

Sikh Religious Practices: Guiding Norms and Texts

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In the compositions (*bani*) of Guru Nanak and his successors, there is no room for the sacraments of the Brahmanical system. The Gurus provide alternative ways of worship and the rites of passage. In his *Vars*, Bhai Gurdas elaborates on the normative and guiding codes for personal and corporate conduct (*rahit*) of the Sikhs. A new form of literature dedicated to *rahit* and called the *rahitnama* emerged in the eighteenth century. The other sources of the period too noted distinctive aspects of the Sikh *rahit*. In this backdrop, the Lahore Singh Sabha advocated uniform religious practices for the Sikhs according to *Gurmat*. One of the earliest measures of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) as a statutory body was to constitute the Rahureet Sub-committee to prepare a comprehensive statement about the personal and corporate life of the Sikhs on the basis of *Guru Granth Sahib* and later Sikh literature, and after inviting responses of the Sikhs within and outside Punjab and India. The process by which the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (1950) was finalized over two decades provides fascinating glimpses into the working of the doctrines of Guru-Granth and Guru-Panth.

In the Time of the Gurus

Guru Nanak lays emphasis on the true conduct (*sach achar*) as above everything else. Taken together, his compositions become a comprehensive statement on the Sikh way of life. It entailed rejection of several traditional beliefs and practices which he regarded as irrational and irrelevant, also providing meaningful alternatives for his 'Sikhs'. Thus, the notion of pollution (*sutak*) associated with child-birth, menstruation and death was characterized as an illusion. There was no merit in the sacred thread (*janeu*) worn by the upper caste males (Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) at their initiation ceremony; it was a symbol of their presumed superiority over the lower castes and not of superior conduct. Similarly, there was no meaning in the existing practices and rituals related to death, like feeding the ancestors (*shraddh*),

offering rice balls (*pind*) to them, and floating lamps on reed mats or leaves (*pattal*) to lighten their path to the lord of death (GGS, 1-4, 6, 38-39, 471-473).

Guru Nanak composed *Alahnian* to overcome the fear of death and the feeling of despondency, and to inculcate a feeling of detachment from worldly possessions and relations. Guru Amar Das composed four more *Alahnian* with a similar import. The *Sadd* composed by Baba Sunder, believed to be his great grandson, refers to Guru Amar Das enjoining the Sikhs that after his passing away, they should accept God's will and perform *kirtan* and sing His praises. There should be no lamentation, nor pacificatory ceremonies of *kirya* (*kriya*) and *pind-pattal*. The practices of *sati* (a widow burning on her husband's funeral pyre) and female infanticide were disapproved (GGS, 578-582, 583, 787, 923; Jaggi, I, 2002, 78, 212; Grewal, 2009a, 144-145).

Guru Amar Das's expression of joy in liberation through the *Anand* came to be recited on all important occasions in a Sikh's life, including birth, marriage and death. Listening to the *Anand* was a means of fulfilling one's wishes, according to Guru Arjan. It is also likely that this composition was sung to celebrate the birth of his son Hargobind. Guru Gobind Singh included it among the five compositions to be recited at the time of initiation into the Khalsa order (GGS, 917-22; Jaggi, I, 2002, 39-40, 99-102; Grewal, 2009a, 239-247).

The fourth Guru Ram Das composed the *Ghorian* and the *Lavan* for the ceremony of marriage, using the metaphors of the devotee's journey towards union with God. The *Ghorian* substituted for the folk songs sung by women at the time of the bridegroom mounting the mare (*ghori*) for departure with the wedding party. The four *Lavan* (rounds) taken by the bridegroom followed by the bride, which eventually became the core of the Sikh wedding ceremony, replaced the seven rounds presided over by the Brahman priest (GGS, 575-576, 772-774; Jaggi, 2002, I, 463).

References to *Ardas* (supplication) occur frequently in contemporary sources. Guru Nanak laid stress on *Ardas* with a feeling of complete self-surrender to God. That it should be offered standing was enjoined by Guru Angad. Guru Arjan emphasized that *Ardas* should be offered with folded hands (GGS, 736-737, 1093; Grewal, 2009a, 119-122; Jaggi, 2002, I, 75). Bhai Gurdas testifies in the early seventeenth century that a Sikh's daily religious routine ended with a prayer followed by the sharing of *prasad* (Var VI, *pauri* 3; Var XX, *pauri* 10). Significantly, the distinctive practice of praying together among the followers of Guru Nanak was

noticed by a mid-seventeenth century Parsi observer (Grewal and Habib, 2001, 78 for Mobad's *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*).

The place where the Sikhs worshipped collectively, or in congregation (*sangat*) is called the *dharamsal* by Guru Nanak and his successors; the term Gurdwara (*gurduar* or the door to the Guru's abode) is also used (GGS, 7, 19, 350, 351, 353, 412, 415, 919, 933, 938, 1015, 1030, 1198, for example). The *dharamsal* symbolized the Sikh faith as its most visible institution. Where the Guru was present was obviously the central *dharamsal*. Bhai Gurdas mentions that a large number of *dharamsals* had come into existence with activities like the singing and exposition of *gurbani*, copying of its manuscripts, and preparation of the *langar* (Malhotra, 2023, 43-46).

Bhai Gurdas underlines the importance of *nam dan isnan* (meditation on God, charity, and physical and moral purity), a phrase used by Guru Nanak for the essential features of the Sikh way of life. The Sikhs should rise early in the morning, bathe and meditate on the Guru; recite the *Japuji* and then go to the *dharamsal* and sit there; they listen to the *bani* of the Guru and sing *Gurbani*. At dusk, they sing the *Sodar* in association with others; at night, the *Kirtan Sohila* and the *Aarti* are recited, and the *prasad* is distributed (*Var I, pauri 38; Var VI, pauri 3; Var XII, pauri 2; Var XXVI, pauri 4*).

Significantly, Bhai Gurdas also states that the Sikhs do not follow conventional customs and traditions of caste and lineage (*kul dharam*) related to birth, marriage, and death. Nor do they observe *bhaddan* (tonsure), ancestor worship (*jathere*), and loud lamentation and traditional dirge on death. In marriages, Sikhs do not indulge in singing obscene and abusive songs (*sitthnian*). The worship of the *sati* is discarded by them (*Var V, pauris 10, 14*).

During the pontificate of the nine Gurus an initiate was given *charan amrit* which was also called *charan-pahul* or *pag-pahul* (Nabha, 1999, 457). According to Bhai Gurdas, it was prepared by using 'the dust of the feet of the Sikhs of the Guru' (*Var I, pauris 3, 23; Var VI, pauri 17; Var XXII, pauri 14*). Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan dwell on the sanctity of the dust of the feet of the men of piety (GGS, 828, 1263). In all probability, the reference here is to 'those who had advanced on the path of the Guru' (Malhotra, 2016, 145). Subsequently, for instituting the Khalsa in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh introduced initiation of the double-edged sword (*khande ki pahul*). The *dharamsal* became the place where the *pahul* was administered. It may be added that just before his passing away, the tenth Guru had invested Guruship in the *Granth Sahib* and the Panth which

crystallized in the eighteenth century as doctrines of Guru-Granth and Guru-Panth (Sainapat, 1967, 132; Malhotra, 2016, 104-110).

The substance of Sikh religious practices appears to be in place by the end of the seventeenth century, which was reinforced and amplified by the *Rahitnamas*.

The Eighteenth Century *Rahitnamas*

A new literary form called the *rahitnama* denoting a written code of belief and conduct for the Sikhs appears to have emerged in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. This literature is normative and relates primarily to the Sikh way of life. After prolonged scholarly skepticism, the scholars of the Sikh tradition are now inclined to place six *Rahitnamas* in the time of Guru Gobind Singh, highlighting a close link between the institution of the Khalsa and the production of *Rahitnamas*.

