

Interview with Mohneet Kaur

00:00:06SPEAKER_KK

This is Karmine. Today is August 7th, 2023. I am interviewing for the first time Mohneet Kaur. This interview is taking place in our respective homes in Virginia and Florida. The interview is sponsored by Jakara and is part of the "Storytelling and Settlement Through Sikh LGBTQIA+ Oral Histories" Project. The purpose of this research is to document the lived experiences of Sikhs in the United States or from LGBTQIA+ backgrounds. We want to provide a more complete history of Sikhs, through interviews that ask LGBTQIA + Sikhs about their different experiences, how they understand themselves and their communities and how they make homes in the US. Unlike a job interview or survey, oral history interviews are all about you and your life. We can talk about anything you want and in any order. To start off, I wanted to ask a question that's a bit broad. *[this portion of the interview had interconnectivity issues]*

00:01:56SPEAKER_MK

Wait, can you hear me? You like froze for most of the question - I didn't hear it. Can you repeat it one more time?

00:02:09SPEAKER_KK

Yeah. Okay. Well, I'm hoping that at least my side caught the beginning part, but I'll repeat the question. So we are going to start a bit broad with our conversation today. So when you think back to your experiences of growing up, I would love to hear a little about what comes to mind for you. Are there any common stories, smells, or relationships that come to mind when you describe growing up?

00:02:59SPEAKER_MK

Oh, like just in general? Um, I guess growing up, I grew up in a very religious way. I literally went to a Sikh boarding school [Akal Academy Baru Sahib]. My dad wanted me to have a very close relationship with Sikhi, so he sent me to boarding school so I could learn about religion and live in a religious way on a daily basis. It was a Sikh boarding school, so we had to wake up, do *paath*¹-- and do *paath* multiple times a day, so we would start off with *nitnem*, then eat breakfast, go to classes. We would also have divinity classes where we'd learn more about Sikh history, and then do *paath* again in the afternoon, have classes again, and then end our day by doing *paath* in our hostel. So it was very much a religious way of living. My dad was very intentional about the reason he sent us there was so we could have a religious upbringing in a way that he thought kids in the Sikh diaspora don't get to. But with that also came a lot of religious trauma of having to live by certain rules every day. But yeah, I think I spent most of my childhood in a very strict version of what Sikhi was to my family and specifically to my dad, and just trying to live up to that. Yeah.

00:04:44SPEAKER_KK

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. When you think about your relationship to Sikhi, you said it was a very strict version of Sikhi that you grew up with in the experience of boarding school. But how would you say your relationship with Sikhi came and evolved over the phases of your life? So thinking about your Sikhi, if you had to define it in phases of your life, what would those be?

00:05:30SPEAKER_MK

Yeah, growing up was very rules-based. There were certain things that I couldn't do. And it stayed that way for as long as I was with my dad, which was until sophomore year of high school. Okay, so like phase 1 in boarding school it was very much like whatever we were told to do is what I would do. After we [my brother and I] left boarding school, we came to the U.S. and started living with our mom and dad. And my mom and dad have very different ideas of Sikhi. My dad, like I said, is very strict, very rules-driven, and my mom's more lenient. So I guess phase two was when I left boarding school and started living in the U.S. full-time. I had a difficult time navigating how to do *paath* on a regular basis, or if I even wanted to. Because it's kind of hard for a kid to do *paath* every single morning and then go to school. Especially if school started at 6 or 7 a.m., or you have to leave for school at 6 or 7 a.m., trying to figure out a time to do *paath* before then. It gets a little difficult because

¹ *Paath* refers to recitation or prayer from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji.

it takes a while to do *paath* too. And it's hard as is to wake up early and go to school, but also having to figure out how to do *paath* before getting to school was really hard. I just remember not wanting to do *paath*. And it was doable when I was with my mom because she wasn't so specific about having to do *paath*. But with my dad, it was kind of harder. But I remember when I first left boarding school, there were a few years where I just didn't do *paath* as regularly. It would only be if I were to go to a Gurdwara Sahib. And then eventually I did start finding my way back to doing *paath*. But I wanted to be on my own terms, and I'm glad that I was. But once I started doing *paath* again, it kind of became a thing that my dad wanted us to do as a family. And again—I don't know—I was just kind of taken away from when I wanted to do *paath* versus it becoming a rule again that we have to do it at a certain time and we have to do it together as a family.

And I guess phase three would be when I moved to Florida with my mom and just started living with her and went no contact with my dad. And I just stopped doing *paath* as regularly. And that's when I honestly truly started thinking about my relationship with Sikhi. Because for the first time, it was not my dad dictating what Sikhi is, but me having to question on my own what it means to be Sikh and what it means to be part of Sikhi and what it means to just be a good Sikh. I didn't really want to follow the rules that I grew up with, mostly because I didn't see any basis to them. And anytime you question an elderly Sikh, especially an orthodox Sikh like my dad, about why those rules exist—like rules like not listening to music or not getting your ears pierced or not cutting your hair—they don't really give a reason for it. It's just like, “oh, it is the way it is.” And it's normal for kids to question, but I feel like questioning is usually seen as disobedient by a lot of orthodox Sikhs. So there's just not a lot of room for questioning when I was growing up. So I just started to question a lot more once I was living in Florida with my mom. And I honestly just didn't know how to go about defining my relationship with Sikhi. I still had a connection with God and I knew that. And I would still go to the Gurdwara Sahib on Sundays or on holidays like New Year's and stuff. But it was hard trying to navigate the religious trauma aspect of it. I still get panic attacks when I do *paath* because it does remind me of a very intense part of my life, I guess. But just not being so hard on myself for not doing *paath* was one of the first things I had to do. Yeah, I don't know. I feel like I'm still in that phase of questioning what it really means to be Sikh. And when I joined Sikhs Students Association in college, one of the reasons I did that was because I wanted to have that as a resource to maybe answer some of the questions that never got to be answered in my childhood. And also have a guide, which is what I was looking for when I left my dad. I feel like it was kind of too much to expect from SSA too because it's also just other kids who are also navigating their relationship with Sikhi. But it was just nice to meet other Sikhs who weren't so particular about how one should be a Sikh or what's the right way to be a Sikh. And it allowed me to be patient with myself and allow myself to unlearn all the rules that I grew up with. And just realize that there's not just one specific way to be a Sikh, that you can have a relationship with Sikhi and Waheguru in different ways, and it doesn't have to be as strict as I thought it was growing up. I feel like my relationship with doing *paath* is still evolving because I don't really understand where I stand on it now. Because ideally I would want to do *paath* regularly, but I feel like it gets hard when you're navigating life on a day-to-day basis. But it's also like, is it really required to do *paath*? I'm sure some people might believe that it is, but I don't know. I feel like when I think about what to do or things to do as a Sikh, it just gets kind of complicated. Because following the rules in a very specific way I feel like just takes away from Sikhi and understanding Sikhi on a true basis. So I'm just trying to not have rules drive me anymore and just kind of take it day-by-day on how I feel is best for me as a Sikh. And someone who does have a relationship with God and wants to maintain that, but doesn't want to stress myself out by thinking that I'd upset God if I don't do *paath* every day or if I don't follow certain rules. I don't know, that was kind of a convoluted answer. But I feel like it's just been a lot of unlearning things from my childhood and trying to still decide what Sikhi means for me. When I know that it means something, and I know that I live life in a way that I do believe in God and I do try to maintain that relationship. But it gets to the specifics of how I go about maintaining that relationship that I'm still evolving on, I guess.

