establishes an equality of origin. While attempting to answer if there is single light among everyone then why people are different, so he gives example of a drop of water that how it take different shapes in different environments. (Singh, 2001)”

¹ based on interview conducted on December 3, 21

Sociologically, every society has a varied role for religion. As a system of practice, religion provides a structure to perform actions for societal transformation. It also heavily influences societal practices and beliefs, being a part of its substructure. It has been found that in many societies, it is responsible for constituting a space for class consciousness and struggle. That leads to socio-political and ideological revolutions. Different religious faiths function differently in divergent societies (Maduro 360-366). Both society and religion are not universal singular concepts but are appropriated as singular notions through dominant methodological approaches. Contextual realities must not be ignored in any attempt to understand a particular society or religion. Maduro (360) has observed that “religion is not always a subordinate element within social processes; it may often play an important part in the birth and consolidation of a particular social structure.”

4. The welfare aspect of religion

In an attempt to understand religion spiritually, Weber discussed religious virtuosi, who seek the ultimate salvation through transcendence. Goldman and Plaff saw the potential of social change through religious virtuosi. They were found to be well-motivated, disciplined, and filled with spiritual and social capital to bring about social change as a religious virtuosi activist. Weber observed that the virtuosi are dissatisfied with the restrictions on spiritual excellence due to structural conditions. This dissatisfaction causes them to act in the world to end those restrictions and bring about social changes to allow for the attainment of a higher life for everyone. Although he thought them to be isolated from the secular world, religion as a collective and social force (Durkheim) makes virtuosi a religious, political and social force for change (Levine; Weber:162-66). They are always ready to sacrifice their individual interests over the more extensive interests of society because they are not for personal material gains but have larger goals of salvation (Goldman & Plaff; Weber). In a way, virtuosi have achieved transcendence above their individuality and mundane social world to serve their societal fellow beings.

Almost every religion provides for a social welfare structure to care for the people. United Nations (75) defines social welfare “as an organised function is regarded as a body of activities designed to enable individuals, families, groups and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions.” Although the concept of social welfare is an

“essentially contested concept”, yet, “in the " historical " sense, in which to understand it means to know (something about) the whole gamut of conditions that have led to, and that now sustain, the way we use it” (Gallie 129) paves the way to use it differently as an appraisive concept in the varying contexts of usages. Similarly, every religious tradition has its own concept of social welfare to serve and care for mankind. In Hinduism, people are encouraged to engage in community service as a transformative practice without personal recognition or publicity (Pio and Syed 3-20). In fact, every religion has stressed welfare and charity for the needy through different acts within their defined frameworks, i.e. zakat in Islam, charity in Christianity, almsgiving practice in Buddhism, and *Daan* in Hinduism. All these concepts are part of a broader worldview of their particular religious belief system, hence carrying their own meanings to the practising individuals. Individuals carry categorical values of the concepts in their day-to-day conduct.

Natural and cultural theorising reduces religious phenomena and experiences by imposing interpretive frames. The former explains phenomena in terms of more fundamental physical structures; the latter, typical of Marxists, does so in terms of more fundamental power structures. They might be true for their usage case, but their rightness cannot be universal. Such an analysis almost always presupposes the universal singularity of ‘religion’. The diversity and complexity of different religious traditions are often ignored when using a single Western Protestant Christian religion lens to interpret different traditions. This reductive phenomenon of conveniently selecting particular aspects and convenient ignorance of particularity is reduction (Lewin 51). According to Eliade, religion consists mainly, if not totally, of a component or attribute that defies simple scientific explanations.

5. Sikhism

This aligns with Dr Kanwaljeet Singh's² description of the emergence of the Sikh Faith. He posits that the spatial socio-political conditions influence the collective unconscious of the population, leading them to seek a new and different arrangement of socio-political order to eliminate moral-ethical crisis and stagnation. The resulting arrangement is equipped with revolutionary ideas and practices to combat injustice and inequalities in all aspects of life and elevate individuals and communities spiritually. *Sikhi*, also known as Sikhism, embodies this arrangement, in which “Truth is the highest of all, but

² Based on interview conducted on November 14, 21

higher still is the truthful living”(SGGS, Ang 62). Guru Nanak has directed the Sikhs always to be engaged in the world and never to think about any detachment or withdrawal from worldly life, so a Sikh is a social being, active and attached in all spheres of life. As put out by him in *Gurbani*

ਜਬ ਲਗ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਰਹੀਐ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹੀਐ || (SGGS, Ang 661)

“As long as we are in this world, O Nanak, we should listen, and speak of the Lord.” It comes from the conception of god in Sikhism. Sikhs conceptualise the god or *Akal Parakh* in two ways: *Nirguna* and *Sarguna*. It has no form, colour, or shape when subtle or *nirgun*. He is actually formless, and the only reason we can convey His three attributes and many states through the letters that these words scrape is that our voice and expression compel it. Yes, that god is ever-present or comprehensive in every element of his nature in the *Sarguna* form. Guru Nanak Dev ji has conceptualised this in his *Gurbani*

ਜੇਤਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਤੇਤਾ ਨਾਉ ॥

ਵਿਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕੇ ਥਾਉ ॥ (SGGS, Ang, 4)

“The created universe is the manifestation of Your Name. Without Your Name, there is no place at all.”

6. The concept of *Seva* in Sikhism

The word *Seva* comes from the Sanskrit word *Sev*, meaning to serve, submit, trust or pray. The noun meaning of *Seva* is to give service. It has been used numerous times in *Gurbani*. In different instances, it carries different meanings. Anand and Kaur (SDSS) have located a unique position of Sikhism in the history of Indian religious traditions. It came up with a vision of granting meaningfulness to worldly life. Hence, for a Sikh, enterprise is life. *Seva* and *Simran* are the foundation of the lifestyle the Gurus have advocated for, bringing about a revolutionary shift in religious and social life. According to Sikhism, the two tenets of a Sikh's life are service and meditation. *Seva* is a power that has radically altered how people think and behave. To elevate *Seva*, Guru Nanak Dev ji has consented

ਬਿਨੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਫਲੁ ਕਬਹੁ ਨ ਪਾਵਸਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰਈ ਸਾਰੀ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 992)

“Without selfless service, no one ever receives the fruits of their rewards. Serving the Lord is the most excellent action.”

In Sikhism, *Sevak* is the one whose purpose is to serve, according to *Gurbani*. Serving or, instead, selfless service in Sikhism is called *Seva*. Sikhs are known for their acts of *Seva*; it has become a marker of Sikh identity. It is universal to the Sikh community around the world. *Seva*, as practised by Sikhs around the world, has no parallel (Sohi et al.). *Seva* is an essential part of the Sikh way of life that travels from generation to generation; as Sewa Singh Kalsi has pointed out, “Most parents encourage their children to perform *sewa* at the gurdwara. They serve food in the dining hall and sometimes look after the shoes of the *Sangat*.” Selfless service or *Seva* carried after self-transcendence, known as self-surrender in Sikhism. *Sevak* of Sikhism is a sacred activist who experiences the inner happiness and outer effectiveness of her work, which she undertakes as a compassionate service. She knows that the profound crisis the world is in needs everyone to act with the most profound compassion and wisdom and who, in the face of growing injustice, suffering and violence, is committed to being a source of hope, energy and change (Harvey). It is to become a suffering light for humanity by completely losing individual selfishness, and it is what the guru demands of a Sikh (Singh, SOTS). Family, community and Nation are also extensions of self. One practising *Seva* not for one’s own interests, but these extensions are also not *Seva*, said Dr Harbhajan Singh(2021)³. Even Sikhs performing acts of *Seva* for the propagation of their own religion should never be considered *Seva*. *Seva* is the enamoured situation with the other. Acts of *Seva* drive from an undercurrent of the Sikh ideals for leading an engaged life. Sikh ideals are the norms that are necessary for any action to occur as Talcott Parson has put out, “A normative orientation is fundamental to the schema of action in the same sense that space is fundamental to that of the classical mechanics; in terms of the given conceptual scheme there is no such thing as action except as an effort to conform with norms just as there is no such thing as motion except as change of location in space”. *Seva's* act is unique in that it is an act yet part of the general Sikh behaviour with a conscious purpose and objective. There are clear socio-political patterns of direction for the acts of *Seva*, directed via norms of *Sarbat da bhala* or welfare of all, as given out in *Gurbani* of

³ based on interview conducted on November 24, 21

Guru Granth Sahib. Acts of *Seva* are intentional for the purpose of realisation of the Sikh utopian society.

A *Sevak* aims to be *Gurmukh*, which translates to 'mouth of the Guru,' which signifies a person leading a life guided by the Guru's teachings. Beyond its general implications, *Gurmukh* has three deeper levels that underpin *Seva* among different categories of Sikhs. The first level, *Gurmukh*, involves following the principle of 'do unto others as they do unto you,' which means reciprocating good for good and evil for evil. The second level, *Gurmukhtar*, entails turning away from evil and wholeheartedly embracing the Guru's teachings. A *Gurmukhtar* acknowledges and appreciates the kindness shown to them, responding with gratitude and a willingness to assist those in need. The third level, *Gurmukhvar*, applies to individuals who serve others impartially, treating all, whether friends or enemies, equally and with compassion (Massey).

In the Sikh ideological sphere, Service and Simran are not only the two central pillars, but they are also inseparable from each other. A *humane-abhav*, meek, and tender-hearted *Mouk*, *Muhid*, or *Khadam* is required for Simran or God's service. To become an *Anin Sevak* or Sikh, another name for a righteous and victorious servant, it is necessary to demonstrate the veracity of the Guru-*Wak* of "Hari Ka Sevakku So Hari Jeha" (SGGS, Ang 1073).

Dr. Paramvir Singh⁴ finds *Seva* to be so deeply embedded in Sikh life that it has become a passion for Sikhs. They are always seeking to find ways to serve others. *Seva* is multidimensional yet accommodative, with no concern for undying socio-political issues. He referred to the following words of *Gurbani* for presenting his case in that regard

ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰਤ ਹੋਇ ਨਿਰਕਾਮੀ ॥ ਤਿਸ ਕਉ ਹੋਤ ਪਰਾਪਤਿ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 286)

“One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, Shall attain his Lord and Master.”

When the devotee who is helping is devoid of any desires of his own or *Nishkam*, Guru Sahib emphasises in these words that he has attained the status of "*Swaami*" or benefactor. This concept may be expressed more straightforwardly by saying that *Sevak* becomes the "master" through humble service. But providing a service that elevates a "*sevak*" to the rank

⁴ based on interview conducted on January 19, 22

of "lord" is not easy. Transcendence in daily life is not hard to attain, so one wishes to gain something out of their acts of welfare.

ਅਪਨੀ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਜਿਸੁ ਆਪਿ ਕਰੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਮਤਿ ਲੇਇ ॥੨॥ (SGGS, Ang 287)

“He Himself grants His Grace; O Nanak, that selfless servant lives the Guru's Teachings.

॥2॥”

These two points in the aforementioned text are particularly noteworthy since “*Sevak*”, and “*Sikh*” are interchangeable here. A perfect Sikh is a sincere servant and also an outright servant. The second is the caution that obtaining the highest rank of *Sevak*, or Sikh, requires both the Lord's blessing and the teachings of the Guru.

It is noteworthy that during Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji's *udasis*, whenever he approached a dishonest wealthy person, his first instruction for him was that he should distribute the wealth amassed by killing the rights of others through sin, oppression, etc., among the poor and the needy. Before doing the work of religion, he should be dedicated to the supreme service of sharing.

Gurbani repeatedly talks about the *Seva* of god or *Hari* in many instances. The agony of every living thing is endless; therefore, serving *Hari* also entails serving his creation and the desire to love, respect, and defend him. Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji succinctly states this unavoidable truth:

ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥

ਤਾ ਦਰਗਹ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਾਰ ਲੁਡਾਈਐ ॥੪॥੩੩॥ (SGGS, Ang, 26)

“In the midst of this world, do *Seva*, and you shall be given a place of honor in the Court of the Lord. Says Nanak, swing your arms in joy! ॥4॥33॥”

Shabad, or verse in the form of Guru Granth Sahib, is the present guru for the Sikhs. The discourse of *shabad* has also been considered *Seva* in Sikhism. Bodies are prone to death, disease and degradation, but guru in the form of *Shabad* is eternal. The only effective service is to reflect on the Guru's words, meaning to reflect on the Guru's teachings and follow his example. Or, become someone who understands the Guru's emotions and devotion. If you

remove *Gurbani's* teachings and ideas, service to others would resemble desire and selfishness rather than devotion to the welfare of others. This way, the benefit provided through *Seva* will continue to be a bargain for the service others provide, making the whole process a mere transactional relationship. The *Sevak* must be utterly devoted to God and must follow the Guru's instructions in order to prevent this predicament. One should constantly remember that when serving, one serves the Guru, not a specific recipient. One will appreciate the guru for kindly inspiring him to serve and enlightening him. As directed by *Gurbani*,

ਜੇ ਕੇ ਹੋਇ ਬਹੈ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ॥

ਤਿਸੁ ਦੇਨਹਾਰੁ ਜਾਨੈ ਗਾਵਾਰੁ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 282)

For a Sikh, *Seva* is dedication. A Sikh serves with a lot of bravery, love, and devotion. *Seva* that is mandated is not beneficial to the *Sevak*; these acts of *Seva* don't provide any visible worldly advantages to them. *Seva* is only effective, in accordance with Sikh tradition, if it is rendered voluntarily. In the Sikh tradition, *Seva* is an essential part of Sikh life. This is self-surrender. *Seva* performed with enthusiasm is successful. When *Gurbani* asks to serve with body and mind, it means to serve with complete presence. Guru Arjan Dev ji has written that humility is a must while performing the acts of *Seva*. It means to build a self of pure body. Guru Arjan Dev has said that by doing *Seva*, the body is purified; that is, the dirt of the ego is removed.

ਕਮਾਵਾ ਤਿਨ ਕੀ ਕਾਰ ਸਰੀਰੁ ਪਵਿਤੁ ਹੋਇ ॥

ਪਖਾ ਪਾਣੀ ਪੀਸਿ ਬਿਗਸਾ ਪੈਰ ਧੋਇ ॥

ਆਪਹੁ ਕਛੁ ਨ ਹੋਇ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਨਦਰਿ ਨਿਹਾਲੀਐ ॥

ਮੇਹਿ ਨਿਰਗੁਣ ਦਿਚੈ ਥਾਉ ਸੰਤ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲੀਐ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 518)

“Serving them, my body is purified. I wave the fans over them, and carry water for them; I grind the corn for them, and washing their feet, I am over-joyed. By myself, I can do nothing; O God, bless me with Your Glance of Grace. I am worthless - please, bless me with a seat in the place of worship of the Saints.”

Seva shall also be understood as a constitutive entity for the practising individual or community. It shapes subjectivity (or subjectivities) by serving the constitutive function. Since our conscious actions are inherently "horizontal," their entire meaning always includes their objectives' present and absent elements (Bernet et al.). Whatever action is performed in the practice of *Seva* would serve both immediate and corollary functions. Every participant in that act would be motivated to engage in further such actions. That situation possesses a possibility of mass constitution of *Seva* intentionality. Herbert Spiegelberg has observed intention as a tool that objectifies, identifies, connects and constitutes.

Husserl recognises only the relative being of the world. For him, every existence in this world depends upon the possibility of experience. Experience is relative to each and every individual being. A portion of the world that is not fully revealed because of a lack of data or knowledge due to absent experience is constituted with the prior intentionally collected knowledge (Mudri).

7. *Seva* at the Subjective realm

For the performance of the acts of *Seva*, transcendence above self is one necessary means. It is very fundamental to look for individual means and values to get a sense of understanding of individual actions (Parsons). Transcending above self is an essential feature of humans that differentiates them from animals. A man can observe himself as a third person, whereas an animal cannot look beyond its immediate surroundings. The performance of *Seva* is only possible by suspending the lower self and immediate reality prison house. Transcendence is an enabling condition of the *Seva*. For Dr. Kanwaljeet Singh, surrender of self makes an ordinary person a Sikh. The surrender of self is walking on the path of *Gurbani*. The act of surrendering self is also giving away ego and petty greed. Ego, greed and aesthetics are the hurdles for *Seva*. To a surrendered self, Aesthetics are aesthetics of *Gurbani*, not defined by the lower self as spatial trends. Similarly, Dr Gurveer Singh (2021)⁵ believes that the performance of *Seva* is necessary for developing a humble attitude; without humbleness, one cannot win over ego, which has been called a chronic disease in the *Gurbani* (SGGS, Ang 466). Humility is the direct opposite of ego that one can attain through *Seva*, and he exemplified that with the following words of *Gurbani*

⁵ based on interview conducted on December 13, 21

ਆਪੁ ਗਵਾਇ ਸੇਵਾ ਕਰੇ ਤਾ ਕਿਛੁ ਪਾਏ ਮਾਨੁ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 474)

ਸੇਵਕ ਕਉ ਸੇਵਾ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 292)

Dr Manvinder Singh⁶ also recognises *Seva* as a tool for eliminating *Humai* or ego. According to him, if a Sikh makes a mistake in their behaviour, they are encouraged to do some form of *Seva* as a way to rectify it., like dusting at Gurudwara, cleaning utensils, cleaning the shoes of devotees etc., as their punishment. This practice of *Seva* is believed to free them of their evil thoughts of otherness and develop a humble attitude. It is part of Sikh tradition to serve for individual reformation. Dr Amar Singh⁷ also found it not just to be a punishment but an attempt to reform the human psyche filled with ego. Hence, this is called *Tankhah*, meaning salary, a religious salary. *Seva* is given a salary. Guru Nanak has identified *Humai* or ego as a chronic disease of the human personality. The cure to this disease is not outside but within humans themselves; that is *Nirmata* or humbleness with the blessing of Guru's word.

ਹਉਮੈ ਦੀਰਘ ਰੇਗੁ ਹੈ ਦਾਰੂ ਭੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਾਰਿ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 466)

As per *Gurbani*, becoming one and the same with god is the final destination that a *Sevak* achieves. Only the wishes of the almighty can make someone a faithful servant, as in the following verses of *Gurbani*.

ਏਹ ਕਿਨੇਹੀ ਚਾਕਰੀ ਜਿਤੁ ਭਉ ਖਸਮ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਕਾਢੀਐ ਜਿ ਸੇਤੀ ਖਸਮ ਸਮਾਇ ॥੨॥ (SGGS, Ang 475)

Becoming one with god means achieving the position of the lord. *Sevak* is giving something, and those who can give something have a feature similar to the lord. A lord has a lot to give to others. Similarly, *Sevak* has something to offer to others, that is, their service or *Seva*. Throughout *Gurbani*, the term '*upkar*' or 'favour' is never mentioned. Instead, '*Seva*' is the preferred term used. In Sikhism, service symbolises humility, whereas favour is a covert act of egoism. So for Sikhs, in the midst of various deeds of kindness and service, it is crucial

⁶ Based on interview conducted on January 09, 22

⁷ Based on interview conducted on January 21, 22

to remain mindful of *Gurbani*. This is only feasible if the service is performed with *Hari* or Guru's knowledge. The second scenario will involve negotiations rather than successful service. Guru Nanak, in his *Gurbani*, says, O Nanak, he alone is called a selfless servant, who cuts off his head and offers it to the Lord. The head is the ego, and giving it away is to accept God's will. He says that by enshrining the *Shabad* within his heart, the faithful *Sevak* accepts the will of the true guru.

ਸਬਦੈ ਸਾਦੁ ਨ ਆਵਈ ਨਾਮਿ ਨ ਲਗੈ ਪਿਆਰੁ ॥

ਸੇਵਾ ਥਾਇ ਨ ਪਵਈ ਤਿਸ ਕੀ ਖਪਿ ਖਪਿ ਹੋਇ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਸੇਈ ਆਖੀਐ ਜੋ ਸਿਰੁ ਧਰੇ ਉਤਾਰਿ ॥

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਭਾਣਾ ਮੰਨਿ ਲਏ ਸਬਦੁ ਰਖੈ ਉਰ ਧਾਰਿ ॥੧॥ (SGGS, Ang 1247)

“He does not find the taste of the Shabad, and he does not embrace love for the Name. His service is not accepted; worrying and worrying, he wastes away in misery. O Nanak, he alone is called a selfless servant, who cuts off his head, and offers it to the Lord. He accepts the Will of the True Guru, and enshrines the

Shabad within his heart. ||1||”

ਸੇ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਹਰਿ ਆਖੀਐ ਜੋ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਖੈ ਉਰਿ ਧਾਰਿ ॥

ਮਨੁ ਤਨੁ ਸਉਪੇ ਆਗੈ ਧਰੇ ਹਉਮੈ ਵਿਚਹੁ ਮਾਰਿ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 28)

“Those who keep the Lord enshrined within their hearts are said to be the servants of the Lord. Placing mind and body in offering before the Lord, they conquer and eradicate egotism from within.”

Seva is a movement that operates similarly to how the human body's desire, wrath, greed, infatuation, and pride inclinations do. Like when the thought of lust comes, the sexual feeling, or when the thought of anger comes, the heat or anger, by stoking greed, the body becomes ineligible for acts of 'goodness'. The spirit of *Seva* needs to be aroused, which may include exerting physical effort or reticence. Like desire, wrath, greed, infatuation, and egoistic inclinations must be subdued via individual effort; the body must be prodded, urged, and encouraged to instil the spirit of *Seva* (Singh et al., SDSS).

7.1. *Seva*, through consciousness and intentionality

According to Armstrong, being *sentient* means being conscious and able to perceive and respond to one's environment. This requires self-awareness, as described by Carruthers. To truly serve others, one must be in a state of consciousness. This view suggests that conscious states involve mental states about mental states or a kind of meta-mentality or meta-intentionality. In this sense, unconscious thoughts and desires are merely those that we experience covertly. Intentionality is the directness of our minds towards something. Intentionality is something that enables our mind to focus on something that is outside of it. The inside feature of our mind is consciousness that is focused outside through intentionality. *Seva* is a conscious, intentional act. It is to live as per *Gurbani* to march towards a higher life state. Although we might see someone performing the acts of *Seva* through their bodies and other resources, ultimately, the inner mental state is directing our bodies to commit such acts. The commitment to those acts is only possible through intentionality. The act is secondary, and intentionality is primary, so there can never be types of *Seva*. It can only be categorised through the intentionality of the underlying act. The distinction is an issue of meaning and, as such, relates to the reflective or ontological level. However, this distinction is made on the level of the physical world, that of the natural attitude. One can understand *Seva* as exceeding usual limits by being a phenomenological intentional act. The conscious location of immanent is what is present and given, and intentional beyond the limits of immanence is what it ought to achieve through its conscious act.

7.2. *Dasvand*

In Sikhism, there is a tradition called *Dasvand* where one donates one-tenth of their income to noble causes. This practice symbolises giving back to the community's shared resources in the name of the Guru. By returning one-tenth of your earnings to God, the provider, you acknowledge that your wealth comes from a higher power. This act of generosity can be seen as a seed of trust that can increase your revenue like a plant grows from a seed. This concept is also known as tithe (Singh et al., SDSS). *Dasvand* is to support the acts of *Seva* through monetary service. *Dasvand*

has long been a component of Sikh tradition. The practice is comparable to Muslim zakat, which mandates allocating 2.5% of one's annual wealth for the welfare of the poor and the needy, and Christian tithes, which require members of the church to pay a tenth part of the annual produce of their land or its equivalent in money to support it and the clergy. Although allusions may be found, such as those in Parasar Rishi's teachings advising the householder to save 1/21 of his wealth for Brahmans and 1/31 share for the gods, classical Indian culture did not have a fixed method for controlling gifts or charity (Singh et al., SDSS). *Dasvand* is a unique form of charity in the Sikh community that emphasises the importance of serving others as a whole. It is a communal act that involves sharing one's earnings with others rather than simply giving alms. Unlike traditional forms of charity, where one party is seen as a giver and the other as a receiver, *Dasvand* promotes equality and recognises everyone as part of the same community. This principle makes *Dasvand* a positive and meaningful concept (Massey 48).

Dr Paramvir Singh also mentioned the system of *Dasvand* in Sikhism, which is to provide financial support for the acts of *Seva*. In this system, every Sikh is directed to contribute one-tenth of their income for *Seva*. Activities supported by *Dasvand* range from *Langar* to education institutions for underprivileged children. Sikhs have even funded socio-political movements for the welfare of the masses with the money collected through *Dasvand*. The institution of *Dasvand* provides help to the needy and acts as a binding force for community members while organising help (Singh SDSS).

Dasvand is also a form of *Seva* through financial means. Through the service of wealth, the devotee breaks his attachment to *Maya*. One starts to hesitate to accumulate *maya* by committing sins or killing the rights of others. There is a significant distinction between charitable giving and *Seva*, or *Dasvand*. People merely perform acts of kindness to appease their mental cravings. In *Gurbani*, great care has been taken to forbid such a practice. People desire to receive several times more benefits from their donations. This curiosity is detrimental rather than good. Rich people spend their money on worldly pleasures and vices, which adds to the weight of their misdeeds. According to *Gurbani*, the living creature shouldn't take pride in their money. The pride of helping others via money is eliminated when a living being views all possessions as belonging to the Lord and treats them as such.

Therefore, he is content to refund the deposit. In this context, a few instances are provided.

ਦੇ ਦੇ ਮੰਗਹਿ ਸਹਸਾ ਗੁਣਾ ਸੋਭ ਕਰੇ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥

ਚੇਰਾ ਜਾਰਾ ਤੈ ਕੂੜਿਆਰਾ ਖਾਰਾਬਾ ਵੇਕਾਰ ॥

ਇਕਿ ਹੋਦਾ ਖਾਇ ਚਲਹਿ ਐਥਾਉ ਤਿਨਾ ਭਿ ਕਾਈ ਕਾਰ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 466)

“They give and give, but ask a thousand-fold more and hope the world will honour them. The thieves, adulterers, perjurers, evil-doers and sinners- after using up what good karma they had, they depart; have they done any good deeds here at all?”
The fundamental tenets of Sikhism include reciting the name, performing honest labour, and sharing whatever you earn. Honest work is essential to earn money. Distribution of funds is *Dasvand*; it performs good deeds with money gained legitimately. Giving from one's earnings to the needy and the destitute is done in the name of religion. Participating in the *Sangat's* service and supporting a system shared by everyone, regardless of nationality, caste, colour, or race, is most important. This is the *Seva* of *Dhan* or money. Although not everyone can distribute money equally, everyone can donate, so the most requisite part is the genuine spirit.

ਧਾਇ ਧਾਇ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਨ ਸ੍ਰਮੁ ਕੀਨੇ ਇਕਤੁ ਕਰੀ ਹੈ ਮਾਇਆ

ਦਾਨੁ ਪੁੰਨੁ ਨਹੀ ਸੰਤਨ ਸੇਵਾ ਕਿਤ ਹੀ ਕਾਜਿ ਨ ਆਇਆ ॥੧॥ (SGGS, Ang 712)

“With great effort and exertion, the miser works to gather in the riches of Maya. He does not give anything in charity or generosity, and he does not serve the Saints; his wealth does not do him any good at all. ||1||”

8. *Seva* as social action

When examining the Sikh principle of *Seva* as a form of social action from a Sociological perspective, it is necessary to refer to Max Weber's definition of social action. According to Weber, social action refers to the behaviour of individuals within social relationships. Weber believed that sociology's job was to reduce the action to 'understandable' action because interpretive sociology views the individual and his acts as the fundamental social unit

(Weber, 1946). For him, social action was not just a behavioural patterned act but always carried a consciousness full of life and spirit. Every social action is meaningfully oriented, not unguided and out of the blue reaction to a particular situation. Weber's *Verstehen* is a synonym for "Intentional behaviour, meaningful behaviour, and subjectively understandable behaviour (Tucker, 1956)". He has used this term to understand the nature of social behaviour.

In the case of *Seva*, the experiential side of service seems subjective. But in the Sikh consciousness, the individual service aspect is as collective as the expressive subjective aspect. A servant who attains the state of oneness with all becomes a conscious being and takes the supreme form. It is the transformation of service into worship. In Sikhism, *Seva* is part of the three-fold principle of reciting the name, performing work, and giving—much like *Naam (Meditation)*, *Daan (Sharing)*, *Ishnaan (Cleaning)*. Since the *Naam* is the driving force in sharing and working, the *Seva* that the Sikh's link with the *Naam* is independent in nature and expression. Therefore, even if it is acknowledged that the Sikh concept of *Seva* contains both modern and traditional components, it remains independent in terms of context, expression, and outcome. *Seva* acts as the benchmark for the Sikh conscious experience and expression. Reaching a higher state requires one to perform congressional *Seva*.

ਜਨ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਉਤਮ ਕਾਮਾ ॥੨॥ (SGGS, Ang 164)

“Serving Your slaves is the ultimate good deed. ||2||”

Punishment is given as *Seva* in Sikh tradition, the peak of *Seva's* social manifestation. The desire to live a life free of crimes with a cleansing (*Ishnaan*) of mind and body through *Seva* is implied through this tradition. It leads to the social, moral, and spiritual acceptance of guilt rather than acting out in retaliation or rage. *Seva* is taken, not given, because of this. *Seva* is rendered, not paid. *Seva* is not just an act but an experience. *Seva* is an experience in addition to a deed. *Seva* is a work founded on the trust of values that shows up as humility and the truth.