The *Prashan-Uttar* is placed in 1694-95. The extant eight manuscripts of the *Prahlad Singh Rahitnama* enable us to place it in 1697. After a careful study of the *Tankhahnama* (also called *Nasihatinama*), I have suggested that there is nothing in its contents against the assumption that it was written during the time of Guru Gobind Singh. Grewal has argued that much of the content of the *Sakhi Rahit Patshahi 10* gets related to the early Sikh tradition, and it may be regarded as originally composed around 1700. The *Prashan-Uttar*, *Tankhahnama* and the *Sakhi Rahit* are attributed to Bhai Nand Lal (McLeod, 2003, 45; Mann, 2008, 249, 275nn97,99; Malhotra, 2005; 55-81; Grewal, 2011, 207). Mann has examined several manuscripts of the largest *Rahitnama* called the *Prem Sumarag*, including a copy prepared in 1707. He also refers to the manuscript of 1701 seen by its first editor, Bhai Randhir Singh. Thus, Mann emphatically places the *Prem Sumarag* within the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh. After a close analysis, Grewal too places this *Rahitnama* early in the eighteenth century. Mann has seen a manuscript of 1700 of the *Rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh which has the preface and the *rahit* part. Mann argues that these two parts have 'clear literary integrity, standing as independent unit of the text, and the sections have distinct characteristics of their own'. Later on, in the 1740s, to this original core were appended the two narratives and the section on '*tankhah*' with the entire work attributed to Chaupa Singh. Grewal supports this argument through his own analysis of the contents of this *Rahitnama* (Mann, 2008, 249-50, 275n95, 276nn101-4; Grewal, 2011, 213). Thus, the largest *Rahitnama*, the four short *Rahitnamas*, and a substantial

part of the second largest one can be placed in the years from 1695 to 1708. Only two works of this *genre*, by Desa Singh and Daya Singh, are placed in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (McLeod, 2003, 70, 71-72; Malhotra, 2016, 12-13; Malhotra, 2021, 46-52).

The eight *Rahitnamas* vary in terms of size, scope and detail. Together, however, they cover much common ground and suggest a broad consensus regarding the Sikh rites and religious practices. There is considerable repetition but much of it comes from independent sources which, in fact, reinforce one another. There are differences which might be due at least partly to the changing situation over time. Variations could also be due to the situation of the author, his predilections and sources of information. Essentially, the *Rahitnamas* lay down what the Sikhs should believe and practice as their faith. The *Rahitnamas* cover the daily regimen of individual and congregational worship, Akal Purkh as the object of worship, and belief in the ten Gurus and the *shabad*; in addition to the life cycles ceremonies and obligations towards the fellow Sikhs and the society at large. The *dharamsal* (Gurdwara) figures as the most important institution of the Sikhs. Daily visits to the *dharamsal* are prescribed. The preparation and distribution of the *karah prasad* and the *langar* are underlined. The sanctity of the unshorn hair (*kesh*) figures in a big way. The double-edged sword (*khanda*) emerges as an essential constituent of the rites of passage. Several Brahmanical and conventional practices are discarded. The two later *Rahitnamas* generally reiterate what we find in the early *Rahitnamas*. We may briefly take up the individual *Rahitnamas*.

The *Prashan-Uttar* states that an essential part of the *rahit* of a Sikh of the Guru is to rise early in the morning, bathe, and recite the *Japuji* and the *Jap*. The Sikh should then go to have the Guru's audience (*darshan*) and sit in his presence with all attention. In the evening, he should listen to the *Rahiras*, *kirtan*, and the *katha* (*Prashan-Uttar*, 1968, 191-193).

The *Prahlad Singh Rahitnama* lays emphasis on the exclusive worship of the Supreme Being (Akal Purkh). A person who worships idols of stones, memorials at the place of cremation (*marhi*), a grave, or who thinks of any other *panth* as better, is not to be considered a Sikh of the Guru. A Sikh should not wear the sacred thread (*dhaga*). Referring to the daily worship, the *Rahitnama* says that in the forenoon a Sikh should eat nothing before reciting the *Japuji* and the *Jap*. Nor should a Sikh recite anything other than the compositions of the true Guru. Before the evening meal, a Sikh should recite the *Rahiras*. A Sikh should respect his *kesh* and he should never eat without the turban. He should never put on a cap and

inhale snuff. Also, the Sikhs should have nothing to do with the Minas, the Masandias, *mona* (clean-shaven) and the *kurimar* (those who kill their daughters). A Sikh of the Guru should keep the offering for the Guru (*kar*) in a money box (*golak*) and should never covet it (*Prahlad Singh Rahitnama*, 1995, 65-66).

The *Sakhi Rahit ki Patshahi 10* underlines that a Sikh should worship the *shabad* alone. A Sikh should not go to a sepulcher (*marhi/masani*), and he should listen only to *Gurmat* and not to a Brahman priest, Mulla, or a religious head (Padha, a Mian, or a Mahant). A Sikh should rise in the last quarter of the night, bathe, and read the *Japuji* and the *Jap*. The one who is unable to read, should recite two *paurs* of each. Before attending to one's work in the morning, a Sikh should go to the congregation, bow down, and listen to the *shabad*. At mid-day, he should wash his hands and feet and read the *Japuji* and the *Jap*. In the evening, about an hour before sunset, the *So-Dar* and the *Rahiras* should be read. The sanctity of the *kes*h is underlined. A Sikh should never use a razor. Just as the sacred thread is the marker of a Hindu so *kes*h is the marker of the Khalsa. A Sikh should never eat without covering his head. There is a strong injunction against the use of tobacco in any form; it is as heinous as eating beef. Instead of the traditional rite of *shraddh*, the *Rahitnama* recommends that a Sikh should prepare all kind of delicacies, invite the Khalsa, recite the *Anand*, and perform *Ardas* before serving food to them. It is emphasized that the Akal Purkh has provided for the *kirya karam* of the Panth (*Sakhi Rahit*, 1987, 133-138).

In the *Tankhahnama*, the unity of God is assumed, and worship is to be addressed only to the *Vaheguru*. The Sikhs are instructed to look up to the Guru for everything and never to turn to anyone else. The importance of God's Name, charity and purity (*nam*, *dan* and *isnan*) is underlined. Going to the congregation (*satsang*) in the morning and listening to the *shabad* attentively and with devotion, and talking about it with understanding is desirable for a Sikh. He should invite a poor Sikh to sit with him. He must bow his head after the *kirtan*. The sacred food (*karah prasad*) is distributed at the end of the *kirtan* and *katha*. The meticulous way in which the *karah prasad* is to be prepared, distributed, and partaken of is spelt out. Furthermore, a Sikh of the Guru should perform *Ardas* before undertaking anything important, maintain a money box (*golak*) and contribute the tenth part of his earnings (*dasvandh*). For daily worship, he should rise early in the morning, take bath with cold water, and recite the *Japuji* before eating anything. In the evening, he should recite the *Rahiras*; the *Sohila* at

night could be recited individually in the home (*Tankhahnama*, 1968, 191-193; Malhotra, 2005, 66-76).

