

Interview with Sundeep Morrison Part 1 of 2

00:00:05 **SPEAKER_MM**

Okay, so just, you know, to kind of start off to kind of honor and respect one another in this space, and also narrate as a narrator, I want to share a little bit about myself, and hopefully that will give you some sort of understanding of what the project is, and then you can formulate how you want to arrive with sharing your story with us. So my name is Manu. I go by she/her/they pronouns. I currently live in Los Angeles and a native to California, born and raised in San Jose. And so I have an endearing relationship with NorCal versus SoCal. But Yeah, just in terms of like constantly being around the Punjabi Sikh community and stuff, kind of, you know, my home was the space where a lot of folks from Punjab came directly to our home as the first home, like the first arrival, you know, was the spot of the first arrival. And so I've been around like all different ages and it's really informed kind of who I am and the work that I do now.

00:01:30 **SPEAKER_MM**

And so I have an evolving relationship with not just with Sikhi in general, but also with LGBTQIA+. And I don't know what that means for me, you know, and I haven't really defined it, which I'm okay with. I think it's evolving and that's beautiful because I'm finally in a crack, if that makes sense. And I like it there.

00:01:57 **SPEAKER_MM**

So yeah, so it kind of, and this project was happening, I met prabh and stuff, and then they were looking for research assistants and stuff, and I applied, and so here we are, doing this. And it's kind of interesting because I'm also a doctoral student in anthropology and social change, kind of coming into this from a different angle. So my research is on youth sexualities in Punjab. And I really didn't kind of situate or position myself into my work, even though you should as you're sort of developing how you're gonna enter the field or whatever, and so I'm sort of theorizing it, I'm engaging with it academically, but now I'm also very personal and very communal with it too. So all of these things are happening to me. So that's kind of how I'm arriving into the space and with these conversations and hearing these stories.

00:02:56 **SPEAKER_SM**

I think that's beautiful.

00:02:58 **SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, thank you. Yeah, what sort of interests you in engaging in the story, storytelling capacity?

00:03:07 **SPEAKER_SM**

Yeah, I think that, you know, my journey has been kind of a coming back to Sikhi in a lot of ways. And so just a brief overview I was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and out in the prairies. And you know my upbringing was through my grandmother. I was raised by my my naniji, my maternal grandmother lived with us So I spent a bulk of my time while my parents were trying to carve out a life. And so I think I had the feeling before I had the words for my identity. And then I think at the time, too, of just the journey of feeling deep connections to Punjabi culture and then Sikhi, but also having these feelings that I didn't have words to, it felt like almost like a deep inner conflict. And I was also raised Namdhari –, and we can get deeper in this – but I was raised with a Namdhari ideology [I don't identify with it or practice it], which is now I identify it as a cult [To me it felt like growing up in a cult]. It's a subset of Sikhi. And so it, so yeah, I was just deep feelings of the more I came into myself the further I felt from having a place in our community as a culture and as a religion. And so I thought oh well everything feels like it's in conflict I'll just pull back. And so now what was appealing is that when I see siblings like prabh and like you doing the work and it's seeing shades of us in spaces where I felt like I had no space. And so that just on a soul selfish level, it helps me reconnect with parts of myself that I felt like I had no place. So that's why this time in community feels so appealing, but it also is very healing at the same time.

00:05:06 **SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, it's a kind of surfacing, you know, letting it sort of exist finally outside of just our faults. You know? Yeah. So sharing your life story can be a very personal, vulnerable experience. What's something you hope to sort of gain with sharing your story or hope that others will share your story?

00:05:39**SPEAKER_SM**

Knowing that all parts of us can exist in all the spaces and that we don't have to make ourselves smaller or suffocate parts of ourselves that deserve to grow just like the rest of us.

00:06:03**SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, everything and anything. Those are sort of some of the questions that we have. So we can kind of arrive to it. It's sort of been a more broader space. But if you have any questions or clarifications.

00:06:35**SPEAKER_SM**

I'm just I'm grateful that it exists.

00:06:38**SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, me too. There's something about the archive that is very futuristic that I'm finding a place for understanding and open political, social strength that is. Yeah. So shall we create the future?

00:07:09**SPEAKER_SM**

Oh, you just gave me chills. Yes. Yes, mighty sister, let's create the future. Oh my gosh.

