

# Proposal for Gurdwara Emoji

To

**Unicode Consortium**

Submitted by

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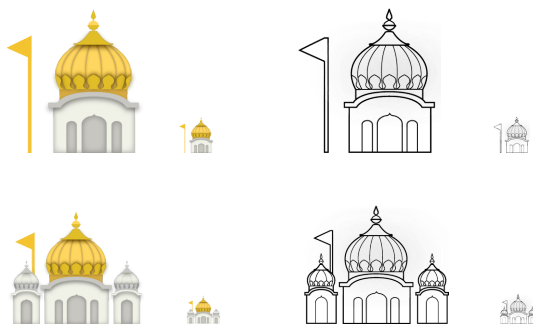
Date: June 2, 2021

## Identification

Short names and keywords for the proposed emoji are:

**A.** CLDR Short name: SIKH TEMPLE | GURDWARA

**B.** CLDR keywords: SIKH | GURDWARA | SIKH TEMPLE | RELIGION



**Figure 1.** Proposed images for Gurudwara emoji. Art by Jessica Saggu, released under the CC-BY licence.

## Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the **Gurdwara Emoji** to the existing place-religious category where it should be placed after the Hindi Temple Emoji.

A Gurdwara is the primary place of worship for the adherents of Sikhism, a religion that originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent around the end of the 15th century. More than just a place of worship, the Gurdwara is a community space, which among other

things is a place for sharing food, socialization, and provides individuals with an opportunity to connect with the community.

The inclusion of this emoji will positively add to the increasingly diversity-cognizant repository of emojis.

## **Introduction**

Sikhism is the fifth largest organized religion in the world, with approximately 120–150 million adherents around the world.<sup>1</sup> In terms of size, the number of adherents of Sikhism are more in number than Judaism and Shintoism<sup>2</sup>. In addition to this, the growth of adherence in Sikhism is at a rate of 3.08% (from 1970-2010), which is fourth highest amongst religions.<sup>3</sup>

India, the United Kingdom, and Canada are countries with the greatest proportions of Sikhs. Around 75% of Sikhs live in the Indian state of Punjab.<sup>4</sup> Besides this, Sikh communities exist all over the world, with large populations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Smaller populations of Sikhs are also found in Western Europe, Mauritius, Malaysia, Philippines, Fiji, Nepal, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Singapore.

A Gurdwara (*gurdwārā*; meaning “door to the guru”) is a place of assembly and worship for Sikhs.<sup>6</sup> The institution of a Gurdwara is central to Sikhism. It has a ‘Darbar Sahib’ where the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh scripture) is preserved.<sup>7</sup> All Gurdwaras have a *langar* hall, where anybody can eat free vegetarian food served by volunteers. They may also have a medical facility room, library, nursery, classroom, meeting rooms, playground, sports ground, gift shop, and finally a repair shop. In this respect, a Gurdwara acts more than just a place of worship, but as a space for gatherings, and addresses several functions of a community.

## **Architecture**

The dome (gumbad) is the crowning feature of Gurdwaras. A popular model for the dome is the onion-shaped and ribbed lotus commonly white or gold, topped by an ornamental pinnacle. A

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_religious\\_populations#Adherents\\_in\\_2020](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_religious_populations#Adherents_in_2020)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major\\_religious\\_groups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups)

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism\\_by\\_country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_by_country)

<sup>6</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurdwara>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.discoversikhism.com/sikh\\_gurdwaras/gurdwaras.html](http://www.discoversikhism.com/sikh_gurdwaras/gurdwaras.html)

Gurdwara can be identified from a distance by tall, orange flagpoles bearing the *Nishan Sahib*, the Sikh flag.<sup>8</sup>

These two features are salient to represent and identify the building of a Gurdwara despite the creative freedom practiced under Sikh architecture which follows various conventions across the globe (*Figure 2* and *Figure 9*).



1. Guru Nanak **Gurdwara Smethwick** in Sandwell, one of the first and largest gurdwaras in the UK.



2. Guru Nanak Sikh **Gurdwara Delta-Surrey** in Canada is a major centre of Sikhism in Metro Vancouver and counts thousands of Sikh worshippers among its congregation.



3. **Gurudwara Panja Sahib** situated in Hasan Abdal (Pakistan) stands for historical significance where the earliest Sikh guru, *Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji* and *Bhai Mardana Ji* stopped on their travels.



4. **Gurdwara Bangla Sahib** is one of the most prominent Sikh gurdwara in the heart of Delhi, India. It is instantly recognisable by its golden dome and tall flagpole.

**Figure 2.** Gurdwaras from around the world are recognisable by the dome and tall flag-post despite regional stylistical differences.