The *Prem Sumarag* (PS) is the most comprehensive of the *Rahitnamas* which has ten chapters. It begins with meditation on God's Name and the injunction that the Sikh should not believe in any *guru* other than the Sikh Gurus. This is followed by instructions for worship from morning till night (PS, 1965, 1-10). For initiation into the order of the Khalsa through the double-edged sword (*khande ki pahul*), water should be sweetened before it is administered. The volunteer should put on a white dress, including long drawers (*kachh*), and should wear five arms. The number of the Khalsa present at this time should be at least five. Five stanzas of the *Anand* should be recited, followed by a prayer (PS, 1965, 16-17). A married woman could take initiation from a devout Sikh (Gurmukh). The *Ardas* should be followed by the instruction that 'she should have education in Gurmukhi, read and love *shabad-bani*'. The initiated women should associate with one another and reflect on the *shabad*. A widow could also take initiation, but no saffron (*kesar*) is to be sprinkled on her; she should wear an iron ring on her finger and observe restraint and chastity. It is explicitly stated that the injunctions given in the first two chapters of the *Rahitnama* are meant for both men and women (PS, 1965, 16-18).

The ceremonies connected with the birth of a child start with conception, with *pahul* for the mother along with the sight of weapons like the *khanda*, bow and arrow, and the sword. If a son is born, he should first be made to bow to arms and the *Granth-Pothi*, and the first feeding (*gurhti*) to be given to him should be touched by a *khanda*. After offering *Ardas*, sanctified food (*prasad*) should be distributed among the Khalsa and the kin on the same day (PS, 1965, 22-23). Other ceremonies for the son relate to *pahul* administered to him by five Sikhs, piercing of his ears for rings made of gold or silver, keeping his *kesh* intact, naming him with the epithet 'Singh', and feeding the Sikh men and women present on the occasion. The *Prem Sumarag* adds that the 'same' ceremonies are to be performed on the birth of a daughter who should also be administered *pahul*. She should bear the epithet '*devi*' in her name (PS, 1965, 25-26).

The chapter on marriage is much longer. It covers different situations from betrothal to the marriage through the four *Lavan*. The age of marriage of the boy and the girl should be 17 years. The boy should be a good Sikh. The consent of both should be taken before the marriage ceremony. After offering an *Ardas*, they should go round the fire

clockwise, with the bridegroom leading the bride. Each time a stanza of the composition *Lavan* is sung, some *ghee* should be thrown into the fire. After all the four rounds, *khande ki pahul* should be administered to the couple. Five stanzas of the *Anand* should be sung and then *karah prasad* should be distributed. There is emphasis on community solidarity and the bride's parents should not hesitate to eat at the place of her Sikh in-laws as they used to eat in all Sikh homes before the marriage (PS, 1965, 27-42).

On the death of a Sikh there should be no beating of the breasts by women; all men and women present should sing the *Alahmian*. A new pair of *kachh* should be put on the body of the deceased after it has been washed. After dressing it, a sword should be placed on its right. There should be no wailing; God's will should be accepted without any sign of grief. The widow should adopt simplicity and restraint and read the *Pothi Shabad-Bani* (PS, 1965, 79-85).

Cremation of the dead is essential. Even a child should be cremated. On death anniversary, all kinds of food should be served to the hungry and the Khalsa, and *kirtan* should be performed. It is emphasized that the essential procedure in all situations is the same for all: for men and women, for the young and the old, for the married and the unmarried, for mothers and childless widows. The ashes could be consigned to a nearby stream or buried in the earth. For condolence, there should be no association with Masands and their followers, and with those who practiced *bhaddan* (tonsure) after the death of their parents (PS, 1965, 85-93). It may be underlined that there is no role for a Brahman in the *Prem Sumarag*; everywhere there is *Gurbani*, the *Khalsa*, and *Ardas* or direct supplication by the congregation.

Turning now to the second largest *Rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh, its Preface states that the *mukte* (redeemed Gurmukhs) giving instruction to the Sikhs visiting Anandpur insisted on the rejection of the traditional patterns of matrimony and the ceremony of marriage. This was brought to the notice of Guru Gobind Singh who ordered that a manual of *rahit* should be prepared in consonance with the teachings of the *Granth Sahib* (*Rahitnama Huzuri Bhai Chaupa Singh*, 1995, 77-78). In the *rahit* component of the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* (CSR), the most important belief shared by all Sikhs is belief in the *shabad* of the Guru, his *bani*. A Sikh should not believe in any *guru* other than Guru Nanak and his successors. A lot of importance is given to the *dharamsal* and its maintenance. The *dharamsals* associated with the Gurus are places of pilgrimage for the Sikhs (CSR, 1987, 62, 68, 70, 72).

Furthermore, a Sikh of the Guru must bathe early in the morning and recite *Japuji* five times and any other *bani* that he knows by heart. Before going to the *dharamsal* he should offer prayer (*Ardas*). In the evening, he should recite the *Rahiras* and the *So-Dar* at his place or join the congregation (*sadh-sangat*). A Sikh should keep the hair unshorn and keep a comb (*kangha*) for keeping his hair clean. He should bear *kirpan* and wear *kachh*. He should never smoke tobacco, nor inhale snuff. The injunctions never to be infringed are against female infanticide, tonsure, and use of tobacco (CSR, 1987, 58-60, 62, 63, 65-66, 72-74, 76-78).

In the *tankhah* part of this *Rahitnama* placed at a later date, there are 280 injunctions on acts of infringement (*kurahit*) which make Sikh men and women liable to penance. Many of the injunctions are common with those given in the *rahit* part. *Langar* and *karah prasad* also figure prominently in the '*tankhah*' part. Specific injunctions for Sikh women are followed by the statement that the Guru's instruction is meant for both men and women (CSR, 1987, 97-116; Malhotra, 2013, 61-63).

Different modes of initiation are recommended for the Sahajdhari and Keshdhari Sikhs. The Sahajdhari Sikh should be initiated through *charan pahul* for which a *charan* (foot) of the *manji* (low flat lectern) of the *Granth Sahib* is washed in water, and to this water are added *patashas* (round soluble sweets) and stirred while five stanzas each of the *Japuji* and the *Anand* are recited. The new entrant is given this water to drink (CSR, 1987, 60).

A clear preference, however, is shown for the initiation of the double-edged sword. The detail of the ceremony given in this *Rahitnama* is not found in any other work of the early eighteenth century. Guru Gobind Singh is said to have prepared the *pahul* of *kesh* (*kesan di pahul*) on the seventh of Sawan in 1697 [sic]. Chaupa Singh was asked by the Guru to bring a bowl of water, and then to stir it with a knife while reciting five of his compositions (*Savvayyas*). When Chaupa Singh started the recitation, some soluble sweets (*patashas*) were mixed with water to make it tasteful. After this process was over he took the bowl in his hand and stood before the Guru. Taking five palmfuls of water the Guru sprinkled it five times over Chaupa Singh's eyes and five palmfuls over his head. Guru Gobind Singh recited the famous *Savvayya* of the *Chandi Charitra* which starts with '*deh Siva bar mohe ihae*'. With his own hands he gave initiation (*pahul*) to Chaupa Singh and asked him to utter '*Vaheguruji ka Khalsa Vaheguruji ki Fateh*'. On the first day, five Sikhs were given initiation. The Guru instructed that in future five Sikhs should be present at the time of

initiation. The one who administers it should follow the same procedure as that of the Guru himself. The initiated Singhs were to be instructed in the *rahit*, to keep arms, and to add the epithet 'Singh' to their names. The *kesh* was a distinctive mark of a Singh. According to this *Rahitnama*, only the male Sikhs were to be given the initiation of the double-edged sword: anyone giving it to a Sikh woman would become liable to punishment (CSR, 1987, 60, 68, 82-84, 101-103).

