

## By reference to British values, what are the best values for humans to aspire to?

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### Introduction

People are often praised for their generosity toward one another. If we look back to ancient times, when human civilization was developing, a sense of values was developing too. These values have been passed down to this day through families, friends, teachers, and culture.

Generally, Human values are values of life, they are important for every human being irrespective of their cast, color or race. They shape the life of person, they make us differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. A person with a good human values is loved and respected by all.

Thus, this Guru Nanak Social Mobility Scholarship is much more than financial aid; it is a living commitment to a deeper kind of justice. It's built on the Sikh idea of **Vand Chhako**—a call to share what we have not out of pity, but because we see our own well-being tied to the well-being of others. This scholarship actively works to break down the barriers that stop people from reaching their potential, which makes you ask a bigger question: what values truly matter if we want to build a world that is fair and compassionate for everyone, just as Guru Nanak Dev Ji envisioned?

The UK's five "Fundamental British Values"—democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance—offer a practical toolkit for running a peaceful society. They emerged from Britain's long and often turbulent history, from the Magna Carta pushing back against royal power to the struggles for the right to vote. But on their own, they can feel like a set of rules. It's when you view them through the lens of Sikh principles like **Sarbat da Bhala** (working for the good of all), **Seva** (selfless service), and a fierce commitment to justice (**Nyau**) that they transform. They become a pathway to building a society where everyone has the chance to not just exist but to truly flourish.

This essay argues that British values provide one of the most balanced and practical frameworks for human flourishing. By exploring their history, meaning, and application—and drawing connections with Sikh jurisprudence, which emphasizes fairness, equality, justice, and community—it will show why these values are among the best for humanity to aspire to

### Sikh Jurisprudence: A Moral Compass for Society

To really figure out what values humans should aspire to, we need a framework that measures them by how they treat the most vulnerable among us. Sikh jurisprudence, which comes from the teachings of Guru Nanak and the Gurus that followed, gives us exactly that. It's not just about theory; it's about action. At its heart is the beautiful concept of **Miri-Piri**—the idea that temporal power (Miri) and spiritual wisdom (**Piri**) must always go hand in hand. A government that has no morality is a tyranny, and a faith that does not engage with justice is empty. They need each other to create a world that is both functional and good.

Three principles from this tradition feel especially important for this discussion:

**Nyau (Justice):** This is not just the cold, blind justice of the law books. This is a justice that takes sides. It's the justice that Guru Nanak Dev Ji showed when he saw the suffering caused by Babur's invasions and spoke out directly against the emperor's cruelty. It's a justice that stands with the oppressed (**Pir Parai**), asking not just if a law was broken, but whether the law itself is right.

**Radical Equality:** The Gurus did not just preach equality; they built systems to make it happen. The institution of **Langar**, where everyone—king or beggar, Hindu or Muslim—sits together on the floor to share a simple meal, was a revolutionary act. It physically dismantled the caste system and social hierarchies that told people they were better or worse than others. The **Sangat**, the congregation, works the same way, every voice has equal weight in the community. This was a radical notion in a world rigidly divided by birth and creed, and it remains a powerful challenge to modern inequalities

**Sarbat da Bhala:** This is perhaps the most beautiful and challenging ideal: to work for the welfare of all creation. It's a commitment that extends beyond your own family, your own community, or your own country. It's a value that forces us to think globally and act selflessly.

This framework does not just add another layer to British values; it gives them a soul. It asks one simple but powerful question of any value: does it actively uplift the weakest and create a fairer world? If not, can we really call it aspirational?

## Democracy: Voice and Shared Responsibility

Democracy, in its simplest sense, is government by the people. In Britain, democracy was not born overnight. It was a result of long struggle. The Magna Carta in 1215 first said that even a king was not above the law. Centuries later, the Great Reform Act of 1832 started to fix a broken system where tiny, almost empty villages (called "rotten boroughs") had MPs while big industrial cities like Manchester had almost no representation. It took until 1928 for all women to get the vote. This gradual evolution is actually a strength—it shows that democracy is a process, not a single event. It's about constantly trying to become more inclusive.