00:07:17**SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, no pressure, no pressure.

00:07:20**SPEAKER_SM**

No pressure.

00:07:26**SPEAKER_MM**

Oh boy. All right. So I'm going to start with the general introduction and then give a little bit of a project description and then jump into sort of what our first question is. And then stop me if anything needs to be clarified. I can repeat the question and all that. Okay.

00:07:51**SPEAKER_MM**

So this is Manu Multani. Today is August 31st, 2023. I'm interviewing for the first time Sundeep Morrison, who uses they/them pronouns. This interview is taking place at Los Angeles, California and online via TheirStory. This interview is sponsored by Jakara and is part of the Storytelling and Settlement through Sikh LGBTQIA+ Oral Histories Project. The purpose of the research is to document the lived experiences of Sikhs in the United States who are from LGBTQIA+ backgrounds. We wanna provide a more complete history of Sikhs through interviews that ask LGBTQIA+ Sikhs about their different experiences, how LGBTQIA+ Sikhs understand themselves and their communities, and how LGBTQIA+ Sikhs make homes in the US. Unlike a job interview or survey, an oral history interview is all about you and your life. We can talk about anything you want and in any order. So we're going to start with a little bit of a broad question. So when you think back to your experiences of growing up, tell me a little bit about what comes to mind to you. To you, are there common stories, relationships, sights, maybe even smells that come to your mind that help describe growing up?

00:09:28**SPEAKER_SM**

So we always had music in our house. I always considered music our other family member. My mom was a classically trained musician, but she would do kirtan every Sunday, kirtan seva de gurdwara. And so there was always either Bollywood tracks or Surinder Kaur playing or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's music, always, always

music. So it was a very noisy household that I grew up in. And the smell of dhoof – incense – brings me back. Sometimes it's difficult for me to smell that because it brings up so much. That and the sweet and spicy you know it's like the undertones of onion, garlic, and ginger were always permeating through the house. And the smell of tarka just attaching itself to our clothes. Those are the kind of smells and the sounds that I grew up in.

00:10:34**SPEAKER_MM**

Is there sort of like the music or the smells that you sort of try to recreate or sort of share or revisit?

00:10:45**SPEAKER_SM**

Yeah so it's, it's been a little over a year since I lost my mom. And so smell is such, is so deeply part of my sense memory. And so when I miss her, you know, and I'm not a big chaa drinker, but I'll just make it, you know? Just cause I miss her, the masale wali chaa [*the chaa made of masala*], and you know, playing her songs just so I can feel closer to her, my bijji.

00:11:15**SPEAKER_MM**

So you grew up, you said, with your bijji and your mom. Who else was in your household?

00:11:23**SPEAKER_SM**

So I had my dad, and then I had an older brother, and I have a younger brother. And so we all grew up in the northeast in Calgary.

00:11:37**SPEAKER_MM**

And so what are some stories you may have heard like from your communities or your family growing up that sort of made you like understand yourself or perhaps question yourself as it relates to Sikhi?

00:11:56**SPEAKER_SM**

Yeah, I mean, my grandmother, it was very interesting. So growing up, as far back as I can remember, we were part of the sect of Namdhari, which it was very different. So we would go to regular Gurdwara on Sundays, but then Saturday evenings, we would have Nam Simran at our house. And there was only two families that were practicing Namdhari at the time in Calgary. So we would go to their house one weekend, they would come to our house. And I just remember my grandmother was a devout Sikh. She wore her kirpan, and she was actually my deepest connection to my Sikhi because I shared a bedroom with her. So waking up in the morning I would hear her, you know, I would fall asleep hearing her do her Rehras and her evening prayers and I would wake up to her doing Nam Simran. So she was my connector who would sit down and through Punjabi kind of break down what Gurbani was telling us. And so her and my dad had a kind of a deep conflict because there were two types of Sikhi that were being presented, one that centered patriarchy men, and then one that centered Gurusab. So that was very interesting. And then there was a certain set of rules and parameters of how one should appear and look and what the power structure was. So it was very interesting kind of seeing two spectrums of Sikhi.

00:13:55**SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, yeah. And so which side are you saying or were you sort of understanding Sikhi to be more patriarchal, which one sounds like was more maternal?

