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## Sikhism

### An Indian Religion in Addition to Hinduism and Islam

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At the end of August 2008, the media in Austria reported the following: “Austria’s Sikhs demand religious freedom.”<sup>1</sup> The Austrian Broadcasting (ORF, “Österreichischer Rundfunk”) stated: “The Sikhs in Austria, on the occasion of an International Conference of Experts on Human Rights in Vienna, criticized what they considered a ‘lack of religious freedom’ in Austria.”<sup>2</sup> Austria is no exception in this regard in Europe. Similar complaints and accusations have been directed at Germany, France, and England. The same is happening in the United States and Canada. The Sikhs, so went the complaints, were forbidden by the authorities to use their typical particular names or to wear their religious symbols. Who are the Sikhs? What is so characteristic of their religion? What religious rights do

1 “Austria’s Sikhs Demand Religious Freedom,” *Die Presse*, 28 August 2008.

<<http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/religion/409784/print.do>> [26 September 2009].

2 ORF News, 29 August 2008,

<<http://religion.orf.at/welcome>> [28 October 2008].

they want? When, where, and why are there conflicts? In the following I would like to write about the Sikhs and their religion, then describe some of their religious practices, and finally go into the question of the tensions that can exist between faith and culture.

## 1 The Sikhs and Their Religion

Male Sikhs are often immediately recognizable by certain obvious marks: they wear a beard, they do not cut their hair, they wear a turban, and have a characteristic surname, namely, Singh (“lion”). On the one hand, this does not hold for all Sikhs; and on the other hand, other religious and ethnic groups wear turbans (e.g., Muslims, Afghans, Iranians, Indians, etc.). These visible signs of being Sikhs were and are often questioned in the United States and Europe and are rejected.

“Today the Sikhs make up the most recent independent religious community of India. Worldwide their number is estimated to be about 29 million. They live primarily in the Indian state of Punjab, but are also scattered over all of India and make up about 2.2 percent of the estimated total population” of India (Gächter 2008: 16). Sikhs emigrate readily, especially to the United States, Canada, South Asia, East Africa, and England. As a result of these waves of emigration over the past 100 years, more than a million Sikhs are dispersed outside of India (Pashaura Singh 2006a: 146; Nesbitt 2003: 71). All of Europe is part of the Sikh diaspora. In the German-speaking part it is estimated that there are more than 23,000 Sikhs. In every country they make up one of the smaller religious communities.

The Sikh tradition reaches back to the social and religious experience of Gurū Nānak in the 15/16th century.<sup>3</sup> He appeared on the scene as a reformer of Hindu and Islamic traditions. He was an intelligent, educated person, who missed very little of what was going on in politics, government, society or religion, or in nature (Grewal 1990: 7). Whoever recognizes him and his nine successors as a Gurū (that is, as a teacher or spiritual master) would be called a Sikh. “Sikh” in Punjabi means “disciple, student”; in our Sikh context: a student who takes seriously the teaching and worldview of his teacher and who follows this way (in Sanskrit *panth*) and belonged originally to the Nānak-*panth*. He was a pupil of Nānak. The name Nānak fell away later and “Panth” refers now to the community of Sikhs.

3 Nānak lived from 1469 to 1539.

The Panth is distinguished before all else by a strict monotheism, which cannot be depicted in pictures, and by the acceptance of the spiritual guidance of the Gurū. That there is only one God is the conviction of Nānak and of Sikhs today. They bring this out every day in the Mūl Mantra (the original formula of faith) and when they pray in the morning (*japujī*). I used this formula of the Sikhs once at a Mass for Catholic students instead of the creed. When I asked them what they thought about this at a concluding common breakfast, they were unanimous in thinking that this must be a very ancient confession of faith, even of the early Church. The English paraphrase of the Sikh confession of faith would read as follows:

One God  
His name is Truth  
He is the Creator  
The Supreme Being  
He is without fear  
Without Enmity  
He is timeless  
He is unborn  
Self-existent  
He is realized through the grace of the True Gurū.<sup>4</sup>

To avoid possible misunderstanding among my students, I left out the last sentence and added the following sentence from the Sikh morning prayer:

How great is he?  
The True One alone knows,  
And he, who presumes and says he knows,  
Is a fool among fools, as such he goes.<sup>5</sup>

“God in the Mūl Mantra and in other texts is praised as the One, Eternal, Immortal, Truth, and the Real. He is the Creator, Omnipresent, Almighty, without form or shape. In negative fashion, the Highest Being is timeless, unborn, depending on no one for existence, exalted above all else. He is also beyond doing anything to cause fear and hostility. He is the Truth, which suggests no change, because as the Absolute Reality he permeates everything without adulteration. God cannot be grasped in words and is praised as beyond human understanding; he is ineffable” (Gächter 2003: 375). According to the understanding of God among the Sikhs, God does not appear as an avatar, as he does in Hinduism, to save the world, nor do the Sikhs believe in an incarnation of God.

4 The Ādi Granth (AG) begins with the Mūl Mantra of Gurū Nānak, AG I. There are many attractive translations. Cf. also the translation of Gurbachan Singh Talib (1997: 140).