Modern examples continue this tradition of democratic accountability. In *R (Miller) v Secretary of State for Exiting the EU* [2017] UKSC 5, the Supreme Court confirmed that the government could not trigger Brexit without Parliament's approval, affirming that executive power is accountable to democratic institutions. This was democracy in action: ensuring the people's elected representatives had a say in a decision of national importance. Similarly, the devolution of power to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd represents a modern evolution of democratic principles, attempting to bring decision-making closer to the people it affects.

But from a Sikh perspective, democracy finds its deepest meaning when it's infused with a sense of spiritual responsibility. The Sikh practice of **Sangat**, where a community gathers and makes decisions together, with every person having an equal voice—is a form of spiritual democracy. It's about collective wisdom. Even more powerfully, when Guru Gobind Singh Ji established the Khalsa, he passed temporal authority not to a single king, but to the community itself. This was a breathtaking act of faith in collective

decision-making, embodying the principle of Guru Panth, that the Sikh community itself is the repository of guidance and authority

So, the aspirational value is not just democracy. It's democracy guided by **Sarbat da Bhala**. It's a system where the goal of leadership is not to win power, but to serve the common good. It's about constantly asking: whose voice is still missing? Who are we still leaving behind? This makes democracy a living, breathing tool for social mobility, always expanding to include those on the margins

### **Rule of Law: Equality before a Just Law.**

The Rule of Law, famously defined by **A.V. Dicey** (1885), rests on three principles: equality before the law, supremacy of ordinary law, and judicial oversight. It underpins stability, fairness and predictability in British society. The idea that “no one is above the law” remains its cornerstone.

We see this in everyday life. The speed limit is a perfect example. If you're caught speeding, you get a fine. It does not matter if you are rich or poor, famous or unknown. The same rule applies to everyone, and that's what makes it fair and makes our roads safer for the whole community. This predictability is essential for trust in public institutions.

From Sikh thought challenges us to go a crucial step further. What if the law itself is unjust? What good is a rule that's applied equally if the rule is wrong? This is where the Sikh concept of **Nyau** comes in. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's martyrdom is the ultimate example of this. He was executed by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb for defiantly protecting the right of Hindus to practice their religion freely. The emperor's law was clear, but it was morally wrong. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji chose to defy an unjust law, showing us that true justice is a higher principle than blind obedience. His sacrifice stands as an eternal reminder that the legitimacy of law is derived from its morality, not merely its power.

Therefore, the value we must aspire to is not just the Rule of Law, but the Rule of a Just Law. This means our legal system must do more than just punish crime; it must actively protect the vulnerable and tear down systemic inequality. Laws like the Equality Act 2010 try to do this by making discrimination illegal and forcing organisations to think about fairness. This is how the law becomes a powerful engine for social mobility—it doesn't just promise a level playing field; it actively works to build one. The modern concept of judicial review, where courts can assess the legality and sometimes the proportionality of government actions, is a practical mechanism that moves the British system closer to this ideal of a just law, ensuring state power is exercised fairly and for a proper purpose.

### **Individual Liberty: Freedom with Purpose**

British history is full of fights for individual liberty. Philosophers like John Locke argued that we have natural rights to life, liberty, and property. John Stuart Mill gave us the “harm principle”—the idea that you should be free to do anything you want as long as you do not harm others. These ideas are enshrined in modern laws like **the Human Rights Act** (1998), which protects our freedom of expression, our right to a fair trial, and our liberty and security. This value is about protecting a space for each of us to live our lives, think our own thoughts, and be who we are without the state crushing us.

This freedom is essential. But Sikh philosophy adds a profound layer of purpose. In the Sikh worldview, liberty isn't just “freedom from” interference; it's “freedom to” serve. The highest expression of liberty is **Seva**—selfless service. True freedom is not found in doing whatever you please, but in using your skills, your time, and your energy to lift up other people and help your community. Your freedom is meaningless

if you are trapped by poverty, prejudice, or a lack of opportunity; true liberty requires the capability to act, not just the absence of restraint.

