



THE COUNCIL OF
SIKHS IN LAW

THE SIKHS IN LAW SELECT COMMITTEE
SITTING AT 33 BEDFORD ROW LONDON
ON 2 JULY 2023

Ref: BR/R/23

BEFORE:

PROF SATVINDER SINGH JUSS (CHAIR)

And

DR GURNAM SINGH

And

HARJAP BHANGAL

And

DR DALVIR KAUR GILL

And

BALDIP SINGH

BLOOM REPORT REVIEW AND FINDINGS OF
THE SIKHS IN LAW SELECT COMMITTEE
HANDED DOWN 19 JULY 2023 AT 10.30AM AT THE HOUSE OF LORDS

[A] Introduction

1. It was Prime Minister Boris Johnson who back in October 2019 appointed an Independent Faith Engagement Adviser. This was in the person of Mr Colin Bloom and he was to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Communities, for Levelling Up Housing and Communities on how faith engagement can be improved. This would be in terms of recognising the contribution of faith communities, in ensuring fair treatment when using or working in public service, and in addressing harmful practices linked to faith.

The final report, also known as *The Bloom Review*, drew upon 21,000 responses and it was published on 26th April 2023, in a document ambitiously titled, “Does Government do God? An Independent review into how Government engages with Faith”. Running into no less than over 60,000 words in 159 pages, it contains twenty-two recommendations with respect to whether the Government is “properly engaging with people of faith.”¹

2. There is much to commend in the Bloom Review. It tackles difficult subjects, from ‘Faith in the UK Armed Forces (Chapter 5) to Religious Marriage (Chapter 8). Sadly, however, the Bloom Review deprives itself of enduring value. This is principally because of its obsession with ‘Faith Based Extremism’ (Chapter 6), where it has unnecessarily and inaccurately target the Sikhs. For this reason, *Sikhs in Law* has commissioned this Report specifically in relation to concerns arising withing the Sikh community in the manner in which they have been targetted in Chapter 6. This is because with respect to Sikhs, Bloom relies on two concepts as the building blocks of his Review of the Sikh faith. First, religious behaviour that is ‘subversive’. Second, religious behaviour that is ‘extremist.’
3. We have no hesitation in stating at the outset that Bloom is wrong in the way he uses both these epithets to describe Sikhs in the UK. First, the use of the label, ‘subversive’ to apply to legitimate Sikh political activity in the UK is misconceived. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary definition of ‘subversive’ is “*trying or likely to destroy or damage a government or political system by attacking it secretly or indirectly.*” Bloom presents no evidence that Sikh activity in the UK, which recognises freedom of expression, is designed in any way to destroy or damage the UK government or its political system in any way whatsoever. Second, with respect to ‘extremism’ Bloom asserts that there is no legal definition. Whether or not that is true, the Government already uses a workable definition. The definition used in the Prevent strategy (discussed below) is that a behaviour is extremist if it is in the form of a, “*vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values.*” The reference here is to ‘British values’, which have to be fundamentally undermined by some active opposition. It is not a reference to the values of a foreign state. And, one of the values fundamental to what makes Britain a free society, is freedom of speech and expression. Bloom presents no evidence of any Sikh behaviour which undermines fundamental British values so as to be a matter of concern for the government. Criminal activity, where it exists, properly falls within the purview of the criminal law, and the State already has adequate means at hand to deal with such, through the means of the regular courts.

¹ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith.*” At pp. 18-24 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

4. It is against this background that the Sikh Community petitioned the Council of Sikhs in Law to review the Bloom Review, which had a specific concern with Chapter 6, which was headed “Faith based Extremism”. The Sikh Community were particularly aggrieved that 13 pages had been dedicated to them compared to a around half a page to other faiths.
5. The Council of Sikhs in Law appointed an independent Select Committee of leading academic and legal minds to consider the communities’ grievance.
6. A notice calling for evidence was put out on 12th June 2023. An overwhelming response from both lawyers, academics and members of the community was received. A notice was also sent to Colin Bloom to which no acknowledgement or response was received.
7. The Sikhs in Law Select Committee convened a Meeting on 2nd July 2023 at 33 Bedford Row London. It having heard lengthy oral evidence and a mass of written submissions the committee reserved its review and findings.
8. The Select Committee now present its findings in writing before The Honourable Council.

[B] Executive Summary

9. The Bloom Review opens with the observation that “[n]early 20 years ago, a former Prime Minister’s spin doctor famously replied to a Vanity Fair Journalist: ‘I am sorry, we don’t do God!’, and how, “for many people of faith it has become a cultural reference point, confirming their suspicions that government neither understands faith and crucially, nor does particularly want to.”² The Bloom Review is a blue-print, however, for exactly how the Government should not do God. The Review makes the bold assertion that “[t]his is the first time that faith has been reviewed in this way, and the first time in living memory that an administration has bravely asked: ‘Are we properly engaging with people of faith?’”³ Bravely or not, this is exactly how the Government should not engage with people of faith. This is principally for three reasons.
10. First, Colin Bloom is not a scholar of religion. Whilst he is the Faith Engagement Adviser at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, he has previously served, not only as executive Director of the Conservative Christian Fellowship, but also been the Director of Christians in Politics. This

² The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith at p.5*” (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

³ Ibid.

raises a dangerous possibility of bias and demonstrably shows a lack of independence in faith. Even the christian *Evangelical Alliance*, whilst observing how, “[t]he Bloom review has ignited an important conversation about faith engagement at the centre of government” is troubled by the use of biblical references. Its head of public policy, notes how whereas the Bible does point out how we should “[b]eware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves”, the use of such language where there are recommendations to be made to the Government is inappropriate:

“As Christians the language of apostate and heretic is familiar to us because of the Bible teachings on such matters. However, to read such words in a report to the UK government is alarming. Particularly where there is such a strong position against such language and an expectation for the government to watch out for such use of language in the context of religious extremism.”⁴

11. Second, Colin Bloom’s methodology is unconventional and unorthodox. He begins with the declaration that,

“[t]here are three types of believers. The first are ‘true believers’ who, regardless of their faith, are sincere, devout and peaceful. Government can and should work with true believers. The second are ‘non-believers’ who, like true believers, are generally sincere, peaceful and decent. True believers are part of the solution to improving society. The third are ‘maker-believers.’ Make-believers are generally the cause of most of the problems that government encounters in the faith space. Make-believers are often motivated by ego, money, prestige or power and abuse their position to promote themselves or their causes, clothing them with religion to give them divine legitimacy.”⁵

12. These are enormously large claims. They are riddled with two problems. First, not a single citation is given as a source reference for either of them. From the tripartite categorisation (with its dubious category of ‘make-believers’), to the claim that they are ‘the cause of most of the problems that government encounters’, no reference whatsoever is given. Second, while ‘belief’ is central to the Judeo-Christian religious faith system ‘belief’ in itself is not central to many religions outside it. Eastern religions are focused more on a ‘way of life’ with an emphasis on practices and traditions. Bloom ignores this at his peril and as such his Review is fundamentally flawed from its very inception.

13. Third, on 6th July 2023 the following questions were tabled before the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities:

(i) For what reason his Department decided that the Independent Faith Engagement Review call for evidence should be open for 28

⁴ Alica Edmund, “*Further Reflections on Colin Bloom’s Faith Engagement Review*”, 15th May 2023 (Available at <https://www.eauk.org/news-and-views/further-reflections-on-colin-blooms-faith-engagement-review>). The reference here is presumably to how outcasts in a faith system are branded “as ‘apostates’, ‘unbelievers’, or ‘heretics’” (at p. 112, at para 6.1.)