<sup>8</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurdwara>

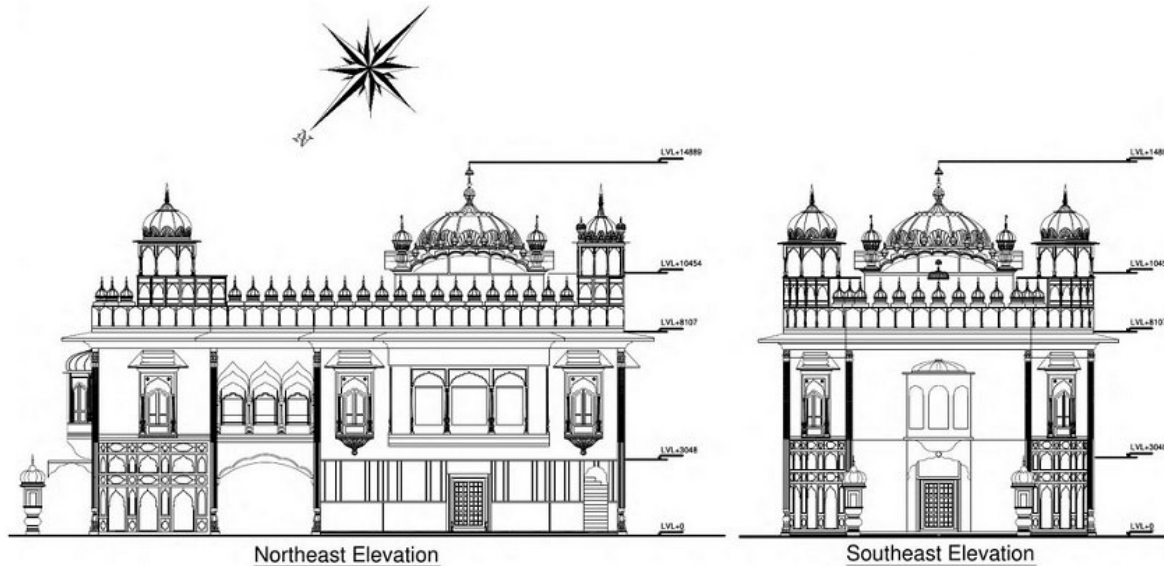
**Image Credits (Clockwise):**

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guru\\_Nanak\\_Gurdwara\\_Smethwick\\_2\\_\(3194495970\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guru_Nanak_Gurdwara_Smethwick_2_(3194495970).jpg);

[https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4142/4925065732\\_eb793017c8\\_b.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4142/4925065732_eb793017c8_b.jpg);

[https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/File:BanglaSahib\\_by\\_Solarider.jpg](https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/File:BanglaSahib_by_Solarider.jpg);

<https://www.sikhnet.com/news/sikhitecture-sikh-architecture-gurdwaras>



Sri Harmandir Sahib side and rear elevations.

**Figure 3.** Sri Harmandir Sahib or the Golden temple is one of the most famous Gurdwaras and part of the seven wonders of the Asian continent. **Image credits:** [http://www.discoversikhism.com/sikh\\_gurdwaras/gurdwaras.html](http://www.discoversikhism.com/sikh_gurdwaras/gurdwaras.html)

## Selection factors - Inclusion

Gurdwara is an important icon for representation of Sikh faith and culture. We believe its inclusion in the emoji space is necessary in the Place-religious category (which presently includes emojis for Church, Kaaba, Synagogue, Shinto shrine, and Hindu Temple).

### A. Compatibility

There have been emojis created for specific Sikh festivals on platforms like Twitter<sup>9</sup>, but at present there is no emoji which represents the Sikh temple or Gurudwara across any vendor.

### B. Expected usage level

#### 1. Frequency

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.socialsamosa.com/2017/11/twitter-emoji-guru-nanak-jayanti/>



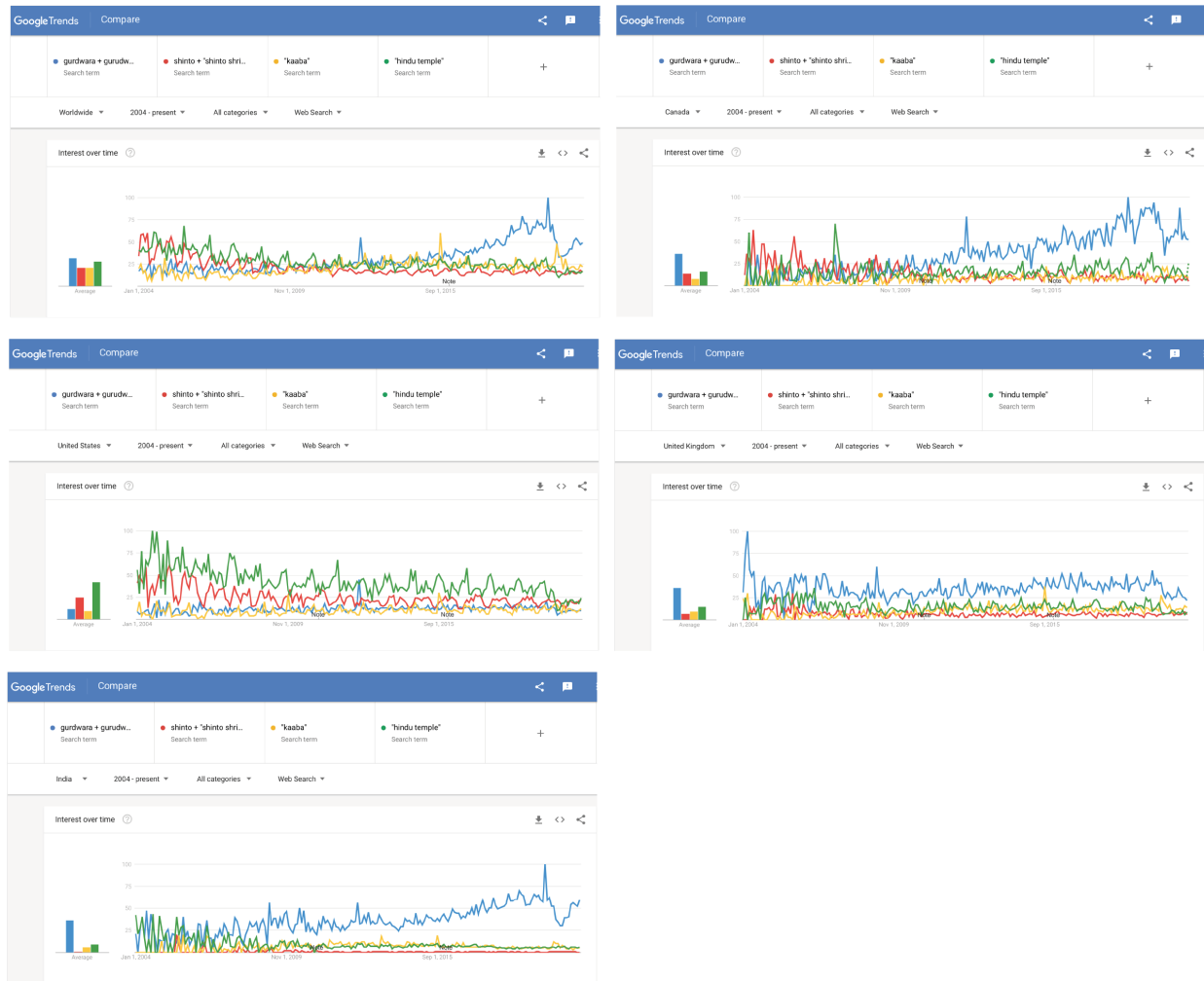
We expect a high frequency of usage. Further to this, we anticipate a distributed use of the emoji, due to the presence of the Sikh community around the world.