5 *Japujī* 26 (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib* 1996: p. 8), cf. also *japujī* 5.

I, too, could have prayed the statement: “He is realized through the grace of the True Gurū,” for the Gurū here is described as the True Gurū (*sat-gurū*). He is God himself revealing himself. If the revelation comes from a human Gurū, who instructs the believers, then his authority does not rest on an office nor on an advance in knowledge in the presence of his student. “A Gurū can only be called such if he follows the will of God and is freed from everything worldly. He experiences himself as perfectly filled by God . . . The Gurū reveals the Word, which God then himself shares, immediately or through a human Gurū . . . The reverence for the Gurū, then, is not worship of a person by people, but corresponds to the belief in the Divine Presence in a person, who in everything is God, except in the flesh” (Thiel-Horstmann 1988: 21 f.). The 10 Gurūs of the Sikhs understand each other as the pipeline to the one Divine Reality, who had spoken through Nānak. This religious authority of the Gurūs was vested in the Ādi Granth (AG, literally: the first book of the Sikhs) by the Gurū Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and last Gurū in human form. The Ādi Granth is the primary source of the teaching of the Gurūs and enjoys an authority which no Sikh would question. No other writing has such a central place in the religious life of the Sikhs as this first book, the Ādi Granth, which has replaced the role of human Gurūs.<sup>6</sup>

Although many Sikhs are only partially familiar with the content of the Ādi Granth, they know the central message of the Gurū: Liberation can come about only by meditating on the Divine Name (God). This message of salvation is handed on in the Ādi Granth, the Holy Scripture. Therefore it is honored as “Ādi Śri Gurū Granth Sāhib,” as the title of the standard version of this book testifies. This, then, is “the Gurū who is from the beginning, in the form of a book.” Today there is no human Gurū in the religious community of the Sikhs. The Gurū Granth Sāhib is the religious foundation of the Sikhs, which should become visible in the way they live. According to it, all people without regard for race, sex, caste, religion, have an equal chance to reach liberation and salvation. God sends his grace to each one who does their best. Caste, gender, asceticism, the practice of external forms of piety

6 For a recent discussion about the Ādi Granth see, among others, Cole and Pira Singh Sambhi (1978); McLeod (1989); McLeod ed. (1984); Callewaert (1996); Pashaura Singh (2000). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (1996) is an English version translated and annotated by Gopal Singh. See “Japji Sahib – Sikh Prayer” <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYayqwene3Mg>> [26 September 2009].

have no religious value.<sup>7</sup> All people have access to gurdwara (*gurdwara*, *guduārā*), the temple of the Sikhs. In this complex of buildings of the gurdwara, there are public kitchens of the Sikh Gurūs (*gurū kā langar*). Here people of different castes, class, and religions are fed free of charge. This illustrates until today the equal value of all human beings and demands a new social awareness. This message of Nānak was social dynamite. In contrast with the Hindus and Muslims, the Gurūs make no distinction between the sexes, for example, when it comes to being integrated into the religious community (Panth), learning the teachings, regarding remarriage, and taking part in conferences and meals in common. In this connection admittedly the tension in the relationship with the social reality has not been resolved since the beginning of the Panth.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Religious Practice

The final goal of the Sikhs is to become one with God. On the one hand it depends on God and his grace, and on the other hand on human effort, on what they do and what they do not do. The necessary religious adjustment to accomplish this is based on their understanding of God, which sets the tone for their social order, their religious practice, and their rituals. The Gurū Granth Sāhib occupies a central part in all Sikh ceremonies and rites.

### 2.1 Prayer and Ritual

As part of their regular pious practices, the Sikhs begin each day with a prayer to God. The very first act is to confess to one's belief in God. The Sikh does this by reciting the Mūl Mantra, which I have already cited, and then chants some hymns. Another of one's private rituals is a prayer in the evening.

Many texts in the Gurū Granth have been taken over as prayers. Before and after any important task, devotion or ritual, one says a formal prayer of petition (*ardās*) while standing with hands folded together. At liturgical gatherings of the family or community one member firmly recites the text "*Vāhigurū*" "Hail to the Gurū," which the rest of the community repeats after the fashion of a refrain. This prayer is so well known that it has developed into the most important name for God. Very well

loved also is *kīrtan*, which is the singing in common of songs and hymns with musical accompaniment. This is a special way of honoring God and of concentrating while meditating on his name. Kīrtan is treasured by all Sikhs. Five hymns, the Kīrtan Sohilā conclude the evening prayers. These are also recited after the burial of a Sikh. No Sikh ceremony, whether religious or not, is complete without prayer.

### 2.2 Rites of Passage

Upon entering a new stage of life, prayer accompanies pious, practicing Sikhs throughout their life. It is understood that the Gurū Granth Sāhib and its hymns have a special part to play as one passes through the various stages of life, which are 1. Birth – Bestowal of Name; 2. Amrit Ceremony – Baptism; 3. Marriage; 4. Burial. These are not always celebrated in the same way by all Sikhs (Takhar 2005; K. S. Singh 1998).