⁵ *Ibid.*, at p.5

days; and whether he sought independent advice on this decision;

- (ii) What questions were asked to faith communities during interviews for the Independent Faith Engagement Review;
- (iii) Who responded to the call for evidence for the Independent Faith Engagement Review;
- (iv) Who gave evidence in person to the Independent Faith Engagement Review;
- (v) How many and what proportion of those people also provided written evidence through the call for evidence;
- (vi) How many and what proportion of (a) respondents to the call for evidence and (b) people who gave evidence in person to the Independent Faith Engagement Review were from the Sikh community; and
- (vii) With which faith organisations the Government has a policy of not engaging.

14. On 14th July 2023, the answer provided by Dehenna Davison⁶ was, “that as an Independent reviewer, Colin Bloom was free to meet with any individuals or organisations he chose to inform his review” and that, “he was not under any obligation to inform officials of his meetings or to pass on any written evidence.” He was “an Independent reviewer”, and so he “met with a with a wide range of stakeholders - including charities, organisations, academics and other sectoral experts and key individuals of all faiths and none - whom he deemed to have relevant insight into particular themes relevant to his report.” Nevertheless, “[g]iven the sensitive issues covered in his review, Colin Bloom was committed to preserving respondents' anonymity so they could speak freely” and that “[w]hile these anonymised sources and external analysis have informed the review, the views and recommendations expressed are Mr Bloom's own.” Before one begins to wonder why the views being put forward to the Government should be those of Colin Bloom’s own, Dehenna Davison explained that, “[t]he call for evidence was conducted in adherence with the Cabinet Office's consultation principles, including consideration of the length of the consultation.” Reference was made to how, “[g]iven the sheer volume of responses (over 21,000), the length of the consultation period clearly provided sufficient time for individuals and organisations to respond.” This Select Committee, commissioned by *Sikhs in Law*, will consider below whether such a claim is sustainable or not. For the moment, it may be noted that Dehenna

⁶ The answer is published on the Parliament web site and can viewed at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>

Davison did then proceed to provide a most interesting and revealing “breakdown of respondents by declared faith” which we learn “was as follows,” namely, that Christians comprised nearly half of Colin Bloom’s respondents, at the 47.01% (numbering 9,874); Muslims comprised under a quarter at 19.94 % (numbering at 4,189); Hindus at half that figure at 12.01% (numbering 2,522); but Sikhs even behind Atheist/ Humanist⁷ and Pagan⁸, at a paltry 1.69% (numbering at just 354) respondents.

15. So, even though Bloom recognises in Chapter 6 that “[t]he British Sikh Community is one of the oldest minority communities in the UK”, with the 2021 Census results showing “there are approximately 524,000 people in England and Wales who identify as Sikh”; and even though he refers to “approximately 250 gurdwaras in the UK, with the largest able to accommodate over 3,000 worshippers”⁹, he is only able to interview 354 respondents. Even then as Dehenna Davison explains to us above, without his being “under any obligation to inform officials of his meetings or to pass on any written evidence”, choosing himself to decide who “he deemed to have relevant insight” so that as “an Independent reviewer” armed with his own “anonymised sources and external analysis” we can be assured that when it comes to what the Bloom Review has to say about Sikh ‘subversive’ and Sikh ‘extremist’ behaviour, we should remember that “the views and recommendations expressed are Mr Bloom's own,” and of no one else. And yet, remarkably the Government is being invited to act on them. So much so, that at Recommendation 16, in relations Chapter 6, the Bloom Review calls for “improved faith literacy across government and the parliamentary estate, particularly on intrafaith issues, so the government can be more discerning regarding engagement and representation within British Sikh communities.”¹⁰

16. Nevertheless, on the day that Bloom reported on 26th April 2023, the Government website immediately went onto to proclaim this report as “a landmark review into faith engagement’ and whilst it added that Bloom recognises religion to be a “force for good” it also adds that, “a better understanding of faith would also equip government to tackle issues such as forced marriage...radicalisation in prison; and faith-based extremism, including the ongoing challenge of Islamist extremism, and the small but growing trends of Sikh extremism and Hindu nationalism.” That is all very well, except that there are then 13-pages devoted to alleged Sikh extremism

⁷ 11.74% numbering at 2466 respondents

⁸ 1.81% numbering at 381 respondents

⁹ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith*” at p.122 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

¹⁰ Ibid., at p.22

compared to around half-a-page for most other religions.¹¹ Compare that to the two short paragraphs on Hindu Nationalism.¹² Bloom appears to have overlooked the fact that on 2nd September 2016 the Charity Commission reported on the activities of a Hindu organisation, where an event was held at a school between Sunday 26th July 2014 and Monday, 3rd August 2014, during which a speaker in Hindu history classes was recorded by an undercover journalist, working for *Hardcash* who had broadcast on *'Charities Behaving Badly'* on ITV, as having raised comments which the Charity Commission found that "the Speaker's comments were wholly inappropriate and unacceptable at an event run by a charity.", and that "the trustees ...need to take proactive steps to ensure RSS has no control or influence over the charity and its affairs ...¹³ Yet, for Bloom Sikh activism is 'extremism'. Other religious activism for Bloom, such as that within Hinduism, is 'nationalism' – and even then, of only modest concern. This is clear from his bland assertion that, "[n]ationalist movements within the British Hindu diaspora have become somewhat more prevalent in recent years" but that it seems there is nothing to worry about here give that, [t]his can be seen in the sophisticated though ultimately small mobilisation of Hindu nationalist activists..." The Review, running into 159 pages, has 8 chapters. Starting with 'Religion, belief and faith in the UK' in chapter 1, it moves quickly onto 'Faith literacy in Government', at Chapter 2, before going onto discuss 'Faith in Education', 'Faith in Prison', and 'Faith in the Armed Forces,' in chapters 3,4, and 5. It is, however, chapter 6, on 'Faith-based extremism', which is most problematic, together with 'Faith-based exploitation' in Chapter 7, before Bloom ends with 'Religious Marriage' in Chapter 8.

17. Bloom states that "there is no legal definition of extremism."¹⁴ Although Bloom uses the word 'extremism' 50 times without himself making any attempt to define what it means, a workable definition does exist. It is to be found in the Government's Prevent strategy where extremism is defined as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs."¹⁵ Yet, Bloom does not use this definition. This is why his "faith-based extremism' is problematic in Chapter 6 because it is deliberately tendentious in creating a controversy where none exists. The description of extremism in the Prevent strategy is with respect to its undermining of fundamental British values. It has nothing whatsoever to do with struggles for self-determination abroad. That being so, whereas the inclusion of 'Buddhist nationalism' – where

¹¹ "Government needs to better understand faith, independent review claims" (Press Release, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-needs-to-better-understand-faith-independent-review-claims>)

¹² Bloom Review, at Section 6.5

¹³ See: *RSS - SEWA International UK - AWAAZ* report (Available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/inaccuracies-and-distortions/223067>)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, at para 6.1, at p. 112

¹⁵ See, *Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England & Wales* , Updated 1st April 2021 (Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales>)

the reference is entirely to Myanmar and Sri Lanka with not a single citation being given¹⁶ – may be one such example of a tendentious use of extremism by Bloom, an even more glaring example is the reference to *Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistani extremism ('PKE')*” which runs initially into 5 pages¹⁷. It has three components.