*Figure 4a and 4b* show the results for **Google Trends Web Search** worldwide for the search terms: ‘gurdwara’, ‘hindu temple’, ‘kaaba’, and ‘shinto shrine’. The trends indicate that the worldwide frequency of Gurdwara is higher in recent years when compared with others.

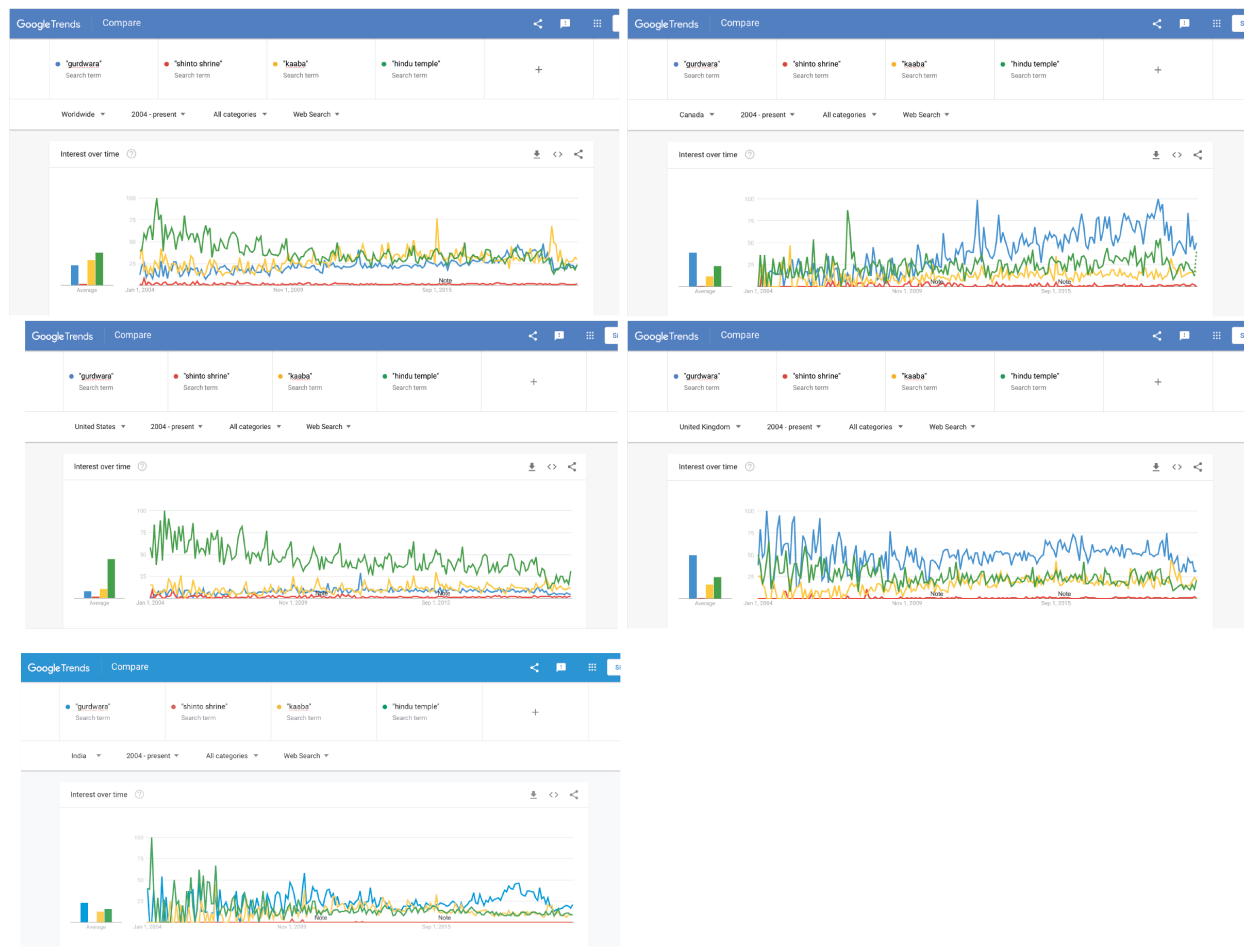
The regions of Canada and the United Kingdom which hold a strong Sikh presence, show considerable popularity with the search term “gurdwara” compared against “hindu temple”, “kaaba” or “shinto shrine”, especially in recent years. Similarly, the results for India, the region with maximum native Sikh population, show a positive trend in use of “gurdwara”.

While conducting these searches, we have used search terms according to Google Trends search instructions and included multiple possible spellings for a single search term (in *Figure 4a*). For example, instead of using the search term “shinto”, we use “shinto + shinto shrine”, in order to include the possible search terms. We have also included single search term results (in *Figure 4b*) which are equally favourable.