Seva is a noble and auspicious action that creates a platform to support togetherness based on an ideal. That idea is to make a utopian society. It is ideal for the masses to join together in service of the creation. *Seva*, at a mass scale, is filled with joy, happiness and enthusiasm. It is a transformative ideal with the potential to change. The following verses from *Gurbani* convey how an individual is transformed by offering *Seva*

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੇਵਾ ਖਾਲ ਜਿਨਿ ਖਾਲੀ ॥

ਤਿਸੁ ਘੜੀਐ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਚੀ ਟਕਸਾਲੀ ॥੨॥ (SGGS, Ang 1134)

“Whoever, as *Gurmukh*, serves and works hard, is molded and shaped in the true mint of the *Shabad*, the Word of God. ||2||”

Social action has been defined as social behaviour in psychology and sociology. Many social scientists have given it the status of a proper observation unit. When an actor behaves in such a manner that he aims to influence the actions of one or more other individuals, that type of behaviour is considered social behaviour. Max Weber was the first to use and emphasise social activity as the foundation for sociological theory (Mitchell).

As per Max Weber (FMW: EIS), sociology is a scientific field that aims to understand social action analytically to determine its cause and effect. All human behaviour is considered social action and carries subjective meaning, with each participant considering the other's behaviour. Each social action has an objective. Weber emphasised that social actions reflect the values and beliefs of the actors involved. These values and beliefs are derived from human consciousness and are also responsible for spiritual well-being.

Seva is a unique mixture (maybe more) of four types of social actions suggested by Max Weber. *Seva* is a traditional action in the Sikh tradition and belief system. It is an effective social action as a part of the Sikh attitude emanation from community behaviour. *Seva* is not a calculated decision to gain something out of this act. Guru Granth Sahib has instructed Sikhs not to expect anything in return for their service to others otherwise, that kind of act shall not be considered *Seva*. They shall serve selflessly. Strict obedience to values and means is paramount in acts of *Seva*, taking it to the sphere of *Wertrational* or value-rational action. *Seva* is an intentional act covering welfare, justice and oneness. Thus it is also a *Zweckrational* goal-oriented action.

9. Socio-political concerns of *Seva*

Dr. Harpal Singh Pannu⁸ defines *Seva* as giving something valuable to someone in need. What can be given, anything one possesses, money, material, labour (mental or physical). Even giving their own life (martyrdom) for a higher cause is *Seva*. According to him, performing *Seva* is an act of sacrifice that may include the sacrifice of life. Sikh faith emerged in a period of socio-political chaos, where the ruling class was least concerned about their subjects, so *Seva* was a Sikh way of social welfare. *Seva* is an instrument of socio-political change in the Sikh ideological paradigm. He finds *Seva* a sacred principle practised in a secular world to elevate oneself spiritually. Sikhs are exhorted to provide *Seva*, for example, by serving the *langar*. Although in institutional terms, the tradition of *langar* was started by the third Guru, Guru Amar Das, sharing food together was integral to Guru Nanak's Kartarpur community (Nesbitt). Sikh *rehat maryada* talks about *langar* having the dual purpose of providing food to the needy and establishing the ethos of brotherhood and equality. *Langar* realises the principles of *sangat* (congregation of devotees) and *Pangat* (devotees sitting in line to eat food) to break chains of otherness and discrimination. *Langar* became the rendezvous for social cohesion. Although *langar* is served where the *sangat* assembles, *Gurudwara* is the place where *langar* is served all day to anyone required. Dr Amar Singh sees *Gurudwara* as an essential institution of *Seva* and a congressional place for *Sangat*. The Fourth Guru of Sikhs, Guru Ramdas, started the institution of *Gurudwara*, which is the place of assembly and prayer. *Sangat*, a congregation of enlightened ones, is very critical in the development of intentionality of *Seva* among the Sikhs and their next generations. "The institution of gurdwara plays an important role in promoting the ideal of human equality. Everyone—irrespective of caste, colour, creed, or gender—is welcome to the gurdwara and is offered *langar* (communal meal) and *karah-parshad* (blessed food) without distinction. Most Sikhs, particularly children, learn their initial lessons of *sewa* by helping in the community kitchen (Kalsi)." "Taking part in *seva* in the *gurudwaras* is a form of organisational religiousness." (Sohi et al. 2070) While interpreting *vaars* of Bhai Gurdas, Dr. Jodh Singh has described *Sangat* as a sacred pool. *Gurudwara* is the place where most of the time *Sangat* ensembles. It has been called a place where a 'formless' god resides.

ਸਾਦਰੁ ਸਬਦਰੁ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਅਕਥ ਕਥਾ ਕਿਉਂ ਜਿਹਬਾ ਜਾਣੈ।

⁸ Based on Interview Conducted on October 12, 21

ਉਸਤਤਿ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਕਥਨੀ ਬਦਨੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਨ ਆਣੈ।

ਗੰਧ ਸਪਰਸ ਅਗੋਚਰਾ ਨਾਸ ਸਾਸ ਹੈਰਤਿ ਹੈਰਾਣੈ।

ਵਰਨਹੁ ਚਿਹਨਹੁ ਬਾਹਰਾ ਦਿਸਟਿ ਅਦਿਸਟਿ ਨ ਧਿਆਨੁ ਧਿਝਾਣੈ।

ਨਿਰਾਲੰਬੁ ਅਵਲੰਬੁ ਵਿਣੁ ਧਰਤਿ ਅਗਾਸਿ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ਵਿਝਾਣੈ।

ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਸਚਖੰਡਿ ਹੈ ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਿਝਾਣੈ।

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕਾਦਰ ਨੋਂ ਕੁਰਬਾਣੈ ॥੧੨॥ (Bhai Gurdas, vaar 16)

“The Lord is beyond taste and words; how can His ineffable story be told by tongue? He being beyond praise and slander does not come in the periphery of telling and hearing. He is beyond smell and touch and the nose, and the breath is also wonder-struck but cannot know Him. He is away from any varna and symbolism and is even beyond the sight of concentration. Without any prop He resides in the grandeur of earth and sky. Holy congregation is the abode of truth where through the word of the Guru, the formless Lord is recognised. Whole of this creation is sacrifice unto the creator.”

Dr Paramvir Singh considers *Gurudwara* as the centre of the Sikh way of life. *Gurudwara* is also a place to organise *Seva*; it has *Dawakhana* to treat patients, *langar* to feed the hungry, a library for the seekers of knowledge and a place to rest and stay for travellers and the homeless. Every *gurudwara* has a *Nishan Sahib* (Sikh flag), which is tall so that it can be seen from a distance by anyone in need. *Nishan Sahib* symbolises the political identity of Sikhs, ensuring protection for the seeker. These are all institutions of *Seva*, Dr Gurveer Singh added. *Seva* is incorporated into every activity performed at *Gurudwara*. Besides spiritual instruction, *gurudwara* has become a centre for social service (Singh, OFSF). Dr Manvinder Singh has stressed that, in Sikhism, *Seva* is not just a concept but, with its continued practice from the guru period, it also has its own historicity. Historicisation has further strengthened the importance of *Seva* in Sikh subjectivity. He calls it a feature of Sikhism that its concepts are practical to be practised worldwide. He quoted Guru Nanak, saying only those who know the right path who earn with their hands and share it with others.

ਘਾਲਿ ਖਾਇ ਕਿਛੁ ਹਥਹੁ ਦੇਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਰਾਹੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ਸੇਇ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 1245)

“One who works for what he eats, and gives some of what he has - O Nanak, he knows the Path. ||1||”

For a *Sevak*, serving *langar* or practising another example of *Seva* is part of doing away with the structural conditions of deprivation and abuse that cause a hindrance in the attainment of a higher life. *Sevak* is the one who feels responsible for the conditions around her and gets into the shoes of others to feel empathetic about them. Food, accommodation, health, safety, etc., are the basic necessities that act as sluice gates for the ultimate development of human beings. Providing these essentials can be the way towards the elimination of hurdles for ultimate development. *Seva* is the way of life for the Sikhs, through which Sikhism provides a structure for eliminating the conditions of deprivation. Attempting to attain the 'higher life' by turning their attention towards more meaningful actions. It is like protecting the initiated ones on the path of divine love by the emancipated ones without any limits of race or creed, in the words of Pooran Singh. Dr Amar Singh observed how agitating farmers at Delhi borders had arranged for the education of underprivileged children; even when they were of the opinion that there had been injustice against them, they still had the welfare of others in their mind. For a provider of such service(s), it is a way to live a life according to the principles of faith and get the joy of blessedness for contributions to creating a society based on justice. Dr. Harpal Singh Pannu asserted that *Seva* should never be performed out of pity and to gain material and metaphysical rewards. It shall always be carried out with empathy towards broader goals of cosmic will and justice. It shall never cause pauperisation but act as an enabling structure for capacity building at individual and community levels. It shall always be directed towards informing humans of their ultimate capabilities, which will never be an outcome of charity.

Compared to religious virtuosi, who are few, not all, every Sikh is directed to be *Sevak* to be able to get a "place in the court of the lord". Guru Nanak Dev "categorically rejects the ascetic path of withdrawal, remaining silent, one-point meditation or the like (Singh, OFSF). In a similar pursuit, he rejects withdrawal, monasticism and asceticism and hails truthful living and deeds. Guru Nanak Dev, in his *Gurbani*, has directed Sikhs to keep away from such people who cannot earn their living and become ascetics. He hails the one who earns their living and shares with others. Sikh *rehat maryada* defines a Sikh as a "person whose faith consists of belief in one God, the Ten Gurus, the Adi Granth and other scriptures and teachings of the Ten Gurus. Additionally, he or she must believe in the necessity and importance of "Amrit" (the Sikh baptism ceremony)." Each individual subscribing to the Sikh faith shall study the scripture and remember the god, lead a life as per the teachings of the Gurus and, very importantly, engage in active service of the community. In the Weberian

sense, it makes every Sikh religious virtuosi. Sikhism emphasises a cosmic vision for man, where a man or woman shall have a relation with self and the outside world. *Seva* is associated with a worldly aspect of Sikhism; thus, it is related to humanity's social relations, according to Dr Jagbir Singh⁹.

ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥ ਤਾ ਦਰਗਹ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 26)

“In the midst of this world, do *seva*, And you shall be given a place of honor in the Court of the Lord.”

The practice of the *Seva* is necessary for every Sikh, and it is one of the core concepts of Sikhism, according to Dr Gurveer Singh. For Dr Harbhajan Singh, *Seva* is a sacred duty, whereas Dr Gurveer Singh defines it as *Hukam* or the religious order of Guru, which must be fulfilled without questions. It is at the foundational base of the Sikh faith. Dr Kanwaljeet Singh describes this necessity of practice of *Seva* not as a duty but as the nature of a Sikh. For him, when a Sikh internalises the word of *Gurbani*, her life becomes an example of the way of life emanating from *Gurbani*. As per *Gurbani*, it becomes an unconscious will to perform acts of *Seva* while leading a life. *Seva* and Sikh are inseparable, and both are the same. Ideally, being a Sikh is a *Seva* because every act a Sikh performs shall be an act of *Seva*, be that in any sphere of life. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth guru of Sikhs, himself exemplified that by washing the clothes of *Sangat*. Dr Harpal Singh Pannu gave the example of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh (Sikh ruler from 1801 AD to 1839 AD), who carried a sack of cereals for an old man who was unable to do so. The life of a Sikh is an opportunity to earn god's grace while leading a life of *Seva*; by doing so, one will acquire liberation in life.

ਜੇ ਲੋੜਹਿ ਚੰਗਾ ਆਪਣਾ ਕਰਿ ਪੁੰਨਹੁ ਨੀਚੁ ਸਦਾਈਐ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 465)

“If you yearn for goodness, then perform good deeds and feel humble.”

Sikhism, or *Sikhi* in Punjabi, is the discipleship of the Guru. A true disciple abides by ‘Kirt Karo, Nam Japo, Vand Chakko’ principles. *Kirt* or *Kirat* is to toil for one's bread in the spirit of holiness, *Kirat* is not just for one but gathering bread for hungry mouths (spirit of the *Langar*), providing solace to the sick, and clothing the naked. In this context, Dr Harpal Singh Pannu (narrated a *Sakhi*, where a rich young man wanted to present a valuable gift to Guru Gobind Singh. Guru sahib saw his tender hands and asked whether he ever did any physical labour in his life. His answer was no, so Guru Gobind Singh declined to accept his

⁹ Based on interview conducted on February 08, 22

present and told him to do *Kirat* first; only then could he present something to Guru Gobind Singh. *Nam Japna* or ‘Remembrance of Him’ is what ‘gives true life’ (*Rahihās*) and makes one accustomed to practising selfless *Seva*. Dr Jagbir Singh finds *Nam* to be an instrument of establishing one’s relationship with the whole or cosmos, *Kirt* cements one as a social being

ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਬਦਿ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 1343)

“Selfless service and intuitive awareness come by reflecting upon the Word of the *Shabad*.”

Vand Chakko, or Sharing what you have with others, is the ultimate realisation of oneness among everyone (Singh, SOTS). For Dr. Harpal Singh Pannu, belief in one monotheistic god or *Akal Purakh* is the central point of reference for Sikhs to see everyone as equal. It is the core concept of Sikh belief. According to him, Sikhs exhibit the spirit of oneness through compassion and acts of *Seva*, with an absence of bigotry. Establishing oneness in the worldly domain was one of the primary objectives of Guru Nanak Dev; through this oneness, the disintegration of society was to be ceased. Contested ideological space had caused a breakdown of human ties and social cohesion. In this context, Sikhism emerged, according to Dr Harbhajan Singh. Guru Nanak Dev did not give any new name of God but only preached what was already in common religious practice. Dr Harbhajan Singh¹⁰ said that the oneness of Guru Nanak was not only the oneness of the creator but also the oneness of creation. In Sikhism, God is one, and that is for each and everyone, not only for Sikhs. Meaning Guru and God are not confined to Sikhs. The practice of *Seva* set the trajectory of the human mind towards accepting and respecting differences. Going further, the empathic acts of *Seva* develop a worldview free of feelings of all kinds of otherness. The other is accepted as a whole whole-minded being and is not denied any agency of their own. There is no disrespect for otherness, but it is appreciated through the gain of knowledge about their particular being. At the same time, *Seva* has been observed to be a cultivator of the ‘We’ feeling by promoting community ties and eliminating egocentric, selfish self-seeking (Singh, FAFOTS). When Sikhism appeared, according to Dr Gurveer Singh, socio-politically, people were so fragmented that there was a smell of disunity in the air of the sub-continent. The socio-political sphere was highly contested and spaced in that environment, Guru Nanak

¹⁰ Based on interview conducted on 24 November, 21

Dev talked about oneness. This oneness was his central concern while declaring every human being equal irrespective of their beliefs, as per Dr Gurveer Singh. Likewise, Dr Paramvir Singh also accepts the argument of worldly oneness propagation as a fundamental concern for Guru Nanak Dev; the same is reflected in the following words of *Gurbani*

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥

ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 1349)

“First, Allah created the Light; then, by His Creative Power, He made all mortal beings. From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So who is good, and who is bad? ||1||” Oneness or *ikonkar* is the departure point of Sikhism, in the words of Dr. Manvinder Singh. It is the core of Sikhism that is reflected in every sphere, from scriptures to history to practice. For Dr Manvinder Singh, *Seva* is the instrument of practice through which oneness is achieved. *Seva* is the practice of the principle of oneness where all the shackles of otherness, like colour, creed, caste, gender, etc., are broken to achieve the oneness of all beings emerging from one divine light or *Akal Purakh*, creator of all. An embodiment of such a belief through practice is essential to earning *Sikhi*, as no one is Sikh just by birth, added Dr. Manvinder Singh. Next, he pointed out how the socialisation of individuals leads to the creation of boundaries of perceived and physical identities that bound them in certain groups of race, nations or religion. Breaking these boundaries yet preserving the diversity of life created by the *Akal Purakh* is the goal of Sikhism. Bhai Ghanayia, a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh’s period, served as an example by giving water to the Mughal soldiers fighting the army of Guru Gobind Singh. When complained, Guru Gobind Singh also directed Bhai Ghanayia to give the injured Mughal soldiers first aid. This instance is not just a portrayal of the kindness of Guru Gobind Singh but a direction to Sikhs that there shall be no dehumanisation. The feeling of oneness, even in war, is an embarkment on the journey to fight evil in principle. The same was depicted when in a farmer protest, *Langar* was served to the confronting police party. It is an example of practising oneness even at confrontation or war, which leaves no place for dehumanisation in the contours of otherness. There is even a sect in Sikh tradition mainly dedicated to *Seva*, called ‘Seva Panthi’. They trace their lineage to Bhai Ghanayia ji.

The very foundation of the Sikh concept of *Seva* is built upon these pious words. It comes through the active participation of the Sikhs in socio-political spheres, as TN Madan observes that the primacy of Guru Nanak’s concern with individual salvation needs hardly

be emphasised; what must not be overlooked, however, is the fact that he did not teach a selfish concern for one's own salvation alone, but rather the moral responsibility of fellow human beings as well. Guru Nanak summed up his teachings very simply '*Kirt Karo, Nam Japo, Vand Chakko*' (work for a living; abide in the meditative recitation of God's name; share what you have with others). The self is thus seen in relation to the divine and the social, so a withdrawal from either of these relationships must spell out one's extinction. This combination of piety and practical activity (in the form of worldly labour) is the essence of Guru Nanak's this-worldliness. He professed a family life shouldering all its responsibilities and preached against an ascetic lifestyle. Dr. NGK Singh stressed that living one infinite life is the core belief of Sikhism.

ਨਾਨਕ ਅਗੈ ਸੇ ਮਿਲੈ ਜਿ ਖਟੇ ਘਾਲੇ ਦੇਇ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 472)

“O Nanak, in the world hereafter, that alone is received, which one gives to the needy from his own earnings and labor. ||1||”

Seva is also an equalising force. Bertolani has observed that “The normative discourse widely shared in Sikhism affirms the equality between man and woman before God, the equal possibility of liberation, the opportunity to perform the same roles and functions in religious practice and, for both genders, to manifest their devotion to the guru through the performance of every kind of *Seva*.” Women could act through their own agency while engaging with a communal sphere in the *Gurudwara*. Women could partake in their religious activity through the acts of *Seva*. “Sikh children learn the fundamental principles of Sikh tradition at the *gurdwaras*. Their belief in the equality of human beings is confirmed as soon as they enter the congregational hall. They begin to appreciate the equality of sexes when their mothers and fathers sit on the same carpet in the *gurdwara* with other members of the congregation” (Kalsi).

10. Intentionality of *Sarbat da Bhala*

Seva, including other activities, makes the individual concerned for others; in the course of time, it has become part of Sikh subjectivity, according to Dr Amar Singh. Dr Manvinder Singh believes that the endless race for resources has rendered humans empty and selfish. One responsible for others is free from the greed of massing what belongs to everyone. Thus, *Seva* is universal fellowship, conceived through a conscious Intentional act of '*Sarbat da Bhala*' (literally translated as the welfare of all, in English). It has led to the formation of

Sikh subjectivity. Similarly, Dr Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh defines *Seva* as selfless service, an enactment of divine adoration for the welfare of humanity. For her, *Seva* is not only practising acts of compassion for those in need, but it is truthful living. She narrated a verse from *Gurbani* stating, ‘Truth is high, but higher still is truthful living’, asserting that *Seva* is an attempt to realise truthful living.

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 62)

“Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living. ||5||”

Truthful living is *Nirmal karma*, as per *Gurbani*. Dr Amar Singh finds it to be a fundamental message of *Gurbani*. *Nirmal karma* guides a practising Sikh to lead a life of pure intentionality. Pure intentionality makes practising Sikhs responsible socio-political beings. *Seva* is an ideal, a moral, religious ideal. Dr. Paramvir Singh sees this ideal as working to make an ideal being, *Gurmukh*, one who metaphorically has her face towards Guru. *Gurmukh* is *Nirbhau*(has no fear) and, at the same time *Nirvair*(Doesn’t give fear to anybody), and is an example of social harmony. All actions and deeds of such beings are meant for cosmic justice, “Every human act, it is true, has its mental and its material component; yet we are justified in distinguishing actions which are predominantly cultural and ultimately directed towards 'ideal' ends and purposes, and actions which are predominantly determined by natural facts and urge, and aim at some tangible transformation of external reality.” (Scheler 62). It can be verified in the following words of *Gurbani*

ਸਰਬ ਧਰਮ ਮਹਿ ਸ੍ਰੈਸਟ ਧਰਮੁ ॥

ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਕਰਮੁ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 266)

“Of all religions, the best religion, Is to chant the Name of the Lord and maintain pure conduct”

Conducting oneself as *Nirbhau-Nirvair* is the opposite of the human tendency to dominate others. Emanuel Kant sees the human ego progressing unchecked from the day self-consciousness arises. To protect oneself from being confronted by other's egos, one covertly develops a ‘superior understanding’ of oneself. A *Gurmukh*, who is without the tendencies of fear and domination(*Nirbhau-Nirvair*), can be a true *Sevak*.

Whatever one does shall have honest intention, i.e. ‘*Sarbat da Bhala*’, part of daily Sikh prayer (*Ardas*) that is performed two times a day. According to Jaswant Singh Neki, “The *ardas* does not conclude without an ardent supplication for the welfare of the entire mankind

under the lord's Benevolent will. This becomes the prayer for all mankind for all times, transcending both time and space." Welfare emanating from 'Sarbat da Bhala' is not humanitarianism in nature, but it is beyond that. The welfare notion of *Seva* is different from the welfare of the 'welfare state' in terms of its universalist approach to welfare recipients. The welfare state strives to work toward the welfare of residents of a particular geographic region or some particular community of humans. The welfare emanating from *Seva* reaches out to everyone irrespective of their colour, creed, race, religion, nationality or gender. "It helps Sikhs to realise the ideals of equality and brotherhood laid down for them by the Gurus. Practising *Seva* by making available one's services in any form brings about spiritual gratification and moral upliftment and builds social bonds and good community relations among the people performing it." (Sohi et al. 2071). Beneficiaries of *Seva* are not just humans but every creation of Almighty God that, including every flora and fauna. As put out in the *Gurbani*

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 8)

"Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all."

The holistic understanding of the universe set out the intended space for *Seva*, there are multiple dimensions, and it is as wide as the creation itself, said Dr Gurveer Singh. Sikh *Rehat Maryada* defines two types of conduct for a Sikh, one is individual conduct, and the second is communitarian conduct. Personal conduct is for her to seek proximity with God, while communitarian conduct is her responsibility towards the broader world. In that regard, Dr Harbhajan Singh asserts that the *Seva* also intends to create a political environment based on justice and freedom. Non-delivery of justice and suppression of freedom have resulted in socio-political unrest. For Dr. Kanwaljeet Singh, *Seva* may start from some individual or communal worldly act. Still, its ultimate aim is spiritual elevation, so *Halimi Raj* is the resultant solution to establish the rule of justice and freedom.

ਪੈ ਕੇਇ ਨ ਕਿਸੈ ਰਵਾਣਦਾ ॥

ਸਭ ਸੁਖਾਲੀ ਵੁਠੀਆ ਇਹੁ ਹੋਆ ਹਲੇਮੀ ਰਾਜੁ ਜੀਉ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 74)

"Let no one chase after and attack anyone else. Let all abide in peace, under this Benevolent Rule. ||13||"

ਤਖਤਿ ਰਾਜਾ ਸੇ ਬਹੈ ਜਿ ਤਖਤੈ ਲਾਇਕ ਹੋਈ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 1088)

“That king sits upon the throne, who is worthy of that throne.”

Seva was regarded as a high moral virtue in *Gurbani*. Saying that the Lord exists in all beings has sparked ingenuity in men. Because it has been shaped into a cooperative effort, human solidarity has been reinforced. Saying that through *Seva*, the truth has become stronger in real life. A man can acquire physical, mental, and spiritual powers and prevent physical and social ailments and crimes by exercising self-control and decency, thanks to the guidance provided by *Gurbani* via collective service. The great life force of the Guru Granth Sahib directs human life for communal service.

ਵਿਚਿ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਵਰਤਦਾ ਬੁਝਹੁ ਸਬਦ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ (SGGS, Ang 1314)

“The Lord God prevails in the *Sangat*, the Holy Congregation; reflect upon the *Shabad* and understand.”

Man learns to consider his responsibility to society in addition to himself when sitting in a holy congregation. He also develops compassion for other people. Birth, caste, gender, and other forms of prejudice are not tolerated there. People view humanity as a gift from God. This service, which is creative living, is the desire to help people in general. The search for truth entails considering all people as one big family. As a result, man is united in the social, religious, and spiritual community via the spirit of *Seva*. It encourages initiative in a person, which fosters their creative abilities. Such a regulation leads to pleasure and satisfaction in life. This meaning frees man from the grasp of his acts' primitive origins. Both personally and socially, life is interconnected. *Seva* at the communal level refers to planning one's activities in a way that serves others. A person is tested for absolute renunciation via mind, body, and riches by renunciation of his selfishness at *gurdwaras* and *Sangat*, which are excellent institutions for maturing the *Seva* in Sikhism. Only physical value in such a spiritual existence is intended for other people's delight. (Singh et.al., SDSS)

Seva is a social ethic that instructs the *Sevak* to devote herself to others. The devotion reflects in many forms that may be knowledge; one exploits her abilities for the common good in *Sangat* form while serving the *Langar*. She has a single line of service for everyone. The essence of this *Seva* ethos is the sense of service that permeates a Sikh's life.

Manual labour and religious activities are related to the ethos of civic service. Giving with your whole heart strengthens your feeling of duty and removes your connection to what you receive. The sense of service that Sikhs ask for in their daily prayer, "*Nanak naam chad di kala tere bhane sarbat da bhala*," is that your labour can benefit someone else.

As per Guru Nanak, humans possess a unique characteristic of having a narrow viewpoint, known as "*houmai*" or "I-am-ness," which obstructs spiritual growth and realisation of the greater self, "*Sachiara*." To attain morality and a fulfilled life, one must expand their consciousness and overcome this self-centeredness. Guru Nanak describes a journey of self-realisation through five stages or "*khands*." The first stage, "*Dharam Khand*," emphasises fulfilling social duties and instilling a sense of responsibility towards others. Moving on to the "*Gian Khand*," individuals gain wisdom and knowledge, enhancing their intellectual understanding. The third stage, "*Saram Khand*," involves emotional harmony and aesthetic realisation, promoting a deeper connection with oneself and the world. The fourth stage, "*Karam Khand*," represents selflessness, enabling individuals to serve humanity without any attachment to personal gain. Finally, the fifth stage, "*Sach Khand*," signifies the achievement of the universal perspective, transcending the ego entirely and experiencing harmony between action, consciousness, and bliss. Here, actions are guided by an all-encompassing perspective seeking the greater good for all beings (Singh et al., SDSS).

11. Elimination of otherness

Seva has the potential to eliminate otherness. Most of man's activities are motivated by passion, rage, greed, infatuation, and pride, bolstering his ego. *Seva*, in the Sikh tradition, refers to the process of eradicating man's negative emotions, the feeling of otherness. His perspective enlarges, and his creative abilities grow as he works to serve others. He achieves mental and physical coherence and adopts a more natural style of living. It appears to believe in the oneness of all things and the natural way of existence, whereby it enters the world of truth without of pretence or mask.

ਅਪਨਾ ਬਿਗਾਰਿ ਬਿਰਾਂਨਾ ਸਾਂਢੈ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 875)

“He may neglect his own affairs to work for others,”

Continuous practice of such kind of *Seva* makes one enter such a realm that they feel happy watching others happy. Material wants to fill a life bereft of *Seva*. The goal of the material thirst (passionate greed) was to find fulfilment. Their hold breeds illnesses of the body and mind. But as per *Gurbani*, Lust has no final peak

ਸਹਸ ਖਟੇ ਲਖ ਕਉ ਉਠਿ ਧਾਵੈ ॥

ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਮਾਇਆ ਪਾਛੈ ਪਾਵੈ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 278-279)

“Earning a thousand, he runs after a hundred thousand. satisfaction is not obtained by chasing after Maya.”

From a psychological perspective, this renunciation results from contentment, which gives the mind bravery and fortitude. It endows him with the ability to fend off oppression, defend the underprivileged, and combat both social and economic exploitation.

Scholars have identified *Seva* as an instrument to achieve equality and togetherness. Two examples, one from history and another from contemporary times, are relevant in this sense. Bhai Ghanayia, a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh’s period, served as an example by giving water to the Mughal soldiers fighting the army of Guru Gobind Singh. When complained, Guru Gobind Singh also directed Bhai Ghanayia to give the injured Mughal soldiers first aid. This instance is not just a portrayal of the kindness of Guru Gobind Singh but a direction to Sikhs that there shall be no dehumanisation. In another exemplary instance, farmers agitating in Delhi against the farm laws were seen serving *Langar* to the police party deployed to stop them. Continuous practice of *Seva* results in the development of such a consciousness among the practitioners that they start to appreciate other’s happiness. Concern for others has become a part of Sikh subjectivity with *Seva*.

