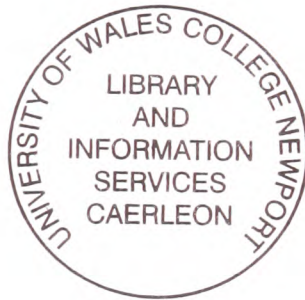


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# **Sikh Groups in Britain and Their Implications for Criteria Related to Sikh Identity**

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**PhD**

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**University of Wales College, Newport**

## DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... *A.K. Tauchar* ..... (candidate)

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## STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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## Summary

This thesis examines Sikh groups in Britain and the implications these have for criteria related to the issue of Sikh identity. Five groups have been selected. They are: the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā; the Nāmdhāris; the Ravidāsīs; the Vālmīkis; and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, which is also frequently associated with the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO).

The thesis begins with a historical analysis of Sikhism, to discover what it meant to be a Sikh in the days of the founder of the faith, Gurū Nānak, and during the time of the successive Gurūs. Political and social issues related to the development of Sikhism and emerging Sikh identity are examined also at the outset.

Each group has its own unique contribution to make towards highlighting certain indicators and inhibitors of a Sikh identity. Thus, an important part of the present thesis is to examine the beliefs and practices of each group in order to assess its contribution towards a Sikh identity. Each group has unique leaders and founders; it is interesting, therefore, to see what implications the leaders' backgrounds and teachings have on the ethos of the group studied. The present thesis has aimed to highlight the implications of five groups -- who have in the present and/or in the past have Sikh connections -- on issues related to Sikh identity. This has been undertaken by continuous reference to four fundamental questions.

A thematic approach was adopted for concluding the thesis. Each of the themes arose as significant factors developed throughout the research. The themes illustrate areas that are responsible for the promotion, as well as the hindering, of a uniform Sikh identity among the groups. The five themes that emerged were: (1) The concept of Gurū in Sikhism; (2) Leaders and founders; (3) The role of the *Rehat Maryādā* in relation to Sikh identity; (4) Caste and the *Panth*; (5) The issue of Sikh identity in relation to Punjabi ethnicity.

The present research has shown that there are no overall dominant criteria with which to assess the Sikh identity of the Sikh community as a whole. Thus, contrary to prevalent views about the Sikhs, there are many different "types" of Sikhs present today. I have suggested a federal identity of the Sikh community as a whole. This implies a unity of Sikhs worldwide but independence in the interpretation of Sikhism for the different groups. A federal identity might mean one or two core beliefs -- such as the acceptance of the Sikh Gurūs' teachings and belief in the Sikh Absolute -- but, further than that, it is up to the individual group to express its unique beliefs and practices.

## Abstract

This thesis examines Sikh groups in Britain and the implications they have for criteria related to the issue of Sikh identity. Five groups in Britain were selected for study. The five groups are: the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā; the Nāmdhāris; the Ravidāsīs; the Vālmīkis; and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, which is also frequently associated with the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO). Although the last of the five groups is largely based in America, there is a minute representation of members in the UK.

In addressing a rationale for the research, four areas of inquiry were identified. (1) What indicators for Sikh identity are suggested by an analysis of the historical development of Sikhism from the period of Gurū Nānak to the present day? (2) Where applicable, what particular ethos is created by the founders and/or leaders of each of the groups, and how does this ethos inform issues related to corporate Sikh identity? (3) What indicators for Sikh identity are suggested by an analysis of a selection of groups that are regarded in the present as Sikh, or who have been regarded so in the past? (4) How far is the *Rehat Maryādā* helpful and appropriate in defining a Sikh? These four questions are answered by examining the origins, development, beliefs and practices of each of the five groups.

The research was also motivated by the need to assess the moves within Sikhism to establish *specific* criteria for defining uniformly who exactly is a Sikh, and the viability of such uniform identity. To this end the research began with an analysis of the history and development of the Sikh faith, identifying criteria that have been established over the last five centuries to discover how the Sikh faith and its followers have been defined. This was used as a basis for an analysis of the five different Sikh groups.

The first group to be examined in chapter 3 was the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. This group places immense stress on *Sants* unique to the group -- a factor that immediately highlighted diversity and not conformity in terms of Sikh identity.

Although followers of the Sikh faith are required to believe in ten human Gurūs only, the Nāmdhāris continue the line of human Gurūs to the present day. In chapter 4, I highlight that, although the belief in human Gurūs has caused the Nāmdhāris to be regarded as heretics by Sikhs generally, they are, indeed, stringent observers of the *Khālsā*. Thus, they present a paradox relating to the issue of Sikh identity in terms of belief and religious observance. Again, diversity not conformity characterizes the group.

Low-caste conversions to the Sikh faith also present interesting perspectives related to the issue of Sikh identity. In chapter 5, I have undertaken a study of the Ravidāsīs, who were formerly referred to as the *chamārs*, originating from the leather-working caste of Untouchables. This is followed in chapter 6, by another former Untouchable caste referred to as the *chūhrās*. These originated from the sweeper caste and are today known as the Vālmīkis. My research has revealed that low-caste converts were not treated equally by higher-caste Sikhs. This resulted in the former being forced to establish distinct identities from Sikhs. Clearly, caste status informs acceptance or non-acceptance as a Sikh.

In chapter 7, I undertook a study of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, which has followers from a western background. This is a group that lacks Punjabi ethnicity, unlike the majority of Sikhs who have a Punjabi background. I found that ethnicity is responsible for tensions between western Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs despite the western Sikhs' overt emphasis on the *Khālsā* form.

In conclusion, I address the issue of Sikh identity with reference to five themes in chapter 8. Each theme contributes to criteria that have arisen throughout the study. The research concludes that there is no authoritative yardstick with which to assess the issue of Sikh identity. Thus, a uniform, corporate identity of the Sikh community as a whole, is not possible. Indeed, it serves to alienate a substantial proportion of Sikhs from the overall fold of the Sikh faith. What I have suggested is a federal identity. This would mean one or two core beliefs but, further than that, it is up to the individual group to express its unique beliefs and practices.

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# **Glossary**

<i>achūt</i>	Literally translated as “untouchable”, a member of the former Untouchables.
<i>Ad Dharm</i>	The Movement of the 1920s, responsible for raising the psyche of the <i>chamārs</i> .
<i>Ādi Granth</i>	The Sacred Book of the Sikhs.
<i>ādivāsī</i>	The original inhabitants of India.
<i>ahaṃkāra</i>	Ego, one of the five vices, causing individuality.
<i>akhaṇḍ pāth</i>	A continuous forty-eight hour reading of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> .
<i>amrit</i>	Holy water, nectar.
<i>amritdhārī</i>	An initiated Sikh who wears the Five Ks -- the five symbols of the Sikh faith.
<i>amrit chaknā</i>	One who will take <i>amrit</i> (verb).
<i>amrit śakyā</i>	One who has taken <i>amrit</i> (noun); used synonymously with <i>amritdhārī</i> .
<i>anand kāraj</i>	The Sikh wedding service.
<i>ātman</i>	The individual soul.
<i>avatār</i>	An incarnation usually of the Hindu God Viṣṇu.
<i>avidyā</i>	Ignorance.
<i>Bābā</i>	A Holy man.
<i>baisākhī</i>	The Sikh New Year, celebrated on April 14.
<i>bāñā</i>	Attire associated with the <i>Khālsā</i> , this includes the Five Ks and the turban.
<i>bāñī</i>	Religious teachings of the Sikh Gurūs.
<i>bhagat bāñī</i>	The works of the low-caste <i>Sants</i> , contained in the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> .
<i>bhakti</i>	Loving devotion to the Divine.
<i>bhog</i>	The end of a <i>pāth</i> .
<i>Brahman</i>	The Totally Transcendent Absolute.
<i>Brahman-ātman</i>	The concept of monism.
<i>brāhmin</i>	The Hindu class of priests.
<i>caste</i>	Sikhs use the concept of <i>jāti</i> rather than <i>varṇa</i> .
<i>cakra</i>	Centre of consciousness.
<i>chamār</i>	The caste of leather-workers.
<i>chūhrā</i>	The sweeper caste.
<i>deh-dhārī</i>	The Gurū in bodily form.
<i>dīwālī</i>	Sikh festival to commemorate Gurū Hargobind’s release from prison.
<i>dīwān</i>	The main service in the <i>gurdwārā</i> .
<i>giān</i>	Knowledge.
<i>giānī</i>	One who has knowledge of the Sikh scriptures.
<i>gorā</i>	A western convert to Sikhism; literally “white”.
<i>gristī</i>	The householder’s life.

<i>gurbānī</i>	The words of the Sikh Gurūs.
<i>gurdwārā</i>	Sikh religious place of worship.
<i>gurmukh</i>	The individual who has overcome his or her ego.
<i>gurmukhī</i>	The language in which the Sikh scriptures are written.
<i>gurpurb</i>	Celebration of births, deaths and martyrdoms of the Sikh Gurūs
<i>gurū</i>	A spiritual teacher/guide. Also used for the ten Sikh Gurūs
<i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	The Holy Book that is the Eternal Gurū of the Sikhs.
<i>Gurū Nānak Nishkān</i>	Followers of Sant Puran Singh of Karicho, Kenya, and his successors.
<i>Sewak Jathā</i>	
<i>halāl</i>	An animal killed according to Muslim law; <i>halāl</i> meat is forbidden to be consumed by <i>Khālsā</i> Sikhs.
<i>haumai</i>	Ego, preventing the individual from becoming <i>gurmukh</i> .
<i>havan</i>	Fire ceremony.
<i>Healthy, Happy,</i>	Followers of Yogī Bhajan, who place immense
<i>Holy Organization (3HO)</i>	emphasis on <i>kuṇḍalinī yoga</i> .
<i>Hukam</i>	The Divine Will of God.
<i>izzat</i>	Family/individual prestige.
<i>jaṭ</i>	The <i>zāt</i> of farmers.
<i>jhatkā</i>	Animal killed by one stroke, this meat can be consumed by Sikhs.
<i>jīvaṇmukt</i>	One who is liberated while still alive.
<i>jñāna</i>	Knowledge.
<i>kacchā</i>	Pair of shorts worn by <i>amritdhārī</i> Sikhs.
<i>kanghā</i>	A comb which <i>amritdhārī</i> Sikhs wear in their hair.
<i>karā</i>	Steel bracelet worn on the right wrist.
<i>karāh prasād</i>	A sweet dough-like mixture shared by the congregation.
<i>karam/karma</i>	The law of action and reaction.
<i>kes</i>	Uncut hair of a Sikh.
<i>kesdhārī</i>	A Sikh with uncut hair.
<i>Khālsā</i>	Community of the "Pure Ones" -- initiated Sikhs.
<i>Khaṇḍā</i>	The Sikh emblem.
<i>khatrī</i>	The caste to which the Sikh Gurūs belonged.
<i>kirpān</i>	A sword carried by <i>amritdhārī</i> Sikhs.
<i>kīrtan</i>	Devotional singing, usually in the <i>gurdwārā</i> .
<i>Kūkā</i>	A term used synonymously with <i>Nāmdhārī</i> .
<i>kuṇḍalinī</i>	Dormant energy, represented by a coiled snake.
<i>laṅgar</i>	Communal meal which all share at the <i>gurdwārā</i> .
<i>lāvān</i>	The four circuits which the couple take around the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> during the wedding ceremony. Each circuit is taken at the end of each verse of the wedding hymn composed by Guru Rāmdās for his daughter's wedding.

<i>manmukh</i>	Ignorant being; one bound by desires, ego and worldly concerns.
<i>māyā</i>	Illusion.
<i>mazhabī</i>	A low-caste convert into the Sikh faith.
<i>monā</i>	A Sikh who cuts his or her hair.
<i>mukṭi</i>	Liberation of the soul from transmigration.
<i>Nadar</i>	Grace of God.
<i>Nām</i>	The Name of God.
<i>Nāmdhāri</i>	Sikh followers who follow a continuation of living Gurūs.
<i>nām japnā</i>	Recital of the Name of God.
<i>nām simran</i>	Meditation on the Name of God.
<i>nirguṇa</i>	The unmanifest Absolute.
<i>niśān sāhib</i>	The flag which symbolizes the <i>gurdwārā</i> as a Sikh place of worship.
<i>pāñj pyāre</i>	Historically, the first five initiates of the <i>Khālsā</i> ; today five initiated Sikhs are also referred to as the <i>pāñj pyāre</i> and are entitled to administer <i>amrit</i> to those wishing to take initiation.
<i>Panth</i>	The Sikh community.
<i>patit</i>	An apostate Sikh.
<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>	One of the Epics of Hinduism, used by the Vālmīkis.
<i>rāmgarhīā/tarkhān</i>	The Carpenter/artisan caste.
<i>Ravidās</i>	The Gurū of the Ravidāsī community.
<i>Ravidāsī</i>	Community of the followers of Ravidās.
<i>Rehat Maryādā</i>	<i>Khālsā</i> guide for the Sikh way of life.
<i>sabhā</i>	Religious building, this term is frequently used among the Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis.
<i>sādhana</i>	The practice that leads to spiritual enlightenment, the goal of each soul.
<i>sadhāran pāth</i>	Reading of the whole of the Sikh scripture, with breaks.
<i>saguna</i>	The manifest aspect of the Absolute.
<i>sahajdhārī</i>	A non- <i>Khālsā</i> Sikh.
<i>samptaṭ pāth</i>	Reading of the whole of the Sikh scripture, undertaken in times of crisis/illness.
<i>samsāra</i>	The continuous cycle of transmigration.
<i>saṅgat</i>	The Sikh congregation.
<i>saṅgrānd</i>	First day of the Indian month.
<i>Sant</i>	A spiritually enlightened individual, also used to refer to the <i>Sant</i> tradition of North India.

<i>Satgurū</i>	The "True Gurū", a Sikh term used for referring to the Divine.
<i>Scheduled Classes</i>	Formerly known as the Untouchables, who were traditionally regarded as being outside the caste system.
<i>sewā</i>	Service to the community and to God, as well as serving in the <i>gurdwārās</i> .
<i>Shromanī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee</i>	This committee is responsible for the religious affairs of the Sikh community, as well as control of the <i>gurdwārās</i> in Punjab and Haryana.
<i>Sikh Dharma of the Western hemisphere</i>	Organization in which Americans convert to the Sikh faith.
<i>śiṣyah</i>	A pupil.
<i>śudra</i>	The fourth class of the Hindu caste system.
<i>Vālmīki/Bālmīki</i>	Author of the <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> , and the community of his followers.
<i>Wāhegurū</i>	"The Wonderful One", a term used by Sikhs for the Absolute.
<i>Yoga Vasiṣṭha Yogī Bhajan</i>	Vālmīki's metaphysical work. The spiritual head of both the 3HO and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.
<i>zāt</i>	Traditional occupation.



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## *Introduction*

## 1:1 Background

My interest in the area of Sikh identity arose as a result of studying for an undergraduate degree at Gwent College of Higher Education<sup>1</sup> in 1992 -- this was my first *academic* contact with my long-practised faith. Being born into a *jaṭ*<sup>2</sup> Sikh family, I was brought up with traditional Punjabi values, regularly visiting the *gurdwārā*,<sup>3</sup> where I attended Punjabi classes along with my sisters each Sunday. My family observe the *gurpurbs*<sup>4</sup> that we celebrate in the *gurdwārā*. Although we eat meat my mother never cooks *halāl* meat, this is meat slaughtered according to Islamic rites: I was told that Sikhs are *commanded* not to eat *halāl* meat simply to distinguish us from Muslims. My family are not *amritdhārī*, that is to say, they have not been formally initiated into the Sikh faith, and my father remains a *monā*.<sup>5</sup> In wedding receptions of relatives and family friends alcohol is openly consumed by males, including my father and uncles. We do not visit the *gurdwārā* every day of the week, neither is there any emphasis in my home on reciting the prescribed *banīs* -- *japjī*, *rehrās* and *kīrtan sohilā*<sup>6</sup> -- each morning, evening and before going to bed. In all respects we were, and are, encouraged to regard ourselves as Sikhs.

It was as an undergraduate that I first came across any mention of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*,<sup>7</sup> which appeared to be a definitive statement of *Khālsā*<sup>8</sup> Sikh identity

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<sup>1</sup>Now known as University of Wales College, Newport (UWCN).

<sup>2</sup>The farming *zāt* (caste).

<sup>3</sup>The Sikh place of worship.

<sup>4</sup>Birth anniversaries of the Sikh Gurūs.

<sup>5</sup>This term applies to Sikh males who, having cut their hair, do not wear a turban. They are, also, mostly clean-shaven.

<sup>6</sup>The *japjī* is found at the very beginning of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and is recited by devout Sikhs each morning. The *rehrās* and *kīrtan sohilā* are selections of hymns from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* that are recited in the evening and late-evening respectively.

<sup>7</sup>The prescribed norm of behaviour, in the form of rules and regulations, which is to be followed by all *amritdhārī* Sikhs. The whole of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* is enclosed in appendix 6.

<sup>8</sup>The *Khālsā* was created by Gurū Gobind Singh in 1699 and gave Sikhs a visible outward appearance. I shall deal with the creation of the *Khālsā* in detail in Chapter 2.

in the *Panth*.<sup>9</sup> The *Rehat Maryādā* suggests that a *true* Sikh is a person who lives by the tenets of Sikhism, including observance of the *Khālsā* with its prominent display of five external symbols, known as the Five Ks. The *Rehat Maryādā* imparts a very firm definition of who a Sikh is, and I discovered that certain of my practices -- and those of my family -- did not measure up to its ideals. This left me with many questions, such as, if a *true* Sikh is an *amritdhārī*, an initiated Sikh, who has taken *amrit sanskār*,<sup>10</sup> and who obeys rules such as a ban on alcohol and cutting the hair, then am I a Sikh? Is my father, who drinks alcohol and cuts his hair a Sikh? Who really *is* a Sikh? Thus, an initial inquiry has revealed that, although the original intention of the *Rehat Maryādā* was to impart a corporate identity on all Sikhs, it is, in actual fact, responsible for excluding many Sikhs from its definition. Hence, for the majority of Sikhs, the *Rehat Maryādā*'s depiction of what it views as a *true* Sikh appears, at this stage, to be an inadequate yardstick for what it really means to be Sikh. I began to feel an intriguing need to investigate the whole idea of Sikh identity. And one essential issue was immediately apparent -- the fact that the majority of the Sikh *Panth*, like my family, is not *amritdhārī*. Does this mean therefore, that the majority of the *Panth* cannot in actual fact be considered as *true* Sikhs?

Many people have a misconceived perception that all Sikhs are the same. Pictorial representations of Sikhs nearly always depict a Sikh male with a turban and beard. However, not all Sikh males keep the hair and beard uncut. It is not prohibited for women to wear the turban, though the majority of Punjabi Sikh women do not.<sup>11</sup> My research, therefore, will attempt to address the issues concerning the Sikh identity

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<sup>9</sup>The Sikh community collectively.

<sup>10</sup>The rite of initiation whereby the initiate drinks water that has been made holy by reciting verses from the Sikh scripture, and to which sugar crystals have been added: it is thus that *amrit*, holy water, is prepared.

<sup>11</sup>This is in contrast to *gorā* Sikh women. *Gorā* literally means *white* and is used of western converts who belong to the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. I propose to look at this group in chapter 7.

of those who do and do not fit into the definition of a Sikh as stated in the *Rehat Maryādā*. An initial analysis thus far, has already highlighted different “types” of Sikhs. These include:

- *monā/sahajdhārī* – clean-shaven.
- *kesdhārī* – one who keeps the *kes*,<sup>12</sup> the hair and beard, unshorn but is not necessarily initiated.
- *amritdhārī*<sup>13</sup> – initiated Sikh.
- *patit* – one who, having had taken *amrit*, has lapsed.
- *gorā* – a western, non-Punjabi, Sikh convert.

## 1:2 Aims

This research will seek to answer four questions:

1. What indicators for Sikh identity are suggested by an analysis of the historical development of Sikhism from the period of Gurū Nānak to the present day?
2. Where applicable, what particular ethos is created by the founders and/or leaders of each of the groups, and how does this ethos inform issues related to corporate Sikh identity?
3. What indicators for Sikh identity are suggested by an analysis of a selection of groups that are regarded in the present as Sikh, or who have been regarded so in the past?
4. How far is the *Rehat Maryādā* helpful and appropriate in defining a Sikh?

In the light of the fourth of these aims, a *Khālsā* Sikh is the ideal of the *Rehat Maryādā*'s definition of a Sikh. And in this context, too, I shall seek to investigate how far this definition accepts, or differentiates between, members of the *Panth* -- namely, *amritdhārī* and *sahajdhārī* Sikhs. An important remit will also be to assess whether the *Rehat Maryādā* is, indeed, a sensible yardstick for depicting the “Sikhness” of the groups selected for study. The very fact that there are groups present in Sikhism today that differ from the general *Panth* necessitates scrutiny of the very boundaries constituting *Khālsā* adherence.

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<sup>12</sup> Some authors occasionally use the spelling *kes*, I shall however be retaining the traditional spelling and dropping the *h*.

<sup>13</sup> *Kesdhārī* and *amritdhārī* Sikhs are superficially identical in outward appearance.

Thus, there will be a considerable interplay between aims 3 and 4 above, and there will be a need to define provisionally who a Sikh is, as far as the *Rehat Maryādā* definition is concerned, and to relate such a definition to the groups being studied. This should inform conclusions on the overall issue of Sikh identity. In identifying specific Sikh groups for study, however, criteria for selection will depend partly on groups that are fairly stable in that they have some credibility in terms of a historical basis and developed beliefs. In order to fulfil the four fundamental aims, I include at this point a number of more proximate questions that will inform the progress of the research and its ultimate conclusions. These are:

- By what historical and traditional criteria should Sikh identity be characterized?
- How far do the historical claims of a group identify it with the status of Sikh identity, and what are the reasons why this identification might be rejected or accepted?
- Were members of a group Sikh historically, but have no present connection with Sikhism?
- With regard to the beliefs and practices of each group, is it
  - (a) to be regarded as being Sikh, or
  - (b) more orientated to being defined as Hindu, or
  - (c) neither Sikh nor Hindu, but a faith in its own right?
- Is a group "Sikh" according to the *Rehat Maryādā* definition or is it rejected on the basis of the *Rehat Maryādā*, but regards itself as Sikh nevertheless?
- Does the *Rehat Maryādā* definition exclude a group as essentially non-Sikh or does the group itself not desire to be within the boundaries of Sikhism?
- Are the beliefs and practices of a group in accordance with teachings of the Sikh Gurūs and the *Rehat Maryādā*, or do they suggest other influences, such as Hinduization of Sikh practices?
- Does the *Panth* as a whole regard the beliefs and practices of the selected groups as being Sikh or non-Sikh?

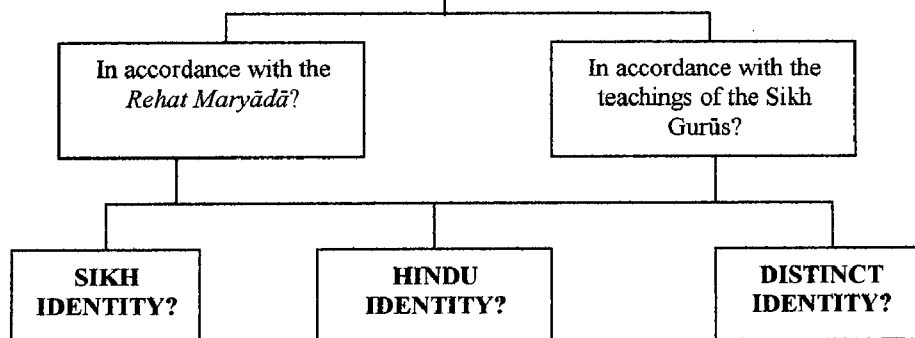
- Why do individuals identify with a particular group, and does group identity inform a Sikh identity?
- Does a group have a particular caste following? If so, what relevance does this have for the issue of Sikh identity?
- To what extent does ethnicity inform Sikh identity?

In examining selected groups, certain categories for both beliefs and practices will be investigated. These can be broadly summarized as follows:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>The tables will be more specific at the end of Chapter 2.

SELECTED GROUPS	
BELIEFS	PRACTICES
Monotheism	Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship
Absolute is <i>nirguṇa</i>	The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief
<i>Sagūṇa</i> essence of God is present in creation	<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>
Panentheistic concept of the divine	Singing of <i>kīrtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself	Recitation of <i>ardās</i> during worship
Predestination	Performance of <i>akhaṇḍ pāṭhs</i>
Total reliance on God	<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs
Human birth as highest	Serving of <i>gurū-kā-laṅgar</i>
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God	Distribution of <i>prasād</i>
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>	Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>
Becoming a <i>jīvanmukt</i> is the ideal	Importance of the Sikh Gurūs
Detachment from worldly lures	Prominence of the <i>Khaṇḍā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire	Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony
Advocation of <i>bhakti</i>	Emphasis on the Five Ks
Interiorized religion	Emphasis on being <i>kesdhārī</i>
Rejection of image worship	Traditional Punjabi dress for females
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	Requirement for males and females to cover their heads
Rejection of yogic practices	Celebration of the <i>gurpurbs</i>
Worthlessness of rituals	Celebration of <i>baisākhī</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>
<i>Nām simran</i>	Celebration of <i>dīwālī</i> as the release of Guru Hargobind from prison
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>	Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>	<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhī</i>
Company of the <i>satsaṅgat</i> is essential	Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khaṇḍā</i>
	Endogamous marriages <sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup>Endogamous marriages are so common among Sikhs that they might be listed as Sikh practices, though the Gurūs and the *Rehat Maryādā* do not require it.

### **1:3 Content**

To commence this research I propose to examine the question of Sikh identity from a historical perspective. This will be undertaken in some detail in the first chapter and will target the first of my four aims. I then propose to examine five groups, the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā, the Nāmdhāris, the Ravidāsīs, the Vālmīkis, and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, which is often equated with the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO). Having examined these particular groups, I propose, then, to select the major criteria that have emerged in relation to Sikh identity and to examine such criteria from a thematic perspective in the final chapter: this should provide a conclusion to the research. Examination of each group will need to be flexible, allowing for areas that may be of more relevance to one group than another. Thus, although there will be some common criteria for assessing each group, there will inevitably be points of departure that reflect the difference in orientation of each group. Complexities that serve to *inhibit* Sikh identity during the historical development of a movement will also need to be examined. A glossary has been provided for major Punjabi terms used throughout the thesis.

### **1:4 Rationale for selection of groups**

The rationale for selecting the five groups is various. Although a wide range of groups might be selected, because of time limits, it would be impossible to study all of them to the degree of detail necessary. One reason for selecting the particular groups is to some extent pragmatic in the fact that they are accessible. Not only are the selected groups -- with the exception of the *gorā* Sikhs who are negligible in the UK -- found in Britain but, they are receptive to being studied. They are also stable and, therefore, are likely to continue and grow rather than disappear before my research is completed.

As far as the particular order of analysis of the groups is concerned this is,



again, informed by pragmatism with the objective of minimizing repetition in each section. Analysis of the groups will begin with the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. On initial analysis the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā appears to be Sikh orientated and appears to be a perfect example of Sikhs following the *Rehat Maryādā* scrupulously. This group, I anticipate, will serve the purpose of providing a general background to the major teachings of the Sikhs. In Chapter 4, I plan to study the Nāmdhāri Sikhs who, again, initially appear to be stringent *Khālsā* Sikhs because of their outward form -- the exception being the horizontally tied white turban. I am interested in discovering to what extent the definition of a Sikh becomes distorted with the Nāmdhāri Sikhs' continuation of human Gurūs. Importantly, the group has been honoured by the Shromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee (SGPC),<sup>16</sup> which defines the Nāmdhāris as Sikhs due to their massive contribution towards India's Independence.

The Ravidāsīs will be examined thirdly because of their apparent Sikh alliance due to their utilization of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. While it would seem obvious that a group which houses the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is surely Sikh orientated, this criterion for Sikh identity needs analysis in relation to this group. How far emphasis is placed on the hymns of Ravidās in preference to those of the Sikh Gurūs will be an important aspect of scrutiny. The Ravidāsīs are also a caste-based group,<sup>17</sup> and much of the material covering the caste system in this section is also relevant to the Vālmīkis, who are also caste-based.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the Vālmīki section will follow that of the Ravidāsīs' to ensure minimal repetition when discussing issues related to caste. My particular interest in the role of caste in Sikhism arose during undertaking a study of

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<sup>16</sup>This is regarded as the authority on matters pertaining to the Sikh community and is, indeed, responsible for the publication of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

<sup>17</sup>The majority of the Ravidāsī followers are from the *chamār zāt*, the caste of leather-workers.

<sup>18</sup>The caste of sweepers, formerly known as *chūhrās*.

the sensitive issue of caste in the *Panth* for my BA dissertation in 1995. Because of time limits however, a detailed study of lower-caste groups in Sikhism could not have been undertaken at that period.

The Vālmīkis are a particularly interesting group to study, which is why I have selected this group for the purpose of the research. Initial visits to Vālmīki centres have indicated a stronger sense of a Sikh connection in the Coventry temple than any other Vālmīki centre, and this is a point I should like to investigate. Many Vālmīki predecessors were *chūhrās* who had initiated into Sikhism, and it remains to be seen to what extent the Vālmīkis retain their ties with the *Panth*. It would seem at this inchoate stage of the research that both the Vālmīki and Ravidāsīs emerged from the *Panth* in order to raise their social position -- whether or not they are within the *Panth* today is to be assessed in order to exhibit their contribution towards a Sikh identity. Particular reasons for eschewing Sikh identity, if any, will also need analysis here. Therefore, the groups being studied need to provide a broad range of perspectives on Sikh identity.

Last, I propose to examine the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere because of its non-Punjabi background. The inclusion of a study of *gorā* Sikhs is particularly pertinent to issues of Sikh identity. The *gorā* Sikhs, being non-Punjabi, provide a different tangent to Sikh identity, which has been predominantly linked to the Punjabi ethnicity of the majority of the *Panth*. I have on many occasions heard Punjabi Sikhs saying that *gorā* Sikhs are not proper Sikhs because of their non-Punjabi background. However, initial observations reveal that the *gorā* Sikhs show explicit adherence to the *Khālsā* form: even women wear turbans. Therefore, I aim to inquire whether Sikhs *can* be non-Punjabi, or whether Sikhism is specifically and exclusively Punjabi orientated. As previously mentioned, with the exception of this

one group, those I have chosen are represented in appreciable numbers in the UK, and they hold distinctive positions with regard to Sikhism. The four preceding groups are all of Punjabi origin, and the *gorā* Sikhs, with their obvious difference to Punjabis, should hopefully shed some light on the concept of Sikh identity.

The criteria of allegiance to the ten Gurūs and to the *Rehat Maryādā* provide both the initial yardstick for study and the final one for critical analysis and assessment in this research. The final analysis also, of necessity, should face the issues of caste and Punjabi identity. Caste discriminations were continuously spoken against by the Sikh Gurūs. Nevertheless, caste has survived in the *Panth*. Indeed, it is the very survival of caste, and overt discrimination against the lower castes, that seems to have led to the distinct development of some groups. A question that will need to be answered in this study, then, is to what extent are low-caste Sikhs accepted as equals by the *Panth*, and if they are not, what effect has this had on those groups? Furthermore, initial scrutiny has indicated that both the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkān Sewak Jathā and the Nāmdhāris are predominantly of the *rāmgarhīā zāt*.<sup>19</sup> The issue of *zāt*, therefore, is critical to this study.

Assessing the contribution of particular founders and leaders within the groups will enable me to determine in what ways the group is different from the general *Panth*. The social behaviour of the Punjabi groups is linked to their common ethnicity, and this Punjabi ethnicity often takes precedence over what religious praxis dictates. The reluctance to accept *gorā* Sikhs by the majority Punjabi *Panth*, stems from this Punjabi basis, and is a theme that will need examination in some detail. From experience as a Punjabi Sikh, I shall investigate whether Punjabi customs and traditions dictate what is right and wrong at the everyday level. Mainly, this takes

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<sup>19</sup>The carpenter/artisan caste.

form as *izzat* "family honour". What a Punjabi Sikh does, and avoids is, therefore, mainly based on his/her Punjabi ethnicity. The particular balance between such ethnicity and Sikh identity itself is an interesting one, and will absorb some space in the progress of this research.

Two groups that have not been researched in the present thesis are the Nirankārī Sikhs<sup>20</sup> and the Nihangs.<sup>21</sup> The Nirankārī Sikh community is not represented in significant numbers in Britain. Furthermore, in many respects issues raised by Nirankārī Sikhs, such as a living Gurū, are already proposed to be examined in relation to the Nāmdhāri Sikh tradition of living human Gurūs. A significant reason for excluding the Nihangs from the present research is that they do not offer easy access to women.

Another group that I have not researched in the present thesis are the Radhasoamis. Although two of its leaders have been *kesdhārīs*, the group is not accepted by the majority of the *Panth*, which views it as being more akin to Hinduism than Sikhism. As McLeod has indicated, the Radhasoami connection to the *Panth* is "regarded as slim at the very most".<sup>22</sup> A study of the *Nānak Panthīs* has also been omitted from the present research. This is due primarily to the fact that, as far as I am aware, there is an absence of such a community in Britain.

It is envisaged that the study of the groups I have not examined will offer

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<sup>20</sup>Although the line of ten human Sikh Gurūs and the installation of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* are not disputed by the Nirankārī Sikhs, they nevertheless have a tradition of living Gurūs. The group is regarded as a reform movement, teaching Sikh values to lapsed Sikhs. It stresses meditation on the divine Name of God. The Nirankārīs believe that Babā Dayal, who was vital in reviving the lapsed *Panth*, is the human successor of the Sikh Gurūs. See McLeod, W. H. (1984) *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 121-6. It is well to remember that there are two main strands of Nirankārīs: the Sant Nirankārīs and the Sikh Nirankārīs. The former are not classified as Sikhs.

<sup>21</sup>In the eighteenth century the Nihangs were referred to as the Akalis. The Nihangs are ardent protectors of the *Khālsā* and visibly display the militant nature of the *Panth*. They are distinguishable by their blue clothes and heavy display of steel weapons. See McLeod, *ibid.*, pp. 132-3. The Akalis/Nihangs are well known in Sikh history for their efforts towards *gurdwārā* reform. This I intend to look at in detail in the following chapter.

<sup>22</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1997) *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 193.

scope for future research. I intend to open up the issues of diversity in the *Panth*, other researchers will be able to examine the diversity further.

## 1:5 Methodology

The basis of the research will be a thorough understanding of the present position in the field related to each group and to general issues of Sikh identity. As far as the historical beginnings of Sikhism are concerned the work of Bhāi Gurdās is invaluable for the question of identity in the very early Kartarpur community.<sup>23</sup> Chaupa Singh's *Rahitnāmā*,<sup>24</sup> as well as Oberoi's work<sup>25</sup> shed interesting light on the issue of identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kahn Singh Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*,<sup>26</sup> will also be utilized for its importance in the Singh Sabhā<sup>27</sup> period which began in the late nineteenth century. This will be followed by initial visits to chosen communities in order to create preliminary contact. Permission from the leaders of each group will be negotiated carefully. Subsequent visits will be made to interview the group in order to expand on main areas of beliefs, practices, and history. This will also involve attending *gurdwārā* services, including specific days such as *gurpurbs* in order to interview individuals of different ages and gender, and to collect literature appropriate to each group. The practice to be adopted will be the writing up of material on a previously visited group, whilst visits are being made to a new group. Furthermore, I shall attempt to be as informed as possible about each group before making initial visits to them; this will allow for questions to cover any obscurities or interesting areas about each new group.

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<sup>23</sup>Singh, J. (1998) *Vāraṅ Bhāi Gurdās*, Volumes One and Two, New Delhi: Vision and Venture.

<sup>24</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1987) *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

<sup>25</sup>Oberoi, H. (1997) *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

<sup>26</sup>Nabha, K. S., translator Singh, Jarnail (1984) *Sikhs . . . We are not Hindus*, Ontario: The Sikh Social and Educational Society.

<sup>27</sup>The Singh Sabhā was an organization formed by educated Sikhs who aimed to stop Sikh participation in rituals and worship that went against the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs.

I find that the use of questionnaires in English, or indeed Punjabi, can prove difficult when bearing in mind on the one hand, some respondents' lack of being able to communicate in English or, on the other, unwillingness to respond to such formal approaches. Thus, primarily, interviews will be conducted without any formal agenda, in Punjabi or Hindi, using English only if relevant. My ability, as a Punjabi, to be able to speak fluent Punjabi, as well as Hindi, should prove invaluable in this area. Moreover, without a structured questionnaire informants are able to answer freely, often remarking on areas that would not have been considered by myself. The use of photographs to clarify points made in the text will also be an important means of presenting evidence. Photographs help the reader to visualize the interior decor of religious centres, as well as to acquire something of the atmosphere of each group. Photographs are invaluable when illustrating beliefs concerning the place of worship, especially to depict whether the centre is typically Sikh or non-Sikh orientated.

It is proposed to establish the confidence of each group by assuring them that my purpose is to bring the group to the wider attention of the public and not to devalue or criticize it in any way. This should lead to a friendly, very informal relationship with my informants. To date, initial contacts have resulted in many of the older members referring to me as *betī*, an Indian term meaning "daughter". Indeed, two of the communities -- the Vālmīkis and the Nāmdhāris -- have rewarded my efforts with a *saropā*, a mark of honour in the form of a gift offered in front of the whole congregation. I have managed to create an informal relationship with the informants of the groups, this, as Anwar states, enables "a quality of 'free flow' to much of the information obtained".<sup>28</sup> Creating this informal relationship, I suggest, is the most appropriate and essential facet of the methodology for this kind of research.

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<sup>28</sup>Anwar, M. (1979) *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain*, London: Heinemann, p. 226.

Initially, informants on the whole, have been eager and have shown interest in my research. Importantly, so far, informants have introduced me to influential individuals of the group. This includes having received personal blessings from Satgurū Jagjīt Singh, the present Nāmdhāri Gurū, and Bhāi Mohinder Singh, the present *Sant* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Additionally, I have found this type of relationship enables me to gain the confidence of male informants and other males who work in close contact with them. This is important since the major communicators are males. Subsequent visits will be made to each community until all information required is collected. These subsequent visits should enable a closer, trusting relationship with the communities.

### **1:6 Constraints**

Experience so far has highlighted a number of sensitive and ethical issues that need to be addressed constantly, particularly during the initial phase of the research. Such problems necessitate adaptable rather than rigid methodology. The following issues are pertinent here.

Since some groups are caste orientated, and Sikhs generally deny the existence of caste, this is a highly sensitive issue. A particular area of sensitivity -- especially with regard to the Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis -- is my own high-caste *jaṭ* birth. This is especially pertinent since the lower castes often complain of discrimination at the hands of the land-owning *jaṭ*s. This sensitivity can be initially overcome by my not using my family surname. Rather, I can use "Opinderjit Kaur" -- without my family surname of "Randhawa". In this way, informants cannot tell what *zāt* I belong to. Once the trust of the communities is obtained, I find that my being a *jaṭ* becomes irrelevant.

Another problem I occasionally encounter lies in the need to isolate a particular target group for interview, such as women or children. Females sometimes feel inhibited if their husbands or other males are present: similarly youngsters are, occasionally, inhibited by their elders. Additionally, my being female has the potential to create tension or inhibition when interviewing groups of males. Nevertheless, it is hoped that repeated visits will help informants to relax and talk freely about matters which they wish to voice and which I wish to raise. It is anticipated that members of each group may want to scrutinize my findings and comments in order to examine whether I have written anything that offends the group or its leaders in any way. This is an aspect that will need sensitive handling in order not to inhibit any critical analysis I might wish to present.

Being a female Punjabi woman occasionally presents a degree of difficulty. I find that with the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā especially, informants do not take the approach of a woman seriously. This can be overcome to an extent since the research will not be confined to examination of one centre of each group: it is intended to visit several. On the other hand, being female has enabled *closer* relationships to be established. This is mainly due to the fact that, during congregational worship, the females talk freely, and this helps the male members to feel relaxed in my presence too. As a result, after a number of initial visits I have been invited back to the homes of informants for dinner or a cup of tea.

I believe that the advantages of my being a Punjabi Sikh and carrying out research among Punjabis (with the exception of the non-Punjabi *gorā* Sikhs), far outweighs the disadvantages and constraints. Informants are able to interact with me with a relaxed attitude. I do not have to involve interpreters, and those I interview do not have to feel inhibited by their lack of English-speaking ability. By contrast,



interviews with *gorā* Sikhs have been rather formal. The *gorā* Sikhs, I feel, are rather reserved, probably because they are being questioned by a Punjabi Sikh -- the majority of whom, as already stated, refuse to accept the *gorā* Sikhs as proper Sikhs.

## 1:7 Literature Review

There is no overall source that examines various groups in Sikhism with the purpose of analysing the issue of identity. On the other hand, there are a number of sources that look at the issue of Sikh identity generally -- this is primarily with regard to the *amritdhārīs* and *sahajdhārīs*. One of the most important works which looks at the problem of defining a Sikh is McLeod's *Who is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity*.<sup>29</sup> This work has provided a valuable insight into the problems that are apparent with the uniform definition of a Sikh provided by the *Rehat Maryādā*. McLeod clearly highlights that the *Rehat Maryādā* is to be followed stringently by those who take initiation into the *Khālsā*. But where does this leave the *sahajdhārīs* -- those Sikhs who, although they may follow the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs, do not see the need to adopt the *Khālsā* form? This research will inevitably examine the problems of one authoritative definition of who is a Sikh. To this end, differences that occur between the different groups present within Sikhism will need investigation. The uniform definition of a Sikh by the *Rehat Maryādā* needs careful examination in this context.

The translation of Kahn Singh Nabha's famous *Ham Hindu Nahin*, as mentioned above, into English has provided useful insights into the distinctiveness of the Sikhs from Hindus.<sup>30</sup> The work takes the form of a dialogue between a Hindu and a Sikh, the former being adamant in labelling the Sikhs as a sect within Hinduism.

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<sup>29</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1992 rp of 1989 edn) *Who is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>30</sup>Nabha, *Sikhs . . . We are not Hindus*.

This book was one of the basic books of the Singh Sabhā Movement, a movement that aimed to discourage Sikhs from practising anti-Sikh rituals. It is of benefit to my work in that it highlights many practices that are still adopted by Sikhs -- such as fasting and superstition. Essentially the *Rehat Maryādā* defines such praxis as not admissable to a *true* Sikh.

Cole and Sambhi in *The Sikhs*, have presented the essential postulates of Sikh practice and religion.<sup>31</sup> This book is invaluable for checking the central doctrines and praxis of the Sikhs. Kalsi's *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain*, has researched different Sikh communities in the Leeds and Bradford area.<sup>32</sup> His study has taken a different approach to that which this research will entail, in that his primary concern is the caste structure among these communities. Although the issue of *zāt* is inescapable, my study will incorporate the different angle of analyzing the indicators and inhibitors for identity claimed by the communities themselves.

Oberoi in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, provides a detailed explanation of the importance of producing the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.<sup>33</sup> His work also examines the circumstances that led to the development of the Singh Sabhās, the Chief *Khālsā Dīwān* and the *Tat Khālsā*, resulting in the establishment of the Shromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee. These organizations have each contributed to the issue of who a Sikh is, and many of the leaders of these organizations were, indeed, responsible for providing the definition of a *Khālsā* Sikh as stated in the *Rehat Maryādā*. Succintly, therefore, this work forms a good background to the need to define a Sikh, and will enable me to put into perspective how far the uniform *Khālsā* definition is adequate in encompassing all Sikhs. Indeed,

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<sup>31</sup>Cole, W. O. and Sambhi, P. S. (1995, 2nd fully revised edn, first published 1978), *The Sikhs*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.

<sup>32</sup>Kalsi, S. S. (1992) *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain*, Leeds: University of Leeds.

<sup>33</sup>Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

the aim of the Singh Sabhā was to end diversity in the Sikh faith. It has to be investigated however, whether the uniform definition of who is a Sikh is itself responsible for different types of Sikhs in the *Panth*.

Nesbitt has written several articles that deal with the identity of the Ravidāsī and Vālmīki communities.<sup>34</sup> Her studies however, are based in the Coventry area of the West Midlands. My research will examine centres of each of these groups throughout Britain, and will assess to what extent some centres are more Sikh-orientated than others.

Pashaura Singh and Barrier in *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, have provided useful insights into the issue of Sikh identity.<sup>35</sup> The importance of the Singh Sabhā's role in the creation of the *Rehat Maryādā* has been written of in detail. Again, however, my work will develop the issue of identity on a different tangent with regard to the many groups present within Sikhism. Jaswinder Singh's *Kuka Movement: Freedom Struggle in Punjab*, contains important documents about the Nāmdhāris, also referred to as Kūkās.<sup>36</sup> The documents provide first hand evidence of the attitudes of the British authorities in India towards the Kūkās. A further benefit of the book is that it contains letters that were written by Gurū Rām Singh, the Nāmdhārī Gurū, himself.

Information on the *gorā* Sikhs via interviews in Britain will be difficult since the number of *gorā* Sikhs in Britain is extremely small. Therefore, I shall have to rely largely on literature and sources published by the Sikh Dharma of the Western

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<sup>34</sup>Nesbitt, E. (1990) "Religion and Identity: The Valmiki community in Coventry" in *New Community*, 16 (1990): 261-74; "Pitfalls in Religious Taxonomy: Hindus and Sikhs, Valmikis and Ravidasis" in *Religion Today*, 6 (1994): 9-12; "Valmikis in Coventry" in Ballard, R. (1994) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, London: Hurst and Company.

<sup>35</sup>Singh, Pashaura and Barrier, N. G. (eds) (1999) *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, New Delhi: Manohar.

<sup>36</sup>Singh, Jaswinder (1985) *Kuka Movement: Freedom Struggle in Punjab, Documents, 1880 – 1903 AD*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.

Hemisphere and the 3HO themselves. In this respect, S. S. Shanti Kaur Khalsa's *The History of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere* will be resorted to due to its concise information regarding the history, and certain practices, of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>37</sup> A great deal of other information on the *gorā* Sikhs will be obtained via e-mail to prominent *gorā* Sikhs of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, largely based in America.

The central primary text in this research is the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. For this I shall mainly resort to Manmohan Singh's translation.<sup>38</sup> The reason for reliance on Manmohan Singh's translation is that each word of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is cited in *gurmukhī*<sup>39</sup>, Punjabi<sup>40</sup> and English. Therefore, one can refer to the Punjabi, and the *gurmukhī*, if need be. It is also the approved Shromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) translation. I shall occasionally refer to Gopal Singh's translation of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*<sup>41</sup> if I feel that his translation of a particular hymn is better than Manmohan Singh's. The *Rehat Maryādā*, again, is central to the research, since it is the *Rehat Maryādā* itself that cites the definition of who a Sikh is. While working from the Punjabi version of the *Rehat Maryādā* it would seem pragmatic, as far as this research is concerned, to cite from the English translation.<sup>42</sup>

Last, primary literature unique to each group will provide first-hand information regarding the respective beliefs and practices, as well as enabling insights into each community as a whole. Furthermore, the *gurdwārā* constitutions of particular groups will be invaluable when assessing their religious orientation.

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<sup>37</sup>Khalsa, S. S. Shanti Kaur (1995) *The History of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, Espanola, New Mexico: Sikh Dharma Publications.

<sup>38</sup>Singh, Manmohan (1996 rp of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

<sup>39</sup>This is the language in which the *Ādi Granth* was originally composed: it is a language no longer spoken by Sikhs and has therefore become "old Punjabi".

<sup>40</sup>The everyday language spoken by Sikhs and the majority of Hindus and Muslims originating from the Punjab region.

<sup>41</sup> Singh, Gopal (1993 rp of 1968 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Delhi: World Book Centre.

<sup>42</sup>*Rehat Maryada* (1978) Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (in English).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### *Who is a Sikh? Historical Perspectives*



## 2:1 Being a Sikh in Gurū Nānak's day

The issue of Sikh identity dates back to the time of the Gurūs and has not, as I intend to demonstrate, been resolved five hundred years later. At the outset it needs to be emphasized that the first definition of a Sikh by legislation came as the consequence of the *Gurdwārās Act* in 1925 and was modified later in 1971. It needs to be examined therefore, what a Sikh was prior to the *Gurdwārās Act* and, indeed, prior to the formation of the *Khālsā* by Gurū Gobind Singh in 1699. I begin with an analysis of identity at the time of the foundation of Sikhism, that is, with the early Sikh community under the guidance of the first Sikh Gurū.

The early followers of Gurū Nānak were known as the *Nānak Panthīs*. To be a follower of Gurū Nānak in the earliest times meant making *bhakti* (loving devotion to the Divine) the centre of one's life through meditation on the *Nām*, the Name or essence of God, and concentrating on *gurbāṇī*. This was, essentially, an internalized, meditative focus. The *Nānak Panth*, therefore, had no need to be concerned with a sharp distinction, externally, from the other faiths of the time. There was no urgent need during this period for Sikhs to identify themselves as being distinct from Hindus, and they shared the same festivals, as well as the same philosophical beliefs such as *karma* and *saṃsāra*. Oberoi reiterates this lack of a need for an independent identity for Sikhs in the early period of Sikhism; up to the time of the fourth Gurū, the main emphasis on *bhakti*, rather than any outward recognition was characteristic.<sup>1</sup> He remarks that seventeenth century Sikhs existed in a universe that was "free of fixed identities",<sup>2</sup> that is, there was no great concern to differentiate between the Punjabi Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs.

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<sup>1</sup>Oberoi, H. (1994) *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 50-1.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56.

However, Oberoi's views, I believe, should not be pressed as far as to accept too blurred an identity for early Sikhs. Clearly, identity during this period was not an issue, but there were sufficient differences from Hinduism and Islam to differentiate these early Sikhs in some ways. The emphasis was on living a life of simplicity and purity, one in which the individual was not entangled in the never-ending saga of rituals and *brāhmanism*. Gurū Nānak offered his followers serenity through meditation on the Name of God, *nām simran*, and through singing praises, *kārtan*, to the Divine. A "Sikh" in this period was a "disciple" of the Gurū: as the term *Sikh* itself illustrates. Interestingly, Shackle has highlighted that there is only one example of "*sikkha*" used in the *bāṇī* of Gurū Nānak.<sup>3</sup> The term alludes to one "having instruction, guided by teaching".<sup>4</sup> This suggests that Gurū Nānak's emphasis was not to create a distinct movement, but rather to guide others towards liberation. The emphasis was on following the teachings of Gurū Nānak, not following him as the leader of a new movement.

Nevertheless, I suggest that the early community must have felt some degree of separation, due to the different nature of the teachings of Gurū Nānak from those of Hindu and Muslim ascetics and the different emphases in praxis. Pashaura Singh is also of the opinion that "the process of Sikh self-definition began in Gurū Nānak's lifetime during the period when he settled at Kartarpur."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the famous couplet by Gurū Nānak:

There is no Hindu,  
There is no Musalman

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<sup>3</sup> Shackle, C. (1995 2<sup>nd</sup> edn of 1981) *A Gurū Nānak Glossary*, New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Singh Pashaura (1999) "Early Markers of Sikh Identity: A Focus on the Works of First Five Gurus" in Singh Pashaura and Barrier, N. G. *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar: New Delhi, p. 76.

is in itself indicative of the already recognized separateness of the followers of Gurū Nānak from the two dominant traditions of the time.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, McLeod has stated that the need for an identity amongst the early community became greater in the light of offspring born into the Sikh faith.<sup>7</sup> He writes that: “The janam-sākhīs reveal something of this struggle for identity, and of the tensions which it involved.”<sup>8</sup> The “tensions” mentioned here, involved probably the degrees to which followers should detach from their Hindu religious background. This continued link with Hinduism was inevitable since the majority of followers had been born as Hindus and, more significantly, Gurū Nānak himself was a Hindu. There was probably a need to differentiate the *Nānak Panth* to an extent from the wider Hindu society. Nevertheless, I suggest that, at this period, it is highly likely that followers remained Hindus: their following of Gurū Nānak did not necessarily mean they became non-Hindus, but they were certainly becoming different Hindus in respect of much belief and some practice.

In differentiating his followers from *brāhmaṇic* Hinduism, Gurū Nānak continuously stressed the irrelevance of rituals that dominated popular Hindu devotion. He also denounced the prejudice of the Hindu caste system, himself refusing to wear the sacred thread that would demonstrate his spiritual rebirth as a member of the *dvijā* classes.<sup>9</sup> There was much to distinguish his followers from Muslims too, and this included the elevation of the position of women. But Gurū Nānak retained in his teachings the concepts of *karma* and *saṃsāra*, which stand in

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<sup>6</sup>Nānak’s emphasis was on *bhakti*, but this was not the *saguna bhakti* of popular Hinduism that was to a tangible manifestation of the Divine; rather it was *nirguna bhakti* towards a formless God. It is highly likely that Nānak belonged to the *Sant* tradition, thereby rejecting a great deal of Hindu practices such as the superiority of *brāhmins* and their dependence on performing rituals.

<sup>7</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1980) *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam-sākhīs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 260.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>The *dvijā* classes were the top three classes of the Hindu class system and were the only classes allowed to undergo the sacred thread ceremony that indicated the spiritual rebirth of the individual.



opposition to the Muslim belief in the day of judgement: it must be said that such Hindu concepts were accepted in Sikhism rather than Muslim ones. The acceptance of such concepts further obfuscates the Sikh break from Hinduism in the early Sikh community. I believe, however, that there was no *real* break from Hinduism at this point, rather it was the ritual aspect which found no place in Gurū Nānak's message. It is this simplicity, together with the lack of insistence on intermediaries such as the *brāhmins*, which would have attracted his first followers.

Although scholars believe that the early *Panth* was not concerned with an outward recognition of a Sikh, the fact that Gurū Nānak is always portrayed as being turbaned, and in the Islamic mystic's *Sufi*-style dress, are factors that might indicate otherwise. Furthermore, the successors of Gurū Nānak are also portrayed with turbans.<sup>10</sup> But it is common for traditions to be anachronistic, and it may be that the uncut hair and the wearing of the turban that were introduced by the last Gurū, were projected back to the days of Gurū Nānak. It cannot be said conclusively, despite representations of all ten Sikh Gurūs as *kesdhārīs*, whether Gurū Nānak and his eight successors were, in fact, *kesdhārīs*. Importantly, then, one cannot ascertain whether a distinct outward identity had ever been established by Gurū Nānak. It is well to note however, that Gurū Nānak probably had many *Sufi* associates and was, therefore, probably influenced by their dress. The turban was an important feature of *Sufi* dress, since it indicated respect.<sup>11</sup>

From his teachings one would be inclined to believe that Gurū Nānak would have been against any symbols or markers of external devotion. Therefore, it is likely that the early *Panth* concentrated on the internalization of religion, rather than an outward identity. This, in itself, is indicative of some degree of differentiation. While

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<sup>10</sup>This would have been prior to the recognized form of a Sikh as instituted by Gurū Gobind at the *Khālsā* ceremony, a point that will be taken up below.

<sup>11</sup>This will be examined in section 2:4.

McLeod alludes to the idea that: “For as long as Nanak lived in Kartarpur the question of identity required no attention, nor did it seriously concern the growing community during the period immediately following his death,”<sup>12</sup> a certain sense of belonging must have existed for the followers to be able to identify themselves with Gurū Nānak. Again, I suggest this was probably due to the insistence on internal religion, as opposed to the externalised rituals, as in the case of Hinduism and Islam. It is very unlikely that the Kartarpur community would have had any external identification of their adherence to Gurū Nānak’s teachings.

For a clearer picture of the nature of the Kartarpur community, one must consult the works of Bhāi Gurdās, which are the earliest extant sources available as witness to the development of the early Sikh community. For this purpose, I utilize Dr. Jodh Singh's *Vārāṅ Bhāi Gurdās*.<sup>13</sup> Bhāi Gurdās' works are very important with regard to what was expected of a Sikh during the early evolution of the *Panth*. In the context of investigating whether there was a prescribed norm of behaviour for Sikhs prior to the creation of the *Khālsā*, Bhāi Gurdās provides *no* reference to the importance of the *kes* or, in fact, to any other distinguishable feature, for the early community. He is, nevertheless, aware that the followers of the Sikh Gurūs are not to be regarded as either Hindu or Muslim. According to Bhāi Gurdās the people of these faiths are “selfish, jealous, proud, bigoted and violent.”<sup>14</sup> The qualities of a true Sikh are clearly indicated by him: “They having loving devotion in their heart remain jubilant. Such people are the emperors full of delight. Becoming egoless they serve the *saṅgat*, congregation, by bringing water, grinding corn etc. for it. In humility and joy they lead altogether distinct life (*sic*).”<sup>15</sup> This kind of emphasis on interiorized

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<sup>12</sup>McLeod, *Early Sikh Tradition*, p. 245.

<sup>13</sup>Singh, J. (1998) *Vārāṅ Bhāi Gurdās*, vols 1 and 2, New Delhi: Vision and Venture.

<sup>14</sup>*Vār 1, Paurī 21*, translator Jodh Singh, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup>*Vār 3, Paurī, ibid.*, p. 107.

religion and faith as being the hallmark of a Sikh is repeatedly stressed in the works of Bhāi Gurdās. A *true* Sikh is one who keeps the company of *Sants* and meditates on the Name of God: “He with full care keeps his consciousness attuned to the Word and listens to nothing except the words of Guru. He beholds the true Guru and without the company of the saints feels himself blind and deaf.”<sup>16</sup> Participation in exteriorized religion, in the form of irrelevant rituals, is the seal of the *manmukh*,<sup>17</sup> who stands antagonistic to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. One must become a *gurmukh*<sup>18</sup> and hold the Name of God as being the one saving act: “The life led in the light of omens, the nine planets . . . incantations, magic divination by lines and by the voice is all futile . . . The *gurmukhs* who reject all superstitions enjoy happiness with their Lord and get across the world-ocean.”<sup>19</sup> Further indication that the *gurmukh* is essentially a spiritual being is emphasized in the importance of rising in the early hours of the morning (*amritvelā*) and meditating on the Name of God.<sup>20</sup> Overtly and repeatedly, a true Sikh, according to the *Vārs* of Bhāi Gurdās is one who centres his/her life on the Gurū and the *śabad*: “Adopting the teachings of the Guru, the individual is called a Sikh of the Guru.”<sup>21</sup> The importance attached to initiation for the followers of the Gurūs is mentioned by Bhāi Gurdās. To become a Sikh -- a disciple -- one must take initiation: “Getting initiated by the Guru the disciple has become a Sikh.”<sup>22</sup> It is well to remember here that initiation in the *Vārs* of Bhāi Gurdās refers to *charanamrit*<sup>23</sup> and not to *khaṇde-dī-pāhul*.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the form of initiation in the early Sikh

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<sup>16</sup>*Vār 4, Paurī 17, ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>17</sup> The ignorant and selfish individual; literally “one who is self-orientated.”

<sup>18</sup> The spiritually awake individual, whose orientation is towards God, rather than the self.

<sup>19</sup>*Vār 5, Paurī 8, Vārāṅ Bhāi Gurdās*, translator Jodh Singh, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup>*Vār 6, Paurī 3, ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>21</sup>*Vār 11, Paurī 3, ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>22</sup>*Vār 3, Paurī 1, ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup>This is the practice of pouring water over the feet of the Gurū, which is then drunk by the initiate. This form of initiation existed until the formation of the *Khālsā* in 1699.

<sup>24</sup>This is initiation into the *Khālsā* whereby water, with dissolved sugar crystals is drunk by the initiate in the presence of the *pāñj pyāre* -- five Sikhs who symbolize the original five members of the *Khālsā*.

community has no requirements to uphold any outward symbols of faith. The emphasis is placed throughout on spiritual elevation.

Interestingly, occasional references are made to the turban by Bhāi Gurdās. Important, however, is the fact that the turban in his references has *no* apparent connection to unshorn hair. More likely, the turban was worn by Hindus and Muslims, as well as followers of the Gurūs, as a mark of proper behaviour:

Having taken bath on the well, a person forgot his turban and returned home bare headed. Seeing his improper conduct (of being bare headed) the silly women started weeping and wailing (seeing turbanless master of the house they conjectured the death of some one in the family) . . . (Then the fact was disclosed by him that he just forgot to wear turban).<sup>25</sup>

This leads me to conclude that, from the evidence of Bhāi Gurdās' *Vārs* the issue of *kes* has to be left open with regard to the early Sikh community. Indeed, as already stated, his is the earliest extant evidence we have of the nature of the Kartarpur community, and this illustrates very well that the nature of a *true* Sikh is highlighted through spirituality. The *true* Sikh, in the early community therefore, was one who arose early and meditated on the Name of God. By this, both the heart and mind were purified in order to await humbly the Grace of God, which alone can liberate the soul from transmigration. There was absolutely no insistence, as shown from the *Vārs* of Bhāi Gurdās, on outward ritual or external symbolism. The emphasis was purely on an inward identification with the teachings of Gurū Nānak. Accordingly, therefore, a *true* Sikh in the period of Gurū Nānak was a *gurmukh*.

At death, it is the *gurmukh* who will become united with God; this is the goal of the Sikh faith. The *manmukh* who has not meditated on God's *nām*, will continue to transmigrate in the cycle of *saṃsāra*. All such aspects are at the heart of Sikh metaphysics, and it is a heart that insists on an *inward* religion as emphasized by Gurū

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<sup>25</sup>*Vār 32, Paurī 19, Vārāṅ Bhāi Gurdās*, translator Jodh Singh, p. 267.

Nānak and his successors. Cole remarks: "Nanak did not want to destroy men's faith and certainly he did not regard Hinduism and Islam as false, but he knew that true religion was something inward, not an outward show."<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, a Sikh in Gurū Nānak's day was one whose mind had been cleansed of all evil as a result of *nām simran* and *nām japnā* (meditation on God's Name), *kirat karnā* (performing good deeds) and *vand chaknā* (sharing one's income with the less fortunate). The *Nānak Panth*, therefore, placed no emphasis on a distinct external identity for its followers. The definition of a Sikh was a wide one in the Kartarpur community. It was with the successors of Gurū Nānak that the distinct identity of the community was gradually developed. The most significant distinction came during the gurūship of the fifth Sikh Gurū. It is to the successors of Gurū Nānak that I now turn in order to throw light on the distinctive development of the *Nānak Panth*.

## **2:2 Changes that occurred with the following eight Gurūs**

The first moves towards a distinct Sikh identity were taken by Gurū Amardās. By the period of his gurūship there were many Sikhs by convention, that is, they were born into the Sikh faith as a result of their parents having adopted Sikhism. There was thus a need for a degree of institutionalization since the Sikh faith was no longer in its initial stage. Since first generation Sikhs had willingly experienced the beauty of Gurū Nānak's teachings, they knew, to a certain extent, what was expected of them as his followers. It was with the increasing number of second generation Sikhs that a clearer identity -- as being distinct from Hindus and Muslims -- was needed. Such institutionalization of the Sikh faith was vital in order for it to be able to adapt and

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<sup>26</sup>Cole, W. O. (1973) *A Sikh Family in Britain*, London: Religious Education Press, p. 34.

survive in changing situations. Indeed, Gurū Nānak himself ensured the continuation of his ideas by appointing a human Gurū before his death.

But the establishment of more institutionalized practices by the Gurūs often led to a contradiction of the teachings of Gurū Nānak. One such example is the construction of the *bāolī* "well" at Goindwal -- to become later a place of pilgrimage - - by Gurū Amardās.<sup>27</sup> This however, was in significant contrast to Gurū Nānak's teaching that pilgrimage was unnecessary. Yet, and importantly, one should not overlook the fact that in his compositions, Gurū Amardās spoke about the inferiority of pilgrimage compared to the superiority of one who concentrates on the Word of God, *gurbāṇī*:

By no means this dirt of ego is washed off, even though one may have ablutions at hundreds of places of pilgrimage. (AG 39)<sup>28</sup>

It is only by meditation on the Name of God, Gurū Amardās taught, that the individual is spiritually cleansed:

Contenance, truthfulness and self-restraint are all contained in God's Name. Without the Name man becomes not spotless. (AG 33)<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, it is likely that the *bāolī* was constructed to deter Sikhs from visiting Hindu places of worship -- an overt illustration of Gurū Amardās' intention of providing Sikhs with a distinct identity from Hindus.

Gurū Amardās also established the *mañjī* system.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that the establishment of *mañjīs* helped to promote the Sikh faith. Their origin can be traced

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<sup>27</sup>The *bāolī* constructed at Goindwal suggests overtones of Hindu pilgrim centres. Significantly, it was to be reached by eighty-four steps -- indicative of the popular Hindu view that an individual is reborn 8400,000 times (84 *laks*) before *mukti* is gained. In contradiction to the suggestion that the *bāolī* was a means of pilgrimage in the Sikh faith, is the view that it was constructed for thirsty Sikhs who visited the centre of Goindwal. Nevertheless Gurū Amardās had established a *tirath* (pilgrimage centre) for Sikhs at Goindwal. It was constructed for the very reason of giving Sikhs a pilgrimage centre of their own to offset their going to predominantly Hindu sites such as Hardwar and the Ganges.

<sup>28</sup>Singh, Manmohan (1996 rp of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), p. 132.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 112.

back to Gurū Nānak who left a *saṅgat* wherever he went, each *saṅgat* being left in the charge of a Sikh who was appointed by Gurū Nānak himself.<sup>31</sup> Since Gurū Amardās could not, single-handedly, see to the needs of the Sikh community, the leaders of the *mañjīs* were given the privilege of being able to initiate members through *charanamrit*.<sup>32</sup> In order to check the progress of the *mañjīs*, Gurū Amardās made it compulsory for their leaders to gather once a year on *baisākhī* at Goindwal,<sup>33</sup> this would also enable the leaders to exchange ideas and comments with each other -- thus enabling effective development of a distinct Sikh identity. It was decided that a great annual *melā*, fair, would be held at Goindwal each *baisākhī*. Eventually Gurū Amardās required Sikhs to meet twice a year at Goindwal, on *baisākhī* and *ḍīwālī*. The motive behind meeting on these two festivals was to promote the idea of Sikh distinctiveness from Hindus. Sikhs were required to meet on the Hindu festive days, but for non-Hindu reasons. Clearly, the need for establishing a distinct Sikh identity is seen here. Further moves towards a Sikh identity were promoted by Gurū Amardās in his composition of the *Goindwal Pothis*.<sup>34</sup> Gurū Amardās probably recognized the fact that, since many Sikhs had Hindu ancestors, popular Hinduism was not totally absent from the *Panth*. If measures were not taken to promote explicitly the nature of

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<sup>30</sup>*Mañjī* literally means an Indian bedstead which, when used by the Gurū, symbolized authority. The precise reason for having named the system as *mañjī* is not quite clear; it is suggested that in India when a holy man or gurū is addressing an audience he sits on a higher level, usually a *mañjī*, than the audience, who usually sit on the floor. Hence the term *mañjī* may be used in this sense as designating authority over the *saṅgat* of a particular locality. It came to refer to the system whereby the whole of the Sikh community was assigned under twenty-two leaders, chosen by Gurū Amardās, each having a district of his own. The community was growing and it was, therefore, impossible for the Gurū to attend to all followers sufficiently.

<sup>31</sup>See Singh, Teja (1984 rp of 1922 edn) *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, Amritsar: SGPC, p. 103.

<sup>32</sup>Singh, Fauja (1979) *Guru Amar Das: Life and Teachings*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd, p. 124. Fauja Singh makes it clear that initiates would drink *amrit* that had been prepared by water poured over the feet of the *mañjī* leader himself. He goes on to remark that the initiation of followers by the *mañjī* leaders "answered an urgent Sikh need of the time and immensely helped in the spread of Sikhism" (*ibid*).

<sup>33</sup>Cole, W. O. and Sambhi, P. S. (1998 2<sup>nd</sup> fully revised edn, first published 1978) *The Sikhs*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, p. 22.

<sup>34</sup>Collections of the hymns of the earlier Gurūs, to which the hymns of the third Gurū were added. See Mann, G. S. (1996) *The Goindwal Pothis*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

the teachings of Gurū Nānak as distinct from the established *truth* of the Hindu *Vedas*<sup>35</sup> then the *Vedas* would gain unnecessary reverence among the *Panth*. What is definite is that the Sikhs were no longer to consult the Hindu scriptures.<sup>36</sup>

A significant assertion of a distinct Sikh identity is illustrated by the institutions made by the fifth Gurū. By establishing *Harmandir Sāhib*<sup>37</sup> as the central place for Sikhs, and installing the *Ādi Granth*<sup>38</sup> within it, Gurū Arjan provided both a spiritual centre and a sacred scripture for the Sikhs. In having a scripture of their own, the Sikhs no longer needed to utilize either the *Vedas* or other Hindu scriptures, or the *Qurān* -- an assertion *per se* of the moves towards establishing Sikh distinction from Hindus and Muslims. Prior to its existence there was no scripture in which the beliefs of those who followed the Sikh faith were written down. Thus, by providing a scripture and a religious centre for followers, Gurū Arjan was, in effect, firmly establishing a new community. His teachings illustrate well his attitude towards Hindu and Muslim customs:

I practise not fasting, nor observe I the month of Ramzan . . .  
I go not on pilgrimage to Mecca, nor worship I at the holies. (AG 1136)<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, Gurū Arjan was firm in asserting that Sikhs are not Hindu or Muslim, but a distinct, separate, faith in their own right. Thus, from this period onwards a marked development of exclusive Sikh identity was beginning to take form. It was after the martyrdom of Gurū Arjan by the Mughals that the *Panth's* development experienced a

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<sup>35</sup>"The Vedas and semitic texts know not the Lord's mystery" (AG 1021). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 3351.

<sup>36</sup>Singh, Pashaura "Early Markers of Sikh Identity" p. 79.

<sup>37</sup>This is the present day Golden Temple, a title given to *Harmandir Sāhib* after Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh had the building covered in gold leaf.

<sup>38</sup>Prior to its installation as Gurū, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* was referred to as the *Ādi Granth* -- literally the "first compilation" of the works of the first five Sikh Gurūs.

<sup>39</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 3738.



turning-point. It was from this period onwards that the *Panth* took on a specifically militant nature, and stressed its distinction from the Muslim persecutors.<sup>40</sup>

I have highlighted above, a number of features that clearly illustrate that the *Panth* was perceived as being distinct from both Hindus and Muslims early on its development. But it was the *Khālsā* of Gurū Gobind Singh that *sealed* the distinct Sikh identity.

### **2:3 The period of Gurū Gobind Singh**

The major contribution of Gurū Gobind Singh to Sikhism was the formation of the *Khālsā*<sup>41</sup> at the *baisākhī* festival in 1699, which made it compulsory for Sikhs to wear five outward symbols, the Five Ks, at all times. Those wishing to become devout followers of the ten Gurūs were now initiated by the ceremony of *khaṇḍe-ḍī-pāhul*, whereby initiates were to drink holy water that had been stirred by the *khaṇḍā*, rather than initiation via *charanamrit*, by which Gobind Singh had previously been initiated. The event was critically important for Sikhism since the formation of the *Khālsā* endeavoured to provide Sikhs with a final distinct identity from both Hindus and Muslims, as much by outward appearance as inward philosophy. However, as I demonstrated above in section 2:2, the move towards distinctiveness for Sikhs, occurs much earlier than the first *Khālsā* ceremony.

The insistence on the irrelevance of *avatārs*, and of caste, and on independence from *brāhmanic* rituals -- all criticized by Gurū Gobind Singh -- was designed to distinguish Sikhs from Hindus. The institution of a ban on eating *halāl*

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<sup>40</sup>The first moves towards militancy were heralded by Gurū Hargobind who was commanded by his father, Gurū Arjan, to sit on the throne fully armed. Gurū Hargobind introduced the concept of *mīrī-pīrī* -- the temporal and spiritual authority of the Gurū.

<sup>41</sup>The term *Khālsā* had been derived from the Arabic word "*khalisah*" referring to "Pure": see *Vaisakhi*, pamphlet published by the Sikh Missionary Society, London, p. 1. Additionally, Gurū Gobind Singh had already abolished the *masand* system instituted by Gurū Rāmdās, due to the *masands* misusing their delegated authority. Since they had the right to bestow *charanamrit*, many of the *masands* had started to set up their own rival sects.

meat was intended to distinguish them clearly from Muslims.<sup>42</sup> Whether the turban was actually instituted by Gurū Gobind Singh as part of the *rahit*<sup>43</sup> on *baisākhī* 1699, cannot be determined. It is not possible to ascertain precise historical events that led to the turban being a visible feature of the *kesdhārī* Sikh. Although the turban is not one of the Five Ks, pictorial representations of all ten Sikh Gurūs, and of the *pāñj pyāres*<sup>44</sup> show them adorned with the turban. Indeed, today the turban is a distinguishable feature of all *kesdhārī* Sikh males.<sup>45</sup> Four major prohibitions, to be avoided by all Sikhs were laid down by Gurū Gobind Singh. Sikhs were:

- (1) to abstain from cutting any hair,
- (2) not to smoke or take any intoxicants,
- (3) refrain from eating *halāl* meat, and
- (4) never to indulge in adultery, thus displaying high morality and virtuosity at all times.<sup>46</sup>

A major question arising from the issue of Sikh identity is what incentive led to Gurū Gobind Singh formulating the *Khālsā* with its outward symbolism? Why was there a particular need for such specific Sikh identity at this time? One thing for sure is that this historical event led to a greater awareness of the presence of Sikhs by other religious communities of the time. There is some evidence to suggest that Gurū Gobind Singh did not instigate all the rules and regulations of the *Khālsā* at that *baisākhī* festival in 1699, but that they were added at different times later and

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<sup>42</sup>Further measures to define Sikhs clearly as separate from Muslims are contained in the much later *Rehat Maryādā*, where it explicitly states that Sikh women should not practise *purdāh*, the custom by which Muslim women completely veil themselves. This will be dealt with in section 2:7 below.

<sup>43</sup>The *Khālsā* code of discipline.

<sup>44</sup>According to tradition, Gurū Gobind asked for five men who would be willing to accept death and would be ready to be decapitated. One by one five men stood up and were in turn taken into a tent. The congregation assumed that the *pāñj pyāre* had been killed, but to their astonishment the five appeared all dressed in the Five Ks. They were initiated by Gurū Gobind by the ceremony known as *khande-āi-pāhul*, whereby a mixture of water and sugar crystals was stirred by a *khandā* and drunk by the five men, symbolizing their spiritual transformation from sparrows into hawks. Whether the whole of this event is historically true or whether it has been telescoped cannot be ascertained. But, this is the view held generally by the *Panth*.

<sup>45</sup>There is no objection to females wearing a turban. However, its prominence is displayed among Sikh males. As previously mentioned, an exception are the *gorā* Sikh women.

<sup>46</sup>*Vaisakhī*, (pamphlet) p. 8.

telescoped into one event.<sup>47</sup> This view is strengthened by McLeod who is of the opinion that, although an actual code of discipline may safely be attributed to *baisākhī* 1699, other aspects of the *Khālsā* are to be regarded as consequences of later events.<sup>48</sup> It is understandable as to how, with time, certain features may have been added to the original *rahit* of Gurū Gobind Singh. This is because the *rahit* was not written down immediately until the appearance of formal rules and regulations in the form of the *rahitnāmās*.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, tradition may not be accurate -- as stated in the words of McLeod, "it would be strange for tradition to get it all right".<sup>50</sup> Whether all, or only a few, of the Five Ks were instituted is not a matter that need detain this research further. The important issue bearing relevance to the present research is that, according to Sikh tradition, the *Khālsā* was created on *baisākhī* day in 1699. Sikhs would have gathered on this day due to Gurū Amardās' command that all Sikhs should assemble on *baisākhī* every year. The events of this day in 1699 led to an outward identity for Sikhs -- one that constitutes the *Khālsā* form to the present day.

It is interesting to note that during a Sikh and Punjab Studies Conference in May 1999 at Coventry University, Professor Grewal mentioned that the *Khālsā* armies of the eighteenth century included *sahajdhārīs*.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, even though the creation of the *Khālsā* had taken place, there appears to have been no notion that only *amritdhārīs* were Sikhs. The presence of *sahajdhārīs* in the *Khālsā* army, as Grewal alluded, indicates that *sahajdhārīs*, *kesdhārīs* and *amritdhārīs* were all Sikhs. Professor Grewal's opinion gains support when it is considered that the earlier Singh Sabhās regarded *amritdhārīs* and *sahajdhārīs* as Sikhs. Grewal also considers that

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<sup>47</sup>See Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, p. 36.

<sup>48</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1976) *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup>These were the first written records of the *rahit*. However, their authenticity is doubted, I intend to look at the *rahitnāmā* issue in detail in section 2:5.

<sup>50</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1997) *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 53.

<sup>51</sup>The term *sahajdhārī* refers to non-*Khālsā* Sikhs, that is, Sikhs who have not undergone the *amrit* initiation, and are therefore under no obligation to wear the Five Ks.

Gurū Gobind Singh's use of the term *Khālsā* applied to *sahajdhārīs* and *amritdhārīs*. The latter had taken *khaṇde-dī-pāhul* and thereby became Singhs, whereas the former were non-Singhs. So the term *Khālsā* was used generally to refer to *all* followers of Gurū Gobind Singh, whether *amritdhārī* or not. Grewal's opinions are strengthened by Bhāi Harbans Lal; who writes: "In the Sikh heritage, Sahajdharis were defined and treated as Sikhs in all meanings and senses because they accepted the ten Gurus as their mentors and continued the same relationship with *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*."<sup>52</sup> He goes on to assert that: "The Khalsa congregation included all Sikhs, Amrtidhari and Sahajdhari. There were many prominent Sahajdhari Sikhs."<sup>53</sup> I gain the impression that Gurū Gobind Singh did not regard only *Khālsā* Sikhs as proper Sikhs -- though this certainly obscures the issue of the importance of outward identity. What could be suggested is that the Gurū recognized that not all his followers could retain strict adherence to the *rahit* and that many lived up to the ideals of Gurū Nānak who had spoken against an outward show of faith. At this point, the reasons behind Gurū Gobind Singh's institution of the *Khālsā* need to be examined.

It is clear that Gurū Gobind Singh felt the urgent need to lay down the precepts of the Sikh faith in the form of outward symbolism that would create among his followers a sense of separate identity -- primarily from the followers of Islam. The urgent need to distinguish *Khālsā* Sikhs from Muslims lay in the fact that Sikhs were being persecuted for being followers of the Gurūs. Therefore, Gurū Gobind Singh probably wished for the distinction to be between Sikhs and Muslims.<sup>54</sup> The issue regarding Hindus is not very clear since many Hindu families included Sikh converts

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<sup>52</sup>Lal, B. H. "Sahajdhari Sikhs: Their Origin and Current Status within the Panth" in *Sikh Identity*, p. 111.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>54</sup>The Punjab, being the gateway to India, was continuously invaded by foreigners who were not always accommodating to the faith of the region they invaded. There are many accounts in Sikh history that illustrate for those who did not convert to Islam, the penalty was death.

too. Many people kept the outward symbols of the Sikh faith without being formally initiated: such was the case of the uninitiated *kesdhārīs* -- the case of the majority of Sikhs today. The rules by which a Sikh should behave, many of which were probably dictated in 1699, became the *rahit*, that is, it was the correct way of living for those who followed the teachings of the ten Gurūs. The precepts laid down became the basis of the *rahitnāmās* and, later, the *Rehat Maryādā*.

According to Gopal Singh, one of the motives behind the formation of the *Khālsā* had been the martyrdom of the tenth Gurū's father, Gurū Tegh Bahādur who was publicly beheaded under the reign of the Muslim Emperor, Aurangzeb.<sup>55</sup> Gopal Singh tells us that: "Guru Tegh Bahadur, had been beheaded in a public square of Delhi, but no one had come forward, except two low-caste Sikhs in disguise and under cover of darkness, to claim his body."<sup>56</sup> The very fact that the Sikhs had come in disguise when it was dark meant that they were not courageous enough to admit to the Muslim rulers that they were Sikhs, for fear of persecution or of being forced to embrace Islam. Importantly, their having come in disguise suggests that, prior to the creation of the *Khālsā*, Sikhs were, indeed, visibly recognizable, otherwise why would the two low-caste Sikhs feel the need for the disguise? For the next twenty-four years Gurū Gobind Singh probably trained his followers in bravery and courage, and instilled in them the power to confront the Mughal authorities.

On keeping the outward identity of the *Khālsā* (especially the uncut hair covered by the turban),<sup>57</sup> Sikhs were to be recognized at once as strong, martial

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<sup>55</sup>Singh, Gopal (1990 rp of 1979 edn) *A History of the Sikh People*, Delhi: World Book Centre, p. 284.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>The most important outward symbol that enabled Sikh identity to express itself was the turban, which became the hallmark of a Sikh. Thus, even out of a crowd of people, one could clearly distinguish a Sikh and a non-Sikh.

followers of the Sikh faith.<sup>58</sup> It is important to note here that institutionalization does not indicate that Gurū Nānak's message was contradicted, but merely that it enabled the message to adapt to changing conditions in order for Gurū Nānak's message to survive. The followers of the succeeding Gurūs became known as the *Panth* collectively, and Gurū Nānak's name was dropped to indicate the followers were adherents to the teachings of *all* the Gurūs.<sup>59</sup> This might suggest that later innovations by Nānak's successors are to be regarded on a par with Nānak's beliefs and practices.

The need for establishing a *rahit* by Gurū Gobind Singh was also partly the outcome of the increasing number of Sikhs in the Punjab, which made it impossible for the Gurū to attend all areas. The establishment of *masands* had already proved unsuccessful, since the Gurū had felt the need to abolish them. It was necessary, therefore, to establish a set pattern of practices by which all Sikhs should behave.<sup>60</sup> Above all, prescribed rules by the tenth Gurū ensured the survival of the *Panth*. The *Khālsā* established by Gurū Gobind Singh thus went as far as possible in clearly defining, in the seventeenth century, who exactly a Sikh was.

Continuous persecution from other faiths raised the issue of Sikh identity and the question of who was a Sikh. Gurū Gobind Singh thus felt the urgency to label the Sikh community clearly as distinct from other faiths, and prepared the Sikhs to die for the survival of their faith. By giving the Sikhs a set of rules and regulations by which to live, Gurū Gobind Singh established a firm Sikh identity in the seventeenth century. This completed a process that had begun much earlier in the development of Sikhism.

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<sup>58</sup>This outward, militant transformation of the *Panth*, as remarked earlier, could be said to have begun under the sixth Gurū, Hargobind, the final and full transformation being attributed to Gurū Gobind Singh.

<sup>59</sup> McLeod, W. H. (1992 rp of 1989) *Who is a Sikh?* Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Singh, T. *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, p. 61.

## 2:4 The *kes* and Sikh identity

Of major distinction, then, between Sikh and non-Sikh, especially outside India, is the Sikh's most prominent display of the turban,<sup>61</sup> which is inseparably bound with the *kes*.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the issue of *kes* is particularly pertinent to the debate about Sikh identity in the sense that an individual may no longer be regarded as a Sikh if he/she cuts his/her hair. This is because such individuals do not conform to the status of a *Khālsā* Sikh as defined by the *Rehat Maryādā*, even though they will consider themselves Sikh -- as will the majority of their associates. Thus the question of Sikh identity appears a paradox.

Even with changing attitudes in the modern world, *Khālsā* Sikhism has retained its insistence on uncut hair, and one must ask why such importance is attached to the *kes*. One answer to this question may be that religion has always associated uncut, long hair as a symbol of the individual's devotion to God.<sup>63</sup> As such, Kirpal Singh suggests: "the uncut hair (*kes*) holds the highest sanctity in Sikhism".<sup>64</sup> It is often argued by *Khālsā* Sikhs that God, on purpose, intended humankind to have long hair, otherwise why is it that, of all the parts of the human body, it is the hair that grows continually? Mansukhani argues that: "The shaving or removal of hair is regarded as a challenge to the Creator and His Divine Will. The ban on hair-cutting

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<sup>61</sup>As indicated in 2:3 above, it is not possible to establish whether the turban was part of the *rahit* of Gurū Gobind Singh, or whether it was appended to it.

<sup>62</sup>Although a Sikh is supposed to display all of the Five Ks at all times, a study of the *karā*, *kanghā*, *kirpān* and *kacchā* is not otherwise relevant to the present study on the issue of Sikh identity.

<sup>63</sup>For example, the most famous biblical story of Samson in the Jewish and Christian tradition is concerned with how his hair was the source of his energy and divine strength. Jesus too, in the majority of his pictures is always portrayed as having long hair. Apart from these two "western" characters, many Hindu Gods are represented with their long, maybe uncut, hair. This portrayal of hair in both eastern and western ideology must inevitably have some significance relating to an individual's mental and spiritual state of mind.

<sup>64</sup> Singh, Kirpal (1985) *The Sikh Symbols*, London: Sikh Missionary Society, U.K., p. 5.

for the *khalsa* was demanded in order that God's design of man should be left as He intended. Hair is a protection for the head. Who are we to alter God's great design."<sup>65</sup>

Traditionally, the ascetics and *sadhūs* (holy men) of India have kept uncut hair. Therefore, prestige was attributed to the *kes* prior to the creation of the *Khālsā*. Importance attached to the *kes* appears to have been the topic of a conversation between Gurū Nānak and a Muslim religious leader.<sup>66</sup> The idea of prestige associated with the Indian turban is also found in one of Gurū Arjan's hymns:

Make good deeds thy body and faith thy bride.  
Revel thou in the True Lord's love and entertainments.  
Make pure that is impure. Deem thou the Lord's presence thy counsel.  
Let the complete body be the turban on thy head.  
A Muslim is he who is kind-hearted. (AG 1084).<sup>67</sup>

Important to note is that the turban, here, has no connection whatsoever to a Sikh identity. The last line of the verse clearly indicates that the composition belongs to *Sufīs*, not Sikhs. The *Sufīs* wore turbans along with Hindus, too, as a sign of respect. Its use is rather like a woman covering her head before leaving the house and in the presence of elders and, importantly, is therefore not exclusive to Sikhs. Today, however, many Sikhs are easily recognized due to the style of tying their turbans that, as repeatedly stated, became a necessity for all *amritdhārī* Sikhs, in order to distinguish them from other communities. Cole and Sambhi take the point of distinction further by expressing the view that in distinguishing Sikhs from others, the possibility of unfair persecution of non-Sikhs was taken into consideration:

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<sup>65</sup> Mansukhani, G. S. (1989) *A Book of Sikh Studies*, Delhi: National Book Shop, p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> According to a debate described in the *Janamsākhīs* (the "birth testimonies" of Gurū Nānak) between Gurū Nānak and a Muslim *pīr* (religious leader) by the name of Bahauddīn, Gurū Nānak is recorded as having told Bahauddīn that by shaving their hair, the Hindus and Muslims have degraded themselves. He goes on to assert that ordaining humans with *kes*, is God's divine Will, *Hukam*, and each individual should therefore obey the *Hukam*: see Singh Kirpal, *The Sikh Symbols*, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 3570.



When the Gurus encouraged the wearing of the turban they did it partly to prevent non-Sikhs being picked upon and treated as Sikhs in time of local persecution, and they did it also to prevent the less courageous of their followers deserting and merging with the crowd when the going became hard.<sup>68</sup>

Initiation, too, became an outward symbol of identity and unity of all Sikhs. Since Gurū Nānak preached the fatherhood of God and the one family of all humankind, Gurū Gobind Singh brought Gurū Nānak's ideal concept of equality to its highest potential by firstly making the *pāñj pyāre* drink from the same bowl. The irrelevance of caste distinctions was strengthened due to the fact that the five men were from different *zāts* and also from different regions of India, illustrating the unity of the Sikh faith.<sup>69</sup> But Gurū Gobind Singh's institution of the *kes* suggests that the ideal *amritdhārī* in Sikhism, is also one who has uncut hair.

The act of initiation in Sikhism is not merely physical for, above all, it is regarded as a spiritual rebirth. Just as the Hindu twice-born, *dvijā*, classes were spiritually reborn at the *upanayana*, sacred thread, ceremony so, too, initiated Sikhs could be regarded as being "twice-born".<sup>70</sup> Violation of the rules of the *Khālsā* results in the person becoming a *patit* and therefore returning to the inferior non-spiritual state in which he or she was prior to taking initiation into the *Khālsā*.

On becoming initiated the Sikh's next step is to bring himself or herself nearer to God by *nām simran*:

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<sup>68</sup> Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, p. 116.

<sup>69</sup>The *pāñj pyāre* were:

- (1) Bhāi Dayā Singh, a *khatri* from Lahore, Punjab.
- (2) Bhāi Dharam Singh, a *jaṭ* from Rohtas.
- (3) Bhāi Mohkām Singh, a *dhobī* (washerman) from Dwarka, Gujrat.
- (4) Bhāi Sāhib Singh, a *nai* (barber) from Bidar, Karnataka.
- (5) Bhāi Himmat Singh, a *jhīr* (water carrier) from Jagannath Puri, Orissa.

(*Vaisakhi*, [pamphlet] p. 4).

<sup>70</sup>The spiritual aspect of initiation is commented on by Randhir Singh in his Punjabi work entitled *Amrit-ki-Hai*, translated into English by Trilochan Singh: "Baptism in Sikhism is not mere ritual. It is a spiritual rebirth. Those who go in for baptism without inner preparations and discipline remain deprived of its spiritual impact in their body and mind." Singh, Trilochan (1981) *The Meaning of Sikh Baptism*, Ludhiana, Punjab: Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh Trust, p. 16.

Thy Name, O Lord, is the Formless One;  
Dwelling on it, one falls not into Hell. (AG 465).<sup>71</sup>

But this raises a crucial point. Since it is *nām simran* which brings the individual closer to God, it could be contended that a Sikh should primarily be regarded as one who has total faith in *Satgurū* and the teachings of the ten Gurūs: initiation is only the *means* to this. And the institution of the means by Gurū Gobind Singh arose, essentially, out of a need for a more military character to Sikhism.<sup>72</sup> But once that need is removed, is such initiation a prerequisite to true inner spirituality?<sup>73</sup> Thus, the period of Gurū Gobind Singh's successorship gave rise to the necessity of forming the *Khālsā*; it was certainly this that created a heightened consciousness of identity among the Sikhs, and a more marked military outlook. This was necessary at the time, but the pure spirituality of Gurū Nānak's teachings underpins this and is the bottom line of Sikh identity. The reasons as to why the *Khālsā* identity was stressed in the late nineteenth century, and why becoming *amritdhārī* was viewed as the mark of the *true* Sikh, are taken up in the following section.

## **2:5 The nineteenth century and the subsequent rise of the Singh Sabhā**

The problem of defining a Sikh as belonging to a sect of Hinduism is one that Sikhs have faced throughout the development of their faith. Even after the death of Gurū Gobind Singh, the Sikhs were regarded in a sense as Hindus. Yet the main term of identity that Sikhs used to describe themselves in the early phase of development was

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<sup>71</sup>Singh, Gopal (1993 rp of 1968 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Delhi: World Book Centre, p. 459.

<sup>72</sup>The militant character of Gurū Gobind's teachings is portrayed in the way that he equated the sword with God. Harbans Singh draws attention to the autobiography of Gurū Gobind Singh -- the *Bachitra Natak* -- in which he uses the term "Sword" to refer to God: "I bow with love and devotion to the Holy Sword, Assist me that I may be able to complete this work." Singh, Harbans (1994) *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 81.

<sup>73</sup>Since the teachings of Gurū Gobind Singh remain separate in the *Dasam Granth*, the nature of Sikh doctrine as contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* remains concentrated on the importance of *bhakti* through *nām simran*. Although the teachings of Gurū Tegh Bahādur were added to the original *Ādi Granth*, the compositions of Gurū Gobind Singh remain in a separate volume. And it is in the *Dasam Granth* that the importance of the *Khālsā* is highlighted, not in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.

*Hum Hindu Nahin*, that is, *We Are Not Hindus*. Following this they moved to what Barrier depicts as a “more positive phase that emphasized the innate value of Sikhism and its contribution to Indian and world civilization.”<sup>74</sup>

Interestingly, in the Punjab census of 1855 Sikhs were still counted as members of the Hindu faith.<sup>75</sup> It was not until 1868 that Sikhs were listed as separate from Hindus: there was however, no clear-cut definition of a Sikh as yet.<sup>76</sup> The British enumerators felt the need for firm boundaries as to who was a Sikh in order for them to enumerate Sikhs in the 1891 Punjab census; this must have had its effect on the minds of the Singh Sabhā leaders -- those dedicated to preventing Sikhs being re-absorbed into Hinduism. Thus, it was in 1891 that the first, clear, definition of a Sikh was used by the British as one who was a *Khālsā* Sikh.<sup>77</sup> The number of *Khālsā* Sikhs must have visibly increased for them to have bearing on the British definition of a Sikh -- an important consideration when bearing in mind that the Lahore Singh Sabhā, which placed emphasis on the *Khālsā* form, had by now been established. Thus, the *sahajdhārīs* were most likely to have been enumerated as Hindus: significantly a total of 1,344,862 Sikhs had described themselves as being Hindus.<sup>78</sup> The *sahajdhārī/amritdhārī* relationship to the *Panth* continues to be the centre of debate to the present day.

It is true that the origins of the Sikh faith, when traced back to the teachings of Gurū Nānak, were Hindu, since he himself was brought up according to Hindu

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<sup>74</sup>Barrier, N. G. in Juergensmeyer, M. and Barrier, N. G. (1979) *Sikh Studies*, California: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, p. 41.

<sup>75</sup>See McLeod *Who is a Sikh?* p. 86. The non-distinctiveness of the Sikhs had also been voiced by Wilson, who, in 1862, depicted the Sikhs as a sect within Hinduism and the Sikh faith as a reform movement that arose in denial of caste distinctions. (Wilson, H. H. [1978 rp of 1862 edn] *Religions of the Hindus*, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, p. 121ff). Wilson made the assumption that there are no major distinctions between a Sikh and a Hindu. But his book was written before the census of 1868 in which, for the first time, Sikhs were counted as separate from Hindus, and before the attack of the *Ārya Samāj* -- a Hindu party that refused to acknowledge the Sikhs as distinct from Hindus.

<sup>76</sup>McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?* p. 86.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 11.

tradition. However, in the same way that Jesus was a Jew and his teachings developed into a separate religion so, too, is the case with Sikhism. Interestingly, and importantly, I must point out that the constitution of India, to this day, legislates Sikhs as a *sect* within Hinduism.

The confusion about whether Sikhs are Hindus can be understood if one bears in mind the fact that Sikhs share many social and religious ideas with the Hindus, such as belief in caste,<sup>79</sup> *karma* and transmigration. However, it must be emphasized that Sikhism has expressed its own stance and, therefore, has modified these beliefs in its own way.<sup>80</sup> The threat of Sikhs absorbing into Hinduism was recognized by the late nineteenth century Singh Sabhā -- an extremely important movement with regard to influencing Sikhs to establish a distinct identity of their own.

### **2:5:1 The Singh Sabhā**

The main concern of the Singh Sabhā was to prevent the absorption of the Sikh faith into the larger fold of Hinduism. Furthermore, the movement aspired to discourage diversity within the *Panth*. By the nineteenth century, the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses was increasingly appearing in Sikh practice.<sup>81</sup> Members of the *Panth* openly participated in practices against which the Sikh Gurūs had voiced their criticism. Thus Sikhs participated in what Oberoi, using Weber's term, describes as the "enchanted universe".<sup>82</sup> The day-to-day lives of a vast majority of Sikhs consisted in anti-Sikh rituals such as the worshipping of saints -- from both Hindu and Muslim

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<sup>79</sup>Although the Gurūs spoke out against caste prejudice and instituted such customs as the *langar* (free-kitchen) in the *gurdwārās* and common surnames to symbolize equality among all, *zāt* is still retained in Sikhism, particularly in matrimonial matters.

<sup>80</sup>For example, the concept of *karma* has been adjusted in Sikhism to teach that one's *zāt* does not dictate the duties that should be performed; everyone has the chance to work towards his or her liberation, but ultimate release is dependent only on God's Grace, *Nadar*.

<sup>81</sup>See Singh, Khushwant, (1987 rp of 1966 edn) *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 136.

<sup>82</sup>Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 141.

backgrounds -- superstitions, black magic and the worshipping of ancestors.<sup>83</sup> Thus, in the nineteenth century, the Sikhs were not just a people of the "Book", *brāhmins* were being consulted, and rituals were undertaken to prevent illnesses and to grant boons. But these accepted and popular customs of the Sikhs in the nineteenth century were in contradistinction to their *gurbāṇī*. The diversity in practices was perhaps best illustrated via the marriage ceremonies among Sikhs -- indeed, before the intervention of the Singh Sabhā there was no uniform Sikh wedding ritual.<sup>84</sup> The writings of travellers to India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provide further useful insights into such praxis common amongst Sikhs. One example, here, is from the writings of Jacquemont: "The Sikhs have also retained a large number of Hindu superstitions. . . . Their priests are always of high caste Hindu descent and they have such contempt for the lower castes . . ." <sup>85</sup> Furthermore, in spite of the event which had taken place on *baisākhī* 1699, there were still many Sikhs who had not yet taken *amrit* and had not, therefore, initiated into the *Khālsā*.<sup>86</sup> Thus, diversity in the *Panth* with regard to practice and belief was prevalent and had been pertinent to all stages of early development -- this is what the Singh Sabhā leaders aimed to end. Nevertheless, Pashaura Singh is of the opinion that, although it was inescapable that popular Sikh religion was heavily influenced by Hindu culture, this was not the case overall; the Gurūs had, indeed, promoted the distinctiveness of the *Panth*, and this was practised by the "elite of the *Panth*."<sup>87</sup> Even so, the whole *Panth* did not live strictly according

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<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, chapter 3, pp. 139-203.

<sup>84</sup>The majority of Sikhs were married by the *vedī* tradition whereby circuits were taken around the fire, as in the Hindu manner. In October 1909, the Anand Marriage Act was legalized. From then on, Sikhs were to be married by taking four *pheras* around the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. The Nāmdhāris, however, did not adopt this practice, they continue to take *pheras* around the fire.

<sup>85</sup>Jacquemont cited in Garrett, H. L. O. (1985 rp of 1934 edn) *The Panjab A Hundred Years Ago*, New Delhi: Rima Publishing House, pp. 9-10.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>87</sup>Singh, Pashaura "Early Markers of Sikh Identity" p. 83.

to Sikh practices alone -- indeed, if they had, then there would have been less effort on behalf of the Singh Sabhā to define Sikhs clearly as distinct from other faiths.

The first Singh Sabhā was established at Amritsar in 1873.<sup>88</sup> What must be noted here is that the early Singh Sabhās were primarily geared towards laying down correct observances of *gurbānī* -- there was not much emphasis on Sikhs adopting the *Khālsā* form. The prescribing of *Khālsā* ideals was accentuated by the later Singh Sabhās.<sup>89</sup> Thus, diversity of identity obtained widely, whereby both *amritdhārīs* and *sahajdhārīs* were members of the *Khālsā*.<sup>90</sup>

The Singh Sabhā aimed at publishing literature that would unite all Sikhs in belief and practice, and end Sikh participation in the "enchanted universe".<sup>91</sup> The printing press had been introduced by the American Ludhiana Mission in 1834, and cannot be overestimated in the efforts of the Singh Sabhā: it allowed ideas to be effectively communicated between the Punjabis.<sup>92</sup>

Although many *rahitnāmās* and *tankhāhnāmās*<sup>93</sup> were in existence, their authority was not particularly marked in the nineteenth century; none was seen as having utmost jurisdiction for the Sikh community. It is well to remember that the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* was not officially approved by the SGPC until 1945, and it was not passed until 1950. Thus, the extant formal *rahitnāmās* of various authors were utilized by the Singh Sabhā in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the educated leaders of the Singh Sabhā could not accept all *rahitnāmā* material because of

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<sup>88</sup>Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 258.

<sup>89</sup>Much literature has been published on the history and purpose of the Singh Sabhās. There is no need to reiterate the material here. For detailed information on the Singh Sabhās see Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, and Barrier, N. G. (1998) "The Singh Sabhās and the Evolution of Modern Sikhism, 1875-1925" in Baird, R. D. (3rd revised edn) *Religion in Modern India*, Manohar: Delhi, pp. 192-223.

<sup>90</sup>This issue has been looked at in section 2:3 above.

<sup>91</sup>See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, chapter 3.

<sup>92</sup>See Barrier, N. G. (1998) "The Singh Sabhās and the Evolution of Modern Sikhism, 1875-1925" in Baird, *Religion in Modern India*, p. 196.

<sup>93</sup>These are works that state prohibitions for *Khālsā* Sikhs and action to be taken against those *Khālsā* Sikhs who break the *rahit*.

discrepancies and substance that was no longer relevant in the nineteenth century.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, much of the content of the *rahitnāmās* was sifted for what the Singh Sabhā leaders saw as reliable material, in order for the Sikh community to be defined as being distinct from Hindus and Muslims.

Indeed, much of what became the definitive *Sikh Rehat Maryādā* is derived from the *rahitnāmās*, which are the first records of the *rahit* as instituted by Gurū Gobind Singh on *baisākhī* 1699 when he created the *Khālsā*.<sup>95</sup> The earliest extant *rahitnāmā* is that, allegedly, by Chaupa Singh Chhibbar<sup>96</sup> -- known as the Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā*. Sikh tradition claims that Gurū Gobind Singh had instructed Chaupa Singh, a close companion of the Gurū, to write down the *Khālsā* code of discipline as instructed to Sikhs on *baisākhī* 1699.<sup>97</sup> The authenticity of the Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā*<sup>98</sup> however, is doubtful. It contains material that would not have been acceptable to Chaupa Singh himself. He was the tutor of the tenth Gurū and had looked after him as a child. Neither he, nor the Gurū himself, would have accepted much of the material.<sup>99</sup> It follows that the opinion of many Sikhs and scholars today ascertains that much of the original Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* has been distorted by ignorant Sikhs.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>See McLeod, W. H. (1987) *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup>The aim of the *Sikh Rehat Maryādā* is to provide a code for *Khālsā* Sikhs, therefore, it does not see the need to cater for *sahajdhārī*, uninitiated Sikhs.

<sup>96</sup>Chaupa Singh was born as Chaupa Rai into a *brāhmin* family, therefore, he must have taken initiation and become a *Khālsā* Sikh in order for his name to have changed to Chaupa Singh. See McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup>This seems a valid opinion since the *Khālsā* community would have been growing and dispersing to the extent that it would have been impossible for the Gurū to attend to all *Khālsā* Sikhs. Therefore, a written statement would have been vital in order for the Gurū's chosen associates to be able to administer *khaṇḍe-ḍī-pahūl* on his behalf.

<sup>98</sup>Dating between 1740 and 1765 (see McLeod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, p. 10).

<sup>99</sup>This includes reverence and superiority of the *brāhmins*, as well as the tenth Gurū's involvement in the *devī* cult. See McLeod, *ibid.* Furthermore, the extant Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* contains no reference to the Five Ks and, additionally, the language used is not that of the period of the tenth Gurū (*ibid.*, p. 15).

<sup>100</sup>McLeod, *ibid.*, p. 12. The Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* can be attributed to Chhibbar *brāhmins* who were not very happy with the *Khālsā Panth* development in the eighteenth century (*ibid.*, p. 49).

The *rahit* was a continuing process, although, much of it had been dictated by the tenth Gurū in 1699. According to McLeod, “pre-1699 sources indicate that a rudimentary *Rahit* was evolving prior to the founding of the Khalsa.”<sup>101</sup> But much of it evolved in the post-*Khālsā* period during the eighteenth century. Thus, although the extant Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* is often regarded as unauthentic, its importance lies in the fact that it is closer to the period of Gurū Gobind Singh than any other *rahitnāmā*. Nevertheless, certain features of the extant Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* would not have been accepted by the Singh Sabhā, which aimed to end Sikh participation in the “enchanted universe”. For example, the Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* includes the reference that:

(iii) Sikh marriages should be performed by Brahmans.<sup>102</sup>

Such factors suggested that the Sikhs were not distinct from Hindus. Therefore, the Singh Sabhā solemnized the *Anand Kāraj Act* in 1909.<sup>103</sup>

The establishment of a branch of the *Ārya Samāj* at Lahore, Punjab, in 1877<sup>104</sup> posed a particular threat to the survival of Sikhism.<sup>105</sup> The assumption that Sikhs are to be regarded as Hindus was outrightly rejected by the Singh Sabhā; indeed, the famous book by Nabha entitled *We Are Not Hindus*, is one of its basic books. Grewal has remarked that Nabha's work was the most authoritative statement of Sikh identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>103</sup> The elevation of *brahmīns*, against which the Gurūs taught, was further stressed by references in the Chaupa Singh *Rahitnāmā* that “(iv) Brahman Sikhs should receive double the deference and attention normally bestowed on a Sikh” (*ibid.*). Thus the Singh Sabhā endeavoured to produce a set of rules and regulations for Sikhs to follow.

<sup>104</sup> See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 279.

<sup>105</sup> Shackle points out that the Singh Sabhā spoke against the *Ārya Samāj's* attempt to define Sikhs as simply belonging to the Hindu faith; he states that propaganda stimulated by the Singh Sabhā aimed at a stricter following of the *Khālsā*. See Shackle, C. “Sikhism” in Hardy, F. (1990) *The Religions of Asia*, London: Routledge, p. 192.

<sup>106</sup> Grewal, J. S. (1999) “Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity” in Singh, P. and Barrier, N. G. *Sikh Identity*, p. 232.



But links between Punjabis, both Sikh and Hindu, would have been inevitable since they shared the same family and same *zāts*, including shared customs and festivals.<sup>107</sup> Above all, the Sikh Gurūs themselves were originally Punjabi Hindus too. However, the Sikh break from Hinduism was evident in the Gurūs' rejection of *zāt* prejudice, of *brāhmaṇic* rituals, and of the polytheism that was a popular feature of devotional Hinduism. Indeed, Khushwant Singh states that it was, ironically, the teachings of the *Ārya Samāj* itself that helped to promote an awareness of a distinct identity among Sikhs, he writes: "The more the [Arya] Samajists claimed Sikhism to be a branch of Hinduism, the more the Sikhs insisted that they were a distinct and separate community."<sup>108</sup>

The *Ārya Samāj*, led by Swami Dayanand, preached the supremacy of the *Vedas* and, in so doing, the idolatrous and polytheistic nature of popular Hinduism was rejected.<sup>109</sup> The stringent followers of the *Ārya Samāj* viewed Dayanand as a *ṛṣi*, before whom Gurū Nānak and the Gurūs could never be placed in importance.<sup>110</sup> The first Sikh followers of the *Ārya Samāj* initially accepted it as being similar to the *true* Sikhism as taught by the Gurūs. Nevertheless, Dayanand's open criticism of the Sikh faith could not be tolerated by those who followed the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs. The *Ārya Samāj* lost the majority of its Sikh followers, who became ardent supporters of the Singh Sabhā movement.<sup>111</sup> The effect of the *Ārya Samāj* in the Punjab was, in fact, to raise among Sikhs the necessity of a clear identity of their own. The criticism

<sup>107</sup>See Jones, K. W. "Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877-1905" in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 32 (1973): 457.

<sup>108</sup>Singh, Khushwant, *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, p. 147.

<sup>109</sup>Moreover, Dayanand condemned the authority of *brāhmīns*. Thus in these non-Hindu aspects the *Ārya Samāj* had appealed to the educated Punjabis and, initially at least, to a number of Sikhs. However on his arrival in the Punjab, Dayanand openly criticized the Sikh religion, as well as its Gurūs as being mere mortals who had begun their own sect within the overall boundary of Hinduism.

<sup>110</sup>Khushwant Singh comments: "Aryas specifically rejected any claim to infallibility for Guru Nanak, since it would have placed Sikhism and its founder above their own movement and their own prophet, Swami Dayanand." (Singh, Khushwant, *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, p. 460).

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 462.

of the *Ārya Samāj* had created an increased awareness among Sikhs that they were not a minority sect within Hinduism. So what and who were they to be identified as?

The influence of Christian missionaries in the Punjab also prompted the Singh Sabhā to take swift action. Sikhs had been greatly shocked when, in 1853, Mahārājā Duleep Singh became a Christian.<sup>112</sup> It was the egalitarian message that attracted large numbers of lower-caste Sikhs into Christianity, and they constituted the highest percentage of Sikhs converting into the Christian faith. Although Sikhism had claimed to be casteless, these low-caste Sikhs did not achieve the position of equality that the Gurūs had preached. Significantly, the decision of four educated Sikhs to convert to Christianity came as a great blow to the Singh Sabhā, which recognised the dire need to do something about Sikh conversions to Christianity.

It was the goal of the Singh Sabhā to create a consciousness of identity among Sikhs, an identity that created a *Khālsā* view and one that clearly emphasized to Sikhs that they are in no way to be regarded as belonging to Hinduism. The Singh Sabhā, according to Harbans Singh, is undoubtedly responsible for the *purification* of the Sikh faith.<sup>113</sup> This becomes clear when bearing in mind the following aims of the Singh Sabhā, as illustrated by Gopal Singh:

- (a) to propagate the Guru's Mission in its pristine purity;
- (b) to do away with the Brahmanic rituals which had creeped (*sic*) into the Sikh society;
- (c) to publish books;
- (d) to hold discussions and debates of scholars of doctrine...
- (e) to inculcate pride in the Sikh youth in their tradition and history; and
- (f) to propagate the cause of the Panjabi language by opening schools and publishing books, journals and newspapers.<sup>114</sup>

The efforts of the Singh Sabhā in this respect have been succinctly summarized by

Oberoi:

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<sup>112</sup>Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 222. Mahārājā Duleep Singh was the son of Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh who is also known as the "Lion of the Punjab".