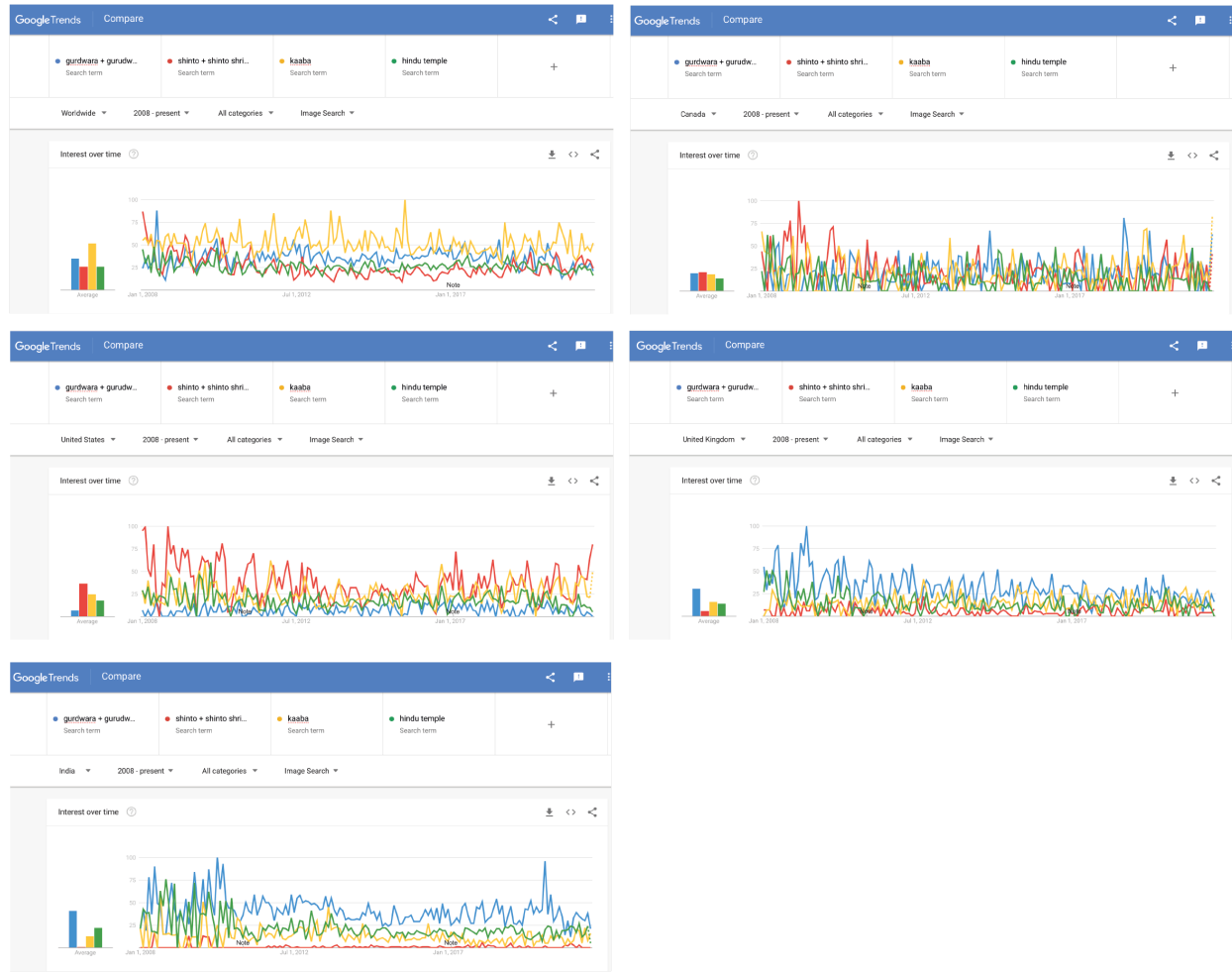
The results for **Google Trends Image Search** in *Figure 5* are similarly positive worldwide for the search term ‘Gurdwara’. The rest of regions of the United Kingdom, India and Canada show a highly positive rate/frequency of use for the search term Gurdwara with certain major peaks through recent years especially in the Indian subcontinent.



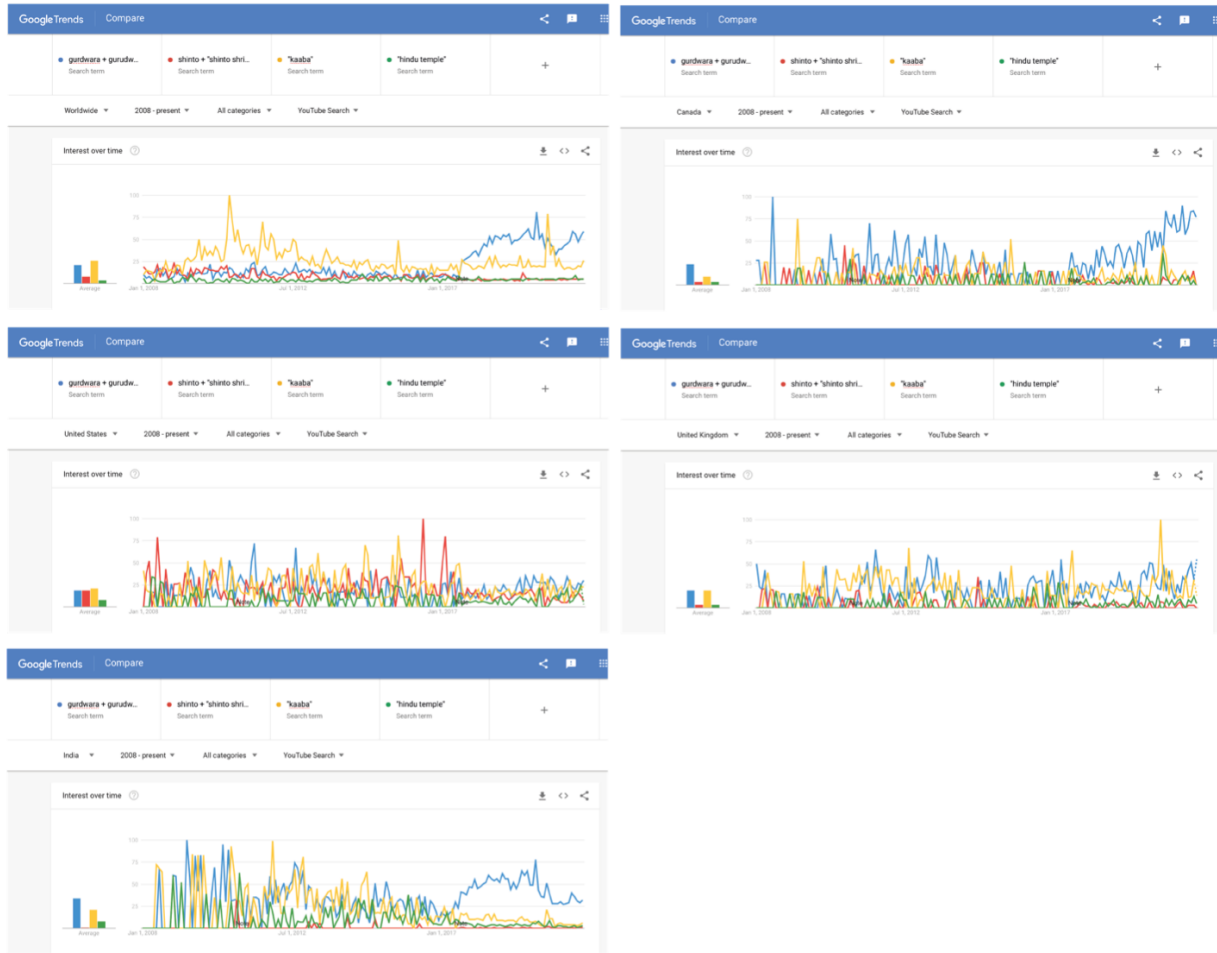
**Figure 4a.** Results for Google Trends Web Search for the search terms “gurdwara + gurudwara”, “hindu temple”, “kaaba” and “shinto + shinto shrine” across The United States, United Kingdom, India, Canada and Worldwide. **Data source:** Google Trends (<https://bit.ly/3vnhvho>)