- (b) First, it is said that “[t]he first area of concern is the power struggle within some areas of British Sikh communities over who will represent them.” Not a single reference is cited as to where this power struggle is taking place and at which Gurdwara and in what way. Sikh Gurdwaras in the UK, as Bloom must surely know, are autonomous with their own Constitutions and charitable status. Elections are held and are keenly contested. However, an even more serious criticism is how this alleged power struggle bears any relation to ‘Sikh extremism’ and ‘pro-Khalistani extremism’ since it is simply not explained.
- (c) Second, it is said that, “[t]he second concern is the division between some British Sikh communities which is caused by an extremist fringe ideology...” . This is despite the recognition that, “[i]t is important to note that the promotion of Khalistani ideals is not of itself subversive...”. If this is so, it is not clear why it is then declared in the next breath that “the subversive, aggressive, and sectarian effect on wider Sikh communities should not be tolerated,” because no evidence is given of what it is that is ‘subversive’ or ‘sectarian’. Instead, it would appear that Bloom has evidence but it is that, “[p]ropagating hate and divisions, trying to brainwash youth to cause divisions and hate in India [which is] really sad.”
- (d) Third, it is said that “[t]he third area of concern is the activities of some individuals and organisations that are demonstrably fuelling sectarianism and anti-Muslim sentiments, as well as legitimising discriminatory and misogynistic behaviour.” Here the charge against some Sikhs in the UK is more serious. It is that, “[a]ll are allowed to express their view and raise concerns of any injustice in India but spreading hate and brainwashing Sikh youth is [a] a matter of serious concern...”. Bloom concludes that “[a]lthough all three areas of concern are different, they are sometimes conflated by self-appointed ‘community leaders’ seeking prestige or power.¹⁸ Bloom remains oblivious to the fact that the vast majority of Sikh Gurdwaras have democratically elected leaders under their constitutions. To crown it all, there is the even more astonishing admission by Bloom that “no question was specifically asked about these issues”¹⁹, which begs the question, why ever not? If no question was asked, how is Bloom so sure of the existence of these alleged subversive activities?

¹⁶ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith* at p.121 at para 6.6 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

¹⁷ Ibid., at para 6.7.1 , at pp. 121-125

¹⁸ Ibid., at p. 123

¹⁹ Ibid., at p. 124

18. In the next section Bloom then goes onto consider ‘Who represents British Sikh communities?’²⁰ over two pages. Why a question as mundane as this should fall under the broader heading of *Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistani extremism* (‘PKE’) need not detain us for now. Suffice it to say that Bloom poses the question that “[f]or the government to engage with British Sikh communities in both a constructive and productive way, it is vital to address the issue of who is best placed to represent British Sikhs.” No evidence or foundation is provided for the assertion that in order for the Government to be ‘constructive and productive’ in its dealings with the Sikh community that it only has to be dealing with one person. To do so would not only misrepresent the broad range of Sikh organisations but risk that one person compromising himself/herself by saying just what the Government wants to hear. In fact, Bloom provides his own answer to the very question he poses, namely, that “[t]he structure of Sikh communities differs from some other religions because *there is no official leader or religious authority for Sikhs in the UK*” (emphases added). Bloom, nevertheless, seems obsessed with dwelling on dissension and dispute, observing how, “[t]his complexity can crate a power struggle over who will be the pre-eminent Sikh body at official levels in government bodies and in the media.”²¹ He then disarmingly ends with the comment that, “[t]his problem is not unique, and many other faith traditions have a similar internal struggles.”²² Why then is this an issue that needs highlighting in relation to Sikhs? And, why does it need ventilating under the heading of *Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistani extremism* (‘PKE’)? Bloom does not explain.
19. Bloom next moves onto a consideration of ‘*Pro-Khalistan subversion*’ in the next three pages.²³ He explains how “[t]he Khalistan movement is a Sikh separatist movement seeking to establish an independent and sovereign Sikh state called Khalistan (Land of the Pure) in the Punjab region of India.”²⁴ There are three problems with the analysis, however. First, while paying lip-service to the notion that “[t]he promotion of pro-Khalistani ideas does not have to be subversive”²⁵, Bloom nevertheless ends up concluding that it is just that without a shred of evidence of how it is ‘subversive’. Second, Bloom states that, “[w]hilst these extremists reflect a tiny minority, they attract disproportionate amounts of attention and stoke divisive sentiments...”²⁶ However, no source is cited as a reference for either the disproportionate amounts of attention that it is alleged this tiny minority attracts, or as to how successful they are in stoking divisive sentiments. Third, Bloom then decides to leave these shores entirely and move for support for his thesis to Canada. As he explains, “[t]he subversive way of working is not unique to the UK. Canada is also experiencing a similar

²⁰ Ibid at para 6.7.2, pp. 124-125

²¹ Ibid., at pp. 124-125

²² Ibid., at p. 125

²³ Ibid., at para 6.7.3 at pp. 125-127

²⁴ Ibid., at p. 125

²⁵ Ibid., at p. 126

²⁶ Ibid., at p. 126

phenomenon, as explained in the 2020 report...²⁷ However, the report by the Canadian think tank Macdonald-Laurier Institute and the report by Terry Milewski's 'Khalistan: a project of Pakistan, overlooks the fact that Milewski's report has been heavily criticised as being, "politically motivated, fallacious and far from the truth."²⁸ The reference to "[t]he former Premier of British Columbia (Canada), Ujjal Dosanjh, was allegedly threatened and severely beaten for speaking out against Sikh extremists and terrorists."²⁹ However, this is precisely the kind of reasoning by analogy that fails. Britain is not Canada and Bloom can point to no citizen of Britain of such high profile who has been attacked in this way. Even in Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has come out in favour of freedom of expression,³⁰ being maintained.

20. The most explosive part of the Bloom Review in relation to Sikhs, however, is under the sub-section headed '*Subversive activity in the UK*' running into a further three pages.³¹ Bloom can refer to only three examples here, neither of which are 'subversive' by any stretch of imagination.

(a) First, he states that '[t]he issue of secessionist political agendas within the Indian diaspora was highlighted during the controversy over calls for an additional tick box option in the 2021 Census, which would allow individuals to identify as ethnically Sikh instead of, or as well as, religiously Sikh."³² It is not immediately apparent why a demand for an additional tick box which helps Sikhs identify as ethnically Sikh is subversive, even if it is to do with secessionist Sikh politics, as Bloom argues. Bloom contends himself with the assertion that "[s]ome respondents to this review claimed that the tick-box controversy bears all the traits of an extremist interpretation of pro-Khalistan ideology" because those in the opposing camp maintain that "the ancient Sikh teachings of oneness" are such that they "contain[s] no endorsement of

²⁷ Ibid. at p. 126

²⁸ See the open letter from Sikh Scholars to the board of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, 15th September 2020 (Available at <https://www.sikhscholarsresponse.com/>)

²⁹ The Bloom Review, "*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith*" at p.127 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

³⁰ See, '*Canadian PM Says 'India Is Wrong' After Jaishankar Calls Out 'Khalistan Terror,' Business Today*. In 7th July 2023, after there was reported to be "shock and outrage in India over Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau trying to pass off a tableau depicting the assassination of Indira Gandhi, then prime minister of India as freedom of expression" (Available at <https://www.businesstoday.in/bt-tv/video/canadian-pm-says-india-is-wrong-after-jaishankar-calls-out-khalistan-terror-388725-2023-07-07>)

³¹ Ibid., at para 6.7.4 at pp.

³² Government needs to better understand faith, independent review claims" (Press Release, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-needs-to-better-understand-faith-independent-review-claims>)

³² The Bloom Review, "*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith*" at para 6.7.4, at p. 127 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

an exclusive ethno-religious state called Khalistan.”³³ This, however, on Bloom’s best case put forward, is only a matter of opinion between two opposing groups of people: one for, one against. It certainly is not subversive to be asking for a separate tick-box. In any event, Bloom’s assertion flies in the face of his earlier declaration that, “[F]or the avoidance of doubt, it is no longer an offence under UK law to advocate for the creation of a new state, or for changes in an existing state (which may have been seen as an offence against the government or the crown in the historic past” because “[i]n the UK , people are free to campaign with all the nationalistic fervour they want...”³⁴ With all nationalistic fervour they want? If so, he does not explain why he is so critical of Sikh activism.