This is where the link to social mobility becomes so clear. **The Guru Nanak Scholarship** is itself an act of Seva. It uses resources to give someone the liberty—the freedom from financial barrier—to pursue their calling. It understands that real liberty is emancipatory. It's about breaking the chains that hold people back so they are free to achieve their potential and, in turn, use their talents to serve the wider world. Liberty is not a solo journey; it's the first step toward contributing to the collective good.

## **Mutual Respect and Tolerance: From Coexistence to Equality**

The British values of mutual respect and tolerance are the glue that holds a diverse society together. Tolerance is the baseline—it's the willingness to put up with beliefs and customs that are different from your own, even if you do not like or understand them. It's what stops society from fracturing into conflict. Mutual respect is a step further; it's about actively recognising the inherent dignity and worth of every single person. Laws like the **Equality Act** (2010) try to build this respect into the fabric of our society by making discrimination illegal. This legal framework provides essential protection, creating a baseline below which society must not fall.

These are vital. But Sikhism shows us a more radical, more active form of togetherness. The values of **Sangat** and **Pangat** (the line of people sitting together for Langar) do not just ask us to “tolerate” each other from a distance. They force us to literally sit side-by-side as equals, to share food and conversation. This is a powerful, physical act that destroys invisible barriers of caste, class, and creed. It's not passive; it's an active building of community.

We saw a beautiful example of mutual respect in action during the **COVID-19** pandemic with the “Clap for Carers.” Every week, people across the UK stood on their doorsteps to applaud NHS staff and key workers. So many of these workers were from minority ethnic backgrounds, immigrants, and people who are often overlooked. For a moment, the whole country stopped to show its respect for their incredible contribution and sacrifice. It was a collective, human moment of gratitude that transcended difference.

Another everyday example is the right to wear religious clothing in public. Seeing someone in a turban, hijab, kippah, or with a cross is not just a sign of tolerance; it's a sign that our society is strong enough to make space for different identities. People don't have to hide who they are to belong.

The aspirational value we should strive for, then, is radical equality. It's moving beyond just tolerating diversity to actively creating a community where everyone feels they truly belong and have an equal chance to succeed. This is the only environment where true social mobility can flourish. It requires not just abolishing formal discrimination, but proactively creating inclusive spaces—from boardrooms to classrooms—where diversity is valued as a source of strength and innovation

## **Why British Values Stand Out Globally**

Why should British values, fused with Sikh jurisprudence, matter to humanity at large? Because they provide a balanced, pragmatic yet morally grounded framework.

In a world facing migration crises, climate change, and global inequality, democracy ensures participation, the rule of law provides accountability, liberty fosters innovation, respect nurtures harmony, and tolerance prevents conflict. When infused with Sikh ideals of justice, service, and equality, these values become universal tools for addressing global challenges.

For example, climate justice demands the rule of a just law—where environmental regulations protect not just ecosystems but the poorest communities most affected by climate change. Migration requires tolerance elevated into radical equality, ensuring refugees are not merely accepted but fully integrated with dignity.

Thus, these values, enriched by Sikh thought, are not parochial “British” ideals but universal aspirations for human flourishing. They offer a template for building societies that are both strong and compassionate, ordered and just.

## Conclusion

So, what are the best values for humans to aspire to? They are the values that give us both a strong foundation and a moral compass. The British values of democracy, the rule of law, liberty, respect, and tolerance provide the essential architecture for a functioning, fair, and free society—the “how.” But Sikh jurisprudence, with its unwavering call for justice (Nyau), selfless service (Seva), and radical equality, provides the soul and the purpose—the “why.”

Together, they create a complete vision for a world that is not only stable but also compassionate and just. The Guru Nanak Social Mobility Scholarship is a perfect example of this powerful fusion in action. It is a practical program (the ‘how’) that is fueled by the spirit of Vand Chhako and Seva (the ‘why’). It doesn’t just talk about values; it puts them into practice by actively breaking down barriers and creating opportunity.

The most aspirational values, therefore, are those that do both: they provide the rules for a peaceful society, and they fill those rules with a spirit of love, justice, and shared humanity. They guide us in building communities where everyone, without exception, has the freedom to flourish and the opportunity to contribute to the well-being of all.

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