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The Guru's Way: Exploring diversity among British Khalsa Sikhs

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Abstract

This article will examine some of the diversity within the Khalsa tradition. Although Sikhs are regularly described as being 'orthodox' or 'non-orthodox' depending on whether or not they have undergone the amrit initiation ceremony, research into the religious lives of young British Sikhs found much diversity within the British Khalsa tradition. This diversity is based primarily around different maryadas or 'codes of conduct' each of which emphasise particular ideas and practices. Rather than comparing these maryadas to a supposed 'norm', maryada specific practices and notions of religious authority will be examined in order to understand how the ideas presented in these maryadas impact on ideas of Sikh identity, dietary requirements, gender equality and scriptural authority.

Introduction

Although Sikhs are regularly placed into one of two categories, with those who wear the turban and the five Ks being described as 'orthodox' and those who do not support these religious symbols being 'non-orthodox'², McLeod (2005: 97) identifies five distinct 'types' of Sikhs. Amritdharis are those who having been initiated as members of the Khalsa then follow the Khalsa rahit [code] which includes the wearing the 5Ks at all times; the kesh (uncut hair), kangha (wooden comb), kara (steel/iron bangle), kacch (shorts that must not come below the knee) and kirpan (sword). Secondly, Keshdharis are those with uncut hair, who observe some or all of the Khalsa rahit but who have not undergone initiation. Third are Sahajdharis who cut their hair and do not observe the rahit, some of whom belong to groups which do not emphasise the need to undergo Khalsa initiation. Fourth are Mona (shaven) Sikhs who belong to Khalsa families (bearing the name Singh for men or Kaur for women) but who cut their hair, and finally Patit (fallen) Sikhs are those who were Amritdharis but who have committed one of the four kurahits, or violations of the rahit, these being cutting one's hair, eating meat that is halal, having sexual intercourse with anyone other than one's spouse, and using tobacco (2005: 119).

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² For example see DeVries et al. (2010: 57)

This article will examine some of the diversity within the Amritdhari Khalsa community in Britain,³ explored during a wider research project on the religious lives of young British Sikhs.⁴ Although it may be assumed that once they have undergone initiation all members of the Khalsa are instructed to follow the same religious practices, it will be demonstrated that there is much diversity within the Khalsa stemming from differing interpretations of exactly what is required in terms of dress and practice, which manifests itself in a number of different codes of conduct, or maryadas. Although the UK presence of a number of these groups has undergone some scholarly analysis to date including Barrow's (2001) examination of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, Nesbitt's (1985) examination of the Nanaksar movement and Takhar's (2005) examination of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha and Sikh Dharma, the remaining groups Damdami Taksal and the Nihangs remain relatively unexamined even though they have gained a strong presence in the UK since the late 1990s particularly among Sikh youth.⁵ Rather than comparing these to a supposed 'norm', or labelling particular practices orthodox or unorthodox, in this article I will examine the similarities and differences between the various Khalsa groups and the maryadas they follow, highlighting any particular aspects of tradition and religious authority which are emphasised. This will begin with an examination of one of the most popular codes of conduct among Khalsa Sikhs, the Sikh Rahit Maryada.

Commented [JS1]: Footnote inserted for extra reference

The Sikh Rahit Maryada

The Sikh Rahit Maryada (SRM) a document described as "the Official Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions" (SGPC: 1994) was published in 1950 by the SGPC following a 20 year consultation process with Sikh scholars of the time. The SGPC, or Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Chief Gurdwara Management Committee) is one of three religious bodies which compete for religious authority within Sikh circles, the other two being the Akal Takht and the Sant Samaj (Nesbitt 2005: 127).⁶ Although the SGPC is regarded as the

Commented [JS2]: Clarification of SRM / SGPC as per referee's recommendations

³ For studies which explore other aspects of diversity among Sikhs including non-khalsa and caste-based groups see Takhar (2005) and Singh, Gurharpal (2012) 'Sikhism' in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto (eds.), Routledge, pp. 100-110

⁴ For further details see www.arts.leeds.ac.uk/jasjitsingh

⁵ Although some research on UK Nihangs has recently begun to emerge, see Singh, S (2014)