(b) Second, Bloom takes as “another example” the fact that “during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic” there “was a press release criticising government’s guidance for places of worship as ‘offensive’” In the footnote to this statement, Bloom explains how this “press release is no longer available” but adds that the *Times of India* reported it on 16th June 2020.³⁵ What is reported there, however, is fact that whereas within 48 hours of the of the setting up of the Government’s Places of Worship Taskforce dozens of Gurdwaras had rejected it in June 2020, they had done so on strictly religious grounds. These were that (i) the use of alcohol based hand sanitisers was unacceptable for a religion where alcohol was banned; (ii) the shutting down of Gurdwaras for normal services was unacceptable for a religion whose places of worship are kept open at all reasonable times; and (iii) the restriction upon entry to Gurdwara of the over-70s on grounds of their acute vulnerability was unacceptable for a generation for whom the gurdwara had been a centre-piece of their social life and existence. Yet, Bloom makes the extraordinary claim that “this reviewer was disappointed to witness the un-cooperative and disruptive behaviour of some Sikh groups intent on sowing division and asserting their influence, particularly towards the efforts of other faith representatives who were stepping up to the plate in a time of great national need.”³⁶ No reference is cited for this claim. No explanation is given that those with these sincerely held views were ‘sowing division’ within the community. We find that Bloom would have done better to return to an earlier passage in the Review where he acknowledges how “the Guru Nanak gurdwara in Wolverhampton hosted COVID-19 testing pilot in November 2020, which helped NHS England identify undiagnosed cases and protect those most at risk from the virus.”³⁷

³³ Ibid. at p. 128

³⁴ Ibid. at para 6.1 at p. 112

³⁵ See, “*Sikhs unhappy over govt guidelines for places of worship*” The Times of India, 16th July 2020, cited at footnote 343 of the Bloom Review.

³⁶ Bloom Review, at p. 128

³⁷ Ibid., ay p.38 at para 2.5

(c) Third, Bloom refers to how it was that '[a] prominent Sikh in public life, Lord Singh of Wimbledon, has alleged deliberate ill-treatment aimed at silencing him...' which was "in response to a complaint made against him" by an organisation.³⁸ The footnote to this claim adds that, "[t]he name of the organisation has been redacted for the purposes of this review."³⁹ Bloom goes on to explain that "[t]he complaint against Lord Singh was not upheld, but the report also did not find evidence that the complaint was brought in 'bad faith' as part of a sustained campaign against him."⁴⁰ But if that is so, it is difficult to see how this episode qualifies itself for inclusion in Bloom's '*Subversive activity in the UK*'. The question posed by Bloom surely answers itself!

21. We believe that much of the mis-characterisation alluded to here is due to the fact that Bloom is not an 'independent Faith Engagement Adviser'. He is the former Executive Director of the Conservative Christian Fellowship and Director of Christians in Politics. As David G. Robertson has stated,⁴¹ his review has "clumsy mistakes", which would have been avoided had the Government "commissioned someone with a training in the academic study of religion." Instead, "the report is intended to promote the narrative that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is always and necessarily positive." However, as Robertson also makes clear, "[s]triking by its absence is any mention of Christian terrorism—or even explicit connection between white supremacism and Christianity. Nor does the report mention clerical abuse in Christian institutions—arguably the biggest scandal involving religion today, with multiple legal proceedings underway in the UK and elsewhere." The net result is that "[r]ather, like the Sewell Report on race (another heavily-criticised and supposedly independent report commissioned by the Johnson administration)," for Robertson, "this report was intended to make the case the government wanted it to." And yet, "a report that frames one religious tradition as inherently less problematic than others, and reinforces that tradition's connection to institutionalised power to boot, will not contribute to a more equal and peaceful society." In short, "[f]inding ways for communities to live together well is a noble and important aim, but it won't be achieved by ignoring reality."⁴²

22. Two final observations are in order. First, Bloom is keen to see reaction and observes that, "[i]n particular this report recommends that the MPs who are in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Sikhs consider the findings of this

³⁸ Ibid., at p. 128

³⁹ Ibid., at footnote 344

⁴⁰ Ibid., at p. 129

⁴¹ David G. Robertson, "*In Good Faith? How the Bloom Report misrepresents religion in the UK*", *Contemporary Religion in Historical Perspective*

(Available at <https://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/religious-studies/?p=1507>)

⁴² Ibid.

Report.”⁴³ The APPG for Sikhs is yet to express an opinion on it. We believe that it is important that an august parliamentary voice such as that of the APPG now make its position clear on the Bloom Review. Second, Bloom advocates that “[t]he government must take special care in understanding and wisely navigating these aspects of Sikh communities” and calls for “improved faith literacy training for public servants..” Whereas on the face of it ‘faith literacy’ is a laudable aim, we believe that the mis-characterisation by Bloom of Sikh practices and behaviour risks damaging good race relations in Britain and communal co-existence, which has for so long been an attractive feature of UK life.

23. For all these reasons, we are of the view that of its 26 Recommendations, the Bloom Review fails to make out the case for its **Recommendation 16** where it is stated that:

“Government should clearly define and investigate extremist activity and identify where this exists within the Sikh community, taking steps to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of subversive and sectarian Sikh extremist activity. Government should ensure that unacceptable and extremist behaviours are not inadvertently legitimised by government or parliamentary engagement. The reconsideration of previous decisions regarding the activity and legality of certain groups should be included. This will require improving faith literacy across government and the parliamentary estate, particularly on intrafaith issues, so government can be more discerning regarding engagement and representation within British Sikh communities.”⁴⁴

24. This is because any recommendation to the Government that it should “take steps to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of subversive and sectarian Sikh extremist activity,” will need to be based on a more open and more representative method of collecting evidence, one that is less clandestine and surreptitious, and one which is ultimately more objectively verifiable, and is both independent, and seen to be dependent, rather than merely to be declared to be so.
25. The Sikh community should welcome any recommendation of the Bloom review to work with government and senior faith leaders to explore matters relating to the whole community. In one sense this dialogue and openness has been a principal tenet since the inception of the Sikh religion. A quick glance of history past and present, demonstrates that this is not a new concept for Sikhs. The religion is fundamentally based upon openness, inclusivity, and diversity. The religion implores its followers to treat humanity as one. Its places

⁴³ Ibid., at p. 129

⁴⁴ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith* at p. 22 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

of worship are open to all, irrespective of background, its “selfless service” ethos seeks to assist all of humanity.

26. Bloom reports Sikhs are commended for their defining qualities as charitable and hospitable. We find following our review that Sikhs have and continue to contribute in more ways than this, including promoting community cohesion, contribution to law and politics and have been and remain fully integrated in all aspects of British society.
27. Parts of the report are however concerning. Recommendations from it, impact the Sikh community, more so than any other. Regrettably the impact is seen as adverse by some Sikhs. Parts of the report do not appear to be embedded in firm credible evidence.
28. Bloom said that Sikh community were, “*outstanding contributors to UK society but said that work had not been done previously on extremism within this group to the same extent as others*”. If that is so then consideration of the Sikh community deserved a more sensitive consideration based on a wider pool of evidence. Insofar as any views which strongly detracted from this general position were concerned, they ought to have been included a separate comprehensive report or heavily caveated the published addendum.