00:14:09**SPEAKER_SM**

Yeah, I would say Namdhari, because it's all men. It's men in power. And it was now, again, the more I kind of revisit, I'm like, wow, that was, it feels, we were taught it was completely antithetical to what Sikhi is, where we center Gurusab. And here we are, we were bowing to these men. And so I always feel like the indoctrination that was happening, my grandmother was secretly undoing. You know, she would have sidebars and say, you know, this is really how it is. And so we were like, oh, yeah, okay. And, and it was in my teens, where we moved from Calgary to Toronto, where there was a bigger Namdhari population where they had their own Gurdwara. That's when we became, it was really apparent that this is, this isn't how things should be. And so that was a really

tough time. And it did make me question a lot about the Sikhi I was presented versus the kind of the truth of Sikhi.

00:15:15SPEAKER_MM

Yeah, so it sounded like you also had someone who was like, you need to interrogate this. Don't just sort of like follow whatever's like sort of happening in front of you. There's different relationships that you can have. Yeah. So it seems like you were also possibly thinking about how your relationship to Sikhi is going to evolve and change. Were you sort of contemplating that at that time? Or were you like, this is who I am, this is how I want to build community, this is kind of where I need to enter. And were you even thinking about sort of gender and sexuality at that time?

00:16:00SPEAKER_SM

Yeah, I think, and this is something I share, of me probably around age even seven or eight, you know, and my parents, I think they just chalked up my tomboy years as growing up with brothers, right? But I just felt such a deeper identity of, even then, of how masculine and feminine was presented, right? And so I, there's one really clear memory is that it was like the dreaded walk to matha thek [*prostrate*] would always give me so much anxiety. I remember I would sweat. I would sweat and I'd be like okay I have to make sure the ponche of my salwaar are facing forward and that you know and especially going through puberty, I felt so much like you want to conceal and hide and I wanted to get matha theking over with as fast as I could because it felt like the world's eyes were on you.

And so I remember it was maybe 13, oh Yeah it was after we moved to Toronto. It was like 14. And you know I matha thek and we were eating langar and I was sitting next to my grandmother and there was an auntie that always just would nitpick everything from my appearance to what I was eating. She just had it out for me. And so we're sitting there in the langar hall, my biji and I sitting next to each other, and she came and sat in front of us. And she goes to my grandmother, she goes, you know, 'Eda kuch karna pheyna.' [*Something will need to be done about this one.*] And she's like, you know, like, "You have to do something."

00:17:37SPEAKER_MM

I was like, "Ki gal aaa?" [*What's the issue?*] She said, "Mundeya vanghu thurr diya." [*She's walking like a boy.*] And I just felt my face get hot. And I was just so embarrassed and so angry, but stunned. I don't know if you've ever had that feeling where you're frozen, because you feel so much. And then my grandmother just said, "Phir ki?" [*And what of it? So what?*], and she ate and she got up and she left. And then my grandmother turned to me, and she was like, you know, we would go to Mandir sometimes. She was like, "Asi mandar jaane hain na? [*We go to mandir, don't we?*]" I'm like, "Yeah." She's like, "Shiv ji de kol, aadmi te janani da roopa ah. [*The Divine Being Shiv Ji has both the form of a man and woman.*]" And I said, "Yeah." She goes, "Saareyaan vich a, tere ch koi nukhs nai. [*Everyone has this [form] in them, there is nothing bad with you/how you are.*]"

00:18:17SPEAKER_SM

And it was that moment, you know, she had like maybe an eighth grade education, but it was like that moment has stuck with me. And I'm like, you know, and that was enough. That was enough for me to go, you know what, I'm okay in this moment. Like it'll be all right, you know what I mean? And so, yeah, I think the excavation of that, of being at odds with myself and then her passing when I was 17 was just such a devastating blow because I felt like I lost my best friend, I've lost a parent, and my biggest advocate.

00:19:01SPEAKER_MM

But their legacy lives with you. Yeah. So much like richness and gold and yeah, it's just so much. Yeah. Did you like sort of think then like about coming out or was there a coming out for you? I'm not saying it's essential that a coming out needs to happen, but I'm just sort of curious if there was sort of like, was that sort of the interest for you to kind of like then start exploring that more? Or were you like, oh, I don't know, I'm not gonna define it. I don't like you mentioned earlier, didn't have sort of language, you know? Was it that sort of scenario for you?