<sup>113</sup> See Singh, Harbans, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, p. 254.

<sup>114</sup> Singh, Gopal, *A History of the Sikh People*, p. 610.

A separatist 'Sikh history' was matched by a vigorous drive to establish distinct Sikh rituals and observations for life cycle ceremonies. This was furthered by the substitution of non-Sikh festivals by Sikh celebrations. Central to this concern with the rites of passage was the desire to rid Sikhism of all Brahmanical-Hinduized accretions.<sup>115</sup>

But diversity was present among the Singh Sabhās themselves. The earlier Sabhās of Amritsar differed from the later Sabhās of Lahore. Attempts at enforcing *Khālsā* ideals became noticeable among the *Khālsā Panth*.

After the annexation of the Punjab, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, is reported to have been impressed with the fighting qualities of Sikhs, thus encouraging Sikh enrolment into the British Army of the Raj.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, the barracks of the Raj were moved to the Punjab. Attentively, the British Army promoted enrolment of *amritdhārī* Sikhs, due to the aura of courage and bravery associated with the Five Ks. Significantly, "a Sikh recruit was asked to undergo the initiation rite, and it was mandatory for him to maintain the external symbols of the faith."<sup>117</sup> Thus, the British were, in effect, promoting Sikh identity as constituting the *amritdhārīs*. The Sikh community was indispensable to the Raj, which even enlisted the help of *granthīs* to administer *amrit* to new officers and to ensure no breach of the *Khālsā* symbols took place.<sup>118</sup> The British seemed truly to believe that the prowess of the Sikh was inseparable from his outward *Khālsā* appearance. Relationships between the *Tat Khālsā* and the Sikh soldiers increased impressively due to their shared ideals of the mark of a *true* Sikh.<sup>119</sup>

At around 1902-1903, a number of the Sabhās had affiliated into a central organization known as the Chief *Khālsā Dīwān*. Generally, the Chief *Khālsā Dīwān*, like the earlier Sabhās, tended to regard both *Khālsā* Sikhs and *sahajdhārīs* as

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<sup>115</sup>Oberoi, H. S. "A Historiographical and Bibliographical Reconstruction of the Singh Sabhā in Nineteenth Century Panjab" in *Journal of Sikh Studies*, 10 (1983): 120-1.

<sup>116</sup>Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 361.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 362, and for further details pp. 361-77.

Sikhs.<sup>120</sup> The later Singh Sabhās were responsible for the establishment of the *Tat Khālsā*, translated as "Pure Sikhs", which insisted on the identity of a Sikh as being a *Khālsā* Sikh.<sup>121</sup>

Importantly, the Singh Sabhā was not alone in attempting to revitalize the lapsed *Panth*. There were a number of movements that arose in the nineteenth century as the need towards adherence to Sikh teachings and principles became more necessary. Indeed, the rise of these movements suggests that a separate Sikh identity was not clear-cut, and that the continuation of the *Panth* was viewed as being in danger. Two such movements were the Nāmdhāris<sup>122</sup> and the Nirankārīs.<sup>123</sup> Both these groups, together with the Lahore Singh Sabhā, attempted to force the *Khālsā* Sikh identity on the *Panth*.

The year 1898 CE further heightened Sikh separatism -- this time legally. The issue concerned a gentleman, Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, who had converted to Sikhism before his death. After his death his wealth was left in a trust. His wife claimed that since he had died a Sikh, the Hindu law of inheritance no longer applied. The Punjab Court found itself in a dilemma in determining whether Sikhs were to be regarded as Hindus or as a separate faith.<sup>124</sup> The court's final decision that Sardar Majithia was in fact a Hindu must have engendered considerable disappointment among the *Tat Khālsā* leaders. On the other hand, it is probable that at this point in history many Sikh converts were adamant that they wished to be labelled as within the boundaries of Hinduism. It is true to say that, even to the present day, there are Sikhs who do not wish to create too much fuss over the issue of total separation from their

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<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 305-06. It is the influences of the Singh Sabhās, which formulated as the *Tat Khālsā*, that are echoed in the pages of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, issued by the SGPC at Amritsar in 1945.

<sup>122</sup>This group will be examined in chapter 4.

<sup>123</sup>Details regarding the Nirankārīs can be found above in section 1:4.

<sup>124</sup>See Jones, K. W. "Ham Hindu Nahin", p. 467.

Hindu background: this is bound to cause problems when discussing the overall question of Sikh identity.

The endeavour towards removing idol worship from Sikh holy places resulted in the fruitful removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple in 1905.<sup>125</sup> The *Tat Khālsā* firmly endorsed the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* as the basis of all religious practices; there were to be no *brāhmins* consulted in religious rites. All Sikhs, no matter from what *zāt*, were now to perform their own life-cycle rites in a specifically Sikh manner. Ultimately, religious diversity was not acceptable by the *Tat Khālsā*.<sup>126</sup>

Many Sikhs went their separate ways in not obeying all or some of the regulations stated by the *Tat Khālsā* -- eventually to be stated in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. Thus diversity within the *Panth* was far from completely obliterated. If a Sikh lives as required by the *Khālsā* code, then there is no doubt concerning who a Sikh is, that is, no question of being called a Hindu. But the problem of Sikh identity continued into the twentieth century with the need for the *Gurdwārās Act*, which enabled Sikhs to gain control of their own *gurdwārās*, and the need to be able to define their religion and, ultimately, themselves. Prior to the Act the definition of a Sikh was a wide one. It is the *Gurdwārās Act* of 1925 that, for the first time, defined a Sikh.

## **2:6 The Akali struggle and the *Gurdwārās Act* of 1925**

Large-scale persecution of Sikhs and their *granthīs* in the eighteenth century resulted in the management of individual *gurdwārās* coming under the control of those who were not necessarily strict adherents of the Sikh faith.<sup>127</sup> The *mahants* had become

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<sup>125</sup>See Oberoi, "A Historiographical and Bibliographical Reconstruction of the Singh Sabhā in Nineteenth Century Panjab", p. 126.

<sup>126</sup>See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 426.

<sup>127</sup>The *masands*, as mentioned already, had been abrogated by Gurū Gobind Singh; in their place arose the *mahants*, heads of religious establishments.

corrupt due to the large sums of money being offered by worshippers at the *gurdwārās*. Anti-Sikh practices were incorporated by the *mahants* into everyday worship.<sup>128</sup>

The *gurdwārā* holds great importance for a Sikh, since it is here that he/she can hear the sacred words of *gurbāṇī*, and it is here that the importance of the Sikh congregation, *saṅgat*, can be realized. The *gurdwārā* is a centre for Sikh identity where youngsters are made aware of their faith. Moreover, Sikh history recalls martyrs for the *gurdwārās*.<sup>129</sup> Therefore, misuse of the *gurdwārās* by *mahants* could not be tolerated by those who followed the teachings of the ten Gurūs. There was a danger of Sikhism being rapidly absorbed into Hinduism, and of the Sikhs losing their tenuous separate identity. The struggle to dismantle the authority of the *mahants* was led by the Akalis, the immortal Sikh Soldiers (sometimes also referred to as *Nihangs*).<sup>130</sup> The Akali movement was totally opposed to violence, all its protests and campaigns were carried out with a non-violent attitude.<sup>131</sup>

The Akali struggle, which lasted from 1920-1925, arose for two major reasons: first, to eradicate the misuse of authority by the *mahants* and, secondly, to

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<sup>128</sup>It is likely that they consumed alcohol while on holy premises and at many *gurdwārās* the young female attendants were often the victims of harassment. (See Singh, Mohinder [1978] *The Akali Movement*, Delhi: Macmillan, p. 23.) In short, the *mahants* and their *chelas* (followers) lived a life of luxury and immorality. Successorship in the hands of the *mahants* encouraged belief that a particular *gurdwārā* was by right their very own possession. Sikhs were openly insulted in their places of worship; for example one particular *mahant* is believed to have threatened the people by proposing to mix tobacco into the sacred food. (See Singh, Teja, *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, p. 103).

<sup>129</sup>A famous legendary example is that of Bābā Deep Singh who, on his way towards saving Amritsar from the Muslims, received a severe blow to his head. Legend has it that this did not stop him from proceeding towards Amritsar, carrying his head in one hand and his sword in the other.

<sup>130</sup>The *Nihangs* have been previously highlighted in section 1.4. Previous attempts to restore the Sikh faith to its purity, as taught by the Sikh Gurūs, had been led by movements such as the Nāmdhāris, Nirankāris and the Singh Sabhā, and it has been suggested that the Akali struggle for reform in the *gurdwārās* had arisen from these provincial movements. (See Singh, Mohinder, *The Akali Movement*, p. 5).

<sup>131</sup>The Babbar Akali movement is a group of militant Sikhs, who broke away from the Akalis. They are seen as nationalists, who are often confused with the peaceful Akalis due to the similarity in costume of both groups. The Babbar Akalis are a later development and should be regarded as being separate from the peaceful struggle of the Akalis.

revolt against the British government which was giving its support to the *mahants* and denying Sikhs the right to manage their own *gurdwārās*. The British government had appointed its own managers, often *mahants*, to control the main *gurdwārās*.<sup>132</sup> The *mahants* were destroying the nature and identity of the Sikh faith by allowing immoral and anti-Sikh practices to take place in the *gurdwārās*, and the government was, in effect, refusing Sikhs control over their religious matters. Therefore, double opposition from the British and the corrupt *mahants* necessitated the Sikhs uniting as one in their struggle for reform and control of their *gurdwārās*.

The Akalis recognized the need for a central authority that would manage the running of major *gurdwārās*. This was later to be fulfilled by the Shromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, which elected its nine members of committee on September 1921 inviting correspondence from prospective delegates. Delegates were required to satisfy the following conditions:

- (1) He must have received *Amrit* or baptism,
- (2) must be a regular reader of the scriptures,
- (3) must possess the five Ks,
- (4) must be an early riser, and
- (5) must be giving 1/10th of his income regularly for the *panthic* cause.<sup>133</sup>

Controlling the *gurdwārās* and removing all anti-Sikh rituals from Sikh worship were the main goals of the SGPC.

The Akalis' peaceful stance when struggling for *gurdwārā* reform is highlighted in what is known as the Nankanā Tragedy.<sup>134</sup> The incident to which it

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<sup>132</sup>The Akalis were fighting a two-way struggle: against the *mahants*, and against the British government that was interfering in the religious affairs of the Sikhs with the aim of gaining supreme authority over Sikh *gurdwārās*. In the *gurdwārās* themselves there were Hindu and Sikh rituals taking place side-by-side and, as Teja Singh aptly comments, "any reasonable man will admit that it is impossible to perform both Hindu and Sikh rituals in the same temple" (Singh, Teja, *The Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, p. 199).

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113. The author uses sexist language and thus, in his writings, suggests that prospective candidature only applied to males.

<sup>134</sup>Immoral practices were taking place at the *gurdwārā* in Nankanā where devotees were being harassed by the *mahant*, Narain Das. Narain Das, retained his authority in the *gurdwārā* due to the government backing he received. He refused to give in to the SGPC, arranged for a gathering of

refers, took place at Nankanā, the birthplace of Gurū Nānak, and marks a significant turning point in the Akali Movement. The Akali struggle for *gurdwārā* reform against the British government was also the issue of the Keys Affair. Although the management of the Amritsar Golden Temple, the *Akal Takhi*<sup>135</sup> and adjoining *gurdwārās* had come under the control of the SGPC in October 1920, the keys to the Golden Temple were retained by the government.<sup>136</sup> This could not be tolerated by the Akalis who demanded that the keys be given to Sikhs themselves. Eventually the government handed the keys over to the SGPC. After the Akalis had taken control of another *gurdwārā*, referred to as *Gurū-kā-bāgh*, they had won their second victory

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*mahants*, and stimulated *mahant* propaganda against the SGPC. Narain Das used the excuse of self-defence and labelled the peaceful Akalis as extremists who intended to attack the *gurdwāra*. He secretly began to gather weapons to use against the pacifist Akalis. A meeting was arranged between the Akalis and Narain Das for 4 March 1921, on which day a *jathā* (group) of Akalis, who eagerly wanted to pay their respects at the *gurdwārā* at Nankanā, marched on ahead and arrived at Nankanā on 19 February 1921. Narain Das was under the impression that all the Akalis had reached Nankanā and that this was, therefore, the perfect opportunity to destroy the opposition. The *jathā* was so engrossed in singing religious hymns that they were unaware the gates behind them had been shut, and that they had been trapped by Narain Das and his armed men. The *jathā* was fired upon and not one of its members survived the insane attack. The Akalis peacefully became martyrs. Narain Das was arrested, further proceeding towards Nankanā, by the Akalis, was initially impeded by the commissioner; but he could not stop the Akalis, who eventually took control of the *gurdwārā*. The result was that other *mahants* surrendered to the Akalis and accepted the authority of the SGPC to whom the keys of the *gurdwārās* were given. This attack at Nankanā awakened in Sikhs an awareness of the urgency to gain control of their places of worship (see Singh, Mohinder, *The Akali Movement*, p. 35). The government's involvement at Nankanā cannot be overestimated: it wanted to retain its control over the *gurdwārās*, but rather than coming into direct confrontation with the Sikhs, used the *mahants* as a means. Overall expulsion of the *mahants* was not possible until the government withdrew its support from them; indeed, Mohinder Singh states that the *mahants* were being legally backed by the government to stay in the *gurdwārās* (*ibid.*, p. 26).

<sup>135</sup>The highest worldly authority in Sikhism.

<sup>136</sup>The president of the SGPC had asked Sardar Sunder Singh Ramgharia, the government-appointed manager, to hand over the keys of the *gurdwārā* to him. There was a great disturbance among the Akalis when they discovered that the deputy commissioner had sent his men to Ramgharia's house to collect the keys. Protests were carried out by the Akalis that subsequently resulted in a whole group of Akalis being arrested. The government's actions in taking the keys were the cause of much agitation. The government knew fully that once total authority was given to the Akalis, the SGPC would have total dominance among the Sikhs in the Punjab. Sikhs were encouraged not to come to any compromise with the government over the Keys Affair until all Akalis held in prison were released. Negotiations on the part of the British proved futile, they had finally to give in to the Akalis and release all arrested members unconditionally. The Akalis had defeated the government on this issue and effectively gained total control over the Golden Temple. Mahatma Gandhi expressed his joy on this occasion and sent the following telegram to the president of the SGPC: "First battle for India's freedom won. Congratulations." (See Singh, Mohinder, *The Akali Movement*, p. 47). The British suffered a considerable loss of prestige over the Keys Affair since it was a British officer himself who travelled to the president of the SGPC to hand over the keys.



over the government and were on their way to a complete reformation of the Sikh *gurdwārās* and, thus, towards their task of giving the Sikhs an identity of their own.

### **2:6:1 The Shromani Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee**

The authority of the SGPC to control the major *gurdwārās* was finally realized. The peaceful struggle of the Akalis for *gurdwārā* reform ended on 6 August 1925, with the Sikh *Gurdwārās* and Shrines Act being enforced on 1 November 1925. The major aims of the SGPC were:

- (i) to bring the Sikh religious places under *panthic* control and management,
- (ii) to do away with the permanent position of the *Mahants*, thus ending their irresponsibility,
- (iii) to utilise the property and income of the *Gurdwārās* for the purposes for which they were founded, and
- (iv) to practise the Sikh religion according to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus as preserved in the *Adi Granth*.<sup>137</sup>

The *Sikh Gurdwārās Act* of 1925 defined a Sikh as follows:

'Sikh' means a person who professes the Sikh religion or, in the case of a deceased person, who professed the Sikh religion or was known to be a Sikh during his lifetime.<sup>138</sup>

If any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he shall be deemed respectively to be or not to be a Sikh according as he makes or refuses to make in such manner as the State Government may prescribe the following declaration:

*I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion.*<sup>139</sup>

So for twenty years -- that is, until the definition of a Sikh as stated in the *Rehat Maryādā* in 1945, the definition of a Sikh was a broad one, with no pronounced emphasis on outward forms. Rather, it stressed a Sikh as being one who accepted the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and believed in the ten Gurūs. *Khālsā* observation, therefore, was not prompted until 1945. A significant reason for this more overt *Khālsā* orientation

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<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>138</sup>It seems peculiar to draw reference to the "Sikhness" of a deceased person. However, there must have been an apparent reason. One suggestion is that, since by 1925 the majority of Sikhs were so by convention, it was necessary to determine whose ancestors were Sikhs and whose non-Sikh.

<sup>139</sup> Amritsar *Rehat Maryada*, (1978) Amritsar: SGPC, p. 25.

may be attributed to the fact that Sikhs were continually being referred to as a sect of Hindus, necessitating the outward form, as instituted by Gurū Gobind Singh, being enforced on Sikh followers. This seems to suggest that the issue of Sikh identity was, indeed, becoming more critical towards the mid-twentieth century, and caused the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to impose a stronger awareness of the *Khalsā* signs.

It must be said that the *Gurdwaras Act* came into existence as the result of the Akalis' awareness of the external threats to Sikhism, especially from the corrupt practices of the *mahants*. A forceful assertion of Sikh identity was needed because it was felt that Sikhism was gradually being absorbed into Hinduism. Therefore, in addition to defining who a Sikh was, it was also necessary to define the beliefs of a Sikh, which were becoming continually obscured with the practices of two religions being performed at the same time in the same shrine. Sikhism and its followers needed to be defined for the survival of the Sikh faith among future generations. Accordingly, Sikh associations such as the Akalis and the *Tat Khalsā*, along with prominent scholars, decided to formulate a set of rules and regulations according to which all followers of the Sikh faith should behave and live. These rules were collectively gathered and approved by the SGPC on 3 February 1945 and formed the *Rehat Maryādā*, a guide to how a *Khalsā* Sikh should behave and live.<sup>140</sup> The *Rehat Maryādā*, therefore, as previously indicated, reflects a strong influence of the ideals of the *Tat Khalsā*, as well as the Akali movement. The ensuing section aims to assess the role of the *Rehat Maryādā* in the lives of Sikhs.

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<sup>140</sup>See Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, p. 200.

## 2:7 The case for corporate identity: the *Rehat Maryādā*

The *Rehat Maryādā* is authoritative in defining who a Sikh is. It is in the *Rehat Maryādā* that the definition of a Sikh, first stated in the *Gurdwārās Act 1925*, becomes more developed. It is important to reiterate here is that the precedent for the majority of the *rahit* was set out by Gurū Gobind Singh when he initiated the *pāñj pyāre* at the first *Khālsā* ceremony. By making the *pāñj pyāre* drink from the same vessel, Gurū Gobind Singh emphasized the idea of equality among the Sikh followers and this suggests a certain levelling and conformity in the issue of identity. I now want to turn to the important question of how far the *Tat Khālsā* ideal succeeded in creating uniformity of the *Panth*. The standard set by the *Rehat Maryādā* came to impose, in aspiration, corporate identity on the Sikhs. This identity today, states that it is the *amritdhārī* who is a *true* Sikh. Therefore, the *amritdhārīs* -- who are required to follow stringently the *Rehat Maryādā* -- have come to constitute the *Khālsā* elite in the *Panth*. The way forward for each individual, according to the *Khālsā*, therefore, is to follow the *Rehat Maryādā* as strictly as possible.

The prominence of the *Rehat Maryādā* lies in the fact that it is consulted whenever there is uncertainty concerning how a religious ceremony should be correctly performed. Additionally, the correct performance of ceremonies, as corroborated in the *Rehat Maryādā*, is also followed by non-*Khālsā* Sikhs. *Sahajdhārī* Sikhs undergo the *anand karāj* ceremony when getting married, and will follow the life-cycle rites as sanctioned in the pages of the *Rehat Maryādā*. In this respect therefore, the *Rehat Maryādā* crosses the boundaries of being important and exclusive to the *amritdhārīs* only. It is regarded as a guide by non-*Khālsā* Sikhs also and, therefore, is certainly relevant for them -- though to what degree, is pertinent to my investigation here. A central area of consideration with regard to the utilization of

the *Rehat Maryādā* by non-*Khālsā* Sikhs, therefore, is to what extent the *Khālsā* code constitutes correct behaviour in *their* view or, conversely, how far is there a degree of laxity in observance of the *Rehat Maryādā* by the majority of Sikhs.

Influenced by Punjabi culture, Sikhs maintain certain superstitious trends in everyday demeanour. For example, although the *Rehat Maryādā* denounces superstition (pp. 6 and 12), it is considered inauspicious to sneeze prior to an important event. Additionally, certain days of the week are not suitable for washing the hair. The mother pours oil in the doorway to welcome her son and his newly-wed bride. The same groom will undergo the *anand karāj* ceremony as prescribed in the *Rehat Maryādā*, and will then, first at his bride's home, and then at his parent's home, be blessed by the auspicious oil-pouring ritual. It would appear that these superstitions are influenced by continued Sikh participation in the "enchanted universe" noted above -- the very non-Sikh behaviour which the *Tat Khālsā* had aimed to put an end to in order to promote a distinct Sikh identity.

These are merely some examples amongst many where both adherence to, and neglect of, the *Rehat Maryādā* takes place side-by-side, by the majority of Sikhs, and illustrates that Punjabi customs obtain alongside, yet without backing from, the *Rehat Maryādā*. Therefore, it is true to say for the moment that, being a Sikh -- uninitiated or *amritdhārī* -- may not suggest being totally focused on the entire aspirations of the *Tat Khālsā* leaders. Therefore, *Khālsā* stringency, as established in the epoch of the *Tat Khālsā*, cannot be the sole criterion in terms of investigating who is a Sikh on an all-encompassing level. Other themes must be considered such as the Punjabi culture and ethnicity that form the backbone of everyday Sikh social behaviour.

The SGPC is responsible for managing *gurdwārās* in Punjab and Haryana, it has also had a degree of influence over Sikh religious places in the diaspora. The

SGPC is the “statutory committee set up by the Punjab government.”<sup>141</sup> In the *Rehat Maryādā*, the SGPC defines a Sikh as follows:

- (a) He should worship only one God, and should not indulge in any form of idol worship.
- (b) Live a life based on the teachings of the ten Gurus, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, and other scriptures and teachings of the Gurus.
- (c) Sikhs should believe in the Oneness of the ten Gurus, That is, that a single soul or entity existed in the ten Gurus.
- (d) A Sikh should have no belief in caste, black magic, superstitious practices; such as the seeking of auspicious moments, eclipses, the practices of feeding Brahmans in the belief that the food will reach one’s ancestors, ancestor’s (*sic*) worship, fasting at different phases of the moon, the wearing of sacred threads and similiar rituals. . . .
- (i) Sikhs should not cut their children’s hair. Boys are to be given the name Singh and girls the name of Kaur.
- (j) Sikhs should not partake of alcohol, tobacco, drugs or other intoxicants....
- (q) A Sikh should live his whole life according to the tenets of his faith....
- (t) Any clothing may be worn by a Sikh, provided it includes a turban (for males) and a Knicker (*Kachh*) a similar garment.<sup>142</sup>

It must be noted that the above definition of a Sikh applies to the *amritdhārī* who is, thus, a *Khālsā* member. But does one who does not obey all of the requirements still qualify as a Sikh? This is where the problems arise. Individuals may cut their hair, but still regard themselves as Sikhs: when judged by the yardstick of the *Rehat Maryādā* however, they are *not* Sikh. And if this is the case, what are they? It is understandable that the *Khālsā*, with its outward recognition, was seen as a necessary institution made by Gurū Gobind Singh in the face of late seventeenth-century situations of the Punjab. Additionally, as seen above, the *Khālsā* way of life was further promoted by the *Tat Khālsā* in order to prevent the absorption of Sikhs into Hinduism. Today, however, the *Khālsā* regulation should not, I believe, be too binding on Sikh identity to the extent that it alienates a large portion of the *Panth*.

The prominent feature of the *Rehat Maryādā* is that it promotes specifically Sikh-orientated practices for followers of the Sikh Gurūs. It is important, therefore,

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<sup>141</sup> McLeod, *Sikhism*, p. 305.

<sup>142</sup> *Amritsar Rehat Maryada*, pp. 12-13. Here, again, one witnesses the use of sexist language in the *Rehat Maryādā* which appears to be defining male Sikhs, rather than incorporating both males and females.

because it aims to establish a distinct Sikh identity, dealing with spiritual as well as practical matters. It supports egalitarian principles in its denouncing of the caste system (pp. 7 and 11) and stresses the irrelevancy of ritual and superstitious practices (p. 12). The *Rehat Maryādā* is also a spiritual guide, it states: "A Sikh should live his whole life according to the tenets of his faith" (p. 13). It is essential that *amritdhārī* Sikhs do not cut the hair, must at all times wear the Five Ks and, amongst other regulations, rise before dawn. An *amritdhārī* who has defied the rules of the *Rehat Maryādā* becomes a *patit* and, therefore, no longer a *true* Sikh. This, then, would apply to any *amritdhārī* Sikh who cuts his or her hair. The *patit* must retake *amrit* if he or she is to become an initiated member of the community again. A *sahajdhārī* Sikh basically refers to a non-*Khālsā* Sikh, one who has not been initiated. Here, the *Rehat Maryādā* does depict the *sahajdhārī* as a Sikh, but as one who has not yet taken formal initiation into the *Khālsā*, though he or she follows the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs.

The position of the SGPC towards *kesdhārīs* is not very clear. A *kesdhārī* Sikh is one who, although keeping the *kes*, has not taken *amrit* and is, therefore, under no obligation to obey the rules of the *Rehat Maryādā* but follows so many of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs. It appears that the *Rehat Maryādā* views their position as neither here nor there. A *kesdhārī*, if not *amritdhārī*, is not eligible for elections of the SGPC members, neither is the *kesdhārī* to be co-opted as a member of the SGPC.<sup>143</sup> These roles can only be undertaken by an *amritdhārī* Sikh. Furthermore, a definition of a *kesdhārī* is not cited in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. One could deduce, therefore, that displaying the *Khālsā* symbols without having taken initiation are to no avail in the view of the SGPC. It follows on that it is, indeed, *only* the *amritdhārī* who

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<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

is a proper Sikh. The category or, rather, the lack of definition of what a *kesdhārī* is according to the SGPC, demonstrates very well the inability to define who a Sikh is - bearing in mind that the majority of the *Panth* fall into this category.

The aspiration of the writers of the *Rehat Maryādā*, nevertheless, is that one-day the *sahajdhārī* will be initiated and become an *amritdhārī*, therefore a *true* Sikh. The *Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Act* of 1971 defines a *sahajdhārī* as a person:

- (i) Who professes Sikh religion, believes in one God, follows the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and the Ten Gurus only;
- (ii) Who performs all ceremonies according to Sikh rites;
- (iii) Who does not smoke, use tobacco, kutha (Halal Meat) in any forms;
- (iv) Who does not take alcoholic in any forms drinks (*sic*);
- (v) Who is born in not Sikh family (*sic*), but not a Patit.<sup>144</sup>

Clearly, this is not suggesting that a *sahajdhārī* is *not* a Sikh. Similarly, and interestingly, Bhāi Harbans Lal attributes the term *sahajdhārī* to all Sikhs. He remarks that the meaning of the term *sahajdhārī* depicts one "Who has achieved the state of Sahaj, which is a state of tranquility, bliss."<sup>145</sup>

But initiation is important: it is believed to help one on the path to salvation, thus the fate of those who are neither initiated nor keep the *kes* indicates no possible chance of *mukti*. The argument from the *Khālsā* point of view is that being a Sikh is to love all that the Gurus have instituted -- including the *Khālsā*. In the view of *amritdhārīs*, had it not been for the Five Ks, for the outward distinct Sikh identity, Sikhism would probably have been absorbed into Hinduism a long time ago. The *Tat Khālsā*, as already stated, aimed at promoting this Sikh distinction by emphasizing the Five Ks and the need to become *amritdhārī*. But a central question pertaining from the Singh Sabhā period through to the present day is, who has authority in defining a Sikh? According to the precepts of *Khālsā* Sikhism, being *gurmukh* without being an *amritdhārī* is not enough to qualify an individual for a possible union with God. On

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<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>145</sup>Lal, B. H. "Sahajdhari Sikhs: Their Origin and Current Status within the Panth" p. 110.

the other hand, in popular opinion, *kesdhārī* Sikhs are seen to occupy a halfway position between the *amritdhārīs* and *sahajdhārīs*. Most would regard them as Sikhs. Thus there is a marked similarity between the *amritdhārī* and the *kesdhārī*, both prominently displaying the characteristic feature of a Sikh, the turban. However, the *kesdhārī* is in sharp contrast to the *monā*, who is a shaven Sikh.

The turban itself is an object of great prestige in the eyes of a Sikh. The purpose of the turban, as pointed out by Cole and Sambhi, is symbolic rather than functional.<sup>146</sup> It is inevitable that in Sikhism the turban and *kanghā* are inseparably bound with initiation and, therefore, the *kes*.<sup>147</sup> The Sikh's right to wearing a turban has widely been recognized outside India. Since wearing the turban is essential to an *amritdhārī* Sikh, efforts of legislation in Britain to prevent it being worn whilst riding a motorbike, and the compulsory use of a crash-helmet, were strongly opposed by members of the Sikh community.<sup>148</sup>

Nevertheless, there is clearly a case for a broader definition of a Sikh if one is to look at the evidence of the earliest stage of Sikhism. In the period of the *Nānak Panth*, as has been suggested above, there was no emphasis on a distinct external identity for followers of Gurū Nānak. As McLeod states: "What is certain is that many who claim to be Sikhs will continue to cut their hair, leaving us with the

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<sup>146</sup>Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, p. 117.

<sup>147</sup>The display of different colours of turbans is purely each individual's personal preference: the colours do not really have significance -- apart from a yellow turban symbolizing the *Khālsā*, which is worn at the annual festival of *baisākhī*. Additionally, a red or pink turban is worn by the Sikh bridegroom.

<sup>148</sup> With the considerable help and support of the MP of Ealing and Southall, Mr Sydney Bidwell, the Sikhs won their battle with the government, and were able to wear the turban instead of the crash helmet. The *Road Traffic Act* of 1972 was thus amended in 1976 to allow the Sikhs a Religious Exemption from the Act. The *Motor-Cycle Crash-Helmets (Religious Exemption) Act* 1976 thus read as follows: 1. In section 32 of the Road Traffic Act 1972 there shall be inserted after subsection (2) the following new subsection:- "(2A) A requirement imposed by regulations under this section (whenever made) shall not apply to any follower of the Sikh religion while he is wearing a turban." 2. This Act may be cited as the *Motor-Cycle Crash-Helmets (Religious Exemption) Act* 1976. Bidwell, S. (1987) *The Turban Victory*, London: The Sikh Missionary Society UK, p. 67.



problem of how to frame a definition which accommodates both the strict *khalsa* and those who in practice set aside the *Rahit*."<sup>149</sup>

## **2:8 The situation in Britain in the twentieth century**

I have briefly indicated above the difficulty in classifying *all* followers of the Sikh faith under one overall definition. The problem of Sikh identity is highlighted by McLeod: "Sikh identity cannot be described with the ease or clarity which so commonly we assume. Paradoxically it is the increasingly clear definition of Sikh identity which produces an increasingly acute problem of identity."<sup>150</sup> The "acute" problem of identity pointed out by McLeod is concerned with two important factors -- immigration from the Punjab<sup>151</sup> and its concomitant problems associated with employment where it is not always possible for Sikhs to retain their *outward* identity and, also, the changed attitudes of Sikhs overseas. These two basic factors suggest a need for the redefining of the boundaries of Sikh identity. For the earlier migrants maintaining the *Khālsā* form of religion was not a primary issue; they had come to Britain to make money and had hoped to return to India. In some respects, therefore, the *Khālsā* orientation of the *Rehat Maryādā* has been challenged by migrants. Nevertheless, their *spiritual* reverence towards *gurbāṇī* did not necessarily encounter any changes.

One of the major reasons for the earlier Sikh settlers in Britain having to cut their *kes* -- and thus depart from *Khālsā* appearance -- was the need to find employment. The issue of employment was the main reason for leaving the Punjab: religion in this respect, especially outward identity, had to take a backseat for a while, or at least until the immigrant had established himself and sent for his family to join

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<sup>149</sup> McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?* p. 113.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> The Punjab, which is situated in Northern India, is the homeland of the Sikhs, it is here that the foundations of the Sikh faith originated and developed. "Punjab" is translated as the "land of the five rivers", the rivers of Ravi, Jhelum, Chanab, Sutlej and Beas.

him in Britain. New arrivals from India were influenced by earlier migrants to have their *kes* cut as Cole and Sambhi point out: "Some migrant Sikhs made the error of cutting their hair and abandoning the turban when they arrived from India, being assured by Sikhs already there that they would not find employment otherwise."<sup>152</sup> Cole and Sambhi suggest it *was* an "error" and, indeed, many Sikhs felt it spiritually so. But it was because of the Sikh's outward identity that he was a victim of discrimination. Indeed, earlier immigrants were rarely able to take action against prospective employers in defence of their *kes*, turban, or any other issues, primarily because of the lack of ability to communicate efficiently with non-Asians. On the whole, nevertheless, earlier migrants felt a need to conform to western society.

As time went on they saw Britain as a permanent residence, and subsequently called the remainder of the family to come to Britain.<sup>153</sup> The atmosphere of the Punjabi village was being created among the Sikh communities in Britain. Ballard aptly states that: "As a result, and almost unbeknown to themselves, sojourners were gradually being transformed into settlers."<sup>154</sup> But when the family as a unit migrated, those who had been in Britain longer were sometimes encouraged by newly-arrived migrants to readopt *Khālsā* practices,<sup>155</sup> thus recreating an awareness of their Sikh identity, *externally*, as well as spiritually. For others, the opposite influence occurred and migrants were encouraged to abandon external signs of their faith and culture, although retaining the *spiritual*.

Racism encountered by the early immigrants constantly made them aware of their separate identity.<sup>156</sup> Employers had no understanding of eastern religions and

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<sup>152</sup>Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, p. 194.

<sup>153</sup>Ballard, Roger (1989) "Differentiation and Disjunction Amongst the Sikhs in Britain", in Barrier, N. G. and Dusenbery, V. A. *The Sikh Diaspora*, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, pp. 208-9.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>156</sup> Although, they were British, as commonwealth citizens.

were therefore ignorant of the needs of Sikhs: they could not understand the religious significance of uncut hair or the need to maintain the wearing of the turban. But this raises a crucial and controversial issue as to whether the Sikhs who had to cut their hair in order to find employment could be regarded as Sikhs or not. It is clear from within the Sikh community itself that most migrants would have unequivocally stressed their Sikh status as expressed *internally*: that is, they would have continued to follow the teachings of the ten Gurūs in regard to spiritual aspects of the religion, despite abandoning external symbols. There was an intention among these Sikhs that one day they would either return to the Punjab, and therefore resume their outward identity or, on securing their future prospects, would again begin to grow their hair. In any case early Sikh immigrants accepted uncut hair as indicative of their strength and masculinity, a point noted by Helweg.<sup>157</sup> Thus, they would not have been prepared to cut it for anything less than a very exigent purpose -- in most cases, employment. It was probably as the consequence of families reuniting once the myth of return had been abandoned, that the newly arrived women orientated their family members towards traditional Sikh values once again. Importantly, I suggest here, spiritual conformity to the principles of the Sikh faith was not compromised. Thus, the question arises, is the standard set by the *Rehat Maryādā* fair to those who remained *spiritually* faithful to Sikh principles and, to British-born Sikhs who inherited a lessened emphasis on outward symbols?

Today, many Sikhs born outside India, in countries like Britain, no longer see the importance of keeping the hair unshorn. These individuals may, nevertheless, be well versed in Sikh philosophy and may be devout followers of the Sikh religion: is it fair to say, then, that they are not Sikhs because of their outward appearance? On the

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<sup>157</sup> Helweg, A. W. (1979) *Sikhs in England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3.

other hand the majority of Punjabi Sikhs are born into their faith and have not accepted Sikhism through personal choice (unlike, for example, the majority of the *gorā* Sikhs).<sup>158</sup> Being Sikhs by convention renders it difficult for many young Punjabi Sikhs to establish exactly why they are following the teachings of the ten Gurūs in an internalized sense. Some parents do not keep outward symbols and do not familiarize their children with their faith -- and this is a particular problem outside the Punjab -- but they still regard themselves as Sikh. So, many British-born Sikh children are told that they are Sikhs without knowing what it *really* entails. Furthermore, being brought up in a country anywhere in the world will inevitably have an impact on the individual: whereas the first migrants to Britain saw it as an opportunity for future prospects only, British-born Sikhs are obviously in a firmer position to regard Britain as their native country. Dharam expresses the concern that those Sikhs -- especially the younger generation -- who do not keep the outward form of the *Khālsā*, will eventually break away completely from Sikhism.<sup>159</sup>

Here I come to the essence of the rather particular and urgent problem: should the definition of a Sikh be less *Khālsā* orientated so that it can take into consideration the influences of western society on the younger generation in particular, or, should it retain its *Khālsā* orientation in order to preserve the essence of what a Sikh really is outwardly and inwardly in the face of possible dilution of Sikh culture and meaning? Sikhs themselves clearly recognize the problems associated with maintaining the *Khālsā* appearance, as Ballard states:

In every gurdwara the *gyanis* continuously and repeatedly stress that young Sikhs must remain orthodox if their religion, community, and culture is to be preserved. While some British-born Sikhs have indeed become religious enthusiasts, most, to the disappointment of the *gyanis*, have remained skeptical about taking aboard all the practices routinely advocated. But this does not mean

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<sup>158</sup> This group will be examined in detail in chapter 7.

<sup>159</sup> Dharam, S. S. (1986) *Internal and External Threats to Sikhism*, USA: Gurmat Publishers, pp. v-vi.

that most young people have ceased to take an interest in Sikhism. Rather there are now considerable inter-generational differences between parents and their children over just what they expect from their religion and traditions.<sup>160</sup>

It follows on therefore, that British-born Sikhs are interpreting their faith differently from their parents and/or grandparents. This does not mean that the younger generation, as a whole, does not necessarily have pride in its heritage.

The diaspora illustrates well the internal issues relating to the *Panth* as a whole. For example, the issuing of a *hukamnāmā*<sup>161</sup> from the *Akal Takht* for *laṅgar* to be eaten whilst sitting on the floor was taken seriously by many *gurdwārās* in the diaspora. It must be taken into account that, unlike *gurdwārās* in India, *gurdwārās* in the diaspora are often accustomed to having tables and chairs in the dining areas. Nevertheless, *gurdwārās* in the diaspora were affected by the *hukamnāmā*, resulting in many removing tables and chairs from the *laṅgar* areas. Another internal pressure on the Sikh diaspora is the concern whether to conduct services from English translations of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* for the benefit of British-born Sikhs who are not fluent in Punjabi. This also has its implications for the *gorā* Sikhs. It is well to remember that, although the total diaspora is around two million out of the total sixteen million followers of Sikhism, the diaspora raises issues relating to Sikh identity that affects the *Panth* as a whole.

Surprisingly, a *gurdwārā* in South Wales no longer requires elected members to observe the external signs of Sikh identity.<sup>162</sup> On the other hand many *gurdwārās*

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<sup>160</sup> Ballard, "Differentiation and Disjunction Amongst the Sikhs in Britain" p. 227.

<sup>161</sup> A letter of instruction issued on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1998.

<sup>162</sup> The election of members for a *gurdwārā* committee is usually decided by its constitution. The constitution of the Sikh *gurdwārā*, Pearl Street, Cardiff, for example, though not defining a Sikh, accepts that a Sikh is one who believes in the teachings of the ten Gurūs and who meditates on God's Name. It does not appear to stress the fact that a Sikh must be one who has been initiated and therefore is *amritdhārī*, or should keep the *kes* (*Constitution, Sikh Gurdwara, Pearl Street, Cardiff*, [1983], p. 4.) While members whose conduct is seen to be harmful to the Sikh community will be asked to leave, outward criteria such as the *kes* are not required for those eligible for election. This is a good example of a practising Sikh community that does not place great emphasis on the external symbols of Sikhism but, rather, stresses the inward faith and inculcation of Sikh values.

in highly Sikh populated areas, such as that of the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā, do insist on members of the committee -- and especially *granthīs* -- being members of the *Khālsā* and observing every rule, thus strengthening Sikh identity in the diaspora. Indeed, this group, as will be examined, places utmost importance on the *Khālsā* and envisages all its members, especially the younger generation, adopting the *Khālsā* form. In sharp contrast however, are the Ravidāsī and Vālmīki communities who place no pronounced significance on the *Khālsā*; these implications are studied in detail in the relevant chapters below.

At present, no other definition of a Sikh than that contained in the *Rehat Maryādā* is seen as authoritative. But using this alone as a criterion for assessing the "Sikhness" of particular groups, is not adequate enough. In the analysis of Sikh groups in Britain that have sprung from Sikh influence, and which now follows in the succeeding chapters, I intend to use broader criteria and discussion, since this will enable me to assess the importance of the *Rehat Maryādā* in issues of Sikh identity. These criteria will be:

- To analyse how far each group conforms to *Khālsā* ideals laid down in the *Rehat Maryādā*.
- To examine the extent to which a group places supremacy on belief in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the ten Gurūs, and to examine the extent to which other scriptures -- and indeed other gurūs and leaders -- are attributed importance.
- To assess the extent to which beliefs and practices inform the identity of the group as Sikh, as more orientated to being defined as Hindu, or as neither Sikh nor Hindu, but having a separate and distinct identity.
- To relate the data found into standardized tables for the beliefs and practices in Sikhism in the case of each movement. This will enable me to assess whether the characteristics of each movement are essentially in line with Sikh belief and practice, as accepted by the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, or not. Beliefs and practices specific *only* to the group studied will also be tabulated.

- To examine the particular position on *zāt* within each group, and to investigate the extent to which groups have a specific caste following. Retaining caste distinctions is against the teachings of the Gurūs and a rejection of the ideals of *Khālsā* initiation.

It has been indicated in this research so far that there are many varieties of Sikhs in the *Panth*. I intend to examine this variety by looking at five different groups in order to assess their contributions to Sikh identity. I begin by looking at the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā in the following chapter. The criteria I establish for assessing Sikh identity with regard to the beliefs and practices of each group studied, and that are briefly outlined in chapter one, will be in the form of two separate tables as below. Categories chosen are informed by essential beliefs from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and common and traditional practices that would be considered correct behaviour in accordance with the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

<i>Belief found in Sikh religion</i>	<i>Present among the group being studied</i>	<i>Absent among the group being studied</i>
Monotheism		
Absolute is <i>nirguṇa</i>		
<i>Saguna</i> essence of God is present in creation		
Panentheistic concept of the divine		
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself		
Predestination		
Total reliance on God		
Human birth as highest		
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God		
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>		
Becoming a <i>jīvaṅmukt</i> is the ideal		
Detachment from worldly lures		
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire		
Advocation of <i>bhakti</i>		
Interiorized religion		
Rejection of image worship		
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>		
Rejection of yogic practices		
Worthlessness of rituals		
<i>Nām simran</i>		
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>		
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>		
Company of the <i>satsaṅgat</i> is essential		

**Table 1. Conformity of beliefs found among the group studied and the general *Panth*.**



<i>Sikh Practice</i>	<i>Present among the group being studied</i>	<i>Absent among the group being studied</i>
Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship		
The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief		
<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>		
Singing of <i>kīrtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>		
Recitation of <i>ardās</i> during worship		
Performance of <i>akhand pāths</i>		
<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs		
Serving of <i>gurū-kā-laṅgar</i>		
Distribution of <i>prasād</i>		
Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>		
Importance of the Sikh Gurūs		
Prominence of the <i>Khandā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol		
Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony		
Emphasis on the Five Ks		
Emphasis on being <i>kesdhārī</i>		
Traditional Punjabi dress for females		
Requirement for males and females to cover their heads		
Celebration of the <i>gurburbs</i>		
Celebration of <i>baisākhī</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>		
Celebration of <i>dīwālī</i> as the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison		
Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>		
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhī</i>		
Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khandā</i>		
Endogamous marriages		

**Table 2. Conformity of practices found among the group studied and the general *Panth*.**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### *Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā*

### 3:1 A brief outline of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā

The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā<sup>1</sup> is a group that places noticeable emphasis on a specific *Sant* following, unique to the group. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is also interesting because of its mainly *rāmgarhīā* Sikh following. This immediately raises the need for inquiry as to whether the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā lives up to the ideal of an egalitarian society as emphasized by the Sikh Gurūs. The group itself came into existence as a consequence of the efforts of its founder, Sant Puran Singh, who had migrated to East Africa from India. Thus, a significant proportion of followers -- the majority of whom, as stated, are *rāmgarhīā* -- also have an East African connection.<sup>2</sup> The ethnic origin of *all* followers is Punjabi. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is a reform group dedicated to the religious revival of the diaspora Sikh community by performing mass *amrit* ceremonies. It is the degree of its acceptance of *Sants* that will be of particular interest in studying the beliefs and practices of this group, and the light this characteristic sheds on issues of Sikh identity. The followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā adhere to the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurūs, as well as the teachings and commands of their spiritual leader, Sant Puran Singh. Moreover, they show full respect for the tenets of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. The main aim of the organization is for the *sangat*, the congregation, to follow the teachings of Gurū Nānak and for all to become *amrit śakyā*, that is, to become fully initiated members of the *Khālsā*. From the outset, then, this particular movement might be expected to be thoroughly Sikh in terms of belief and practice. Yet, and importantly, it is well to remember that the Gurū Nānak

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<sup>1</sup>The title *Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā* is translated as follows: *Gurū Nānak* -- refers to the founder of the Sikh religion, and therefore indicates his supreme position within the group; *Nishkām* -- is the key to the group, it means "selflessness"; *Sewak* -- is one who serves God; *Jathā* -- a group of people.

<sup>2</sup>The majority of Sikhs who initially migrated to East Africa from India were of the *rāmgarhīā* *zāt*, this was due to the crafting ability of the *rāmgarhīā* sought by the pioneers of the African railways.

Nishkām Sewak Jathā has its own *gurdwārās*. This is an overt indication of the group's segregation from the general *Panth*. The latter, although usually having caste orientated *gurdwārās* in the UK also, does not necessarily have particular living spiritual leaders affiliated to its *gurdwārās*.

### 3:2 Sant Puran Singh

The term *Sant*, as noted by Joy Barrow, has two meanings in the Sikh tradition.<sup>3</sup> First, it refers to the *Sant* tradition of India, which was divided into the *Vaiṣṇava Sants* and the Northern *Sants*. Gurū Nānak probably belonged to the latter with their insistence on the ineffable, *nirguṇa*, nature of the Absolute; whereas the former recognized depictable forms of the Absolute. The second usage of the term *Sant*, as indicated by Barrow, refers to a spiritual guide.<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, therefore, the wide number of *Sants* found in Sikhism today -- a number of whom are unique to a particular group of Sikhs -- are deemed to be spiritually enlightened beings. Such is the case of Sant Puran Singh<sup>5</sup> and his successors among the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. I must point out, however, that *Sants* are not to be confused with the Sikh Gurūs.

Sant Puran Singh was born in India *ca.* 1898 and migrated to Karicho in Kenya *ca.* 1917 in order to seek new opportunities -- like other Indians who had migrated to Africa around this period. Since Sant Puran Singh belonged to the *rāmgarhīā* caste of Sikhs, he followed his traditional *zāt* occupation as a carpenter, having his own workshop in Karicho, known as the "Karicho Wagon Works", where he made wheels

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<sup>3</sup>Barrow, J. "Religious Authority and Influence in the Diaspora: Sant Jaswant Singh and Sikhs in West London" in Singh, P. and Barrier, N. G. (1999) *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Delhi: Manohar, p. 335.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>According to followers, he is said to have been a humble person, always recognizing the needs of others, thus Sant Puran Singh is commonly called Sant Bābā Puran Singh Ji. The term *Bābāji* is used synonymously with *Sant* of a spiritually enlightened individual. His followers truly believe him to have possessed supernatural powers. Such a view is expressed by an informant at the London *gurdwārā* who had worked with Puran Singh ever since the latter's arrival in Britain.

for carriages.<sup>6</sup> Followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā believe that one day Sant Puran Singh had a divine inspiration and was called by God to bring people who had wandered away from religion back into the Sikh faith. Followers of the *Sant* would gather in his workshop in Karicho to learn more about the Sikh religion, the importance of the ten Gurūs, and the holy scripture, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Sant Puran Singh stressed the importance of taking initiation, which in turn entailed vegetarianism and complete abstinence from alcohol and tobacco.<sup>7</sup> Sant Puran Singh was responsible for the mass initiation of Sikhs and non-Sikhs into Sikhism. Thus, it was in Karicho that the first *Jathā* of Sant Puran Singh was established. The ideal of *bhakti*, as I shall illustrate below, is a prominent feature of Sant Puran Singh's teachings. He also preached about selfless service -- *nishkāmātā*: individuals should perform *sewā*, service, without hope of a reward and with a complete loss of ego. The attraction of Sant Puran Singh's message, according to his followers, is that it is seen as a totally true, honest and spiritually uplifting ideal. It follows that the founder is, indeed, regarded a *Sant* in the truest sense by his followers.

In 1956, a visiting *Sant* from India, Bābā Manī Singh, made the Sikh public in the United Kingdom aware of Sant Puran Singh by calling him a *mahāpurakh*, "a great man", with a divine mission in the diaspora.<sup>8</sup> The term *mahāpurakh* thus labelled Sant Puran Singh as a spiritual giant in the eyes of his followers, and in the view of Bābā Manī Singh he was a great soul, *mahātma*.

In 1968 Sant Puran Singh first visited Britain. He brought along with him five Sikhs who had taken *amrit* from him in Kenya: their task was to establish the *Jathā* in

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<sup>6</sup>Information from the Leeds *gurdwārā*.

<sup>7</sup>Vegetarianism in Sikhism remains a disputed area -- the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* neither encourages nor discourages its practice.

<sup>8</sup>As a member of the Hounslow *sangat* remarked.

Britain.<sup>9</sup> An informant at Birmingham estimated that at this time there were about five percent *kesdhārīs* in the UK. The first *amrit parchār*<sup>10</sup> was carried out by Sant Puran Singh, at the Shepherd's Bush *Gurdwārā*<sup>11</sup> in 1971, and again in 1972. It was not until 1975 that Sant Puran Singh migrated to the UK permanently.<sup>12</sup> The majority of Sant Puran Singh's followers were, and remain today, of East African origin and, as previously cited, mainly from the *rāmgarhīā zāt* of Sikhs. At this preliminary stage the importance of Sant Puran Singh within the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā should not be underestimated. I now need to ascertain the extent to which his position is retained and emphasized, or taken over, by his successors.

### **3:3 The successors of Sant Puran Singh**

Sant Puran Singh's death took place in Ilford, Essex on 5 June 1983. A total of around twelve to fifteen thousand people were reported to have attended his funeral.<sup>13</sup> The successor of Sant Puran Singh was Bhāi<sup>14</sup> Norang Singh who had been chosen by the former to carry on the divine mission. It is believed by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā that the one same spirit and spiritual power obtained by Sant Puran Singh had been passed through to his successors. It is a belief that certainly has overtones of the *joṭ*, divine light, that was passed from Gurū Nānak to succeeding Gurūs and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. There seems to be evidence here, therefore, that, successorship in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is being compared to the *joṭ*

<sup>9</sup> Information from the Hounslow *gurdwārā*.

<sup>10</sup> Initiation ceremony into the *Khālsā*, by taking *amrit*.

<sup>11</sup> This was one of the first *gurdwārās* in Britain, and was for the benefit of the whole Sikh community, it is not to be regarded as a *gurdwārā* exclusively of the *Jathā*.

<sup>12</sup> I was informed that his original intention had been to migrate from Kenya to Delhi; however, on realizing that East African migrants in the UK were in more need of religious guidance, he settled in London. On his arrival he stayed with his daughter in Clapham, then in 1976, moved in with his son in Ilford, where he stayed until his death.

<sup>13</sup> Figures obtained from the Leeds *gurdwārā*. Sant Puran Singh's funeral was covered on television. His ashes were taken to northern Punjab, to a place known as *Bhagor Sāhib*. It was Sant Puran Singh's wishes that his ashes be scattered into the river there. At the site there is Gurū Gobind Singh's *gurdwārā*, and I was told that since the ashes of many great men had been scattered at this river so, too, was the desire of Sant Puran Singh for his own ashes.

<sup>14</sup> This term is used to indicate respect.

of Gurū Nānak.<sup>15</sup> Successors were tested before taking on their role, to assess their abilities to lead the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.<sup>16</sup> I was told that having faith in God and being a spiritually uplifted individual were the main characteristics looked for in successors.<sup>17</sup> The succeeding *bābāji* is not elected, rather he is *selected*; no meetings are held to discuss who will be chosen out of a panel of prospective applicants.<sup>18</sup> I should emphasize that no initiation rites whatsoever take place when a new leader takes over the total responsibility of the *Jathā*. This is primarily due to the fact that the spiritual nature and the light of wisdom, *joṭ*, has already been passed on to him by the previous leader. It is well to remember that no "initiation" rites as such took place when one Sikh Gurū vested gurūship in the next.<sup>19</sup>

### 3:3:1 Bhāi Norang Singh

Discourse with followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā revealed a belief that Norang Singh was seen as being on a spiritually high plane, and was thus prepared by Sant Puran Singh for succession<sup>20</sup> -- a point that indicates that Bhāi Norang Singh had the qualities of a *Sant*. Prior to having met Sant Puran Singh,

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<sup>15</sup>There is some suggestion that Sant Puran Singh and his successors are attributed a divine status. However, on this point, it must be noted that all human beings are regarded as divine in a sense, due to the immanent nature of the Supreme God residing in the heart of each individual. The fact to emphasize here is that this divine aspect is regarded as being of a *higher* nature among the Nishkām Sewak Jathā *Sants*; thus it follows that they are regarded as being on a higher spiritual level than their followers. This concept I propose to examine in detail in section 3:6. This exaltation is further heightened by the fact that Sant Puran Singh, Bhāi Norang Singh and the present *Bābāji*, are believed to possess supernatural powers, which include the ability to relieve followers from certain ailments.

<sup>16</sup>This does not mean, of course, that they had to sit some form of formal examination, rather, Sant Puran Singh, while in their presence, was able to detect their devotion and ability of "guiding" diaspora Sikhs.

<sup>17</sup>The power of authority from one leader to the next is reflected in the similar selection of the *Dalai Lama*.

<sup>18</sup>During the leader's lifetime, it already becomes apparent to him and to followers as to whom the next leader will be.

<sup>19</sup>To mark the gurūship of the next Gurū, the preceding Gurū would hand over the five coins, a coconut and the book of hymns. See Cole, W. O. and Sambhi, P. S. (1998 2<sup>nd</sup> fully revised edn, first published 1978) *The Sikhs*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp. 16-8. It is interesting to note that this practice of already choosing his successors by Sant Puran Singh differs from the successorship of the Sikh Gurūs; Sant Puran Singh chose the next two successors during his lifetime. Although Gurū Nānak chose Lehnā to become Gurū Angad, it was Gurū Angad who chose Gurū Amardās.

<sup>20</sup>I was told that Bhāi Norang Singh was appointed to the role of leadership while Sant Puran Singh was still alive. The latter would often leave decisions to Norang Singh in order for the members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā to become accustomed to his later role.

Norang Singh was living in Malacca, Singapore, where he was a member of the *saṅgat* of a holy man, known by the name of Sant Bābā Sohan Singh.<sup>21</sup> A member of the Leeds *saṅgat* commented that Sant Bābā Sohan Singh instructed Norang Singh that he should now go to England. There, he would meet a *mahāpurakh* whom he was to regard as God himself.

On coming to England, Norang Singh eventually met Sant Puran Singh to whom he offered his abundant *sewā*. Norang Singh commenced his *sewā* to the public at large, and began the development of the Birmingham *gurdwārā* in 1983. He also acquired permission to restore some damaged architecture at the Golden Temple, Amritsar.<sup>22</sup> Norang Singh died on 3 July 1995. The ashes of Norang Singh were also scattered in the river at *Bhagor Sāhib*, ten days after his cremation at the Birmingham crematorium.<sup>23</sup>

### **3:3:2 Bhāi Mohinder Singh: the present spiritual leader**

Bhāi Mohinder Singh, who was born in March 1939, took over the role of leadership in 1995; thus he was 56 years of age when he became the successor of Bhāi Norang Singh. Bhāi Mohinder Singh as remarked earlier, was originally appointed by Sant Puran Singh himself to become the successor after Norang Singh and, along with Mr. Harbans Sagoo,<sup>24</sup> had taken *amrit* in 1973 from Sant Puran Singh in Africa. Since Sant Puran Singh has not left any indication as to the successor of Bhāi Mohinder

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<sup>21</sup>Information from the Leeds *gurdwārā*.

<sup>22</sup> Since all *gurdwārās* in the Punjab come under the supreme control of the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Norang Singh asked written permission from the SGPC to undertake the project of renovating the Golden Temple, and also to change the *cholā* "canopy" over the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. On 3 February 1995, Bhāi Norang Singh obtained permission from the SGPC to undertake his *sewā* of refurbishing the Golden Temple. Other projects that had been carried out by Norang Singh were the building of the *gurdwārā* at Guray, the birthplace of Sant Puran Singh, and a *gurdwārā* at Anandpur, as well as constructing a bridge in Phagwara. The fact that many projects have been undertaken in Phagwara is due to the fact that, when locating the geographical position of a site such as Guray, it is best to indicate that it is either in or near Phagwara so that individuals can locate the site's whereabouts. Apart from this, there is no other reason for Phagwara to be so popular, it is merely used as a geographical indicator.

<sup>23</sup>Bhāi Norang Singh was cremated in the same crematorium as Sant Puran Singh had been.

<sup>24</sup> Mr. Sagoo is in charge of the Leeds *gurdwārā* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.



Singh, it remains to be seen how his successor will be chosen. Bhāi Mohinder Singh's *bhakti* is attested by the organization, which recognizes him as an individual of high spiritual standing, a *Sant* indeed. Prior to becoming *bābājī*, Mohinder Singh was employed as a civil engineer by the Zambian Government. Despite his responsible and successful vocation, on being "called" by Sant Puran Singh to come to England, Mohinder Singh resigned his highly paid executive job in Africa to come to the *gurdwārā* on Soho Road, where he has since been working as an unpaid volunteer.

The importance of Mohinder Singh among the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā cannot pass unnoticed. A tremendous amount of respect -- at times veneration -- is given to him by the *saṅgat*. He is the present leader of the group worldwide. He is consulted in virtually every aspect of social, as well as religious, life. Members will bow down to him, in the same way that one pays respect to a great *sadhū* or *mahātma*, and ask for his blessing. He is consulted for his advice on purchasing property, on taking up a prospective job, he is also requested for his blessings to sick members of the family: thus he fulfils a number of altruistic roles. His decision is seen as final. Followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā believe that an individual cannot come as far as the *bābājī* has without the capacity for spiritually fulfilling the needs, and answering the questions of, the *saṅgat*. There are good grounds here for asserting that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is comparing the roles of their *Sants* with the ten Gurūs. And, if this is the case, then the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā has created a fundamental diversity from general Sikh belief -- enough, I would claim, to suggest deviation from *Khālsā* norms and from fundamental Sikh belief.

### 3:4 Development of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā

The present number of Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā followers worldwide is assessed by the group itself as approximately one million.<sup>25</sup> Significantly, since most of these followers are East African in origin, Bhachu has termed them "twice-migrants".<sup>26</sup> Like other Indians in the UK, the "myth of return" has also disappeared from the psyche of these followers, that is to say they do not see themselves as returning permanently to India. Britain is now their home and they are here to stay; this has resulted in ethnic minorities of the diaspora often reasserting Indian values in their lifestyle. The majority of East African Sikhs tend to be from the *rāmgarhīā zāt* who are more *Khālsā* orientated in their approach to religion than other Sikh *zāts*, especially the *jaṭs*. Since the *jaṭs* are the majority group in the *Panth*, the *rāmgarhīās* aim to establish themselves as superior on religious grounds. The fact that Sant Puran Singh initiated the origins of the group in East Africa, has given East African followers a special kind of bonding with him, and with the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. According to Bhachu, the majority of East African Sikh migrants to Britain are on the whole more religiously inclined than other *zāts* coming directly from India; their experiences are, therefore, made use of on their second migration from East Africa to Britain.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This figure was obtained from the Birmingham *gurdwārā*, which is seen as the centre for the UK followers; since no statistics were shown to me, I am unable to verify the figure.

<sup>26</sup> Bhachu, P. "The East African Sikh Diaspora" in Barrier, N. G. and Dusenberry, V. A. (1989) *The Sikh Diaspora*, Delhi: Chankaya Publications, pp. 235-60. Twice-migrant indicates the stages in migration: first from India to Africa, then from Africa to Britain.

<sup>27</sup> Bhachu's findings are somewhat astonishing since it would be expected that if twice-migrated, then the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā should be "twice-diluted". But her findings are based on extensive research and therefore contain validity. A suggested reason for the *Khālsā* orientation of the twice migrants in comparison to direct migrants from India is that the East African *rāmgarhīās* had already experienced living in a foreign country where their values were to be kept separate from the values of African society. Therefore, since the *rāmgarhīās* had already experienced a threat to Sikh values in Africa, these would now be strengthened due to a longer experience of migration than those groups whose first experience of migration was in coming to Britain. In the case of the latter, they may not have realized fully what the impact of migration to a diaspora country was going to be, therefore they were not as prepared as East African migrants, which the majority of Gurū

The message of Sant Puran Singh, as remarked earlier, was that of *nishkāmātā*: to perform service without any feeling of wanting a reward. It is this kind of service that has promoted the growth of the group. Centres of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā are presently found in:

- Handsworth, Birmingham,
- Beeston, Leeds,
- Hounslow, London,
- Guray, Punjab,
- Anandpur Sahib, Punjab,
- Karicho, Kenya.

This is an indication that many were attracted to the teachings of Sant Puran Singh.

The very first centre, as highlighted in 3:2 above, was at Karicho, Kenya, where Sant Puran Singh lived and where the first *Jathā* had formed. The first *Jathā* in the UK was at Leeds, where Sant Puran Singh frequently stayed; however, the first *gurdwārā* of the organization was that at Birmingham, followed by one at London, and then one at Leeds. Interestingly, I was told that originally Sant Puran Singh had no intentions of establishing *gurdwārās* exclusive to the *Jathā*, he wanted to perform *sewā* and *amrit chaknā*<sup>28</sup> in the *gurdwārās* already existing in the UK. However, the existing *gurdwārās* failed to co-operate with him, hence premises were sought. Informants commented that the reason for this lack of co-operation by the *gurdwārās* was due to the fact that its leaders were inclined to regard the *Jathā* as a political movement and, further, they were not prepared to hand over the running of the *gurdwārā* to Sant Puran Singh. But why did Puran Singh want to run the *gurdwārās*? Did he feel that centres in Britain were not being run efficiently and he should take over? Naturally, this would provoke resentment from *gurdwārā* committees, after all his proposals were suggestive that he was better than the already existing presidents

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Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā followers are.

<sup>28</sup>Enabling followers to take *amrit*.

of *gurdwārās*. With regard to the establishment of *Jathās* and the group's separate *gurdwārās* in the UK, an informant at Hounslow reflected on a famous saying of Sant Puran Singh's:

The seeds have been sown in Leeds,  
the development of the seeds has taken place in London,  
the fruits have been borne in Birmingham.

The implications of this saying are that the first group of followers -- that is, the "seeds" -- was established in Leeds. This was followed by the second *Jathā* in London, whereby the "seeds" having been sown, the *Jathā* was now developing. The first centre was set up in Birmingham -- it was here that the "fruits" had developed from the seeds, substantial enough to donate funds to set up the centre as the headquarters of the group.

The Birmingham *gurdwārā* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak *Jathā* was established in 1978, as a result of the efforts of Norang Singh, whilst working under the authority of Sant Puran Singh. It was also the support of the *saṅgat* that enabled the *gurdwārā* on Soho Road to be converted from a Polish club, into the splendour it has today.<sup>29</sup> The day-to-day running of the *gurdwārā* at 18-20 Soho Road, Birmingham, is in the hands of the chairman, who is currently Mohinder Singh. The committee consists of the chairman and four trustees. Utmost authority lies with Mohinder Singh, who is consulted on all matters requiring a decision, and every aspect with which the *gurdwārā* is concerned -- again an overt emphasis on the *Sants* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak *Jathā*. There are countless individuals who help in managing the *gurdwārā*, such as distributing *laṅgar*, washing, cleaning, cooking, and so on. All members of the committee, and all who help out in the *gurdwārā*, are unpaid volunteers.

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<sup>29</sup>This *gurdwārā* has become central since the departure of Sant Puran Singh, both Norang Singh and Mohinder Singh basing themselves here. The *saṅgat* aims to attend the Birmingham *gurdwārā* for all major events taking place.

The London *gurdwārā* was established in 1980, with its first *akhaṇḍ pāth* taking place in 1981. The London *gurdwārā* currently runs classes in GCSE Punjabi, for which eighteen qualified teachers are used, some of whom are retired secondary school teachers. The *gurdwārā* boasts a ninety-five percent pass rate. In addition, music classes are held every Friday, along with *tablā* classes. *Kīrtan* is also taught to the youngsters, who are allocated one hour every Sunday to sing in the *dīwān* "main service".<sup>30</sup> Clearly, and importantly, these activities are designed to maintain Sikh culture and identity in the *saṅgat*.

The *gurdwārā* at Leeds was established in 1986. In addition to the regular services offered by all *gurdwārās*, it also functions as a social centre. Particular emphasis is placed on the awareness of its Sikh identity by the younger generation -- it is debatable as to what extent this promotes specific group identity also. Since the younger generation is more susceptible to western influence, the centre feels young people are in need of more attention. The *gurdwārā* offers a wide range of clubs and classes, including a discussion class in which the youngsters can address topics related to their own problems.<sup>31</sup>

Funds for the *gurdwārās* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, both in the UK and abroad, have been raised by voluntary contributions from followers. Government funding has never been a part of the group. It was remarked that appealing for funds is prohibited, therefore, all costs are covered by volunteering contributors.

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<sup>30</sup>The involvement of the children is further encouraged by giving them tasks involved with the *sewā* of the *gurdwārā*, such as cleaning and polishing the *laṅgar* hall, washing the *rumālas*, that is, the cloths placed over and around the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. A ladies' *satsaṅg* programme is also held, which they may perform in the homes of followers, or in the *gurdwārā*.

<sup>31</sup>The atmosphere is informal and the participation of the youngsters is encouraged. The *gurdwārā* has affiliated with the Leeds College of Music, to provide lessons on the harmonium and the *tablā*, and gives learners opportunities to perform *kīrtan* at the *gurdwārā*.

### 3:4:1 The role of the *gurdwārās*

The main thrust of Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā *gurdwārās*, as stressed by Birmingham informants, is that they provide stability for the community and act as centres where the *Jathā* can come together and strengthen communal bonds.<sup>32</sup> Pertinent here, however, is the nature of the “communal” bonds being referred to -- a corporate Sikh community, or followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā? Important here is that, although on the surface the *gurdwārās* promote Sikhism, underlying prominence of the *Sants* is an inescapable aura of these *gurdwārās*. The *gurdwārās* keep records of all members so that they can be informed on all issues. This again provides stronger links by involving all members, and encouraging a sense of belonging very specifically to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Membership is open to all followers over the age of eighteen, and is dependent on the individual’s belief in the Gurūs, and adherence to their teachings: in addition the members must at least be *kesdhārī*, preferably *amritdhārī*. The particular rubric of the group reads as follows:

A non political, non profit making religious charity funded by voluntary donations dedicated to selfless service of humanity and propagation of religious belief and spirituality. All members are unpaid volunteers.<sup>33</sup>

In addition the *gurdwārās* of the organization provide free accommodation and, importantly, they *are* open to all -- whether followers of the *Sants* or not. Responsibilities of the *gurdwārā* however, are only given to followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.

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<sup>32</sup>The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā has also been involved in hosting a conference at Birmingham in which the Department of Social Responsibility discussed the disaster of Lockerbie. Issues such as what would have been done if the same were to happen in other areas of the UK, including their own local areas, were examined. It was decided that in such an event, the *gurdwārās* would be used as mini hospitals.

<sup>33</sup>Stated in the Constitution, as at Leeds *gurdwārā*, also printed as a letter heading.

Marriages are also carried out in the group's *gurdwārās*. Thus they serve to strengthen the bonds between followers and enable them to gather together socially too. The *gurdwārā*, like *gurdwārās* of the general *Panth*, is also seen as the place where one learns about prospective spouses for children. It is at the *gurdwārā* that attendants become aware of who is looking for particular qualities in a spouse -- ranging from desired height to a desired career. In this way, to an extent, the *gurdwārās* can also be regarded as marriage bureaux. Marriages of followers continue to be arranged endogomously -- thus maintaining caste identity.

### **3:5 Purpose of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā**

High on the agenda of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, as cited above, is for followers to take *amrit* and become initiated members of the *Khālsā*,<sup>34</sup> with total abstinence from meat and alcohol, thereby becoming known as *amrit śakyā*,<sup>35</sup> that is, initiated members of the *Khālsā*. One informant stressed that followers are not to give

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<sup>34</sup>The stance of the group with regard to the outward forms of the *Khālsā*, more importantly concerning the *kes*, has involved its participation in the rights for Sikhs in Britain to be able to wear the turban. The organization was actively involved in the Mandla case that took place in the early 1980s. The case caused much anxiety within the Sikh community when the son of a Birmingham solicitor, Mr. Mandla, was told he could not wear his turban at the private Catholic school where he studied. The case went to the appeal court where the ruling was in favour of the headmaster, Mr Dowell Lee. Mr. Mandla, a Sikh of East African origin and also a member of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, had fought his son's case; the result was regarded a very serious issue indeed, as it was seen as a threat to the whole Sikh community. Consequently, Sant Puran Singh organized a march through London in 1983 commencing from Hyde Park and ending at Downing Street where a petition against the ruling was shown. A total of forty thousand Sikhs attended the march, resulting in the case being re-opened at the House of Lords. This time the ruling was in favour of the Sikh community; moreover, Lord Denning had called the Sikhs a nation -- a significant turning-point in the history of diaspora Sikhs, since other religious groups such as the Muslims are not covered by discrimination acts, due to their not being formally recognized as a nation. The Sikhs however, are now covered under the Racial Acts against discrimination, and this covers nations rather than religions. The march and its subsequent result enabled the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā to gain wider recognition among the Sikh community. An informant remarked that the march and its outcome were certainly one of the milestones of Sant Puran Singh's life. Another salient phase of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā's involvement in such issues was demonstrated by Sant Puran Singh's involvement in the Turban Versus Crash Helmet Act. Sant Puran Singh had organized a march in 1982, again through the streets of central London. Many similar marches were organized by the whole of the Sikh community, with the result that those Sikhs who wore turbans were to be exempt from wearing the crash helmet whilst riding on a motorcycle.

<sup>35</sup>This term is synonymous with *amritdhārī*. It is used widely among the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā to indicate clearly that one has fulfilled the aim of the group, that is, has undergone the *amrit* ceremony. *Amrit chaknā* indicates one who will take *amrit* or is about to take it; whereas, *amrit śakyā* refers to one who has taken *amrit*, and therefore is *amritdhārī*.

Sant Puran Singh supremacy over the ten Gurūs but, rather, are to respect Sant Puran Singh and his emphasis on returning to the essence of the Sikh religion: the teachings of the Gurūs should be in the centre of one's heart and the community and all at the *gurdwārā* should be served with *nishkāmatā*, selflessness. This suggests that, in aspiration at least, the group's beliefs are in line with Sikh thought. Sant Puran Singh's sole purpose was to return Sikhism back to its essence -- an effort that is reminiscent of movements such as the Singh Sabhā.

The Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā professes to function wholly for the benefit of the people, asking no payment for services offered such as the performance of *akhaṇḍ pāths* and other ceremonies -- in this respect the ideal of *nishkāmatā* is, indeed, upheld. The *gurdwārā*, like all *gurdwārās*, is seen as a model for *sewā*, where all can help out in the kitchen, clean, and contribute practically to ensure its smooth running for the benefit of the *saṅgat*.

### **3:6 Ideals of religious philosophy in the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā**

I propose to examine below whether the main ideals of the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā are pertinent to a corporate Sikh identity, or whether they are more akin to an individual identity within the general fold of Sikhism. This section, thus, attempts to consider what implications the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā has towards the standard of *Khālsā* adherence as ordained by the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

#### **3:6:1 The relationship between God and the individual**

A personal relationship with the Divine forms the basis of Sikh philosophy; indeed, it is this personal relationship that enables the devotee to love God and meditate on His Name.<sup>36</sup> The personal approach to God in Sikh teachings is often depicted as the

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<sup>36</sup>Although the masculine "His" is often used when speaking of God, it must be remembered that *Wāhegurū* is *nirguṇa*, is beyond attributes and gender. Nevertheless, as is common to many faiths,



bride's love for her groom; the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā also depicts a devotee, male or female, as the "bride" of God.<sup>37</sup> Thus, it follows that God is beyond gender in *gurbāṇī* since the whole of humanity is symbolized as the bride. In this respect, adherence to Sikh teachings is, indeed, exemplified by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Just as the husband bestows his love on his wife so, too, God - - depicted as the groom in *gurbāṇī* -- bestows His sovereign love to His honest and true devotees. The aspect of separation experienced by the bride towards her groom is that of *viraha*, a characteristic feature of *Sant* tradition. This indicates the ineffable nature of the Absolute. So, it is because of the pain of *viraha*, separation, from her beloved, that the bride seeks to unite with him. It is an analogy in line with Sikh thought as portrayed in the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs. This is illustrated in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*:

Seeing this play, my mind became happy. My Groom, the Lord, has come to wed me.  
Sing, sing, O ladies, the songs of wisdom and reflection.  
Into my home, has come my Spouse, the Life of the world. (AG 351)<sup>38</sup>

*Gurbāṇī* states that the ultimate goal is union with God, and this can only be achieved through the devotee offering total love to God. Total love cannot be obtained if the devotee approaches religion with a questioning attitude. *Bhakti* to God must be offered without an egoistic motive; the individual must offer *bhakti* for the

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Sikhs often speak in masculine terms about what is essentially an "It".

<sup>37</sup>With regard to the gender of God, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh has suggested that the symbol of *Ik-Onkar* highlights the fact that God in Sikh thought, is beyond gender. She writes: "*Ik Onkar* (One Being Is) is the core representation of the Sikh faith: the numeral 1 (Ikk or One) celebrates the existence of That which is beyond gender, space, time, and causality, and refers directly to the Ultimate Reality, to Being Itself. Yet this One is sensuously addressed and cherished in the Sikh holy writ as mother and father, sister and brother -- thus as both male and female" (Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur [1993] *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3). Furthermore, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh points out that Gurū Gobind Singh emphasized the goddess Dūrgā in his compositions (*ibid.*, p. 121). However, she goes on to highlight that Dūrgā is never worshiped by Gurū Gobind Singh, Dūrgā is used as an inspiration for the Sikh community only (see *ibid.*, pp. 125-6). Thus, the Gurūs do not acknowledge the Hindu goddess' capability of liberating the *bhaktā*, the only one who is capable of this is *Wāhegurū*.

<sup>38</sup>Singh, Manmohan (1996 rp of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 1171.

peace of his or her inner self. It must be remembered, as mentioned earlier, that Sikhism regards each individual as divine, since God's essence is contained in each individual's heart. God is essentially *nirguṇa*, beyond the comprehension of the human mind. However, God has become *saguṇa* through creation in order that humankind may form a relationship with It. This *saguṇa* aspect holds importance for both the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and Sikhism generally, since humanity cannot form a loving relationship with a totally transcendent Absolute. Although becoming *saguṇa* through creation, and being immanent within each human heart, God does not take on any form. Thus there are no *avatārs* or *murtis*, images, of God in Sikh thought generally or in the teachings of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.<sup>39</sup> Although there are no *avatārs* in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā -- which itself professes to a Sikh affiliation -- it is well to remember comments made earlier about devotees seeking the blessing and "healing powers" of Mohinder Singh. The proper conduct in Sikhism is for a Sikh to concentrate on the teachings of the Gurūs, as contained in *gurbāṇī*, not to seek miracles from holy men. In fact, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā followers adhere more closely to the latter practice.

### **3:6:2 Bhakti**

*Bhakti* in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, as pointed out several times above, entails *nishkāmātā*, selflessness and motiveless service of others, and unconditional love for God -- this is true also of general Sikh belief. *Nishkāmātā* is the basic philosophy of the group, as its name indicates. The message of *sarbat dā bhalā*, "the well-being of all", is also accentuated. Begging and stealing are strongly disapproved

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<sup>39</sup>I must emphasize that there is no scope for monism in Sikh thought, so that rather than using the analogy of the drop absorbing into the ocean, as in monistic teachings, the analogy of the fish is used in Sikhism. That is, although the fish needs water to survive, it never becomes absorbed in the water, the fish always retains its difference from the water. In this sense the fish and the water form a unity, but in a dualistic sense. In the same way, an individual will not gain *mukti* without realizing his or her inseparability yet difference from God.

of, but the practice of *vand chaknā*, to share with those less fortunate, is emphasized by the group. All these are characteristic of the main tenets of Sikhism, which are also adhered to by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. The practice of *nām japnā* is seen as vital by the group if one is to hold any hope of achieving *mukti*. The group's emphasis on *nām japnā* is a clear indicator of a Sikh alliance, which obeys the teachings of the Gurūs and their insistence on the benefits of *nām japnā*:

Nanak never forgets the Name and his mind is reconciled to the True One.  
(AG 419)<sup>40</sup>

*Nām japnā* in itself is of greater value than pilgrimages and performing worthless rituals, as stressed by Gurū Nānak:

Pilgrimages, Austerities, Mercy, Charity,  
Bring but honour small and paltry.  
One must Hear, Believe, Love the Name, (AG 5)<sup>41</sup>

In terms of *bhakti* therefore, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā follows *gurbānī* in its insistence on *sewā* and *nām japnā*. Nevertheless, I found that the emphasis on seeking the blessings of the *Sants* often took primacy to the benefits of *nām japnā* -- if *nām japnā* brings one closer to God, what does the blessing of a *Sant* confer?

### **3:6:3 Karma or predestination?**

Sikhism teaches that the prerequisite of *mukti* is unconditional *bhakti* to *Wāhegurū*, who in his compassionate nature will offer his grace, *Nadar*, to his devotee and thus enable the soul's release from *samsāra*. Gurū Nānak taught that the most essential entity needed for the liberation of the soul is the *Nadar* of God:

O'Nanak! the Merciful Master, with his kind look, makes them happy. (AG 8)<sup>42</sup>

In line with Sikh teachings, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā believes that an individual's efforts will take him or her so far on the path to *mukti*, but that ultimate

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<sup>40</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 1390.

<sup>41</sup> Singh, Gopal (1993 rp of 1968 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Delhi: World Book Centre, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 27.

release is dependent on the pre-eminent *Nadar* of *Wāhegurū*: even desiring *mukti* entails a selfish need.<sup>43</sup> Thus the ideal of *nishkāmatā* is given pre-eminence by the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā, since it involves performing *sewā* without any expectations in return: the group emphasizes that there is no place for egoism in the blissful union with *Wāhegurū*. This idea of egoless service fits in with *gurbāṇī*, which condemns *haumai*, selfishness and ego. Gurū Arjan highlights the binding effects of *haumai*:

I am inebriated with ego, am imbued with other relishes and love evil friends.  
My Beloved see-est me wandering in lacs of lanes. (AG 1303)<sup>44</sup>

### 3:6:4 Definition of a Sikh

According to the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā, a *gurmukh* is one who meditates on God's Name in the form of *nām japnā*. Additionally, the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā states that a *true* Sikh is an *amritdhārī*: the *Khālsā* identity of the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā is clearly accentuated here. Thus -- and importantly, in terms of *Khālsā* observation -- members of this group are, indeed, observers of the *Sikh Rehat Maryādā*. The Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā defines a *gurmukh* as an individual who behaves and lives according to the message and advice given in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. This is reminiscent of *gurbāṇī*, which reiterates that the *gurmukh* is one whose life is totally orientated towards God and the teachings of the Gurūs as contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*: it is the *gurmukh* who will attain bliss with the Absolute:

The Guru-ward is emancipated, and falls not into entanglements. He ponders over the Divine word, and is delivered through God's Name. (AG 152)<sup>45</sup>

The Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā does not regard *monās*, those who cut their

<sup>43</sup>By effort is not meant egoistic action that produces fruitive *karma*, but, rather, an effort to cleanse the soul from ego and desire. Therefore the devotee, rather than desiring *mukti*, is to perform *nishkāṁ sewā*, that is, worship without any desire for the fruits.

<sup>44</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 4302.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 511.

hair, as being Sikh. However, it does hold a sympathetic view towards them and hopes they will become *amritdhārī*, and therefore *true* Sikhs. Here, again, the group adheres to the *Rehat Maryādā* with its aspirations towards *sahajdhārīs*. The fact that the overall majority of followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā are *amritdhārī* is an indication *per se* of the efforts towards *Khālsā* ideals by the group. It would be true to say, therefore, that when the *Khālsā* identity is considered, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā followers are ultra-stringent. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā considers itself to be *more* Sikh than the general *Panth* in its adherence to the Five Ks. But in attempting to be thoroughly *Khālsā* orientated, ironically, they are regarded as separate and different -- a characteristic that they themselves court, as much as it is placed on them from many of those outside their fold.

### **3:6:5 Human Gurūs**

Akin to general Sikhism, members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā attach great respect to the ten Sikh Gurūs, and to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. It has been emphatically claimed by many followers that, apart from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, they do not regard any other as belonging to the line of Gurūs. Belief in all the teachings of the Gurūs as portrayed in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is essential for all followers. In accordance with Sikh belief, Sant Puran Singh is to be seen as a spiritually enlightened being, but is not to be regarded a successor to the Sikh Gurūs in any way - - therefore, their Sikh identity appears solid. Respect to the same level as that attributed to great *sadhūs* and *mahātmas* of the Indian tradition is permissible, nevertheless, to Sant Puran Singh and his successors. I was told that, although Sant Puran Singh and his successors are shown a tremendous amount of respect and prestige, they are not to be confused with the Gurūs: rather, they are given the title of *Sant* or *bābājī*, indicating a respected person. Practically, however, although the term

Gurū itself is not applied to the leaders, I am tempted to suggest that sufficient emphasis on the leaders is evident to suggest a difference from Sikh teachings.

This is certainly evident in practice. During my visits to the centres, especially the Birmingham *gurdwārā*, I observed that there is a room in which pictures exclusively of Sant Puran Singh and Bhāi Norang Singh are given great significance. The followers bow down to the photographic representations of the leaders, though it must be admitted that this could be dismissed by the followers as mere respect for a holy person, and not suggesting that the leaders are regarded as being Gurūs. Yet such is the power of the present leader that, as remarked earlier, followers would come to him with problems relating to illnesses or social matters. And the fact that they truly believed such problems could be solved with the intervention of the *bābājī* suggests a level of supremacy that at times inhibits the attempts at Sikh conformity of the group. But I must point out that there are no photographs of Sant Puran Singh or his successors in the prayer halls at any of the UK Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā *gurdwārās*. However, the practices concerning the celebration of *baisākhī* and the death anniversary of Sant Puran Singh, which will be looked at in 3:7 below, will seek to develop this point about the status of Sant Puran Singh and his successors.

### **3:6:6 Miracles**

Miracles associated with Sant Puran Singh and his successors are received and interpreted in different ways by the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. But all adherents, nevertheless, accept the validity of such miracles. It was remarked by a number of informants that evidence of miracles has promoted the spiritual/mystical aspect of Sant Puran Singh -- a belief, I suggest, that is responsible for present numbers in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, and which justifies some brief mention of them here. The same informants were also quick to point out,

nevertheless, that the encouragement of miracles in Sikhism is taboo. Furthermore, although the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is discouraged from any hagiography concerning Sant Puran Singh and his successors, accounts exist proclaiming that illnesses such as cancer in devout followers have been cured by Puran Singh. However, it was repeatedly emphasized by other informants that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is forbidden to make mention of miracles. Prominence is given to Sant Puran Singh's emphasis on *bāṇī* for curing illnesses, rather than on miracles themselves: miracles do not produce pure faith, only a mere "miracle-based" faith. It was remarked that, the very fact that large numbers of Sikhs had taken *amrit* and adhere to *gurbāṇī*, is, in itself, a miracle of the revival of Sikhism in the diaspora.<sup>46</sup>

Other miracles stress the divine intuition of Sant Puran Singh, and his successors. An informant at Hounslow assured me that he himself had tested Sant Puran Singh on meeting him<sup>47</sup> and was subsequently satisfied that Sant Puran Singh

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<sup>46</sup>Yet a miracle expressing some degree of divinity, with regard to Sant Puran Singh, was recounted by another informant who worked very closely with him. A brief account of the miracle as dictated by the informant is the following: "In 1976 during a *sampaṭ akhaṇḍ pāth* [lasting eleven days in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā] in Southall, Sant Puran Singh had delivered a message which had been given to him during a vision six weeks earlier. At this occasion a *gorā* (western male) and *gorī* (western female) had attended. After the service Sant Puran Singh asked the female what she had seen. In reply she answered 'I saw whatever you showed'. The woman was reported to have told Sant Puran Singh that she looked up at the sky and saw the *devatas* dressed in white clothes, hands held together asking Sant Puran Singh what orders he had for them. At this, Sant Puran Singh told the woman to remain quiet and speak no further." (Account by a member of the Hounslow *sangat*). Furthermore, it was related to me that adherents believed on this day a bright light illuminated the London area of Southall, suggesting something very special had taken place. The result of the alleged event was that a large number of individuals had taken *amrit*. But miracles do not always involve the presiding *Sant*. I was told that a *sampaṭ akhaṇḍ pāth* is performed when a particular problem arises, either with regard to an individual, or to society at large. The *sampaṭ akhaṇḍ pāth* is believed to be so powerful that it eases the problem in question; it yields very fruitful results. It is begun with a particular *śabad* relating to the problem, such as illness, chaos, or any awkward problem, then other *gurbāṇī* is read, with intervals in which the particular *śabad* is repeatedly recited. A complete reading of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is undertaken; this may be done over any number of days, but is usually eleven days. Basically the *sampaṭ pāth* is similar to the *sehaj pāth*, that is, a complete reading of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* with breaks taken between the readings. I was told that the literal meaning of *sampaṭ* is "to place/enclose a particular object in a box": therefore *sampaṭ* is performed to enclose a problem or illness, thus eradicating it.

<sup>47</sup>Before meeting Sant Puran Singh, the informant had originally performed *sewā* to the Nānaksar *Sants*. This group is viewed also as a movement within the Sikh *Panth*, and is headed also by *Sants*. The founding *Sant* was Nand Singh, who was succeeded by the famous Ishar Singh. A particularly unique practice among the Nānaksar followers is of meditating in caves or purpose-built alcoves, known as *bhores*. Contrary to the Gurūs' teachings, the movement places an emphasis on austerity and

was a highly spiritually enlightened person. He explicitly told me that Sant Puran Singh and both his successors have cured many followers of illnesses that doctors could not. Thus, it is sufficient to remark that a somewhat miraculous and supernatural nature is attributed to Sant Puran Singh and his successors by the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. This is a clear area of deviation from their adherence to *Khālsā* practices.

Although a number of differences occur, the majority of philosophical beliefs of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā are obtained from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. I am now in a position to set the beliefs of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā alongside the criteria listed for general Sikh belief that was drawn up in Table 1 in section 2:8 above.

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asceticism. Another interesting practice among the Nānaksars is their treatment of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* that, as McLeod points out, indicates that the scripture, is, indeed, regarded as a living person. It is covered with extra *rumālas* (covers) in the winter (McLeod, W. H. [1997] *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 198). The informant told me he never found true happiness among the Nānaksar *Sants*, and on meeting Sant Puran Singh was told by him that what he was looking for would not be found among the Nānaksars, for it had not reached them yet. This is a good indication of the degree to which the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā views itself as distinct from other groups -- despite its allegiance to the main tenets of Sikh belief.



<i>Belief found in Sikh religion</i>	<i>Present among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā</i>	<i>Absent among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā</i>
Monotheism	#	
Absolute is <i>nirguṇa</i>	#	
<i>Saguna</i> essence of God is present in creation	#	
Panentheistic concept of the divine	#	
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself	#	
Predestination	#	
Total reliance on God	#	
Human birth as highest	#	
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God	#	
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>	#	
Becoming a <i>jīvaṇmukt</i> is the ideal	#	
Detachment from worldly lures	#	
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire	#	
Advocation of <i>bhakti</i>	#	
Interiorized religion	#	
Rejection of image worship	#	
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	#	
Rejection of yogic practices	#	
Worthlessness of rituals	#	
<i>Nām simran</i>	#	
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>	#	
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>	#	
Company of the <i>satsaṅgat</i> is essential	#	

**Table 3. Conformity of beliefs found among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the general Panth.**

The majority of the beliefs of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā are clearly those found in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Therefore, as far as philosophical teachings are concerned, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is in line with *gurbānī*. Thus, in matters of religious belief, they exhibit valid indicators for a Sikh identity. However, there are aspects of their beliefs that are clearly outside general Sikhism. These are listed in the following table.

Concept found among Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā belief	Totally absent from general Sikh belief	Expressed differently in Sikh belief
Emphasis on <i>Sants</i> unique to the group	#	
<i>Sants</i> of the group can help towards <i>mukti</i>	#	
Miracles associated with the group's <i>Sants</i>	#	
True Sikh is an <i>amritdhārī</i>		Being <i>gurmukh</i> is essential

**Table 4. Differences in belief between the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the general Panth.**

The level of importance attached to Sant Puran Singh and his successors is the most important here, for it differs from the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs and what might be acceptable to the *Rehat Maryādā*. It remains now to examine the practices of the group.

### **3:7 Central Praxis**

During my visits, informants at centres of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā pointed out that practices that take place are not, in essence, established to differentiate them from the rest of the *Panth*. Rather, I was told that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā aims to do things properly rather than differently. I believe this is a very important point that, ironically, is responsible for the *distinction* between the

Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the general *Panth*. This emphasis on properness among the group appears to be fragmenting Sikh identity rather than cementing it. Owing to its stress on doing things properly, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā has developed many features that are distinct from other groups and, indeed, from overall Sikh practice.<sup>48</sup>

The origin of the distinct practices is believed to have come from Sant Puran Singh. Each of the three *gurdwārās* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā in Britain have the same constitution. The constitution states that the commencement of *akhaṇḍ pāths* and *bhogs* should take place at 5am, and the same pattern is followed in each centre. Slight differences may sometimes occur as to what time members are expected to rise in the morning; this depends on individual circumstances, such as age and health.

### **3:7:1 Form of worship**

The practice of *akhaṇḍ pāths*, continuous forty-eight hour readings of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, is very important for the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, as it is for the *Panth* as a whole. However, the form of *akhaṇḍ pāths* carried out by the group differs from the general *Panth* in that they are stressed to a greater degree by the former. *Akhaṇḍ pāths* held by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā commence at 5am and end with the *bhog* at 5am the second day.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, throughout the service, there will be present continuously three *amritdhārī* males: the *pathī* (reader) for the *akhaṇḍ pāth*, the reader of the *Japjī Sāhib*, and the *giānī*<sup>50</sup> who will distribute the *karāh prasād*.<sup>51</sup> All will wear white clothes, and there is to be no participation by

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<sup>48</sup>One such example is the performance of five *akhaṇḍ pāths* continuously, which will be looked at below.

<sup>49</sup>Sant Puran Singh's belief on this matter was that those who love God will attend the service at any time.

<sup>50</sup>*Giānī* is used to refer to an individual who is learned in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.

<sup>51</sup>*Karāh prasād* is the sweetmeal distributed during the service to symbolize equality between all those

those who eat meat. Noticeably, there is no marked emphasis on the white colour in general Sikhism. In return for the service, whether performed at the *gurdwārā* or in the home of a follower, the *pathī* will accept no money, clothes or other gifts, he will also provide and pay for his own transport. The practice of performing five *akhaṇḍ pāths* continuously on marked occasions, such as *gurpurbs* and anniversaries, is also a distinctive feature of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, which is nowhere supported by the *Rehat Maryādā*. Again the emphasis on being *proper* Sikhs is steering the group away from conformity.

The main purpose of the institution of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* was to end diversity in the *Panth*, whereby all Sikhs would have one uniform praxis.<sup>52</sup> I contend that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is responsible for *accentuating* diversity within the *Panth*. But the insistence on five *akhaṇḍ pāths*, I reiterate, does not have any place in the general *Panth* and, significantly, not even among *amritdhārīs* of the general *Panth*. Moreover, it has no mention in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. This suggests that being a follower of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, and being a member of the overall general *Panth*, are not always coterminous -- a factor entrenched somewhat by the additional point that the Sikh *Panth* does not accept Puran Singh and his successors in the same sense as followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Other Sikhs tend to regard practices, such as five *akhaṇḍ pāths*, as being totally irrelevant and somewhat ostentatious, criticizing the group as attempting to create an ethos of being the most *Khālsā* orientated within the Sikh *Panth*. The attitude of other Sikhs is sufficiently represented by an informant at the Singh Sabhā Hounslow, who was particularly concerned to voice his opinion by posing the question of the relevance of five *akhaṇḍ pāths*. He labelled it as a mere attempt on behalf of the Gurū

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present at the *gurdwārā*, it is a characteristic feature of all *gurdwārās*.

<sup>52</sup> This has been looked at in detail in chapter 2.5 above.

Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā to place itself above everyone else. For many Sikhs, then, *Khālsā* ultra-stringency might mean a rigid Sikh identity, but it is not admired. Significantly, a Sikh identity does not necessarily equate with practices of the kind aimed at by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Hence, in this respect, I reiterate that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā has sought for itself some distinction from the overall *Panth*, and is thus accentuating diversity.

### **3:7:2 Involvement of the younger generation**

The centres of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā promote the involvement of the younger generation in order to make them aware of their Sikh orientation. Many functions are held by the group, with the particular aim of active involvement of the youngsters. The London *gurdwārā* has held special camps for the last two years, in which the youngsters are encouraged to learn about Sikhism. Inevitably this also features seminars on Sant Puran Singh, Norang Singh and Mohinder Singh. Social, as well as religious events take place, with the present leader attending every day of the programme. As well as expanding on Sikh teachings, the group clarifies what the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is by showing films on its development and its involvement in the gold *sewā* at Amritsar. There is some evidence to suggest that, by making the youngsters aware of the contributions of Sant Puran Singh and his successors, the camps are in actual fact promoting a separate, splintered identity to the youngsters as being followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.

The *gurdwārā* and *sewā* play a prominent role in the younger generation's decision to take *amrit*. Here, the group differs to some extent from general attitudes in Sikhism due to its continuous efforts to encourage the youngsters to become *amritdhārī*. But this is not forced on them. The aim is for a sense of belonging to develop, and for *amrit* to be taken as a result of the individual's own will. It is an aim

that brings this group inside the boundaries of *Khālsā* Sikhism, which also stresses that the survival of the *Panth* is possible through its members taking *amrit*.

### 3:7:3 The position of women

It was remarked by informants at the Birmingham, Leeds and Hounslow *gurdwārās* that women are allowed to conduct services, if they wish to do so. However, women in the *gurdwārā* commented that they would rather do certain traditional jobs assigned to them -- prepare food for the *langar* and see to the decorative side of the *gurdwārā*. This, they feel, is where they are most needed and where men would not be able to cope: therefore, conducting the services is left to male members of the *gurdwārā* and the issue of female *giānīs* has never really arisen. Noticeably, the majority of *giānīs* in the general *Panth* are also male, in this respect therefore, there is no marked difference between the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the overall *Panth*.

Although on the one hand, it was remarked that women are given a very special position within the group, women cannot take part in the service during an *akhaṇḍ pāth*. Here, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā differs from the majority of the *Panth*. It is nowhere stated in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* or, indeed, in *gurbāṇī* that certain religious practices are prohibited to females. Gurū Nānak himself openly criticized Hinduism for discriminating against women when it came to religious performance, and for refusing to allow women to read Hindu scriptures; Gurū Nānak encouraged females to read the scriptures:

From a woman, a woman is born. Without a woman, there can be none.  
Nanak, only the one True Lord, is without a woman.  
The mouth which ever praises the Lord, is fortunate, rosy and beautiful.  
Nanak, those faces shall be bright in the court of that True Lord. (AG 473)<sup>53</sup>

Thus, although claiming to be *true* Sikhs, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā seems, also, to be exhibiting signs of discrimination against women in religious

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<sup>53</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, pp. 1562-3.

practice -- something that *gurbāṇī* strongly disapproves of. On inquiring why the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā refused female participation in *akhaṇḍ pāths*, the question was evaded by male informants.<sup>54</sup> They remarked that women have other duties such as preparation of the *langar* and cleaning of the *gurdwārā*, which do not leave time for participating in the *akhaṇḍ pāth*; this I did not find a satisfactory answer! Nevertheless, another informant supported my suspicions of male domination when he explicitly remarked that women are not allowed to read from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, or perform any *sewā* to the Holy Book. Interestingly, on my visits informants were predominantly males. I managed to talk to a few women, who commented that they were needed more in the kitchen than in the *dīwān* hall on busy occasions such as *akhaṇḍ pāths*. The reasons for female exclusion from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib sewā* on these occasions were not expanded on any further, except that the order was given by Sant Puran Singh that only *amritdhārī males* could take part in the actual performance of an *akhaṇḍ pāth*. Additionally, the *karāh prasād* for the *akhaṇḍ pāth* is only to be prepared by the male *amritdhārī giānī* -- despite its fundamental principle being associated with equality of both caste and gender. The *karāh prasād* during an *akhaṇḍ pāth* in Sikhism generally can be prepared by an *amritdhārī* male or female and is not restricted to *amritdhārī* males only. The *Rehat Maryādā* confirms this as the norm:

Anyone who has prepared it [*karāh prasād*] in the prescribed manner, can bring it to a Gurdwara for distribution.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, from personal experience as a Sikh woman, ritual pollution attached to menstruating females is an aspect of Hinduism that Sikhism, on the whole, has not totally rejected. Importantly, there is no statement as such in Sikhism, unlike the

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<sup>54</sup>This could be due to taboos regarding female pollution that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā has retained from Hinduism. This concept is looked at below.

<sup>55</sup>*Rehat Maryādā* (1978) Anritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 11.

Hindu Laws of Manu with regard to menstruating women. I cannot determine whether the concept among Sikhs is widespread, but it *does* exist. A few examples include menstruating women not taking part in cooking *langar* and not preparing *karāh prāsad*. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā has gone a step further, however, in a total refusal of women -- whether menstruating or not -- from preparing *karāh prāsad*.

Thus the attitude of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā towards women clearly differentiates (and from a feminist principle might be said to exclude) them from the general *Panth*. Such attitudes certainly obscure their adherence to *gurbānī* where the social and religious uplifting of women is repeatedly present. In this respect, therefore, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is not egalitarian -- it denies full equal rights to females. Moreover, since its majority membership is from the *rāmgarhīā zāt* a certain distinctiveness of character is clear. Nevertheless, the position of women in the *Panth*, as a whole, is a perplexing and ambivalent one. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh writes:

As far back as I can remember, the characterization of girls and women in my society was a source of constant ambivalence and thus always fascinated me. The Sikh household into which I was born was part of a Punjabi society that brought together diverse traditions in which the status of women was as dubious as it was critical. I saw them exalted, and I saw them downgraded.<sup>56</sup>

But I must reiterate that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is explicitly biased in its refusal of female participation in *akhaṇḍ pāths* and its disallowing them to prepare *karāh prasād* in the *gurdwārā*. It is not therefore, adhering to Sikh principles with regard to its position on women.

The education of girls is nevertheless, greatly encouraged by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā -- the group claims that the majority of young women belonging to the group are graduates.<sup>57</sup> Very few girls of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām

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<sup>56</sup> Singh, *The Feminine Principle*, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> As an informant at the Hounslow *gurdwārā* remarked.



Sewak Jathā end their education at GCSE level; rather they go on to higher and further education, resulting in the members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā being financially stable; the same also applies to males. Therefore, with regard to education, no discrimination is applied between males and females. Since the stage of *grstī*, that of the householder, is an important aspect of Sikh life, the role of the mother is seen as a very important one indeed. Thus, while women are more curtailed in some areas of religious practice, they are encouraged in education.

### **3:7:4 Importance of *amrit* initiation**

Being *amritdhārī* is the ideal aimed at by both the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the *Rehat Maryādā*: therefore, in this matter the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is firmly in line with *Khālsā* Sikhism. An inner transformation of mind and heart are essential qualities of an *amritdhārī*. The group's adherence to *Khālsā* practices is exemplified by its emphasis on the *Khālsā* form, which is seen as the disciplined way of life as dictated by the code of conduct. It is important that both husband and wife are *amritdhārī*, for the uninitiated partner is regarded as polluting to the *amritdhārī* partner. This, however, is clearly differentiating between *amritdhārī* Sikhs and all others. The reading of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is reserved only for *amritdhārīs* in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā *gurdwārās*. In general *gurdwārās* whether or not the *granthī* must be *amritdhārī* cannot be determined with total certainty. The more *Khālsā* orientated *gurdwārās* insist that the *granthī* is *amritdhārī*, whilst the less *Khālsā* orientated require that he or she be at least *kesdhārī*. In the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā the non-initiated can only contribute to the *sewā* of the *gurdwārā* by cleaning, cooking and serving the *saṅgat*.

It must be noted that the *Rehat Maryādā* does not require *amritdhārīs* to be vegetarians; *amritdhārī* Sikhs are not prohibited from eating meat,<sup>58</sup> as long as it is not *halāl*. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, however, *insists* on members -- the majority of whom are *amritdhārīs* -- being pure vegetarians, a practice that has no authority in the teachings of the Gurūs, or in the *Rehat Maryādā*. Nevertheless, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā does not stand alone in expecting *amritdhārīs* to be vegetarians -- many *gurdwārās* other than those of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā also insist that the initiated must abstain from meat-eating.<sup>59</sup> The issue of vegetarianism in Sikhism continues to be a matter over which there are differing opinions among Sikhs themselves.

It is important to note that since the *gurdwārā* is open to people of all faiths and backgrounds, the *laṅgar* is always vegetarian. Therefore, the food prepared in the *laṅgar* is universally acceptable. With regard to the individual's personal choice, although vegetarianism is not a requirement of Sikhism, many Sikhs in actual fact retain Hindu notions of meat eating as polluting.<sup>60</sup> In this respect, therefore, a large number of *amritdhārīs* prefer not to eat meat. So, since the *gurdwārā* is strictly vegetarian, members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā extend the principle of not eating meat into their everyday lives. In their opinion, abstaining from meat eating involves the concept of ritual purity, since the handling of meat is also a source of ritual pollution.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Although there is no prohibition on the eating of beef, Sikhs generally will not eat it out of respect for the cow, a tradition that has been carried on from their Hindu background.

<sup>59</sup>Examples include Nānaksar *gurdwārās*, the Nāmdhārīs and the *rāmgarhīū gurdwārā* on Foleshill Road, Coventry.

<sup>60</sup>From personal experience, many other Sikhs, although not vegetarian will abstain from meat eating on one particular day of the week -- in Britain this is usually on a Sunday.

<sup>61</sup>Information from the Hounslow *gurdwārā*.

### **3:7:5 Gurdwārā organization**

Unlike general *gurdwārās*, no elections take place for committee members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā; the five original members of the committee, as mentioned earlier, were chosen by Sant Puran Singh, the criteria for which was that individuals be *amritdhārī* and abstain totally from meat and alcohol. The *jathedār* of the whole organization, who acts similarly to a chairman, is Giānī Mulak Singh and, with the other four members, each has an equal position. The *gurdwārās* of the group are run according to the established traditions of Sant Puran Singh, rather than on the agreed arrangement by committee members as in *gurdwārās* of the *Panth*. This has overt implications for the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is continually endorsing the power of Sant Puran Singh -- *gurdwārās* are still running as to how he wished. Moreover, this has overtones of declaring Sant Puran Singh as the “leader” of Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā *gurdwārās* even after his death. It also has a sense of proclaiming him as a supreme person who has religious centres devoted to him. This suggests a more overt deviance from a corporate Sikh affiliation.

### **3:7:6 The ideal of *nishkāmatā* in practice**

*Gurdwārās* of the general *Panth* make charges for individuals who use their services, such as the undertaking of the *akhaṇḍ pāth* by *giānīs*, and a member of the *gurdwārā* conducting the wedding ceremony. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, as mentioned earlier, does not charge for services -- thus highlighting its adherence to *sewā* more so than the general *Panth*. It is entirely up to individuals if they wish to pay for events such as marriages, death ceremonies, naming ceremonies, or an *akhaṇḍ pāth* and, if so, the amount payable is to be decided by the individual and not by the *gurdwārā*. Thus the group requires nothing in return for services performed. In addition, all the centres of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā around the world

have facilities for followers and visitors to stay at the *gurdwārās*' purpose-built accommodation. The accommodation is free and everyone is welcome to stay as long as is required for peace of mind. In this respect the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is truly carrying forward the message of *gurbāṇī* to perform deeds unselfishly.

### **3:7:7 Significance given to the colour white**

Although there is no marked emphasis on any particular colour in general Sikh practice, older members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā tend to wear a white turban, signifying wisdom.<sup>62</sup> Utmost importance is attached to ritual purity; those participating in services, especially *akhaṇḍ pāths*, will wash their body and hair before taking any part in the service. Leaving the building and travelling by bus, or any action that causes pollution to the self and one's clothes, will necessitate taking another bath. Thus, wearing white clothes, which symbolize purity and cleanliness, maintains the sanctity of the building. Although, in Sikhism generally, a bath on rising early in the morning is essential for all *amritdhārīs*, there is no need for repeated baths during the day and no insistence on wearing white clothes; neither is there any such requirement in the *Rehat Maryādā*. It is well to note that in general the Sikh widow generally tends to wear white also.

### **3:7:8 The celebration of *baisākhī* at the Birmingham *gurdwārā***

In line with Sikh practice in general, *baisākhī*<sup>63</sup> is celebrated with great enthusiasm by the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, who refer to it as *baisākhī gurpurb*. Highly notable is the vast number of *kesdhārīs* present – an indication of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā followers' adherence to the very institutions created on *baisākhī* in 1699. The service begins ten days earlier, with the first of five

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<sup>62</sup>It shows that a person is ageing and, therefore, has become wiser with regard to spiritual knowledge and adherence to the Sikh faith.

<sup>63</sup>*Baisākhī* is celebrating the day in 1699 CE on which the outward form of Sikhism, the *Khālsā*, was created by Gurū Gobind Singh. It takes place on April 14 every year. Prior to the tricentenary of the *Khālsā* in the year 2000, *baisākhī* was celebrated on April 13.

*akhaṇḍ pāths* commencing at 5am,<sup>64</sup> the final *bhog* taking place at 5am on the day of *baisākhī*. On the actual day of *baisākhī*, the custom of changing the *nisān sāhib* is observed, as it is by all Sikhs. At the Birmingham *gurdwārā* the *nisān sāhib* is changed at 7am, slightly earlier than *gurdwārās* that do not belong to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.

Of major significance in the events taking place on *baisākhī* is the large number of followers taking *amrit*, both in general *gurdwārās* and *gurdwārās* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Since the purpose of the group is for its followers to become *amritdhārī*, the day of *baisākhī* is one on which mass initiations are conducted.<sup>65</sup> Regarding the actual event of taking *amrit*, the ceremony begins with Mohinder Singh – the present *bābājī* -- washing the feet of the *pāñj pyāre*.<sup>66</sup> The significance of this action is to highlight the *bābājī*'s humility. This act is a prestigious event, since it shows that an action such as washing the feet of others is not regarded as being low.<sup>67</sup> It was interesting to note that a significant number of youngsters were also about to take *amrit* -- a great achievement in the eyes of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and, indeed, something aspired to by the general *Panth*.<sup>68</sup> The photograph below illustrates Mohinder Singh washing the feet of the *pāñj pyāre*, (he is pointed out by the X on the photograph):

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<sup>64</sup>The practice of five continuous *akhaṇḍ pāths*, as highlighted earlier, is one that belongs exclusively to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā.

<sup>65</sup>All those who wish to take *amrit* are asked to record their names. This is in order for the group to keep the initiated posted on all issues, and to give them a sense of belonging to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. I was told that continuous contact with followers prevents them from drifting away. There are age restrictions for those undertaking *amrit*.

