

WESTERN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SIKH PRACTICES: NINETEENTH CENTURY PERSPECTIVE

**Kulwinder Singh Bajwa
Former Associate Professor &
Incharge, Department of
Punjab Historical Studies,
Patiala**

Actuated by political motives, western interest in the Sikhs commenced with the British occupation of Bengal in 1765 C.E. Just in the same year, 16-17 April, 1765 C.E.¹ Sikhs had occupied Lahore and struck coins as a declaration of their sovereignty. The Khalsa looked upon this achievement as a mark of the Guru's special favour and when coining money they repeated the inscription which had already appeared on the seals of Banda Singh Bahadur and the coins of Jassa Singh:

Deg o tegh o fateh o nusrat be-dirang

Yaft az Nanak Guru Gobind Singh

(The kettle and the sword (symbols of charity and power) victory and ready Patronage have been obtained from Guru Nanak-Gobind Singh).² However, the ascendancy of the Sikhs dismayed the administrators of the English East India company at Fort William (Calcutta). Since, they considered themselves as the legitimate successors of the Mughals, therefore, rise of the Sikhs on the political scene was viewed as a great threat to their plans to be a

paramount power in the Indian sub-continent. Hence, to form a definite long term policy against the Sikhs, Warren Hastings, first British Governor-General (1772-1785 C.E.) in India, was obliged to have definite and detailed information about them.³ Their past, however, was meant to elucidate their present for sound political action in the near or distant future. This practical interest was further supported and supplemented by the intellectual curiosity of the few who were interested in universal history or the history of the religion. More candidly, the British imperialists were in quest for the real basis of inspiration behind sudden political ascendancy of the Sikhs. As a corollary, from the last quarter of 18th century onward, travelers, diplomats, administrators and scholars had written about the Sikh history and religion.⁴

However, dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed two major developments in the Indian sub-continent: sudden and rapid rise of Maharaja Ranjit on the political scene of the land of the five rivers and British occupation of Delhi in 1803C.E. which ended Maratha influence in northern India. Latter development had pushed the British frontier to the river Jamna and made the East India company an immediate neighbour of the Sikhs, a 'singular nation' that inhabited the territories between the rivers Jamna and Indus.

Thus, changed political scenario made knowledge about the Sikhs still more imperative. Accordingly, the directors of the East India company by their dispatch of the 5 June, 1805C.E. desired that all available information on the geography and history of India should be collected.⁵ Consequently, a number of British civil and military servants in the garb of travellers, diplomats etc were deputed to secure as much information as they could extract about the Sikhs from various means. Besides, several individuals wrote at their own on the Sikhs, though not without specific purpose. It is quite apparent from the large number of important publications synchronizing with important events related to the policies of the British imperialists towards the Sikhs. Nevertheless, presently we purpose to analyze the writings of the Western scholars published between 1809 to 1877C.E. for understanding their Perspective on the Sikh practices during the early 19th century.⁶

For better understanding of their approach to the subject and nature of evidence presented by them, we may classify these writings, into four categories: (i) travelogues are significant genre of this phase. For, being brought up in a particular socio-religious set up, the travelers observed those social institutions and religious practices which appeared to them peculiar and which were

generally over looked by the native chronicles, (ii) those works which are devoted to the general survey of Sikh history such as John Malcolm, Steinbach, M'Groger and Alexander Cunningham's works; (iii) those writings which were devoted to the religious history of India, especially those dealing with the late medieval period. In these writings, Sikhism has been discussed as a part of the Indian religious traditions. Works of William Ward, H.H. Wilson, R.N. Cust etc, falls in this category. However, besides being sketchy and brief, these are mostly based on secondary sources; ⁷ (iv) Trumpp's work falls into the category of those writings which primarily deals with Sikh theology for he was the only 19th century western scholar who was commissioned to the study of the Sikh theology on the pattern of Christian theology.

