

CONTROVERSY OVER SEHJDHARI SIKH BUT WHO IS A SIKH?

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A controversy over the rights of a Sehjdhari Sikh is going on in the news in these days. The main reason for this controversy is that the Sehjdhari Sikhs want as many rights to control the Gurdwaras and to enjoy political, educational and social benefits as the Amritdhari Sikhs or Kesadhari Sikhs. During this controversy the children of Sikh parents, who are non-kesadharis, are neither considered as Sehjdhari Sikhs nor ordinary Sikhs instead they have been declared as Patits and have no right at all of being a Sikh. However, a Sehjdhari Sikh being clean-shaven is not a Patit.

The main cause of this problem (controversy) is that the term, 'Sikh', was not defined precisely besides other types of Sikhs were introduced as needed by the custodians of Sikhism.

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE) during the Period of Renaissance (14th -16th centuries), the period of advent of Science, and now Sikhism has entered into the 21st century when Science is at its peak of its progress but the Sikh theologians and the custodians of Sikhism still failed to define a SIKH as a term should be.

Since I wrote the need of 'Defining a Sikh' in 1992 and thereafter, I have not come across any serious effort by any Sikh institute, Sikh clergy, or custodians of Sikhism to define a Sikh [2-4]. Now this issue (Who is a Sikh?) is becoming more and more complicated every day. And the SGPC is facing problems from every corner. The irony is that Sikh theologians and researchers have not only ignored to define the 'Sikh' but many other terms (Sikhi, Gurmat, Manmat, Gurshikh, Gurmukh, Manmukh, Guru, Sabd, Sabd Guru, Sat Guru, etc.) used in Gurbani as the terms should be.

Let us try to define the term, 'Sikh'. First of all we must understand the meanings of 'term' and 'definition'.

Term

1. A word or expression that has a precise meaning in some uses or is peculiar to a science, art, profession, or subject.
2. Any word or phrase used in a definite or precise sense.
3. [pl.] words that express ideas in a specified form.

Define

1. To determine or identify the essential qualities or meanings of something.
2. To make distinct, clear, or detailed in outline.
3. To make a definition.

Definition

1. A statement expressing the essential nature of something.

The word 'SIKH' is a term, which should be defined according to the above explanation given for a 'term', 'define', and 'definition'. The definitions of a SIKH given so far in various literary sources on Sikhism do not meet these criteria.

DEFINITIONS ALREADY ACCEPTED

Let us now discuss some definitions of a Sikh already accepted by the Sikh clergy and Sikh authorities and deficiencies and redundancies therein:

1. A Sikh in the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 [6]

(Part I, Chapter 1, Section 1)

(9) **Sikh** -"Sikh" means a person who professes the Sikh religion or, in the case of a deceased person, who professed the Sikh religion or was known to be Sikh during his lifetime.

If any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he shall be deemed respectively to be or not to be a Sikh according as he makes or refuses to make in such manner as to the [State]¹ government may prescribe the following declaration:

"I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion."

²(10) "**Amritdhari Sikh**" means and includes every person who has taken *Khande-ka-amrit* or *Khanda de pahul* prepared and administered according to the tenets of Sikh religion and rites at the hands of five *pyaras* or beloved ones".

³(10-A) "**Sehjdhari Sikh**" means a person:

- (i) Who performs ceremonies according to Sikh rites;
- (ii) Who does not use tobacco or kutha (Halal meat) in any form;
- (iii) Who is not a Patit; and
- (iv) Who can recite Mul Manter.

⁴[(11) "**Patit**" means a person who being a Keshadhari Sikh trims or shaves his beard or keshas or who after taking amrit commits any or more of the four kurahits.]

- (i) Substituted for the word "Provincial" by the Adaptation of Laws Order 1950.
- (ii) Inserted by Punjab Act XI of 1944 section 2(b).
- (iii) Inserted by Punjab Act No. 1 of 1959 section 3(4).
- (iv) Inserted by Punjab Act No XI of 1944, section 2(b).

Comments

The above definitions lack consistency and precision. For example, "Sikh religion" has not been defined or explained. It raises a question. What is a Sikh religion?

"Believes in Guru Granth Sahib" means idol worship. It should have been "follows the philosophy of the Sikh Gurus incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib."

In the definition of "Amritdhari Sikh" a word "person" is used for whom that has taken *Khande da Amrit*. There is no mention whether that "person" is a Sikh or non-Sikh.

"Sehjdhari Sikh" has been defined as a person who only performs ceremonies according to Sikh rites and can only recite Mool Mantra. It means he does not have to follow the Gurus' philosophy incorporated into the Aad Guru Granth sahib'. Recitation of Mool Mantra only, means believing in mantra-system that is contrary to the Guru's philosophy. In fact, there is no indication of or definition of a Sehjdhari Sikh in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. However, the word "sehj" has been used extensively and that means "tranquility" and also as "slowly". It is recommended to everybody (Sikh) in the Gurbani to attain this stage of "sehj" (tranquility) by understanding and practicing the teachings imparted in the Gurbani.