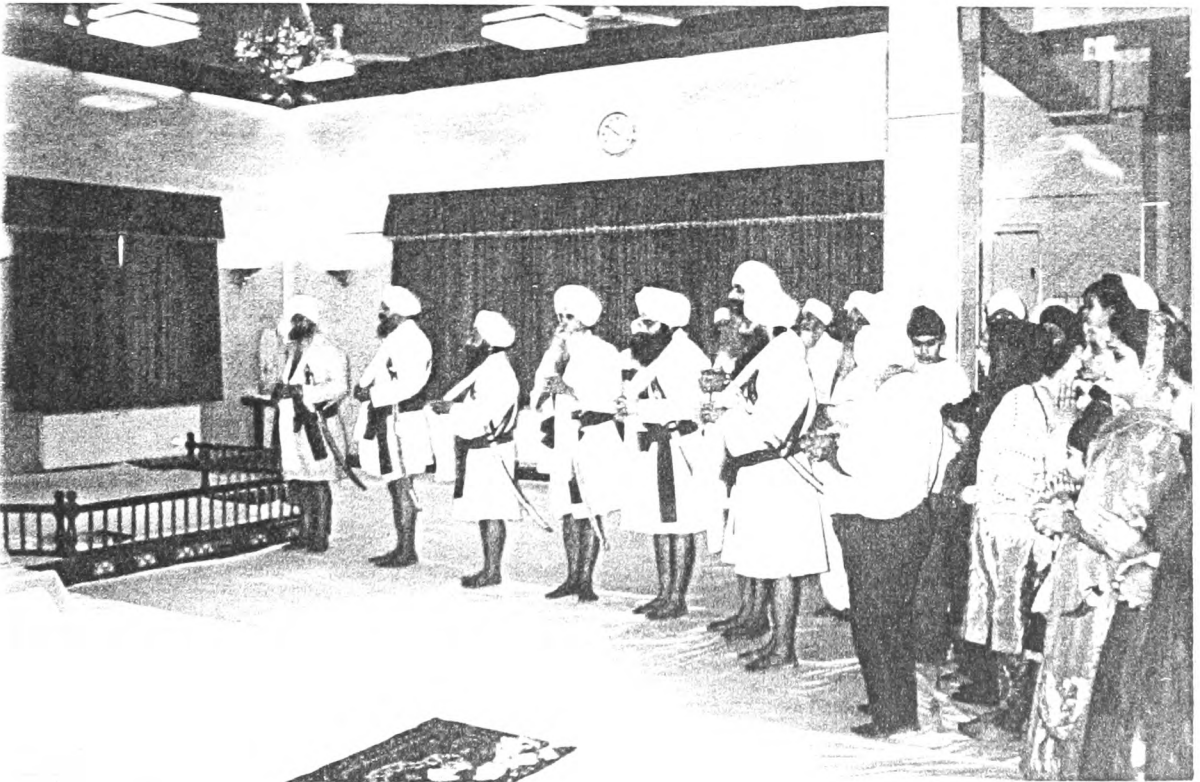
<sup>66</sup>Those in charge were not too happy with my filming this aspect. I was told not to show the film or any photographs to outside organizations. The reason for this attitude was not particularly understood, although at a later date, I was assured by an informant at the Leeds *gurdwārā* that nothing suspicious is taking place.

<sup>67</sup>I was not allowed to film the actual *amrit* ceremony of followers, since those not taking *amrit* were asked to leave the room.

<sup>68</sup>Very young children are not permitted to take *amrit* due to a lack of understanding of the responsibility that they are undertaking.



The photograph below shows the lining up of the *pāñj pyāres*, and two guards also in the same uniform:



The very fact that mass initiations take place on *baisākhī* in the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is a clear indicator of the level of adherence to the *Khālsā* by the group. In this matter, their *Khālsā* orientation and conformity cannot be questioned -- this, needless to repeat, is the ideal sought by the *Rehat Maryādā*.

### **3:7:9 Gurburbs**

In line with Sikhism as a whole, the *gurburbs* of the Sikh Gurūs are celebrated enthusiastically by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Significant services are held on *baisākhī*, the martyrdom of Gurū Arjan, the *gurgaddi* of the *Ādi Granth*,<sup>69</sup> Gurū Nānak's birthday, the martyrdom of Gurū Tegh Bahādur, and Gurū Gobind Singh's birthday. These are central to overall Sikh practice. The festivals of *holā mohallā* and *dīwālī* are also celebrated.

Although the birthdays of Sant Puran Singh or his successors are not celebrated, emphasis is placed on celebrations that commemorate the deaths of Sant Puran Singh and Bhāi Norang Singh. Interestingly, the term *gurburb* is not applied to the death anniversaries of the two leaders, since they are not regarded as Gurūs, but *Sants*. In general Sikhism the term *gurburb* is only applied to anniversaries of the ten Gurūs and the *gurgaddi* of the *Ādi Granth*. Hence, in clearly pointing out that the death anniversaries of Sant Puran Singh and Norang Singh are not *gurburbs*, informants intended that the group should not be seen to be outside *Khālsā* Sikhism. But the death anniversary of Sant Puran Singh is celebrated through five *akhaṇḍ pāths*, held by each of the *gurdwārās* at Birmingham, Leeds and Hounslow. One *akhaṇḍ pāth* is held throughout the *gurdwārās* on the death anniversary of Norang Singh. Again, an informant at Birmingham was quick to point out that the death

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<sup>69</sup>This is to mark the occasion of Gurū Gobind Singh proclaiming the *Ādi Granth* as the eternal Gurū of the Sikhs, and its installation at *Hazur Sāhib*.

anniversaries of the leaders of the group do not take precedence over the *gurpurbs*; the main aim is allegiance to *gurbañī*. On this matter, the *Rehat Maryādā* states that:

No ceremony, other than a Sikh Ceremony, is to be performed in a Gurdwara<sup>70</sup>

The distinctiveness of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā in celebrating the death anniversaries of Sant Puran Singh and Bhāī Norang Singh, and the emphasis and reverence they attach to the *Sants*, are areas of deviance from adherence to the *Rehat Maryādā*. Furthermore, the fact that the two deceased leaders belong exclusively to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and not to the overall *Panth*, again promotes what must be claimed as the distinctive nature of the group.

In summary, many practices of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā are indeed, representative of indicators towards the clear corporate Sikh identity of the group. Hence, as far as the practices of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā are concerned, they are in accordance with requirements stated in the authoritative *Rehat Maryādā*. This conformity is tabulated below.

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<sup>70</sup>Amritsar *Rehat Maryada*, p. 6.



<i>Sikh Practice</i>	<i>Present among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā</i>	<i>Absent among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā</i>
Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship	#	
The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief	#	
<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Singing of <i>kīrtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Recitation of <i>ardās</i> during worship	#	
Performance of <i>akhaṇḍ pāths</i>	#	
<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs	#	
Serving of <i>gurū-kā-laṅgar</i>	#	
Distribution of <i>prasād</i>	#	
Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>	#	
Importance of the Sikh Gurūs	#	
Prominence of the <i>Khaṇḍā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol	#	
Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony	#	
Emphasis on the Five Ks	#	
Emphasis on being <i>kesdhārī</i>	#	
Traditional Punjabi dress for females	#	
Requirement for males and females to cover their heads	#	
Celebration of the <i>gurpurbs</i>	#	
Celebration of <i>baisākhī</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>	#	
Celebration of <i>ḍīwālī</i> as the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison	#	
Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>	#	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhī</i>	#	
Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khaṇḍā</i>	#	
Endogamous marriages	#	

**Table 5. Conformity of practices found among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the general *Panth*.**

As can be clearly seen, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā follows each of the main practices and, therefore, illustrates its *Khālsā* orientation. But it is, rather, what it *adds* to such practices that serves to separate and differentiate it within the *Panth*, as is seen in the following table.

Practice found among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā	Totally absent from general Sikh practice	Expressed differently in the <i>Panth</i>
Five <i>akhaṇḍ pāths</i> continuously	#	
No participation of females in an <i>akhaṇḍ pāth</i>	#	
<i>Kaṛāh prasād</i> to be prepared by males <i>only</i>	#	
Committee members chosen by Sant Puran Singh		Committees elected
Importance of the colour white		Older Sikhs and widows tend to wear white
Commemorations for the deaths of Sant Puran Singh and Bhāi Norang Singh	#	

**Table 6. Practices that distinguish the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā from the general *Panth*.**

### **3:8 The position of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā within the *Panth***

With regard to the *Rehat Maryādā's* insistence on the outward form of the *Khālsā*, it has to be said that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā occupies an important position *within* the *Panth* -- as its overall majority of *amritdhārīs* illustrates. The stress placed on the importance of *amrit* is highlighted by the fact that, as indicated earlier, within the group only *amritdhārī giānīs* can prepare the *kaṛāh prasād* during an *akhaṇḍ pāth*, and only *amritdhārī* followers are allowed to prepare *langar*.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup>It was remarked by an informant at Birmingham that the *gurdwārās* of the group in Birmingham, Leeds and London are seen as being the most *Khālsā* orientated when compared to other *gurdwārās* of

Further discussions and observations revealed that the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā boasts one of the largest majorities of *amritdhārīs*, which includes a significant number from British-born Sikhs. This is due to the efforts of Sant Puran Singh and his successors, whose aim was, and continues to be, the religious reorientation of diaspora Sikhs by the correct performance of the Sikh religion -- often leading to a position of *Khālsā* ultra-stringency. The emphasis is on the teachings of the ten Gurūs: the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is the sole scripture used. Nevertheless, the insistence on the *Sants* of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā places doubt on their position within the *Khālsā*, and is too prominent a feature to be overlooked. My claim here is that, if leaders other than the ten Sikh Gurūs and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* are followed, then this is deviance from Sikh belief and identity in a fundamental issue. Furthermore, the group has a mainly *rāmgarhīā* following.<sup>72</sup>

The very fact that a room, as remarked above, in the Birmingham *gurdwārā* is devoted exclusively to Sant Puran Singh further highlights the emphasis on *Sants*. It is not permitted to take photographs of this room, which displays various enlarged portraits of Sant Puran Singh, in front of which, members will *matāh tekḥ*, bow in reverence. A few portraits of Bhāī Norang Singh are also present, and members will *matāh tekḥ* in front of these too. I must stress that there are no representations of the Sikh Gurūs in this room, but followers will visit it in order to pay respect to Sant Puran Singh, also to Bhāī Norang Singh. Members and visitors sit quietly in the room to meditate in the spiritual presence of these two *Sants*. What I want to stress here, is that, devotees in this particular room exhibit a stronger Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak

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the area.

<sup>72</sup>In theory the group claims to accept followers from any *zāt* without any discrimination whatsoever. I was told that if I, as a *jat*, wanted to become a member of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, there would be no obstacles, providing I was ready to take *amrit* and become a vegetarian. In practice, however, it cannot be ignored that the overwhelming majority of followers of the group are *rāmgarhīā*. This may be due to the fact that, since the leaders themselves are *rāmgarhīā*, followers also tend to be so: thus offspring who claim allegiance to the group will obviously be *rāmgarhīā* too.

Jathā identity, than a corporate Sikh *Panthic* identity. Additionally, the belief among followers that the blessing of the present *bābājī*, like his predecessors, is adequate to cure certain illnesses, appears to attach some kind of divine and miraculous element to the nature of the spiritual leaders.

An important consideration here is why the *saṅgat* seeks the blessing of Mohinder Singh. Why does he not, instead, stress that followers should find comfort in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*? Surely, it is the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* that is the guide for the *Panth* and not Mohinder Singh? This is another area, therefore, that might suggest the difference and separation of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā from the general *Panth*. Few, if any, outside the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā would seek the advice of Mohinder Singh. Also, the fact that Sant Puran Singh's teachings are of such importance amongst his followers, demonstrates a drifting from the *Khālsā* if the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* is taken as the yardstick; the *Rehat Maryādā* alludes to the fact that an *amritdhārī* Sikh should not follow the teachings of any other than the ten Sikh Gurūs.<sup>73</sup>

However, the importance of Sant Puran Singh among the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā can be justified if one bears in mind that the tradition of *Sants* and their following has a long history in the Sikh faith. I should emphasize that the importance of keeping the company of *Sants* is made mention of in the writings of the Sikh Gurūs: Gurū Arjan himself advocated one's association with *Sants* via the *saṅgat*, attributing *Sants* with "superhuman ideals":

On the theological plane, a sant is an exalted and venerable figure in the Sikh scriptures. He is to be applauded by ordinary Sikhs. The virtuous life associated with a sant or a *brahmagyani* (one who has a perfect knowledge of God) is strenuously defined in Sikh scriptures. A sant is almost a super-human ideal. Guru Arjan, the fifth guru, devotes several passages in his famous composition *sukhmani* to praise the virtues of a saintly person calling him by various new

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<sup>73</sup> Amritsar *Rehat Maryada*, p. 21.

names *sadh*, *sant* or *brahmgyani*; making him almost a pale reflection of the God.<sup>74</sup>

The Sikh community today has various *Sants* who visit the diaspora and are greeted most welcomingly by the particular *saṅgat*. This prominence of visiting *Sants* in the lives of diaspora Sikhs, has been highlighted by Tatla: “the role of visiting *Sants* is of crucial importance, . . . *Sants* have shaped the lives of many of their Sikh disciples directly, inspiring others to uphold the religious ideals, and have contributed in several ways to the community’s causes and institutions.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā also has a tradition of receiving, quite frequently, *Sants* from India, in addition to spiritually enlightened *sadhūs* and other holy men. There is no particular visiting *Sant*, although Yogī Bhajan of America has visited a few times, along with Sant Bābā Labh Singh.<sup>76</sup>

In the light of this evidence, the prominence of the *Sants* in the group is not so exceptional. It could be claimed, then, that the acceptance of such religious leaders does *not* place the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā beyond conformity to the *Panth*. After all, the primary role and aim of Sant Puran Singh was to bring back the drifted members of diaspora Sikhs, who, through taking *amrit*, would be able to take pride in their *Khālsā* Sikh identity. However, the *supremacy* of Sant Puran Singh and his successors, among followers, enigmatizes their claim to belong within the strict *Khālsā Panth*. Importantly, although the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā claims to be thoroughly Sikh, at times -- as the insistence on *Sants* peculiar to the group suggests -- the group differentiates *itself* from the general *saṅgat*.

So although Sant Puran Singh's aspirations appear analogous to those of the *Panth* as a whole, it is his level of *supremacy per se*, I suggest, that threatens the

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<sup>74</sup>Tatla, D. S. “Nurturing the Faithful: The Role of the Sant among Britain’s Sikhs”, in *Religion*, 22 (1992): 351.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>76</sup>Information from the Leeds *gurdwārā*.

*Khālsā* conformity of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Belief in Sant Puran Singh's divine calling has led to his *exalted* respect and veneration. The idea that Sant Puran Singh was appointed by God to carry out his divine mission appears to be very similar to that of Gurū Nānak's experience. In this respect, I felt that the group is giving Sant Puran Singh an extremely superior position by comparing his calling and task to that of Gurū Nānak's. The comparison between Sant Puran Singh and Gurū Nānak is further highlighted by the fact that followers believe the birth of the former, like that of Gurū Nānak, was non-karmic. That is, Sant Puran Singh had already become one with God and, rather than taking rebirth to reap the fruits of his past *karma*, he had reincarnated in order to help others on the path to *mukti*.

In section 3:3:1 above, I noted that a member of the Leeds *saṅgat* had stated that Sant Puran Singh was to be regarded as a God himself by his successor, Norang Singh. This is a remarkable statement by an adherent of the group, and is extremely important since it is indicative that informants at the *gurdwārās* are placing Sant Puran Singh on a level by which their adherence to *Khālsā* teachings becomes considerably compromised. Sikh teachings declare that worship is due to the One Supreme God only, who has no *avatārs*, no tangible aspects for worship. Thus, the placing of Sant Puran Singh on such a high level that is suggestive, in any way, of a godly status, is something that *gurbāṇī* is *strictly against*, as the *Rehat Maryādā* states:

He [a Sikh] should worship only one God, and should not indulge in any form of idol worship.<sup>77</sup>

This, then, is a fundamental area of difference from general Sikh belief.

It is this issue of the status of the *Sants* of the group that lies at the heart of its differentiation from the rest of the *Panth*, I suggest. Sant Puran Singh must himself

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<sup>77</sup>Amritsar *Rehat Maryada*, p. 12.

have felt the need for such differentiation in some of his actions. The very fact that Sant Puran Singh initially wanted to set himself as leader of *gurdwārās* is a concise indication of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā's separateness from the general *Panth*. Indeed, if the teachings and practices of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā were those of the general *Panth* then there would be no need for distinct places of worship. I feel that Puran Singh's words:

The seeds have been sown in Leeds,  
the development of the seeds has taken place in London,  
the fruits have been borne in Birmingham.

are themselves indicative of what might be described as a separate Sikh identity. The context of Puran Singh's words is suggestive of his followers being separate from the general *Panth* -- otherwise why the need to establish distinct *Jathās* and *gurdwārās*? If respect to the ten Gurūs and their *gurbānī* is the message of Sikhism, then why did followers not attend ordinary *gurdwārās* -- why this overt necessity to establish unique *saṅgats*? I find it difficult to accept that Sant Puran Singh was promulgating a corporate Sikh identity while emphasizing *his* message and *his saṅgat* -- these accentuate separation and highlight problems of attempts to establish a uniform Sikh identity. This is a separateness, I contend, that has resulted in diversity rather than uniformity in the *Panth*. Nevertheless, the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā cannot be excluded from the *Panth*, due to its overt emphasis on the *Khālsā* form. Levels of reverence towards the *Sants* unique to the group however, differentiate it from other Sikhs. The particular *Sants* are revered by the group alone in their *separate gurdwārās*.

A point to note here is that the offspring of those who follow the group also become known as followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. However, they only become full members on taking *amrit*; this is the minimum qualification

needed. Thus, again, here is the insistence on a specific identity of followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā who initiate into the group, as well as a corporate identity into the *Khālsā* fold. This insistence on taking *amrit* is so great that certain roles, as illustrated above, can only be performed by *amritdhārīs*. Furthermore, other Sikhs of the *Panth* do not often regard the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā as *true* Sikhs because of the latter's overt insistence on the *Khālsā*. This is highly significant for it is indicative that extreme *Khālsā* adherence does not necessarily constitute a sound criterion for uniform Sikh identity. Nevertheless, followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā truly believe that, due to the expanding number of followers every day, the day will come when the group will lead the whole of the Sikh *Panth*.<sup>78</sup> This desire to lead is a strong indication that the group does, indeed, view itself as above the *Panth* as a whole, even if it stresses, at the same time, that it is within it.

Significantly, not all *rāmgarhīās* support the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. Conversations with *rāmgarhīās*, who are not followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, disclosed that they view the group as not being true Sikhs due to their insistence on their "own" *Sants*. This is interesting, and suggests that not only are there characteristics *within* the group that differentiate it from Sikhism in general, but that Sikhs *outside* the group -- even of the same *zāt* -- regard this group as being different from the general *Panth*.

It is clear that diversity, rather, than coherence in the *Panth* is enhanced by the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā. The claim of the followers of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā to be true Sikhs has created a rather diverse identity added to a caste-exclusive attitude among them. I argue that a single definition of a Sikh is

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<sup>78</sup>As expressed by an informant at the London *gurdwārā*.



inadequate when considering groups such as the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, who are for the most part thoroughly *Khālsā* orientated, and yet can be differentiated in their practices. Diversity within the *Panth* is further accentuated by the Nāmdhāris, whom I intend to examine in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### *Nāmdhāris*

#### 4:1 Nāmdhāris and the *Panth*

The term Nāmdhāri is translated as "one who has the Name of God imbued in the heart", and it refers to a Punjabi community that stresses meditation on the Name of God, *nām japnā* -- a practice that was at the core of the original Nānak community, and one that remains essential to Sikhism today. Another term often used interchangeably for the Nāmdhāris is Kūkās.<sup>1</sup> This term is derived from the Punjabi word "to shriek" (*kūknā*), and refers to the ecstatic singing taking place during Nāmdhāri communal worship. Occasionally, the Nāmdhāri community is also referred to as the *Sant Khālsā*, *Sants* referring to "saints". Both these characteristics also stem from ideas that were important to the foundational Nānak community.

Although Nāmdhāris themselves have never doubted their Sikh affiliation, it will be important to examine how the *Panth*, overall, regards them. A major distinction between the Nāmdhāris and the general *Panth*, is that the former continue the tradition of living Gurūs. Consequently, they deny status of gurūship to the *Ādi Granth*. It is here that the issue of Sikh identity becomes rather intricate. An important paradigm of distinctiveness *per se* is the fact that Nāmdhāris will refer to themselves as "Nāmdhāri Sikhs". This at once suggests secession -- as far as they, themselves, are concerned -- from other Sikhs. By examining the practices and beliefs of this community, I shall endeavour to find out what light they throw on the issue of Sikh identity.

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<sup>1</sup>Kūkās is the plural, the singular is Kūkā. The number of Nāmdhāri followers is difficult to estimate. Nāmdhāri informants suggested figures ranging from around one million in Britain, to two and a half million world-wide. The figure for Britain, however, is very exaggerated since the total population of Sikhs as a whole in the UK is approximately 500,000.

A particular feature of this group is that it is not a caste-based organization, unlike some other groups looked at in this study.<sup>2</sup> Although its membership consists of a substantial majority of members from the *rāmgarhīā zāt*, there are also followers from the *jaṭ* and *arorā*<sup>3</sup> *zāts*. A small percentage of members from the Scheduled Classes also make up its total numbers.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, inter-caste marriages take place, a practice unique to Nāmdhāris.

Nāmdhāris adamantly believe, as remarked above, that the line of human Gurūs did not end with Gurū Gobind Singh's installing the *Ādi Granth* as eternal Gurū. This labels the Nāmdhāris as heretics by many Sikhs. Whereas the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, as indicated in the previous chapter, attributes the term *Sant* to religious leaders of the group, the Nāmdhāris explicitly equate their leaders as successors of the ten human Sikh Gurūs. Despite this, preliminary investigation has revealed that there are numerous ways in which this particular group is thoroughly *Khālsā* adhering. It is for this reason that the Nāmdhāris are considered as belonging within the overall *Panth*.

Nāmdhāris believe that the tenth Gurū did not die in 1708 CE, but went on to live a secretive life and, before his death, selected a *human* successor. This successor became the eleventh human Gurū according to the Nāmdhāris. The eleventh Gurū was succeeded by the most important of the Nāmdhāri Gurūs, Rām Singh (born 1816 CE). There have been three successors since the alleged death of Gurū Rām Singh:<sup>5</sup> these

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<sup>2</sup>Such as the Vālmīkis, composed of the *chūhrā zāt*; the Ravidāsīs, composed of the *chamār zāt*; and the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā, composed of the *rāmgarhīā zāt*.

<sup>3</sup>This is a *zāt* of merchants, found in both the Hindu and Sikh faiths.

<sup>4</sup>This information was received from an informant at Wolverhampton. Exactly what proportion is made up of the Scheduled Classes is uncertain.

<sup>5</sup>Nāmdhāris do not concur with British government records of Gurū Rām Singh's death while in exile; according to them, he did not die and will return very soon. This belief will be explored in detail in

are Gurū Harī Singh (1819 - 1906), Gurū Pratāp Singh (1890 - 1959), and the present Gurū -- the spiritual head of all Nāmdhāris -- Gurū Jagjīt Singh (born 1920). Therefore, Gurū Rām Singh's successors are not labelled as the 13th, 14th and 15th Nāmdhāri Gurūs, they are, instead, referred to as the 1st, 2nd and 3rd successors of Gurū Rām Singh.<sup>6</sup> It is this acceptance of the continuation of the line of Gurūs that lies at the heart of the group, and to which all their practices and beliefs need to be related: it is non-conformity balanced with *Khālsā* stringency and maintenance of Sikh tradition.

Nāmdhāris are immediately distinguishable by the horizontal style in which they tie their white turban across the forehead. This style is, apparently, reminiscent of the manner in which Gurū Nānak is portrayed as having tied his turban: thus, the aim is towards very traditional practices. It is clear that in certain aspects the Nāmdhāris attempt to be wholly traditional, taking their beliefs and practices right back to the original Nānak community, and yet, they have tended to be regarded as quite a heretic group with regard to one major belief. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that, since on initial analysis, the rules of the *Khālsā* are observed rigidly by the Nāmdhāris, the majority, if not all, Kūkās are *amritdhāri* and aim to follow all rules stringently. Since Nāmdhāris are pacifists,<sup>7</sup> and wish to commit no harm to

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section 4:2:4 below.

<sup>6</sup>Thus the successors of Gurū Rām Singh assume the role of "deputy Gurūs", looking after the Nāmdhāri community until the return of Gurū Rām Singh. For this same reason, Gurū Rām Singh's *gaddī* "seat" at Bhaini Sāhib remains unoccupied.

<sup>7</sup>The Nāmdhāri community is most renowned for its role in India's freedom struggle. They fought wholeheartedly against the British authorities, which caused their leaders to be seen as threats by the British government. The efforts of the Nāmdhāris during the struggle for Independence were acknowledged by the first President of Independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, in the following words: "No Indian can deny the importance of efforts put in by Satguru Ram Singh and his followers, Nāmdhāri Sikhs, seventy five years ago in achieving the freedom of the country. Congress merely followed the path shown by them and attained independence." Cited in *Asian Affairs: U.K. Special*,

living beings, they are staunch vegetarians. As far as scriptures are concerned, since the *Ādi Granth* is not accepted as the eternal Gurū -- resulting from belief in a continually living Gurū -- equal importance is attached to both the *Ādi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth*.<sup>8</sup>

A brief introduction to the Nāmdhāris, then, has already presented a paradox when examining the criteria they present with regard to the issue of Sikh identity. On the one hand, they display clear indicators of a Sikh affiliation due to their insistence on the *Khālsā* code of discipline. On the other hand, however, their practice of acknowledging a succession of human Gurūs, in addition to the ten human Gurūs -- and, importantly, regarding them as Gurūs rather than *Sants* -- offends fundamental Sikh belief. And yet, the Nāmdhāris' position within the *Panth*, as remarked earlier, has not been totally rejected. Significantly, McLeod has pointed out that: "Faced by their devotion, the Tat Khalsa in general and Principal Teja Singh<sup>9</sup> in particular concluded that even if they [Namdharis] were astray on one vital point they were at least potentially aligned with the Panth."<sup>10</sup> This apparent enigma will need to be examined when I look at the practices and beliefs of the Nāmdhāri community. To begin with, a brief overview of the history and development of the Nāmdhāris is necessary in order to ascertain the general ethos of the group, and how this relates to a particular Sikh identity.

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*50th Anniversary Issue*, March 1997, p. 20. Yet, despite such a militaristic past, the Nāmdhāris today are a pacifist group. How this came about will need to be examined in section 4:2:3 below.

<sup>8</sup>The *Dasam Granth* contains the writings of the tenth Gurū, Gobind Singh. His compositions are not present in the *Ādi Granth*.

<sup>9</sup>Teja Singh is renowned as a great scholar and was also a member of the *Tat Khālsā*.

<sup>10</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1997) *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 191-2.

## 4:2 History of the Nāmdhāri tradition

### 4:2:1 Continuing the line of human successors

Nāmdhāri justification for the succession of human Gurūs, after the death of Gurū Gobind Singh is extremely important to assess the Sikh alliance of the group. According to the Nāmdhāris, Gurū Gobind Singh did not die at Nander in 1708, as understood by Sikhs generally. Instead, he lived his later life as Ajapāl Singh until the year 1812. Nāmdhāris believe that Gurū Gobind Singh, assuming the role of an actor, merely disappeared from the scene of his alleged death at Nander. It is an account detailed by Macauliffe.<sup>11</sup>

Macauliffe's account is interpreted differently by Nāmdhāris and non-Nāmdhāris. According to the Nāmdhāris, the account itself justifies, literally, the fact that Gurū Gobind Singh did not die, but acted out a mere disappearing scene. On the other hand, non-Nāmdhāri Sikhs interpret the account as alluding to the *physical* death of the tenth Gurū, though his *spiritual* presence, nonetheless, was always retained within the *Panth*. This latter opinion is again strengthened by Macauliffe when he goes on to state that the physical death of the Gurū took place on the day in question in 1708,<sup>12</sup> supporting the Gurū's spiritual presence among the *Panth*, as

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<sup>11</sup>This view is recorded by Macauliffe in his following account: "While all were mourning the loss of the Guru a hermit arrived and said, 'You suppose that the Guru is dead. I saw him this very morning riding his bay horse. When I bowed to him he said, 'Come, O hermit, let me behold thee. Very happy am I that I have met thee at the last moment.' I then asked him whither he was wending his way. He smiled and said he was going to the forest on a hunting excursion. He had his bow in his hand, and his arrows were fastened with a strap to his waist.' The Sikhs who heard this statement arrived at the conclusion that it was all the Guru's play, that he dwelt in uninterrupted bliss, and that he showed himself wherever he was remembered. . . Wherefore for such a Guru who had departed bodily to heaven, there ought to be no mourning. The ashes of the bier were collected and a platform built over them." (Macauliffe, M. A. (1990 reprint of 1909 edition) *The Sikh Religion: Vol 5*, Delhi: Low Price Publications, p. 245).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 246.

opposed to an actual physical bodily existence as postulated by the Nāmdhāris.<sup>13</sup> From this period onwards emerges the distinction in belief between the Nāmdhāris and the general *Panth*, and it is also from this period that Nāmdhāris believe Gurū Gobind Singh changed his name to Ajapāl Singh.

Kūkās therefore believe that gurūship was *not* eternally vested in the *Ādi Granth* but, rather, Gurū Gobind Singh, before his death in 1812, chose an *arorā* by the name of Bālak Singh, from the village of Hazro, as his successor. The birth date of Gurū Bālak Singh is uncertain, according to some authors it is cited as 1797,<sup>14</sup> whereas others suggest a date of 1799.<sup>15</sup> Overall, however, the most frequent date, accepted by Nāmdhāris is 1785.<sup>16</sup> There is unanimity over the date of Gurū Bālak Singh's death, that of 1862.<sup>17</sup> Thus Bālak Singh is regarded as the eleventh Gurū by members of the Nāmdhāri community. But, then, how do the Nāmdhāris legitimize the *fait*

<sup>13</sup>Nevertheless, justification from the Nāmdhāri point of view in support of Gurū Gobind's physical existence after his alleged death is presented, contentiously, in their opinion that Gurū Gobind Singh helped various individuals to escape from the fort at Poona-Sitara. This is a task they believe must insinuate the Gurū's *bodily* presence. See Namdhari, Dalip Singh (1977) *Gursikhi Vichardhara*, Ludhiana: Namdhari Vidhiak Jatha, p. 73.

<sup>14</sup>See Singh, Khushwant (1966) *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup>See Singh, Harbans (1994) *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 192.

<sup>16</sup>See Singh, Nihal ((1966) *Enlighteners*, Sri Jiwan Nager: Namdhari Sahit Prakashan, p. 58. This date is also accepted by Nāmdhāri informants.

<sup>17</sup>There is not much literature, or records, available that can be consulted with regard to the life accounts of Gurū Bālak Singh, authors do, however, cite the name of Gurū Bālak Singh's father as being Dial Singh of Hazro. See Singh, Gurmit, (1978) *Sant Khalsa*, Sirsa: Usha Institute of Religious Studies, p. 27. It can nevertheless be assumed that whilst living as Ajapāl Singh, Gurū Gobind Singh must have met Bālak Singh and found in him the qualities that were needed in his successor. McLeod draws attention to the fact that, prior to meeting Gurū Gobind Singh, Bālak Singh had led a pious and devoted life, but had always been in search of a gurū who could satisfy his spiritual quest. (McLeod, W. H. [1984] *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 128.) If Ajapāl Singh had been looking for a successor, and since the four *Sāhebzādhi* had already been killed by the Mughal authorities, then it was to Bālak Singh that he had turned. (The *Sāhebzādhi* are the four sons of Gurū Gobind Singh, who were: Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh. Ajit and Jujhar Singh were killed during the Chamkaur battle of 1704. The two younger sons -- Zorawar and Fateh Singh, traditionally aged at 7 and 11 -- became martyrs when they were bricked up alive at the orders of Vazir Khan at Sirhind, having been given the choice of conversion to Islam or death). A central question at this point is that if the *Sāhebzādhi* had remained alive, then would gurūship have been transferred to them?



accompli that the *Ādi Granth* was installed as the eternal Gurū, and is believed so by Sikhs at large? The Nāmdhāris answer this critical point by stating that there is no glimpse or hint whatsoever, in the Sikh religious writings of Gurū Gobind Singh, stating that the *Ādi Granth* is to be the eternal Gurū. They draw attention to the fact that the often repeated saying of

*Gurū Maniyo Granth*  
(Regard the *Ādi Granth* as Gurū)

which is recited during the Sikh *ardās*<sup>18</sup> was not composed or uttered by Gurū Gobind Singh, but is a mere addition by poets.<sup>19</sup> Thus, they retain the belief that there is no original suggestion in the compositions of Gurū Gobind Singh that transfers gurūship to the *Ādi Granth*. Furthermore, the Nāmdhāris believe that the nature of the true Gurū, as indicated in the *Ādi Granth*, refers to a *living being*,<sup>20</sup> the scripture as true Gurū, being an alien concept.

The Nāmdhāri acknowledgement of a succession of human Gurūs should, strictly speaking, make their position in the *Panth* as a whole, rather dubious. The ambiguity of their Sikh leaning is partially resolved by the concept of *mīrī-pīrī* in the Sikh tradition.<sup>21</sup> From the time of the sixth Gurū to the tenth Gurū, this dual existence of the *Ādi Granth* (representing spiritual authority) and the human Gurū (representing

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<sup>18</sup>This is recited at the end of general *gurdwārā* services. Therefore, the Nāmdhāri *ardās* differs slightly from the Sikh *ardās* due to the former not reciting the *Granth* as Gurū. Additionally they add the names of Bālak Singh and the Nāmdhāri Gurūs to the list of ten Gurūs who are remembered during *ardās*. Jagjīt Singh, the present leader's name, is not recited if he is present at the place of worship.

<sup>19</sup>Gurmit Singh highlights the point that the words are not found in the writings of Gurū Gobind Singh but, rather, appear in the *Panth Parkash*, a book published in 1880, which had been written by Giani Gian Singh. See Singh, Gurmit *Sant Khalsa*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>*Gursikhi Vichardhara*, p. 75.

<sup>21</sup>This concept was introduced by the sixth Gurū Hargobind (1595 - 1644), to symbolize the temporal and spiritual authority of the Gurū. The spiritual authority, that is, the *pīrī* concept (derived from the Islamic term for a *pīr*, a spiritual leader) was present in the Sikh scriptures, which had been compiled by the previous Gurū, Arjan, in 1603 - 1604. The temporal authority, that is, the *mīrī* (also an Islamic term used for a commander or a chieftain) was to be fulfilled by the human Gurū and the *Panth* collectively.

temporal authority) was an essential feature of the *Panth*. The justification from the Nāmdhāri point of view, therefore, is that if the *Ādi Granth* and the human Gurū complemented each other before 1708,<sup>22</sup> then surely this tradition is vital to the survival and guidance of the *Panth* in the present period also? It is a view that is not without some justification. It is important here to include the Nāmdhāris' own evidence and viewpoints on an issue that differentiates and separates them from Sikhs of the *Panth*, and one that rejects fundamental Sikh belief. I begin with the Nāmdhāri belief in the eleventh Gurū, Bālak Singh.

#### 4:2:2 Gurū Bālak Singh

Importantly, in the majority of cases, Nāmdhāris do not refer to Gurū Bālak Singh as the founder of the Nāmdhāris, neither is he referred to as the first Gurū of the Nāmdhāris. This title is bestowed on Gurū Rām Singh, Bālak Singh's successor. It is a point to which I shall return below. Yet, writing about the virtues of Bālak Singh, Harbans Singh certainly refers to Gurū Bālak Singh as the founder.<sup>23</sup> He points out that: "The founder, Bhai<sup>24</sup> Balak Singh (1799-1862) of Hazro, was a holy man whose noble example and sweet persuasive manner won him a number of followers."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Sikhs at large believe that after 1708, that is, the date of Gurū Gobind's death according to non-Nāmdhāri Sikhs, eternal gurūship was vested in the *Gurū Granth Sahib*, as it was now to be referred to. Because the line of human Gurūs was to come to an end, temporal authority was invested in the whole *Panth*.

<sup>23</sup>In the majority of literature regarding the Nāmdhāris, it is found that, although non-Nāmdhāris such as Harbans Singh refer to Bālak Singh as the founder (Singh, H. *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, p. 192), the majority of Nāmdhāris will refer to Rām Singh as the founder. The Nāmdhāris view Bālak Singh as an intermediary between the tenth and twelfth Gurūs. The implications of this belief will be examined when I look in greater detail at the life of Rām Singh. A major consideration in regard to this point is that Rām Singh is regarded by the Nāmdhāris as being an *incarnation* of Gurū Gobind Singh.

<sup>24</sup>Interestingly, Harbans Singh has referred to Bālak Singh as Bhāi rather than as Gurū, and in the same book he also refers to Rām Singh as *Bābā* (*ibid.*, p. 192). I think he probably wishes to distinguish the Nāmdhāri Gurūs from the ten Sikh Gurūs, who, according to him, are alone worthy of the title of "Gurū".

<sup>25</sup>Singh, Harbans, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, p. 192.

The essential path of truthful living and *nām simran*, which had been originally stressed by Gurū Nānak and continued through his successors, along with the *rahit* of the *Khālsā*, were also stressed by Bālak Singh.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in this respect, he carried on the task of the human Gurū as guiding the *Panth*. But it is at this point that a line is drawn between followers of the Nāmdhāri tradition and the majority of Sikhs, who believe adamantly and whole-heartedly, that prior to his death in 1708, Gurū Gobind Singh vested eternal gurūship in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Nevertheless, emphasis on strict adherence towards maintaining the *Khālsā* form, promulgated by Gurū Bālak Singh, cannot be ignored for its contribution towards proclaiming outward Sikh identity after the death of Gurū Gobind Singh.

According to Bali and Bali, Gurū Bālak Singh, like his successor Gurū Rām Singh, was also watched closely by the British authorities.<sup>27</sup> This is an important point, for it highlights the fact that Gurū Bālak Singh must have had a substantial number of followers -- sizable enough to have been noticed by the British in India. Surveillance of him by the government is amply supported by the following letter, sent to Head Office by Mr. Green, the then District Superintendent, in which he refers to the followers of Bālak Singh as *Jagiāsīs* (or *Habiāsīs*, which could also refer to *Abhiāsīs*)<sup>28</sup>. The letter reads as follows:

*12th June. Mr Green, Asstt (sic). District Superintendent of Police,  
Attock.*

About 16 years ago, a Sikh named Balak Singh, caste, Arora, started a new sect of Sikhs at Hazru, in the Rawalpindi district. They were named Jagiasis (or

<sup>26</sup>See Singh, Khushwant, *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, p. 128.

<sup>27</sup>Bali, Y. and Bali, K. (1995) *Warriors in White*, New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup>According to McLeod, the term *Jagiāsī* refers to " 'worshipper', from *jagya* or *yagya*, 'sacrifice', 'offering'. In some references the title used is *Abhiasi* (*abhiasi*, 'student', 'one who meditates or devoutly repeats a sacred *mantra*', from *abhiyas*, 'study, meditation, repetition')": McLeod, W. H. "The Kukas: A Millenarian Sect of the Punjab" in Wood, G. A. and O'Connor, P. S. (eds) (1973) *W. P. Morrell: A Tribute*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, p. 272, endnote 1.

Habiasis), and made large numbers of converts in the neighbourhood during their founder's lifetime.

Amongst his more favourite disciples were three:

- (1) Kahn Singh, who now is the head of the sect at Hazru;
- (2) Lal Singh, now resident at Amritsar.
- (3) Ram Singh, for some years past resident of village Bhaini, in Ludhiana, and the subject of these notes. On the death of their founder, which occurred some months ago, the members of the sect appear to have unanimously elected Ram Singh as his successor. Though the sect seems to have failed in the neighbourhood of Hazru since Balak Singh's death, it has thriven in the most remarkable manner in the district adjoining the home [of] his more energetic successor.<sup>29</sup>

Since the letter states that Kahn Singh is the head of Hazro, it could be assumed that on becoming Gurū, Rām Singh had elected certain leaders for different districts. It is highly likely however, that a sturdy Kūkā following probably existed at only two places in the Punjab, that is, at Hazro where Gurū Bālak Singh had lived and, also, to where Gurū Rām Singh had moved initially; the second place was Bhaini, from where Gurū Rām Singh originated and to which he had now returned. A fuller account of this will be given in the following section.

Hence, Gurū Bālak Singh chose Gurū Rām Singh as his successor, thus later becoming the twelfth Gurū according to the Nāmdhāris. Attitudes towards *zāt* are highlighted by the fact that, although Bālak Singh was an *arorā*, Gurū Rām Singh was from the *rāmgarhīā zāt*. Nevertheless, Gurū Rām Singh's successors all belong to the same family and, therefore, have also been *rāmgarhīā*.<sup>30</sup>

Gurū Rām Singh had assumed gurūship while Bālak Singh was still alive. Traditional accounts state that Rām Singh formed the Nāmdhāri community on 12 April 1857: whereas the date of Bālak Singh's death has been widely accepted as

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<sup>29</sup>Singh, N. and Singh, K. (1989) *Rebels Against the British Rule: Guru Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup>The present Nāmdhāri Gurū is married to a Nāmdhāri of the *jat zāt*.

being 1862. Why did Gurū Rām Singh assume gurūship while Bālak Singh was yet alive? On this point, Nāmdhāris believe Gurū Bālak Singh had realised the fulfilment of the traditional prophecy in Gurū Rām Singh, that Gurū Gobind Singh would take rebirth as a *rāmgarhīā* and would once again become the Gurū of the Sikhs. These prophecies will be discussed in section 4:2:2. Suffice it to say here, that Gurū Bālak Singh is seen as an intermediary between the tenth and twelfth Gurūs -- an intermediary for the period in which Gurū Gobind Singh needed to take rebirth as Rām Singh, as Nāmdhāri tradition asserts: “he [Guru Gobind Singh] bestowed Guruship on Balak Singh as a trustee saying that he would receive it back when he appears as a reincarnate in the name of Ram Singh at Bhaini.”<sup>31</sup> It is now necessary to take a detailed look at the life account of Gurū Rām Singh, the founder of the Nāmdhāri group of Sikhs.

#### 4:2:3 Gurū Rām Singh

As mentioned earlier, Gurū Rām Singh is regarded as the most important of the Nāmdhāri Gurūs since he is referred to as the founder of the Nāmdhāri Sikhs, and believed to be the reincarnation of Gurū Gobind Singh.<sup>32</sup> The birth date of Rām Singh is traditionally given as 1816.<sup>33</sup> Gurū Rām Singh is hailed for his efforts and success in redirecting the lapsed *Panth* towards stringent practice of the *Khālsā* tradition, as well as creating the Nāmdhāri *Panth*, which became known as the *Sant Khālsā*, on 12 April 1857. Additionally, Gurū Rām Singh, and the actions and struggles of his followers in the fight for Indian Independence, are found in every source that looks at

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<sup>31</sup>Singh, Gurmit, *Sant Khalsa*, p. ii.

<sup>32</sup>A popular Nāmdhāri representation of Gurū Rām Singh can be seen in appendix 2:5.

<sup>33</sup>There is controversy, however, over the date of his death, the Nāmdhāris believe Gurū Rām Singh is still alive and is to return among his followers -- a point to which I shall return below.

India's struggle for Independence; it was a struggle clearly carried forward by each of his successors. Thus, his military contribution and his endeavours towards *Khālsā* stringency -- and therefore a promotion of Sikh identity among his followers -- must be acknowledged.<sup>34</sup>

Briefly examining the life history of Gurū Rām Singh, one learns that he was born in 1816,<sup>35</sup> in a village called Bhaini of Ludhiana district in the Punjab: it is a place commonly referred to as Bhaini Sāhib by Nāmdhāris.<sup>36</sup> Harbans Singh alludes to the belief that it was while he was in the army, that Rām Singh came into contact with his predecessor, Bālak Singh at Hazro.<sup>37</sup> Rām Singh remained in the army until the annexation of the Punjab in 1849.<sup>38</sup> Traditional accounts of the Nāmdhāris recall that Rām Singh had become extremely disheartened by the state of affairs in British-

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<sup>34</sup>The latter is perhaps best illustrated in contemporary Nāmdhāri society by the fact that it is very rare to see a non-*kesdhāri* Nāmdhāri.

<sup>35</sup>See Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup>It is assumed that, like the births of the Sikh Gurūs, Rām Singh's birth was also *non-karmic*. Indeed, as remarked earlier, Gurū Gobind Singh is presumed by the Nāmdhāris to have stated that he would return as Bālak Singh's successor; hence Rām Singh is regarded as an incarnation of Gurū Gobind Singh himself. The prophecy, that is, the *sakhī* that supports the incarnation of the tenth Gurū, is highlighted in the following document, which was allegedly taken by a secret agent, by the name of Gainda Singh, from the village of Bhaini. The document states: "Guru Gobind Singh Sahai. I Guru Gobind Singh will be born in a carpenter shop, and may be called Ram Singh. My house will be between the Jamuna and the Sutlej rivers. I will declare my religion. I will defeat the *Feringhee* [British], and put the crown on my own head, and blow the 'Sunkh' [trumpet of victory]. . . . I, the carpenter, will sit on the throne. When I have got 1,25,000 of Sikhs with me, I will cut off the heads of the *Feringhee*. I will never be conquered in battle. . . . Day by day Ram Singh's rule will be enlarged. God has written this. It is not lie my brethren" (see Ahluwalia, M. M. (1965) *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, p. 55). The reference that Gurū Gobind will be reborn into a carpenter shop clearly portrays Rām Singh's birth into a *rāmgarhīā* family. His father owned a carpenter workshop that saw to the needs of the predominantly farming community of Bhaini, which lies between the Jamuna and Sutlej Rivers. The importance of Gurū Rām Singh as the awaited-for Gurū of the Nāmdhāris, who would fight in the struggles for independence, cannot be overestimated.

<sup>37</sup>Singh, Harbans, *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, p. 192. The belief that Gurū Rām Singh met Gurū Bālak Singh while in the army is also supported by Fauja Singh Bajwa, who goes a step further in stating that the meeting took place in 1841 in Hazro, whilst Rām Singh was on his way to Peshawar: Bajwa further adds that Rām Singh "immediately fell under his [Bālak Singh's] spell" (see Bajwa, F. S. (1965) *Kuka Movement*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 6).

<sup>38</sup>The Punjab was the last state in India to be taken over by the British Empire after Mahārājā Ranjīt Singh, had died. For a detailed account of the annexation of the Punjab and the preceding anglo-Sikh wars, see Singh, Harbans *The Heritage of the Sikhs*, chapter XVI.

ruled Punjab, leading to Rām Singh's revolt against British power in India. In addition to the political orientation of his followers, Gurū Rām Singh was also responsible for their religious revival.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, a group of freedom fighters, sharing affection for the emancipation of Mother India, began to assemble, with Rām Singh as their leader.

Militancy and religious revival promoted, hand in hand, the issue of Sikh identity. The Sikhs, according to Gurū Rām Singh, therefore, could not free India until they were saintly in their everyday lives. Indeed, the concept of *mīrī-pīrī* was continued by Gurū Rām Singh. He, as the twelfth Sikh Gurū, guided the *Panth* both in the spiritual and temporal sense -- in the same manner as his predecessors from Gurū Hargobind onwards had done. Importantly, according to Nāmdhāris, Gurū Rām Singh had not started something new, he was carrying on the Sikh tradition as had been begun by his predecessors. In this respect, the role of the Nāmdhāri Gurūs, in relation to Sikh identity, cannot be overestimated.

Emphasis on the fact that the revolt led by Gurū Rām Singh was not to be portrayed as a military organization alone needs to be continuously underlined. Rām Singh's insistence on truthful living is stressed by Bali and Bali.<sup>40</sup> With regard to the

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<sup>39</sup>By this period, the Sikh community had become rather lapsed in its adherence to the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs, resorting to such practices as the assistance of *brāhmīns* for rituals, as well as the consumption of alcohol. Since Gurū Rām Singh was primarily involved in the Punjab, and the majority of his followers professed the Sikh faith, the tenet of his religious revival was essentially to follow the *Khālāsā* way of life in as rigid a manner as possible. This struggle for spiritual, as well as political freedom has been asserted by Bali and Bali, who write: "He [Rām Singh] soon began to understand that freedom was something much more than political freedom. It meant social and spiritual freedom too" (Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 16).

<sup>40</sup>They write: "Although he taught his followers to sacrifice their lives for their motherland and their faith, he did not teach violence and militance for greed and idle grandeur. It was not just another military organisation. It was a sect of good commonfolk, patriots, peaceful peasants and hardworking ordinary craftsmen, who sought to live an honest and just life, clean, tolerant and full of humanity. But they had to be a special kind of warriors. They were to preserve and not to destroy the great cultural values of their own country" (*ibid.*, p. 23). The Nāmdhāris adopted a more peaceful approach to

bestowal of gurūship on Rām Singh, Gurcharan Singh Gian specifies that in 1841, at Hazro, the *gurgaddī* was offered to Rām Singh by Gurū Bālak Singh.<sup>41</sup> Earlier, it was stated by Fauja Singh Bajwa that the first meeting between Bālak Singh and Rām Singh had taken place in 1841. Therefore the *gurgaddī* was offered to Rām Singh on his first encounter with Gurū Bālak Singh.<sup>42</sup>

Moving on now to look at the important events which took place on the eve of *baisākhī*, 1857, it can be stated that this was the first time that Gurū Rām Singh and his followers were to be collectively known as the Kūkās -- among themselves, and among the Punjabi community at large.<sup>43</sup> Bajwa gives a very detailed account of the events that took place on the day of the creation of the *Sant Khālsā*.<sup>44</sup> Here, however, I shall mention the main points only.

The creation of the *Sant Khālsā* by Rām Singh took place in his village of Bhaini Sāhib; hence, Bhaini became the official headquarters of the Kūkās and remains so to the present day. Values and ideals instituted in the original *Khālsā* in 1699, by Gurū Gobind Singh, were now reinstated and re-emphasized by Gurū Rām Singh. Important to note is that by this period the Sikh community had lapsed

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Independence after Gurū Rām Singh had been exiled to Rangoon. Rām Singh's successor, his younger brother, Gurū Hari Singh, was confined to the village of Bhaini, and strict curfews applied to him. By this period, the Nāmdhāris were being stringently watched by the government; furthermore, meetings of more than five Nāmdhāris were banned. Due to these immense restrictions, the approach of the Nāmdhāris changed to one of non-militancy.

<sup>41</sup>Giani, G. S. (1986) *Leaflet: Main Travels of Sat Guru Ram Singh Ji*, Uttar Pradesh: Namdhari Darbar.

<sup>42</sup>Nāmdhāris themselves believe that Gurū Rām Singh's first encounter with Gurū Bālak Singh occurred at Hazro where, immediately, Gurū Bālak Singh recognized Rām Singh as the reincarnation of Gurū Gobind Singh. Bālak Singh placed five coins and a coconut in front of Rām Singh and thus passed gurūship to him. (Kaur, Beant [1999] *The Namdhari Sikhs*, Forest Gate, London: Namdhari Sikhs Historical Museum, pp. 19-20).

<sup>43</sup>The term "Kūkā" itself was to herald the community as the pioneers in the struggle for independence; their *kūk*, "cry or call for freedom", was against British power in India (see Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 8).

<sup>44</sup>Bajwa, *Kuka Movement*, chapter III.



considerably with regard to their religious adherence to the *Khālsā* rules. All present were required to take *amrit*, "nectar", and were to live a life in observance of the *Khālsā* as stated in the *rahit*. Noticeably, Kūkās believe that, prior to the formation of the *Sant Khālsā*, initiation was not openly available to women. Thus, they believe that Gurū Rām Singh's encouraging women to take *amrit* was a radical reform resulting in the mass initiation of women into the *Panth* for the first time. The Kūkās were renowned for their *Khālsā* adherence, and were at once recognized by their white horizontal turbans and their white homespun clothing. Gurū Rām Singh was in effect strengthening Sikh identity as constituting *amritdhārīs*.

How far, then, did the efforts of Gurū Rām Singh have significance for the wider *Panth*? My view here is that it was not as influential as the *Tāt Khālsā*, discussed previously in 2:5. The *Tāt Khālsā's* emphasis on becoming *amritdhārī*, I suggest, had a greater affect on the issue of Sikh identity for the *Panth* as a whole than the efforts of Gurū Rām Singh. The *Tāt Khālsā* did not introduce radical changes in the concept of gurūship as the Nāmdhārīs had.

Many new rules were instituted at the formation of the *Sant Khālsā*: all followers were to wear the *mālā*, a white rosary with 108 knots. Additionally, since the wearing of the *kirpān* had been banned by the government, Kūkās were instead to wear axes, which were referred to as *lathis*.<sup>45</sup> It was also on this day that Rām Singh hoisted the triangular white flag of the Kūkās: this is displayed outside all Nāmdhārī centres to the present day, instead of the saffron *nisān sāhib* found outside *gurdwārās* of the general *Panth*. Regarding the white flag, S. S. Jeet has stated:

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<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

The first triangular white flag of the Indian Independence Movement - which symbolises Truth, Purity, Simplicity, Peace and Unity was hoisted by the 12th Guru - Sri Satguru Ram Singh Ji Maharaj on the eve of the Baisakhi Festival - 1st Baisakh Samat 1914<sup>46</sup>. . . when Sri Satguru Ji inaugurated the SANT KHALSA (also known as Nāmdhāri Sikh Panth)...<sup>47</sup>

The *Sant Khālsā*, that is, the Saint-Soldiers, which the Kūkās had now become, regarded themselves as the fulfillers of Gurū Gobind's following declaration:

To be a Khalsa is to be a lion, is to tolerate no oppression, is to be a life long warrior in the propagation of virtue.<sup>48</sup>

Here, again, the imbalance between maintaining the *Khālsā* form and heresy, on behalf of the Nāmdhāris, is evident. Although, on the one hand, the *Sant Khālsā* is the Saint-Soldier aspiration of the tenth Gurū, paradoxically his proclamation of the *Ādi Granth* as *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is not accepted by the Nāmdhāris. In terms of corporate, uniform Sikh identity, therefore, the Nāmdhāris would not be able to conform.

A central question here is how far Rām Singh was asserting his supreme authority over that of Gurū Gobind's by re-enacting the original *Khālsā* ceremony? Although the ideals of the original *Khālsā* ceremony are strengthened whenever there is a gathering of the *pāñj pyāre* and the initiation of followers, Rām Singh had gone a step further and had instituted a new group of *Sant Khālsā*. Although they were to follow the rules of the *rahit*, certain practices would have distinguished them as being specifically Kūkās. His actions might be justified if one remembers that Gurū Rām Singh is regarded as a reincarnation of Gurū Gobind Singh and was, therefore, reinstating in 1857 what he had already done in 1699, in his previous existence.

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<sup>46</sup>Samat 1914 corresponds to 1857 CE; the Indian calendar (Samat) is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>47</sup>Jeet, S. S. (undated) *Leaflet: Brief Remarks about Namdhari Sikhs*. London: Namdhari Sikh Sangat UK.

<sup>48</sup>Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 28.

However, the creation of the *Sant Khālsā* created a distinction between Kūkās and other Sikhs -- the Kūkās became something of a "sect" or a "cult". Inevitably, the question has to be asked whether Gurū Rām Singh was reinforcing *general* Sikh identity or had he in actual fact laid the foundation for a *separatist* Sikh identity? I suggest the latter, since the Nāmdhāris are a group within the *Panth* and do not find acceptance of their concept of gurūship among the *Panth* as a whole. Bali and Bali allude to the idea that the Kūkās "were always to remember that their cult was born in the *baisākhī* season",<sup>49</sup> and this endorses the sense of separation between Kūkās and the *Panth*. Nevertheless, the importance of the original *Khālsā* ceremony performed by Gurū Gobind Singh was never to be underestimated.<sup>50</sup>

In his struggle for Independence, Gurū Rām Singh introduced the concepts of non-cooperation and *swadeśī*.<sup>51</sup> In total, his non-cooperation strategy contained the following aims:

- (1) Boycott of Government services
- (2) Boycott of educational institutions opened by the British.
- (3) Boycott of law courts started by the British.
- (4) Boycott of foreign-made goods.
- (5) To refuse to obey and resist the laws and orders which one's conscience abhors.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup>Singh, Gurmit, *Sant Khalsa*, p. iii.

<sup>51</sup>That is, to boycott all British services and goods. Additionally, the Kūkās resisted the so-called "educational advancement" of India by refusing to learn the English language; they were going to remain wholeheartedly Indian in every respect. As is expected, the Kūkā movement or following had by now taken on an increasingly political role; the Kūkās could not tolerate the pain caused by a foreign power that treated the people of India as second-class citizens. Gurū Rām Singh was the first Indian freedom fighter to employ this non-cooperation stance. This concept was to be adopted also by Mahatma Gandhi sixty years later in his struggle for Indian Independence. As a result of the *swadeśī* ideal, the Kūkās refused to wear garments that had been made from material imported from Britain: instead they wore only homespun clothing. This is visibly carried forward to the present day, where the more conformist Kūkās, in Britain also, will wear only garments made from *khaddar*, a type of course cotton from India.

<sup>52</sup>Singh, N. and Singh, K. *Rebels Against the British Rule: Guru Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs*, p. xiii.

Therefore, by boycotting British goods and services, every Kūkā of pre-Independent India was effectively playing his or her individual role in the struggle.<sup>53</sup> It must not be assumed that because the Kūkās had become politically involved in gaining Indian independence that religion and social practices had taken a back seat. It is in this matter that the following of Gurū Rām Singh had become distinct from other freedom fighters of the period. This in turn, although strengthening the *Khālsā* ideal, was nevertheless splintering Sikh identity in terms of belief, since the Kūkās were so obviously the group who denied Gurū status to the *Ādi Granth*.

Owing to the lapsing of religion in the *Panth* at large, Gurū Rām Singh had introduced certain reforms among the Nāmdhāri community, at the foremost of which was the paradigm of simplicity. Weddings were to be simplified to a great extent and the practice of large dowries among the Kūkās was totally abolished. Such was the emphasis on simplicity that the practice of mass marriages became popular among the Kūkās. The practice of mixed *zāt* marriages that probably had not happened in the times of the Sikh Gurūs and, thereafter, was now taking place among the Kūkās. As long as the couple were followers of the Kūkā tradition, their *zāt* did not matter: this practice is carried on to the present-day. This factor again endorses a specific identity for the Nāmdhāris. In this respect, they were egalitarian to a greater extent than the Sikh Gurūs themselves who had observed *zāt* distinctions in matrimonial matters. Additionally, places of worship were not to be extolled for their expensive architecture or belongings; they were to be primarily centres for attaining peace. An attitude towards an inexpensive lifestyle must have been meaningful to the Kūkās, the

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<sup>53</sup>See Lal, Shiv (1994) *Dateline Punjab - Lifeline Sikhs*, New Delhi: Election Archives, p. 77.

majority of whom came from poor backgrounds.<sup>54</sup> *Nām simran* was placed on the highest level, hence the term "Nāmdhāri". The revolution led by Gurū Rām Singh thus consisted of two strands: an outward revolution against the British in India, as well as an inward revolution that proclaimed the *Khālsā* according to traditional Sikh values.<sup>55</sup>

Early British attitudes towards Rām Singh, and the Kūkās, are highlighted in the following report, sent as early as June 1863 to Head Office by Mr. T. D. Forsyth, the Officiating Secretary to the Government, Punjab:

5. But advantage is taken of his movement to circulate paper, whether true or false, in his name, which contain matter dangerous to the public welfare. . . there is undoubtedly an impression abroad that he is setting himself up as a future king, who is to drive the British out of the Punjab. . . .<sup>56</sup>

From 1863 onwards, Rām Singh was kept under strict surveillance by the British.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Singh, Khushwant, *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup>Rām Singh's political charisma led him to seek allies with Kashmir and Nepal, as well as Russia, to help in the freedom struggle (See Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*, p. 4). The main aim for contacts with Kashmir was that the Nāmdhāris could enter the military in Kashmir and receive the necessary training for their cause (*ibid.*, p. 108). Although Nepal had initially provided support to the Nāmdhāris, Ahluwalia is of the opinion that the simple-minded Nāmdhāris were used by the Nepal ruler for his own cause, and that Nepal had no real interest in the independence struggle of India (*ibid.*, p. 115). A detailed account of Nāmdhāri contacts with Kashmir and Nepal can be found in chapter IX of Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*. As regards contact with Russia, Rām Singh was aware of the fact that the "Russians were powerful enough to threaten and frighten the British" (Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 22). Rām Singh thus portrayed his qualities as a gifted individual who was responsible for the political, as well as religious, organization of the Kūkās.

<sup>56</sup>Singh, N. and Singh, K. *Rebels Against the British Rule: Guru Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>57</sup>That the Kūkās were seen as a marked threat is apparent in the following report, written three years later, on 11 September 1866, by Colonel R. G. Taylor, the Commissioner and Superintendent of Ambala: "You will remember that in June last I reported demi-officially, for His Honour . . . that Ram Singh of Bhainee had with his followers been conducting himself in such a manner that I had thought it advisable to reimpose the restriction on his liberty which had been partially relaxed. . . 18th March 1866. 2. The result has been the same throughout, namely, that the opinion of one and all has been that the sect is a mischievous one, and that its existence and especially its rapid increase threatens disturbance sooner or later. . . 5. I am distinctly of opinion, however that the time is come for taking serious notice of proceedings of this agitator . . . and his sect. 6. I am therefore of opinion that the following measures should be adopted at once: 1st:- That Ram Singh be arrested and removed far away from the scene of his present machinations. This might be done via Lahore and Mooltan to Bombay or by Delhi to Calcutta, but the former would be preferable. . . 8. It is my thorough belief that those lads

An interesting comment made in the same report reads as follows:

17. Ram Singh may have commenced as a mild religious reformer on the fashion of Nanuk, but his stirring Lieutenants are hurrying him into a more near imitation of the warlike Gooroo Gobind".<sup>58</sup>

These words imply that the government was curious as to the religious affiliation of the Kūkās. They were probably aware that Rām Singh was an important leader amongst the group, but what they probably did not realize fully was that he was in actual fact regarded as the incarnation of the tenth Sikh Gurū and was proclaimed as the twelfth Gurū by the Kūkās, and not just a "mild religious reformer". To the government the *Panth* must have appeared to be unified rather than being characterized by different emerging groups. Thus, to the government, Sikh identity consisted of the belief in ten Gurūs and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* as eternal Gurū.

Something of a contrast to the peaceful, pacifist nature of the Kūkās today is illustrated by the events of June 1871, involving a couple of incidences that highlight the Kūkās as vigorous protectors of the cow.<sup>59</sup> Viewed as a continuing threat by the British, Rām Singh was exiled to Rangoon, Burma in March 1872. This did not mean however, that his followers had lost all contact with him and that the Kūkā following had declined. Secretly, Gurū Rām Singh managed to pass letters, in the form of

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mean war sooner or later, and I strongly recommend my Government to be beforehand with them. . . .12. It is my object to show that we disapprove of this agitation: our doing so will discourage many half-gulled, novitiates, while it will, I know, be a relief to the minds of our well-wishers to see that we have the matter in mind and do not intend to be played tricks with (*ibid.*, pp. 16-20).

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>The government had allowed Muslim butchers to slaughter cows and set up beef stalls in and around the holy city of Amritsar. Measures were undertaken by the Kūkās: a group of whom murdered four Muslim butchers. A total of sixty-eight Nāmdhāris were blown to pieces by canons over two days, at the orders of the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana District, Mr. L. Cowan. From then on the government showed concern whenever there was a gathering of Kūkās: even religious gatherings were looked on with suspicion. Thus, Rām Singh and his Kūkā followers were seen as more and more of a threat to the *Raj*, which was readily accepting the view that in order to curb resistance in the Punjab Rām Singh was to be closely watched (Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 68).

*hukammāmūs*,<sup>60</sup> to his followers, who would travel great distances and risk their lives to keep contact with their Gurū. In September 1880 Rām Singh was moved on to Mergui Jail, due to his having retained contacts with the Kūkās. While in Mergui, reports hint of Rām Singh's alleged violent phases: this, according to the officers, was due to his "prolonged retention in confinement; removal to Mergui, and the discovery of his attempts to communicate with his friends."<sup>61</sup> According to government records, it was while in exile in Mergui that Gurū Rām Singh died on 29 November 1885.<sup>62</sup> This belief is, however, totally rejected by the Nāmdhāris.

#### 4:2:4 Controversy over the death of Gurū Rām Singh

Another report sent by the Civil Surgeon, confirms Rām Singh's cremation as having taken place during the morning of 30 November 1885.<sup>63</sup> So why do the Nāmdhāris not believe that their Gurū had died in Mergui? Nāmdhāri tradition affirms that when Gurū Harī Singh received his brother's belongings, they were not genuine.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Kūkās believe that the writing of the report was a mere act and that Rām Singh had now been moved on to a different, secret location. Nāmdhāris believe that Gurū Rām Singh will live until the age of two hundred and fifty. This is perhaps best justified in the words spoken by Rām Singh himself while on his way to exile in

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<sup>60</sup>Orders/instructions.

<sup>61</sup>Bali and Bali, *Warriors in White*, p. 87.

<sup>62</sup>Documentation states explicitly that Rām Singh died after serious bouts of diarrhoea, the Civil Surgeon at Mergui reports that: "The man has been in a decline sometime past, and with the setting in of the cold weather, he has had another attack of Diarrhoea and he complained of the change very much . . . he succumbed to the present attack and died quiet (*sic*) exhausted at 4.30 P.M. in my presence . . . I have arranged for the cremation of the body at about 8 O' clock tomorrow morning and that I shall be present at the burial place early to see to the necessary arrangements being completed for the burning according to the Hindu custom" (*ibid.*, p. 223).

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 225.

1872: he is believed to have said that "this body can sustain for 250 years".<sup>65</sup> It has also been stated that Rām Singh managed to escape from the Mergui Jail in 1885 and, in order to defend themselves the report was made up by the authorities.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, it is due to the belief that Gurū Rām Singh is yet alive and will return to be among his followers that, as mentioned earlier, the successors of Rām Singh are not referred to as the 13th, 14th and 15th Gurūs, but are, rather, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd successors of Rām Singh.<sup>67</sup> I was told that it is in their separation and awaiting of Gurū Rām Singh, that Kūkās frequently sing in great *bhairāg*, in great yearning and longing for him. The successor of Gurū Rām Singh was his younger brother, Harī Singh.

#### 4:2:5 Gurū Harī Singh

Gurū Harī Singh was born in September 1819. He took on the role of Gurū from 1885 until his death in 1906.<sup>68</sup> Gurū Harī Singh was not permitted to move out of the village of Bhaini for the whole of the twenty-one years that he was Gurū.<sup>69</sup> Nihal Singh comments: "He [Harī Singh] carried on his mission peacefully and patiently".<sup>70</sup> It is a peaceful, pacifist nature that is characteristic of the Nāmdhāri community world-wide today. Prior to his death in 1906, Gurū Harī Singh chose his youngest son, Partāp Singh to become his successor.

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<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>66</sup>Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*, p. 171.

<sup>67</sup>Information from an informant at Wolverhampton.

<sup>68</sup>A Nāmdhāri depiction of Gurū Harī Singh can be seen in appendix 2:6.

<sup>69</sup>Singh, Khushwant *A History of the Sikhs: Vol 2*, p. 134.

<sup>70</sup>Singh, Nihal, (1966) *Enlighteners*, Jiwan Nager: Namdhari Sahit Prakashan, p. 75.



#### 4:2:6 Gurū Partāp Singh

Partāp Singh, who had been born in 1890, became Gurū at the age of sixteen.<sup>71</sup> One learns that Partāp Singh extended his support, along with the whole of the Kūkā followers, towards Mahatma Gandhi for India's Independence.<sup>72</sup> It was during the period of Partāp Singh's gurūship that India finally gained Independence from the British on 15 August 1947. Partāp Singh enjoyed Indian Independence for twelve years. At his death in 1959, it was one of his sons: Jagjīt Singh,<sup>73</sup> who became his successor, and who is the present Spiritual Head of Nāmdhāris world-wide. Thus far, the contribution of the Kūkās to general Sikh identity in its political history is clear. Today the Kūkās are hence renowned as the freedom fighters of India.

#### 4:2:7 Gurū Jagjīt Singh

Gurū Jagjīt Singh was born on 22 November 1920, thus assuming the role of Gurū at the age of thirty-nine. Although Jagjīt Singh's headquarters remain situated at Bhaini Sāhib, his visits to the Nāmdhāris all over the world are frequent.<sup>74</sup> His reception is extremely notable on his visits to Britain, and as many as possible of his followers will attend a place in order to receive the *darsan*, "a sight of," and blessing of, the Gurū.<sup>75</sup> The photograph below is of Jagjīt Singh, during his visit to Forest Gate on 30 November 1997. Attention needs to be given to the actual position of the Gurū's seating: the *chatrī*, canopy, over his head and the metal surrounding in which he sits,

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<sup>71</sup>For a Nāmdhāri representation of Gurū Partāp Singh, see appendix 2:7.

<sup>72</sup>Lal, *Dateline Punjab - Lifeline Sikhs*, p. 77.

<sup>73</sup>His other son is Bīr Singh.

<sup>74</sup>See appendix 2:1.

<sup>75</sup>The Gurū's *darsan* is seen as being of utmost importance in maintaining community adherence in the diaspora, and equally important for youngsters to create and maintain bonds with the Nāmdhāri tradition. All the Gurū's air travel costs and arrangements while visiting a certain country, as well as those of his closest devotees who accompany him wherever he goes, are met by the Nāmdhāri *sangat* themselves.

are both reminiscent of the similar placement of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in non-Nāmdhāri *gurdwārās*. In his absence it is to this position at the foot of the encasement to which Kūkās will bow down:



Jagjīt Singh has been called a "crusader for peace and social justice",<sup>76</sup> he is a member of the World Council of Peace.<sup>77</sup> This portrays the Nāmdhāri stance towards achieving world peace and harmony, and further illustrates the pacifist nature of followers of the Nāmdhāri tradition.<sup>78</sup> The Gurū and the Nāmdhāris as a whole, have

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<sup>76</sup>Cover page of *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 15, January 1998.

<sup>77</sup>Singh, G. *Sant Khalsa*, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup>The tradition of enjoyment of classical music, which was stressed among the Nāmdhāris by Gurū Partāp Singh, is fervently emphasised also by Gurū Jagjīt Singh. Music Festivals have been held in the UK in the honour of the present Gurū.

no political role at present.<sup>79</sup> By his followers, Gurū Jagjīt Singh is referred to as *His Holiness Shri Satgurū Jagjīt Singh Ji Muhārāj*.<sup>80</sup>

### 4:3 Development of the Nāmdhāri community in Britain

As has been highlighted previously, major development -- indeed, the formation of the Nāmdhāri community -- took place under the gurūship of Rām Singh. The community was officially established on April 12 1857 as the *Sant Khālsā*. Since Gurū Rām Singh, and his successors, who belonged to the same family, were from the village of Bhaini Sāhib, the Nāmdhāri head quarters continue to be situated there. Furthermore, Bhaini is of importance since this is where the *Sant Khālsā* was originally initiated and formed. The present spiritual head of the Nāmdhāris, Jagjīt Singh, also has his base at Bhaini Sāhib. The village has become an important pilgrimage site for the Nāmdhāris.

The first Nāmdhāri centre in Britain was established on Terrace Road, Forest Gate; this was later moved to Upton Lane, Forest Gate. This is the Head Office of the Nāmdhāri *sangat* in Britain, at present. Funds were raised by voluntary contributions. The blessing and advice of Gurū Jagjīt Singh was sought for all Nāmdhāri centres. Other Nāmdhāri centres in Britain are to be found at Louis Street, Leeds; and

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<sup>79</sup>The political struggle for India's Independence having been achieved, the aim of the Nāmdhāris is to keep India united, not divided; hence Nāmdhāris oppose the demand for Khalistan.

<sup>80</sup>Many miracles are associated with Jagjīt Singh. An often cited one is of his involvement in the 1976 droughts in Britain. It is believed that it was Jagjīt Singh's presence and prayers while in Britain that caused it to rain. Other miracles also recall how his presence in barren lands results in the growing of fruits and crops. It is also believed by the Nāmdhāris that ailments can be cured by the Gurū's blessing on his devout believers. Thus, his highly spiritual nature is, indeed, widely acknowledged among his followers. One such follower, Gurūdev Sharan, writes thus about the spiritual nature of Jagjīt Singh: "Whoever comes in contact with this supreme spiritual personality gets inspired with the Name and holy scriptures. Qualities like truth, purity, service, sacrifice, non-attachment, benevolence and modesty radiate from his personality. His aim in life is to follow the path of the Dharam (virtue) and guide other (*sic*) along this path" (Gurūdev Sharan in *Souvenir for the Satguru Partap Singh Music Festival*, 31st March and 1st April 1996 at Brent Town Hall, London: Namdhari Sikh Heritage Society, [no page numbers]).

Coventry Road, Hay Mills in Birmingham. The Head Office at Forest Gate is also referred to as the "Namdhari Sikh Heritage Society".

#### 4:4 Beliefs emphasized in the Nāmdhāri tradition

Before taking a look at the beliefs of the Nāmdhāris, I must emphasize that, apart from one *major* difference, the main philosophical beliefs of the Nāmdhāris concerning God, the human condition, *karma*, *Nadar*, *Hukam*, *samsāra* are essentially in line with general Sikh belief. Therefore, rather than repeating Sikh philosophy generally, I shall examine only those beliefs that are either unique, or that are interpreted differently, among the Kūkās.<sup>81</sup> The major, and substantial, difference between Nāmdhāris and non-Nāmdhāri Sikhs is the formers' belief, as reiterated on many occasions, in human Gurūs.

##### 4:4:1 The *deh-dhārī* Gurū

The *deh-dhārī*<sup>82</sup> Gurū, refers to the tradition of a living, human Gurū, that is, the Gurū in bodily form -- as opposed to general Sikh belief of scripture as Gurū. Thus the words:

*Gurū Maniyo Granth*  
(Regard the *Ādi Granth* as your Gurū)

recited during the Sikh *ardās*, as mentioned in section 4:2:1 above, have no significance for the Kūkās, and are, therefore, not recited during the Nāmdhāri *ardās*. The rejection of the *Ādi Granth* as Gurū by Nāmdhāris, is a clear indication that the Nāmdhāris are a Sikh group that is *different* from all other Sikhs. When present, Nāmdhāris will bow in front of the *Ādi Granth* to show respect, but only for *gurbānī*

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<sup>81</sup>For a detailed look at the main philosophies in Sikhism, see: Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, chapter 5; and McLeod, W. H. (1996 rp of 1968 edn) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, chapter 5.

<sup>82</sup>A Gurū in human bodily form.

contained within it. During worship and the performance of rituals, equal importance is given to both the *Ādi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth*. Attributing equal importance to these two scriptures is indicative of a definitive difference between Nāmdhāri and general Sikh practice. The *Ādi Granth* is the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* for the *Panth*, it is the eternal Gurū, no other can take its place. However, by denying gurūship to the *Ādi Granth*, the Nāmdhāris cannot be regarded as supporting corporate Sikh identity through uniformity of belief and practice.

In attempting to be as traditional as possible, the Nāmdhāris carry on the ways and customs as practised from the inauguration of the Sikh faith. Importantly, in doing so, they treat the *Ādi Granth* in the same manner as after its compilation by the fifth Sikh Gurū. During the period of Gurū Arjan's gurūship onwards, human Gurū and *Ādi Granth* guided the community side-by-side. Thus, the need for a human Gurū to guide the community and see to its needs is a point about which the Nāmdhāris are stringent. Indeed, the contribution of Gurū Rām Singh and the Kūkā Sikhs to Indian Independence is undeniable. In his role as Gurū, Rām Singh protected the *Panth* as a whole from oppression. Furthermore, the spiritual aspect was never overshadowed by the militant -- Gurū Rām Singh continuously emphasized saintliness by adopting the *Khālsā* form among the Kūkās. In this respect, the *Khālsā* identity of the Kūkās is presently strengthened by their adherence to the ideals contained in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

Nāmdhāris, therefore, view the role of the human Gurū as being of utmost importance in the guidance of the community. It is only a *human* Gurū who can respond to the present circumstances, and thus adapt to changing circumstances. The

human Gurū is vital for the continual guidance of Nāmdhāri Sikhs. Furthermore, there is no hint in *gurbānī* that states that there are to be ten human Gurūs only. Nāmdhāris take literally the words of the *Ādi Granth*, which state that the rule of the Gurū is to remain permanent:

In the Iron age, thou art called the accepted Guru's Nanak, Angad and Amar Dass.  
Imperishable and Immovable is the rule of the reverend Guru, for such is the command of the Primal Lord. (AG 1390)<sup>83</sup>

The above words indicate that the rule of the Gurū will always remain; for Sikhs generally, this implies eternal authority that has been vested in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. The Nāmdhāris however, although carrying on human succession, as is the tradition from Gurū Nānak onwards, have denied the important institution of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* by Gurū Gobind Singh prior to his death in 1708. Nevertheless, in accordance with AG 1390, and other references similar to it from *gurbānī*, the Nāmdhāris adamantly affirm that they are not led astray and are thus representatives of a Sikh affiliation in every way. Therefore, the present Gurū of the Nāmdhāris is Gurū Jagjīt Singh, and not the *Ādi Granth*. Moreover, since *Sikh* is translated as "disciple", Nāmdhāris argue that surely this must mean that the *śiṣyaḥ*<sup>84</sup> needs a Gurū to offer guidance and advice to the changing contingencies of society.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, Nāmdhāris draw attention to the words of Gurū Amardās, who highlighted that without the Gurū's guidance, the individual cannot gain *mukti* (AG

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<sup>83</sup>Singh, Manmohan, (1996 rp of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, pp. 4590-1.

<sup>84</sup>That is, the disciple. The term *chela* can also be used for a disciple; however, *śiṣyaḥ* is frequently used by the Kūkās.

<sup>85</sup>This view is accepted by the Nāmdhāris: "Guru is not bound in time-limit. He was and will be present in every age as he is badly needed by us, the humanbeings, in every period; for there is no knowledge without him and no Emancipation without the knowledge. He therefore does incarnate in every age" - *Gursikhi Vichardhara*, p. 61.

361). Yet, it must be remembered that these hymns were composed by the earlier Gurūs, who probably believed that the lineage of human Gurūs would always continue. But by investing gurūship eternally in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, was Gurū Gobind Singh actually ignoring the precepts of *bāṇī*? Gurū Gobind Singh's institution of the *Ādi Granth* to that of the eternal Gurū of the *Panth* was an important measure that had to be taken in the early eighteenth century. By this time, many rivals had set themselves up as Gurūs and this was causing schism in the *Panth*. Thus, to end rival sects, the tenth Gurū brought the line of human succession to an end. Temporal authority was vested in the *Panth* itself, with spiritual strength contained within *gurbāṇī*.

In replica of the selection of the ten Sikh Gurūs, the Nāmdhāri Gurū is not elected, but is recognized by his gifts of spirituality and ability to guide others towards *mukti*. Since no elections take place, the Gurū is not called a leader but, rather, the spiritual Head or Guide. The present Gurū will nominate his successor himself. Like the Sikh Gurūs, the Nāmdhāri Gurūs have all been males; unlike the Sikh Gurūs however, the Nāmdhāri Gurūs, with the exception of Bālak Singh, are of the *rāmgarhīā zāt*. The present Gurū's decision is final on all matters, socially and religiously. Thus, for the Nāmdhāris, the supreme authority is *their* living Gurū and not the Shromaṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee, which has no control over Gurū Jagjīt Singh. The Nāmdhāris have no cabinet of selected persons, but there are the Gurūs' closest followers who accompany him wherever he goes. Yet, as pointed out earlier, the *gurgaddī* at Bhaini Sāhib remains unoccupied in view of the belief that Gurū Rām Singh is to return and guide his followers through the present era.

The Nāmdhāris believe they are advancing both socially and religiously with the tradition of living Gurūs. Socially, in that a human Gurū can respond to contemporary issues and religiously, because the guidance of a human Gurū is continuously present for the community. It is reiterated that this tradition is not new: far from it, they are following the *maryādā*, the tradition, of the successorship of Gurūs. In the same manner as the Gurūs responded to changing circumstances and enabled the continuity of the *Panth* so, too, is this carried forward to the present day. Thus, the Nāmdhāri response to the present era can be called modern.

#### 4:4:2 *Nām simran*

Extremely important among the Nāmdhāris is the practice of *nām simran*. The *nām* is to be captured in each heart; thus giving rise to the very term "Nāmdhāri". Since the human condition is one of suffering, it is *nām simran*, or rather *nām japnā*, that enables the individual to tread the path towards *mukti*, ultimate release being dependent on the *Nadar*, the Grace, of *Wāhegurū* -- a belief central to Sikh philosophy as a whole. The importance attached to *nām simran* is highlighted by Gurū Arjan:

Contemplating the Lord's Name and ever uttering the Master's praises in the saint's society, O Nanak, immaculate becomes the mortal. (AG 1357)<sup>86</sup>

A unique practice among the Nāmdhāris is the giving of a *gurmantar* -- a secret *mantar* on which the devotee meditates -- by a ritual known as *nām lenā*, "to receive the *gurmantar*".<sup>87</sup> The *gurmantar* is imparted by the present Gurū. Therefore, on his visit to Britain, followers who have not already done so, will become part of

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<sup>86</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, pp. 4479-80.

<sup>87</sup>The devotee is never to utter this *gurmantar* loudly, nor tell it to anyone, because of its very holy significance.



the Nāmdhāri community by receiving a *gurmantar*. Devout followers, who may perform this very important ritual on his behalf, are also selected by the Gurū. The giving of a secret *gurmantar* appears to be unique to the Nāmdhāris. Nāmdhāris postulate that the practice of giving *gurmantar* to the devotee is a ritual that was practised by the Sikh Gurūs also.<sup>88</sup> Since the *gurmantar* given to the Kūkā is to remain a secret, *nām simran* is performed quietly to oneself. This is in sharp contrast to the participation in *kīrtan* among the Nāmdhāris that is sung aloud, often ecstatically.

#### 4:4:3 *Kīrtan*

It is the ecstatic singing aloud of *kīrtan* that has earned the Nāmdhāris the name of Kūkā, which, as indicated earlier, is derived from the word 'kūk', "to shriek". The *kīrtan* is also called *hali dā dīwān*, meaning loud singing. The participants in *hali dā dīwān* lose themselves in the singing in a kind of mystical trance. This feature is unique to the Nāmdhāris. To accompany *kīrtan*, only classical Indian instruments are used.<sup>89</sup> Emphasis is placed on *kīrtan* because of the Nāmdhāri belief that it is "food for the Almighty God and the human soul".<sup>90</sup> Nāmdhāris rigidly adhere to the following hymn composed by Gurū Amardās in which he advocates singing in the praise of God:

Attuned to Thee, Thine devotees ever sing Thy praise  
Singing the True Lords (*sic*) praise through true melody, I am absorbed in the  
True One. (AG 1068)<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Gursikhi Vichardhara*, p. 70.

<sup>89</sup> An eminent position is given to classical music among the Nāmdhāris, as will be illustrated below.

<sup>90</sup> Kavi, Pritam Singh in *Souvenir for the Satguru Partap Singh Music Festival*, 1996.

<sup>91</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, pp. 3514-16.

Although *kīrtan* is a common feature of all *gurdwārās*, its “trance-like” involvement is only found among the Nāmdhāris. Again, then, one cannot escape the fact that in attempting to adhere to *gurbāṇī* literally, the Nāmdhāris tend to deviate from general Sikh practice, and incorporate practices that distinguish them from the general *Panth*.

#### 4:4:4 Nāmdhāri *sakhīs* (prophecies)

There are a number of *sakhīs* “prophecies” that are fervently held by the Nāmdhāris. These *sakhīs*, as pointed out by Ahluwalia, were found by the Kūkās in a tank/pool at the village of Haripur, Sirsa District in 1876.<sup>92</sup> A full, detailed list of these *sakhīs* can be found in Ahluwalia’s work.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps one of the most important *sakhīs*, is, that, already dealt with above, that Gurū Gobind Singh will re-incarnate and be reborn into a carpenter’s family. This reincarnation is acknowledged by the Kūkās *only*, as Gurū Rām Singh. The *sakhī* foretells that:

The 12th Guru will be the most perfect and the greatest; will be born as a carpenter’s son; and will begin his devotions at the age of 5.<sup>94</sup>

I must point out that, such is the importance of belief in these *sakhīs* that those Nāmdhāris who did not believe in the prophecies were to be “cut off from the congregation”.<sup>95</sup> What is clear, at this point, is that the Nāmdhāris dearly hold these prophecies and stringently regard the succession of Gurūs as being justified in *gurbāṇī*. This has enormous implications when assessing the criteria presented by the Nāmdhāris towards the issue of Sikh identity.

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<sup>92</sup> Ahluwalia, *Freedom Struggle in India*, p. 182.

<sup>93</sup> Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*, chapter 16.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185. Additionally, the *sakhīs* also prophesy a war between Russia and Turkey (*ibid.*, p. 186).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Although the Nāmdhāris have a number of beliefs that differentiate them from the *Panth*, the major concepts of Sikh philosophy are, nevertheless, adhered to. This is illustrated in the table below. In this respect, the Nāmdhāris exhibit strong indicators of a Sikh identity.

<i>Belief found in Sikh religion</i>	<i>Present among the Nāmdhāris</i>	<i>Absent among the Nāmdhāris</i>
Monotheism	#	
Absolute is <i>nirguna</i>	#	
<i>Saguna</i> essence of God is present in creation	#	
Pantheistic concept of the divine	#	
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself	#	
Predestination	#	
Total reliance on God	#	
Human birth as highest	#	
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God	#	
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>	#	
Becoming a <i>jīvanmukt</i> is the ideal	#	
Detachment from worldly lures	#	
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire	#	
Advocation of <i>bhakti</i>	#	
Interiorized religion	#	
Rejection of image worship	#	
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	#	
Rejection of yogic practices	#	
Worthlessness of rituals	#	
<i>Nām simran</i>	#	
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>	#	
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>	#	
Company of the <i>satsangat</i> is essential	#	

**Table 7. Conformity of beliefs found among the Nāmdhāris and the general Panth.**

Paradoxically, certain beliefs found among the Nāmdhāris differentiate them from the general *Panth*. The following differences are significant enough to suggest the impossibility of Nāmdhāris being part of a uniform, corporate Sikh identity.

Concept found in Nāmdhāri belief	Totally absent from general Sikh belief	Expressed differently in Sikh belief
Tradition of human Gurūs	#	
Eternal gurūship was not vested into the <i>Ādi Granth</i>	#	
Gurū Gobind Singh did not die in 1708	#	
Importance of the <i>gurmantar</i>		Only a few Sikh groups such as the Nānaksar share this tradition

**Table 8. Differences in belief between Nāmdhāris and the general *Panth*.**

#### **4:5 Nāmdhāri praxis: adherence or deviation?**

There are a number of practices that take place among the followers of the Nāmdhāri tradition that are clearly different from those taking place in general Sikh custom. It is to these practices that attention is now drawn.

##### **4:5:1 The Nāmdhāri *Rehat Maryādā***

The essence of the Kūkā way of life is simplicity and calmness. These have been highlighted in the Nāmdhāri *Rehat Maryādā*, as instituted by Gurū Rām Singh. A full, translated version of the Nāmdhāri *Rehat Maryādā* can be found in McLeod's *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*.<sup>96</sup> The very fact that the Nāmdhāris have a

<sup>96</sup>McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, pp. 129-30. The major rules and regulations of this *Rehat Maryādā* are as follows: "Rise during the last watch of the night and taking a pot of water [for cleansing] go out into the fields to relieve nature. When you return scour the pot twice, remove the clothes which you were wearing while in the fields, clean your teeth, bathe, and recite [the prescribed portions of] sacred scripture. . . Commit both *Japji* and *Jap* to memory, and also *Shabad Hazare*. You

*Rehat Maryādā*, distinct from the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, has clear impacts on the issue of uniformity of Sikh identity.

In accordance with their *Rehat Maryādā* the Nāmdhāris are stringent vegetarians. In contrast, the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* does not require vegetarianism; it places an injunction on *halāl* meat only. Nāmdhāri respect for all life forms is shown in day-to-day living. In addition to the ban on alcohol, followers take care not to consume intoxicants. This includes a total abstinence from tea and coffee; in replacement of tea, *chātā* is served in the home and during *langar*, it is milk boiled with Indian spices, but no tea leaf.

The more stringent Nāmdhāris are known as Sodhīs and take utmost care in everything they do, including what they consume. The present Gurū and his closest disciples can be included in this group. I must emphasize that the Sodhīs do not form a sect within the Nāmdhāri tradition but are noted for their extreme religious observance. Sodhīs will not drink tap water, since it is considered unclean: they will usually carry a *garbī* with them, this is a steel container in which the water is kept. Most Nāmdhāris prefer to drink bottled water, for the same reasons. Some, who do not have easy access to river or spring water, will also bathe from bottled water. *Amrit* is never prepared with tap water. I was told that *karāh prasād* will be made with milk

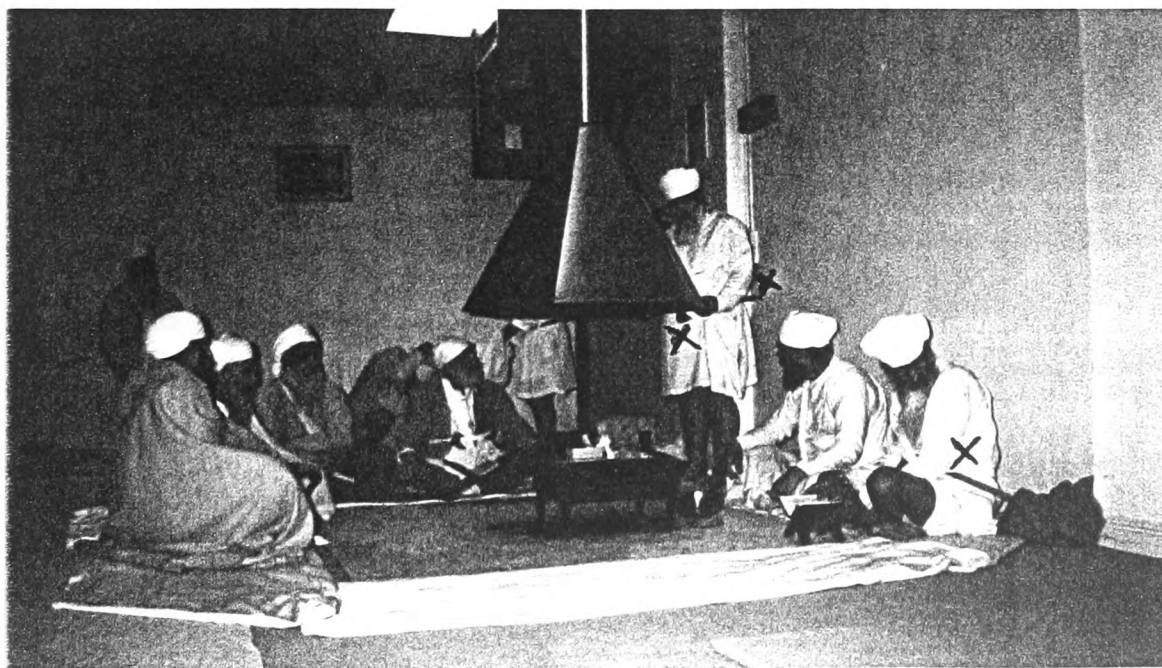
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must also learn *Rahiras* and *Arti Sohila*". In his endnote, McLeod mentions that the *Arti Sohilla* is 5.3 of the *Kirtan Sohila* "by heart". "All should lead a life of restraint and contentment. . . Respect the daughter or the sister of another man as you would your own. The Guru has told us how we should regard the rights of others. . . He who fails to take initiation from the Guru and who utters the Guru's mantra without first receiving it from him shall have his face blackened in this world and the next. . . Even the person who strikes you must be forgiven. The Guru is your Protector. Always conceal your own good deeds from others. Gather to sing the sacred hymns regularly. Sing passages from the scriptures daily. . . Always wear the approved breeches (*kachh*). When taking off a *kachh* withdraw one leg and put it in the leg hole of another pair before withdrawing the second leg. Never conceal an evil deed committed by another person. Do not sell or barter a daughter or a sister. Constantly repeat the Guru's name. Never eat meat or drink alcoholic liquor. Continue always in the fear of God."

if there is no spring water available. In most cases the *prasād* is usually dry, that is, fruits and nuts. *Kaṛāh prasād* is usually made for *bhogs* and other special religious ceremonies. Food is stringently checked for ingredients, and cakes and so on must be retin-free. Since the Kūkās are very scrupulous about what they eat, and with whom they eat, they usually prepare their own food when in the company of non-Nāmdhāri hosts.

#### 4:5:2 Pacifism

Despite the considerably militant past that I have outlined, the Nāmdhāri community today is explicitly pacifist. It is a feature of the group that originated soon after the exile of Gurū Rām Singh to Burma. Nāmdhāris do not wear *kirpāns*, and one reason for this may be due to their pacifist outlook. However, another reason, as noted above, is due to the ban on *kirpāns* in Gurū Rām Singh's period, during which he commanded the Kūkās to wear axes, referred to as *lathīs*. These are also worn by a number of Nāmdhāris to the present day. The wearing of *lathīs* by the Kūkās is illustrated in the photograph below, which was taken during the preparation for *havan*, the fire ceremony, prior to the celebrations of *holā mohallā*, in Birmingham:



The *lathī* is clearly illustrated by X marked on the photograph above. Shiv Lal points out that historians have suggested that the non-wearing of the *kirpān* is "symbolic of the Nāmdhāris' faith in a non-violent political creed".<sup>97</sup> To what extent this is true is debatable, for the *lathī*, too, seems to suggest overtones of militancy. The carrying of the *lathī*, nevertheless, is not a common feature, the majority of Nāmdhāris -- including the present Gurū -- do not carry it.

#### **4:5:3 Nāmdhāri dress**

Another physical characteristic of the Nāmdhāris is the prominence given to the colour white. During communal worship especially, it would be very unusual to see a Nāmdhāri wearing brightly coloured, or dark clothes. The colour white is symbolic of spiritual, as well as physical, purity -- an aspect of utmost importance for Nāmdhāris. The turban of the Nāmdhāri is always of the colour white, and is tied horizontally across the forehead. On the whole, Kūkās, both male and female, child and adult, will not wear the *sahwār*, that is the loose, flared bottoms worn with a long tunic: this, they believe, is a Muslim fashion. So, instead the *pujamā* is worn. These are the tight fitting trousers worn with the long tunic.<sup>98</sup> The wearing of gold jewellery, which has become a sign of one's social position, especially among Sikhs generally, is not observed by Kūkās. Nāmdhāris dress in a simple style: poor and rich dress alike.

#### **4:5:4 Havan: the fire ceremony**

A distinctive ritual among the Nāmdhāris is that of *havan*, also referred to as *jag* (*vajñā*). This is the fire ceremony performed before all major celebrations, it may also be requested by, or performed on behalf of, a follower. It is believed that *havan* is

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<sup>97</sup> Lal, *Dateline Punjab - Lifeline Sikhs*, p. 79.

<sup>98</sup>For an illustration of Nāmdhāri dress, see appendix 2:2.



performed to cleanse the mind -- whether individual or communal -- of evil and impurity. Nevertheless, it could be claimed that the performance of *havan* is a major contradiction of the teachings of Gurū Nānak who rejected outright the performance of rituals, in favour of interiorized religion (AG 1169). However, popular religion needs some tangibility with which to express devotion, and in this respect, ritual found its way into Sikh practice.<sup>99</sup> The Nāmdhāris, therefore, cannot be regarded to have deviated from the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs in the performance of *havan*. Indeed, Gurū Nānak also spoke against pilgrimage, yet the third Gurū constructed the *baolī* at Goindwal, which became a pilgrimage centre for Sikhs. These measures were seen as necessary for the continuation of the *Panth*.

The correct performance of *havan*, is highlighted in the Nāmdhāri *Rehat Maryādā*.<sup>100</sup> The actual ritual lasts about forty-five minutes, and is performed during the early hours of the morning.<sup>101</sup> *Kīrtan* is sung throughout the ceremony by the *rāgīs*, musicians. Each person who is taking part in the performance of the ritual, takes *amrit* immediately before its commencement.<sup>102</sup> In turn, each of the participants takes his place around the *jag* square.<sup>103</sup> In total there are seven participants, five to read the sacred verses, one to add incense to the fire, and a seventh to sprinkle water

<sup>99</sup> Above all, the taking of *amrit* at the *Khālsā* ceremony is an example *per se* of the presence of ritual in Sikhism.

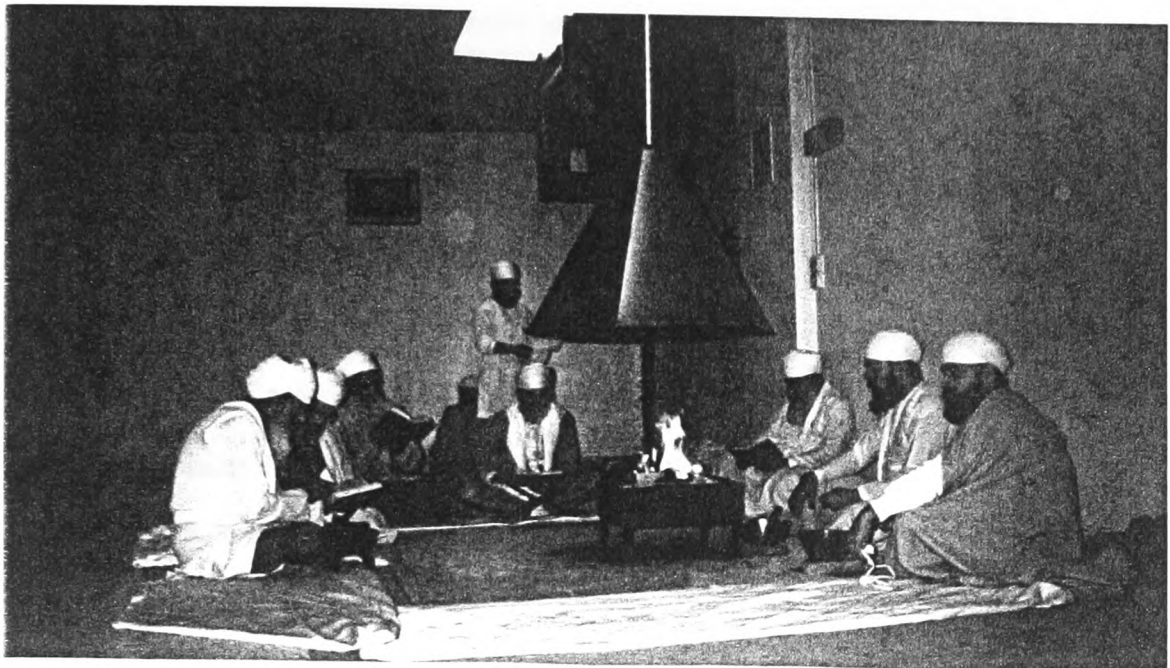
<sup>100</sup> *Havan* by the Nāmdhāris should be performed in the following manner: "When a *jag* (*vajna*) is to be performed purify the place where it is to be held (the *jag* square) by plastering it. Bring earthen vessels which have not previously been used and wash your feet before entering the *jag* square. There perform the *havan*, or *hom* (ritual fire ceremony). Use wood from either the *patas* or the *ber* tree. Do not [fan the fire by] blowing it with human breath. During the course of the ritual fire service (five officiants) should read the following from copies of the scriptures: *Chaupai*, *Japji*, *Jap*, *Chandi Charitra* and *Akal Ustat*. A sixth officiant should meanwhile pour incense (on the fire) and a seventh should (intermittently) sprinkle a few drops of water on it" (McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, p. 130).

<sup>101</sup> I have filmed the *havan* on *holā mohallā* at the Birmingham centre on 22 March 1998; this can be viewed for further clarity.

<sup>102</sup> See appendix 2:4.

<sup>103</sup> On this particular occasion, participants were males. I was told that this is usually the case.

onto it. The following photograph was taken during the performance of the *havan* ceremony: the five readers are situated starting from the left, then is seated the officiant who will add incense every so often and, finally, on the extreme right is seated the officiant who will sprinkle water onto the fire, after each addition of incense.



At the beginning of the ritual, the Nāmdhāri *maryādā* is stipulated by placing a coconut wrapped in cloth into the fire. I was told that this replaced the ancient Hindu custom of sacrificing an animal or human head for *yajñā*. Due to the pacifist nature of the Kūkās, a coconut is used because of its visible similarity to a head. Interestingly, the *havan* ceremony of the Nāmdhāris is very similar to Hindu fire rituals. Its practice

is also followed by the Zoroastrian religion and may, therefore, reflect a very ancient tradition. I should emphasize that *havan* is exclusively a Nāmdhāri practice. According to the Nāmdhāris however, the *havan* ceremony was undertaken by the Sikh Gurūs too, thus they retain its performance as necessary in order for the traditional *maryādā* to be continued, as stated by the following words:

Havan is also another performance of great importance. Before commencing any ceremony or inauguration of a concern sacred fire is lit. During the regime of all the preceding Gurus this practice had been carried on at all functions. Guru Gobind Singh before instituting the Khalsa Panth, performed Havan about a year and spent a huge sum more than a lac.<sup>104</sup>

This emphasis on tradition -- doing things as they were in the period of the Sikh Gurūs -- however, leads the Nāmdhāris to be seen as separatist, and not part of the uniform Sikh identity as desired by the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. The practice of the fire ceremony is not, I reiterate, a part of the *maryādā* of the *Panth* as a whole. Its performance places the Nāmdhāris outside general Sikh practice.

After the completion of *havan*, *karāh prasād* is brought into the worship hall and all stand while it is carried towards the "stage" on which the *Ādi Granth* is also present. *Amrit* is then prepared again, since those who had participated in the *havan* are pure enough to make *amrit* for those wishing to take it. The *amritdhārīs* read the following compositions, while another person stirs the sugar crystals into the water: *janjī*, *jap*, *chaupai*, *anand sāhib* and *savaiyas*. *Karāh prasād* is prepared once again for the completion of the *amrit* ceremony. Hence *karāh prasād* is prepared each time the *amrit* is made and each time the *havan* is performed, it is also prepared for each time the *bhog* of each *pāth* takes place.

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<sup>104</sup>Gursikhi Vichardhara, p. 83.

#### 4:5:5 Nāmdhāri Weddings

Nāmdhāri weddings illustrate well the problems raised by the issue of attempts at Sikh uniformity with regard to praxis. Importantly, as mentioned in chapter 2 of the present thesis, the *Anand Kāraj* Act was passed in 1909, which gave Sikhs a marriage rite of their own. Prior to this the Sikhs followed the Hindu custom of taking *pheras* around the sacred fire: now, however, the Sikhs were to walk around the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Thus, the *anand kāraj* rite strengthened Sikh identity as distinct from Hindus from the early twentieth century to the present day. The Nāmdhāris however, continue to take the *pheras* around the sacred fire, because of their emphasis on following traditions from the inception of the Sikh faith. They believe that since the Gurūs had married according to the Hindu custom, then so should they. Again, there is an attempt to revert to original customs. Nevertheless, as in general Sikh practice, four *pheras* take place, one to each of the *lāvān* hymns composed by Gurū Rāmdās.<sup>105</sup> Before the actual Nāmdhāri ceremony begins, the couple take *amrit*. Both the bride and groom wear simple white clothes, and the bride wears no jewellery -- again a unique practice among the Nāmdhāris.

The wedding is a very simple and inexpensive affair. The general Sikh social custom of a large reception after the wedding is not practised among the Nāmdhāris. No reception at all takes place and, furthermore, no dowry is given. I was told that those who do hold a reception or give or take dowry are shunned by the Nāmdhāri community. In their ideal of inexpensive marriages, the practice of mass weddings is

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<sup>105</sup>The *lāvān* hymn was composed by Gurū Rāmdās for his own daughter's wedding. It consists of four stanzas, thus a *phera* is taken at the completion of each stanza.

also common among the Kūkās. These usually take place in the presence of Gurū Jagjīt Singh. Large numbers of Nāmdhāri couples, all dressed in white, walk around a huge ceremonial fire, four times.

A unique practice among the Nāmdhāris, as previously indicated, is that of mixed-*zāt* marriages. However, of major importance, is that the couple are followers of the Nāmdhāri tradition. Thus, a Nāmdhāri *jaṭ* can marry a Nāmdhāri *rāmgarhīā*, and so on. Whether marriages are actually conducted between higher *zats* with Scheduled Classes is a sensitive issue.<sup>106</sup> But of major consideration here is the issue that inter-caste marriages may actually be *consciously* performed. What I am suggesting here is that they are purposely adopted to convey the fact that the Nāmdhāris are stringent followers of Gurū Nānak, who openly criticized the caste system -- another Nāmdhāri attempt to be as traditional as possible. Nevertheless, the Sikh Gurūs themselves, although denouncing caste prejudices, married within their *zāt*; the marriages of their offspring were also arranged with *khatrīs*. But it would appear that the Nāmdhāris are following the teachings of the Gurūs with regard to equality more literally than Sikhs in general and more fervently than the Gurūs themselves: indeed, the present Gurū, who is a *rāmgarhīā*, is married to a *jaṭ*. On the one hand the Nāmdhāris are following the teachings of the Gurūs that deride caste, but on the other they are not conforming to the practice of the Sikh Gurūs with regard to endogamy.

The Nāmdhāri wedding -- which is called the *Anand* Marriage -- was instituted by Gurū Rām Singh. Sikh weddings of the time involved parents of the

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<sup>106</sup>Nāmdhāris are hesitant to openly admit the fact that marriages between the higher *zāts* with the Scheduled Classes do *not* take place.

bride being overburdened with costs for her dowry -- a major reason for female infanticide among Indians generally. Thus, in his endeavour to stop female infanticide, and to prevent the bride's family having to pawn its goods to the rich landlords, Gurū Rām Singh introduced simple and inexpensive weddings for the Kūkās. Gurū Rām Singh's rationale in instituting the *Anand* Marriage has been clearly summarized by Ahluwalia.<sup>107</sup> In aiming to conduct the wedding simply, there are no other customs such as the *milnī*, which takes place before the wedding ceremony in Sikh weddings generally. Instead, the bride will give the groom a simple white *mālā*. Neither is the custom of *sagan* adhered to by Kūkās: this is the custom of the bride's family giving gifts -- often expensive ones such as gold -- to the groom. The Nāmdhāri groom will not wear the *pujamā*. Instead he wears the *kacchā*, which is usually covered with the long tunic top. *Havan* is again performed before the commencement of the ceremony in order to cleanse the minds of the couple.

Thus, it is clear that, with regard to the wedding ceremony, the Nāmdhāris clearly exhibit criteria that are separatist. Their practices differentiate them from Sikhs of the general *Panth*. Paradoxically, however, the emphasis placed on both bride and groom to take *amrit* prior to the ceremony sheds a strong *Khālsā* overtone on the non-Sikh ritual of Nāmdhāri weddings. Importantly, it must also be remembered that the *lāvān* hymn is recited and not any non-Sikh literature, these factors therefore, are indicators that promote Sikh conformity.

#### **4:5:6 Festivals**

The main festivals celebrated by Sikhs generally are also celebrated by the Nāmdhāris. The most obvious one not celebrated, however, by Nāmdhāris, is the

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<sup>107</sup> Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*, pp. 49-50.

*gurgaddi* of the *Ādi Granth* -- the commemoration of gurūship being invested in the *Ādi Granth*. In addition to Sikh celebrations in general, the Nāmdhāris have extra festivals or commemorations related to the historical events and persons of their particular group. A full list of Nāmdhāri celebrations and commemorations can be seen in appendix 2:9.

The festival of *holā mohallā*, the spring festival celebrated by all Sikhs, is given the additional name of *trīvenī* among Nāmdhāris. As the term *trīvenī* indicates, it is celebrated for three reasons, the actual *holā mohallā* celebration, as well as the birthdays of Gurū Bālak Singh, and that of Gurū Partāp Singh.<sup>108</sup> In this respect the Nāmdhāris have a number of unique celebrations -- a fine example of their distinctiveness from the general *Panth*. The celebration of *trīvenī* was instituted by the present Nāmdhāri Gurū. Celebrations begin with the *havan* ceremony, as is common to all joyous occasions. The whole day's events are focused on the performance of *kārtan*.<sup>109</sup> A special lecture is also given to inform the *sangat* of the reasons behind celebrating *holā mohallā*.<sup>110</sup>

*Baisākhī* for the Nāmdhāris takes on a double celebration. As well as celebrating the birth of the *Khālsā* by Gurū Gobind Singh in 1699, Nāmdhāris also

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<sup>108</sup> Although Gurū Partāp Singh's birthday actually occurs a few days later, it is celebrated on *holā mohallā*.

<sup>109</sup> It is common practice that, for the major festivals, one Nāmdhāri centre is chosen. In 1998, the celebrations were held at the Birmingham centre on Sunday 22 March; this meant that the *sangats* from Leeds and London travelled to Birmingham, mostly by coaches, which were hired by the organizers of each *sangat*. After the *havan* ritual is over, *Asā dī vār* is read, this is followed by a total of four *bhogs* taking place, one each for the *pāths* of *holā mohallā*, Pratāp Singh's birthday, Bālak Singh's birthday, and a fourth *bhog* takes place for all three *pāths* together. *Karāh prasād* is prepared for each *bhog*, the congregation stand every time the *prasād* is brought into the hall.

