



University of
Chester

CSARS Group · *Conference 2015*

Recovery from Addiction Conference

University Of Chester · 2nd & 3rd November 2015

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**“Reconstructing Sikh Spirituality in Recovery
from Alcohol Addiction”**

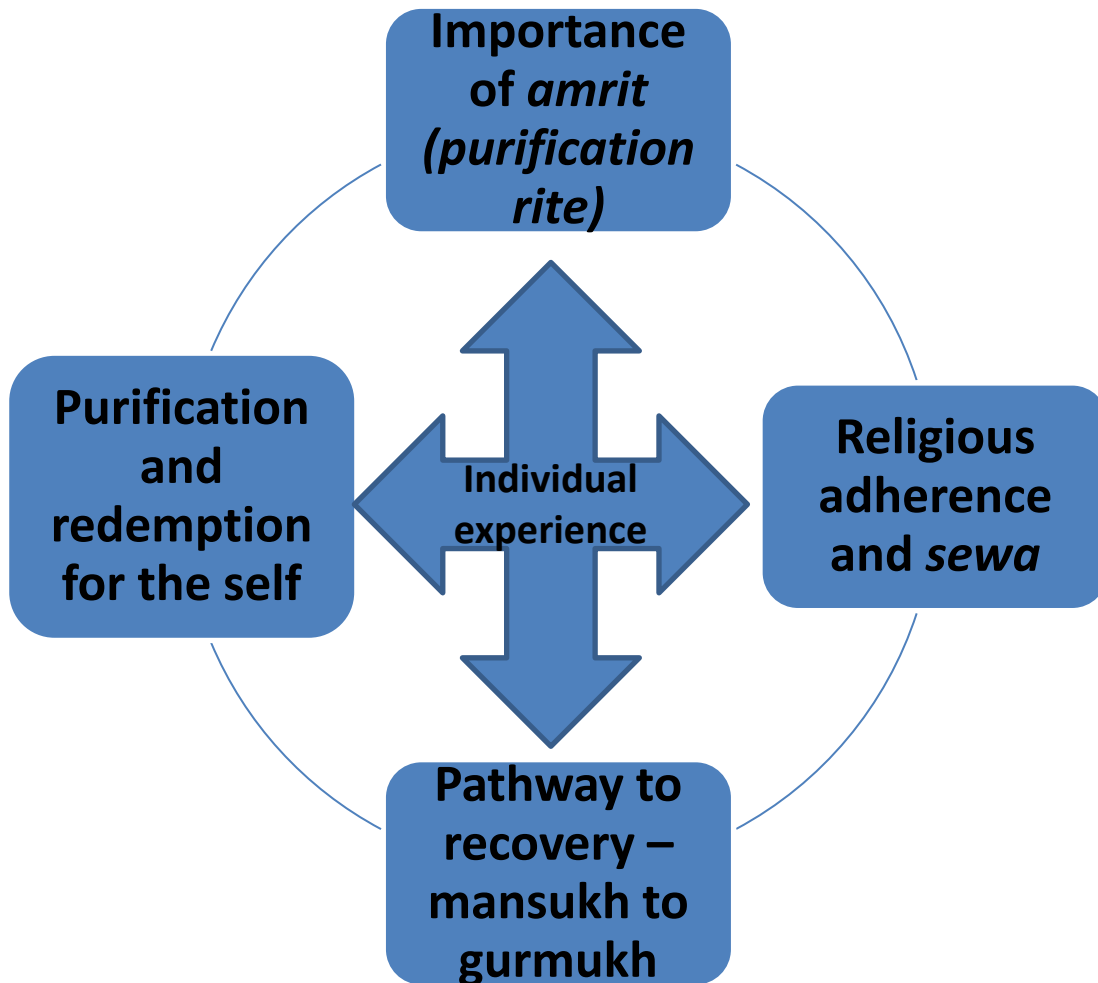
Alcohol addiction, Recovery, Sikh Identity

- Introduce the paper, our ideas, provide a context
- Emphasise the importance of psycho-social, cultural contexts
 - Brief outline of original research
 - Why we decided to revisit and develop
- Resituate the experience using sociological ideas
- Nuanced, richer sense of Sikhism