00:13:34SPEAKER_KK

Thanks, thank [you for sharing that]. [*this portion of the interview had interconnectivity issues*] [You mentioned] when you were younger a lot of people responded with like, pretty much like “it is what it is.” And...you mentioned...like, what does it mean to be a Sikh? Are there any other questions you have been grappling with throughout your life as it pertains to Sikhi?

00:14:15SPEAKER_MK

I feel like it's just been— a lot of my questions have just been surrounding the rules that I was told were required as a Sikh. So like, cutting hair has been a big thing for me, because I wasn't allowed to growing up. So I just like, wondered why that was. And a lot of people incite scripture and say, you have to read a lot more scripture to

understand. Yeah, it's mostly just been like, why the rules that now a lot of Sikhs live by, why they exist in the first place, or what's the rationale behind them. I feel like those are the biggest questions that I grew up trying to get answered because those are the things I had to live by on a daily basis. And I didn't like living by them. But also – the reason I didn't like living by them was because I didn't really have an answer to those questions. And I feel like it would have helped a lot more if I got an actual reasonable answer as to why those rules exist.

00:15:31 **SPEAKER_KK**

That makes sense. So, now thinking about gender and sexuality, how did you learn more about these topics growing up?

00:15:58 **SPEAKER_MK**

Um, I feel like when gender was discussed in terms of Sikhi or in my household, when we learned about it in Sikh school and divinity classes for me in boarding school, it was all like, Sikhi is supposed to be egalitarian, women and men are supposed to be treated the same. But then the lived reality of a Sikh household is very different because I would see the way that my dad would treat my mom or even how he would treat me differently from my brother. And kind of seeing how gender roles were imposed on us growing up and wanting me to like, do house chores, wanting my brother to do more manual tasks and forbidding him from doing house chores because that's a woman's job. It was just very, I don't know, jarring to see the difference between what we were taught about gender in Sikhi and how it's supposed to be equal versus how it's usually played out in Sikh households. And then in terms of sexuality, I feel like there was just like no conversation on sexuality growing up in classes or at home. It was just like, a topic that you're never supposed to talk about until you're like, marriage age. It was very much like shut down. So I, didn't grow up thinking about sexuality at all. And it was, a taboo topic, like I would get, worried about thinking about it and – because we grew up thinking that God's everywhere, God's listening to us. He knows what we're thinking and everything. So even like, thinking about sexuality was something that I would try not to do or I would feel so bad. Because it wasn't just like you're not supposed to talk about it. It was like, you're not supposed to think about it or like, act on it at all. It was almost stigmatized, I guess, to even think of yourself as like, having a sexuality or being a sexual being. So I grew up just trying not to think about it at all, and like not questioning it, or not giving it a second thought. And if I did think about it, it would be something that I would have to be ashamed about.

00:18:29 **SPEAKER_KK**

Where do you think that came from? Was it internal sources, external sources?

00:18:38 **SPEAKER_MK**

Yeah, it was a lot of, again, my dad, mostly. Just like, being very particular about what was not accepted in Sikhi. And one of those things was just being or just thinking about your sexuality or like being attracted to people, even if it is someone of the opposite sex. Like, even that wasn't okay. Because like, in the end, arranged marriage is the way for Sikhs, I guess, according to him. So I couldn't like, yeah, I couldn't like, act or like, do or think anything about my sexuality. And then, the only time we talked about anything besides being heterosexual was when it was shown on TV. And my only memory of that is just my dad saying that it was immoral. So just, yeah. I just ended up being like, not thinking about it. Because I wasn't just going to be ashamed, but I was also going to have to deal with real anger from my dad. And like, yeah, I wouldn't want to deal with anything that comes with his anger, which is usually like abusive patterns and stuff. And as a child, you know how much control your parents are going to have over your life – not just for the period that you're a child, but into your adulthood. Like, I always thought my marriage or wedding would be on his terms. So that was like, a really real fear for me. And anytime I tried to oppose the arranged marriage idea he had, he would get angry and not talk to me fully [for weeks or months]. So I knew from the very beginning that even thinking about anything besides arranged marriage was going to result in him being angry. So I guess I internalized a lot of that too, and just tried not to think about going against anything that he had set down as a rule.

00:21:01 **SPEAKER_KK**

It sounds like the messages from your dad are also like, connected to that question you were talking about earlier about like, what's required of a Sikh? Like, the messages were that, 'oh, it's required of a Sikh to get a marriage or to have a relationship.' So I'm guessing similar to what you said earlier, your ideas on sexuality changed in your life. So thinking about understanding gender and sexuality, in terms of phases, what would

those be? And I know you touched on your childhood a bit already.

00:22:19SPEAKER_MK

Yeah. I feel like one of the things I've talked to you about too in the past is just like, the difference between what's supposed to be Sikhi and what's like, Punjabi culture kind of finding its way into how people live in Sikh households. So in terms of gender, I do like, think very much in the way that like, when we're talking about Sikhi, that it is egalitarian, that women and men— women and men are like, created equal, supposed to be treated equal. And that there aren't supposed to be like, these like, split gender roles that are moreso defined by Punjabi culture than they are in Sikhi, I feel like. So I grew up having that mindset, even though I did see how Sikhs would treat women and men differently, or like how my dad would treat me and my brother differently. I did like, try to maintain the idea that like, how my dad was treating me and my brother differently was obviously not fair. And I would fight back against it too. But obviously it wouldn't result in anything because parents— it's usually hard to like, say anything against parents and having it actually stick or make a difference. But I guess I did like, try to maintain at least like, in myself, not losing sight of what I believed, despite how I was treated and how I had to act at my dad's house.

And then in terms of sexuality, I feel like because I was just like, so ashamed to even think about my sexuality, I just like, spent so long just not thinking about it. So [phase 1] I would say up until like, high school, I would just like try not to think about my sexuality. And then [phase 2] college is really when I guess I started thinking about it for the first time and started questioning it a lot more. But even then I would just like, I don't know, dismiss anything that like, went against my understanding of my being straight at the time. I would just like, I don't know, anything else that I would think about, I was like, maybe, maybe not. But like, until I'm sure, I can't like, 100% say that I'm not straight. And that doesn't necessarily have to do with Sikhi, but more so like, I guess, non-Sikh ideas of how someone like, comes to terms with their sexuality or like, how someone understands their sexuality was also a big part of like, me being in denial for so long or like, me not willing to like, accept my sexuality. But I think in terms of Sikhi, it was just that like, because there was no room to like, talk about it or to even like think about it, talk about it, or explore it on your own terms, I just dismissed like, my sexuality for the longest time and just like, let it be whatever the norm is, is what I would accept for myself and anything else. I just like, would shut down and not think about it, and not want to question it at all. And now like, having come out, I've obviously come to terms with my sexuality and have had some time to think about it. But even now I do find myself kind of like, resorting to old patterns of having to consciously think about— I shouldn't have to be like, dismissing my thoughts all the time. And I'm just like, so used to immediately saying no to myself that now that I have come to terms with myself, I have to fight those thought patterns very consciously. And when I do think about like, other aspects of like, my gender identity and stuff, I do still like, just try not to like, think about it as much, because I think it just gets like, really confusing or just like, it feels like, overwhelming at times. But I guess [phase 3 now] I'm trying to unlearn just like, the not talking about it, not thinking about it, like shutting down and just like, actually giving myself space to question and like, I guess sit with the discomfort and just not immediately shut down.