<sup>110</sup> I should point out that, although *holā mohallā* has its origin in the Hindu festival of *holī*, it has been modified for the Sikh *Panth*. Gurū Gobind Singh did not favour the throwing of coloured water, as is practised on *holī*, neither did he support the practice of drinking *bhang*, an intoxicating liquid, by the *holī* participants. He therefore gave *holī* a new meaning, it was now to colour the mind and heart brightly towards God. Furthermore, Gurū Rām Singh emphasized the performance of *nām simran* during *holā mohallā*.

celebrate the birth of the *Sant Khālsā* by Gurū Rām Singh in 1857 -- the latter is *unique* to Nāmdhāris. I must reiterate that the celebration of the formation of the *Sant Khālsā* as the “second birth of the *Khālsā*” is outrightly rejected by Sikhs of the general *Panth*. Thus, importantly here, the Nāmdhāris are differentiating themselves from the *Panth*. Gurū Rām Singh re-established the *Panth*, one hundred and fifty eight years after its formation by the tenth Gurū, by hoisting the white flag. The major festivals are always celebrated on the first Sunday following the date, except if the day falls on a Sunday, then being celebrated on the exact day.

As with Sikhs and Hindus in general, the *rakhī* custom, “brother's day”, is also observed.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, the festival of *dīwālī* and the *gurpurbs* of the Sikh Gurūs as well as the Nāmdhāri Gurūs, are also celebrated. A *melā* is also held to commemorate the Nāmdhāri martyrs. Interestingly, the birthdays of the Hindu *avatārs*, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are also celebrated -- a practice that would not have been approved of by the *Tat Khālsā* for Sikhs to celebrate nor, I might add, by the Sikh Gurūs. Although many Hindu customs have, indeed, survived in Sikhism, the celebration of Hindu religious festivals devoted to Hindu gods undoubtedly isolates the Nāmdhāris from the general *Panth*. Bearing in mind chapter 2 of the present thesis, Sikh participation in the “enchanted universe” is responsible for the efforts of the *Tat Khālsā* in promoting distinctive Sikh identity. Adherence to such practices are thoroughly non-Sikh.

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<sup>111</sup>In the Indian tradition overall, a sister ties a *rakhī* (a brightly coloured band) around her brother's wrist, he in turn gives her money and promises to protect her.



#### 4:5:7 Places of worship

The Nāmdhāri place of worship is not called a *gurdwārā*, but is referred to, as in the case of the Birmingham centre:

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Occasionally, it is also referred to as a *dharamsālā*, a centre for correct living or practising of religion. The abstinence from using the term *gurdwārā* is probably due to the fact that in Sikhism generally, wherever a copy of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is placed, that place becomes a *gurdwārā*. However, since Nāmdhāris do not regard the *Ādi Granth* as Gurū, and since the present Gurū is not always present at the centre, it is thus not given the term *gurdwārā*.

It is well to remember that the term *dharamsālā* was used in the early Sikh community to refer to a place where Sikhs would gather to sing praises of God. The importance of the *dharamsālā* is further highlighted since it “was one of the features which conferred a distinctive identity on the Nanak-panth.”<sup>112</sup> Thus, the Nāmdhāris, in attempting to preserve the nature and beliefs of the original Nānak community, prefer to retain the term *dharamsālā* rather than *gurdwārā*.

Another distinct feature of the place of worship is that, instead of a saffron *nisān sāhib* being present outside the building, the Nāmdhāri centre has a white, triangular *nisān sāhib*. This is, of course, reminiscent of the white flag hoisted by Gurū Rām Singh on the formation of the *Sant Khālsā* in 1857. Today the white *nisān sāhib* is unique to the Nāmdhāris. They retain the belief that the *nisān sāhib*, originally introduced by Gurū Angad, was white, and displayed the emblem of *Ik-Onkār*. Thus the white *nisān sāhib* was totally void of any militant aspect. It was Gurū

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<sup>112</sup> McLeod, *Sikhism*, p. 8.

Hargobind who changed the colour to saffron, symbolizing the mustard flower that is used to represent the *shahīdī*, martyr, readiness of followers.<sup>113</sup> The emblem of *Ik-Onkār* -- ੴ -- remained until it was replaced by the *Khaṇḍā* -- ੴ -- after the creation of the *Khālsā* by Gurū Gobind Singh. Thus, the retaining of the white *nisān sāhib* clearly illustrates the Nāmdhāris' adherence to traditional practices.<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, in view of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, a Sikh place of worship must have either a saffron or dark-blue *nisān sāhib*<sup>115</sup> to distinguish it from other buildings. By purposely exhibiting the white *nisān sāhib*, I feel that the Nāmdhāris are accentuating their separateness from the overall *Panth*. If this is the case, then, again, they are diversifying from the notion of a uniform Sikh identity.

The interior of the Nāmdhāri place of worship is replete with pictures of the Nāmdhāri Gurūs and scenes of Nāmdhāri history. This illustrates well the *difference* between Nāmdhāris and non-Nāmdhāri Sikhs. Nevertheless, pictures of the Sikh Gurūs are also present. The *Ādi Granth* is not housed in the same manner as it is in Sikh *gurdwārās* generally, the main focus is, instead, a huge picture of the present Gurū. Above his picture, attached to the ceiling, is the *chatrī* -- a symbol of respect -- and at his feet is placed a white sheet. It is at this spot, called the *singhāsan*, that is, at the feet of the Gurū's picture, that followers perform *maṭāh teknā* "bowing" -- this is

<sup>113</sup>Information from an informant at Wolverhampton.

<sup>114</sup>I was told that the white *nisān sāhib* is symbolic of the *pīrī* concept mentioned above; while the saffron *nisān sāhib* symbolizes the *mīrī* concept. So, does this mean that, in retaining the colour white, the Nāmdhāris are rejecting Gurū Hargobind's concept of temporal authority? It would seem unlikely for the Nāmdhāris to deny the *mīrī-pīrī* concept since it was practised by the sixth to the tenth Sikh Gurūs. As was discussed above in the context of the *deh-dhāri* Gurū, it seems, in fact, that they carry the *mīrī-pīrī* concept *further* by having both scripture (*pīrī*) and, particularly, by emphasizing the living Gurū (*mīrī*). I would think that the white colour is retained because it portrays, more closely, their pacifist outlook on religion, and because, as mentioned, the original *nisān sāhib* was white in colour: highlighting the Nāmdhāri adherence to traditional Sikh practice.

<sup>115</sup>*Rehat Maryada* (1978) Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 8.

done *before* bowing to the *Ādi Granth*. When the present Gurū visits Britain, it is at the *singhāsan* that he will sit. Thus, the eminent position of the living Gurū is stressed over and above the *Ādi Granth* -- again an overt criterion that inhibits true Sikh identity. A *giānī* is usually present to read from the *Ādi Granth*: respect is always shown to it. The *Dasam Granth*, as previously indicated, is also given equal importance among the Nāmdhāris since it, too, is scripture. Furthermore, it could be suggested that since Gurū Rām Singh is regarded as a reincarnation of the tenth Gurū -- the composer of the *Dasam Granth* -- respect is shown for what Gurū Rām Singh, as Gurū Gobind Singh, had composed in an earlier lifetime. I must stress that the Nāmdhāri Gurū is never worshipped: in the same way as Sikhs in general show respect for the Gurūs and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* so, too, Nāmdhāri Sikhs show respect to, but not worship of, their living Gurū.

#### **4:5:8 Worship**

Although in essence, worship is quite similar to that of general *gurdwārās*, there are a number of differences among Nāmdhāris. One is that the congregation stands every time *kaṛāh prasād* is brought into the hall. *Kaṛāh prasād* is placed on the side of the *Ādi Granth*, as it is in *gurdwārās*. The singers and *rāgīs* are also an important presence on the stage, since there is, as was seen, an emphasis on *kārtan* among the Nāmdhāris. Music is continuous through the service, unless a lecture or speech is given. The position of the *Ādi Granth*, the living Gurū's picture, and that of the musicians and singers, is clearly illustrated in the following photograph, taken at the Birmingham centre:



Another distinct feature of Nāmdhāri worship is their unique pattern of the recital of *ardās*. A full translation of the Nāmdhāri *ardās* can be found in McLeod's *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*.<sup>116</sup> The major differences between the *ardās* of Sikhs in general and Nāmdhāris are:

- Nāmdhāri *ardās*, does not contain the words: *Gurū Maniyo Granth*.
- The names of Gurū Bālak Singh and the Nāmdhāri Gurūs are also added to the Nāmdhāri *ardās*, as well as reference to the Kūkā martyrs who were blown up by canons.
- The name of the present Gurū, Jagjīt Singh is not recited during *ardās* if he is present at the particular place of worship.<sup>117</sup>

Since worship begins during the early hours of the morning, *langar* is served twice in the Nāmdhāri centres -- in the morning and at mid-day. Frequently, grief is shown for the Kūkās' separation from Gurū Rām Singh, whom, as I have illustrated,

<sup>116</sup> McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>117</sup> Although his name is not recited when he is present at the centre, it is however, recited when he is absent from the particular centre.

they believe is yet alive. A poem known as the *Kūkā Barā Māh* is sung.<sup>118</sup> *Pāths* are often held for the much-awaited return of Gurū Rām Singh.

#### 4:5:9 Classical music

Since the performance of classical music occupies a special position among the Nāmdhāris, music festivals are held in the presence of the Gurū when he attends Britain. Classical music was emphasized by Gurū Rām Singh and carried forward by Gurū Harī Singh. Gurū Partāp Singh also continued this tradition by opening a school of music at Bhaini in 1928. The love for classical music is now encouraged by the present Gurū who, encouraged by his father, Partāp Singh, began his musical education at the age of four.<sup>119</sup>

The Nāmdhāri Gurū has funded the musical training of many youngsters who have gone on to become renowned musicians of Indian classical music. The emphasis on music among the Nāmdhāris is aimed at being as traditional in practice as possible. Nāmdhāris acknowledge the fact that the love of music has existed in the Sikh faith since the time of Gurū Nānak. Furthermore, the hymns of the *Ādi Granth* are composed to be sung to classical rhythms. Nadkarni clarifies this point:

Social history records that the Namdharis were involved with music from the time of the first **guru** of the Sikhs, Nanak Dev, who was himself not only spiritual personality, but also a blue-blooded musician. The Granth Sahib, is possibly the only religious work where almost all the hymns, known as **shabads**, are set to Hindustani **raga** music. They are regarded as inspired hymns and deeply respected as **Gurbani**.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Part of the *Kūkā Barā Māh* reads as follows: "There is no comfort without the Sat Guru; all the Singhs are grieved. The Singhs do not enjoy their sleep, and keep awake all night in anxiety. They do not find any relish in their food. Grief for the separation of the Guru is eating up their vitals. Who will cause the Guru to meet me, so that I may make offerings to him? I am sacrificed to the Guru. O Chanda Singh! the Guru went to Burma." (Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of the Panjab*, p. 164). A longer translation of the *Kūkā Barā Māh* can be found in Ahluwalia, *ibid.*, pp. 160-68.

<sup>119</sup>Kavi, P. S. in *Souvenir for Satguru Partap Singh Music Festival 1996*, (no page numbers).

<sup>120</sup>Nadkarni, M. in *ibid.*

In his efforts to continue the appreciation of classical music among the Nāmdhāris, Gurū Jagjīt Singh has set up music schools in Mandi, Delhi, Jammu, Jalandhar and Ludhiana.<sup>121</sup> Among the Nāmdhāris, *kīrtan* is performed to classical music only; I was told that during *kīrtan*, it is felt that the Gurū is present in spirit.

The practices of the Nāmdhāris, as illustrated above, present the perplexities associated in issues relating to set criteria for Sikh identity. Their utmost insistence placed on the *Khālsā* form is in line with the *Khālsā* Sikh identity, and although the Nāmdhāris deviate from many accepted Sikh practices, in actual fact they also conform to many others. These are, thus, criteria that both inhibit and strengthen the Sikh identity of the Nāmdhāris. What is clear is that the efforts towards tradition, in terms of religious practice, has caused the separatist identity of the Nāmdhāris. Ultimately, they are *within* the *Panth* due to stringent adherence of the *Khālsā*, but they are *different* Sikhs -- those who will never be defined by one uniform definition of Sikh identity, as can be seen from the following table.

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<sup>121</sup>Sharan, G. in *ibid.*

<i>Sikh Practice</i>	<i>Present among the Nāmdhāris</i>	<i>Absent among the Nāmdhāris</i>
Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship		#
The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief		#
<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> <sup>122</sup>		#
Singing of <i>kārtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Recitation of <i>ardās</i> during worship	#	
Performance of <i>akhand pāths</i>	#	
<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs	#	
Serving of <i>gurū-kā-lungur</i>	#	
Distribution of <i>prasād</i>	#	
Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>		#
Importance of the Sikh Gurūs	#	
Prominence of the <i>Khandā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol		#
Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony	#	
Emphasis on the Five Ks	#	
Emphasis on being <i>kesdhārī</i>	#	
Traditional Punjabi dress for females	#	
Requirement for males and females to cover their heads	#	
Celebration of the <i>gurpurbs</i>	#	
Celebration of <i>baisākhī</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>	#	
Celebration of <i>dhīwālī</i> as the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison	#	
Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>	#	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhī</i>	#	
Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khandā</i>		#
Endogamous marriages		#

**Table 9. Conformity of practices found among the Nāmdhāris and the general *Panth*.**

<sup>122</sup> Nāmdhāris take *lāvān*, but around *havan*.

The position of the Nāmdhāris is rather like that of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā where ultra-*Khālsā* stringency in fact results in separatism from Sikhs of the general *Panth*. Guidelines for correct Sikh practice are contained in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, however, the Nāmdhāris do not accept its authority -- they have their own *Rehat Maryādā*. This fact, *per se*, illustrates the complexities of one uniform definition of Sikh identity. The practice of *not* acknowledging the *Ādi Granth* as eternal Gurū, however, is a major consideration for a separate affiliation of the Nāmdhāris. The central focus in general *gurdwārās* is the *palkā* housing the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. In Nāmdhāri centres however, the central focus is the *singhāsan* where Gurū Jagjīt Singh will sit on his visits to the particular centre. This accentuates deviance from accepted Sikh belief and practice here. The table below highlights practices common to the Nāmdhāris that are important enough to suggest non-Sikh practices among the Nāmdhāris.



Practice found among the Nāmdhāris	Totally absent from Sikh practice	Expressed differently in the Panth
White <i>nisān sāhib</i>		Saffron in colour with <i>Khandā</i> emblem
The <i>Ādi Granth</i> is not Gurū	#	
White horizontal turbans		No specific requirement or colour
Fire ceremony	#	
<i>Lāvān</i> around <i>havan</i>		<i>Lāvān</i> around the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>
Inter-caste marriages	#	
Ecstatic <i>kīrtan</i> ( <i>hali dā dīwān</i> )	#	
Importance of the <i>sakhīs</i>	#	
Nāmdhāri <i>maryādā</i>	#	
<i>Baisākhī</i> also celebrating birth of the <i>Sant Khālsā</i> in 1857		Celebration of the <i>Khālsā</i> by Gurū Gobind Singh in 1699
Festival of <i>trīveni</i>	#	
Religious centre called <i>dharmśālā</i>		Religious centre called <i>gurdwārā</i>
<i>Singhāsān</i> of living Gurū is focal place of worship in the <i>dharmśālā</i>	#	
Names of Nāmdhāri Gurūs added to <i>ardās</i>	#	

**Table 10. Practices that distinguish the Nāmdhāris from the general Panth.**

#### **4:6 The position of the Nāmdhāris within the Panth**

Attempting to reach a conclusion concerning the position of the Nāmdhāris within the Panth is, on the one hand, relatively easily done, but on the other is problematic with regard to the one major difference -- the tradition of living Gurūs. Indeed, the Nāmdhāris are regarded as heretical and non-Sikh by a significant number of Sikhs of the general Panth. This is because the Nāmdhāris call their leaders by the term "Gurū", instead of *Sant* or *Bābā*. Their strict adherence to the *Khālsā* tradition, which is illustrated by the fact of the majority, if not all, followers being *amritdhārī*, is a criterion *per se* that would not inhibit the Nāmdhāris' conformity to uniform Sikh

identity. However, their rejection of the *Ādi Granth* as the eternal Gurū of the Sikhs, is a significant reason *per se* that inhibits the Sikh identity of the Nāmdhāris.

In accordance with the definition of a Sikh as stated in the *Gurdwārās Act* 1971, a Sikh is to declare his or her identity by professing the following words:

I solemnly affirm that I am a Keshdhari (*sic*) Sikh, that I believe in and follow the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Ten Gurus only, and that I have no other religion.<sup>123</sup>

Bearing in mind the above declaration, the Nāmdhāris are an enigma in terms of their Sikh affiliation. Their *outward* conformity to a corporate Sikh identity is clear -- and is sufficient for the group to be included *within* the *Panth*. However, they deviate *radically* from what must surely be regarded as one of the basic and foundational tenets of Sikh belief. In some ways this might suggest the pre-eminence of outward conformity -- the necessity of being *amritdhārī*, *kesdhārī* and observance of the Five Ks.

Furthermore, the Nāmdhāris' contribution towards Indian Independence in terms of their historical militant involvement on behalf of all Sikhs, bears testimony to their Sikh alliance. The Nāmdhāris were among the first to be involved in the Independence struggle. Then, too, the Kūkās stressed the *Khālsā* form during the period in which the *Panth* was becoming increasingly lapsed. Thus we have a paradox between a non-*Khālsā* continuation of human Gurūs versus their stringent observation of the *Khālsā* conduct. And, furthermore, many beliefs of the Nāmdhāris are in accordance with the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, and it is well to remember that the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* nowhere mentions that there should be only ten human Gurūs. However, the Nāmdhāri emphasis on practising traditions that have existed in the

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<sup>123</sup> *Amrtisar Rehat Maryada*, p. 27.

earliest phases of Sikhism differentiates them from other Sikhs. This illustrates well the diversity of the Sikh *Panth* and, furthermore, anomalies associated with a uniform definition of Sikh identity. I should point out that the Nāmdhāri tradition and beliefs must have had an impact on the *Panth* for the group to survive to the present day. Indeed, the Nāmdhāris have a substantial following in India and the diaspora.<sup>124</sup>

In their opinion, the fact that they have a line of human successors, including a present Gurū, *does not* exclude the Nāmdhāris from the fold of the *Khālsā*. Thus, the tradition of the *Ādi Granth* alongside a human Gurū has been carried on from the time of the compiler of the *Ādi Granth*, Gurū Arjan. But there is deviance, too, in that many reforms made by the Singh Sabhā and *Tat Khālsā* leaders are not adhered to by the Nāmdhāris. The *anand karāj* ceremony and the performance of *havan* among the Kūkās remain exclusive to their practices. In retaining more distinctive practices, including the style of the turban, the Nāmdhāris continuously claim that they are continuing the *maryādā* of the Sikh faith as it was from the inception of Sikhism. In this respect they fully justify their claims to a Sikh orientation -- but the result is a differentiation *within* the *Panth*. Thus, I feel the attempt to be wholly traditional, taking their beliefs right back to the original Nānak community, tends to overshadow the Nāmdhāris as a deviant group, even if their allegiance to the *Khālsā* places them within the *Panth*.

Their tradition of a living Gurū in preference to the *Ādi Granth*, causes them to have their own centres of worship, resulting in less contact with the general *Panth*.

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<sup>124</sup>It was remarked by an informant at Wolverhampton that Gurū Jagjīt Singh has good relations with Yogi Bhajan, the leader of a western group of Sikh followers. I propose to highlight in chapter 7 that the group, like the Nāmdhāris also places a marked insistence on the *Khālsā* form.

Again, this creates separate groups within the *Panth* and threatens a corporate and uniform definition of *all* Sikhs.

Further issues raised in respect to criteria related to the issue of Sikh identity are examined by looking at lower *zāt* conversions to the Sikh faith. I begin, in the succeeding chapter, by looking at the Ravidāsīs, formerly referred to as *chamārs*, in order to assess the implications of caste issues and the light they shed on indicators that challenge a uniform Sikh identity.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### *Ravidāsīs*

## 5:1 Who are the Ravidāsīs?

Low-caste conversions to Sikhism shed an interesting light on the issue of whether all who have taken initiation are accepted equally as Sikhs. The egalitarian teachings of Sikhism have important implications when discussing Sikh identity. For this purpose, I have undertaken a scrutiny of the Ravidāsī community in the present chapter. As highlighted previously, the Ravidāsīs were formerly known as the *chamārs* -- the leather-working *zāt* of the Scheduled Classes.<sup>1</sup> They are a Punjabi community that takes its name from allegiance to a historical figure, commonly referred to as Ravidās<sup>2</sup> who is regarded as Gurū and not *bhagat*, as in the case of the overall *Panth*. At the outset, I should emphasize that there is no evidence to suggest that there was a following of Ravidās during his lifetime. The wider recognition of Ravidās as a Gurū can be attributed to the fruition of the efforts of the founders of the *Ad Dharm*, who were themselves *chamārs*.<sup>3</sup> I must point out that membership of the Ravidāsī community is exclusively composed of the *chamār zāt*. The *chamārs* converted in mass numbers to the Sikh faith in the hope of achieving equality. However, these *chamārs* became Ravidāsīs as a result of the continued prejudice of higher *zāt* Sikhs. Significantly, the approach taken in the present chapter is radically different from that taken to earlier sections. Whereas previous groups studied have overt connections with the general *Panth*, the Ravidāsīs today have no real concern to be associated with the *Panth* or, indeed, with Sikhism on the whole. Importantly, although originally *chamārs* had converted in masses to the Sikh faith, today the Ravidāsīs exist as a

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<sup>1</sup>The Scheduled classes were at one time referred to as the Untouchables, that is, members of the lowest strata of Indian society, the new term being originally coined by the British during the census of 1931. According to them, this term implied no connotations of the concepts attached to untouchability -- primarily that of pollution. In addition, the members of the lower classes found the term "Scheduled classes" less patronizing than the term *harijans* (children of God), which was applied by Mahatma Gandhi in his move to improve the social conditions of the lower classes.

<sup>2</sup>It is to him that they trace their origin, an important factor since, as will be seen, it is one that makes the Ravidāsī community a caste-based institution.

challenge to traditional Sikh identity. Moreover, the Ravidāsīs stand as an outstanding example of the fact that caste identity is a major criterion of Sikh identity itself. The *chamārs*' historical connections with Sikhism need to be looked at in order to examine implications arising in relation to Sikh identity, and in order to establish the special ethos of this group.

Ravidās spoke out in favour of his caste. Hence he is regarded as *biradarī gurū*, that is, the gurū of the *chamār zāt* by his followers.<sup>4</sup> Although the Ravidāsīs will refer to Ravidās as their Gurū,<sup>5</sup> hence illustrating the extent of devotion to him, Sikhs in general will refer to Ravidās as a *bhaktā*<sup>6</sup> -- a devotee and *not* a Gurū. Traditionally, being members of the Scheduled Classes, the *chamārs* are counted among the downtrodden and oppressed people of India: their traditional occupation involves working with the highly polluted material of leather, hence the term *chamār*, which is translated as "leather worker". Kalsi has traced the term to *charam-kara*, also meaning leather-worker.<sup>7</sup>

Ravidās has provided his followers with a set of beliefs, with a philosophy regarding the nature of God and the individual, and with the reason for the individual's separation from God. Thus, from the perspective of his followers, Ravidās is more than a *bhaktā*, he is *the* teacher, *the* Gurū who guides his disciples, *śiṣyaḥ*,<sup>8</sup> to *mukti*. Living in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries CE, he was both a social reformer and a spiritual teacher, who probably belonged to the Northern *Sant*

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<sup>3</sup>The *Ad Dharm* movement, which raised the psyche of the *chamārs*, will be examined below in section 5:4.

<sup>4</sup>See Kalsi, S. S. (1992) *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain*, Leeds: University of Leeds, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup>Ravidās took a major step in his period of speaking out concerning the atrocities against the low castes. The efforts towards a more humane treatment of lower classes -- in particular the *chamārs* -- was heightened in the 1920s by the *Ad Dharm* movement, which I propose to analyze in section 5:4.

<sup>6</sup>The term *bhaktā* indicates an individual who is highly devoted to a personal God, and one who seeks to surrender the self to God in total loving-devotion.

<sup>7</sup>Kalsi, *The Evolution of A Sikh Community*, p. 126.

<sup>8</sup>Although the term *śiṣyaḥ* is used more commonly by non-Punjabis, it appeared frequently in responses

tradition. Highly significant is that Ravidās himself belonged to the *chamār zāt*; hence his popularity among *chamārs*. The association between the followers of Ravidās and Sikhism is evidenced by the fact that forty-one hymns composed by Ravidās are contained in the *Ādi Granth*. Thus the Ravidāsī community utilize the *Ādi Granth* as its base for religious teachings; interestingly, the Ravidāsīs preferably refer to the scripture as *Ādi Granth*, rather than *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. I must emphatically point out that the scripture is used primarily for the forty-one hymns of Ravidās contained within it. The remainder of the scripture does not have any overt significance for the Ravidāsīs. Informants frequently voiced that a project is underway in India whereby the hymns of Ravidās found in the *Ādi Granth* and elsewhere are in the process of being gathered into one composite volume. Once this has been achieved, the *Ādi Granth* will no longer be utilized in Ravidāsī places of worship. Precise details of the project were unobtainable. Significantly, the consonance of thought between Ravidās and the *bāṇī* of Gurū Nānak is probably the major factor for the former's *bāṇī* being included in the *bhagat bāṇī* of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. My contention is that both men were associated with the Northern *Sant* tradition of India and this is the factor that underpins the synonymy between the thought of both men. The Ravidāsīs' Sikh, Hindu and yet separatist associations and character make them an interesting group in so far as they shed light on issues of Sikh identity.

Although Ravidās was born into the *chamār* caste, he himself in his *bāṇī* declares that *brāhmins* bowed down to him.<sup>9</sup>

He, whose kindreds carted foul carcasses all round the city of Banaras,  
To him now bow the Brahmins of great merit, for, he Ravidasa, their scion,

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to conversations with members of the Ravidāsī community.

<sup>9</sup>A surprising act since a *chamār* would have been highly polluting to a *brāhmin*.



became the Slave of God's Slaves. (AG 1293)<sup>10</sup>

This was an outstanding achievement, since it must be remembered that Ravidās lived in a period of Indian history in which the lower classes were denied access to the temples and denied the right to be able to worship God by orthodox means. But while homage was paid to Ravidās by some *brāhmins*, he was continually responsible for vexing them, mainly due to the fact that he was castigating the religious system that recognized the *brāhmins* as its chief custodians.<sup>11</sup> Ravidās believed in the freedom of all humankind and the irrelevance of caste distinctions. His spirituality is continually emphasized by his followers:

*Guru Ji* succeeded in his aims when the *Brahmins* fell upon his feet after watching his miracles. Even kings and queens became his followers.<sup>12</sup>

Ravidās's main purpose and vision of things to come can be summarized in the following words, which highlight that, contrary to Hindu belief:

*God is available to all those who seek Him,  
whatever their caste.*

## 5:2 The life of Ravidās

Before I begin a historical investigation into the situation of the *chamārs*, prior to and after conversion to Sikhism, it is necessary to gain an insight into details concerning the historical Ravidās.<sup>13</sup> Although a point of departure from the topic of Sikh identity,

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<sup>10</sup>Singh Gopal, (1993 rp of 1960 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, New Delhi: World Book Centre, p. 1234.

<sup>11</sup>The *brāhmins* were seen as vital in performing all necessary rituals and sacrifices to ensure the prosperity of the devotee concerned. By denying the relevance of rituals or any intermediaries between God and the devotee, Ravidās was in actual fact saying that the power bestowed on *brāhmins* was totally unnecessary.

<sup>12</sup>Bharti, B. and Mal, M. (undated) *Guru Ravidass Ji: His Life and Teachings*, Wolverhampton: Dalit Welfare Association UK, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup>Although a number of sources may be found which refer to Ravidās, the authenticity of the majority is doubtful, due to hagiography. The main source for studying the life of Ravidās is the *Ravidās Vāñī*: this, however, is also susceptible to hagiography. The most reliable account of his *bāñī* can be found in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*: this, as mentioned earlier, contains forty-one hymns composed by Ravidās. Nevertheless, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, although referring to the fact that Ravidās was a cobbler (AG 659, 486), does not cite other details about his life -- for this one must look elsewhere. Other early

details regarding Ravidās will facilitate clarification of the attraction he had for the *chamārs* -- and the particular outcome of such attraction in the self-identity of this group.

### 5:2:1 Birth, early years and connections with Sikhism

According to tradition and popular belief, Ravidās was born in Benares. The *Raidās Jī Kī Bāñī aur Jīvan Charitra* mentions Kashī as his birthplace,<sup>14</sup> this is of course the present-day Benares. On this matter, Raju points out that, although Ravidās may have been born around the Benares area, he himself never actually mentions this. Therefore his birthplace varies, according to authors.<sup>15</sup>

One thing for certain is that Ravidās was born to *chamār* parents; he, himself, makes many references to his *chamār zāt*:

Low is my caste, low my birth:  
But Ravidas, the cobbler, seeks Thy Refuge, O Ram, the King of kings!  
(AG 659).<sup>16</sup>

I am of low caste, with little honour, my birth is low:  
And still I, the cobbler, have not Served my Lord, the King, who Pervades the

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Punjabi Sources include a few references about Ravidās given by Bhāi Gurdās (1551-1629 CE), who is believed to have composed many *vārs*, verses, at the order of Gurū Arjan (Callewaert, W. M. and Friedlander, P. G. [1992] *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, Delhi: Manohar, p. 12). The *vārs* of Bhāi Gurdās have been looked at in chapter 2:1. The *Janamsākhī* of Miḥarban refers to Ravidās a few times, too, as well as the Punjabi *Pothīpremābhōdh* (CE 1693) which is the earliest known Punjabi hagiography of Ravidās (*ibid.*, p. 13). Early Hindi sources that refer to Ravidās are many: one such text is the *Raidās Kabīr Gosī of Sain* (c. CE 1600?), which takes the form of a debate between Ravidās and Kabīr concerning the nature of the Supreme God (*ibid.*, p. 16). Additionally, the *Vāñī* of Mīrābai refers to Ravidās as her alleged gurū, and the *Vāñīs* of Dadu (1554 - 1603 CE) and his disciples also refer to Ravidās, indeed, Dadu holds Ravidās in high esteem (*ibid.*, pp. 11-17). The *Pāc-vāñī*, which is a Rajasthani document, contains the collections of five saints, among whom one is Ravidās. References to Ravidās are also contained in a text entitled *The Bhaktāmālā* by Nabhādās, dated around the seventeenth century CE. The main sources I shall be using for examining the life and *bāñī* of Ravidās will be the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Bhaktāmālā* of Sri Nabhādās with commentary by Priyādāsa. This is to be found at the Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library London, and contains references to both Mīrābai and Ravidās. The other major source is the *Raidās Jī Kī Bāñī aur Jīvan Charitra*, which is also held at the British Library. Other sources I shall look at include literature published by the Ravidāsī Associations of the UK, and the Punjabi text entitled *Sri Gurū Bhagat Mal*, which contains references to many saints and gurūs; this has been borrowed from the Southall *sabhā*'s library. I shall use the work of Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, frequently.

<sup>14</sup> *Raidās Jī Kī Bāñī aur Jīvan Charitra*, (1908) Allahabad: Belvedere Steam Printing Works, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Raju, K. S. (undated) *Ho Banjaro Rām Ko*, Chandigarh: Ratna Memorial Trust, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 634.

universe. (AG 486).<sup>17</sup>

Noticeably, Ravidās' *bāṇī* in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is contained as *bhagat bāṇī*: the hymns of the low-caste saints. Thus, traditionally, the hymns of Ravidās in the *Ādi Granth* are respected as those of a low-caste individual. Gurū Arjan's inclusion of the *bhagat bāṇī* into the *Ādi Granth* is, therefore, highly indicative of the casteless faith of Sikhism. The compositions of low-caste saints were included alongside those of the Sikh Gurūs.

The matter concerning the original collection of hymns of low-caste saints, prior to their inclusion into the *Ādi Granth* by the fifth Sikh Gurū in 1604-5 CE, is one of dispute among Sikh scholars.<sup>18</sup> According to Darshan Singh "the Compositions of the *bhaktas*, were definitely known to Guru Nanak",<sup>19</sup> thus supporting the point that they must, indeed, have been collected by Gurū Nānak and written into his *pothī*.<sup>20</sup> However, this statement is challenged by McLeod who suggests that the *bhagat bāṇī* was among the collection of hymns of Gurū Amardās due to their similarity with his own ideas.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, the *Raidās Jī Kī Bāṇī aur Jīvan Charitra* states that Ravidās in his previous life was a *brāhmin*.<sup>22</sup> The account states that Ravidās was initiated by Ramananda, and honoured and served him as his gurū. One

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 481.

<sup>18</sup>Scholars generally believe that the hymns were collected either by Gurū Nānak or by the third Sikh Gurū, Amardās (1552 CE - 1574 CE). Traditional belief, however, supports the statement made earlier that the hymns of Ravidās were being sung by Mardānā. I suggest the hymns were more likely to have been Gurū Nānak's collection since it was he who emphatically taught of the irrelevance of caste distinctions. By collecting the hymns of low-caste *bhagats*, Gurū Nānak would have been putting his theory into practice. In any case, Gurū Amardās would have obtained the hymns from a previous collector, since his dates make it impossible for him to have ever met Ravidās.

<sup>19</sup>Singh, D. *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, p. 5. Darshan Singh refers to one of the greatest scholars of Sikhism, Sahib Singh's *Adi Baeerh Bare*, (1970, Amritsar: Singh Brothers, pp. 85-108), as alluding to this belief. However, on a reading of this source, there appears to be no direct document to which Sahib Singh points as evidence for his belief; he believes that *gurbāṇī* itself is evident of Gurū Nānak's knowledge of the *bhagat bāṇī*.

<sup>20</sup>Gurū Nānak's book of hymns that was subsequently passed on to the succeeding Gurūs.

<sup>21</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1976), *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 71.

<sup>22</sup>*Raidās Jī Kī Bāṇī aur Jīvan Charitra*, p. 1.

particular day Ravidās had brought food from a *bānīyā*,<sup>23</sup> who associated with *chamārs*, thus, the food that the *bānīyā* sold, was considered to be polluted. Ramanada, on finding out that the food was from the *bānīyā*, became outraged and cursed Ravidās that he be reborn as a *chamār*. Hence, in his next life, Ravidās was born to *chamār* parents.<sup>24</sup> What is clear is that there has often been a tendency for the higher-class Hindus to link Ravidās with the *brāhmin* class of Hindu society; this, in their opinion, is to make him socially acceptable. Their belief is that Ravidās *was* a *brāhmin* in his previous life and was reborn only to help the lower classes. I must emphasize that Ravidās in his hymns makes no such references to a *brāhmanical* heritage: he is proud of his caste as a *chamār* and he himself confirms his social position (AG 659).

The period of Indian history into which Ravidās was born is very significant in the context of the plight of the lower castes, who were, at this time, the victims of great oppression at the hands of the higher classes. Only the higher classes had the privilege of worshipping God by orthodox means. Ravidās raised his voice against the oppression of his caste members and sought equality and the universal brotherhood of humankind.

### 5:2:2 Enlightenment

The religious charisma of Ravidās caused many of the lower castes to believe in him, much to the dismay of the *brāhmins*, who could not accommodate the attitudes towards equality emerging in the psyche of the lower castes. The particular disgust of the *brāhmins* arose when they witnessed followers of Ravidās accepting him as their

<sup>23</sup>Zāt of business people.

<sup>24</sup>The account goes on to say that Ravidās as a baby remembered some aspects of his previous life, by which he refused to suckle the milk of his now *chamār* mother. (*Raidās Jī Kī Bānī aur Jīvan Charitra*, p. 2). It was not until Ramananda came, as an order from God (in the text called *Bhagwān*) to visit the baby, that Ravidās then began to suckle his mother's milk. The text at this point states that Ramananda had named the child as Ravidās, and the name *Raidās* was also applied after some time. (*Raidās Jī Kī*

leader through the initiation ceremony of *charanamrit*,<sup>25</sup> this act involved intense *bhakti* on behalf of the disciple. To the *brāhmins* however, it involved the acquisition of utmost pollution. According to Darshan Singh, this period of Ravidās's life reflects *sadhna* "spiritual endeavors", during which Ravidās proclaimed the right to be able to worship God: it was a time when the *brāhmins* set out to make his life uncomfortable. But a second period involved Ravidās having attained spiritual realization and hence being renowned as a great saint: it is during this latter period, as previously indicated, that *brāhmins*, too, came to pay their respects to Ravidās.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the irrelevance of caste was highlighted by the fact that Ravidās the *chamār* was being venerated by higher-caste men due to his knowledge about God; this is the prevalent belief among his followers, as illustrated by Bharti and Mal:

People hate my caste because the people of my caste are involved in leather work. But elite of high caste people are worshipping me as I am also a low caste man and working as a shoe mender, so Oh God! this I believe is the result of your company.<sup>27</sup>

There is no reference to any particular gurū as the source of Ravidās's enlightenment in his *bāñī*, although it has been popularly claimed that the gurū of Ravidās was Ramananda. Therefore, the religious spirit was present within Ravidās from a very early age, and it is his popularity among the people around Benares that led to his wider recognition.

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*Bāñī aur Jīvan Charitra*, p. 2).

<sup>25</sup>Mukandpuri, N. S. Mahi, *The Teachings of Guru Ravidass*, Birmingham: Guru Ravidas Cultural Association, p. 19. The ceremony involved disciples pouring water over the feet of Ravidās and then drinking the water that had been gathered into a bowl.

<sup>26</sup>Singh, Darshan (1981) *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, Patiala: Punjabi University Patiala, pp. 38-39.

### 5:2:3 Dating

There is much uncertainty regarding the dates of Ravidās -- although agreement has not yet been established -- most suggest dates from 1414 CE to 1540 CE.<sup>28</sup> The fact that there are a variety of dates for the birth and/or death of Ravidās, and that they are frequently being changed, is due to an attempt to associate him with prominent figures of the past such as Gurū Nānak, Ramananda,<sup>29</sup> Kabīr, Mīrābai, and other great saintly individuals.<sup>30</sup>

The prevalent view among scholars such as Macauliffe<sup>31</sup> is that Ravidās was a younger contemporary of Kabīr.<sup>32</sup> Significantly, the hymns of Ravidās contain references to Kabīr (AG 1293):

And whose father too was like this, he, known as Kabir, became renowned in the three worlds.<sup>33</sup>

Darshan Singh, citing Rabindranath Tagore's *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*<sup>34</sup> draws attention to the fact that Ravidās is also referred to in the hymns of Kabīr:

The barber has sought God, the washerwoman, and the carpenter.  
Even Raidaso was a seeker (*sic*) after God,<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup>Singh, D. *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, p. 20.

<sup>29</sup>Associating historical figures of the past with the fifteenth century North Indian gurū, Ramananda, is a common feature of Indian tradition, in order to elevate the status of the saint in question. Dates may also often be changed in order to be able to affirm that a particular devotee was the disciple of the saint. The issue concerning the dates of Ravidās, has been discussed in greater detail by Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, pp. 26-8.

<sup>30</sup>A few variations on dates concerning Ravidās will illustrate the number of different viewpoints: The All India Adi-Dharam Mission and the Śadhu Samperdai Society of the Punjab give the birth date of Ravidās as 1414 CE (Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 11). McLeod considers Ravidās to have probably been born around 1440 CE, and to have died in 1518 CE (McLeod, W. H. [1996 rp of 1968 edn] *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 155). Raju cites the birth date as being either 1376 CE or 1433 CE, and states that most followers celebrate Ravidās' birth anniversary either on January 15 or February 15 (Raju, *Ho Banjaro Rām Ko*, p. 23). The *Raidās Ji Kī Bānī aur Jīvan Charitra* mentions Ravidās as a contemporary of Kabīr, whom the author of the text believes had lived in the fourteenth century (*Raidas Ji Kī Bānī aur Jīvan Charitra*, p. 1).

<sup>31</sup>Macauliffe, M. A. (1990 edn of 1909) *The Sikh Religion: Vol 6*, Delhi: Low Price Publications, p. 316.

<sup>32</sup>Singh, D. *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 1234.

<sup>34</sup>London: Macmillan, 1962.

<sup>35</sup>Singh, D. *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, p. 7.

This suggests that Kabīr knew of Ravidās. A major consideration here, however, is that the authenticity of the hymns collected by Tagore is doubtful.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, although according to popular tradition Kabīr was a predecessor of Ravidās, there is disagreement over the dates of Kabīr.<sup>37</sup>

As remarked earlier, it is common in Indian tradition to link the great *Sants* with Ramananda, in order to give them social standing in the *smārta*<sup>38</sup> reaction to the *bhaktī* movement. However, the works of Ravidās have no reference to his being a disciple of Ramananda. Moreover, if he were a *Sant*, Ravidās may not have agreed to accept the authority of a mortal gurū.<sup>39</sup> Darshan Singh mentions that there is a problem in claiming that Ravidās was initiated into the spiritual life by Ramananda, since, according to *brāhmanic* laws, a low-caste person cannot be initiated into the social order by a *brāhmin*.<sup>40</sup>

According to the *Miharbān Janamsākhī*, Ravidās, along with other *Sants*, came to visit Gurū Nānak.<sup>41</sup> Historically this may be correct since both men may have been contemporaries. This could probably be the source of Gurū Nānak's awareness of Ravidās's hymns since, prior to their inclusion in the *Ādi Granth* by Gurū Arjan, there is a belief that they were often sung by Mardānā.<sup>42</sup> This claim is further supported by Callewaert and Friedlander who refer to the *Miharbān Janamsākhī* as

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<sup>36</sup>Tagore's work is based on an earlier collection by a Bengali collector known as Kshitimohan Sen, who amalgamated various hymns concerning Kabīr from oral traditions prevalent among *sadhūs*. Hence, since oral traditions are no definite source of authenticity, the alleged reference to Ravidās by Kabīr as an indication of the latter's awareness of Ravidās cannot be accepted with any certainty.

<sup>37</sup>Sen, Kshitimohan, (1974) *Medieval Mysticism of India*, Delhi: Oriental Reprint, pp. 87-88.

<sup>38</sup>Flood clarifies that the *smartās* were *brāhmins* who "were particularly concerned with *dharma* in respect to caste and stage of life, the *varṇāśrama-dharma*" (Flood, G. [1996] *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 56).

<sup>39</sup>Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 25.

<sup>40</sup>Singh, Darshan, *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, p. 37. Yet it may have been possible for Ravidās to have met Ramananda if one accepts the dates of Ravidās as being 1414 CE - 1540 CE, and Ramananda as having lived until the third quarter of the fifteenth century. On the other hand I must emphasize that the dates concerning Ravidās have not yet been fully agreed either by scholars or, indeed, by the followers of Ravidās.

<sup>41</sup>McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 56.

<sup>42</sup>Singh, D. *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*, p. 5. Mardānā was the musician friend of Gurū Nānak who

clearly stating this point.<sup>43</sup> What this evidence tentatively suggests, then, is that Ravidās had some links with the founder of Sikhism from the start and, certainly, a measure of commonality of thought. The congruity of thought between the two men, I believe, is due to their *Sant* heritage.

Traditional belief among the Ravidāsi community and, indeed, the Hindu followers of Mīrābai, proclaim Ravidās as the gurū of the famous female *bhaktan*, Mīrābai.<sup>44</sup> Mīrābai is believed to have been a princess, born around 1498 CE<sup>45</sup> and is renowned for her utmost devotion to Kṛṣṇa, whom she regarded as her husband in every sense. Alston, however, is of the opinion that it would be highly unlikely that Ravidās was Mīrābai's personal gurū because of the problem regarding the dates of both individuals: as mentioned earlier Mīrābai is believed to have been born around 1498 CE, whereas Alston believes Ravidās taught in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>46</sup> The dates of Mīrābai are also not agreed on. On the other hand, if the dates of Ravidās are accepted as 1414 – 1540, then it is possible for the two to have met.

I suggest the dates of Ravidās to be somewhere between 1414 CE – 1540 CE, since this would have brought him into contact with Gurū Nānak, who thus became aware of Ravidās's hymns. It is, indeed, these dates that the majority of followers associate with Ravidās, hence believing him to have lived until the ripe old age of one hundred and twenty-six years.<sup>47</sup> However, it would have been highly unlikely for Ravidās as a fifteenth century Untouchable, to have lived to such an age.

For the majority of this study I shall accept the dates of Ravidās as having lived in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries CE. With regard to the death of Ravidās,

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accompanied him on all his travels.

<sup>43</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 30, and *Souvenir on the 572nd Birth Anniversary of Shri Guru Ravidass Ji*, (1986), Birmingham: Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha UK, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Alston, A. J. (1980) *The Devotional Poems of Mirabai*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



the *Raidas Ji Ki Bāṇī aur Jivan Charitra* states that he died at the age of one hundred and twenty years old; taking his *bāṇī* with him he vanished and became eternal.<sup>48</sup> Thus, to devotees, this accounts for the fact that there is no reliable, original *bāṇī* of Ravidās.

#### 5:2:4 Basic teachings of Ravidās

At this point, I want to give a brief summary of the basic beliefs of Ravidās in order to understand why his *bāṇī* was included in the *Ādi Granth* and, furthermore, to assess the acceptance of his teachings in the society in which he lived. A detailed study of the life and teachings of Ravidās is of major importance in view of the closeness of the teachings of Ravidās to those of Gurū Nānak -- a similarity, I believe, that is due to their shared *Sant* heritage. Thus, the links between Ravidās and the *bāṇī* of Gurū Nānak are present from a very early period. It is for this reason that Ravidās' life and teachings need close analysis for it would seem that the congruity of thought between both men should qualify the followers of Ravidās as Sikhs. A detailed look at Ravidās' *bāṇī* is intended in section 5:5.

From reading traditional accounts of his life and *bāṇī*, such as that contained in the *Ādi Granth*, the *Bhaktāmālā* of Nabhādās and *Raidās Ji Ki Bāṇī aur Jivan Charitra*, the conclusion can be drawn that Ravidās attached no value to meaningless ritual and the exalted position of *brāhmins*, who were needed to perform what he considered to be worthless acts (AG 658). Ravidās promoted a sense of prestige among the lower castes, making them aware of their rights in society and encouraging them to refuse to be treated as second-class citizens: they too had a right to worship God, and sincere and devoted prayers were the main and meaningful acts. Furthermore, Ravidās attached no importance to material wealth, he maintained that

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<sup>47</sup>*Souvenir on the 572nd Birth Anniversary of Shri Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 28.

<sup>48</sup>*Raidas Ji Ki Bāṇī aur Jivan Charitra*, p. 7.

spiritual wealth in the form of *bhakti* and truthful living were more beneficial to the individual (AG 694). Ravidās also insisted on good deeds.<sup>49</sup> These ideas are similar to those of Gurū Nānak and it is probably the shared Northern *Sant* tradition that is responsible for the *bāṇī* of both Ravidās and Gurū Nānak being so much in line with each other.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the *Bhaktāmālā* of Nabhādās highlights that Ravidās strongly advocated *satsaṅg*, that is, the company of holy people: he believed that the devotee could truly accomplish spirituality by associating with saints.<sup>51</sup> *Bhakti* performed with an egoless mind is the highest ideal; there is no worth in devotion if one's mind is clouded by desire.<sup>52</sup> Ravidās practised *nirguṇa bhakti* to a *nirguṇa* God who was *saguṇa* via creation, and immanent in each individual soul -- here, his teachings resemble very much those of Gurū Nānak.

The common view among scholars, such as Darshan Singh,<sup>53</sup> is that Ravidās belonged to the *Sant* tradition of Northern India and, as I have stated above, Gurū Nānak is also believed to have been an heir to this tradition.<sup>54</sup> This view is strengthened by the existence of factors such as his rejection of ritual and image worship, emphasis on the company of holy people, his teachings on the irrelevance of social classes, and the emphasis on the *nirguṇa* aspect of the Supreme God -- all characteristic features of the northern *Sant* tradition that practised *nirguṇa bhakti*.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>This point is highlighted by Macauliffe who refers to an ancient Indian saying regarding the unique ability of swans, he writes: "Rav Das is said to have been such a perfect saint of God that his conversation and poetry were like suns to dispel the darkness of doubt and infidelity. He performed the meritorious acts prescribed in the Vedas and the Shastars. Orientals believe that if milk mixed with water be placed before a swan, it can by its peculiar bill separate both, and drink only the milk. In the same way Rav Das selected virtue from vice, made choice of good acts and avoided things forbidden" (Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion: Vol 6*, p. 320).

<sup>50</sup>The main teachings of Gurū Nānak are looked at previously in chapter 2:1.

<sup>51</sup>*Bhaktāmālā of Sri Nabhādās, with commentary by Priyādāsa*, (1953) Bombay, p. 128.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>Singh, D. *A Study of Bhakta Ravidasa*.

<sup>54</sup>See McLeod. *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. pp. 151-8.

<sup>55</sup>These will be looked at in detail in section 5:5:8.

From the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* it is clear that the *Sants* are responsible for Ravidās's realization of God, he writes in AG 486:

The Saints who are Thy body, Thy life-breath, O Lord,  
Them, through the Guru-given Wisdom, have I found, O God of gods.<sup>56</sup>

It may also be possible however, that Ravidās may not have had any allegiance to a school of thought since there is a lack of evidence in his hymns to suggest he followed a *particular* gurū or any *particular* tradition. It is well to note that the *Sant* tradition was not a uniform movement, but consisted of groups of people from different religious backgrounds who favoured a more internalized and less ritualistic approach to the divine. Ravidās reflected this kind of thought. McLeod, for example, suggests that he belonged to the earlier freer phase of the *Sant* tradition.<sup>57</sup>

The irrelevance of caste distinctions is a pronounced feature of the *Sant* tradition, too, and this is a theme taken up with force in the hymns of Ravidās, who taught that one's caste played no role towards liberation (AG 858). Ravidās's insistence on meditating on the *Nām* of God, rather than performing worship, *pujā*, to anyone or anything else (AG 974), provides additional evidence for his *Sant* background; the necessity of *Nām* is a characteristic feature of *Sant* worship.<sup>58</sup> Inevitably, the common *Sant* background of both Gurū Nānak and Ravidās will inform their beliefs and teachings and account for much similarity between them.

### **5:2:5 The miracles of Ravidās**

Many miracles have come to be associated with Ravidās and since there are many in number, with different interpretations, a few are selected and mentioned below. The point to bear in mind, before commencing any further, is that hagiography is also common to miraculous accounts of Indian religious figures; these, as Callewaert and

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<sup>56</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 481.

<sup>57</sup> See McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, pp. 151-8.

<sup>58</sup> Schomer, K. and McLeod, W. H. (1987) *The Sants*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 31.

Friedlander bring to attention, increase the status of the saint in question, but when set aside do not necessarily detract from authentic accounts of life events.<sup>59</sup>

Certainly Ravidās was a social reformer of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries CE, but whether he actually had miraculous powers depends on the extent of belief of his followers, who regard him as a "messiah".<sup>60</sup> Since there are common elements underlying the description of miracles in both Hindi and Punjabi sources, it could be suggested that these have become embedded in the traditional accounts of the life of Ravidās. Those traditional miracles associated with Ravidās that have become most popular among the Ravidāsīs are looked at below.

Inevitably, the miracles serve the important purpose of raising the status of Ravidās either spiritually or in terms of class. Some do so more specifically; since traditionally the *chamārs* have been associated with the lowly, highly-polluting strata of Hindu society, it seems obvious that the Ravidāsīs would raise their Gurū's status to one of great significance among Indian society.<sup>61</sup>

In the main, miracles seek to raise the status of Ravidās in two major ways: first, by illustrating that, when compared to the devotion of *brāhmins*, it is Ravidās's devotion that is portrayed as being the purer. Secondly, the status of Ravidās is raised in conjunction with the caste system.<sup>62</sup> Time and time again, the miracles attempt to raise the status of Ravidās as being higher than that of the *brāhmins*, who are often shown to be wanting in the nature of their spirituality. According to Ravidās, it was

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<sup>59</sup>Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup>Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 10. It is unusual for the term "messiah" to be used in an Indian context, and probably expresses the writers' wish to be placed within the framework of a western context.

<sup>61</sup>Rules and regulations attached to the caste system dictate that if a higher-class member comes into contact with the lower classes, then the former has been polluted and must undergo ritual purity rites in order to remove any hindrances to his/her chances of *mokṣa*.

<sup>62</sup>The traditional account among Ravidāsīs, of Ravidās initiating the Queen of Chittor, and eventually her husband, serves to illustrate the fact that higher-class individuals had realized the spiritual status of Ravidās (Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 30). This account is regarded as a miracle by Ravidāsīs, since a queen had accepted a low-caste person as her Gurū.

the individual who was truly devoted to God that had an elevated status:

Whether one be a Pandit, or a warrior, or a canopied king of the world – he equals not the Devotee of God. (AG 858).<sup>63</sup>

The *brāhmanization* of the *chamār* Ravidās, as previously indicated, has often been attempted by the higher-class Hindus in order to make him socially acceptable, although Ravidās had openly proclaimed his *chamār* birth:

Low is my caste, low my birth. (AG 659)<sup>64</sup>,

Miracles state of how the higher classes described him as having been born into a higher class in his previous births. One traditional account attempts to describe how four sacred threads, *janeau*, each relating to the four ages of *Satyug*, *Doappar*, *Traita* and *Kalyug*<sup>65</sup> were found under the skin of Ravidās.<sup>66</sup>

The *janeau* can only be worn by members of the top three twice-born, *dvijā*, classes, and illustrates their spiritual rebirth. Describing Ravidās as having not one but four *janeaus*, increased his prestige and status as being of high-class heritage, thus instantly giving him the right to enter temples and worship God by orthodox means. Yet I must emphasize that Ravidās does not mention any relation to the higher classes in his hymns -- as stated above, he openly proclaims himself to be a *chamār*, thus emphasizing the fact that all have the right to worship God, regardless of their class:

May he be a Brahmin, or a Vaisha, a Kshatriya or a Shudra-and, even if he be a *Chandala* of an unclean mind,  
He becomes Immaculate and Pure, Contemplating his God; and Saves himself  
and all who belong to him. (AG 858).<sup>67</sup>

It appears a paradox as to why there would be an account common to Ravidāsī

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<sup>63</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 815.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 634.

<sup>65</sup>The four ages, *yugas*, correspond to the Hindu view that the world goes through a total of four ages, each becoming more degenerated and corrupt than the one before it. The age of *Satyug* was one where righteousness and *dharma* prevailed; the present age is that of *Kalyug*, the age of darkness, where the virtuosity of righteousness is almost forgotten and where anarchy dominates. In Hindu tradition, at the end of the present age, *Kalyug*, the tenth *avatār* Viṣṇu, in the form of *Kalki*, the warrior riding on a white horse, will appear and herald in the new *yuga* of righteousness.

<sup>66</sup>Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 21.

tradition about their Gurū being associated with a *brāhmanical* heritage. One would have thought that among the followers of Ravidās the irrelevance of caste distinctions would be accentuated, rather than an orientation occurring that seems to link Ravidās with the highest strata of Hindu society. This anomaly has been commented on by Callewaert and Friedlander who succinctly state:

These stories magnify his [Ravidas's] greatness by stressing his transcendent status, a common element in hagiographies, and they allow even high caste devotees to accept Ravidas into their own pantheons of saints by denying his *Chamar* origins and identifying him with the Brahmanical tradition.<sup>68</sup>

Callewaert and Friedlander may be somewhat overstating Ravidās's acceptance by the higher classes at large. The fact that Ravidās was a *chamār* would never have allowed the *brāhmīns*, in particular, to associate *openly* with him. The crossing of paths of these two classes at extreme ends of the hierarchical system involved various rites by which the higher-class person was to purify himself. These miracles served the purpose of promoting the acceptance of Ravidās as a spiritual Gurū beyond confinement exclusively to the *chamārs* -- how far this was actually true in practice is a debatable matter. The accounts seem to have been concocted by those higher-class Hindus whose uncompromising ideals made them reluctant to accept the *chamār* origin of Ravidās.

### **5:3 The position of Scheduled Classes in India**

The *chamārs* form the largest *zāt* of the Scheduled Classes. The very term "Untouchable" is used by higher castes to indicate the group of people from whom a distance must be kept at all times due to Indian notions of ritual purity and pollution. The concept of ritual purity and pollution is a religious one, and has existed in Indian thought probably from the time of the Aryan invasion into India, and inevitably

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<sup>67</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 815.

<sup>68</sup>Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 34.

resulted in the large-scale oppression of the lower castes. The low castes emphatically state that they are the *ādivāsīs*, the original, pre-Aryan inhabitants of India.<sup>69</sup> The Aryans oppressed the *ādivāsīs*, and imposed their own religious order on the original people.<sup>70</sup> Such discrimination becomes maximised when noted that ritual pollution results in the accumulation of bad *karma*: conversely ritual purity, which in this case is accumulated from contact with higher-class members, brings good *karma*. However, the point to emphasize here is that a member of the Scheduled Classes is considered so ritually polluted from birth that no amount of bathing or other rituals can result in ritual purity.

Changing the form of employment, especially in towns and cities, and emigration from India, have failed to remove the stigma of pollution attached to the Scheduled Classes. A *brāhmin* will become polluted to such an extent on contact with a low-caste person that he will have to undergo bathing<sup>71</sup> -- and in some cases other rituals -- in order to remove the high level of pollution accumulated as the result of such contact. It is interesting to note that even among the Scheduled Classes themselves there are levels that can be regarded as more polluting than others. During conversations with the Ravidāsī communities, I found that the Vālmīkis, belonging to the *chūhrā zāt*, are regarded as being lower in the scale among Scheduled Classes, because of the traditional occupation of the *chūhrā* as a sweeper. Nevertheless, it is the traditional occupation of the *chamār* as a leather-worker -- and so coming into contact with dead animals -- that makes him or her a source of pollution to the higher

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<sup>69</sup>For a detailed study of the origin of the *mazhabīs* -- the low-caste converts to Sikhism -- see Ashok, S. S. (1979-80) *Mazhabī Sikhān Dā Itihās*, Hounslow: Kartar Singh Nayyar. This term in its literal sense is used to refer to the *chūhrā* members who converted to Sikhism; it is, however, sometimes used to refer to both *chūhrā* and *chamār* converts. In addition to throwing light on the origin of the caste of the *mazhabīs*, Ashok also highlights the importance of Bhāi Jiwan Singh, the Rangretia, in Sikh history, as well as the role played by the *mazhabī* martyrs.

<sup>70</sup>Initial research has indicated that this point is emphasized to a greater extent among the Vālmīkis than it is among the Ravidāsīs.

<sup>71</sup>The bath is the most common means of the purifying ritual (See Dumont, L. [1980] *Homo*

classes.

The Indian social scale of hierarchy is therefore an important consideration when examining this group, together with the *chūhrās*. The *brāhmins*, because of their high degree of ritual purity from birth, and because of their traditional occupations such as priests, temple attendants and performers of sacrifice, have attained a highly-exalted position within Indian society. They are, therefore, traditionally believed to be on the path towards liberation, *mokṣa*. The *chamārs* are so polluted that they can never be inwardly or outwardly clean. The danger of pollution is further controlled by endogamy. Marriages within the *chamār* and *chūhrā* communities are also endogamous, it is very rare for a *chamār* to have, for example, a *chūhrā* spouse. Interestingly, according to Dumont, the *brāhmin* and *chamār* exist to provide stability to the caste system: "It is clear that the impurity of the Untouchable is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahman (*sic*). They must have been established together, or in any case have mutually reinforced each other, and we must get used to thinking of them together."<sup>72</sup> Therefore the impurity of the Scheduled Classes has been determined in accordance with the utmost purity of the *brāhmin*: it is an impurity that can never be removed according to traditional Hinduism. The significance of Ravidās in respect to this matter is that his efforts enabled the consciousness of the lower classes to be raised, and caused them to become more aware of the prejudice against them. It appears highly unlikely, however, that the prejudice was ever abandoned, even temporarily, by the higher classes, who continued suppressing members of the Scheduled Classes -- justifying it in the name of religion. I must emphasize that the full recognition of Ravidās among the Scheduled Classes, especially the *chamārs*, gained importance with the rise of the *Ad Dharm* movement,

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*Hierarchicus*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 48).

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.



which I shall examine in section 5:4 below.

The developing faith of Sikhism was particularly attractive to the lower castes in the hope that they would achieve equality with other Sikhs, and would, therefore, erase the stigma of untouchability associated with their class. This was to be expected in view of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs of the irrelevance of caste distinctions. Importantly, the Sikh Gurūs were opposed to beliefs concerning ritual purity and pollution. The institution of the *laṅgar* in all *gurdwārās*, portrays the idea of equality and highlights the Gurūs' disregard for notions of pollution. Members of the congregation, and all who visit the *gurdwārā*, eat together -- hence rejecting Hindu laws of prescribed distances between higher and lower castes. The institution of the *laṅgar* opposes Hindu views that food is considered highly contaminated if it comes into contact with a low-caste person. Higher classes can accept *kacchā* -- raw, uncooked food -- but are required to cook it themselves. However, *pakkā* -- cooked food, is not accepted by higher classes, due to its polluting nature. Significantly, Sikhism, in theory, discards these concepts and insists that all may participate equally in *laṅgar*. Additionally, the notion behind the distribution of *kaṛāh prasād* in the *gurdwārā*, further strengthens the idea of equality between all castes.

The egalitarian spirit of the Sikh faith went a step further in welcoming the lower castes -- Gurū Arjan purposely designed the *Harmandir* building to have four doors, signifying that it was open to all classes. This was a courageous move, indeed, considering that his was a period where lower castes were refused entry into temples. The ideal of equality was further accentuated by Gurū Gobind Singh in his creation of the *Khālsā* in 1699. *All* were eligible for initiation, no matter to what caste they belonged. The original *pāñj-pyāre* came from different castes, including the lower classes. They shared *amrit* from a common bowl -- something highly alien to the caste

system. Eradication of caste names in favour of Singh and Kaur meant that an individual's caste could no longer be distinguished by the family surname. Thus, initially at least, Sikhism appealed very much to the lower castes who underwent initiation via *khande-dī-pāhul* and became Sikhs. The attraction of the low castes towards Sikhism, has been appropriately remarked on by Grewal, who writes: "The Khalsa had a plebian base. If anything, the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization was reinforced by the Khalsa."<sup>73</sup> However, it is well to remember here that, although there are no rules regarding commensality patterns, marriages within the Sikh community remained then, and now, endogamous. The connection with Hinduism was maintained due to the fact that marriages were to be arranged within one's own *zāt*; indeed, the Sikh Gurūs and their offspring all belonged to, and were all married within, the *khatrī zāt*.<sup>74</sup> Ironically, on converting to Sikhism the low castes were not treated as equals by the higher-caste Sikhs in many respects. This occurred although the Gurūs stressed that one's social position had no effect on chances of achieving *mukti* and, unlike the prevalent Hindu view, Sikhism preached that salvation was open to all.

In contrast to the earlier stages of Sikhism, the later developing community gradually began to recreate the discrimination against the low castes: whether or not this prejudice has ever been abandoned is debatable. Whereas the low castes had previously been oppressed by the tyranny of the *brāhmins*, they were now subject to harassment mainly from the landowning Sikh *jats*. The extent of prejudice towards the lower-caste Sikhs is stated by McLeod: "Outcastes were prohibited from entering many *gurdwaras* and the sacred *karah prasad* was preserved from their

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<sup>73</sup>Grewal, J. S. (1998) *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 205.

<sup>74</sup>A mercantile caste. All except the eighth Gurū were married; Gurū Harkrishan died at the age of eight from an attack of smallpox.

contamination.”<sup>75</sup> Regretably, therefore, the low castes retained their low-caste status -- so Sikhism did not truly give them the equality that they desired. Is this why many *chamārs* and *chūhrās* set out to find solace in a revolt movement, as the *Ad Dharm* was viewed in its early stages? Important here is that converting to Sikhism, Islam and Christianity did not remove the stigma attached to untouchability.

Although Article 17 of the Constitution of India has outlawed untouchability, it is apparent that it very much exists in practice today. In the Punjab, many *chamārs* are employed by the *jaṭ* landowners to carry out menial jobs on farms.<sup>76</sup> From personal experience of caste while in India, I saw that *chamārs* are not allowed to wander freely around the courtyard of a *jaṭ*'s farm. The food given to the *chamārs* is handed to them in the fields, and served in crockery that is stored separately from that of the landowner's. A particularly disturbing, but not untypical, incident showing *jaṭ* attitudes towards the *chamārs* occurred in March 1956 when a group of *chamārs* were severely beaten by a group of *jaṭ*s for merely drawing water from the public well at Nagaur in the district of Jodhpur.<sup>77</sup>

Today, there are some positive aspects to the situation of the low castes: the cities have offered them better prospects of employment; education has also enabled them to break away from traditional occupations. As the very term "Untouchable" implies pollution, it was due to M. K. Gandhi's efforts that the Untouchables were renamed as *harijans*, that is, "Children of God". Gandhi believed the practice of untouchability had no place in Hinduism. Until the reforms introduced by the Indian government, Untouchables were denied access to temples. Gandhi's attitude towards untouchability is clearly expressed in his following words:

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<sup>75</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1992 rp of 1989) *Who is a Sikh?* Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup>The numbers of *chamārs* employed by *jaṭ*s is now decreasing. Instead, workers are increasingly being employed from Uttar Pradesh.

<sup>77</sup>Ghurye, G. S. (1994 rp of 1986 edn) *Caste and Race in India*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, p. 332.

I think we are committing a great sin in treating a whole class of people as untouchables and it is owing to the existence of this class that we have still some revolting practices among us. It has been a passion of my life to serve the untouchables because I have felt that I could not remain a Hindu if it was true that untouchability was a part of Hinduism.<sup>78</sup>

The term *harijan*, however, is resented by the lower castes: they find the term rather patronizing since it does not portray the real state of affairs in Indian society. Many of the lower castes wish to retain the traditional title of *achūt* -- which in Hindi is translated as "Untouchable". But the overall preference among the lower castes is the term *Dalit*, which is translated as "oppressed". It is a designation, many believe, that more accurately depicts such a low-caste position within Indian society and is perhaps the most appropriate of terms. Massey clearly portrays the plight of *Dalits* in India, he writes:

The Dalit people are those who, on the basis of caste distinctions, have been considered "outcastes", because the architects of the system did not see fit to include them in the graded four-fold caste structure of Indian society. On the basis of this status they have been made to bear extreme forms of disadvantage and oppression for centuries, a continuous assault on their humanity which virtually reduced them to a state of being "no people".<sup>79</sup>

This depiction of being "no people" aptly describes the treatment of the *Dalits* in India by the higher classes, especially the *brāhmins*. A typical example of discrimination in the village situation would be that the *Dalits* are often prohibited from drawing water from the well used by higher classes, for fear of the danger of ritual pollution to the latter. Importantly, the British during the *Raj*, preferred to rename the Untouchables the "Scheduled Classes" and it was this term that became embodied in the Government of India Act of 1935.<sup>80</sup>

It is clear then, that being outside the Hindu class system, the *chamārs* were always regarded as Untouchables in Hindu society. They therefore sought to find

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<sup>78</sup>Richards, G. (1985) *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, London: Curzon Press, p. 161.

<sup>79</sup>Cited in Massey, J. (1997) *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation*, Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, pp. 1-2.

<sup>80</sup>Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p. 306.

equality by converting to the apparently egalitarian faith of Sikhism in which *gurbānī* strictly condemned caste prejudice. However, the Sikh faith was found wanting in translating beliefs concerning equality into practice. The *chamārs*, on becoming Sikhs, found that they continued to be discriminated against by higher *zāt* Sikhs; thus, their social position was no better than if they had remained Untouchable Hindus. Increasing dissatisfaction with their treatment by both higher-caste Sikhs and Hindus led to the development of the *Ad Dharm* movement by a group of educated *chamārs*. The *Ad Dharm* promoted the recognition of Ravidās as Gurū and, in consequence, masses of *chamārs* abandoned Sikhism and Hinduism for a distinct recognition as Ravidāsīs, taking a member of their own *zāt* as Gurū.

Thus, the majority of *chamārs* had originally converted to Sikhism. This may be responsible for many Sikh practices surviving among them, as will be illustrated below. A significant number, however, became Ravidāsīs without the medium of Sikhism, that is, directly from Hinduism, and this may be responsible for certain non-Sikh practices of the community. Increasingly, Ravidāsīs are now being born as followers of Ravidās and not as Hindus or Sikhs. At this point, I need to present the medium for this transition in the form of the *Ad Dharm* movement. It was this movement that sought to elevate the position of the *chamārs* -- both Sikh and Hindu -- in Indian society.

#### **5:4 The *Ad Dharm* movement**

At the outset I must make it clear that the presence of many Sikh practices among the Ravidāsīs is a result of historical connections of the *chamārs* with the Sikh faith. As previously stated, having become Sikhs, the *chamārs* experienced disappointment since in practice the Sikh faith did not uphold the egalitarian teachings of its Gurūs. Continuous disheartenment and prejudice faced by the *chamārs* eventually led to an

independent identity -- as Ravidāsī -- as a result of the *chamār zāts*' efforts towards enhancing its status. Thus, the *chamārs* found their distinctiveness in Ravidās. Although the *Ad Dharm* proclaimed a distinct identity, a number of Sikh practices were retained by the *chamārs*, the majority of whom had originally converted to the Sikh faith. How far such practices have been modified to a more distinct Ravidāsī identity on behalf of the *chamārs*, will need to be examined below.

The *Ad Dharm* movement, which began to flourish in the 1920s, is responsible for the social and religious uplifting of the Scheduled Classes -- in particular, the *chamār zāt*. The term *Ad Dharm* in translation, means "original religion", and is reminiscent of the idea that the Scheduled Classes are the original inhabitants of India. The founder of the *Ad Dharm* movement was Mangoo Rām, an educated *chamār* who worked as a secondary school teacher.<sup>81</sup> Education however, did not offer Mangoo Rām the social status of which he was deserving -- since he was born a *chamār* he continued to be treated a *chamār* by Hindu classes. Mangoo Rām had already spent a period of his life in the United States from where he accumulated considerable influence to be able to begin a movement for the uplifting of the lower castes.

The identity being sought for the followers of the *Ad Dharm* was that of a *qaum* -- a distinct religious community of people. They were no longer going to be content with just remaining on the lowest strata of Hindu, and Sikh, society in which they were refused equal rights.<sup>82</sup> Since they were already being treated as separate from the higher classes and, indeed, as separate from the followers of Hinduism, then it was feasible that they should think in terms of forming an identity and religion of their own. Importantly, although the *Ad Dharmis* rejected the caste system, the

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<sup>81</sup>The advantage of leaders of the movement like Mangoo Rām, was that they were at least literate, which was quite unusual for *chamārs* in this period of history.

<sup>82</sup>Page 42 of "The Report of the Ad Dharm Mandal" explicitly states: "Each Ad Dharmi should separate himself from Hindus, Sikhs, and members of other religions." (Juergensmeyer, *Religion as*

persistence towards establishing their own *qaum* was, however, based on caste, since it was predominantly comprised of members from the *chamār* caste. The *qaumik* identity of the Scheduled Classes, therefore -- in particular the *chamārs* -- consisted of their self-constituted superiority over the Aryans. This was reinforced by the suggested origin of the Scheduled Classes as the original inhabitants of India, their status as a separate community, and the accumulation of their own unique traditions.<sup>83</sup> The *Ad Dharm* movement was thus regarded as the main medium for the raising of the status of the Scheduled Classes. Its first meeting took place at Jullunder, Punjab in 1925.

The *Ad Dharm* promoted the idea that the *chamārs* were a religious group in their own right, who had Ravidās as Gurū, and his teachings as guidelines for religious living. Thus, by following Gurū Ravidās they acquired their own identity as *Ad Dharmis*,<sup>84</sup> not as the despised members of the faiths that refused to give them equality. Contradictorily, the Sikh faith, which had pledged to give *all* its members equality no matter what caste they were, did not keep to its promise. It was among the *chamārs*, rather than the *chūhrās* that the movement mainly gained acceptance.

The existence of the *Ārya Samāj*, literally "the society of the Aryans" had its subsequent effects on the anima of the founders of the *Ad Dharm*, most of whom had been educated in schools established by the *Ārya Samāj* itself.<sup>85</sup> The founder of the *Ārya Samāj*, Dayananda Saraswati, aimed at converting the lower castes back into Hinduism through the purificatory rite of *śuddhi*, which in turn would give them

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*Social Vision*, p. 307).

<sup>83</sup>Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 71.

<sup>84</sup>My visit to the Wolverhampton Ravidās Temple has, indeed, endorsed this aspect of identity; my informant told me that he was an *Ad Dharmi* who followed the teachings of Gurū Ravidās. Moreover, he frequently referred to Hindus and Sikhs as "them", thus highlighting that he was to be regarded as not being one of "them" but an *Ad Dharmi*.

<sup>85</sup>Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, pp. 64-5.

certain rights and privileges.<sup>86</sup> Dayananda proclaimed the idea that each individual's caste should be determined by education, and not by birth.<sup>87</sup>

However, the *Ad Dharm* leaders opposed the *Ārya Samāj*'s promotion of the ideal that the lower castes would find solace by returning to Hinduism. The promise of equal rights, by the *Ārya Samāj*, however, was never conformed to in practice. The intention of the *Ad Dharm* was not a mere absorption into the boundaries of the Hindu faith, for here, they would never be accepted as equals. Therefore, the function of the *Ad Dharm* was to overcome the threat of the *Ārya Samāj* that aimed at abolishing a distinct identity for the Scheduled Classes.

Many new traditions and customs were introduced by the *Ad Dharmi* leaders. They placed special emphasis on the colour red.<sup>88</sup> Traditionally the red colour was denied to the *ādivāsīs* due to its exclusive association with the Aryans. *Ad Dharmis* encouraged the Scheduled Classes to wear bright red turbans and clothing in order to assert their new identity of equality. The particular emblem and *mantra* of the *Ad Dharm* was *Soham* which is taken from the *Upaniṣads* and means "I am That" -- thus again promoting egalitarianism.

The *Ad Dharm* movement was as political as much as it was originally religious. In addition to establishing a new religious identity for the lower classes it also aimed at establishing the *Ad Dharmis* as a political nation, having as much say in the politics of its country as other groups. The religious as well as the political charisma of the *Ad Dharmi* leaders enabled the Scheduled Classes to respond politically to their call. It was as a result of the British government's involvement in India that the *Ad Dharmi* leaders seized the opportunity -- based on the British ideal

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<sup>86</sup>Jones, K. W. "Ham Hindu Nahin" in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 32 (1973): 463. The overall aims of the *Ārya Samāj* have been highlighted in section 2.6 above.

<sup>87</sup>Richards, *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, p. 56.

<sup>88</sup>Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 53.



of equality among the citizens of India -- to voice their opinions and rights, being fully aware that they had the backing of the government. The first political movements among the Scheduled Classes occurred in 1910, resulting in the formation and establishment of the All-India Depressed Classes Association and the All-India Depressed Classes Federation. Both the Federation and the Association aimed at encouraging the Indian National Congress to remove untouchability.<sup>89</sup> Political response from the Scheduled Classes also raised the demand amongst them for a country, or at least a state of their own which was to be called "Achutistan" -- land of the Untouchables -- thus portraying the extent of their intention to become a distinct nation from both Hindus and Sikhs. The dream of Achutistan however, remained an unfulfilled one.

Thus, the *Ad Dharm* rejected the caste system arguing that pre-Aryan India had no caste discrimination. Ravidās became the posthumous patron of the movement; this could be seen as a large-scale revivalism of him and his teachings. Interestingly, the report of the *Ad Dharm* leaders explicitly stated that the founders of the religion of the *Ad Dharmis* were, in addition to Gurū Ravidās, other low-caste saints such as Vālmīki, Kabīr and Nāmdcv.<sup>90</sup> But it was Ravidās' mission against the oppression of his class members that was carried forward in the efforts of the *Ad Dharm* to abolish the practice of untouchability. The *Ad Dharm* sought to base itself at Benares, the birthplace of Ravidās. It was an indication that this is where the fight against oppression would begin, and it was from here that it would work towards the abolition of that very oppression. The aims of the *Ad Dharm* were revolutionary in the history of the traditional position of Untouchables in India. The social reforms of the *Ad Dharm* are aptly portrayed in their following report:

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<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>90</sup>Page 11 of "The Report of the Ad Dharm Mandal, 1926-1931" cited in Juergensmeyer, *ibid.*, p. 299.

In addition to the political aspect of *Ad Dharm* Mandal,<sup>91</sup> Jullundur, which has been very successful, there is even a greater emphasis on social reform. The religious and organizational status of the Untouchable has been raised through our efforts. For example, we are getting education for Untouchable children. As one wise man of the Punjab put it, "*Ad Dharm* has performed miracles beyond imagination." To us, no talk is worthwhile without action. We are not interested in simply collecting money the way the other groups are doing. They collect money for their own luxuries, for their own names. Our principle is solely humanitarian. As someone has said, "It is only the struggle for humanity's improvement which is worth the pain of having been created." And as Guru Ravi Das has said, "for the spirit of sympathy, the whole body is created".<sup>92</sup>

The census of 1931 was to be a turning point in the mission of the *Ad Dharmis*. It was looked forward to with great enthusiasm since this census would determine once and for all the identity of the followers of the *Ad Dharm* movement.<sup>93</sup> The census of 1931 was the first since the beginning of the founding of the *Ad Dharm* movement. Prior to this, members of the Scheduled Classes were to be enumerated as Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims. Now, however, they had the opportunity to include themselves under their own title. There was a great determination on behalf of the Hindus and Sikhs for the *Ad Dharmis* not to be counted as a separate *qaum*. They carried out physical attacks on the *Ad Dharmis* as part of the pressure placed on them not to record themselves as belonging to the *Ad Dharmi* category in the census.<sup>94</sup> But the *Ad Dharmi* leaders had persevered on this issue of identity as a distinct *qaum*, and strengthened their followers against persecution from Hindus and Sikhs. The following song of the *Ad Dharm* illustrates this very well:

Leave the bickering behind;  
And tie your turban red;  
We do not have to record  
Any *qaum* other than our own;  
So, *Ad Dharmi*, be strong.<sup>95</sup>

Census figures show that a total of 418,789 *Ad Dharmis* had been recorded in the

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<sup>91</sup>*Mandal* is the term used to refer to an organization, that is, the *Ad Dharm Mandal*.

<sup>92</sup>Page 5 of "The Report of the Ad Dharm Mandal, 1926-1931" in Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 294.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76.

Punjab.<sup>96</sup> This was a great achievement, bearing in mind that their first formal meeting had taken place in only 1925. The fact that many *Ad Dharmis*, the majority of whom were *chamārs*, are likely to have been forced to state either Hindu or Sikh as their religion, must also be kept in mind. One point was surely determined by the 1931 census, and that is that the *Ad Dharmis* were to be seen as a distinct *qaum* from now on, with Ravidās as their leader. They were neither Hindus *nor Sikhs*.

But the dissolution of the *Ad Dharm* movement was gradually beginning because of its over-involvement in politics, and insufficient concern over its religious aspect. The office of the *Ad Dharm* at Jullunder was officially closed by Mangoo Rām, in June 1946.

Article 17 of the Constitution of India, in January 1950, finally abolished untouchability and made its practice illegal. The Scheduled Classes were indiscriminately to be allowed access into all temples and were to be given jobs in the government, and had the right to become educated. However, according to my personal experience of caste while in India, the practice of untouchability, especially in the villages, still continues, and is still endorsed by Sikhs. This is a pronounced contradiction of *gurbāṇī*. However, in the cities the former Scheduled Classes have the right to resort to lawsuits if they feel that they have been discriminated against in employment. The vigorous pursuit towards equality, which had been fought by the *Ad Dharmi* leaders on behalf of the Scheduled Classes, and for their future generations, is summed up in their report, below:

In short, the founding of the *Ad Dharm* Mandal is for humanitarian purposes and to fulfil our duty to humanity. We carry the banner of the downtrodden people, and we devote our entire lives to the cause, so that future generations may follow in our footsteps and follow the cause, a cause which has long been neglected.<sup>97</sup>

The modern, twentieth-century status of Ravidās as Gurū of his followers is,

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<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

therefore, inextricably bound to the *Ad Dharm* leaders and their vigorous pursuit for equality -- an equality denied to the *chamārs* by the apparently egalitarian Sikh faith. The *Ad Dharm* leaders, in their search for religious acceptance, echoed the reform spirit of Ravidās in his own search to demonstrate the inappositeness of prejudice based on caste distinctions. Thus, the position of Ravidās among the *chamārs* is greatly elevated since he aspired to give the Scheduled Classes a dignified status. Noticably, he is called Gurūji by followers.<sup>98</sup>

### **5:5 Analysis of the *bāṇī* of Ravidās and its comparison with the teachings of Gurū Nānak**

The hymns of Ravidās contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, are regarded as the most authentic of his works; indeed, a single and separate composite collection of his hymns was never made. In addition to the presence of the hymns of Ravidās in the *Ādi Granth*, scattered references to his works are present in the writings of other authors, such as the Fathepur Manuscript and the *Pāc-vāṇī*.<sup>99</sup> In addition to the hermeneutics of Ravidās's *bāṇī* found in the *Ādi Granth*, I shall also be looking at his *bāṇī* not found in the Sikh scripture -- mostly in the *Pāc-vāṇī* -- in order to assess whether the ideas of Ravidās resemble the thought of Gurū Nānak. I shall also assess to what extent the compositions of Ravidās, promoted amongst his followers, echo Sikh philosophy as a whole. I reiterate that I believe Ravidās, like Gurū Nānak, was an heir of the *Sant* tradition of Northern India. This would explain the consonance and congruity of thought between the two men.

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<sup>97</sup> Page 5 of "The Report of the Ad Dharm Mandal, 1926-1931" cited in *ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>98</sup> Bharti and Mal, *Guru Ravidass Ji*, p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 37.

### 5:5:1 The concept and Name of God

Ravidās's God is essentially the *nirguṇa* God of the *Sants*. This is a God who is never born, who is Infinite, Imperishable, Unconquerable and Complete.<sup>100</sup> But such a *nirguṇa* aspect does not preclude a highly devotional worship -- *bhakti* -- as the following hymn of Ravidās shows:

O God, I'm truly attached to Thee:  
And attaching myself to Thee, I've broken off with all else.  
Wheresoever I go, I go to Serve Thee.  
For, like Thee, there is not another God. (AG 659).<sup>101</sup>

This highlights well the monotheistic approach to a formless God in line with Sikh theology in general: there is no other God than the One Supreme God. Ravidās taught that one should form attachment to God only -- attaching oneself to the temporary lures of the material world may bring physical pleasure, but the individual will continue to remain in separation from God. It is thoughts such as these that might suggest evidence as to why Ravidās's works were included in the *Ādi Granth*, and which highlight the common, shared *Sant* heritage of Ravidās and Gurū Nānak. On this point, McLeod aptly suggests that the works of *bhagats*, such as Kabīr, Nāmdev and Ravidās, were included in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* due to their similarity with the hymns of the Sikh Gurūs.<sup>102</sup> To what extent this is true will be examined in more detail below by comparing the hymns of Ravidās contained in the *Ādi Granth*, with those of Gurū Nānak. Here, however, I wish to take up the devotional use by Ravidās of the name Rām for God. Gurū Nānak, in contrast, does not have any prominent name for God, although he uses Rām occasionally. Instead, he refers to God simply as *Nām* -- indicative of the essence, but not form, of God in the world.

Nānak's use of *Nām* reflects the formlessness of God: whereas the use of more

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>101</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 634.

<sup>102</sup> McLeod, W. H. (1984) *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, Manchester: Manchester

tangible names could indicate an image of God in the devotee's mind. The God of Gurū Nānak, and the Sikh Gurūs, is essentially *nirguṇa*.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the very fact that a God takes human form, according to the Hindu doctrine of *avatārs*, inevitably means its involvement in death. McLeod clarifies this claim: "To be incarnated means to be involved in death, which is the supreme enemy, the characteristic quality of the unstable world and the ultimate antithesis of God's own eternal being . . . This, by implication, means that there can be no place for a doctrine of *avatars* . . ." <sup>104</sup>

A question arising from Ravidās's hymns is that, if he describes God as Rām, does this mean his view differs from Gurū Nānak's thought, or is his concept of God essentially equal to that of Gurū Nānak's? The *Name* of God undoubtedly holds importance in Ravidās's thought:

All epics and Puranas and Shastras are but mere words:  
Vyasa, the seer, said the last word, after a great thought, that nothing equals the  
Name of God. (AG 1106)<sup>105</sup>

This hymn is reminiscent of the teachings of Gurū Nānak with regard to the *Name* of God:

They, who are bereft of the Lord's Name, fall like the wall of sand.  
O, how are we to be Released without the Name? Thiswise one falls into Hell.  
(AG 934)<sup>106</sup>

Apart from referring to God as Rām, an examination of the hymns of Ravidās does not suggest any other prominent name for God. The concept of the *Name* seems to be similar to Gurū Nānak's teachings on the *Nām*, that is to say, that it is indicative of the

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University Press, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup>It is emphasized that the concept of God, according to the thought of Gurū Nānak, is essentially monotheistic: importantly, Gurū Nānak rejects the *avatār* concept prevalent in Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, making the monotheistic nature of God one of the most important doctrines of the Sikh faith. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that in Hindu thought one may believe in a manifestation, or an *avatār*, for example Kṛṣṇa, and regard it as the major form of the Absolute *Brāhman*. This, also is suggestive of a monotheistic approach to the Divine. But, even though all divine manifestations in Hinduism are ultimately one, Gurū Nānak's thought had no room for physical conceptualizations or bodily forms of God (AG 1038).

<sup>104</sup>McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 171.

<sup>105</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 1059.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 890.

manifest *essence* of God in the world, but not of any *form* of God: God cannot be given a name in this latter sense. And meditating on His *Name*, *nām simran*, will bring one closer to God because it is meditating on his essence, it is bringing God into the heart of the self. However, Ravidās himself never actually uses the term *nām simran*, instead he uses the term *Rām japan*, which indicates meditating on the name of Rām.<sup>107</sup> This is essentially equivalent to Gurū Nānak's concept of *nām simran*. Indeed, in another hymn, Ravidās openly claims that contemplating God's *Name* is in itself the highest act of worship, and that it replaces popular ritualism; this act will lead the individual out of the illusory *māyā* and cause him/her to realize that true bliss is to be united with God (AG 694).<sup>108</sup>

Thus, as I have illustrated, the hymns of Ravidās, with regard to the teachings on the concept of the *Name* of God, resemble very closely the thought of Gurū Nānak. Clearly Ravidās believed that the contemplation of the *Name* of God was the highest act of *bhakti*, and does not appear to give any name for God besides that of Rām. Referring to God as Rām cannot be taken to mean that the God of Ravidās was in any sense the *saguna* God of Vaiṣṇavites.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, there are many instances in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* where Gurū Nānak refers to God as *Harī*, Rām and *Allah* -- this does not imply that Gurū Nānak believed in the multiplicity of Gods: rather, he believed the One God has different attributes but at the same time cannot be given a more concrete name.<sup>110</sup> The hymns of Ravidās found in the *Pāc-vāṇī* also include many

<sup>107</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, p. 98.

<sup>108</sup> The Contemplation of Thy Name is my Worship (of Thee) :

This is also my ablution in the holy waters.

For, without Thy Name, everything is an illusion, O God.

Thy Name is my seat, and the stone at which I rub the saffron; and also the anointing (of Thee) with it.

The Light that burns in it is also of Thy Name : and lo, the three worlds are illumined (AG 694), (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 664).

<sup>109</sup> This point is further illustrated by Ravidās in the *Pāc-vāṇī*: "Raidas says, I worship Him, who has no village, no place and no name." (Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, p. 98).

<sup>110</sup> Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, p. 71.

references to his use of the term Rām for the Supreme God<sup>111</sup> -- as was seen in the case of his hymns contained in the *Ādi Granth*. Like the use of the term Rām in the *Ādi Granth* this does not mean at all that his hymns in the *Pāc-vāṇī* have a pronounced *avatār* aspect to them. Accepting that Ravidās was an heir to the *Sant* tradition can justify his using the term Rām for the essentially *nirguṇa* aspect of the Supreme -- using Vaiṣṇava names for the formless *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Absolute was a common feature of *Sant* tradition.<sup>112</sup> Although Ravidās uses the term Rām to refer to God, he explicitly claims that ultimately God has no *Nām*, thus displaying close affinity with the thought of Gurū Nānak.

It is interesting to note that Ravidās also uses the term *Satgurū* to refer to the Supreme, thus the term cannot be said to have originated in Gurū Nānak's writings.<sup>113</sup> Ravidās' usage of the term *Satgurū*, which can be attributed to his *Sant* learning, is clearly expressed in the following:

the Satguru cries out aloud,  
If you wish to perform humble service,  
that is what devotion longs for.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, as in the hymns of Gurū Nānak, Ravidās's concept of God is also that of a totally transcendent Absolute that is beyond the conception of the human mind (AG 858). In the words of Gurū Nānak:

Thousands are Thy eyes, yet hast Thou eyes ?  
Thousands are Thy forms, yet hast Thou a form ?  
Thousands are Thy lotus-feet, yet hast Thou feet ?  
Thousands are Thy noses to smell, yet hast Thou a nose,  
O Wonder of wonders ? (AG 663)<sup>115</sup>

The affinity with Gurū Nānak's hymns and the *nirguṇa* nature of Ravidās's concept of God, are clearly declared in his following words:

<sup>111</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, p. 107.

<sup>112</sup> Schomer and McLeod, *The Sants*, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> The followers of Ravidās believe that the term was originally coined by Ravidās and "borrowed" by Gurū Nānak. (Information obtained from the Shri Guru Ravidass Cultural Association, Birmingham).

<sup>114</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, p. 146



Says Ravidas : "O God, Unutterable is Thy Gospel : so what more shall I say?  
Thou art what Thou art, and there is nothing to Compare with Thee".  
(AG 858)<sup>116</sup>

In the hymns of Ravidās, as in the hymns of Gurū Nānak, the *Nām*, the essential essence of God, is depicted through his compassion, his giving of salvation, and his forgiveness of sinners who wish to be united with God. Clearly, then, both Ravidās and Gurū Nānak express the importance of the devotee meditating on the *Nām* of God: this in itself is the greatest act of *bhakti*. Accentuation of the *Nām* is a central feature of *Sant* belief. In this respect, the hymns of Ravidās resemble those of the *Sant* tradition and, moreover, those of Sikhism generally.

### 5:5:2 *Bhakti*

According to the followers of Ravidās, there are a total of nine types of *bhakti*: the *bhakti* advocated by Ravidās is that of *prema-bhakti* -- the highest *bhakti* -- which is complete and utter love for God.<sup>117</sup> This *bhakti* exemplifies the extent of devotion which Ravidās himself had for the Supreme God. Vaudeville points out that *prema-bhakti* is also referred to as *bhava-bhakti* by the northern *Sants*,<sup>118</sup> thus the teachings of Ravidās concerning *prema-bhakti* may possibly be attributed to his *Sant* background. The devotee's longing for God, in the same way as the bride's longing for her beloved, which is referred to as *virāha*, is also a feature of *prema-bhakti*, in which the *bhaktā* yearns for union with God.<sup>119</sup> Ravidāsīs believe that God can be realized by all -- regardless of caste -- as long as one prays to God with loving devotion. This is, indeed, reminiscent of the *bāṇī* of the Sikh Gurūs. Ravidās taught:

The Lord fathers no one but him who is in love with Him. (AG 658).<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 638.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 815.

<sup>117</sup> Radio programme on the *gurpurb* of Ravidās 22 February 1997, Southall: Sunrise Radio.

<sup>118</sup> Vaudeville, C. in Schomer and McLeod, *The Sants*, p. 29.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>120</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 633.

It is by meditating on the *Nām* of God, that the *bhaktā* is cleansed of sins and steps onto the path leading to ultimate union with God in the state of *mukti* when there is no more rebirth into the world of suffering. Ravidās, in his hymns, highlights the importance of *bhakti* on the *Nām*:

All epics and Puranas and Shastras are but mere words.  
Vyasa, the seer, said the last word after a great thought, that nothing equals the  
Name of God.  
They who, by Good Fortune, are Attuned to the Lord, wrapt in the seedless  
Trance of Equipoise,  
They are Illumined from within : and no more is the fear of births and deaths for  
them. (AG 658)<sup>121</sup>

These teachings are very much in line with the *bāṇī* of the Sikh Gurūs who placed *bhakti* above all rituals.

### **5:5:3 Karma and predestination**

The concepts of *karma* and predestination, in the context of liberation, present a paradox in Sikh metaphysics, the anomaly being whether God is wholly responsible for the individual's life, acts and liberation, or whether the individual through his/her own efforts can work towards liberation. I shall begin by examining the evidence from both Gurū Nānak and Ravidās that it is essentially the *Nadar* of God that is responsible for the path towards *mukti*, and shall then examine anomalies to this concept. An examination of Gurū Nānak's teachings appears to emphasize the complete sovereignty of God. This inevitably precipitates his view that the *Nadar* of God plays the vital role in the liberation of the individual. Thus, fundamental in Gurū Nānak's thought is the idea that ultimate union with God is the responsibility of God, rather than the individual; this is perhaps best illustrated in the following verse:

His Will (forsooth)  
Inborn in us, ingrained,  
Thou follow  
(Thus is Truth attained). (AG 1)<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 633.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

However, Ishar Singh is of the opinion that the operation of *Nadar* is dependent on the individual's initial voluntary orientation towards God.<sup>123</sup> That is, the individual needs primarily to decide whether he/she wishes to be united with God -- once this decision has been taken, *Nadar* is offered to help achieve *mukti*. But, it is debatable whether this would have been the belief of Gurū Nānak; God's Grace, almost by definition is "pre-venient", always present before human initiative. In the *Mool Mantar* it is clear that the truth about God is revealed by the *Nadar* of God -- without this revelation an individual cannot turn towards God:

By the Grace of the One Supreme Being, The Eternal, the All-pervading . . .  
True He is and True He shall be. (AG 1)<sup>124</sup>

Thus, predominant in Gurū Nānak's hymns is his insistence on the utmost supremacy of God as being vital in each individual's achievement of *mukti*. Ultimately this does not mean, however, that *karma* plays no role -- an anomaly in relation to the *Nadar* of God that will be discussed below. Does the thought of Ravidās agree with that of Gurū Nānak in his teachings on how the individual is to attain *mukti*? One of Ravidās' hymns alludes to the idea that the only hope of escaping the law of *karma* is for the individual to have the mercy of God bestowed on him or her. Indeed, Ravidās refers to God as the *Lord of Bliss*. This expresses affinity with Gurū Nānak's thought: it is through God's mercy/Grace that *mukti* can be achieved (AG 486).<sup>125</sup> It is clear, too, that for Ravidās God can overcome the *karma* that binds the individual to reincarnation, the *coming and going*:

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<sup>123</sup>Singh, Ishar (1988) *The Philosophy of Guru Nanak*, Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, p. 205.

<sup>124</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 1.

<sup>125</sup>"Wheresoever, are the living beings, they are subject to *Karma*, And so they are shackled by the unbreakable fetters of Death, and against it nothing avails.  
O Ravidas, the Slave of the Lord, give up thy Doubt and Sorrow: the Guru's Wisdom is the Austerity of austerities. O Thou Destroyer of the Devotees' fears, O Thou Lord of Bliss, Thy Mercy is my only Hope in the end" (*ibid.*, p. 481).

Thou Knowest all and I am so Ignorant : Thou art the Destroyer of 'coming-and-going'.  
So all life seeks Thy Refuge and Thou Fulfillest all. (AG 858)<sup>126</sup>

Inseparable from the concept of predestination is the concept of *Hukam*, which is translated as God's "Will". Of major importance in Gurū Nānak's teachings is the idea that everything in the universe ensues in accordance with the *Hukam*; since God is All-Powerful, he knows what each individual's *karmic* outcome will be. All is done according to the *Hukam* of God (AG 154). This last point is a *Sant* characteristic that is also present in Ravidās's hymns: he makes the point that it is in accordance with the Will that even low-caste individuals can achieve *mukti*:

O Love, who is it that can do this but Thou?  
Yea, the poor are Embellished only through Thee, O my Lord and Master, over  
whose Head waves the Canopy (of His Grace). (AG 1106)<sup>127</sup>

Does the emphasis on *Nadar* and *Hukam* mean that the human is a mere puppet without any personal volition? It is important to note that the bestowal of divine Grace does not mean the giving of salvation. What it does mean is that, through the bestowal of such Grace, the individual now has the opportunity to seek and gain enlightenment through his or her own efforts: this is where the *karma* of the individual plays a role. However, we must bear in mind that salvation ultimately comes only through *Nadar*; nevertheless, the human individual can work towards salvation *because of the Nadar*. The law of *karma* is operative in the thought of Gurū Nānak. However, it operates within the overall function of *Hukam* (AG 1107).

Despite what has been said above, it is plain to see that there is sometimes an apparent paradox in Gurū Nānak's teachings regarding *karma* and *Nadar*. This is illustrated in his following hymns: the first exemplifies the individual's role in shaping his or her own destiny; the second points out the outstanding necessity of

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<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 815.  
<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1059.

*Nadar* and *Hukam* in deciding whether one will gain *mukti*:

As one does, so is one rewarded:  
As one sows, so also one reaps. (AG 662).<sup>128</sup>

In Thy Will, do we Cross the Sea of Existence, in Thy Will is our Load sunk in  
the mid-stream. (AG 762).<sup>129</sup>

In light of the apparent enigma found in the teachings of Gurū Nānak, it appears that Ravidās in his following hymn from the *Pāc-vāñī* exhibits a tendency towards believing that each individual's own efforts are essential on the path towards *mukti*. Desire is to be abandoned, and this will lead to the loss of the ego -- this is most probably the "wisdom" to which he referred earlier:

If you stop yearning after the supreme state,  
bliss becomes reality.<sup>130</sup>

The fact that "bliss becomes reality" when the ego is lost, seems to suggest a lack of God's ultimate role in individual salvation. And Ravidās' following hymn also shows an absence to any reference of God's participation:

Devotion arises when the sense of 'self' is lost,  
abiding in contemplation within.<sup>131</sup>

Although *bhakti* is obviously towards God, there is no mention of God actually being wholly responsible in accordance with the *Hukam* for individual *mukti*. The following hymn contained in the *Pāc-vāñī* however, provides a slight allusion to God's role in *mukti*:

refrain I have come, I have come,  
my God, into your refuge.  
Know me as your servant,  
be merciful to me.<sup>132</sup>

Does the reference to "be merciful" indicate that God's mercy is to be used in the

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<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 637.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 727.

<sup>130</sup>Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 107.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 110.

same context as God's Grace? Clearly, the fact that one has to search for emphasis on the *Nadar* of God in the *Pāc-vāñī* contrasts sharply with the words of Ravidās in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* where he *does* refer to the role of *Nadar* in salvation:

I'll dedicate and make an offering of my body and Mind to Thee:  
And so, by the Guru's Grace, will I Attain Thee, my  
Immaculate Lord (AG 525)<sup>133</sup>

On the issue of whether the individual's efforts are to any avail, Ravidās, again, appears to reflect the thought of Gurū Nānak:

Ravidas is Imbued with the Lord's Love,  
And so, by the Guru's Grace, he will fall not into Hell. (AG 487)<sup>134</sup>

Although utmost authority rests with the *Nadar* of God, it is arguable whether Ravidās would have viewed the efforts of the individual as being worthless. He frequently mentioned the fact that the practice of meditating on the *Nām* of God will enable one to be closer to God (AG 694) and this implies individual effort. Yet he also repeatedly mentioned that release is dependent only on the Grace of God (AG 486). Therefore, according to Ravidās, although *Nadar* is absolutely essential, efforts on the part of the devotee, such as meditating on the *Nām* are also important.

Ravidās mentions that the total of one's accumulated *karma* is important for the individual who does not achieve union with God because of ego, *ahamkāra*, and ignorance, *avidyā*. The consequences of bad *karma*, *pāpa*, will have to be reaped in the next life:

But, he, who prides on his sons or wife,  
From him the God Asks the Account (of his Misdeeds).  
The pain of the wrought deeds one has forsure to suffer,  
And then it is too late to cry: "Save me, O my loved ones". (AG 1196)<sup>135</sup>

Since the law of *karma* is so deeply entrenched in Indian metaphysics, its validity cannot be ignored. And as far as the efforts of an individual are concerned,

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<sup>133</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 516.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 481.

free will must exist, otherwise there is no reason why the human race should be endowed with the sense of discrimination. The fact that humans are unique in God's creation suggests the point that humans alone have the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. God has given each individual free will under his sovereign *Hukam*, the individual has been "chosen" to receive *mukti*. It is then up to him/her either to realize the *Hukam* and thus tread on the path that leads towards salvation, or, otherwise, deny the *Hukam* and remain trapped within *samsāra*.<sup>136</sup> Similar to the teachings of Gurū Nānak, Ravidās stressed that it is on God that the final decision to emancipate the individual from *samsāra* depends. Supporting the importance of *Nadar*, Ravidās portrays God as the controller that decides the fate of his creation (AG 487). The sovereignty of God in each individual's liberation supports my contention of a shared *Sant* heritage of both men.

#### **5:5:4 Overcoming ignorance**

Ravidās explained that the cause of the individual's separation from God is ignorance or *māyā*, which leads one to perceive worldly wealth and pleasures as being permanent. The mind of the worldly-wise individual is clouded by *avidyā*, preventing the perception of reality as being an inseparable part of God. Overcoming ignorance can be achieved through meditating on the *Name* of God with loving devotion in order to reveal true knowledge about God (AG 486). In the *Pāc-vāṇī*, also, Ravidās views the world as a grand illusion that will disappear, once the individual has overcome *avidyā*:

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<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1147.

<sup>136</sup>It could be contended that if the individual did not have the right of free will then there would be no apparent urgency to raise the *manmukh*, one who is attached to worldly pleasures, to the level of *gurmukh*, one who is orientated towards God. An analogy has been drawn between the *Hukam* and the Sun: each individual has free will which may be compared to earth, the comparison being made with the fact that, just as the earth revolves around the sun, which is equated to the *Hukam*, the earth also has

Everything perishes which can be seen,  
no one believes in what cannot be seen.  
That devotee is free from desire  
who says 'Ram is beyond description'.<sup>137</sup>

What did he mean by this? Nānak perceived the world as real, because it has been created by God, although in a finite state. Does Ravidās refer to an illusionary, unreal world, or is there similarity, in the views of both men, that the world is real but will perish due to its finite nature? For Gurū Nānak, the value of the world is perceived very differently by the *manmukh*, in contrast to the *gurmukh*. The latter, in Gurū Nānak's thought, views the material pleasures and lures of the world as being temporary and unbeneficial to the ultimate goal of the soul. The *manmukh* however, is obsessed with accumulating material wealth, as opposed to spiritual wealth, believing the world to be a permanent entity and drawing further away from the love of God, thus remaining entangled in the cycle of *saṃsāra*. These are ideas likely to be reflected in the above hymn composed by Ravidās -- the *gurmukh* realizes the ephemeral state of the world. Ravidās proclaims meditating on the *Name* as the means for overcoming *māyā*:

Raidas says: My tongue, chant *ram*!  
Maya never remains anyone's companion.<sup>138</sup>

The aim of human life according to Ravidās, therefore, is to overcome ignorance that will lead to the cessation of *saṃsāra*. Abiding in heaven is not the goal, since it will involve rebirth once the effects of accumulated *pūnya* have been reaped. Likewise, a rebirth into hell does not mean an end to *saṃsāra* either, as indicated by the *Pāc-vāṇī*.<sup>139</sup> *Bhakti* is extolled by Ravidās in both the *Ādi Granth* and *Pāc-vāṇī* as being essential if one is, to gain *mukti*. It is the paths of *bhakti-marga* and *karma-marga* that are advocated by Ravidās in the *Pāc-vāṇī*. Therefore, there is a rejection

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a rotation of its own. (Mansukhani, G. S. [1982] *Aspects of Sikhism*, India: Punjabi Writers, p. 70).

<sup>137</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.



of *jñāna-marga*, the path of knowledge, whereby one subdues the senses and realizes the true nature of the self. Indeed, the path of knowledge is thoroughly introspective and world denying, and this rejection of it is further evidence that Ravidās eschewed the notion of a completely illusionary world, along with the ascetic path of renunciation:

There is no devotion in wisdom, yoga and renunciation,  
in what one says or causes to be said,  
in searching for an abode in the sphere of the Void  
or in any form of showing off.<sup>140</sup>

The ignorance to be overcome is the ignorance that lures the self-centred individual to the world and away from God. Thus, in Nānak's teachings, the *haumai* can only be lost when the individual has overcome ignorance. It is the *haumai* of an individual that is responsible for remaining ignorant to the true nature of the self, and prevents liberation:

Yea, (in Ego) do we know not the Essence of Deliverance.  
In Ego is (one's involvement with) Maya ; in Ego is one shadowed (by Doubt).  
Yea, in Ego is our birth upon birth. (AG 466)<sup>141</sup>

### 5:5:5 The self

The concept of the self, as taught by Ravidās is summarized in his following verse:

Thou art me: I am Thou: where is the difference?  
Do the gold and the golden bracelet differ? Or, the water and the waves?  
(AG 93)<sup>142</sup>

In the same way as the golden bangle does not differ in its essential composition from the piece of gold from which it was taken so, too, the essential nature of the *jīva*, the self, is at one with God. This is not suggesting monism but, rather, that the essence of God pervades each individual soul. Ravidāsīs believe that the individual's body is composed of three parts -- the material body, *tan*, the mind, *man*, and the soul, *jīva*.

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<sup>139</sup>“I realised that heaven and hell are the same – in both there is error, brother!” (*ibid.*, p. 107).

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>141</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 460.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

The *jīva* is the most important entity for this is eternal; the *tan* is the mere physical body that houses the *jīva*. On the *jīva*'s release from the *tan*, the *tan* is a heap of waste that thereafter has no relevance or use.<sup>143</sup> The *man* is responsible for the state and condition of the *jīva*'s rebirth, it is within the *man* of the *jīva* that *ahaṅkara* is contained, and this must be removed if the *jīva* is to gain *mukti* (AG 793).

The concept of the self in the *bāṇī* of Ravidās is very similar to the Sikh concept of the self. Sikhism teaches that, although the essence of God pervades the heart of each human soul, ultimately God is beyond and above all that He has created. Therefore, both Ravidās and the Sikh Gurūs teach the dual nature between the self and God -- at *mukti* the soul will not become God but will exist in a blissful relationship *with* God. This is a mystical, but dual, union.

#### 5:5:6 Caste

Ravidās's teachings on caste are pertinent since as an Untouchable, he was outside Hindu social classes. It might be expected, then, that the relevance he attached to the social position of an individual would occur in his hymns.<sup>144</sup> Gurū Nānak was also concerned with the issue of caste and class -- particularly the over-exalted position of the *brāhmins* within Hindu society. These had attained such an elevated status that they were demanded in virtually all aspects of religious as well as social life. A significant feature of Gurū Nānak's hymns was his criticism of their adverse attitudes towards the lower *zāts* and the injustices committed against them. Thus, Gurū Nānak expressed a dislike for discrimination based on the Hindu caste system; in the words of McLeod: "Guru Nanak emphatically condemned pride based upon caste status,

<sup>143</sup> Raju, *Ho Banjaro Rām Ko*, p. 172.

<sup>144</sup> The prevalent Hindu view during the period in which Ravidās lived, was that only those individuals who belonged to the twice-born, *dvijā*, classes could attain salvation, *mokṣa*. Ravidās however, went against contemporary practices and beliefs and taught that the path towards salvation was available to all who devoted themselves to worshipping God, regardless of what one's class or caste was (AG 858). Nānak taught the same.

notions of purity and contamination arising out of caste distinctions, and above all any suggestion that caste standing was either necessary or advantageous in the individual's approach to God."<sup>145</sup> It was precisely Gurū Nānak's denial of the belief in ritual purity and pollution that influenced his conception of the *langar*.<sup>146</sup> The custom of *langar* is also accepted by the Ravidāsīs and is a feature of the *sabhās*. In this respect the followers of Ravidās and Gurū Nānak have much in common, since both leaders taught the total irrelevance of concepts such as ritual pollution associated with food. Ravidās came into much confrontation with the higher classes, who were unyielding in their beliefs on caste distinctions.

### 5:5:7 Reality

Ravidās' teachings on reality are more pronounced in the *Pāc-vāṇī* where he states:

refrain Whoever abides in the experience of Ram  
is touched by the philosopher's stone -  
he has no sense of duality.<sup>147</sup>

The above hymn of Ravidās is referring to the non-duality of all existence in an egoless state; it is highly unlikely he is referring to a unity with the divine in a monistic sense. He who experiences the divine loses the ego and therefore ceases to differentiate between this and that, rich and poor, good and evil, low caste and high caste -- thus resulting in an absence of duality. The hymn may also apply to the mystical union between God and the devotee -- perhaps a Nāth influence on the thought of Ravidās.<sup>148</sup> This mystical union, as opposed to a more overt duality existing at *mukti*, is also a characteristic feature of Gurū Nānak's thought,<sup>149</sup> and forms the core of Sikh philosophy.

<sup>145</sup> McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 209.

<sup>146</sup> The *langar* was essentially put into regular practice by the third Sikh Gurū, Amardās. The practice of commensality, whereby only members of the same class would eat together to minimise the risk of pollution, was shown to be irrelevant.