⁶ The SGPC was constituted following the Sikh gurdwaras act of 1925 which facilitated the passing of the control of historical gurdwaras in the Punjab from their current (often corrupt) guardians (Nesbitt 2005: 78-79). Deol (2000: 81) notes that "the income derived from

Parliament or “Constituent Assembly” of the Sikhs (Shani 2008: 317) and is responsible for managing historical gurdwaras in the Punjab, Nesbitt (2005: 131) notes that its remit “technically extends only as far as the pre-1966 Indian state of Punjab, in other words it operates only in the present states of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, but not, for example, in Delhi, let alone the diaspora”. The Akal Takht, established by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, is the seat of temporal authority for Sikhs and takes the form of a highly symbolic building directly facing the Harmandir Sahib, or Golden Temple. The Sant Samaj is a recently formed body of independent groups led by charismatic personalities or sants (Nesbitt 2005: 94) who issued their own maryada in April 1994 (Singh and Barrier 1996: 295).

Commented [JS3]: Further clarification re: the relationship between the SGPC and the Akal Takht as recommended by SN3

Commented [JS4]: Early reference to Sant Samaj as recommended by referee

As Deol explains, the fact that the SGPC is in charge of a number of Sikh religious institutions in the Punjab including the Akal Takht and the Golden Temple, has “conferred a unique religious authority on the SGPC” (2000: 81). As the SGPC control the Akal Takht, they are responsible for appointing its head, the Akal Takht Jathedar, often referred to as the ‘chief priest’ or ‘pope’ of the Sikhs⁷ although as Nesbitt (2005: 127) explains he is not a ‘priest’ at all but an officer appointed and paid by the SGPC. Given the close relationship between the two, the Sikh Rahit Maryada published by the SGPC is also sometimes referred to as the ‘Akal Takht Maryada’ providing the document with further authority by linking it to the institution established by the sixth Guru.

Commented [JS5]: Further clarification re: the relationship between the SGPC and the Akal Takht as recommended by SN3

The Sikh Rahit Maryada is divided into six sections, focusing on a variety of topics including the definition of a Sikh, aspects of Sikh living, gurdwara etiquette, how to read the Guru Granth Sahib, taboos and ceremonies, and details about how to undertake Khalsa initiation. In particular the SRM emphasises the importance of ensuring that any initiate has a free choice when undergoing initiation.⁸ In terms of gender, the SRM is presented in language which tries to apply equally to both genders relating edicts to ‘He/She’, ‘His/Her’, and ‘Himself/Herself’. It states that any Sikh can perform kirtan (devotional worship) and

Commented [JS6]: Further details about the Sikh Rahit Maryada to set context as recommended by SN6, SN7

religious property and the daily offerings of devotees provided the SGPC with access to enormous financial resources ... [allowing] the SGPC to establish numerous schools and colleges, hospitals and medical dispensaries”.

⁷ For example, the Jathedar is referred to as the ‘pope of the Sikhs’ in this recent newspaper article. See ‘Kin in fray, Akal Takht chief must quit, says Congress’, Tribune News Service, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2013/20130507/punjab.htm#11> [Accessed 01/12/2013]

⁸ The SRM states that “The person to be baptized should not be of very young age; he or she should have attained a plausible degree of discretion” (SGPC: 1994).

read from the Guru Granth Sahib regardless of gender (SGPC: 1994). With regards to whether women should be allowed to act as one of the five initiated Sikhs who administer amrit during the Khalsa initiation ceremony, known as the panj pyare (five beloved ones), the SRM specifically states that “these Sikhs may even include Sikh women” (SGPC: 1994).

Although its language is “rooted in the Punjabi Indian culture of a different era and needs to be recast in more gender neutral terms” (Singh I.J 2004) it can be argued that the SRM asserts that practices are open to Sikhs of both genders and that initiation produces Khalsa Sikhs to whom all religious practices are open. The SRM is most likely to be adhered to by those Khalsa Sikhs who do not explicitly affiliate with one of the groups described below and consequently the majority of gurdwaras established in the UK follow this code of conduct.