#### *Birth – Bestowal of Name*

It has always been important for the Sikhs to found and look after a family. The birth of a child, which is the first stage of life, is ritually celebrated. In some families it is a custom to whisper the Mūl Mantra in the ear of the newly born. As soon after the birth as the mother is able, the parents, often accompanied by relatives and friends, bring the baby to the gurdwara both to thank God and to give the baby its name. The actual ceremony begins with the recitation of prayers for the good health of the baby, for a long life, and for the strength to lead a good Sikh life. After this the Gurū Granth Sāhib is opened at random in order to decide upon the name of the baby. The first letter of the first hymn on the opened left side will determine the name of the boy or girl. If "G" is the first letter, then the first name will start with "G", for example, Gurbachan or Gurddeep (translated as "one who holds on to the Word of the Gurū," or "enlightened by the Gurū"). The basic idea is that the child gets his or her identity from the word of the Gurū, from God, and begins life as a Sikh (Pashauara Singh 2006a: 142). The first name is the same for boys and girls. The sex is specified by the addition of some other word like "Singh" (lion) for the male (Gurbachan Singh) and "Kaur" (princess) for the female (Gurbachan Kaur). Frequently also, especially in North America, the caste name is added as a last name, for example, Grewal, Dhaliwal, etc.

As soon as the first name of the child has been

<sup>7</sup> Cf. AG 19, 83, 140f., 349, 635, 686, 789.

<sup>8</sup> See especially chapter 4 "Ravidāsis" (Takhar 2005: 89–123); cf. also Horstmann (1996: 157); Jakobsh (2003).

chosen, those present express their joy with applause. As is the case with most religious ceremonies, there follows a sacred meal called “prasād” or, according to the region, “prashād.” The word *prasād* means “grace” and “food.” The family brings as their gift a sweet prepared with equal parts of coarsely refined wheat flour, clarified butter, and raw sugar, with water added. After this has been brought to the Gurū Granth Sāhib, it is shared as a sacred food by those present. For Sikhs this is a *gur prasād* or a *sat-gur prasād*. They receive this gift as sacred food by the True Gurū’s (God’s) grace (McLeod 1995: 118, 167). As an expression of thanksgiving, the parents often present the gurdwara with a *rumala*. According to tradition this consists of four expensive pieces of cloth in which one wraps the Gurū Granth Sāhib if it is not to be read.

### *Amrit Ceremony – Baptism*

When the child has grown up to the point that it can understand the teaching of the Sikhs and their rules and ceremonies, then, through another ritual, it becomes part of the Khālsā community. This is the key initiation ceremony *amrit sanskār*, often called the baptism of Khālsā by the Sikhs. This ceremony goes back to the 10th Gurū Gobind Singh.

In the year 1699, the Gurū Gobind Singh gathered the Sikhs in Anandpur/Punjab and founded the Khālsā, a quasi-militant Brotherhood of the Pure, to fight against oppressive and unjust leaders and to uphold freedom and equality of all. The Gurū tested the Sikh loyalty of five men from different castes. They were urged not to cut their hair and to carry weapons (McLeod 1995: 121–124). At the same time they were invited to drink from the same bowl. The Gurū prepared this drink in an iron bowl in which he stirred sugar water with his two-edged sword. By means of this initiation ceremony, the distinctions between caste membership, class and hereditary occupations were done away with. Finally, thousands who were ready to accept the Khālsā rules (*Rahit Maryada*) were accepted into the Khālsā community (McLeod 2003).

Today the ceremony called *amrit dī pāhul* or *amrit sanskār* is performed following this original pattern. *Amrit* means immortal; the water of eternal life or the nectar of immortality. For this reason the ritual by means of which one becomes a member of the Khālsā brotherhood is called the “baptism with the nectar of immortality” and “sacrament of the nectar of immortality.” Today the amrit ceremony, the baptism of the Sikhs, takes place in the presence of the Gurū Granth Sāhib usually in the gurdwara.

Anybody who wishes and is prepared to live as a Sikh according to the Khālsā rules of behavior is eligible to take part in this amrit initiation ceremony. In Khālsā families the children are baptized around the age of 14. Converts – men and women, even adults from other countries, religions, and castes – can also be admitted into the Khālsā.

The baptism is mostly performed early in the morning in the gurdwara after the Sacred Scripture, the Ādi Granth, has been opened. Since Sikhs do not recognize a priesthood, as, for example, Christians do, lay people perform the baptism. Five baptized men from the Sikh community are assigned to this task. These are men who have proven themselves by the way they live and, according to the Sikh code of conduct, should not have any physical handicap.<sup>9</sup> As a group they present themselves as the esteemed followers of the 10th Gurū. As a result every baptism goes back in an unbroken line to the last human Gurū. It represents a repetition of the first baptism performed by Gurū Gobind Singh and symbolizes devotion to the Khālsā Brotherhood (Horstmann 1996: 156).