00:19:47SPEAKER_SM

Yeah, I think for me, it was just coming out to myself of the more I learned of going, oh, you know what? Yeah, I do feel this way. And I am attracted just as much as I am to boys, to girls. And oh, that does have a name and, and my identity. So, I did feel at odds because it was, you know, but it was also like, I think someone, I think I read it somewhere, it was like, you know, what part of yourself did you have to kill in order to survive? And that now we're trying to breathe life back into. Right? Some playing the part of the good, long-haired Indian girl, Punjabi-Sikh kuri, that fit the aesthetic. So then that alleviated any critique or criticism. And, but I do remember it was really closer to even moments in middle school and high school of going, oh, you know what? I do feel this way. But I you know definitely not having any conversations with my parents or anybody in my family I didn't feel because there was such a pressure right. My dad you know was a dastar wearing Sikh, my mom did kirtan and so we were this quasi maybe from the outside it was like a pious religious family. And so really the pressures of just fitting in. And I knew that there was free, like there was freedom on the other side, and that would be through my education. I was picking the farthest universities. I was like, my ticket out of here or to be closer to myself is gonna be my education.

00:21:33 **SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, I can totally relate to that. It seemed like college campuses were the only source, the only way where we could live by ourselves.

00:21:44 **SPEAKER_SM**

Oh yes, I mean when I, you know, and I knew I wanted to be a storyteller, you know, and I would say whether it was on the page, in front of the camera, behind it, or something. My Biji planted the seeds of storytelling, you know, even with Sakhis, and I remember that that was the first thing of learning about life lessons through Sakhis, you know, and just her, the way she would tell a story. And we've, you know, I was just like, oh, this makes me feel something. But yeah, moving from Toronto, and then we relocated to Windsor. And that was another thing of going to New York. And my parents actually saying yes, sending me to film school in New York, but that was so liberating because I was nobody's daughter, I was nobody's sister. And that was another thing too of, on a socioeconomic level, we were maybe like middle class-ish, but there was a time where we spent two years living in a basement when we landed in Toronto you know. And so but if that was really when my my especially through my dad it was like reinforcing caste pride you know. And it was caste was presented to me under the guise of tribal identity, right? And so really excavating that we may not have this, but at least we're this, but in New York, it was like all these things were stripped away and I could just, and I felt like I had come to like the queer epicenter of the world. It was amazing. I was like, this is awesome. You know, to be there, it was very liberating.

00:23:31 **SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, yeah. I have so many follow-up questions. So like, yeah, you know, you talked about Sakhis for a little bit, and I am curious if there are some that sort of you can share that resurface, and if not, that's fine. And then my other question was also sort of like your relationship also more broadly with your siblings, and how that kind of represented itself in terms of maybe gender lines. But yeah.

00:24:04 **SPEAKER_SM**

Yeah. Yeah, I think definitely my household, it took so little to be considered an amazing son, And it took so little to be considered a terrible daughter. So I felt like there were two justice systems. There was one for my brothers and then there was one for me. And that was really, really hard to grow up because I think like my relationship to anger, I always say like I knew violence and anger before I met you know love and kindness. It was really hard. That was tough. I remember when I didn't have words for my feelings of just like you know like doing Ardaas and like just praying like why wasn't I made a boy? It'd be so much easier if I were just a boy and be able to live because I felt like, okay, in a girl body, clearly my purpose was, wasn't to be educated so I could be strong or I could have that knowledge. It was so that I could be marriage material. So I almost felt like it was just upping my market value. And that was one thing that was abundantly clear of like, you're going to eventually belong to somebody else. So we need to make sure your sticker price is good enough. And that and and whereas my brothers I felt like they could you know have that liberation and they could for lack of better words fuck up and make mistakes and live and go and see and be in the world. But yeah, that was really tough.

And so that was hard. And then also it was just knowing my identity. It just makes me sad, but it's okay. I don't, I'm not close to my brothers and I don't think there's ever been a closeness there. And Rakrii was yesterday, you

know? And so I just remember feeling deeply lonely because there was always a yearning for siblings. And I know I felt like the more I came into myself the further I got from them. And it's painful. But and then I allow, you know, it hurts because I know that my queerness definitely changed that relationship. And the more I claimed parts of myself, the harder it was. So there is distance. I'm not close to my brothers or my father. And that's why the loss of my mom was so devastating because she was like a father figure to me. But I am grateful for, that's why my chosen family is so sacred. But I always, yeah, that's something I always longed for. Yeah. Yeah.