00:26:40SPEAKER_KK

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And forgive me if I like, say anything wrong; I'm just like, trying to process. But I think you said that like even when you were questioning your sexuality and stuff, you kind of like, shut it down, as you said, and you attributed that to not necessarily any Sikh ideas but but non-Sikh ideas. So can you talk a little bit more about that and like, what ideas kind of ideas contributed to you like, shutting down yourself?

00:27:30SPEAKER_MK

Yeah, I feel like the biggest thing was just like, not really having any like, romantic experiences in high school or like, in college, which might also be like, conservative, Sikh and Punjabi upbringing. But it was like, knowing that I was straight, or like, knowing that I was attracted to men, I guess I like, checked off a box of like, okay, I guess I like, meet that aspect of like, my sexuality, but I couldn't be sure about me liking like, non-men. Or like, anyone besides men, because I hadn't really like, had any experiences with anyone who wasn't a man I mean, I hadn't really had any experience with like, men either, I guess, by that sense, but it's like, usually like, straight people, they know they're straight, even though they haven't necessarily like, been with someone of the opposite sex or like, had any like, experiences, I guess, with anyone of the opposite sex. But usually when someone comes out, there's a lot of questions of like, 'how do you know? Have you like, been with a girl? Like, have you like, actually had a relationship with a girl or with someone who's not a man?' And I hadn't, and I

wasn't sure, like, I don't know— I was just like, afraid of being wrong or like, I don't know. It was just like, a lot of like, not really wanting to use women or anyone who like, didn't identify as male like, not wanting to use them for like, my personal like, exploration of my sexuality, because that would also be like, wrong and just, yeah, I didn't want to like, use people. But also not being 100% sure because I hadn't really had those experiences with, yeah, with like, women and like, anyone who like, doesn't identify as a man. So I was just like, scared of I don't know, I just thought I had to be like, 100% sure before coming out. And there was like, no way for me to go about that, it seemed like at the time to me. Because there is that standard of like, how do you know if you like, haven't been with someone who isn't a man? And I honestly just didn't know how to go about answering that question. Yeah.

00:29:56 **SPEAKER_KK**

Well, thank you so much for [this part of the interview had interconnectivity issues]. It's something like, honestly, I haven't really thought too much about before, but it's like, we live in a moment of society where the default is heterosexual. And it seems like, I guess, to be queer, you almost have to like, prove it more, whereas like, it's obviously easier to default to being straight. So, I know you mentioned coming out earlier. I'm wondering what does coming out mean to you? Like, in your experience how straightforward or linear is the experience of coming out or being out? And is that something that everyone would have to do at some point in their life?

00:31:04 **SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like for me, the biggest part of coming out was just like, coming out to myself. Because, I mean, for the longest time, before I came out, I would say that I was straight or whenever I would be asked about my sexuality, I would say that I was straight and like, my understanding of myself was also that I was straight. So like, the first step in coming out for me was just like, coming out to myself and like, realizing that I'm not straight and that I do like people that aren't just men. And then like, the next step was, I guess, coming out to my now girlfriend. And I feel like falling for a woman was like a big part of me coming out. Um, which I guess like, I don't know, I sometimes think about like, if that hadn't happened, how I would have gone about even coming to terms with my sexuality. But yeah, for me, it was like, it's something that kind of happened in [the moment] it wasn't something I planned out. But it wasn't like, there wasn't like, one exact moment that I was like, 'Oh, now I know.' It just kind of happened, I guess, slowly and over time.

Um, but like, honestly, it happened in a conversation with, um, yeah, with my girlfriend, with my now girlfriend then friend, where I was just like— I honestly don't even remember that conversation now, because it was just like so much happening. And I just remember like crying in that time, but not remembering exactly what I said or what she said. Um, but it was just like, after honestly like a couple years of questioning, just like, allowing myself to like, come to terms with the fact that I'm not straight. And also allowing— allowing myself to like admit that I did have feelings for someone else. So, um, yeah, for me the biggest thing with coming out was just like, coming out to like my friends, like the people that I regularly see. Because there are people that I love and care about that I know would accept me. Um, and then, I don't know, I kind of had like a weird process of like, coming out to myself and then like my girlfriend, and then my friends, and then I wanted to come out to my mom and my brother. Um, because again, I see them regularly and like, I live with them. Um, and I did want to introduce them to my girlfriend so I felt like that in order to do that, I obviously had to like come out to them. Um, and especially since I'm like moving in with my girlfriend in a few weeks, I felt like I had to come out to my mom and my brother in order to explain that too.

Um, and then, in terms of like extended family, I honestly haven't come out to them, and I don't think I will— I'm just going to leave them guessing. Because the process of coming out, I felt like was pretty awkward at times for me. Like, it just, I don't know, it feels kind of random almost when you're coming out, because like, no one's really asking what your sexuality is, I feel like. [chuckles] And I just felt like I was like telling them when like, honestly, they didn't really need to know. And yeah, I just don't want to have a conversation with extended family, so I'm going to avoid it as much as I can. Even though my extended family have— they have told my cousins, who I do talk to, that they know I'm gay, but I just — I'm going to leave them like having conversations in their family and just like not talking to them about it. Because I feel like it's just like, one, weird how they got to that conclusion by themselves. Because they came to it like before I'd like even come to terms with my own sexuality, which, I don't know, I just feel like I hate when people like assume things based on like little behaviors and like make it out to be so much more than it is. Um, but yeah, I don't know. I feel like, back to like the question, like, does everyone else have to come out? I don't think so. I think it really just like, it depends on like, who your family is. And who you honestly talk to regularly or who you consider a part of your life and

someone you want to share that aspect of yourself with. But for me, like the most important part was just like, coming out to myself and coming to terms with myself and just like finally accepting myself. Everything else was just kind of like secondary. And having gone through that, like, I didn't honestly feel like it was necessary to come out. And I only tried to do it to like the people that I felt like I absolutely had to. Um, so I feel like it definitely depends on the person and like who their family is too. Because there's also like for a lot of people, there's a very real fear of like violence as a response to coming out, which I was fortunate not to have. So like, I didn't have to worry about that. But like, I feel like if that's definitely like, I don't think coming out is like a necessity or something that people like have to do as part of their journey. Yeah, I think it just depends on the person. But for me, like the most important thing was just like, like I said, like accepting myself.