The person to be baptized must bathe or shower before the baptism and must wash the hair. The person should wear no jewelry or other ornamentation which requires body piercing.<sup>10</sup> They must wear the five emblems of the Khālsā, which consist of the five “Ks” (*pañj kakār / pañj kakke*), because the name of each external feature begins with the letter “K”, i.e., uncut hair (*kesh*), comb (*kanghā*), a steel bracelet worn around the right wrist (*karā*), a sword or poinard (*kirpān*), and shorts which do not reach over the knees (*kachh*). Men also wear a turban.<sup>11</sup>

One of the five chosen men explains the Sikh religion to those being baptized. After those who are being initiated have declared that they are ready for baptism, the five people who are to initiate them sit around a steel tub filled with water and rock candy. Five hymns are sung; the reciter following the example of the 10th Gurū stirs the water with a double-edged sword. Finally they stand up, hold the tub, and pray over the amrit, over the water of immortality, which had just been prepared. Every candidate, male and female, receives amrit, drinks the holy water so that the body might be cleansed of evil vices. First he intones “*Vāhigurū jī kā khālsā! Vāhigurū jī kī fateh!*” (Khālsā be-

<sup>9</sup> Sikh Rahit Maryada: art. 24c.

<sup>10</sup> Sikh Rahit Maryada: art. 24d.

<sup>11</sup> See illustrations in Khushwant Singh and Raghui Rai (1986: 48, 54–57); Thursby (1992: Plate 31, 34–37; McLeod (1991: fig. 12, 43).

longs to the Wonderful Lord! Victory belongs to the Wonderful Lord). Then the eyes of the candidates are sprinkled five times with amrit. It is a symbolic act by which the way of life of the baptized will be changed. Finally, amrit is poured five times on the head to sanctify the hair. After this the candidate should maintain the natural shape of his hair and should listen to the voice of his conscience (Pashaura Singh 2006a: 143; 2006b: 513, 504). At the same time this is the official mark of the Gurū which supposedly also went back to Gurū Gobind Singh. Every sprinkling should be accompanied by the *Vāhigurū* call. “Thus, a person becomes a Khālsā Sikh through the transforming power of the sacred word” (Pashaura Singh 2006a: 143).

The five initiators pray the Mūl Mantra, which is repeated by the newly baptized. At this point the Khālsā code of conduct (*Rahit Maryada*) is explained; this is what the baptized will have to follow. They must pray daily, wear the five symbols of the Khālsā and avoid the four evils, namely: to cut the hair, to eat meat butchered according to Muslim rules (*halāl*), to commit adultery, and to smoke tobacco. If a Sikh breaks one of the four rules, he must first acknowledge his guilt and repent and then be baptized again.

After this instruction, prayers are again said and a section of the Gurū Granth recited. If any of the baptized had not yet ritually received a Sikh name, they receive one now and those who had not yet been given the surname of Singh or Kaur, has it now conferred upon them. At the end they all eat *prasād* from the same bowl as a sign of the equality of all, also without distinction of male and female.

Anyone who has been baptized according to this ritual, who has taken amrit (*amrit-dhāri*), is Amritdhari Sikh and a member of the Khālsā Brotherhood or Khālsā Order as it is often called today. Even today people put much value on the difference between Khālsā Sikhs and non-Khālsā Sikhs. Strictly understood, only the initiated are full members of the Khālsā. They make up a relatively small group, estimated to be perhaps 15% of the Panth. Similar to these is the larger group of Keshdhari Sikhs, numbering about 80% of the Panth.<sup>12</sup> These wear long hair (*kesh-dhāri*) and have ideally taken on the other external symbols and rules of behavior of Khālsā, but have not been formally accepted into the Khālsā. In a wider sense, these, too, will be counted as belonging to the Khālsā. Believers in the Panth, however, who only honor the Gurūs and the Sacred Writings, but do not follow the rules

of behavior (*Rahit Maryada*) and do not follow the five “Ks” (*sahaj-dhāri*) are called Sahajdhari Sikhs and do not belong to the Khālsā (McLeod 2003: 202–204; Bhai Harbans Lal 1999). In addition there are some groups in the Panth without special names, who, indeed, exhibit close connections with the Khālsā, but allow their hair to be cut (Takhar 2005; Gächter 2003: 372f.).

### *Marriage – Wedding*

Before marriage Sikhs often celebrate betrothal (*kurmai*). According to the Sikh code of conduct this is not absolutely necessary. Usually this takes place on the day of the wedding, but it can also be held on an earlier day. The betrothal, at which family and friends gather, takes place in the gurdwara or the home of the groom’s parents. On this occasion prayers are recited before the Holy Writings, the Gurū Granth Sāhib, and hymns are sung. There is an exchange of gifts. The family of the bride hands over fruits and sweets and eventually a ring, a steel arm band (*karā*), and a poinard (*kirpān*) for the groom. The bride receives clothes and sweets from the family of the groom. From time to time someone will wave bank notes over the head of the groom, a symbol of well-being, which later will be sent to the needy. The ritual concludes with a prayer for the pair.