Furthermore, on the birth of a child, the father should give him the water in which the feet of five Sikhs have been washed to drink as *pahul*. If the child is to be brought up as a *Keshdhari*, he should be given initiation of the double-edged sword, his hair should be kept uncut, and his name should be chosen from the *Granth Sahib* (CSR, 1987, 65). There is only one sentence about the rites connected with marriage that the Sikh of the Guru should employ a Brahman in the ceremony of marriage (CSR, 1987, 72). In all probability, the reference here is to a Brahman Sikh like Chaupa Singh himself who was apparently well-versed in the *Gurbani* and the marriage ritual based on it. However, in the rites connected with death, no role is given to the Brahman. There should be no lamentation on the death of a Sikh. Even if the deceased was a *Sahajdhari*, no tonsure (*bhaddan*) should be performed. The Guru's *shabad* should be sung when the dead body is taken away for cremation. Sacred food (*prasad*) should be distributed among the persons present. This *Rahitnama* says that ashes of the deceased should be taken to the Ganges for immersion. *Katha* and *kirtan* should be performed for eleven, thirteen, fifteen, or seventeen days, according to the means of the family. The *Granth Sahib* should be installed in the home for a complete reading. The practice of customary charity is recommended (CSR, 1987, 63).

In the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Desa Singh, the very first article of *rahit* is *khande ki pahul* administered by five Singhs who also give instruction about the *rahit*. Its essential features are to love the *bani*, to lodge 'Vaheguru' in the heart and to utter 'Vaheguru', to rise early, bathe and to recite in the morning the *Japuji* and the *Jap*, the *So-Dar* in the evening and the *Sohila* at the end of the first quarter of the night, to appropriate *nam*, *dan* and *isnan*, and to contribute *dasvandh* for the Guru. The initiated person is required to carry arms and wear turban and have a comb (*kangha*) and a dagger on his person. He should not offer *Ardas* without weapons (*shastar*). He should shun the reprobate groups, including the killers of daughters. The *karah prasad* should be touched with a knife (*kard*) before it is distributed equally among all present. The writer then gives

the proper method of preparing and serving *langar*. There are strong injunctions against eating meat prepared in the Muslim fashion (*kuththa*), use of tobacco in any form and other intoxicants, including alcohol. A Singh should go to the holy places like Anandpur, Amritsar, Patna, and Abchnagar and should meditate on Guru and God. He should celebrate *Gurpurabs* (Desa SR, 1995, 128-135).

Daya Singh Rahitnama prescribes *khande ki pahul* (*amrit*), the *kesh*, sword, and the *kachh* as essential for the Khalsa. The person to whom *pahul* is given should wear *kachh*, bind his hair in a knot and tie a turban. He should stand up with an unsheathed sword in hand. The water of *amritsar* (the sacred tank at Ramdasapur) should preferably be used for preparing *amrit*. While stirring the water with knife (*kard*) to prepare *amrit*, the whole of *Japuji* should be recited, followed by the *Jap*, *Chaupai*, five *Savvayyas* and the five stanzas of the *Anand*. A Singh should then take the permission of the assembly (*sarbat*) and take the bowl in his hands to let the new entrant drink from it. That knife should be placed in the turban. He should place his right hand over the left and drink the *amrit* and exclaim 'Vaheguruji ka Khalsa, Vaheguruji ki Fateh'. In this way he should drink five palmfuls of *amrit*, and it should be sprinkled over his eyes and head. He should be given the initiatory formula (*gurmantar*) of *satnam* and a new name. *Ardas* should be performed and the *karah prasad* should be eaten by all. There is a strong injunction against *hukka* and the sacred thread. A Singh should avoid a 'Turk' (Muslim associated with administration), a Brahman, worshippers of Sakhi Sarvar and the followers of *faqirs* (Daya SR, 1995, 68-74).

Corroborative Sikh Literature and Persian and European Accounts

Like the *Rahitnamas*, the *gurbilas* genre of literature (poetical works in praise of a Guru or Gurus) emerged in the eighteenth century. It narrates events in the life of Guru Gobind Singh in a broad chronological framework. As the first work of this kind, Sainapat's *Gursobha* (1708) was inspired by the *Bachittar Natak* (1698). Sainapat's work became a model for later works, particularly the *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* by Koer Singh, which in all probability was composed in 1751, and Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas* which was composed in 1797. The *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian ka* by Kesar Singh Chhibber (1769) and the *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla (1776), however, cover all the ten Gurus as one entity and also bring in the eighteenth-century developments in their narratives.

Together, these works refer to the institution of the Khalsa and the *rahit* pronounced on that day. They lay emphasis on the initiation of the double-edged sword, sanctity of the *kesh*, bearing of arms, use of epithet 'Singh' and blue dress, and taking food in the *langar* without discrimination among the four castes. The other essential elements mentioned are the *kachh* (long drawers), *kangha* (comb to clean the hair twice daily), *kard* (knife), and the salutation 'Vaheguru'. There is an explicit rejection of the Brahmanical rites and practices, especially with regard to death, including *sati*. Interactions with the 'five' reprobate groups as well as the perpetrators of female infanticide and the 'Turks' are forbidden. It may be added that the *Amarnama*, a work in Persian verse, composed around 1708 by a minstrel (*dhadhi*) called Nath Mall, adds that the eating of *halal* (animal butchered in Muslim fashion) was forbidden. He underscores that the Sikhs of the Guru should not perform any Brahmanical rite (*kiryā karam*) (Nath Mal, 1953, 36-39).

Significantly, even the Persian and European accounts of the eighteenth century notice the following practices of the Sikhs: the rite of initiation, and its being open to all castes and creeds; equality among the initiated; their obligations to keep the hair unshorn, wield five arms, wear steel bracelet and blue dress, assume the epithet 'Singh', and use the salutation 'Vaheguruji ka Khalsa Vaheguruji ki Fateh'. They should not interact with the 'five categories', which included the killers of daughters and those practicing tonsure. The Sikhs should learn the Gurmukhi alphabet and read the scripture, shun tobacco and the practice of *sati*, and allow widow remarriage. They should share God's bounties with others, give charity and share food with non-Sikhs as well (Grewal and Habib, 2001, 107-108, 115, 132 for News Reports in Persian 1707-12, and accounts of Muhammad Qasim and Mirza Muhammad; Singh, 1962, 18, 19, 63-64, 74-75 for accounts of Wilkins, Polier, Browne, and Griffiths).

Under Sikh Rule (c.1765-1845)

Evidently, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Sikh rites of passage and religious practices continued to be followed and the *Rahitnamas* continued to be copied, and their contents disseminated. There is indication also of the people taking initiation of the double-edged sword. The most striking tangible development was the construction of a number of Gurdwaras. This was made possible by numerous revenue-grants (*bhet*, *dharmarth* given to the *dharamsals* (Gurdwaras) by the Sikh

rulers and their *jagirdars* (assignees of revenues). The *Granth Sahib* as the Guru was housed in the Gurdwara as the primary institution of the Sikhs. Grants were given also to the copies and recensions of the *Granth Sahib*. A new class of *granthis*, *ragis*, *rababis* and *ardasias* came into existence, subsisting on grants from rulers and the local community, and taking care of the proper mode of worship (Malhotra, 2023, 51-57). Although our focus here is on the promotion of the Sikh way of life under Sikh rule, also on record are the multifaceted charities of the Sikh rulers, especially Ranjit Singh, to the Brahmanical and Islamic places of worship (Banga, 2019, 161-166).

Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1790-1839) assiduously continued with the religious grants of his predecessors. He beautified and gold-plated the Harmandir (Golden Temple) and made no compromise with its sanctity (Malhotra, 2023, 57-61). By all accounts, the 'Khalsa Army' created by him had a preponderance of the initiated Sikhs in the cavalry and the infantry and nearly half in the artillery. A copy of the *Guru Granth Sahib* was kept in the Sikh battalions and regiments which had *granthis* on their staff (Cunningham, 2003, 177n). Even a battery in the artillery had a *granthi* on its staff (Bajwa, 1964, 111, 114, 116, 140-141). The persons aspiring to join the army were encouraged to take initiation (*pahul*) by Ranjit Singh (Grewal and Banga, 1987, document 157; Suri, 1961, 195).