00:37:11 **SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you for sharing about that, coming out to yourself and to others. And as you said it can be awkward to come out to others because it seems almost unprompted in a way. That makes a lot of sense. Now we can move to some questions about identity formation. So I'd love to hear a little bit about how you think of yourself. So how has your understanding of yourself looked like at different points of your life? *[this portion of the interview has interconnectivity issues]*

00:38:10 **SPEAKER_MK**

Um, I feel like, like growing up, being Sikh was just like something that I always knew because it was in the way that we grew up and the way that like we did everything was like, informed by the fact that I was born into a Sikh family and that I'm Sikh and like, given that I went to [a Sikh] boarding school at like the age of four. So even my parents wanted it to be like a very direct part of my life since I was a kid. In terms of my sexuality, like I said, I just didn't think about that aspect of my identity for the longest time. Um, but now when I think of myself now I'm more questioning of my relationship with Sikhi than I am with my sexuality. Um, but even then, I feel like I'm so secure in the fact that I am a Sikh, it just really comes down to the specific details of how to be a Sikh or like how to be a good Sikh. That's usually when I start to question. I feel like I've come a long way in the sense that like, now, I do see myself as like, a Sikh who's also part of the LGBTQ plus community, but it did obviously start off with like, my identity being reduced to like, just being Sikh or being a Sikh woman at times. But even then, growing up, it was just like, just think of yourself as like, Sikh first and everything else as like, kind of like secondary. Um, but now it's just like, understanding that obviously I'm going to have like different aspects of my identity and they're going to coexist. And they're going to intersect and just give me a different experience than like maybe a Sikh woman, or like, someone who might not have like those specific identities. Um, just like my experience is obviously going to be like, different than like, like other members of like, the Sikh community or even the LGBTQ plus community. But there has definitely been quite a lot of questioning along the way. And like, a lot of questioning still. Um, so I'm not like, obviously as secure as I could be like, in my identities. But I guess like, the goal is to just continue working on how I understand myself and my identities and like, trying to be more secure in them moving forward.

00:41:10 **SPEAKER_KK**

You mentioned, um, like there's a lot of different ways to be part of the Sikh communities or LGBTQIA plus communities. What does it mean to be a part of a LGBTQ plus community? Do you think it's a single community or a set of communities or something else?

00:41:38 **SPEAKER_MK**

Um, I think it can be a set of communities. I know like, at college, I feel like when I came across the LGBTQIA plus community, it was mostly like, white people, white queer people. And I feel like that deterred me for the longest time.. And I feel like that deterred me for the longest time. And it was very similar to like, growing up, I was also like, deterred from like, white feminists too, and like, didn't really feel a part of like, that movement either. Because I feel like they don't really like, understand the intersection of being someone who's not white or being a person of color *and* being a part of those communities. But I think also [with] me just having come out towards like, the end of my last year of college, I feel like I didn't really get a chance to like, be a part of like, I guess like specific communities on grounds, or like specific spaces that were meant for LGBTQ plus individuals, because I just like denied myself that for the longest time. And didn't I feel like I deserved to be in those spaces because I like, hadn't come out earlier. When I did, it just like, I don't know, so I just still felt like an outsider. And I just like still felt like an outsider. And just like, didn't feel that I could allow myself to like, be a part of those spaces, I guess. But the biggest form of support was like, my friends, they're all also part of the

LGBTQIA plus community. So just like having them and like, I don't know, seeing like, different experiences in my friends too allow myself to like, at least not feel completely alienated. Because like, feel completely alienated. Because like, in a way, they're also my community that I did feel a part of. But I don't know, I feel like community that I did feel a part of. But I don't know, I feel like now that I'm in the real world, I'm still kind of like, navigating those spaces. And like, trying not to see myself as an outsider now. But still like, [not] really knowing how to like, enter the spaces that are specifically meant for LGBTQIA plus people. Yeah, I don't know, I feel like it's still like, very new for me. And just like, I'm trying to take baby steps towards it. Not like, I don't know, constantly feeling like I'm not supposed to be in those spaces like I used to.

00:44:41 **SPEAKER_KK**

Yeah, I guess the question about whether or not you need to be a part of the LGBTQIA community, you might still be navigating that question. Just kind of like, struggling with that feeling of being outsider, but you were able to find support in friends and maybe feel more a part of a community [that way]. Do you think that's accurate?

00:45:05 **SPEAKER_MK**

Wait, so what was that? So just the last part.

00:45:24 **SPEAKER_KK**

I was going to say, you mentioned that you were able to connect with friends who were in certain LGBT communities. And would you say that's [*this part of the interconnectivity issues*] part of being a part of the community?

00:45:36 **SPEAKER_MK**

Yeah, because my friends have been out for a while and were very active in the LGBTQIA plus communities in our case, on grounds that they were a part of. I felt like when I came out to them, they didn't make me feel like 'oh you just came out, so you don't know what the experience is' or like or anything like that. I feel like they immediately integrated me into those communities. And even before I'd come out, just by being their friends, I was also a part of those communities as an ally. So I didn't feel like I had to go out of my way and try to be a part of the communities that they were a part of; it just felt more natural just by being friends with them that I would be a part of whatever they were a part of, especially if that was something that we shared or connected on, or experiences that we felt we had similar understandings of. Because like my friends are also LGBTQ plus people of color, so they also understood what it meant to be both a person of color and someone who's a part of the LGBTQ plus community. And also navigating conservative family structures, which tend to be very common in Sikh families, too. So yeah I just felt like I ended up being a part of the communities that my friends were also a part of, just by them sharing those experiences with me and me feeling comfortable sharing my experience with them.

00:47:43 **SPEAKER_KK**

That's great that you were able to connect with your friends in a way that made you feel a part of those communities. Can you identify the label of LGBTQIA plus [that you identify with]? How would you define that label for yourself? [*this portion of the interview had interconnectivity issues*]

00:48:00 **SPEAKER_MK**

Wait, sorry, can you say the second question again?

00:48:15 **SPEAKER_KK**

I'll just repeat the whole question. If you identify with one of the labels of LGBTQIA plus, how would you define that label for yourself? More broadly, how would you define queerness?

00:48:25 **SPEAKER_MK**

Okay. Um, I feel like for now, when I came out, and now I see myself as pansexual, which I guess is not in the professional LGBTQIA plus title. But at times I do just want to forego labels because I have also come across the bi versus pan discourse, and that's a lot, too. [laughs] And I feel like with being a part of the community, there's a lot of discourse that comes out, too, or that you get exposed to, and that just seems like a lot at times. And then there's also wondering, 'am I pan, or do I just have comphet [compulsory heterosexuality]?' But I think above all, I do find comfort in the label of just queer, because I feel like it allows me to, I guess, have a label, but not go into specifics of other labels or specifics of who I'm attracted to or who I'm of who I'm not attracted to and how I see myself. I feel like just being queer allows me to not deal with the discourse of what it means to be a certain identity. And just leaving it as, 'oh, I'm queer.' It just lets me be, I don't know, I feel like it just allows me to not just get overwhelmed by the politicization of certain identities, or even the theoretics of it, because I know there's a lot of theory on specific labels, too, which, at times, just seems really overwhelming, and seems like I don't want to think too much about. So, yeah, I just feel like identifying as queer just makes it not as overwhelming for me, especially as someone who's, I feel like, still trying to understand my sexuality and my gender identity, it just allows me to exist without constantly having to question or theorize about my identity.

