

## **Sikh Heritage Month Podcast**

### ***Episode 1: Seva – Selfless Service, featuring guest Principal Sukhwinder Singh Buall***

#### **Introduction**

Thank you for tuning in to the Sikh Heritage Month podcast presented by the Toronto District School Board. In this student led podcast series, we will explore concepts, themes and ideas prevalent in the Sikh religion and discuss how they fit in with the fabric of our learning communities. We're so happy you have joined us and we hope you take away some important nuggets to talk about within your learning space.

#### **Interlude 1 (01:06)**

My name is Angad and I'm in grade six at Smithfield Middle School. Sikhism has ten Gurus who are considered to be the spiritual leaders and teachers of the faith. The first guru is Guru Nanak, and the 10th and last guru is Guru Gobind Singh. The teachings and wisdom of the Gurus are compiled in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scriptures of Sikhism. The Guru Granth Sahib is considered the living Guru of the Sikh faith and it contains hymns and poems from not only the Gurus, but also other spiritual leaders from different religious backgrounds.

My name is Hukam. I'm in grade three at John D. Parker. The ten gurus in Sikhism are Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Guru Angad Dev Ji, Guru Amar Das Ji, Guru Ram Das Ji, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, Guru Hargobind Ji, Guru Har Rai Ji, Guru Harkrishan Ji, Guru Tegbahadur Ji, Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

These Gurus were the spiritual leaders and teachers of the Sikh faith who laid the foundation for the principles, beliefs and practices of Sikhism. Their teachings and wisdom are compiled in the Guru Granth Sahib - the Holy Scriptures of Sikhism.

Sikhism was founded by the first guru, Guru Nanak Dev ji in 1469ce. They were followed by nine more Gurus in succession. The 11th guru is the holy Scripture. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji comprising of all the guru's teachings. "Aagya bhairi akaal ki, tabai jalayo panth. Sabh Sikhian ko Hukam hai, guru manyo Granth," which means under orders of the immortal being, the panth was created. All the Sikhs are encouraged to accept the Granth as their Guru. Core beliefs of Sikhism include that there is only one God, god is without form or gender, everyone has direct access to God, and everyone is equal before God. Sikhism promotes compassion for different religions as well as equality, social justice and humanitarianism.

Sikhism's core beliefs emphasize constant spiritual devotion of God and adherence to the principles of truthfulness, empathy, humility and charity.

Bumper: And you're listening to the Sikh Heritage Month podcast, a TDSB production.

### **Interlude 2 (04:11)**

My name is Gurpreet and I come from Smithfield Middle School. The word Sikh means disciple of a Guru. A Guru is another way of saying teacher. There have been ten human Gurus in my religion. Our sacred scriptures called Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

My name is Maanasbir Sethi and I'm from Smithfield Middle School. I'm in 7th grade, and a lot of people ask me how Sikh people are identified visibly by their names or what they wear. So Sikh people usually have a surname Singh or Kaur, and they can be identified by the turbans they wear, also known as Patkas and the unshaved beards.

## **Interview with Sukhwinder Singh Buall (05:18)**

### **Samrath**

Welcome to Sikh Heritage Month podcast. Our guest today is Mr. Sukhwinder Singh Buall, who is the principal at Beaumonde Heights Junior Middle School in Toronto District School Board. I'm Samrath and I'm a grade ten student at Thistletown Collegiate in TDSB.

### **Gunreet**

I'm Gunreet, a grade eight student at Beaumonde Heights, and I will be co-hosting today's podcast with Samrath.

We are really excited to have a conversation with Mr. Buall at today's topic of Seva: Selfless Service. So Mr. Buall, can you tell us about yourself, who you are and your experiences as a Sikh Canadian?

### **Mr. Buall**

I am the turban bearing Sikh. Right. Been teaching in Toronto School Board as educator for more than two decades. So my experience has been both positive and negative. As well as a turban bearing Sikh. I do draw a lot of attention. I'm very visible. So I remember when I started teaching in 2001 at a middle school in Toronto District School Board. That was 2001, that is

the year of 9/11. So I remember being called a name in the hallway. Yes, it was in a school called Name. A student called me a name. But again, not realizing who I was, it took a quick conversation for that student to understand, right. That who I was and what I stands for and so on. Right. So that was my first experience. But definitely if you go out of GTA greater Toronto area, I remember back then getting some curious looks, whether you're stopping at Tim Horton. Right. Also number of times, especially even within Toronto or outside Toronto. Right. And when I talked to another person and they would comment something like that, oh, you speak really good English, were you born in Canada? And so on. So yes, although maybe they were curious to know me or they didn't know anyone or anyone didn't interacted with somebody who was wearing turban or so on.