A parallel development of the early nineteenth century was significant. Much before the Anglo-Sikh wars in the 1840s, the British had been taking interest in the history and religion of the Sikhs for diplomatic and political reasons. They wanted to make 'an assessment of the Sikhs as a political power and the future course of their political élan' (Grewal, 2012, 37, 40). The British believed that the military success of the Sikhs was due to the practices enjoined by Guru Gobind Singh. Therefore, to understand the Sikhs, the British wanted to understand the *Rahitnamas*. Here, the Orientalist interest of the well-known polymath, John Leyden, became useful. The first English translation of the *Prem Sumarag* had been prepared by Leyden around 1809, which he provided along with translations of some other works to his friend John Malcolm for his *Sketch of the Sikhs*, published in 1812. Interestingly, Malcolm notices the *dharamsal* as a plain building. He also explains initiation of the double-edged sword and obligations of the initiated (Malcolm, 1986, 45-48, 50-51, 74, 116-117, 68, 172-173, 180-188).

After Ranjit Singh, the British needed to know the Sikhs even better. In 1844, Major R. Leech, Assistant Agent to the Governor General based at

Ambala, translated a portion of the *Prem Sumarag* as 'the best-read book' on ceremonies performed before and after the birth of a child, and for marriage and death. He also rendered into English the *Tankhahnama* and the *Prahilad Singh Rahitnama*. Leech even prepared a list of historical Gurdwaras associated with the Gurus and the sons (*Sahibzadas*) of Guru Gobind Singh and his mother, Mata Gujri (NAI, New Delhi, 1945). J.D. Cunningham gives a free translation of the *Prahilad Singh Rahitnama* and the *Tankhahnama* in his well-known *History of the Sikhs* published in 1849, the year of annexation of the kingdom of Ranjit Singh (Cunningham, 2002, 394-99). Compared to Malcolm and other British writers, Cunningham's work is marked by a sympathetic attitude and empathetic understanding, probably also under the influence of the Romantic movement in England (Grewal, 2009 b, 323-328).

Reinforcement under Colonial Rule

Annexation was accompanied by significant political, administrative, economic, social and cultural changes. There was much greater administrative integration, and the new means of communication and transportation brought people closer. The printing press and the newspapers and periodicals enhanced their awareness. The introduction of modern education gradually led to the emergence of an educated middle class which responded actively to the disapproval of their socio-religious practices by the British administrators and Christian missionaries. The missionaries used educational and philanthropic institutions and the printing press for spreading Christianity in this region. To resist their agenda, the educated Punjabi men introduced their programs of reform and education and started their own periodicals in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. This situation of cultural contact resulted in the emergence of a number of socio-religious reform movements, most notably, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharam and the Dev Samaj among Hindus; the Anjumans and the Ahmadiyah among Muslims; and the Singh Sabhas among Sikhs (Jones, 1989, 85-121).

Things had changed drastically for the Sikhs in the British Punjab. They had not only lost their power and positions but also their revenue assignments and other privileges. The high British officials became hopeful of the Christian missionaries winning many converts from amongst the Sikhs who were considered more progressive than the Muslims and Hindus in the Punjab. The initial successes of the

missionaries alarmed the Sikh aristocracy and the emerging professional middle classes which led to the formation of the first Sri Guru Singh Sabha at Amritsar in 1873. It was formed with the efforts of the Sikh aristocrats like Sardar Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia, Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Kanwar Bikrama Singh of Kapurthala, besides traditional scholars like Giani Gian Singh of Amritsar and a middle-class professional like Gurmukh Singh. Soon, the educated Sikhs from the emerging middle classes felt dissatisfied with the feudal outlook, conservative attitude and inactivity of the leaders, and founded another Singh Sabha at Lahore in 1879. It consisted mostly of the educated Sikhs. Bhai Gurmukh Singh played an important role in its foundation and was made its secretary. Sardar Attar Singh of Bhadaur, Giani Ditt Singh, Bhai Harsa Singh and Bhai Jawahar Singh Kapur were among the leading members of the Lahore group. More Singh Sabhas followed, each claiming to work for the Sikh community as a whole and upholding the doctrine of Guru-Panth. Efforts at coordination among them led to the formation of the Khalsa Diwans at Amritsar and Lahore, respectively in 1883 and 1886 (Sidhu, nd., 36-46).

Serious differences cropped up between the two Diwans and the affiliated Sabhas on the issues of true Sikh rites and religious practices, with implications for distinctiveness of Sikh identity. A major source of tension between the two leading Singh Sabhas, and the two Khalsa Diwans related to gurudom. The influential leader of the Amritsar Sabha, Baba Khem Singh Bedi (a descendant of Guru Nanak), claimed special veneration as the *guru* lineage (*guru-ansh*) and chose to sit on a cushion (*gaddela*) in the presence of *Guru Granth Sahib*. He also distributed charms. This was opposed by Bhai Gurmukh Singh, who travelled extensively to propagate the Sikh rites and religious practices. In one of his lectures published as 'Lasani Qaramat', he says that when the five ingredients in the initiation rite – *gurmantar*, *khanda*, water, sugar, and *kesh* with human body – get combined, it results in total transformation of the recipient who becomes fearless (Sidhu, nd., 106, 123-126). To propagate his concerns, Bhai Gurmukh Singh started the *Gurmukhi Akhbar* (1880), *Vidyarak* (1881), *Khalsa Gazette* (Urdu), *Sudharak*, and the *Khalsa Akhbar* (last three in 1886). His article in the second issue of the *Sudharak*, entitled 'Gurmat Mandan Murti Puja Khandan', evoked strong opposition of the *pujaris* and *granthis* of the Golden Temple and a clamor for his excommunication at the behest of Khem Singh Bedi (Singh, 1944, 30, 31, 36).

The *Khalsa Akhbar* (KA), the weekly newspaper in Gurmukhi launched by Bhai Gurmukh Singh on 13 June 1886, particularly reflected the

growing concern of the Singh Sabhas with the observance of Sikh religious practices. Under the editorship of Bhai Ditt Singh from 1887 to 1901 (with some break in publication), who became well-known as a publicist, the *Khalsa Akhbar* functioned as the conscience keeper, mirror and spokesman of the Sikh community. The reasoned approach of its strongly worded editorials particularly appealed to the Sikhs associated with army and administration, and students at large. It invited information, questions and doubts and responded in the light of the Sikh religious practices as enjoined by the Gurus (*Gurmaryada*). After a year, the paper felt gratified that because of its appeal, people were increasingly following the birth, marriage and death rites 'according to the Khalsa Dharam' (KA, 4 June 1887, 3-4).

The picture emerging from the columns of the *Khalsa Akhbar* gives the impression of growing awareness among the Sikhs about the correct religious practices. Apart from celebrating *Gurpurabs* (days associated with the Gurus), the Sikhs increasingly attended the weekly, monthly and annual gatherings (*jormelas*) of the local Singh Sabhas in which speeches were made and initiation of the double-edged sword (*amrit*) was given (KA, 12 June 1887, 6; 18 June 1887, 8; 28 July 1893, 2; 14 August 1893, 1, for example). The paper reported that for death rite *Gurmaryada* was being followed by ordinary people (KA, 7 January 1887, 6-7; 2 March 1887, 6-7; 12 March 1887, 1; 30 April 1887, 7; 21 May 1887, 8). One marriage ceremony, with the *Granth Sahib*, *karah prasad* and the *Anand*, was considered a step in the right direction (KA, 9 March 1887, 5-6). Almost on weekly basis, the paper continued to report the cases of Sikh rites being followed for birth, marriage and death.