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha (AKJ) draws its inspiration from Bhai Randhir Singh (1878–1961) the ‘main personality’ of the AKJ who had achieved a ‘high understanding of Sikhi’ (Barrow 2001: 100). The AKJ rose to prominence as an orthodox religious group (along with the Damdami Taksal) in part due to the events of Vaisakhi 1978 when members of both groups mounted a protest in Amritsar against the Sant Nirankaris, a sect they considered heretical for venerating a living guru and who they believed were circulating works which they considered blasphemous (Oberoi 1993). Previously known as the ‘Bhai Randhir Singh ka Jatha’ (McLeod 2005: 9) the AKJ places great emphasis on the performance of kirtan (McLeod 2005: 10) regularly organising rainsbhai kirtans or rainsbhais, programmes of devotional singing and meditation organised monthly in different towns across the UK (Barrow 2000: 205) which start in the early evening and then continue without a break for the whole night.⁹ Other AKJ specific practices relate to the amrit initiation ceremony, during which the panj pyare place their hands on the head of the initiate whilst reciting the word Waheguru, a practice known as nam-dhrir which is specific to the AKJ initiation. In addition, unlike many of the other Khalsa groups described in this article, the AKJ actively allow women to participate in the panj pyare. Rather than creating their own maryada, the AKJ have published a list of ‘points of contention’ with the SRM (Singh M: 1993), which can be summarised as follows:

Commented [JS7]: Amended to clarify the significance of the panj pyare as recommended by SN6

Commented [JS8]: Mention of Bhai Randhir Singh as recommended by referee

Commented [JS9]: Comment about the AKJ’s view on female participation in the panj pyare as recommended by the referee

⁹ A survey of locations of rainsbhais on the akj.com website highlights the wide geographical spread of the AKJ in the UK with these events being held in Leicester, Coventry, Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Croydon, Derby, Hitchin, Slough and Walsall.

- a. **Meat** – whereas the SRM commands amritdhari Sikhs against “eating the meat of an animal slaughtered the Muslim way” (SGPC: 1994), the AKJ argue that those who have undergone amrit initiation should not consume meat of any kind.
- b. **Five Ks** –the AKJ state that instead of kesh (hair) the tenth Guru prescribed the keski (small turban) as the first of the 5Ks. Consequently most members of the AKJ both male and female wear turbans.
- c. **Format of the Guru Granth Sahib** –until the early 1970s all copies of the Guru Granth Sahib were presented in larivaar format, in which all the words were connected without breaks, after which point the SGPC released a single-volume edition in which the words were separated from one another in ‘pad chhed’ format (Mann 2001: 126). Whereas previously readers would have to recognize the words and make the appropriate breaks while reading, pad chhed allowed “reading for those who were not trained to read the continuous text.” (Mann 2001: 126). The AKJ promotes a return to the larivaar format of the Guru Granth Sahib.
- d. **Structure of the Guru Granth Sahib** – this relates to the authorship of the Rag Mala, a list of ragas at the very end of the Guru Granth Sahib whose authorship according to McLeod (2005: 166) is open to question. Whereas the SRM states that akhand paths [continuous readings] of the Guru Granth Sahib may be concluded with the reading of the Rag Mala (SGPC: 1994) the AKJ believe that the Rag Mala was not written by the Gurus, and was added at a later date. Consequently, it is common for the Rag Mala not to be read at the conclusion of AKJ akhand paths.
- e. **Food practices** –the AKJ argue that initiated Sikhs should only consume food prepared by amritdhari Sikhs as those initiated by the AKJ are instructed to share food with amritdharis only. In addition, the ‘Rahit Bibek’ maryada “commands complete vegetarianism and insists on the use of sarab loh (all iron) [utensils] whenever possible” (McLeod 2005: 167).

In her research on the presence of the AKJ in Southall based on fieldwork carried out in the late 1990s Barrow (2001) notes that as there were no AKJ specific gurdwaras at that time, rainsbhais were usually organised in a variety of gurdwaras across the country (2001: 98). In my own research on the significance of the AKJ for young Sikhs, I noted like Barrow (2001: 115) that many of the AKJ events were attended by those under the age of 30. I also found that increasing numbers of gurdwaras around the UK are now being run by Sikhs who affiliate to the AKJ, many of whom also attend the annual ‘Khalsa Camp’, a summer camp affiliated to the AKJ which has run in the UK since 1991 (Singh J 2011: 260). Given the

increasing numbers of families and religious institutions affiliating to the AKJ, their presence in the UK is certainly set to increase.