00:50:50SPEAKER_KK

You mentioned that pansexual isn't in the acronym, but it's in the 'plus.'

00:50:57SPEAKER_MK

Yeah, that's true. [laughs]

00:51:05SPEAKER_KK

Yeah, but, and you mentioned being sometimes more comfortable calling yourself queer. How would you define what queerness means?

00:51:24SPEAKER_MK

I feel like, I know there's obviously a lot of scholars have talked about it a lot, and there's a lot of theory on it. But beyond that, I feel like, for me, it's just, I don't know, just, I guess, going against the norm in a bit, in just how you exist, and how you actually live. Anything that goes against the hetero-patriarchy, I feel like, could be queerness. So anything that just isn't accepted as a norm for me I feel like constitutes as queerness. Yeah.

00:52:20SPEAKER_KK

[this part of the interview had interconnectivity issues] Yeah. So leading to the next question, how would you define a Sikh, and what are your thoughts on people being able to self-identify as Sikh?

00:52:48SPEAKER_MK

Honestly, I just, I think a Sikh is anyone who believes in the core tenets and values of Sikhi, and Waheguru, and just having that love and passion for Sikhi and Waheguru, I feel like is enough to characterize anyone as a Sikh. And it is a religion that you can willingly be a part of, so I feel like anyone, as long as they genuinely believe in the values that come with Sikhi, can identify as a Sikh.

00:53:32SPEAKER_KK

[this part of the interview had interconnectivity issues] What would you say are the main values of being a Sikh?

00:53:50SPEAKER_MK

I feel like for me, some of the core values of Sikhi is just one, that everyone's created equal, and everyone should be treated equal. So again, I feel like it's one of the main principles or values of Sikhi. Believing in *seva* [volunteering/community service] and doing *seva* regularly, or just in your day-to-day life, just looking out for people and trying to just help out in your community. And again it doesn't have to be just by going to the Gurdwara Sahib and doing *seva* there, you can just volunteer in your community and that also can contribute to

seva. Or even if you help out anyone that you interact with, that can also just be seva. I think just helping another person can just contribute to Seva. Yeah, I feel like just like— Oh, and then believing in— actually being politically active, fighting for justice and liberation for all, I feel like is also a part of Sikhi that a lot of people might not consciously recognize. But I feel like not being silent when obviously oppression is happening around you, and actually taking a stand for oppressed and marginalized communities, I feel like is a very direct part of Sikhi that I feel like is something that a lot of Sikhs should probably start working towards. Yeah. I know there's a lot more specific values too once you get into scripture and everything, but I feel like for me, the main ones are usually just helping others and being a good person, and just believing in equality for all, and actively fighting for justice and liberation for everyone.

00:56:03 **SPEAKER_KK**

Yeah, it's like the idea of *Miri Piri*, the spiritual and political engagement in the community. Are there any stories of Sikh communities in history, or even in the Sikh communities you have been involved in, that could help you understand yourself better, or your relationship with Sikhi better?

00:56:50 **SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like a lot of the *sakhis* that I grew up listening to from my *nani* [maternal grandma] just helped me, like, I don't know. It usually serves as a place to come back to when I feel like I'm questioning Sikhi, or I'm questioning certain ideals. Because even a lot of the orthodox Sikhs, I feel like, falter, even though they have ideas of what you need to do and don't need to do when it comes to Sikhi, they still have anger and arrogance and stuff that's still against Sikhi. So I feel like it just helps me understand that not everyone's as perfect as they see themselves as, or not everyone has the right— actually, no one has the right to police another person's Sikhi to begin with. And we all might have something to work on as Sikhs, and are not necessarily always going to be perfect. So when I do think about how another Sikh might perceive me, or see me as a bad Sikh, I just have to remind myself of the values that I believe in, and the values that could apply to everyone, and that not everyone is necessarily following every single rule, or every single value that's a part of Sikhi.

But I feel like also, since college, meeting different Sikhs in my community, like you and Jasleen from SikhRI, or even learning about organizations like SikhRI, has introduced me to a whole new world of seeing Sikhi and Sikh teachings and research evolve, I guess in ways that they hadn't when I was little. And growing up, Sikhi just seemed really rigid, but now seeing organizations like SikhRI has introduced me to how I can understand topics like gender and sexuality within the context of Sikhi, and not have it be something that's taboo, or just not discussed at all. And also just seeing how different Sikhs exist, they don't necessarily all have the same understanding of Sikhi, or don't live the exact same way or follow the exact same rules, but at the end of the day, we're all Sikhs, and we all have a very personal and close connection to Sikhi. It just makes me feel better about not feeling guilty about going against certain forms of Sikhi that I've grown up with, and just feeling more secure in different ways that we can all be Sikhs, and it doesn't just have to look a specific way.

00:59:39 **SPEAKER_KK**

That makes a lot of sense. How would you describe your experiences and relationship with Sikhi and LGBTQIA plus communities?

01:00:14 **SPEAKER_MK**

I guess I can speak on the Sikh community more, just because I feel like I've been a more active part of it longer. I usually just try to seek out Sikh communities wherever I go, and just try to be a part of that. And if nothing else, for me, I guess whenever I move to new places, the first thing to do to find a Sikh community is almost as soon as I go to the Gurdwara Sahib. And it's not necessarily the people that I meet there, but just the Gurdwara Sahib itself serves as a community for me, a place that I go to for comfort or whenever I go through bad times. Usually whenever I go places, the first thing I look up is if there's any Gurdwaras near me, because it feels nice knowing that I have that one space to go to whenever I need to. So it's usually how I try to maintain a Sikh community, it's trying to go to the Gurdwara whenever I can, or even seeking out Sikh people around me. I feel like it was easier to do in college, where there's a clear Sikh Students Association, so I'm not sure how I'm going to go about it now. But it helps knowing that just going to a Gurdwara Sahib alone can just be a way I maintain a connection with Sikhs and even the Sikh sangat in my area. And then with LGBTQIA plus community, again, I feel very new to it, but it is something that I want to try to explore more ways that I can be a part of. But for now, it's still something that— I'm also, since I'm between areas, I haven't settled in a specific place. I don't really

know how I would go about it until I'm settled down and have had a chance to look around and see the communities around me. But I feel like the one thing that's helped is just having my girlfriend there and knowing that that's something that we can do together, or something we can seek out and be a part of together as well.

01:02:44**SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you for sharing that. *[this portion of the interview had interconnectivity issues]*

01:03:15**SPEAKER_MK**

Sorry, can you say the question one more time?