00:27:51 **SPEAKER_MM**

I have a younger brother too and I feel like the pressure was just always there. You know, the pressure not only to be this emblematic daughter or sister or whatever, you know all swung up in these moral limitations. The pressure was also sort of like, how do I get them to understand how is it that this system, this patriarchy is damaging all of us? You know, this way of thinking is damaging all of us. Like, how do you, how can you build that thread? It sounds like your grandmother and your mom were the kind of vessels through which you were trying to do that.

00:28:41 **SPEAKER_SM**

Yeah, yeah, and that's why it's, you know, chosen family so, so healing, you know. And, And it is hard because I think that I've always had a deep relationship to my Sikhi, you know. And it was, and now the more that I dive in, it's like, wow, we use this, we've weaponized so much, like just how faith is weaponized, you know, for control, for fear, for all of it. But it was so hard because I felt like it's either or. And especially there's so much gravity on outward appearance too. And that was a lesson too of, you know, of even my dad watching somebody who looked the part, but then who was living in a very different way than what our Gurus wanted us, you know, and that's been very difficult to me is because I feel like I'm discounted so easily in spaces before I even step into them because I took my partner's last name. So culturally, it's like Sundeep Morrison and enu Punjabi da ki patah. Eh deek goreyan da last name, the last, you know, or whatever [*What do they know of Punjabi? Look, they have a white person's last name*]. And then because my relationship to my hair has been very, very deep and nuanced and tricky. And, you know, it's so deep. So all of these things I'm excavating.

00:30:30 **SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, through your unlearning of your experience with Sikhi, you're also learning and rehabilitating your experience with Sikhi. Tell me more about your relationship with your hair.

00:30:46 **SPEAKER_SM**

I think that for so long, I kept my hair long because it was part of Sikhi and that's just, there was no question of it. But I just remember feeling almost like it was this mass. And I think with my masculine identity, it was such a war with it. And just feeling comfortable in my skin of being forced, essentially forced to keep it. I think it's beautiful if you arrive at a space and you arrive there organically, but I think that, you know, like I just felt like I had to look a certain way and present a certain way. Or I was just discounted, or I was bringing shame upon my family, or I wasn't being a good Sikh. And so I guess I feel most euphoric with a buzz cut at this juncture in my life. It makes me feel the most at ease and peace with my body. In my non-binary-ness, where I feel like my masculine and my feminine and neither, nothing, and all of it, and none of it can all live. But I think it was being forced because, you know, and like our culture, even long hair is such a deep sign of beauty, you know. And aside from the religious aspect, hair is so precious. And so it was really tough. And I think that was a really big blow for my parents too. Because for me, cutting my hair and buzzing it, it was, it felt liberating. And I carried a lot of shame of like even feeling good in my body, you know, and there may be a version of me in the future that keeps my hair, I have no idea. You know, that could be part of it. But at this juncture, it's just, my euphoria is when I'm, when I can just feel comfortable in my skin. But that was something that was very much thrust upon all of us as kids. And there was no rhyme or, like, there was no depth. Like now I see, like, you know, The depth and the explaining and and all of the knowledge versus when someone just says hey, this is how it's done, do it this way.

00:33:16 **SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah Yeah, I definitely struggled with that a lot too growing up, where it was like, these are just rules you just follow, and nobody knows why. Nobody knows why. Yeah. And I never grew up with a relationship with my

hair. It was just sort of like, it always has to be tied back. Like for me, that was like the thing. Like my dad would always say, you have to tie it back.

00:33:44SPEAKER_SM

You know? Mine too, yeah.

00:33:46SPEAKER_MM

Yeah, it's like such a controlling element that's tied to our gender and sort of our presentation and all of that. So yeah, it's interesting how these like symbolic things kind of have a direct relationship to Sikhi and how we sort of embody it or not so much.

00:34:09SPEAKER_SM

Yeah, it just added to my dysphoria. Now, thank goodness for therapy, but it just really added to my dysphoria. And I think that sometimes fellow Sikhs that meet me or see me, you know, and it's like, mostly with the elders, is that's one of their first questions of like, why don't you keep your hair? You know, And I'm like, okay, I'll meet you where you're at. And I can have that conversation, but it's like, if someone has no kind of viewpoint of identity, right, or queerness, or even any inkling of it, then for sure they're not going to understand how deeply things can affect you, especially from your body aesthetic. Yeah.