It is understood that Sikhs will marry. Celibacy has neither a social nor an ethical value. The wedding ritual is called *anand kāraj* and usually takes place in the morning in the gurdwara. It is called the “Rite of Happiness” (Horstmann 1996: 157; Uberoi et al. 1995). The marriage can also take place elsewhere, perhaps in the house of the parents of the bride, but always in the presence of the Gurū Granth Sāhib. Basically it should not take place in a hotel or in a public wedding hall or any kind of hall. The liturgical ceremony was established in 1909 and today practically every Sikh is acquainted with it. Usually the Granthi takes over, i.e., the person who normally recites the holy texts in the gurdwara. As a matter of principle any Sikh who is familiar with the ritual can be asked to lead the wedding, which normally is performed in the home place of the bride. Although today’s religious ritual is only a hundred years old, the most important liturgical songs go back to the 15th and 16th centuries. The 4th Gurū Ram Das composed the four stanza wedding hymn *Lāvān*, which is recited and sung as the high point of the marriage ceremony.<sup>13</sup>

12 McLeod (2000: 105; 2003: 8–10, 202–204). See also the articles on Khālsā in Harbans Singh ed. (1995–1998).

13 For illustrations of the Sikh wedding see M. Singh (2004).

While the wedding guests and their hosts are gathering in the gurdwara, kīrtans, religious songs and hymns, are normally sung. The bride sits to the left of the groom directly in front of the Gurū Granth Sāhib; the rest of those taking part also sit on the floor. The one officiating begins the festivities with a prayer and blessing for the welfare and happiness of the bride and groom and for their parents. After a hymn taken from the sacred writings, the one in charge turns to speak to the bride and groom to explain to them the meaning of a Sikh wedding and the duties connected with that. A married pair should be of one heart and soul which can be accomplished only if there is mutual love, understanding, and compromise. This will often be accompanied by a verse from the 3rd Gurū Amar Das: “The bride and the groom are one soul and one spirit in two bodies” (AG 788).

This is followed by the liturgically decisive act. The father of the bride gives one end of a long scarf to the groom, lays it on his shoulder and puts the other end of the scarf into the hand of the bride. In this way he hands his daughter over to the protection of the groom. The presiding Sikh then sings a verse from the wedding hymn (*lāvān*) which is repeated by the singers and community. The two getting married – bound together by the scarf – walk around the Holy Book, the Gurū Granth Sāhib, in a clockwise direction. After every circuit they honor the Gurū Granth Sāhib by bending very low and touching the ground with their forehead. During the entire ceremony the bride and groom do not speak to each other. It is the common bowing which expresses their mutual acceptance. Thus “they are solely – and equally – bound to the Sacred Word rather than to any legal or social authority” (N.-K. Singh 2005b: 8397). This ceremony will be repeated accompanied by the three stanzas of the *Lāvān*. Circling around the Gurū Granth Sāhib four times symbolizes the journey of people to God. The Gurū, God himself, is witness and sanctifies the bond that unites them for life. There follow religious songs and prayers. The Ādi Granth is opened at random and a verse on that page becomes the motto for the day. The wedding rite (*anand kāraj*) closes with the distribution of *karāh prasād*, the sacred sweets. So much for the religious part of the wedding.

While the *anand kāraj* is celebrated all around the world, in addition there are many cultural customs added depending on the ethnic group and region where it takes place.<sup>14</sup> The secular customs and celebrations may last several days.

For the Sikhs marriage is monogamous. According to the Sikh code of conduct,<sup>15</sup> neither caste, class, social rank, or ancestry should influence the choice of one’s marriage partner. Nevertheless, caste does have special meaning for marriage among the Sikhs. Sikhs, especially in India, are rooted in the local kinship structure. They marry within the same caste, but outside of their subcaste (*gotra*). To marry inside of the *gotra* is strictly forbidden. The Sikhs actually follow this marriage rule less from a religious perspective; they think of it rather as a purely social rule.<sup>16</sup>

### *Death and Burial*

When they die, Sikhs hope that the grace of God will free them from being born again and thus to regain their original unity with God. This hope is emphasized in all of the liturgical texts related to burial.

Basically at death only prayers from the holy writings should be recited or sung or the prayer “Praise to the Lord” (*Vāhigurūji*) should be repeated.<sup>17</sup> First the corpse is washed and wrapped in clean clothes. Amrithari Sikhs wear their external identifying marks (namely: uncut head hair and beard, comb, kirpān, steel arm band, *kachh*, and a fresh turban). Thereby the permanent and inalienable identity as an Amritdhari Sikh is confirmed on his corpse. Normally the dead are cremated. A prayer is said for the burial and the body is brought to the place where the cremation is to take place on a bier. A son or a close relative or even a friend lights the funeral pyre on which the corpse is placed. The assembled community sits to the side and listens to or sings kīrtan, songs of praise to honor God. Once the pyre is in full flame the Kīrtan Sohilā, the solemn memorial song, which is supposed to be part of the daily evening prayer, is sung. Finally a prayer of petition is recited. The ashes with the burnt bones will be placed in a nearby flowing river or buried near the place of cremation.

If no cremation is possible there is no hesitation about placing the body in some body of water or to bury it in the ground. If the burial is in America or Europe, there are various ritual variations, e.g., instead of carrying the corpse on a bamboo stretcher, a coffin and a hearse will be used. Instead of lighting a pyre of wood, the oldest son or some other designated relative or a close friend pushes

<sup>15</sup> Sikh Rahit Maryada: art. 18a.