**Figure 4b.** Results for Google Trends Web Search for the search terms “gurdwara”, “hindu temple”, “kaaba” and “shinto shrine” across The United States, United Kingdom, India, Canada and Worldwide. **Data source:** Google Trends (<https://bit.ly/3eBO6RH>)



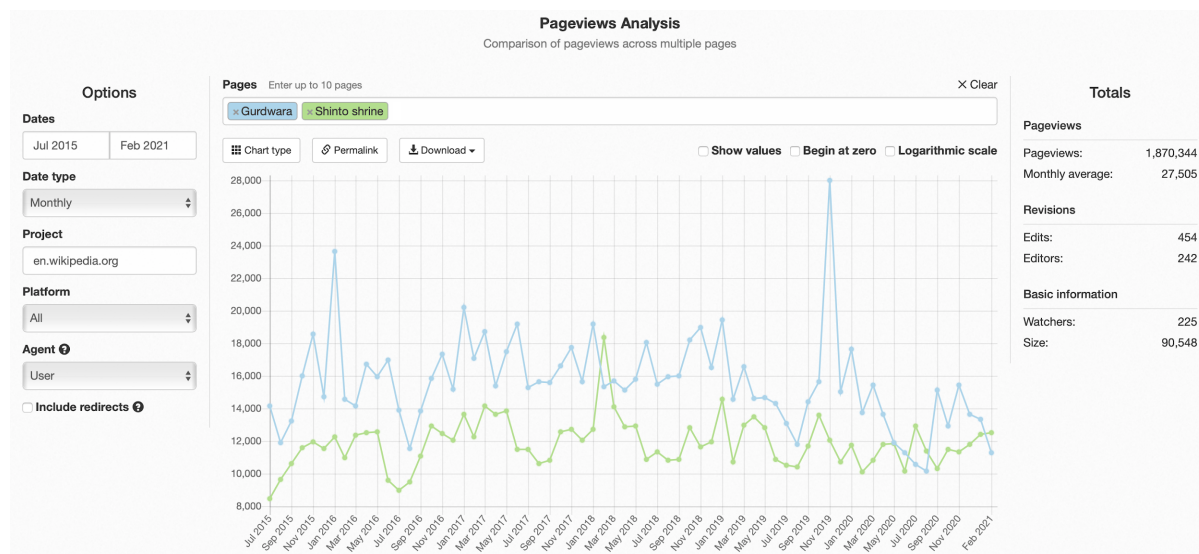
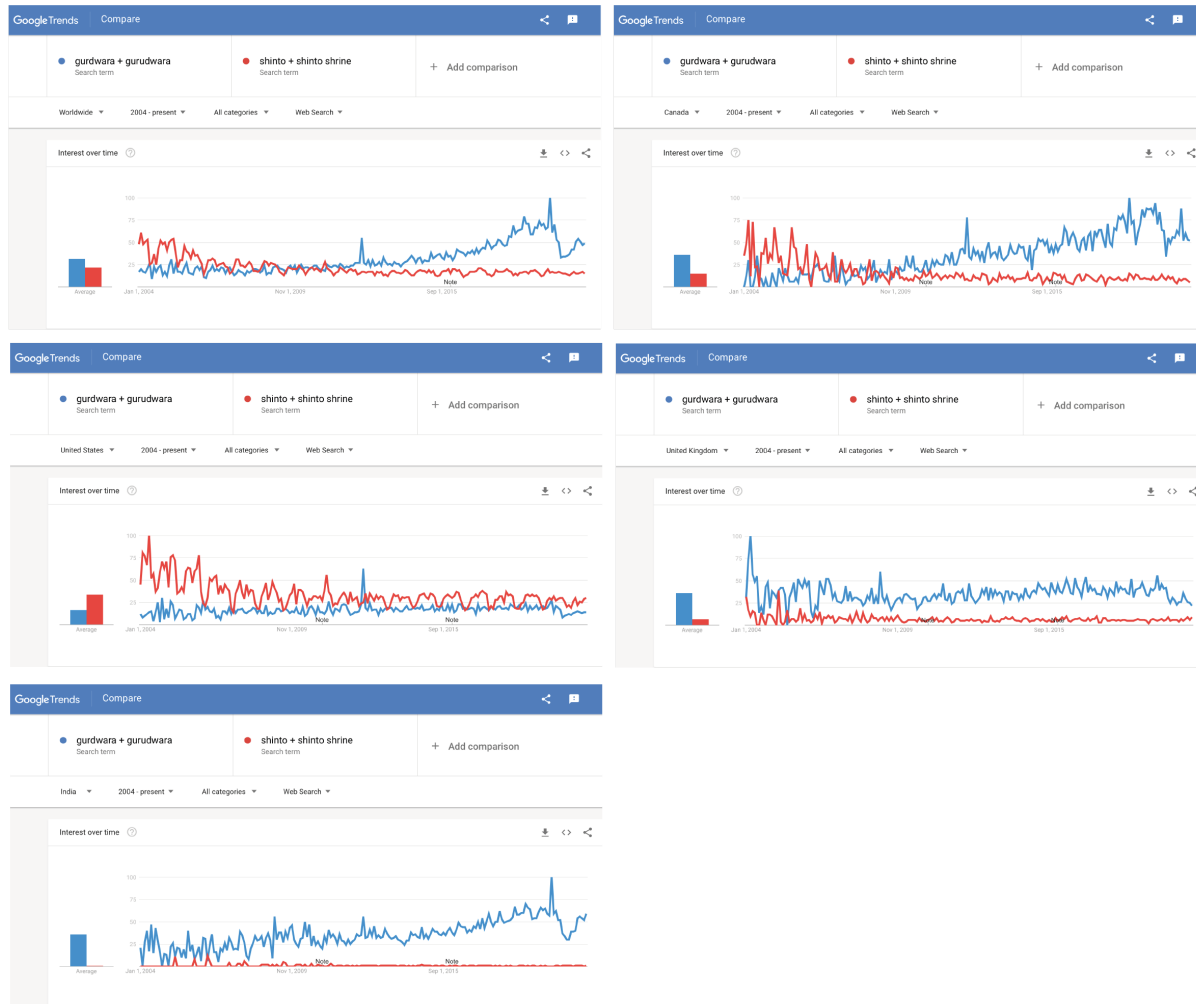
**Figure 5.** Results for Google Trends Image Search for the search terms “gurdwara + gurudwara”, “hindu temple”, “kaaba” and “shinto + shinto shrine” over worldwide show the popularity of Gurdwara through recent years. **Data source:** Google Trends (<https://bit.ly/3sV2RM9>)