00:34:59SPEAKER_MM

Yeah, menu vi keh var lagda keh, you know, ona di sumaj thori si limited ah, but fir menu eda vi lagda, like limited ah, ja tusi jandey nai? [*Yeah, it also seems to me, you know, their understanding/knowledge is a little limited, but also at the same time, it seems to me like, is it limited or you don't want to know?*] You know, it's really hard. It's really hard to meet them where they're at because It's also like, is this a teaching moment? Is this a learning moment for you? So can I explain that to you or no? Like, is this door closed, you know? Yeah,

00:35:27SPEAKER_SM

100%. I think that that's like where I have to do my own capacity check. Of like, does this feel like a genuine question? Like, you know, like, "Tusi sachi puch dey a? Jey tusi pehla hi mudh thu apna maan bana leya ve, ve me ki a me kaun an, tey tusi menu debate vich leauna jandey a? Debate li... eh conversation li mere kol energy hai nai, uncle or auntie. [*Are you asking truly? Or did you make up your mind beforehand – of what I am and who I am – and now you are coming to me to bring me into a debate? For a debate... I don't have energy for this conversation.*]" You know what I mean? And I think it trips them up, too. And that's always interesting, is like, when they ask, and I'm like, "Yeah. Mere muh javaani Ardaas raatti hoi ya. [*Ardaas is steeped onto my tongue and memory.*] And it's not just raati hoi ya [*and it's not just mindlessly memorized*], but it's because that's how my biji taught us all the Gurus, right? And so I'm like, "Yeah, like jaadu me Ardaas kardi ya, oh mere tey, mere Parmathma da conversation chal rahi ya – sadi conversation chal rahi ya. Me shaheedya nu parnam kar rahi ha. May sarey Guru-a nu sari shradaa na bulaah rahi ha. Or eh ya meri raab murrey bhenthi. [*When I do Ardaas, They are, my Divine and I are in conversation – our conversation is going on. I pay respects to our martyrs/witnesses of our faith. I am calling on our Gurus with deep humility. And this is my ask to my Divine before Them.*]" You know what I mean? Like, that's my conversation. And I can have that whatever way. I don't even have to start it a certain way. But it's very interesting that I'm, you know, you can kind of smell the bullshit sometimes when someone's – ona da daamag baand a [*their mind is closed*] – and they just want to pull you into some nonsense, but it is an interesting time too.

00:37:04SPEAKER_MM

So within those struggles how do you sort of find your sangat, how do you find community, how do you sort of build that for yourself?

00:37:14SPEAKER_SM

Oh my gosh I've been, I feel so fortunate. So I was just in Rochester and it was for the month, oh my God, what was it? Yeah, it was after they were out of school, but before my birthday. And so my sibling, who also identifies on the queer spectrum, Rajul, put together a Sikh exhibit and wanted to include queer Sikh voices.

And she and I had been in community for a while, never met in person. And a bunch of us queer, Sikhs got together in Rochester, and it was so healing. And it was queer, Sikh, a queer, Sikh gathering. And it felt like a vial *[wedding]*. It felt like asi sarey vial li katteey ayenya *[we all came together for a wedding]*. You know, we stayed up late talking about everything, and we did a photo shoot, and that was so healing. I hated taking pictures. I was like, me kaddi vi photo lendi di si *[I never let others take pictures of me]* because I was like oh, now I have to wait and I have to wear this and do this. And it was like the first time. But we had such a deep conversation just about Sikhi. And so what's healing for me, is I feel so lucky that I met my siblings. Veh menu mere veer bhenn mil gaye. Jedey menu deek sakdey ya, menu pyar kar sakdey ya. Te naale menu, mere eh meysuss kardeya bay Parmathma tey Waheguruji le pyar haiga mere li. Jiven vi a mein--menu aapne aap nu baadlna nai pehna. Tey pher oh sukhoon milda. Key tusi naal ekkaatey bhey sakdey haan. Sikhi baarey gal kar sakdey haan--ithas barey soch sakdey haan, gal kar sakdey haan. *[That I met my brothers and sisters {siblings}. Those who can see me, can love me. And with me, they can empathize with me about the Divine and Waheguru having love for me. In whatever form I am in – I don't have to change myself. And from that, I get peace. That we all can come together and sit together {share in community}. That we can talk about Sikhi – we can think about history and talk about it.]* To have siblings that are so deeply well-versed in Sikhi that are sharing that knowledge, and it's so healing of like, "Oh wow, I never knew this is what was written here, or this is what this meant."