[C] Concerns over Bloom’s Methodology

29. Any report is only as good as its methodology. Colin Bloom’s methodology has already been addressed above in the Parliamentary Question of 6th July 2023 and the answer of 14th July 2023. We find that Bloom fails on this score because of his unbalanced and biased review of faith groups in Britain. He fails to provide substantive evidence for many of the claims made against the Sikh community in Britain which is given disproportionate coverage by him. There is inadequate detail provided on the data collection process and the procedures followed. In the end, the report lacks the necessary substantive evidence required to support the claims he makes and so risks putting the Sikh community in a vulnerable position by stoking anti-Sikh sentiment at a time when hate crime against the Sikh community is on the rise. This contradicts the motivations of the report which includes identifying ways to support the contribution of faith organisations within communities, break down barriers, promote acceptance, create opportunities for co-operation and improve faith literacy.
30. First, a feature of any robust research is that it should clearly outline the procedure for data collection. We find that his brief description on Methodology on page 15 and page 16 is not justified. Thus, Bloom reports that:

“a high premium was placed on ensuring that the evidence collected adequately captured the opinions and lived experiences of as many people as possible, including the people and organisations that represent the vast

diversity of faiths and beliefs in the UK. The initial evidence-gathering process involved numerous meetings and interviews, engaging charities, organisations, sectoral experts and key individuals of all faiths, beliefs and none to discuss and share any data on specific areas of interest. This also included assessing research and academic papers, other independent government reviews, All-Party Parliamentary Group reports, and news articles.”⁴⁵

31. Yet, there is plainly **(a)** insufficient detail on who was present at these meetings; **(b)** insufficient detail, and in fact no detail, on where these meetings or interviews (‘engagements’) took place; **(c)** insufficient detail, and in fact no detail, on the overall quantity of engagements; **(d)** insufficient detail, and in fact no detail, on engagements by religious or faith group, such as for example, whether there was a proportionate representation; **(f)** insufficient detail, and in fact no detail, on whether interviewees were provided an opportunity to verify or contextualise statements when the Report was in draft form; **(g)** insufficient detail, and in fact no detail, on whether a peer review or consultation was conducted before publication.

32. Second, we found that Bloom particularly fails in his methodology in ensuring that it is both transparent and proportionate with respect to the means and ends that he sets out to achieve. The fact is that there is no detail on the format of the engagements and on whether they were structured or semi-unstructured, nor what the breakdown of responses is by reference to age, gender, or socio-economic class. In the 2021 Census for England and Wales, 524,000 people identified as Sikh. This accounted for just 0.88% of the population. It represented the fourth largest religious group after Christians, Muslims, and Hindus. Who was responding to what, and in which way, was something that should have been broken down in the responses. All we can discern is that:

“In a third phase, a public call for evidence was launched on 13 November 2020, closing on 11 December 2020. It received over 21,000 responses to a series of questions around how those of all faiths, beliefs or none perceive government’s engagement with faith. It covered a large proportion of the final topics outlined in this review, although not all, as this final stage of stakeholder engagement was designed to provide further evidence where gaps had been identified. The response to the call for evidence was far higher than anticipated – bringing up over one million pieces of data – emphasising the strength of public feeling associated with matters of faith.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Government needs to better understand faith, independent review claims” (Press Release, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-needs-to-better-understand-faith-independent-review-claims>

⁴⁵ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith* at p. 15 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

⁴⁶ Ibid., at p.15

33. We find that these claims do not withstand closer scrutiny because **(a)** no detail is provided on where the “public call for evidence” was made; **(b)** no detail is provided on the “series of questions” asked; **(c)** no detail is provided on what informed the “series of questions”; **(d)** no explanation is provided as to why it should be thought that a call for evidence of just 21 business days should be deemed sufficient in the circumstances of the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic; **(e)** and no explanation as to why a report, such as that of an esteemed academic, Dr Jasjit Singh of Leeds University, which is the only externally funded report on Sikh radicalism in the UK, is not referred to by Bloom – despite being sent to him. This recent 2017 report, *‘The Idea, Context, Framing, And Realities of ‘Sikh Radicalisation’ In Britain,’* was commissioned by CREST (Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats), offering a contextualised account of Sikh activism, is quite simply ignored. Further, the reference to 21,000 responses is no more than a mere 0.06% of the 33.8 million population that identified with a religion in the 2021 Census for England and Wales.
34. Third, Bloom uses several discreditable sources. These are either dated sources from *Wikipedia* and the *Times of India* from as long ago as 2006, or they have little or nothing to do with Sikhs in the UK, such as for example, a selective reference to incidents having occurred in countries like the US, Canada and India, which bear not only no resemblance to British Sikhs, but occur in a very different political culture.
35. Fourth, and far more seriously, insofar as any of the sources are creditable, we found that Bloom ascribes a meaning to some reports which were never intended by their authors. There are a number of striking examples of this. A report by a leading Sikh academic, a Professor of Sikh Studies at Birmingham University, compiled together with a renowned Sikh journalist, is the recent 2019 *‘The changing nature of activism among Sikhs in the UK today’* by Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal and Sunny Hundal, specifically for the Commission for Countering Terrorism. It is ascribed a meaning and a tenor which its authors never intended for it. Similarly, a reference to a disagreement between Lord Singh and another Sikh organisation⁴⁷, is a poor basis upon which to formulate an argument for Sikh subversiveness in the UK. In the end, we can only conclude that Bloom’s professed ‘call for evidence is only for the purposes of shoring up anti-Sikh sources and narratives.
36. Fifth, we are emboldened in the view above, by the fact that Bloom does not use the UK government’s own definition of extremism. This is as follows:

⁴⁷ Ibid., at p.128

“The vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.”

37. Ironically, Bloom himself does not ignore that fact⁴⁸, in his Report that:-

“The conduct and livelihood of Sikh communities is, in many ways, a perfect embodiment of the best of the British values that are taught in our schools (freedom, democracy, justice, tolerance and respect) Sikhs have a strong belief that they are all one, and all are equal before God. It is because of this belief in oneness that traditional Sikh teaching explicitly condemns the caste system, strongly advises against denominationalism and sectarianism, and promotes the equality of women and men.”

38. However, we found that this was all the more reason, especially given the flawed nature of his investigation and ‘call for evidence’, the labelling of Sikhs as ‘subversive’ was a conclusion reached by Bloom all too easily. After all, he notes how in the light of widely available objective evidence, British Sikhs are “a perfect embodiment of the best of the British values” and are not in “vocal or active opposition” to those values. We found that it was therefore unclear why Report on faith should go out of its way to label Sikhs as “extremists”.

39. Sixth, we found that religious activism, when referred to other religions was described as ‘nationalism’, but when referred to Sikhs was described as ‘extremism’, a further example of Bloom’s biased and prejudiced approach. We are not oblivious of the fact that what Bloom is singling out,⁴⁹ is “a small, extremely vocal and aggressive minority” who he tells us are “promoting an *ethno-nationalist* agenda” (emphases added). He points out how, “one critic of the pro-Khalistan activists” claims “they are hijacking the Sikh faith for their own *nationalistic* ends” (emphases added). Yet, Section 6.7 is labelled *Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistani extremism (‘PKE’)* whereas other sections refer to “*Nationalism*”. No explanation is given as why this is so.

40. Seventh, we found Bloom also to be biased and prejudiced in his approach given the disproportionate length of Section 6.7 compared to other faith groups that he covered. Sikhs represent 0.88% of the population in England and Wales as of the 2021 Census. Bloom himself noted that “pro-Khalistan” which he described as “extremists” were only “a tiny minority”⁵⁰ within the Sikh community of the UK at large, whose contribution to British society was recognised as “overwhelmingly positive”. It is therefore unclear why more than 11 pages are allocated to the discussion of “Sikh extremism and pro-

⁴⁸ Ibid., at p.21

⁴⁹ Ibid., at Section 6.7.3 on page 125

⁵⁰ Ibid., at p. 26

Khalistan extremism” in Chapter 6.⁵¹ One can compare that to less than two pages on Islamist extremism, or one page to White Supremacy and British nationalism, or to even less than that to Neo-nazi Occultist Groups, Black Nationalists, Nation of Islam, Black Hebrew Israelites, Israel United Christ, Hindu Nationalism and Buddhist Nationalism. It is almost as if Bloom was simply going through these other groups in order to get to the Sikh faith, in order to give his approach a semblance of authenticity, before targeting it as ‘subversive’ and ‘extremist.’