12. Justice through the practice of *Seva*

Gurbani emphasises that only those worthy of the throne, shall rule. Thus *Halimi Raj* is another dimension of *Seva*, practised in the socio-political sphere for creating an environment necessary for spiritual elevation through the practice of *Seva*. This dimension of *Seva* places it in the socio-political ethic domain. Being in the socio-political, ethical domain, *Seva* elevates itself from a moral act of compassion to a foundation of justice and rule. Guru Nanak described the earth as *Dharmsal*. *Dharam* is translated as religion, moral or duty as a social obligation, whereas *sal* is a place of abode, meaning that life is meant for conducting good deeds. It calls for a unique relationship with the world where one shall lead a life of lived religion. Lived religion is an actual essential life carrying family, social and broader responsibilities. Dedication to justice and care for others is an important part of Sikh life(Kalsi). “The notion of *sewa* is closely linked with the concept of *dharmsal* espoused by Guru Nanak, who taught his followers to engage in righteous deeds by serving the

community. (Kalsi)” Sohi et. al. (2075) also acknowledge this fact by saying, “It signifies commitment to a shared philosophy of equality and of serving members of the community selflessly in order to fulfil one's duties as a Sikh (membership and shared emotional connection dimensions).” Dr Paramvir Singh recognises that ideals of all forms of justice and freedom are necessary for any administrative setup to be called *Halimi Raj*. He explained how Sikhs have fought against tyrannical administrations through military and political means as part of *Seva*. To play such a role, institutionalisation is required. Dr. Amar Singh believes that serving the public while being in politics is the best way to practice *Seva* at a mass level. Although he agrees with Dr Manvinder Singh in believing that we compartmentalise *Seva* into several different forms or categories, all it seeks is justice, whether in social, political, economic, climate or other spheres that affect the balance of life. Balance of life is in the ‘will of god’, accepting that will or *Hukam* is the highest form of *Seva*, making a practitioner ‘god-like’. A ‘god-like’ elevated human can deliver true justice. For such a person, everyone is equal. *Gurbani* explicitly mentions that *Sevak*, one who performs *Seva* is like a god.

ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਸੇ ਹਰਿ ਜੇਹਾ ॥ ਭੇਦੁ ਨ ਜਾਣਹੁ ਮਾਣਸ ਦੇਹਾ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 1076)

“The Lord's servant becomes like the Lord. Do not think that, because of his human body, he is different.”

The intentionality of justice is the supreme method to classify some random act as *Seva*, not any compartmentalisation of pre-fixed categories. The primary concern is intentionality; practitioners of *Seva* can be from any religious or ethnic group. Dr. Amar Singh sees the practice of *Seva* as not reserved for Sikhs only, although Sikhs have got significant visibility with their continued performance of acts of *Seva*. There is a possibility of addressing all kinds of issues through the practice of *Seva*, say food through *langar*, peace and security by recognising everyone as one, and the environment through labelling water, earth and air as father, mother and *Guru*, respectively. Even women have been observed to practice *Seva* in an attempt to overcome gender inequality (Bertolani). The collective efforts of *Seva* have the potential for multifaceted changes in socio-political spheres and collective psyche transformations, according to Dr Amar Singh. Dr. Manvinder Singh finds endless opportunities to improve life by focusing on ‘*Sarbat da Bhala*’ intentionality. Restoration of life as per the will of God, according to Dr Amar Singh, is the primary reason for which Guru Nanak started *Sikhi*.

Giving a central pivotal place to intentionality has solved the problem of the crystallisation of *Seva* as just a mere ritual in Sikh life. Sikhs have focused primarily on ‘*Sarbat da Bhala*’ intentionality rather than making it a ritual by continued evolution in the *Seva* in every space and time. Dr. Paramvir Singh mentioned that in 16th-century mechanical fan waving, *Langar*, etc., were the principal acts of *Seva*, while in turbulent times, Sikhs opted for swords to protect their way of life, as *Seva*. Today, to tackle global climate change and humanitarian crises worldwide, Sikhs have formed different organisations working with modern practices to provide help in the form of *Seva*. He concluded that methodologies have changed, but purpose and intentionality have remained the same throughout history.

It also includes that Sikhism is not a pacifist religion. Guru Gobind Singh has directed Sikhs that whenever in the pursuit of good, “..... all the options for solving a conflict have been exhausted completely, only then is the taking of the sword in your hand deemed legitimate.” The idea of *Seva* is to treat other people's suffering as one's own. Wishing for peace before the cause of misery is removed is illusory. The only way to eliminate the cause of misery is via knowledge. Giving blind eyes is the same as enlightening the ignorant. Knowledge alone can perform this task. The support of *Seva* is just that. This serves as the primary motto (Singh et al., SDSS).

12. Conclusion

It's important to recognise that qualitative information, being intersubjective, is not merely subjective; it describes what is observable and agreed upon by everyone involved. As an expression of *Sarbat da Bhala*, *Seva* has been observed as a binding force. With the intentionality of the welfare of all, *Sevak* strives to value every sphere of life with her efforts of cohesive oneness by recognising life's worth through the identification of cosmic will or *Hukam*. *Seva* sees the potential of collective life by highlighting responsibility for others over nihilistic individualistic tendencies. The Sikh concept of *Seva* carries a great possibility as an acculturation notion for the entire world. Undoubtedly, the Sikh's social and religious consciousness was greatly influenced by the concept of *Seva*. So, the main goal was to serve the world, whether preaching overseas, singing hymns from afar, establishing *Gurudwaras* and towns, or even excavating lakes. This is the meaning of religion and *Begampura* (an ideal time and space) in Sikhism. *Seva* has also been envisaged as a realisation of true *Dharma* (duty) as an individual or community that is voluntary, not imposed by any form of

authority. This is also the method of realising the dream of *Halemi Raj*. The central axis of Sikh devotion is the spirit of *Seva*, which gives the human being significance in the service of the Lord coupled with the establishment of public service and Guru devotion. The Sikh community dedicates itself to serving others with its bodies, resources, and minds. Public and social welfare initiatives are examples of services. The attitude of *Seva* instils diligence and integrity. A personal, ethical, and spiritually disciplined lifestyle, hard effort and a true spirit enable a man to live a healthy existence. Altruism puts out the flame of want, ego, and renunciation.

13. Summary

This chapter on the Sikh concept of *Seva* explores the central theme of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and its profound significance in Sikhism. *Seva* is an integral part of the Sikh faith and is viewed as a fundamental duty and expression of devotion to the Divine. *Seva* goes beyond mere acts of charity. *Seva* is considered an act of love, compassion, and humility towards all living beings, transcending barriers of caste, creed, and social status. It is seen as a means of experiencing the divine presence in every individual, fostering a deep sense of interconnectedness. The discussion has been based on the teachings of *Gurbani* found in the Guru Granth Sahib and interviews with ten field experts of Sikhism. Guru Nanak emphasised the importance of *Seva* as a way to be one with all and do away with all kinds of otherness. Subsequent Sikh Gurus further reinforced the value of *Seva* and made it an integral part of the Sikh way of life. From serving food in the communal kitchen (*langar*) to contributing to social welfare initiatives through *dasvand* and setting a communal *intentionality* of *Sarbat da Bhala* (welfare of all), Sikhs actively engage in various acts of *Seva* to benefit others and promote the well-being of society. By selflessly serving others, Sikhs believe that they cultivate humility, compassion, and detachment from ego, ultimately bringing them closer to the Divine and leading to spiritual enlightenment.

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The Khalsa Aid in Punjab: A Case Study

1. Introduction

This chapter delves into the profound significance of the lived religion approach, a perspective that has gained considerable prominence for its focus on the real-life experiences of religious individuals. Rooted in existentialist phenomenology, this approach portrays religion as a tangible tool enabling individuals to engage with the external world. Khalsa Aid, founded by Ravinder Singh in 1999 as a non-profit organisation, exemplifies the practice of religion in everyday life through its dedication to the welfare of people facing crises. Going beyond conventional religious boundaries, Khalsa Aid blurs the lines between the sacred and the profane through the practice acts of *Seva*. This chapter explores Khalsa Aid's endeavours within the context of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, shedding light on its diverse assistance efforts spanning education, health, disaster relief, and its impact on fostering hope during crises.

The lived religion approach is the study of routinely practised religious principles in day-to-day routine life. Kim Knibbe & Helena Kupari (158), in an attempt to understand the prospects of religion in modern times, identified lived religion as something at the centre of the religious studies field nowadays. They saw a gap traced by sociology's 'founding fathers' between modernity and religion. They found that lived religion looks beyond the gaps to focus on encounters and experiences of religion in daily life. Pioneers of sociology saw religion as the pivotal point of life that they included in their respective theories (Ammerman 194). The lived religion approach emphasises more on 'countless daily practices, habits, and patterns of social life' to establish an understanding of any religious tradition. As a starting point, this approach was developed in the process to find linkages between quotidian life and background conceptual paradigm. With its focus on 'the actual experience of a religious person', the lived religion approach has gained much space in the sociology of religion (Nyhagen 498).

The lived religion approach was connected to the 'lived body' and existentialism concepts of phenomenology. Religion was viewed as a platform providing an embodied tool to interact with the outer world (McGuire; Knibbe et al.). Whereas existentialist understanding

of the concept takes it to the realm of 'life-world'. It considers lived religion to be a conceptual foundation of one's world of interaction, i.e. life world (Knibbe et al. 167). Robert Orsi asserted that the key to understanding the study of lived religion is learning to apply disciplined attention to how individuals explain, understand, and employ their signs and practises in the context of their experiences and the structures and environments in which these signs and practices occur.

Khalsa Aid works worldwide in crisis situations, i.e., wars, floods, etc. Ammerman, using everyday religion for lived religion (Knibbe et al. 168), has argued that lived religion is nothing but acts of religion in daily life. She does not favour confining religion to institutional spheres; instead, "finding religion in everyday life means looking wherever, and however, we find people invoking a sacred presence." She goes on to recognise the criticality of social environments. She argues that identifying religion in the social processes where it is formed and used would help us better grasp its presence in daily life. Actually, the role religion plays in shaping individual consciousness is very central.

Religion is crucial in accumulating intellectual capital in the form of values and individual morality. Any response to a particular situation is shaped by an already-established system of value consciousness (Ammerman 197). Similarly, deep inshrined religio-cultural values stepping to the fore because of incidental awareness became the cause for the birth of Khalsa Aid. The whole *Khalsa Panth* was celebrating their 300th birth anniversary when a young man from an immigrant family in the United Kingdom named Ravi (Ravinder) Singh was watching the refugee crisis in the Balkans. The situation was due to the ongoing Yugoslav civil war (1991-2001) in the Balkans. Ravi Singh was emotionally displeased by watching the visuals of the suffering of the poor people. He decided not to sit idly and keep watching everything on the television; instead, he chose to do something. His concern for the suffering people became the cause for the birth of the Khalsa Aid.

Ravi Singh had initiated Khalsa Aid as a non-profit organisation that intended to provide its services to those in need during natural and man-made calamities. Ravi Singh thought Khalsa Aid as an arrangement of humanitarian support through the ideological and theoretical base of the Sikh ideal of "Recognise the whole human race as one". Taking inspirational cues from Sikhism to help out is living the religious principles. Guru Granth Sahib has repeatedly asserted the reality of worldly life. There has been an emphasis on leading a life of truthfulness with concern for others. This story of Ravi Singh is evidence of religious assertion in the contemporary world's secular space(claimed). "An empirical claim

that religion only exists in private or individual forms would deny the power and influence of institutional forms of religion” (Nyhagen 501), as religion has been declared as something personal and private in the modern age. Still, Ravi Singh found his ‘private’ religious ideals provoking public actions for a larger good. Lived religion is frequently observed being performed in public or through group actions and beliefs. Line Hyhagen has claimed that because religion is constantly connected to the social circumstances in which people live and act, it can never be private. Instead, it provides followers with a feeling of "moral guidance, conviction, and belonging" that is ultimately communal.

Peter A. Berger has insisted that it is a false assumption that we live in a totally secular world; today's world is religious. He said older religious institutions may have lost their relevance over time. Still, new and evolved institutions have emerged that have made religion and its values more apparent in both society and politics. Commenting on modernism as a contemporary governing ideal, Berger says that the revival of religion “provides a massive falsification of the idea that modernization and secularization are cognate phenomena. (6)” When the question of centrality in life arises with increased reliance on empirical tools for making sense of it, Berger finds people flocking to religion.

“The religious impulse, the quest for meaning that transcends the restricted space of empirical existence in this world, has been a perennial feature of humanity.”

Khalsa Aid has been seen working with an embodied expression of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. The practice of *Seva* is an embodiment of living the Sikh tradition. It is a way of life as per the Sikh faith. *Seva* is an integral part of the historicity of Sikhism. In Mcguire’s (118) words, “lived religion consists of the practices people use to remember, share, enact, adapt, and create the stories out of which they live. And lived religion comes into being through the practices people use to turn these stories into everyday action.” Practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva* is living the Sikh tradition in everyday life.

2. The practice of *Seva* as a sacred ritual

There is no doubt that the motivational structures of religion generate a will of people for good. Still, a clear demarcation is needed to appropriate institutions and individuals as religious. An inquiry to check whether they are genuinely inspired by religious belief or use it to legitimise their actions. While doing such a thing, religion shall never be categorised as

one single category. There may be contextual differences among different religious traditions, so be their resultant material outcomes in particular realities. It is easy to find the presence of religion in activities outside of the generally understood sites of religion.

Such a cultural and historical development of academic disciplines has prevented them from independently recognising religious traditions ‘other’ than European ones. These developments have become conceptual limits (McGuire 44) that can only be addressed with an alternate view from the other traditions.

The established dichotomy of sacred and profane becomes obscure with the practice of religious values and ideals in daily life. Binary understanding of any space as sacred or profane is questioned by establishing the social meaning of terms related to sacred or profane. Expression emanating from experiences gives meaning to the acts in the process of eliminating the definitional boundaries. It is the reverse process of contested meaning space that divergent parties use to exert their control (McGuire 25).

Practice is directly placed in belief, there is no possibility of religious tradition without some form of roots in faith. Lived religion as the practice of ideals is connected to the faith. Because embodied practices, in which the divine is rendered vividly real and present through the experiencing body, significantly impact the world of daily living, we may present individuals over institutions. That would be problematic in the sense that it would make institutions sit below individual minds in general. Religion is not something that individuals consider in isolation. One requires the social support of societal systems to maintain the subjective reality of religion. This process establishes practices to embody religious beliefs. Hence, a clear relation between practice and belief is found.

Material bodies are vital to the religious experience and practice. There is a distinctive social and psychological process involved in the personification of religious ideals. Ritual practice is the one that cements the embodiment of social meanings. Ritual practises are integrated and embedded into each participant's own body as a whole. The body metaphor may become a tangible, logical, and emotional reality via body practice (McGuire 119-130). Bourdieu claimed that remembrance and embodiment of practices involve the whole of the sense. Involved senses are not limited to physical ones but include learned senses like justice and disgust. Learning of senses is a social process. Continuous learning of senses through generations forms a memory of senses.

“Sociologist Deniele Harviu-Leger has described religion as a chain of memory by which people are linked with tradition of their faith community. Most people think

of the transmission of such memory as a cognitive process, with children learning about the community's beliefs, scripture, and norms.”(Mcguire 100)

Action on the ground facilitates spiritual connections. A sacred practice unites the body, the intellect, and the spirit. Individuals who practise exchange subjective insights. Intersubjectivity, or experiencing another person's subjective experience, does not include conscious thinking, in which the experience of another individual or the experience of the other is the subject of thought. A sacred practice is a shared subjective experience that is influenced by one's social environment, creating a shared lifeworld. It ends with the eradication of distinctions between the self and others. The collective embodied practice fosters a tangible sense of belonging and community.

Practice is grounded but not bounded. There are always clear signs of any practice having roots in a certain ideological domain. Spatial features force any practice to allow bricolage flexibility. Bricolage is a social practice by which an individual constructs a creative assembly by eclectically pasting together seemingly disparate, preexisting bits and pieces of meaning and practice (Strauss 11-20).

To the individual making such creative synthesis, the components may seem incongruous to an outside observer, but they make sense and are useful in their own universe of purpose and perspective. Such an adaptation happens all the time and in every social setting. Intentionality is the key to understanding such a process. For future individual or group synthesis, individually blended pieces can become culturally shared elements. We could speculate that some historical periods and societies would have social conditions that encourage extensive bricolage in all facets of culture, while other historical periods and societies would have conditions that would lessen people's motivation or freedom to be creative with their religious practices. It's also possible that certain cultures have foundational beliefs that allow for such a process to occur (McGuire 100).

Sikhi is not culturally exclusive. Sikhism emerged in a culturally complex amalgamation of diverse societal settings of medieval Punjab, where many traditions existed together. Sikhs are instructed to embrace goodness from everyone and everything. Sikhs have adapted contemporary techniques to live out their values and beliefs in the modern world. Although performing *Seva* is a traditional Sikh duty, it is also opposite to societal inertia.

Jasmeen Kaur has observed the same in her research work, “People without bothering about themselves or their loved ones are volunteering to give lives to unknowns. Humanity still exists. The organization named Khalsa Aid provided hundreds of oxygen concentrators to

India, where the government failed to cope up with the medical resources. According to Sky news Jas Singh, one of the volunteers of Khalsa Aid piloted the flight full of oxygen concentrators free of cost to help India.”

While discussing his concept of habitus, Pierre Bourdieu argues that continuous existence in a social space makes a person or community resistant to change and an instrument to the status quo. Such individuals and societies prefer accepting the social reality as it is, and accepting it for granted is easier than rebelling against it and presenting alternatives. Sikhs have been able to break barriers of nation, race, caste, creed, including others while ‘living out their values and beliefs. While performing acts of Seva for the suffering people of the Balkans, Ravi Singh was undertaking every practice he was capable of.

“At the time of the celebrations across the UK, and around the world, there were terrible images on the news of refugees struggling to cross the cold and mountainous border to reach a safer and peaceful Albania. I read in the newspaper about a small group who were organising an aid convoy to Albania – the Sikhi teaching of ‘Sarbat da Bhalla ’ came rushing to my mind. I phoned the group from the newspaper and asked to join them to help deliver aid donated by the Sikh community, who had been extremely generous in giving food and money – within two weeks were on our way with two trucks and a van load of aid to Albania. (khalsaaid.org)”

He was not exclusive in his approach to practice only through traditional methods. The central point for him was to provide help.

“Ravi saw the footage of the Kosovan refugees on the news and was inspired by one Sikhi ideology in particular “ –*Sarbat da Bhalla*” meaning “well-being for all” – recognising the humanity in us all and reaching out to those in need, regardless of race, religion, borders. (khalsaaid.org)”

That act of help was a sacred act for Ravi Singh. It all came through the practice of *Seva*. “Practices or abstinences that are rooted in religious beliefs” are sacred practices. It is the practice through bodies, embodied practice to experience and live religiously. As stated in the literature of Khalsa Aid,

“Whilst the inspiration for the charity stems from a strong belief in the Sikh principles, our work is by no means restricted to the Sikh community. Khalsa Aid became the first ever cross-border international humanitarian aid organisation based on the Sikh principles.”

In a similar fashion, Bob Singh Virdee describe his experience with Ravi Singh and Khalsa Aid in the peak days of the Covid-19 pandemic

“I saw that Ravi Singh was going to Casualty and going to hospitals by himself with a few volunteers to give hot food as a way of keeping up staff morale. Ravi is inspirational and living the way we have been instructed to live by our Gurus. He has great charisma, which inspires people to live as a Sikh. This was just one example of a way to do that.

March 2020 was initially cold and quite dreary. So I said I would go with Ravi to the hospitals. A few restaurants in Southall had made food so we collected it and then went to the first hospital to drop it off. Going through that first A&E department with physical red flags everywhere, and warning signs, was a shock. We walked through all that to take this food to the staff rooms and the workers clapped because they were so appreciative that people were doing something for them too. I won't lie though, it was quite scary, because you were so physically close to COVID-19.

If you are so close to tragedy and you can do something to help, you do. We keep our kesh (uncut hair) to stand out and stand up, and to be people who others can come to when they need something. Being a Sikh is not only a word; your actions have to portray your true nature. Whatever I can do, I hope to live by the teachings and practice of Guru Nanak Dev Ji [the first Sikh Guru] and to do as much as you can little. These are the principles I hope to live by. The Gurus lived their life by example and we have to live our lives by example, to teach our kids, and show and act the way the Gurus taught us to ... (Kaur et al. 83)”

3. Socio-Religious Profile of Office Bearers of the Khalsa Aid

The researcher interviewed 8 office bearers. Out of these 6 were male and 2 female.. All of the office bearers professed to have Sikhism as their religion and Punjabi as their mother tongue. Except for two office bearers, all others were unmarried. Office bearer designations are given as per the different sectors they work in, i.e. Education and wedding project co-ordinator, Medical project co-ordinator and Disaster manager and documentation co-ordinator. One office bearer was a videographer that showed intent on how Khalsa Aid focuses on documenting their work. It shows the stress and reliance of the organisation on different social media platforms. The organisation also has a dedicated legal affairs team.

4. Codes generated from the interviews of the beneficiaries and the office bearers of Khalsa Aid

The process of the analysis of the interview schedules for beneficiaries and office bearers of EcoSikh started by reading through the transcribed data and identifying preliminary codes. After generating initial codes, the researcher organised them into categories or themes. As coding progressed, the data was continually interpreted within the context of the identified themes. The entire process resulted in the following themes and Codes(sub-themes):

Table 3.1. Themes and codes

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
1	Initial knowledge of Khalsa Aid for the beneficiaries and the office bearers	Social media
		School
		Hospital
		Family
		Friend
		<i>Gurudwara</i>
		Employee of Khalsa Aid
		Media
2	Delivery of the service mechanism of Khalsa Aid and feedback	Direct delivery of material and services
		Paid to school

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Paid to hospital
		Paid to contractor/Service provider
3	Objectivity of operations on the ground	No discrimination
		No target group
		Needy
		Need based intervention
4	Effects of operations of Khalsa Aid on the ground	Economic support
		Educational opportunities
		Life-saving assistance
		Medical treatment
		Mobility improvement
		Gratitude and appreciation
		Positive impact
		Empowerment and economic independence
		Challenges
		<i>Seva</i>
		Local participation
		Positive perception

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Sustainability
		Spiritual satisfaction
5	Relevance of Khalsa Aid in the society	Hopefulness and direction
		Better than Governments
		Upliftment
		Religious and caste inclusivity
		Positive image of Sikhs
		Transformative assistance
		Societal cohesion
		Sustainability of the operations
		Capacity building
		Long term assistance
		Unbiased attitude
		Dedication
		Systematic beneficiary selection
		Multifacet assistace
6	Scope for improvement for the Khalsa Aid	Verification process improvements
		Continue good work

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Appreciation
		Economic support for <i>Amritdhari</i> Sikhs
		Religious camps for youth
		Need based Support
		Youth engagement
7	Decision making process at Khalsa Aid	Centralised decision making
		Engagement of <i>Sangat</i>
		<i>Sangat</i> as stakeholders
		Authority to field managers
		Situational decision making
		Area specific decisions
		Feedback from people
		Senior management involvement
8	Relation of Khalsa Aid with the state	No state involvement
		Permissions from the state
		Cooperation with local authorities
		Limited cooperation with the state

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		<i>Sangat</i> cooperation
9	Khalsa Aid in the face of Modern day challenges	Potential for transformation
		Societal transformation
		<i>Sarbat da Bhala</i>
		<i>Seva</i>
		Broad prospective on <i>Seva</i>
		Intentionality of justice
		Democratic Struggles
		Environmental advocacy
		<i>Sangat</i> participation
		Capacity building
		Volunteer participation
		<i>Dasvand</i>
		Cooperation with local authorities
		Cooperation with other organisations
		Longterm impact
10	Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> according to the beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid	Application of Sikh principles

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		<i>Dasvand</i> as support
		Helping with discrimination
		empathy Unbiased attitude
		Immediate help
		Hopefulness
		Defining <i>Seva</i>
		Universal brotherhood
		Legacy of Bhai Ghanayia <i>Naam Japo, kirat karo, vand chhako</i>
11	Activities of Khalsa Aid and the Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i>	Practice of the Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> Non discrimination
		Intentionality of justice Application of Sikh principles
		Parallel to Bhai Ghanayia
		Equality
		<i>Sarbat da Bhala</i>
		Sangat as stakeholders
		Alignment with <i>Seva</i>

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Social justice
		Need based intervention
		Challenges
		Bureocrazy

5. Themes for the study of Khalsa Aid in Punjab

The following major themes for the study were discovered after reading and re-reading the data from interview schedules of beneficiaries and office-bearers of the organisation.

Table 3.2. Major Themes of the Study of Khalsa Aid

First knowledge of Khalsa Aid for the beneficiaries and the office bearers
Delivery of the service mechanism of Khalsa Aid and feedback
Objectivity of operations on the ground
Effects of operations of Khalsa Aid on the ground
Relevance of Khalsa Aid in the society
Scope for improvement for the Khalsa Aid
Decision making process at Khalsa Aid
Relation of Khalsa Aid with the state
Khalsa Aid In the face of Modern day challenges
Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> according to the beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid
Activities of Khalsa Aid and the Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i>

6. Discussion

The study of Khalsa Aid was conducted with the aim “To investigate the activities of the Khalsa Aid in Punjab, with respect to its analysis and interpretation of the Sikh concept of *Seva*”. Data was collected from the organisation's beneficiaries and office bearers. For data collection, two different in-depth interview schedules were used.

6.1.1. *Geographical profile of the beneficiaries*

Data were collected from all over Punjab, in the case of beneficiaries of the organisation. The beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid are spread all over the Punjab. That is shown in the pie chart. Khalsa Aid has its headquarters in Patiala, Punjab, from where they run their operations in Punjab. All the office bearers of the organisation were interviewed at this location.

6.1.2. *Socio-religious profile of the beneficiaries*

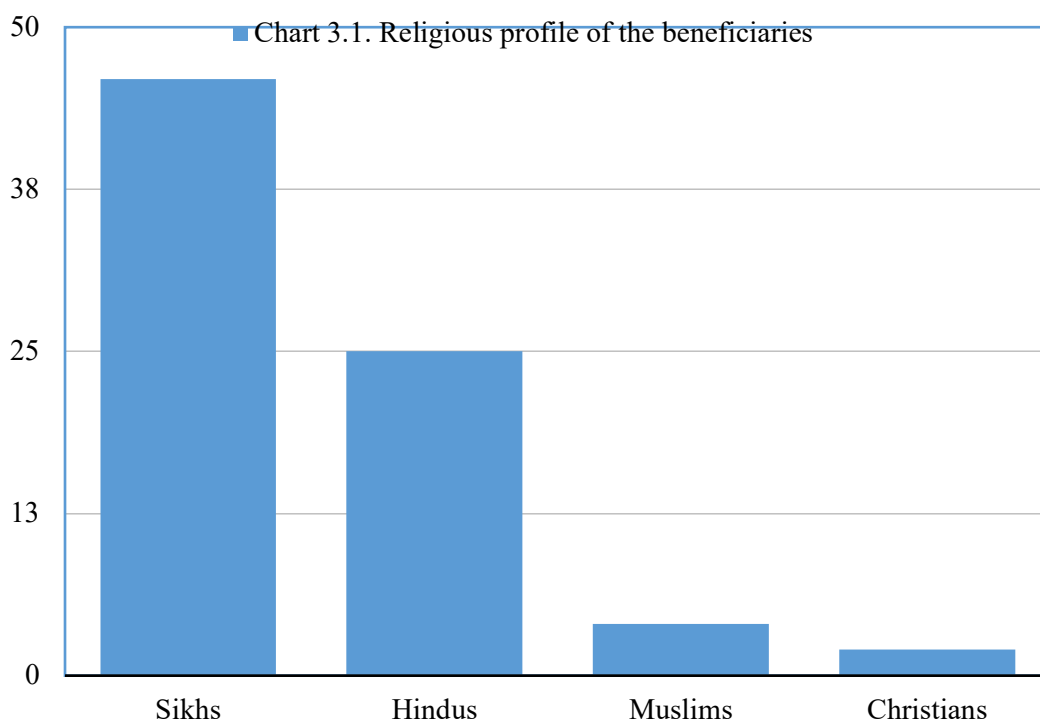
Beneficiaries were aged from 2 months to 67 years. There was a mix of males and females among beneficiaries. Although Sikhs were in the majority, a considerable number of Hindus and a few Muslims and Christians were among the beneficiaries. Almost all other beneficiaries had Punjabi as their mother tongue except for a few. As for marital status, there

were married, unmarried, divorced and widowed beneficiaries. Apart from individuals, the study also Includes services provided to communities and institutions.

Khalsa Aid provided assistance to individuals from different castes. The caste profile of the beneficiaries is as follows: 15 were Mazhabi Sikhs, 14 were Jatt Sikhs, 7 were Brahmins, 6 were Balmikis, 4 belonged to Ramdasia Sikhs, 4 were Muslims, and 2 were Christians. Some respondents did not provide their caste details. The caste category was not applicable to the beneficiary institutions.