By 1900, the concerted efforts of the Singh Sabhas showed significant results. The activity of the newly created Singh Sabha at Kairon, district Amritsar, is rather telling. Within a year of its foundation, under its aegis Sikh religious practices were followed for 12 births, 4 engagements, 11 marriages, 4 remarriages, and 12 deaths, while *amrit* was taken by 40 men and 12 women. Further, on the Hola day, an impassioned speech about the power of *amrit* moved the gathering so much that *amrit* was taken by 97 boys, 150 women and 85 defaulters (*kurahitiye*), while about a hundred had their punishments (*tankhah*) forgiven (KA, 30 March 1900, 8). Significantly, the Sikhs of Bhago Majra, district Ambala, vowed before the *Granth Sahib* that they would do everything according to '*gur-riti*, and anyone deviating from it would be considered a defaulter (*tankhahia*)' (KA, 18 January 1901, 5). In response to a question, the editor also clarified that

there was no difference in the religious practices for men and women. By the time Bhai Ditt Singh died on 6 September 1901, awareness about Sikh religious practices had increased significantly. It may be added that the *Khalsa Akhbar* also drew attention to the mismanagement of the Golden Temple. It underscored that the Golden Temple belonged to the Sikh Panth alone and that its management is accountable to the Panth. Therefore, un-Sikh practices at this premier institution should be discontinued (KA, 1 January 1887, 3-5; 20 November 1893, 1).

All along, the insistence of the Arya Samajis, and especially the priestly class among the Sanatani (orthodox) Hindus, that the Sikhs were Hindu had also been growing. This was reinforced in a way also by Avtar Singh Vahiria, a protégé of Baba Khem Singh Bedi. However, only three Singh Sabhas – of Amritsar, Faridkot and Rawalpindi – and the Bedis, Sodhis, *pujaris*, *granthis*, and some other influential and conservative Sikhs were aligned with Bedi. In 1894, he published the *Khalsa Dharam Shastar Sanskar Bhag* written by Vahiria. It is purported to be a guide to the rites of passage for the Sikhs from birth till death. In its 18 chapters, the writer talks about the ‘distinctiveness’ of the path of the Gurus (*Gurmat*) and its sacraments (*sanskars*). At the same time, he traces the Sikh sacraments to the Brahmanical practices and scriptures. He regards the Sahajdharis as important as the Khalsa. A male child until the age of 10 should preferably be given *charan pahul* according to Vahiria. It is prescribed also for the Sahajdharis and the Sikh women, although for the latter complete devotion to their husbands should be everything. The four *varnas* should be given *amrit* separately, and a further distinction should be made with regard to the outcastes (*up-varnas*). Along with the other ‘Ks’, a small *kirpan* should be in the hand of the person taking initiation (*Khalsa Dharam Shastar*, 1894, 19-26, 31-47, 132-34). Incidentally, on the assumption that Khem Singh Bedi was the ‘head’ of the Singhs ‘from a religious point of view’, Falcon published an English translation of Vahiria’s work in 1896 as a *Handbook on Sikhs for the Use of Regimental Officers* (McLeod, 2003, 358-365).

Simultaneously, however, several works underscoring distinctiveness of Sikh religious practices appeared in the 1890s. To cite a few examples: Bhai Thakar Singh published the *Gurmat Hulas* (1898) in which he discusses the Sikh marriage ceremony and praises the Sikhs who have rejected the Hindu rite. In 1899, on the occasion of the second centenary of the Khalsa, the Khalsa Bhaichara published the *Khalsa Dharam Sanskar (Vidhi Vivah Bhag)* according to the *Gurmaryada*. Its draft had been

presented first for corrections. Its readers were requested to point out errors (*dosh*), if any, to the secretary so that further corrections could be incorporated. In Bhai Partap Singh Ragi's *Khalsa Dharam Sanskar Bidhi* (1900), the Khalsa are appealed to perform their rites according to the *Gurmat*. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid published *Gurmat Anusar Mritak Sanskar* (1902) which was followed by his *Shradh Prabodh* (1903). Then came Bhai Partap Singh's *Khalsa Kanniya Vivah Sanskar* (1905).

The most eloquent votary of the distinctive religious identity of the Sikhs was Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha (1861-1938), a celebrated scholar associated with the Lahore Singh Sabha. In his *Hum Hindu Nahin* (1898), a booklet containing over a hundred pages and which has gone into several editions and reprints, he points out the basic differences between the Brahmanical and the Sikh positions. He lays stress on One God, and maintains that the distinct identity of the Sikhs was deliberately created by the Gurus. It is based on their beliefs and practices. For a Sikh, *Guru Granth Sahib* is the only authoritative scripture, and its *kirtan* and recitation the only mode of worship. Its path of liberation is open to all. The Sikhs have their own mode of initiation through *charan-pahul* and *khande ki pahul*. The Sikh religious symbols - *kesh*, *kachh*, *kara*, *kangha* and the turban - and the rites of birth, marriage and death are distinct. The Sikhs do not observe distinctions of caste for commensality. For matrimony they confine themselves to the Sikhs. The Sikh *rahit* covers the personal and social conduct and relations with the outsiders (Nabha, 2023, 26-128; Grewal, 2011, 283-290). It may be added that to reinforce his argument Bhai Kahn Singh published the *Gurmat Sudhakar* (1899), giving selections from the *Rahitnamas*.

Divergent Strands: Early Decades of the Twentieth Century

The need for a central body to coordinate and to put up a united front was acutely felt after the death of the stalwarts like Sardar Attar Singh Bhadaur (d.1896), Raja Bikrama Singh of Kapurthala (d.1898), Bhai Gurmukh Singh (d.1898), and Giani Ditt Singh (d.1901). The Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD) was formed in 1902 at the initiative of Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia who became its secretary and Bhai Arjan Singh of Bagrian was elected its president. The CKD had the long-term goal of seeing all Sikhs following the common rituals and symbols, but strong ideological differences regarding the scripture and the *rahit* surfaced. One of its radical leaders, Babu Teja Singh of the Singh Sabha at Bhasaur near Patiala separated in

1907 over his radical position regarding some basic issues like the *Ragmala*, the *Dasam Granth* and the Sahajdharis. The Bhasaur Singh Sabha renamed itself as the Panch Khalsa Diwan (also calling itself the 'Khalsa Parliament'). In 1908, it published its own code of conduct, entitled the *Khalsa Rahit Prakash* in which it maintained that the *Ragmala* should be excised from the *Granth Sahib* and that the *Dasam Granth* should not be treated as a scripture. Further, after initiation of the double-edged sword, women too should wear turbans. For the Panch Khalsa Diwan there was no room for the Sahajdharis.

Two other significant developments of the first decade of the twentieth century had a direct bearing on the Sikh rites and religious practices. For several years the Lahore Singh Sabha and its associates and the newspapers sharing its concerns, like the *Khalsa Akhbar* and the *Khalsa Sewak*, had been asking for removal of idols from the circumambulatory path (*parkarma*) of the Golden Temple. Finally, on 1 May 1905, under pressure from the provincial government, its manager had to order the Brahmans from the hills to remove their idols. It is generally not known that behind the manager's order was a quiet initiative by Prince Ripudaman Singh of Nabha (PSA, 1905, 668/12, Conf.). He had been a pupil of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha. Subsequently, as an Additional Member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council (1906-8), Ripudaman Singh introduced a Bill for the Sikh form of marriage in 1908. However, his term was not extended because his outspokenness had displeased the Viceroy. The moderate Sunder Singh Majithia was brought in to steer the Bill through, which was passed in 1909 as the Anand Marriage Act. Significantly, over 126 Singh Sabhas and other Sikh bodies had expressly written to the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in support of this measure. Even ordinary Sikhs were in its favor (Grewal and Banga, 2018, 28-29, 36-38). These two developments suggested that the Sikh opinion was rallying in support of the Singh reformers who had earlier been labelled as the 'radicals', or the 'Tat-Khalsa'. However, there was considerable opposition to both these measures from the Hindu orthodoxy and the conservative Sikhs like Avtar Singh Vahiria.