41. Eight, we found Section 6.7 on ‘*Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistani extremism (‘PKE’)*’ to be especially to be divisive and damaging to good communal relations in the UK. The implicit suggestion in the heading of this section, namely, that all ‘Khalistani’ belief is extremist could have been avoided if Bloom had made an attempt to understand the meaning “Khalistan”. The Arabic word ‘khalis’ stands for ‘pure’ and the suffix ‘-stan’ comes from the Persian root ‘istan’ , meaning ‘land.’ Khalistan stands for a sovereign state for Sikhs. Bloom’s failure to grasp this leads him into a number of errors:

(a) Bloom refers to a perceived “power struggle” within some British Sikh communities. Where does this not exist in a faith system? And, what does this have to do with ‘extremism’? What credential does Bloom have to opine on the internal concerns of a particular religious community in the UK? The answer is none. And if the answer is Yes, why does Bloom not apply the same critical approach to other religious groups in his report? He does not.

(b) Bloom talks of the “legitimising” effects of “discriminatory and misogynistic behaviour”, but provides no evidence of this whatsoever. He just assumes that some members of the Sikh community (one of the most open and liberating faith systems in the world) are voiceless and marginalised, especially the women folk.

(c) Bloom, as already noted, supports his theory of ‘pro-Khalistan ‘subversion’ by reference to Canada which bears no resemblance the subject at hand, namely, a discussion of Sikh activism in the UK

(d) Bloom, as already noted, uses the case of “attempts to change the Census”⁵² by British Sikhs, as an example of “Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistan extremism,” which is not justified or justifiable.

⁵¹ Ibid., at p. 121 – 132

⁵² Ibid., at p. 128

(e) Bloom, as already noted, criticises how the “government’s guidance for places of worship” was undermined by some Sikh Gurdwaras as “reportedly published”⁵³ by reference to a *Times of India* article, but a criticism of a government policy, but adherents of a faith who want to keep their places of worship open and running as normal, is hardly indicative of ‘extremism’ or ‘subversion’ under a section titled, “Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistan extremism”.

(f) Bloom, as already noted, refers to the isolated experience of one individual, Lord Singh of Wimbledon, to shore up his case of ‘extremism’ and ‘subversion’ and even that is taken out of context.

(g) Bloom, as already noted, refers to recent examples of interfaith marriages,⁵⁴ where none of the people he refers to were convicted of extremist or terrorist activities, and where none of the faith-based groups are discussed in relation to the use of their orthodox services for celebrant to a marriage who is not of the same faith.

(h) Bloom refers to “Online and media content”, but given its ubiquitous presence in the lives of all, neglects to discuss this in relation other faith groups.

(i) Bloom’s every example of a faith benefiting society comes from a Christian perspective, leading him to regard other religious faith systems as inherently suspect. And, most suspect for him are the Sikh and Islamic traditions, as he gets ever more strident in the use of his language, enjoining the authorities to:

“Take action against these Sikh and Islamic groups who spread hate and glorify innocent killing and incite hate, [redacted] are misusing charity funds coming from Sikh Gurdwaras and many Islamic groups doing [the] same, no place in our civilised society for these groups, must be banned!”⁵⁵

42. For all these reasons, we found The Bloom Review to be inflammatory, risking inciting hatred towards both Sikh and Muslim communities. No Sikhs are said in the Review to have been convicted of any terrorist acts in Britain, and the Sikh community has always condemned any form of hate crime against any individual and is fundamentally opposed to hateful sentiments against any community. On the other hand, Bloom ignores how Sikhs have been the target

⁵³ Ibid., at p.128

⁵⁴ Ibid., at p.129, Section 6.7.5

⁵⁵Ibid, at p. 114, Section 6.2

of hate crimes themselves as anti-Islam sentiment has grown in this country following the events of 9/11.

[D] Evidence & Analysis

43. Bloom expressed three particular concerns over the way in which Sikhs organise themselves and engage with the Government. These have already been set out at the beginning in an earlier part of this report. We will now consider these three concerns in the context of the evidence we received.
44. **First**, Bloom had a concern over *“the power struggle within some areas of British Sikh communities over who will represent them at official levels and be recognised as the pre-eminent Sikh body in the UK.”*⁵⁶
45. The Committee heard evidence from Ms A Kaur *Social Scientist and Organisational Psychology Doctoral Student (researching social justice and intersectionality, religious identity/freedom and human rights within the context of systems of oppression such as coloniality, religious racism and racial capitalism*, who provided both written and oral evidence to the committee, specifically around organisational structures she mentioned that the requirement to have a leader is a colonial concept and that in India and for Sikhs particularly since Guru Gobind Singh the 10th Guru, they have followed a community consultation model with the majority verdict being carried. This emanates from the ‘panch pardhani’ system which translates to “five governors”. And although it references five, she said the concept and ethos is what is used to govern and make decisions be that a committee or group of five or more. We were reminded that similarly one can trace back to the earliest court structures that India had a village judicial system called the “panchayat” which is a bench made up of 5- elders and most respected within each village.
46. We heard from Dr Jasjit Singh from the University of Leeds who said that although there may be power struggles within the Sikh community, this is no different to issues in other religious communities. He informed the panel that while there is work to do on how Sikhs manage internal disputes, which he highlighted in his own report, Sikhs of differing ideological backgrounds regularly work together on issue of concern to the whole community.
47. Dr Jasjit Singh referred us to the only definition of 'extremism' he is aware of. Although not within statute, the Government has defined extremism in the Prevent strategy as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.”
48. Dr Jasjit Singh, of the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds, informed the Committee both in written and oral

⁵⁶ Ibid., at p. 123

submissions that he was funded by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) which was funded by the ESRC, the UK intelligence and security agencies and the UK Home Office, to produce a report on Sikh Radicalisation. He published his report in November 2017, titled “The idea, context, framing and realities of Sikh Radicalisation’ in Britain. Given the report and executive summary are freely available for download he expressed surprise that his report was not referenced anywhere in Bloom's review, despite this report having been independently submitted to the call for evidence. He also highlighted how many of the issues 'revealed' in Bloom's report, for example around the issues of sectarianism and anti-Muslim sentiments, had already been covered in his own report with more in depth analysis and nuance

49. We heard that there are a number of organisations such as The Sikh Council, The Supreme Sikh Council, Sikh Network, Sikh Assembly and the British Network of Sikh Organisations. From our understanding of what Mankamal Singh of the Sikh Network he told us, there have been Round Tables where attendees have turned up on the basis of open invites, and where important issues have been discussed and debated in a civilised fashion, with no technical difficulties. Mankamal Singh explained how Sikh attendees were routinely engaging with the British Government with around 20-25 representatives sitting at the Round Tables in Parliament. There is no reason why this form of engagement by the Government with Sikh representatives cannot continue. Instead, Colin Bloom, with no evidence to show otherwise, has taken the peculiar view that the Round Table format was too large to operate effectively and should be reduced to a handful of a few. That will risk, as Mankamal Singh pointed out, the select few being of a particular background, political standing and viewpoint, such as to not specifically and accurately represent the Sikh position at large (eg, reference was made to Lord Rami Ranger in this respect, who whilst being a founding member of the Hindu Forum of Britain, is also the Chairman of the Pakistan, India & UK Friendship Forum, as well as of the British Sikh Association).
50. Blooms says “[f]or the government to engage with British Sikh communities in both a constructive and productive way, it is vital to address the issue of who is best placed to represent British Sikhs.” Yet, this overlooks the fact, as Jasveer Singh of the Sikh Press Association put to us, that “the UK establishment seems to amplify certain voices” and “rather than those that connect with the community...” He stated that “[s]ikhs around the UK believe that reports like Bloom’s are in part driven by a desire ...to build closer trade relationships with India.”⁵⁷ We came to the conclusion that the author of the Bloom Review lacks the very faith literacy that he advocates and that if this report is adopted by the Government as it stands then all it will do is enshrine faith illiteracy. Therefore, the criticism of there being no hierarchy of discernible authority in the Sikh

⁵⁷ This is a viewpoint that Jasveer has also had published in Baaz: see, ‘*Jasveer Singh: The Bloom Review Fails on Sikhs*’ (28 April 2023)

faith is rejected, as is the suggestion in the Bloom Review of there being a significant power struggle, as both are poorly evidenced.