Nihangs

For Pashaura Singh (1996: 157) “Nihangs constitute a distinctive order within the Khalsa ... recognized by their distinctive appearance [which constitutes wearing] ... a high turban known as a damala, surmounted by a piece of cloth called a pharhara (“standard” or “flag”)”. Although some Nihangs do settle down, others “roam around the Punjab and ... for the festival of Hola Mahalla they converge on Anandpur to participate in mock battles” (McLeod 2005: 147). The Nihangs present themselves as the keepers of a puratan or traditional maryada which has remained untainted by the influence of the British colonisers. Although there is no one Nihang maryada, a maryada has been published by the Buddha Dal as part of a gutka (prayer book).¹⁰ The key differences between the practices of Nihangs, and the other Khalsa groups can be summarised as follows:

- a. **The Three Granths:** A particularly significant aspect of Nihang thought relates to the reverence attached to the sword, or Bhagauti¹¹ which results from its inclusion in the Dasam Granth and the Sarbloh Granth¹², two texts which are revered equally by Nihangs along with the Guru Granth Sahib. In revering these three granths equally, the Nihangs are distinct from other Khalsa groups. The SRM for example mentions the Dasam Granth but not the Sarbloh Granth and explicitly states that “no book should be installed like and at par with the Guru Granth”.¹³ It is important to note that

¹⁰ This maryada is currently only available in Punjabi although an English translation is available online at <http://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?%2Ftopic%2F37293-nihang-rehat%2F> [Accessed 23 May 2012]

¹¹ A key point of contention relates to whether Bhagauti refers to the goddess Durga (McLeod 2005: 34) or the sword (Dhavan 2011: 201). Reinhart observes that many Sikhs have issues with “the extensive attention paid to the goddess in the Dasam Granth ... [raising] the question of whether these tales promote goddess worship and are therefore seemingly at odds with normative Sikh theology” (2011: 69).

¹² According to McLeod (2005: 52), the Dasam Granth is a text which is regarded as entirely the work of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh by some, but which others believe only contains a small number of compositions written by the tenth Guru. Opinions also vary on the authorship of the Sarbloh Granth, with McLeod describing this text as “a work by an unknown poet, probably dating from the late 18th century, which concerns an avatar of Sarab Loh or Shiv (Siva).” (McLeod 2005: 182).

¹³ http://sgpc.net/rehat_maryada/section_three_chap_four.htm [Accessed 11/09/2013]

unlike the Guru Granth Sahib, the Dasam and Sarbloh Granths both include compositions explicitly praising the Khalsa, possibly explaining why these texts have become increasingly important for young Sikhs in providing textual legitimacy for the necessity to wear the 5Ks.

- b. **Meat** - Badyal notes that in rural India Nihangs are often asked to use their swords to kill goats in the belief that a goat killed by a Nihang will help the donor achieve salvation (1974: 44). Unlike other Khalsa groups which regard the eating of meat fish and eggs as a kurahit or cardinal violation of the rahit, many Nihangs do eat meat as long as the meat is jhatka, i.e. has been decapitated by a single blow of the sword on the back of the neck (Arora 1990: 11)
- c. **Intoxicants** – Unlike the Sikh Rahit Maryada (SRM) which clearly states that users of intoxicant (hemp, opium, liquor, narcotics, cocaine, etc) should be boycotted, many Nihangs, particularly those in India, use hashish (sukha) known as sukh nidhan (treasure of bliss) which is sometimes served in Nihang gurdwaras as parshad, and which many Nihangs believe helps them meditate and concentrate (Badyal 1974: 44).
- d. **Gender** – The Nihang code of conduct appears to be targeted towards male initiates with edicts including “The beard should not be dyed black” and “Never take the honor of a woman or adulterate”. Initiation practices between males and females also differ, with men receiving khande ki pahul (amrit prepared with a khanda), and women being initiated with amrit prepared with a kirpan (Jakobsh 2003: 213).