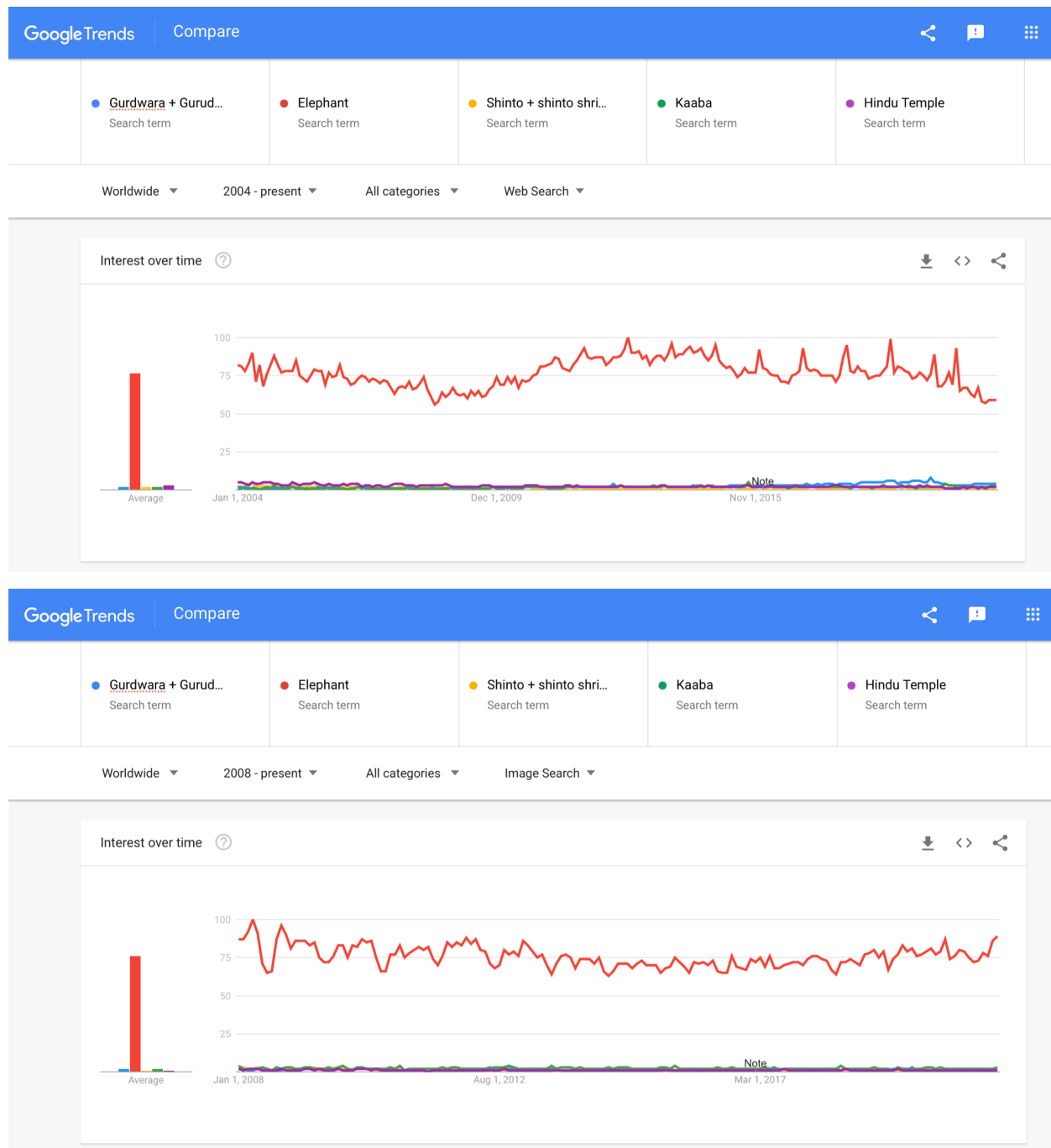
**Figure 6.** Results for Google Trends YouTube Search for the search terms “gurdwara + gurudwara”, “hindu temple”, “kaaba” and “shinto + shinto shrine” across The United States, United Kingdom, India, Canada and Worldwide. **Data source:** Google Trends (<https://bit.ly/3xqgqgq>)