But those are some of negative experiences. But I think things have changed to some extent over the years. But also there are a few positive experiences. For example, one time I was at a Canadian Tire in the garden center. It was actually in Beaumonde Heights community here somewhere because a lot of Sikh people lived early on and still there's a big Sikh population in this area. One of the older lady came over, I think I just pushed a cart or something, I don't even recall fully. And she just came over and she was saying, thank you for doing it, but you didn't really have to do it. But I know Sikh people are really good people. And she was saying, oh, my neighbors is Sikh. I know all about Sikh people. They're one of the best people who live in this area and so on. They help others. I know about Golden Temple, right. And so on. She seems to have a lot of knowledge about the people who were Sikh. So that was kind of positive. And a few times actually, since I got promoted to since I'm in the role of principal, so I would say more than one time.

More than one time, definitely I get a comment about when racialized folks or racialized parents, grandparents or committee members, they've seen me or they find out that I am the principal. So a few times they have kind of commented like oh is about the time, or other times they just want to make sure they say good morning to me because they just wanted to say thank you or appreciate who I was at what I was doing. But I think one really positive experience was one day at my other school where I was principal at Firgrove Public School in Toronto, School Board. So one time I was on lunchtime duty and I had a caretaker and he called me over and he said, oh, this gentleman wanted to talk to you, Mr. Buall. I said oh? He said, oh, yeah, he just wanted to talk to you. And it was a black gentleman and he actually because there was a big fence, like 6ft fence in the middle in the parking lot area. I was in the yard, right? So he just pulled his hand on top of the fence and just shook my hand. He wanted to shake my hand because he said, oh, I just found out from your caretaker you are the principal.

So I just want to say hello. Hi and thank you for being the principal. You're at Firgrove. So they're like negatives and positives. I think those are my experiences. But even, yes, like a lot of those positive experiences, if we think about today what's happening in Canada too, right? Yes, I am wearing turban. I'm visible Sikh, right? And I can practice my religion, like fully, freedom of religion as per charter of rights. But if I cross over to Quebec, I won't be allowed to do the job like be a teacher or principal in there because of Bill 21, right? So, yes, we have made a lot of progress in terms of when it comes to people understanding who Sikhs are and Sikh values and so on. But at the same time, within Canada, Sikhs and other visible minorities or people who have visible articles of faith are barred from performing certain jobs, for example, in education or offices, government offices and so on, which is meaning discrimination is kind of legalized or

legislated. It is the law. So we hope I know it is challenged in the Supreme Court, so we'll see what happens to it.

But so there there are a lot of progress made on one hand to end discrimination, racism and so on, but on the other hand, with Will 21 in Quebec, it is legalized or legislated by the government.

### **Samrath**

Yeah, I agree with you. We've done a lot of progress, but we still have a long way to go to. And so one of my questions for you is that what does your turban mean for you?

### **Mr. Buall**

Turban? Turban is like a symbol of I mean, when Sikh people start wearing Turban, it was people in India at that time were not allowed. Only the royals or kings were allowed to wear a turban. So when Sikhs started wearing the turban, it was basically everyone can wear a turban. Everyone can be royal, everyone can be king. Also, when you're wearing Turban, you're Sikh. It's kind of ending any of the discrimination. Mean everybody is equal. Also it represents humility, right? Humility. And you stand out as a Sikh, meaning you're practicing Sikh values when you're wearing Turban, right? Whether it's a social justice, equality, right. Sava and so on.

### **Gunreet**

So let's go to our next question. So what is Seva and what does seva mean to you?

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Yes, seva is in sacred religion. Seva is selfless service, meaning when you're doing something, you're not expecting anything in return, any form or shape. Right. That is called selfless service. And in Sikh values, we call it seva. And when we're talking about Seva, the unique thing about it, it is not you're helping the Sikh people or you're helping the people within the community. Sikh community. You're helping the people regardless of race, cost, religion, color and so on. And that is actually truthful seva, when you're even helping, doing selfless service to the people, to the others who are not from the community, that is selfless service. One of the example is in Canada, within Canada, how the seva is done. Sikh Nation, this organization called Sikh Nation, they've been doing blood donation camps in November in memory of 1984, Sikh genocide. And they've been able to save a lot of lives. I think there were like close to 200,000 lives were saved with those blood donation camps. Right. So you're donating blood is like selfless service. Right? So that is one example of Seva. But there are many other forms and shapes Seva comes in.