Commented [JS10]: Translation as recommended by SN10

Nihangs also view themselves as one of four historical sampradayas along with the Udasis, Nirmalas and Sewapathis. Writing about the Sikhs of Hazur Sahib, Nihang and Singh (2009: 15) state that, rather than being one homogenous group, the eighteenth century Khalsa was in fact made up of two broad divisions, the Singh-Khalsa comprised of those Sikhs “who underwent the khanda-pahul initiation ceremony, took the martial name “Singh” and were expected to abide by a strict code of conduct” and the Sahajdhari-Khalsa who were “free from the rahit [code of conduct] of the Singhs” (2009: 15). Rather than examining the historical accuracy of this claim, it is important to understand the consequences of this discourse. The Nihang idea that they are one group within a larger diverse Khalsa challenges normative notions about the Khalsa identity as Nihangs support the view that the Khalsa is a voluntary society within the Sikh Panth and consider members of the Sahajdhari-Khalsa, who do not maintain the five Ks, as members of the Khalsa.

Commented [JS11]: Translation as recommended by SN11

In my own research I found that in addition to individuals including Niddar Singh who promote the Nihang tradition in the UK (Hegarty 2011), the rise in the number of young

British Sikhs visiting Anandpur Sahib on the festival of Hola Mohalla has led to an increased awareness of the existence of the Nihang tradition, as has the evolution of online forums promoting the plurality of the Khalsa, for instance Sikhawareness.com (Singh S 2012: 129) and the publication of books on the Nihangs, including 'Warrior Saints' by Madra and Singh (1999). As increasing numbers of British Sikhs including Madra and Singh are researching Sikh history, many are engaging with British accounts of the Sikhs from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a number of which include pictorial and written descriptions by the British of encounters with 'Akali Nihangs' (Madra and Singh 2004) so lending an historical authenticity to the Nihang tradition. Unlike the AKJ rainsbhais, there are currently few occasions when the Nihangs of the UK congregate together. Nevertheless it is clear that the Nihang tradition is growing in influence for a number of young British Sikhs.

Sikh Dharma / 3HO

Unlike many Khalsa groups which are primarily made up of Sikhs with a Punjabi background, the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere is a group with a large number of non-Punjabi Sikh members. Founded in 1969 by Harbhajan Singh Puri who later became known as Yogi Bhajan, all members of Sikh Dharma wear turbans and white traditional Punjabi clothes and adopt Khalsa as their last name, regardless of gender (Elsberg 2003: 3). Although the organisations' names are commonly used in conjunction with one another, 3HO and Sikh Dharma are in fact distinct, although both draw inspiration from Yogi Bhajan. Whereas the 3HO movement focuses almost exclusively on Kundalini yoga and tantra, Sikh Dharma which also emphasises the importance of Kundalini yoga concentrates more on Sikhism (Takhar 2005: 158). Jakobsh (2008: 388) notes that the lines of leadership in both the 3HO and Sikh Dharma organisations are entirely self-contained with no link to traditional Sikh authority structures.

For Jakobsh (2008: 398) two developments in particular have led to increased interaction between Punjabi Sikhs and 3HO/Sikh Dharma in recent years; firstly the use of the internet by 3HO/Sikh Dharma which has made the 3HO/Sikh Dharma identity accessible to Sikhs all over the world and secondly the events of 9/11 which have caused 3HO/Sikh Dharma Sikhs to work together with local Punjabi Sikhs to educate Americans about the Sikh religion (ibid: 400). Despite some departures from some normative Sikh practices including the emphasis on Kundalini yoga, Sikh Dharma include the Sikh Rahit Maryada in their manual entitled 'Ceremonies and Code of Conduct of Sikh Dharma.'¹⁴ The Sikh Dharma

¹⁴ For a complete copy of 'Victory and Virtue', please visit:
<http://fateh.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/sikhism.nsf/OpenDatabase&Start=1&Count=30&Expand=1>

Commented [JS12]: Reference to Takhar outlining the distinction between Sikh Dharma and 3Ho as recommended by referee

movement is regarded as a Khalsa group for the simple reason that large numbers of its members have been initiated into the Khalsa (Jakobsh 2008: 387) and as I found in my research on young Sikhs' engagement online, is attractive to many young Sikhs in the diaspora whose first language is English, as much of the content available on the Sikhnet website is delivered in English (Singh 2014: 85).