00:39:34SPEAKER_SM

So it was just really healing because it's sangat but the deepest form of sangat. And I have never, those are the safest I feel like in Sikh spaces, is queer Sikh spaces. And that's something I'm healing because I still can't walk into a gurdwara with ease. And that may never happen. It's OK. It's like those spaces are very triggering. But it was so healing to be able to talk about Gurbani, you know, and for all of us to sit. So yeah, I get emotional just because they're so beautiful, they're such beautiful beings. I feel really lucky.

00:40:19SPEAKER_MM

Yeah, And especially when you feel like you don't exist, they visibilize you. Yeah. And we have these questions, right? Like, we deeply adore and connect and identify with being a Sikh and then if the outside worlds tell us we can't be. And this is the way we find reconciliation, right? It's through this. So through these conversations and stuff have you been able to arrive to what Sikhi might mean for you or what being Sikh is or what Sikh means to you?

00:41:10SPEAKER_SM

So I think I've been thinking a lot about seva and not, And I know that, you know, growing up, we see outward seva with our community, but I've been like, how am I incorporating seva for self? Veh apne aap di vi seva karni pehni ya *[That I will have to do some service/caretaking of self too.]*. Like how am I incorporating that for myself? And I think boundaries is a form of seva for yourself. I think affirming and journaling, like all the things I love doing that pour into me, that's my self-seva. And when that part of me that misses siblingness, I reach out to my chosen family, you know what I mean? And that's Sangat. And you know just recently I started listening to more kirtan because that was one thing, Namdhari kirtan is done more so in very classical rag. And it's beautiful. But it's like reconnecting with those parts. And now, like, you know, if you come to my house, I have no pictures of the Gurus. It was very hard for me to have any iconography because it's very triggering. And now I'm like slowly bringing small elements and repairing that. So it's, yeah, so that's what I've just been thinking of. Seva is a concept in line with how we take care of ourselves.

00:42:51SPEAKER_MM

And that's how you sort of live and practice Sikhi for yourself.

00:43:02SPEAKER_SM

Yeah, I think it's that and also just the idea of you know it's as simple as pyar *[love]*, right? It's that pyar. And really like I've had to build a relationship with my anger you know. And I think it's like when someone is struggling with a you know the trans community, queer community, or just identity, that really it's something they're having a reckoning inside themselves. That somewhere it's deeply seated, that they're finding and fighting themselves. It has less to do with me and more to do with them. Because my Sikhi tells me, and this is what I'm trying to remind myself too of like, my Guru, my Parmathma loves everyone. And my Parmathma, I

feel, you know, that when I have my moment with Dharam Raj, that there's not gonna be a gravitas on more so what I look like, but what were my karm, how did I treat people? How did I treat myself? How did I treat my kids? How did I treat my partner on this earth? You know what I mean? Like that's where I feel the gravity's gonna be because there's so many people that look the part that are doing horrific things. And then like, what is the definition of a good Sikh or a Sikh period? And so it was a lot of the undoing of going, no, no, no, it's internal. The external is beautiful, beautiful. That's where you land, but you gotta do the inner work first. So that's what gives me hope.

00:44:59**SPEAKER_MM**

Yeah, And so what are your thoughts on people like being able to self-identify as Sikhs?

00:45:06**SPEAKER_SM**

I think that Sikhi doesn't belong to anybody, you know what I mean? It doesn't belong to anybody. I think that there's been so much gatekeeping and then just my personal experience growing up in a subset of Sikhi, where there were so many controlling parameters, I think it's your relationship to God. Whatever...

00:45:37**SPEAKER_MM**

I lost you. I lost you. Can you hear me? Okay.

00:45:50**SPEAKER_SM**

Still have a bit of that.

00:46:14**SPEAKER_MM**

Okay. Okay, let me just hop back in. Silence. Okay. You