### **Samrath**

We know that Sikh pioneers in Canada have done a lot of Seva for Canada today. What were some contributions made by Sikhs in Canadian history which we can consider to be their seva?

### **Mr. Bual**

Yeah, I think when you look at the Sikh history in Canada or six in Canada, six been in Canada earlier 19th century, I mean, starting to arrive at 1897. I think that is the first six they were, you know, happened to live in Canada as they who were, you know, the former soldiers in British Army. But I think one of the main events in Sikh history in Canada occurred when one of the Sikh named Gurdit Singh, he decided to challenge the discriminatory

continuous journey immigration law. So at that time, immigration law was that you're supposed to sail from one country to Canada without any interruption, meaning your continuous journey. Indirectly, the law was imposed to keep Indian immigrants or Sikh immigrants or Asian immigrants out of Canada. So he decided to kind of challenge it. He rented a ship called Kamagatamaru, it was Japanese ship, and he sailed directly from Hong Kong to Vancouver. Right. Kind of indirectly fulfilling that condition that he was. He had 300, I believe 357 passengers. Mostly they were Sikh on board. But when it landed in Vancouver, obviously they were not allowed to land. And I think Ship stayed for a couple of months at the Vancouver harbor and finally it was forced to leave Canada and Canadian lands.

And when it went back to India in Calcutta, I guess most of the passengers on board were either killed or jailed to lifetime imprisonment and so on because they were labeled that against the British Empire at that time. So that was one of the way of challenging I guess from that on there was a lot more awareness raised in terms of discriminatory immigration laws and so on. Right, but that was the first occurrence that happened. And also there are many other examples. So many of the pioneer six in Canada, when they came over to Canada, they worked in lumber mills in Vancouver area, British Columbia. And some of them, they worked hard in the mills. And one of the Sikh named Mayo Singh, he actually founded his own lumber mill and he established his own town named after his ancestral village, Paldi in the Vancouver area. And in that town, actually, at that time, there was a school, there was a lumber mill. So people were working there. And he welcomed people from different ethnicity, for example, Japanese right. Or Chinese and Chinese background, any other immigrants, the white people and so on. If you look at the picture of one of the classrooms at that



time in the village of Paldi, it seems to be at that time, we're talking about 1918.

But if you look at that picture, it is you see multiculturalism in Canada. It seems to be that was the first town or one of the first towns where multiculturalism existed, not existed, people like really lived together with each other and so on. So that's again, when we talk about multiculturalism in Canada, so setting the stage for it was one of Sikh pioneers named Mayo Singh and who founded a town named Paldi after his ancestor village in Vancouver area.

### **Gunreet**

Well, that's very interesting, but I have a follow up question to that. Do you know why Sikh pioneers in Canada have done a lot of seva?

### **Mr. Buall**

Like, for example, there are many other even like for example, definition of a refugee in Canada, right. There was a certain set of certain way that refugees were defined who could be a refugee climate in Canada. So in 1985, six and one Ghani's person, they challenged that law and it went to Supreme Court. Right. So they were basically basing their applications and they're challenging the Canadian immigration and asking the Canada citizenship and Immigration government to define what they mean by refugee, right? Because refugee was meant differently by United Nations at that time. But Canada government has a different definition of it. Again, it was excluding number of people who were genuine refugee claimants at that time. So government has to basically change. And it opened a door for a lot of new refugees from different countries where their lives were at risk. Right. So that is one of the ways, right. Six are paving during the history of

Canada, shaping and leading the human rights, are challenging the discriminatory practices in Canada and so on.

### **Samrath**

Mr. Bual, I have a question. When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for the incident of Kamagata Maru, how did you feel? What impact did it have on you?

### **Mr. Bual**

Okay, I believe with the Prime Minister, he did apologize in the parliament. So that was long overdue. So I think I felt a right thing was done after a long time acknowledging, right, that it was wrong, the ship was wrongly stopped, and people were discriminated at that time. I'm happy, right. It happened, and it happened during my lifetime.

### **Gunreet**

I have another question for you. We know that in Gurdwaras, which are Sikh places of worship, there are langar seva. Can you tell our listeners here about langar seva? And why is it so important to Sikhism?