If we narrow down the comparison only with the Shinto religion (*in Figure 7*), which falls in a similar category as roughly being part of ‘other religions’, the result is much more favourable to our proposal, even worldwide.



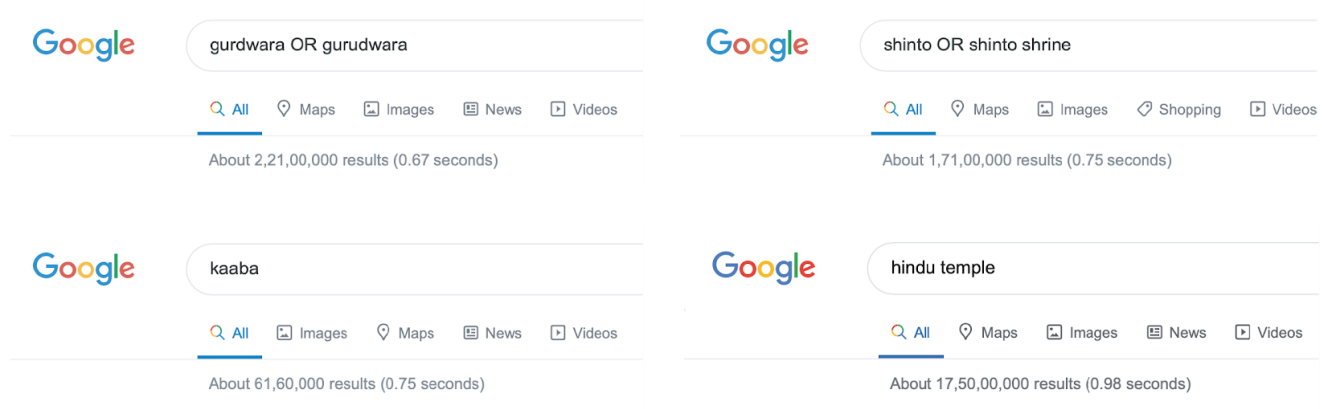


**Figure 7.** Results for search terms “gurdwara + gurdwara” and “shinto + shinto shrine” across The United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Worldwide show a clear popularity of Gurdwara especially through recent years **Data source:** Google Trends (<https://bit.ly/2Qwst4R>); Pageviews Analysis (<https://bit.ly/3dQ9QS7>)

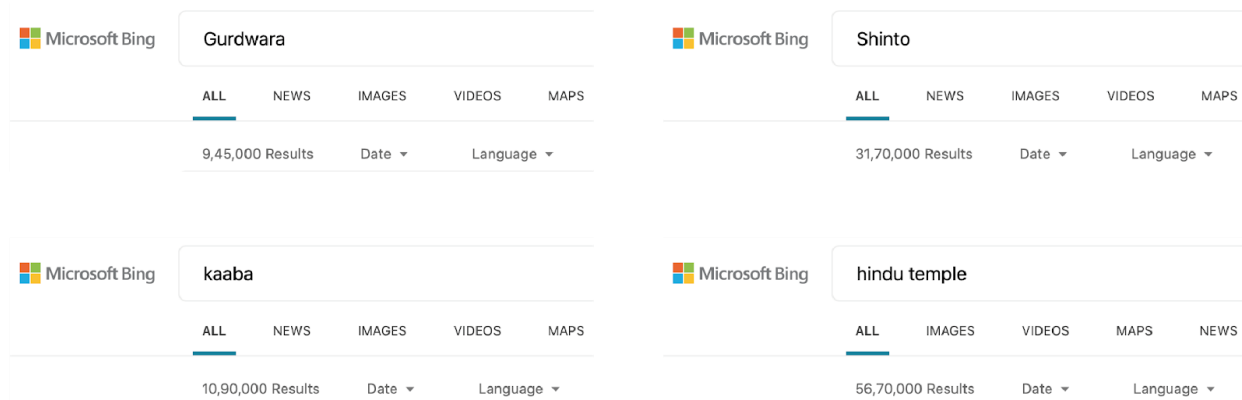


**Figure 8.** Results for Google Trends Web Search and Google Trends Image Search for the search terms “Gurdwara + Gurudwara”, “Elephant”, “Shinto + shinto shrine”, “Kaaba” and “Hindu Temple” worldwide. **Data source:** Google Trends (<https://rb.gy/ici6nk>)