01:03:20**SPEAKER_KK**

How would you describe your relationship with Sikh communities?

01:03:24**SPEAKER_MK**

With Sikh communities? Um, I feel like it depends— Well, there's definitely an older generation of Sikhs that I feel like I'm usually at odds with, because they have very specific ideals, especially if they're like, people who have immigrated from India. They seem to kind of be stuck in the time period that they immigrated in, so they have very rigid ideas of what Sikhi is, and I feel like I usually don't find community there. Or honestly, not just older generations, but there's even people in our generation that we saw in college who have a very specific idea of how Sikhi is, and are very orthodox at times, or are very rules-based, and I feel like I usually just stay away from that community. It's just not something I want to expose myself to. But there's also communities of Sikhs where they're a lot more lenient in how they understand their relationship with Sikhi and how they practice Sikhi on a day-to-day basis, and I feel like I usually feel a lot more comfortable and at home with them.

01:04:57**SPEAKER_KK**

And you mentioned going to the Gurdwara is a main way that you are able to maintain your relationship with Sikhi, and I was wondering what types of resources or support do you seek to navigate your experiences, whether they be with Sikhi or sexuality and gender? For instance, that could include going to the Gurdwara, engaging in Gurbani,, or any other resources.

01:05:38**SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like in terms of resources, I usually find them online. I feel like in person, it's kind of difficult to navigate and ask for resources, because you're not really sure about the person that you're interacting with. Also like, Gurdwara is a place where people do tend to be kind of judgy. When I lived in Ohio, when I was little, the Gurdwara Sahib knew all about my family, and when my mom and dad got divorced, they all took my dad's side and ostracized my mom. So I grew up seeing the difference in how they treated my dad and how they treated my mom. So I've always seen the Sikh sangat as being a little judgy at times, or just knowing all about your business and your family's without you necessarily having told them. So I do try to stay away from talking too much to Gurdwara committee members, for example, because, again, they do tend to be a lot older and more orthodox. With the Gurdwara that I now go to in Florida, yeah, I feel like I've gotten scolded more than I have been accepted, because there are still people there that have very specific ideas of how one should conduct themselves when they're in a Gurdwara, or how one should conduct themselves as a Sikh. So I'm usually scared of being judged by any sangat member, or just being judged for how I am as a Sikh. So I usually don't seek out resources in a Gurdwara Sahib just based on the kind of experiences I've had growing up. So usually for resources I do, I feel like I either text you or just look [it] up. I feel like the best thing that I've done when I first started questioning Sikhi was looking up things that I was curious about in Sikhi, and seeing what other people's views are out there too, like people that I probably would never meet. But just getting to see all the different perspectives that exist on specific issues, and then more recently just getting exposed to more specific research that's being done in the realm of Sikh issues that isn't being conducted by more orthodox Sikhs, but is being done by people who are actually open to having discussions about what gender and sexuality, or caste and everything, what that looks like in Sikhi, in terms of scripture and the lived experiences. Yeah, I feel like my biggest resources have been the internet and online, and just looking stuff up.

01:08:55**SPEAKER_KK**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Like Gurdwaras maybe by going in person, it doesn't seem like the safest thing in your experience, so online [resources can be] more helpful. Thanks for telling me about that. [Wanted to check in] on how you're feeling, and whether you think a break could be helpful, or how you'd like to continue.

01:09:38**SPEAKER_MK**

My computer cut you off, what was that?

01:09:42**SPEAKER_KK**

I'm just checking in on how you're feeling, like whether [you'd like to take a] break, or are open to continuing

01:09:50 **SPEAKER_MK**

I'm open to continuing.

01:10:18**SPEAKER_KK**

Great. Great. So, we talked a little about your experience growing up, and how you have formed your identities, how they relate to each other, and how you see them in relation to yourself.

So now I want to ask a little bit about the areas you've lived in and grown up in. And you mentioned a few places. *[this portion of the interview had interconnectivity issues]*

01:11:05**SPEAKER_MK**

Yeah, so I guess my earliest memory of a place having an influence on how I understood Sikhi was in India, when I went to boarding school. Yeah, I was taught a very specific way of how to be a Sikh, or how to be a good Sikh according to their standards. Because the purpose of the school was to teach Sikhi according to their standards. Because the purpose of the school was to teach you how to be a Sikh, and what you need to do in order to be a Sikh. And then, I lived in Ohio after that, and that was mostly living with, switching off between my mom and my dad. And I guess, in a way, also switching off between totally different, opposite ideas of what it meant to be a Sikh. So just kind of being conflicted, I guess, growing up in Ohio, of my mom's understanding of a very lenient version of Sikhi, versus my dad's very strict understanding of Sikhi. And then living in Florida after that was more just me finally getting a chance to navigate Sikhi for myself without really having anyone telling me how Sikhi is supposed to be, or what a good Sikh looks like or acts like.

And then college in Virginia then allowed me to meet other people, who I guess, a lot of it was going through stuff very similar to me. They're also questioning what Sikhi means to them, or they're still in the process of navigating how to develop a relationship with Sikhi and how to maintain that relationship. So I felt like I was with people my age who are also in the same place in life with Sikhi as I am. And then in terms of queerness, I feel like, like I talked about before, I didn't really allow myself to think about my queerness until I got to college. But college, like meeting people who are a lot different than me, or just meeting people with similar experiences as me, or similar questions as me, just allowed myself to explore more and understand myself more than I probably would have if I hadn't met them, or if I hadn't gone to college. I feel like college was the place where I got the most exposure to a lot of different people, but also allowed myself to explore my relationship with Sikhi and queerness a lot more, and just be okay with questioning and not necessarily having to be 100% certain about everything all the time.

01:14:02**SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you for sharing that. The reason we ask that question is because place and geography are important to help people find stability and community and make sense of themselves. Were there any historical and community and make sense of themselves. Were there any historical or personal events that were formative for you, based on where you grew up, or where you are now?

01:14:44**SPEAKER_MK**

Can you say the question again?

01:14:49**SPEAKER_KK**

Were there any historical or personal events that were formative for you, based on where you grew up, or live now?

01:14:58**SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like boarding school was definitely like...Wait, sorry, did you say something?

01:15:07**SPEAKER_KK**

No.

01:15:07**SPEAKER_MK**

Oh, okay. I feel like boarding school was really formative in the sense of... I don't know, boarding school was the negative side of my relationship with Sikhi, and just traumatizing me. Like their purpose was to build so many students' and children's connection with Sikhi, but in the end they ended up doing the opposite. So I feel like that kind of exposed me to Sikhi more, and introduced me to learning Punjabi and scripture, things that I do value in myself now. And things that my family members do see, like at least like 'oh I know Punjabi now, and at least I had exposure to Sikhi at a very young age.' But on the flip side, at the same time, just traumatizing me from ever questioning anything growing up. And just like, I don't know, leaving me feeling very concerned at times about Sikhi. But then college was, I guess, a more positive experience of being in a community with other Sikhs, and getting to be okay with not always having all the answers, and still being a good Sikh. Or just defining what Sikhi means for myself, and not necessarily by scripture and by rules that people have defined as rules and stuff.