Alcohol use / misuse

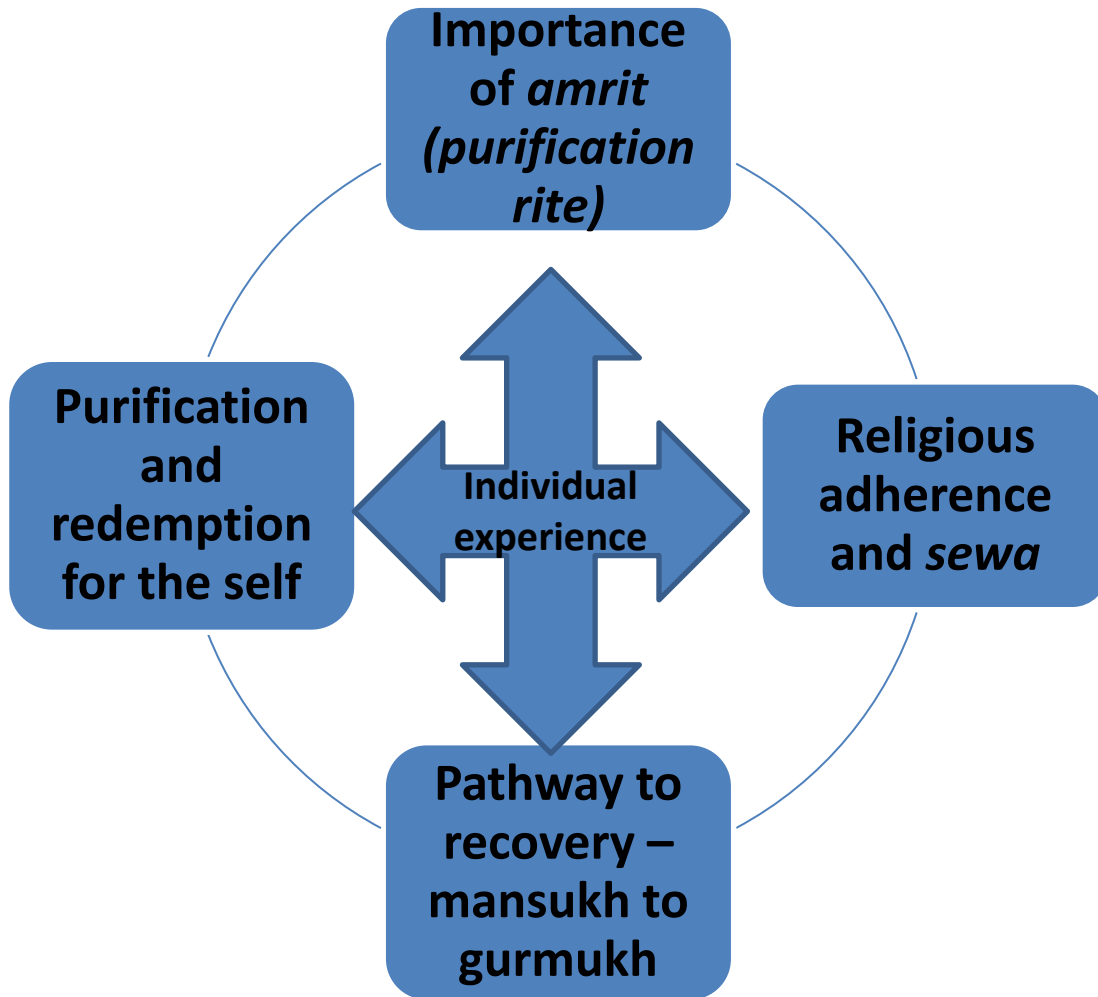
- Variety of research indicates some significant issues
- More use generally; more use alone
- Findings suggest alcohol use has culturally embedded place in many Sikh groups
- Hospital admissions increased (Sikh men presenting with alcohol related liver disease)
- Explanations suggested:
 - Cultural, masculine, practices – bonding, working, socialising
 - Acculturation stress – being in host country – alcohol used as coping mechanisms
 - Race, racism, discrimination, hostility – Intersection of race, ethnicity, class and culture? (Direction for future research...?)

Components of original model



- Community Psychological study (Morjaria-Keval 2006)
- 18 south Asian men, 10 Sikh men, 25-60.
- Changed their drinking behaviour, abstinent from 5 months to 18 years
- Semi-structured interviews, detailed personal accounts, participants experiences, beliefs, views – interested in their experiences and how they made sense of these issues.