<sup>16</sup> Takhar (2005); Uberoi et al. (1995: 124); K. S. Singh (1998).

<sup>17</sup> On death ritual, see Sikh Rahit Maryada: art. 19; Horstmann (2007).

<sup>14</sup> See the excellent study by K. S. Singh (1998).

the button that starts the mechanism that moves the coffin into the crematorium (Horstmann 2007: 42).

After the cremation people go to the house or to the gurdwara. Here they recite from the Gurū Granth Sāhib. After six verses of the “Song of Joy” (*anand sāhib*), another prayer of petition is offered. The mourners and guests, before leaving, eat *karāh prasād* together (Horstmann 1996: 157; 2007: 49).

A complete reading of the entire Gurū Granth Sāhib (*akhand pāth*) finally ends the mourning period. This will be done together over different days and will be carried out by members of the household of the deceased or by relatives. If possible during these days, they should share *kīrtan* every night, which means they should come together and sing religious songs. On the 10th day, or on a day suitable for the relatives, the reading will come to an end and the ritual for the dead will be complete. There are no further official religious events to come; no tombstone reminds the people of the deceased. Nevertheless, on the annual anniversary of the deceased, the family members often go to the gurdwara and prepare a *langar*, a meal in memory of the deceased (N.-K. Singh 2005b: 8397).

### 3 Areas of Tension between Religious Beliefs and Culture

The Gurū Granth Sāhib is essential for all rituals. According to the contents of this Holy Writing there can be no doubt about the equality between men and women or about the equal value of all people. This corresponds to and flows from the image of God which Sikhs hold. The liturgical texts of their stages of life reinforce this belief. The message of salvation is not restricted to gender or to religious specialists. Lay people, men and women, can read the scriptures and perform rituals at home or in the gurdwara. That all Sikhs should be treated equally is clearly established in the scriptures as part of their theological perspective and according to the Sikh code of conduct.

The ideal of equality was, indeed, always recognized. In everyday life, however, it is not always so because the Sikhs live mostly in the patriarchal culture of the Punjab and have carried this with them elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> The male dominated explanation of the Scriptures and of tradition and other factors put the male, the man, in the center of thinking. For example, there are unwritten rules according to which

the women should perform religious ceremonies most often at home, while public ceremonies are mostly performed by men, who recite the scriptures and lead the rituals. Krishan Kaur Khālsā was the first woman to perform *kīrtan* in 1980 in Amritsar in the Golden Temple complex,<sup>19</sup> but not in the main hall. Only in September 2004, Bibi Jagir Kaur became the first woman to be elected as president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which was founded in 1920 and continues to be the highest Sikh executive committee which has responsibility for Sikh institutions and finances.<sup>20</sup>

It is understood that the rituals which constitute the rites of passage in theory are the same for men and women. Practically it can look quite different, as is often the case in every religion.

The same holds for the proceedings held when surnames are given. Names, as such, do not specify gender, but surnames do. “Singh” and “Kaur” do distinguish between the sexes. But the celebration is dominated by the men, and male dominance is revealed in the celebration of name giving itself, for the boys it is more extravagant, bigger, and more ambitious than it is for girls.

Men and women both can be baptized and received into the Khālsā community by participating in the amrit ceremony. Both are to wear the same five symbols. Nevertheless, “Sikh identity has been monopolized by masculinity, for it is the Sikh male, with his topknot or turban, who has come to represent all Sikhs” (N.-K. Singh 2005a: 3337). Boys are privileged in every area, which one can see on many festive occasions. For well-placed Sikhs the first tying of the turban for a boy (*dastar bandhan*) is much more extravagant today than ever before. It is a popular rite of passage for boys, but not for girls.

The dowry and the gifts for the daughter and her family when she gets married are quite costly. After the wedding it is understood that the wife will move in with her husband’s family. Patrilocality rules. She will leave her own parents’ home. At the death of a family member it is the family of the mother or of the wife which spends for the turban if it is a man’s funeral and for the scarf (*dupatta*) if a woman’s. In both cases they also contribute some money. If a daughter dies – it makes no difference at what age or what her class status is – it is the duty of

18 For this discussion of gender see among others: N.-K. Singh (2005a), on whose contributions I rely here especially; see also Pashaura Singh (2006b: 561 f.); Bala (2001).

19 <<http://www.mrsikhnet.com/2005/08/1973-amritsar-gurumustuk-sitting-with.html>> [29 September 2009].

20 President from 1999 to 2000 and from 2004 to 2005. However, she had to leave her position because of criminal activities.

her birth family to pay for the meal after the death rituals. It is especially the parents of daughters who get the feeling of gender differences. The religious base equality and equal treatment remains a social challenge. Especially feminists bring such gender differences to the fore.