6.1.3. Beneficiary classification based on their assistance requirement

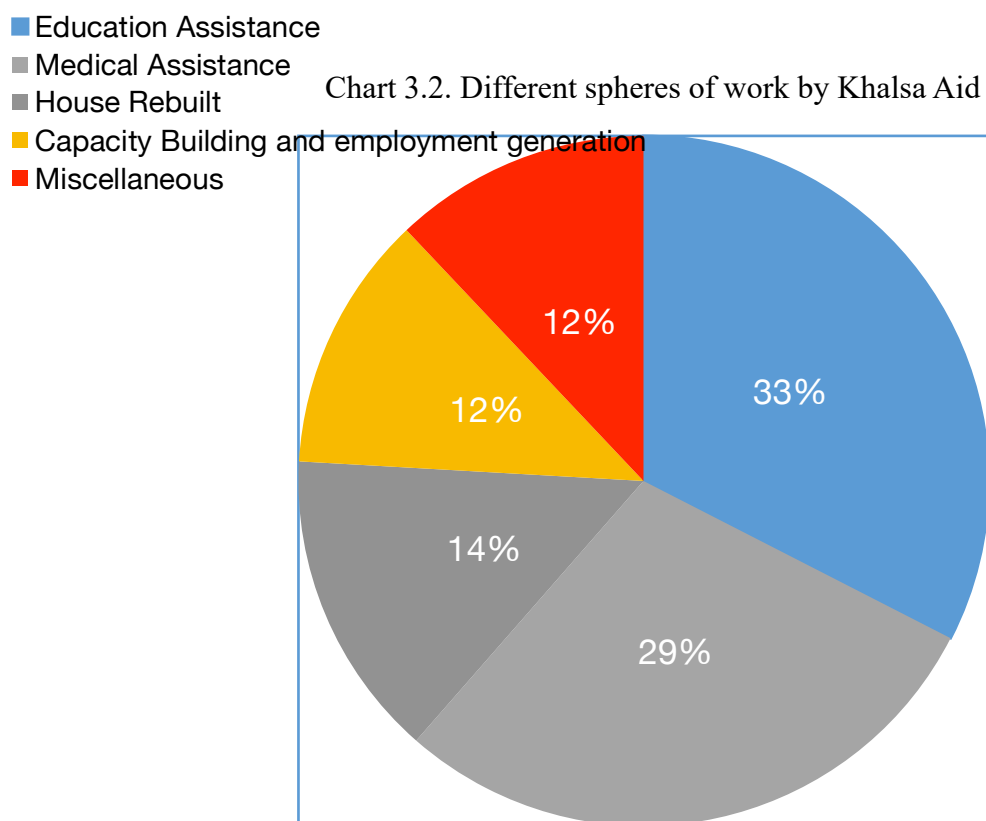
Khalsa Aid caters to several different areas while offering its services. The study has witnessed a need-based intervention by the organisation. Most of the cases featured in this study were related to assistance for education. Khalsa Aid runs its school, Khalsa Aid Dashmesh Public School, in the Sangrur district of Punjab, where there are several cases in which they provide free education to disadvantaged children. The study has also included some cases where assistance has been provided for school and higher education elsewhere. Another area where assistance was provided was health and medical care. In some cases, beneficiaries could not bear the cost of the treatment, while some were provided with oxygen concentrators who had issues related to Covid 19. The study also includes some beneficiaries



who had their houses rebuilt. Some houses were damaged in the Punjab floods in 2019,

whereas some could not afford routine construction and repair. Khalsa Aid has also assisted in capacity building and employment generation for some beneficiaries who were either affected by the worst natural issues or lacked economic impetus in the first place. There were also miscellaneous cases like providing medicine to cows in *Gaushala*, regular ration kits for children at a music academy for disadvantaged children etc. in one case, Khalsa Aid provided Badminton kits to para husband-wife international badminton players who could not afford them. They were going to Africa for their sporting event. These beneficiaries again took help from Khalsa Aid when their mother had a heart attack. They took the help of 65000 rupees that were directly sent to the hospital. Some beneficiaries were public representatives, i.e. village Sarpanch(elected village headmen). They took assistance on behalf of the collective people.

6.2. The first knowledge of Khalsa Aid for their beneficiaries and the office bearers



There were different mediums for beneficiaries to learn about Khalsa Aid. Still, a large majority learned about them through social media. However, some beneficiaries learned about this organisation through friends, social circles or family members. One beneficiary

got aware of Khalsa Aid when they were helping her neighbours. One saw them helping other patients in the same hospital. It was also observed that some institutions like schools and hospitals told beneficiaries about Khalsa Aid keeping in view the economic condition of the service seekers. Some beneficiaries got to know them while they were helping others. This shows the public visibility of Khalsa Aid in this field. Some examples of narrations by some beneficiaries exhibit that it is not hard to encounter Khalsa Aid:

“ Came to know from our neighbours.”

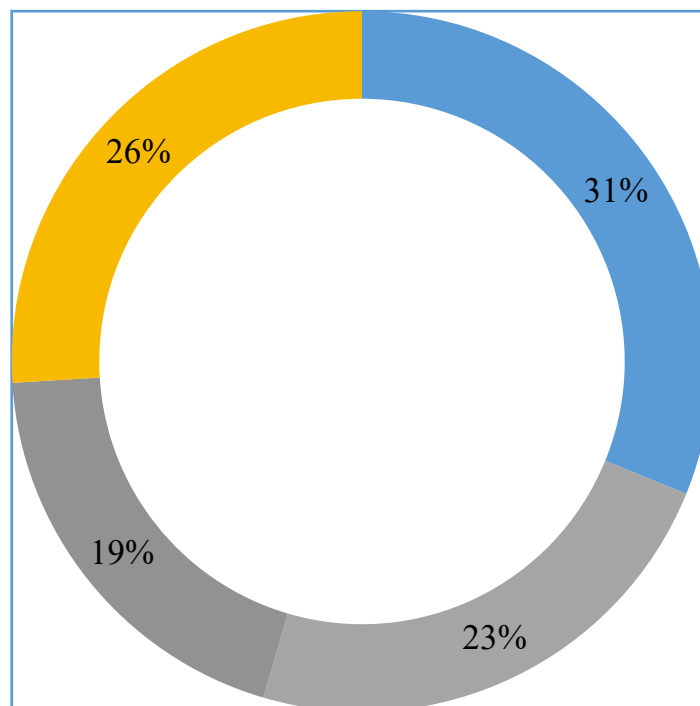
“Hospital told us about Khalsa Aid.”

“ First, relatives told us about them, and then we found their number online.”

“ Came to know about them through social media.”

■ Social Media ■ Friends and Family ■ Through Institutions ■ Others

Chart 33. Discovery of Khalsa Aid for Beneficiaries



“ A friend told us about them. He had taken their help for his son.”

“ School told us about them.”

“ We saw them on Social media.”

“ Someone had told us about them in *Gurudwara*.”

“ They had to our village to help during floods.”

“ We came to know about them through school.”

“ A friend told us about them.”

“ Father was injured; some random Sikh guys were helping us. Then they encountered some issues and gave Khalsa Aid number.”

“ They had helped us in mother’s treatment, so we knew them.”

“ We were taking treatment from Faridkot, and somebody gave the number from there.”

“ We had only one teacher left at our village government school. One parent knew Khalsa Aid, and they asked them for funds to hire more teachers.”

“ They came to our village for flood relief work in 2019.”

On the office bearer side, some first became volunteers of the organisation, then joined them as office bearers. Two got to know them through their friends, too, through social media, one through newspaper articles, and one attended a seminar organised by Khalsa Aid. Here is what they had to say on this:

“ I saw Khalsa Aid first time on social media. Then I attended a program they organised in 2018 with a friend.”

“My friend Gurpreet Singh(Operations Head, South-East Asia) and I were classmates in college, so through him, I knew Khalsa Aid.”

“ I came to know about this organisation through a close friend of mine, who is also my colleague in the medical project(Khalsa Aid).”

“ I was introduced to Khalsa Aid by an employee of Khalsa Aid.”

“ Volunteering since 2018 and joined as an employee in Jan 2022.”

“ Social media(2018 Punjab floods time).”

“ I was aware of the activities of the Khalsa Aid. I saw them performing *Seva* at farmers agitation at Delhi border where I joined them as a volunteer.”

“ Had read about them in a newspaper article.”

“ My friends were attached to this organisation since our college days, I came to know through them.”

This makes it clear that encountering Khalsa Aid in Punjab is not hard. There are all different sorts of ways to know about them, which makes them approachable to people.

6.3. The mechanism of delivery of the services of Khalsa Aid and Feedback

Khalsa Aid delivers welfare assistance in several different fields that, include Medical aid, education aid, house construction for poor families, assistance for families affected by the 1984 Sikh genocide, help for people affected by natural disasters, marriage aid for girls of poor families and employment generation, among others. It was observed in this study that Khalsa Aid's delivery of services mechanism is transparent and well laid out. In most cases, assistance was directly paid to third-party service providers, i.e. material shops, grocery stores etc. Khalsa Aid also arranged mason or contractors in house construction scenarios. In one notable case, where due to the Covid-19 lockdown, *gaushala*(Shelter for stray cows) needed animal medicine, Khalsa Aid arranged and directly provided them with the requested drugs.

According to the office-bearers of Khalsa Aid, they are engaged in several different areas to provide help. Every situation is dealt with, keeping in mind particular needs. They have devised different methods, techniques and procedures to reach all concerned situations. One office bearer said about providing help in natural disaster situations, “In big affected areas we manage with teamwork, local NGOs of that area and government.....” Another office-bearer added that the mechanism for the delivery of services” depends on the situation of the area visited.” “ Activities are done in a systematic manner with the teams according to the correct ground level situation.” One more office-bearer asserted.

Generally, direct beneficiaries of the organisation, ie. Medical assistance receivers, education assistance receivers, house construction/rebuilt assistance receivers etc., are assisted in a pre-determined procedural manner. Upon receiving a request for assistance, the organisation representative visits the home to enquire about the genuineness of the claims of financial conditions and other related aspects. If found, a satisfactory organisation asks for confirmation from local bodies, either village panchayat or municipal corporation. In the end, full or partial assistance is delivered. Some beneficiaries needed oxygen cylinders and physically took them from the Khalsa Aid office. In one case where the beneficiary wanted to start a welding business, was sent a welding set by the Khalsa Aid Partial office.

Similarly, Khalsa Aid never directly handed out money to the end user except for a few exceptions where there was no other option and cases where they were giving monthly pensions. Instead, they pay money to the service provider, i.e. school, hospital, or

construction contractor, in the case of a house rebuild/repair. Some beneficiaries testified this:

“Khalsa Aid sent material. They even paid for labour expenses that included mine too.”

“ They gave me a food van that was made per the specification I gave.”

“They delivered library books themselves.”

“ They arranged everything by themselves. I worked with labour and mason when my house was being built.”

“ They direct send school fees to the school bank account.”

“ Khalsa Aid came to do relief work in our village. They also came afterwards and donated a tractor, seeds for the next crop and other related things.”

“ They direct sent money to the contractor.” (For house roof construction)

“ Khalsa Aid volunteers came to give a sewing machine.”

“ They are paying two girls from our village who are working as teachers in the government school.”

“ Khalsa Aid talked with the hospital and directly paid them money.”

“ They first paid the bills directly to the hospital and also gave us some money as we had nothing left.”

“ They purchased material for sweet shop and fast food business setup and then gave it to us.”

“ They delivered us badminton kits in four days.”

Formal request application



Home visit by a volunteer or team member



Application marked by local bodies



Confirmation by the service provider



Delivery of assistance

It received positive feedback from the beneficiaries for the efficient delivery of service efforts. One beneficiary even said that they are doing the work that the government needs to do. Other beneficiaries saw them as trustworthy and flag bearers of the Sikh community. It is important to mention a case of a beneficiary who was unsatisfied with the assistance provided. The Beneficiary's husband is bedridden due to some physical condition; she needs

help with her children's education. Khalsa Aid provided a partial amount of money required for the purpose, which did not satisfy her.

6.4. The objectivity of operations on the ground

An unbiased, objective approach to Khalsa Aid was seen in this study. In all welfare delivery instances, at no instance place any social, cultural or religious discrimination was observed. At one place, the beneficiary was thankful to the organisation that organisation helped them; despite their Hindu religious background, they needed money for a liver transplant for their children. Another beneficiary (who was not a direct beneficiary) said that he was pleased that the organisation has provided help for the cows that the Hindus give very high status.

When asked about the idea behind the formation of Khalsa Aid, most of the office bearers claimed that the organisation was found to serve humanity without any discrimination. Another office-bearer said that Providing help without bias was the idea behind the formation of this organisation. Some office bearers invoked Guru Gobind Singh's verse "ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਚਾਨਬੋ" meaning recognise the whole human race as one when asked for the ideological background of Khalsa Aid. One office-bearer added that offering *Seva* without any form of discrimination is the ideological background of the organisation. Sikh teachings to consider each living organism as equal is the ideological background of this organisation, another one said.

On the question of target groups, all the office bearers claimed to have no preference for any social or religious group for giving welfare assistance. Anybody can be assisted as per their needs, no target groups, said one office bearer. Another office-bearer claims that needful people are the only target group for Khalsa Aid. Following were the responses of office-bearers in this regard:

The idea behind the formation of this organisation is the "welfare of people, help of people without any consideration of caste-religion, service to humanity." And the ideological background of this organisation is "Recognise the whole human race as one."

"Beneficiaries are selected as per their needs, not based on caste or religion. They should be needful."

"Khalsa Aid does not have any target group."

“Serving the needful” was the idea behind the formation of this organisation, and “preformation *Seva* for humanity without any discrimination” is the ideological background of Khalsa Aid.

“Sikh principles are followed while working in the field. In top priority is to avoid ego while treating everyone as equal. The beneficiary should not get a feeling of inferiority.”

“ We do not have any target group. We go anywhere, wherever needed.”

“ The fundamental idea behind the formation of this organisation is serving humanity.”

“ The ideological background of this organisation serving humanity recognising the whole human race as one.”

“ Basically, I follow Sikh principles while working in the field- help everyone who is in need without the discrimination of caste and creed.”

“ Fundamental principle of this organisation is ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਚਾਨਬੈ.”

“ Every needy person is part of our target group.”

The ideological background of this organisation is “ as in Sikhism, and it is taught to consider each human being as equal.”

“ We don’t have any target groups. We help those in need at the ground level, and it goes on until someone is in need of it.”

“ As in Sikhism, it is taught in every step to consider each living being as an equal, everyone as one race.”

6.5. Effects of operations of Khalsa Aid on the ground

Khalsa Aid had a positive impact on the lives of its beneficiaries that were included in this study. One beneficiary who had no work after the COVID-19 lockdown was assisted in setting up a mobile repair shop. He said it had given him new energy and positivity in life. The same thoughts were conveyed by a handicapped girl who is unable to walk. She has five members in her family, and they had only one room house for all of them. The Khalsa Aid team met her when they were constructing a home for her neighbours. After her request, they built a separate room with an attached washroom. Some team members of Khalsa Aid keep in touch with her. She has also been provided with a tablet computer to get some exposure to the outside world as she leads a static life due to her physical condition. Some beneficiaries added that Khalsa Aid contributes to good optics of the Sikhs worldwide. Following are some of the opinions shared by the beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid:

- Because of the help provided by Khalsa Aid, “ we were saved from a big economic burden, other it would have been very tough.”
- “ Because of the inactivity of the lower body, I could not go anywhere. Now Khalsa Aid has provided me with an electric wheelchair, I can move around.”
- “ 171 children, their families and two teacher and their families, all have benefitted.”(Because Khalsa Aid is paying monthly salaries to two teachers)
- “ Our daughter is able to study because of Khalsa Aid.”
- “ If our children are alive today, it is just because of Khalsa Aid.”

Figure 3.1. Khalsa Aid at farmer’s protest



Source: New Indian Express

- “ Taking inspiration from the Khalsa Aid, we also have started doing *Seva*. ”
- “ I am thankful to Khalsa for their help(helping in our house construction). My husband is suffering from kidney disease. We could not do it.”
- “ People to study books at the library. Some children also come from neighbouring villages.”
- “ I now volunteer with them and also help people on our own whenever possible.”

- “ Now I am motivated to achieve something in life.”
- “ They are like god for us. No one had helped us like this before.”
- “ Our children are studying because of them. One child is now studying in Australia on a scholarship.”
- “ I was the sole breadwinner for my family. Khalsa Aid has helped us with medical treatment. I am very thankful.”
- “ My life is completely changed. We have a roof over our heads. We could not do it.”
- “ They help poor people without any consideration of religion.”
- “ Our child’s life was saved. Now we wish to help others whenever possible.”
- “ They gave me economic independence.”

This may have contributed to the contentment of the office bearers of Khalsa Aid. One Office bearer claimed that the employees and the volunteer of the Khalsa Aid are very well respected in society, and another Office bearer said that he feels privileged with his engagement with the Khalsa Aid. Positive perceptions among people for Khalsa Aid have led to the participation of volunteers and ordinary folks in the organisation's activities. It has been a significant effect of the operation of Khalsa on the ground that has turned broader society into a stakeholder of their activities. Following were other assertions from the office-bearers of the organisation:

“ People appreciate us after receiving assistance. We receive lots of praise.”

“ The love we receive from people” is the most significant achievement of Khalsa Aid. In contrast, the personal achievement for the office-bearer has been “ inner spiritual happiness after helping people”, and he “ cannot describe in words” the satisfaction he feels while working with Khalsa Aid.

“ From the day I work with Khalsa Aid, I see people have been cooperating with us.”

“ With the practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, Khalsa Aid is giving a message of humanity to the world.”

“ We actually receive both negative and positive feedback. The people who have benefitted from assistance receive bless us to the next level, but the people who are not okay or do not receive assistance for some reason certainly give negative feedback.”

Figure 3.2.Khalsa Aid team in flood relief work



Source: IndiaTimes

“..... It(Khalsa Aid) is able to assist in any situation and any affected area.”

“.....people who cannot afford their treatment come to us, when they get treated because of out they bless us a lot..... “

“ Our organisation is helping people get education, health and housing.”

“.....our efforts create long-term impacts on the ground.”

“....giving people hope that Khalsa is there to help” is the organisation's most significant achievement.

The organisation “uplifts society” and “makes the world a better place”. We receive “ the praise“ as feedback.

“ Whenever we work in the period of some natural calamity, local *Sangat* enthusiastically participates with us in all the welfare efforts.....it increases our will and determination to work.”

“ Mostly, our activities are sustainable. We support people in self-employment, getting education and medical treatment. These have positive, sustainable effects in the society.”

“ We never had to find volunteers. Wherever we perform *Seva*, locals also participate with full zeal. They feel happy to perform *Seva* with us.”

“.....it(Khalsa Aid) is playing a crucial role in the upliftment of society.....every human has appreciated our work.....the ideology of one human, one race is spreading globally...”

6.6 Relevance of Khalsa Aid in the society

During this study, it was observed that Khalsa Aid tries to intervene in various spheres to deliver their services as per their organisation's capacity. The organisation benefits society as it offers its services in multiple domains, said one office bearer in the same spirit. In this period(2018-2023), Khalsa Aid volunteers organised *Langar Seva* at the Delhi farmer protest site. They made a temporary shelter for the farmers to stay, provided them with warm clothes in the winter period, and installed a water purification unit, among other actions to help farmers and visitors alike. They also organised temporary schools for slum children living around the protest site. Khalsa Aid stated on its website, while the agitation was ongoing, “..... We are honoured to be supporting the protests on the ground through our India team, who are working to provide Langar and other essential commodities at this time.”

Beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid had to say the following on this:

- “ Khalsa Aid is contributing to the upliftment of the society.”
- “ Khalsa Aid is doing more work than governments.”
- “ They help people from all religious backgrounds.”
- “ They are uplifting poor sections.”
- “ They help everyone without religious bias.”
- “ They reach first, wherever required.....bring social cohesion.....these sort of organisations are needed...they are heroes for us.”
- “ Khalsa Aid is working very hard to help needful people.”
- “ Helping children to get an education.”
- “.....creating good environment in the society.....help without any discrimination.....”
- “There are no biases in their work.”
- “They are the best organisation in this field.”
- “ They are doing the work the governments should be doing.”
- “Khalsa Aid has created positive images of Sikhs.....teaching to help each other.”
- “ The organisation has become a support for poor people in crisis situations.”

- “ Hope of help in any situation...they are filling a gap.....hopeful that they will direct society in a better direction.....no other organisation help like this.”

Similarly, they sent ration aid to the affected people in the Punjab floods in 2020. People were given cattle, seeds, tractors etc., to help rebuild their lives. One office bearer expressed that the organisation benefits society by serving needy people.

These other efforts encouraged one of the Khalsa Aid office bearers to claim that they are improving the world through their actions. Another office-bearer said that because of the *Seva* of the needful population, Khalsa Aid is relevant in society.

“ The contribution of Khalsa Aid to the society is unparalleled.”

“ Help provided for education, health and employment transforms in the lives of beneficiaries.”

“ Khalsa Aid helps everyone in need, whoever comes, without any kind of discrimination.”

“ It is impossible to count the number of people who have benefitted from our activities. Everyone is helped after following the process.”

“ Khalsa Aid delivers assistance like acute medical treatment for the poor and education aid. These have lifelong relevance in the lives of beneficiaries.”

“ I feel a little blessed that I am part of such a great organisation that provides assistance to too many with open hands without any discrimination.”

“ The organisation provides assistance in multiple areas. Therefore, it is definitely beneficial for society.”

“ Our programs are sustainable, like health assistance, education aid, and shelter for the homeless. These initiatives have long-term impacts on the concerned beneficiaries.”

“ It(Khalsa Aid) uplifts the society.”

“ We have no data about the number of beneficiaries, but the number of going up day by day because of the cooperation from the *Sangat*. ”

“ Whenever we offer our *Seva* to anyone, we never see their caste, creed, or class. We just see their need.”

“ We are working for capacity building in the society by helping people start their businesses, helping in getting an education.”

“ Cooperation and love from people have been our biggest achievement. The organisation is considered close to humanity because of assisting people without any discrimination.”

6.7 The decision-making process at Khalsa Aid

The responses from office-bearers of the organisation show that the decision-making process at Khalsa Aid is centralised with the flexibility of granting some authority to the field managers. It was also observed that office-bearers of the organisation were always keen to depict the involvement of *Sangat* in the decision-making process. However, it was never conveyed what is the mechanism of involving *Sangat* in decision-making. It may be assumed that they might be taking their feedback through different mediums of communication. As the previous discussion shows, drawing volunteers for the organisation is effortless whenever required. It shows the popularity of Khalsa Aid with the common population. To maintain such a popular appeal, it is understandable for organisations to make them stakeholders by acting on their feedback. That is also true for approaching people for donations in the form of *Dasvand*. The office-bearers had to say the following when asked about this:

“ As per the situation in the field, according to the feedback from *Sangat*, or as per the policy of management.....”

“ Team leader is responsible for decision-making in the field.....”

“ The decisions are taken by the seniors and the management members after the whole office basis processing is done.“

“ Senior management takes decisions in the organisation.....”

“ Depend on the situation of the area visited.”

“ Whenever we work in natural disaster situations, we make decisions as per the needs, with the discussion with *Sangat*.....” Here, the *Sangat* can be defined as a locally affected population.

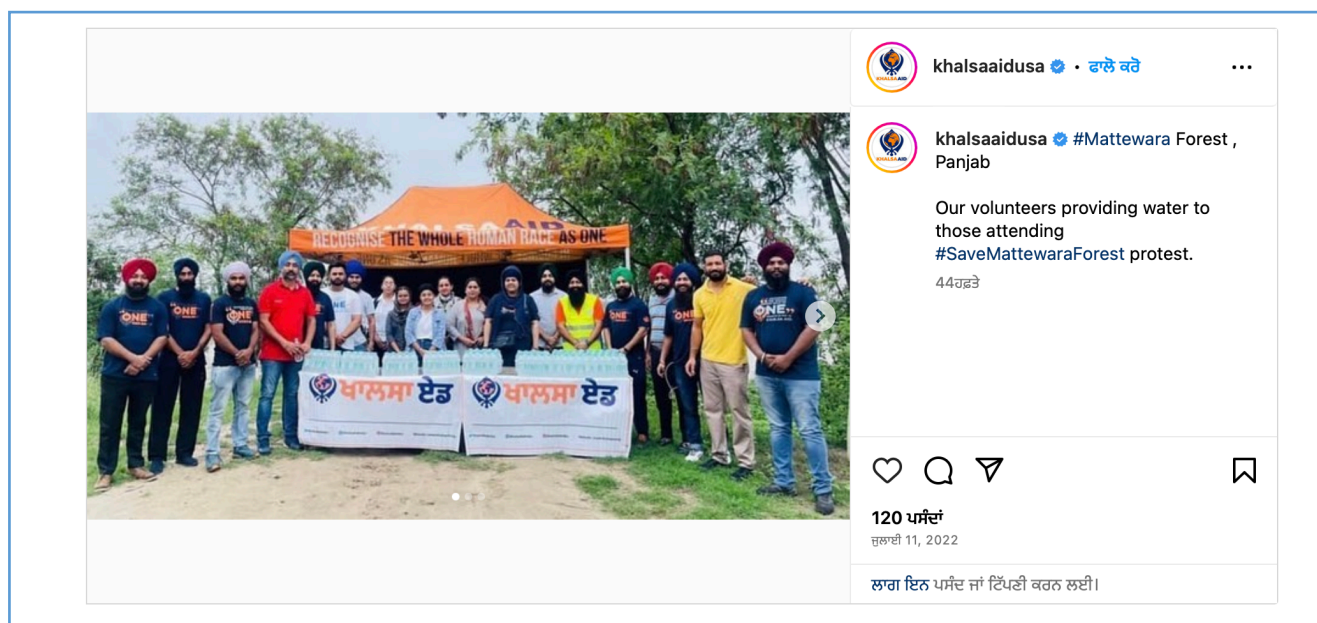
“The team leaders can take decisions according to the circumstances.....managers and admins can be given extra powers.....”

“Teams make all the decisions or with suggestions from field experts.”

6.8 Relation of Khalsa Aid with the State

The relationship of Khalsa Aid with the state can best be described as a working relationship. Sometimes, an organisation needs to get government permissions for its activities, one office bearer told in the interview schedule. On the question of support by the state, an office bearer

Figure 3.3. Khalsa Aid team at Mattewara protest site



Source: Instagram

said that state support for Khalsa Aid activities is limited to permissions only. There were varied responses by the office bearers; the state pays absolutely no role in the activities got Khalsa Aid, an office bearer said. Another said that the *Sangat* is the only stakeholder in the activities of Khalsa Aid; the state is not involved in any form. In Sikhism, *Sangat* is defined as a faithful congregation. These are the people who live life as per Sikh values.

The office-bearers of Khalsa Aid had to say the following when explicitly asked about the role of the state in their activities:

“ There is no role of any single state in this. Khalsa Aid works in the entire country with the help of *Sangat*. ”

“ Yes, sometimes we seek government permissions for some activities. ”

“ There is a minimal role of government in all activities of Khalsa Aid. Sometimes, we need to take permission from the government to provide services to the people. ”

“ State plays no role. ”

“ Whenever we go do *Seva* anywhere, government permissions are granted very quickly. We do our *Seva* with full respect to the local laws. Apart from this, we have no cooperation from governments. ”

“ State or government has no role in any operations. It all is done with the cooperation of *Sangat*. ”

6.9 Khalsa Aid in the Face of Modern-day Challenges

A beneficiary of Khalsa Aid, whose house was damaged and needed repair work that he could not afford, feels that he is an example of how this organisation has the potential to transform the lives of communities in the face of modern challenges. Another beneficiary, who also took Khalsa Aid's help for repair, said that Khalsa is building a system to help those in need in order to transform the lives of communities in the face of modern challenges.

A critical aspect of Khalsa Aid's operations in Punjab has been its cooperation with other organisations and government agencies in the field. Although their relations with the state can only be best described as a working relationship, they could still cooperate with them at critical junctures. These cooperations are helpful in finding ways through routine problems, also setting an example for cooperative coexistence.

According to the office bearers of the organisation, Khalsa Aid is able to generate its funds through contributions from *Sangat*. This form for donations is called *Dasvand* in Sikhism. It is the tenth part of income that Sikhs are required to donate to 'noble causes'. *Dasvand* from the *Sangat* is the source of funding for the organisation, all the office bearers told. Securing the funding from *Sangat* makes them answerable to them, which is a democratic practice. That is also true for the volunteers of the organisation. Office-bearers claimed that volunteers are always ready to help them in the field, and they never had to call them; instead, volunteers approach them.