Components of original model



- “Spontaneous Recovery”
- This was a major theme of original research
- ‘Unofficial’ help and support centres
- ‘Spontaneous’ recovery needed researching
- Obstacle, issues, ‘hidden’ recovery that policy and practice might miss

Some Sikh 'ground' rules (very shortened version)

- Guru Nanak – purpose of life is to realise one's connection with the eternal spirit – facilitate one's reunion with this spirit
- Receive gods grace, released from cycle of birth and death
- Suffering caused by: forgetting existence of god; mind lacking control, indulging in worldly pleasure....
- Moral principles provide guidelines, through scriptures...
- Path to salvation is
 - a) love
 - b) sewa (devotion to duty for others)

Re-working concepts...

- What is religion / what isn't
- What is culture/ what isn't
- What is recovery / what isn't
- What is a sikh / what isn't

Not Static state,
but Fluid
Processes

- Moving away from Binaried understandings – dichotomies we use to make sense of our world, by limiting the options – so we don't go mad
- They are useful BUT they are not how we 'DO' social, cultural, religious, 'ethnic', in a word, 'real' lived life.

Processes

Addiction
Suffering
Recovery
Faith

Processes, NOT states –
but not just
Psychological, or
'Divine' – They are
Cultural and Social

Sikhism, and its role in recovery is also a
process...How?

mechanisms

- Needed to re-situate original paper and data
- Emphasise the socially fluid, culturally dynamic ways in which spirituality, here in Sikh forms of recovery, work at the spaces *between 'other worldly / this worldly' relation*
- Facilitates **personal change, through social continuity**

mechanisms

Religious ideas appear divinity based, higher 'planned'...

Context – South Asian, Sikh Diaspora is multi-national, global, historical phenomenon

How is Sikh belief system(s) mobilised for recovery?

Scriptures, Rituals protect core values

But embedded **WITHIN** community, within ethno-religious framework

Acknowledging *grounded, social, cultural* nature of these mechanisms.

the question Sociology brings to this discussion is:

How is recovery 'done' in Sikhism?

- The 'doing' of roles, beliefs, values, attitudes – which are moral constructions...
- ...are about mechanisms of *continuity and change*
- Psychological, social contexts to addiction, and Sikh spiritual frameworks *connect* to these contexts
- Tensions in religious, faith life in secular, western, global commercialised existence...
- **...but the Sikh framework doesn't *clash* with modernity...it works *through it!!!***

Actually, How is Sikhism 'done' in recovery?

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Spirituality / Materiality

- ***Amrit*** - vows, initiations, purification – ‘nectar of immortality’
(*sugar and water, rep. universal source of life + intense love (sweetness) of God*)
- From *Amlī* to *Amritdhari* → 5 Ks physical reminders of religious boundaries – commitment to self, God, duty
- Built in allowances → possible to have different ‘membership’ – informal, private, abstinence pledge.
- ***Built in commitment to social good, community, Gurdwara – Amrit is repair of alcohol addiction, AND social / community ties***

Reconstructing identities

- Narrating 'new' versions of older selves –*biographical continuity through re-construction*
- *Stripped of old self, new layers of Sikhism, 'Community service' is paramount layer...*
- ...inherently facilitates better recovery...but Without guarantees –
- Require constant dedication, possibility of relapse
- Previous selves: fragmented belonging partial commitment
- **'Authentic' 'Original' Sikhism through Amrit REINTEGRATES Self, and Self into Society**

The spiritual IS the social...

- Can't break free of the karmic cycle without social and community embedded-ness
- 'Re-birth' is actually a re-imagining of a more pure, 'authentic form' of Sikhism, rid of the previous adornments of material life.
- Amrit is bridging mechanism between 'other-worldly' and 'this worldly' realms
- Path to spiritual enlightenment is also a 2 way path to stronger social and cultural connections – Sikh Identity

Service provision impacts

- Beyond an academic understanding
- Think through integration of unofficial mechanisms
- Potential misconceptions at service delivery / support access ('spiritual' defined as 'other', therefore not effective, not legitimate)
- Need to undermine long held 'cultural' models...
- '...they'll deal with their own kind in their own way...'
- Counter isolated practices, provide support – integrate Gurdwaras (e.g. examples in Canada)
- Focus academic, practitioner, policy work on the detailed picture of Sikh systems



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- The Alcohol Education Research Centre
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Thank you, questions