In the diaspora outside of India there are additional problems, mostly with officials and the courts. In the birth registry office there is often a problem when a baby's name has to be entered regarding a name that is sex neutral, a name indeed that could be given to a boy or girl. The city of Vienna calls attention to this on its web site when it gives the directive: "The first given name must correspond to the sex of the child. If you intend to give your child an uncommon name or a name from another culture, in every case before registering the birth of your child please make telephone contact with the registry office."<sup>21</sup> In Germany, only after a decision by the Federal Constitutional Court on December 5, 2008, are given names which are gender neutral allowed without a secondary name, like the Sikh name "Kiran" (Ray of light).<sup>22</sup>

In Canada, the USA, and Europe there are always vigorous arguments regarding the 5 "Ks" and the turban, which the Sikhs wear for hygienic reasons to protect their hair. Conflicts that have traditional roots are sometimes imported by rival religious groups into their new countries. The gun battle and blood bath that took place in Shri Ravidas Sabha, the temple of the Ravidasis, on May 24, 2009, in Vienna surely had both religious and social roots. Religiously the Ravidasis challenged the Khālsā Sikhs because of the total rejection of the amrit ceremony and its external symbols, the 5 "Ks". Socially, also, the Ravidasis are predominantly made up of Dalits, who belong to the lower castes and are despised by some Khālsā Sikhs who are of higher castes.<sup>23</sup> These identity issues do not make life in the diaspora easier.

Wearing a turban and kirpān is often a problem that is viewed and judged differently in different countries and for different reasons. France, for example, since 2004, does not allow religious symbols to be worn in public schools; thus the turban was forbidden. There are also schools, for example in Canada and the USA, which insist on school uniforms, and, indeed, for consistency insist that the turban cannot be worn. Many airports, for safety reasons, refuse to allow Sikhs to carry a kirpān on board. Although it is allowed in India, Hong Kong, and Great Britain, it is forbidden in some states, also in Germany, to drive a motorcycle wearing a turban rather than a helmet. Some companies do not hire Sikhs, who refuse to follow certain regulations, for example, to wear a helmet on the job for safety reasons. Sikhs who feel discriminated against often take these issues to court, because the application of such rules violates their religious freedom or go against their human and ethnic rights.<sup>24</sup>

According to French law, a driver's license or an ID card cannot be given if the person insists on wearing a turban in the photo. The hairline and ears must be visible. On November 27, 2008, the European Court for Human Rights in Strassburg rejected a Sikh appeal against France which did not issue him a driver's license, because it did not allow a photo of the Sikh applicant wearing a turban to appear on the driver's license.<sup>25</sup> Public safety took precedence over a religiously motivated life style.

In most countries the safety of the general public is of central concern, as the judgement of the Senate II of the Equal Treatment Commission of Austria (GBK II/5) in 2006 confirmed. The Commission refused to consider the complaint of a Sikh, that he was not allowed to take his 22 cm long dagger to a course he was taking to further his education. He refused to hand over his great kirpān for safekeeping. The decision of the Senate, among

21 <<http://www.wien.gv.at/verwaltung/personenwesen/geburt/geberf-vorname.html>> [29 September 2009].

22 BVerfG, 1 BvR 576/07 of December 5, 2008, paragraph no. 1–21, <[http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rk20081205\\_1bvr057607.html](http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rk20081205_1bvr057607.html)> [31 October 2009]; see also "Geschlechtsneutrale Vornamen ohne Zweitnamen erlaubt" by Knud Bielefeld: <<http://blog.beliebte-vornamen.de/2009/01/geschlechtsneutrale-vornamen-ohne-zweitnamen-erlaubt/>> [31 October 2009].

23 One cause of this violence was the visit of Sant Rama Nand and Sant Niranjān, two Ravidasi preachers from the Punjab. Sant Rama Nand was murdered and Sant Niranjān and 16 other believers were severely wounded in the Ravidas Sabha, which is the gurdwara of the Ravidasis. See "Shri Guru Ravidas Sabha" (24 May 2009): <<http://www.vienna.at>> [20 September 2009]; NZZ online (25 May 2009): <<http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten>> [20 September 2009], etc.

The community of Sikhs from several European countries clearly distanced themselves from this incident. See the community of Sikhs in Austria: <<http://www.sikh.at/archive.htm>> [20 September 2009]. For Ravidasis and various groups with Sikh traditions see Takhar (2005) and Kalsi (1992).

24 "United Sikhs," a nongovernmental organization for diversity and equal opportunity, as a member of the UN, does what it can in such cases.

25 European Court of Human Rights (Press Release issued by the Registrar, 27 November 2008): "Inadmissibility Decision Mann Singh v. France": <[http://www.echr.coe.int/ECHR/EN/Header/Press/News/Archived+news/ArchivesNews\\_2008.htm](http://www.echr.coe.int/ECHR/EN/Header/Press/News/Archived+news/ArchivesNews_2008.htm)> [29 October 2009]. See: "Sikh Turban Case Inadmissible" (27 November 2008) by Antoine Buyse: <<http://echrblog.blogspot.com/search?q=sikh+turban+case>> [29 October 2009].



other things, based itself on scientific research that concluded that the length of the knife to be carried by a Sikh was not specified in the Sikh code of conduct and that it was not at all unusual that only a tiny decorative copy of the kirpān, hanging from a chain, would suffice. The Senate denied that discrimination on religious grounds was the reason.<sup>26</sup> The guarantee of the safety of all participants in the course was accepted as justification for the decision.