Khalsa Aid office-bearers claim that their activities are sustainable and have a long-term impact on society. Some cases of beneficiaries testified these claims. One beneficiary who had lost his employment due to COVID-19 listed his requirements for house reconstruction. As a process of enquiry, when a representative of the organisation visited his home, he came to know about his employment status. The applicant was unemployed. The organisation offered to help him set up a mobile repair shop instead. The applicant agreed, and the process was completed. These sorts of instances of capacity building were witnessed in other cases also where Khalsa Aid helped beneficiaries start their own business. A husband-wife couple of para-athletes were given badminton kits to participate in an international event. A music academy for underprivileged children gets monthly rations.

There has been a discussion on the intentionality of justice in this study. The discussion concluded that the Sikh concept of *Seva* should not only be defined as certain acts of kindness as popularly serving *Langar* at *Gurudwara*, cleaning the shoes of the devotees and other related acts. But a broader sense of *Sarbat da Bhala* should be the primary objective

behind any practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Every such act shall conform to the idea of justice for all, which should never have a narrow sense of welfare of the human only. It was observed in this study that Khalsa Aid was present in the fight for environmental rights on two different occasions in Punjab. The first case was of agitation against cutting off an old forest in Ludhiana City of Punjab, and the second case was of a *Dharna* in front of a liquor factory at Zira, Punjab. Agitators claimed the factory had been dumping their polluted water in the ground via borewell without any treatment. In both these cases, Khalsa Aid reached with water, food and other help at protest sites. The tribune reported quoting a protester on 24 December 2022 that they had received “dry ration, mattresses and other daily use items from the Khalsa Aid.” In the end, the government of Punjab agreed with the protesters. It can be rightly concluded that Khalsa Aid was part of these democratic struggles by defining the Sikh concept of *Seva* as an act for the intentionality of justice.

It also came up in the interviews. Local teams take all the decisions with inputs from the *Sangat*, a beneficiary added when asked about the decision-making process in the Khalsa Aid. Field coordinators, with the help from local *Sangat* and organisation management, take decisions together, another office bearer said. However, this study couldn't establish how *Sangat* participates in decision-making. This analysis emanates from the following statements made by office-bearers in the interview schedule:

- “ Wherever we go to perform *Seva*, locals come to volunteer their services with us. They also sometimes become permanent volunteers with us. “
- “ We cooperate with local NGOs and government as per local circumstances.”
- “ When we start any new project, we consult with local organisations to perform our functions.”
- “ When we initiate any new project, donations start coming naturally. Many from *Sangat* give us regular donations as *Dasvand*.“
- “ We cooperate with other organisations during the disaster in the disaster-affected areas.”
- “..... cooperations are made with the local entities. They are the ones they are the ones with more knowledge of their area.”
- “ The funds are secured through donations(*Dasvand*).”
- “ Our operations like health aid and education aid have long-term positive effects on society.”

- “ For every organisation activity, funds come from *Sangat* as *Dasvand*. ”
- “ The ideology of one human, one race is spreading globally. Thus, one day, every human might follow the same.”

6.10 Sikh concept of *Seva*, according to the beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid

The question of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and the activities of Khalsa Aid was fundamental. This study has to answer whether the actions of Khalsa Aid align with the Sikh concept of *Seva*. To answer this question response of the beneficiaries of the organisation is essential. It is important to know what they think is the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Most of the beneficiaries did not respond to this question, and some simply replied, “*Sarbat da Bhala*”, meaning welfare of all. As in the analysis of the researcher, most of the beneficiaries of Khalsa Aid were poor people who lacked the intellectual assertiveness to respond to this question. The responses of the beneficiaries also give a chance to see what the ordinary people of Punjab think about the Sikh concept of *Seva*. The responses of the beneficiaries, as recorded in the interview schedule, are as follows:

- “ Doing noble work is *Seva*. ”
- “ *Seva* is pillar of Sikhism. Sikhism is open to everyone.”
- “ *Seva* is excellent work if done without any bias.”
- “ *Seva* is to help without any discrimination.”
- “ Leading life as per Sikh principles is *Seva*. ”
- “ Help those in need is *Seva*. There are many ways to practice *Seva*. ”
- “ Helping needy people with *Dasvand* money is *Seva*. ”
- “ Selfless service without any discrimination” is *Seva*.
- The Sikh concept of *Seva* is” *Naam Japo, Kirat Karo Vand Chhako*(Mediate on *Naam*, do honest labour, share with others) and empathy for others.”
- The Sikh concept of *Seva* is “to have an attitude of non-biases and never to look down on anyone.”
- “ Whenever there is a problem, Sikhs come to the front to help and perform selfless service. They discriminate against anyone on the basis of caste class. they perform their *Seva*. This is the Sikh concept of *Seva*. ”

- “ They carry the legacy of Bhai Ghanayia Ji.”
- “ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਹਚਾਨਬੋ.” (To consider everyone one and equal)
- “ *Naam Japo, Kirat Karo Vand Chhako is Seva.*”

These interpretations may look divergent, but a close look reveals that equality, sharing, and the development of a non-discriminative attitude are the essence of all interpretations. Beneficiaries talked about treating each individual equally without any discrimination. Some talked about doing honest labour and sharing it with others. All responses give a sense of establishing equality among all. All fourteen responses show that there shall be an intentionality of ‘good’ and justice. Non-discrimination, non-biased attitude and treating everyone as equal also indicate a commitment towards broader Sikh principles, primarily oneness of creation and the creator, one God.

6.11 Activities of Khalsa Aid and the Sikh Concept of *Seva*

This is the most critical question of this study of Khalsa Aid. The beneficiaries answered this question, and they all gave positive responses that the activities of the Khalsa Aid were as per the Sikh concept of *Seva*. One beneficiary said that the Khalsa Aid is channelising *Dasvand* in a good way. A beneficiary even draws a parallel between the Khalsa Aid and Bhai Ghanayia ji, who is seen as an example of *Seva* in Sikh history. He used to serve water to wounded enemy soldiers in war. When Guru Gobind Singh learned about this, he instructed him to also give first aid to the injured enemy soldiers without any discrimination. A beneficiary was thankful to the organisation that they helped them despite him having a Hindu religious background. Non-discrimination was an important condition of *Seva* in Sikhism. Its observation was also observed when asked about any emphasis of the organisation on the socio-religious background of the beneficiaries, and it was found that Khalsa Aid had no preference for any religious or social to assist. This study also saw a Hindu and a Christian beneficiary. An equal treatment of different religious groups was seen. When asked whether the activities of Khalsa Aid are in-line with the Sikh concept of *Seva*, most of the beneficiaries did not respond, and some responded with one word yes and definitely only. The other responses from beneficiaries on how they associate Khalsa Aid with the Sikh concept of *Seva* are as follows:

- “ Yes, they are doing capacity building.”

- “ Khalsa Aid is doing *Seva*. ”
- “ Khalsa Aid follows Sikh principles.”
- “ They are totally in line with *Seva*. ”
- “ The working of Khalsa Aid is as per the Sikh concept of *Seva*. ”
- “ They help everywhere and everyone.”
- “ Definitely, *Seva*, they are channelising *Dasvand* in a good way.”
- “ As Bhai Ghanayia Ji had not seen any religious difference, they, too, don’t see the background of people” while helping.
- “ Yes, their working is as per the Sikh concept of *Seva*. They do selfless service.”
- “ They are working as per the Sikh concept of *Seva*. ”

On the office bearer's side, all the responses for the target group indicated that Khalsa Aid doesn't have any specific religious or social group as their target group, rather a number of office bearers said that the needful people are their only target group; they may belong to any social or religious group. Other significant instances that showed how Khalsa Aid connects themselves with the Sikh concept of *Seva* were:-

- “ Yes, our organisation help everyone in need without considering religion or caste.”
- “ Source of funding for Khalsa Aid is *Dasvand* and donations.”
- “ By helping the people in need, Khalsa Aid shows Sikh principles to the world.”
- “ *Seva* of humanity, helping everyone by treating every religion as equal.....” is the ideological background of Khalsa Aid.
- All the office-bearers claimed that *Dasvand* from *Sangat* was their only funding source.
- Some office-bearers claimed the participation of *Sangat* in the decision-making process.
- All the office-bearers claimed that they do not have any target group.
- “ Khalsa Aid is committed to the principles of Sikhism. We practice *Seva* by not prating any biases against any religious community and following ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਰਚਾਨਬੈ.”
- “.....this organisation must be seen as corresponding to the Sikh principles as its tagline is “ Recognise the whole human race as one.”

- A spirit of “ Selfless service for humanity.” is what he gained personally while working with Khalsa Aid.
- The ideological background of this organisation was to “ practice the Sikh concept of *Seva* for humanity.”
- “ The spirit of helping everyone emanates from the Sikh concept of *Seva* for the organisation.”
- “.....Selfless service to humanity.....” was what the office bearer gained personally while working with Khalsa Aid.
- “ Every activity of the organisation is funded through *Dasvand* from the *Sangat*. We spend every penny of it with utmost care.”
- “Sikhism teaches to serve humanity. This is what we do.”
- “ Whenever we perform *Seva*, we follow the Principle of Guru Nanak to treat everyone equally and help the needful.”
- “ Our actions are as per the Sikh principles because our Gurus have taught us *Sarbat da Bhala*.”
- “.....the Sikh concept of *Seva* is the concept that is followed with the top most priority.”
- “ All our services are delivered per the Sikh concept of *Seva*. ”

Khalsa Aid is an organisation that provides assistance to individuals of different faiths in various locations and areas. Their funding comes solely from *Dasvand*, a portion of income donated by Sikhs for charitable causes. However, they have not disclosed the amount they receive in monetary or other means from Punjab. Like many NGOs, Khalsa Aid faces challenges such as a lack of transparency, centralisation, and bureaucracy. However, they involve the *Sangat*, or community, in decision-making and consider their suggestions. While this study could not establish the mechanism of decentralised decision-making, Khalsa Aid's work aligns with the Sikh concept of *Seva*, which emphasises justice and does not discriminate in any form of service. They provide assistance in education, health, relief work, and employment opportunities and have even provided oxygen concentrators during the Covid-19 pandemic. They have supported agitators fighting for social and environmental rights by organising *Langars* and other forms of assistance. Khalsa Aid does not discriminate

and has helped individuals of different religions, including Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.

6.12 Suggestions for improvement to Khalsa Aid

Beneficiaries and office bearers of Khalsa Aid pointed out some areas that need to improve. One beneficiary became unemployed due to the Covid-19 lockdown. His house condition was not good, so he contacted Khalsa Aid volunteers for the renovation work. They visited him and came to know about his employment situation. After their deliberations, it was decided that the organisation would help him set up a mobile repair shop, a capacity-building exercise. Both parties agreed. To complete this process, beneficiary claims were to be verified. The verification process went through the local MC(municipal councillor). The beneficiary said he felt uncomfortable in this verification process as MC is a political person. He expected electoral favours in return for his signature on the verification documents. The beneficiary suggested that the organisation should adopt an alternative verification mechanism as it was uncomfortable for him.

One other beneficiary felt that the organisation should focus more on helping Sikh families, which is a testament to the fact that it provides assistance to other religious groups. One more suggestion was for the organisation of area-based volunteers. Many beneficiaries did not give any suggestions, and some appreciated the organisation even in suggestions. Other responses from the beneficiaries, when asked to give suggestions to the organisation, were as follows:

- “ Only those people should be helped who actually need that. There should be proper verification before providing any assistance.”
- “ The organisation is doing *Seva* in a good way.”
- “ Economically weaker *Amritdhari* Sikhs should be helped.”
- “ We have no words to thank them.”
- “ Although they are already doing good work, still there should be more focus on the education of poor children.”
- “camps for religious Sikh education should be organised for the children.”
- “ No need; the organisation is doing good work.”
- “ I just want to appreciate them.”

- “ They should plan something to engage youth.”
- “ They should find alternative ways to verify recipients, MC and Sarpanch are elites.”
- “ Very thankful for what they are doing.”
- “ They shall continue what they are doing.”
- “ I'm not capable enough to suggest them. Still, this organisation is improving with time.....”
- “ We pray for them.”
- “ I don't want to give any suggestion to them. They are doing excellent work.”

An office bearer also suggested that the organisation should digitise its volunteer data. Another office-bearer suggested that Khalsa Aid should adopt technological advances to streamline their services to the group. Office-bearers of the organisation expressed their satisfaction with the working of Khalsa Aid. It can be seen from the following opinions conveyed by them on this issue:

“ No(No suggestion), changes are made from time to time.”

“ Since the day of inception, Khalsa Aid has been improving every day. Whenever we find shorting comings and inaccuracies, they are dealt with after properly discussing the issue.”

“ At this point, this organisation is doing great, in my point of view.”

“.....no improvement needed.”

“improvements keep occurring from time to time. These changes occur with our and *Sangat's* suggestions.”

“ As far as improvements, technological advancements can be made according to the scientific methods.”

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of Khalsa Aid's activities reveals a profound adherence to the Sikh concept of *Seva*, reflecting the organisation's dedication to lived religion which has gained prominence by emphasising the actual experiences of religious individuals. This approach has been instrumental in understanding how individuals explain, understand, and incorporate religion into their daily lives. Rooted in the existentialist branch of phenomenology, the lived religion approach views religion as an embodied tool that allows individuals to interact with the external world. Khalsa Aid, with its motto of "Recognise the whole human race as one,"

exemplifies the practice of religion in daily life through its work for the welfare of people in various crisis situations.

Khalsa Aid is a non-profit organisation founded in 1999 by Ravi (Ravinder) Singh. The organisation's foundation rests on the concept of *Seva*. Beneficiaries consistently praise the organisation's non-discriminatory, unbiased approach to assisting. The organisation supports individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, exemplifying the Sikh ideal of treating all with equal respect and compassion. This ethos is mirrored in historical narratives such as the account of Bhai Ghanayia Ji, who rendered aid to wounded soldiers without regard for their affiliation.

An important aspect of Khalsa Aid's success lies in its funding mechanism – *Dasvand* – a practice where Sikhs contribute a portion of their earnings to charitable causes. This practice not only sustains the organisation but also engenders a sense of accountability to the *Sangat*. The involvement of *Sangat* members in the decision-making process fosters transparency and echoes democratic principles.

Khalsa Aid's work extends far beyond conventional charity. It addresses a spectrum of modern challenges, from disaster relief to education and employment opportunities. The organisation's response to environmental and social rights concerns underscores its commitment to *Seva* as an embodiment of justice and equality. Its assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, from providing oxygen concentrators to supporting agitators fighting for rights, illustrates its adaptability and readiness to aid during crises.

This study also reveals challenges, including issues of centralisation and bureaucracy that some beneficiaries perceive. Nonetheless, the organisation's commitment to the Sikh concept of *Seva* remains steadfast. Khalsa Aid has demonstrated its potential to bring about transformative change, promoting cooperative coexistence among different groups through its actions.

In the end, Khalsa Aid epitomises the Sikh ideal of *Seva* by providing assistance without discrimination, working for justice, and striving for the welfare of all. Its remarkable impact on individuals and communities, its alignment with Sikh values, and its proactive engagement in diverse challenges exemplify a profound commitment to humanitarianism. Khalsa Aid's legacy, founded on the Sikh concept of *Seva*, stands as an inspiring testament to the power of *Seva* in creating a more equitable and just world.

8. Summary

This chapter starts by exploring the significance of the lived religion approach, which has gained prominence by emphasising the actual experiences of religious individuals. This approach has been instrumental in understanding how individuals explain, understand, and incorporate religion into their daily lives. Rooted in the existentialist branch of phenomenology, the lived religion approach views religion as an embodied tool that allows individuals to interact with the external world. Khalsa Aid, with its motto of "Recognise the whole human race as one," exemplifies the practice of religion in daily life through its work for the welfare of people in various crisis situations.

Founded in 1999 by Ravi (Ravinder) Singh as a non-profit organisation, Khalsa Aid operates beyond the conventional boundaries of religious sites, representing a new form of religious intervention. By engaging in acts of *Seva* in different scenarios, they blur the established dichotomy between the sacred and the profane.

To examine Khalsa Aid's welfare efforts in the context of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, the researcher utilised interview schedules containing questions for both office bearers and beneficiaries of the organisation. Through these interviews, the researcher found that the organisation is providing assistance to all social and religious groups while helping in the fields of education, health, disaster relief etc. They have been able to generate hope of finding help in crisis situations.

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The EcoSikh in Punjab: A Case Study

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the environmental concerns of Sikhism, placing particular emphasis on the active role played by EcoSikh in addressing the pressing environmental crisis. Through an analysis of EcoSikh's literature, we gain valuable insights into their approach and motivations, rooted in Sikh ideals and the concept of *Seva*. EcoSikh effectively aligns environmental issues with Sikh beliefs in maintaining ecological balance and ethical behaviour. This chapter underscores the profound importance of *Seva* as a core principle guiding EcoSikh's efforts to combat environmental degradation and climate change. Interviews with beneficiaries and office-bearers further illuminate how EcoSikh embodies *Seva* in its environmental protection initiatives, garnering support from both the community and government authorities.

EcoSikh was established in response to the partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) with the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE). The Long Term Plans for Generational Change Programme was launched in 2009 to assist major religious traditions in developing long-term plans to improve their relationship with the environment and focus their investments on environmental protection. A gathering of representatives from all nine major religions was held at Windsor Castle, United Kingdom, to discuss practical strategies for the environment. Dr Rajwant Singh of SCORE represented the Sikh community at the event. The establishment of EcoSikh is a direct outcome of this gathering, and the organisation's representatives refer to it as the "Sikh response to climate change."

EcoSikh has established a reputation for its active campaigns promoting environmental protection and tree planting. They have showcased their work on social media and in academic circles (Prill; Mooney). It presented a formidable challenge to categorise the endeavours of EcoSikh as a manifestation of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, given that ecological conservation is not customarily linked with this sacred Sikh principle. In this chapter, we aim to bridge this knowledge gap by delving into EcoSikh's practices and examining the environmental wisdom found in Guru Granth Sahib.

2. EcoSikh invoking Sikhism for environmental action

EcoSikh is very clear about its motivation. Although their name, EcoSikh, leaves no doubt about them being a Sikh organisation, the mission statement is more lucid and transparent proof of their motivation and goals:

“EcoSikh connects Sikh values, beliefs, and institutions to the most important environmental issues facing our world. We draw on the rich tradition of the Sikh Gurus and the Khalsa Panth to shape the behaviour and outlook of Sikhs and the world, ensuring that our deep reverence for all creation remains a central part of the Sikh way of life.” (EcoSikh)

EcoSikh describes itself as “a response from the Sikh community to the threats of climate change and the deterioration of the natural environment.”(EcoSikh) EcoSikh is a recognition of religious inspiration for individuals and communities. Both individuals and communities are driven by different inspirations to conduct their actions in individual and community lives. It has been noted that considering environmental crisis only as techno-scientific was an error. Instead, this problem also has an ideological and philosophical element in it. Taking nature and its resources as consumable entities meant for human progression has problematised human relationships with nature. It is of utmost importance to see the relationship of individuals and communities with nature in the face of growing environmental concerns. Religious potential for shaping behavioural patterns for sustainable ecological lifestyles is highly critical. Admitting their environmental work under the umbrella concept of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, EcoSikh has declared that “Compassion, Humility, Contemplation, Contentment and Service (*seva*) without expecting any material or spiritual reward”(EcoSikh), are necessary for indulging oneself with the spiritual realm of Sikh faith. Through the practice of *Seva* with other ideals of the Sikh faith, one can “remain aware of the earth and operate in the mundane material world, with the object of transforming and spiritualizing it into a higher plane of existence. In this spiritual state, individuals are motivated by an intense desire to do good, transforming their surroundings.” Apart from clearly communicating their motivations for their environmental service, EcoSikh has tried to confer spiritual meaning to their work.

The Sikh statement on climate change by the EcoSikh organisation reaffirms the criticality of the environmental situation with the Sikh ideal for nature and the role of the Sikh concept

of *Seva* in tackling climate change. It also underscores the need for an integrated approach while proceeding with this concern.

“Through His teachings, our first guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, explained that the world we humans create around ourselves is a reflection of our own inner state. So as we look around at our wasteful and polluting practices, we obtain an insight into the chaos within us. When the tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, founded the Khalsa in 1699, he charged Sikhs to challenge any force that threatened the wellbeing of others. He made us warriors with the responsibility to protect the vulnerable. Today, the Earth is vulnerable because of climate change and because people have not protected their environments. Today, it is time to act and show that we are true warriors of the Khalsa. We must make amends with the Earth. Our Mother Earth, Mata Dharat, has gone through undeniable changes at the hands of humans. It is abundantly clear that our action has caused great damage to the atmosphere and is projected to cause even more damage if left unhandled. Since 1980, the average temperature of the earth’s surface has increased drastically. Glaciers and Arctic ice are melting, and sea levels are rising – threatening plant and animal species and hurting the poor people of the world first. As Sikhs, we appeal to lawmakers, faith leaders, and citizens of the world to take concrete action toward reducing carbon emissions and protecting the environment. And as Sikhs we pledge to take concrete actions ourselves. We have a responsibility to follow our Gurus’ teachings and protect the vulnerable.

Governments have struggled to find consensus and have been slow to reduce the effects of releasing greenhouse gases and excessive carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. As climate change and thoughtless practice continue to threaten food and environmental security worldwide, governments have to put environmental issues at the center of security concerns. We should not only hope they will do so; we have to take the initiative to push our own governments to act.

Sikhs should be front-runners of change. *Seva*, the practice of selfless service, is a main tenet of Sikhism. Sikhs can perform *Seva* by reducing our carbon footprints, recycling, investing in renewable energies, and being mindful of where our food comes from. Gurdwaras, as beacons of righteous thought, must be eco-friendly. Our religious spaces, when in harmony with nature, will allow Sikhs to be more spiritually connected to Waheguru, the creator of all.

Respect for nature is ingrained in Sikh teachings. As Guru Nanak Ji said: *Pawan Guru pani pita mata dharat mahat* (Air is our teacher, water our father and the great sacred earth is our mother). If we act now, we can protect our atmosphere, water resources and earth for ourselves and for future generations. To achieve internal peace, we must first look at the environment in which we live.”(EcoSikh)

The organisation EcoSikh highlights the connection between Sikhism and the environment. As per Sikhism, the external world is a reflection of our inner state, which is a belief that originates from Guru Nanak Dev. Additionally, Guru Gobind Singh Ji charged Sikhs with the responsibility to protect the vulnerable, making them warriors for the safety of others. Today, climate change caused by human actions has made the earth vulnerable. Therefore, it is the duty of Sikhs to urge global leaders and fellow citizens to reduce carbon emissions and protect the environment. Sikhs should also commit to leading by example through *Seva* by decreasing their carbon footprints, promoting renewable energy, and practising mindful consumption. As spiritual centres, Gurdwaras must adopt eco-friendly practices to strengthen their connection with nature and *Waheguru*, the creator, as respect for nature is a fundamental principle of Sikhism. Taking action now can safeguard our environment for present and future generations.

3. Contemporary environmental crisis and tackling approaches

It is important to note that climate change was declared the ‘defining issue of our time’ by former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, in 2014. This proclamation is particularly relevant given the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations body responsible for assessing climate change science, as outlined in their 2013 report.

“It is extremely likely that more than half of the observed increase in global average surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in greenhouse gas concentrations and other anthropogenic forcings together.”

The United Nations itself started a discussion on sustainable development, especially by the World Commission on Environment and Development, which defined sustainable development in one of its reports. Sustainable development was defined as “ to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs”(Castro 196). There is sufficient evidence that rapid industrialisation and other related

economic activity have resulted in environmental degradation, so a rethinking of modernisation theory and industrial development is the need of the hour. It is a highly critical situation because environmental damage has the potential to cause ultimate destruction to life on Earth (Smith 151-170).

The element of greenhouse gases points the finger at the culpability of human activity for climate change and environment-related issues. As we are discussing the role of faith and religion in tackling this problem, in the same spirit World Economic Forum has noted in its 2014 document:

“Faith permeates our world, providing a moral and ethical compass for the vast majority of people. Evidence shows that beyond individual religious practice faith is increasingly moving into the public sphere and may affect various aspects of economic and social life. More and more often, people of faith are becoming key partners in organisations aimed at tackling a varied set of global challenges – a sign of the important role of faith leaders and communities in bringing about social change.”

The notion of human struggle against nature is highly problematic. It is also against the basic tenets of the Sikh faith. Harmony with nature and sustainability of life while contributing to human rights, social and economic rights, and very important in this day of age, environmental rights are preached in Sikhism in a temporal context (Singh). It is a reflection of the integrated approach to preserving the environment as it finds the poorest, most vulnerable, and marginalised sections of society as most affected by environmental problems. For this integrated approach, Singh refers to Guru Granth Sahib:

"Henceforth such is the Will of God: No man shall coerce another; No person shall exploit another. Each individual has the inalienable birthright to seek and pursue happiness and self-fulfilment. Love and persuasion is the only law of social coherence." (SGGS, Ang 74)

The current times require a sustainable development approach rather than accelerated economic growth that ignores the huge looming ecological crisis because of climate change and global warming. Tackling this situation needs a shift to green expansionary policies that “..... would entail a drastically changed transport system, energy policy, housing policy and creation of what are called green jobs. (Singh, 39)” However, the profit-centric nature of the capitalist economic model (O’Connor) continuously attempts

to stimulate demand that is fulfilled by utilising natural resources. For such a situation, Singh (CNAES) looks for a political remodelling of the governance apparatus to 'Eco-Socialism'. At the same time, he also points out the limitations of such an approach in present times.

Sikhism sees environmental issues as a problem of human development and social justice. Poverty is a significant cause of the exploitation of natural resources in the developing world; hence, without the proper consideration of these factors, it will do more harm than good. A life conducted as *Seva* by feeling love, care and justice through eliminating otherness presents a possibility of a life close to the ideals preached by Sikh Gurus (Singh SACFTEIP).

EcoSikh, although labelling environmental catastrophe as a climate emergency, stresses not just a reactionary response to the situation. They have stated clearly that "The crisis requires a going back to the basic question of the purpose of human beings in this universe and an understanding of ourselves and the Divine creation" (EcoSikh).

4. Deep ecology

At the intellectual environmentalism scene, another trend that has presented similar sentiments is deep ecology. It has tried to problematise the contemporary social model as a suspect for the larger problem while questioning the validity and scope of reformist environmentalism. The entire socio-political-economic model of 'running the world' has been questioned.

" Nature, in this paradigm, is only a storehouse of resources which should be "developed" to satisfy ever increasing numbers of humans and ever increasing demands of humans. Science is wedded to technology, the development of techniques for control of natural processes is an end in itself. The new is valued over the old and the present over future generations. The goal of persons is personal satisfaction of wants and a higher standard of living as measured by possession of commodities"(Devall 301).

Deep ecology thinkers have identified environment reformist movements as something seeking to make changes to improve conditions on the environmental front without raising questions about the present dominant model of living and treating nature and its resources. Whereas deep ecology seeks a unity, metaphysical unity of nature and humans, that could identify both entries as one for the creation of an eco-philosophy (Devall 301-303).

The continuous propagation of environmental issues has resulted in a global sensitivity towards ecological crises. Mass awareness of such issues resulted in a mass movement placing this matter in civil and formal political circles. Today, many political outfits are engaged in parliamentary politics around the world. These political parties are centred on the idea of ecologism that holds the “sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life. (Dobson, 3)”, it is believed that this form of socio-political system would consequently have a more meaningful and fulfilling life compared to the present form of material consumption-based society.

Sikh children raised with continuous exposure to *Gurdwara* and its activities learn about the importance of the Sikh concept of *Seva* (Mooney 332). Through *Seva*, an attitude toward service and welfare develops among children from an early age. With the ideal of oneness and belief in every which way presence of god, an attitude of service and welfare reaches nature. Mooney argues further that Sikhs are engaged in multiple spheres of life, seeking improvement. For that, he invokes JS Grewal

“a rigorous analysis of the compositions of Guru Nanak reveal that there is hardly anything in contemporary politics, society or religion that he finds commendable”

Sikhism preaches a life fully engaged with the outer world. The outer world in the Sikh worldview is part of ‘the one’, which is not categorically different from the self as the self is also a part of that ever-present universal ‘the one’. Guru Nanak calls ‘the one’, *ikonkar*, that is present everywhere and beyond. It is the creator of everything and also present in every form in its creation (SGGS Ang 1). Hence Sikhs do not see the environment as a passive entity present out there to be exploited for worldly gains but as a residing place for the creator, *ikonkar* (SGGS Ang 469). Hence Sikhs identify different aspects of life as interrelated to each other and equally crucial for the sustenance of life. Categorical separation of spheres of life in a broader context is unacceptable in Sikh tradition. An understanding from Guru Granth Sahib reveals that there has been persistence in the singular origin and creator of all universal elements, as in the following verses

ਪੁਰਖਾਂ ਬਿਰਖਾਂ ਤੀਰਥਾਂ ਤਟਾਂ ਮੇਘਾਂ ਖੇਤਾਂਹ ॥

ਦੀਪਾਂ ਲੇਆਂ ਮੰਡਲਾਂ ਖੰਡਾਂ ਵਰਭੰਡਾਂਹ ॥

ਅੰਡਜ ਜੇਰਜ ਉਤਭੁਜਾਂ ਖਾਣੀ ਸੇਤਜਾਂਹ ॥

ਸੇ ਮਿਤਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਸਰਾਂ ਮੇਰਾਂ ਜੰਤਾਰ ॥

Men, trees, sacred shrines of pilgrimage, banks of sacred rivers, clouds, fields,

Islands, continents, worlds, solar systems, and universes;

The four sources of creation - born of eggs, born of the womb, born of the earth and born
of sweat;

Oceans, mountains, and all beings - O Nanak, He alone knows their condition. (SGGS,
Ang 467)

“The world, like all creation, is a manifestation of God. Every creature in this world, every plant, every form is a manifestation of the Creator. Each is part of God and God is within each element of creation” (Environmental Theology in Sikhism). The environmental concern of the Sikh community is not a reactionary move because of the circumstances of present times but a way of life. In a similar fashion, Nicola Mooney (316) argues while commenting on the environmental activism of Sikh millennials that:

“Sikh environmental engagements may also demonstrate the notion of *mīrī-pīrī* or the inseparability of spiritual and temporal domains and thus the interdependence of the sacred and the social. I also suggest that in as much as they are diasporic, global, and civically engaged in their transnational adoptive homes, the environmental activism of Sikh millennials relate not only to global millennial concerns but also to their understandings of Sikhism and prevailing issues in Punjab.”