51. **Second**, Bloom had a concern over, *“the division between some British Sikh communities which is caused by an extremist fringe ideology within the pro-Khalistan movement, a separatist movement seeking to create a sovereign homeland for Sikhs in the Punjab region.”*⁵⁸
52. This statement can be broken down into three sections, namely, those of (i) extremist fringe / extremism activities; (ii) pro-Khalistan activities; and (iii) separatists/ separatism.

(i) Extremism

53. We consider two issues under this hearing. Firstly, the lack of a definition of extremism and secondly failure to consider expert evidence and reports that had already been published:
54. Dr Jasjit referred us to the only definition he is aware of although not within statute, The Government has defined extremism in the Prevent strategy as: *“vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.”*
55. Dr Jasjit Singh, of the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds, told the Committee both in written and oral submissions that he was commissioned by the Government to produce a report on Sikhs Radicalisation. He published his report online for free called *“The idea, context, framing and realities of Sikh Radicalisation’ in Britain*. The Report is dated November 2017. He raised two concerns. Firstly, that the starting point for anyone undertaking the task Bloom undertook would have been to consider Dr Jasjit’s report, as it is the only report in this field. Secondly, that despite Dr Jasjit independently having submitted his research to Colin Bloom when the call for evidence was made, his report is not considered or referenced anywhere at all by Bloom. Third, that the findings Bloom makes are unfounded and ignore the actual realities on the ground. He further raised concerns about how it was that with Colin Bloom having been commissioned to write his report in 2019 that it has only come out in April 2023 amidst trade negotiation agreements with India, a concern that both Prof Pritam Singh and Prof Meena Dhandha shared when they gave evidence. In fact, Prof Meena Dhandha went further and said she felt there were ulterior motives to this report, which had all the hallmarks of the adoption of diversionary and distraction tactics by the Government, in order to take the focus away from the real issues facing the people of this country. Professor Dhandha in her written submissions had no doubt that in making *“unsubstantiated, overblown, and misleading claims about Sikhs in*

⁵⁸ Bloom Review at p. 123

Britain” the Bloom Review was “evading mention of established facts about Hindu extremist groups in the UK” so that the “[e]xcess attention to so-called ‘extremist’ activities of Sikh groups serves to deflect attention from the growing menace of Hindu extremism.”

56. Lord Singh of Wimbledon in his interview to the *Times of India* was also clear that Sikh extremism “appears to have been magnified somewhat” taking up to 12 pages. In fact, “recent government statistics on the religion of terrorists or extremist in British prisons indicate none who identify as Sikhs.”
57. We now turn to the definition of extremism. The report acknowledges that (legal) definitions are not in place in respect of some (tendentious) terms such as “terrorism” and “extremism” but nonetheless proceeds on the footing of self-imposed definitions. This process is likely to lead to outcomes which are manufactured and erroneous.
58. With this in mind it is hard to see how Bloom reached the conclusion that there is a fringe extremism movement. The panel made three Freedom of Information (‘FOI’) requests of the Government. None showed disturbances at Gurdwaras which would have led to concerns about so-called terrorism.
59. With regard to brainwashing children at Sikh Youth camps, we heard evidence from Mrs Sarbjit Kaur who has assisted at the Walsall Gurmat Camp since it was established in 1984, the first Sikh Camp in the UK which has been used as a blue print across the country. She told us that they do cover teaching of all Sikh history from the Birth of Guru Nanak to modern day atrocities. She reminded us that the Sikhs have always had to defend themselves and it is important to all Sikh children to have a good understanding of the sacrifices made by forefathers. The panel asked her what if anything is taught about the 1984 Sikh Genocide. She said that the children are taught of Sikh martyrs just as we remember the sacrifice of those in World War I and II.
60. The panel had the benefit of a detailed report from Dr. Ramindar Singh MBE DL and Dr. Sujinder Singh Sangha OBE FRSA. It also heard in person from Dr S S Sangha. He has been an educator of children in the UK between 16-18 for over 30 years. His services have been acknowledged by the UK government. He was asked if in all his years he was aware of any brainwashed or radicalised children. Or, if any child before him presented with hate and terror. He was categorically of the view that this was not the case. As he explained, Sikh children have always been taught the importance of all faiths as being of equal value and the duty upon them to be respectful of them. On the other hand, he was conscious of the fact that Sikh children were easy targets for racist abuse and bullying, especially post 9/11, given their outward appearance of having long hair and being turbaned.

61. We remind ourselves of the evidence of Mankamal Singh who was present at a meeting with the Counter Terrorism Unit on 27 June 2023 who confirmed that Sikhs did not pose a threat to the UK.
62. We were extremely assisted by the written submission of Talbir Singh Kings Counsel a leading Criminal silk, who submitted the Bloom report used a self-imposed definition of “harmful extremism” behaviour which seeks to subvert democratic order (such as by denying pluralism or shutting down debate), that glorifies or condones violence or harm towards others or that seeks to divide and undermine communities through aggressive intimidatory, racist or misogynistic tactics..” The use of this definition was ill-advised. A Scotsman/woman championing the cause of the SNP for independence whilst promoting the film Braveheart could easily fall foul of this definition. As for Bloom’s reference to Sikh extremists uploading videos and other materials onto social media platforms such as Facebook, iTunes and YouTube, the issue is not referenced and without proper evidence to substantiate Blooms conclusions, this finding is rejected by the panel.

(ii) Pro Khalistani

63. Prof. Pritam Singh said the demand for a Sikh Homeland is no different from the Scots wanting independence from the United Kingdom, using the right to self-determination to protect one’s identity and culture. To brand those seeking a home land as either extreme or pro-Khalistani extremists is an over-reaction. The Panel has reminded itself, and taken note of Dr Jasjit Singh’s report that, “The term ‘Sikh radicalisation’ was first used in Indian media in the *Economic Times* on January 8th 2015 (Sharma, 2015) as topping the agenda for an Indo-UK counter terrorism joint working group meeting.” It begs the question where such terminology has come.
64. Our attention as also bought to an interview given by Colin Bloom for *India Today* where he was asked if he found any links between the Sikhs and Pakistani funders. Given that there is no reference to this in his report he could have denied it. Instead, he answered that, “I think its important that the British government use their extensive technical expertise to see where this funding is coming from, not just the funding but also who is empowering ‘them’ [Sikhs] clearly this is an awful lot bigger than we realised”. This was quite unwarranted. Indeed, when asked about potential involvement of Pakistan in Sikh activities, he went on to say “I have some suspicions that it might be the case, but as I say it will be up to the British authorities and I don’t speak on behalf of the British government, but I think it’s on them to investigate these things.” This is an irresponsible statement with a potential to do great harm to communal relations in the UK. The fact is that there is no mention of anything like this in Bloom’s report. He had found no such evidence. He could simply have said exactly that. Instead, he chose to create a suspicion of such funding being in existence when he had no basis to do so. Indeed, when the pro-

Khalistan group 'Sikhs for Justice' (SFJ), were identified as having links with the Pakistan ISI, they brought a defamation case against Terry Milewski and the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. The case did not go to a full trial because the SFJ withdrew the claim. This was only after Milewski had conceded in cross-examination at the Pre-hearing, that there was "a lack of evidence in support of key facts," and that that "he did not know whether Pakistan is involved in any way in the SFJ's referendum campaign."⁵⁹

65. The fact is that Khalistani activism has much more complex roots than Bloom realises. As Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal and Sunny Hundal note in their 2019 report, 'The changing nature of Sikh activism', pro-Khalistan activism "can also be described as legitimate activism rooted in grievances arising due to structural inequalities and alienation from power structures. It is important Sikhs be allowed to debate the merits of a Sikh homeland without such conversations being reflexively labelled as 'extremist' or 'terrorism'." If this is so, it is unclear why Colin Bloom should describe any reference to Khalistani activism as falling under the category of *Sikh extremism and pro-Khalistani extremism*.⁶⁰