Since, these writers belonged to different socio-cultural and religious traditions and could not comprehend Sikh movement and Sikhism in its proper form therefore their inadequate understanding of Sikhism led to misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the Sikh tradition. For example, majority of these writings present Sikhism as a response to the prevailing disorderly and chaotic religious condition in India and emphasize the reformatory character of Sikhism. In their works, Sikhism

appears to aimed at synthesizing the positive elements from both Hinduism and Islam, having universal appeal and validity. Beyond this point, they failed to perceive the originality of the vision and mission of Guru Nanak. Nevertheless, in their endeavour to elucidate the historical role of Sikhism, they have striven to determine the place and role of Sikhism among the Indian religions. Main issues which came to be discussed and elaborated in this context are the historical origin of the Sikh tradition, life history of the founder of the faith, relation of Sikhism to its historical background, development of Sikh religion, place of Sikhism among the religion of the world and analysis of the Sikh beliefs and practices in relation to the doctrines and practices of the proceeding religious traditions. Sikh beliefs and practices which have been discussed and deliberated in these works are: the recitation of the name of the Almighty, reverence to Guru Granth Sahib, emphasis on the active social life, service to humanity, equality of the status of women, absence of untouchability, mode of initiation, practice of holding Gurmatta and performing *ardas*, dress symbols, the practice of *dan* and *ishnan* which together with the practice of *nam* forms cardinal doctrine of Sikhism. Rejection of the doctrine of *avtar*, caste system, the practice of idolatry, sati,

sacrificial rituals, priest craft, ritualistic bathing at pilgrimages place etc; have also been noticed by these scholars.

To understand the Sikh practices one has to understand Sikh way of life. The 'way of life' encompassed the whole life span of an individual. And, to be born, to marry and to die are looked upon as the three great events of a man's life. In the first and the last case, he has no power of choice and there are some who think that one has very little in the second two. Be this as it may, certain it is that births marriages and deaths are looked upon in every country, civilized and uncivilised, as events of utmost importance. However, we do not come across much information in these works, about the rituals and ceremonies performed on these occasions, so far as the Sikhs are concerned. They do mention that the Sikhs performed certain ceremonies at the times of birth, marriage and death but does not provide details about these ceremonies. For example William Ward observed that the Sikhs have certain ceremonies after the birth of a child, at their marriages and at death..." He further observed that "the shows at their weddings resemble those of the Hindoos", but not rites. They burn their dead and there are rare instances of the practice of *sati* among the Sikhs and these are to be found, if at all, in the royalty or higher strata and not among the

Sikh masses. Referring to the cremation ceremony, he says that “They generally sing certain couplets of their *Shastru* (Hymns from Guru Granth Sahib), accompanied with music, as they convey the body to the cemetery; and sometimes a great multitude of Sikhs assemble on these occasions, and continue singing till the body is entirely consumed”.⁸ However, they give us to understand that the ceremonies performed on these events by the Sikhs did not akin to the ceremonies performed by the Hindus and the Muslims.⁹

Discussing the initiatory rites, *Khande-di-Pahul* as the only means to enter into the fold of Sikhism, more candidly into the fold of Khalsa Brotherhood, has been underlined.¹⁰ This is necessary for both: a ‘Sikh’ to be a ‘Singh’ as well as for those who wishes to adopt Sikhism as their creed. Captain Mathew and Baron Charles Hugel refers to the Akal Takhat as the Baptistery of the Sikhs.¹¹ However, the ceremony could be performed at any place at any time but the presence of five Baptised Sikhs, and Guru Granth Sahib and a Granthi (Scripture reader) is the first minimum requisite. Almost all these authors have delved on the initiatory rites in one way or the other. But few of them have described the mode of initiation, preparation of *pahul*, injunctions to the neophyte and the *rehit* (code of conduct) of the Khalsa in detail. For example,