In fact, sometime after the death of Khem Singh Bedi (1905), Vahiria began working on a bigger book which appeared in 1914 as the *Sikh Dharam Shastar*, omitting the word 'Khalsa' from the title. As he says in its preface, he took four years to prepare it and another two years to seek responses from the Sikh *takhts* (seats of authority), *mahants* (heads of religious institutions), *sants*, scholars, different branches of the Bedis, the

CKD, and the Khalsa College, Amritsar. Vahiria now minimizes the importance of the Khalsa Panth within 'Sikh Religion' and presents it as a reformist movement among 'Hindus'. He justifies pilgrimage to the Ganges and fire sacrifice (*havan*). He says that Brahmanical and Sikh practices can be used simultaneously in Sikh marriage. Furthermore, he unambiguously presents Guru Nanak as an incarnation (*avtar*) like Rama and Krishna, and the *Vedas* and *Puranas* as equally authoritative as the Sikh scripture. He emphatically subscribes to the ideal of the four-fold order (*varnashrama*) and its built-in notions of purity and pollution. He supports the worship of the Goddess, Brahmanical rites of passage, parity of the *charan pahul* with initiation of the double-edged sword, and that of the Sahajdhari Sikh with the Khalsa Singh, both of whom are actually called 'Hindu' in this work. For Vahiria, Sikh faith represented one of the many *panths* or sects among Hindus (*Sikh Dharam Shastar*, 1914, 23-30, 289, 291, 293-294, 296, 310-311, 354).

Already, in October 1910, the CKD had appointed a committee to prepare a draft on Sikh rituals which was completed in June 1912 and printed in the *Khalsa Samachar* for general comment. Twenty-seven Sikh groups (*jathas*) and 105 persons responded with suggestions. The CKD incorporated the approved suggestions and printed these again in the *Khalsa Samachar* in 1913. Eighty persons and 26 groups responded to it this time. After long discussions the third and final draft was passed unanimously in 1915 by the General Committee and published as the *Gurmat Prakash Bhag Sanskar*. It tried to weed out uncertainties and focus on the rites of passage. However, this document was rather complex and detailed and meant essentially for the educated. It could not be acceptable to the Sikhs in general (Gulshan, 2005, 61; McLeod, 2003, 171-173).

Thus, out of the views about the Sikh rites and religious practices presented by the radical Panch Khalsa Diwan, conservative Avtar Singh Vahiria and the moderate Chief Khalsa Diwan, none seemed to carry sufficient weight. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the first world war (1914-18) and its aftermath had overtaken the attention of the Sikhs. Some individuals nevertheless continued to write on the Sikh rites and religious practices in the early 1920s.

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee

In the wake of the widespread discontent after the first world war, the long-standing demand for the control and management of Gurdwaras by

the Sikh Panth got an impetus. The enthusiastic response to the call for martyrs to rebuild the demolished wall of Gurdwara Rakabganj in Delhi reflected a new mood. On the refusal of the priests of the Harmandir to accept offering of *karah prasad* from some outcaste Sikhs in October 1920, the reformers took over the Harmandir and the Akal Takht. The government entrusted their management to a committee. Eventually, at the initiative of the reformers, a large representative body called the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) was formed in November, with the objective of controlling and managing all historic Gurdwaras. The task of taking over the Gurdwaras by the Singh volunteers, generally called the Akalis, was coordinated by the Shiromani Akali Dal, formed in December 1920. These bodies came into existence on the principle that the Gurdwaras belonged to the Panth and demanded that the government should hand over their control and management to the Panth through legislation.

The SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal worked in unison. Despite opposition from the local British administration, they succeeded in taking over a large number of the historic Gurdwaras. Wherever they met with resistance directly or indirectly at the behest of the administration, it resulted in bloodshed as at Tarn Taran and Nankana Sahib (1921), or it became a *morcha* (prolonged non-violent agitation) like that of the keys of the Golden Temple (1921), Guru ka Bagh (1922), and Jaito (1923-25). From 1921 to 1924, the Punjab Government used repression and simultaneously tried to diffuse the situation through successive proposals for legislation but these were not acceptable. Finally, in 1925, the government relented, and the Bill drafted in consultation with the relatively moderate SGPC leaders provided for a Central Board for the management of the historic Gurdwaras. The Bill became law in November 1925. In its first meeting in October 1926, the Central Board renamed itself as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

In its meeting in March 1927, the SGPC constituted the Rahureet Sub-committee of 28 eminent Sikhs with Professor Teja Singh (convenor), Giani Sher Singh, Professor Jodh Singh, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Bhai Vir Singh, and Babu Teja Singh as members, among others. The last, however, was excommunicated in 1928 for replacing '*bhagauti*' by '*sat nam*' in the *Ardas* and for writing '*Vahuguru*' instead of '*Vaheguru*'. In 1931, Bhai Randhir Singh, the founder of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, was added to the Rahureet Sub-committee. After four years of meetings and consultations, the draft of the proposed *Rahit Maryada* was published in the *Gurdwara*

Gazette of April 1931 (No. 3). There was a considerable response from the Sikh individuals and institutions in India and outside (Gulshan, 2016, 41-53). The report of the Rahureet Sub-committee dated 1 October 1932, was published giving a list of its members, and adding the names of those individuals and associations (as far as Malacca, Malaysia and Stockton, USA) who sent suggestions regarding the draft. Interestingly, among such respondents was a government contractor named Hazara Singh, who himself published his questions and objections in a booklet under the title, 'Open Discussion (*Khuli Vichar*) according to *Gurmat*' (Hazara Singh, 1931).

Alongside, in 1934, the SGPC constituted the Religious Advisory Committee (Dharmik Salahkar Committee) to advise on religious matters. The two committees worked in tandem. The Advisory Committee met 16 times till 1946, and gave definitive advice on several crucial aspects like subordination of Guru-Panth to Guru-Granth; rejection of personal guruship; the *Dasam Granth* not to be treated as the Guru; identification of Guru Gobind Singh's compositions; performance of *kirtan* in Gurdwaras only by the Sikh men or women; *Ardas* to begin with a verse in the scripture; use of Urdu and Hindi versions of the *Granth Sahib* for unbroken reading (*akhand path*); the Sahajdharis to follow the Sikh rites and ceremonies; and the definition of a Nihang. Until further verification, *status quo* was to be maintained regarding the *Ragmala* (or the *Mundavani*) for concluding the reading of the *Granth Sahib*. It may be added that because of riots leading to partition in 1947, the issue of the *Ragmala/Mundavani* could not be examined as intended by the Religious Advisory Committee (Panthak Mate, 2002, 15-18, 20-21, 23-24, 27-30, 39, 40-41; Ashok, 2017, 212-213, 234-235).

In its meeting of 12 October 1936, the SGPC had approved the revised *Sikh Rahit Maryada*, but it remained open for suggestions. For the benefit of those who did not read Gurmukhi, Teja Singh published in English his book on *Sikhism: Its Ideals and Institutions* (1938). This was followed by Jogendra Singh's *Sikh Ceremonies* (1941). The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* was amended in 1945 and published finally in 1950. The process through which it was prepared over a period of two decades or so can be seen as the working of the doctrines of Guru-Granth and Guru-Panth.

