



'I never thought I'd be terrorised by my fellow Sikhs at a wedding'

When interfaith marriages take place, UK temples now often hire security guards to protect weddings from demonstrators

The ceremony in Leamington Spa is a lot smaller than the newlyweds had hoped. Just close family and friends – those they can really trust. The marriage takes place in secret, on a Friday afternoon.

It's a beautiful, bright day at the town's Gurdwara Sahib temple, but there is an anxiety in the air that is more than typical pre-wedding jitters: the young couple have been forced to marry under "oppressive circumstances" after **previous weddings were disrupted by protesting religious men who do not want Sikhs to marry out of the faith.**

The protesters dress in hoods, cover their faces and intimidate guests at the temple. Yet they are Sikhs – a religion readily associated with peace and inclusivity.

"I have got through the days of being called a Paki and a nig-nog," the registrar Bhopinder Singh tells the Guardian. "I never thought that the day would come when I would be frightened and terrorised by people of my own faith."

When an interfaith marriage now takes place, the temple is forced to hire security guards to protect couples and their families. To avoid trouble, some couples are choosing to get married on weekdays, which are less likely to be disrupted.

The bride is a follower of Jainism, an ancient Indian religion similar to Buddhism, and her groom is a Sikh. The couple do not want to be identified for fear of repercussions.

At the temple, volunteers cook sabzi and chapattis in the kitchen, preparing to feed the forty or so people of every faith who will walk through its doors to attend the wedding.

The bride says she received a phone call that morning and was told her wedding would have to be a day sooner than planned, for her own safety.

“We have been educated here and are moderate and should be free to marry whomever we wish,” she says. “I had to rush up from London – this is no way to be. There is a fundamental problem with the way [the protesters] are behaving and it will not be accepted.”

Her new husband says: “We have had to get married under oppressive circumstances. We were forced into this. The other option was to have a bigger wedding but hire security and we didn’t want to do that.

Mota Singh, a councillor and former mayor of Leamington Spa, calls the protesters “fundamentalists”. Singh, 77, says because of his moderate outlook he has received repeated threats from the group online and in person and has even had a brick thrown through his window.

Shamsher Singh, previously told the Guardian: “More and more young people are becoming interested in the true interpretation of what it means to be Sikh.

“The elder generation arrived [in the UK] and fitted their faith round the need to assimilate, survive and to get work. This led to a stripping back of the spiritual nature of what it means to be a Sikh to a series of symbols.

“Now younger people want to reclaim Sikhism as a deeply spiritual, peaceful and encompassing religion and this is why we are seeing these protests.”

Shortly after the Sikh Council was formed, it issued an edict saying weddings between Sikhs and non-Sikhs could not take place in temples, arguing that the Sikh wedding ceremony, Anand Karaj, should be reserved only for Sikhs.

Marrying people of other faiths is acceptable, they say, but conducting that marriage in a Sikh temple is not. Non-Sikhs can only be involved if they accept the Sikh faith and change their name to include Singh or Kaur, the council insists.

The temple's registrar, Bhopinder Singh, said he was pleased the wedding season was almost over for the year. "I have been in this country since the age of nine and have lived through the football hooliganism of the 1970s. These guys were far more scary than football hooligans," he said. "They were foul-mouthed and intimidating and I have never experienced anything like this."

Other temples across the country have been less robust under pressure from the protests groups and no longer hold interfaith marriages. But the temple committee in Leamington is adamant that they will continue. "On the face of it what they are protesting is against mixed marriage – but it is deeper than that," said the temple trustee **Jaswant Singh Virdee**. **"They want to control the temple with their own people and with their own extremist views."**

Balraj Singh Dhesi, the first Asian mayor of Leamington, said the protests were a British phenomenon. **"Interfaith marriages have been taking place since the birth of Sikhism hundreds of years ago. These prejudices, which are growing and are very concerning, will cause damage to British society."** They are indigenous to this country but yet have an obvious disregard for integration."

Friday's wedding passed off without incident, but there is a grim irony in a couple spending the biggest day of their lives praying for it to be totally uneventful.

Exam-Style Question b) 5 marks

Give ONE example of extremism in Sikhism. (5 marks)

P - Point – make your point

An example of extremism in Sikhism is the fundamentalist young Sikhs who want to re claim Sikhism as deeply spiritual because they feel that their parent's generation

E – Evidence your point

They are turning up to Sikh Gurdwaras holding mixed marriages and

E- Explain your evidence

Jaswant Singh Virdee believes that these protests run deeper than just protesting against mixed marriage

Balraj Singh Dhesi said

**Censorship Discrimination Extremism Human Rights
Personal Conviction Prejudice Social Justice**