(iii) Separatism

66. This is an interesting term used within the report. The panel note the evidence of Prof Pritam Singh of Oxford, an academic specialist in the dynamics of Indian capitalism and human rights, that the Sikh demand for a homeland is nothing more than the Scottish National Party seeking an independent state or when Britain left the EU. The latter referred to as nationalism but Sikhs as separatists.
67. The Panel benefited from, and were grateful at the hearing, from having the contribution of Prof. A S Chawla, an academic and a criminal advocate from India, whose submissions made clear how the word 'separatism' is much misunderstood. As he explained:-

"Separatism is a word regularly used in India particularly by government authorities. It can be defined as an instance of political disintegration wherein political actors in one or more sub-systems withdraw their loyalties, expectations, and political activities from a jurisdictional center and focus them on a center of their own. Considering the cost of such a strategic separatist movement in the nation, the government throughout history has made use of Sections like Sec. 124-A of the Indian Penal Code famously known as the Sedition Law which has been defined as: "Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or

⁵⁹ See *Sikhs for Justice v. The Macdonald-Laurier Institute*, 2021 ONSC 7063 (CanLII) (Available at <https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onsc/doc/2021/2021onsc7063/2021onsc7063.html>)

⁶⁰ The Bloom Review, "Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith at p. 123 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law, shall be punished with [imprisonment for life], to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine."

68. Therefore, this Panels find it extremely troubling that the word 'separatism' or the reference to 'separatists' is used so freely by Bloom in his report without a proper appreciation of its proper context. Given what Prof Chawla has stated it is quite clear that there are many parts of India that can be said to be in a state of political disintegration or not as the case may be. Sikh 'separatism' is not unique in this sense. In fact, we were concerned as Cllr. Parbinder Kaur reminded us in her evidence to the Panel that Bloom has repeatedly appeared on Indian TV channels, hardly at all in UK channels, and certainly not even once on Sikh UK channels to explain the import of his report before a faith group which his Review directly affects. She told us the Bloom Review already has little traction in the UK compared to what has been made of it in India, especially in relation to the way in which Bloom has focussed on Sikhs. The Panel were shown 4 video clips of Bloom on Indian TV channels. The relevant parts have been quoted within this report.
69. **Third**, Bloom had a concern over, *"the activities of some individuals and organisations that are demonstrably fuelling sectarianism and anti-Muslim sentiments, as well as legitimising discriminatory and misogynistic behaviour."*
70. Here Bloom is dealing with interfaith marriages. We heard detailed evidence regarding this from Sikh faith leaders and Sikh academics. Here also Bloom fails to understand what it was that was specifically objected to in such cases. The objection was not to interfaith marriage *per se*. It was to the use of the specific 'Anand Karaj' ceremony mandated by the Sikh Code of Conduct (the 'Maryada') which requires such a ceremony to be used only where both parties to the marriage are Sikhs. This is not a breach of equality laws because a ceremony other than one that was not an 'Anand Karaj' would be perfectly acceptable under the Sikh Code of Conduct. Sarabjit Kaur told us from her years of working with Sikh youth and other prominent Sikh figures that there is no objection to interfaith marriages and a couple receiving a blessing at a Gurdwara provided that an 'Anand Karaj' ceremony was not used.
71. For all these reasons, as Talbir Singh KC reminded us, Bloom was wrong to say that "[f]or generations many Sikhs have been able to marry outside the community, including interfaith marriages" but that "some groups have sought to aggressively pressure Sikh leaders and gurdwaras to ban the Anand Karaj (the Sikh marriage ceremony) for interfaith marriages." He refers to how "[i]n 2007, arsonists attacked the house of a gurdwara leader in Birmingham in

what was believed to be a reprisal attack...⁶¹, but what Bloom wholly neglects to mention is that in August 2007, the seat of Sikh temporal authority, the Akal Takht in Amritsar, issued an Edict banning Anand Karaj marriages for interfaith couples.⁶² Yet, Bloom makes no reference to this. That is not to say, however, that the disruption of wedding ceremonies is not to be deprecated or condemned in the few isolated cases where this has happened. This, however, is not a question a religious faith losing its way but of the weight of the criminal law being applied to lawless behaviour. Insofar as this has happened we abhor such conduct. We nevertheless make it clear that there is no evidence that such behaviour is condoned by any Sikh leader or institution in the UK.

72. In any event, most such protests have been peaceful and the examples Bloom gives do not support his claim. Bloom refers to how it was that “[d]uring an interfaith marriage at the Leamington Spa Gurdwara, a group of more than 50 men protested the marriage.”⁶³ Bloom’s source is a BBC report of the event on 11th September 2016.⁶⁴ What Bloom does not do, however, is to refer to the subsequent BBC report of 6th February 2018. This refers to the trial of two of the fifty men, “[b]ut both men, from Coventry, had told the court the demonstration was a protest against alleged misuse of funds at the temple”⁶⁵ and both had been acquitted. Nor does he draw any attention to the fact that by 19th October 2016 it was being reported that the “[f]ifty people arrested at a Sikh Temple have been told no further action will be taken against them,” and yet they had initially been arrested “on suspicion of aggravated trespass.”⁶⁶ This is not surprising. Sunny Hundal’s written evidence, with respect to the protests against ‘inter-faith’ marriages, was also to the effect that, “even though the activities mentioned in that section relate to either Sikh nationalism or low-level thuggery and harassment, which is also prevalent in other communities. There is no evidence in the section for violent extremism that approaches terrorism.”⁶⁷

⁶¹ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith* at p. 129 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

⁶² For a discussion of the Edict, see the Supreme Sikh Council UK (Available at <http://sikhcounciluk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Mixed-Marriage-guidelines-final.pdf>)

⁶³ The Bloom Review, “*Does Government do God?: An independent review into how government engages with faith* at p. 130 (Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1152684/The_Bloom_Review.pdf)

⁶⁴ Ibid., where at footnote 349 he refers to The BBC (11 September 2016) ‘*Leamington Spa Sikh temple protest: Fifty-Five arrested*’. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-37332307>

⁶⁵ The BBC (6 February 2018) “*Pair cleared of Leamington Spa temple protest charges*” (Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-42961334>)

⁶⁶ The BBC, “*No action over 50 Leamington Spa Sikh Temple arrests*”, 19th October 2016, (Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-37704905>)

⁶⁷ Sunny Hundal, *Sikhs in Law* written submission 2nd July 2023.

Concluding Remarks

1. The Bloom Review is not independent and impartial.
2. The Bloom Review is fundamentally flawed both in its methodology and in its outcome.
3. The Bloom Review proceeds on the basis of assumptions that are flawed and misconceived and betray an alarming lack of understanding of the Sikh Community, such that it lacks the very 'faith literacy' which it recommends the Government to adopt in the future.
4. The Bloom Review is accordingly unsafe and unsatisfactory and should not be relied upon by any Government body or department, in the drafting and promulgation of policies which the Sikh Community, or it will risk damaging race relations in the UK.
5. The Bloom Review has damaged the hitherto excellent relationship between the Sikh Community and the British government, and risks continuing doing so, if it is not set aside by the British Government.
6. The Bloom Review in its Chapter 6 on 'Faith-Based Extremism' is not fit for purpose, as it relates to Sikhs, given what has been stated above.
7. The Bloom Review in its Chapter 6 on 'Faith-Based Extremism', lacks the fairness, transparency, and proportionality one would expect of a report to the Government, and should be declared to be so.

This concludes our Report.

PROF SATVINDER SINGH JUSS (CHAIR)

DR GURNAM SINGH

I agree

DR DALVIR KAUR GILL

I agree

HARJAP SINGH BHANGAL (Solicitor)

I agree

BALDIP SINGH (Barrister)

I too agree