01:17:08**SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you for sharing that as well. Can you talk a little bit about your connection to California?

01:17:28**SPEAKER_MK**

I guess my connection to California is still pending, but I am going to be moving to California in two weeks. My girlfriend grew up there, has lived there her entire life, and I'll be moving there now and living with her. So I feel like there's still so much about California I need to learn about, and obviously see once I'm there. But I did spend a week there for spring break [2023]. And that, I feel like, was really nice, just because one, I got to see LA, but two, I kind of felt like [at] home. And honestly, parts of it reminded me of India too, because there's like fruit vendors on the streets and stuff, which I feel like is very reminiscent of Punjab in India. But I have been looking up what the closest Sikh community to LA is, because from what I've seen, there isn't really that much of a Sikh community. Maybe [they're not] LA itself [but] a little farther from LA. But I know there's a Gurdwara that my girlfriend's sister always drives by, that she wants to go to, and she's waiting for me to get there to take [us]. So already having people tell me where the Gurdwaras are before I'm even there has been really nice. But yeah, I don't know, I used to be scared of California when I was little, just because of all the earthquakes. [laughs] So I honestly never saw myself as living on the West Coast, and especially in California. So seeing that I'm moving there now has been something that I would have never thought of me doing, even last year. But the fact that I'm doing it now, it's exciting, but also a little nerve-wracking. But yeah, I'm excited to be in California, and see everything there is. And be in a different side of California than maybe the biggest Sikh community concentration is, because I know it's mostly in Northern California slash Bay Area slash San Jose. But still getting to see what the Sikh community is like in Southern California.

01:19:59**SPEAKER_KK**

That's so exciting. Thank you for sharing about that. So the last couple of questions are about desire, intimacy, and healing. So tell me a little bit about what you think desire is, and how does this and other related concepts influence relationship-making for you?

01:20:42**SPEAKER_MK**

How does it influence what?

01:20:45**SPEAKER_KK**

Relationship-making.

01:20:48**SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like desire can be superficial at times. *[this part of the interview had interconnectivity issues]* And then intimacy is building off of a relationship that you already have created and maintained with the person. And I think it can just be like, just feeling close to someone that you already have a relationship with, and a way to maintain that relationship and be healthy and still feel close to your partner or whoever you're in a relationship with. Yeah, I feel like intimacy can solidify your relationship even more over time. But I feel like both are integral to relationship-making, and making sure that the relationship stays, I guess, healthy and alive, as some people might say, for a long period of time. And I feel like in order to maintain a relationship in the honeymoon phase, I guess, that people talk about, is making sure that that desire is still there, and a way to keep that desire is to be intimate with your partner and maintaining intimacy, even at times where it doesn't feel like it's...I don't know, it just feels like a good way to show your partner that you're still there for them and still care about them, and feeling that your needs are also met by your partner, just by being intimate constantly over an extended period of time.

01:22:39**SPEAKER_KK**

Yeah. You just mentioned that intimacy is a integral part to a relationship. What do you believe to be the circumstances required with intimacy? Whether that be in a romantic relationship or any other relationship.

01:22:45**SPEAKER_MK**

Wait, what's that question? What are the circumstances required to...

01:22:50**SPEAKER_KK**

For creating intimacy, whether that be in a romantic or any other sort of relationship.

01:23:21**SPEAKER_MK**

I don't know, that's a hard question I haven't thought about too much. But I guess, I feel like it has to come from your... You already [having] at least a relationship with the person. It's not stranger that someone that you've met a few times and have built a relationship with, then I feel like there's room for intimacy to be introduced in order to maintain that relationship further. But I feel like the starting point has to be, you already have a relationship with a person, whether it's romantic or non-romantic. And in order to, I guess, maintain and keep it going is where intimacy comes into play. And you try to find ways where you can meet each other and just do things that you both enjoy together and are able to care for each other. And also just communicating throughout what the relationship means to both of you and how you best feel cared for. And even asking the other person how they feel cared for and making sure the relationship is meeting both of your needs, not just one person's and not believing the other person. But yeah, just making sure that you're both getting what you're expecting and not having, I guess, unspoken offenses or... I don't know, communicating with the person when the needs aren't being met or when they're doing something that you don't like. I feel like that can also... Communicating with the person and making sure that you're being as honest with them can also just be a way to be intimate because you are being vulnerable and you are keeping the relationship's best interests at heart and by communicating, you're hoping to maintain and continue that. And it just like shows that you care about the person and the relationship and you to want to maintain that over a long period of time.

01:26:02**SPEAKER_KK**

These days, where would you say creating space, intimacy, that care that you mentioned, and communication on each other's needs is on your list of priorities? Do you feel like it's on your list of priorities? Do you feel like it's easy to make space for that or are there any other factors that influence where that falls?

01:26:30**SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like it can kinda be difficult to create a space for communicating because it is a difficult conversation to have and it's something that I've struggled with a lot in my friendships because I don't usually communicate that well. And I feel like for most people it has to do with how you grew up and what kind of communication styles you were taught. And in my family, we just don't communicate. So personally, I've gone to therapy and tried to work on my communication skills. So it is a priority for me, but I feel like it is difficult to initiate that conversation, especially if you're not used to communicating with your family members. It's hard to do with your friends as well, especially if you've gone into a habit of not really communicating as often. It can be difficult to initiate the conversation after such a long time of being friends.

But I feel like it is necessary and it does end up being necessary because without that communication, you end up forming a lot of resentment towards the other person that you're in a relationship with or just being angry or having expectations of the other person that honestly they don't even know you have because you haven't really communicated that with them in the first place. So I feel like even though it is hard, it is important and you should prioritize creating that space sooner rather than later because it can lead to anger that the other person doesn't even know you have. And a lot of emotions that you end up bottling up that might come up at a later time. If you were to communicate, you could resolve those emotions much quicker and just overall help create a healthy relationship versus if you were to just bottle everything up and not communicate, that's just kind of creating an unhealthy relationship on your end.

01:28:38**SPEAKER_KK**

Thanks for sharing that. It's very well said. And so you talked a little bit about what desire and intimacy means to you and how you prioritize intimacy in your life. *[this portion of the interview had interconnectivity issues]* So I guess I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about dreams, hopes, and aspirations. And in Punjabi we use the word *umeedan*. So I was wondering if you would share your *umeedan* for yourself.