Understanding Sikh ideals has moved contemporary Sikh generations towards helping the cause of environmental protection and preservation. A close look at Sikh activity in the environmental sphere reveals a role of personal and communal subscription to the Sikh concept of *Seva*. EcoSikh, in their organisational literature, explicitly mentions verses from *Gurbani* as their inspiration for their work. It is recognition of the fact that “the contemporary transnational capitalist-technocratic society, with its profit interests which claims to have mastered the techniques of controlling and conquering Nature, is, unfortunately, faced with the problems of environmental degradation, a basic threat to the global living” (Lourdunathan 168). EcoSikh has stated in its vision statement:

“Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first embodiment of Divine Light in the Sikh tradition, laid the foundation for a sacred vision for the environment when he composed the *salok* as second Mehala:

ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ ॥

(Air is the Guru, Water the Father, and the Earth is the Great Mother)”

Scholarly discussions on the environmental credentials of Sikhism pointed out the presence of similar ideals in Sikh doctrine. Recognising Sikhism as a ‘lived tradition,’ i.e. the practice of the sacred values in daily life, Susan E. Prill has identified three aspects of Sikh tradition, based on which environmental claim of Sikhism is justified

“(1) that passages in the gurbani, particularly Guru Nanak’s famous verse ‘Pavan Guru Pani Pita’, suggest that environmental sensitivity is an integral part of the Sikh faith, (2) that Guru Har Rai expressed a desire to attend to nature and Sikhs who choose to do so are thus honoring his teachings and (3) that the Sikh ideals of *Sarbat da Bhala* (the well-being of all) and especially *seva* (service) should include social and environmental advocacy” (223).

The Sikh concept of *Seva* is essentially a multifaceted umbrella religious moral-ethical ideal for maintaining a balance of life. It shall not be limited to any specific domain of life but rather be recognised as an overarching ideal for the viability of existence. There are limitless possibilities of forms of practice for *Seva*. As per “Sri Guru Granth Sahib, man and the material world are seen no more as external to each other, but as being involved in inter-dependent relationships, reciprocally conditioning each other's life. (Singh ECISGGS)”

Sikh faith directs humans not to practice any domination over nature. Instead, they shall lead a life of harmony with nature. Any attempt to tame natural forces without concern for the sustainability of life on Earth can end up inviting disasters. Nature will be able to regenerate itself, but humans will have to face ultimate consequences. Nature has been declared as a spiritual teacher in Guru Granth Sahib as God is revealed through it.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਸਿਨਾਖਤੁ ਕੁਦਰਤੀ ॥ (ਮਹਲਾ 4, ਪੰਨਾ 141)

O Nanak, the True One is the Giver of all; He is revealed through His All-powerful Creative Nature. (Mehl 4, SGGS, p 141)

Sikh Gurus have shown us the way by exemplifying a harmonious relationship with nature by making *Sarovars*(Sacred pools) in Gurdwaras. That is supposed to support marine life, maintain the water recharge cycle, and promote hygienic living among devotees. Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai Ji, asked Sikhs to plant trees and build Kartarpur, a city of gardens and parks(Singh ECISGGS).

ਫਰੀਦਾ ਖਾਲਕੁ ਖਲਕ ਮਹਿ ਖਲਕ ਵਸੈ ਰਬ ਮਾਹਿ ॥ (ਮਹਲਾ 5, ਸਗਗਸ, ਪੰਨਾ 1381)

Fareed, the Creator, is in the Creation, and the Creation abides in God. (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 1381)

Lourdunathan has found that environmental degradation is not just a technical problem but is deeply enshrined in the philosophical realm. He found that 18th-century humanism catered only to the interests of Western scientific men and dominant classes. Understanding of nature emanating from such an ideology had an ‘in-built insensibility to ecology’. There was a metaphysical exclusion of nature. He stressed that there should be attempts to find ideological grounds for sustainable life. EcoSikh, in similar lines, recognises that “We are called to the vision of Guru Nanak, which is a world society comprising God-conscious human beings who have realized God. To these spiritual beings, the earth and the universe are sacred..... Guru Nanak, in his philosophy, states that the reality that humans create around themselves is a reflection of their inner state. The current instability of the natural system of the earth – the external environment of human beings, is only a reflection of the instability and pain within humans. The increasing barrenness of the earth’s terrain is a reflection of the emptiness within humans”(EcoSikh).

ਦਾਣਾ ਹੋਇ ਅਨਾਰ ਦਾ ਹੋਇ ਯੁੜਿ ਯੁੜੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਸੈ।

ਹੋਇ ਬਿਰਖੁ ਹਰੀਆਵਲਾ ਲਾਲ ਗੁਲਾਲਾ ਫੁਲ ਵਿਗਸੈ।

ਇਕਤੁ ਬਿਰਖ ਸਹਸ ਫੁਲ, ਫੁਲ ਫਲ ਇਕਦੂ ਇਕ ਸਰਸੈ।

ਇਕਦੂ ਦਾਣੇ ਲਖ ਹੋਇ ਫਲ ਫਲ ਦੇ ਮਨ ਅੰਦਰ ਵਸੈ।

ਤਿਸੁ ਫਲ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵਈ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਫਲੁ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਿ ਰਸੈ।

ਜਿਉ ਜਿਉ ਲਯਨਿ ਤੇੜਿ ਫਲਿ ਤਿਉ ਤਿਉ ਫਿਰਫਿਰ ਫਲੀਐ ਹਸੈ।

ਨਿਵ ਚਲਣੁ ਗੁਰ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਦਸੈ ॥੧੧॥ (Bhai Gurdas ji, vaar 4)

“The seed of pomegranate merges into dust by becoming dust. The same becoming green is adorned by flowers of deep red colour. On tree, thousands of fruits grow, each fruit being more delicious than another. In each fruit reside thousands of seeds produced by one seed. As there is no dearth of fruit on that tree so the gurmukh is never at loss to realize the delights of the fruits of nectar. With the plucking of the fruit the tree again and again, bursting into laughter bears more fruits. Thus the great Guru teaches the way of humility.” There are repeated instances of ecological metaphors in different Sikh pieces of literature. The above verse is from a ‘vaar’ of Bhai Gurdas ji, where he describes how nature has no dearth of ‘fruits’ for humanity, except they bow in humility to receive such ‘fruits’. That teaches a lesson about sustainability and co-existence. (Singh ECIIGGS)

In such an attempt, Lourdunathan found eco-sophism enshrined in Sikhism. He described eco-sophism as a “philosophy of ecological harmony and equilibrium”. Ecosophism involves the development of a religious attitude of sensitivity to nature. This approach believes in a holistic approach to the universe with ‘nature-eco-spirituality’. It is a religious and philosophical worldview that provides a “face-to-face relation with nature”. The ecosophical model has designs for the “liberation of life” that include nature, women and other unprivileged sections of society. Holistic justice is central in the ecosophical approach with the norms of cosmic unity and biocentric equality. It sees human and non-human lives as ‘intrinsic value’ for life on earth. “People and Nature is the core of ecosophia(ism)” (Lourdunathan 169).

ਸਭਨਾ ਜੀਆ ਕਾ ਇਕੁ ਦਾਤਾ ਸੇ ਮੈ ਵਿਸਰਿ ਨ ਜਾਈ ॥੫॥

There is only the One, the Giver of all souls. May I never forget Him! (SGGS Ang 2)

So it is clearly narrated in Guru Granth Sahib that only one creator has created everything establishing an equality of origin. Creation is omnipresent and sustainer of the world. “He creates, animates, sustains Nature. Nature is the dwelling place of God, and hence reverence to Nature is a must.” Hence “Nature is not a mere object that could be utilized to human ends – but it has intrinsic dignity and value.” Lourdunathan has found repeated instances where the Immanence and presence of God are stressed in its creation itself, proving that “the Sikh religion imparts the spirit of self-righteousness to the entire subject of Nature.” Bertolani (5) has also noted similar thoughts with respect to marginals in Sikh thought; she has primarily focused on women. She said, “The divine is understood as transcending every binary and category, moving beyond an exclusively masculine-gendered image of a monotheistic, patriarchal God. Sexism and taboos against women, female pollution, menstruation, and sexuality are rejected, and the female body is celebrated in its creative power.”

It is repeatedly asserted in the Sikh tradition that there shall be no escape from worldly reality. In fact, it is described as the place to earn good deeds and have one’s place with God (SGGS, Ang 757). The human body has been described as a bridge to reach the ultimate. It has been declared as a space where “dwells the Beneficent Lord, the life of the world who cherishes all. Ever illustrates is the body bride....meditates on the Name (SGGS: p.754).”

For Lourdunathan, “in the ecosophical language, the Sikh religion, with its affirmation of the earth as Divine, calls for continuous consciousness of its harmony and unity. That the earth cannot be consumed for selfish purposes, but conserved – on the basis of need and not greed.” It all arises from the understanding that

“Amidst (creation) He fixed the earth, a place for righteous action” (Japji: SGGS-7). According to the Sikh belief the world is Holy, and one’s relation to it must also be holy. The whole world is Holy. Be you in its purity absorbed. By discarding of egoism does one find acceptance at God’s portal (SGGS: p.142). By this portrayal of the world (earth) as a place for righteousness and purity, Guru Nanak insists that we relate with others with equality and justice. And that there is a possibility of a future for the history of Nature, for it has a spiritual meaning. The monistic denial of the “reality” of the world, for the Sikh religious mind, is inadequate and un-Godly.”

5. Socio-Religious Profile of Office Bearers of the EcoSikh

The researcher interviewed 7 office bearers. Out of these 6 employees, 4 were male and 2 female. One of the officer bearers was a stake holder All of the office bearers professed to have Sikhism as their religion and Punjabi as their mother tongue. Except for one female office bearer, all others were unmarried. Office bearer designations include a media manager. He manages social media accounts and media that are uploaded there. It shows the stress and reliance of the organisation on different social media platforms. The organisation also has a liaison officer. One of the office bearers was an operation head in India. Other positions were Campaign Manager, Finance and Accounts Executive and Operations Manager.

6. Codes generated from the interviews of the beneficiaries and the office bearers of EcoSikh

The process of the analysis of the interview schedules for beneficiaries and office bearers of EcoSikh started by reading through the transcribed data and identifying preliminary codes. After generating initial codes, the researcher organised them into categories or themes. As coding progressed, the data was continually interpreted within the context of the identified themes. The entire process resulted in the following themes and Codes(sub-themes):

Table 4.1. Themes and Codes

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
1	Discovery of EcoSikh for their beneficiaries and office bearers	Friend and relative referrals
		Word of mouth discovery
		Events and workshop participation
		<i>Gurudwara</i>

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Social media
		Seminar
		Volunteer to office bearer transition
2	Delivery of the service mechanism of EcoSikh and feedback	Micro forest plantation
		SOP for plantation
		SOP for Selection
		Expression of interest
		Location survey
		Monitoring and care
		Nursery
		Feasibility study
4	Limited exposure and reach of EcoSikh outside social media	Common lands plantation
		Emphasis on Social media
		Workshops and seminars
		Need for direct contact
		Cost effective communication
		Social events participation

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Referrals from outside India
5	Effects of the operations of EcoSikh on the ground	Environmental <i>Seva</i>
		Dedication to environment
		Motivating for environmental protection
		Greening Punjab
		Improving air quality
		Nature preservation
		Visible changes on ground
		Fight against deforestation
		Spreading awareness
		<i>Oxyzen langar</i>
		Tangible results
6	Relevance of EcoSikh in the society	Environmental action
		Bringing positive change
		Benefitting birds and nature
		Spreading awareness
		Helping in environmental protection
		Inspiring others

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Changing perception
		Urban forestry
		Youth engagement
		Environmental protection through Sikh ideals
		Contribution to earth
		Concept of <i>Seva</i>
7	Scope for improvement for EcoSikh	Increase ground presence
		Organise small camps
		Include fruit trees
		Fund raise
		Plantation of community lands
		Centralising forest data
8	Decision making process at EcoSikh	Reaching out to more people
		Centralised decision making
		Board involvement in decision making
		Routine decisions by field managers
		Macro operational working

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
		Centralised command structure
9	Relation of EcoSikh with the state	State adoption of programs
		Suggestions to state
		Cooperation with state
		Politicians are appreciative
		Refrain from activism
		Bureaucracy is cooperative
		Challenge of government approval
10	EcoSikh in the face of Modern day challenges	Focus on awareness and sustainable development
		Fight against deforestation and pollution
		Religious messaging
		Efforts for society and nature
		Policy influence
		Tangible results
		Sikh response to climate change
		Application of the Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i>

Sr. No.	Themes	Codes(Sub-themes)
11	Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> according to the beneficiaries and office bearers of EcoSikh	Complete dedication
		Serving nature and environment
		Working for overall betterment
		Holistic understanding
		Fight for right cause
12	Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> according to the beneficiaries and office bearers of EcoSikh	<i>Seva</i>
		<i>Seva</i> of environment is second to god
		Practicing <i>Seva</i>
		Dedication to environment is <i>Seva</i>
		Beneficial for mother earth
		Activities of EcoSikh are <i>seva</i>
		Divergent opinion

7. Themes for the study of EcoSikh in Punjab

The following major themes for the study were discovered after reading and re-reading the data from interview schedules of beneficiaries and office-bearers of the organisation.

Table 4.2. Major themes of the Study of EcoSikh

Discovery of EcoSikh by their beneficiaries and office bearers
Delivery of the service mechanism of EcoSikh and feedback
Limited exposure and reach of EcoSikh outside social media
Effects of the operations of EcoSikh on the ground
Relevance of EcoSikh in the society
Scope for improvement for EcoSikh
Decision making process at EcoSikh
Relation of EcoSikh with the state
EcoSikh In the face of Modern day challenges
Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> according to the beneficiaries and office bearers of EcoSikh
Activities of EcoSikh and the Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i>

8. Discussion

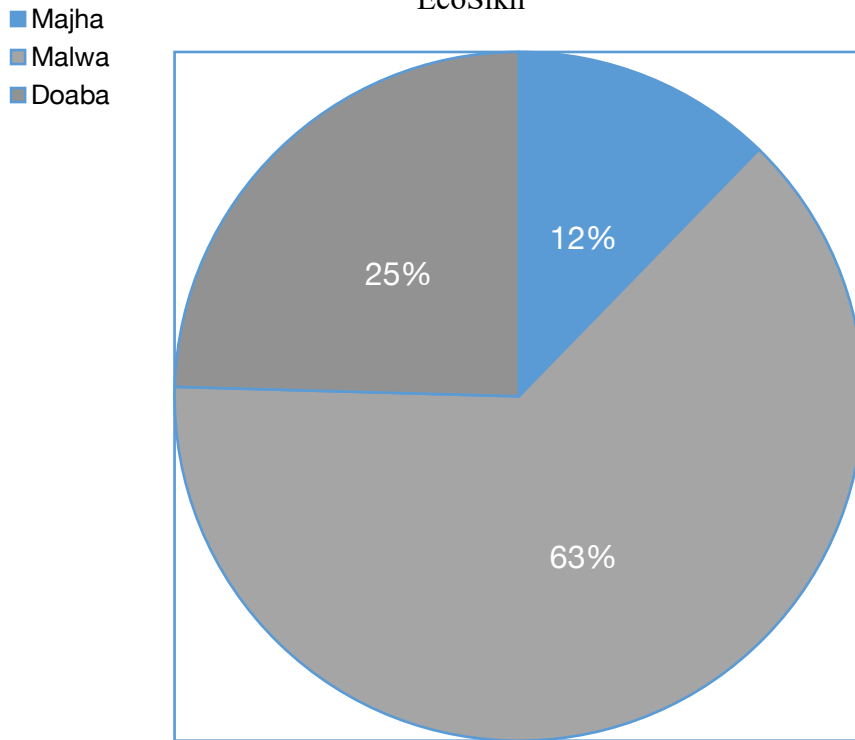
This study of EcoSikh was conducted with the aim “To scrutinise the activities of the EcoSikh in Punjab, with respect to its analysis and interpretation of the Sikh concept of *Seva*”. Data was collected from the organisation's beneficiaries and office bearers. For data collection, two different in-depth interview schedules were used. The total number of samples for the study was 63, of which 56 were the beneficiaries and 7 were the office bearers.

8.1.1. Geographical profile of the beneficiaries and office bearers

Data was collected from all over Punjab, in the case of beneficiaries of the organisation. There were geographical disparities as some areas have more representation compared to others. That is shown in the pie chart. This disparity results from the concentration of work

by the organisation in some areas of Punjab. Economic explanations of this fact are the availability of spare land for plantation purposes and less dependency of land owners on land assets for economic survival. EcoSikh has its headquarters in Ludhiana, Punjab, from where it runs its operations in Punjab. All the office bearers of the organisation were interviewed

Chart 4.1. Geographical Profile of the Beneficiaries of EcoSikh



at this location.

A total of 57 beneficiaries were interviewed for this study. Thirty-six were from the Malwa region. Geography and population-wise, Malwa is the largest region of Punjab. 14 out of 22 districts of Punjab are in Malwa. Malwa's largest work concentration is in Ludhiana, where they have 20 different micro forest plantations. EcoSikh has its headquarters in Ludhiana, so they are most active there. The Doaba region of Punjab, which has four districts, accounts for 14 beneficiaries, whereas Majha, which also has four districts, accounts for seven beneficiaries, that are 12% of the total.

8.1.2. Socio-Religious Profile of the Beneficiaries

All the beneficiaries of EcoSikh in their Guru Nanak Sacred Forest program were male. Research could not interview any female beneficiary in this program. This fact also shows the gender-based situation of land ownership in Punjab; as for the micro forest plantation, the availability of land is the primary requirement. Wherever the plantation was on common

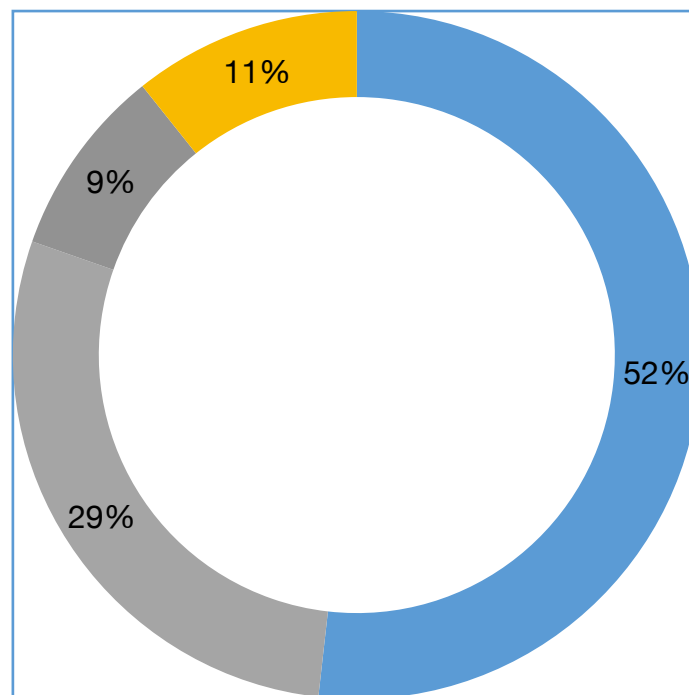
community lands, in all the cases, contact persons were men too. There was a religious mix of beneficiaries belonging to both Sikh and Hindu religious traditions. Still, a large majority believed in the Sikh faith. All the beneficiaries had Punjabi as their mother tongue. The majority of the beneficiaries were married.

In terms of the caste profile of EcoSikh's beneficiaries, 32 were Jatt Sikhs, 2 were Khatri Sikhs, and 1 was a Jain. Some Khatri Sikh and Jain respondents, as well as a few Jatt Sikh respondents, mentioned their caste, while others chose not to reveal it. There was also some institution whose caste detail was not applicable.

8.1.3. Beneficiary classification based on assistance requirement

EcoSikh is only active in the field of environmental protection and awareness. Clean Air Punjab, Green Gurudwara and plastic-free *Langar* are some of the significant advocacy campaigns that EcoSikh is running. All the beneficiaries of this study were provided consultations and services for the plantation of small forests. The organisation calls them Guru Nanak Sacred Forest., a small plantation of trees at private and communal sites. These are micro forests of local species. In Punjab, the organisation plants 62 species of native trees. Density and specific species are decided as per local conditions. EcoSikh said that the species list had been prepared with research through forest surveys with assistance from available research material and experts in the field. They added that all the material used in the process is organic. EcoSikh uses the “Miyawaki Methodology” for the plantation of small micro forests. For the technical know-how of this methodology, EcoSikh has collaborated with Afforestt Association, based in Bangalore, India. Originally, Akira Miyawaki, a Japanese botanist, was the inventor of “Miyawaki Methodology”. EcoSikh follows the “Miyawaki Methodology” principles of developing native vegetation species from seeds. For this purpose, the organisation has set up their nursery in Ludhiana, Punjab. Apart from plantations at communal and private sites, EcoSikh has also planted “Guru Granth Sahib Bagh”. It is “.....the first ever *Gurbani*-based garden that will exhibit the entire range of trees/plant species referred to in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib along with the related *Gurbani* quotes. Guru Granth Sahib Bagh covers 5-acre land at a historical Gurdwara, Gurusar Sahib, in Patto Hira Singh village in Moga, Punjab. This garden is dedicated to Guru Nanak Dev ji on his 550th Gurburab, and it will serve as a live workshop, an exclusive educating centre for our children, youngsters and elders to bridge the gap between Sikhism and Nature. It will attract people of all faiths & religions, environmentalists & nature lovers,

Chart 4.2. Discovery of EcoSikh by beneficiaries



scholars & professionals, devotees and all those who seek personal and spiritual benefit.”
(EcoSikh)

To develop a rationale for Guru Granth Sahib Bagh, EcoSikh cites Punjab's “critical environmental situation” that affects Sikhs and other state populations. The situation is that “tree cover has reduced to 3.5% in Punjab, which ideally should be 33%.” The organisation identifies it as not just an ecological crisis but also a crisis of moral degradation,” In the last eight years, we have learnt that our current generation hasn’t valued nature and environment the way our Gurus have taught us.” Thus, for EcoSikh Guru, Granth Sahib Bagh is not just a tree plantation. The organisation aims to teach society and its youth about the relationship between nature and the *Gurbani*. Youth and society are the beneficiaries of this project if we follow the words of EcoSikh.

While working with the individuals and communities, EcoSikh rhetorically claims to be working for a bigger goal: to benefit the entire flora and fauna. They underpin sustainability and balance of life on earth. “The chief beneficiary is Mother Earth.” was the response of one offices-bearer on being asked about intended beneficiaries.

8.2 The first knowledge of EcoSikh for their beneficiaries and office bearers

There were different methods of discovery of EcoSikh for the organisation's beneficiaries and office bearers. EcoSikh does have a significant social media presence that was visible in the study. 29 out of 56 beneficiaries discovered EcoSikh through the Internet and social media. Two beneficiaries learned about them through their friends and the other two attended seminars organised by the organisation. Some respondents did not remember exactly how they had discovered EcoSikh. The fact that many respondents had discovered EcoSikh through social media shows the extent of the organisation's social media presence. The organisation has hired one employee to manage its social media accounts. There was also a dedicated person for media design and video editing. Catchy social media content motivates viewers to engage with EcoSikh for similar services. While asked whether the organisation's help was one-time, some beneficiaries responded that the organisation keeps in touch. 'Remaining in touch' means sending the organisation photos and videos of the micro forest, most of the time. However, beneficiaries also asked about problems in the growing and later phases of the plants. Social media is a significant interaction medium for EcoSikh to engage with the members of the public. Along similar lines, the organisation also attract volunteers" through the website and social media platforms, offline events, through existing volunteer network", an office bearer added while responding to the question about finding volunteers. Another said," They always approach us by taking information from social media" about the volunteers. "Volunteers apply on their own on our website. Sometimes they drop us by at the office", one more office-bearer added. The organisation also invite volunteers to join them as an office-bearers said," Usually, volunteers themselves approach us or/ we put it on our social media".

The situation was different for the office bearers as they all discovered EcoSikh through friends, relative word of mouth or an event organised by the organisation. One office bearer, now operations head in India, joined EcoSikh as a volunteer first and became an office bearer. He discovered EcoSikh "through Facebook" and met Ravneet Singh (project manager at that time) at a Gurudwara. Another office bearer, who is a campaign manager for "Clean Air Punjab", an advocacy campaign run by the organisation, came to know about this organisation through a friend. Again, another office bearer, working as a Finance and Accounts Executive, said her cousin was a part of this organisation.

Figure 4.1. The researcher with a beneficiary at a micro forest



Source: Photographed during the fieldwork

Workshop and other events organised by the organisation attract beneficiaries and potential employees; as an office bearer working as a liaison officer said, “I met them on Saras Mela in 2018 at PAU”. PAU refer to the Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana. Another office-bearer came to know about EcoSikh through “word of mouth”.

8.3. The mechanism of Delivery of the services of EcoSikh and feedback

EcoSikh plants micro forests in the space provided by the beneficiaries. It has developed an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for conducting plantations. In all the cases, beneficiaries have expressed their interest in the said plantation. After the expression of interest, organisation representatives visit the proposed place and survey the location for sunlight and air availability. If the designated location is acceptable on these parameters, the organisation collect soil and water sample that are critical for any plantation to succeed. One organisation representative shared that usually, they first visit the intended site for the plantation. With their general sense of location, they decide whether that place needs soil and water testing. They only go for testing if that is required. After that, they coordinate with the intended beneficiary for a suitable date for the plantation.

Expression of Interest



Location Visit



Water And Soil Testing



Day/Date Coordination for plantation



Plantation

Once the necessary steps have been completed, EcoSikh provides saplings and at least two experts for consultancy and the required machinery. Sometimes, the beneficiaries arrange for the necessary machinery and labour locally. EcoSikh charges a fee for the saplings, consultancy, and other services, which vary based on the location and related factors. Their nursery is located at Sajjan Casting Industries in Ludhiana, from where they transport the saplings to various destinations.

The organisation keeps in touch with the beneficiaries to check on the health of the plantations. On one instance where some plants from a plantation were suffering from some disease, they paid extra attention to diagnose the problem and treat the suffering plants. A beneficiary also said that organisation representatives visit his place every six months only to click pictures and make videos for promotional purposes.

EcoSikh also plants micro forests at common communal sites like cremation grounds, Schools etc. At these places, the SOP is a little different. Organisation representatives are either approached by public representatives, or they approach them for plantation at a commonplace. EcoSikh charges a sum of money for saplings, consultancy or other related

services when they deal with individual landowners, but they usually do not charge anything while working with the communities.

Office-bearers of the organisation added the following points on the delivery of services and selection of the beneficiaries:

“ We do a feasibility study. We have our SOP for selection.”

“ We have a dedicated team for every project and do take the help of volunteers.”

“ We have various programs and projects which target people of all age groups. The campaign is done in schools, colleges and corporates.”

“ We follow the standard operating procedure to select the location for the plantation.”

“ We have devised an SOP to manage and arrange events, and we strive to follow that to the point.”

8.4. Limited exposure and reach of EcoSikh outside social media

It was observed in this study that EcoSikh has limited reach outside social media and other online platforms. Beneficiaries of the organisation asserted that they had little knowledge of other activities of the EcoSikh; the organisation was not known in their circles. One beneficiary said the organisation is well known on social media but unknown on the ground. A number of different beneficiaries suggested that EcoSikh should try and engage with more people on the ground.

EcoSikh conducts workshops and seminars addressing the "climate crisis" to discuss the environmental challenges and suggest efforts that individuals and communities can undertake, according to one of their office-bearers. They also participate in social events to connect with a larger audience, although only a few respondents were introduced to the organisation through these events. Some of these responses were:

“ I attended a workshop organised by the organisation at Khalsa College, sector 26, Chandigarh.”

“ I was convinced at a workshop to have a small forest on our place.”

