SPEAKER STORY SECONDARY VERSION – Amandeep Amy Kaur Ark

**History and Detail:** My Name is Amandeep. I also go by the name Amy (which is a name that I started using at the age of 16 to stop people laughing at my name which happened a lot when I was at school!) I now use both Amandeep and Amy as both are names that I identify with. I was raised Sikh, and still follow the Sikh faith, but my parents were moderate sikhs, we followed Sikh values and prayed at the Gurudwara (which is the Sikh place of worship), but we cut our hair and ate meat for example (basically there were some things that we followed and others that we did not). I am a first generation British-Indian (which means that I was born in England but that my parents were born in North India, Punjab). I grew up in a town in the South of England, it was a town with small groups of ethnic minorities and the school that I went to had around 20% ethnic minorities, of which the Sikh community were a small number. This meant that I faced some racism growing up, not as much as some people! But enough to make me think that I was different from lots of my friends who were white British.

**Conflict / Tension**: As I started to get a little older in primary school and secondary, I started to feel a tension between home and school. At school, friends would talk about what they did on the weekend or ate the night before and it was always different to me so I would keep quiet as I did not want to be seen as different, I wanted to fit in. I did not feel confident talking about the food that I ate or the music that I listened to at home. I did not see anyone that looked like me on TV or my culture, language, clothes or food in the world outside of my family or Sikh community. That made me question who I was and I was confused about who I wanted to be. I became very quiet at school; I would not speak up because I thought that what I would say was not interesting to people. As a result, I was not very confident and would follow what my friends were doing without really questioning anything or talking about how I really felt or what I thought.

I also didn’t understand the teachings at the Gurudwara, I could not understand a lot of the words so I did not feel that I belonged there either. I felt as though I did not really fully belong in either world and spent a lot of time at home questioning who I was and where I belonged.

**Aha Moment**: It was not until later when I was 18 that I went away to London to university that I met more people who were my age, Sikh, Punjabi and also confident in who they were as British Indian and Sikh. I came to realise that my confusion about who I was and where I belonged came from influences in the environment around me and the culture that I was growing up in, not because there was something wrong within me. It took time for me to step out and become more confident, and over the three years at university I struggled with being very quiet and not always speaking out, but gradually I became comfortable in my skin. I realised that I could accept and belong to all parts of myself, even if both parts were very different, I could bring together these experiences into a more comfortable version of me.

**Resolution:** The final transformation for me into being able to openly talk about my experiences came when I was doing my Post-graduate certificate in Youth and Community work. One module was about the development of identity and I shared my story in a safe place, with honesty… this was a very empowering experience, to be heard and received and my experience being acknowledged helped me to talk openly to anyone about how I used to feel about my two-lives growing up. I am now really proud to talk about my Punjabi heritage and Sikh faith.

**Conclusion**: I really appreciate the time and space that I had to explore my identity, where I come from, how the experiences I have had have shaped me and how I respond to situations. I have also got better at telling people about how I deal with situations, how I need space to understand things and am still not the loudest voice in the room, but that is okay! I can also see how the Sikh faith has influenced me greatly and is a core part of how I live my life. Sikh values have been at the heart of how my parents brought me up and what they taught me… doing good for others; how actions have consequences for others too; kindness and supporting others; equality, honesty, and integrity; and finally, that strength and resilience is within us all as human beings and we are stronger by overcoming challenges. For me, my beliefs and sense of belonging were what I questioned when I was growing up and it was a process that I had to go through to be able to make decisions about who I wanted to be and become confident in who I am today.

I believe that my faith is shown in what I do every day. It is not shown through how often I pray or visit the Gurudwara. The most important part of being Sikh for me is the message and understanding that we are all equal because we are all created by one God. I still do struggle with double standards shown in the behaviours of some family members and people that I have met within the Sikh community who promote inequality through caste systems and sexism. I believe that they go against the core values of equality that I see in Sikhism. I also understand that these are influenced by cultural environments and not just religion and I would like to challenge these by referring to the Sikh value of equality.

And that is what part of being Sikh means to, Amy, also known as Amandeep! Thank you for listening to my story 😊