01:29:46**SPEAKER_MK**

I guess just like for me, I usually don't think long term. I try to take it day by day just because it's hard to even envision that far into the future. But for now, I guess my *umeed* would be getting to California safely and like being happy there with my girlfriend and her family and just being able to begin creating a life with her. And just being like— well, there's also a lot of like... California being an expensive state. And then also like finding a job and housing crisis and stuff like that. So navigating that and hoping that I'm able to get a job for myself and my girlfriend and her family and helping out any way I can. Especially because they're giving me a space to live. So just hoping that I'm not too much of a burden and I'm able to help out as much as I can. And I guess another *umeed* is like bettering my relationship with my family as well. And also providing for them and not feeling guilty about leaving them. And working on a lot of the guilt that comes with just leaving your family and pursuing opportunities for yourself. Yeah, and just being more secure in how I am and allowing myself to question and navigate different identities of mine on my own terms, including my relationship with Sikhi. And not really feeling like I'm in a rush to get answers either because I feel like I usually tend to get impatient and just like... I don't know, being okay with not having answers at times and just giving myself time and grace to just explore, I guess.

01:31:52**SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you. Thank you for sharing your *umeedan* for yourself. And like one thing, I also wanted to ask you about your *umeedan* for different communities that you identify with. I guess, going back to when you were in the Gurdwaras, I know you said there were a lot of exclusion and maybe more of a hostile environment. So, can you talk a little bit about like the *umeedan* you have for Sikh communities in that context and for any other communities that you identify with under the LGBTQIA plus umbrella?

01:32:52**SPEAKER_MK**

For the Sikh community, my *umeed* is always that we work towards being more inclusive and not scaring people away or shutting people down, especially people who are already in the community. Just like not creating this rigid understanding of Sikhi and just turning them away, which I have seen happen within my own family, like with my brother too. He's like—because of the religious trauma we went through— he no longer, he doesn't

identify as Sikh and never wants to step foot in the Gurdwaras. So, my hope is that we don't allow stuff like that to continue happening all over the world with different people. And that we do, I don't know, just be more patient with people and not be so rigid with rules and how we're supposed to be and how we're not supposed to be. Yeah, and also just not letting biases and prejudices get in the way, because there's still stuff I see about some Gurdwaras not allowing same-sex Anand Karaj, just questioning where you're even in the rationale for that and just opening your world view. But I guess outside of Gurdwara, within the Sikh community, I do hope for the Sikh community to be more politically involved, not just in Sikh matters or in Punjabi matters, but for other marginalized communities too, especially in the diaspora. Or in our case, in the US, just not comparing ourselves to other movements, but actually helping them. And just, I don't know, just not being so caught up with our own matters and actually being able to selflessly support and be in solidarity with other marginalized communities too, without necessarily expecting that transactional something in return.

And above all, just connecting to our core values, which I feel like a lot of people tend to forget too, just not being politically apathetic and actually being politically involved towards not just our own causes, like I said, but different causes of different marginalized communities too. And at the same time, in terms of how judgmental some Sikh members tend to be, remembering that that's also against Sikhi, that we should not have anger and not be arrogant and not have all those negative qualities either, and just be open to understanding people without immediately judging them or casting them away from Sikhi. And then I guess in terms of the LGBTQ plus community, I feel like since I'm still kind of new and navigating, I don't have specific hopes for the community itself beyond just understanding that queer people can have different experiences and there aren't just specific experiences that you have to have in order to be a part of the community, and also just how different identities might intersect for you to have a different experience than what some queer people might be used to. And just understanding that it is more difficult for people of color, for example, to be a part of the LGBTQ plus community than it might be for someone who's not a person of color. And then also, not everyone has to come out to be a part of the community either. Someone can be, I guess, closeted to their family, but still be a part of that community and still be able to live a life with whoever they want without necessarily having to come out to their family. I've heard some people talk about how it's difficult to be with someone who's closeted, but you also have to understand that it might not necessarily be safe for them to even come out to their family. So just being okay with you [how] you don't have to come out in order to be a part of the community.

01:37:57**SPEAKER_KK**

Yeah, like hoping that that sort of pressure and expectation of like what does it mean to be a part of the community and to come out. It ties a lot to what you were talking about earlier how about your early experiences with LGBTQ communities were very centered around white experiences. So also expanding the space for people of color experiences. So relating to all of that, how have common narratives or stereotypes of Sikh histories or LGBTQ plus histories influenced you? And do they affect the types of worlds, people, or futures that you desire or can imagine?

01:39:08**SPEAKER_MK**

Sorry, can you say that one more time?

01:39:15**SPEAKER_KK**

And I can also drop it in the chat. So how have common narratives or stereotypes of storytelling in Sikh histories or LGBTQIA plus histories influenced you? Do they affect the types of worlds, people, or futures that you desire or can imagine?

01:39:37**SPEAKER_MK**

I feel like the common narratives of storytelling in Sikh histories are usually just like, like sakhis or very like religious stories, or stories of Sikh battles, and like, I guess, martial Sikh history. And I feel like I've been more influenced by like sakhis than I have of like, Sikh military history, but they just like remind me whenever I think of like sakhis that I was told when I was little, they just like remind me of key values. Like the moral of a sakhi is like a specific value. So they just remind me of key aspects of Sikhi that I might not be consciously thinking of. And they like, allow me to be secure even when I'm like, being policed by like other Sikhs on how I should be a Sikh. Yeah, I feel like it just allows me to think about what kind of a Sikh I want to be going forward. And just like remind me of the values that like, I personally hold really close to my heart from Sikhi. I don't really know much about like, storytelling with like LGBTQ plus histories. Most of my upbringing was like Sikh

storytelling and like stories that would be told by my grandparents, which are usually about like Sikh values.

01:41:22**SPEAKER_KK**

[this part of the interview had interconnectivity issues] But like those stories, it's like sort of about daily life.

01:41:34**SPEAKER_MK**

Yeah, I feel like a lot of the sakhis have to do with things that you should— like principles that you should live by on a daily basis. And I do try to remind myself that whenever I feel like I'm not being a good enough Sikh, or I feel like I'm questioning my relation with Sikhi, sakhis kind of like help me—help like ground me. In like what it means to be a Sikh on my own terms. Yeah.

01:42:11**SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you for sharing that. And the last question that I have for you today. So as a follow up question, what do you hope comes out of sharing your life history with us?

01:42:32**SPEAKER_MK**

Um, I hope that it helps someone who might like come across it and read it. Who might also be in a similar situation as me. And just like, in general, I guess allows anyone to realize that like, you don't have to have a specific memory or have a specific experience to exist as like an LGBTQIA plus Sikh, that like a lot of different types of Sikhs exist. And I just hope that like, someone else can be secure. And even like for me, coming back, and maybe like when I read the interview or like listen to it, maybe [it will] help me see how far I can come into the future. Or just allows me to feel secure in my identities too.

01:43:31**SPEAKER_KK**

Thank you so much for your time today. It was really helpful to hear your life story. Do you have any questions?

01:43:58**SPEAKER_MK**

No, not really. But thank you for having me. Thank you for reaching out. And even considering me to be a part of this in the first place. Because I know I probably would not have thought of being a part of it. But like, yeah, thank you for not allowing myself to continue to treat myself as an outsider, but letting me feel, I guess, seen as like, a person who is Sikh and part of the LGBTQ plus community, which I probably would have like, denied to myself.

01:44:42**SPEAKER_KK**

Glad to hear you felt safe enough to share that with us. Appreciate that. Thank you so much and I will talk to you soon.