The Sikh Rahit Maryada

The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* is a historic document which subsumes the developments of five centuries. It begins with the definition of a Sikh as the one who believes in One Supreme Being, the ten Gurus, *Guru Granth Sahib*, compositions of the Gurus, and the initiation rite (*amrit*) of the tenth Guru, and who does not subscribe to any other religion. A Sikh has two kinds of conduct: personal (*shakhsi*) and corporate (*panthak*). The personal conduct (*shakhsi rahini*) is then divided into three parts: i) Meditation and repetition of Name (*nam*); ii) daily personal discipline (*nit nem*) which concludes with *Ardas* at the end of the day; and iii) congregational worship in a Gurdwara and its discipline. The last includes performance of *kirtan*; taking command (*hukam*) from *Guru Granth Sahib*; its regular (*sadharan*) and unbroken (*akhand*) reading (*path*); its conclusion with the *Ragmala*, or the *Mundavani*, as the local practice may be; offering of *Ardas*; preparation and distribution of the *karah prasad*; and exposition (*katha*) which can be of *Gurbani*, writings of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal besides the accredited works of Sikh history.

Significantly, even when the earlier sources underline the efficacy of the collective prayer and refer to it as an integral part of the religious, social and material life of the Sikhs, they do not give a set form of prayer. Even Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha does not mention a formal *Ardas* in his *Mahankosh* published in 1930. The draft of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* in 1936, in all probability, contained the first statement of the Sikh prayer approved by the Panth. It takes note of the sacrifices of the Sikhs through history and comes up to the movement to free the historic Gurdwaras. Its English rendering is given in the works of Teja Singh and Jogendra Singh mentioned before. After 1947, the Gurdwaras left in Pakistan got included in the prayer. The SGPC published the present *Ardas* in 1952. It mirrors Sikh history, or collective memory about events touching the Panth deeply (Grewal and Banga, 2011, I, 14-15).

The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* spells out the desirable conduct of a Sikh according to the precepts of the Gurus. He should worship One Supreme Being (Akal Purkh), believe in *Guru Granth Sahib*, *bani* of the Gurus, and in the same light shone in them. There is no room for the worship of gods and goddesses, caste, untouchability, Brahmanical rites and rituals and belief in any other religious book. A Sikh should learn Gurmukhi to read *Guru Granth Sahib*. Ethically, he is required not to use intoxicants, steal or gamble, kill a daughter, or have any relation with the one indulging in

female infanticide. The Sikh men and women are forbidden to pierce their nose and ears. A Sikh of the Guru should keep the hair of his son and daughter intact and provide them education in Gurmukhi and Sikh tenets. A Sikh should make an honest living, give charity to the poor, be loyal to his wife, treat another woman as mother and another's daughter as his own daughter. A Sikh woman should be faithful to her husband. She should not observe *purdah* or use veil. A Sikh has the obligation of wearing long drawers and turban, but a Sikh woman may or may not wear a turban. Both should greet another Sikh with '*Vaheguruji ka Khalsa, Vaheguruji ki Fateh*'.

The rites of passage for birth, marriage and death are included in the desirable conduct of a Sikh (*Gurmaryada*). All the ceremonies are centered on *Guru Granth Sahib*. The document lays emphasis also on the related ethical aspects. For example, child-birth does not entail impurity (*sutak*). Marriage should be between two grown up Sikhs. In an alliance, there should be no consideration of caste (*jati*) or sub-caste (*got*), or of auspicious days and time, or of payment of money. Also forbidden are the Brahmanical and popular practices like the tying of chaplet (*sehra*), fire worship (*havan*), ancestor worship, and dancing and consumption of liquor on marriage. A widow or widower can remarry by the *Anand*. If the wife is alive, then the second marriage should ordinarily be avoided. The ceremonies related to death preclude the practices like lamentation, placing the dead body on the floor, giving the cow in charity, and breaking the skull (*kapal kriya*) of the half-burnt body. There is disapproval also of prolonged mourning, raising a memorial on the spot of cremation, and the pacificatory practices like *pind* and *shraddh*. It is emphasized again that on all good and bad occasions, a Sikh should simply offer *Ardas* and read *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Seva (service) figures separately as an important part of an individual's conduct, rather duty towards humankind, with no barriers of caste, religion and race. Its form could vary according to the needs of the situation. 'Gurdwaras are the laboratories for teaching the practice of service' (Singh, 1938, 111). A Sikh is expected, therefore, to render it first in the Gurdwara itself, including the *langar*. It is emphasized that in seating for the *langar*, there should be no differences of high and low and birth or place, and everyone should be served without distinctions of any kind.

The corporate conduct (*panthak rahini*) lays emphasis on the doctrine of Guru-Panth, initiation rite (*amrit sanskar*), transgressions and

punishments (*tankhah*) and the *Gurmata*. The points emphasized in this section are welfare of others (*parupkar*) as a Sikh's duty for life which he can perform more effectively through the Panth. The five 'Ks' (*kesh*, *kirpan*, *kachhera*, *kangha*, and *kara*) are mentioned in connection with the initiation rite. Before taking *amrit*, a volunteer is clearly asked if the entailed obligations are acceptable to him. In his new life as the Khalsa he is told to maintain personal discipline, always carry the five 'Ks', and discharge corporate responsibility.

The initiate should shun the bad practices (*kurahit*), their perpetrators and the anti-Panth groups. The punishments for default (*tankhah*) cover some kind of personal service involving labor with hands. Finally, only the selected issues are amenable to the *Gurmata* (collective decision in the presence of *Guru Granth Sahib*): the primary principles of Sikh faith like the status of the Gurus and *Guru Granth Sahib*, initiation (*amrit*) ceremony, code of conduct (*rahit-bahit*), and preservation of the structure of the Panth. A *Gurmata* can be passed only by the apex group (*shiromani jatha*) representing Guru-Panth. Lastly, appeals against the decisions of the local congregations (*Gur-sangats*) can be made to the Akal Takht.

In Retrospect

Nearly 75 years have passed since the publication of the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* and it still remains a definitive text for the Sikh religious practices, underscoring their relative simplicity. It is based on *Guru Granth Sahib* and the Sikh literature from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, particularly, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, eighteenth century *Rahitnamas*, and the writings and periodicals of the Singh Sabha phase. Despite variations in detail, there is considerable consensus in these works which got incorporated in the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* as the daily religious discipline of a Sikh, his ethical obligations, and desirable conduct and worship in a Gurdwara, including *kirtan*, besides preparation and distribution of the *karah prasad* and *langar*. Also incorporated are the rites related to birth, marriage and death, and the initiation of the double-edged sword. Furthermore, stress is laid on service and welfare of others, reasons and punishments for *tankhah* are explained, and the scope of the *Gurmata* is spelt out. Above all, a Sikh is defined and the relative importance of Guru-Panth and Guru-Granth is clarified. The issue of the *Ragmala*, however, could not be settled because of the exceptional circumstances of the late 1940s. As a whole, the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*

integrates the doctrinal, religious, ethical and social aspects in a Sikh's personal and corporate life centered on the Gurdwara, with *Guru Granth Sahib* as the core. There is no scope for any other scripture, let alone the Brahmanical rites and rituals. Reading and understanding of the scripture by the individual is emphasized and also her/his active involvement and that of the family and kin in religious life. Distinctiveness of community identity is underscored alongside tolerance for other religions and openness to all. While consolidating the developments of five centuries, the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* visualizes no geographical barriers and remains normatively relevant for the Sikhs of the Guru everywhere.

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