<sup>147</sup> Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 105

<sup>148</sup> McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 153.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

### 5:5:8 *Sant* influence

The fact that the hymns of Ravidās and Gurū Nānak are so similar in context cannot be attributed to mere coincidence. The similarities, I believe, are due to the likelihood that both Gurū Nānak and Ravidās were influenced by the *Sant* tradition of Northern India.<sup>150</sup> The doctrine of Gurū Nānak is not just a rehash of *Sant* tradition; Gurū Nānak's development of his *Sant* background has been highlighted by McLeod, who remarks that: "Nanak raised this inheritance to a level of beauty and coherence attained by none of his predecessors. It is in the coherence and the compelling beauty of his explanation that Nanak's originality lies."<sup>151</sup> Significantly, there is a tendency in the hymns of Ravidās to warn his readers against believing that the pleasures of the world are real and take primacy over the worship of God.<sup>152</sup> This warning is, again, a characteristic feature of the *Sant* tradition and stresses the idea that existence without God is not really an existence at all.

Common themes in the works of both Gurū Nānak and Ravidās are a result of what Vaudeville refers to as the *Sant sadhana*, indicating that, according to the *Sants*, *mukti* is based on three pillars:

- (a) Insistence on the divine *Name* (*nāma*);
- (b) *Bhakti* to the *Satgurū*, the Divine Gurū; and
- (c) The importance of the *satsaṅgat*.<sup>153</sup>

All three pillars play a prominent part in the religious thought of both Gurū Nānak

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<sup>150</sup>The question concerning whether these two great men actually belonged to the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* sect is not relevant here: Ken Bryant has clearly pointed out a number of differences between the *Sant* poetry as expressed through Gurū Nānak, and the poetry of the Vaiṣṇavites. He makes the comparison that whereas *Sant* poetry is directed towards the *Nām*, Vaiṣṇavite poetry is expressed to the *rupa*, the physical form of the divine, primarily in the expression of the *avatārs*, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. In sharp contrast to Vaiṣṇava worship of the *avatār*, worship for the *Sants* is essentially interiorized, it is the "terrain of the human soul, and ultimately the terrain of the created universe" (Bryant, K. "Sant and Vaiṣṇava Poetry: Some Observations on Method" in Juergensmeyer, M. and Barrier, N. G. [1979] *Sikh Studies*, California: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, p. 67).

<sup>151</sup>McLeod, W. H. in Foy, W. (1977) *Man's Religious Quest*, England: Croom-Helm, p. 287.

<sup>152</sup>Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Ravidas*, p. 82.

and Ravidās, as illustrated in their hymns found in both the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Pāc-vāṇī* of Ravidās. Since devotion is to be offered to the Supreme God alone, there is no scope for intermediaries. In line with Sikh thought therefore, Ravidās insists on devotion to the One God only:

Those who renounce a diamond like Hari,  
and pin their hopes on others,  
Shall go to death's city -  
this is the truth, says Raidas.<sup>154</sup>

It should also be noted that the resemblance of ideas in the hymns of Gurū Nānak and Ravidās, contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is also reflected in the language of the hymns known as the *Sant Bhasa* -- the language of the *Sants*.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, the usage of common words to describe certain themes would have been inevitable. The *Sant Bhasa* was widely used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by north Indian poets.<sup>156</sup> The similarities between the hymns of Gurū Nānak and Ravidās, as a consequence of their common *Sant* heritage -- especially the utmost importance on the sovereignty of God in all aspects of life -- are further clarified in the following table:<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Vaudeville, C. in *The Sants*, p. 31.

<sup>154</sup>Callewaert and Friedlander, *The Life and Works of Raidas*, p. 169.

<sup>155</sup>McLeod, *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, p. 5.

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup>The *Ādi Granth* translations have been taken from Singh, Manmohan (1996 rp of 1964 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

SANT CONCEPT	GURŪ NĀNAK	RAVIDĀS
Irrelevancy of caste	<i>Recognise Lord's Light within all and inquire not the caste (AG 349)</i>	<i>Whether he be a Brahman, a cultivator, menial, a warrior, . . . a pariah . . . he becomes pure by the Lord's meditation (AG 858)</i>
<i>Nirguna</i> nature of God	<i>Thousands are thine forms, yet Thou hast not even one (AG 663)</i>	<i>What Thou art, that Thou art alone (AG 858)</i>
<i>Saṅgat</i>	<i>In the Society of saints, Lord's elixir is obtained (AG 598)</i>	<i>How can the saint's slanderer ever be saved? (AG 875)</i>
Will of God ( <i>Hukam</i> )	<i>Whatever is His will, that comes to pass (AG 154)</i>	<i>I have contracted affection with the Lord, the Prime-player (AG 487)</i>
Name of God ( <i>Nām</i> )	<i>I ever beg for God's Name Grant me this boon (AG 687)</i>	<i>Thy Name, O Lord, is my adoration (AG 694)</i>
Grace of God ( <i>Nadar</i> )	<i>He manifests Himself unto him, on whom is His grace (AG 931)</i>	<i>By Guru's grace, like this he shall not go to hell (AG 487)</i>
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	<i>He is without birth, death, lineage and caste (AG 1038)</i>	<i>The mortals read, hear and reflect upon the innumerable Names of the Lord, but they can see not the Embodiment of gnosis and love (AG 973)</i>

**Table 11. Important features of the *Sant* tradition present in the hymns of Gurū Nānak and Ravidās -- as contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.**

The fact that the hymns of Ravidās resemble those of Gurū Nānak, was probably the reason for their inclusion into the *Ādi Granth*. Does this mean, therefore, that those hymns not in line with Gurū Nānak's thought were not included? This does not appear to be the case on the basis of the analysis above. The hymns of Ravidās found outside the *Ādi Granth* -- predominantly in the *Pāc-vāṇī* -- resemble very closely his hymns found in the Sikh scripture, and show a similarity to Gurū Nānak's thought, suggesting that both men were heirs to a common tradition. On the subject of similarity, dominant themes found in Gurū Nānak's thought, such as the concepts of *Akāl Purakh*, *Satnām* and *Ik-Onkār* were already being used by Ravidās,<sup>158</sup> thus, again, alluding to the fact that both men had access to the *Sant* tradition that stressed the monotheistic nature of God and the significance of the *Nām*. There is an overwhelming parity of belief between Ravidāsī and the general *Panth*. The comparison is summarized in the table below.

<sup>158</sup>Information from Birmingham *sabhā*.

<i>Belief found in Sikh religion</i>	<i>Present among the Ravidāsīs</i>	<i>Absent among the Ravidāsīs</i>
Monotheism	#	
Absolute is <i>nirguṇa</i>	#	
<i>Saguna</i> essence of God is present in creation	#	
Panentheistic concept of the divine	#	
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself	#	
Predestination	#	
Total reliance on God	#	
Human birth as highest	#	
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God	#	
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>	#	
Becoming a <i>jivanmukt</i> is the ideal	#	
Detachment from worldly lures	#	
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire	#	
Advocation of <i>bhakti</i>	#	
Interiorized religion	#	
Rejection of image worship	#	
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	#	
Rejection of yogic practices	#	
Worthlessness of rituals	#	
<i>Nām simran</i>	#	
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>	#	
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>	#	
Company of the <i>satsaṅgat</i> is essential	#	

**Table 12. Conformity of beliefs found among the Ravidāsīs and the general *Panth*.**

However, one cannot ignore the overt emphasis the Ravidāsīs place on a distinct identity. Although the beliefs of the Ravidāsīs seem essentially criteria for a Sikh identity, the Ravidāsīs *do not* wish to be labelled as adhering to such. The differences between the beliefs of the Ravidāsīs and the general *Panth* revolve around the central tenet of the acceptance of Ravidās as the founder and Gurū of the group. They are the following:

Concept found in Ravidāsī belief	Totally absent from general Sikh belief	Expressed differently in Sikh belief
Emphasis on the term <i>Rām</i> for God		No particular name utilized to refer to God
Ravidās can help the devotee towards the path of liberation	#	
Belief in Ravidās as pre-eminent Gurū	#	
Rejection of <i>Ādi Granth</i> as Gurū	#	
Rejection of the supremacy of Gurū Nānak and the other Sikh Gurūs	#	
Ravidās is <i>the</i> Gurū		Ravidās is a <i>bhagat/Sant</i> , not a Gurū

**Table 13. Differences in belief between the Ravidāsīs and the general *Panth*.**

With regard to the beliefs of the Ravidāsīs, there are, then, considerable similarities with *Khālsā* beliefs. On the surface these might be strong indicators for a Sikh identity of the Ravidāsīs. Importantly, the similarities, as noted above, would have been a reason why the hymns of Ravidās were included in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. I must emphasize that there is no pronounced disparity in the hymns of Ravidās found in the *Ādi Granth* and elsewhere. It could be claimed, therefore, that with regard to a Sikh identity, as far as the beliefs of the Ravidāsīs are concerned, they are in line with general Sikh belief -- even if a Sikh identity is rejected. For those *chamārs* that converted to Sikhism the later shift to a Ravidāsī identity would have been a fairly



smooth one considering the similarity of basic beliefs. Had they been accepted by Sikhs the consequent focus on Ravidās would probably never have occurred. But it is the similarity of ideas between Nānak and Ravidās -- informed by their common *Sant* background -- that provides the links with present-day Sikh religious philosophy. The congruity of foundational philosophy might suggest that there is every reason for interactive interdependent belief and praxis between Ravidāsīs and Sikhs, and an easier interface between one and the other. While the nature of the Ravidāsī faith is so similar to Sikhism that some might wish to view them as Sikhs of a sort, the ethos of the Ravidāsīs is separatist to the extent that there is a self-expressed divorce from the Sikh faith. It is caste that has brought this about and that will remain a fundamental criterion in assessing the "Sikhness" of any group. From an analysis of the Ravidāsīs - - whose beliefs are so close to Sikhism -- it would have to be said that caste issues override considerations of belief as a determinant of identity.

### **5:6 Development of Ravidās *sabhās* in the United Kingdom**

The main aims of the *sabhās* are to promote the teachings of Ravidās among his followers. It is difficult to estimate in number the followers of Ravidās in Britain.<sup>159</sup>

The main emigration of the Ravidāsīs into Britain took place during the 1950s and 1960s, with the majority of migrants coming from the Jullunder and Hoshiarpur districts of the Punjab.<sup>160</sup> Eventually, as the different communities began to settle in Britain, they also brought with them the ideas of their country, resulting in other Indians maintaining their prejudiced attitude towards lower-caste members. Most prejudice however, has always been from the *jat* caste members among Sikhs, who

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<sup>159</sup>A figure of about 300,000 was obtained from informants at the Wolverhampton Ravidāsī temple. However, this figure seems unlikely since the whole of the Sikh population in Britain is approximately 500,000, the majority of whom are *jats*.

<sup>160</sup>Leivesley, A. "Ravidasis of the West Midlands" in *Sikh Bulletin*, 3 (1986): 37. The Ravidāsīs, like other immigrants, came to Britain in the hope of employment and a better financial future. They came to Britain because they believed this country could offer them equality and that the prejudices present

continue to remind the *chamārs* of their status. In areas such as the Midlands and Southall there have been many incidences where riots have broken out between *jāts* and *chamārs*.<sup>161</sup>

The Ravidās Association of Wolverhampton was first established in 1962 due to the large number of Ravidāsīs living there.<sup>162</sup> It was the first Ravidāsī organization in the whole of Britain.<sup>163</sup> The Ravidās temple was built soon after in 1968, also in Wolverhampton at 181 Dudley Road. This building was demolished in 1980, and in its place a new building was constructed.<sup>164</sup> Significantly, this was a major step for the Ravidāsīs who set out to proclaim their rights to set up their own places of worship.<sup>165</sup> Worship in the Ravidās temples took its own form and accumulated particularly Ravidāsī characteristics. The Ravidās *sabhā* of Wolverhampton has been described as:

a body of those people who are interested in well-being of Ravidassia community, Ad-Dharmi community, backward classes So (*sic*) called Untouchables (*sic*), the poorest of the world and who care for as well as believe (*sic*) in humanity. Since the formation of this sabha in 1963, it has tried its best to unite our people who are dedicated and devoted to the teaching and philosophy of Shri Gurū Ravidass Ji. Here we like to mention that this Sabha has achieved a very high place in our own people and in multicultural society in this country and in India with its work and deeds towards the upliftment (*sic*) of our poor masses.<sup>166</sup>

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in the Indian social structure were not going to be present here.

<sup>161</sup> Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 247.

<sup>162</sup> Information from Ravidās Temple Wolverhampton, 28 May 1997.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> The main achievement of the Wolverhampton *sabhā*, in addition to the promotion of the teachings of Ravidās among the community, has been its extremely large donation towards the Shri Guru Ravidās Technical Institute in Phagwara, India. I was told that the institute is a large complex that aims at the education of the lower classes. Women are encouraged to attend sewing classes, computer classes for both girls and boys are conducted, and leather merchants teach about the leather trade. Other donations have been made to enable the construction of water wells for the lower classes in India. In Britain, a community centre has been built in Wolverhampton, which is not merely for religious purposes, but for social ones such as sports and education, too. Additionally, donations are sent to wherever a Ravidāsī temple or centre is to be constructed, whether in India, Britain or Paris. A current project being undertaken by the whole of the Ravidāsī community in India and Britain is to construct a hall as a memorial to Ravidās in Hardwar, India. This is a large-scale project and the new building will be given the title of *Beghampura Ashram*, literally "the abode of heaven, the city without sorrow".

<sup>166</sup> *Brief History of This Sabhā* (undated), leaflet printed by the Guru Ravidass Temple, Wolverhampton.

Prominent among the Ravidāsī community was the establishment of the Dalit Welfare Association (DWA) in 1984, which was involved in the promotion of literature dealing with the lower castes, in particular the Ravidāsīs: its concern was to uplift the Dalit youth mentally.<sup>167</sup> The DWA has now amalgamated into the Wolverhampton *sabhā* at 181 Dudley Road and therefore ceases to exist as an organization, most of its members being on the committee of the temple. The DWA was based at Wolverhampton and has also published literature on the life and teachings of Ravidās. Its primary function, to promote the teachings and philosophy of Ravidās, was through publishing pamphlets, articles in newspapers, and generally educating the *chamārs* about the life and teachings of their Gurū.<sup>168</sup> The DWA had been involved in the political matters of the Ravidāsī community. I was told that the formation of the DWA was encouraged by the older members of the community, who wanted a political involvement in matters concerning them. To sum up, the DWA endeavoured to provide education for the Ravidāsī community, as well as to promote a sense of equality and to arrange social events for the community to gather together.

The central Ravidāsī committee office for the UK -- referred to as the Shri Gurū Ravidāss Cultural Association -- is situated at the Birmingham temple; the Association is seen as authoritative in taking major decisions.<sup>169</sup> It acts as the central governing body for all *sabhās* in the UK and is concerned with the "social, religious, educational and cultural interests of the Ravidāss Community".<sup>170</sup> The actual premises of the temple, referred to as the Shri Gurū Ravidāss *Bhawan*, Birmingham (at which

<sup>167</sup>Information on the DWA has been obtained from the Wolverhampton *sabhā*.

<sup>168</sup>The DWA was also anxious to bring an awareness to society about the injustices committed against the lower castes in India; newspaper articles were written to highlight the total disrespect given to such castes. With the help of Bilston College, Wolverhampton, English classes were offered to members of the Ravidāsī community. Cassettes, focusing on the teachings of Ravidās were also distributed among the community.

<sup>169</sup>The aims and objectives of this *sabhā*, as highlighted in its constitution, can be seen in appendix 3:2.

<sup>170</sup>*Welcome to Shri Guru Ravidass Bhawan Birmingham*, pamphlet published by the Shri Guru Ravidass Cultural Association.

the Association is also based) were converted from an old church and opened in 1992, the project costing £1.5m.<sup>171</sup> Funds for the *Bhawan* were largely collected by the voluntary contributions of the Ravidāsī community.

The associations and *sabhās* of the Ravidāsī community in Britain are based in Wolverhampton, Southall, Birmingham and Coventry.<sup>172</sup> They act as a mouthpiece for the community and, further, exist to promote a sense of unity among the *chamārs* in Britain.

### **5:7 Practices: Sikh or Ravidāsī?**

The main centre of Ravidāsī practice is the *sabhā*, which functions as a socio-religious gathering place for the Ravidāsī community. Importantly, the religious places of worship are not called *gurdwārās*. The *sabhās* play an important role in the lives of the diaspora Ravidāsī community, since it is here that the particular practices and traditions of the community are upheld and are used to guide the followers, in particular, the younger generation. The practices form a focal point to the present chapter, for they are used as criteria with which to assess the identity of the Ravidāsī community. Furthermore, they present an important perspective in relation to overall Sikh identity.

#### **5:7:1 Worship**

During worship, in addition to Sikh practices such as the *ardās*, Hindu practices such as that akin to the waving of a lamp during the performance of the *arati*<sup>173</sup> are observed. But rather than *arati* to one of the Hindu forms of God, the *sabhā* practices *arati* of the *Name*. During the *arati* hymn the Ravidāsī devotee recites:

*Nām tero arati*  
Thy Name, O God, is my *arati*

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<sup>171</sup>Details received from the Birmingham *Bhawan*.

<sup>172</sup>Information obtained from the Wolverhampton *sabhā*.

On completion of the *arati* hymn that praises Ravidās, the slogan of

*Jo boley so nirbhay Shri Gurū Ravidāss Jī kī jai!*  
That person is fearless who recites the praise of Gurū Ravidās!

is shouted out aloud, rather like the usual Sikh slogan of

*Jo bole so nihāl sātsrīakāl!*

that is also shouted out aloud at the end of a Sikh service. The pattern of the *ardās* also differs from that of *ardās* in a Sikh service. The intention of *ardās* appears to be the highlighting of the life and teachings of Ravidās. It is believed that Ravidās himself began his *bhakti* with *ardās*.<sup>174</sup> After *ardās*, too, the slogan is repeated:

*Jo boley so nirbhay Shri Gurū Ravidāss Jī kī Jai!*

Importantly, the followers are declaring their Ravidāsī identity. The order of worship in a *gurdwārā* is as follows:

- *Kīrtan*.
- *Anand Sāhib* -- composition by Gurū Amardās is read to the congregation.
- *Ardās*.
- A *hukamnāmā*<sup>175</sup> from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is recited.
- Distribution of *karāh prasād*.

In contrast, worship in a Ravidāsī temple follows the order of:

- *Kīrtan* -- usually from the hymns of Ravidās.
- *Arati*.
- *Anand Sāhib*.
- *Ardās*.
- *Hukamnāmā*.
- Distribution of *karāh prasād*.<sup>176</sup>

The first point to make is that there is no *arati* in worship taking place in a *gurdwārā*.

I was told that the inclusion of *arati* in Ravidāsī places of worship does not necessarily mean the actual act of performing *arati*. On normal worship days, only the *arati* hymn is sung, the beginning of this is as follows:

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<sup>173</sup> *Arati* is the act of waving *divās* in front of the gurū or deity being worshipped or respected.

<sup>174</sup> Raju, *Ho Banjaro Rām Ko*, p. 150.

<sup>175</sup> "Command for the day".

*Nām Tero Aarti Majanu Muraray  
Har Ke Nām bin Jhuthey Sagal Pasārey*

Thy Name, O God, is mine *ARATI* and mine ablutions,  
without the name of God all display is vain

On special days, however, such as the days when *akhand pāths* are held to commemorate a *gurpurb*, the *arati* act is performed with the lamp by Ravidāsīs; this is known as the full *arati*.<sup>177</sup> The full *arati* is a feature of Hindu worship; it is not to be performed by Sikhs, as stated in the *Rehat Maryādā*.<sup>178</sup> A further feature that differentiates worship in the *sabhā* from that in a *gurdwārā* is that during *ardās*, it is the hymns of Ravidās, and other low-caste saints, which are given prominence over the hymns of the Sikh Gurūs. Occasionally, I was informed, the hymn of a Sikh Gurū may be used during a service.

### 5:7:2 Celebrations

Special significance is attributed towards Ravidās and other saints from the low castes: emphasis is on their own caste Gurū. Although the festivals of *dīwālī* and *baisākhī* are celebrated, I was told that they are not celebrated in the same manner as Sikhs.<sup>179</sup> This again illustrates the Ravidāsī insistence on being distinct from the Sikh faith.<sup>180</sup> And yet, an informant from the Coventry *sabhā* differed: he gave the reason for celebrating *dīwālī* at Coventry as the commemoration of the release of the sixth Sikh Gurū, Hargobind from imprisonment -- an example of a more Sikh orientation.

### 5:7:3 The *gurpurb* of Ravidās at the Southall *sabhā*

The *gurpurb* of Ravidās is the most important celebration of the year and is heralded with much excitement by the community. At the Southall *sabhā* the celebration lasts for a total of three days, with the forty-eight hour *akhand pāth* beginning at 10am on

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<sup>176</sup>Information gained from the Wolverhampton *sabhā*.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup>*Amritsar Rehat Maryada*, (1978) Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 6.

<sup>179</sup>Information from the Birmingham *sabhā*.

Friday 21 February and ending at 10am on Sunday 23 February with the *bhog*.<sup>181</sup> I attended the *gurpurb* of Ravidās, which took place on 23 February 1997. A *kīrtan* procession took place on Saturday 22 February beginning at 10am, and proceeded through the streets of Southall, ending at the *sabhā*.<sup>182</sup>

Months of preparation are involved in order to make the *gurpurb* the highlight of the year for the religious community: it is also seen as a social event where the whole of the Ravidāsī community of the locality gather together. Announcements of the *gurpurb* were made on the popular Asian Sunrise Radio about the program of events, along with members of the community ringing in to the studio and congratulating all on the birth of their Gurū Ravidās. Sunrise Radio, which broadcasts from Southall also, gave a few hour-long lectures on the life and teachings of Ravidās, accompanied by *bhajans* sung by *rāgīs* from India and England.<sup>183</sup> In addition, relatives, *giānīs* and other religious people were invited from around the world. The approximate number of followers present was around fifteen hundred. The annual *gurpurb* functions to strengthen the identity of the Ravidāsī community since the majority of attendants are present for a common reason -- to celebrate the birth anniversary of *their* Gurū.

The *niśān sāhib* is changed on the *gurpurb* of Ravidās rather than on *baisākhī*, the birth of the *Khālsā* that takes place annually on April 14, as in Sikh practice generally. The practice of changing the *niśān sāhib* on this day, rather than on *baisākhī*, clearly distinguishes the Ravidāsīs from general Sikh communities, and thus shows their non-observance of the *Khālsā*.

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<sup>180</sup>On this point see appendix 3:1, which clearly illustrates the Hindu background of celebrating *dīwālī* at the Birmingham *sabhā*.

<sup>181</sup>These are changed every year so that the *bhog* takes place on a Sunday around the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February.

<sup>182</sup>The progression of the procession was transmitted on Sunrise Radio. Competitions were also held to actively involve the youngsters, who were competing against each other for the best paintings and drawings on the life story of Ravidās.

The practice of performing full *arati* takes place on the *gurpurb* of Ravidās: during which a tray of *divās* is lit and waved around the picture of Ravidās situated in front of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Both males and females perform *arati*. Regarding the performance of *arati*, I must point out that I have witnessed this taking place in a number of *gurdwārās* of the general *Panth*. During a recent *akhand pāth* at a relative's home, the *giānīs* asked members of the congregation whether they would like to perform *arati*, and the congregation took part enthusiastically, waving the tray of *divās* in front of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. The point to be made here, then, is that, the mere performance of *arati* cannot be taken as an indication of the non-Sikh orientation of Ravidāsī practice. The practice of *arati* is, however, against Sikh teachings: indeed, the practice is condemned as superstitious in the *Rehat Maryādā*:

It is considered superstitious to ring bells, burn incense, light ghee-lamps and wave them in a *platter* before the *Guru Granth Sahib*.<sup>184</sup>

The ringing of bells is also present during Ravidāsī worship, and is accompanied by the sound of a conch -- both are distinctively Hindu practices. Another Hindu practice during worship at the *sabhā* on the *gurpurb* of Ravidās is the casting of flowers towards the portrait of Ravidās after the *arati* hymn has been sung.

Major emphasis is placed on the hymns of Ravidās, especially during his *gurpurb*. At the Southall *sabhā* an attractive leaflet is handed out with the words of the *arati* hymn in Punjabi from which all worshippers can sing. Since the worship is conducted from the *gurmukhī* script and the congregation converses in Punjabi, it must be assumed that all members have originally migrated from the Punjab.

I managed to talk to a few youngsters to ask them about their reasons for being at the *sabhā*. The answers were quite mixed. Some of the younger children said they

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<sup>183</sup>The *gurpurb* was also transmitted live via Sunrise Radio on Sunday, between the hours of 1-2 pm.

<sup>184</sup>*Amritsar Rehat Maryada*, p. 6.



were at the celebration because it was their “God’s” birthday and would be getting lots of nice things to eat. Others, slightly older, replied they were forced to come along by parents. The responses were interesting, suggesting that Ravidās is seen as a divine being, a “God” by the children. This bears similarities to the divinity often attributed to the Sikh Gurūs, in particular, Gurū Nānak, who is often referred to as Gurū Nānak *Dev Jī*; the term *Dev* being indicative of *Devā*, that is, God.<sup>185</sup>

#### 5:7:4 The *saṅgat*

The place of the *saṅgat* is given special importance among the Ravidāsīs since Ravidās emphasized the significance of associating with holy people, and the importance of the Gurū in showing the devotee the true path (AG 486). It is in good company that individuals learn more about God; sinners, too, can be saved by the correct guidance of the Gurū. Ravidās’ teachings here are reminiscent of the Northern *Sant* tradition. The honour given to *Sants* is highlighted by Ravidās in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*:

The Saints who are Thy body, Thy life-breath, O Lord,  
Them, through the Guru-given Wisdom, have I found, O God of gods.  
O God of gods, Bless me with the Society of the Saints and with the Joy of  
hearing their Word and with their Love. (AG 486).<sup>186</sup>

The important position attached to the company of those who know the truth about religion is illustrated in the Wolverhampton *sabhā*: the *giānī* is present at the *sabhā* for members of the congregation to be able to ask him questions regarding religious philosophy, and to be able to ask questions concerning other social matters such as marriage arrangements and so on. The presence of holy people, such as the *giānī* in the *sabhā*, elevates the spiritual value of the building, which is regarded as an important religious place. Classes are also held in the *sabhā* on Sundays when

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<sup>185</sup>It is important to remember that in Sikh thought one finds the belief that the whole of humanity is divine in a sense, since God is manifest in the hearts of all human beings. Ultimately, however, God is above all that he has created. Hence the term panentheistic is often used to depict the Sikh faith.

younger children can learn Punjabi; Hindi is not taught at all in the *sabhās* -- illustrating an important linking of the Ravidāsīs with the Punjabi and not Hindi community. In addition, children are taught about the life and teachings of *their* Gurū, Ravidās.<sup>187</sup> This promotes an awareness of Ravidāsī identity among the younger generation. The method of meditation in the *sabhās* takes the form of listening to the *bāṇī* of Ravidās contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, together with prayer and worship. The very fact that the *bāṇī* of Ravidās takes precedence over the *bāṇī* of the Gurūs is a clear marker of the non-Sikh identity of the *sabhās*. I reiterate that a hymn of the Sikh Gurūs is used only occasionally.

### 5:7:5 Marriages

The practice of endogamous marriages takes place within the Ravidāsī community, as in Indian society overall. A *chamār* will marry only a *chamār*. Marriages between *chamārs* and *chūhrās* are not accepted. Most marriage ceremonies are performed in the *sabhā*, with the reception taking place at a local club or community centre. The *sabhās* also have the right to be able to perform register marriages within the building; registering marriages is compulsory since it is through these that the marriage certificate can be obtained. I was told by the *giānī* at the Wolverhampton *sabhā* that the order of marriage among Ravidāsīs is analogous to that of the Sikh tradition: the couple take four circuits around the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, which is in line with the Sikh marriage tradition. With regard to the marriage ceremony, therefore, the Ravidāsīs exhibit a Sikh orientation. This however, should not be pressed too far, because the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is used *only* because it contains the hymns of Ravidās. Nevertheless, the recital of the *lāvān* hymn points to the Sikh nature of the wedding ceremony amongst Ravidāsīs.

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<sup>186</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Gopal Singh, p. 481.

<sup>187</sup> See appendix 3:3, which clearly portrays the Ravidāsī, rather than Sikh, emphasis of the community.

### 5:7:6 *Niśān sāhib*

Present outside the *sabhā* building is the *niśān sāhib*, the characteristic emblem of a Sikh place of worship. However, the Ravidāsī *niśān sāhib* is red instead of the saffron yellow it usually is. The red colour is indicative of the *Ad Dharm*'s emphasis on the colour red in asserting the Scheduled Classes' equality with the higher classes. I was told that on entering India, the Aryans did not allow the natives to wear the colour red in order that the latter were kept separate from the invaders. Moreover, the *niśān sāhib*, whose sole purpose is to distinguish the building as a place of worship, takes a distinctively Ravidāsī form: instead of the *Khaṇḍā* being present on the *niśān sāhib*, the Punjabi inscription of the *Hare* symbol, which indicates the *Name* of God, is present, surrounded by the first line of the *arati* hymn: *Nam Tero Arati*. . . . Informants remarked that the stars or other decorations visible on the *niśān sāhib* always add up to forty-one, symbolizing the number of Ravidās's hymns contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. While I was told that the building may also sometimes be referred to as a *gurdwārā* -- and therefore the presence of the *niśān sāhib* points out that the building is a *gurdwārā* -- the design of the *niśān sāhib* is deliberately changed from that of the Sikh *niśān sāhib* in order for passers-by and members of the community to understand that the building is specifically a Ravidāsī centre. Although the constitution of the Southall *sabhā* itself states that the colour of the *niśān sāhib* should be orange (section 1b), which is in common with Sikh practice, the *niśān sāhib* of the Southall *sabhā* is, as already mentioned, red.

The term "Sikh" is not present either inside or outside the building, nor are the terms "Sikh" or "Sikhism" mentioned in the constitution. It is apparent therefore, that the constitution aims to further the significance of Ravidās among the community; there is no emphasis on the Sikh Gurūs or their teachings. There is also no

requirement for the candidates of the committee to be *amritdhārī*, or *kesdhārī*. Members of the congregation are under obligation to cover their heads, and this conforms to Sikh practice at all *gurdwārās*. However, unlike the congregation at the *gurdwārā*, there was a very tiny percentage of *kesdhārīs* -- this was the case among both males and females.<sup>188</sup> The *giānīs* and *rāgīs* were all *kesdhārīs*,<sup>189</sup> but the leaders of the *sabhā* were *monās*. It is important to note that among other Sikhs such as the *jaṭs* and *rāmgarhīās* one may also see clean-shaven individuals, the tendency however is greater among the Ravidāsī community, thus portraying their intention not to be regarded as *Khālsā* Sikhs. Regarding the issue of hair, McLeod writes:

If a *Jat* cuts his hair, there is a strong likelihood that his claims to be regarded as a Sikh will continue to be recognized. If, however, any member of the *Khatri/Arora/Ahluwalia* group should do likewise, he will usually be treated thereafter as a Hindu. The same is also true of Harijan Sikhs except that in their case the alternative identity could conceivably be Christian.<sup>190</sup>

The slogan of *Hare* is present all over the *sabhā*, including the headscarves of the male worshippers. In actual fact, if one were to bear in mind the prominence given to the *Khaṇḍā* and to the *Ik-Onkār* symbol in a *gurdwārā*, the same prominence is instead given to the symbol of *Hare* in all *sabhās*. The symbol *Hare* represents the “spirit of the Almighty God”.<sup>191</sup> It serves to replace the position of the Sikh *Khaṇḍā*. The *Hare* symbol occurs thus:

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It has become unique to the Ravidāsīs. The point I wish to emphasize here is that, the significance given to the symbol of *Hare*, and the complete absence of the *Khaṇḍā*, suggests that the Ravidāsīs do not wish to court a Sikh identity. Although the

<sup>188</sup>See appendix 3:6.

<sup>189</sup>See appendix 3:7.

<sup>190</sup>McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?* p. 111.

<sup>191</sup>Information from Wolverhampton *sabhā*.

Ravidāsīs have veneration for the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, this is due to the fact that it includes the most authentic collection of their Gurū's hymns. Their emphasis, indeed, is on a Ravidāsī identity. Since the *Khaṇḍā* represents the *Khālsā*, it is inevitable that it would not be given any importance because of the fact that Ravidāsīs do not adhere to the *Khālsā*.

### **5:7:7 Pilgrimage**

A pilgrimage site of particular importance to the followers of Ravidās is a memorial in the form of a temple at Benares. The temple that stands at the sacred birthplace of Ravidās has been erected "to glorify the spiritual heritage and pious memory of Gurū Ravi Dass Ji".<sup>192</sup>

The prevalence of Ravidās in religious practices, as illustrated above, clearly illustrates that, because of their non-acceptance as equals in the *Panth* and with the subsequent emergence of the *Ad Dharm* movement, today the Ravidāsīs are increasingly in favour of an identity as followers of Gurū Ravidās. Yet there are clearly a number of practices that have been adopted from Sikhism. The table below lists those practices that are predominantly present among Sikhs generally and are retained by the Ravidāsīs.

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<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*

<i>Sikh Practice</i>	<i>Present among the Ravidāsīs</i>	<i>Absent among the Ravidāsīs</i>
Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship	# <sup>193</sup>	
The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief	#	
<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Singing of <i>kīrtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Recitation of <i>ardās</i> during worship	#	
Performance of <i>akhand pāth</i> s	#	
<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs		#
Serving of <i>gurū-kā-laṅgar</i>	#	
Distribution of <i>prasād</i>	#	
Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>	#	
Importance of the Sikh Gurūs		#
Prominence of the <i>Khaṇḍā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol		#
Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony		#
Emphasis on the Five Ks		#
Emphasis on being <i>kesdhāri</i>		#
Traditional Punjabi dress for females	#	
Requirement for males and females to cover their heads	#	
Celebration of the <i>gurpurbs</i>		#
Celebration of <i>baisākhi</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>		#
Celebration of <i>dīwālī</i> as the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison		#
Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>		#
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhi</i>		#
Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khaṇḍā</i>		#
Endogamous marriages	#	

**Table 14. Conformity of practices found among the Ravidāsīs and the general *Panth*.**

<sup>193</sup>This is likely to be absent in future if the Ravidāsīs have their own collection outside the *Ādi Granth*

From the above table, it becomes clear that the Ravidāsīs are increasingly dissociating themselves from Sikhism. Nevertheless, a few Sikh customs are retained. As far as the majority of these are concerned, I must stress that modifications -- more specifically Ravidāsī ones -- are accentuated. On the other hand, the sole scripture used by the Ravidāsīs is the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. However, it was continually stressed during research on the community that the Sikh scripture is used *solely* for the reason that it contains forty-one hymns of Ravidās in a language that is comprehensible to the Punjabi Ravidāsī community. Separation from a Sikh identity is further evidenced when it is borne in mind that there is no marked emphasis on the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs. Moreover, the Ravidāsī insistence on promoting a non-Sikh identity has led to the incorporation of many practices that find no place in general Sikh praxis. Thus, the emphasis, as illustrated in the table below, is on a Ravidāsī identity.

Practice found in the Ravidāsīs	Totally absent from general Sikh practice	Expressed differently in the <i>Panth</i>
Prominence of the <i>Hare</i> symbol		Prominence of the <i>Khandā</i> symbol
Religious centre called a <i>sabhā</i>		Religious centre called a <i>gurdwārā</i>
Worship centred on the teachings of Ravidās		Worship centred on the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs
Ringling of bells and blowing of conch during worship	#	
Non-Sikh <i>ardās</i>	#	
<i>Baisākhī</i> celebrated as a harvest festival only	#	
<i>Gurpurb</i> of Ravidās is the highlight of the year	#	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on the <i>gurpurb</i> of Ravidās		<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhī</i>
Red <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Hare</i> symbol		Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khandā</i>
No emphasis on the <i>Khālsā</i> form	#	

**Table 15. Practices that distinguish the Ravidāsīs from the general *Panth*.**

## 5:8 Distinctiveness of Ravidāsīs

The constitution of the Southall *sabhā* presents important points relating to the question, or rather the paradox, of the identity of the Ravidāsī community. The main aim of the *sabhā* with regard to religion is explicitly stated in its constitution:

To worship almighty God in accordance with the teachings and principles of Shri Guru Ravi Dass Ji from the Holy Book Shri Guru Granth Sahib.<sup>194</sup>

Although the individual *sabhās* have their own constitutions, the above aim is true of all Ravidāsī *sabhās*. It is plain to see that major emphasis is placed on the teachings of Ravidās rather than the Sikh Gurūs. There is a reference further in the Southall constitution however, that refers to other Gurūs -- but does not necessarily indicate the Sikh Gurūs:

To arrange lectures and discussions on the life and mission of Shri Guru Ravi Dass Ji and all other Gurus.<sup>195</sup>

Since all the *sabhās* attach primary importance to Ravidās rather than the Sikh Gurūs, this indicates the explicitly non-Sikh identity of the community. Most significantly, the *sabhās* promote the Ravidāsī identity among the former *chamārs*. This preference for Ravidās is against the prescribed behaviour of a Sikh as stated in the *Rehat Maryādā*, which states that a Sikh should not follow the teachings of any other apart from those of the ten Sikh Gurūs:

[A Sikh should] Live a life based on the teachings of the ten Gurus, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, and other scriptures and teachings of the Gurus.<sup>196</sup>

In this respect, therefore, the Ravidāsīs cannot be regarded as Sikhs, when the *Rehat Maryādā* is taken as the yardstick. Indeed, the *Khālsā* ideal prescribed by the *Rehat Maryādā* is totally rejected by the Ravidāsīs.

Although the number of references in the Southall constitution that actually

<sup>194</sup> *Amended Constitution of Shri Guru Ravi Dass Sabha, Southall*, (1979), p. 2 (a).

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4 (3c).



refer to the *sabhā* as a *gurdwārā* are only two (in section 5c and in section 10c), the constitution *does*, nevertheless, mention the distinctly Sikh term *gurdwārā*. The Southall constitution points out, in section 4a, that celebrating the birth anniversary of Gurū Ravidās is the highlight of the year: no mention is made of the *gurpurbs* of Gurū Nānak or the other Sikh Gurūs. It is well to remember that the accentuated importance of this *gurpurb* in all *sabhās* clearly prevents the Ravidāsīs from displaying any Sikh identity.

I suggest that the identity of the Ravidāsī community has been realized beyond the kind of general distinct identity proclaimed by the *Ad Dharm* movement: it is distinctly Ravidāsī. The *Ad Dharm* emphasized the identification of the Scheduled Classes as being a *qaum*, a nation in their own right, having their own Gurū and their own traditions. In the Punjab the confusion over the identity of the *chamārs* existed because many had converted to Sikhism, but the stigma attached to their Hindu heritage of untouchability remained. Hence the *chamārs* were caught in the midst of Hindus and Sikhs, with neither faith accepting them as a part of its community. The *Ad Dharm*, which placed emphasis on Ravidās and endeavoured to raise the position of the Scheduled Classes, thus gave them an identity with which to associate. But although the *chamārs* can take jobs other than shoemaking, they continue to be regarded as low-caste *chamārs* by the higher castes of other religious groups. It is interesting to note, as pointed out by Jackson and Nesbitt, what a Ravidāsī child describes as her identity:

I know what culture I am, Hindu, but it's not as if we're restricted to Hindu because we believe in Sikhism as well. It's just one thing really.<sup>197</sup>

According to Leivesley, the Ravidāsīs are not Sikhs but are within the Sikh

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<sup>196</sup> *Amritsar Rehat Maryada*, p. 12.

<sup>197</sup> Jackson, R. and Nesbitt, E. (1993) *Hindu Children in Britain*, Staffordshire: Trentham Books, p. 28.

universe -- this is due to their using the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, observing *laṅgar* and following a few Sikh customs.<sup>198</sup> As my research has shown, there are considerably more points at which they converge with Sikhism -- in particular, the underpinning philosophy that informs religious belief and practice. The religious thought, as I have illustrated above, is probably due to the *Sant* heritage of both Gurū Nānak and Ravidās. Leivesley rightly suggests that they are not Hindus either, but have their own identity as Ravidāsīs: thus culturally the Ravidāsīs are *chamārs*, politically they are *Ad Dharmis*.<sup>199</sup> My research has alluded to the idea that although the Ravidāsīs utilize the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and retain certain Sikh praxis, the insistence is on *distinctiveness*, not on identification with the *Panth* or, indeed, with any wider *qaum*. And despite the instalment of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in their religious places of worship, and a complementary philosophy, the Sikh identity of the Ravidāsīs is questionable and very limited. As indicated above, it was often remarked by informants that if the hymns of Ravidās were ever collected into one composite volume, then the usage of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in communal worship would cease. Sewa Singh Kalsi however, is of a different opinion.

Kalsi considers that the Ravidāsīs are Sikhs but were forced to set up their own *gurdwārās* due to their treatment by higher-caste Sikhs, who maintained notions of purity and pollution and thereby did not allow the *chamārs* to prepare *laṅgar* in the *gurdwārā*.<sup>200</sup> Thus, by setting up their own *gurdwārās*, the *chamārs* remained Sikhs and were able to practice Sikhism within their own *zāt* community where they were not subject to prejudice from higher-caste Sikhs. The question of their identity for Kalsi, therefore, is that they are to be regarded as Sikhs since they converted to Sikhism. This should, theoretically, be the case. However, their non-acceptance by

<sup>198</sup> Leivesley, "Ravidasias of the West Midlands", pp. 37-8.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

the *Panth* as a whole caused them to reject the Sikh faith and find religious satisfaction through the teachings of their own *zāt* Gurū, and my contention is that they have now rejected Sikh identity. Although retaining a number of Sikh orientated practices, the Ravidāsīs assert that these practices have no overt connections to the *Panth*. For example, although the ideal of *satsang* is emphasized, the Ravidāsīs point out that it is a feature of the *Sant* tradition and Hinduism generally and is not unique to the Sikh faith.

The pollution notion of caste has been retained within the psyche and attitude of higher-caste Sikhs -- this is an overt contradiction of what the Gurūs taught. The formation of the *Khālsā* by Gurū Gobind Singh involved men of different castes drinking from the same bowl, thus abolishing the Hindu notion of ritual pollution; in essence this is an attitude that all Sikhs should adopt. I believe, therefore, that it is due to the higher-caste Sikhs' non-observance of the teachings surrounding the formation of the *Khālsā* that the *chamārs* have been forced to search for their own identity. The emphasis on distinction is so great that the Ravidāsīs are not promoting themselves as separate from other Sikhs, but rather as *non-Sikhs*. I suggest, then, that Kalsi's view is misguided.

Those *chamārs* who converted to Sikhism in the past, it might be claimed, should be regarded as Sikhs. Such *chamārs*, however, were made to feel that they were not part of the Sikh community. Therefore, although having historical Sikh connections, they have rejected Sikhism and, like all Ravidāsīs, no longer wish to be defined as constituting a Sikh identity. It follows that gradually the *chamārs* ceased to keep the outward symbols of Sikhism that they had eagerly embraced at conversion.

The attitudes of higher-caste Sikhs towards the former *chamārs*, has resulted

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<sup>200</sup> Kalsi, *The Evolution of a Sikh Community*, pp. 130, 137.

in the Ravidāsīs no longer wishing to be within the framework of a corporate Sikh identity. They wish to be isolated from the *Panth* altogether. Not being accepted by higher-class Hindus either, there arose confusion and anxiety among the *chamārs* as to their specific identity. With the formation of the *Ad Dharm* movement, the *chamārs* were for the first time confronted with the promotion of their class unity as being distinguished into a *qaum*, they no longer needed to be ridiculed by higher-caste Sikhs and Hindus, and therefore saw no obvious reasons for conforming rigidly to either of these two faiths. Thus, in my opinion, this has resulted in some Hindu and Sikh praxis in the Ravidāsī community, but a community that wishes to distinguish itself as belonging exclusively to a Ravidāsī identity. In some communities the praxis may be more Sikh than Hindu, and *vice versa* in other communities. Either way, it is an inheritance of beliefs and practices that have synchronized into distinctiveness and separation as followers of Gurū Ravidās. Importantly, this is reminiscent of the Christian faith that did the same with Jewish traditions, and Gurū Nānak who did the same with Muslim and Hindu traditions. Significant to note therefore, is that religious groups hardly arise out of a vacuum, they need to be informed by some immediate past traditions.

The Ravidāsī identity is also occasionally referred to as *Ad Dharmi*. Informants were emphatic about referring to Sikhs as “them” -- clearly illustrating their position with regard to a distinct, non-Sikh identity. Interestingly, the *giānī* at the Wolverhampton Ravidass Temple remarked that the identity of the community is confusing; he commented that those who revere the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* are Sikhs. But, regarding the *chamārs*, it is up to each individual whether he or she wishes to be referred to as Sikh or as *Ad Dharmi*. He declared further that the Ravidāsī committee itself had not yet clarified the issue of identity. Significantly, nevertheless, the

majority of the followers of Ravidās describe themselves as Ravidāsīs -- not as Hindus or Sikhs. Therefore, to be a Ravidāsī is to follow the teachings of Ravidās -- even if these appear very similar to those of Gurū Nanak.

A good example of the syncretistic Hindu/Sikh inheritance is the practice of distributing *karāh prasād*. Similar to worship in *gurdwārās* of the general *Panth*, *karāh prasād* is distributed at the end of the main service and this is a feature of Hindu temple worship, too. In a video about the Ravidāsīs in Birmingham, one speaker voiced that, as a low-caste person, he was refused *karāh prasād* in both India and Britain: thus by distributing *karāh prasād*, the Ravidāsīs exclude no one from the *sabhā*.<sup>201</sup> The importance of *laṅgar* is not rejected, therefore, in the Ravidāsī *sabhās*. The tradition is maintained but its distinctive Ravidāsī nature is characterized at the same time. Such differences underline the complex situation of whether the community is to be regarded as Hindu or Sikh or, a distinct movement separate from both. But while adoption of Hindu and Sikh traditions may, at first glance, suggest some identity with these religions -- particularly the latter -- it is the deeper issues that are of relevance here. Ultimately, there is a rejection of the *Khālsā*. Thus, the presence of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* indicates a surface Sikh orientation, the performance of *arati* a Hindu orientation, and the emphasis on Ravidās's hymns a distinct Ravidāsī orientation. Underpinning all, however, is a complete rejection of caste-ridden Hinduism and Sikhism, and *Khālsā* Sikhism in general.

Ravidāsīs assert their equality with other members of society. My view is that the efforts which have gone towards distinguishing their religious places of worship as distinctively Ravidāsī temples, and the lack of references to Sikhism within those temples, illustrate fully the idea that the Ravidāsīs do not wish to be placed merely

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<sup>201</sup> Open University Video: "Man's Religious Quest – The Ravidasias Birmingham".

within the scope of Sikhism, or for that matter Hinduism -- they are neither of these religions, but are Ravidāsīs. This claim is emphatically voiced in a notice issued by the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha UK (which can be seen in appendix 3:5) stating that followers of Ravidās are to be called Ravidāsīs -- this is *their* religion. With regard to a Hindu identity, I found that it was only a minute percentage of informants who regarded the Ravidāsīs as being a sect of the Hindu religion. The majority referred to themselves as Ravidāsīs. A few followers referred to themselves as being Sikhs. This problem of providing clear-cut boundaries for the Ravidāsī community, has been pointed out by Nesbitt:

The existence of the Valmiki and Ravidasi communities highlights the pitfalls of any over-easy definition of individuals or communities as 'Hindu' or 'Sikh'. Both these communities are Punjabi, both have separate premises for corporate worship in Punjab and in Britain (e.g. Coventry, Southall). In both communities some members have Hindu-sounding names such as Anita Devi, Ram Lal, while others have Sikh-style names, e.g. Avtar Singh, Kulvinder Kaur.<sup>202</sup>

Again, Nesbitt points to the dangers of establishing identity from surface issues. (In fact, having Hindu names is no more indicative of a Hindu than a westerner with an old Hebrew name like Daniel, Gabriel or Adam being a Jew). It is interesting to note that, during my visits, and clearly visible in the video on Ravidāsīs in Birmingham,<sup>203</sup> one can usually distinguish a Ravidāsī who keeps a turban but not the beard from a *kesdhārī* Sikh who will keep both the turban and beard. Regarding this matter, one informant, although retaining the common Sikh name of Singh, was extremely insistent that he was under no circumstances to be regarded a Sikh, he was not one of "them" but was a Ravidāsī.

Further indications of a separate identity from Sikhs are clear when considering that the Ravidāsī *sabhā* has both Hindu and Sikh characteristics. These, I

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<sup>202</sup>Nesbitt, E. M. "Pitfalls in Religious Taxonomy: Hindus and Sikhs, Valmikis and Ravidasis" in *Religion Today*, 6 (1990): 11.

<sup>203</sup> Open University Video "The Ravidasias Birmingham".

suggest, are simply syncretistic traditions: when taken as a whole, they are absorbed into a distinctively Ravidāsī character. For example, at first it may seem that one has entered a *gurdwārā* due to the layout of the *sabhā*, with its carpeted floors, *laṅgar* hall and covered heads. However, on closer contact the *sabhā* is differentiated from a *gurdwārā* in many ways, and the atmosphere of being in a *gurdwārā* is absent. Initially the main point of differentiation is the lack of pictures of the Sikh Gurūs, which would be very unusual for a Sikh *gurdwārā*. Normally, the walls of a *gurdwārā* display a range of pictures of the Gurūs, more prominently of Gurū Nānak. In the Southall *sabhā* however, there is only one portrait of Gurū Nānak and one of Gurū Gobind Singh, which are placed in front of the *palkā* housing the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Between both portraits is placed a portrait, of similar size, of Ravidās. There is also a prominent, considerably larger and almost life-sized painting, of Ravidās. Even at the Coventry *sabhā* where there appears to be a more Sikh orientation than in others -- given that a number of portraits of the Sikh Gurūs were visible -- the underpinning ethos is distinctly Ravidāsī. It appears, therefore, that, apart from the Coventry *sabhā*, major significance is visually attached to Ravidās rather than the Sikh Gurūs. This surely questions whether the *sabhā* could still be regarded as being a *gurdwārā* in any sense, with such particular differences.

According to Kalsi, however, the *sabhā* is a *gurdwārā* since, wherever a copy of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is installed, that place becomes a *gurdwārā*.<sup>204</sup> However, I believe that the term *sabhā* is the most appropriate to use for Ravidāsī temples. This is the term used by the Ravidāsīs themselves. Such a claim is supported by the lack of emphasis on Sikh identity which is clearly expressed by the lack of *Khaṇḍās*, the prominence given to Ravidās over the Sikh Gurūs and, moreover, the very term

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<sup>204</sup> Kalsi, *The Evolution of a Sikh Community*, p. 134.

“Sikh” being absent from the majority of *sabhās*. In addition, the supremacy given to the symbol *Hare* further separates the *sabhā* from practices in a *gurdwārā*. However, one cannot ignore that the *gurdwārā* aspect of the *sabhā* is emphasized through participation in *laṅgar*. This, I suggest, is a traditional feature of Sikhism that has been retained by the Ravidāsīs, but I strongly believe that it is not an indication of their desire to be labelled as Sikhs: rather, it serves to strengthen the concept of equality among the congregation. Lannoy has remarked that the term *sabhā* is indicative of “a rather loose association found among high castes”.<sup>205</sup> From this one might deduce that the purpose in labelling the Ravidāsī centres as *sabhās* is the *chamārs*’ assertion of their equality with the higher castes -- and, more importantly, of their distinct identity from Sikhs.

It is clear to me that the emphasis within the *sabhā* is on the people being followers of Ravidās; emphasis on being followers of the Sikh Gurūs holds no importance. The prominent position and esteem with which Ravidās is held by his followers was repeatedly emphasized by an informant who vigorously expressed his regret over the usage of the term *bhagat*, rather than Gurū, by a recent author when referring to Ravidās. The same regret was expressed by another member of the Ravidāsī community, who pointed out that, although followers will refer to Ravidās as Gurū, Sikhs insist on calling him a *bhagat*.<sup>206</sup>

Being a follower of Ravidās, therefore, entails utmost belief in *his* teachings, rather than on the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs. In their total insistence on Ravidās, the community of his followers places no importance on taking *amrit* or on the Five Ks. *Amrit* is seen by the Ravidāsīs, as in Sikhism generally, as initiation into the Sikh *Panth*, and is therefore not practiced; no *amrit* ceremonies take place in the *sabhās*.

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<sup>205</sup> Lannoy, R. (1971) *The Speaking Tree*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 165.

<sup>206</sup> Information from a Ravidāsī informant at Birmingham.



This total abstinence from the *amrit* ceremony and its outward symbolism clearly places the Ravidāsīs outside the boundary of *Khālsā* Sikhism. Significantly, the Ravidāsīs constitute a critique of Sikhism. It is, indeed, groups such as the Ravidāsīs that challenge the corporate identity in Sikhism. After all, the Ravidāsīs were prepared to accept *Khālsā* Sikhism that said nothing about its hidden caste prejudice. Ravidāsīs as a group expose the Sikhs as *not* following their Gurūs' teachings on the issue of equality -- and, thereby, Sikhs undermine their own criteria for uniform identity.

According to personal experience of caste within Sikhism, the attitude of higher-caste Sikhs towards the Ravidāsīs is demonstrated by the fact that many Sikhs will not refer to the *sabhā* as the Ravidāsī temple, but will insist on referring to it as the *chamār gurdwārā*. While attributing the status of a Sikh place of worship to Ravidāsī temples, the important point here is the caste discrimination against the worshippers. The majority of higher-caste Sikhs would not eat in a *chamār* house or in the *sabhā* -- thus disobeying the Sikh teachings associated with the *langar*. A member of the Ravidāsī community, in Birmingham, expressed the fact that the Ravidāsīs are not made to feel welcome in the Sikh *gurdwārās* or Hindu temples.<sup>207</sup> While many Sikhs will resent the fact that the Ravidāsīs do not wish to be perceived as being Sikh, they will not give the Ravidāsīs equality with themselves. In terms of Sikh identity, then, it is clear that low-caste status is a criterion that bars a group from being acceptable within the *Panth*: there is no space for the overruling of caste distinctions in Sikhism generally.

I believe, therefore, that although the Ravidāsīs retain some Sikh practices, and a good many religious beliefs consonant with Sikhism, their identity as Sikhs is to

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<sup>207</sup> Open University Video "Ravidasias in Birmingham".

be rejected, in particular as a result of their total abstinence from the *Khālsā* tradition, and the utmost importance given to their Gurū, Ravidās. Thus, in the case of the Ravidāsīs, it is more of a definite distinction *from*, rather than *within*, the *Panth*. They themselves do not wish to be seen as affiliating to a Sikh identity. This is very different to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the Nāmdhāris who, although differing from general Sikhs in certain respects are, nevertheless, Sikhs, and who, moreover, consider themselves Sikh. The *chūhrā* conversion to the Sikh faith also has important implications for Sikh identity. Dissatisfaction with the egalitarian teachings of Sikhism caused masses of *chūhrās*, like the *chamārs*, to seek a distinct identity. The *chūhrās* adopted Vālmīki, the alleged author of the *Rāmāyana*, as their Gurū. The implications that this presents to the issue of Sikh identity are scrutinized in the succeeding chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### *Vālmīkis*

## 6:1 Why the term “Vālmīkis”?

The Vālmīkis, like the Ravidāsīs, are a good example of the outcome of lower *zāt* conversions into the *Panth*. The Vālmīki community, which is Punjabi, is composed *exclusively* of the *chūhrā*<sup>1</sup> *zāt*, a caste belonging to the Scheduled Classes. It is therefore a caste-based organization that takes Vālmīki, the alleged author of the *Rāmāyana*, as its Gurū. Vālmīkis adamantly affirm that their Gurū was also of the *chūhrā zāt*. Thus, as a starting point, the character of Vālmīki needs to be looked at in order to determine the extent to which his beliefs and teachings have influenced the nature of his community of followers. It is important to note that Vālmīki's religious background was Hindu. Indeed, his alleged composition, the *Rāmāyana*, is an important text for popular Hinduism to the present day. The anomalies this presents to a Sikh identity among the former *chūhrās* will, therefore, be interesting to scrutinize.

On initiation, members from the lower *zāts* are supposed to be treated equally with all *zāts* present within the *Panth* -- after all the principle of egalitarianism (emphatically voiced in *gurbāṇī*) was a major attraction for the lower *zāts*. Thus, masses of *chūhrās* initiated into the Sikh faith in order to raise their social position. However, the prejudice of higher *zāt* Sikhs refused to accept the *chūhrā* Sikhs as equals. Subsequently, although having been initiated into the *Panth* historically, today the majority of *chūhrās* have moved away from a Sikh orientation into a specifically Vālmīki recognition. Nevertheless, the contribution that the *mazhabī* Sikhs make towards the issue of Sikh identity is an important reason for including the Vālmīkis in the present research.

The study of this group becomes pertinent when bearing in mind the practices of the Coventry Vālmīki temple that houses both the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the

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<sup>1</sup>The traditional occupation of this *zāt* is that of sweepers.

*Rāmāyana* alongside each other. Contrastingly, all other Vālmīki centres in Britain *do not* house a copy of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in their religious places of worship. Thus the identity of the Vālmīkis, as a whole, is to be investigated in what follows in order to establish the context in which one would define them -- Sikh, Hindu or neither. Interestingly, although being responsible for their exclusion in the first place, many higher *zāt* Sikhs do not like the idea of the Vālmīkis moving away from a Sikh affiliation and asserting equal standing within the Indian social structure. Such Sikhs prefer to see the *chūhrās* as the lowest strata of the *Panth* and continue to refer to the Vālmīki temples as the *chūhrā gurdwārās* -- thus constantly voicing their prejudice towards the lower *zāts*.

The historical connection of the *chūhrās* with the developing *Panth* arises significantly from the event in history when the severed head of Gurū Tegh Bahādur was carried by a member of the *chūhrā zāt*, Bhāi<sup>2</sup> Jaitā (also known as Bhāi Rangretā) and taken to the young Gobind Dās. It was as a witness to Rangretā's courage in taking the Gurū's head from the Mughal invaders, that the child Gobind spoke the famous words:

*Rangreti Gurū ki beti*  
The Rangretiās are the children of God.

It was following this event that large numbers of *chūhrās* took *amrit* and entered the *Panth* in the hope of achieving equality with the other Sikh *zāts* -- a hope enhanced by the fact that the teachings of all the Gurūs stressed the irrelevancy of caste. Unfortunately, the stigma attached to untouchability remained in the *Panth*: moreover, the distinctiveness of the lower *zāts* from the upper was significantly retained due to the fact that the lower *zāt* converts were named *mazhabīs*. This term, although translated as "the religious ones", nevertheless indicated that such persons were of a

*Rāmāyaṇa* alongside each other. Contrastingly, all other Vālmīki centres in Britain *do not* house a copy of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in their religious places of worship. Thus the identity of the Vālmīkis, as a whole, is to be investigated in what follows in order to establish the context in which one would define them -- Sikh, Hindu or neither. Interestingly, although being responsible for their exclusion in the first place, many higher *zāt* Sikhs do not like the idea of the Vālmīkis moving away from a Sikh affiliation and asserting equal standing within the Indian social structure. Such Sikhs prefer to see the *chūhrās* as the lowest strata of the *Panth* and continue to refer to the Vālmīki temples as the *chūhrā gurdwārās* -- thus constantly voicing their prejudice towards the lower *zāts*.

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lower *zāt*.<sup>3</sup>

The *chūhrās*' non-acceptance into the *Panṭh* by higher-caste Sikhs, eventually led to the formers' efforts to raise themselves socially. Thus, Vālmīki was heralded as Gurū by the *chūhrās*, in the same manner in which Ravidās was acknowledged by the *chamār* converts to Sikhism. At times it is difficult to ascertain whether the person of Vālmīki is a legend or an actual historical figure. Obviously according to Vālmīki tradition -- as well as popular Indian belief, since Vālmīki allegedly composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* -- he is believed to have existed. But there remains some uncertainty concerning references to Vālmīki as author of the epic in various sources. Nevertheless, in firmly believing that Vālmīki, the Great Sage, single-handedly composed the original epic of Rāma, the Vālmīki community adamantly reveres the author as its *zāt* leader, and accepts that the Great Sage was of the *chūhrā zāt*.

The followers of Vālmīki zealously regard him as *mahārṣi*,<sup>4</sup> as their Gurū, their spiritual leader. He is often referred to as *Jagat Gurū Vālmīk Mahārāj*, that is, "Vālmīki the Gurū of the World". What we have here, then, is a traditional Hindu sage revered by the community of his *chūhrā* followers in their efforts to assert equality within the Indian social structure. This is a structure in which they are traditionally placed at the very bottom, being subject to widespread oppression in India. While the social position of the *chūhrās* has changed very much with their migration to diaspora countries such as Britain -- particularly with regard to economic advancement -- the stigma of untouchability is still present in the attitudes of higher *zāt* Indians, both Sikh and Hindu. My major emphasis will be on those *chūhrās* who originate from the Punjab, northern India, since it is among the Punjabi *chūhrās* that

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<sup>2</sup>*Bhāi* is used as a mark of respect and is translated as "brother".

<sup>3</sup>Like the Ravidāsīs, the Vālmīkis are also outside the caste system and were referred to as Untouchables.

<sup>4</sup>A Great Sage, holy man.

conversion to Sikhism had been quite marked.

The present chapter will thus seek to explore some of the complex issues of identity associated with the former *chūhrās* who converted to the Sikh faith, and who today are referred to as Vālmīkis. The first point of departure, however, must be an analysis of the figure known as Vālmīki -- an historical person according to his community of followers, but a legend when considering actual historical evidence. The particular ethos that Vālmīki has given to the group needs to be investigated. It is often the case that the term "Vālmīki" is used interchangeably with the term "Bālmīki", this is due to pronunciation differences by which Punjabi speakers substitute the letter *v* for the letter *b*.<sup>5</sup> In this section I shall be using the term "Vālmīki".

## 6:2 Who was Vālmīki?

### 6:2:1 Sources for studying Vālmīki

At the outset it needs to be recognized that very little factual evidence can be cited with regard to the life of Vālmīki. Importantly, it is also difficult to ascertain whether he was, indeed, the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. But the Vālmīki community firmly assert that Vālmīki was an actual *historical* person, endowed with divine qualities.<sup>6</sup>

The main source for gathering details about Vālmīki is the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself, traditionally believed to have been composed by Vālmīki.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this

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<sup>5</sup>The dialects of Punjabi also mean that some Punjabis will use the *b*, whereas other Punjabis will use the *v*.

<sup>6</sup>It is due to the exalted and, at times god-like, position of Vālmīki held by his followers that hagiography is a common feature of the traditional tales or stories surrounding him. This is common to the legends of all great individuals and blurs any evidence that can point towards an interpretation of beliefs about Vālmīki.

<sup>7</sup>Scholars generally agree on the date of composition of the epic to be between 400 BCE and 200 CE. See Coward, H. (1988) *Sacred Word and Sacred Text*, New York: Orbis Books, p. 108; Sankalia, H. D. (1982) *The Ramayana in Historical Perspective*, New Delhi: Macmillan India, p. 7. Shastri is of the opinion that the date of composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* cannot be cited with any certainty (Shastri, H. P. [1985 edn] *The Ramayana of Valmiki: Vol I*, London: Shanti Sadan, p. xv). The *Rāmāyaṇa* belongs to the *smṛti* class of Hindu literature, and refers to literature that is "remembered". Thus *smṛti* literature is often portrayed in the form of a story, like that of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Coward, *Sacred Word*



study I shall use Shastri's three-volume English translation of the *Rāmāyana*.<sup>8</sup> Vālmīkis believe that their Gurū is also the author of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, sometimes referred to as the *Mahārāmāyana*. The work itself, however, cites no author,<sup>9</sup> therefore scholarly debate is widely differing with regard to its compiler. The literature is highly metaphysical in nature, and focuses on a dialogue between the sage Vasīṣṭha<sup>10</sup> and Rāma; it is used by various Vālmīki *sabhās* to provide guidelines for their metaphysical beliefs. As Shastri comments, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is spiritually important because it “deals with the inner development of Shri Rāma as opposed to his outer deeds and . . . remains one of the most authoritative and respected philosophical treatises of Vedānta”.<sup>11</sup> The contents of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* will be looked at comprehensively when the beliefs of the Vālmīki community are examined. It is important for its contribution to the spiritual identity of Vālmīki adherents. Furthermore, it will help to determine whether the Vālmīkis, on the basis of their religious beliefs and the background of their founder, are more akin to a Hindu

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and Sacred Text, p. 108). Since Vālmīki is commonly referred to as *ādikavī*, the first poet, his epic the *Rāmāyana* is referred to as *ādikāvya*, the first poem. The *Rāmāyana* is composed of a total of seven books, *Kandās*, these are: Book 1 - *Balā-Kandā* (the birth and childhood of Rāma); Book 2 - *Ayodhyā-Kandā* (in Ayodhya and the beginning of the fourteen-year exile of Rāma, Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa); Book 3 - *Aranyā-Kandā* (the forest, and Sitā's abduction by Rāvaṇa); Book 4 - *Kishkindhā-Kandā* (in the country of Kishkindha where Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa seek the help of the monkey tribe to rescue Sitā); Book 5 - *Sundarā-Kandā* (“the Auspicious Book”, the monkey tribe enter Lanka), Book 6 - *Yuddhā-Kandā* (the war between Rāma and Rāvaṇa; Rāma, Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa return to Ayodhya after fourteen years, Rāma is made King); Book 7 - *Uttarā-Kandā* (the aftermath: Rāma's abandonment of Sitā, Vālmīki's hermitage, and the birth of Lava and Kusha). Gathering information from the *Rāmāyana* in its present form however, presents complexities with regard to the original nature of the work. Although Vālmīki is believed to have composed the original *Rāmāyana* single-handedly, the first and final books of the *Rāmāyana* in its interpolated present form are now accepted as being of a later date than the main text. See Fowler, Jeaneane (1997) *Hinduism: Beliefs and Practices*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, p. 18; and Whaling, F. (1980) *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 15. Doubt arises over factual life-details of Vālmīki when it is borne in mind that the majority of details about Vālmīki are found in these two augmented books. Because of their later composition and ambiguous authorship, these details of the life of Vālmīki cannot really be regarded as authentic. Nevertheless, since it is in these two books that Vālmīki features predominantly, their contents must be looked at.

<sup>8</sup> Shastri, *The Ramayana of Valmiki: Vols 1-3*.

<sup>9</sup> Shastri, in his foreword to *World within the Mind* (1997 6th imp.) London: Shanti Sadan, states that Vālmīki is the author of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*. Shastri's work translates and summarizes extracts taken from the original Sanskrit *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* of Vālmīki.

<sup>10</sup> Vasīṣṭha is a renowned Sage; he was advisor to King Daśaratha and his sons, and the family priest.

<sup>11</sup> Shastri, *World Within the Mind*, p. xviii.

character rather than a Sikh affiliation, or whether they are, indeed, to be regarded as distinct from both faiths.

The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is also a useful source when examining details about Vālmīki,<sup>12</sup> as is the famous Hindi version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Tulsidās, known as the *Rāmacaritāmānas*.<sup>13</sup> Accounts found in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* are utilized by Vālmīkis due to the fact that the early life accounts of Vālmīki differ considerably in both the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and *Rāmacaritāmānas* from that of the original *Rāmāyaṇa* composed by Vālmīki. But it is important to look at the accounts given in all three sources, since on examination two contradicting narratives exist as to who Vālmīki was. These discrepancies have been remarked on by Rao: "One type describes Vālmīki as a sage-poet born of a high-caste brahman family and endowed with supreme wisdom and the divine sensibilities that made him the creator of poetry, while the other type describes him as a sinner transformed into a saint."<sup>14</sup> Since Tulsidās' account falls into the latter type, and since it is his account that is used more widely on a popular devotional level, the majority of non-Vālmīkis accept the "robber-transformed-into-saint" tradition.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This work was not composed by the Sage Vālmīki, but is nevertheless, based on the main themes in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Whaling states that no author can be attributed to the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (see Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rama*, p. 111). It differs from the original in many aspects: the most significant departures are details regarding the earlier life of Vālmīki, and the text's emphasis on promoting the divine nature of Rāma to a greater degree than that found in the original by Vālmīki. The divine nature of Rāma is not fully articulated in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*: although Vālmīki is aware that his main character is an *avatār* of Viṣṇu, he concentrates on the human nature of Rāma. It is more so in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* that Rāma becomes a deity to whom worship is offered (see Tapasyananda, S. (1985) *Adhyātma Ramayana*, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, pp. iv – v). Importantly, Whaling stresses the fact that the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is not merely an epic, but a scripture (Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rama*, p. 140).

<sup>13</sup> Translated as "Lake of the Acts of Rāma". This source again differs from Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* with regard to the details of the sage's earlier life, and with its further aim of developing the divine nature of the hero of the epic. It is due to Tulsidās' Hindi version of the original by Vālmīki that Rāma is popularly worshipped as a personal deity. Therefore, it is the *Rāmacaritāmānas* that is used widely by those who offer *bhakti* to Rāma. Members of the Vālmīki community do not use Tulsidās' version since their focus of attention is Vālmīki himself, and not Rāma; worship for them is accentuated around Mahārṣi Vālmīki, and thus only his original epic is used.

<sup>14</sup> Rao, V. C. "Vālmīki" in Eliade, M. (1987) *The Encyclopedia of Religion: Vol. 15*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, p. 184.

<sup>15</sup> This is a view that has never been accepted by the Vālmīki community who are dismayed that the

If the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a Hindu text is the major source of the life of Vālmīki, noticeably the Sikh scripture, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* contains no hymns composed by the sage.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the prominence given to the *Rāmāyaṇa* immediately raises questions concerning any Sikh orientation of the community. An indirect reference to Vālmīki, however, is cited in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* via a verse by Ravidās, in which he refers to the caste of Vālmīki.<sup>17</sup>

While pertinent also to the wider context of Vālmīki belief and practice, the Vālmīki community itself publishes informative material. From this literature, the two most important are first, a series of monthly newsletters in the form of “journals”, which are given the title *The Service* and which are distributed among the Vālmīki community in Britain. *The Service* contains various articles that are of interest to the community both religiously and socially, and is published in Birmingham, West Midlands. Second, another publication, *Vālmīk Jagrītī*, which is updated every few years and is distributed for the benefit of the Vālmīki community, takes on a more religious nature, and aims at educating the community about Mahārṣi Vālmīki, including the correct way of religious practice for followers.<sup>18</sup> These two publications are important for establishing details about the life of Vālmīki that are accepted by his followers.

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majority of Indians have accepted a misleading view of their Gurū, which is nowhere supported in the original *ādikavā*.

<sup>16</sup>An obvious reason for this is that the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic takes the form of a narrative rather than a metaphysical, spiritual approach like the hymns of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Furthermore, the epic involves, although very slightly, the recognition of the hero as an *avatār* -- this again is in contrast to Sikh belief that has no scope for *avatārs*.

<sup>17</sup>“Why lookest thou not at Balmik? From what a low caste, what a high rank obtained he? Sublime is the Lord’s devotional service” (AG 1124). Singh, Manmohan (1996 rp of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 3701.

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## 6:2:2 Dates of Vālmīki

The dates of Vālmīki -- if he was an historical person -- cannot be cited with any certainty. The *Vālmīk Jagrītī* states that Vālmīki was born in 3,000 BCE,<sup>19</sup> this is also supported by *The Service*.<sup>20</sup> His dating revolves only around the issue of whether he was a contemporary of Rāma or not, and the Vālmīki community themselves firmly hold that their Gurū was a contemporary of Rāma.<sup>21</sup>

The *Bālā Kandā*, the first book -- though probably a later addition -- clearly states that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was narrated to Vālmīki by the divine sage Narada:

Having heard the story of the life of the sagacious Rama from the lips of Narada, which, when recounted, confers perfect righteousness on the hearer, the holy Sage [Vālmīki] wished to know more concerning this sacred theme.<sup>22</sup>

This does not necessarily mean that Vālmīki had never met Rāma. But the chapter further highlights the fact that the whole of the saga of Rāma was experienced by Vālmīki, through the grace of Brahmā.<sup>23</sup>

The *Yuddha Kandā*, the sixth book, and traditionally believed to be the final book of the original epic composed by Vālmīki, makes no mention of the instruction of Narada for the compilation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. So why does the first book, the *Bālā Kandā*, explicitly state this? The need for Book One to be interpolated may have arisen from the fact that Vālmīki was from a low-caste background. Therefore, in order for his work to be accepted by higher-class Hindus, the additions were made in order to stress that knowledge about Rāma -- if accepted as a historical person -- had

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<sup>18</sup>The publication is distributed on behalf of the Shri Guru Valmik Sabha, Southall.

<sup>19</sup>Soba, P. L. in *Valmik Jagrīti* (1998 issue) Southall: Shri Guru Valmik Sabha, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>*The Service*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, October 1982, Handsworth: Design and Print Services, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa* itself -- more specifically in its first and seventh books -- provides evidence that Vālmīki met with Rāma (*Uttara Kanda*, chapter 96), that he looked after Sitā (*ibid.*, chapter 49), and that it was Vālmīki who brought up Lava and Kusha: teaching them to sing the whole saga of Rāma (*ibid.*, chapters 93-4). However, it must be remembered that Books One and Seven are probably later additions -- thus presenting problems with regard to the dates of Vālmīki.

<sup>22</sup>*The Ramayana of Valmiki, Bala Kanda*, chapter 3, translator Shastri.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.* Yet, although Vālmīki's initial knowledge of Rāma was cited by Narada, the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself suggests that Vālmīki and Rāma had met during the latter period of Vālmīki's life. For instance,

been granted to Vālmīki by Narada, thus, making Vālmīki socially acceptable. Books Two to Six have no mention of a divine vision.

The date of Vālmīki's other work, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is also difficult to ascertain. Vālmīkis themselves believe that the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* was originally part of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*: this makes sense when one realizes that the work takes the form of a metaphysical discourse between Rāma and the sage Vasīṣṭha -- the family Gurū. The *Valmīk Jagrītī* expresses this prevalent belief among Vālmīkis:

Bhagwan Valmik Ji composed the Ramayana, and the Yoga Vasistha as one book. At some stage in the by-gone years these were separated, one being called The Ramayana and the other Yoga-Vasistha.<sup>24</sup>

### 6:2:3 The life details of Vālmīki

While there are contradicting theories about who Vālmīki was, and his acceptance as a historical reality, most scholars today are of the opinion that Vālmīki was most definitely an historical person.<sup>25</sup> But even among the Vālmīkis themselves, there are differing views and beliefs with regard to the genealogy of their Gurū.

One of the most significant traditions among his followers is that Vālmīki was of a low-caste Hindu background. This appears to be an obvious stance since the Vālmīkis would be proud of a Gurū of their own *zāt* who is seen, primarily among his followers, to elevate their position amongst the hierarchical caste system, in which the *Dalits* are at the very bottom. Vālmīki's low-caste background was apparent to Ravidās also who, in one of his passages from the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, stated:

Why lookest thou not at Balmik?  
From what a low caste, what a high rank obtained he? (AG 1124)<sup>26</sup>

Many Vālmīkis resent the fact that, in order to make him socially acceptable, higher-

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Vālmīki presents Sitā before Rāma, and proclaims her virtue (*ibid.*, *Uttara Kanda*, chapter 96).

<sup>24</sup>*Valmīk Jagrītī*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup>See Goldman, R. P. (1984) *The Ramayana of Valmīki*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 3701.

class Hindus will tend to insist on Vālmīki's *brāhminical* ancestry.

Altekar draws attention to a work entitled *Srī Vālmīki Prakāśa*, in which the authors, Amichand Sharma and Sadhu Bodharama, state that Vālmīki was once of the *cāṇḍāla* low caste.<sup>27</sup> So, although the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* nowhere states that he was of a low caste, Vālmīkis themselves believe otherwise. It would seem strange that, if Vālmīki were not of a low caste, he should be revered as Gurū by his *chūhrā* followers.

Contrary to the alleged low-caste birth, one fact that clearly emerges from the traditions, is that both Rāma and his brothers regarded the sage Vālmīki as being from the twice-born classes. Nowhere is it cited in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* that Vālmīki is of a low-caste origin. However, since the *Uttarā Kandā* is regarded as a later addition to the original poem, and since it is here that Vālmīki plays a main role, many suggest that reference to Vālmīki's high caste has been deliberately added in order to make him socially acceptable among the higher-class Hindus as the author of the great epic. Evidence for the insistence on Vālmīki's high caste is echoed in the words of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for Rāma repeatedly draws attention to Vālmīki's *brāhminical* status:

O Fortunate and virtuous Brahmin, may it be so! I fully concur in thine irreproachable words. . . . O Brahmin, though wholly convinced of her innocence,<sup>28</sup>

My contention here is that it would be highly irrational of the Vālmīkis to have regarded their spiritual leader as a *brāhmin*: it simply would not make sense. The *brāhmins* are traditionally the rigid upholders of the caste system and go to great lengths to avoid contact with low castes. Why then would the *chūhrās* acknowledge a *brāhmin* as their Gurū? Their present identity as a caste group makes such a belief an important one.

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<sup>27</sup>Altekar, G. S. (1987) *Studies on Valmiki's Ramayana*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, p. 3.

Later adaptations of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, namely the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and Tulsidās' *Rāmacaritāmānas*, present a very different picture of who Vālmīki was, in contrast to the original *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is from these interpretations of the original work that Vālmīki is popularly regarded as having been a robber who later transformed into a sage. Although stating that Vālmīki was born a *brāhmin*, the author of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* puts forward the idea that Vālmīki had begun associating with robbers and, furthermore, that he had children from a low-caste woman.<sup>29</sup> This account is also found in the *Rāmacaritāmānas*.<sup>30</sup> For the purpose of my work, I shall concentrate on what the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* has to say about the life of Vālmīki, since it is only this version that is used by the Vālmīki community, and to this version only that popular tradition asserts Vālmīki as the author.

#### 6:2:4 Miracles attached to Vālmīki

In contrast to the lives of other religious leaders no miracles are attached to the life of Vālmīki. If such exist they are not of common knowledge to my informants. However, one popular legend common to the Vālmīkis, and which has the character of a miracle, is the account that surrounds the belief that a pot of *amrit* "holy water, nectar" was buried at what is now the site of the Golden Temple, Amritsar. This event is not, however, recorded in the original *Rāmāyaṇa*, neither is there any historical evidence for this. Nevertheless, the Vālmīkis firmly believe that, during a horse fight, Rāma was accidentally killed by his sons Lava and Kusha. Because of the children's despair on seeing their father dead, Vālmīki prepared *amrit* that was given

<sup>28</sup>*The Ramayana of Valmiki, Uttara Kanda*, chapter 97, translator Shastri.

<sup>29</sup>Tapasyananda, *Adhyātma Ramayana*, p. 87.

<sup>30</sup>Both works proceed to describe how Vālmīki had met seven sages who told him to ask his family whether they would be ready to reap the results of the sin he had incurred as the result of the lootings: the family answered in the negative. Thus, Vālmīki, wishing to repent for his sins, returned to the sages who advised him to repeat *mārā-mārā-mārā* (*ibid.*, p. 88) -- this is, of course, the name of Rāma recited backwards. Both accounts state that many years had passed whilst Vālmīki remained in the same place, chanting *mārā-mārā-mārā*, and during the course of time an anthill, *vālmīka*, had encompassed the whole of Vālmīki's body (*ibid.*). Hence the term "Vālmīki" -- born out of an anthill --



to Rāma and others who had died; at once the dead became alive. The traditional account, as narrated by informants at the Birmingham Vālmīk Mandir, describes how Vālmīki had buried the rest of the *amrit* under the ground and prophesied that the *amrit* would bear fruits in the *Kalyug*.

This traditional miracle of the Vālmīkis tells how, after thousands of years, in the *Kalyug*, a pond had formed at the position where Vālmīki had buried the *amrit*. This location corresponds to that of *Harmandir Sāhib*. According to Punjabi folklore, including Vālmīki tradition, a princess named Rajnī was forced to marry a *pinglā* -- a disabled leper. The traditional account narrates how one day the *pinglā* put his hand into the pond, and his hand was cured. He eventually managed to dip his whole body into the pond, the effect of which was that he was totally cured. Rajnī and her husband were able to live happily as a result of Vālmīki's curative *amrit*.<sup>31</sup>

The Vālmīki tradition recounts that, not long after the *pinglā* had been cured, Gurū Rāmdās had come across the *amrit* and laid the foundations of the holy city of Amritsar, on which *Harmandir Sāhib* was later constructed by his son, Gurū Arjan. In view of this legend the city of Amritsar is important among the Vālmīkis. The Vālmīkis express immense concern that Sikhs and Hindus do not acknowledge the *amrit* of Vālmīki as the reason for Gurū Rāmdās's founding of the Holy City of the Sikhs. They believe that this historical incident is deliberately overlooked by higher *zāt* Sikhs and Hindus, who do not wish to elevate the significance of the low-caste Gurū, and his followers.<sup>32</sup> This attitude, as will be seen in what follows, typifies

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refers to the spiritual rebirth of the now sage.

<sup>31</sup>For a detailed depiction of this miraculous story, see the Punjabi classic film "*Dūkh Bhanjan Terā Nām*".

<sup>32</sup>Information from the Birmingham *mandir*. This account of Vālmīki as responsible for the burying of the *amrit* in the first place is familiar only among the Vālmīkis. On this matter, I asked a number of Sikhs whether they knew of this account: the answers were all emphatically negative. It was remarked by the same informants that there was a recent uprising among the Vālmīkis who were angered over the sequence of events filmed by Ramanand Sagar in his mega-hit serial of the *Rāmāyana*. The community was angered that Sagar had not shown, neither in India nor Britain, the scenes relating to

Vālmīki connection with, yet rejection of, Sikhism.

In promoting the miraculous nature of Vālmīki's character, a member of the Coventry temple pointed out that Mahārṣi Vālmīki had spiritual powers, given the name *divyā śaktī*. These enabled Vālmīki to see into the future, hence Vālmīki tradition accepts that Vālmīki had composed the *Rāmāyaṇa* many centuries before Rāma had been born.<sup>33</sup>

### 6:2:5 Main teachings

At this point I need to mention, briefly, the central teachings of Vālmīki, leaving the teachings to be examined in greater detail when the beliefs of the Vālmīki community as a whole are examined in section 6:4. Important to note, is that the majority of the teachings of the Vālmīki community originate from the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, which is believed to have been composed by Vālmīki; this work, as indicated above, is also referred to as the *Mahārāmāyaṇa*.

The main themes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* extol family love and duty (as in the case of the parents' love for Rāma and his three brothers and *vice versa*, the love between Rāma and Sitā, and Sitā's obedience to her husband). Rāma does not question Daśaratha's command for exile: thus total obedience to one's parents and elders is taught among the Vālmīki community.

It seems peculiar that there is no evidence, as in the hymns of Ravidās, of any endeavour on the part of Vālmīki to denounce the prejudice of the caste system. On the contrary, there are many instances in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where it could be said that

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the burying of the *amrit* by Vālmīki. Ramanand later justified himself by claiming that, although the scenes had been shot, transmission had stopped the series beforehand; he claimed, furthermore, that his portrayal of Rāma's saga had been based on Tulsidās' version, and not on the original. This account serves to illustrate the importance of Vālmīki among his followers, but it is also important because of its overt connection with Sikh history

<sup>33</sup> Another account among the Vālmīkis is related to an incident in the *Mahābhārata*. A *mahāyag* "great sacrifice" was being performed by the Pāndavas. Nobody, including Lord Kṛṣṇa, could blow the conch, so Vālmīki was called. It was he alone who possessed the ability to blow the conch that enabled the *mahāyag* to be successfully completed.

Vālmīki actually *upholds* caste distinctions. For example, the account in the *Uttarā Kandā* illustrates the story of how a *brāhmin's* son had died due to a *śudra* practising austerities.<sup>34</sup> The only way to bring the son back to life was for Rāma to cut off the head of the *śudra* -- an act for which the gods praised Rāma:

“Well done! Well done!” overwhelming Rama with praise, and a rain of celestial flowers of divine fragrance fell on all sides, scattered by Vayu. . . . By thy grace, this Shudra will not be able to attain heaven!<sup>35</sup>

In Vālmīki's *Rāmāyana*, the divinity of Rāma is not overtly emphasized. Vālmīki has depicted Rāma as being very much human. This is a distinct indication why Rāma is not worshipped among Vālmīkis and there are no images of him in the Vālmīki *mandirs*. Furthermore, the role of the relationship of *gurū-śiṣyah*, teacher and disciple, also seems to be important for Vālmīki. Continuously in the *Rāmāyana*, Vālmīki applauds the necessity of Gurūs such as Vasiṣṭha in decision-making. Vālmīki himself becomes the Gurū of Lava and Kusha.

In line with Indian belief in general, Vālmīki believes that the loss of the ego is essential for one's happiness. In the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, the Sage Vasiṣṭha teaches the following to Rāma:

The purity of the soul appears vividly in the bright and placid countenance of a man after his egoism and its accompanying faults are melted down in the mortified mind.<sup>36</sup>

The above appears very similar to the nature of a *jīvanmukt*. It could be assumed therefore, that the goal of becoming a *jīvanmukt* is aimed at in the teachings of Vālmīki. Vālmīki teaches that the cessation of the desires of the heart and mind are the pre-requisites for ending the suffering cycle of *samsāra*:

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<sup>34</sup>*The Ramayana of Valmiki, Uttarā Kandā*, chapters 73-76, translator Shastri.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 584.

<sup>36</sup>Shastri, *World Within the Mind*, p. 91.

RAMA SAID:

“Sir! How can we put a stop to the wheel of delusion<sup>37</sup> which by its rapid rotation is constantly grinding every part of our body?”

VASISHTHA SAID:

“Know, Rama, that the revolving world is that great wheel, and the human heart is its nave or axis, which by its continuous rotation, produces all this delusion within its circumference. If, by means of your manly exertion, you can put an end to this movement of your heart, you will stop the rotation of the circle of delusion at once.<sup>38</sup>”

Thus, Vālmīki accept the Indian concepts of reincarnation, and delusion of the self through ego activity and its response to the world. Additionally they acknowledge, too, the overall Indian philosophical notion for the need to overcome desire. It is this that is the “movement of your heart”.

The importance of the Gurū and the *satsaṅg*, the gathering of the holy, are emphasized for one seeking liberation. However, the *śiṣyah* also has to contribute if true knowledge about the self is to be gained. This is implied in the following passage from the *Yoga Vasishtha*:

RAMA SAID:

“O Lord, if *Atman* knows Itself and is not influenced by any external agency, then what is the use of a *guru*, *Sat-Saṅg*, or the *Yoga*?”

VASISHTHA EXPLAINED:

“O Rama-ji, the *guru* and the scriptures show the way and give the method. They point out to the pupil: ‘Thy real Self is *Atman*’, but they cannot transmit their God-realisation to him. The pupil himself has to do the rest. The *guru* can neither think nor practise for the pupil. . . In the same way, the *guru* and the scriptures give the spiritual Truth to the pupil, but the pupil himself has to apply reflection and meditation and realise what they have taught him.<sup>39</sup>”

From the above details, concerning the life of Vālmīki, one cannot ignore that as a Hindu, the Hindu nature of Vālmīki’s teachings must have important implications for

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<sup>37</sup>Shastri adds a footnote here to highlight that this is a reference to *samsāra* (*ibid.*, p. 29).

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

the ethos of his group of followers. This presents anomalies when assessing the position of the Vālmīkis amongst the *Panth*.<sup>40</sup> It needs to be analysed, therefore, why the *chūhrās*, the majority of whom embraced Sikhism, eventually adopted a Hindu sage as their *zāt* Gurū. Interestingly, Vālmīki remains the only Gurū/leader of the group to the present day.

### 6:3 The social and religious positions of the *chūhrās* in India

Since the traditional occupation of the *chūhrās* in India, as sweepers and cleaners, involves contact with faeces and refuse, they are regarded as being highly polluted, and polluting to, the higher classes of both Hinduism and Sikhism. Another term often used to refer to the *chūhrās* is *bhangi*: this is the term of which Dumont predominantly makes use.<sup>41</sup> Like the *chamārs*, the *chūhrās* are frequently referred to as *achūt*, meaning Untouchable, thus the *chūhrās* were originally counted amongst the so-called Untouchable class -- a term not now legally acceptable though still widely used.<sup>42</sup>

Like other *Dalits*, colonies of *chūhrās* are often found on the outskirts of a village. It is not particularly clear whether the *chūhrā* and *chamār* have a hierarchical scale amongst themselves.<sup>43</sup> In the light of Dumont's work, neither of these two castes are polluting to each other.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Juergensmeyer regards the *chūhrās* as the "lowest of the Untouchable castes".<sup>45</sup> This view is also supported by

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>40</sup>The beliefs, and the anomalies these present, will be looked at in detail in section 6:4.

<sup>41</sup>Dumont, L. (1980) *Homo Hierarchicus*, Chicago: The University of Chicago, pp. 135-6, 360.

<sup>42</sup>Much of the material covered on caste with regard to the *chamārs* in chapter 5:3, is also relevant to the *chūhrās*. Therefore, there is no need to reiterate the material here. I shall, therefore, mention points that are only significant to the *chūhrās*.

<sup>43</sup>My research has indicated, as highlighted in 5:3, that the *chūhrās* are often seen as being "lower" than the *chamārs*.

<sup>44</sup>Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 135.

<sup>45</sup>Juergensmeyer, M. (1982) *Religion as Social Vision*, California: University of California Press, p. 169.

Zinkin: she states "all over India *Chamars* will have nothing to do with Sweepers".<sup>46</sup>

Whereas education was once denied to *chūhrās*, Vālmīkis in Britain and India alike encourage the education of their children, many of whom have now prospered in academic fields.<sup>47</sup> Community leaders encourage the whole community towards achieving high standards of education, which are vital for the Vālmīkis to assert their equal standing among all other communities, both Indian and non-Indian. Education is no longer denied to the Vālmīkis, both in India or abroad, they therefore make good use of a system that was once outrightly refused them.

A moving account of a few days in the life of a *chūhrā* boy, is poignantly narrated by Mulk Raj Anand in his book entitled *Untouchable*.<sup>48</sup> Anand's account is based in the early part of the twentieth century, and illustrates the position of the *chūhrās* before the Constitution of India outlawed the practice of untouchability. However, I must reiterate, that prejudice against the lower castes continues, particularly in the villages of India. In the foreword to the book, E. M. Forster highlights the harshness by which the *chūhrās* in India were treated. The passage reads:

The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound forever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them.<sup>49</sup>

Anand's main character is Bakhā, a *bhangi*, who resentfully has to announce his arrival by shouting "*posh, posh*" so that any high castes avoid touching him.<sup>50</sup> This practice has only ceased recently and it will remain in some of the traditional villages.

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<sup>46</sup>Zinkin, T. (1962) *Caste Today*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 8.

<sup>47</sup>The need to educate the community as a whole was particularly voiced during my visits to Vālmiki temples and homes. Concern was expressed over the denial of education to the elder generation of Vālmīkis who had been brought up in India. Thus many of the elder generation of Vālmīkis remain illiterate to this day.

<sup>48</sup>Anand, M. R. (1940) *Untouchable*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. vi.

My father pointed out that when he was at school in the Punjab, the *chūhrā* pupils had to warn the *brāhmin* pupils of their arrival. Ghurye also asserts that traditionally a sweeper is to carry a broom and shout out on his arrival so that others may be warned of his "polluting presence".<sup>51</sup> It is disturbing to read of how, when Bakhā and his sister, Sohini, enter a temple, they are cursed for having defiled the other attendants.<sup>52</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that when treated in the manner illustrated by Anand above, the *chūhrās* -- today referred to as Vālmīkis -- spoke out against the oppression they faced for centuries. Not all *chūhrās*, however, are followers of Vālmīki. Large numbers of *chūhrās* also converted to Christianity. A number of *chūhrās* that converted to Sikhism, remain *mazhabīs*. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of the *chūhrās*, especially in Britain, are Vālmīkis.

The Vālmīkis are a modern community; they were not to be found as a community a hundred years ago. Their origin as a community can be traced back to the early 1920s, when a movement, probably influenced by the *Ad Dharm*, emerged. Before I examine what implications the early half of this century had for the Vālmīkis, it must be mentioned that efforts to improve both their religious and social conditions were undertaken by the *chūhrās* prior to this. One such step towards achieving equality was the attraction of the apparently casteless faith of Sikhism.<sup>53</sup> McLeod is of the opinion that major influx into the *Panth* by the *mazhabīs* took place during the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> It is true to say that the *chūhrās* had already enjoyed a marked recognition in Sikhism since the time of Gurū Gobind Singh since, as noted earlier, it was a *rangretīā*, a *chūhrā*, who had bravely brought

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>51</sup> Ghurye, G. S. (1994 reprint of 1986) *Caste and Race in India*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Anand, *Untouchable*, p. 61.

<sup>53</sup> This has been examined in chapter 5:3, and also applies to the *chūhrās*.

<sup>54</sup> McLeod, W. H. (1976) *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 103.

the ninth Gurū's severed head back to the child Gurū.<sup>55</sup> Their special role in Sikh history however, has never been fully acknowledged by Sikhs generally.

On their conversion to Sikhism, the *chūhrā* initiates were probably known collectively as Rangretiā Sikhs. It is not very clear from which period in Sikh history the term *mazhabī* originated. It appears that since it was a Rangretiā who had brought the Gurū's severed head to the young Gurū, Sikhs from the lower *zāts* were probably referred to as Rangretiās initially. Eventually the term began to be used synonymously with *mazhabī*. According to Hew McLeod, the term *mazhabī* was not in regular usage in the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. Therefore, initially the term Rangretiā was probably the more usual term to refer to the low-caste converts into Sikhism.<sup>56</sup> The very fact that such a term was coined to separate the higher castes from the lower, illustrates, very clearly, that in practice the *Panth* was, and still is, ignoring the teachings of *gurbāṇī*.

Thus, from the very beginning there appears to have been distinction between the higher *zāt* Sikhs and those who were from the low castes. Like the term *harijan*, many Vālmīkis resent the title of *mazhabī*: they argue that if they are so-called Sikhs then why do they have a distinctive term to mark them out as the "religious ones". Does this mean that the higher-caste Sikhs are not religious? Even though Sikh teachings have no scope for caste discrimination, prejudice towards the *mazhabīs* did, and continues to, take place.<sup>57</sup> For example, during the early twentieth century they were not allowed to prepare the *langar*, and many higher-caste Sikhs would refuse to sit next to *chūhrās* during the communal meal -- a blatant contradiction of *gurbāṇī*. Although Gurū Nānak and succeeding Sikh Gurūs continually emphasized the

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<sup>55</sup>A traditional illustration of the Rangretiā giving the severed head of the Gurū to Gobind Rai can be seen in appendix 4:4.

<sup>56</sup>Information via e-mail from Dr. McLeod.

<sup>57</sup>The Sikh Gurūs' attitudes towards the caste system have been looked at in chapter 5:3.



irrelevance of caste distinctions among the *Panth*, it is with Gurū Gobind Dās<sup>58</sup> that the presence of the so-called Untouchables became more noticeable among the *Panth*. Gurū Nānak taught that caste had no bearing on the individual's quest for liberation, he stressed:

Recognise Lord's light within all and inquire not the caste, as there is no caste in the next world. (AG 349)<sup>59</sup>

Ultimately, the *chūhrās*, on becoming *mazhabī* Sikhs, were no better off than if they had remained trapped in the Hindu caste system. I would say they were in a deeper conflict within themselves by turning to Sikhism. Unjust as it was, Hindu law books openly sanctioned discrimination against the *chūhrās*. Sikh teachings however, repeatedly condemned their mistreatment and taught they were equal, whereas in practice Sikhs were openly disobeying the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, by perpetuating stringent caste discrimination. This must have been a bitter disappointment to the *chūhrās*, as with the *chamārs*.

Another move by *chūhrās* wishing to improve their social stance was by converting to Christianity.<sup>60</sup> Mass conversions took place between 1880 and the 1940s.<sup>61</sup> The attraction of the Christian faith for the lower classes was that it taught equality for all in the eyes of God, and promoted the education of the lower castes.<sup>62</sup> In the long run, the *Ārya Samāj* did not succeed in re-converting the lower castes, since a large number of *chūhrās* continue to be Christians today.

It is as a result of the efforts of the *chūhrās* as a whole that the Vālmīki

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<sup>58</sup>Before he became the tenth Gurū, Gobind Singh was known as Gobind Dās.

<sup>59</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 1164. Gurū Nānak further emphasized that all are equal in the eyes of God: "The four castes of warriors, priests, farmers and menials are equal partners in divine instruction." (AG 747), *ibid.*, p. 2437.

<sup>60</sup>Noticeably, of all the Indian Christians, the majority percentage is made up by converts from the *chūhrā zāt*.

<sup>61</sup>Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 185.

<sup>62</sup>The *Ārya Samāj* was in part a response to the Christian missionaries in India. By then, Christianity had managed to convert many individuals from the lower classes, Dayananda's main objective was to "reclaim" the converts by preaching that the *Ārya Samāj* had no place for caste distinctions, and

community as it is today, came into being. As mentioned previously, the Punjabi movement of the *chūhrās* was probably influenced by the *Ad Dharm*. This view is supported by Juergensmeyer, who has remarked that the Vālmīki movement could be “regarded as a direct replacement for the Ad Dharm”.<sup>63</sup> Many *chūhrās* had initially become members of the *Ad Dharm*, though for a short period only.<sup>64</sup> Since the members of the *Ad Dharm* were predominantly *chamārs*, who had taken Ravidās as their *Ādi Gurū*, the *chūhrās* eventually formed their own Vālmīki Sabhā, taking Vālmīki, the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as their own religious founder. The acceptance of Vālmīki by the *chūhrās* was taken on the grounds that he had been acknowledged by the higher classes and, more importantly, as previously highlighted, the *chūhrās* believe him to have been of their *zāt*. This, as Juergensmeyer highlights, “served as an appropriate symbol of lower-caste cultural integrity as well as a link with the high tradition.”<sup>65</sup>

Juergensmeyer also points out that the first reference to the Vālmīki Sabhā was made as early as 1910.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, around this time, the *Ārya Samāj* encouraged the development of the Vālmīki community due to its Hindu appearance and social customs. It was also the *Ārya Samāj* that encouraged the promotion of ṛṣi Vālmīki.<sup>67</sup> The *Ārya Samāj* promoted the awareness of the Vālmīki community so that more and more *chūhrās* would remain in the so-called Hindu fold of Vālmīki rather than convert to Islam or Christianity in the hope of equality.<sup>68</sup> Although the early Vālmīki Sabhā retained contacts with the *Ad Dharm*, a distinction between the two low-caste

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Christian converts were brought back to Hinduism by the *shuddi*, purification rite.

<sup>63</sup>Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 169.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>68</sup>It was not long however, before the Vālmīki Sabhā began distancing itself from the *Ārya Samāj*, probably as a result of a realization concerning attempts of the *Ārya Samāj* leaders to control the affairs of the Sabhā. Also, the *Ārya Samāj* is translated as the “Society of the Aryans”; surely the *ādivāsīs*

movements always remained.<sup>69</sup> The most obvious distinction was that the Vālmīki Sabhā promoted Mahārṣi Vālmīki as its *Ādi Gurū*, whereas the *Ad Dharm* promoted Gurū Ravidās as its *Ādi Gurū*: both movements were similar, however, in their determination to strive for religious and social improvement.

After India gained independence, the working conditions for Vālmīkis -- many of whom continue in their traditional occupation -- have generally improved. This, as noted by Juergensmeyer, is probably a result of the joint efforts of the Sweeper's Union<sup>70</sup> and the Vālmīki Sabhā. Increasingly, the *chūhrās*, along with the *chamārs*, are moving out of agriculture -- an aspect of Punjabi life dominated by the *jaṭ* Sikhs. In their place, new immigrants are becoming the employees of the *jaṭ*s, most being members of the peasant castes from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and are referred to as *bhaiyās*.<sup>71</sup>

In summing up the efforts towards social and religious betterment by the *chūhrās*, it is apparent that they, including non-Vālmīkis -- that is, those who have converted to Christianity and Sikhism -- are no longer going to tolerate the atrocities committed against them by both higher-caste Hīndus and Sikhs. Today the followers of Vālmīki resent being called *chūhrā*; they are Vālmīkis, who are to be treated in the same way as the other inhabitants of India. In their veneration of Mahārṣi Vālmīki as their Gurū, the Vālmīkis have shown clearly that they are no longer going to be pushed into the sides of Sikhism and Hinduism where they were never integrated as equals. Today they have their own religious system and their own temples in which no other than a Vālmīki himself/herself can dictate what should and should not be

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were unable to fit into this context?

<sup>69</sup>Juergensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision*, p. 171.

<sup>70</sup>This was formed not long after the Vālmīki Sabhā, also by *chūhrās*. Whereas the Vālmīki Sabhā was primarily concerned with religious improvement, the Sweepers' Union was concerned with the social uplifting of the Vālmīkis, *Religion as Social Vision*, pp. 173-9.

<sup>71</sup>Ballard, R. "Migration in a wider context: Jullundur and Mirpur compared" in *New Community*.

done. This is a great achievement when one bears in mind that there was a time when entry to temples was denied to the *chūhrās*.

Since the Vālmīki community is a religious organization in its own right, an examination of the beliefs of the Vālmīki community is pertinent at this point.

#### **6:4 Philosophy: Rāmāyaṇa or Gurū Granth Sāhib?**

The majority of the beliefs held by the Vālmīki community originate from the *Yoga Vasishtha*, and not the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.<sup>72</sup> At present, the Vālmīkis are in the process of making the *Yoga Vasishtha* openly available to the community by translating it into Punjabi.<sup>73</sup> When widely used the *Yoga Vasishtha* will probably take on more significance than readings from the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself. This matter is expressed to the Vālmīki community via the *Vālmīk Jagrītī*.<sup>74</sup>

In Coventry, like the other Vālmīki centres, it is the *Yoga Vasishtha* that is the basis for the majority, if not all, philosophical teachings.<sup>75</sup> The *Yoga Vasishtha* is composed of a total of thirty-two thousand verses.<sup>76</sup> Since the whole of the *Yoga Vasishtha* is difficult to acquire, I shall be using Atreya's translation of the main verses.<sup>77</sup> In addition, I shall also be using the *Yoga Vasishtha Sara*,<sup>78</sup> an English translation of selected verses.<sup>79</sup>

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II (1983): 123-4.

<sup>72</sup>The Coventry temple is an exception to this, its implications are examined in section 6:6.

<sup>73</sup>Vālmīkis envisage that this translation will then be used in all their places of worship, rather than by the Bedford and Oxford communities only, as is the case at present.

<sup>74</sup>"Let us unite to create a Yoga Vasishtha in simple Punjabi. This will be read in all Vālmīki Religious places and homes and will be a guide to every one who reads it. Until we all read from one holy book, we cannot unite." (p. 27)

<sup>75</sup>On the whole, there is no marked insistence among Vālmīkis to follow the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs that are laid down in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Importantly, at Coventry the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is read from once a month. For the rest of the time it is the Punjabi translation of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* that is recited.

<sup>76</sup>*Vālmīk Jagrītī*, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup>Atreya, B. L. (1993) *The Vision and the Way of Vasishtha*, Madras: Indian Heritage Trust.

<sup>78</sup>This title is translated as "The Essence of Yoga Vasishtha".

<sup>79</sup>*Yoga Vasishtha Sara*, (1994) Tiruvannamalai, South India: Sri Ramanasramam.

The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is very specific concerning who can read its philosophy. The text is intended for those who aspire to achieve liberation. It is not for one who is totally ignorant, neither for one who already has gained knowledge about the true Self. Therefore, it is for those who wish to gain knowledge about reality.<sup>80</sup> The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* conveys the belief that the Sage Vasīṣṭha, whose dialogue with Rāma is the basis of the text, was divinely appointed by the God Brahmā to help liberate the people of India.

At this point it is necessary to examine the main concepts of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* in order to investigate what implications these have for the Vālmīki followers, and, moreover, to assess whether the Vālmīki community, with regard to its beliefs, is identifiable within a Sikh boundary of definition.

#### 6:4:1 Reality

The over-riding emphasis of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is its exposition of the theory of *advaita* -- non-duality/monism. Immediately I must stress that, overall, there are no monistic teachings to be found within the metaphysics of Sikhism.<sup>81</sup> Atreya has stated that the great philosopher of *advaita*, Śaṅkara himself, as well as the authors of many passages of the *Upaniṣads*, were influenced by the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*.<sup>82</sup> The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* teaches that the world is in actual fact an illusion, *māyā*, it only exists via the imagination of the ignorant being -- ignorant in the sense that he/she is unaware that only *Brahman*, the Absolute exists. Therefore, in reality, there is no such entity as an individual soul or self, everything is *Brahman* in which no dualities exist. For the

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<sup>80</sup>The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* expresses this point explicitly in its following words:

"He is entitled to (study) this scripture, who has the firm belief, "I am bound; let me be liberated", who is not much ignorant, and not wise either." (*The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 29, translator Atreya).

<sup>81</sup>Monism is a feature of one of the Hindu schools of thought, that of *advaita vedānta* which, in its present form, is traced back to Śaṅkara, whose dates are traditionally around 788-820 CE. (Flood, G. [1996] *An Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 92). Śaṅkara's teachings are derived from the great Hindu texts, the *Upaniṣads*.

<sup>82</sup>Atreya, B. L. (1966) *The Yogavasīṣṭha and its Philosophy*, Moradabad: Darshana Printers, p. 3.

wise person, who has realized the truth, the world is seen as mere amusement.<sup>83</sup> The wise ones have realized the monistic nature of reality; to them the world is as a dream:

Firmly convinced of non-duality and enjoying perfect mental peace, yogis go about their work seeing the world as if it were a dream.<sup>84</sup>

It is only the knowledge of *Brahman-ātman* -- the soul within is *Brahman*, there is no individuality, everything is *Brahman* -- which is true realization of reality: this is what the wise person, the *jīvaṃmukt*, has realized. Any other knowledge is merely illusionary. The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* states the following with regard to what real knowledge is:

(The Wise) understand Self-knowledge (alone) as knowledge. On the contrary, those other knowings are (only) false knowledge on account of non-perception of the real truth (or the essence).<sup>85</sup>

The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha's* perception of reality as monistic is, as remarked earlier, in sharp contrast to the dualism of Sikh teachings.<sup>86</sup> While Sikhism teaches that the essence of God dwells within the heart of each human being -- and in this sense each human is divine -- it is important to note that the essence is not the Absolute Itself. This is essentially *nirguṇa*, beyond the three *guṇas*, qualities that characterize a being. The theory of *advaita*, which forms the core of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, is therefore much more in line with Hindu monistic traditions -- it has no scope within Sikh metaphysics.

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<sup>83</sup> "The entire world is perceived with amusement as jugglery by a person endowed with reflection, free from fever and possessed of a cool mind, having abandoned all this cage of mental agony like the worn-out skin (abandoned) by a snake." (*The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 138, translator Atreya).

<sup>84</sup> *Yoga Vasīṣṭha Sara*, 10, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 139, translator Atreya.

<sup>86</sup> Although, according to Sikh philosophy, the individual is inseparable from God, a distinction between the soul and God always remains. So, although the individual soul, according to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is totally dependent on God -- the realization of which is a prerequisite on the path towards *mukti* -- there is no concept that the individual soul actually *becomes* the Absolute: in this sense a duality will remain at *mukti* between the soul and the Absolute, *Wāhegurū*. So, whereas the analogy of a drop of water being absorbed into the vast ocean and thus losing all individuality is true of the teachings of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, it is best to use the analogy of a fish for which water is vital for survival when considering Sikh teachings: although the fish (each individual soul) is totally dependent on the water (the Absolute) for its survival, it does not *become* the water.

Whereas the *Yoga Vasishtha* views knowledge as overcoming the grand illusion, that is, *māyā*, where the created world is a mere product of the mind, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* asserts that the world is real, it has been created by God. However, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* accepts *māyā* in the sense that it is the false attachments to the world that result in a separation from God. Reality, according to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is different from the conception of it in the *Yoga Vasishtha*, for the former teaches that true realization consists of acknowledging one's love for God, *dualistically*. An existence without God will lead to further entrapment in *samsāra*. The need to overcome attachment to *māyā* is repeatedly stressed by Gurū Nānak.<sup>87</sup>

The philosophy of the *Yoga Vasishtha* teaches that each mind produces a different perception of the world, thus in this sense one cannot paint a generalized picture of what the illusion depicts to the ignorant. This point is summarized in the following verse:

The illusion of the world is produced in every mind differently and severally.<sup>88</sup>

The fact that the world is like a dream, or a void, is emphasized over and over again:

That visible object is indeed not absolute till it is our object of experience. We (as experiencing individuals) and this (visible) world are just clear void. As that (void or dream-world) is, so is the entire (world).<sup>89</sup>

The world in which we live, nevertheless, is "real" in the sense that we operate within it. But it is not *actually* created as it is according to Sikh philosophy. It is the enlightened *ātman* that is no longer affected by the grand-illusion. *Māyā*, according to the *Yoga Vasishtha*, therefore, is, perceived as "real" by those who are on the lower level, that of *avidyā*. Those on the higher level of truth have realized it is only *nirguna Brahman* that exists. The thought of the *Yoga Vasishtha* therefore, is quite opposite to

<sup>87</sup>"The false mammon-worshipper likes not the truth. Bound to duality, he comes and goes" (AG 109). (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 362).