The word "Patit" used in clauses 10-A (iii) and in item 11 indicates that Sehjdhari is that person who was never Keshadhari, thus, cannot be called as Patit. Its analogy is that children born in the Sikh families, who were never Keshadhari, cannot be called as Patit.

On the other hand any Sikh who trims beard or Keshas has been declared as Patit. It means he has no right to be a Sikh whereas a Sehjdhari, who is clean-shaven, is still a Sikh.

The terms "Amritdhari Sikh" and "Patit" were added in 1944.

"Sehjdhari" is the latest addition, i. e. in 1959.

The recently introduced term, "Sehjdhari" in Sikhism is now creating a lot of problems.

The above discussion indicates that there are four types of Sikhs in the present Gurdwara Act: Sikh, Amritdhari Sikh, Sehjdhari Sikh, and Patit. This division of Sikhs not only violates the basic principle of Gurus' philosophy of equality for the humans but also for the equality among the Sikhs.

2. A Sikh in the Mahan Kosh [5] (originally written in 1927 and published in 1930)

A Sikh is (p 192): One who is the follower of Sri Guru Nanak Dev, One who adopts the Sikh religion of Satguru Nanak Dev, and one who considers Sri Guru Granth Sahib as his religious Granth and ten Satgurus as same body and spirit.

A Sehjdhari is (p 137): A branch of the Sikhs whose members do not adopt *khande da Amrit, kachh* and *kirpan*, but do not believe in any religion except that of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Amritdhari is (p 78): That Singh who had adopted Amrit.

Comments:

Here Bhai Kahn Singh accepts three types of Sikhs. Here again all the three definitions lack consistency and precision:

It is to be noted that Bhai Kahn Singh [5] used a word 'Singh' instead of a 'person' to define an Amritdhari.

Who is a Singh?

Then he used another word 'Kharagdhari' in the 'Amritsanskar' description (p 77). According to him a 'Kharagdhari' is the one who keeps sword, i. e. Kirpandhari (p 370). In other words an Amritdhari is also called 'Kharagdhari' and/or 'Kirpandhari'.

Contradictory statements by Bhai Kahn Singh:

"Sikh" is one who adopts the Sikh religion of Satguru Nanak Dev.

"Sehjdhari" is one who does not believe in any religion except that of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The above two statements indicate that there are two kinds of religions according to Bhai Kahn Singh: one is of Satguru Nanak for the Sikhs and the other of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is for the Sehjdharis.

3. A Sikh in Rehit Maryada, Published by the SGPC in 1945 [7]

ਜੇ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਜਾਂ ਪੁਰਸ਼ ਇਕ ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ, ਦਸ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਤੋਂ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਕ), ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅਤੇ ਦਸ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੇ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਅਤੇ ਦਸਮੇਸ਼ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਉਤੇ ਨਿਸਚਾ ਰਖਦਾ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਕਿਸੇ ਧਰਮ ਨੂੰ ਨਹੀ ਮੰਨਦਾ ਉਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਹੈ ॥

The literal translation is as follows:

"A woman or a man, who believes in one God, ten Guru Sahibans (from Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Sri Guru Gobind Singh Sahib), Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Bani and advice of ten Guru Sahibans and the

Amrit of Dasmesh Ji and does not accept any other religion, is a Sikh."

Comments:

'Believes in one God' does not make this definition distinctive than others because Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others also believe in one God. Thus, this is not specific characteristic of a Sikh according to the rules of defining a term.

'Believes in Ten Guru Sahibans' is not correct according to the Gurbani because in Gurbani it says believe in the Sabd not in Gurus.

'Believes in advice of ten Guru Sahibans' is also not correct because only the advice (Bani) of Guru Nanak and other five Gurus (Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjan, and Guru Teg Bahadur) was declared authentic by Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh and that has been incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS).

The word '*nischa*' that means 'belief' or 'faith' is usually interpreted by many Amritdharis as 'obligatory' to be a Sikh. The word 'belief' or 'faith' cannot be interpreted as 'obligatory' or 'imperative' under any circumstances. It may be necessary to add here that 'belief' and 'faith' are often used interchangeably but 'belief' may or may not imply certitude in the believer whereas 'faith' always does even when there is no evidence or proof, consequently, the 'faith becomes 'blind faith'. Nevertheless, Guru Nanak rejects 'blind faith' and advises to research, analyze, and evaluate before accepting any statement or philosophy.

4. A Sikh in the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) Constitution

"A Sikh means a person who professes the Sikh religion, believes and follows the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only and keeps unshorn hair and has no other religion."

Comments: In this definition there is no mention of Amrit as mentioned in the SGPC's Rehit Maryada. Consequently, a Sikh, who wears a Kirpan (dagger) can be charged for carrying a weapon and he/she cannot defend himself/herself for wearing it as a religious symbol because this definition will not support his/her case in the court.