### **Mr. Bual**

Langar seva is, like, in Sikh communities in every Sikh Gurdwara. Gurdwara guru dwara is Guru's House, right? So Sikh place of worship. That's the name for gurdwara is the name for Sikh place of worship. So it is like free community kitchen. Langer is like I mean, if you have to use the English word, is a free community kitchen, which is part of every single Sikh Gurdwara around the world, whether it's in Canada or elsewhere in India or anywhere in the world. Right? So concept of communication is a

couple of things. First of all, it is free food offered to anyone, regardless of race, religion, caste, right? And number two, when you eat longer, you sit in a row on the floor. So whether you're a king or a poor person from historical practice or even today, if it's a prime minister or another person, taxi driver or anyone else, they all sit together and have a meal together, right, in the same row. And it is open to as I said, I have seen people from different communities having lunger, right? And also during the COVID times, like, for example, another way of lung or communication is during COVID times, many Sikh organization, including Calls aid, they offered free grocery to the people in need, right.

During that COVID crisis. And actually, one of the biggest free kitchen is in India, in Amritsar, holy city of six in Amritsar and in Guru called Darbar Sahib or Golden Temple in English, so where about 100,000 people eat every day. So about 100,000 meals are served every day. Again, people come from different religions, backgrounds, castes, right? And they come together for a meal. So it's not only a free community kitchen, but it also promotes the values of equality and values of community together in the gurdwara.

### **Gunreet**

Well, that explains it. Well, I have seen many people hand out some langar at the gurdwara. Have you ever helped do Seva and help hand out langar in the gurdwara?

### **Mr. Buall**

Yeah, actually, when lungar is done, mostly prepared by the volunteers, mainly they're not paid. So I have done it many times, or most of the times I go to gurdwara on special occasions, it is everyone or anyone can help out

or volunteer to prepare that community meal or longer in the gurdwara. Again, you don't have to be Sikh to do it. You could be from different religion. Different religion or different color, race, background, it doesn't really matter. So it's run by volunteers and I have done it many times. I think that's one of the most satisfying thing to do for any sake, not only me.

### **Samrath**

Mr. Buall, I'm wondering where does the money come from to prepare so many meals? Where does the cost come from?

### **Mr. Buall**

It is just the donations by different people. Right. Mainly the Sikh people. But I have seen people from different again, other walks of life also donating to gurdwara or community kitchen because they feel that's the right thing to do. It's an offer to everyone or anyone in the gurdwara.

### **Gunreet**

And the last question is, if you could describe your relationship to Sikhism in one word, what would it be and why would it be that?

### **Samrath**

Yeah, to me there are a number of things, but I think I'll stick to one, which is in Sikhism, one of the Sikh values, we call it *sat*, which means truth. Right. So I think that is what is close to me. But I mean, truth, we know truth is high, but in Sikhism, truthful living is even higher. So, one of the Sikh Gurus. Founder of Sikhism Guru, Nanak. Right. In his own words, he described truth is high, but truthful living is even higher. So that's what I live one of the Sikh values that are kind of like close to me, but including many

others. Right. So honest living and honest earning, but also searching for truth all the time.

### **Samrath**

Mr. Buall, I just want to say thank you so much again for being a guest on the Sikh Heritage Month podcast. And have a great day.

### **Mr. Buall**

Yeah, it was my pleasure.

Bumper: And you are listening to the Sikh Heritage Month podcast, a TDSB production.

### **Interlude 3 (28:32)**

Sikhism, is a monotheistic religion that originated in the 15th century in the Punjab region of India, which is now divided between India and Pakistan. It was founded by Guru Nanak, who taught a message of equality, compassion and devotion to one god, regardless of caste, creed or gender. Over time, Sikhism developed into a distinct faith, which is a rich history, culture and traditions.

My name is Harshdeep and I'm in grade eight. The Order of the Khalsa is a central institution in Sikhism established for the 10th and last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh. The Khalsa is a community of initiative Sikhs who have taken vows to follow a strict code of conduct known as the five Ks. The five Ks are the Kesh, uncut hair, the kara, steel bracelet, the Kanga comb, the Kachhaa, shorts, and the Kirpan, sword. The Khalsa is responsible for

upholding and defending the Sikh faith, and its members are expected to be brave, virtuous, and selfless.

Hi, my name is Pranay, and I'm in grade eight. The main tenets of Sikh faith include belief in one God, equality of all human beings, honest living, and selfless service. Six believe in the concept of seva or selfish service, which involves serving others without expectations of reward or recognition. Six of them also emphasizes the importance of simran or meditating on the name of God and living a life of righteous deeds. The ultimate goal of Sikh faith is to achieve unity with God, which is called mukhti - Liberation.

### **Outro (30:51)**

You've been listening to the Sikh Heritage Month podcast presented by the Toronto District School Board. Thank you to all the students and staff that helped to make this production possible. We'd love to hear about how students have connected with the content and discussions in these three episodes. If you're sharing on Twitter, use the hashtag #SikhHeritageTDSB and you can also tag the handle @TDSB\_SHM.