EcoSikh's advocacy campaigns have contributed to its visibility, as several interviewees in this study stated that they followed the organisation's social media presence on different online platforms. Some beneficiaries shared their thoughts on this trend:

“ I used to follow them on social media and saw plantations. I also got motivated for that.”
“ I saw their videos on Facebook of small jungle plantations, and we invited them for that.”
“ I saw a small forest plantation on social media.....”
“ Came to know about EcoSikh while randomly scrolling through YouTube.”

These individuals have also motivated others to engage with the organisation, as many beneficiaries have said that they came to know about this organisation through their friend

Figure 4.2. The researcher with a volunteer at a micro forest



Source: Photographed by the researcher

circle. As the plantation of the micro forest is subject to the availability of spare land, many social media users who had become aware of this organisation motivated others for the plantation when they did not have availability of the land themselves. It shows a positive aspect of running public relations(PR) campaigns through social media. Virtually existing social media has become a tool for physical existence. Organisation representatives cited the cost-effectiveness of this communication medium when asked about this. Similarly, some beneficiaries have added:

” My friend encouraged me to plant a small jungle plantation.”
“I saw a small forest in my friend’s place, so I also wanted one.”
“ I wanted a small forest on our land, and my relative had motivated me.”
“ My friend used to work with EcoSikh. He had told us about them and their project of Guru Nanak Sacred Forest.”

There were also some instances where people living outside India introduced and motivated their friends and family members to the micro forest plantations, as some respondents have asserted:

“ A friend now living in Canada knew them (EcoSikh).”

“A friend now living in Canada told us about a micro forest plantation at the *Ashram*.”

“ A relative, now living in a foreign country, told us about the organisation.”

8.5. Effects of the operations of EcoSikh on the ground

The beneficiaries of EcoSikh have a positive perception of the impacts of the organisation's operations. Beneficiaries added that the organisation is making efforts to improve the environment of Punjab. Micro forest plantation, which the organisation named Guru Nanak Sacred Forest, was seen as contributing to the land, air and overall nature. One beneficiary, who is incredibly enthusiastic about birds, was pleased that he saw birds visiting his home

Picture 4.3. Micro Forest in the Initial Stage



Source: Photographed by the researcher

daily because of the plantation. Beneficiaries were also optimistic that the organisation was creating awareness about environmental protection. Although one beneficiary was also pessimistic about EcoSikh, he said the organisation is a commercial entity working for profit. He further added that NGOs have no accountability. One more beneficiary added that they

Figure 4.4. A beneficiary with a micro forest



Source: Photographed by the researcher

do not do anything for them; they ask the end user to arrange everything, and if they arrange something, they charge money for that. Following are some of the comments made by the beneficiaries of the organisation:

“ They are dedicated to the environment.”

“ EcoSikh is doing *Seva* for the environment. It is a duty for everyone.”

“ EcoSikh is motivating people for environment protection.”

“ They are making Punjab greener.”

“ They are improving the air of Punjab. “

“ Working (EcoSikh) for nature preservation and environmental protection.”

“ Producing (EcoSikh) results for the environment.”

“ They (EcoSikh) are making contributions to the fight against deforestation.”

“ They (EcoSikh) are creating awareness for environmental issues.”

“ Working for nature and the environment is the need of the day. They are doing so. It is good. It is good for everything: land, air, birds, weather etc.”

“ They (EcoSikh) are performing *Seva* by bringing greenery by planting more trees.”

“ We feel happy that we have done good work by planting trees.”

“ They (EcoSikh) are doing the most important task of this age.”

“.....micro forests planted by the organisation are also beneficial for a wide range of species.”

Office bearers of the organisation also made claims about how the organisation has made their impacts on the ground. An office bearer added that EcoSikh is contributing to the

sustainable development goals of the United Nations with their efforts for environmental protection and awareness. Another office-bearer saw that “EcoSikh is providing tools and solutions to stop climate change. This is how it benefits society”. Pavneet Singh, operations head in India, said that EcoSikh was formed with the idea “to promote environmental action taking inspiration from Sikh history and scripture.” and their “...activities affect all in a positive manner.....” It has benefitted “thousands of people.” He added that they have been able to “bring about practical change on the ground.....” and he felt “extremely satisfied...” while working with this organisation. Other office-bearers brought the following points to this discussion:

“The ideology behind EcoSikh is to inculcate the principles of environment protection and create awareness about climate crisis.....we have planted 400+ forests and reach over a million people through our awareness campaigns.....our organisation provides unlimited oxygen langar to the *Sangat*.”

“The organisation plants forests to fight climate change and runs campaigns to spread awareness.....one tree consumes one ton of CO₂, and we have planted lakhs of trees so far.....everyone who associates with us gets to benefit in some ways, but the larger part of nature is getting benefitted.”

“.....our jungle benefits 22 families, our reach is about one million....with forest, we are managing all three aspects - Air, water and soil preservation.”

“We have planted 400+ forests in the last three years. The beneficiaries are all the people living in these areas.....our results are tangible. You can see the quality of air, low temperature and biodiversity in our forests. It is the need of the hour.”

8.6. Relevance of EcoSikh in the society

Recognising EcoSikh as an environmental organisation that works to protect and preserve the environment through the teachings of Sikhism, beneficiaries of the organisation had positive feedback for their contribution to society. A beneficiary said, “EcoSikh is spreading awareness about nature and the environment in society.” “.....the organisation is making a positive contribution to the socio-cultural scenario of Punjab by contributing towards the environment”, was the response from another beneficiary. Beneficiaries were optimistic and favourable in their response to the efforts being made by the organisation for environmental

Figure 4.5. The researcher at a grown micro forest



Source: Photographed during the fieldwork

protection and awareness. Some of the other beneficiaries have highlighted the following things:

“ They(EcoSikh) are bringing positive change.”

“ Not just we but entire nature and birds have benefitted.”

“ Spreading awareness about environment protection.”

“ They(EcoSikh) are motivating others for environment protection.”

“ Helping in environment preservation efforts.”

“ They(EcoSikh) are doing necessary work for the environment and nature.”

“ They(EcoSikh) are performing their duty for the environment.”

“ EcoSikh is inspiring others for environment protection.”

“ They (EcoSikh) are very relevant in today’s day of age.”

“ Today's environment is in a bad state. We see lots of pollution and other bad effects on the environment. The state of the environment affects our physical and psychological state also, and they are trying to change our environment for good so that it would contribute positively to our society.”

“.....changing perception of people towards environment.”

“ The youth of our village now regularly meet here(micro forest location) to discuss further plans for the greening of our village.”

“NGOs work for their profit, and their motive is not *Seva*. Real social work is in religious places(institutions). They(EcoSikh) work less and do more promotions.....NGOs have no accountability.....only volunteer work is effective, not paid employees.”

“ After their continuous efforts air of Punjab will become cleaner. More birds will survive.”

“ They(EcoSikh) are making a small effort. They cannot do everything by themselves.....but they can set an example for others.”

“ They are telling people about Sikhism and the environment, which is good for society.”

Office bearer also tried to assert claims for the contribution of EcoSikh to the larger society;

an office bearer said, “EcoSikh works for cleaner air, which is beneficial for overall society”

Another office-bearer added that “EcoSikh produces tangible results in the form of low temperature and biodiversity, so is relevant for the society.” The office bearers have tried to

substantiate their claims by referring to their activities as in line with the UN sustainable development goals. ‘Sustainability and contributions to nature’ were the themes of assertions

for EcoSikh’s claim for relevance to society by their office bearers. These were some of the additional points respondents added to the discussion:

“ Very content in contributing to this organisation and society.”

“ Integrity, honesty, selfless service, respect towards nature, equality and sacredness of all life” are the principles that EcoSikh follows to run “ awareness drives, environmental action,

Figure 4.6. A volunteer watering a micro forest



Source: Photographed by the researcher

public movements towards environmental issues” in the socio-political domain.

“.... to save and conserve our mother earth....” EcoSikh “.....plant mini forest/ urban forest....” Run “ ...awareness campaigns like Sikh Environment Day, Clean Air Punjab, etc.....youth engagement programs.”

8.7. The decision-making process at EcoSikh

This specific question was to be answered by the office-bearers of the organisation. It was discovered from the responses provided by the office-bearers of the organisation that EcoSikh has a centralised decision-making mechanism. When asked about the decision-making process, office bearers most prominently replied that board members were the decision-makers in the organisation. One office bearer named the organisation president the sole decision maker, whereas another named field managers to be responsible for the decision-making process. Following were some of the responses given by the office-bearers in this regard:

“ Most of the decisions are taken by the President of EcoSikh, with project heads via meetings.”

“Decisions are taken by the board and communicated to employees and volunteers. Daily decisions are taken by people working in respective fields.”

“ Policy made by the board and the President; daily decisions made by the managers.”

“ Decisions are taken by board members in board resolutions.”

“We have a board that decides all these things.”

While discussion with the organisations' beneficiaries shows that the field decision for plantation-related issues was made by concerned managers in the field, it was seen that the organisation has not gone for soil and water testing in every case; field managers have decided for testing based on their past subjective understanding of water and soil quality of particular site of a plantation. Similarly, objective conditions on the ground have dictated what equipment and material will be arranged by the beneficiaries and what will be provided by the organisation. This relates to the on-ground operation decision-making. Policy and macro operational working of the organisation have a central command structure.

8.8 Relation of EcoSikh with the State

It was observed that EcoSikh maintains cooperative relations with the state. The Punjab state has adopted some programs of the organisation as their own like they adopted the Guru Nanak Sacred Forest program by EcoSikh on the 550th birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The state also adopted some awareness initiatives by the organisation. An office bearer, now

operations head in India for EcoSikh, added, “EcoSikh give suggestions to the state and makes them aware of relevant environmental issues. The state sometimes adopts our policies.” The nature of cordial relations of the organisation with the state was further categorically clarified by the office bearer, saying, “EcoSikh maintains an unbiased stand towards political parties and refrains from activism.” At the same time, one office bearer termed government approvals as a big challenge for the organisation. The following statements made by some of the office-bearers can provide more understanding of the issue: “ Relation with the state government is good. We would appreciate it if we could get space/land from the government for planting more forests. - before they turn into dumping ground.”

“State is now making efforts to connect with us and work towards the betterment of the environment.”

“ We suggest states and make them aware of relevant issues. They take our advice and sometimes adopt our policies or mimic our programs. The bureaucracy is always helpful. The politicians are always appreciative. “

“ The cooperation of the state is crucial.”

“ Miyawaki method of afforestation should be added to the policy of PPCB(Punjab Pollution Control Board) so that industries could easily adopt it.”

8.9. EcoSikh In the Face of Modern-day Challenges

Climate change and its related issues pose a significant challenge to our world today, as observed in the existing literature (Karl et al.; McNutt; and Tol). EcoSikh, both its beneficiaries and office bearers, share similar sentiments about this issue. With its focus on educating and raising awareness about environmental concerns and advocating for policy changes to promote sustainable development, EcoSikh is fighting for a common cause. One beneficiary noted that environmental pollution affects not only our physical health but also our psychological well-being. By striving to impact the environment positively, EcoSikh is making a valuable contribution to society. However, cooperation from the masses is crucial to the success of this cause, as expressed by another beneficiary who believes that more people need to join EcoSikh in their efforts to transform the lives of communities.

Nonetheless, some of the beneficiaries have noted limitations of NGOs, like they often work for their profits, and their motives are not always selfless service. Another beneficiary added

that pollution and loss of green cover are significant problems of the day where the EcoSikh is trying to fight. Another important takeaway from the study was the discovery of the fact that none of the beneficiaries had any knowledge about any other organisation working in the same field in Punjab. Despite having all kinds of limitations, EcoSikh has been able to connect and motivate people to environmental consciousness. They have used religiously charged messaging to generate results. One beneficiary has added that if a forest has been planted in Guru Nanak's name, people are more likely to care for it.

The office bearers of EcoSikh believe that the organisation's efforts to preserve air, water, and soil are highly beneficial for society. Dedicated to environmental sustainability, the organisation's activities have positively impacted nature. In the opinion of the office bearer, Mother Earth is the primary beneficiary of EcoSikh's efforts. Another office-bearer feels that the organisation's work is to preserve the environment, educate people about environmental issues, and advocate for policy changes that promote sustainable development. Similarly, an office-bearer claimed that they have been able to produce tangible results. Micro forest plantation is the most visible result of the efforts made by the organisation.

Through advocacy, EcoSikh has influenced policy development and changes by the respective political and religious authorities. Sikh Environment Day (14 March) is one of the achievements that the organisation claimed through continuous persuasion to the Sikh religious authorities. On the 550th birthday of Guru Nanak Dev, the Organisation campaigned to plant 550 trees at different administrative units in celebration. The Government of Punjab also adopted this program. 'Government of Punjab', which is the official Twitter handle of the Punjab government, tweeted on 30 September 2018

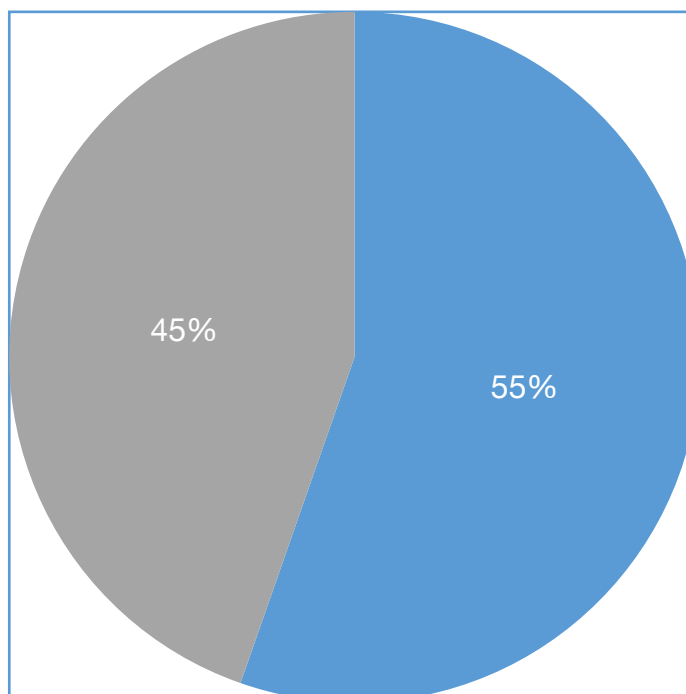
“2019 marks the 550th Year of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Birth Anniversary. Every Village in Punjab will plant 550 trees to commemorate this divine milestone. Starting with the environment, the tree plantation drive will rejuvenate and revive the rural ecosystem in the state.”(Government of Punjab, 2018)

EcoSikh has responded to the modern-day challenge of climate and nature degradation by applying various methods under the broader framework of the Sikh concept of *Seva*.

8.10. Sikh concept of *Seva* according to the beneficiaries and office bearers of EcoSikh

- Responded
- No Response

Chart 4.3. Sikh concept of *Seva*



Only some of the beneficiaries responded to the question of whether they understood the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Many did not have any understanding. Most of the beneficiaries did recognise that the efforts made for environment protection and nature conservation constitute *Seva*. Some beneficiaries also brought *Sarbat da Bhala* (welfare of all) when asked about *Seva*. There was an evident understanding among the beneficiaries of a holistic rather than a narrow humanistic scope for the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Recognising it as a universal ideal. Following were the responses of some of the beneficiaries of EcoSikh, when asked about the Sikh concept of *Seva*:-

“ The Sikh concept of *Seva* is *Sarbat da Bhala*. ”

“ Helping the needy is *Seva*. ”

“ Welfare of all is *Seva*. ”

“ The *Seva* of nature is the *Seva* of humanity. ”

“ Preservation of the environment and nature is also *Seva*. ”

“ Not only humans, serving nature and environment is also *Seva*. ”

“ Doing something for others, without selfishness, is *Seva*. ”

“ Working for the overall betterment of everyone is the Sikh concept of *Seva*. ”

“ Fighting for the right cause and care for everyone is *Seva*. ”

“ Working for overall nature is *Seva*. ”

“ The *Seva* of nature is very important.”

“ Striving to do something good for society or the environment is definitely *Seva*. ”

“ Total *samarpan*(total dedication to cause)” is *Seva*.

“ Doing something good for the society is *Seva*. ”

On the other side, office-bearers of the EcoSikh often reiterated their commitment to the Sikh concept of *Seva*. They also talked about getting *Dasvand* from *Sangat* as a source of funding. They took examples from *Gurbani* and the Sikh history to associate them with the holistic framework of *Seva*.

“....our organisation work for projects that are tangible, and results can be seen. We do *Seva* for our mother earth and the climate.”

We fund our activities “through *Sangat*. ”

Our work is both “ work and *Seva* ”.

“.....we work on the teachings of Guru Har Rai Ji,”

“ ਪਵਣੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਣੀ ਪਿਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਧਰਤਿ ਮਹਤੁ (Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all), ਬਲਿਹਾਰੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਵਸਿਆ (Your almighty creative power which is pervading everywhere), are our motto.”

“ Not only *Langar* and *Chhabeels* are *Seva*, working for birds, animals, and the environment is also *Seva*. ”

“ Helping others without any discrimination is *Seva*. ”

8.11. Activities of EcoSikh and the Sikh concept of *Seva*

The responses for this discussion are drawn from the answers given by beneficiaries on the question as to whether they find activities of EcoSikh in line with the Sikh concept of *Seva*. There were varied responses. Most of the beneficiaries did not give any response. These were those who did not have any understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Some found parallels to the Sikh thought and history, as one said “.... they explained how Guru Nanak and Sikhism teach us to care for the environment.” Another beneficiary testified on EcoSikh employing Sikh ideals to take a message of environment protection. The intentionality of ‘good’ was the primary factor for them to categorise any act as *Seva*, as expressed by one

beneficiary, “Not only organising *Langers, Chhabeels* is *Seva* but working for the environment, birds and animals is also *Seva*”. However, there was also a beneficiary who was not sure that the operations of EcoSikh in Punjab conformed to the Sikh concept of *Seva*; like the beneficiary, who never found the NGOs to be real entities in the practice of *Seva*, said that EcoSikh is a commercial entity working for their monetary profits. He felt that the activities of EcoSikh were not in-line with the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Even these beneficiaries who were unsure and negative to EcoSikh’s conformity to the *Seva* felt that working for the environment and nature conservation was an act of *Seva*. Following were the views shared by the beneficiaries and the office bearers of EcoSikh on how the acts of EcoSikh were *Seva*:-

“ They(EcoSikh) associate themselves with Sikhism. If trees had been planted on religious lines, they would be cared for.”

“ The organisation has committed themselves to the task of the environment, which is second to God. Working for God is definitely *Seva*. ”

The following **positive** references to the activities of EcoSikh and the Sikh concept of *Seva* were also made by the office-bearers and beneficiaries:

- EcoSikh is practising *Seva* by working for the environment.
- EcoSikh is doing *Seva* of the environment, beneficiary feels.
- Beneficiary finds the activities of EcoSikh as per the Sikh concept of *Seva*.
- The activities of EcoSikh are *Seva* as they serve trees, birds and broader nature.
- The organisation has dedicated itself to the cause of the environment, which would have long-term positive effects; this is definitely *Seva*, according to the beneficiary.
- Office bearer believes that EcoSikh is doing *Seva* for mother earth and the climate.
- The office bearer is happy that she performs *Seva* while working with EcoSikh.
- Office bearer believes that the operations of EcoSikh correspond to the Sikh concept of *Seva*.
- The office bearer feels that the operations of EcoSikh correspond to the Sikh concept of *Seva*.
- Activities of EcoSikh can be categorised as *Seva*, office bearer claimed.

One beneficiary had a **negative** assessment of the work of EcoSikh, and he did not find a positive correlation between the Sikh concept of *Seva* and the operations of the organisation:

“ Their(EcoSikh) work is not in line with the Sikh concept of *Seva*. It is paid work.”

8.12. Scope for improvement for EcoSikh

It was found that EcoSikh doesn't have a significant presence in the field compared to its online visibility. Most of the suggestions put forward by the beneficiaries were centred on increasing ground presence for the organisation. One beneficiary suggested that “.... that organisation should organise small camps in cities and villages so that more people could join them.” Some beneficiaries wanted the organisation to include fruit trees in the saplings they plant in a small forest. Another beneficiary, who is against the beneficiary funding structure that EcoSikh follows, asserted that the organisation should generate their own funding instead of arranging funding from private individuals who are giving their land to small forest plantations. He suggested that this way, organisations would be able to have plantations at common community lands. A beneficiary who was entirely against the approach adopted by EcoSikh said that paid employees are not fit for the practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva*; only volunteer work in this field is effective. Following are some more suggestions from the beneficiaries:

“They(EcoSikh) should work for more visibility....”

“ They(EcoSikh) should try to reach out to more people.”

“ They(EcoSikh) should plant those trees that produce more oxygen.”

“ They(EcoSikh) should not charge any fee.”

“ If the organisation can generate their own funding, they can have adequate land in Punjab, but funding from beneficiaries is not sustainable.”

“ Only volunteer work is effective, not paid employees.”

The only suggestion from the office bearer side was the need to centralise forest data.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of EcoSikh revealed that beneficiaries of the organisation generally agreed that engaging in environmental and nature conservation work aligns with the concept

of *Seva*, driven by the intention of promoting 'goodness.' This intentionality was seen as the primary criterion for categorising an action as *Seva*. However, there were instances where some beneficiaries expressed uncertainty about whether EcoSikh's activities in Punjab truly conform to the authentic Sikh concept of *Seva*. One individual even perceived EcoSikh as a commercial entity primarily motivated by monetary gain. Nevertheless, even among these sceptical viewpoints, the consensus remained that contributing to environmental well-being is indeed an act of *Seva*.

On the other hand, the office bearers of EcoSikh firmly believed that their organisation's activities inherently constituted *Seva*. They justified this by emphasising their service to the environment, encompassing trees, birds, and nature as a whole. Their conviction was that their dedicated work in the environmental domain holds enduring positive impacts, aligning with the essence of *Seva* as envisioned in Sikh beliefs. While some beneficiaries highlight the need for increased on-ground presence and broader engagement, others find the activities closely aligned with the Sikh concept of *Seva*. EcoSikh's connection to Sikh teachings and the integration of religious sentiments with environmental actions underscore its mission to serve human beings and the natural world. The organisation's efforts have catalysed a positive societal change, inspiring individuals to embrace a greener and more sustainable lifestyle.

In a broader context, the study sheds light on the diversity of perspectives surrounding the interpretation of *Seva* within the framework of EcoSikh and its operations. While some participants outrightly rejected EcoSikh's claim to *Sevak* status, viewing it as a profit-driven modern entity, the organisation has managed to maintain a favourable image largely due to its unwavering focus on environmental issues. The organisation's criticism can also be attributed to the structural constraints of NGOs. This unique perspective as a Sikh-driven entity adds to its credibility, particularly in the face of the ongoing climate emergency. These conversations and viewpoints were prevalent among the organisation's beneficiaries and office-bearers. The organisation's multifaceted approach, from planting micro forests to raising awareness about environmental issues, reflects a deep commitment to preserving nature, benefiting both the present and future generations. EcoSikh's engagement with the state, its advocacy efforts, and its successful campaigns, such as Sikh Environment Day and the Guru Nanak Sacred Forest program, exemplify its impact on policy changes and society's consciousness about environmental concerns.

However, a diverse range of opinions is evident in the study, as some express scepticism about the extent of alignment between EcoSikh's operations and the concept of *Seva*. Despite this, the organisation's dedication to environmental preservation and its positive impact on society remains unmistakable.

EcoSikh's journey embodies a harmonious synergy between faith, values, and environmental responsibility. As it continues to navigate the challenges of climate change and contribute to a healthier planet, it underscores the significance of collective action and the transformative power of aligning noble principles with practical efforts. In doing so, EcoSikh stands as a poignant example of how the timeless concept of *Seva* can be extended to embrace the stewardship of the environment for the benefit of all.

10. Summary

This chapter presents a comprehensive examination of the Sikh community's environmental concerns, with a specific focus on the active involvement of EcoSikh in addressing the current environmental crisis. EcoSikh's approach and motivations have been analysed by examining literature produced by the organisation, which provides valuable insights into their perspectives on Sikh ideals and the concept of *Seva* as a source of inspiration. They also align environmental issues with Sikh ecological balance and ethical behaviour beliefs. The study highlights the significance of the Sikh concept of *Seva* as a fundamental approach adopted by EcoSikh to combat environmental degradation and climate change. By aligning their efforts with the concept of *Seva*, EcoSikh aims to foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards nature, reflecting the deep-rooted values within the Sikh community. To gain deeper insights into EcoSikh's environmental endeavours and their initiative's impact, the researcher interviewed beneficiaries and office-bearers using interview schedules. These interview schedules incorporated fundamental questions that form the crux of this study. The responses obtained from these interviews show how the organisation approached environmental protection as *Seva*. EcoSikh garnered support from the community and the government authorities through their activism. It has presented a case for *Seva* to tackle modern-day challenges by contributing to the fight against climate change and global warming.

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Appendix I

Interview Schedule I (For Subject Experts)

1. For a Sikh, what is the objective behind performing *Seva*?
2. Are there different modes for practising the concept of *Seva*?
3. How the concept of *Seva* is practised, and what are its different forms?
4. Is there any difference between the practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva* and the work of other voluntary organisations?
5. Who can practice *Seva*? Are there any restrictions based on gender, caste, creed, race, faith, etc.?
6. What are the different forms of *Seva* with reference to Sikh history and scripture?
7. Are the actions performed while practising? What was the context of the emergence of the Sikh Faith?
8. What is the belief system of Sikhism?
9. What are the core concepts of Sikhism?
10. What are the foundations of *Seva* in Sikhism?
11. How does *Seva* relate to other Sikh concepts?
12. What is the conceptual background of *Seva*? Metaphysical, ethical, moral or something else?
13. Is *Seva* a duty?
14. Is *Seva* an individual action or communitarian?
15. Is there any institutionalisation or structuring of this concept in Sikhism?
16. How the concept of *Seva* is defined in Sikh scriptures?
17. .What are the notable examples of *Seva* from Sikh history?
18. How is *Seva* embedded in routine Sikh life?
19. How *Seva* and Sikhism are related?
20. *Seva* only intended towards humans?
21. Who shall be the benefits of *Seva*?

22. Can *Seva* be translated as service or voluntary service?
23. Spiritual or profane, in what broader category does *Seva* fall?
24. Have there been any evolutions in the practice of the concept of *Seva* in Sikhism?
25. Can the work of Sikh Non-Government organisations(NGOs) be defined as *Seva*?
26. How Sikh NGO's are different from other secular NGO's?
27. Is there any qualitative difference in work done by other Religious Non-Government organisations(RNGOs) and Sikh NGOs?
28. How does the Sikh concept of *Seva* interact with the socio-political sphere?
29. What is the relevance of the concept of *Seva* in the 21st-century socio-political arena?
30. Can the concept of *Seva* be defined as transformative in the global modern age?

Appendix II

Interview Schedule II (For Beneficiaries)

Name:-

Mobile Number:-

Organisation:-

City:-

Address:-

Gender:-

Religious belief:-

Mother tongue:-

Marital status:-

Caste:-

Family Income:-

Profession:-

Rural/Urban

1. How did you come to know about this organisation?
2. What was your requirement?
3. Had you tried taking help from any other organisation about your issue? If yes, how their approach and response was different to this organisation?
4. How would you describe your first meeting with the organisation's representatives?
5. What information was acquired from you?
6. Were you comfortable with the experience of your first contact with the organisation?
7. Did you have any prior experience with any other organisation, for whatever matter? If yes, how would you compare that with your experience with this organisation?
8. Did you receive the assistance that you required?
9. How was the assistance provided to you?
10. Was it a one-time assistance?
11. Are you satisfied with the assistance provided to you by the organisation?
12. Do you know about other activities of this organisation?

13. Have you ever volunteered for the organisation? If yes, Why did you decide to be a volunteer?
14. Do you know other volunteers of the organisation?
15. Can you describe how this organisation is viewed in your area?
16. How do you think this organisation has impacted the socio-cultural scenery of Punjab?
17. Did you find any emphasis of the organisation on your religious and social background?
18. What differences do you find in your life after assistance from the organisation?
19. How the activities of this organisation are affecting the society around you?
20. Does this organisation have the potential to transform the lives of communities in the face of modern challenges?
21. Do you find this organisation relevant to the society?
22. Do you have any understanding of the Sikh Concept of *Seva*?
23. Do you find the activities of this organisation in line with the Sikh concept of *Seva*?
24. Do you have any suggestions for the organisation for improvement?

Appendix III

Interview Schedule III (For Office Bearers)

Name:-

Designation:

Mobile Number:-

Organisation:-

City/Village and District:-

Address:-

Gender:-

Religious belief:-

Mother tongue:-

Marital status:-

Caste:-

Family Income:-

Profession:-

Rural/Urban:-

1. When did you join this organisation?
2. How did you come to know about this organisation?
3. What was the idea behind the formation of this organisation?
4. What is the ideological background of this organisation?
5. What principles do you follow in the field while working?
6. What are the operations of your organisation in this area?
7. How long has this organisation been operating in this area?
8. What is the source of funding for this organisation?
9. How do you manage your activities in the field?
10. Do you have paid employees?
11. How do you find volunteers for your activities?
12. How are the decisions taken in your organisation? How are the office bearers elected?
13. What has been your experience of working with this organisation?
14. How do you select beneficiaries for the various programs of your organisation?