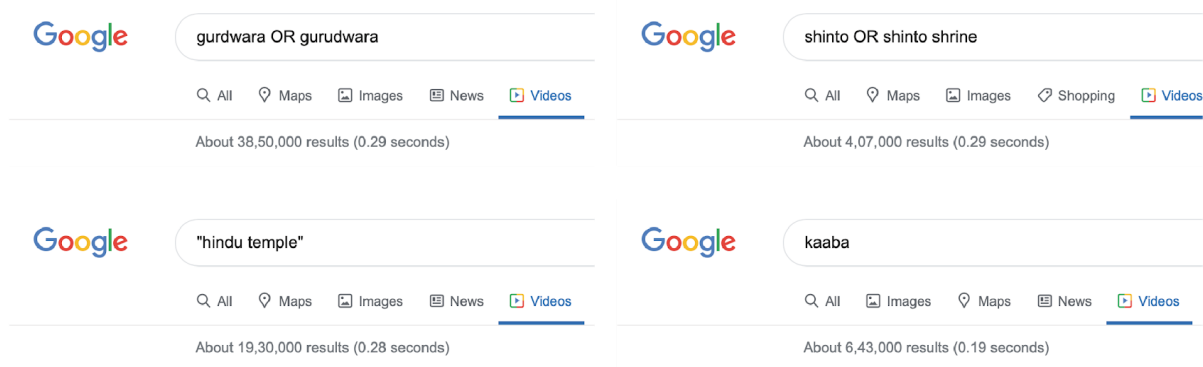
In **Google Search** results, we find results favorable to our proposal where the search term “gurdwara OR gurudwara” is 1.3 times more than “shinto OR shinto shrine” and 3.5 times of “kaaba”.



In **Bing Search** the search term “gurdwara” has the least results amongst other search terms, yet it is close to the term “kaaba”.



**Google Video Search** shows almost twice the number of searches for “gurdwara OR gurudwara” as compared with “hindu temple” and 9.4 times the number of “shinto OR shinto shrine” searches.



## 2. Multiple usages

The multi-purpose use of the Gurdwara building itself holds the possibility of usage in these multiple aspects as an educational centre, community kitchen (*langar*), place of hymns (*kirtan*) and even a clinic.<sup>10</sup> Parallely, it holds all possibilities to be used as an in-itself symbol, ideogram or/and in meaningful sequences.

The Gurdwara/Sikh temple emoji can be used to convey multiple meanings. Some examples are:

- To indicate community events and gatherings, such as weddings.
- To represent a place or landmark in a message.
- Usage during Sikh festivals, religious occasions (*Gurupurabs*), and cultural events.

## 3. Use in sequences

The proposed Gurdwara emoji holds possibilities of usage in sequence with other existing emojis. Many permutations of use are possible, for example:

- Running person, Gurdwara and Hands joining emojis in this sequence could mean going to Gurdwara for prayer.
- Gurdwara and Flowers used together could mean celebration.
- A person-with-turban can be used with Gurdwara emoji to represent a Sikh.

<sup>10</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurdwara>

- Gurdwara and Raised Hand emoji could be a call for volunteers, while Gurdwara and Curry and Rice could represent *Langar* food.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Breaking new ground

The Gurdwara emoji would be the first representative emoji for the Sikh faith, and in this respect it will break new grounds and open up representation for underrepresented communities.

### C. Distinctiveness

Despite the borrowed nature of Sikh architecture, it is distinctively unique as a religious place. The golden dome (*gumbad*) and the flag-post (*Nishan Sahib*) are essential features that create distinctiveness.<sup>12</sup> An iconic representation of the Gurdwara is possible and complete through these two salient features which remain common to all Gurdwaras. One can see these two features running common through all the representations in *Figure 9*.

Even though a white dome is more common in many Gurdwaras, we suggest a golden dome due to the popularity of the Golden Temple which is a well-known Gurdwara and an architectural marvel, known popularly even among non-Sikhs.



**Figure 9.** Various stamps representing the building of a Gurdwara. The onion-shaped dome and the flag-post (*Nishan Sahib*) remain constant in all four images.

### D. Completeness

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/dining/free-food-sikh-gurdwara-langar.html>

<sup>12</sup> An outline of Sikh architecture, SS Bhatti,

[https://web.archive.org/web/20070927230013/http://www.sikhspectrum.com/022004/architecture\\_art.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20070927230013/http://www.sikhspectrum.com/022004/architecture_art.htm)



The Gurdwara emoji would be a positive addition to the Place-Religious category where it will expand the set of religious iconography to include other religions. We believe that the proposed emoji will serve the growing diaspora of the Sikh population as well as other communities.

## Selection factors - Exclusion

### E. Petitions or “frequent requests”

There have been campaigns demanding a representation of the Sikhs (for e.g. Khanda emoji) on sites like *change.org* but none have gained traction beyond 300 votes. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no petitions for the Gurdwara emoji but some people have voiced their demand on platforms such as Twitter.



Figure 10. No major petitions as such, but few people are demanding this emoji on Twitter.

### F. Overly Specific

The Gurdwara is not overly specific—just as other buildings in the place-religious category are not overly specific. These buildings are an integral part of cities, and can be used to indicate a wide range of roles that they play for the community.

### G. Open-ended

The proposed Gurdwara emoji cannot be said to be open-ended. This is a unique and distinctive building, easily recognized by both adherents and non-adherents. The two specific identification features are the fluted onion-shaped dome (*Gumbad*) and the flag-post (*Nishan Sahib*).

## **H. Already Representable**

The Gurdwara cannot be presently represented in the emoji space. Furthermore, there is no symbol for Sikhs or Sikhism in the emoji dictionary that can be used in sequence with the common place-of-worship emoji to indicate a place of worship for Sikhs or Sikh individuals.

## **I. Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, specific landmarks, deities**

The proposed Gurdwara emoji does not fit into any of the above categories.

## **J. Transient**

Religious iconography is often at the center of a faith. The institution of the Gurdwara is no different and is as old as the religion of Sikhism itself.<sup>13</sup> The proposed emoji is not likely to be transient due to the centrality of Gurdwara in Sikhism.

## **K. Faulty Comparison**

The proposed emoji is submitted on its own accord. None of the arguments made above can be said to be faulty comparison with other Emojis in the Place-religious category.

## **L. Exact images**

The proposed emoji does not require an exact image and is not the only representation. Multiple representations and interpretations are possible. The image we have proposed is likely to be easily identified by Sikhs. Alternatively, Non-Sikhs associate a golden dome with Gurdwaras due to the popularity of Golden Temple.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/sikhs-across-borders-9781441113870/>