<sup>88</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasishtha*, 329, translator Atreya.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, which teaches that, although a *gurmukh* lives without attachment to worldly desires or pleasures, the world in which one lives is not an illusion.<sup>90</sup> The belief of the Vālmīkis, with regard to reality, therefore, is a concept that does not fit in with the Sikh perception of corporeality.

#### 6:4:2 The self

Since reality, according to the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, is monistic, the Self (*ātman*) is *Brahman*. As long as the "visible object" that is illusion exists, the liberation of the Self into its true being that is *Brahman*, cannot occur. Therefore, the aim is to overcome the illusory lures of the mind and realize the true Self:

The world, you, I and the like of false nature are called "the visible object." As long as it arises (or exists), so long there is no liberation.<sup>91</sup>

So how does one manage to overcome *māyā* and realize the true nature of the Self? How is knowledge obtained? This is possible only when the ego and attachment to worldly pleasures are subjugated. This will occur via the path of *jñāna yoga* whereby true realization of the Self as *Brahman* is perceived.

Clearly, the orientation of the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, which forms the basis for Vālmīki belief, is not in line with Sikh teachings -- in this case Vālmīki beliefs are more akin to Hindu philosophy. Sikhism stresses liberation through *bhakti yoga*. The *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* on the other hand, promotes *jñāna yoga*, which is the *only* way to overcome duality. When reality is perceived as being non-dual, as it is in the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, then knowledge consists of the realization of *Brahman* as the Only Absolute, the Only Existence. Thus, in this context there is no scope for any feelings of individuality.

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<sup>90</sup>Nevertheless, *māyā* causes bondage in both the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, however the perception of what is *māyā* differs radically in both scriptures. There is no such emphasis in Sikhism to transcend the world -- it is the life of a householder, the *grihast*, which is repeatedly stressed in *gurbānī*.

<sup>91</sup>*The Vision and the Way of Vasiṣṭha*, 1598, translator Atreya.



### 6:4:3 Attachment and ego

It is ignorance that causes the Self to be trapped in the continuous cycle of *samsāra*. In line with Sikhism, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* also teaches that it is *only* those who have shunned ignorance who will achieve *mukti*:

Rāma! Men of lofty intellect have crossed over, in a moment, the ocean of worldly existence which is difficult to be crossed, merely by the raft which is the application of knowledge.<sup>92</sup>

When one becomes attached to worldly life, he/she becomes attached to the desires associated with it. The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* teaches that, in the case of the ignorant being, an attachment is formed to this illusion which would be inimical to the path of liberation.<sup>93</sup> One who has deserted the ego becomes tranquil in all situations, since he/she is no longer affected by them, as asserted in the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*:

He is declared as tranquil for whom there is no thought of "I" in the worthless (body and the like) even in endless calamities and during long periods of universal destruction.<sup>94</sup>

Like the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*'s concept of the *gurmukh*, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* teaches that once the ego has been overcome, desire for worldly pleasures, including attachment, will also be conquered. Then and only then will an individual be on his/her way towards liberation.<sup>95</sup> Thus, only the *gurmukh* has the possibility of *mukti*.

The concept of *ahaṅkāra* is reminiscent of the concept of *haumai*, found in the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs. The *haumai* is the ego, the producer of separateness; it causes the individual to believe that he/she is not dependent on *Satgurū* for survival. The effect of *ahaṅkāra*, according to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, is that it causes an illusion on the part of the ignorant being, who perceives *Brahman* as the "other" instead of the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>95</sup> "When the mind has become tranquil and has given up the desire for enjoyment and when the burning of attachment of the entire group of senses (to worldly objects) has been accomplished, the pure words of the preceptor rest in the mind (of the disciple) as drops of water coloured by saffron (settle) on a

true Self. Thus the effect of both *ahaṃkāra* and *haumai* is that the individual forms attachments to worldly things that result in entrapment in *samsāra*. Therefore, both the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* are similar in their insistence on eradication of the *ahaṃkāra/haumai*. On this matter, Gurū Angad stresses that:

The nature of ego is this, that man goes about his business in pride. The trammel of ego is this that man, again and again, enters into existences. (AG 466)<sup>96</sup>

The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* mentions steps that are to be taken for one aspiring to achieve liberation. One way is by associating with the *satsaṅgat*, that is, keeping the company of good, wise people, who will influence the aspirant.<sup>97</sup> Since the *satsaṅgat* is composed of those with tranquil mind and heart, this reflects the real nature of one's true Self, therefore enabling one to be in harmony with reality.<sup>98</sup> Thus, it appears that the *satsaṅgat* is of more value than the practice of austerities and rituals. This teaching of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is very much in line with Sikh theology that accentuates keeping the company of *Sants*, good people; this was stressed by the Sikh Gurūs:

In the society of saints, Lord's elixir is obtained, and meeting the Guru, the ear of death departs. (AG 598)<sup>99</sup>

The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, in line with Sikhism generally, highlights the worthlessness of rituals and their subservience to the association with good people (verses 216-27). This rejection of rituals raises an interesting point. If Vālmīki is the author of both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, then why would he devalue external rituals such as pilgrimages, austerities and religious sacrifices in the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* on the one hand,

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pure white cloth" (*ibid.*, 198-9).

<sup>96</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 1539.

<sup>97</sup> "Contentment, company of the good (or the virtuous), reflection (or investigation of the Truth) and tranquillity – only these are the means of men in crossing over the ocean of worldly existence." (*The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 201, translator Atreya).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>99</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 1967.

and yet uphold them on the other hand in the narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa*?<sup>100</sup>

To solve this apparent confusion, one must return again to *advaita* philosophy. Basically, ignorant beings are on the lower level of understanding. They perceive *Brahman* as *saguṇa*, thereby forming a personal relationship with It in the form of deities, particularly *Īvara*. *Īvara*, according to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, is mere illusion, a product of the mind -- which is responsible for producing perceptions. This level is necessary, nevertheless, to allow the consciousness to evolve, in order to be able to reach the higher level where it is only *nirguṇa Brahman* that is reality.<sup>101</sup> It is *jñāna yoga* whereby realization that transcends ordinary consciousness to the higher level becomes possible. This is, therefore, opposed to *bhakti yoga* that is practised by those on the lower level -- the level of ignorance. So the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is best understood by those who have managed to rise above the lower level and discard the *Rāmāyaṇa* as now insufficient on the path towards reality.<sup>102</sup> Here, it is likely, then, that Vālmīki philosophy follows Hindu *advaita* belief in accepting a higher and lower level of approaches to the divine.

To clarify the two levels, Subramuniyaswami succinctly highlights four stages on the path to liberation in Śaiva Hinduism -- the four stages, which are evolutionary, incorporate both the lower and higher levels of reality.<sup>103</sup> As stated above, the lower level needs to be transcended before the aspirant can progress to the higher level. The path of enlightenment, according to Subramuniyaswami, is divided into the four stages of:

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<sup>100</sup>The *Rāmāyaṇa* is pervaded with accounts of sages performing severe austerities, and accounts of King Dasaratha and his sons performing sacrifices -- in particular the *aśvamedha*, the horse sacrifice.

<sup>101</sup>"Devotion to God Viṣṇu is invented for the sake of the progress (or employment) in the auspicious state of (Self-knowledge), of foolish persons running away from scriptural injunction, effort and reflection (or investigation)." (*The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 1667, translator Atreya).

<sup>102</sup>The Vālmīki community nevertheless utilize both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, and collectively refer to both scriptures as the *Mahārāmāyaṇa*.

<sup>103</sup>Subramuniyaswami, S. S. (1993) *Dancing with Śiva: Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism*, India and USA: Himalayan Academy, pp. 107-115.

- (1) *charyā* -- which is virtue and selfless service;
- (2) *kriyā* -- which is worship, in the form of *bhakti yoga*;
- (3) the stage of *yoga* -- which is meditation;
- (4) *jñāna* -- which is "the wisdom state of the realized soul."<sup>104</sup>

Subramuniaswami stresses the point that "the four *pādas* [stages] are not alternative ways, but progressive, cumulative phases of one path."<sup>105</sup> The *ātman* may pass through many countless births before the final state is realized.

These four stages basically correspond to the approaches to God in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*. The first and second stages are concerned with *bhakti yoga* that must, in the third and fourth stages, be transcended by *jñāna yoga*. The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* teaches that knowledge about the Self is also to be obtained through meditation -- this is the third stage in the Hindu context as described by Subramuniaswami above. Meditation, according to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is geared towards the inner Self that is the Absolute.<sup>106</sup> The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* further recommends that when practising meditation, the mantra *OM* should be used. This is to be accompanied by *prāṇayāma* -- breathing techniques -- used by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains for the evolution of the consciousness of the self.<sup>107</sup> Together, these practices will enable one to obtain knowledge of the true Self. Since it is the true essence within that is being meditated on, there is no scope for image worship or for invocations through *mantras*. This echoes the Sikh Gurūs' teachings on interiorized religion: in which there is no need for external aids. Thus the *mantra* of *Wāhegurū* or *Satgurū* is sufficient for Sikhs (AG 686).<sup>108</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 1691, translator Atreya.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 2007-09.

<sup>108</sup> I must point out that the *mantras* of *Wāhegurū* or *Satgurū* are not used by the Vālmīkis on the whole, with the exception of some *mazhabī* Sikhs. Vālmīkis tend to use the Hindu *mantra* of *OM*.

## 6:4:4 God

The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* expounds the theory of *nirguṇa Brahman* that is within, and therefore physically indescribable. It teaches:

The worship of God consisting of artificial worship (of idols and the like) is declared for those who have intellects which are not perfected and who indeed have undeveloped and delicate minds. On account of his being of the nature of perception (or sensation) situated within the reach of everybody, nothing whatever such as invocation or Mantra-s (or sacred formulæ), is employed for him.<sup>109</sup>

Atreya, above, has misleadingly translated the term “him” for the Absolute. Since *Brahman* is *nirguṇa*, It has no gender or form and is thus expressed as *Tat*, meaning “That” -- hence the *Upaniṣadic* utterance of *Tat Tvam Asi* -- “That Thou Art”. Another important discrepancy that I need to underline here is that the concept of *avatārs*, in this case of Rāma, does not fit in with the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* concept of *nirguṇa Brahman*. However, it is well to remember that the concept of Rāma as an *avatār* is not prominent in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, for here the main character is very much a human being. It is the later adaptations of Vālmīki's narrative, that is, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmacaritāmānas* of Tulsidās that extol the concept of Rāma as an *avatār* of Viṣṇu. This, then, would partially remove the difficulty of compromising a concept of *nirguṇa Brahman*.<sup>110</sup> But the tenor of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a whole suits a Vedic conception of a plurality of deities and not a monistic Absolute.

According to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* theory of *nirguṇa Brahman*, however, there is no scope for a personal God. It has to be said, however, that humanity at large cannot

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<sup>109</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 1682-3, translator Atreya.

<sup>110</sup> The Vālmīkis, therefore, have no specific orientation towards Rāma; if pictures of him are present then these will be in relation to his involvement with Mahārṣi Vālmīki only. In accordance with the teachings of Vālmīki, the community does not offer *bhakti* to Rāma. Therefore, the concept of *avatārs* is not acceptable given the *nirguṇa* concept of the divine; this again is in line with Sikh thought. In the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* itself, there is no mention, in the dialogue between Rāma and the Sage Vasīṣṭha, of the importance of Rāma as an *avatār*. Therefore, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* views such worship to *saguna* forms of the Absolute as being secondary to meditation on one's inner Self, which is *Brahman*. This, as I have said, is similar to Sikh teachings that emphasize interiorized religion: since the essence of the divine is within, no outward ritualism or devotion to images is needed.

cope with this idea of a totally transcendent Absolute, it needs some tangible aspect on which to focus. It thus follows that the concept of God in the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is quite different to the practices or beliefs concerning God that preside among the majority of Vālmīkis. This is no less obvious in Sikhism where *Tat* -- the indescribable Absolute -- is referred to as "God" by the general community.

Vālmīki is commonly referred to as *Bhagwān Vālmīk Jī* by his followers. Furthermore, even though outward devotion is seen as secondary, and the *nirguṇā* concept of God underpins the religion, Vālmīkis offer *bhakti* to Vālmīki, who is *Bhagwān* for them. Here, there is a good deal to suggest, tentatively, a divinisation of Vālmīki by his followers -- almost a monotheistic devotion. On the other hand, it was also stressed that the Supreme God for the Vālmīkis is the *nirguṇ brahm, Brahman*. This term, *brahm*, used by the Vālmīkis, is Hindu in character. Thus in practice, there is a contradiction in the philosophy and actual practices of the Vālmīkis. Soba, in the *Vālmīk Jagrītī*, writes that Vālmīki is called *Bhagwān Vālmīk* due to his being described by Pandit Bakshi Ram as being *Brahm Giānī*, that is, one who has knowledge of *Brahm*.<sup>111</sup> Soba further clarifies that the phrase *Wohi Ek Brahm*, "That One God" -- which is recited by Vālmīkis -- praises the formless God, but the same incantation then goes on to praise *Vālmīk Bhagwān Kī Jai*, "Victory to God Vālmīki".<sup>112</sup> This illustrates the contradiction between theory and practice superbly. However, although Vālmīki is referred to as *Bhagwān*, he is not to be regarded as an *avatār*, that is, *sagūṇa Brahman*, in the same way as Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. According to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* all humans are ultimately *Brahman*, in the same way as Vālmīki is. However, since Vālmīki has realized *Brahman*, this puts him in a special position as having ultimate knowledge that can be passed on to others. Thus he is *Bhagwān* to his

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<sup>111</sup> *Valmīk Jagrītī*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

followers and will enable them, too, to realize the truth about the real Self. This elevation of Vālmīki to the status of *Bhagwān* is strictly against *gurbāṇī*, and compromises any attempts to suggest a Sikh leaning of the Vālmīkis.

Nevertheless, the concept of God in both Vālmīki and Sikh theology has clear similarities. The basic creed of Sikhism, the *Japjī* refers to the Ultimate as *Akal Murat* and *Ajūnī*: immortal and beyond births and deaths. In *gurbāṇī*, the *nirguṇa Brahman* became *sagūṇa* in order that It may be loved by humanity. Ultimately, however, God remains *nirguṇa*, totally formless and unconceptualized. Thus the *nirguṇa Brahman* of both the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is totally beyond the apprehension of the human mind. With regard to the *nirguṇa* nature of God, Gurū Nānak states the following:

Without seeing God, one can say not aught regarding Him. How can one describe and narrate Him, . . . (AG 1256)<sup>113</sup>

The *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, like the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* also teaches that *Brahman* has no form:

Know that as the worship of the Deity, in which the Self-god is worshipped by flowers in the form of tranquillity and awareness. The worship of a form is not worship.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, like the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, strongly discourages any kind of worship in which the Absolute is given a form. In the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha Brahman* is one's inner Self. It has to be realized inwardly; only then is *Brahman*, one's real Self, experienced.<sup>115</sup>

The *sagūṇa* forms of God such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Adityā, the Sun, and Brahma are depicted by the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* as being a mere product of the consciousness of the

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<sup>113</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 4143.

<sup>114</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasiṣṭha*, 1688, translator Atreya.

<sup>115</sup> "This One is indeed not far away, nor near. He is not unattainable; nor is he in an inaccessible place. He is of the nature of the light of one's own Bliss. He is obtained only from one's own body" (*ibid.*, p. 1678).

ignorant self, and consciousness of an object, as opposed to Pure Consciousness that has no subject-object differentiation:

This Siva, wearing the moon, is mere Consciousness. Viṣṇu, the Lord of Garuḍa, is mere Consciousness. The Sun is only mere Consciousness. Brahmā, the lotus-born, is mere Consciousness.<sup>116</sup>

Worshipping any other than the Ultimate Reality, which is the Self, will not bring liberation. The egoistic consciousness, often depicted as the *jīva*, must be overcome to transcend false perceptions of *saguṇa Brahman*. It is only by one's own efforts in inquiring about the true nature of the Self that ultimate bliss is to be obtained. Thus the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* advocates liberation through one's own efforts rather than reliance on any outside agent such as a personal God. It is *giān*, also referred to as *jñāna*, "knowledge" about *nirguṇa Brahman*, and not *bhakti* that will bring about *mukti*. This is summarized in the following verses of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*:

The Principle of Consciousness residing in the cave of the heart is the principal and eternal form of the Self. The one with the conch, disc and the mace in the hands (i.e., the form of Viṣṇu) is the secondary form.<sup>117</sup>

In knowing one's own Self, the principal means is investigation arising from human effort. The secondary means is divine favour and the like. Be one devoted to the principal means.<sup>118</sup>

Like the *advaita* of Śaṅkara true knowledge is that *Brahman*, the Absolute, is Pure Consciousness:

This Consciousness here without any object to be known is that eternal Supreme Spirit (or *Brahman*). This Consciousness here, associated with the object to be known is called this knowing (or grasping of objects).<sup>119</sup>

The verse indicates that whereas *Brahman* is Pure Consciousness, as is the true Self, it is the ego-consciousness that sees the objects of the world.

*Bhakti* to a personal God is foolish since, according to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 1677.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1713.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 1715.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 469.



aim is to become one with the Only Reality which is the Self. *Bhakti*, offered in the hope of receiving divine Grace therefore is useless for one aspiring for the truth:

This Mādhava (or Viṣṇu), even if worshipped for a long time and possessed [*sic*] of great love (for the devotees), cannot give Knowledge to one without investigation. Whatever is obtained by anybody anywhere, that is acquired by the employment of one's own power; not from another anywhere.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, it is only by *giān* that the true Self is realized. There is no sense here of divine Grace -- the Sikh *Nadar* -- of the necessity for God to grant liberation, or even that one is on the path to it. Self effort is essential in the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*. Moreover the superiority of one's own efforts over *bhakti* is alien to Sikh theology. And yet, it has to be said that in *practice*, the Vālmīki community, as we shall see below, *do* offer *bhakti* to the Supreme God. So although the philosophy of *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* states that *bhakti* has no scope in monistic terms of reality, in practice the community has overt signs of a monotheistic approach to divinity.

#### 6:4:5 *Karma*

Unlike the hints of a concept of predestination found in Sikh teachings,<sup>121</sup> the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is emphatic about the idea that the past *karma* of each being is responsible for the individual's present condition. The *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, because of the monistic nature of its perception of reality, leaves no scope for the belief that all happens in accordance with the *Hukam*, the sovereign Will, of God -- the underlying principle of Sikh philosophy.

Vastly different from Sikh metaphysics, therefore, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* teaches that it is only by one's own actions, one's own efforts, that liberation can be realized. The following verse from the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* summarizes the need for human effort:

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 1672-3.

<sup>121</sup> The concepts of *karma* and predestination in Sikh teachings have been discussed in detail above, in chapter 5:5:3.

One's friend is oneself alone. One's enemy is oneself alone. If the self is not protected by oneself, then, there is no other means.<sup>122</sup>

In comparison to Sikh metaphysics, the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* states that it is through the human form that Self-realisation in *mukti* is possible because of the sense of discrimination and reasoning. This is identical to Sikh belief where the human birth is regarded as the highest of all births. A point of departure, nevertheless, is again apparent in the following verse of the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* that compares one who is reliant on the Will of God to an animal, as the result of being on the lower level of devotion to God:

"One would go to heaven or hell impelled by God." He (who thinks so) is ever dependent on another. He is only an animal. There is no doubt (about this).<sup>123</sup>

This is alien to Sikh belief where each being is believed to be predestined according to the *Hukam* of God.<sup>124</sup> The *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* is adamant in its teachings that there is no such thing as predestination: it is our past *karma* that is responsible for our present circumstances. Since the concepts of *Hukam* and *Nadar* are central to Sikh teachings, any hint of a Sikh alliance of the Vālmīkis is considerably compromised as a result of the concept of *karma* found in the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*.

#### 6:4:6 *Mukti*

The nature of the state realized at *mukti* is very different in Sikh theology to that of the metaphysics of the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*. In the former, at death the *ātman* will reside in total bliss with *Wāhegurū*; the soul will not become *Wāhegurū*. Hence, in this sense, a duality remains at *mukti*. According to the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, at liberation there is total monism, the self exists blissfully as the Ultimate Reality, *Brahman*, or *Brahm* as the

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<sup>122</sup>*The Vision and the Way of Vasiṣṭha*, 161, translator Atreya.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>124</sup>Sikh philosophy teaches the Sovereignty of God in all matters. *Wāhegurū* has the power to overcome any natural law or state at any time in accordance with the *Hukam*. Therefore, each being is granted *mukti* only by the Grace of God. See chapter 5:5:3 above. See also my M.A. thesis titled: "An Investigation of the Doctrines of Grace and Predestination in the Hymns of Guru Nanak", (unpublished) 1996: University of Wales College of Cardiff.

Vālmīkis call It. There is a total reabsorption into the true Self. This, as has been shown, has strong overtones of the Hindu *advaita* system, and stands in sharp opposition to the dualism of Sikh teachings -- indicating the non-Sikh orientation of the Vālmīkis.

Atreya points out that there are seven stages on the path of self-realization, this is a "gradual process which may extend to any length of time or to several lives of the individual, in accordance with the intensity of his aspiration and earnestness of his efforts."<sup>125</sup> These seven stages of knowledge are present in the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*.<sup>126</sup> They appear to correspond to the four states of consciousness -- those of the waking state, dreaming sleep, dreamless sleep and finally *turiyā*. The first two states, as Billington comments, are dualistic due to the presence of the ego that gives rise to the mind; this is described as the "normal state of consciousness."<sup>127</sup> It is with the third state that the ego is overcome. Here, since there is no mind, the consciousness cannot give rise to perceptions: it follows, thus, that dualities are overcome, resulting in the final state of liberation -- *turiyā*.

Important to note is that, since the stages towards realization, both in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, involve the abandonment of desires, liberation is not seen as the fulfilment of a desire. Liberation is not desired, rather it is *realized* when true knowledge of the Self is found, as remarked by the author of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*:

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<sup>125</sup> Atreya, *The Yogavasīṣṭha and its Philosophy*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>126</sup> 1. *Śubhecchā* - virtuous desire to transcend *samsara*. 2. *Vicāranā* - investigation or reflection into the nature of the Self. 3. *Tanumānusū* - the illusions of the mind become less affective to the aspirant. 4. *Sattvāpatti* - when the sense of Pure Being has been attained. 5. *Asamsakti* - attachment to worldly objects is overcome. 6. *Padārthābhāvanī* - the illusion is overcome. 7. *Turyagā* - Oneness as *Brahman* is fully realized. This stage is *nirvana*, or liberation. (*The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 2095-2102, translator Atreya).

The one bound by desire is indeed bound. Liberation would be the destruction of desires. Having completely renounced desires, you give up even the desire for liberation.<sup>128</sup>

So, according to the *Yoga Vasishtha*, in reality there is neither bondage nor liberation -- only *Brahman* is reality.<sup>129</sup> The distinction between bondage and *nirvāṇa* is made only by those who are ignorant of their true state.<sup>130</sup>

#### 6:4:7 The *jīvanmukt*

The *jīvanmukt* who has obtained *nirvāṇa* whilst still alive, resides in the stage of *turyāga*. This being has overcome all duality and has realized that the world is a mere illusion. The *jīvanmukt* is the ideal according to both the *Yoga Vasishtha* and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*; his/her qualities are depicted by the *Yoga Vasishtha* as follows:

He is declared as a liberated person for whom, possessed of a mind turned inward, an object of pleasure is not for pleasure (i.e., does not produce delight) and trouble is not for grief (i.e., does not produce grief).<sup>131</sup>

The *Gurū Granth Sāhib* describes a *jīvanmukt* as one who, having realized that he/she cannot live as being separate from God, is liberated whilst still in the physical body and, thus, one who has lost all desires and attachments to the physical world (AG 1343). Since the Sikh concept of the divine is panentheistic, the divine is always greater than the created universe, its systems such as *karma* and *samsāra*, and all phenomena within it.<sup>132</sup>

The *Yoga Vasishtha* talks of two states of liberation. One is the state that the *jīvanmukt* has obtained, that is, liberation whilst still in the human body. The other state of liberation is that achieved at the dissolution of the physical body, whereby

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<sup>127</sup> Billington, R. (1997) *Understanding Eastern Philosophy*, London: Routledge, p. 35.

<sup>128</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasishtha*, 1986, translator Atreya.

<sup>129</sup> Thus for the wise one, there is no desire to be liberated from any bondage, since there is no such thing.

<sup>130</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasishtha*, 1645, translator Atreya.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 2296.

<sup>132</sup> In Sikhism, due to the sovereignty of God, the doctrines of *Nadar* and *Hukam* override all systems, both concepts reinforcing panentheism. Hence one becomes a *jīvanmukt* only in accordance with the *Hukam*.

there is no more *samsāra*, and the being returns to its true state as *Brahman*.<sup>133</sup> But there is no spiritual distinction at all between a *jīvanmukt* and one who has died the physical death and achieved liberation.<sup>134</sup> This concept of the *jīvanmukt* is akin to monistic *Upaniṣadic* thought, where true realization ends all duality. At liberation, the Self does not assume any form; as the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* puts it, there is no more “I” or “not I”:

The One liberated without a body neither appears, nor disappears, nor is extinguished. He is neither existence nor non-existence. He is not far off. He is neither “I” nor “not I”, nor another.<sup>135</sup>

Although the *jīvanmukt* may seem to be physically bound by the human body, he or she is spiritually free.<sup>136</sup>

#### 6:4:8 Caste

Given that the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* expounds *advaita*, it is to be expected that caste distinctions have no relevance since, ultimately, each being is of the essence of the One Reality. However, there is an obvious distinction between those with a lower and higher perspective of reality. Those who are of the ignorant nature will fail to perceive the Oneness of *Brahman* and, therefore, will view the differences between castes as important in the society in which they live. Caste distinctions are characteristic of those with a lower level of perception. The following verse from the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* suggests that one living in ignorance is better off living like an outcaste:

O Rama, it is indeed nobler to wander begging about the streets of the outcasts (*chandālas*), an earthen bowl in hand, than to live a life steeped in ignorance.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 1627-9, translator Atreya.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 1630.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 2452.

<sup>136</sup> *Yoga Vasīṣṭha Sara*, 16, p. 9.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, p. 3.

But, justification for caste distinction is given in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyana* itself.<sup>138</sup> Of most significance, and rather contradictory to the beliefs of the Vālmīkis, is the story, cited above in 6:2:5, relating to the death of a *brāhmin*'s son, found in *Uttarā Kandā*, chapters 73-76 of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyana*.<sup>139</sup> It seems rather strange that Vālmīki, the apparent author of both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, would actually be promoting caste prejudice in such a manner, if he were a member of the lower *zāts*.

On the other hand, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* mentions that for the *jīvaṇmukt* the duties of caste, *varṇāśramadharmā*, have no restrictions, the *jīvaṇmukt* is totally detached from them:

Abandoned by (or freed from) the restriction of the scriptures relating to the duties of caste and conduct according to the stage of life, he goes out of the snare of the world like a lion out of a cage.<sup>140</sup>

Yet, even the reference to *varṇāśramadharmā* suggests acquiescence in it. Importantly, the words of Gurū Nānak have deep implications for the social condition of Vālmīkis when considering the atrocities associated with caste distinctions. On the matter of caste, Gurū Nānak repeatedly emphasized that:

Recognise Lord's light within all and inquire not the caste, as there is no caste in the next world. (AG 349)<sup>141</sup>

It was due to the apparent casteless faith of Sikhism, as previously remarked, that many *chūhrās* became *mazhabī* Sikhs.

Whatever the teachings regarding caste may be in the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* or *Rāmāyana*, the Vālmīkis, having their own religious community, insist on being

<sup>138</sup>In the epic, there are continuous references to the importance of *brāhmins* in the performance of rituals.

<sup>139</sup>*The Ramayana of Valmiki*, 2306, translator Shastri. The story, which was looked at briefly in section 6:2:5 above, narrates how a *brāhmin*'s son has died as the consequence of a *sūdra*, by the name of Shambuka, having been practising austerities. It is only when Rāma slays Shambuka that the son is brought back to life. Thus, the original epic itself upholds caste privileges by devaluing the practice of austerities by a *sūdra*. The point must be remembered, however, that the first and last books of the *Rāmāyana* are later additions.

<sup>140</sup>*The Vision and the Way of Vasīṣṭha*, 2306, translator Atreya.

<sup>141</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 1164.

treated as equals among Indians. They refuse, especially in Britain, to be treated as Untouchables. In their disgust of the slaying of Shambuka, the Vālmīkis do not regard Rāma as an *avatār* of God. On this point, *The Service* reads as follows:

This Rama who mercilessly took away the life of Sambuka for no other fault than that he was making penance is held to be the Avatar (Incarnation) of Vishnu! If there were kings like Rama now! Alas! What would be the plight of those who are called Sudras? <sup>142</sup>

For the Vālmīkis, caste plays no role. In answer to my question as to what the attitude towards caste is among the Vālmīkis, I was told by a panel of members of the Coventry temple that:

Valmiki community does not recognise the concept of caste. It is believed to be an evil innovation that came into being after the arrival of Aryans who were attracted to India by the richness of its land, culture and wealth. <sup>143</sup>

In summary of the beliefs found among Vālmīkis, it is clear that the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* expounds the *advaita* theory, which is also found in the monism of the *Upaniṣads*, and which is very much akin to the teachings of the *advaitist* Śāṅkara. In this respect therefore, reality as taught by the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* is very different to that found in the teachings of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. I suggest that the move away from images, among the Vālmīkis, is more an influence of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, rather than the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. In other words, there is more of a Hindu than Sikh influence on Vālmīki theology. However, a few concepts are akin to those found in the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs, the most significant one is that of the concept of a *nirguṇa* Absolute. Like Sikh teachings, the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* also devalues any worship of *avatārs*. Because of the rejection of images in both scriptures, neither Sikhs nor Vālmīkis participate in image worship. Since realization comes from within, both the

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<sup>142</sup> *The Service*, Vol. 1, Issue 9, August 1983, p. 17.

<sup>143</sup> Information received in written form from a panel of community members in Coventry.

*Yoga Vasishtha* and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* view outward ritualism as unnecessary. Vālmīki is referred to as *Bhagwān*, rather like Gurū Nānak is referred to as Gurū Nānak Dev Jī, and both are seen as preceptors who have the purpose of guiding humanity towards *mukti*. The table below lists the main features of Sikh philosophy, and comparable ideas found in the metaphysics of the Vālmīkis.



<i>Belief found in Sikh religion</i>	<i>Present among the Valmikis</i>	<i>Absent among the Valmikis</i>
Monotheism		#
Absolute is <i>nirguna</i>	#	
<i>Saguna</i> essence of God is present in creation		#
Panentheistic concept of the divine		#
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself		#
Predestination		#
Total reliance on God		#
Human birth as highest	#	
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God		#
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>	#	
Becoming a <i>jīvanmukt</i> is the ideal	#	
Detachment from worldly lures	#	
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire	#	
Advocation of <i>bhukti</i>		#
Interiorized religion	#	
Rejection of image worship	#	
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	#	
Rejection of yogic practices	#	
Worthlessness of rituals	#	
<i>Nām simran</i>		#
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>		#
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>		#
Company of the <i>satsangat</i> is essential	#	

**Table 16. Conformity of beliefs found among the Vālmīkis and the general Panth.**

As can be seen, there are a number of similarities in belief. A major departure from Sikh beliefs is that the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* views *bhakti* as inferior to *jñāna* – this concept is alien to Sikhism which places the love of God on the highest level. The main concepts that inhibit any Sikh affiliation, therefore, are the marked differences in theology between the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. These are illustrated in the table below.

Concept found in Vālmīki belief	Totally absent from general Sikh belief	Expressed differently in Sikh belief
Use of <i>Yoga Vasiṣṭha</i> as basis for religious philosophy	#	
Monism	#	
Non-reality of the world	#	
<i>Jñāna yoga</i> higher than <i>bhakti yoga</i>	#	
<i>Mukti</i> is responsibility of the individual alone		<i>Mukti</i> is impossible without the <i>Nadar of God</i>
Usage of the <i>mantra OM</i>		Predominant use of <i>Wāhegurū</i> and <i>Satnām</i>
No reliance on the <i>Hukam</i> of God		Everything depends on the <i>Hukam</i>
<i>Karma</i> alone is responsible for the present situation of each individual <i>Mukti</i> is absorption into <i>Brahman</i>		Each being is predestined  <i>Mukti</i> is a blissful, dual relationship with the Absolute
Non-theistic		Wholly theistic

**Table 17. Differences in belief between Vālmīkis and the general *Panth*.**

It is important to note therefore, that as far as beliefs are concerned, there is more to separate the Vālmīkis from Sikhs than to show any indication of a Sikh orientation. Thus, a result of their mistreatment whilst in the *Panth*, the Vālmīkis use of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* as the basis of their religious philosophy aims to distance them as far from the philosophical teachings of the Sikh faith as possible. It is important now to look at the presence of the Vālmīkis in Britain in order to assess their Sikh/non-Sikh affiliation in practice.

## 6:5 Development of Vālmīki centres

In Britain today, there are a total of five Vālmīki temples. These are situated in Coventry, Birmingham, Southall, Wolverhampton and Bedford. Communities of Vālmīkis also exist in Oxford and Glasgow, but since the numbers there are small, there are no Vālmīki temples there as such.<sup>144</sup> The names of the temples explicitly declare that these are the Vālmīki places of worship, and they are not referred to as being *gurdwārās* by the majority of Vālmīkis.<sup>145</sup> In the case of the Coventry temple, it is called *Jagat Gurū Vālmīk Ji Mahārāj Temple*.<sup>146</sup> In Birmingham it is distinguished as *Bhagwān Vālmīk Ashram*. In Southall and Bedford it is referred to as *Bhagwān Vālmīk Mandir*. The very names of the centres indicate Hindu rather than Sikh practice and, moreover, are explicit indicators for the non-Sikh nature of the religious places of worship.

It is Punjabi that is taught in the temples and the service is also conducted in Punjabi. This is because the community is wholly of Punjabi origin. With regard to religious centres, the aim of the Vālmīk Sabhā of Southall is to "Help Vālmīkis to build their own Mandirs (Temples) in every town and village."<sup>147</sup> The temples are registered as charities, and voluntary donations from members of the community help raise funds for the upkeep of the temples.

I was told that the Southall centre can be regarded as a "head office", since it is here that the Vālmīki committee is based: this is known as the *Shri Guru Valmik Sabha, Southall*.<sup>148</sup> Responsibilities of the head office include dealing with political as well as social problems concerning the Vālmīki community. Additionally,

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<sup>144</sup> Rather, a hall is usually hired for special functions.

<sup>145</sup> Although as indicated earlier, many higher *zāt* Sikhs insist on calling them the *chūhrā gurdwārās*.

<sup>146</sup> See appendix 4.5.

<sup>147</sup> *Valmik Jagriti*, 3rd Issue, p. 6.

<sup>148</sup> Subsequent visits to Birmingham and Bedford however, revealed that at present there is no central Sabhā: elections will be taking place soon and only then will the central office be decided.

international affairs and immigration problems are also dealt with.<sup>149</sup>

The Coventry temple was the first to be established in 1978 as a Vālmīki centre in Britain. However, the first community of Vālmīkis was established in 1960, in the Bedford house of the late Bhagat Singh. This is also where the first Vālmīki programme was held.<sup>150</sup> From here, the group of men took it on themselves to establish communities of Vālmīkis in the major cities of settlement in Britain. In 1963, a fund had been collected by the group of men to be sent towards costs for building a Vālmīki temple in Amritsar. Thus, it was through the collection of funds that more and more Vālmīkis in Britain became aware of the efforts to organize the whole community. The Birmingham community had been established by 1962, the Oxford community by 1966. The Bedford temple was established in 1981.

### **6:6 Prevalent practices of the Vālmīkis**

The Vālmīki temples which, as noted above, are often referred to as *mandirs*, are very important since it is here that the community meets as followers of Vālmīki. It is also here that the younger generation is made aware of its identity and religious orientation.<sup>151</sup> The Vālmīki temples have their own priests, often called *pūjārīs* -- again a Hindu term. Occasionally the priests are referred to as *giānīs*, as in the case of the Coventry temple. The term is also used for the visiting *giānīs* from India. These terms are, in contrast, Sikh. The *pūjārīs* and *giānīs* claim they are Vālmīkis. In their efforts towards asserting equality, the Vālmīkis do not seek the assistance of the

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<sup>149</sup>One of the major tasks of the head office has been to exclude the Coventry temple from the Central affiliation due to Coventry's housing of the Sikh scripture. This will be looked at in detail in section 6:6:4:1 below.

<sup>150</sup>Bhagat Singh had migrated to Britain from Singapore; there, too, he had been involved in the organization of the Vālmīki community of Singapore. A few others worked closely with Bhagat Singh to organize the Vālmīki communities in Britain. One of these men was Mr. Niku Kalyan, who had migrated from Kenya. I was told that Mr. Niku Kalyan had already built a Vālmīki temple in Kenya before coming to Britain. Others included Mohan Lal Garewal, and Mahendar Lal Kalyan (President of the Bedford temple). Literature for the community at that time was being written by Pandit Bakshi Ram.

<sup>151</sup>Having their own temples is seen as a tremendous achievement by the Vālmīkis, since at one time in

*brāhmīns* to perform any rituals whatsoever, the message given to Vālmīkis is that they themselves will undertake all rituals, as highlighted in the *Vālmīk Jagrītī*:

7. Have our Vālmīki Pujaris perform our rituals.<sup>152</sup>

### 6:6:1 Worship

Worship in the Vālmīki temples, with the exception of Oxford and Bedford, takes the form of reading from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>153</sup> The service also includes the singing of *kārtan*, usually in the praise of Vālmīki. This is followed by the *aratī* hymn and, finally, *ardās*. The main day for worship is Sunday, like most other religious centres in Britain. The *aratī* hymn and the *ardās* are prominent features of the worship, both of which take on a distinctively Vālmīki character.<sup>154</sup> The *ardās* recited during the commencement of the service in a Vālmīki temple is distinct from the *ardās* recited in a *gurdwārā*.<sup>155</sup> The first few lines of the *ardās* clearly highlight its differentiation from the Sikh *ardās* as stated in the *Rehat Maryādā*. The Vālmīki *ardās* appears as follows and, interestingly, it illustrates an anthropomorphic nature of the divine that is quite contradictory to the conception of a totally transcendent Absolute of the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*:

*Ardās Samey Bhagwān Jī Ham Hain Khade Dewar  
Hath Dekar Rakhnā, Benatī Baram Bār,  
Man Kī Mālā Chalti Jaye Suwas Suwas Par Nāth  
Vishay Vikaron Se Prabhū Rakhnā Dekar Hath.*<sup>156</sup>

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Indian history they were denied entry into the Hindu temples.

<sup>152</sup>*Valmīk Jagrītī*, 3rd Issue, p. 6.

<sup>153</sup> Additionally verses from the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* are reflected on in Putjabi. In the case of Coventry, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is also read from once every month on *saṅgrānd*.

<sup>154</sup> The beginning section of the *aratī* is recited as follows: *Wohi Ek Brahm, Wohi Ek Brahm, Vālmīk Jai Jai, Bhagwān Vālmīk Jai Jai, Satgur Vālmīk Jai Jai, Sagal Shrishṭī Ke Malik, Sagal Shrishṭī Ke Palak, Mukti Ke Ho Datā. Gurū Vālmīk Jai Jai, Swamī Vālmīk Jai Jai, Satgur Vālmīk Jai Jai, . . .* An English translation of this is: "That is the One Absolute, That is the One Absolute, Victory to Vālmīk, Victory to God Vālmīk, The Lord and Sustainer of all that is, The Lord of liberation, Victory to Gurū Vālmīk, Victory to Swamī Vālmīk . . ." The reference to "God Vālmīk" alongside the "One Absolute" indicates that it is Vālmīki who imparts true knowledge about the Ultimate Reality. See also appendix 4:1.

<sup>155</sup> See appendix 4:2.

<sup>156</sup> The full *ardās* can be seen in appendix 4:2.

At the time of *ardās* dear God we are at your doorstep  
Keep us always protected, this is our request to you  
Help us to continuously devour thee  
Keep us protected always.

The very fact that the *ardās* is not from the *Rehat Maryādā* and has no connections whatsoever to Sikh history, clearly portrays the Vālmīki message that they are different from Sikhs. The service ends with the distribution of *prasād*. If *laṅgar* is being served, then the congregation will eat together, regardless of an individual's caste or background. I must emphasize that, apart from the Coventry temple, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is not used in any manner. In Coventry, when the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is read from at each *saṅgrānd*, it is followed by the Vālmīki *araṅī* and the Vālmīki *ardās*. The central Sabhā has expressed its concern over Coventry's usage of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* alongside the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This practice is against the Vālmīki Sabhā's requirement of how things should be done in a Vālmīki place of worship. This specification states:

13. Vālmīki Mandirs to preach Valmikism only. A Valmiki Mandir must not have any other form of worship except *Puja and readings*, from the Ramayana and Yoga-Vasistha.<sup>157</sup>

The Southall Sabhā also requires the Vālmīki temples to recite the *manglacharn* before any reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Yoga Vasistha* is to begin. The *manglacharn* appears at the very beginning of the *Yoga Vasistha*. It is to be recited by the reader, prior to the reading of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Yoga Vasistha*.<sup>158</sup> These practices, *per se*, are reasons why the Vālmīkis cannot be regarded as Sikhs.

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<sup>157</sup> *Valmik Jagriti*, 3rd Issue, p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> The English translation of the *manglacharn* is as follows: "Salutations to that reality in which all the elements and all the animate and inanimate beings shine as if they have an independent existence, and in which they exist for a time and into which they merge. Salutations to that consciousness which is the source of the apparently distinct threefold divisions of knower, knowledge and known; seer, sight and seen; doer, doing and deed. Salutations to that bliss absolute (the ocean of bliss) which is the life of all beings whose happiness and unfoldment are derived from the shower of spray from that ocean of bliss." (*Valmik Jagriti*, p. 32)

## 6:6:2 Celebrations

The highlight of the Vālmīki calendar of events is the birth anniversary of *Bhagwān* Vālmīk. It is celebrated on different dates by each of the Vālmīki communities. In 1997, the official date was set at October 5: it was on this day that the celebrations took place in India. Oxford and Coventry held their celebrations on 11 October, Birmingham on 19 October,<sup>159</sup> and Bedford on 25 October. The reason for this was pragmatic: the general arrangement was that each of the communities arranged for party coaches to visit each of the centres in turn to mark the anniversary.

The programme is in the form of readings from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, accompanied by *kīrtan*, *arātī*, *ardās*, and lectures on the life of *Bhagwān* Vālmīk and the plight of the Scheduled Classes in India because of the higher-caste Sikhs and Hindus. The whole of the *Rāmāyaṇa pāth* is undertaken which usually starts a week before the day of celebration. *Giānīs* are invited from India, who sing and deliver lectures.<sup>160</sup>

During the service, different centres perform their own *kīrtan*. A particular emphasis is placed on insisting that the congregation should live as Vālmīkis only, and not be caught between two faiths -- a clear indication of the non-Sikh orientation of the community as a whole. Of major significance to the present research, speakers highlighted that Sikhism, as well as Christianity, should be left behind and *only the Vālmīki way of life should be practised*. The question of remaining within Hinduism is not really an issue, since the Vālmīkis were never accepted as equals in the religion that justified the prejudice against them; they do not readily call themselves Hindus in any case. The Vālmīki following is referred to as a *qaum*.

The celebration of *dīwālī* has a particular importance among the Vālmīkis,

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<sup>159</sup>See appendix 4:3.

<sup>160</sup>Additionally, pandits and other well-known persons of the particular town or city are usually invited

since it originates from the story written by Vālmīki. It takes the form of lighting *dīvas* and candles both at home and in the *mandir*.<sup>161</sup> Important to note here, is that all the temples, including Coventry, remarked that it is because of the end of exile of Rāma and Sitā that *dīwālī* is celebrated. None mentioned any reason to celebrate *dīwālī* as commemorative of the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison -- the main Sikh custom.

*Baisākhī* is also celebrated by the Vālmīkis. Repeatedly, however, I was told by informants at the Southall and Birmingham *mandirs*, that *baisākhī* is celebrated as the harvest festival of India only: their celebration of *baisākhī* has no connection with the creation of the *Khālsā* by Gurū Gobind Singh. Interestingly, however, the Coventry temple has the opposite view: it is the creation of the *Khālsā* that is exactly the reason behind its celebration of *baisākhī*. I suggest this is an outcome of the *mazhabī* Sikh nature of its members. I was told at Coventry that the creation of the *Khālsā* has a special significance for the Vālmīkis, since members of their community could initiate into the *Panth* freely, with equality to all others.

Importantly, the *nisān sāhibs* of the various Vālmīki temples are not changed on *baisākhī*, unlike Sikh practice. Rather this takes place on another celebratory day, known as Flag Day. Each centre has its own Flag Day on different dates in the year. With regard to celebrating the birthday of Gurū Nānak, it is only the Coventry temple that does so. Again, this emphasizes the more overt Sikh aspects of Coventry's community. Vālmīkis at Coventry also mentioned that the *shahīdī dīwās* -- the martyrdom of Bhāi Jiwān Singh Rangretiā -- is also commemorated. Vālmīki temples also honour the birth anniversary of *Shri Shri 108 Satgurū Giān Nāth Jī* -- a recent

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to take part in the anniversary celebrations of Mahārṣi Vālmīki.

<sup>161</sup>A service is held by some of the centres, otherwise *dīwālī* is regarded as being more of a family celebration.



saint in the Vālmīki community, who is now deceased.<sup>162</sup>

### 6:6:3 Vālmīki weddings

I must emphasize that weddings in the Vālmīki community are performed in different ways by the various temples. It is up to the families concerned as to the way in which the couple are to be married. Weddings are, nevertheless, performed endogamously. I was told that it is permissible for a Vālmīki to marry a *mazhabī* Sikh or a Christian from the *chūhrā zāt*. It was emphasized by the Coventry community that, although the caste system is not recognized, members are encouraged to marry endogamously. The wedding I attended in Coventry was very similar to any other Punjabi wedding. The *milnī* and reception of the *bharat* took place before the main service. During this particular wedding the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* was read -- a practice possible only at the Coventry temple -- and the couple took four *pheras* to the *lāvān* hymn composed by Gurū Rāmdās, around the *palkī* in which both *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* were housed.<sup>163</sup> There was nothing different about the wedding from other Sikh weddings, apart from the praising of Vālmīki and the form of the *ardās*. At present, efforts are being made by the Southall and Oxford communities to standardize the wedding ceremony. Therefore, it is a possibility that Vālmīki marriages will become standardized throughout the affiliated Sabhās, in the future. This, however, will exclude Coventry since it is not in the affiliation of Vālmīki Sabhās.

An informant at the Southall temple, reiterated that marriages are performed to the wishes of the families concerned.<sup>164</sup> The Southall Sabhā has published a pamphlet on how Vālmīki weddings, according to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* of Vālmīki, should be performed. The pamphlet is entitled: *Yoga Vasīṣṭha Vich Viyāh dā Sanklip*, "The

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<sup>162</sup> A portrait of Giān Nāth can be found in appendix 4:9.

<sup>163</sup> The groom wore a red turban and the bride was dressed in the traditional red clothes. The register was also signed whilst the couple were seated in front of the *palkī*.

<sup>164</sup> Mr. Soba, of the Southall Sabhā, further told me that it is up to members of the community whether

marriage ceremony according to the *Yoga Vasishtha*". The idea is that marriages should be performed around *agni*, as this was the practice in the time of Vālmīki; this is known as the *vedī* marriage, and is Hindu in origin. This is also how the Sikh Gurūs were married. Since the Southall Sabhā is primarily concerned with doing things the Vālmīki way, it explicitly states, in the *Vālmīk Jagrītī* that:

It is about time we do our marriages the Valmiki way. We have been getting married by either Hindu Priests or by Sikh Granthi. Our marriages must now be performed by our own Pujaris. We have to praise our Bhagwan Valmik Ji and use Shloks from his Holy Books. The marriage of Queen Chudala and King Sikhidhwaja in the Yoga-Vasistha and the marriages of Rama and his brothers in Ramayana are the types of marriages for us Valmikis. We here published a book on the marriage chapter 106 of the Yoga-Vasistha (in Punjabi).<sup>165</sup>

The number of *pheras* in all the Vālmīki temples is four. In Southall and Birmingham, the four do not correspond to the four lines of the *lāvān* hymn. Rather, they are undertaken to symbolize respect for religion, respect for the householder's life, the bearing of children and, fourthly, for the wife's obedience to her husband.

For the Oxford community, plans are underway to amend the constitution to render *agni* as unnecessary for the wedding ceremony. At Oxford, no *pheras* take place; rather verses from the *Yoga Vasishtha* are read out to the couple while they remain seated. A member of the Bedford community is usually present to register the wedding, since the Oxford community has no registrar of its own.

#### **6:6:4 Layout of Vālmīki temples**

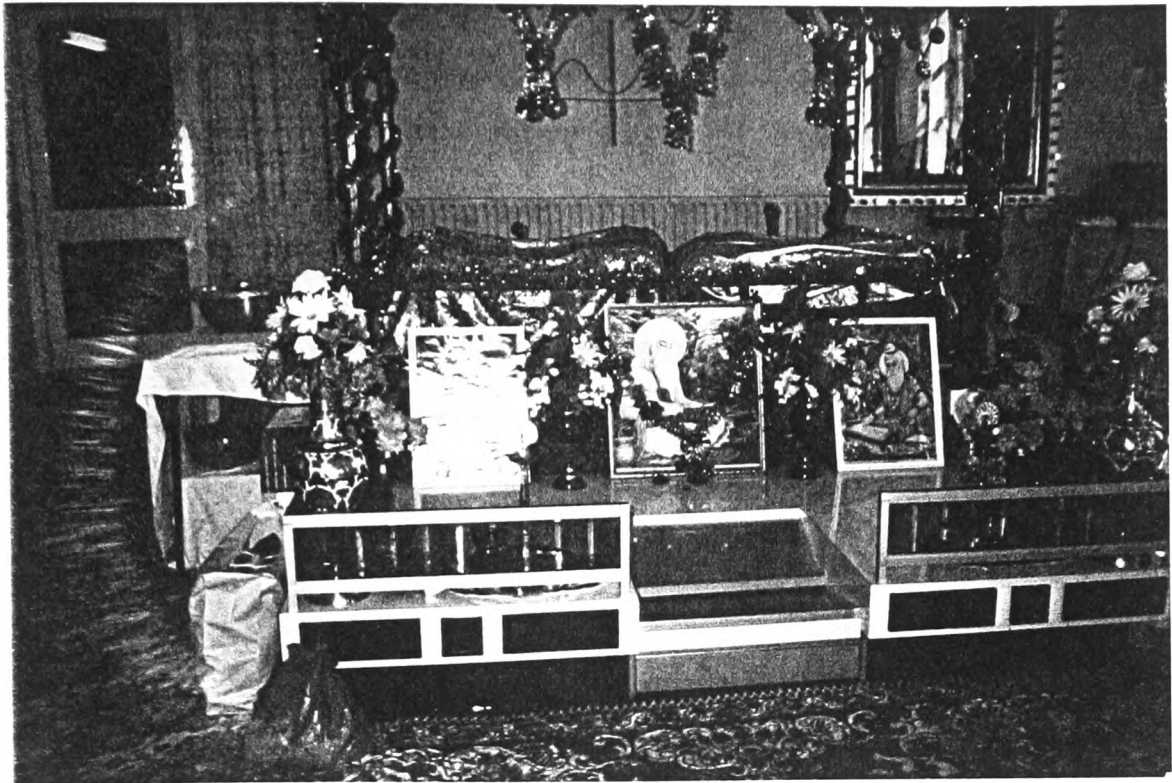
##### **6:6:4:1 Coventry**

The layout of the Coventry temple is very important with regard to the religious affiliation of the Vālmīkis. As soon as one enters the main hall of the Coventry temple, one is confronted by something that is very unusual for a religious place -- the *palkī* houses both the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Rāmāyana* -- a Sikh scripture and a

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they wish to have a *vedī* marriage or whether they wish to take *pheras* around the *Rāmāyana*.  
<sup>165</sup>*Valmīk Jagrītī*, p. 38. The book referred to is the pamphlet on how weddings should be performed.

Hindu scripture side-by-side. This is illustrated in the photograph below:



Also illustrated in the above picture are representations of both Gurū Nānak and Vālmīki, again, side-by-side.<sup>166</sup> The fact that the temple houses a copy of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* makes it a Sikh place of worship, since any building that installs the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* becomes a *gurdwārā*. In accordance with the *Rehat Maryādā* however, it is forbidden to install any other religious book alongside the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. On this matter the *Rehat Maryādā* states:

(e) No other book, however holy and readable, is to be installed in a Gurdwara as the Holy Guru Granth Sahib installed.<sup>167</sup>

It would appear that there is, in actual fact, no contradiction of the *Rehat Maryādā* since the Vālmīki temple is not a *gurdwārā* in the strict sense due to the installation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. On the other hand, according to Sikh belief as indicated above, any

<sup>166</sup>The representation of Gurū Nānak is placed in front of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* on the left, the representation of Vālmīki is placed in front of the *Rāmāyaṇa* on the right.

<sup>167</sup>*Amritsar Rehat Maryada*. (1978) Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. p. 6.

building that houses a copy of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* becomes a *gurdwārā*. Furthermore, strict regulations exist with regard to the proper treatment of the Sikh scripture, which is the eternal Gurū.

With regard to identity, the installation of the two scriptures would suggest a Sikh and Vālmīki orientation. However, like the other Vālmīki centres, Coventry, too, talks of its identity as being Vālmīki. The *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is installed for the simple matter that many members of the community had at one time been *mazhabī* Sikhs. This was the religion by which they were raised and, hence, with which they are familiar. Indeed, the Coventry community has a higher number of *mazhabī* Sikhs than other centres.<sup>168</sup> Many informants were eager to remark that the essence of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is contained in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that was composed long before it. When asked about the importance given to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in the Coventry temple, they alleged that:

Guru Granth Sahib is also used as a Holy Scripture for worship in our temple. Basic teachings as well as philosophies in Guru Granth Sahib are also found in Holy Ramayan as well as Yog Vashisth and there are more mentions of the name Rama in Guru Granth Sahib than one can find even in Holy Ramayan.<sup>169</sup>

Nevertheless, one cannot escape the fact that the *mazhabī* Sikhs are combining aspects of two religions when attending a Vālmīki temple; this is more so in the case of the Coventry temple with regard to both the *mazhabīs* and non-*mazhabīs*. I illustrated earlier, that the beliefs of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* differ on a number of prominent beliefs but, clearly, in the case of the Coventry temple *practices* indicate a considerable Sikh affiliation.

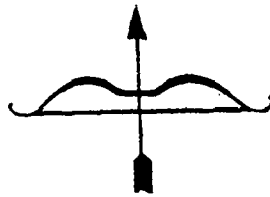
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<sup>168</sup>See appendix 4.6.

<sup>169</sup>Information received in written form from a panel of members of the Coventry temple. I have been unable to verify whether the name Rāmā is used more in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* than the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Shackle has indicated that in the hymns of Gurū Nānak, found in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, the term occurs 285 times (Shackle, C. [1995 rp of 1981 edn] *A Gurū Nānak Glossary*, New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, p. 254).

In the Coventry temple, the Sikh character is enhanced by the many pictures of Rangretiā giving the head of Gurū Tegh Bahādur to the child Gobind. This illustrates well the community's desire to retain its links with Sikh history. Additionally, a few pictures of the Sikh Gurūs are also present. On the other hand, the Vālmīki identity is established by the fact that there is no *Ik-Onkār* or *Khandā* symbol present; like all Vālmīki centres, it is the Vālmīki symbol of the bow and arrow that is displayed.<sup>170</sup>

This appears as<sup>171</sup>:



The Vālmīki character of the Coventry temple is further highlighted by the visual stress it places on Vālmīki.<sup>172</sup> Coventry's "Sikhness" -- in particular the instalment of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* -- has caused great concern to the Southall Vālmīki Sabhā that, in its efforts to proclaim the Vālmīki identity, dislikes the use of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* in a Vālmīki temple. This is the main reason, as mentioned earlier, that Coventry is no longer a part of the Central Sabhā. Of major significance to the present research is the fact that the Central Sabhā (and its affiliated members) has no desire to be labelled as a Sikh-orientated community -- thus accentuating the difference between being Vālmīki and being Sikh.

As previously indicated, although the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is present in the Coventry temple, it is only read from once a month on *sangrānd*. It is interesting to note that the reader of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* does not have to be *kesdhārī*; in most cases it is a *monā*. For the remainder of every month, emphasis is placed on the

<sup>170</sup>I was told that the bow and arrow are "a symbol of power and our ancient origin" by the Coventry panel of informants.

<sup>171</sup>This illustration has been taken from the letterhead of the Vālmīki Centres. Interestingly, although Coventry is not in the affiliation of Central Sabhās it nevertheless utilizes the bow and arrow as the symbol of the community.

<sup>172</sup>A huge portrait of Vālmīki is visible on the wall behind the *pālkī* (see appendix 4:7). Other paintings

Punjabi version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Unlike a *gurdwārā*, it is not necessary for those present to cover their heads, although the majority of females do tend to do so. Like a *gurdwārā*, the temple has a *nisān sāhib* which is also saffron in colour; however it bears the Vālmīki symbol of a bow and arrow and not a *Khanda* or *ḥ*.<sup>173</sup> *Laṅgar* is usually served once a month on *saṅgrānd* when the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is read from.

Each of the three temples has a room for *laṅgar*. During the service, *kaṛāh prasād* is distributed every day of the month. These practices are obviously Sikh-orientated and are a feature of many of the Vālmīki centres. However, a brief mention needs to be made here to the fact that, with the exception of Coventry, the other centres do not refer to the *prasād* as *kaṛāh prasād* -- rather the term used is *prasād* -- more in line with Hindu practice. Similarly, the term *laṅgar* is used rather than *gurū-dā-laṅgar* -- again, deliberate measures to be distinct from Sikhs.

#### 6:6:4:2 Birmingham

The layout of the Birmingham temple is very different to that of Coventry. In Birmingham total emphasis is placed on Vālmīki, and Vālmīki alone. There is no visible connection of the layout with Sikhism at all. It is only the *Rāmāyaṇa* that is installed; there is no *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. There are no pictures of Sikh Gurūs, nor representations of the Rangretiā connection to Sikhism.<sup>174</sup> Like the Coventry temple, there are a few pictures of Ravidās present -- an indication of the close contacts between the Vālmīkis and Ravidāsīs. But the focus is unmistakably on Vālmīki.<sup>175</sup> The picture below shows the *palkī* of the Birmingham temple, in which the Punjabi *Rāmāyaṇa* is housed, surrounded by pictures of Vālmīki:

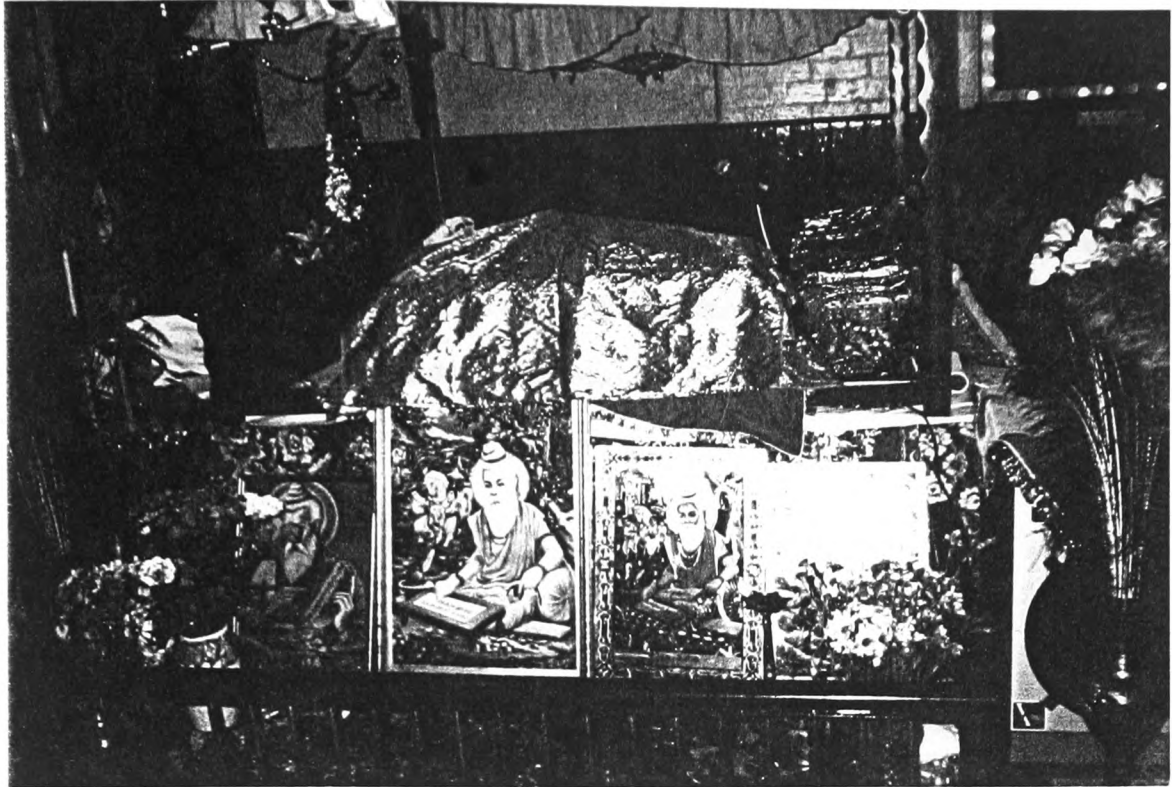
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on the walls highlight those parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story in which Vālmīki plays an active role, such as the creation of the *śloka*, looking after Sitā, and raising Lava and Kusha.

<sup>173</sup> A flag outside a religious building is also a common feature of Hindu temples.

<sup>174</sup> The only visible association with Sikhism is the fact that there may be the occasional *kesdhārī*, especially in the case of Vālmīki *giānīs* visiting from India.

<sup>175</sup> See appendix 4:8.



*Prasād* and *laṅgar* are also served in the Birmingham temple. This practice, I must emphasize, remains Sikh in ethos. The distribution of *prasād* on the other hand is both a Hindu and Sikh practice. The decor of the walls is surrounded by pictures relating to Vālmīki, in particular, the role he plays in the narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. No pictures of Sikh Gurūs are present. Outside the building there is a pink *niśān sāhib*; there are no intentions however to distinguish the building as a *gurdwārā*. The temple is always referred to as the *mandir*, never the *gurdwārā* -- a clear avoidance of a Sikh identity. On a normal Sunday worship day, the number of *kesdhārīs* was none. The majority of males tended not to cover their heads, whereas the females generally did. All these factors suggest that the orientation of the Birmingham temple is exclusively Vālmīki: apart from a negligible number of *mazhabīs*, there is no association with a Sikh affiliation.

### 6:6:4:3 Southall

Like the Birmingham temple, the Southall *mandir* also stresses its Vālmīki leaning. This is to the extent that it is a life-size statue of Vālmīki that is housed in the *palkī*, with the *Rāmāyaṇa* being placed alongside, but outside of the *palkī*. This is due to the belief that Vālmīki is more highly regarded than the *Rāmāyaṇa* that he himself composed. The layout of the *palkī* is illustrated in the picture of the Southall *mandir* below:





A bowl of *amrit* is kept alongside the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but this has nothing to do with Sikhism. The worshippers believe that the *amrit* is *Bhagwān Vālmīki*'s gift to the Indian religion. It was used to bring Rāma back to life when he had been killed in battle. There are no portraits of Sikh Gurūs or any picturized scenes relating to Rangretiā. The ceiling of the *mandir* is beautifully painted with scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>176</sup> Other aspects of the decor are also focused on Vālmīki. *Laṅgar* is usually served on a Sunday in the *mandir*. *Prasād* usually takes the form of fruit or sweets and is distributed whenever worship takes place, as in Hinduism. There is no requirement for males or females to cover their heads, shoes must, nevertheless, be removed, as is the general Indian custom. The building also has a *nisān sāhib*, which is saffron and marks the place as a Vālmīki place of worship. The *mandir* also has a library and a classroom in which Punjabi and music classes are held.

The character of the Southall *mandir* is most definitely not Sikh: rather it is Vālmīki.<sup>177</sup> As in other centres, those Vālmīkis who were brought up as *mazhabī* Sikhs will also attend. The president of the temple is *kesdhārī*, but adamantly proclaims to the members of the Vālmīki community that they should proudly assert their identity as Vālmīkis only. Although the president is *kesdhārī* he emphasized that he was *not* a Sikh. The only reason he still has the *kes* is because he was brought up *kesdhārī* and, therefore, has remained so. He emphasized that his religion was Vālmīki and, despite being *kesdhārī*, he repeatedly commented that Vālmīkis have no connections with Sikhism. I must stress that his opinion is also that of the majority of Vālmīkis who emphatically assert a non-Sikh orientation.

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<sup>176</sup> See appendix 4:10.

<sup>177</sup> See appendix 4:11.

#### 6:6:4:4 Bedford

In line with the other centres, the Bedford temple, too, proudly asserts its Vālmiki identity. There are no pictures of the Sikh Gurūs here whatsoever; thus it was surprising to hear members occasionally referring to the temple as the *gurdwārā*. During the service, a few *kesdhārīs* were present. The scripture used is the *Yoga Vasishtha*, which is placed in the *palkī Parchārs*, “meanings”, “reflections”, are given on the *Yoga Vasishtha* during worship. The two major celebrations that take place at Bedford every year are the anniversary of Vālmiki, and Flag Day, usually at the end of April. Neither *baisākhī* nor the *gurpurbs* are celebrated. With regard to the Coventry community, informants at Bedford unhesitatingly remarked that a Vālmiki religious centre cannot house scriptures of more than one religion, and thus they do not have much communication with the Coventry community.

#### 6:6:4:5 Oxford and Glasgow

As mentioned earlier, there are no Vālmiki temples for the communities in Oxford and Glasgow. For major celebrations, a hall is hired or visits are arranged to one of the Vālmiki temples -- on the whole, visits exclude the Coventry temple.

The Oxford community has been organized by its present President, Mr. Saida Ram Garewal. The Oxford community meets once a month, on the first Sunday of the month.<sup>178</sup> Its committee meets once every three months to discuss certain issues or organization of coming events. A monthly newsletter entitled *Darshan Yog Masik Pattar* is distributed to members of the Oxford community.<sup>179</sup> Plans are underway to

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<sup>178</sup>The Lakeside Community Centre, Oxford is usually the venue. The hall is paid for by donations from community members. The centre is also usually hired by Vālmikis for weddings and other functions.

<sup>179</sup>Mr. Garewal has given me a few copies of the newsletter. Since there is no temple, the newsletter informs members of past and future information, events and so on. The newsletter is handed out during the monthly meeting or otherwise posted to members, a list of whose addresses are held by the President, Mr. Saida Ram Garewal, and the General Secretary, Mr. Darshan Chohan. The membership fee for the Oxford community is £5 per month. The fee covers costs for the community centre, as well as costs towards the printing and distribution of the newsletter. Additionally, the fund enables the community to help members who experience financial difficulties. The collection also helps towards

raise funds for the community to have a temple of its own. Collections are currently being taken from members at Oxford, as well as the other Vālmīki temples.

It is interesting to note that during monthly worship at the Oxford Community Centre, it is only the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* which is used, and not the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This is due to the belief of the community that, since the first and last books of the epic, were not composed by Vālmīki, the epic is not in its original form. Since time is limited, the worship usually lasts for about two hours, after which *laṅgar*, which has been paid for by a member, is distributed. Since the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* is in Sanskrit, its *parchār* is given to the congregation in Punjabi. The emphasis on a non-Sikh orientation of the Oxford community is accentuated by the fact that neither *baisākhī* nor the *gurpurbs* are celebrated in any way. Although occasional lectures may be delivered with regard to Bhāi Jaitā, the community has no marked emphasis on him. Informants from Oxford expressed their dislike of Coventry's keeping of the Sikh scripture, they also expressed that while the Vālmīki members of the community are united, the Coventry *mazhabīs* are not regarded as Vālmīkis at Oxford. This is due to the simple fact that a person cannot belong to two religious groupings -- either one is a Sikh or one is a Vālmīki -- there is no sense in claiming to be a member of both religions.

Additional practices of the Vālmīkis include an emphasis on *bharat natyam* -- classical Indian dancing. Females in the community will often perform *bharat natyam* on special functions. Although no major prominence is given to fasting; fasting for the welfare of one's husband -- *kurvā choth* -- is observed by females. There is no requirement of vegetarianism, although the *laṅgar* is always vegetarian to accommodate the needs of all. There is no marked insistence on followers to wear the

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the cost of funerals of members.

Five Ks, or to be *kesdhārī*. An explicitly non-Sikh feature of the Vālmīki temples is that the *amrit* ceremony is not performed in any of the temples.

To summarize the practices prevalent in the Vālmīki community, I have listed the main practices of the Sikhs, in order to examine which are practised by the Vālmīkis also. The Coventry temple, because of its overt difference in orientation from the other centres, has been listed separately. As can be seen from the table below, there is a sharp indication that the Vālmīkis do not adhere to Sikh praxis. Although *ardās* is performed, it has no connection to the Sikh Gurūs.

<i>Sikh Practice</i>	<i>Present among the Vālmīkis</i>	<i>Absent among the Vālmīkis</i>	<i>Practised at the Coventry temple</i>
Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship		#	#
The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief		#	
<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>		#	#
Singing of <i>kīrtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>		#	#
Recitation of <i>ardās</i> during worship	#		
Performance of <i>akhand pāths</i>		#	
<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs		#	#
Serving of <i>gurū-kā-laṅgar</i>		#	#
Distribution of <i>prasād</i>	#		
Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>		#	
Importance of the Sikh Gurūs		#	#
Prominence of the <i>Khandā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol		#	
Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony		#	
Emphasis on the Five Ks		#	
Emphasis on being <i>kesdhārī</i>		#	
Traditional Punjabi dress for females	#		
Requirement for males and females to cover their heads		#	#
Celebration of the <i>gurpurbs</i>		#	#
Celebration of <i>baisākhī</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>		#	#
Celebration of <i>dīwālī</i> as the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison		#	#
Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>		#	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhī</i>		#	
Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khandā</i>		#	
Endogamous marriages	#		

**Table 18. Conformity of practices found among the Vālmīkis and the general *Panth*.**

From the above, it is evident that the Vālmīkis wish to accentuate their difference from Sikhs. They have incorporated specific practices that clearly identifies them as Vālmīkis -- the majority of these practices have no place in the praxis of the general *Panth*. Needless to say, they inhibit Sikh identity. The emphasis on being Vālmīki, is clarified in the following table that lists practices of the Vālmīkis that are not found among the general *Panth*: the Coventry temple is again featured separately.

Practice found among the Vālmīkis	Totally absent from general Sikh practice	Expressed differently in the <i>Panth</i>	Exception at the Coventry Vālmīki temple
Religious place often called <i>mandir</i>		Religious place called <i>gurūwārū</i>	
Use of <i>Rāmāyana</i> in worship	#		The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> is read from once a month
Absence of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> from temples	#		Only Coventry has a copy of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>
Focus of worship is Vālmīki	#		
No reference to the Sikh Gurūs in <i>ardās</i>	#		
Highlight of the year is the anniversary of Vālmīki	#		
<i>Dīwālī</i> celebrated as the story of Rāma and Sitā		Celebrated for the release of Gurū Hargobind	
<i>Baisākhī</i> celebrated as a harvest festival <i>only</i>		Commemoration of the <i>Khālsā</i>	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on Flag Day		Changed on <i>baisākhī</i>	
<i>Pheras</i> taken around <i>Rāmāyana</i>	#		<i>Pheras</i> also taken around the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>
Emblem of bow and arrow has prominence		<i>Khandā</i> emblem has prominence	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> saffron, pink or red with bow and arrow		Saffron with <i>Khandā</i>	
No pictures of the Sikh Gurūs	#		Also displays pictures of the Sikh Gurūs
Pictures of Vālmīki and scenes from the <i>Rāmāyana</i> feature in the décor	#		

**Table 19. Practices that distinguish the Vālmīkis from the general *Panth*.**

## 6:7 The religious identity of the Vālmīkis

The identity of the followers of Vālmīki is distinctly that of being Vālmīkis. The emphasis is on being *different* to Sikhs. The Southall Sabhā continuously stresses that the community should cease wandering into other religions and should be known as Vālmīkis only -- a clear and overt expression of the community's distinctiveness.<sup>180</sup> It is the retention of Sikh values however, which causes particular concern within the Vālmīki community itself; those who remain *mazhabī* Sikhs challenge the Vālmīki sense of perception of a distinct identity. Practices of the community, as a whole, incorporate certain Hindu aspects, too: therefore, they have elements of both Sikhism and Hinduism.<sup>181</sup> And it is the Coventry Vālmīki community that is indicative of a challenge to a clear-cut definition of what a Vālmīki is. An analysis of the Coventry community is, therefore, given separately at the end of this section; for now, I shall concentrate on the Vālmīki temples that affiliate to the Central Sabhā.

Yet, although the Vālmīkis claim to be non-Sikhs, among the older generation there are still many *kesdhārīs*. Furthermore, the Vālmīkis themselves openly admit that their connection with Sikhism can never be lost due to a popular belief concerning Vālmīki's connection with the city of Amritsar.<sup>182</sup> A relationship with Sikhism exists for the Vālmīkis at large, since many Vālmīki families in the Punjab had adopted Sikhism.<sup>183</sup> But why are the *mazhabī* Sikhs openly discriminated against, and why are the traditional *zār* occupations of the "religious ones" seen as so polluting? It is questions such as these, asked by the Vālmīkis to themselves, and

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<sup>180</sup>This is so, even though some Vālmīkis acknowledge some allegiance to the religions of Sikhism and Christianity.

<sup>181</sup>For a detailed examination of the practices, see section 6:6 above.

<sup>182</sup>This belief accepts that the city is so named because of the tradition, noted above, that Vālmīki himself is believed to have buried a pot full of *amrit* at the spot where the holy lake is situated today.

<sup>183</sup>During visits to the community, many youngsters frequently mentioned that their maternal family is *mazhabī*, and their paternal family is Vālmīki or *vice versa*. However, the identity of the particular youngsters in question was that of Vālmīki.

among themselves, that have prompted them to develop their own distinct identity, in aspiration at least. They are no longer prepared to accept blatant discrimination. Importantly, the question must surely be asked, too, how higher-*zāt* Sikhs can call themselves Sikhs when they do not follow what is openly expressed in *gurbānī*?

During the present research, the Hindu perception of identity among the Vālmīkis has not arisen, at least not as significantly as a Sikh/Vālmīki perception of identity, as expressed by certain members of the community. What must be noted, however, is that although the Vālmīkis regard themselves as an independent *qaum*, I have illustrated earlier that, in relation to their religious beliefs, it is Hinduism that informs the background of the Vālmīkis, more so than Sikhism.

On the other hand, the practices of the community also illustrate their separateness from popular Hinduism, in that there is no worship of the Hindu gods or goddesses. Vālmīki as *Bhagwān*, in the sense that he can help others towards *mukti*, is nevertheless worshipped. In this respect, therefore, I contend that the emphasis is most definitely on separateness from both Hindus and Sikhs with regard to a religious orientation, rather than a synthesis of cultures. Inevitably, the social background of the Vālmīkis remains Punjabi, and this will involve the retention of some common customs. The emphasis on distinction probably took hold by the time of the *Ad Dharm* movement.<sup>184</sup> Taking the author of the original *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vālmīki, as their leader, the *chūhrās* succeeded in creating just such an independent identity, calling themselves Vālmīkis.

I suggest that today the Vālmīki community is not so much a synthesis, but, because of its reliance on the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha*, is something original, since neither Hinduism nor Sikhism rely so heavily on the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* for its religious teachings.

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<sup>184</sup>This movement has been examined in detail in section 5:4.



In practice, the community<sup>185</sup> has no marked connection with Sikhism.

The Vālmīki effort towards distinction, especially from the Sikhs, is supported by the fact that the Vālmīkis have their own symbol of the bow and arrow that clearly visually distinguishes their community as separate from the *Panth*, for whom the symbol of the *Khandā* clearly displays a Sikh identity.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, the centres are referred to as *mandirs* or temples, more often than a *sabhā*, and rather than *gurdwārās*.

As mentioned previously, the Birmingham, Southall, Bedford and Wolverhampton communities explicitly say they have no connections today with Sikhism. Even in informal matters, members of the community generally do not greet one another by saying *satsriakal*, but would rather use *namaste*, the latter being more Indian than the former greeting that is essentially Sikh in character and meaning. There are no representations or features in the temples at all that suggest a Sikh orientation. Underpinning all practices is the point that the Vālmīki temples, with the exception of Coventry, are most definitely not Sikh, for the simple reason that they do not possess a copy of the Sikh scripture -- a practice that prevents their Sikh affiliation.

The Southall temple, together with the Birmingham temple, are stern about promoting a strictly Vālmīki identity. An informant from the Southall *mandir* stated that the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* has no place in Vālmīki worship; therefore it is not used. He went on to remark that the community is not Hindu either, due to the fact that it was never regarded so by the Hindus, and this applies to the Sikhs too; therefore the community is distinct from both these faiths -- it is Vālmīki.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> With the exception of the Coventry temple.

<sup>186</sup> As illustrated earlier, Coventry also shows prominence for the bow and arrow symbol.

<sup>187</sup> The same informant stressed, again, that Coventry is not regarded as a Vālmīki centre because it houses the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*.

So what is the religious identity of the followers of Vālmīki -- is it Hindu, Sikh, both or neither? My research has revealed that the emphasis is to be placed on *distinctiveness*, that is, not being wholly dependent on either. It is interesting to note that Nesbitt has stated: "the Valmikis have followed their own unique religious and social course, and drawn freely and creatively on both traditions [that is, Sikh and Hindu] to construct their own distinctive synthesis."<sup>188</sup> I do not agree that the Vālmīki community is so much a synthesis of Hindu and Sikh traditions. Obviously religious belief and practice do not rise from a vacuum, they have to be informed by some past ideas. But it does not mean to say that their present expression needs to be seen as a synthesis of other religions, they are unique in its own way. For example, my analysis of the beliefs of the Vālmīkis has illustrated that there is not much Sikh theology present in the philosophical beliefs of the Vālmīkis.

Furthermore, the different Vālmīki communities are producing their own literature to educate the younger generation about their religious identity -- which is that of Vālmīki: neither Sikh nor Hindu. Thus the Vālmīki community can be said to be a caste-based organization that aims to be separate from Sikhs and Hindus. The Vālmīkis' assertion that they are not Hindus or Sikhs is true to the extent that their practices are not wholly made up of one or either. It is the *background* of the Vālmīkis that is Hindu and Sikh, not the actual *identity*.

When I asked members of the younger generation -- aged from about eleven to seventeen years of age from the Birmingham, Coventry and Southall temples -- about their identity, they all unhesitatingly replied that they are Vālmīkis. The Southall Sabhā especially is responsible for promoting the Vālmīki identity through the *Vālmik*

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<sup>188</sup>Nesbitt, E. "Valmikis in Coventry: The Revival and Reconstruction of a Community" in Ballard, R. (1994) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, London: Hurst and Company, p. 117.

*Jagrīī*.<sup>189</sup> The *Vālmik Jagrīī* further highlights the utmost importance of *Bhagwān Vālmīki* for his community of followers.<sup>190</sup> In the years to come, when there are no longer *mazhabīs* that remember their Sikh affiliations, Sikhism will exert no influence at all.

The Vālmīki community in Britain today is determined to establish its position of equality among all other faiths. Its members are no longer going to be mistreated by showing allegiance to faiths in which they are treated like animals. Thus the president of the Southall Sabhā, Mr. Gurpal Gill adamantly voices that:

After centuries of oppression and deprivation, Valmikis are joyfully astir with hopes, and aspirations sky-high.  
While we swim in waters of cosmopolitanism and universalism, at the same time the total unity among Valmiki ranks remains our immediate and foremost motive. . .  
We are determined to show to the world our place on universal campus.<sup>191</sup>

Hence, I contend, it is clear that for the Vālmīkis, being a follower of Vālmīki means identification that is distinct from both Hindus and Sikhs. With regard to being different from Sikhs, it is separation *from* the *Panth*, rather than *within* the *Panth*, which is of utmost importance.

A paradox of identity, however, is visibly present with regard to the *mazhabī* Sikhs and, furthermore, in relation to the practices of the Coventry temple.

#### **6:7:1 The religious identity of the Coventry Vālmīkis**

Coventry is, indeed, peculiar, as already indicated, because of its installation of two scriptures -- the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the *Rāmāyaṇā* -- alongside each other in the temple. Despite the retention of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, the overall categorization of the community as a whole as being Vālmīki seems, on the one hand, easily

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<sup>189</sup>In this it openly declares: "To stop wandering into different religions. Be a Valmiki and be proud of it." (*Valmīk Jagrīī*, p. 6).

<sup>190</sup>"Have confidence in Bhagwan Valmik Ji. Accept Bhagwan Valmik Ji as our Guru. Have a Valmiki Press to publish Valmikian research and promotion in all languages." (*Ibid.*, p. 6).

<sup>191</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

ascertained. Yet the Sikh character of the *Jagat Gurū Vālmīk Jī Mahārāj Temple* in Coventry is further endorsed by the fact that it has pictures of the Sikh Gurūs present. The Coventry connection with Sikhism is apparent further through its decor, which was highlighted in 6:6:4:1 above, especially with regard to Bhāi Jaitā.<sup>192</sup> Interestingly, it is only worshippers at the Coventry temple who place a marked position of importance on Bhāi Jaitā.<sup>193</sup> Again, I believe, this is due to the fact that Coventry has more *mazhabī* Sikhs than the other Vālmīki centres. The *mazhabī* Sikhs, however, also regard themselves as Vālmīkis. At Coventry, the style of worship also takes on a Sikh style where male and female members of the congregation are required to cover their heads, unlike a Hindu place of worship where this is not always necessary. This, too, may be from *mazhabī* influence.

Another indication of the Sikh orientation of Coventry is illustrated by the fact that the birth anniversary of Gurū Nānak is not usually celebrated by the Vālmīki temples -- but it is by the Coventry temple. When asked what importance the Sikh Gurūs have for those Vālmīkis who attend the celebration, the Coventry members commented that it has the same importance as for Sikhs. This is in sharp contrast to the reply of an informant at Southall who remarked that, although the Gurūs are

<sup>192</sup>One such picture is included in appendix 4:4. For his bravery, Jaitā, who belonged to the Rangretiā group of *chūhrās*, was renamed as Bhāi Jiwan Singh by the tenth Gurū.

<sup>193</sup>They proudly state that: "Valmiki community feels very proud of its contribution to Sikhism both in spiritual terms as well as the struggle which lead [*sic*] to the formation of Khalsa by 10th Gurū Gobind Singh Ji. Sikh movement in India faced crisis when 9th Gurū Tegh Bahādur Ji was executed in Delhi and Bhāi Jaitā Ranghretta risked his life and managed to bring the remains of 9th Gurū (his Sees) [head] to Kiratpur where he was received by 10th Gurū Gobind Singh Ji . . . Bhāi Jaitā Ranghretta, commonly known as Bābā Jiwan Singh Ji amongst Valmiki community, along with his younger brother Sangat Singh Ji played a vital role in upbringing of Gurū Gobind Singh Ji. . . This contribution to Sikhism by Valmiki Community, through Bābā Jaitā and Bābā Sangat Singh, was honoured by 10th Gurū by calling these brothers 'Runk rette [*sic*] mere Gurū ke bete'. This term of honour was later distorted by evil Hindu-minded Sikh followers who believed in Five Ks but did not really believe in the basic principles of Sikh-Majhab i.e. Sikh religion by calling our Sikhs as majhabis." (Information received in written form from the Coventry panel of informants). The Coventry members also consider that: "also in the battle of Chamkaur Fort, when the life of the 10th Gurū was in danger, Bābā Sangat Singh Ji saved Gurū's life by making supreme sacrifice and dying by placing Gurū's crown (Kalgi Toda) thereby impersonating as Gurū Gobind Singh Ji and gave Gurū a chance to escape death or capture at the hands of Moghul Army. 10th Gurū chose to called [*sic*] our Sikhs as true believers in

respected, they have no real significance for the community. Gurū Nānak is respected as a saint and reformer only.

But what becomes clear is that the ties with Sikhism have not been completely severed. I suggest that the Coventry temple was probably originally more Sikh orientated than it is today and may, in future, continue this trend and become even less Sikh orientated. However, with the establishment of different *zāt gurdwārās* in Coventry, it probably adopted more and more Vālmīki practices; this eventually resulted in the reading of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* once a month on *saṅgrānd*. Furthermore, it is possible that the distinctions between the *mazhabīs* and Vālmīkis of Coventry were not initially pronounced. Therefore, Sikh practices were retained. Discrimination by higher *zāt* Sikhs, in non-Vālmīki temples, probably resulted in many members of the community endeavouring to assert their distinctiveness -- primarily, in terms of separate places of worship from other Sikh *zāts*. Particular tension is expressed towards higher-caste Sikhs due to the fact that the *mazhabī* Sikhs were outrightly discriminated against in the *gurdwārās*. Thus the *mazhabīs* no longer have any desire to visit Sikh *gurdwārās*, but have their own places of worship -- the Vālmīki temples. It was the regard and respect that the *mazhabīs* had for the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* -- now read from only once a month -- that caused the Coventry community to retain it in the *sabhā*. When asked about both its Sikh and Vālmīki orientation, members of the Coventry panel of informants replied:

The congregation in Coventry also included a high percentage from Sikhs who chose to stay within Valmiki community and therefore it was decided to allow worship of Guru Granth Sahib along with the Holy Ramayan and Yog Vashisth. Last 20 years in Maharishi Valmiki Temple have seen a perfect harmony between Sikhs and other Valmiki members which cannot be found amongst other Hindu and Sikhs in UK. . . . Probably the Sabha and temple in Coventry can be considered as central for the purpose of obtaining information about Valmiki Community mainly because this temple caters for the needs of Sikhs along with

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Sikh Majhab but this term was used in a derogatory way by jealous Hindu-minded Sikhs" (*ibid*).

Valmiki whereas other temples are only and purely for Valmiki community.<sup>194</sup>  
It is true to say, therefore, that it is only amongst those Vālmīkis who have been brought up as Sikhs that the paradox of identity is present.

Although Coventry is unique in its practices, and points towards both a Sikh and Vālmīki orientation, it cannot be realistically regarded as being “Sikh”. The most obvious reason for this is the prominence of the *Rāmāyaṇā*. This has conflicting ideas when compared to the theology and philosophy of Sikh scripture. Then, too, there is the obvious emphasis placed on Mahārṣi Vālmīki. Since the Coventry temple alone is practising Sikh and Vālmīki principles, it has caused much tension between itself and the other Vālmīki communities in Britain. The paradox of identity is prominent among the Coventry community -- the other centres find Coventry’s situation an embarrassment.

Noticeably, there are a number of *kesdhārīs* at Coventry, the committee however, places no insistence whatsoever on followers to be so, or to wear the Five Ks. Neither is there any requirement to recite the Sikh prayers either at home or in the temple. The *Gurū Granth Sāhib* has no marked importance for those who perceive themselves as Vālmīkis only. The latter will nevertheless *mattā tekh* in front of the *palkā* in which both the scriptures are housed.

It is the fact that the *Rāmāyaṇā* is so prominent at Coventry that provides an indication of the wishes of the community at large to be identified as Vālmīkis. The panel of speakers at Coventry appropriately expressed that the “Ramayan is the foundation on which our lives and the life of the community is modelled. It is our holy Scripture and our guide to way of life.”<sup>195</sup> The Vālmīki identity of the *Jagat*

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<sup>194</sup>Panel of speakers at Coventry.

<sup>195</sup>One point I should like to raise here is the implications of the phrase in *Yuddhā Kandā*, which states that those who read the *Rāmāyaṇā* will alone be saved. How can this be accepted in connection with the installation of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*?

*Gurū Vālmīk Jī Mahārāj Temple* at Coventry is further emphasized via the prominent position attributed to Vālmīki in both the temple and in the homes of worshippers. The title of the Coventry temple, too, is an indication *per se* for no real connection with Sikhism.

Importantly, an allegiance to the Vālmīki way of life was expressed by the majority of informants themselves at Coventry, who pointed out that the purpose of the members of the community was to live their lives according to the teachings of *their* Holy Gurū Mahārṣi Vālmīk Jī. However, unlike the other Vālmīki communities in Britain, the Coventry community dislikes the idea of being *completely* distinct from Hindus and Sikhs, although certain members proclaim the Vālmīki identity! Some members, in expressing this attitude, said they do not regard themselves as distinct from Hindus or Sikhs, they stated: “Who says that Valmikis are different from Hindus and Sikhs? We would like to know . . .”<sup>196</sup>

It may seem that the religious identity of Coventry is rather obscured with regard to whether it is strictly Vālmīki or Sikh. Indeed, table 18 in section 6.6 above, illustrates that Coventry retains many Sikh practices in ethos. Nevertheless, since the community aspires to live according to the teachings of Mahārṣi Vālmīki, it must be regarded as being Vālmīki. The retention of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* does not really suggest that the whole community is Sikh, since it is the teachings of the *Rāmāyaṇā* and *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* that are used as guidelines and not the teachings of the Sikh scripture. In this respect therefore, the underlying identity of the Coventry community is, indeed, that of being Vālmīkis. Thus, I have demonstrated that identity is something to be ascertained from *within* a group and not from ill-informed perspectives from outside it.

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<sup>196</sup>Panel of speakers at Coventry.

In summary, the religious identity of the Vālmīki community as a whole is perhaps best highlighted in the words of its Coventry members who expressed that: “We see ourselves as Valmikis. Hindu and Sikh are extension (*sic*) to our perception as Valmikis. This is the reason why we find harmony amongst the members of our community irrespective of their religious beliefs.”<sup>197</sup>

Up until now the groups I have studied have all been of Punjabi origin. It is commonly assumed that all Sikhs are Punjabis. However, this is not the case. In the following chapter I shall highlight what implications non-Punjabi converts to the Sikh faith have for the issue of Sikh identity. Thus, in the next chapter I shall look at western converts to the Sikh faith.

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

*Sikh Dharma of the  
Western Hemisphere  
and  
The Healthy, Happy, Holy  
Organization (3H0)*

## 7:1 *Gorā* converts to the Sikh faith

Although the overwhelming majority of the *Panth* and, indeed, each of the previous groups studied, are composed of Punjabi Sikhs, there is now an increasingly non-Punjabi, western following, especially in America. These Sikhs are commonly referred to as *gorā Sikhs*, literally, "white Sikhs". The *gorā* Sikhs associate themselves with what is known as the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, many of them also belonging to the 3HO (Happy, Holy, Healthy Organization). In the present chapter I shall scrutinize how the issue of Sikh identity -- which has been traditionally linked to Punjabi identity -- is affected when looking at the non-Punjabi *gorā* Sikhs. I must point out that the following for the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere in the UK is negligible. Although a large number of UK *gorās* attend *kuṇḍalinī yoga*<sup>1</sup> classes, these individuals are not necessarily students of either or both the 3HO and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. It is in the United States of America that *gorās* of both the 3HO and/or the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are most significant.

I must make it clear that an examination of the *gorā* Sikhs, with regard to the UK scene, has not been possible on a level I had envisaged, compared to the American scene. The most obvious reason for this is that I have not been able to get in touch with a significant number of *gorā* Sikhs in the UK: this is chiefly due to the fact that there is no real organization or centre for the *gorā* Sikhs of Britain. They constitute a very minute -- one may say negligible -- percentage when compared to American *gorā* Sikhs. Nevertheless, I have tried to include the UK scene as much as possible from the information I have received from *gorā* Sikhs in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup>*Kuṇḍalinī* is personified by the coiled snake, as *śaktī* (energy), lying dormant at the base of one's spine. The aim through *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is to awaken this *śaktī* by which it travels up the six *cakras*, or nerve centres, until it reaches the crown of the head, bringing spiritual enlightenment.

Importantly, at times, the 3HO and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are regarded as one group: any distinction becomes blurred. Other times however, the distinction between the two is quite marked. With regard to my research, recognizing where the distinction occurs is very important since, although the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere is Sikh orientated, the 3HO is not necessarily a Sikh group, even though both groups have been founded by Harbhajan Singh Puri, also known as Yogī Bhajan -- a Sikh. According to one *gorā* informant from London, the 3HO and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are definitely two separate groups. The former places an emphasis on *kuṇḍalinī yoga*, whereas the latter concentrates on Sikh *dharma* -- the religious teachings and practices of Sikhism. Moreover, the informant, who is *amritdhārī*, and a member of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, resented the belief that he was in any way different to other Sikhs of the *Panth*. He continuously stressed that he was not a member or follower of a particular group or sect -- he was a student, a *Sikh*.

The majority of *gorā* Sikhs of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere have converted to Sikhism, rather than being born into the faith like the majority of Punjabi Sikhs world-wide today, who are Sikhs by birth and not necessarily by personal choice. I believe that this factor, which I shall look at below, has important implications for the practice of *Khālsā* Sikhism.

## **7:2 A brief note on Harbhajan Singh Puri**

Puri, who was born in 1929, is the so-called Chief Religious and Administrative Authority for Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere and belongs to the *khatrī zāt* of Sikhs. His family originate from the region of the Punjab that is now situated in Pakistan. After partition the family had settled in New Delhi and it was at Delhi

airport that Puri worked as a customs official before leaving for America.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, Puri began teaching *kundalinī yoga* classes to Americans in 1968, hence becoming widely known as Yogī Bhajan. Yogī Bhajan is married to Bibi Inderjit Kaur who, like himself, has a Ph.D.<sup>3</sup> Attracting an increasing number of yoga students resulted in Yogī Bhajan's official formation of the 3HO, the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization, in 1969. Bhajan's insistence on Sikh teachings was not all that apparent in the early years, although he quite frequently talked about his faith to the yoga students.<sup>4</sup> His closest followers began to express an interest in Sikhism. Thus, it is clear that Yogī Bhajan's own Sikh background eventually resulted in the Sikh nature of the formation of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.

In 1971, Yogī Bhajan took a group of eighty-four of his closest students to the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Apparently, it was due to his success in promoting Sikhism to American *gorās* that Yogī Bhajan claims he was bestowed with the title of Siri Singh Sāhib, an honorific term, by the Shromāṇī Gurdwārā Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) at the *Akal Takht*. Important to note here is that the involvement of the *Akal Takht* strengthens the *gorā* converts' assertion of a Sikh identity. But there is some ambiguity over whether the term *was* actually conferred by the SGPC. The *gorā* Sikhs firmly hold that the administrator of Sikhism in the western hemisphere, is a Siri Singh Sāhib, as voiced in a pamphlet published by the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere:

On March 3rd, 1971, Harbhajan Singh was given the ministerial responsibility for the Sikhs of the Western Hemisphere by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.). In acknowledgment of his extraordinary

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<sup>2</sup> Dusenbery, V. A. "Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs: Conflicting Assertions of Sikh Identity in North America" in O'Connell, *et al.*, (1988) *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> Yogī Bhajan's doctorate in Psychology enables him to extend his role as a counsellor.

<sup>4</sup> Dusenbery, V. A. "On the Moral Sensitivities of Sikhs in North America" in Lynch, O. M. (ed) (1990) *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 247.

missionary effort, he was given the title of “Siri Singh Sahib” by Sant Chanan Singh, the President of the S.G.P.C. A few years later he was honoured with the title of “Bhai Sahib” by the Akal Takhat.<sup>5</sup>

This belief is strengthened by Shanti Kaur Khalsa, a *gorī*<sup>6</sup> Sikh, who has also remarked in her book that the title of Siri Singh Sāhib was, indeed, accorded to Yogī Bhajan on March 3 1971, at Amritsar.<sup>7</sup>

Contradictorily however, an article in a copy of the journal *Time*, on September 5 1977, explicitly states that the SGPC has not acknowledged Bhajan as a Siri Singh Sāhib. Although recognizing the fruitful efforts of Bhajan, Tohra (then the President of the SGPC) declared that Bhajan had bestowed the title on himself; the paper report reads:

High Priest Guruchuran Singh Tohra, president of the management committee for northern India’s Sikh temples, confirms that his council has given “full approval” to 3HO and recognizes the yogi as a preacher. Tohra, however, says that this does not mean Bhajan is the Sikh leader of the Western Hemisphere, as he claims. The Sikhs do not create such offices. Nor, Tohra adds, has the committee given Bhajan the rarely bestowed title, Siri Singh Sahib (the equivalent of saying “Sir” three times), which he uses.<sup>8</sup>

It is after the alleged honour by the SGPC that Siri Singh Sāhib Bhāi Sāhib Harbhajan Singh Khālsā Yogijī, that is, Yogī Bhajan, began preaching Sikh teachings openly to his American students. Thus the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood was officially registered in 1973. The title was later modified in non-gender language to become Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. Many of Bhajan’s yoga students underwent the *amrit* ceremony and became the *gorā* Sikhs of the *Panth*. But, I should emphasize that my research has indicated that those who follow the 3HO way of life do not have to follow the Sikh teachings of the Sikh Dharma. Although the ideals of the 3HO,

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<sup>5</sup>*Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, Los Angeles: Sikh Dharma/3HO Foundation, 1649 S. Robertson Blvd. P. O. Box 351149.

<sup>6</sup> A female western convert to Sikhism.

<sup>7</sup>Khalsa, S. S. Shanti Kaur (1995) *The History of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, Espanola: New Mexico: Sikh Dharma Publications, p. 15. The initials of S. S. indicate that Shanti Kaur Khalsa is a Sardārī Sāhibā, an honorific title for female *gorī* Sikhs.

<sup>8</sup>Uberoi “Yogi Bhajan’s Synthetic Sikhism” in *Time*, September 5 1977, p. 24.

such as the holistic approach to everyday life and the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*, are performed by the majority of the students of the Sikh Dharma; students who follow the 3HO alone, are not required to live a Sikh way of life.

The transition from teaching *kuṇḍalinī yoga* to furthering the Sikh religion, as Dusenbery suggests, brought about the addition of the title Siri Singh Sāhib to the frequently used term Yogī Bhajan.<sup>9</sup> Dusenbery, quite confusingly however, appears to contend that members of the 3HO are Sikhs, and that the 3HO changed its orientation towards Sikhism.<sup>10</sup> According to my research, this is not the case. The 3HO and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are two separate ways of life. As highlighted above, although the ideals of the 3HO are present in the Sikh Dharma, this is not necessarily the case *vice versa*. Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and 3HO literature both repeatedly stress the fact that students of the 3HO are not necessarily Sikhs: the literature points out that:

You do not have to be a Sikh to practice or teach the 3HO lifestyle. There are thousands of people who are actively engaged in spreading the 3HO teachings who do not follow the Sikh religion. Nor do all Sikhs utilize the teachings of 3HO in their personal lives.<sup>11</sup>

The influence Yogī Bhajan has on both his 3HO and Sikh Dharma American students cannot be overestimated. Under the guidance of Bhajan, his students have started businesses that include the promotion of health, vitality, books and even a security company. The *Power Broker* magazine has counted Bhajan among "New Mexico's Top 100" influential business people. The article pertaining to Bhajan reads:

Leader of one of New Mexico's fastest growing and most dynamic business communities with 14 corporations under Khalsa International Business and Trading. Business interests range from computer software development and herbal teas to one of the nation's largest private security firms in the Espanola-based Akal Security. His birthday celebrations draw the likes of Gov. Gary Johnson and Senate President Pro Tem Manny Aragon. . . . Gives substantial

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<sup>9</sup> Dusenbery, "Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs" p. 345.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *3HO Foundation*, Los Angeles: 3HO Foundation, P.O. Box 351149.

donations to peace organizations around the world.<sup>12</sup>

Collectively the list of companies is referred to as "KIIT", that is, Khalsa International Industries and Trades and is "a group of companies that exist to serve, heal and uplift humanity through quality products and services."<sup>13</sup> The KIIT group includes such companies as the book-ordering service called "Ancient Healing Ways Catalogue", which trades in all kinds of material with regard to the 3HO and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. Other companies include "Golden Temple Enterprises" from where literature may be obtained, "Yogi Tea",<sup>14</sup> which markets caffeine-free herbal tea, as well as "Sunshine Products", which make available natural body and mind stimulants. Publicity advertisements for the above companies are toned with stimulating phrases from Yogī Bhajan, such as: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience."<sup>15</sup> Thus the emphasis is towards spiritual well-being -- an aspect on which the majority of Bhajan's teachings are based. This potential of realizing one's spiritual assets is further heightened through the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* -- taught to students of the 3HO as well as Sikhs of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.

An informant at London stated that out of those who practice *kuṇḍalinī yoga* in the UK, a very small number know of Yogī Bhajan. They may have heard of him, but would not be able to give detailed insights into his life. I was told that the majority of those who practice *kuṇḍalinī yoga* in Britain have no contact with Sikhism; their primary concern is with the yogic techniques. Some, however, initiate into Sikhism and thus become followers of the *Panth*. It follows, according to the informant, that there is no affiliation as such to the 3HO or to the Sikh Dharma of the Western

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<sup>12</sup> *Power Broker*, November 16-22, p. 14 (n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> *KIIT Mission Statement*, Los Angeles: 3HO Foundation, P.O. Box 351149.

<sup>14</sup> An advertisement of the Yogi Tea Company is enclosed in appendix 5:1.

<sup>15</sup> Cited on the Sunshine Products newsletter.

Hemisphere in the UK. This is vastly different to America where there is a stronger influence of Yogī Bhajan on the *gorā* Sikhs. The successor of Yogī Bhajan has not been decided: this matter, Bhajan believes, will be decided for itself in accordance with the Will of God.<sup>16</sup>

I shall now look at what the 3HO teaches, dealing with the 3HO and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere separately, since I regard them as essentially two separate groups, with the former not having any necessary orientation towards the Sikh faith. This assumption has been based on my research that reveals that the 3HO literature itself frequently states that one does not have to be a Sikh in order to practice the teachings of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization.<sup>17</sup>

### **7:3 The Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO)**

The purely yogic orientation of Yogī Bhajan's teachings is overtly expressed in his genesis of the 3HO, which is recognized as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). What is clear from my analysis of this organization is that -- in the context of throwing light on criteria related to the issue of Sikh identity -- I would have to assert that the 3HO does not have a Sikh leaning. It would be true to say, nevertheless, that many *gorā* Sikhs were originally students of the 3HO. However, with the official establishment of the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood, the orientation of many of these students changed from one of necessarily no religious bearing to that of a strictly Sikh one. But, as far as the 3HO is concerned, further clarification of its non-Sikh affiliation is illustrated in its primary aims:

The 3HO International Kundalini Yoga Teachers Association ensures the excellence of all 3HO Kundalini Yoga teachers, classes and teacher training systems worldwide. IKYTA facilitates communications among national Kundalini Yoga Teacher Associations, and compiles a listing of its membership

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<sup>16</sup>Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 166.

<sup>17</sup> One such example provides sufficient evidence: "One does not have to be a Sikh to practice or teach the 3HO (*healthy, happy, holy*) lifestyle." (*A Growing World Religion* by the 3HO Foundation).



annually for the Internet, and a Teachers Directory Booklet. The IKYTA's Annual Teachers Conference includes educational workshops, networking opportunities, and Yogi Bhajan's inspirational and informative keynote address. IKYTA works to create a professional identity and international recognition for *Kundalini Yoga as Taught by Yogi Bhajan*.<sup>18</sup>

As can clearly be seen from the above, the emphasis of the 3HO is on *kuṇḍalinī yoga* to awaken the mind spiritually -- the practice of *kuṇḍalinī* has nothing in common with Sikh praxis. However, as mentioned previously, it is also practiced by the *gorā* Sikhs of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. It is in this respect that the differentiation between the two groups is often blurred. *Kuṇḍalinī yoga*, for the *gorās*, is taught through IKYTA, International Kundalini Yoga Teachers Association. This is an affiliation of qualified *kuṇḍalinī yoga* teachers. In the UK many IKYTA teachers teach *kuṇḍalinī* to individuals who may not necessarily be students of the 3HO. According to the 3HO *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is:

a potent and effective system of self-transformation and personal development. Kundalini Yoga stimulates individual growth through systematic techniques that strengthen the nervous system and balance the glandular system (the guardians of health), for increased stability and vitality. Meditation improves mental concentration, sharpens awareness and give (*sic*) the direct experience of consciousness. Kundalini Yoga encompasses and draws from all yogic systems and techniques.<sup>19</sup>

Even though *kuṇḍalinī yoga* has no prominent position within Sikh practice on the whole, Yogī Bhajan, nevertheless, stresses its importance to both 3HO and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere students. On this matter he believes that:

The body is nothing but a timepiece with a little crystal of life energy in it which makes it run, and kundalini is that crystal. In every human there is a soul and that soul is nothing but kundalini, the coil that keeps your timepiece going. Without kundalini nothing can exist.<sup>20</sup>

So although the identity of many 3HO members has changed from a yogic orientation to a Sikh one as Dusenbery has commented,<sup>21</sup> I must reiterate that not all 3HO

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<sup>18</sup>“The 3HO Foundation” from the 3HO website -- [www.3ho.org](http://www.3ho.org)

<sup>19</sup>“Kundalini Yoga” -- [www.yogibhajan.com](http://www.yogibhajan.com)

<sup>20</sup>*3HO Foundation* (no page numbers).

<sup>21</sup>Dusenbery, "Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs" p. 345.

students are Sikhs; for those who are not Sikhs the orientation remains yogic.

The overt non-expression of a Sikh identity as far as the practices of the 3HO are concerned is nowhere more apparent than during a 3HO meeting where no copies of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, or for that matter any other religious scripture are present. The *Gurū Granth Sāhib* has no pronounced role in the lives of the non-Sikh students of the 3HO. In Yogī Bhajan's words the "3HO Foundation is an organization which is a ray of hope, applying conscious awareness to body, mind, and spirit."<sup>22</sup>

#### **7:4 Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere**

Chronologically, the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere is later than the 3HO; the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere was formed after Yogī Bhajan, as illustrated in 7:2 above, claimed he had been bestowed with the title of Shri Singh Sāhib. It is the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere that promotes an awareness of Sikh teachings, as channelled through Yogī Bhajan to his students. So the *gorā* Sikhs are students of the Sikh Dharma more so than (and frequently unlike) students of the 3HO, although *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is also taught to many *gorā* Sikhs.

The majority of *gorā* Sikhs have taken *amrit* and, therefore, adopt the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* fully. In the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, Sikhs tend to wear white clothes and white turbans. There is a strong tradition among *gorā* Sikh females, also, to wear a white turban. In this sense, therefore, the *gorā* Sikhs exhibit a keen sense of a Sikh identity in terms of *Khālsā* appearance. The beliefs and practices prevalent among the *gorā* Sikhs will be examined below, but what I wish to examine at this point is the attraction towards a Sikh way of life on the part of the *gorās*.

Bhajan has been called the "Father of the Woodstock Nation", that is, at a time when drugs and alcohol were becoming increasingly popular in America, he

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<sup>22</sup>Leaflet entitled *3HO Foundation*, Espanola: 3HO Foundation, Route 2, Box 132D.

introduced a way of life that aimed at fulfillment without intoxicants. He promoted self-confidence and self-excellence for males and females. Initially beginning with the 3HO teachings, many students went further to find solidarity within the Sikh faith by following Sikh teachings via the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere: thus, under the leadership of Yogī Bhajan.

According to the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, the principles of Sikhism are the following:

- Rising early, bathing and meditating on God's name to cleanse the mind.
- Continuing to remember God's name with every breath throughout the day.
- Working and earning by one's honest efforts.
- Living a family way of life practising truthfulness in all dealings.
- Sharing and selflessly serving others.
- Abstaining from drugs, alcohol, tobacco and meat.
- Keeping the body healthy and as created by God.<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen from the above, Yogī Bhajan has concentrated on the threefold Sikh principle of *nām japnā* (meditation on the Name of God), *kārt karnā* (honest and good deeds), and *vand chaknā* (sharing with others). So, through the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere: "The universal message of the Sikh path reaches out to people of all faiths and cultural backgrounds to encourage peace and unity for all mankind."<sup>24</sup> This contrasts clearly with the 3HO, where students are taught the importance of spirituality through yoga, not necessarily through Sikh teachings, as pointed out below:

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<sup>23</sup>"Sikh Dharma" by the 3HO Foundation.

One does not have to be a Sikh to practice or teach the 3HO (*healthy, happy, holy*) lifestyle. There are thousands of people who are actively engaged in spreading these teachings who do not follow the Sikh religion, nor do all Sikhs utilize the teachings of 3HO in their personal lives.<sup>25</sup>

To assist the needs of the students of the growing Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere the Khalsa Council was formed in 1974 by Yogī Bhajan, whereby he appointed ministers to cater for the demands of the western Sikhs.<sup>26</sup> The ministers, many of whom had already been serving these roles previously in 1972 before the formal establishment of the Khalsa Council, were given the titles of Singh Sāhib for male ministers, and Sardārī Sāhibā for female ministers. These honorific titles continue to the present day and involve on behalf of the ministers the "responsibility for the welfare of the sangat in their respective arcas."<sup>27</sup> The point has been made clear that the Singh Sāhibs and Sardārī Sāhibās are not to be seen as higher in any sense than others Sikhs, on the contrary "he or she was considered a servant of the sangat."<sup>28</sup>

### **7:5 Beliefs of the *gorā* Sikhs**

I shall now proceed to look at the beliefs of the *gorā* Sikhs, as emphasized through the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. The 3HO will not be the main focus since, as illustrated above, it is not necessarily Sikh orientated and, therefore, will not bear significant light on the issue of Sikh identity. The central beliefs of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are found in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. In contrast, I suggest it is possible for a student of the 3HO to be an atheist. This is where one of the major differences between the two groups lies. Atheism is inconceivable for one who is a student of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, since Sikhism teaches the

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>"A Growing World Religion" by the 3HO Foundation.