Under these circumstances the *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* suggests that since many Sikh scholars and theologians claim Sikhism as a universal religion, in fact, it is, and then is it not necessary that the definition of a Sikh should have universal adaptability/acceptability and is based on the Gurbani, incorporated into the Aad Guru Granth Sahib? The Aad Guru Granth Sahib is the only authentic and original source of Gurbani that has been reiterated as the only "GURU" of the Sikhs by Guru Gobind Singh

since Guru Arjan in 1604 had already declared it as Guru:

Granth as Guru

Since the Sabd is the Guru according to Guru Nanak, therefore, the Granth, in which the Sabd of Gurus was incorporated, was equated to Guru (Enlightener) by Guru Arjan some time before the compilation of Granth in 1604 CE as is indicated in his following stanza:

ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ* ਕਾ ਬਾਨੁ ॥
ਸਾਧ ਸੰਗਿ ਗਾਵਹਿ ਗੁਣ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਪੂਰਨ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੁ ॥ਰਹਾਉ॥

AGGS, M 5, p 1226 [1].

"The Granth (Gurbani) is equivalent to the Enlightener. (From which) the noble people discuss (sing) the attributes of the God and deliberate in the congregation on the wisdom (philosophy) given by the God."*

*According to Bhai Kahn Singh [5] 'Parmesar' means Parm + Ishwar. 'Parm' means great and 'Ishwar' has many meanings: Shiv, Swami, God, and also a particular teacher (Guru) of Jogis who teaches the philosophy of Gorakh. In Jap # 5 Guru has also been equated to Ishwar, Gorkh, Brahma, Parbati. Therefore, it is very clear that the word 'Parmesar' used here is equivalent to the 'Guru' (Enlightener).

It means, the day in 1604 the Granth was compiled it was given the status of Guru because of the fact that Sabd is Guru which has been incorporated into the Granth. Since then preaching of Gurbani was carried on from this Granth by Guru Arjan himself and by all other Gurus who succeeded to the 'House of Nanak'. Since the Granth is Guru because of the fact that the Sabd Guru is incorporated in it, therefore, Guru Gobind Singh reiterated this fact in 1708 when he declared that there would be no Guru in person and the lineage of Guru-ship is discontinued in Sikhism permanently henceforth with.

Therefore, definition of a Sikh should be coined keeping in view the teachings of the Gurus (Gurbani) that has been incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib, the only Guru (Enlightener) for the Sikhs as explained above.

The *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* requests the SGPC, Amritsar with great concern to hold a debate by the Sikh intelligentsia of the world at international level to define a Sikh. In this debate an open invitation should be given to the Sikhs having good knowledge of Gurbani besides being specialized in various fields, e. g. different sciences, medicine, psychology, philosophy, history, languages, sociology, political science, law, etc. However, keeping in mind the rules to define a term as explained above, my previous writings (2- 4), and recently held many group discussions, the *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* has coined the following definition of a Sikh to be considered in the forthcoming debate on "Defining a Sikh":

Suggested Definition of a Sikh

A person, who follows Sikhi (Gurmat/Sikhism) that is based on Gurbani, incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan, and Guru Gobind Singh, the Fifth and Tenth Guru in succession to the 'House of Nanak' (Mahla), respectively, is a Sikh*. Consequently, that person is the solely follower of Sikhism and does not practice any other religion simultaneously.

*On Vasaikhi of 1699 Guru Gobind Singh initiated (baptized) some Sikhs and prescribed 5Ks {*Kesh* (turban to cover them), *Kanga* (comb), *Kachha* (shorts), *Kirpan* (small dagger), and *Kara* (steel bracelet)} for them. They are called as Amritdhari Sikhs.

**It is very important that a Sikh is a Sikh who follows the Sikhi (Sikhism) embodied in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib and does not practice any other religion simultaneously. If a Sikh is found practicing any religion other than Sikhi (Sikhism) is deemed not to be a Sikh and loses all the advantages of being a Sikh.

Conclusions

There are many different types of categories of Sikhs, e.g. Sikhs, Amritdhari Sikhs, Sehjdhari Sikhs, and Patit Sikhs as found in various sources of Sikh literature. Besides, there are Namdhari Sikhs, Nirankari Sikhs, and followers of some Sants or their Muths.

However, the present study indicates that there is only one type of Sikh, who accepts and practices the Sikhi (Gurmat/Gurbani) incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Besides there are some Sikhs who have accepted the Amrit of Guru Gobind Singh and they are called Amritdhari Sikhs. Therefore, there are only two types of Sikhs.

Unfortunately the non-kesadhari children of Sikh parents are forming about 80% of whole population of the Sikhs. This fact was accepted by the President of SGPC, Mr Avtar Singh Makkar and the President, Dr Kharak Singh Mann, of Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh. But currently they are not accepted as the Sikhs. Now the big question is:

Who are they?

What is their position according to the definition of Sikh suggested above since they all claim themselves to be Sikhs and accept Aad Guru Granth Sahib as their Guru?

References

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