Commented [JS13]: New reference

Given their ability to appeal to young Sikhs born in the Diaspora whose first language is not Punjabi, the influence of the Sikh Dharma movement is set to grow in particular because my own research found the Sikhnet website to be the most popular website used by young British Sikhs (Singh J 2012: 178). In addition, I found members of Sikh Dharma increasingly being invited to teach at events in the UK with Guruka Singh, the founder of Sikhnet being invited to Sikh Student Camp in 2006 and 2008 and subsequently to the City Sikhs Network and at the Sikh Retreat 2011 (Singh J 2012: 173). Although, there is no way of knowing how many British Sikhs strongly affiliate to the Sikh Dharma, data from the 2011 census points to a small but growing number of non-Punjabi Sikhs living in England and Wales many of whom may have been influenced by the Sikh Dharma movement.¹⁵

Sant-led Groups

Within the Sikh community sants are charismatic personalities (Nesbitt 2005: 94), usually male, who develop a reputation for piety or pedagogical skill and thereby attract an informal following of disciples (McLeod 1989:102). As the normative Sikh tradition teaches that there can be no human Guru after the tenth Guru, for many Sikhs the admiration accorded to sants often oversteps the mark, as the sant is elevated to the status of Guru often without this being openly admitted to (Nesbitt 2005: 100). Although a number of Sant led groups belong to the Sant Samaj, it is important to note that many of these groups have their own individual maryadas. Many of the sant maryadas harbour particular concerns about the purity of women with Sant Ajit Singh of Coventry teaching that women should keep their distance from the nishan sahib, (the triangular Khalsa flag which is usually saffron in colour, although dark blue is common at Nihang gurdwaras) during its annual cleansing "because they may be menstruating and hence impure" (Nesbitt 2005: 112). Although there are many

Commented [JS14]: Translations as recommended by SN13

¹⁵ Data in the census 2011 table available at http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/DC2201EW/view/2092957703?rows=c_ethpuk11&cols=c_relpuk11 indicates that 1.8% of the British Sikh population is white, 1.2% are of mixed ethnicity, 87% are Asian/Asian British and 0.3% are Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

Sant-led groups in existence in India and across the world, I will now focus on those sant-led Khalsa groups which have established a presence in the UK.

Damdami Taksal

Gaining a reputation for its strictly traditionalist approach under Sant Sunder Singh during the early 20th century and achieving further prominence under the leadership of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranvale during the 1970s and early 1980s (McLeod 2005: 50) Damdami Taksal (DDT) based at Chowk Metha (Krishna 2011: 285) near Amritsar now runs as a seminary for children teaching them how to perform kirtan and/or katha (Mahmood 1996: 75). Damdami Taksal has developed its own maryada which, unlike the Sikh Rahit Maryada, makes a clear distinction between the roles of a ‘Singh’, a “Lion – surname of a male initiated Sikh” (Singh H 2004), and a ‘Kaur’, a “Princess - surname of an initiated female Sikh” (Singh H 2004). The DDT maryada further distinguishes between men and women stating that “women should not sit in the Guru’s Hazoori [i.e. behind the Guru Granth Sahib] ... when they are menstruating” (Singh H 2004). In addition relating to the gender of the panj pyare the DDT state that “the Singh’s bestowing the Amrit should be of the highest discipline, true Khalsa” (Singh H 2004) highlighting that for the DDT like many of the groups described so far, the panj pyare should only ever be male.

Commented [JS15]: Mention of key/founder Sant-figure for Damdami Taksal as recommended by referee

Commented [JS16]: Statement about gender as recommended by referee

Indeed, much of the DDT maryada focuses on external appearance. Whereas there are no edicts regarding how the beard should be kept in the SRM apart from the fact that it should not be dyed, the DDT maryada states that “Amritdharee Singhs are to keep their beards open and untied” (Singh H 2004) and should only wear ‘Khalsa colours’ in particular saffron, blue, black or white as “other colours excite the mind and lure it to vices, and are therefore prohibited. Amritdhari Singhs/Singhni’s are specifically not to wear red or green at anytime” (Singh H 2004). Although challenging the AKJ position on the keski by stating that “Keski is not a kakkar (one of the five K’s)” (Singh H 2004), the DDT maryada asserts that “the Guru’s command is for both men and women to wear turbans” (Singh H 2004). There are a number of other differences between the SRM and the DDT maryada which both challenge the status of the SRM and also serve to distinguish the DDT from other Khalsa groups.