<sup>26</sup>Khalsa, S. K. *A History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 107.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

supremacy of God. McLeod refers to the religious side of the 3HO as Sikh Dharma and the educational branch as the 3HO. Nevertheless, he also refers to the students of both groups collectively as 3HO Sikhs.<sup>29</sup> According to my research, the 3HO does not express *any* visible Sikh tendency. It is only through those who are Sikhs, and practice yoga as originally modelled by the 3HO, that a Sikh identity is promoted. Sikh religious alliance is, therefore, characteristic only of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. Cole and Sambhi, too, are of the opinion that the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and the 3HO are essentially two titles for one group.<sup>30</sup> This, too, cannot be supported by the relevant facts.

### 7:5:1 *Kuṇḍalinī yoga*

It is the formidable insistence that Yogī Bhajan places on *kuṇḍalinī yoga* for a sound body and mind, which creates the primary difference between *Khālsā* Sikhs and the followers of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. In his own words, Yogī Bhajan expresses the prominence of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* for the *gorā* Sikhs, as well as the students of the 3HO. He states:

I would like to invoke in you that power that is already yours. It is called Kundalini. Mostly it is dormant, but it's [*sic*] very existence creates the radiance to keep you alive. Kundalini will give you what riches and money cannot; it will give you happiness and satisfaction in your life.<sup>31</sup>

The Sikh Gurūs in their teachings, emphasized that it is the yoga of the *Nām* alone, that is, *nām simran*, that is supreme to all other practices:

Contemplating over the Name and the Saint-Guru's hymns, O Yogi, thou shalt become a hero, through the four ages. (AG 908)<sup>32</sup>

For Gurū Nānak the true *yogī* was one who lived amidst the material pleasures and

<sup>29</sup> McLeod, W. H. (1997) *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 202-03.

<sup>30</sup> Cole, W. O. and Sambhi, P. S. (1998, 2<sup>nd</sup> fully rev. edn, first published 1978) *The Sikhs*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, p. 186.

<sup>31</sup> "Message from Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajan" -- [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)

<sup>32</sup> Singh, Manmohan (1996 rev. of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 2963.

desires of the world, but without forming attachment to them:

Abide pure amidst the worldly impurities. Thus shall thou find the way to Yoga.  
By mere words Yoga is obtained not.  
He is called a Yogi who looks upon all mortals with the same eye and deems  
them as equal. (AG 730)<sup>33</sup>

Essential to the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* -- as taught by Yogī Bhajan -- is *prāṇāyāma*, that is, breathing techniques that aid the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī* lying dormant at the bottom of the spine. In this respect, the students of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are outwardly contradicting *gurbāṇī* that openly states that the realization of God does not come through the breathing techniques of the *yogīs*:

When the Imperceptible Lord reveals His ownself (*sic*) to man, then is he blessed with the knowledge, which the Yogis think, they obtain through breath control in the central, left and right bronchi.  
Nanak, the True Lord is above the three devices of breath-control. (AG 944)<sup>34</sup>

The *gorā* Sikhs recognize that the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is *not* readily accepted in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. They claim, however, that they are more health-orientated than the Punjabi *Panth*. A student of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere writes:

Sikh Dharma members practice three different types of yoga (1.kundalini, 2.laya and 3.tantric) which are supposed to enable them to meditate more efficiently. Members also put great emphasis on health, more so than is respected in the orthodox Sikh religion. In fact both yoga and vegetarianism are rejected by the Holy Book as forms of blind ritual. There has been some controversy.<sup>35</sup>

On the one hand the *gorā* Sikhs claim to be more conformist than Punjabi *Khālsā* Sikhs yet, on the other hand, admit that such practices as vegetarianism and practicing yoga have no place in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Interestingly, the majority of *gorā* Sikhs are vegetarians.

Justification for the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* has, nevertheless, been asserted by the students of Bhajan, who equate the result of raising the *kuṇḍalinī* to the Sikh

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<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2382.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3093.

idea of *charhadī kalā*. Basically, *charhadī kalā* refers to the raised spirits of the *Panth*. Yogī Bhajan's linking of the practice of *kunḍalinī yoga* to Sikh teachings is best illustrated by the fact that he believes the very term *charhadī kalā* was used by Gurū Gobind Singh to allude to the rising of the *kunḍalinī*.<sup>36</sup> Western Sikhs believe that *charhadī kalā* is a result of the *kunḍalinī* having opened all the *cakras*.<sup>37</sup> Yogī Bhajan emphasizes that *charhadī kalā* causes the individual to abandon all obstacles in his or her path to *mukti*. In accordance with this teaching he remarks:

When you do Kundalini Yoga, it is a simple, direct experience, and the kundalini rises. It affects you in spite of all your garbage, so that you start looking toward infinity. That is Cherdi Kala. 'I am I am. Nothing can budge me. Nothing. I am not going to give in. I am all right.'<sup>38</sup>

Validation of the *gorā* Sikh belief that *charhadī kalā* is the result of the awakening of the *kunḍalinī*, appears to hold ground in the words of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. A verse from the *Ādi Granth* states:

ਕੇਡਲਨੀ ਸੁਰਝੀ ਸਤ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਪਰਮਾਨੰਦ ਗੁਰੂ ਮੁਖਿ ਮਚਾ (੧੪੦੨)

*Kunḍalinī sūrjhī sat saṅgat parmānaṅd gurū mukh machā* (1402)

In his translation, Manmohan Singh has translated *kunḍalinī* as “mind's tongue”, his translation of the above verse is as follows:

Associating with the saints, their mind's tongue is opened and through the supreme Guru, they enjoy the Lord of supreme bliss. (AG 1402)<sup>39</sup>

According to Manmohan Singh, the *kunḍalinī* is awakened through the company of the holy congregation. There is no mention of an actual yogic technique whereby to awaken the latent energy. But, AG 1402 supports Bhajan's identification of the awakening of the *kunḍalinī* with the raised spirits, *charhadī kalā*, attained through the

<sup>35</sup> “Sikh Dharma: Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO)” -- www.cti.itc.virginia.edu

<sup>36</sup> Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur (1996) *Kundalini Yoga: The Flow of Eternal Power*, California: Time Capsule Books, p. 55.

<sup>38</sup> Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 117.

*satsaᅅgat.*

A Sikh character is, indeed, given to the yoga as taught by Bhajan. Many classes begin the yoga session by first chanting the *mantar* of

*Ek Ong Kār Sat Nām Siri Wāhe Gurū*

Clearly, this chanting is very Sikh in nature, calling on one of the most frequently used names for the Absolute -- *Wāhegurū* meaning the "Wonderful One". It is highly unlikely that non-Sikh participants would chant the phrase, bearing in mind that *kuᅅᅅᅅalinī yoga* is practiced by individuals from all faiths, not necessarily Sikhs alone. For western Sikhs, this *mantar* is believed to open the *caᅅtras*, or the energy centres.<sup>40</sup> Bhajan goes further in his identification of *kuᅅᅅᅅalinī yoga* with Sikhism. He explains that for Sikhs, *kuᅅᅅᅅalinī yoga is Satnām*.<sup>41</sup> This idea is based on the teaching of Bhajan that yoga is to be united with the soul-giver,<sup>42</sup> God, who in Sikhism is often referred to as *Satnām*. Students of Bhajan refer to the chanting of *Satnām* as the *bīj mantar*, the "seed *mantar*", which enables the aspirant to tune in with the highest consciousness, to the Absolute, and realize his or her true essence: this is when total harmony is experienced.<sup>43</sup>

Another *mantar* that is chanted to begin a *kuᅅᅅᅅalinī yoga* class is

*Ong Nāmo Gurū Dev Nāmo*  
"I Bow to the Creator, to the Divine Teacher Within"<sup>44</sup>

*Kuᅅᅅᅅalinī* participants from all faiths recite the above *mantar*: it is not necessarily Sikh orientated. This *mantar* calls on the great *kuᅅᅅᅅalinī yoga* masters, enabling the student to "tune in" to the consciousness of those great masters who have awakened

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<sup>39</sup> *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 4634.

<sup>40</sup> Khalsa, P. K. *Kundalini Yoga*, p. 215.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



the *kuṇḍalinī*, and who, therefore, have achieved spiritual liberation.<sup>45</sup> This *mantar* links the individual and the spiritual masters and is referred to by Bhajan as the "Golden Chain" indicating the "transference of spiritual awareness, consciousness, and power . . . from master to disciple".<sup>46</sup> The *mantar* of *Ong Nāmo Gurū Dev Nāmo* is sometimes referred to as the *Ādi Mantar*, that is, the first *mantar* or the primary *mantar*, in the sense that it provides the essential link with the spiritual masters.<sup>47</sup>

In their teachings, the Sikh Gurūs constantly highlighted that yogic practices of the ascetics had no place in a householder's life. And yet, importantly, the yoga practised by the Sikh Dharma, nevertheless, enables one to live as a *grihast*, a householder. The students of the Sikh Dharma are not ascetics; they run their own businesses and are employed, in the same way as any Punjabi Sikhs. At the same time there is an insistence, which cannot be overlooked, on the teachings of *gurbāṇī* amongst the *gorā* Sikhs. *Gurbāṇī* is seen by the Sikh Dharma as the *śabad* that procures the melody in one's heart, just as much as in Sikh teaching generally. In this respect *gurbāṇī* is reflected on by the *gorā* Sikhs to eradicate the ego, as is stressed in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*:

Through Gurbani, that unbeaten melody is procured and therewith egotism is annulled. (AG 21)<sup>48</sup>

In fact, in the hymns of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, the Gurūs speak of the unstruck melody (*anahad śabad*) associated with the height of meditation. The verse below seems to convey the point that, through the correct guidance of the teacher, the student can reach this level of spirituality:

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<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>47</sup>Khalsa, S. S. Rama Kirn Singh (ed) (1980 edn of 1976) *Kundalini Yoga Manual*, California: Kundalini Research Institute Publications, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, translator Manmohan Singh, p. 69.

Under Guru's instruction, the perfect man meditates on the Lord. In his mind, the unstruck melodious bands play. (AG 228)<sup>49</sup>

This might suggest that *gurbāṇī* and yogic meditation are not so disparate. McLeod, however, has commented that, although the analogy of the *anahad śabad* is used in the terminology of Gurū Nānak's hymns, it reflects a mere influence of Nāth terminology on the words of Gurū Nānak. McLeod clarifies Gurū Nānak's treatment of such words as "a useful figure of speech, a convenient means of conveying some impression of an experience which is strictly inexpressible."<sup>50</sup> If this is the case, then the practice of, and belief in, the benefits of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* remain counter to the Sikh identity of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.

### 7:5:2 White tantra

In addition to the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*, Bhajan also teaches what is known as "White tantra" to students of both the 3HO and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. The aim of White tantric yoga "is to purify and uplift the being."<sup>51</sup> It is in sharp contrast to the other two types of *tantra* namely, Black *tantra* and Red *tantra*: neither of these are taught by Bhajan. Black *tantra* is often depicted as "black magic", Red *tantra* is associated with sexual energy.<sup>52</sup> The practice of any *tantric* rituals is alien to Sikhism generally; nevertheless, Yogī Bhajan is popularly referred to by his students as the *Mahān Tantric*, "The Master of White Tantric Yoga."<sup>53</sup> Bhajan alone is the *Mahān Tantric* of this present age.

White *tantra* is not *kuṇḍalinī yoga*: rather, it is practiced in pairs at specific times that are known to the *Mahān Tantric* only. White *tantric* yoga is undertaken in the following manner:

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<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 755.

<sup>50</sup>McLeod, W. H. (1996 edn of 1968) *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 192.

<sup>51</sup>Khalsa, P. K. *Kundalini Yoga*, p. 179.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

All the participants sit in rows, facing each other. The tantric energy travels in a zig-zag pattern up and down the rows. . . Although it is practiced with a partner, White Tantric Yoga is not a "sexual" yoga. On the contrary, it transmutes the sex energy from the lower chakras (energy centers) to the higher chakras.<sup>54</sup>

I must reiterate that purification of the mind through *tantric* yoga is not something that is practised by Sikhs generally, and certainly not by *Khālsā* Sikhs. Neither does White *tantra* have any justification in Sikh teachings. Belief that White *tantra* purifies the being is a criterion that clearly places the followers of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere outside the *Khālsā* definition of a Sikh.

### 7:5:3 The ten bodies

Yogī Bhajan teaches that each individual has more than just a physical body. As with Indian metaphysics generally, Bhajan emphasizes the impermanence of the physical body. This exterior body is changing constantly through one's lifetime, being abandoned at each physical death whereby a new physical body is entered into by the eternal soul. This is in line with Sikh teachings. According to the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, underneath this physical body there are ten additional bodies, these have been described, by Parwha Kaur Khalsa, as follows:

1. *Soul Body* – this is the eternal body, described as "God's light which lives in your heart." This is similar to the Sikh teachings of the eternal soul, which has often been linked to the essence of God presiding within each human heart.
2. *Three Mental Bodies* – these are the three main aspects of the mind:
  1. Negative Mind: sends out warnings against danger.
  2. Positive Mind: inspiration.
  3. Neutral Mind: intuitive knowledge based on the above two minds.
3. *Physical Body* – a temple for God to live in.
4. *Pranic Body* – controls breath and "takes in Prana, the life force energy of the universe." This body is strengthened through *prāṇāyāma*, breathing techniques.
5. *Arc Body* – spiritual energy, sometimes called the "halo".
6. *Auric Body* – the aura, the electromagnetic energy of each individual.
7. *Subtle Body* – enables one to understand surrounding situations.
8. *Radiant Body* – the courage and charisma of the individual.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 184-6.

Although all ten bodies are interlinked, at death it is only the soul and the subtle body that go on to the next realm of existence, whether it be rebirth or *mukti*.<sup>56</sup> Death is described as *turiyā*, a good sleep, where the individual has no consciousness of separateness from the higher consciousness in liberation.<sup>57</sup> Here, it appears as though Parwaha Kaur Khalsa is describing death more in a Hindu context. The belief in death as *turiyā* whereby the soul at *mukti* loses any sense of separateness, indicates a hint of monism. If this is the case, then this belief of the *gorā* Sikhs is not Sikh since Sikhism teaches the supremacy of God over the individual soul at all times -- including at *mukti*. However, the Sikh orientation is clearly marked when she expresses the belief that death is seen as union with the Creator, and "Sikhs regard this time as an opportunity to love and accept God's will and sing His Praises."<sup>58</sup>

#### 7:5:4 The Gurū

In line with Sikhism generally, the *gorā* Sikhs believe that, after the ten human Sikh Gurūs, the eternal Gurū of the Sikhs is the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Although the position of Yogī Bhajan is exalted to a high plane at times, the *gorā* Sikhs do not regard him as a Gurū in the same manner as the ten Sikh Gurūs. They are students of the *Panth*, and not students of Harbhajan Singh Puri. Obviously Bhajan is a gurū in the sense that he is the teacher, the master of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*, but he is not regarded as an extension to the ten human Gurūs in any way. Neither is Yogī Bhajan referred to as a *Sant*, although he is respected and honoured with the title of Siri Singh Sāhib. Thus, in this respect the *gorā* Sikhs are thoroughly *Khālsā* orientated, indeed, more so than the *Nāmdhāris* who adhere to the tradition of living Gurūs, but do not accept the *Ādi Granth* as the Gurū of the Sikhs.

The *Gurū Granth Sāhib* is accepted by Sikhs as a *universal* teaching.

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<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189.

Significantly, the practical outcome of this has been thoroughly emphasized through the efforts of Bhajan. Had it not been for him, Sikhism would continue to have been confined to a Punjabi background, as is the case for the majority of the *Panth*. In extending the universality of Sikhism, therefore, the exalted position of Yogī Bhajan is justifiable as being the Chief Religious Authority for Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere, primarily among the *gorā* Sikhs.

#### **7:5:5 Affinity towards Gurū Rāmdās**

There is another aspect in which the firm links with Sikh Gurūs are evident among the *gorā* Sikhs. The teachings of the fourth Sikh Gurū are particularly emphasized by Yogī Bhajan. This is due to the fact that, whilst undertaking two days of *sewā* at Amritsar, Yogī Bhajan professes to have had a strong affinity with the fourth Gurū. It is for this reason that many Sikh Dharma *ashrams* -- opened under the influence of Bhajan -- are referred to as *Gurū Rām Dās Ashram*. Furthermore Yogī Bhajan often uses the *mantar*:

*Gurū Gurū Wāhegurū,  
Gurū Rām Dās Gurū.*<sup>59</sup>

This close affinity for the fourth Gurū, has resulted in the *gorā* Sikhs undertaking continuous journeys to the Golden Temple, Amritsar, the city founded by Gurū Rāmdās. Groups of *gorā* Sikhs perform *kīrtan* at *Harmandir Sāhib* and keenly take part in *sewā* at the Golden Temple complex. These are valid reasons to promote *Khālsā* Sikh identity among the *gorā* Sikhs.

To sum up the beliefs of the *gorā* Sikhs, their core metaphysics are essentially those contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. In this respect, therefore, the Sikh

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<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>Khalsa, P. K. *Kundalini Yoga*, p. 76.

Dharma's claim to a Sikh identity is justified. The benefits of *nām simran* and meditation are in line with Sikh teachings. However, it is the observable emphasis on the practice of *kundalini yoga* that deviates from *Khālsā* Sikhism. Nevertheless, the explicit orientation of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere's Sikh identity, with regard to its beliefs, is very evident in the table below.

<i>Belief found in Sikh religion</i>	<i>Present among gorā Sikh belief</i>	<i>Absent among gorā Sikh belief</i>
Monotheism	#	
Absolute is <i>nirguna</i>	#	
<i>Saguna</i> essence of God is present in creation	#	
Panentheistic concept of the divine	#	
Self contains the essence of God, it is not God Itself	#	
Predestination	#	
Total reliance on God	#	
Human birth as highest	#	
Emphasis on the <i>Nadar</i> of God	#	
Ultimate aim is <i>mukti</i>	#	
Becoming a <i>jīvanmukt</i> is the ideal	#	
Detachment from worldly lures	#	
Emphasis on loss of ego and desire	#	
Advocation of <i>bhakti</i>	#	
Interiorized religion	#	
Rejection of image worship	#	
Rejection of <i>avatārs</i>	#	
Rejection of yogic practices		#
Worthlessness of rituals	#	
<i>Nām simran</i>	#	
Performance of <i>kīrtan</i>	#	
Reciting of <i>śabad</i>	#	
Company of the <i>satsaṅgat</i> is essential	#	

**Table 20. Conformity of beliefs found among the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and the general *Panth*.**

However, although the overall beliefs of the *gorā* Sikhs are those found in the overall *Panth*, their affiliation to Sikh *Khālsā* identity is not completely clear cut. The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere adheres to a number of core beliefs that do not conform to the *Khālsā*. The following table highlights those beliefs prominent among the *gorā* Sikhs that have no place in the *Panth* generally.

Concept found in the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere	Totally absent from general Sikh belief	Expressed differently in Sikh belief
<i>Kuṇḍalinī yoga</i> raises spiritual well-being	#	
White <i>tantra</i> purifies the being	#	
Ten bodies	#	
Death is <i>turiyā</i>		The individual soul will always retain its separateness from God.

**Table 21. Differences in belief between the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and the general *Panth*.**

### 7:6 Practices of the *gorā* Sikhs

It is of significance to note that the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere has no unique *rahit* of its own that students are required to follow. It is, indeed, the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, issued from the *Akal Takht* that is conformed to. Therefore, there is no initiation into the Sikh Dharma of Yogī Bhajan as such; rather, students initiate into the *Panth*. To what extent this is adhered to, is examined below.

According to Dusenbery, a parallel is present between the efforts of the Singh Sabhā and the aim of Yogī Bhajan.<sup>60</sup> The Singh Sabhā, during the latter period of the nineteenth century, asserted what the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere is emphasizing today -- an overt expression of Sikh identity in periods considered to be

<sup>60</sup>Dusenbery, V. A. "Of Singh Sabhas, Siri Singh Sahibs, and Sikh Scholars" in Barrier, N. G. and Dusenbery, V. A. (1989) *The Sikh Diaspora*, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, p. 91.



of threat to the future survival of Sikh values.<sup>61</sup> Dusenbery's assumption is further strengthened by the fact that Yogī Bhajan emphasizes the *Khālsā* as having a very important standing with regard to Sikh identity. Similarly, the Singh Sabhā, too, set out, among other things, to emphasize Sikh stringency in the form of the outward symbols of the *Khālsā*.<sup>62</sup> Thus, displaying the Five Ks is also one of the essentials for those who are guided by Yogī Bhajan, enabling the *gorā* Sikhs to assert their *Khālsā* Sikh identity.

### 7:6:1 *Amrit chaknā*

There is a great emphasis among students of the Sikh Dharma on taking *amrit* and, accordingly, wearing the five symbols of the *Khālsā*, along with the *bāṇā*, the traditional white clothing of a long tunic, often accompanied with tight pyjama-like trousers. Observance of the Five Ks and the traditional *bāṇā* dress is noticeably more so than with Sikhs generally, with their importance being stressed by Yogī Bhajan in his following words: "One thing in Sikh Dharma is very unique which you do not understand. It has a tremendous subconscious effect on you. That is the *bana* which gives you *Niara Panth*, distinct path, which totally pulls you up. There is no way that you can wear this and not be conscious."<sup>63</sup> With regard to the turban, an informant pointed out that it is not just a religious practice, but also protects the head and brain from damage. This aspect is also voiced in an article from the Sikh Dharma homepage in the words originally spoken by Yogī Bhajan:

Tying a turban and having hair on your head does not make you a Sikh. A turban crowns you with your own capacity to understand. You are deathless in the face of a direct confrontation with death. Wearing a head covering enables you to command your sixth center, the *Agia Chakra*. Covering the head stabilizes the cerebral matter and the 26 parts of the brain . . . The benefit of wearing a turban is that when you wrap the 5 to 7 layers of cloth, you cover the

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<sup>61</sup>The role of the Singh Sabhā has been looked at in detail in section 2:5:1 above.

<sup>62</sup>Dusenbery "Of Singh Sabhas" p. 93.

<sup>63</sup>Yogi Bhajan cited in Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, pp. 138-9.

temples, which prevents any variance or movement in the different parts of the skull. A turban automatically gives you a cranial self-adjustment. You can pay for a cranial adjustment, or you can tie a turban for free!<sup>64</sup>

Thus wearing a turban, in the words of Yogī Bhajan benefits Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. Particularly apparent from the above is the fact that the turban is a helpful tool for those who are students of the 3HO whilst practising to awaken and raise the *kuṇḍalinī* through each *cakra*. Noticeably, among the students of the Sikh Dharma the turban is worn by both males and females. Among the students of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, the wearing of turbans by women is in sharp contrast to the Punjabi *Panth*, where turbaned women are in the minority by far. On the whole, in the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere the turban tends to be white: however, a number of informants wore a blue turban. The overall tendency to wear white clothing symbolizes the death of the ego. The emphasis on this kind of outward *Khālsā* Sikh identity is certainly apparent among those who follow the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. The majority of these students are *kesdhārī*. But if the overt Sikh identity of the *gorā* Sikhs is immediately apparent there are some ways in which their membership of the *Panth* is characterized by divisive attitudes.

In asserting their *Khālsā* stringency, the *gorā* Sikhs often show insensitivity to the feelings of Punjabi Sikhs, especially when remarks such as the following are made by the *gorā* Sikhs: “the orthodox Sikhs are all baptized and their adherence to the five “ks” in the present time isn’t as dramatic as that of members of Sikh Dharma.”<sup>65</sup> The *gorā* Sikhs openly declare that they are more rigid in practicing the *Khālsā* than the Punjabi Sikhs themselves. What the *gorā* Sikhs do not appear to bear in mind is that they are students of a phenomenon introduced to them in the mere late 1960s, whereas the Punjabi Sikhs are the five-hundred-year-old followers of this now global religion.

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<sup>64</sup>“The Turban Spiritually” -- [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)

<sup>65</sup>“Sikh Dharma” -- [www.cti.itc.virginia.edu](http://www.cti.itc.virginia.edu)

The *gorā* Sikhs are adamant concerning the belief that their *Khālsā* identity fulfils Gurū Gobind's prophecy of the *Khālsā* spreading to all four corners of the world.<sup>66</sup> The *gorā* Sikhs' strict observance of the Five Ks, and their desire to retain the symbols of their *Khālsā* identity, is best illustrated via their views towards the American Army dress regulations. News was received by Bhajan in 1973 informing him that two *gorā* Sikh officers were forced to cut their hair and shave their beards.<sup>67</sup> Naturally, the *gorā* Sikh community was agitated by the actions of the army and campaigns were begun on behalf of the two soldiers. A few months later, on January 7 1974, the regulations were revised to include the following addition: "A Sikh who is declared to be in good standing by his local Minister may be allowed to deviate from the Army dress code, by wearing beard, hair, turban, special underwear, comb, and a symbolic replica of a kirpan."<sup>68</sup> Thus the efforts and continuous persistence of the *gorā* Sikh community paid dividends in the end in allowing Sikhs to retain their turbans and beards whilst serving in the American Army. This is very much a strong definition of the *gorā* Sikhs' determination to uphold the *Khālsā* identity. However, the decision to allow Sikh officers to retain hair and beard was reversed again in 1981: the issue remains under appeal.<sup>69</sup> With regard to an outward Sikh identity, therefore, the *gorā* Sikhs proudly display the *Khālsā* form. This is a significant indicator for the Sikh identity of the *gorā* Sikhs.

### 7:6:2 IKYTA

Among the students of the 3HO and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, there are student teachers who guide other students in yogic techniques. The overall association of these teachers is known as IKYTA -- International Kuṇḍalinī Yoga

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<sup>66</sup>Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

Teachers Association. Many of these teachers also practice the ideals of Sikh Dharma, but many others are interested in the yogic side only and do not necessarily have any connections with the Sikh faith. I was told that only trained teachers who affiliate to the IKYTA are permitted to teach *kuṇḍalinī yoga*. There is no sanction that proposed teachers are chosen by Yogī Bhajan. Training to become a *kuṇḍalinī yoga* teacher lasts for a total of three years. But, again, it could be argued that those teachers who are also students of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, are not acting in line with *Khālsā* regulations since *kuṇḍalinī yoga* has no place in the overall *Panth*.

#### **7:6:3 Annual events**

As with Sikh practice in general, the *gorā* Sikhs also celebrate the major *gurpurbs* and Sikh festivals of *baisākhī*, *dīwālī* and *holā mohallā*. The birthday of Yogī Bhajan, as the administrator of Sikh teachings to the West, is also celebrated by the *gorā* Sikhs. Additionally, annual events include worldwide camps. Camps are now becoming a feature of Sikh practice generally in its aim of promoting Sikh identity amongst the youth. The camps are an opportunity for *gorā* Sikhs, as well as students of the 3HO, to meet one another and share experiences. The practices of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* and meditation are particularly given prominence during the day's activities. Participation in the whole of the Sikh religious calendar is an unambiguous criterion towards the Sikh identity of the *gorās* of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.

#### **7:6:4 Simplicity**

The essence of a simple life forms the nucleus of Yogī Bhajan's teachings. A drug-free existence is seen as essential and this, as is the practice among *Nāmdhāris*, includes abstinence from alcohol, tea and coffee. *Gorā* students are recommended to drink "Yogi Tea" -- a caffeine-free herbal tea available in six different flavours.

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<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

Rehabilitation centres are operated by students to allow aspirants to live up to the drug-free lifestyle. The "Ram Das Puri Healing Center" situated near to Espanola, in New Mexico is becoming renowned for its efforts towards rejuvenation, prayer and healing through *kuṇḍalinī yoga* and herbal remedies.

Students of the Sikh Dharma are, as noted above, vegetarians. Vegetarianism, I reiterate, is not a requirement of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, however some Sikhs -- in particular the Nāmdhāris -- abstain from consuming meat or eggs. During the camps, it is vegetarian food that is cooked, and vegetarian cookery is taught through classes at the various camps. Many students of the Sikh Dharma have been successful in opening a chain of restaurants known as "Golden Temple Consciousness Cookeries" in the United States and Europe. These restaurants, of course, serve vegetarian dishes only. The *gorā* Sikhs adhere to Yogī Bhajan's claim that the *Khālsā rahit* stresses vegetarianism. However, I must add here that, although there are many *amritdhāri* Sikhs who interpret the *rahit* as indicating a vegetarian stance, I have found no *rahit* explicitly stating this.

The giving of a tenth of one's earnings, *dasvandh*, to help those less fortunate, is an ideal of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, and is also an important feature of general Sikh practice. The principle of *dasvandh* is based on one of the three pillars of Sikhism, that is, *vand chaknā*. A true Sikh is one who practices all three pillars with a sincere heart. The values of giving *dasvandh* have been expressed through Yogī Bhajan, he writes:

Learn from me. I came in this country, and I earned money. Whatever anybody has given was deposited, as the Guru's; that is Dharma. Whatever Dasvandh was given was deposited. For my own living, I earned every penny of it. . . . Everything that I earned I put to work for you, because I want to establish a relationship with you. I came here to serve you -- not to rule you, govern you, guide you, preach to you, teach you, convert you, destroy you or build you. No! I

have no such purpose. I have come to the United States to pay my dues.<sup>70</sup>

The practice of *nām simran* -- as is common with Sikh practice generally -- uplifts the body and mind spiritually, and is emphasized for students of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. Yogī Bhajan teaches that meditation is not just merely closing the eyes, but should come from the deeper essence of each individual. He points out that: "When adversity comes, we automatically meditate. We cannot survive through adversity without meditation. Meditation is not closing our eyes. Birds close their eyes, but do they meditate? That's not meditation."<sup>71</sup> Devout *gorā* Sikhs rise at 3 am each morning to meditate on the Name of God, as is prescribed in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. This, again, is a lifestyle characteristic of a *Khālsā* Sikh.

#### 7:6:5 *Ashrams*

In the UK the *gorā* Sikhs will go to *gurdwārās* of the general *Panth*, but they tend to visit the homes of fellow students more frequently. This is due mostly to the fact that there are no specific *gorā* Sikh *gurdwārās* in the UK. Interestingly, a need for specifically *gorā gurdwārās* suggests some need for separatism and divisiveness from the general *Panth*. Moreover, if the *gorā* Sikhs were thoroughly at home with *Khālsā* Sikhism, they should find general *gurdwārās* sufficient. The centres established by Yogī Bhajan are usually referred to as *ashrams*. It has not been possible to illustrate the interior of such places, since these are situated outside of the UK.

Services in the *ashrams* of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere have a Sikh orientation with the Sikh *ardās* also being recited. Usually, the service is conducted in the language of the country, quite often in English. For this purpose, a translation of selected verses and prayers, the Sikh *ardās*, as well as the *Sidh Ghost*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>"Learn From Me, Give To Dasvandh" -- [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)

<sup>71</sup>"An Attitude of Deathlessness" -- [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)

<sup>72</sup>The *Sidh Ghost*, contained in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, is Gurū Nānak's address to the Yogīs.

of Gurū Nānak are utilized.<sup>73</sup> These are the main translations used by *gorā* Sikhs who cannot read or understand Punjabi. With regard to the translation of the whole of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, it is Manmohan Singh's translation of the scripture that is chiefly used in both the homes and the *ashrams* of the students of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>74</sup>

The *ashrams* also display a *nisān sāhib*, but *not* a characteristically saffron Sikh one with the *Khaṇḍā* symbol. Rather, the *nisān sāhib* of the *ashrams* is triangular, white and gold. It was designed in 1972, and specifically so in order to distinguish the building as a centre of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>75</sup> This suggests a certain separatism from the *Panth* in the same way that religious places are not called *gurdwārās* but *ashrams*. I suggest that, although the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere accentuates non-difference from the general *Panth*, it desires a certain degree of separation -- specifically as the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. The flag illustrates two triangles: the upper white triangle symbolizing *santi*, that is, "purity, light, peace, tranquility, harmony and saintliness,"<sup>76</sup> the bottom yellow triangle representing the *śakti* principle of "power, courage, sacrifice, and action."<sup>77</sup> In the centre of the flag is the blue *Ādi Śakti* symbol representing the "logos of primal energy."<sup>78</sup> In line with Sikhism generally, the *nisān sāhib* of those Sikh Dharma centres that have one, is changed on *baisākhī*. However, a few of the centres have a tradition of *nisān sāhib sewā* on Gurū Nānak's birthday, in addition to *baisākhī*:<sup>79</sup> therefore holding this occasion twice yearly. Not displaying the characteristic Sikh *nisān sāhib* clearly labels the *gorā* Sikh places of worship as

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<sup>73</sup>Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 36.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

different from other *gurdwārās*, thus, inhibiting conformity in and a uniformity of, the *Panth*.

### 7:6:6 Equality of males and females

Especially prominent in the ideals spotlighted by Yogī Bhajan and his wife is the elevation of the position of women. The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere places immense importance on the teachings of *gurbāṇī* that assert the equality of females.<sup>80</sup> The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, as well as the 3HO, endeavour to raise the consciousness of women to enable them to live happy, violent-free lives. This can only be done when the woman realizes her true potential and power as a female through the practice of yoga, as remarked on by Yogī Bhajan and his wife during a conference on Family Violence:

The technology of yoga and meditation, in conjunction with life-style modifications can help men and women better understand themselves and each other, and thereby achieve mutually supportive relationships. Uplifting the consciousness of all men and women is the key to permanently preventing family violence. In a conscious relationship, there is no need for one person to desire control over the other.<sup>81</sup>

The 3HO/Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere holds exclusively female yoga and meditation training centres, referred to as KWTC: Khalsa Women's Training Camp. They provide spiritual fulfilment, by which a woman can experience her identity as a female, as expressed in the words of Yogī Bhajan: "Whether she chooses a career, a family or both, the woman who knows who she really is has a far greater chance to realize emotional and spiritual fulfilment in her life."<sup>82</sup>

The KWTC, therefore, trains women on how to become masters in areas such as career planning, assertiveness, marriage, interpersonal relationships, healthy sexual

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<sup>79</sup> Communication in the form of an e-mail reply from Gurukim Kaur Khalsa, of the Phoenix *saṅgat*.

<sup>80</sup> Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, p. 98.

<sup>81</sup> "Woman: Creator of Consciousness of the World" paper presented by Bibiji Inderjit Kaur Khalsa and Yogī Bhajan at the World Conference on Family Violence, Awareness, Change and Solutions, Singapore: September 8-11, 1998, p. 2.



life, as well as parenting.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, women are encouraged to develop their inner strength that will enable them to overcome all hurdles in life. The experiences of one woman, who had attended the camps, typifies what is described by many as a truly uplifting experience:

In 1980 I came to KWTC for the first time and initially had some of the most negative experiences ever in my life. Other experiences so turned me around that by the end of the second week they had to drag me to the plane. I just did not want to leave. The following summer when I was asked to speak to first-time campers about my experience, I heard myself telling them, much to my surprise, 'Last summer was the first time in my life that I was proud to be a woman.' And I was 40 years old! I have continued to renew myself in many women's camps since then and that experience of personal power and grace continues to grow. S. K. Khalsa, Phoenix.<sup>84</sup>

### 7:6:7 Marriage

Obviously, marriages among the *gorā* Sikhs are not performed endogamously since there is no *zāt* structure amongst the non-Punjabi or, more specifically, the non-Asian converts to Sikhism. In this respect the marriage arrangements of *gorā* Sikhs differ considerably from the majority of the Punjabi *Panth*, with the exception, however, of the Nāmdhāris, where inter-*zāt* marriages are frequent. And yet, although inter-caste marriages take place among the Nāmdhāris, I contend that they would be likely to frown on marriage of a Punjabi Sikh to a *gorā* Sikh. This, I believe, would be the case for the majority of Punjabi Sikhs, due to the fact that the traditional Punjabi culture and traditions -- which form an inseparable link with Sikh traditions -- would not be deemed to hold the same value for the *gorās*.<sup>85</sup> The marriage ceremony among the *gorā* Sikhs is that of taking *lāvān* around the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*, as is the case of general Sikh practice,<sup>86</sup> with the exception, again, of the Nāmdhāris where the *lāvān*

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<sup>82</sup>Yogī Bhajan in "3HO Foundation".

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup>S. K. Khalsa cited in "Who we are as Spiritual Women and Leaders in the Aquarian Age" -- [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)

<sup>85</sup>The implications of Punjabi ethnicity on the issue of Sikh identity will be looked at in the following chapter.

<sup>86</sup>I have not been able to clarify whether the ceremony is undertaken in the medium of *gurmukhī* or the

are taken around *havan*, the ceremonial fire.

### **7:6:8 The younger generation**

The needs of the younger *gorā* Sikh generation have not been overlooked, the Sikh Dharma Office of Youth Affairs was established in 1991 by Yogī Bhajan. This association specifically seeks to involve the young Sikhs actively in the activities of the *Panth* through a series of schools, youth programmes and camps. One of the marked activities includes the young *gorā* Sikhs attending schools in India for a period of time, enabling them to become bi-cultural and appreciate the traditions of *their* Sikh faith. Furthermore, the Khalsa Youth Camp has been operating for the last twenty years to see to the spiritual uplifting of the younger generation of *gorā* Sikhs.<sup>87</sup> Children are encouraged to recite *bāṇīs* and learn about the history, development and teachings of the Sikh faith. Hence, it is through such associations that the promotion of Sikh identity among the younger generation of *gorā* Sikhs is encouraged.

In summary of the praxis of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, the marked prominence placed on the wearing of the Five Ks and, in particular, the importance of being *kesdhārī*, clearly portrays the *gorā* Sikhs as following the *Khālsā* tradition. In this respect, the *gorā* Sikhs are indicating and displaying explicit indicators of a *Khālsā* Sikh identity. The ensuing table clearly illustrates that the majority of practices found in the overall *Panth* are, indeed, conformed to by the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, thus placing them *within* the general *Panth*.

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vernacular. It would appear to make more sense that *gurmukhī* is not used, since the first language of many of the students would not be Punjabi.

<i>Sikh Practice</i>	<i>Present among the gorā Sikhs</i>	<i>Absent among the gorā Sikhs</i>
Use of the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> in worship	#	
The <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i> as the basis for religious belief	#	
<i>Lāvān</i> taken around <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Singing of <i>kīrtan</i> from the <i>Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>	#	
Recitation of <i>arāīs</i> during worship	#	
Performance of <i>akhaṇḍ pāths</i>	#	
<i>Parchār</i> of the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs	#	
Serving of <i>gurū-kā-laṅgar</i>	#	
Distribution of <i>prasād</i>	#	
Place of worship called a <i>gurdwārā</i>		#
Importance of the Sikh Gurūs	#	
Prominence of the <i>Khaṇḍā</i> and/or <i>Ik-Onkār</i> symbol	#	
Performance of <i>amrit</i> ceremony	#	
Emphasis on the Five Ks	#	
Emphasis on being <i>kesdhārī</i>	#	
Traditional Punjabi dress for females	#	
Requirement for males and females to cover their heads	#	
Celebration of the <i>gurpurbs</i>	#	
Celebration of <i>baisākhi</i> as birth of the <i>Khālsā</i>	#	
Celebration of <i>ḍīwālī</i> as the release of Gurū Hargobind from prison	#	
Celebration of <i>holā mohallā</i>	#	
<i>Nisān sāhib</i> changed on <i>baisākhi</i>	# <sup>88</sup>	
Saffron <i>nisān sāhib</i> with <i>Khaṇḍā</i>		#
Endogamous marriages		#

**Table 22. Conformity of practices found among the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and the general *Panth*.**

<sup>87</sup>“Khalsa Youth Camp: A Priceless Gift” -- www.sikhnet.com

<sup>88</sup>This is not the practice in *all* Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere centres, but is the general practice where *nisān sāhibs* are present.

Although the *gorā* Sikhs conform to the overall praxis of the *Panth*, there are additional practices amongst them that preclude a Sikh affiliation. These have been listed in the table below. Thus, although the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere believes that it is stringent in its *Khālsā* identity, it has its own areas of deviant praxis that suggest it would not wish to conform to a uniform Sikh identity.

Practice found in the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere	Totally absent from general Sikh practice	Expressed differently in the <i>Panth</i>
Emphasis on <i>kundalini yoga</i>	#	
Females wearing turbans		Small number of females wear the turban, significantly less than the <i>gorī</i> females
Tendency to wear a white turban		No particular colour emphasized
Association of <i>kundalini</i> teachers	#	
Celebration of Yogi Bhajan's birthday	#	
Religious centre called <i>ashram</i>		Religious centre called <i>gurdvārā</i>
Triangular white and gold <i>nīsān sāhib</i> without <i>Khandā</i>		Saffron <i>nīsān sāhib</i> with <i>Khandā</i>
<i>Nīsān sāhib</i> changed twice yearly	#	
Non-endogamous marriages	#	

**Table 23. Practices that distinguish the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere from the general *Panth*.**

### 7:7 The identity of the *gorā* Sikhs

The very fact that the *gorā* Sikhs follow the teachings of the Sikh Gurūs and, moreover, adhere stringently to the requirements of a *Khālsā* Sikh as stated in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, are indicative of their Sikh identity. The majority of *gorā* Sikhs are at least *kesdhārī*, if not *amritdhārī*. Therefore, the *gorā* Sikhs themselves assert their identity as Sikhs of the *Khālsā Panth*. They declare that they are Sikhs no less than the Punjabi Sikhs. In sharp contrast, Punjabi Sikhs do not freely label the *gorā* Sikhs as fellow Sikhs, and a separation between the two groups exists at all times.

From its inception to the present day, the Sikh faith has always had the Punjab as its inspiration, and this degree of Punjabi ethnicity is absent among the *gorā* Sikhs.

Thus, I suggest that the most obvious division in the *Panth* between the *gorā* Sikhs and the Punjabi Sikhs lies in the basis of ethnicity. Sikh culture and tradition is inevitably bound with the Punjabi tradition and Punjabi culture of India. An important theme of this ethnic Punjabi culture is that of *izzat* "honour". Norms of society are embedded in this notion of *izzat*; it is in accordance with *izzat* that the Punjabi will approach society. This *izzat* concept is not present, some say, in the moral sensitivities of the *gorā* Sikhs. Furthermore, Dusenbery argues that it is behaviour in accordance with *izzat* that has led to misunderstanding between the Punjabi Sikhs and the *gorā* Sikhs:

the moral sensitivities of Gora Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs (and, in this regard, particularly those of the dominant Jat Sikhs) not only differ but also differ in culturally specific ways. . . the notion of *izzat* (honor), apparently so central to Jat Sikh "moral affect," is not shared by Gora Sikhs. . . this difference in moral affect, I argue, enters into the active estrangement of Gora Sikhs and Jat Sikhs and their (mis)apprehension of one another.<sup>89</sup>

So, for example, whereas for Punjabi Sikhs a marriage outside of the *zāt* would bring great shame on the *izzat* of the family, this issue is not present in the lives of the *gorā* Sikhs. Thus, as long as endogamy persists in the Punjabi *Panth*, marriages between *gorā* Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs will not take place. In this sense, a separation is bound to continue between the two divisions of the *Panth*. Nevertheless, although inter-caste marriages do not take place within the Punjabi *Panth* itself, Punjabi Sikhs of different *zāts* mix freely. This is on the basis that each Punjabi will act in accordance with what retains or increases the *izzat* of the particular family, and will be aware of the moral sensitivities of others. Important to note, however, is that there is no written *rahit* that

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<sup>89</sup>Dusenbery "On the Moral Sensitivities of Sikhs in North America" p. 241.

a Sikh must be a Punjabi.<sup>90</sup>

Yogī Bhajan's encouragement for *gorā* Sikhs to assert proudly their Sikh identity is excessive. He continuously advises the *gorā* Sikhs not to succumb to discrimination by the Punjabi Sikhs. This has often resulted in the *gorā* Sikhs asserting that they are more Sikh than the Punjabi *Panth* as a whole. On the issue of the Sikh identity of the *gorā* Sikhs, Yogī Bhajan expresses that: "you are not Sikhs because a yogi came from India and gave you the message. You are not Sikhs because you want to be Sikhs. You are not Sikhs because it is a matter of convenience. You are Sikhs because you are destined to be Sikhs and you'll remain Sikhs so long as you are destined."<sup>91</sup> Thus the direction towards a Sikh identity is firmly rooted in the teachings of Yogī Bhajan, as channelled through the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. His identification with all aspects of Sikhism, or at least his desire to be identified as so, is best illustrated in his appeal for the *langar* to be served whilst sitting on the floor, rather than at tables with chairs. This appeared in the widely circulated Sikh newspaper *Des Pardes*.<sup>92</sup> It was an issue quite prominent in June 1998 since the *Jathedār*, the chairman of the *Akal Takht* has expressed the need for *paṅgat*<sup>93</sup> to be followed in all *gurdwārās* world-wide. By showing his concern in the matter, Yogī Bhajan has indicated that he is involved, together with the *gorā* Sikhs, in all decisions that affect the *Panth* -- Punjabi or non-Punjabi -- as a whole.

Connections between the *gorā* Sikhs and the Punjabi *Panth* are best shown by the close bonds of friendship the *gorā* Sikhs have with the Bhāī Randhīr Jathā, as well as the Nihangs. Both are Punjabi Sikh groups that are prevalent in the Punjab. In 1978 a group of *gorā* Sikhs joined Bhāī Fauja Singh, the leader of the Bhāī Randhīr Jathā,

<sup>90</sup> The ethnicity issue will be enlarged on further in the succeeding chapter.

<sup>91</sup> Bhajan, Yogi "An Attitude of Deathlessness" in *Beads of Truth*, 2 (1989): 36.

<sup>92</sup> The appeal taken from *Des Pardes* is enclosed in appendix 5:2.

<sup>93</sup> Those taking *langar* should sit in rows on the floor -- a requirement made by the Gurūs to symbolize

in a peaceful protest against a group of so-called Sikhs, the Nirankārīs, in Amritsar. Thirteen *gorā* Sikhs, together with Bhāi Fauja Singh, were martyred in the march.<sup>94</sup> This clearly shows the *gorā* Sikhs' involvement with other Sikhs, as well as their involvement in matters of the Punjab. A close friendship also continues to flourish between the *gorā* Sikhs and the Tarunā Dal branch of the Nihang Sikhs. The leader of the Jathā, Bābā Nihāl Singh, has taken it upon himself to host the *gorā* Sikhs whenever they visit the Punjab.<sup>95</sup> The links that the *gorā* Sikhs continue to have with both groups clearly represents the enticement of India, in particular the Punjab, which they claim to cherish dearly.

Yet, it must be said that a significant inhibitor of the Sikh ethos of the *gorā* Sikhs is the emphasis they place on the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*. This is one element, significant enough, that contradicts *gurbāṇī*. However, it is the *gorā* Sikhs' overt emphasis on the *bāṇā* that enables them to fit quite neatly into the *Khālsā* identity. The *gorā* Sikhs' sense of a Sikh identity is strengthened by the fact that, as illustrated in 7:6:3 above, all major Sikh events are celebrated enthusiastically every year. Moreover, unlike the Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis, *baisākhī* and *dīwālī* have an overt Sikh orientation among the *gorā* Sikhs. An account in the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere journal, *Beads of Truth*, recalls the joyous celebration of *Gurgaddī Day* by the *gorā* Sikhs of America.<sup>96</sup> On this day, a parade of *gorā* Sikhs takes place in Yuba City to revere the day on which the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* was installed as the eternal Gurū of the Sikhs. In this respect, the *gorā* Sikhs are more akin to the general *Panth* than the Nāmdhāris, who refuse to recognize the *Ādi Granth* as Gurū. Of significance here is that the *gorā* Sikhs, in line with the general *Panth*,

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equality.

<sup>94</sup>Khalsa, S. K. *The History of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>96</sup>Khalsa, P. K. "Yuba City – New Punjab!" in *Beads of Truth*, pp.23-4.

acknowledge the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* as *their* Gurū, no other equates to the line of gurūship. Another significant point with regard to their *Khālsā* identity is that the *gorā* Sikhs fully comply with the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

Yogī Bhajan has not sanctioned a distinct or unique *rahit* for the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. Thus, although having founded the 3HO, Yogī Bhajan is the *administrator* of Sikhism in the Western Hemisphere. As such, then, the *gorā* Sikhs claim that there is not a following of, or affiliation to, the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere *per se*: rather, what students follow is Sikhism as taught by the Sikh Gurūs. The only real, major point of departure from the Punjabi *Panth* is the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*, especially by those who practice the principles of the 3HO. I must stress, nevertheless, that although the *gorā* Sikhs accentuate their position *within* the *Panth*, a degree of distinction *from* the *Panth* is inescapable when bearing in mind that centres of the group are specifically centres of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. The absence of the term *gurdwārā*, and the absence of a saffron *nisān sāhib* displaying a *Khaṇḍā* clarify the visible differentiation. Furthermore, in practice, Yogī Bhajan is elevated to a pronounced level of leadership in the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. One cannot overlook the fact that he is the leader or the administrator of Sikhism in the West, and his character does, indeed, inform the general ethos of the group. Something of his status among the *gorās* is echoed in the following words from the literature of the "Sikh Dharma International" group:

It is since the late 1960s that thousands of people have begun to embrace the Sikh way of life on a global level. The Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajan, greatly contributed to this awakening to Sikh values through his inspired guidance and leadership. . . . Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere has become a powerful vehicle for spreading the light of the Guru's teachings, because its technologies are uniquely suited to helping people reclaim their spirituality, dignity, and grace. Sikh Dharma is a religion of experience that is open and available to all, Sikh and non-Sikh alike. It teaches that the virtues of love, courage, dedication,



and righteousness belong to all people, just as all people have a birthright to be Healthy, Happy and Holy.<sup>97</sup>

One is tempted to question, therefore, whether it is *gurbāṇī* that the *gorā* Sikhs turn to, or whether it is *gurbāṇī* as expressed through Yogī Bhajan that is the focus.

Moreover, I maintain that the *gorā* Sikhs' degree of adherence to the principles of Sikhism cannot be compared with the Punjabi *Panth* as a whole. This, as highlighted earlier, is due to the fact that the *gorā* Sikh following is still in its first generation of development. The preponderance of *gorā* Sikhs is by choice and not by Sikh birth. This, in my opinion, makes a great deal of difference when assessing the level of religious conformity of a group. Therefore, the present enthusiasm of the converts is yet to be tested with the future generations of *gorā* Sikhs. It must also be remembered that, whereas the migrant Punjabi Sikhs have had to accommodate themselves to a different environment in which alien cultures have, and will, affect the younger generation, the *gorā* Sikhs have not had to face these influences as outsiders in a host nation. The western culture is *their* culture, but they choose to adopt the Sikh way of life. On the other hand, for the Punjabi Sikhs their culture is Punjabi but they have been influenced -- and sometimes forced -- in differing degrees, to adapt according to the culture of the country to which they have migrated.

The *gorā* Sikh elevation of the *Khālsā* identity is aptly highlighted in their criticism of the apparently lax behaviour of the Punjabi Sikhs. This is nowhere more adamantly asserted than in the 1973 *Rejoinder* article by a *gorā* Sikh, Premka Kaur -- then the Administrative Director of Sikh Dharma Brotherhood. The rejoinder by Premka Kaur was written in response to an article by a Punjabi Sikh, Amarjit Singh Sethi, which had appeared in the earlier November 1972 issue of the *Sikh Review*. The

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<sup>97</sup>“Sikh Dharma International: A New Path To a Great Future” Sikh Dharma International, P. O. Box 351149, 1649 So Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA. 90035 USA.

article was also printed by the *Sikh Courier*.<sup>98</sup> Kaur's introductory paragraph, cited from the *Sikh Review*, reads:

The Amarjit Singh Sethi's article, . . . has raised in the hearts and souls of the Sikhs in America and throughout the world, an outraged cry against the treachery of those to justify their faithlessness, (*sic*) their falsehood who have tried and their slander, (*sic*) by sitting in judgement upon the very words and instructions of the Guru.<sup>99</sup>

The purport of Kaur's article is to voice the concern that it is not only Punjabis who are entitled to become Sikhs. This is because, as she points out, *gurbāṇī* is not confined to Punjabis or to Indians alone.<sup>100</sup> It is through Premka Kaur's correspondence to the *Sikh Review* that Punjabi Sikhs first came to know of the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood, following the distribution of thousands of copies of Kaur's letter to the Punjabi *Panth* by the SGPC.<sup>101</sup>

Further volatile emotions between Punjabi and *gorā* Sikhs have ignited due to the fact that Premka Kaur claimed that, on the whole, the Punjabi Sikhs are not following the teachings of *gurbāṇī*, and that the Punjabi Sikhs are endeavouring to adjust the definition of a Sikh, as contained in the *Rehat Maryādā*, to fit into their lapsed retention of the *Khālsā* rules. She states that Punjabi Sikhs are becoming more concerned with societal trends than keeping the *Khālsā* form. I quote at length from Kaur's letter:

There is no *gursikh* unless he is a student of the Guru *first*. One is never a *gursikh* because he happened to be born in India. There is no student of the Guru who has the right to reverse or disregard the *hukam* of his Guru and still call himself a *gursikh*. You are truly losing sight of your very foundation stone, your very roots. You are sitting on the end of a branch and you are cutting it off of the tree. You have become more concerned with society, more concerned with your image as a social group, and you have totally forgotten that if you are not Sikhs of the Guru, then Sikh means nothing at all. You can be a Punjabi no matter what you do and no matter where you go, but you cannot call yourself a Sikh unless you are living as a Sikh. . . . Those Sikhs, (or rather those born into Sikh

<sup>98</sup> Sethi, A. S. "The Religion of Nanak: Basic Issues" in *The Sikh Courier*, Spring-Summer 1972, pp. 13-17.

<sup>99</sup> Kaur, Premka "Rejoinder" in *Sikh Review*, 21 (1973): p. 52.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Dusenbery "Of Singh Sabhas" p. 96.

families) who have cared more for profit and more for Western convention and fashion, who have cared more for social acceptance and a life of ease – they are not Sikhs.<sup>102</sup>

It follows that, according to Premka Kaur, who claims to speak for the American *gorā* Sikhs as a whole, the *gorā* converts are apparently the more rigid followers of the *Panth* than the *sahajdhārī* Punjabi Sikhs. But the comparison between the *gorā* Sikhs and the *sahajdhārīs* that Premka Kaur has made is unfair. Punjabi *sahajdhārīs* cannot be judged in accordance to their outward form -- for the simple reason that they are not *Khālsā* Sikhs. Although the *sahajdhārīs* question the *Khālsā* concept, they, nevertheless, tend to follow the teachings of the Gurūs, in particular, of Gurū Nānak. In this respect, it could be claimed that it is those *gorā* Sikhs who practice *kuṇḍalinī yoga* who are ignoring the teachings of the Gurūs, who spoke out against yogic practices. And, evidently, these practices form an important part of *gorā* Sikh life, sufficiently so to challenge their conformity to Sikh identity in terms of basic beliefs.

The *gorā* Sikhs undoubtedly shed a different light on the issue of Sikh identity to that most commonly associated with the *Panth* and, indeed, in view of the previous groups that I have scrutinized. However, the *gorā* Sikhs are not taking a back seat, they declare assertively that they are Sikhs of the *Panth*, no less than the Punjabis. If this means separate places of worship, then so be it. Importantly, this is no different to many groups within the *Panth* who have their own particular places of worship -- as I have illustrated in previous chapters.

Since the definition of a Sikh according to the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* makes no mention of ethnicity, the *gorā* Sikhs are to be counted among the followers of the *Khālsā Panth*. As far as speaking, writing and understanding the Punjabi language is concerned, this is something that many British-born Punjabi Sikhs themselves find

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<sup>102</sup>Kaur, "Rejoinder" pp. 52-53.

difficult, and for many of these Punjabi Sikhs the mode of communication is English. With regard to the interpretation of *gurmukhī*, Sikhs living in India also have difficulties. It could be argued therefore, that if these same individuals are unhesitant about their Sikh affiliation, then so are the *gorā* Sikhs.

The western, non-Punjabi *Panth*, therefore, now brings into question the whole issue of ethnicity as a criterion for Sikh identity: this I proceed to examine in the following chapter. Ultimately, the non-Punjabi *Panth* is bringing to the fore the concept that Sikhism is a universal faith. Whether the dominant Punjabi *Panth* will openly accept these westerners is something that only time will reveal.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSION**

*Who is a Sikh?  
Thematic Answers*

The present research has indicated that different groups in the *Panth* highlight various perspectives in relation to the issue of Sikh identity. In the course of the research I have answered four crucial questions that underpin my work:

- What indicators for Sikh identity are suggested by an analysis of the historical development of Sikhism from the period of Gurū Nānak to the present day?
- Where applicable, what particular ethos is created by the founders and/or leaders of each of the groups, and how does this ethos inform issues related to corporate Sikh identity?
- What indicators for Sikh identity are suggested by an analysis of a selection of groups that are regarded in the present as Sikh, or who have been regarded so in the past?
- How far is the *Rehat Maryādā* helpful and appropriate in defining a Sikh?

Hence, what are the findings of this research and how far are they valid in answering my four aims? I have attempted to answer this in the context of five areas -- (1) The concept of Gurū in Sikhism; (2) Leaders and founders; (3) The role of the *Rehat Maryādā* in relation to Sikh identity; (4) Caste and the *Panth*; (5) The issue of Sikh identity in relation to Punjabi ethnicity.

### **8:1 The concept of Gurū in Sikhism**

Teachings concerning the concept of Gurū are central to the Sikh faith and its followers; indeed, a “Sikh” is translated as a “disciple”. A fundamental belief of the Sikh faith is that, after his death in 1708, Gurū Gobind Singh instituted the *Ādi Granth* as the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. Thus, the line of ten human Gurūs came to an end. The Gurūs are the preceptors of the truth, since the term *gurū* is derived from two words *gu* and *rū*, signifying that a Gurū is the dispeller of ignorance. Any group that continues the line of human Gurūs is regarded as heretical by *Khālsā* Sikhs. Two such groups are the

Nāmdhāris and the Nirankārīs.<sup>1</sup>

The belief held by the overwhelming majority of Sikhs, that Gurū Gobind Singh had proclaimed the *Ādi Granth* as the eternal Gurū, is not without criticism among some scholars. I do not wish to digress here to analyse such views. Suffice it to say that Madanjit Kaur has contested these views very well and has demonstrated that there exists ample evidence to suggest that the *Ādi Granth* was instituted as the eternal Gurū in 1708.<sup>2</sup> She further states that Gurū Gobind Singh's decision to do this had been the fulfilment of the ideals of the earlier Gurūs. Kaur highlights that the idea was already present in the *Granth*, she writes: "It is evident . . . that the doctrine laid down in the *Guru Granth* by the earlier Sikh gurus, was reiterated by Guru Gobind Singh, when he hailed the *Granth* as the *Guru Granth*."<sup>3</sup> The evidence that Kaur refers to is found in AG 515:

The reverend Lord is the Truest of the true, and true are the Guru's hymns.  
Through the True Guru is the truth recognised and the man is easily absorbed in the  
True Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout this study, and in accordance with general Sikh belief, I have accepted that the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* was instituted as Gurū in 1708. To argue whether this belief is historically correct is beyond the scope of the present research and is unnecessary, given that the vast majority of Sikhs -- and certainly *Khālsā* Sikhism -- accepts the validity of the tradition.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Nirankārīs have not been researched in the present thesis. Details about them can be obtained from Cole, W. O. and Sambhi, P. S. (1998 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edn; first published 1978) *The Sikhs*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, pp. 164-5, McLeod, W. H. (1997) *Sikhism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 186-8, and Kalsi, S. S. (1992) *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain*, Leeds: University of Leeds, pp. 81-5.

<sup>2</sup>Kaur, Madanjit "The Guruship and Succession of Guru Granth Sahib" in Mann, J. S. and Saraon, H. S. (1989) *Advanced Studies in Sikhism*, Irvine: Sikh Community of North America, pp. 121-37.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>Singh, Manmohan (1996 rp of 1962 edn) *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 1698.

<sup>5</sup>Detailed researches that question this view can be found in McLeod, W. H. (1975) *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Delhi: Oxford University Press; and Grewal, J. S. (1982) *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University.

Because of its position as the promulgator of *Khālsā* stringency, the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* explicitly affirms the belief that a Sikh should believe in the ten Gurūs, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and must have "no other guide or Book."<sup>6</sup> This belief, as my research has indicated, is maintained by all Sikhs, whether *Khālsā* or *sahajdhārī*, with the exception of the Nāmdhāris. It is the Nāmdhāris who reject what must be claimed as a fundamental *Khālsā* belief. Surprisingly, the Nāmdhāris are, nevertheless, regarded as being within the Sikh community by a significant number of non-Nāmdhāri Sikhs. This is so regardless of a fundamental, major difference in belief that should place their Sikh identity in question. It would seem, then, that *outward* acceptance of *Khālsā* regulations is more important than acceptance of fundamental *belief* in this case. On the other hand, there are many Sikhs who label groups such as the Nāmdhāris as heretics, precisely because they do not accept one of the main tenets of *Khālsā* belief.<sup>7</sup> An important consideration, therefore, is whether deviation from one central core belief, and yet stringent observation of the *Khālsā* form promotes or hinders Sikh identity. What is clear, however, is that *total* conformity to *Khālsā* stipulations would be impossible for the Nāmdhāris.

Prominent positions are attributed to holy men such as *Sants* and *Bābājīs* within the Sikh community as a whole, though not to the extent of adding to the established line of Gurūs. But in the case of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, particular *Sants* and *Bābājīs* are elevated to levels of supremacy by their followers. I have often gained the impression that prominent *Sants* and *Bābājīs* attempt to establish themselves as the voice of the Sikh Gurūs. Such *Sant-*

<sup>6</sup>Amritsar *Rehat Maryada* (1978) Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup>In terms of adherence of the Five Ks, the Nāmdhāris do not usually wear the *kirpan*; instead, as



orientated groups also challenge *Khālsā* teachings. Further, they tend to distinguish themselves from the general *Panth*, causing diversity of the *Panth* as a whole. The *Sants* and *Bābājīs* are accorded far more prominence than *Khālsā* Sikhism requires. Again, such groups would find *total* adherence to *Khālsā* rules, and total conformity, impossible.

There are groups who deliberately emphasize their distinction from the *Panth* by upholding Gurūs, other than the ten Sikh Gurūs. Two such examples are the Ravidāsīs and the Vālmīkis. For these groups the ten Sikh Gurūs are mere holy men and are not specially revered. Some of those who had taken *amrit* into Sikhism may occasionally revere the Sikh Gurūs on occasions such as *gurpurbs* but such groups do not have any longer an aspiration to be associated with the *Panth* at all, mainly due to their disappointment with not being treated as equals. For both the Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis, their Gurūs are *zāt* orientated, and I agree thoroughly with Kalsi when he points out that the caste of a particular *Sant* or holy man reflects on the caste composition of his followers.<sup>8</sup> It is well to remember that the Sikh Gurūs also all belonged to the same *zāt* and this has had its effect in retaining caste exclusivity in many contexts in Sikhism, hand in hand with social tradition that prefers to retain caste practices. This suggests that uniformity in the *Panth* is impossible. Worth noting, too, is that the Nāmdhāris' continuing Gurūs are *rāmgarhīā*. This appears to make them and their Gurūs more acceptable in the *Panth* because of the size of *rāmgarhīā* membership, and illustrates just how important caste is. Noticeably, *Sant/Bābājī*-orientated groups often tend to exhibit a more *explicit* outward Sikh identity in terms of *Khālsā* appearance than the general *Panth*. To this is added their total acceptance of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and the ten

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highlighted in chapter 4:5:2 above, they show preference for the *lathī*.

<sup>8</sup>Kalsi, *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain*, p. 129.

human Gurūs, to which they equate no others. This clearly brings them within the *Khālsā* fold despite the emphasis on their respective leaders. I believe that not recognizing the ten Gurūs and the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* as the means to realize *mukti* is an obvious criterion that inhibits conformity to a uniform definition of who a Sikh is, and renders it highly questionable whether such beliefs can be labelled as truly Sikh.

## **8:2 Leaders and founders**

Each of the five groups studied has leaders and, indeed, founders of its own. These leaders and founders are not a part of the general *Panth* and, moreover, are responsible for the differentiation of each group from the general *Panth*. The different leaders have taken the groups in various directions and highlight important considerations for the issue of Sikh identity. *Sants* have introduced a number of features that distinguish a group from Sikhs of the general *Panth*. This is accentuated because the *Sants* have their own position of rather elevated importance amongst the group. Important, nevertheless, is the fact that the majority of *Sants* and *Bābājīs* place immense stress on the *Khālsā* form. In the case of the Gurū Nānak Nishkān Sewak Jathā and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, both groups have leaders who, although causing a distinction from the general *Panth*, show eagerness for the *Khālsā* identity. In this respect, these groups must be regarded as being thoroughly Sikh. On the other hand, one cannot ignore that many leaders and founders create separatism within general Sikh identity. It is highly unlikely that they would ever conform to uniform belief and praxis that the *Rehat Maryādā* requires.

Dissatisfaction within the *Panth* has resulted in historical leaders and founders being acknowledged, these historical founders tend to be non-Sikh, as in the cases of Ravidās and Vālmīki. Here, the orientation of the groups has been further and further

away from Sikhism to a point of non-identity with Sikhs. Needless to say, such separatist groups place no importance at all on the *Khālsā* form, though they may keep the turban and *kes*.

The teachings and character of different leaders and founders are responsible for the general ethos of various groups. If these leaders and founders taught no differently from what the general *Panth* maintains, then there would be no such groups: there would be an overall uniformity of the *Panth*. I reiterate however, that leaders and founders from a Sikh background continue to emphasize the *Rehat Maryādā*'s ideal that a *true* Sikh is an *amritdhārī*. So on the one hand, leaders can, indeed, promote corporate Sikh identity and *Khālsā* identity, but they tend to create divisiveness by their very presence.

### **8:3 The role of the *Rehat Maryādā* in relation to Sikh identity**

An important issue that needs to be addressed is whether the groups I have studied accept the authority of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, or whether they have their own rules and regulations. Then, too, there is the issue of whether the behaviour and beliefs of each group inhibit or strengthen Sikh identity in terms of *Khālsā* praxis. Significantly, one of the major purposes of the *Rehat Maryādā* is to make a *Khālsā* Sikh aware of his or her identity as being distinct from the other faiths of Indian origin: thus, it follows that the distinctiveness of Sikh identity as *Khālsā* is best accentuated in the *Rehat Maryādā*.<sup>9</sup>

With the establishment of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, distinctiveness of the *Khālsā* Sikhs was certainly evident, since they were clearly different from other Punjabis in terms of their outward appearance. Importantly, not all followers of the Sikh faith underwent *khande-dī-pahūl*. Thus, Sikh tradition and praxis were interpreted differently

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<sup>9</sup>Precisely why the *Khālsā* form is emphasized is best understood by drawing attention to the reasons behind the need for the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. This issue has been examined in detail above in chapter 2:5.

by the two major divisions of Sikhs -- the *Khālsā* and the *suhajdhārī*.<sup>10</sup> The point I wish to make is that there were clearly *different types* of Sikhs. And this, as my research has illustrated, continues to the present day.

According to personal experience of contemporary Sikh practice, many of the taboos highlighted in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* continue to be practised by a substantial number of Sikhs today. As remarked earlier, the *Rehat Maryādā* is emphatic that Sikhs should not follow Hindu superstitions, as it describes them, neither should Sikhs keep fasts: this is clearly articulated in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*:

A Sikh should have no belief in caste, black magic, superstitious practices; such as, the seeking of auspicious moments, eclipses, the practices of feeding Brahmans in belief that the food will reach one's ancestors, ancestor's worship, fasting at different phases of the moon, the wearing of sacred threads and similar rituals.<sup>11</sup>

However, superstitious practices have not been totally obliterated among the *Panth* as a whole. From personal experience as a Punjabi female, I have come across ample evidence to illustrate clearly that many Sikh females, including my mother, gather for the annual Hindu fast of *kurvā choth*, which is kept to safeguard one's husband. This is one instance among many where social praxis takes precedence over prescribed norms of behaviour.<sup>12</sup>

Another example of the blurred religious boundaries between Sikh and Hindu is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, in India, many Sikhs will undertake pilgrimages to Hindu shrines -- in particular those associated with the *Mātā*, the Hindu goddess. Many Sikhs who visit India from the diaspora will envisage some kind of journey in order to

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<sup>10</sup>Oberoi, H. (1997) *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>*Anrītsar Rehat Maryāda*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>Another well-kept superstition applies to females who are told that they must not wash their hair on certain days of the week -- again an outward contradiction of the *Rehat Maryādā* that incontestably notes that a Sikh is not to believe in superstition. Furthermore, many non-vegetarian Sikhs will not eat meat on a Sunday -- to regard some days as holier than others is not in line with Sikh teachings.

pray for the welfare of the family. These practices were strongly discouraged by the *Tat Khālsā*: indeed, it was such practices that were initially responsible for the aims of the Singh Sabhās.<sup>13</sup> Although the *Tat Khālsā* denounced astrology and superstitious practices, these continue to be practised by many Sikhs today. My father, who migrated from the Punjab, told me that reverence of the Muslim Guggā Pīr -- a saint who Oberoi says was revered in nineteenth-century Punjab by many Sikhs<sup>14</sup> -- still remains in the Punjab today. My father also remarked that members of his family would occasionally revere the *Pīr* too: but, nevertheless, he has no doubts about his Sikh identity.

Research of Hindu-Sikh practices being performed side-by-side has been undertaken by Ron Geaves in his study of the Bābā Bālaknāth *Mandir* at Walsall, West Midlands. His study clearly illustrates that, contrary to the formal instructions of the *Rehat Maryādā*, Sikh and Hindu practices are at times fused into one without any marked emphasis on distinctiveness. During his research, Geaves found that the priest of the Bābā Bālaknāth *Mandir* was a *jaṭ* Sikh: although not *kesdhārī*, he did wear a *karā*.<sup>15</sup> The very term *mandir* is clearly of Hindu orientation, however the decor includes representations of Gurū Nānak and Gurū Gobind Singh. Thus Geaves states that the *mandir* "raised interesting questions concerning the relationship between religion and ethnicity, but it also provoked questions concerning Sikh identity."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Geaves' findings can be compared to nineteenth-century Punjab when Sikhs participated in practices that did not have any Sikh orientation. Adopting practices from other faiths contradicts the requirements of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

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<sup>13</sup> The efforts of both groups have been discussed in chapter 2:5.

<sup>14</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 160.

<sup>15</sup> Geaves, R. "Worship of Baba Balaknath", paper presented to the Punjab Research Group, Coventry University, 25 January 1997.

A growing number of younger Sikhs today question the need for the Five Ks in contemporary society. They feel that the *Rehat Maryādā*'s definition should be adjusted to accommodate those who do not wish to display the outward identity of the *Khālsā*. A central question is whether all Sikhs have knowledge of what the *Rehat Maryādā* is. And, furthermore, do they have access to it? From personal experience as a British-born Sikh, and coming from a *sahajdhārī* family, I believe that a substantial proportion of British-born Sikhs -- especially the younger generation -- do not know what the *Rehat Maryādā* is: this is more so if their families are non-*Khālsā*. The younger generation's attitudes have not received much favour among the elder generation of *kesdhārīs*.<sup>17</sup> Many younger-generation Sikhs believe that one should not idly participate in something that is not understood or aspired to. They hold that a purified interior is far more important than a mere outward show of symbols that have no significance for them. This further adds to the proportion of *sahajdhārīs* in the *Panth* who, in the *Khālsā* terms of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, are not *true* Sikhs. It is well to remember that Gurū Nānak's emphasis was on the interiorizing of religion, he was against prescribed rules and regulations and believed that the *man* of the individual should be cleansed and spiritually uplifted by *bhakti*. A pertinent question is whether *Khālsā* Sikhs have become so concerned with the Five Ks that the idea of *gurmukh* is ignored. And here I must reiterate the point that the *Khālsā* form was not instituted by the first Gurū of the Sikhs.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> A recent publication provides a very interesting example of a puzzled *kesdhārī*, Jaskirat Singh, who writes to his father, Harcharan Singh, about the continued relevance of the Five Ks today (Singh, Harjot [1999] *We are not Symbols: A dialogue between a father and a son*, Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies). Harcharan replies by remarking that the Five Ks are not symbols of mere practical utility, but are rather symbols of love (*ibid.*, p. 16). Therefore the *aspirations* behind the Five Ks are of major importance, not their outward significance. Harcharan Singh further tells his son that a personal relationship with God is possible through love, not knowledge -- to love God is to totally abandon oneself to God's Will (*ibid.*, p. 26).

Much British Sikh home life highlights further how remote the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* is to many Sikhs. It is not uncommon for a Sikh family to set aside time on a Sunday for all to gather together and watch the latest episode of the Hindu *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyana*.<sup>18</sup> The Punjabi-Hindu connection cannot be totally severed for a substantial proportion of Sikhs, who continue to participate in what are essentially Hindu practices. It is, thus, the common Punjabi ethnicity of Sikhs and Hindu Punjabis that results in shared customs to the present day. Interestingly, I have come across many Hindu Punjabis who will wear the *karā* with as much fervour as a *sahajdhārī* Sikh. A conversation with Surinder Lall<sup>19</sup> of Southall revealed that, during the tercentenary *Khālsā* celebrations at Southall, Hindus of the community also participated in the *Nagar Kīrtan* -- an outstanding example of the sense of community between Hindus and Sikhs in Southall.

My research has indicated that, with regard to the five groups studied, diversity is, indeed, a feature of Sikhism. The *Vālmīkis* and *Ravidāsīs*, as a whole, have no place for the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* due to the promotion of a separatist identity. A valid criterion for the Sikh identity of the Gurū Nānak Nishkān Sewak Jathā is clearly present in its utilization and obeying of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. The *Nāmdhāris* are a paradox to the issue of Sikh identity since they reject the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* and its central belief yet uphold the *Khālsā* form and are accepted by *Khālsā* Sikhs.<sup>20</sup> The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere thoroughly recognizes the authority of the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*.

<sup>18</sup>Though it is unlikely whether the same enthusiasm is shown by the same Sikhs for an *Eid* celebration on television.

<sup>19</sup>A school teacher in Southall who has carried out research on Sikh home life.

<sup>20</sup>It would appear that the *Tat Khālsā* probably rejected the *Kūkās* from the *Panth* due to the diversity that the latter were perpetuating. The *Nāmdhāris* did not yield to the reforms of the *Tat Khālsā*, refusing to replace the *rahit* as issued by Gurū Rām Singh with the *Tat Khālsā* ideals. Since the *Nāmdhāris* already had their focus centred on the living Gurū and his *rahit*, they would not have -- and neither have they to

Thus, it is clear that not all Sikhs recognize or, indeed, adhere to the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. The definition of a Sikh as a *Khālsā* Sikh according to the *Rehat Maryādā* is insufficient to include the whole of the *Panth*, the majority of which is not *amritdhārī*. Furthermore -- and this, I believe, is a key issue -- in everyday practices, the *Rehat Maryādā* rates second to accepted customs and traditions, for these are embedded in the ethnicity of Punjabi Sikhs. Importantly, however, non-*Khālsā* Sikhs are not required to follow the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*. Nevertheless, there is much uniformity in praxis; here the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* seems to be consulted and accepted. But from the time of the ten Gurūs, diversity has existed within the *Panth* -- some Sikhs became *Khālsā* Sikhs, while others remained *sahajdhārīs*, or *Nānak Panthīs*. The issue of Sikh identity, I believe, is not, therefore, confined to the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, it is much wider than this. Since it is an *amritdhārī* Sikh who is to follow the *Rehat Maryādā*, what implications does this have for *sahajdhārī* Sikhs? It is well to remember that the first clear definition of a Sikh was stated in the *Gurdwaras Act* of 1925, this required a Sikh to declare:

*I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion.*<sup>21</sup>

The edict pronounced no emphasis on the *Khālsā* form. Rather, it stressed a Sikh as being one who accepted the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and believed in the ten Gurūs. Living a life according to the ideals of the *Khālsā*, therefore, was not prompted until the official recognition of the *Rehat Maryādā* as late as 1945.

Defining a Sikh is extremely difficult, therefore, if the yardstick is taken as the *Rehat Maryādā*; and, as has been shown, there are a number of problems associated with the providing of clear-cut boundaries in which to define *all* followers of the Sikh faith.

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present day -- adopted the *Tat Khālsā* reforms anyhow.



The *Rehat Maryādā's Khālsā* definition is not sufficient and its boundaries need to be extended in order to accommodate the changing norms of society to include all those who follow the Sikh faith yet are excluded from its *Khālsā* fold. *Sahajdhārī* Sikhs also regard themselves as Sikh, and the lack of any recognition of this in the *Khālsā* definition, as contained in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, is clearly visible. The *Rehat Maryādā* also excludes those *kesdhārīs* who are not *amritdhārī*. However, when these uninitiated *kesdhārīs* display outward identity, why can they not be *Khālsā* Sikhs? My claim is that the *Rehat Maryādā* cannot be the guide -- it is not the main criterion with which to assess Sikh identity.<sup>22</sup>

#### 8:4 Caste and the *Panth*

The presence of *zāt* within the Sikh community as a whole is a highly sensitive issue. Many Sikhs outrightly reject any claims that Sikhism has retained the *zāt* notion from its Hindu background, and *gurbāṇī* strongly denounces caste discrimination. However, as my research has demonstrated, in particular with regard to the *Vālmīkis* and *Ravidāsīs*, *zāt* discrimination has not been obliterated from the *Panth*, even though the Sikh Gurūs introduced many features to highlight the egalitarian nature of the Sikh faith. In practice, the stigma of untouchability remains attached to the lower *zāts* that include the *Vālmīkis*

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<sup>21</sup> *Amritsar Rehat Maryada*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> The "Times of India" online news service, 24 March 2001, reported that on 22 March a meeting of the SGPC was held at Takht Kesgarh Sāhib, Anandpur. After the meeting the Jathedar of Takht Kesgarh Sāhib, Professor Manjit Singh, stated that any changes in the designation of a Sikh would have to be in accordance with the provision in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* published by the SGPC. This states that a Sikh "should not take hemp (cannabis), opium, liquor, tobacco -- in short any intoxicants". Professor Manjit Singh stated the meeting agreed that these prohibitions be added to the definition of a Sikh, as such people are classified as "*patits*", i.e. those who violate the Sikh code of conduct. The proposed revised definition of a Sikh would also exclude all *sahajdhārīs*. (Although the meeting was boycotted by the Head Granthī of Harmandir Sāhib, Giānī Puran Singh, it was attended by Akal Takht Jathedar Giānī Joginder Singh Vedanti, Takht Damdama Sāhib Jathedar Giānī Kewal Singh, SGPC President Jagdev Singh Talwandi, eight executive members of the SGPC and members of the Dharam Prachar Committee). This revised definition of a Sikh is due to be endorsed at a meeting in Amritsar on 30 March.

and the Ravidāsīs. Furthermore, with the exception of the Nāmdhāris, the majority of Sikhs continue to arrange marriages endogamously.

Thus, caste distinctions are preserved through the practice of endogamy, by both Sikhs and Hindus. Exogamy is also importantly retained with regard to the *got*, the family surname. Ballard aptly notes that disunity among Sikhs is visibly apparent through the retention of caste distinctions. He points out that although the institution of *langar* promotes the irrelevancy of caste prejudice, the practice of endogamy certainly promotes caste distinctions.<sup>23</sup> Inter-*zāt* marriages are, indeed, a source of dishonour to the whole family. This is something that is embedded in the ethnicity of Punjabi Sikhs. The Nāmdhāris are an exception to this: for them inter-caste marriages -- but *with Nāmdhāris* -- are acceptable. Interestingly, and surprisingly, the Gurūs themselves have nowhere *encouraged* Sikhs to conduct inter-caste marriages. On this matter, as has been noted, the marriages of the Gurūs, along with the marriages of their children, were all arranged endogamously within the *khatrī zāt*. But, obviously, the efforts of the Gurūs were towards removing religious notions of purity and pollution attached to different castes; they taught that one's *zāt* did not matter in the ultimate quest for *mukti*. Contrary to the beliefs of some Hindus, the Gurūs taught that an individual did not have to be reborn countless lifetimes to ascend the hierarchical scale to become a *brāhmin*, and only then have the opportunity for *mukti*.

One may be forgiven for hinting at the hypocrisy of the Gurūs. On the one hand they taught Sikhs to abandon caste distinctions, while on the other hand each Gurū chose a *khatrī* as his successor. The Gurūs were related from Gurū Rāmdās onwards; the first

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<sup>23</sup>Ballard, R. "Differentiation and Disjunction Amongst the Sikhs in Britain" in Barrier, N. G. and Dusenbery, V.A. (1989) *The Sikh Diaspora*, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, p. 203.

three Gurūs had no direct relation to one another. It may well be that the earlier followers of Gurū Nānak were predominantly from the *khatrī zāt*; nevertheless, other *zāts* were attracted towards the apparently casteless Sikh faith as it developed. Then why did none of the later nine Gurūs select a *chūhrā* or *chamār* or even *brāhmin* as successor? The answer may lie in the Gurūs' priorities. If the Gurūs had chosen someone from a different caste, they would have been social reformers; but they were religious reformers. Gurū Nānak does say that it is possible for *brāhmins* or *yogīs* to attain *mukti*. He wanted them to change their *spirituality* not their caste. Changing their spirituality would more naturally effectuate changes in attitudes towards caste.

As mentioned above in chapters 5:3 and 6:3, the attraction towards Sikhism on behalf of the lower *zāts* was that it offered equality. The lower *zāts* had suffered the harsh discrimination from higher-caste Hindus long enough, they endeavoured to improve their social situation -- Sikhism seemed the answer, initially at least. Furthermore, given the synonymous nature of the teachings of Ravidās and Gurū Nānak, Ravidāsīs are orientated closely to Sikhism yet could never be part of it. Again, caste is so deeply embedded in the Indian psyche that Sikhism and all other movements have not obliterated it totally -- or, it might be said even partially. Thus, caste never had, and still has not been, eliminated from the *Panth*. It is because of continued discrimination from higher-*zāt* Sikhs that lower-*zāt* Sikhs broke their ties with both Sikhism and Hinduism and formed their own religions. On the point of discrimination, the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* clearly states that all are entitled to enter a *gurdwārā*:

All are free to enter a Gurdwara without any consideration of caste or creed.<sup>24</sup>

In practice, however, as shown earlier, all are not equals in the *gurdwārā*. Moreover, the

need to establish caste-based *gurdwārās*, in the *Panth* as a whole, is a clear indication that *zāt* divisions are overtly present. To some extent, different *zāts* within Sikhism have their own traditions and customs. For example, *bhātra* Sikhs tend to be stricter regarding their women than *jaṭs* and *rāmgarhīās*. In this respect the *bhātra* culture is quite different from the *jaṭ* culture, which in some cases is different from the *rāmgarhīā* culture. This is likely to inform the existence of different caste *gurdwārās*, ensuring that worship takes on the preferences of the particular *zāt*.

The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere is distinct in terms of the issue of caste in the *Panth*. Since the *gorā* Sikhs are non-Punjabi, they have no caste divisions. Therefore, the practice of endogamy has no significance amongst them. Hence, *gorā* Sikhs are closer to the purer idealism of a casteless religion of Sikhism. Members of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā also observe endogamy. The Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā is composed largely of the *rāmgarhīā zāt*. However, members of other *zāts* are free to worship at the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā centres.

It was indicated above that the Nāmdhāris are somewhat different concerning endogamy for it is permissible to marry outside the *zāt*. Significantly, the present Gurū, who is a *rāmgarhīā* is married to a *jaṭ*. However, during research amidst the Nāmdhāris, I found that, on the whole, the *zāts* preferred to marry endogamously. Also during the research I found that the majority of Nāmdhāris with whom I came into contact were from the *rāmgarhīā zāt*. Although inter-caste marriages are acceptable among the Nāmdhāris, it is true to say that caste discrimination continues to exist: it was frequently mentioned that a Nāmdhāri, whatever *zāt*, would not marry a *chūhrā* or *chamār*. Had time permitted it would have been interesting to research approximate numbers of

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<sup>24</sup> *Amritsar Rehat Maryada*, p. 7.

*chūhrās* and *chamārs* within the Nāmdhāri community -- during my research I came across none.

I have illustrated that *zāt* does, indeed, exist very widely in the *Panth*. I contend that it is because of caste distinctions and prejudice towards the lower *zāts* that the *chūhrā* and *chamār* Sikh converts were not accepted by higher-caste Sikhs into the corporate identity of the *Panth*. Hence, although the lower *zāts* had abandoned the oppressiveness of Hinduism for Sikhism, it became necessary for them to form their distinct faiths in order to overcome discrimination at the hands of higher *zāt* Sikhs and Hindus. The Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis highlight the caste issue admirably and show that at the heart of Sikhism, *gurbānī* is not maintained. Thus the rejection of the essential teachings of the Gurūs, by the higher *zāt* Sikhs, has led to the Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis today becoming non-Sikh groups. Needless to say, therefore, the *Panth* is not egalitarian. The practice of endogamy is a significant measure towards the preservation of *zāt* divisions within the *Panth*. Therefore, the question of who is a Sikh depends largely on one's caste background, as well as the Punjabi ethnicity that has many dictations in accordance with the notion of *zāt*, the most important one being endogamy.

### **8:5 The issue of Sikh identity in relation to Punjabi ethnicity**

Ethnicity is a term commonly used to refer to the social identity, the culture and the traditions, of a community. The term can be traced to the Greek word *ethnos* that implies "a cultural or spiritual sense of belonging."<sup>25</sup> Mitchell considers ethnicity as a "membership of a distinct people possessing their own customary ways or culture."<sup>26</sup> This

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<sup>25</sup>Gupta, D. (1997) *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup>Mitchell, G. D. (1976) *A New Dictionary of Sociology*, London: Routledge, cited in O'Donnell, M. (1994 1<sup>st</sup> edn) *Race and Ethnicity*, Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, p. 4.

shared belonging to a common culture, a common ancestry, language and attachment to a homeland are also the characteristics of ethnicity according to Avtar Brah.<sup>27</sup> Again, Anthias stresses the "sharing" of customs as constituting the ethnicity of a group. For him ethnicity is "being socially located within a particular group and sharing its conditions of existence."<sup>28</sup> In this respect, as reiterated often in this research, Sikh ethnicity is commonly associated with the Punjabi culture and its traditions. Importantly, I must stress that, although Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs share many customs and traditions, the two are quite aware of their distinction. But -- and significantly -- there are many Sikhs who are not really concerned with an overt dividing factor between Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs, at least in terms of the social context.

The extent to which ethnicity informs Sikh identity is exemplified well in the tensions that have arisen between Punjabi Sikhs and *gorā* Sikhs. This is inevitable since the nature of a non-Punjabi in the overall Punjabi *Panth* would be very different in terms of social context and behaviour. Furthermore, since I maintain that Sikh identity overall is linked to Punjabi praxis, it is clear that the *gorā* Sikhs make the issue of Sikh identity a more complex one. Brah is of the opinion that a conjoined tie exists between culture and identity. Indeed, she holds that identity is illustrated through culture; the two "are inextricably linked concepts."<sup>29</sup> This would support my contention that normative Punjabi praxis is something to which the western converts cannot readily adjust.

Gupta is of the opinion that "identities are not permanently inscribed on our psyches but undergo *context* related changes."<sup>30</sup> It was such a "context-related" change

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<sup>27</sup>Brah, Avtar (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge, p. 163.

<sup>28</sup>Anthias, F. (1992) *Ethnicity, Class, Gender and Migration*, Aldershot: Avebury, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup>Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup>Gupta, *The Context of Ethnicity*, p. 3.

that, in the aftermath of the events of 1984 in the Punjab, essentially united the Sikh community as one and as distinct from Punjabi Hindus and Punjabi Muslims -- the recognition of a "persecuted Sikh minority".<sup>31</sup> And although Gupta's work is related to the so-called "extremist" situation in the Punjab, the changing identity is also true, to some degree, of diaspora Sikhs. Such changing ethnicity is something also observed by Watson.<sup>32</sup> These changes may result from political causes -- as in Gupta's example -- or as a result of migration where offspring born in the diaspora are caught between the two cultures associated with their ethnic origin and with their country of birth. Many Sikh parents are concerned about the future generation and the survival of Sikhism in the diaspora. For them ethnicity provides the necessary nurturing of the next generation, making the younger generation more aware of its Punjabi ethnicity. It is this ethnicity -- far more than the British environment -- that decides accepted praxis for British-born Sikhs. British Sikhs, arguably on a marginal basis, are undergoing some kind of an identity *transformation* that, I suggest, has every possibility of becoming an identity *crisis* in a few generations. Values upheld by immigrant parents are not necessarily those maintained with rigidity by the British-born Sikhs. The latter are caught between twin cultures -- being British-born but ethnically Punjabi. On this point, however, Brah is quick to remark that different perceptions of identity between the immigrant parents and British children are not necessarily to be interpreted as conflicts. She believes that parents themselves, having been exposed to a foreign culture, sympathize with the "cross-pressures which bear upon their children."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup> Watson, J. L. (1977) *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 42.

It follows that norms of society for Sikhs are not dictated by religion alone -- their ethnicity is largely responsible for what is right and what is acceptable, in terms of social interaction. These norms are to a great extent determined by a central force, that of the *izzat* notion. The term *izzat* has a number of translations including "honour", "self-respect" and "prestige". Another Punjabi term used interchangeably with the term *izzat* is *mān*. According to McLeod, *izzat* is a *jaṭ* convention.<sup>34</sup> The *jaṭ*'s land in India is a mark of his honour -- the greater the span of land, the greater the *izzat*.<sup>35</sup> I must point out from personal experience that the concept of *izzat* is not only confined to the *jaṭ zāt*, it is a factor that underlies the social interaction of Indians as a whole. On a day-to-day basis, it is obvious from personal experience as a Punjabi female that, when it comes to normative behaviour, it is factors such as *izzat* and ethnicity that are more dominant and, indeed, more important, than the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā* itself. One example is that, whereas the *Rehat Maryādā* discourages endogamy, in actual practice an inter-caste marriage would be frowned on by the majority of Sikhs. This is largely due to the damage an inter-caste marriage would have on the family's *izzat*, and not on religious issues.

An important fact is that *izzat* is not associated with a single individual; rather, *izzat* concerns the whole family. Sikh children are often forced to give up the idea of marrying out of *zāt* or out of religion, or otherwise face a future without the support of the families. If a Punjabi Sikh girl is inclined to follow her own desires, irrespective of the family's honour, the family as a whole will be greatly concerned. If, for example, she had a boyfriend, the family -- should they discover it -- would be anxious to keep the matter secret. It would be very difficult to arrange a marriage for such a girl. These,

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<sup>34</sup> McLeod, *Sikhism*, p. 216.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.



again, are factors that would not normally be an issue for *gorā* Sikhs. In this way many Punjabi Sikhs have given up their own wishes for the sake of their families: very few have the courage to go their separate ways, leaving it to fate whether the parents will ever wish to contact them again.

Parents of Punjabi children will look for spouses in an equal or higher *izzat* family. Very rarely will relationships be formed with a family of ill-reputed *izzat*. This practice would thus include such factors as not arranging a marriage with a girl whose elder sister has run away from home or who has a flirtatious reputation. If an elder sister has married out of *zāt*/religion, it would become difficult to arrange marriages for the younger daughters. Of even greater shame for the whole family would be a pregnant, unmarried daughter. In this instance there have been cases where either the unmarried girl is forced to have a termination, or is taken to India and left there. Thus, all measures are taken to preserve the *izzat* of the family -- in many cases at whatever the cost.

My personal perception is that the concept of *izzat* is more attached to females of the family. On the whole, a son may leave home, but when he wishes to return there is not as much tension as when a daughter has left home and the community had found out about it. Brown clearly illustrates the effects of the loss of *izzat* caused by a daughter to the whole family. He writes: "Deviations from the traditional codes evoke profound disapproval and intense shame. The loss of a girl's virginity, for example, becomes for the family involved a matter of irreparable harm and long-lasting humiliation. In cases such as this, indeed, the whole community shares the sense of ignominy."<sup>36</sup> Although written thirty years ago, Brown's comments are as true today as they were in the 1970s.

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<sup>36</sup>Brown, J. (1970) *The Un-Melting Pot: An English Town and Its Immigrants*, London: Macmillan, p. 123.

Therefore, dishonour will affect arranging marriages for the younger brothers and sisters, sometimes extending as far as cousins. It is in the best interest of the whole family, then, that daughters act "accordingly". Thus, the notion of *izzat*, which is so evident among Punjabi Sikhs, necessitates many obligations in a social context.<sup>37</sup> Hence, Sikh identity is expressed both religiously *and* ethnically, and it is likely that the latter is more important in the case of the majority of diaspora Sikhs. All the groups I have studied are of Punjabi origin, with the exception of the *gorā* Sikhs. The *gorā* Sikhs cannot possibly accommodate this social culture that is so much a part of everyday Sikh behaviour. In this respect, my contention is that traditional social praxis is very important in determining identity. On the everyday level, as shown above, social behaviour and practice are often more prominent than the beliefs of a group.

Language is another issue why the *gorā* Sikhs are not accepted by Punjabi Sikhs. The Punjabi language is the language of the majority of Sikhs. The Sikh Gurūs themselves were Punjabis and wrote in *gurmukhī*: therefore, Sikh services are largely conducted in *gurmukhī* and Punjabi. *Gorā* Sikhs, as a community on the whole, cannot speak or understand Punjabi, so their religious services are conducted in English. On the other hand, the four remaining groups I have researched, that is, the Gurū Nānak Nishkāṁ Sewak Jathā, Nāmdhāris, Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis, all live according to behaviour as required to maintain or increase the *izzat* of the family. They share a common language and traditions originating from their shared Punjabi ethnicity.

A point to conclude with is that Punjabi ethnicity alone does not promote Sikh identity -- this has been illustrated clearly by the insistence that the Vālmīkis and Ravidāsīs place on their distinctiveness. In these cases, issues relating to Sikh identity are

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

informed by factors outside ethnicity, even though such Sikh identity is also informed by the Punjabi culture and traditions.

## 8:6 The way forward

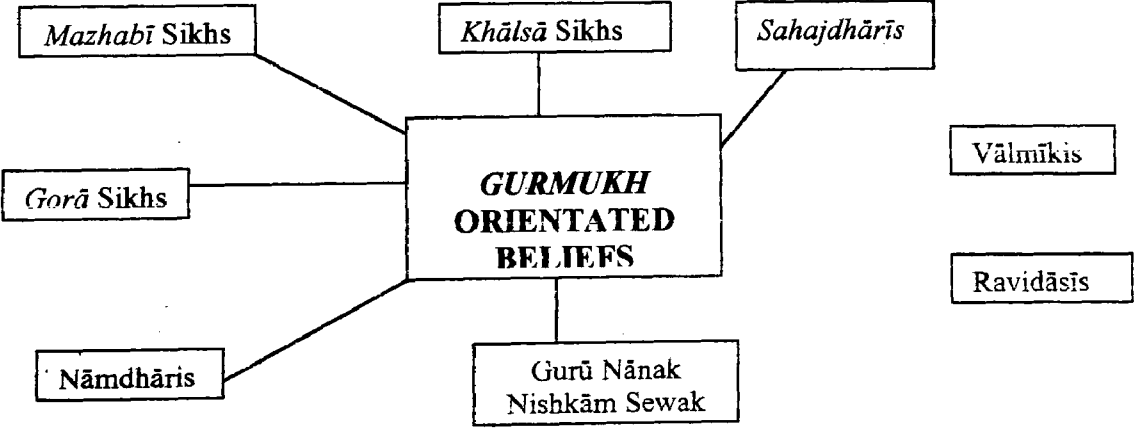
My research has alluded to the fact that attempts to create one overall, uniform definition of Sikh identity cannot be sustained. It is not possible to cite a monolithic definition, such as that contained in the Sikh *Rehat Maryādā*, that will encompass all *types* of Sikhs. Thus, initially, one of my aims was to assess the appropriateness of the *Rehat Maryādā* as a criterion in relation to the issue of Sikh identity. However, as my research has implied, among the groups I have scrutinized, it applies to the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā and the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere only, and even here, there are aspects of non-conformity.

Not all Sikhs are the same, as is commonly assumed. Thus, there are present in the *Panth*, many types of Sikhs, these include:

- Punjabi Sikhs
- *Gorā* Sikhs
- Vegetarian/non-vegetarian Sikhs
- *Mazhabī* Sikhs
- *Khālsā* Sikhs
- Non-*Khālsā* Sikhs
- *Khālsā* Sikhs with living Gurūs
- *Khālsā* Sikhs with particular *Sants*

As evident from the thematic approach undertaken above, the present research has suggested that there is no authoritative yardstick with which to assess the issue of Sikh

identity. The everyday life of a Sikh does not always accord with the *Rehat Maryādā* or, indeed, the *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. My own answer, in the light of my research among the groups, would be in a federal identity of the *Panth* as a whole. This would imply a unity of Sikhs worldwide but independence in the interpretation of Sikhism for the different groups. A federal identity of Sikhs and Sikh groups might mean one or two core beliefs -- such as the acceptance of *gurbānī* and belief in the Sikh Absolute -- but, further than that, it is up to the individual group to express its unique beliefs and practices. Thus the essential core of Sikh identity must be *gurmukh* orientated, the characteristics of which would be an emphasis on *nām simran* and truthful living -- these would be at the heart of the federal identity of the *Panth* as a whole and would not place an accentuated importance on the *Khālsā* form. The following diagram summarizes the position of the five groups studied in relation to a suggested federation of the *Panth*.



Thus the Ravidāsīs and Vālmīkis would not fit into the federation due to their assertion of a non-Sikh identity. Indeed, if the anti-caste pronouncements of the *Rehat Maryādā* had been effective, they would not have had the problems that led to their breaking away. My

claim is that a corporate uniform identity should not be the aim, but a federal identity where distinction from the general *Panth* is exemplified by different groups. I believe that a federation of the *Panth* would allow a core identity based on the ideal of the *gurmukh*. This would reduce caste exclusivity in the *Panth*; it would enable the *gurmukh* to accept *mazhabī* Sikhs as equals, thus enabling the latter to be a part of the *Panth*. This is, indeed, the essence of *gurbāṇī*.

A suggestion of a federal identity is pragmatic because it is exactly what Sikhs, as a whole, will do, and have done, anyhow. On the other hand, the counter-argument is that supporting a federal approach will actually entrench separatist groups and, therefore, caste-based groups. The latter, being a contradiction of *gurbāṇī*, will result in the lower-caste groups being discriminated against and would cause their inevitable break-off from the *Panth*. Furthermore, the present research has indicated that it would be difficult to be accepted as a Sikh without being Punjabi and high *zāt*. These two factors, in fact, tend to override beliefs -- at least in practice. The Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere illustrates rather well that any new movement in Sikhism will tend to be ostracized on grounds of caste and Punjabi ethnicity -- in this case the lack of both. It will be interesting to see what happens with the future generation of *gorā* Sikhs. That is to say, will they be so excluded that they will be forced eventually to be thoroughly separatist and divorce themselves from Punjabi Sikhs of the *Panth*, despite their *Khālsā* orientation? However, even if an essentially *gurmukh* basis existed, I believe the *Panth* would still not abandon endogamy; this is a feature of Indian society that is too deeply rooted to be permanently eschewed. But federal identity, rather than a *Khālsā* identity, would unite all Sikhs in the *religious* context by allowing each Sikh to accept a common core of the faith but

maintain differences in how that core faith is manifest in related belief and praxis. A common thread to unite *all* Sikhs, *Khālsā* and *sahajdhārī*, is certainly needed, but not a rigid one that excludes more than it enfolds.

I believe the way forward for Sikhism is not to place overt emphasis and insistence on the *Khālsā* form since it is responsible for causing divisions between Sikhs. Importantly, it was not instituted in the early development of the Sikh faith. The reasons for its necessity in the period of Gurū Gobind Singh are acknowledged. Today, however, I believe that necessity is no longer prominent. What needs to be addressed in the present period is that the diaspora is bringing new challenges to the survival of Sikhism, especially so with non-Indian born generations. There are many Sikhs today who are losing the essence of Sikhism as contained in the pages of its holy *Gurū Granth Sāhib* and yet insist on the outward form. A balance needs to exist between keeping the *Khālsā* form and being a *gurmukh*. There is no worth in a *Khālsā* Sikh who is essentially *manmukh* orientated -- this is not an adherence to the teachings of the Gurūs. I strongly consider that mere conformity to outward symbols does not constitute a *true* Sikh. A *true* Sikh is a *gurmukh* -- one, I envisage, who does not have to be *Khālsā* adhering. Sikhism today is over five hundred years old; a Sikh knows whether he or she is a Sikh without having to show allegiance in external aids: it is well to note that Gurū Nānak rejected the sacred thread, a mark of the *dvijā* classes, as not having any worth in the individual's quest for *mukti*. The majority of Sikhs are aware that their faith is distinct from other faiths. All this does not mean that I devalue the *Khālsā* form, my point is that first a Sikh should be inwardly pure and then, if he or she desires, external identity can be taken up, but there should be no such requirement that all Sikhs *must* display the *Khālsā* form.

Thus I reiterate that the essential core of Sikh identity must be *gurmukh* orientated: this is what *gurbānī* itself consistently voices.

In conclusion, I have found that

- ❖ (1) Historically, the indicators for Sikh identity have been mainly *gurmukh* based. This is the answer for the future, and there should be no room for caste prejudice among Sikhs.
- ❖ (2) The character and beliefs of particular leaders and founders inform the general ethos of a group of followers. This, in turn, is responsible for separatist groups *within* the general *Panth*. Where the leaders and founders have been non-Sikh there has been a complete break-off *from* the *Panth*.
- ❖ (3) The research of the five groups has revealed that beliefs and practices show diversity, and Sikh identity will have to confront this issue; and finally
- ❖ (4) The *Rehat Maryādā* is not *the* authoritative yardstick by which to assess Sikh identity since it excludes a wide majority of Sikhs who do not conform to a *Khālsā* identity. Furthermore, many *Khālsā* Sikhs are not living up to the tenets of Sikhism. If the *Rehat Maryādā* is unable to endorse its own tenets in practice, how can *Khālsā* Sikhs expect conformity in the wider context?

In the Introduction to the present research, I raised issues of identity in relation to my family who, like the majority of the *Panth* are not *amritdhārī*. I am now in a position to remark that, like my family, for so many Sikhs the *Rehat Maryādā* does not hold any marked position of importance. The *Rehat Maryādā*'s *Khālsā* definition excludes a substantial percentage of Sikhs from its ideal of who a Sikh is, and is thus responsible for the very divisions within the *Panth* that it is trying to obliterate. I conclude, therefore, that a *true* Sikh is essentially a *gurmukh* -- this is what constitutes Sikh identity and encompasses *all* Sikhs. And above all it is the *gurmukh* who is the ideal personification of *gurbānī*. Moreover, it is the *gurmukh* alone who has the opportunity to tread on the path towards *mukti*, leaving the final outcome to the *Hukam* of *Wāhegurū*.

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## **Audio-recordings**

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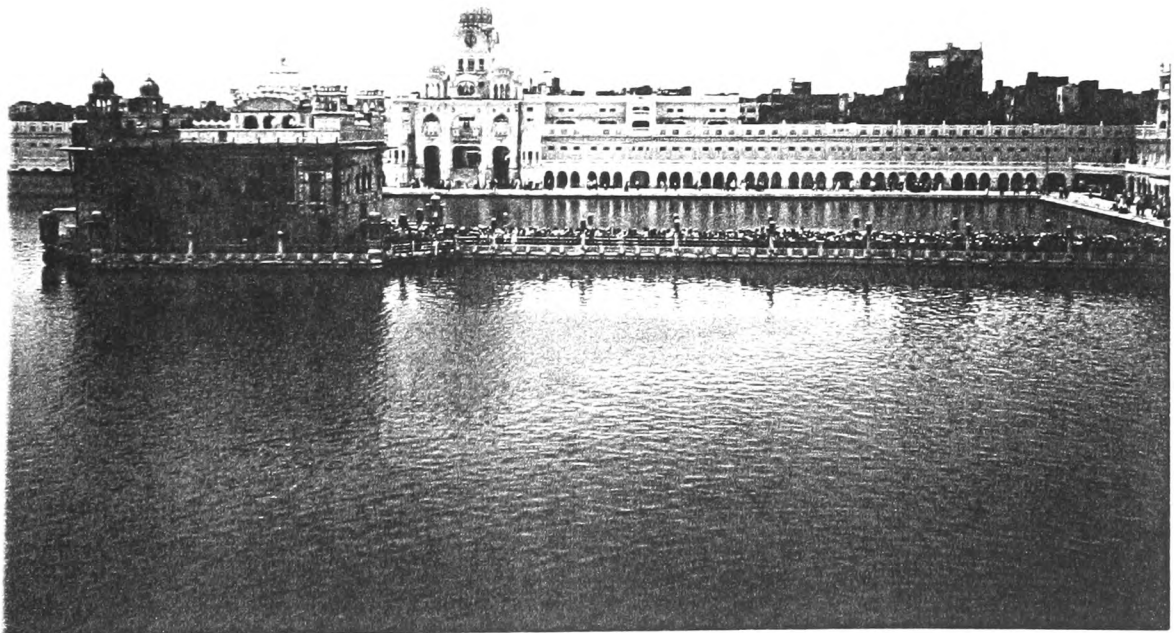
[www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com)  
[www.yogibhajan.com](http://www.yogibhajan.com)  
[www.3ho.com](http://www.3ho.com)

# Appendix 1

## Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā

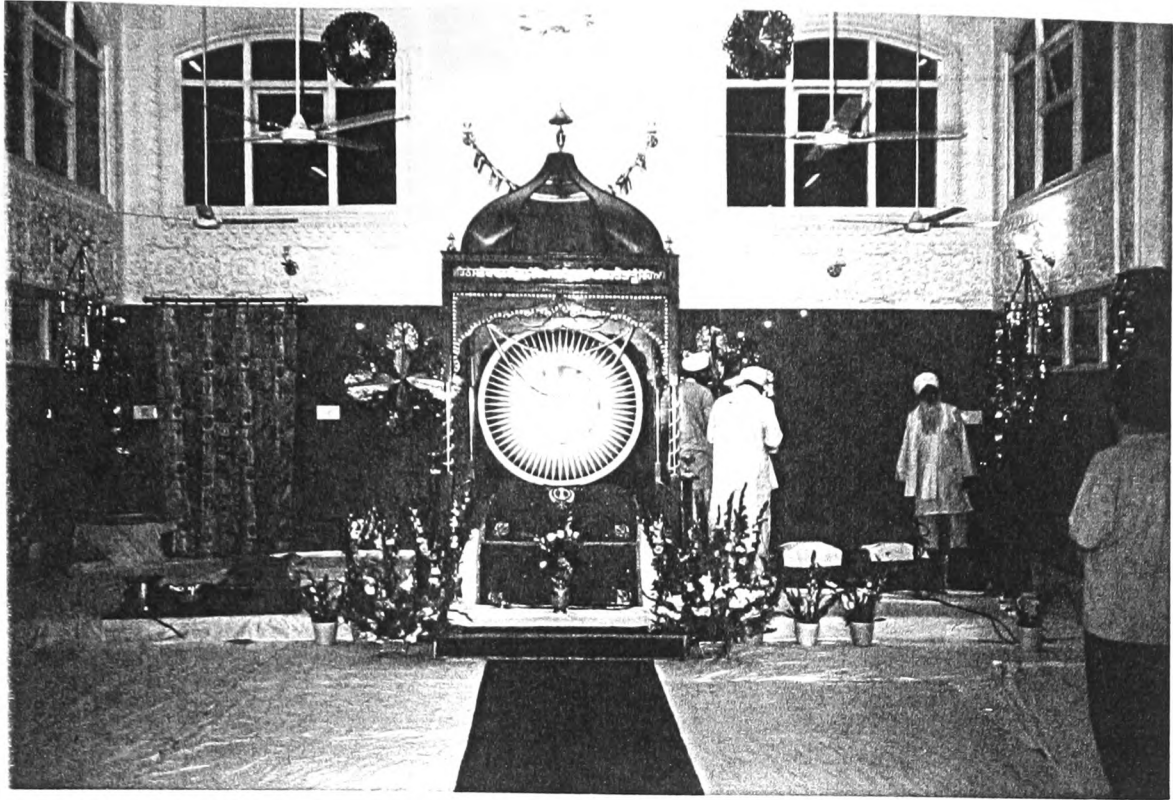


1:1 The office of the Gurū Nānak Nishkām Sewak Jathā at Amritsar. The present *bābāji*, situated in the front row, seven from the left. He is indicated by X

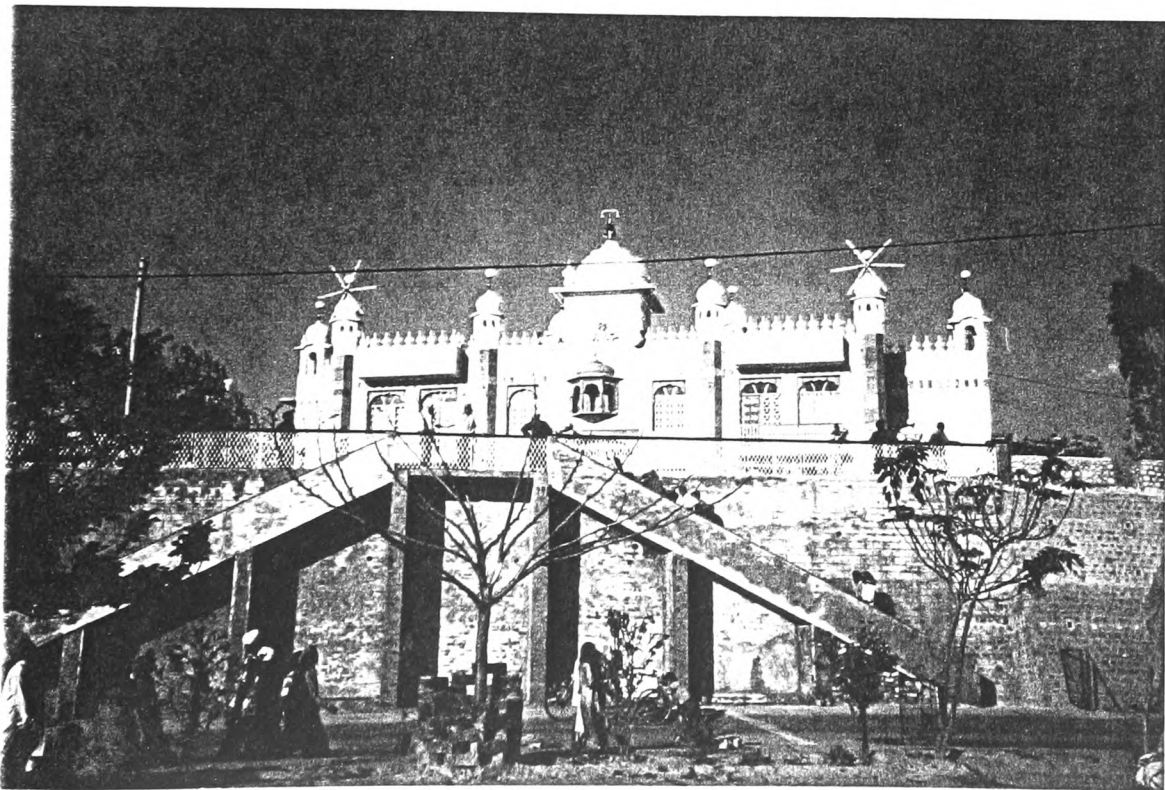


1:2 The renovation project of gold *sewā* at Amritsar, clearly illustrating the results of the renovation.





