

RESOURCE 3.8

Impact of Gurdwaras on the local community

While there is information about the impact of Gurdwaras on the Sikh community, it is not so easy to find data on their impact on wider local communities. Here are some responses to fill that gap.

In 2019 a debate was held in Parliament to mark the end of the first UK National Sikh Awareness and History Month. Contributions to the debate on the Sikh Contribution to the UK included the following:

I will talk briefly about the Gurdwaras in my constituency: Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha on Alice Way; and my Gurdwara on Martindale Road, which is run by the Nishkam Trust, which plays a huge role in many different ways, as I am sure Gurdwaras across the country do. They extend charity and welcome, and they support those in need. Every week they welcome people who may be homeless or hungry. They welcome all, irrespective of background, through their doors. They run weekend classes and Punjabi classes, and host our surgeries as Members of Parliament so that we can reach all those in our communities. They have run immigration workshops – a huge issue in many ethnic minority communities – where immigration advisers are supported in providing confidential support and advice to those who desperately need it.

The Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha on Alice Way hosts the Hounslow Disability Network, which again provides vital support to those who need it. There are wellbeing events, with the NHS, the police and many others across our community, that make a huge difference. [The Gurdwara] also supports the arts, culture and education. My constituent, Hardyal Luther, the former vice-chairman of Guru Nanak Worldwide's council of supporters, organises a Guru Nanak essay competition every year that brings together talent and encourages the younger generations to take part and explore their history, culture and faith.

Seema Malhotra, Labour MP for Feltham and Heston, West London

As well as the cultural and economic contribution that the Sikh community makes to our city, there is a significant social contribution, not least to the health and wellbeing of our environment. Sikhs have a strong relationship with the environment, which is an integral part of their faith and identity. That connection with the natural world prompted Coventry's Sikhs to commit to planting more than 550 trees across the city to mark the 550th anniversary of the birth of Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. That fantastic initiative will help to restore nature to our cities, parks and green spaces, and secure a healthy, resilient and sustainable environment that will benefit people and wildlife for generations to come.

Colleen Fletcher, Labour MP for Coventry North East

Source for Parliamentary debate: bit.ly/SikhsContribution_HoCdebate
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Impact of Gurdwaras on the local community (cont)

2023 Sikh Youth Survey

Several of our survey respondents gave more detailed comments on the impact of the Gurdwaras in their local communities:

In terms of the Gurdwaras' impact on the local Sikh community, I think it's a significant impact, especially if it's in an area where the Sikh population is small.

In terms of impact on local communities, that's a tough one to generalise. Some Gurdwaras have little impact on local communities (almost going unnoticed!), whilst there are others that have a massive impact by starting up schools and community hubs such as the ones found in Birmingham or Wolverhampton.

I suppose you could take the view that every Gurdwara has an impact because of *langar*. It's free and available to all, which obviously can have a great impact on families and individuals in the community, especially if they're struggling with food costs. Surprisingly, not many people outside the Sikh community are aware of *langar*.

JKD, 28, F, Birmingham

The role of the Gurdwara on Sikhs is interesting and has evolved in the UK over the last 100 years. For the last year, I have been travelling around Southeast Asia, South America and Europe. In places where I have visited Gurdwaras abroad, I have noticed a difference in the role of Gurdwaras there as opposed to in the UK.

As the Sikh community has created roots in the UK and the next generation of Sikhs have been born and raised here, they may have found that their relationship with the Gurdwara has changed. I see it more as a place that has a role in infrequent occasions such as weddings and funerals. I experience less of a community feel within the Sikh temple of worship. However, I do also see a lot of work being done by some Gurdwaras, such as Sunday school, homework club, music and sports classes, libraries and support groups.

Outside the Sikh community, I believe the Gurdwara still functions on its core principles, such as equality for all. *Langar* or free food is an act of selfless service which has been rightly embraced by those struggling with the cost of living crisis and homelessness. We see this in the news, such as the lorry driver crisis over Christmas 2022 when Sikhs actively fed stranded drivers, and the Nishkam SWAT charity. On a day-to-day basis, I imagine the impact of a Gurdwara has its positive and negatives. Traditionally Gurdwaras are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which could cause issues such as parking and traffic problems.

I think outreach by Gurdwaras is good, as Sikhs promote selfless service, tolerance and respect.

Sikhs are not expected to pray only in a Gurdwara, therefore the role of the Gurdwara will always have its community aspect. As an assimilated British Indian of Sikh origin, I no longer look to the Gurdwara for community or advice.

HH, 29, F, London