It is hard to say how big the problems facing the Sikhs in Europe based on their religious membership really are. Certainly there are problems – even though all Sikhs do not always agree on what exactly the problems are. It is encouraging, for example, to hear about the positive efforts made to integrate the Sikh migrants. Sikh bus drivers in many cities have no problems anymore wearing their turbans (on Vienna's bus routes, for example).<sup>27</sup> Rather recently also Sikhs were allowed to wear their beard and turban in the Austrian armed forces.

Just as every migration into another cultural condition has consequences, so also the Sikhs experience not only the advantages of migrating but they also experience external and internal tensions based on the religious thinking that accompanies them. In any contact between different cultures, different ways of thinking and issues regarding freedom of conscience and religion, two points often come up and must be appropriately addressed and balanced. The country, into which a different religion, etc., migrates, can enforce the laws that have proven to be good for its citizens, however painful this may be for newcomers. At the same time, the State should be careful to be as sensitive as possible to the needs and feelings of those coming from other cultures when making new laws or enforcing existing laws.

I thank my friend and colleague Ernest Brandewie for the translation of this essay into English. The article is a revised version of my papers "Die Gemeinschaft der Sikhs und ihre Riten zur Einführung in die Lebensphasen ihrer männlichen und weiblichen Mitglieder" presented at the symposium "Lebensabschnitte und Geschlechtsunterschied als Themen der Religionen" (12–13 March 2009, Gesamtösterreichische Tagung der Kontaktstelle für Weltreligionen, St. Virgil/Salzburg, Austria)

26 Federal Ministry for Economy and Labor (2008): Report on Equal Treatment in the Private Economic Sector 2006 and 2007, Part I, pp. 97–102: <<http://www.frauen.bka.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=33802>> [29 October 2009] and <<http://www.frauen.bka.gv.at/DocView.axd?CobId=24551>> [29 October 2009].

27 *Der Standard*, 7 February 2008.

and "Sikhismus – Eine indische Religion neben Hinduismus und Islam" (21 April 2009, Anthropos Institute / Sankt Augustin, Germany).

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## Zur Rezeption des Maori-Versammlungshauses “Te Tokanganui a Noho” in Jules Vernes Roman “Die Historien von Jean-Marie Cabidoulin”

Georg Schifko

In Neuseeland hat der Maori-Widerstandskämpfer Te Kooti einen so großen Bekanntheitsgrad wie vergleichsweise in Amerika der Apachen-Häuptling Geronimo. Te Kooti führte allerdings nicht nur einen unerbittlichen Guerillakrieg gegen Briten und Neuseeländer, sondern war auch der Begründer der heute noch existierenden Ringatu-Kirche, die als “mehr oder weniger christlich” (Greschat 1980: 162) eingestuft wird. Von der großen Bedeutung, die er unter den Maori schon zu Lebzeiten hatte, legte sogar der Maori-König Tawhiao ein beredtes Zeugnis ab. Er machte nämlich die Begnadigung Te Kootis zur unverhandelbaren Bedingung damit er das sogenannte King Country<sup>1</sup> für die Weißen öffnen (Greschat 1980: 173) und durch das Land Schienen für den Zugverkehr verlegen ließe. Te Kooti, der sich zuvor mehrere Jahre im King Country verborgen gehalten hatte, wurde daraufhin auch tatsächlich begnadigt und lebte bis zu seinem Tod (1893) als freier Mann. Die Anhänger Te Kootis haben etwa 1870 ein mit Schnitzereien ausgeschmücktes Versammlungshaus (*whare nui*)<sup>2</sup> gebaut (Abb. 1), um es König Tawhiao zum Geschenk zu machen (Neich 1993: 178; Greschat 1980: 173).<sup>3</sup> Das Haus hieß zuerst “Te Tokanganui a mutu”, wurde aber bald auf den Namen “Te Tokanganui a Noho” umbenannt, was soviel wie “Der Essenskorb von Noho” bedeutet und bei den Maori eine sprichwörtliche Anspielung auf Gastfreundschaft darstellt (Simmons 1997: 18). Das in der Ortschaft Te Kuiti liegende Haus, dem der neuseeländische Anthropologe Roger Neich attestiert, dass es sich um das “most innovative house of the period and the one that started many trends for later houses” (1993: 175) handle, ist von

- 1 Beim King Country handelt es sich um ein im Westen der Nordinsel befindliches Gebiet, in das sich der König und seine Anhänger nach dem niedergeschlagenen Aufstand gegen die Engländer zurückgezogen hatten und dessen Betreten den Weißen damals strikt untersagt war (Schifko 2007: 33). Für den genauen Grenzverlauf siehe King (1981: 90).
- 2 Eine andere Bezeichnung für Maori-Versammlungshäuser lautet *whare runanga*.
- 3 Judith Binney (1997: 275) zufolge wurde das Haus 1883 letztlich dem im King Country lebenden Stamm der Maniapoto übergeben.