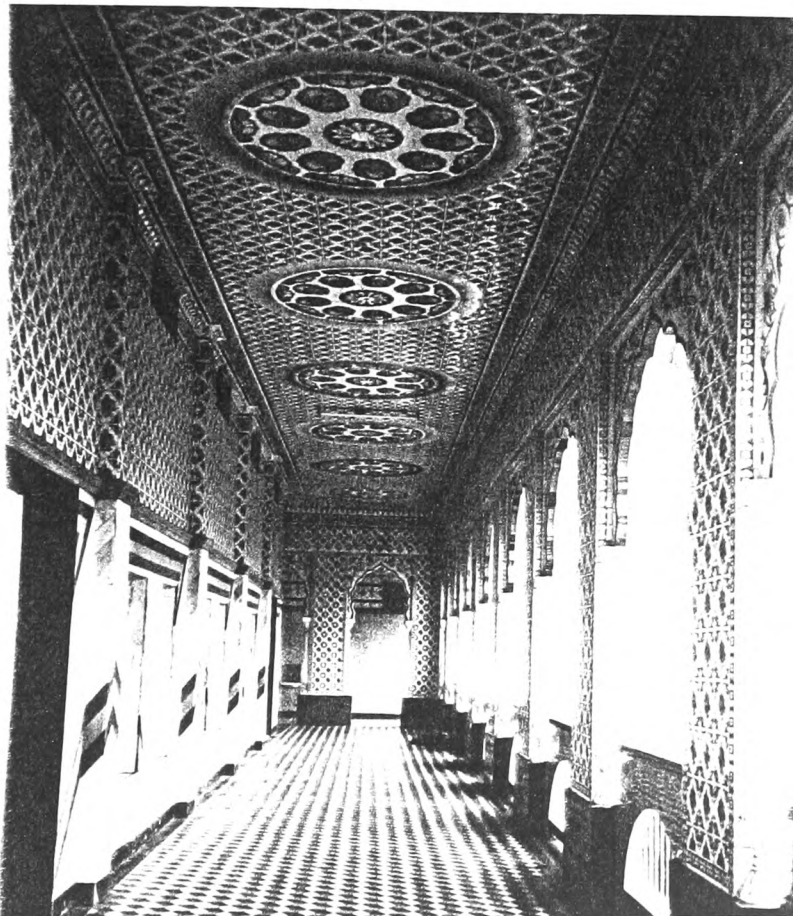
1:3 The prayer hall of the Guray *gurdwārā*



1:4 The Anandpur *gurdwārā*



1:5 A Punjabi class at the Leeds *gurdwārā*



1:6 One of the hallways of the Guray *gurdwārā*



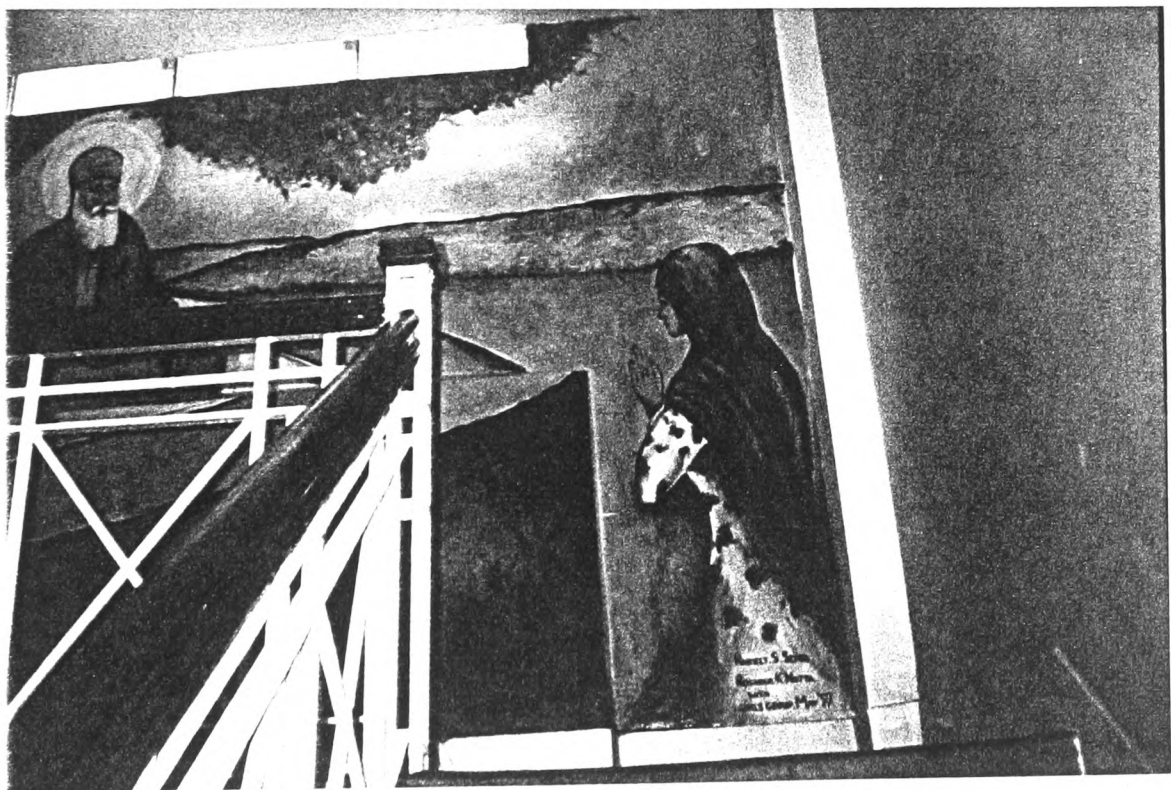
1:7 *Langar* hall at Guray



1:8 Exterior of the Guray *gurdwārā*

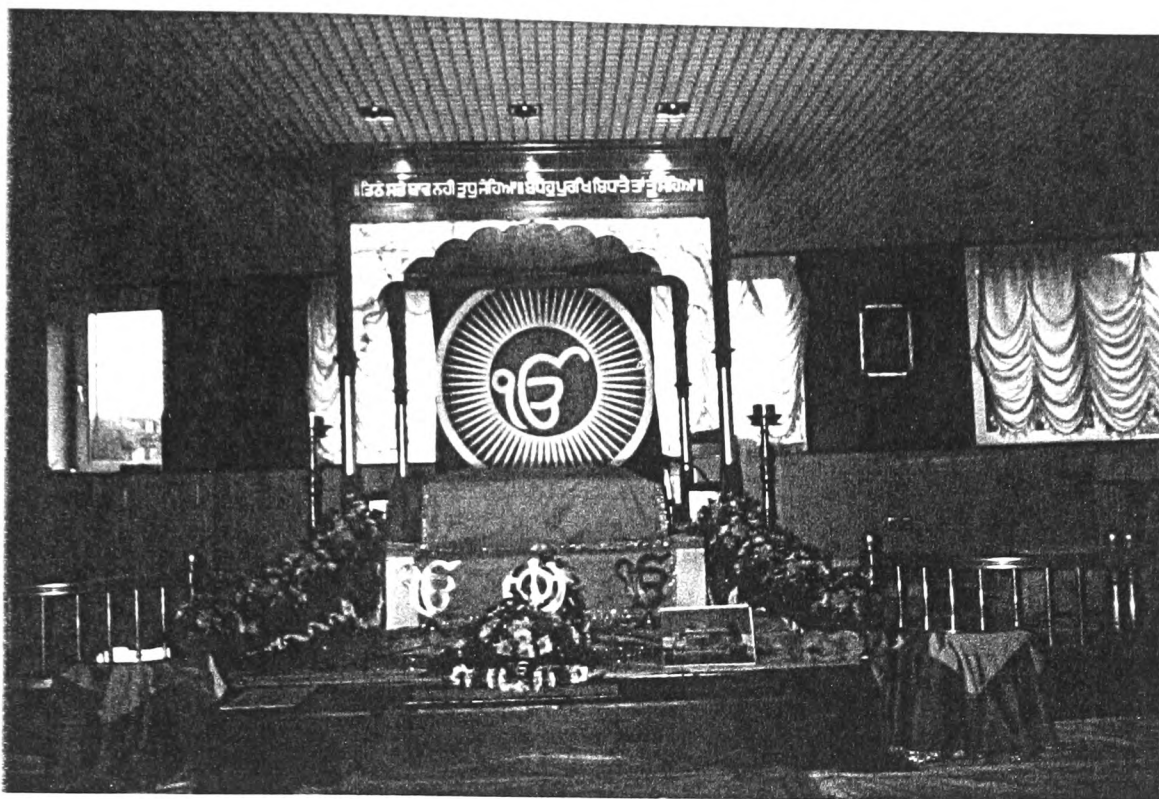


1:9 The Birmingham *gurdwārā* on Soho Road



1:10 A picture painted by a youngster at the Leeds *gurdwārā*





1:11 The prayer hall at the Leeds *gurdwārā*



1:12 Sant Puran Singh and Bhāi Norang Singh at the Birmingham *gurdwārā*



1:13 Sant Pura Singh

ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਮਤਿ <sup>ਉਹ</sup> ਆਪੇ ਆਈ ਆਪ ਦੀ ਬਾਪੁ  
 ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਮਤਿ <sup>ਉਹ</sup> ਸੈ, ਆਪੇ ਆਈ ਆਪ ਦੀ ਬਾਪੁ  
 ਸਚਾ ਸਚੈ ਦਾ ਇਕ ਇਹੁ ਹੈ, ਸਚੈ ਪਾਰਿ ਉਪਕਾਰੇ।  
 ਸਚੈ ਸਚੈ ਦੀ ਬੰਦਗੀ, ਜੇਕਰ ਸਚੈ ਤੈ ਫੁਠਾ ॥  
 ਕਰਤਾ ਸਚੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਜਾਣਦਾ, ਉਸ ਤੇ ਕੁਛ ਨਾ ਗਠਾ ॥  
 ਜੇ ਕਰੈ ਜੋਈ ਭਲਾ, ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਉ ਮਰਿ ਬੁਠਾ ॥  
 ਉਹੁ ਬਿਅੰਤੁ ਕੋਈ ਅੰਤੁ ਨਾ ਪਾਏ, ਮੁਰਖ ਫੁਖਿ ਮਾਰਨ।  
 ਭਲਾ ਕਰ ਬੁਠੈ ਦਾ, ਗੁਰੂ ਮਤਿ ਤੂੰ ਪਾਰਨ  
 ਗੁਰੂ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਦੀ ਸੁ ਪਾਲਨਾ, ਜਾਠੀ ਤੁਪੇ ਬਾਰਨ ॥  
 ਗੁਰੂ ਭਲਾ ਮੰਗੈ ਸਭਸ ਦਾ, ਉਹੁ ਕਰਿ ਕਾਰਨ ॥  
 ਹੁਕਮ ਕਠਾਈ ਚਲਨਾ, ਇਹੁ ਅਠਖੀ ਘਾਟੀ ॥  
 ਮਨੈ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਜੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਦਾ, ਬਣਿ ਜਾਏ ਮਾਟੀ ॥  
 ਬਣੈ ਮਾਟੀ ਜੇ ਸੋਰਿਉ, ਨਾਂ ਕੋਈ ਉਸ ਦਾ ਸਾਟੀ ॥  
 ਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਣੀ ਦਾ ਤਤੁ ਇਹੁ, ਤੂੰ ਸੁਣੁ ਜੈ ਕਾਟੀ ॥  
 ਮੇਰਾ ਬਾਨੁ ਸਾਰਿਕ ਮੇਰਾ ਬਾਨੁ, ਇਹੁ ਆਖੈ ਬਾਣੀ ॥  
 ਉਹੁ ਘਟਿ ਘਟਿ ਮਾਲਕੁ ਇਲਾਹ ਦਾ, ਇਹੁ ਸਚੀ ਜਾਣੀ ॥  
 ਸਚੈ ਸਚ ਉਹੁ ਬੋਲਦਾ, ਜਿਸ ਸਚਾ ਤੈ ਪਠੈ ॥  
 ਕੁਛੁ ਨਿਖੁਣੇ ਨਾਨਕਾ, ਜਿਸ ਸਚਾ ਸਚੁ ਪਠੈ ॥  
~~ਕੋਈ~~ ਨਿਖਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਿੰਘ

I:14 Punjabi Leaflet by Sant Puran Singh.



The leaflet, originally written by Puran Singh portrays his message in the form of a poem.

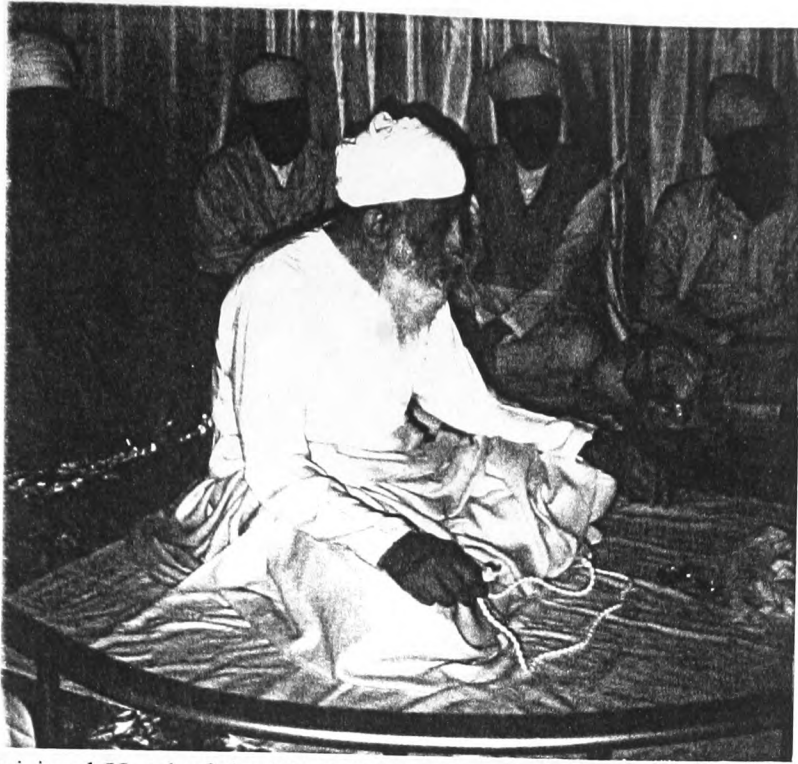
*Meditate on the truth. He [God] is the mother and father.  
Only some understand the teachings of the Gurus. Obey the teachings of the  
Guru.  
Do good things. This is the true and good thing only, all else is false.  
Pray and meditate on the truth.  
God is all knowing, there is nothing that is hidden from him.  
God always does good for humankind. He is eternal.  
Do good even unto the evil ones. Obey the orders of the Guru. The Guru  
wants the good of all.  
Acting according to the Will of God is difficult, one who obeys the orders of  
the Gurus becomes pure.  
Listen to the essence of bani which proclaims:  
                                God is merciful, God is full of daya.  
He is the Lord of the minds of the people.  
The truth always endures.*

*-Lakhari Puran Singh.*

1:15 English translation of the Punjabi leaflet in appendix 1:14

## Appendix 2

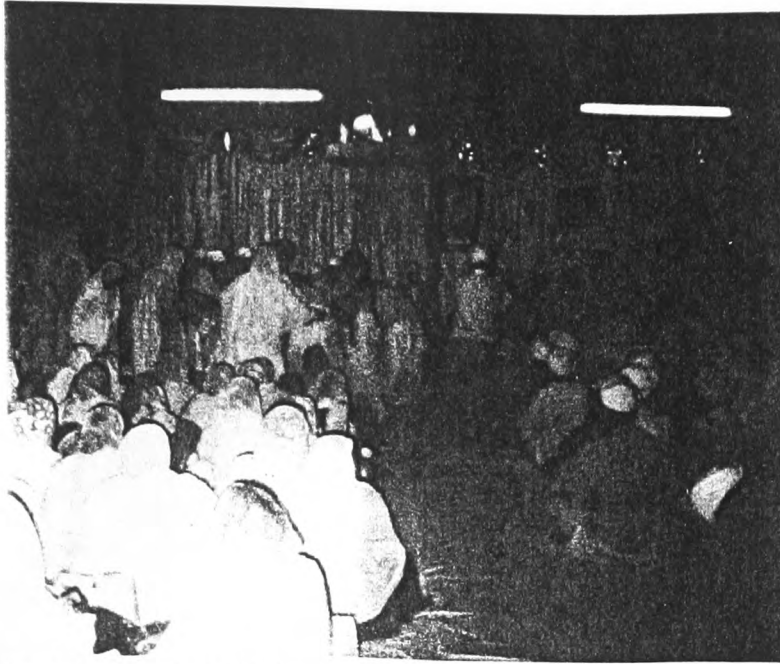
## Nāmdhāris



2:1 The Spiritual Head of the Nāmdhāris, Gurū Jagjīt Singh. Photograph taken during the Gurū's visit to the Forest Gate Centre in November 1997



2:2 The present Gurū leaving the Forest Gate centre. The clothing of the *saṅgat* and their turbans are characteristic of the Kūkās



2:3 The gathering of Nāmdhāris at Forest Gate, during the Gurū's visit in November 1997. The emphasis is placed on white clothing

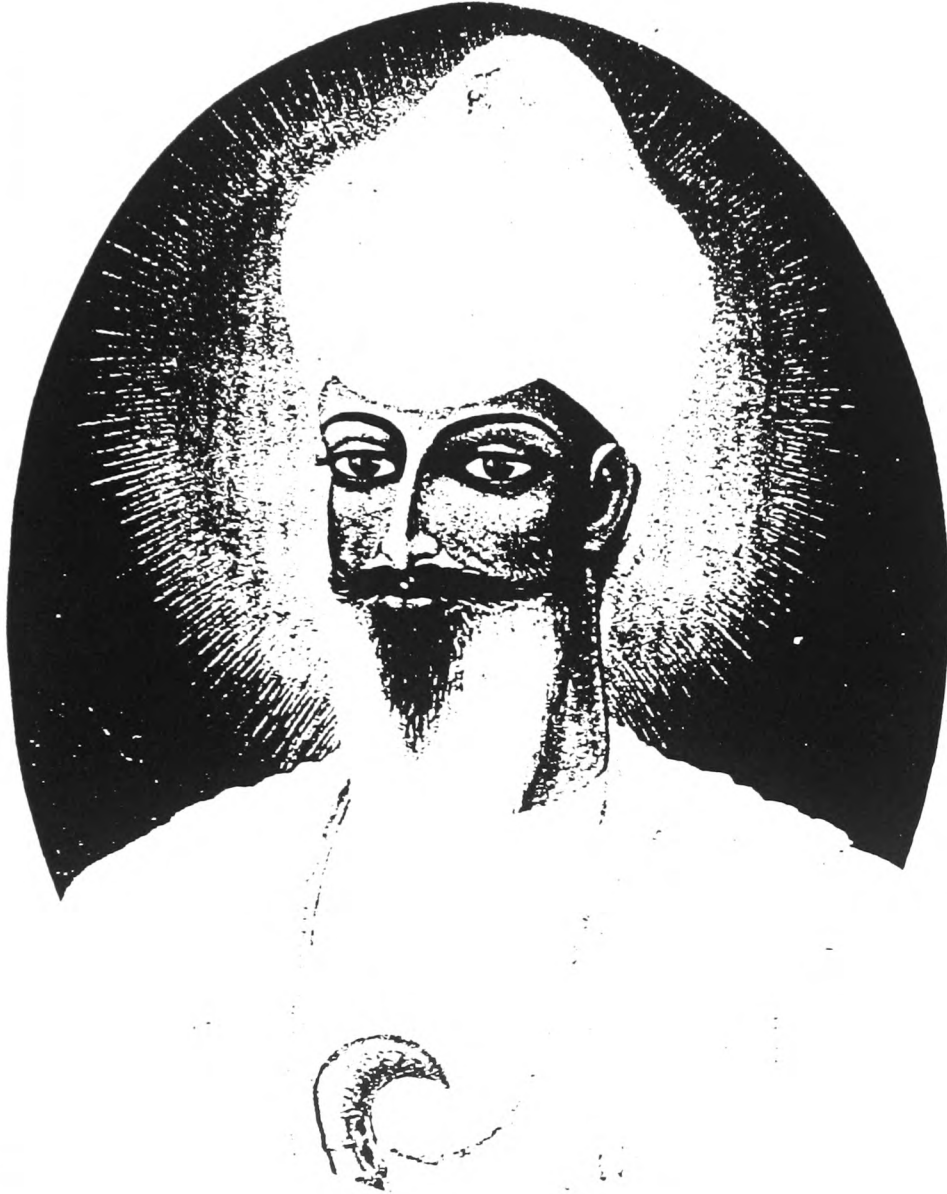


2:4 A participant of the *havan* ceremony, taking *amrit* before commencing the rituals

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ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਸਹਾਇ ।

# The Founder



Satguru Ram Singh Ji

*(Exiled in 1872)*

2:5 Gurū Rām Singh



2:6 Gurū Harī Singh



Satguru Partap Singh Ji  
(1889-1959)

2:7 Gurū Partāp Singh

२ ६ ਸਿਰਿ ਗੁਰਿ ਪਸਾਟਿ ਗਿ ਸਿਖੋ ਚਿ ਪਸਿ ਸਿਖ ਜੋ ਚਿ ਪੁਮ ਕੁ ਈ ਸਾ  
 ਓਇ ਸਿਖ ਤੇ ਹੁ ਨਾ ਮ ਸਿਖ ਦੁ ਪਾ ਹੁ ਨਾ ਮ ਸਿਖ ਸੋ ਕੁ ਸਿਖ ਪੀ ਨਾ ਸਿਖ  
 ਹੋ ਸੀ ਬੁ ਚਿ ਸਿ ਗੁਰੇ ਸਿ ਗੁਰੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਠੇ ਬੁਲਾ ਈ ਪ ਮਾ ਕਰ ॥  
 ਮਾ ਈ ਬੀ ਬੀ ਕੇ ਰਾ ਮ ਜੋ ਵ ਦੁ ਚੁ ਠੀ ਹੁ ਗੁ ਪ ਸੀ ਘ ਨ ਰੇ ਗੁ ਰ ਸਾ ਹਿ ਬ ਜੀ ਨਾ  
 ਸਿ ਗੁ ਕੇ ਸ ਖੀ ਘਾ ਨ ਰ ਕੇ ਏ ਹੁ ਮ ਗ ਰੇ ਗੁ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਪ ਸ ਤੇ ਘ ਗੇ ਜੇ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਨ ਕੁ ਏ ॥  
 ਹੋ ਰੁ ਜੀ ਜਿ ਸ ਜਿ ਸ ਗੁ ਰੇ ਕੇ ਕੇ ਕੇ ਮੇ ਨੇ ਏ ਹੁ ਰ ਖੇ ਏ ਹੁ ਰ ਖੇ ਸੇ ਸ ਕੇ ਠੀ ਰ ਖ ਕ  
 ਠੀ ਜ ਓ ਗ ਚੁ ਹੀ ਦ ਖ ਸੀ ਪਾ ਤ ਮਿ ਰ ਗੀ ਬੀ ਕੁ ਰ ਵੀ ਠੇ ਬੀ ਜੇ ਮਾ ਖ ਕੇ ਮਾ ਖ ਦ ਖ  
 ਵੇ ਰ ਓ ਹੋ ਚੀ ਜੇ ਨ ਗ ਕੁ ਖ ਕਾ ਦ ਖ ਓ ਸੇ ਸਾ ਠੀ ਦ ਖ ਪ ਮੇ ਸ ਦੇ ਕੁ ਜਾ ਖਿ ਠੇ ਕ ਏ ਜ ਓ  
 ਗ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਦ ਹੁ ਕ ਮ ਓ ਸ ਖੇ ਗ ਕਾ ਮ ਓ ਖ ਦ ਨਾ ਮ ਸੇ ਜੀ ਨਾ ਮ ਦ ਤੇ ਬਾ ਠੀ ਪ ਨੁ ਦ  
 ਏ ਹੁ ਬ ਨੁ ਮ ਤ ਨੇ ਜੇ ਸ ਦ ਪ ਠੀ ਰ ਗ ਤੇ ਪ ਗ ਰੇ ਓ ਠੇ ਹ ਮੇ ਸਾ ਸ ਨ ਕ ਰ ਨ ਬ ਠੀ ਪ ਨੁ  
 ਏ ਰ ਕੁ ਸ ਨੁ ਕ ਰ ਨਾ ਏ ਨ ਠਾ ਕ ਮ ਕ ਰ ਮੇ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਏ ਪ ਏ ਅ ਰੁ ਜ ਥਾ ਸ ਕ ਰ ਦ ਨ ਕ ਰ ਨਾ ਪ ਰ  
 ਕੁ ਸੇ ਵੀ ਕੇ ਠੀ ਬੀ ਚੀ ਚ ਕ ਠੀ ਚੁ ਰ ਓ ਨਾ ਪ ਰ ਪਿ ਛੁ ਰ ਤ ਨ ਓ ਠੁ ਰ ਕੁ ਸ ਠੇ ਠੀ  
 ਸ ਚਿ ਦੇ ਦ ਖ ਕ ਏ ਜ ਓ ਏ ਹੁ ਸ ਕੇ ਸ ਦੁ ਵੇ ਏ ਹੋ ਰੁ ਕੁ ਠੀ ਸ ਓ ਏ ਸਿ ਖ ਜੇ ਠੀ ਸ ਖ ਥ ਦੇ  
 ਨਾ ਸ ਦ ਠੀ ਗੇ ਏ ਸੇ ਨ ਖ ਚੁ ਨ ਹੀ ਸੀ ਮ ਗੇ ਜੇ ਕੀ ਪ ਏ ਏ ਠੀ ਨ ਗੇ ਜੇ ਨ ਬਾ ਬੁ ਸਿ ਖ ਚੁ ਠੀ  
 ਖ ਚੁ ਸ ਗੀ ਠੇ ਸ ਨੁ ਖੇ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਨ ਦੇ ਠੀ ਨ ਸ ਨ ਮੀ ਗੇ ਤੇ ਪੀ ਗੀ ਦੇ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਗ ਸੀ ਮ  
 ਠੀ ਪੀ ਗੀ ਦੁ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਦਾ ਸ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੀ ਠਾ ਮ ਗੇ ਗੁ ਰ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ  
 ਜੀ ਜਾ ਦੁ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਹੁ ਰ ਮ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਠੀ ਸ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ  
 ਸਿ ਖ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਹੁ ਕ ਮ ਨਾ ਮੇ ਤਾ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਠੀ ਸਿ ਖ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਨ ਦੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ  
 ਠੀ ਮ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਨ ਦੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਦਾ ਨ ਹੀ ਠੀ ਦਾ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਨ ਗੁ ਰ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਸ ਠੀ ਪ ਠੇ ਮ  
 ਸ ਮ ਗੁ ਰ ਠੇ ਹੁ ਕ ਮ ਨਾ ਮ ਠੇ ਸ ਠੀ ਸ ਗੁ ਰ ਕੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ  
 ਗੁ ਰ ਦੇ ਬਾ ਸ ਠੇ ਸਿ ਖ ਕੇ ਠੇ ਜ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ  
 ਠੇ  
 ਨਾ ਮ ਗਾ ਮ ਸ ਕੁ ਦੇ ਸਿ ਖ ਠੇ ਪ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਸ ਕੁ ਕੇ ਸਿ ਗੀ ਵ ਠੀ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਠੇ ਬੁਲਾ ਏ ॥  
 ਕੁ ਜਾ ਬ ਠੀ ਕ ਠੇ ਕ ਮ ਸ ਕੇ ਸ ਦੁ ਵੇ ਠਾ ਮ ਰ ਪਿ ਛੁ ਰ ਤ ਨ ਠੇ ਕੇ ਜੇ ਕੁ ਜ ਨ ਕ ਰ ਗ ਠੇ ਸ ਦ  
 ਸ ਠਾ ਦ ਖ ਕ ਏ ਜ ਓ ਗ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਸ ਨੁ ਖੀ ਚ ਨੁ ਦ ਖ ਠੇ ਮ ਠਾ ਸ ਰ ਕੁ ਰ ਨੁ ਠ ਦਾ ਸੀ ਤ ਤ  
 ਠੀ ਨ ਜਿ ਸ ਠਿ ਨੇ ਪਿ ਛੁ ਰ ਤ ਨ ਕੇ ਕੁ ਜ ਨੁ ਬਾ ਠੀ ਕ ਰ ਨ ਸ ਠੇ ਜਿ ਸੇ ਠਿ ਨ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਗ ਠੀ ਸ ਨ  
 ਮ ਠੇ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਬੀ ਹੁ ਕ ਮ ਠੇ ਪਿ ਛੁ ਰ ਤ ਦੇ ਨ ਮ ਠੇ ਦਾ ਬ ਤ ਠੀ ਮ ਗੁ ਰ ਸਿ ਖ ਠੇ ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਨ  
 ਗੁ ਰ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਤੁ ਕੁ ਮ ਮੇ ਗ ਠੇ ਸ ਨੁ ਬ ਹੁ ਸ ਖ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਗ ਠੇ ਬ ਨਾ ਹੁ ਕ ਮ ਮੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ  
 ਤ ਪਾ ਸ ਠੀ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੀ ਮ ਗ ਰ ਜੀ ਨ ਮਿ ਲੀ ਕਿ ਸੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ  
 ਗੁ ਰ ਠੇ  
 ਨਾ ਹੁ ਕ ਮ ਮੇ ਕੁ ਮੇ ਸ ਠੇ ਕ ਮ ਮੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ ਠੇ

Letter from Guru Ram Singh to the Sikh Sangat.  
(Courtesy : National Archives of India.)

2:8 A letter sent by Gurū Rām Singh to his followers, while in exile. (Singh, Jaswinder (1985) *Kuka Movement: Freedom Struggle in Punjab, Documents, 1880-1903 AD*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, p. 325)



**(The Sant Khalsa Spiritual Institute of the Namdhari Sikh Community in the United Kingdom)**  
**LIST OF SIKH GURPURABS AND FESTIVALS 1999 CE**  
**(SAMVAT BK 2055 - 2056)**

MONTH	DATE	GURPURABS AND FESTIVALS
JANUARY 1999 BK 2055	14	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of MAGH MAGHI MELA MUKATSAR (SHAHEEDI DIVAS 40 MUKTE) Martyrdom day (1704 CE - BK 1761)
	17 - 18	NAMDHARI SHAHEEDI MELA - (Martyrdom day) MALER KOTLA (1872 CE - BK 1928)
	18	PARDES GAWAN - (Exile of 12 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1872 CE - BK 1928)
	22	BASASNT PANCHAMI (Spring Festival) PARKASH UTSAV (184 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of 12 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1816 CE - BK 1872) NAMDHARI SAMVAT - NEW YEAR - SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI - 184
	26	BHARAT GANATANTRA DIVAS - INDIA'S REPUBLIC DAY (1950 CE - BK 2006)
	29	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 7 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU HAR RAI JI MAHARAJ (1630 CE - BK 1686)
FEBRUARY	12	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of PHAGAN
MARCH  BK 2056	3	HOLA MAHALLA PURAB (1701 CE - BK 1757) NAMDHARIS TRIPLE FESTIVALS PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 11 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU BALAK SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1785 CE - BK 1841)
	5	PARKASH UTSAV - Birthday of SAHIB SRI SATGURU PARTAP SINGH JI MAHARAJ 1890 (CE - BK 1946)
	14	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of CHET
	18	ARAMBH OF BIKRAMI SAMVAT - New Year - (BK 2056)
	25	RAM NAOMI - PARKASH UTSAV - Birthday of SHREE BHAGWAN RAMJI MAHARAJ
APRIL	6	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 9 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU TEG BAHADHUR JI MAHARAJ (1621 CE - BK 1678)
	8	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 5 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU ARJUN DEV JI MAHARAJ (1563 CE - BK 1620)
	14	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of VAISAKH VAISAKHI - 300 <sup>th</sup> YEAR - WORLDWIDE TERCENTENARY CELEBRATION OF The Founding of the KHALSA PANTH by 10 <sup>th</sup> SRI SATGURU JI (1699 CE - BK 1756) VAISAKHI - 142 <sup>nd</sup> CELEBRATION OF The Founding of the NAMDHARI PANTH SANT KHALSA BY 12 <sup>th</sup> GURU - SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI (1857 CE - BK 1914)
	17	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 2 <sup>nd</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU ANGAD DEV JI MAHARAJ (1504 CE - BK 1561)
	25	GURGADDI PURAB - (Enthronement day of 11 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU BALAK SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1812 CE - BK 1869)
	29	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 3 <sup>rd</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU AMAR DAS JI MAHARAJ (1479 CE - BK 1536)
MAY	15	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of JETH
	30	INAUGURATION OF KHANDE DA AMRIT (Nectar) to ISTRIS (Female World at Village SLAHAR) by SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1858 CE - BK 1915)
JUNE	3	INAUGURATION OF ANAND MARYADA BY SAHIB SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI MAHARAJ AT VILLAGE KHOTE (1863 CE - BK 1920)
	15	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of HARH
	17	SHAHEEDI PURAB - (Martyrdom day of 5 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU ARJAN DEV JI MAHARAJ (1606 CE - BK 1663)
	18	JOTI JOTE DIVAS - (Demise Day of 10 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU GOBIND SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1812 CE - BK 1869)
	29	SHAHEEDI PURAB - (Martyrdom day of 6 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU HAR GOBIND JI MAHARAJ (1595 CE - BK 1652)

2:9 List of Nāmdhāri gurpurabs and festivals

MONTH	DATE	GURPURABS AND FESTIVALS
JULY	16	SANGRANDH - First day of Bikrami month of SAVAN
AUGUST	5	NAMDHARI SHAHEEDI MELA (Martyrdom Day) RAIKOT (1871 CE - BK 1928)
	6	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 8 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU HAR KRISHAN JI MAHARAJ (1656 CE - BK 1713)
	15	AZADI DIVAS - INDIA'S 52 <sup>nd</sup> INDEPENDANCE DAY (1947 CE - BK 2004)
	17	SANGRANDH - First Day of Bikrami month of BHADON
	21	JOTI JOTE DIVAS 40 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Demise Day of SAHIB SRI SATGURU PARTAP SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1959 CE - BK 2016)
SEPTEMBER	3	JANAM ASHTAMI PARKASH UTSAV - Birthday Celebration of SHREE BHAGWAN KRISHAN JI MAHARAJ
	10	40 <sup>th</sup> DASTAR BANDHI DIVAS - CORONATION DAY OF PRESENT GURU - HIS HOLINESS SAHIB SRI HAZOOR SATGURU JAGJIT SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1959 CE - BK 2016)
	15	NAMDHARI SHAHEEDI MELA (Martyrdom Day) AMRITSAR (1871 CE - BK 1928)
	17	SANGRANDH - First Day of Bikrami month of ASUN GURGADDI PURAB (Enthronement Day of 12 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1841 CE - BK 1898) ARAMBH JAP PARJOG - Month of Annual Meditation (Dates may change)
	29	GURGADDI PURAB (Enthronement Day of 2 <sup>nd</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU ANGAD DEV JI MAHARAJ (1539 CE - BK 1596)
OCTOBER	12	PARKASH UTSAV - Birthday of SAHIB SRI SATGURU HARI SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1819 CE - BK 1876)
	17	BHOG - JAP PARJOG - End of Annual Meditation (Dates may change) SANGRANDH - First Day of Bikrami month of KATIK
	19	DASEHRA - Festival
	26	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 4 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU RAM DAS JI MAHARAJ (1534 CE - BK 1591)
NOVEMBER	7	DIWALI or DEEPMALA (Festival of lights)
	16	SANGRANDH - First Day of Bikrami month of MAGHAR
	21	PARKASH UTSAV - 79 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of HIS HOLINESS SAHIB SRI HAZOOR SATGURU JAGJIT SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1820 CE - BK 1977)
	23	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 1 <sup>st</sup> GURU) FOUNDER OF SIKHISM SAHIB SRI SATGURU NANAK DEV JI MAHARAJ (1469 CE - BK 1526) ARAMBH OF SAMVAT SRI GURU NANAK SHAHI - New Year - 531
	26	NAMDHARI SHAHEEDI MELA - Martyrdom Day - LUDHIANA (1871 CE - BK 1928)
DECEMBER	13	SHAHEEDI PURAB - (Martyrdom Day of 9 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU TEG BAHADUR JI MAHARAJ (1675 CE - BK 1732)
	16	SANGRANDH - First Day of Bikrami month of POH
	23	SHAHEEDI MELA - CHAMKAUR - Martyrdom Day of SAHIBJADAS SRI BABA AJIT SINGH JI & SRI BABA JUHAR SINGH JI (1704 CE - BK 1761)
	25 -27	SHAHEEDI MELA (SIRHAND) Martyrdom day of SAHIBJADAS SRI BABA ZORAWAR SINGH JI & SRI BABA FATEH SINGH JI (1704 CE - BK 1761)
JANUARY 2000 BK 2056	14	PARKASH UTSAV (Birthday of 10 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU GOBIND SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1666 CE - BK 1723)
	17 - 18	NAMDHARI SHAHEEDI MELA - (Martyrdom day) MALER KOTLA (1872 CE - BK 1928)
FEBRUARY	10	BASANT PANCHAMI - Spring Festival PARKASH UTSAV - 185 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of 12 <sup>th</sup> GURU) SAHIB SRI SATGURU RAM SINGH JI MAHARAJ (1816 CE - BK 1872)

Composed and issued by Publicity Secretary - Namdhari Sangat UK (Tel/Fax: 01902 332964)  
96 Upton Lane, Forest Gate, London E7 9LW - (Tel: 0181 257 1460)

2:9 List of Nāmdhāri gūrpurbs and festivals (continued)

AN EVENING OF  
INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC  
In Aid of  
The Birmingham  
Childrens Hospital

A SHOWCASE OF YOUNG AND ASPIRING MUSICIANS  
PRESENTING  
DILRUBA, SITAR, TABLA, SANTOOR & VOCAL ETC

A DUET PERFORMANCE OF GUEST ARTISTS

7.30 - 9.00pm

Dharambir Singh	- SITAR
Kamalbir Singh	- VIOLIN
Sarvar Sabri	- TABLA

**SATURDAY APRIL 4th 1998**

STARTING AT 6.00pm

AT:

**NAMDHARI SANGAT BIRMINGHAM  
COMMUNITY CENTRE  
1199 COVENTRY ROAD,  
HAY MILLS  
BIRMINGHAM, B29 8DF  
☎ 0121 -753 0092**

COMPERE  
THE ON EVENING  
NAVINDERJIT BHOGAL

FREE  
ADMISSION

ALL DONATIONS  
WILL BE GREATLY  
APPRECIATED

2:10 Advertisement of the Nāmdhāri's participation in social matters

# Appendix 3

## Ravidāsī Community

HAPPY DIWALI

ਦੀਵਾਲੀ ਮੁਬਾਰਕ

Diwali is the festival of lights. In India it is one of the major festivals, celebrated almost throughout the country.

When Lord Rama returned to Aujodhaya after 14 years exile into the jungle, people of that kingdom welcomed him, his wife Sita and brother Lakhshman with the display of lights. To all of us, Diwali is joyous occasion and reminds us of the following:

Victory of Goodness over Evilness

While Rama, Sita and Lakhshmana were in the jungle, the demon king Ravana abducted Sita and took her to his Kingdom at Lanka. Although, Ravana was wise and had divine power blessed to him by Lord Shiva, but he always used this power for many wrong things.

Lord Rama and Sita were the incarnations of Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi, who came together to this world as Rama and Sita for the purpose of destroying demon kings like Ravana. Lord Rama invaded Lanka, killed Rawana and rejoined his wife Sita.

To obey and give full regard to parents.

Rama was sent to exile by his father, King of Aujodhaya at a demand made by his step-mother who wanted the throne for her own son. Rama did not resist, though he was the rightful heir to the throne. But obeyed his father and accepted to go to the jungle for 14 years.

The love, respect and regard for older brother.

Lakhshman went to the exile, simply because he loved his older brother Rama and wanted to stay with him in the jungle. Also, Lakhshman gave Sita a motherly respect.

Prepared by: Dr Charan Singh Bunger.

3:1 The leaflet explaining the origin of *dīwālī*, is clearly celebrated in the Hindu context

- 1 To advance and spread Ravidassia Faith by:
  - (a) encouraging the community to strictly follow the Teachings and Philosophy of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji.
  - (b) undertaking to publish and circulate literature on the Life, Teachings and Philosophy of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji and support publications such as the "Begumpura Parivar"
  - (c) holding conferences, seminars and similar events in which many Scholars and Researchers are involved.
  - (d) directing young generation to understand and follow customs and traditions of the Ravidassia Community.
- 2 To increase affiliation of Sabhas (initially in the United Kingdom and then ~~abroad~~ especially in India) to the Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha U.K.
- 3 To look after the interests of affiliated Sabhas and take every necessary steps to help them with their problems and issues which affect the Ravidassia Community. To take full charge and control of the running of the affiliated Sabha as a 'care-taker' body when the Management and Trustees of such Sabha become ineffective ~~and when the~~ existence of such a sabha is in danger, and then pass on the control to the new Management and the Trustees when elected.
- 4 To co-ordinate all activities with affiliated sabhas to gain unity and strength.
- 5 To set up common practices and procedures for all affiliated Sabhas to follow ~~them~~.
- 6 To set up common programmes among Sabhas to celebrate events or functions of significant importance, especially those related to Sri Guru Ravidass Ji.
- 7 To set up funds to
  - (i) promote religious and educational programmes
  - (ii) sponsor educational projects such as Sri Guru Ravidass Educational Trust at Phagwara. For this project, set up a Review Committee to obtain up to date progress and then take full control of future developments, including sharing of the Trusteeship.
  - (iii) give educational grants to deserving students
  - (iv) help to build Sri Guru Ravidass Bhawans
  - (v) help the Ravidassia Community when suffering from injustices from any source and from natural calamities.
- 8
  - (a) To recognise the Birth Place of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji at Seer Goverdhan Pur, Kanshi (Varanasi) India and take steps to support the completion and running of Sri Guru Ravidass Bhawan at this Holy Place.
  - (b) To encourage and support followers of Sri Guru Ravidass Ji to visit the Bhawan at Seer Goverdhan Pur atleast once in their life time.
- 9 To set up common procedures to eradicate anti-social traditions which affect the Ravidassia Community, examples: Dowry, Unnecessary Expenses on Weddings and Marriage Breakdowns.
- 10 To set up or appoint Sub-committees for specific purposes.

3:2 The aims and objectives of the Sri Gurū Ravidāss Sabhā, UK, as contained in its constitution

## **HYMN (AARTI)**

**Children you should recite this hymn daily,**

NAM TERO AARTI MAJAN MURARAY  
HAR KE NAAM BIN JHUTHEY SAGAL PASAREY  
NAM TERO ASSNO NAM TERO URSA  
NAME TERO KESRO LECHHITKAREY  
NAM TERO AMBHULA NAAM TERO CHANDNO  
GHAS JAPEY NAM LE TUJHE KOW CHAREY  
NAM TERO DIWA NAAM TERO BATI  
NAM TERO TAIL LE MAHEN PASAREY  
NAM TERE KI JOT LAGAYI  
BHAIO UJAARO BHAWAN SAGLAREY  
NAM TERO TAGA NAM PHOOL MALA  
BHAR ATHARA SAGAL JUTHAREY  
TERO KIYA TUJEY KEYA ARPOU  
NAM TERA TUHI CHAWR DHOLAREY  
DAS ATHA ATU SATHEY CHAREY KHANI  
EHA WARTAN HAI SAGAL SANSAREY  
KEHE RAVIDASS NAM TERO AARTI  
SATNAM HAI HAR BHOG TUHAREY.

## **THE RELIGIOUS SLOGANS (JAI-KARA)**

**JO BOLEY - SO NIRBHAY -  
SHRI GURU RAVIDASS JI KI JAI -**

**SHRI GURU RAVIDASS SHAKTI -  
AMAR RAHAY**

**JAI GURUDEV**

3:3 Emphasis is placed on children learning the hymns of Ravidās, rather than the *mūl mantar*; this shows clearly the non-Sikh orientation of the Ravidāsī community

Telephone :  
(0902) 50187



GURU RAVIDASS TEMPLE  
181 DUDLEY ROAD  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
WEST MIDLANDS

OUR REF GRDS/IVL/785

YOUR REF.

DATE

BRIEF HISTORY OF THIS SABHA

Shri Guru Ravidass Dharmik Sabha, Shri Guru Ravidass temple 181 Dudley Road Wolverhampton is a body of those people who are intrestreted in well-being of Ravidassia community, Ad-Dharmi community, backward classe: So called untachables, the poorest of the world and who care for as well as bleave in humanity: Since the formation of this sabha in 1963, it has tried it best to unite our people who are dedicated and devoted to the teaching and philosophy of Shri Guru Ravidass Ji. Here we like to mention that this Sabha has achieved a very high place in our own people and in multicultural society in this country and in India with its work and deed towards the upliftment of our poor masses.

We are proud to mention here that this Sabha has got the honour to be the first organisation of this kind whome have established a Shri Guru Ravidass Temple in Wolverhampton in this country and encouraged our people to establish similar organisations and temples in every town in the name of Shri Guru Ravidass Ji as his mission was to serve every one as human being, create free society and he said there is only one God and in his eyes every body is equal regardless of County Country, rigion, colour, cast or creed and he always wished to create a classless society.

This Sabha is working very hard in the field of education and has established an educational intitution Shri Guru Ravidass Technical Collage Phagwara Punjab India. This is the first intitution on its level ever built on the name of Guru Ravidass Ji. Now we are able to provide a special type of technical education specially for poor masses to enable them to earn their living with pride and dignity.

This Sabha is working very hard with Inter Faith Group to create multiracial understanding among people of all faiths. We have always worked to promote good human and brotherly relations thus for preserving peace and racial harmony which is very much needed to create healthy and strong multiracial society.

3:4 Leaflet published by the Gururavidass Dharmik Sabha, Wolverhampton



**Jai Gurdev** ਜੈ ਗੁਰਦੇਵ

*Say it Loudly,*

*Say it Proudly,*

*We are:*

**Ravidassia**

*[ Followers of Guru Ravidass Ji ]*

Dear Member of the Ravidassia Community

When answering a question about your religion, say it proudly that you are "RAVIDASSIA".

In the next few weeks a Census Test will take place in the United Kingdom. You will answer a question on a survey form about your religion. Declare and answer that you are "Ravidassia".

*Issued by: Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha U.K.*

June, 1997.

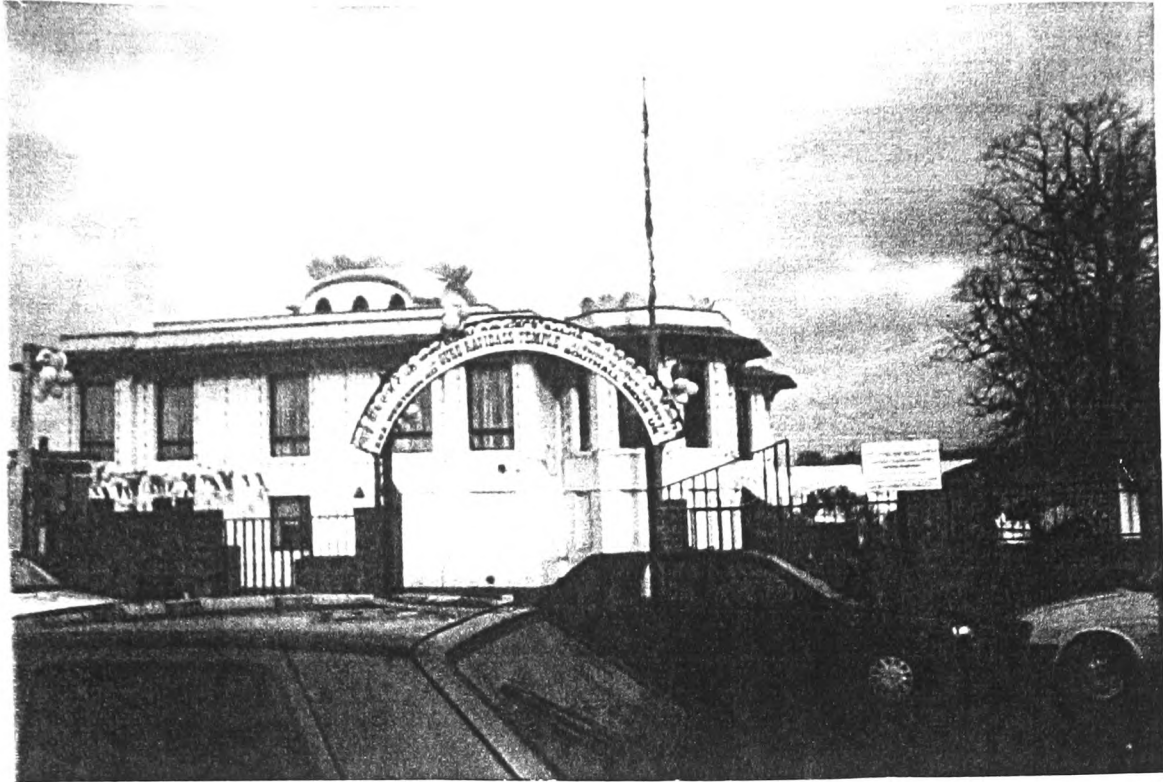
3:5 Notice to all Ravidāsīs to proclaim their religion proudly as being Ravidāsī; displayed prominently at the Southall *sabhā*



3:6 A lack of *kesdhārīs* among the Ravidāsīs, photograph taken at the *gurburb* of Ravidās, Southall *sabhā*



3:7 Although there is no insistence on the *kes*, the *giānīs* are in most cases *kesdhārī*



3:8 The red *nisān sāhib* is clearly displayed outside the Southall *sabhā*

# Appendix 4

## Vālmīkis



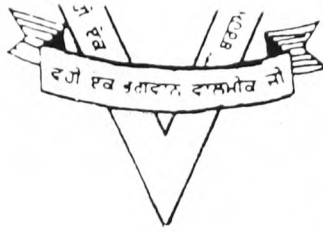
ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ, ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਸਗਲ ਸੁਰੀਸ਼ਟੀ ਕੇ ਮਾਲਕ ਸਗਲ ਸੁਰੀਸ਼ਟੀ ਕੇ ਪਾਲਕ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਕੇ ਹੋ ਦਾਤਾ  
ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ, ਸਵਾਮੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਸਵਰ ਕਲਾ ਸਮਪੂਰਨ ਤੀਨ ਲੋਕ ਰਚਤਾ, ਭਗਵਾਨ ਤੀਨ ਲੋਕ ਰਚਤਾ  
ਸਤਗੁਰ ਤੀਨ ਲੋਕ ਰਚਤਾ, ਅਲਖ ਨਿਰਜਨ ਸਵਾਮੀ ਤੁਮ ਸਬ ਕੇ ਕਰਤਾ  
ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ, ਸਤਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਪਰਮੇਸਵਰ ਆਦ ਕਾ ਤੂ ਨਨਤਾ ਜੀ ਜਗਾਦ ਕਾ ਤੂ ਨਨਤਾ  
ਦਿੰਨਾ ਬੰਧੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਦਿੰਨਾ ਬੰਧੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਪੂਰਨ ਭਗਵੰਤਾ  
ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਵਾਮੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਪੂਰਨ ਪੁਰਖ ਦਿਆਲਾ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਦੁਖ ਹਰਤਾ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਸਭ ਕੇ ਦੁਖ ਹਰਤਾ  
ਸ਼ਾਮ ਸਵੇਰੇ ਤਮਰਾਂ ਭਜਨ  
ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਵਾਮੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਯੋਗ ਵਸ਼ਿਸ਼ਟ ਬਨਾਈਆ ਰਾਮ ਚਤਿਰ ਰਚਾ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਰਾਮਚਤਿਰ ਰਚਾ  
ਲਾਖੇ ਪਾਪੀ ਤਰ ਗਏ ਸੁਣ ਕਰ ਅਮਰ ਕਥਾ  
ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਵਾਮੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਆਰਤੀ ਜੋ ਕੋਈ ਨਿਤ ਗਾਏ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਜੋ ਕੋਈ ਨਿਤ ਗਾਏ  
ਸਤਗੁਰ ਜੋ ਕੋਈ ਨਿਤ ਗਾਏ ਕਹਿਤ ਭਗਤ ਜਨ ਸਵਾਮੀ ਮਨ ਇਛਾ ਫਲ ਪਾਏ  
ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਵਾਮੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ  
ਸਗਲ ਸੁਰੀਸ਼ਟੀ ਕੇ ਮਾਲਕ ਸਗਲ ਸੁਰੀਸ਼ਟੀ ਕੇ ਪਾਲਕ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਕੇ ਹੋ ਦਾਤਾ  
ਸਵਾਮੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ, ਸਤਗੁਰ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੈ ਜੈ,  
ਜੈ ਮਹਾਰਿਸ਼ੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੀ



## ਅਰਦਾਸ

ਅਰਦਾਸ ਸਮੇਂ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਜੀ, ਹਮ ਹੈ ਖੜੇ ਦੁਆਰ ।  
ਹਾਥ ਦੇਕਰ ਰਾਖਨਾ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਬਾਰਮਬਾਰ ।।  
ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮਾਲਾ ਚਲਤੀ ਜਾਏ, ਸੁਆਸ ਸੁਆਸ ਪਰ ਨਾਥ ।  
ਵਿਸ਼ੇ ਵਿਕਾਰੋਂ ਸੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ, ਰਖਨਾ ਦੇਕਰ ਹਾਥ ।।  
ਐਸੇ ਪੂਰਸ਼ ਮਿਲਤੇ ਰਹੇ ਸਿਮਰਨ ਹੋ ਤੇਰਾ ਨਾਮ ।।  
ਮਨ ਬਾਨੀ ਔਰ ਕਰਮ ਸੇ, ਕਰੇਂ ਸਦਾ ਸੁਭ ਕਾਮ ।  
ਸਕਲ ਜਗਤ ਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਜੀ, ਦੀਜੋ ਹਮੇ ਵਰਦਾਨ ।।  
ਸ਼ਾਂਤੀ ਔਰ ਸੰਤੋਸ਼ ਦੇ, ਬਖਸ਼ੋ ਗੁੜ੍ਹ ਗਿਆਨ ।  
ਸਾਧੂ ਸੰਗਤ ਹੋਈ ਰਹੇ, ਕਾਯਾ ਸੁੱਧ ਹੋ ਜਾਏ ।।  
ਭੁਲੇਂ ਨਾ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੇਰੀ, ਸਿਮਰਤੀ ਐਸੀ ਆਏ ।  
ਬਾਲੀ ਲੇਕਰ ਹਾਥ ਕੀ, ਬੀਚ ਮੇਂ ਬੰਦਨਾ ਧੂਪ ।  
ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦ ਤੇਰਾ ਗੁਣਗਾਨ ਹੈ ਸੰਗਤ ਤੁਮਾਰਾ ਰੂਪ ।  
ਵਾਲਮੀਕਿ ਸਤਨਾਮ ਕੋ ਜੋ ਸਿਮਰੇ ਮਨ ਲਾਏ ।।  
ਸੱਚੇ ਨਾਮ ਬਿਬਾਨ ਪਰ ਚੜ੍ਹੇ ਬੈਕੁੰਠ ਮੇਂ ਜਾਏ ।  
ਪੜ੍ਹੇ ਸੁਨੇ ਜੋ ਅਮਰ ਕਥਾ ਦੇਕਰ ਪੁਰਾ ਧਿਆਨ ।।  
ਉਨਪਰ ਦਾਤਾ ਵਾਲਮੀਕਿ ਜੀ ਹੋਤੇ ਹੈ ਦਯਾਵਾਨ ।  
ਕਹੇ ਸੰਗਤ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਜੀ ਦੀਜੋ ਗਿਆਨ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼  
ਜੀਵਨ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਪਾਣ ਲਈ ਕਰ ਹਉਮੇਂ ਕਾ ਨਾਸ਼ ।





ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸੱਚੇ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਭਗਵਾਨ  
ਤੀਨ ਕਾਲ ਤਰਹਿ ਭਵਨ ਮੇਂ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨ ॥

ਧੰਨ ਧੰਨ ਸੱਚੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਦੀਨ ਦਿਆਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲ  
ਨਿਮੇ ਨਿਮੇ ਜਗਤ ਗੁਰੂ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਸੱਚ ਗੋਪਾਲ ॥

## BHAGWAN VALMIK ASHRAM

ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੀ ਦਾ

# ਜਨਮ ਦਿਵਸ

303, Icknield Street, Hockley, Birmingham, B18 5AU

Sunday 19th October 1997  
19 ਅਕਤੂਬਰ ਦਿਨ ਐਤਵਾਰ ਨੂੰ



ਭਗਵਾਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੀ Bhagwan Sri Valmik Ji

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

You will be glad to know that your local Bhagwan Valmik Sabha Birmingham will be celebrating the BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF BHAGWAN VALMIK JI on Sunday 19th October 1997 from 9.30 am until 4.00 pm. You are requested to attend with family and friends. Food will be served all days. **Special guest Giani Kewal Krishan Dhadria from India.**

**PLEASE ARRIVE ON TIME**

ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣ ਕੇ ਅਤਿਅੰਤ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਹੋਵੇਗੀ ਕਿ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਸਭਾ ਬ੍ਰਿਸਟੋਲ ਵਲੋਂ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਜਨਮ ਦਿਵਸ 19 ਅਕਤੂਬਰ 1997 ਨੂੰ 303 ਇਕਨੀਲਡ ਸਟਰੀਟ, ਹੋਕਲੀ, ਭਗਵਾਨ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਆਸ਼ਰਮ ਬ੍ਰਿਸਟੋਲ ਵਿਖੇ ਬੜੀ ਧੂਮ ਧਾਮ ਨਾਲ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਸਮੂਹ ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੂੰ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਮੇਂ ਸਿਰ ਪੂਜ ਕੇ ਧੰਨਵਾਦੀ ਬਣਾਉ। ਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਲੰਗਰ ਅਤੁੱਟ ਵਰਤੇਗਾ। ਖਾਸ ਮਹਿਮਾਨ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੇਵਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਨ ਦਾਦਰੀਆ ( ਇੰਡੀਆ )।

**PROGRAMME :-** Following personalities have been invited to the event:-

1. Consulate General of India .
2. Mr Mohinder Singh Mandair President of Overseas Congress U.K.
3. Chief Supriendant of Ladywood & Handsworth Police Stations.
4. Mr M.L. Grewal President Central Valmik Sabha U.K.
5. Local Councillors
6. Local M.P. Clare Short

ਨੋਟ ਵਾਲਮੀਕ ਸਭਾ ਬ੍ਰਿਸਟੋਲ ਦੀ  
ਸੰਗਤ ਪਾਰਟੀ ਆਪ ਜੀ ਨੂੰ ਕੀਰਤਨ  
ਦੁਆਰਾ ਨਿਹਾਲ ਕਰਨਗੇ।

**ਬੱਚਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਲਈ ਦੁੱਧ ਦਾ ਖਾਸ ਇਤਜਾਮ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।**

ਪਵਿੱਤਰ ਰਸਾਇਣ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਜ ਪਾਠ 13-10-97 ਨੂੰ ਅਰੰਭ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ ਅਤੇ ਭੋਗ 19-10-97 ਦਿਨ ਐਤਵਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਪਾਇਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

**ਆਪ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਦਾਸ**

4:3 Programme of events for the celebration of Bhagwān Vālmik's Anniversary at the Birmingham *mandir*



4:4 The Vālmīki connection with Sikhism. Bhāi Jaitā handing over the severed head of Gurū Tegh Bahādur to the child Gobind

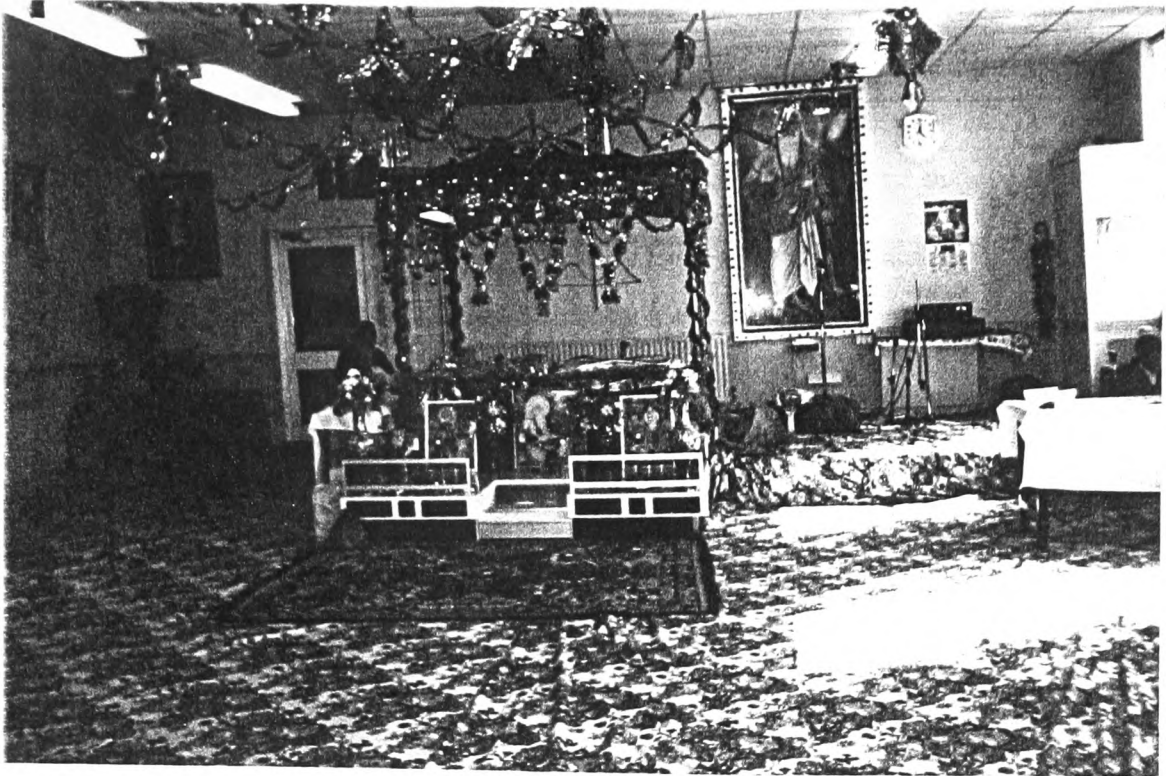




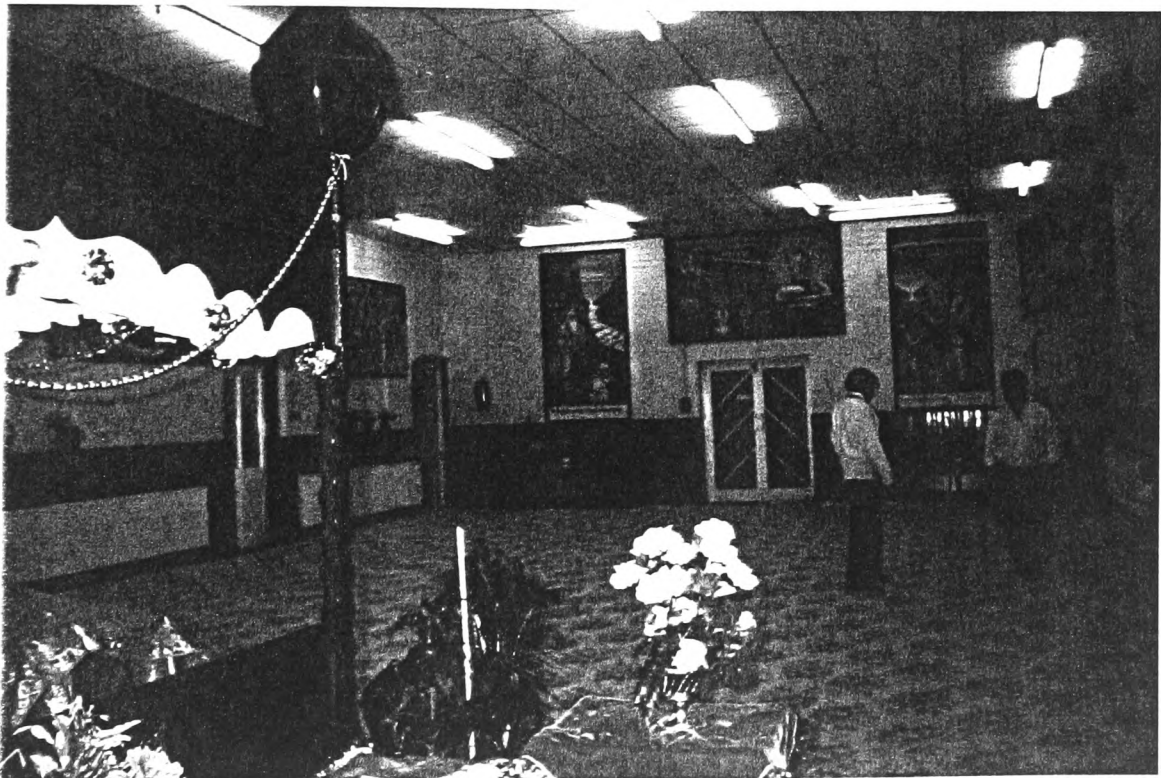
4:5 The sign outside the Coventry temple, highlighting it as a Vālmīki place of worship



4:6 Two *mazhabī* Sikhs outside the Coventry temple



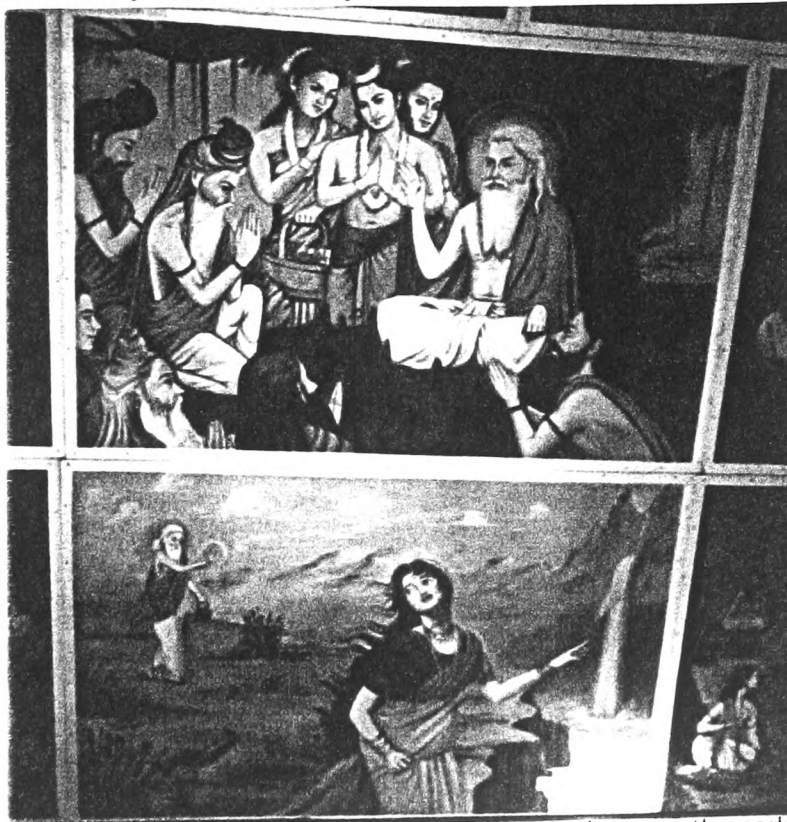
4:7 The interior of the Coventry temple, emphasizing the large picture of Vālmiki and the *palkī*



4:8 The main hall at Birmingham, displaying the scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Vālmiki plays an active role



4:9 Satgurū Giān Nāth, a recent saint of the Vālmiki community (at the Southall *mandir*), whose birth anniversary is celebrated by the Vālmiki community



4:10 Examples of illustrations from the *Rāmāyana*, which cover the ceiling of the prayer hall at Southall



4:11 The sign outside the Southall building, illustrating it as a Vālmīki *mandir*

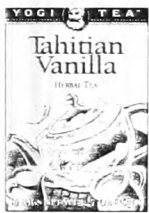
## **Appendix 5**

# **Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and the 3HO**





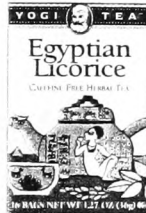
Rise Above It All With A Soothing Cup of Yogi Tea.



*Start with the rich memory of vanilla and let it transport you to an azure-sky*

*day fading into evening on the shores of a tropical sea. Now you're beginning to understand the inspirations of Yogi Tea.*

*Next consider the lingering spiciness of cinnamon, and envision its origins*



*within the mysterious valleys of the tranquil Himalayas. It's here—captured in our all-natural herbal*



*blends, made with the finest ingredients from around the world. Yogi Tea—*



*in six unique flavors delicately balanced to lift your spirit while it soothes your body and soul.*



YOGI



TEA™

©1995 The Yogi Tea Company

5:1 An advertisement for Yogi Tea; this is one of the companies affiliated to KIIT, Khalsa International Industries and Trades



ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥  
ਜਬਦਾਰ ਜੋ ਕਿਛੁ ਭਹਿ ਦੇਤਾ ॥ ਸੋਈ ਸਿੱਖ ਮਾਨ ਸਭ ਲੇਤਾ ॥

ਗੁਰੂਘਰਾਂ ਅੰਦਰ ਪੰਗਤ ਵਿਚ ਬੈਠ ਕੇ ਲੰਗਰ ਛਕਣ ਦੀ ਮਰਿਯਾਦਾ ਬਾਰੇ

# ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਭਾਈ ਹਰਭਜਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਖਾਲਸਾ (ਯੋਗੀ ਜੀ) ਵਲੋਂ ਸਮੂਹ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਨੂੰ ਅਪੀਲ

ਗੁਰੂ ਰੂਪ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ,

ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ॥ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਵਤਹਿ ॥

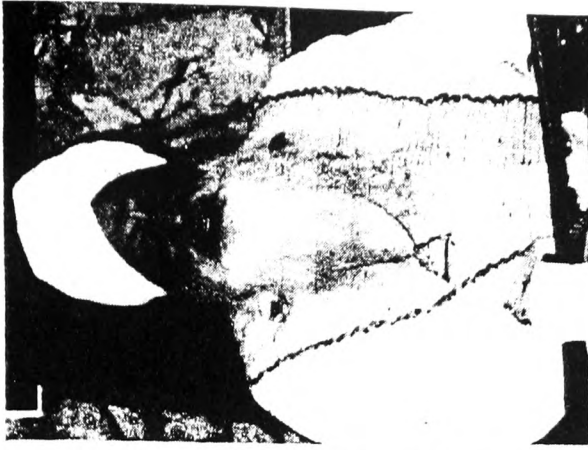
ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਸਰਵਉੱਚ ਨਿਆਂਕਾਰੀ ਅਸਥਾਨ, ਭਗਤੀ ਅਤੇ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਕ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਲੋਂ ਜਾਰੀ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਗਤ ਵਿਚ ਖਾਸ ਮਹਾਨਤਾ ਹੈ। ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਦਾ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਗਵਾਹ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸ਼ੇਰੇ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਮਹਾਰਾਜਾ ਤਟਨੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਨੂੰ ਸਿਰ ਮੱਥੇ ਪੁਵਾਨ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ ਆਪਣੇ ਸਰੀਰ ਉਪਰ ਕੋਤਿਆਂ ਤੀ ਸਜਾ ਨੂੰ ਬਰਦਾਸ਼ਤ ਕੀਤਾ। ਅਜ ਵੀ ਵਿਸ਼ਵ ਭਰ ਵਿਚ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਮੁਲਕ ਅੰਦਰ ਰਹਿੰਦਾ ਸਿੱਖ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨਾਲ ਜੁੜਿਆ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ।

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਜਾਰੀ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਮੰਤਵ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਬੋਲਬਾਲੇ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮੇ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਏਕਤਾ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਕ ਹਨ। ਇਹੋ ਵਜਾਹ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ ਨੂੰ ਖੜ੍ਹੇ-ਖੜ੍ਹੇ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਸਮੇਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਰਕਾਰਾਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲ ਟੇਢੀ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਨਾਲ ਦੇਖਦੀਆਂ ਰਹਿੰਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪਤਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਜੇਕਰ ਹਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨਾਲ ਜੁੜ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਜਬਦਾਰ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਅੱਗੇ ਸਿਰ ਨਿਵਾਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਪੰਥ ਕਿਸੇ ਦਿਨ ਆਪਣੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਸੁਪਨੇ ਸਾਫ਼ਾਰ ਕਰਨ ਦੇ ਸਮਰੱਥ ਹੋ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ! ਪਿਛਲੇ ਦਿਨੀਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਲੋਂ ਪੰਗਤ ਵਿਚ ਬੈਠ ਕੇ ਲੰਗਰ ਛਕਣ ਬਾਰੇ ਜੋ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ, ਕੌਮ ਦੇ ਚੰਗੇ ਭਾਗਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵਸਦੀ ਭਾਰੀ ਬਹੁਗਿਣਤੀ ਦੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੇ ਪੁਵਾਨ ਕਰ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਕੁਝ ਹਉਮੈ ਦੀ ਚੁਭਟ ਵਾਲੇ ਅਤੇ ਭੋਲੇ-ਭਾਲੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਅਜੇ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਬਿਰਤੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਸ਼ਿਕਾਰ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਭਾਂਤ-ਭਾਂਤ ਦੀਆਂ ਦਲੀਲਾਂ ਦੇ ਜਾਲ ਵਿਚ ਫਸੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ। ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਗੱਲ ਦਾ ਪਤਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਵਲੋਂ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਜੋ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਮੋਹਰ ਹੇਠ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਭਾਈ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਵਲੋਂ ਸਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਦੇ ਨਾਂ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਜਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਮੰਨਣਾ ਹਰੇਕ ਸਿੱਖ ਦਾ ਫਰਜ਼ ਹੈ! ਪੰਥ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਵਿਚ ਦਰਜ ਹੈ:

**ਕਾਮ ਪਰਤ ਬਾ ਜੋ ਕਿਛੁ ਤਬਹੀ ॥ ਕਰਤ ਗੁਰਮਤਾ ਮਿਲ ਬਰ ਸਬ ਹੀ ॥**  
ਜਬਦਾਰ ਜੋ ਕਿਛੁ ਭਹਿ ਦੇਤਾ ॥ ਸੋਈ ਸਿੱਖ ਮਾਨ ਸਭ ਲੇਤਾ ॥

**ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ! ਸੰਗਤ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਗਤ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮੇ ਨੂੰ ਜੋ ਵੀ ਮੰਨੇਗਾ ਤਿਸ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ।**



ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਭਾਈ ਹਰਭਜਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਖਾਲਸਾ  
(ਯੋਗੀ ਜੀ)

ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਦਾਸ  
**ਸ੍ਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਭਾਈ ਹਰਭਜਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਖਾਲਸਾ (ਯੋਗੀ ਜੀ)**  
Box 132D Espanola, New Mexico 87532 Tel: (505) 753-6341 Fax: (505) 753-467

5:2 Yogī Bhajan's appeal to the Panth, as a whole, for langar to be served in pangats. The appeal appeared in the Sikh weekly -- Des Pardes (June 1998), published in Southall, West London

# Appendix 6

## The Rehat Maryādā



# REHAT MARYADA

'A GUIDE TO THE SIKH WAY OF LIFE'



*Published by :*

Dharam Parchar Committee

SHIROMANI GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE  
AMRITSAR

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥  
( Ek Onkar Sat Gur Parsad )

## Sikh Rites And Ceremonies

Discipline of the "Word", Discipline of the  
Sacrament, Discipline of Service.

### 1. DISCIPLINE OF THE "WORD"

- (a) A Sikh is expected to rise early in the morning (at about 3 a.m.), and after taking a bath, to meditate on the Name of God.
- (b) He should recite the following compositions of the Gurus as his daily prayers :-  
**Morning**—The *Japji Sahib* of Guru Nanak, and the *Jap Sahib* and the *Ten Swayyas* of Guru Gobind Singh.  
**Evening**—*Rahiras*, including 9 passages (Shabdās) from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, occurring after *Japji a Chaupai* of Guru Gobind Singh, and 6 Stanzas from the *Anand-Bani* (The first five and the last).  
**Night**—(before going to bed) *Sohila*.
- (c) At the end of these recitations, particularly in the morning and in the evening, the Daily Prayer ( Arda s) is offered.

#### THE ARDAS

God is one. Victory to the Lord !  
May God help. The Ballad (Var) devoted to God by the Tenth Guru —(King).

Having first remembered God Almighty, think of Guru Nanak;

May then Guru Angad, Amar Das and Ram Das Guru help us !

Remember Arjan, Hargobind and the holy Har Rai.  
Let us think of the holy Harl Krishan, whose sight dispels  
all sorrows.  
Let us remember Teg Bahadur, and the nine treasures  
shall quickly pour into our homes.

May they all assist us everywhere!

May the Tenth King, the holy Guru Gobind Singh, the  
lord of hosts and protector of the faith, assist us everywhere! I  
Turn your thoughts, O Khalsa, to the teaching of Guru  
Granth Sahib and Chant—

Waheguru (Wonderful Lord) I

The Five Loved Ones, the Master's four sons (Sahibzadas),  
the forty saved ones, and other righteous, steadfast and peni-  
tents who, meditated on His Name, shared their earnings with  
others: who fought with sword and practised charity; who  
saw others' faults but overlooked them; think of their noble  
deeds and Chant—

Waheguru I

All those who for their religion offered themselves to be  
minced, had their scalps chopped off, suffered on the toothed-  
wheel, were sawn, and flayed alive, who never abandoned their  
faith and lived the life of true Sikh with unshorn hair, upheld  
the sanctity of Gurdwaras, think of their spiritual deeds, and  
Chant—

Waheguru I

Think of all the different temples (Gurdwaras), Five holiest  
seats of religious authority and other places hallowed by the  
touch of Guru's feet and Chant—

Waheguru I

Firstly, the prayer of the whole Khalsa is:

May the whole Khalsa be blessed with the love of His  
Name, and in return for that the World may live in peace and  
prosperity.

May God's protection and grace prevail throughout the  
habitation of Sikhs.

4

May victory attend our Charity and our Arms I  
May the follower be blessed with honour I  
May the Khalsa always triumph I  
May Gods' sword help us I

Waheguru I

Bestow upon Thy Sikhs spirit of Sikhism, the gift of Thy  
Name, the gift of Faith, the gift of confidence in Thee, and the  
gift of Thy Knowledge, the gift of pilgrimage and a dip in the  
Holy Tank of Sri Amritsar.

May the Sikh concerts, banners, inns exist for ever; May  
the justice prevail, say—

Waheguru I

May the Sikhs be humble, but their thinking be high, the  
Lord be the cherisher of their wisdom, O Khalsa, Chant  
Waheguru (Wonderful is the Lord).

O Lord I the ever protector of the Panth, grant Khalsa the  
unrestricted approach, control and pilgrimage to Nankana  
Sahib and other Gurdwaras from which the Sikhs have been  
separated.

Through Nanak, may the love of Thy Name for ever be on  
the increase, And may all men prosper by Thy grace.

O, true King I the honour of the humble, support for the  
helpless, shelter for the shelterless, We humbly pray to  
Thy honour to forgive our errors and omissions during the  
holy readings; and accomplish the tasks of everyone.

O, true king I May we come across those noble persons  
whose company inspires to remember your Name. Nanak  
says that through your grace, the world may prosper and bless-  
ings may dawn upon everybody.

The Khalsa belongs to the wonderful Lord, who is always  
victorious.

#### GURDWARAS—THE SIKH TEMPLES

(a) As the Guru is manifest in Sangat, a Sikh must join  
in the congregational worship held in the Gurdwaras.

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- (b) Guru Granth Sahib is daily opened in the Gurdwaras, and is usually closed after the evening prayers.
- (c) Great respect is shown to the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, when opening, reading, or closing it. It is kept in clean clothes, is opened under a canopy\*, and a *cheur* (fly whisk) is always kept at hand to wave over it. When it is brought in, all those present stand up with bowed heads.
- (d) It is considered superstitious to ring bells, burn incense, light ghee-lamps and wave them in a *platter* before the Guru Granth Sahib. It is also objectionable to press the walls of sacred places, to bow before monumental platforms, to consecrate water by placing it under Holy Guru Granth Sahib, or to introduce images in worship.
- (e) No other book, however holy and readable, is to be installed in a Gurdwara as the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is installed.
- (f) No ceremony, other than a Sikh Ceremony, is to be performed in a Gurdwara, nor is non-Sikh holiday to be celebrated there.
- (g) Before the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is removed from one place to another, a brief prayer is offered.

\*These signs of royalty and the marked attention paid by Sikhs to the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, especially when it is exaggerated by ignorant people, give an impression to others that Sikhs worship their Guru Granth Sahib. This is wrong. Sikhs are enjoined to worship nothing but the true Name. They can offer respect to any person or thing worthy of praise, but worship is due to God alone. Perhaps the bowing of Sikhs' before Guru Granth Sahib is misunderstood by Westerners, whose way of salutation is different. They kiss their book whereas the Sikhs bow before theirs, both conforming to the local custom of paying respect. Both ways of salutation are highly personal, but cannot be called idolatry; as the holy book is not given the place of God. In Sikhism the highest respect is paid to the Word, as in a modern state the greatest homage is paid to the law, which stands even above the king. This sovereignty of the Shabad or the Word was acknowledged even by the Gurus, who bowed before it in reverence.

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- (h) When the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is opened for the first time during the day, a prayer is offered and a passage read out.
- (i) Every visitor, whether Sikh or non-Sikh, before entering a Gurdwara is expected to put off his/her shoes and cover his/her head. He should also wash his feet with water at the entrance to the Gurdwara.
- (j) The *prakarma*, or the circumambulation of a Gurdwara, is performed by keeping to the left of Gurdwara.
- (k) All are free to enter a Gurdwara without any consideration of caste or creed. No intoxicant or any obnoxious thing like tobacco is allowed to be taken in.
- (l) The first thing a Sikh does on entering a Gurdwara is to bow before the holy Guru Granth Sahib and take his or her seat, causing absolutely no disturbance to the congregation.
- (m) While making seating arrangements in a Gurdwara, no invidious distinction must be made between man and man or between a Sikh and a Non-Sikh. No extra respect is to be paid to an individual, by providing him with a superior seat, a cushion, a chair, or a cot.
- (n) Women are not to veil themselves while sitting in a congregation.
- (o) There are five Takhts, or thrones of Panthic authority :
- (1) The Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar, (2) Patna Sahib, (3) Kesigharh Sahib at Anandpur, (4) Damdama Sahib, at Tatwandi Sabo (5) Hazur Sahib at Nanded (Hyderabad, Deccan).
- (p) Only Amritdhari (baptized) Sikhs, who observe the baptismal vows, are allowed to enter the innermost

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part of a Takht. All other parts of the Takht are open to everybody, without distinction of caste or creed, except those who have apostated from Sikhism, or have committed any Kurahit, i. e. breach of Sikh Discipline, and have become *Parits*.

- (q) Each Gurdwara has its own flag, saffron or dark-blue in colour, surmounted with a double-edged sword (Khanda)
- (r) The usual order of services performed in a Gurdwara is: the opening of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, music (kirtan), exposition, Gurbani Katha the sermon, the Anand, a prayer, the reading of a passage from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, the distribution of *Karah Prasad*, and the dispersal.
- (s) A large drum (Nigara) should be kept in the Gurdwara and sounded at appropriate times.

#### SINGING OF HYMNS

In a sangat, only hymns composed by the Gurus or their commentary by Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal can be sung.

#### READING OF THE HOLY GURU GRANTH SAHIB

- (a) When the congregation is assembled, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib must be kept open (covered with a scarf if nobody is reading it), and some one must sit in service, at the seat meant for the service-man (Granthi).
- (b) Every Sikh is expected to set apart a room in his house for the opening of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib.
- (c) He is expected to read some portion of it every day.
- (d) The ordinary way of consultation is to open the Holy Guru Granth Sahib at any page and to read the first passage occurring at the top of the left hand page. If the passage begins on the previous page, then the page is turned over and going back the first line of the passage is found. The passage must be read wholly.

If a *Var* (ode) has been selected, then the whole *Pauri* (stanza), including *Sajoks* (staves), should be read as far as the sentence that concludes with the word "*Nanak*".

- (e) Now and then a reading of the whole Holy Guru Granth Sahib is undertaken by a congregation or a family. This reading starts with the recitation of the *Anand\* Prasad* ( communion food). It continues intermittently for a week and the finish is followed by the recitation of the Anand, a prayer, and *Karah Prasad*. In times of trouble and anxiety, the reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is carried on without a break and is finished in about 48 hours. This practice began in the days when Sikhs wandered as outlaws in the jungles, and were not sure of staying more than two days in one place.

#### SEHAJ PATH

- (Normal Reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib ).
- (a) Every Sikh should try to keep a separate place in his or her own home for reading and studying the Holy Guru Granth Sahib.
- (b) Every Sikh should learn *Gurmukhi* and read the Holy Guru Granth Sahib.
- (c) Every Sikh should read a hymn i.e., spiritual lesson (*Hukam*) from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib before the morning meal. If this is not possible for any reason, the reading should be done later during the day. However, one should not have superstitious fears, if one cannot comply with this requirement or, if one is unable to see or read the Holy Guru Granth Sahib at times of difficulty or before undertaking a long journey.
- (d) It is desirable that a Sikh should make a full reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib in the course of one or two months.
- (e) Before beginning a new reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, the first five and the last verse of the *Anand Sahib*

\* First five stanzas and the last one.

should be recited followed by *Ardas* and reading of a spiritual lesson. The new full reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib should, then, commence with the *Jepji Sahib*.

#### AKHAND PATH

##### (Non-stop Reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib)

- (a) *Akhand Path* is done to mark special occasions of great joy, sorrow or distress. The complete reading (carried out by a number of people in a series of shifts) takes approximately 48 hours. The reading must be clear and accurate and not too fast, so that it can be easily understood.
- (b) Any person who asks for or arranges *Akhand Path* should, as far as possible, ensure that the reading is done by himself, his family or friends. If, for any reason, such a person is unable to get such help in the reading, he should at least listen to as much of the reading, as possible. It is wrong for people to arrange for *Akhand Path* without their being prepared to either read or listen to it. Those asked to help in the reading, may be given food and sustenance, according to the means of those that arrange the *Path*.
- (c) No other book should be read while *Path* is going on.
- (d) Before starting *Akhand Path*, the first five verses and the last verse of the *Anand Sahib* should be read, followed by the *Ardas* and *Hukum*. This should be followed by the distribution of *Karah Prasad* (Holy Communion) to the congregation. Then the *Akhand Path* can be commenced.
- (e) A complete reading (either continuous or non-continuous) of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib should be followed by a reading of either the *Mundawni*. The *Ragmala* may or may not be recited according to the local custom or according to the wishes of the person or person who arrange such a Reading (*Path*). The *Anand Mundawni* is then read and followed by the *Ardas* and *Hukum*. After *Akhand Path*, *Karah Prasad* is distributed to the congregation.

- (f) At the time of the *Akhand Path* it is usual to give donations for the upkeep of the Gurdwara and for the furtherance of Sikhism. This should be given according to one's means.

#### KARAH PRASAD

- (a) In order to remove untouchability and to teach social equality Guru Nanak started the custom of distributing *Karah Prasad* among his congregations.
- (b) Anyone who has prepared it in the prescribed manner, can bring it to a Gurdwara for distribution.
- (c) It is a kind of pudding prepared in an iron vessel from flour, sugar and ghee, mixed in equal quantities, and is brought to the congregation. After reciting six stanzas from the *Anand*, which is a hymn of thanks—giving, the man officiating at the function touches the *Karah Prasad* with a *Kirpan* after the prayer.
- (d) Before distributing it among the congregation, he sets apart some quantity for the Five Beloved Ones, and gives it to five regular Sikhs who are known to keep the baptismal vows. Then the main portion is distributed, starting from the man in service of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, without any distinction of caste or creed. The congregation is generally, expected to eat it there and then.

#### EXPOSITION OF THE HOLY GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The exposition of the Holy Word alone is allowed in a Gurdwara. Of course, by way of illustration, Sikh History and the compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal are also freely drawn upon. References to other religions or their books, may also be made, but in order to preserve a spiritual atmosphere, strict injunctions are given to the speakers to observe respect towards others.

#### LIVING ACCORDING TO THE GURUS' TEACHINGS

A Sikh should live and work according to the principles of Sikhism, and should be guided by as follows :

- (a) He should worship only one God, and should not indulge in any form of idol worship.
- (b) Live a life based on the teachings of the ten Gurus, the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, and other scriptures and teachings of the Gurus.
- (c) Sikhs should believe in the "Oneness" of the ten Gurus, that is, that a single soul or entity existed in the ten Gurus.
- (d) A Sikh should have no belief in caste, black magic, superstitious practices; such as, the seeking of auspicious moments, eclipses, the practices of feeding Brahmans in the belief that the food will reach one's ancestors, ancestor's worship, fasting at different phases of the moon, the wearing of sacred threads and similar rituals.
- (e) The Gurdwara should serve as the Sikh central place of worship. Although the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is the centre of Sikh belief, non-Sikh books can be studied for general enlightenment.
- (f) Sikhism should be distinct from other religions, but Sikhs must, in no way, give offence to other faiths.
- (g) Knowledge of Sikhism is highly desirable for a Sikh and this should be acquired in addition to his other education.
- (h) It is the duty of the Sikhs to teach Sikhism to their children.
- (i) Sikhs should not cut their children's hair. Boys are to be given the name of Singh and girls the name or Kaur.
- (j) Sikhs should not partake of alcohol, tobacco, drugs or other intoxicants.
- (k) Sikhism strongly condemns infanticide, particularly female.
- (l) A Sikh should live only on his honest earnings.
- (m) No Sikh should gamble or commit theft.

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- (n) Sikhs must not commit adultery.
- (o) A Sikh should regard another man's wife as his sister or mother; and another man's daughter as his own daughter.
- (p) A Sikh should be loyal to his wife and vice versa.
- (q) A Sikh should live his whole life according to the tenets of his faith.
- (r) A Sikh should greet other Sikhs with the salutation: "*Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki fateh*" (Hail Khalsa of the wonderful Lord who is always victorious.)
- (s) There is no such thing as purdah, for a Sikh Woman.
- (t) Any clothing may be worn by a Sikh, provided it includes a turban (for males) and a Knicker (Kachh) a similar garment.

## 2. DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENT

### (A) BIRTH AND NAMING CEREMONY

- (a) (At the birth of a child any Gursikh relation or friend may pour some water in a small iron (steel) cup and add some Patashas or honey in it and stir the same with a Kirpan while reciting the first five Pauries (Stanzas) of the Japji alongwith the prologue given at the very beginning of this Bani. A few drops of his holy water be poured into the mouth of the child and remaining be taken by the mother. A prayer of thanks giving should also be offered.)
- (b) When the mother rises from her confinement and is able to take a bath-no period being fixed—her friends and relatives go with her to a Gurdwara (which may be in her own house). Hymns of thanksgiving are sung. Sometimes the reading of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib is brought to a finish. Then a passage is read out of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. From the first letter of the first word the assembly is asked to coin a name for the child. Several names may be suggested, and the one that is ultimately approved is announced by the person sitting in service of Holy Guru Granth Sahib at the function. To a boy's name the word 'Singh' and

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to a girl's name the word 'Kaur' is added. After reciting six stanzas of the Anand and consecrating Karah Prasad with a kirpan, after prayer is offered and the Karah Prasad is distributed.

#### (B) THE ANAND MARRIAGE CEREMONY

The Anand form of marriage has been observed since the earliest days of Sikhism and is mentioned in the Rahtnama of Bhai Daya Singh (one of the original five Beloved Ones whom Guru Gobind Singh baptized with his own hands), in Bhai Rattan Singh's *Panth Prakash*, written in 1809, in Prem Sumarg and in *Suraj Prakash*, (both written in the first half of the nineteenth century). It was legalized in 1909 by the Anand Marriage Act.

- (a) Sikh boys and girls are married when they are grown up, and have reached maturity.
- (b) The ceremony of betrothal is not essential. When it takes place, it is a very simple affair. A few relatives of the boy are invited by the parents of the girl, and a kirpan and some sweets are given to them for the boy. This meeting of chosen friends is held with Holy Guru Granth Sahib in their midst.
- (c) The convenience of both parties is consulted, and a day and time is fixed for performing the ceremony of marriage.
- (d) After a prayer, the bridegroom (with no particular signs on him, except a garland) goes with a party of friends and relatives to the house of the bride, where a similar party is ready to receive them. Both parties approach each other from opposite directions, singing hymns of welcome from Guru Granth Sahib. When they are face to face, someone of them steps forward and offers prayer. Then they embrace each other and separate.

In the morning, a congregation is formed with Guru

Granth Sahib in their midst. Both parties sit together and listen to the music of Asa-di-Var or some selected hymns from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. When the music is over, the bride and the bridegroom are seated facing Guru Granth Sahib, the bride being on the left of the bridegroom.

Anybody in the congregation can perform the marriage ceremony. The officiating person asks the couple and their parents to stand up, and, leading them in prayer, asks God's blessing upon the occasion. Then after reading out a passage from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, he addresses the couple individually, pointing out to them their duties towards each other, towards their families, their society, and their religion. The ideal placed before them is that they should become one in spirit:

"They are not wife and husband who only sit together;  
Rather are they wife and husband who have one  
spirit in two bodies"  
(Suh Ki Var III).

They are asked to mould their conjugal relations on the model laid down in the Epithalamium of Guru Ram Das, which is a part of the marriage service. In it the Guru mentions four steps in the development of the life of love: Awe, Love, Restraint, and Harmony.

When the parties bow their heads in acknowledgment, the scarf of the bridegroom is given into the hand of the bride, and they stand up and listen to the strains of music:

"I attach myself to thee.  
Leaving all my relations as bitter.  
I come to cling to thee".  
(Var Ram Kail V).

Then, one by one, the four stanzas of Guru Ramdas's Epithalamium called *Lavan*, are read out of the Guru Granth Sahib and after each reading the couple go round the Guru Granth Sahib, the bridegroom leading the



bride, accompanied by the music of the same stanza sung by the musicians. Each time they return to their places and bow their heads. Then the musicians sing the six stanzas of the Anand and the person who is performing the marriage offers prayers of thanksgiving in which the whole congregation joins. After that **karah prasad** is distributed and the ceremony comes to an end.

- (e) The same ceremony is performed at the re-marriage of a widow or a widower.
- (f) Both parties in marriage are expected to be Amritdhari (baptized).
- (g) Polygamy is discouraged, and the couple enjoined to be faithful to each another.

### (C) DEATH CEREMONY

- (a) At the death-bed of a Sikh, the relatives and friends console themselves and the departing soul by reading Gurbani especially, **Sukhmani**, the Psalm of Peace.
- (b) When death occurs, no loud lamentations are allowed. Instead, the Sikhs chant **Wahiguru, Wahiguru (Wonderful Lord)**.
- (c) All dead bodies, whether those of children or of grown-up people, are cremated. Where cremation is not possible, it is permissible to throw the dead body into a sea or a river.
- (d) The dead body is washed and clothed (complete with all the five symbols) before it is taken out on a bier to the cremation ground. The procession starts after a prayer and sings suitable hymns from **Guru Granth Sahib** on the way. At the cremation-ground the body is placed on the pyre. The **Ardas** is recited, and the nearest relatives light the pyre. When the fire is fully ablaze, someone reads **Soh/la** and offer prayers for the benefit of the dead. Then the

people come away, and leave the relatives of the deceased at their door, where they are thanked before departing.

The bereaved family, for the comfort of their own souls as well as for the peace of the departed, start a reading of the Holy **Guru Granth Sahib** which may be at their own house or at a neighbouring **Gurdwara**. Friends and relations take part in it. After a week or so they again come together when the reading is finished. The usual prayer is offered and **Karah Prasad** distributed.

- (e) The charred bones of the dead together with the ashes are taken from the cremation-ground and thrown into the nearest canal or river.
- (f) It is forbidden to erect monuments over the remains of the dead, although suitable monuments in their honour, at any other place, would be quite permissible.

### 3. DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE

Service is an essential part of a Sikh's duty. It is the practical expression of love. Those whom one is to serve must be loved. The caste system and its accompanying evil of untouchability have, therefore, no place in a religion of service. Service recognizes no barriers of religion, caste, or race. It must be offered to all; it should not take the fixed forms of sectarian charity; but should be freely varied according to the reasonable needs of those whom we want to help.

**Gurdwaras** are the laboratories for teaching the practice of service, for which the real field is the world abroad. The service in **Gurdwaras** takes the form of sweeping the floor, cleaning utensils, fetching water, and pulling or waving the **pankhas** or fans, but the most important institution in this connection is the **Guru's Free Kitchen**.

#### FREE KITCHEN

- (a) The institution of **Guru Ka Langar** or Free Kitchen, is

as old as Sikhism. It was started by Guru Nanak for the purpose of teaching service, spreading equality, and removing untouchability and other prejudices born of the caste system.

- (b) In a way, the kitchen in every Sikh's house is *Guru Ka Langar*; as, he is enjoined to share his food with others. He is also expected to take part in the running of the common free Kitchens opened at Gurdwaras. He may contribute provisions, pay for the expenses, or personally lend a hand in cleaning utensils, fetching water or fuel, or in the cooking and distribution of food.
- (c) Non-Sikhs are also freely allowed to help in the maintenance of the Kitchen.
- (d) No invidious distinction is to be made between man and man, between a Sikh and a non-Sikh, between a caste-man and a so-called outcaste, when making seating arrangements or serving food in the Guru's Kitchen.

#### INCORPORATE LIFE

Discipline of Sacrament, Discipline of Organisation, Disciplinary Action.

After a Sikh has learnt service in a Gurdwara, he has to practise it in the world abroad. For this, organisation is called the *Panth*. Every Sikh is expected to take part in the corporate life of his community and to do his duty to the *Panth*.

#### 1. DISCIPLINE OF SACRAMENT

The first step in joining this organisation is to receive initiation through *Amrit*.

- (a) The *Amrit* ceremony is held in some place which must not be a thoroughfare.

- (b) The Holy Guru Granth Sahib is opened. One regular Sikh is required to sit before it, and five others to conduct the ceremony. These are called *Panj Pyaras*, or the Five Beloved Ones. Women are also eligible for the work. All these Sikhs should wash themselves and their hair, and should be wearing all the five symbols called the Five K's *Kesh* (long hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kacch* (Knickers), *Kara* (iron bracelet) and *Kirpan* (sword).

- (c) None of the Five Beloved Ones should be blind, half-blind, or a cripple. None should have committed a breach of the baptismal vows. All should be fit in every way: strong, healthy, cheerful, and tidy.

- (d) The Sikh baptism is open to men and women \*of all the countries, of whatever race, creed, or caste. The recipients must not be too young. They should wash their hair, and should have the five K's on their person, and no mark or symbol of any other religion. They should not have their heads bare or covered with a cap or hat. No earrings are allowed. The wearing of the other ornaments is also discouraged. All should stand reverently with folded hands.

- (e) If any one has to be rebaptized on account of some breach of the rules, he is taken apart by the Five and some penalty is imposed upon him, after which he is allowed to rejoin the rest.

- (f) The party is then addressed by one of the Five who explains the principles of Sikhism, including belief in the Oneness of God, His love as the only way of salvation, practice of the Name and the Guru's Word as the means of awakening that love in one's heart, and service of man with selflessness and sacrifice.

\* If a woman offers to join the ranks of the Khalsa, she should be given the Sikh baptism—*Prem-Sumerg*.

- (g) They are asked whether they accept these principles. When they give their assent, one of the Five offers prayer for the preparation of *Amrit*: and the person sitting before the Holy Guru Granth Sahib reads out a *Hukam* from it. Then all the Five begin to prepare the *Amrit*: or the water of immortality.
- (h) They place an iron vessel on a pedestal and, sitting round it, put water and a suitable quantity of sweets (*patashahs*) into it. They sit in what is called the 'heroic attitude' with the left knee up and the right knee on the ground.
- (i) They recite the following five selected composition of Gurbani in a loud voice:  
The *Japji*. *Jap*. Ten *Swayas*. *Chaupai* from *Dasam Granth* and 6 stanzas from the *Anand*.  
The reciter, looking intently into the water and placing his left hand on the edge of the vessel, continues stirring the water with a double-edged sword (*Khanda*) which he holds in his right hand. The rest keep both their hands on the vessel, and their eyes fixed on the water.
- (j) When the recitation is over, all the Five stand up with the vessel in their hands, and one of them offers prayer. The *Amrit* is now ready.
- (k) Each candidate is called up and told to seat himself in the 'heroic attitude' (Bir Asan) described above. He or she is asked to make a cup of his hands, by placing the right hand over the left, and to receive five handfuls of the *Amrit* one after another. As each handful is drunk by the recipient, the giver of the *Amrit* shouts "*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*", and the recipient repeats it after him. Then his or her eyes and hair are touched with the *Amrit* five times; each time the recipient is asked to repeat the above words after the giver of the *Amrit*. What is left is drunk off, turn by turn, by all the candidates, sipping direct from the vessel. Thus, they become 'Brothers of the Golden Cup.'

- (l) Then the Five initiators with one voice utter the following invocation to God, given in the beginning of the *Japji*, and the initiated persons repeat it after them:

"God, the one Supreme Being, of the True Name, the Creator, without Fear and Enmity, Immortal, Unborn, Self-existent, and the Enlightener; can be realized through Guru's grace."

This is done five times.

- (m) One of the Five then administers the *Rehat*, or the vows of Sikh discipline.

He tells them that they are to consider themselves as children of the same parents. Their father is Guru Gobind Singh and their mother is Mata Sahib Kaur. Their home is Keshgarh. All the differences based on their previous religions, castes and occupations are done away with, and they begin afresh as the 'purified ones', as the *Khalsa* who believes in one God and in no other gods or goddesses; who conducts himself by the teachings of the Ten Gurus and puts his faith in no other guide or Book. They are to offer the daily prayers regularly, pay tithes, and are never to part with any of the five *K's*. They are to abstain from the following four main taboos, called *Kurahihs*: (1) Removal of hair (2) Eating meat cut and prepared in Mohammedan fashion (*Halal*)\*, (3) Adultery and (4) Using Tobacco in any form.

- (n) If a Sikh commits any of these breaches of discipline, he becomes a '*patit*' (apostate) and has to get himself rebaptized.

The following are some of the minor taboos, called '*tankhah*':

\* The Sikhs eat *Jhatka* meat, i. e. the flesh of a bird or animal that has been killed with one stroke and not by the slow process avoured by the Mohammedans.

- (1) Entering into brotherhood with any of the recalcitrant Sikhs, like the *Minas*, *Masands*, *Dhirmalias*, and *Ram Razas* or with those who, having once accepted Sikhism, take to shaving, smoking, or committing infanticide.
- (2) Dining in the same dish with a person unbaptised or an apostate.
- (3) Dying or picking out any white hair.
- (4) Receiving money in return for a daughter's hand in marriage. (The same taboo now extends to a bribe received on a son's marriage).
- (5) Using any narcotic drug or intoxicant (opium, wine, poppy hemp, cocaine etc.)
- (6) Performing any ceremony which violates any of the Sikh Principles.
- (7) The breaking of any vow taken at Amrit (baptism) ceremony.
- (n) After this, one of the five offers prayer, and the person sitting before Holy Guru Granth Sahib reads out a passage.
- (o) Those who are new to Sikhism must be renamed. The new name is given to them in the manner already described under the naming ceremony.
- (p) At the end *Karah Prasad* is distributed. All the newly initiated Sikhs eat *Karah Prasad* out of the same vessel.

## 2. Discipline of Organization

- (a) **Guru Panth** :-All Amrit-Dhari (baptized) \*Sikhs acting together with the sense of Guru in them constitute the *Guru Panth*.
- (b) **Gur Sangat** :-Wherever there are at least five regular Sikhs, they can form a *Sangat*. When they act in a representative capacity with the sense of the Guru in them,

\* The Guruship was given to the Khalsa and the term Khalsa applies to *Amrit Dhari* (Baptized) Sikhs alone.

they constitute a *Guru Sangat*\*. The Presence of Guru Granth Sahib in their midst is essential.

- (c) **Panthic Meeting** :-Such units meeting as a whole (as was the custom in the early days when the numbers were small) or through their accredited representatives (as is done nowadays) form a meeting of the *Panth*.
- (d) **Gurmattas** :-All decisions affecting the whole community are made by such a panthic meeting. These decisions are called *Gurmattas*.
- (e) For a *Gurmatta* only those subjects can be taken up which are calculated to clarify and support the fundamental principles of Sikhism; such as safeguarding the position of the Gurus and the Holy Guru Granth Sahib, purity of the ritual and the Panthic organization. On other questions such as political, social or educational matters, only a *matla* or resolution can be passed, which is not as sacred and inviolable as a *Gurmatta*.
- (f) The appeal against the decision of local *Sangats* lies with the *Akal Takht*, but the decisions of the Panth are inviolable and are binding on all Sikhs.
- (g) These decisions are conveyed to the *Sangat* in the form of *Hukam-namas*, or orders issued from the *Akal Takht*.
- (h) All cases of reference, about the rituals are disposed of by the *Akal Takht*. These decisions are also proclaimed in the form of *Hukamnamas*.

## 3. Disciplinary Action

- (a) When a Sikh commits a breach of *Rehat*, or the rules of Sikh discipline, as given under different taboos, he is expected to present himself before the nearest *Sangat*

\* When *Amrit Dhari* Sikhs gather in an ordinary way, not in a representative capacity to act as a unit of the *Guru Panth*, but only as a religious gathering, they are called a *Sadh Sangat*. Such a meeting is open to all non-Sikhs, as well as, Sikhs; but not to the *Patita*.

to confess his fault. At this the Sangat appoints a Commission of Five Beloved Ones to try him. When the names of the Commission are proposed, the credentials of each one are challenged, and if nothing is found against any of them, they are confirmed. They hear the offender's confession in detail, and ascertaining the magnitude of his fault, suggest some punishment, which usually is of a light nature, such as fetching water or wiping the shoes of the congregation. If the fault proved comes under the four major taboos, then in addition to being heavily punished, the guilty person is asked to receive *Amrit* (baptism) afresh.

- (b) The *Sangat* is expected not to be vindictive in awarding punishment, so that the person found guilty may not have any rancour left in his mind. After all, the punishment, comes not from an enemy but from the Beloved ones, who impersonate the great Guru, who was all love. The punishment thus awarded is received humorsomely as a Penance (*tankhah*), and no contempt or humiliation is involved in it.
- (c) At the end there is a prayer in which all stand up with the penitent and pray for the forgiveness of their own sins as well as his.