15. How many people have benefitted from your activities?
16. Do you cooperate with any other religious or secular organisations? Which organisations do you cooperate with in this area in particular?
17. Do you have any target groups with reference to your activities?
18. Can the operations of your organisation be seen as corresponding to the Sikh concept of *Seva*?
19. Do you see any relevance of religious organisations in the voluntary sector?
20. Do you run long-term programs in this area?
21. How sustainable are the activities of your organisation?
22. How do you think your organisation is beneficial for the society?
23. What kind of feedback have you received in the context of the activities of your organisation in this area?
24. What challenges do you face while working on the ground?
25. Do you see any scope for improvement in the organisation or in terms of how the activities are organised?
26. What would you consider the biggest achievements of your organisation in this area?
27. What do you think you have gained personally while working with this organisation?
28. How satisfied do you feel while working with this organisation?
29. How are the funds secured for the various activities of this organisation?
30. What is the role of the state as far as this organisation and its activities are concerned?

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Introduction

This study has aimed to explore and understand the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Through this acquired understanding of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, the study has tried to look at the activities of EcoSikh and Khalsa Aid NGOs in the state of Punjab. The state of Punjab, comprising three different geographical divisions of Punjab, Majha, Malwa and Doaba, was selected to explore and examine both organisation's activities. To explore and understand the Sikh concept of *Seva*, the researcher conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with ten subject experts on Sikhism. This study has also referenced *Seva* as given in Guru Granth Sahib, understanding it to be the supreme and primary scripture for the Sikhs. Guru Granth Sahib holds a central location in the Sikh way of life. Sikhs draw their inspiration and meaning of life from Guru Granth Sahib. After 10 Gurus in human form, Guru Granth Sahib is seen in their continuity in *Shabad* form. Sikhs hold an eternal-ubiquitous belief in Guru Granth Sahib.

The study was conducted with the phenomenological approach, where individual human experiences, religious practices and beliefs are given more importance than abstract theoretical perspectives. This study has tried to look into real-world lived experience and their link to the *Gurbani* from Guru Granth Sahib. Conscious understanding of an individual while interpreting her lived experiences was also an area of interest for the study.

It is also worth pointing out that the experiences of individuals were never comprehended in isolation. There was always an attempt to look through that experience by recognising the individuals' ideological paradigms of given statements. Guru Granth Sahib was the primary source for looking at the theoretical prospects of the respondents' statements.

Chart 5.1. Primary findings of the study

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the divergent forms of <i>Seva</i> in Sikhism as depicted in Sikh scriptures? 	<p>As per <i>Gurbani</i>, all the acts of devotion, compassion, selfless service performed without expectation of anything in return are <i>Seva</i>. Hence, the Sikh Concept of <i>Seva</i> can't be compartmentalised into different categories. The intentionality of justice is the only parameter for labelling any action as an act of <i>Seva</i>.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the origin and scope of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ravinder (Ravi) Singh started Khalsa Aid as a humanitarian gesture to deliver aid to refugees stuck in Albania due to the Balkans crisis. He started this by calling for help in <i>Gurudwaras</i>, collecting are and sending it to the affected people. Current operational area of Khalsa Aid is dynamic in nature, as they respond to challenges and problems through time and space. • The idea of EcoSikh emerges from Sikh sensitivity towards environmental conservation. The context of its materialisation was set by a partnership between UNDP(United Nations Development Program) and ARC(Alliance of Religions and Conservation). EcoSikh is engaged in micro forest plantation and awareness campaigns for environmental protection.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the contributions of the Khalsa Aid in Punjab? What are their activities, and who are the intended beneficiaries? 	<p>Khalsa Aid has made a significant impact by providing support to people in crisis without any discrimination. The organisation has been actively involved in various fields such as education, healthcare, responding to crises, building capacities, creating employment opportunities, and constructing homes for those in need. It is worth noting that the organisation provides aid irrespective of consideration of caste, gender, religion and ethnicity.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the contributions of the EcoSikh in Punjab? What kind of activities do they engage in, and who are the intended beneficiaries? 	<p>One of the most significant accomplishments of EcoSikh is the promotion of environmental conservation among the people of Punjab. They have planted Guru Nanak sacred forests in various locations throughout the region and have raised awareness through campaigns and the creation of micro forests. While this study classifies those with land for planting as beneficiaries, it is important to note that the planting of trees benefits the ecology of the entire area.</p>

- Is there an observable parity in the practices of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh, and the concept of *Seva* in Sikhism, with respect to their socio-cultural concerns?

While Khalsa Aid has gained more public recognition, both organisations are rooted in the Sikh principle of *Seva* and work towards different goals. Khalsa Aid is well-known for its broad spectrum of public welfare initiatives, including supporting people fighting for environmental causes, which aligns with EcoSikh's focus. On the other hand, EcoSikh explicitly avoids activism. A shared aspect between the two is their commitment to the Sikh concept of *Sarbat da Bhala* and their appeal for *Dasvand* donations from the Sikh community.

- Can the functioning of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh be read as an attempt to fill in the void created by the rollback of the state, or do they have any other motivations?

The organisations Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh exhibit contrasting relationships with the state, showcasing their distinctive approaches to engaging with governmental authorities. EcoSikh demonstrates a cooperative orientation, actively collaborating with state institutions to align their environmental initiatives with official policies and regulations. This cooperative stance facilitates the organisation's efforts in promoting environmentally sustainable practices, leveraging government support, and potentially achieving a wider impact through shared resources. In contrast, Khalsa Aid maintains a working relationship characterised by a degree of autonomy from the state, which enables the organisation to respond promptly to humanitarian crises and emergencies with agility, unburdened by bureaucratic constraints. In scenarios where there is a "rollback of the state," leading to reduced government involvement in certain areas, Khalsa Aid's independent operational style positions it to fill potential gaps in delivering essential services.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any scope for the Sikh concept of <i>Seva</i> to be categorised as a transformative socio-cultural phenomenon in the modern world? 	<p><i>Seva</i> is a purposeful and intentional social action rooted in the Sikh way of life. It aims to serve the greater good and promote justice, not limited by race or creed. Through <i>Seva</i>, individuals can cleanse themselves of ‘sinful’ acts and benefit both themselves and society as a whole. The <i>Langar</i> tradition, which challenges hierarchical divisions, is a crucial aspect of <i>Seva</i>. <i>Seva</i> also seeks to address structural conditions of deprivation and abuse by providing necessities of everyday life.</p>
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2. The Sikh concept of *Seva*

In Sikhism, the practice of *Seva* best idealises the lived Sikh religion. The practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva* realises the Sikh elements of the Sikh utopia. Practice or *aachaar* of truth has been described as even higher than truth by Guru Nanak Dev in the following verses of *Gurbani*.

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥੫॥

Sachahu Ourai Sabh Ko Oupar Sach Aachaar ||5|

“Truth is the highest of all, but higher still is the truthful living”(SGGS, Ang 62)

Sikhism emerged in 15th-century Punjab, where there was an environment of socio-political turbulence. In such a situation, Guru Nanak Dev developed revolutionary ideas and practices to combat injustice and inequalities in all spheres of life to elevate individuals and communities spiritually. He directed his disciples to be engaged in worldly life, never to think about any detachment or withdrawal from it, resulting in Sikhs being social beings, active and attached in all spheres of life. Guru Nanak Dev conceptualised God as formless and ever-present, *Nirgun* and *Sargun*. For the same reason, the values of equality and social justice are also held in high esteem by Sikhs, who hold that every person is created equal in God's eyes regardless of caste, gender, or social standing.

Seva holds a very central position in Sikhism. The word *Seva* comes from the Sanskrit word *Sev*, which means to serve, submit, trust or pray. Although generally accepted understanding of *Seva* in Sikh tradition is to give something tangible or intangible without expecting any return. Sikhs participate in the acts of *Seva* through their *Tan, Mann and Dhan*, meaning body, mind and material wealth, respectively. Sikhs have been instructed to perform *Seva* with *nishakm, nishkapt* and *nimarta* (without desire and intention and with humility). Food served at Gurudwara, in the form of *langar*, is one of the most prominent examples of *Seva*. The Sikh community is globally known for its acts of *Seva*; in a way, it has become an identity marker for the Sikh community. Children see their parents performing different acts of *Seva* and learn at an early age to do this as well. This is how, as a part of Sikh *Being*, *Seva* travels from one generation to another. *Sevak*, a selfless servant, seeks to transcend the individual self and its extensions like family, community and nation, to undertake compassionate service to become a source of hope, energy and change in a world of profound crisis. A Sikh shall always be sincere and outright *Sevak*. The transcendence of *Sevak* has been equated with religious virtuosi, who have been discussed for their potential for social change (Weber; Levine; Goldman & Plaff). They seek spiritual elevation; in that undertaking, they fight against structural conditions that limit their scope of achieving the ultimate goal. They are well motivated and disciplined and possess social and spiritual capital endowed in their religious grounding. On their way to attaining a higher life, they rise above their individual self for more significant societal gains over material earnings in life. Similarly, *Sevak* is more concerned with the holistic, broader socio-political order. *Sevak*, a conscious actor in the worldly sphere, challenges or tackles growing injustice, suffering and violence as a source of hope, energy and change.

As per the directives given in the Guru Granth Sahib, *Seva* shall always be voluntary. It is believed that the voluntary form of *Seva* takes out the full potential of the *Sevak*. It takes one to the state of self-transcendence and surrenders with a holistic application of body, mind and consciousness to the task. Transcendence is the enabling condition for *Seva* that allows for shelving of the lower self and immediate reality prison house.

As a social action, *Seva* is driven by a normative structure with defined objectives and purpose. It has become a part of general Sikh behaviour with its normative understanding of Sikh communal and individual life. The realisation of Sikh utopian life with the intentionality of *Sarbat da Bhala* is a fundamental tenet of the Sikh concept of *Seva* as a normative social action.

Sarbat da bhala is the welfare of all. It is a part of daily Sikh prayer or *ardas*, where Sikhs ask for *Sarbat da bhala*. Daily recitation has made it part of the Sikh collective psyche and has become an intentional act. In contrast, the practice of Sikhism daily is part of more considerable Sikh communal subjectivity. Through the application of this intentional act, Sikhs ought to achieve universal fellowship. It is a pure intentionality with a mark of truthful living as defined by *Gurbani* of Guru Granth Sahib. That makes *Seva* with *Sarbat da bhala* intentionality a moral, religious ideal that exerts itself in the socio-political sphere as a social activity.

The notion of *Sarbat da bhala* extends beyond humanitarianism. Considering everything emanating from one origin sets out a vision of oneness among all. All include flora, fauna and natural elements. An approach dedicated to the welfare of all is the approach to sustainability and care. The practice of such ideals results in individual and social gratification by establishing stronger bonds among not only the different groups of humans but also with a broader nature. This holistic understanding of the universe also works for the elimination of otherness. That has both social and political effects. With this, the Sikh concept of *Seva* also gains a universal space.

The practice of *Seva*'s religious, moral ideal individually in a socio-political space functions for the constitution of an ideal being, defined as *Gurmukh* in *Gurbani* of Guru Granth Sahib. *Gurmukh* has her face towards Guru and is free from her lower self. *Gurmukh* works for a harmonious society, being *nirbhau* (has no fear) and *nirvair* (doesn't give fear to others) simultaneously.

With an application of clear intentionality, *Seva* comes out as a constitutive entity that objectifies, identifies, connects and constitutes. The performance of *Seva* serves both primary and corollary functions as the *Sevak* would be motivated to perform more such acts. Husserl has recognised that part of the unrevealed world can be constituted with prior intentionally collected knowledge and experience. That presents a possibility of mass *Seva* intentionality constitution.

Guru Arjan Dev, the Fifth Guru, established the requirement for Sikhs to give a tithe of their earnings as a form of taxation to support acts of *Seva*. It is known as *Dasvand*. Acts of *Seva* are ideally funded with money donated through *Dasvand*. For the money to be used for the noble causes of *Seva*, it must be earned through legitimate means. Principally, giving *Dasvand* denotes the god as the giver of all resources, and giving the tenth part returns a part of whatever the god gives. Giving or adhering to *Dasvand* is part of *Naam japo*, *Kirat karo*,

and Vand Chhako (recite God's name, do honest labour and share with others). Doing honest labour, earning a living and sharing it with others. Sharing is *Seva*, which includes *Dasvand*. It makes *Dasvand* a form of *Seva*. *Seva* with the means of monetary resources. *Dasvand* shall also not be equated with direct charity. When associated with *Seva*, it is for capacity building to empower recipients for the sustainable address of broader societal and community needs that, in turn, would serve individual members. Sustainability shall always be an essential factor for the utilisation of *Dasvand*. There have been examples of funding socio-political movements through the money and resources given as *Dasvand*.

3. *Seva* as a transformative force

With all factors included, *Seva* as a social action is a consciousness full of life and spirit. It is meaningfully oriented to defined ends. At the same time, the intentionality of the act is clearly channelised for the realisation of spatial goals. *Seva* as social action is driven through the Sikh way of life, where one is directed to act for the realisation of *Naam*, *Daan*, and *Ishnaan*. *Naam* is to recite the name of god, *Daan* is to ask and share whatever we have individually, and *Ishnaan* is to cleanse the body and mind with good deeds. *Seva* is a social action that is intentional with an objective of the larger good.

Similarly, in Sikh tradition, one who commits sinful acts is asked to perform *Seva* of some kind. The intention is to clean the body and mind with the acts of *Seva* to free one from the dirt of wrongdoings. It corresponds to the notion of *Ishnaan*. This way, such an act is an experience that liberates from guilt, anger etc., so it is transformative to those with direct impact(individual) and society as a whole.

Seva also includes other Sikh traditions, one of which is *Langar*. It is a tradition where everyone who wishes can have food prepared by the *Sangat* (congregation of devotees). To eat food in the *langar*, one has to sit on the floor with everyone (*pangat*). This practice aims to foster brotherhood and equality among all. It is our society that has hierarchical caste and class divisions. This type of cohesive intentionality is transformative in the societal realm.

The practice of *Seva* is pointed towards doing away with the structural conditions of deprivation and abuse that cause a hindrance in the attainment of a higher life. With an empathetic view, *Sevak* wants to remove a hurdle to a higher life by reaching out with the necessities of everyday life. *Seva* provides a structure to end the conditions of deprivation and thus allows the recipients to focus on meaningful actions. *Sevak* acts through this

structure without consideration of race and creed. A related example was the farmer agitation of 2020-21, where agitating farmers, who thought themselves to be an aggrieved party, arranged for food and education for underprivileged families and their children at protest sites. It demonstrates the primacy of justice above all. The underlying potential marks such intentionality of justice for transformation for goodness.

4. Oneness among all through the practice of *Seva*

Contested ideological space and horizontal divisions in the society had caused a breakdown of human ties and social cohesion. In this context, Guru Nanak preached oneness among all that the practice of *Seva* set the trajectory of the human mind towards accepting and respecting differences. Going further, the empathic acts of *Seva* develop a worldview free of feelings of all kinds of otherness. The other is accepted with their identity and agency. The continuous practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva* has been associated with fostering togetherness in society.

It has also been seen that in the practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, gender equality of men and women is enforced. Both men and women can equally participate in the practice of *Seva*. Both sexes sit on the floor to eat *langar*; both participate in its preparation. Children who go to the *Gurudwara* with their parents watch the practice of this equality and inculcate this in their socialisation.

5. The centrality of justice in the practice of *Seva*

In the socio-political sphere, the practice of *Seva* ought to march towards the notion of *Halimi Raj* for creating an environment necessary for spiritual elevation. This way, the Sikhs have been utilising *Seva* to establish a society based on justice. Guru Nanak laid the ideological foundation for such a task in his *Gurbani*. He described the world as *Dharamsal*, *Dharma* ethic or morality and duty, and *sal* as a place of abode. Through this, Sikhs are to take responsibility for the world instead of abandoning it. These responsibilities range from family to the world at large. Guru Nanak did not teach a selfish concern for one's own salvation alone but rather the moral responsibility of fellow human beings. Guru Nanak summed up his teachings very simply: '*Kirt Karo, Nam Japo, Vand Chakko*' (work for a living; abide in the meditative recitation of God's name; share what you have with others).

The self is thus seen in relation to the divine and the social, so a withdrawal from either of these relationships must spell out one's extinction. This combination of piety and practical activity (in the form of worldly labour) is the essence of Guru Nanak's this-worldliness.

It has been observed that the commitment to equality and selfless service has motivated Sikhs to wage political and military struggles against tyrannical administrations as part of their more comprehensive commitment to the *Seva*. It is primarily a concern for justice and spiritual elevation that is justice intentionality. It resists the attempts to compartmentalise *Seva* into different categories. The intentionality of justice is the only parameter for labelling any act as an act of *Seva*. That, too, is not reserved for the Sikhs only.

6. Origin and scope of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh

Giving a central position to intentionality also serves the evolutionary spirit of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. It has played different roles in different times and spaces. 16th-century mechanical fan waving, *Langar*, etc., were the principal acts of *Seva*, while in turbulent times, Sikhs opted for swords to protect their way of life, as *Seva*. Today, to tackle global climate change and humanitarian crises worldwide, Sikhs have formed different organisations working with modern practices to provide help in the form of *Seva*.

6.1. Khalsa Aid

Ravinder (Ravi) Singh started Khalsa Aid as a humanitarian gesture to deliver aid to refugees stuck in Albania due to the Balkans crisis. He started this by calling for help in *Gurudwaras*, collecting that and sending it to the affected people. At first, it was initiated just by organising help for refugees. There was no organised structure. Sikhs do organise such types of assistance from *Gurudwaras*. A prime example of such a thing is the daily *Langar* from Bangla Sahib Gurudwara to the protesters at Jantar-Mantar, Delhi. It is part of Sikh tradition to reach out with such assistance to the needful (Singh, 1647). Ravi Singh followed those footsteps while organising help for the victims of war. This idea of organising help ultimately became Khalsa Aid. Today, Khalsa Aid is not limited to assisting the victims of wars, floods, earthquakes etc., but they are doing regular work for those who need them in their daily lives. They provide assistance for education, healthcare, house rebuilding and repairs, and employment generation, among others.

6.1.1 Contributions, activities and intended beneficiaries

Talking about the operations of Khalsa Aid in Punjab, Khalsa Aid runs a school in Sangrur district, Dashmesh Khalsa School. The school gives free education to more than 600 children. The organisation also give economic assistance to pursue school and higher education. The organisation has designed a health aid program to provide monetary assistance for people who cannot afford medical expenses. This study included cases of liver transplants and oxygen concentrators (during Covid-19) being provided by Khalsa Aid. It was observed in the study that the organisation not only provided preliminary flood relief in the Punjab floods of 2019 but also went some steps ahead by helping communities and individuals rebuild their lives. It was done by providing seeds to the farmers to sow their subsequent crops and providing livestock, tractors and related machinery to farmer cooperatives. Some of the houses that were damaged were rebuilt by the organisation.

It is clear that the organisation has not limited itself to some areas of work. The operational area of Khalsa Aid is dynamic in nature. They are doing whatever is required in the field as per the capacity in their possession. The study observed a case of providing a tablet computer to a handicapped girl who could not move. The organisation came to know about her when they rebuilt her house. A tablet computer was provided to help her get outside exposure as she is not moving out of her home. That tablet computer is a window to the outside world for her as it is helping her socialise in a new way. This instance has been provided to explain the scope of service that Khalsa Aid is delivering in Punjab. There may be new areas of operations as required in different times and spaces. It is the essence of the Sikh concept of *Seva*. Challenges and problems change their nature with time and space, so any static approach to address them may not be practical. Hence intentionality of justice is fundamental to the practice of *Seva*. This has led to the ever-growing scope for Khalsa Aid in their endeavour to practice the Sikh concept of *Seva*.

6.2 EcoSikh

The idea of EcoSikh emerges from Sikh sensitivity towards environmental conservation. The context of its materialisation was set by a partnership between UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and ARC (Alliance of Religions and Conservation). It was announced that both these organisations would arrange a meeting for generational plans of

action with the involvement of significant faith traditions in the world in November 2009 at Windsor Castle. This event aimed to encourage faith leaders to embed the message of environment conservation and climate protection into their public conduct. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon attended this event and called for the recognition of the potential of faith communities against climate change.

From Sikhism, Dr Rajwant Singh from the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE) attended this meeting as a representative of the Sikh community. The mission and objectives set at Windsor Castle motivated the establishment of EcoSikh as a Sikh answer to climate change. EcoSikh carries the Sikh spirit of attaching sanctity to nature. Humans are believed to create their surroundings as a reflection of their inner state in Sikhism. Hence, there is no duality between the inner and outer world.

In Sikhism, nature has been created by the creator, who is present in this. There is only one omnipresent god. So, creation is also a form of the creator. To recognise this reality, the conscious self needs to be controlled, not nature. There is no question of treating it as a mere resource for human consumption. Rather, an attitude of respect and dignity is warranted towards nature. Through the practice of the Sikh concept of *Seva*, the service of nature as the service of the creator. Recognition of this principle fact set out the grounds for the creation of EcoSikh.

6.2.1 Contributions, activities and intended beneficiaries

The objective of EcoSikh was described in its formation. The organisation defines itself as a “response from the Sikh community to the threats of climate change and the deterioration of the natural environment.” The global headquarters of the organisation is in Washington DC, United States of America, whereas the India office has been set up in Ludhiana, Punjab. EcoSikh is engaged in micro forest plantation and awareness campaigns for environmental protection.

Micro forest plantation has been named Guru Nanak sacred forest. Under this initiative, the organisation plants native plants on the land provided by individuals and communities with the Miyanwaki method. This plantation initiative was part of this study. At first, the organisation had started this program to mark the 550th birth year of the first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev. The government of Punjab also adopted this program by directing each governance unit to plant 550 saplings in their available

public lands. Saplings for the same were provided free of cost by the government of Punjab.

Bani of Guru Nanak is fundamental for defining Sikh's relationship with nature. In *Japji Sahib*, Guru Nanak has described God as formless and omnipresent

ੴ ਸਤਿਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ

ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ (SGGS, Ang 1)

One Universal Creator God, The Name Is Truth Creative Being Personified No
Fear No Hatred Image Of The Undying, Beyond Birth, Self-Existent.

EcoSikh drives its claim of working for vital environmental issues by linking them to the values, beliefs, and establishments of the Sikh community. They have claimed that its inspiration comes from the profound teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the Khalsa Panth, which help shape the attitudes and actions of Sikhs worldwide. EcoSikh has established itself as an exemplifier practitioner of religious values and principles. The fundamental principle playing out in their case is the Sikh concept of *Seva*.

In the Environment theology in Sikhism, EcoSikh has declared that, in Sikhism, engaging in acts of compassion, humility, contemplation, contentment, and service (*Seva*) without expecting any material or spiritual rewards is crucial for attaining spiritual fulfilment. By practising the Sikh concept of *Seva* alongside other Sikh ideals, individuals can become more attuned to the world around them and work towards transforming it into a more spiritual existence. This includes striving to do good and positively impact one's surroundings with an intense desire for spiritual transformation.

The Sikh Statement on Climate Change seeks to capture the gravity of the climate situation and find a way to respond to it through the Sikh Concept of *Seva* and other Sikh ideals. ".....As Sikhs, we appeal to lawmakers, faith leaders, and citizens of the world to take concrete action toward reducing carbon emissions and protecting the environment. And as Sikhs, we pledge to take concrete actions ourselves. We have a responsibility to follow our Gurus' teachings and protect the vulnerable.....Sikhs should be front-runners of change. *Seva*, the practice of selfless service, is a main tenet of Sikhism. Sikhs can perform *Seva* by reducing our

carbon footprints, recycling, investing in renewable energies, and being mindful about where our food comes from. Gurdwaras, as beacons of righteous thought, must be eco-friendly. Our religious spaces, when in harmony with nature, will allow Sikhs to be more spiritually connected to Waheguru, the creator of all. Respect for nature is ingrained in Sikh teachings.....”

7. Similarities and differences between Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh

This study has closely examined the operations and objectives of Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, shedding light on their distinctive focus areas. While Khalsa Aid has garnered more widespread recognition, both organisations share a common foundation deeply rooted in the Sikh principle of *Seva*, even as they work towards different goals and issues.

Khalsa Aid, widely acknowledged for its multifaceted initiatives, has established a formidable reputation in the realm of public welfare. The organisation engages in diverse activities, from providing aid during humanitarian crises and natural disasters to supporting individuals championing environmental causes. Interestingly, this environmental focus coincides with the primary mission of EcoSikh, illustrating a potential point of connection between the two organisations.

EcoSikh, as its name suggests, is specifically dedicated to advocating for environmental sustainability from a Sikh perspective. However, it distinguishes itself from activism, suggesting a more nuanced approach to its objectives. While not as widely recognised as Khalsa Aid, EcoSikh is carving a niche for itself in the intersection of faith and environmental responsibility, drawing attention to the importance of ecological consciousness within the Sikh community and beyond.

Despite their differences, a notable commonality between Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh is their shared commitment to *Sarbat da Bhala*, which translates to the well-being of all. This guiding principle underscores their dedication to serving not only their immediate beneficiaries but also society at large. Both organisations actively appeal for *Dasvand* donations from the Sikh community, highlighting their reliance on collective support to further their respective missions.

As these organisations continue their work, it is important to recognise that their activities extend beyond their individual goals. They serve as manifestations of Sikh values in action, embodying the concept of *Seva* and contributing to the betterment of society. Moreover, the

engagement of these organisations with distinct issues demonstrates the broad and impactful reach of *Seva*.

8. Relevance of the Khalsa Aid and the EcoSikh in the context of the rollback of the state

Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, two distinct NGOs, are united by their dedication to positively impacting society. Despite their divergent focuses—one addressing humanitarian crises and the other advocating for environmental sustainability both organisations operate within the framework of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGOs, often called non-profits, are independent entities formed without government authority, functioning globally to address various social, economic, and environmental issues. This shared categorisation as NGOs positions both Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh within the broader context of civil society actors working towards positive change. There is no single definition of NGOs in the available literature. They operate differently in different countries as per local legal frameworks set forth by the administrative apparatus.

Despite this, NGOs enjoy a wider space in the ‘public sphere’. NGOs like Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh are crucial in addressing societal concerns. They often step in where governments may lack resources, capacity, or immediate responsiveness. However, the claim of being true *Sevak*, driven by the Sikh concept of *Seva*, goes beyond just being categorised as an NGO. It delves into the depth of their missions, values, and actions. Transcendence above self, holistic approach to socio-political issues, commitment to *Sarbat da Bhala*, and performing *Seva* for spiritual elevation are features of being a *Sevak*.

NGOs are seen as necessary intermediaries that bridge the gap between states and markets. NGOs have played a significant role in development by filling in where states lacked and creating a vibrant civil society. The relationship between NGOs and civil society is intertwined, and the influence of the former contributes to the latter's legitimacy.

Khalsa Aid's efforts to provide aid during natural disasters, conflicts, and other emergencies align with this principle. Likewise, EcoSikh's efforts to promote environmental sustainability reflect a commitment to the welfare of future generations. To be considered genuine *Sevak*, both organisations must uphold these principles consistently, placing the well-being of others above all else. NGOs, however, face challenges in their operations. Issues of centralisation and transparency can hinder their effectiveness. Critics argue that

some NGOs might prioritise their own agendas or cater to vested interests, diluting their commitment to the greater good. This raises questions about accountability—whether NGOs are accountable to the communities they serve or to their funding sources. Despite these challenges, NGOs, as demonstrated by Khalsa Aid and EcoSikh, can still drive positive change, catalyse awareness, and push for policy shifts.

9. Conclusion

In the ultimate analysis, Martin Heidegger's perspective on the deep connection between human beings and the world around them underscores the profound influence of our experiences on shaping our existence. Heidegger's concept of "thrownness" into the world highlights our inherent need to find meaning within our existence, a significance that religious experiences provide.

Religious practices are not abstract theories but rather integral components that imbue life with purpose and significance. Keeping the particularities of different religions in mind, it should be noted that these practices, rooted in specific beliefs, serve as vehicles for connecting with both the divine and fellow believers. Language and symbols in religious rituals act as bridges, not only linking individuals to their faith but also solidifying their connection to the world.

Society and religion, often treated as separate entities, are intricately intertwined. Just as Heidegger's philosophy emphasises the impact of surroundings on individuals, contextual realities shape societies and their lifeworlds. Therefore, examining religion through a "lived religion" approach, focusing on daily practices, offers a more holistic understanding of how faith is embodied and experienced within particular spatial and social conditions.

This approach also challenges the traditional division between the sacred and the profane, as the lived religion perspective widens the scope of religious activities beyond designated spaces. Despite this expansion, belief remains at the heart of lived religion, and the mutual relationship between practice and belief reinforces the subjective reality of religious experiences.

The intricate relationship between human existence, religious practices, and the broader societal context reveals the profound impact of religion on our understanding of the world and our place within it.

“People beg and pray, Give to us, give to us, and the Great Giver gives His Gifts.”

SGGS, Ang 02

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