Although Damdami Taksal first found a presence in the UK following the events of Operation Bluestar in 1984, it is interesting that few scholars writing about British Sikhs have noted its presence as a religious group in the UK perhaps because unlike other sant led groups, no sants from the DDT visited the UK throughout the 1990s (Tatla 1992: 361).

Although Nesbitt, writing in 1986, noted that “Sikh youngsters have joined the International Sikh Youth Federation set up by Bhai Jasbir Singh, Bhindranwale’s nephew, as well as the Sikh Youth Movement and Damdami Taksal Jatha” Singh and Tatla found that the DDT had “singularly failed to establish an institutionalised presence in Britain” (2006: 92). My own research revealed that following the various tours of the UK carried out by Baba Takhur Singh, the head of the DDT in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Singh H 2009, Singh and Tatla 2006: 234) increasing numbers of gurdwaras across the UK now follow the DDT maryada and consequently the influence of the DDT across the UK has subsequently grown. Other important avenues which appeared to have raised the profile of the DDT maryada in the UK include the annual Sikhi (BOSS) Camp organised by the British Organisation of Sikh Students (Singh J 2011: 264). Those in charge of BOSS appear to be inspired by the personality of Baba Takhur Singh and by DDT given that the items for sale on the BOSS stall include the Damdami Taksal maryada and clothes and CDs supporting slogans relating to the personality of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Commented [JS17]: Correct reference added to Bibliography as per SN16

Nanaksar

Nanaksar is a sant led Sikh group which originated with Nand Singh of Kaleran village, a Ramgarhia Sikh who lived a life of extreme austerity (McLeod 2005: 143). Nanaksar devotees are expected to be totally vegetarian and teetotal. Although there is no published Nanaksar maryada, differences in the practices at Nanaksar gurdwaras highlight divergences from the Sikh Rahit Maryada. These include the lack of a nishan sahib (Khalsa flag) at Nanaksar gurdwaras which “indicates dissociation from the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and from Akali politics” (Nesbitt 1985: 70) and also the fact that Nanaksar only allows male ascetic celibates known as bahingams, from the Sanskrit for bird underlining their detachment from worldly matters (Nesbitt 2000: 302), to fully participate in all aspects of seva (selfless service) in Nanaksar gurdwaras. Nesbitt explains that the rule that “bahingams in Nanaksar gurdwaras should observe celibacy comes not from Sikh roots, but from Hindu concerns about purity” (2005: 135) in continuity with Nirmala tradition (Nesbitt 1985: 70). The Nanaksar maryada also includes the celebration of puranamashi (the night of full moon), the recitation of arti (“adoration”) at each concluding ceremony and the singing of kirtan while akhand path (“unbroken reading” of the Sikh scriptures) is going on (Singh P.: 1996) practices which are in contradiction to the SRM (Nesbitt 1985: 71).

Commented [JS18]: Translation as requested (SN17)

Commented [JS19]: Translations as requested (SN18)

As Baba Nand Singh’s successor Ishar Singh nominated no successor himself, a number of individual Nanaksar strands have developed, each with a particular individual sant in charge. In the UK strands and institutions have developed around Sant Amar Singh (Hayes, Letchworth, Wolverhampton), Sant Mihan Singh (Coventry), Sant Gurdev Singh

(Smethwick, Southall) and Sant Jaswant Singh (Southall, Leicester). The fact that Nanaksar is located in an area of the Punjab (Ludhiana) from which a number of Sikhs have migrated to the UK is significant, and as Nesbitt (1985) explains has led to the establishment of a number of Nanaksar gurdwaras in the UK, particularly in the West Midlands. As a consequence of not having been created along caste lines, Nesbitt (1985: 76) notes that Nanaksar gurdwaras tend to attract members of all caste groups.

Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha

The Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) is a sant led Khalsa group established by Sant Puran Singh in the 1950s in Karicho in Kenya, which now also has a presence in India and its headquarters in Birmingham, UK. Takhar (2005) has undertaken one of the few studies of the group and notes that the majority of its members are of the Ramgarhia caste and are 'twice migrants' (2005: 42), Sikhs who migrated to Britain from East Africa following the implementation of Africanisation in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda during the 1960s. She also notes that the GNNSJ wish to be regarded as an important part of the wider Panth as they have been heavily involved in reconstruction projects at a number of historical gurdwaras in India including the Golden Temple (Walia 1999).

Commented [JS20]: Explanation of 'twice migrants' as per SN19

In keeping with other sant groups and the AKJ, members of the GNNSJ are required to be teetotal, vegetarian and are encouraged to undergo amrit initiation although they do not emphasise the wearing of the turban for females. As the GNNSJ claim to follow the SRM there is no distinct GNNSJ maryada. Subtle differences in practice include an emphasis on wearing white clothes and white turbans. According to Takhar (2005) although the maryada practised by the GNNSJ does not emphasize celibacy, as is the case in many sant groups, women are not allowed to partake in akhand paths, or make the karah prasad possibly for reasons of ritual pollution although Takhar also notes that while women may be somewhat curtailed in some areas of religious practice, they are greatly encouraged in education (2005: 50). In the UK as well as its headquarters on Soho Rd in Birmingham, other branches of GNNSJ are present in Leeds and Hounslow.

Nirmal Kutia Johal

Claiming its lineage from Sant Baba Karam Singh of the Nirmala tradition¹⁶, the sant led group, Nirmal Kutia Johal has established three institutions in the UK. Following the visits of its then head Sant Baba Gian Singh in the late 1970s and early 1980s gurdwaras were established in Bradford in 1982, Oldbury in 1986 and in High Wycombe in 1993.¹⁷ Although there is no distinct published maryada, Nirmal Kutia Johal appears to follow a code of conduct which is very similar to many other sant groups, in which Khalsa initiates are encouraged to wear white and where women are not able to participate fully in all religious practices again following Nirmala concerns about purity.¹⁸

Other Sant Groups

As well as the sant groups described above, a number of institutions affiliated to other sant groups are located across the UK, each with their own particular maryadas. Examples include Karamsar gurdwara in Ilford, Ajit Darbar in Coventry and the Bebe Nanaki gurdwara in Birmingham. Therefore although individual sant groups may not have large numbers of followers in themselves, as a collective a large number of Sikhs attend sant gurdwaras in the UK.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the presentation of the Sikh tradition as a 'neat package' hides much of its diversity and complexity, especially relating to presentation of the Khalsa as a recognised norm whose members all practice in the same way. Although much of the academic examination of the Sikh community to date has focused on groups which sit outside the Khalsa norm, this article has shown that there is much diversity within the Khalsa itself and that the maryadas of all of the various Khalsa groups differ. For example, there are differing ideas with regards to which symbols constitute the 5Ks, with the AKJ viewing the small turban or keski as opposed to the hair or kesh as one of the 5Ks. It has also been shown

¹⁶ http://www.nirmalkutiyaohalan.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=333&Itemid=69

¹⁷ http://www.nirmalkutiyaohalan.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=386&Itemid=124

¹⁸ For further details about the Nirmala tradition see McLeod (2005: 148)

that not all Sikhs believe that members of the Khalsa need to necessarily wear the 5Ks, with the Nihangs for example, viewing themselves as part of a larger Khalsa collective alongside other historical groups including the Udasis and Nirmalas. Although much of the academic examination of the Sikh community to date has focused on groups which sit outside the Khalsa norm, I have shown that there is much diversity within the Khalsa itself and that the maryadas of all of the various Khalsa groups differ slightly, with these differences often being regarded as the aspects which make particular maryadas more authentic than the others. This presentation challenges the simple distinction often made between 'orthodox' and 'non-orthodox' Sikhs highlighting the importance of being aware of different levels of diversity within a particular tradition. In summary, rather than being viewed as being a homogenous group, it is clear that the Khalsa should instead be regarded as a collective of different groups, each with their own particular interpretation of Khalsa practices.

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