Malcolm describes the mode of initiation as: ‘some sugar and water is put into a cup and stirred round with a steel knife, or dagger’.¹² About the *Banis* which were recited while preparing *Amrit* Malcolm observed; “some of the first chapters of the *Adi Granth* and the first chapter of the *Dasama Padshah ka Granth* are read”¹³ Obviously, he is referring to the *Japji* of Guru Nanak and *Jap* of Guru Gobind Singh, But, Hugel’s observations suggests that *Five Banis* were recited which also included *sawayeas* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁴ Prinsep too subscribes to the views of Hugel.¹⁵ However, after its preparation, the performers of the initiation exclaim, “*Wa Guru ji Ka Khalsa! Wa! Guru ji ki Fateh*”. After repeating this exclamation five times, they say, “This sherbet is nectar. It is the water of life, drink it”. The receivers of the *Amrit* obeys and “some sherbet prepared in a similar manner, is sprinkled over his head and beard (face)”.¹⁶ Practice of changing the old name of the neophyte at this time too was in vogue. This was to make the receiver of the *Pahul* to understand that now he/she has entered into a new Brotherhood and his older name, caste, clan, occupation etc. has no consideration in this new society.¹⁷ Schonberg has referred to the distribution of *Karah Parsad* and *langar* after the completion of the ceremony.¹⁸

These writers have also delved on the question that at what age the neophyte could be initiated into Sikhism. For example, Malcolm says that the *Pahul* may be taken at any time and at any age but, ‘the children of the Singhs all go through this rite at a very early age’.¹⁹ According to Cunningham, there is no authoritative rule regarding age, but the presence of the Five Babtised Sikh is the basic requirement to perform the rites.²⁰ Trumpp asserts that, “the initiatory rites into the Khalsa is the *Pahul*. It is generally administered by five Sikhs and not before the attainment of years of direction; its administration is considered very meritorious and by instructing a disciple in the doctrine of the Guru, one will get final emancipation even while living”.²¹ However, both, Cunningham and William Ward refers to the administration of *Pahul* to women in the same manner as men.²²

Regarding the injunctions given to the Khalsa, almost all of them have taken up this aspect of the *Pahul* ceremony in one form or the other. Some have described these commandments in detail while some has only given hints. In this context, Malcolm says, “After the ceremonies, the disciple is asked if he consents to be of the faith of Guru Govind”. He answers, “I do consent”. He is then told”, “If you do, you must abandon all intercourse with *Minas*,

Dhirmalias, Masandias, Ramrayias, Kurimar, and those who perform *Bhadan*. Besides, they were instructed in some general precepts: “He is told to be gentle and polite to all with whom he converses, to endeavour to attain wisdom, and to emulate the persuasive eloquence of Baba Nanak. He is particularly enjoined, whenever he approaches any of the Sikh temples, to do it with reverence and respect, and to go to Amritsar, to pay his devotion to the Khalsa, or state; the interests of which he is directed, on all occasions, to consider paramount to his own. He is also enjoined “to read, the *Adi Granth*” and “whatever he has received from God’, ‘It is his duty to share with others’. And, after the disciple has heard and understood all these and similar precepts, he is declared to be duly initiated”.²³ Cunningham has described the do’s and don’ts like this. “All he (Guru Gobind Singh), said must become as one; the lowest were equal with the highest; caste must be forgotten; they must accept the ‘pahul’ or initiation from him and the four races must eat as one out of one vessel.” The ways of the Hindus must be abandoned”, By means of “the Khalsa alone could salvation be attained”. They must surrender themselves wholly to their faith and to him as their guide. Their words must be *Kirtnash, Kulnash, Dharamnash, Karamnash*”. They should “worship the one

invisible God”, and “honour the memory of Nanak and of his transanimate successors”. They should ‘rever and bow to nought visble save the *Granth*, the book of their belief’. They should keep ‘unshorn hair’ and affix epithet ‘Singh’ to their names. They should “wear arms and pay devotion to steel”. They should not have any social intercourse with *Dhirmalias*, *Ramrais*, *Masadias*, *Bhadnias*, *Kurimar* etc. They should also refrain from the use of tobacco and any kind of other drugs. To wear blue dress and ‘*kach*’ (breeches) were other important injunctions.²⁴ However, Trumpp’s views appears to be more relevant in this context. He says that after the initiation ceremony, the Guru gave the order that, “whoever desire to be his disciple, he must always have five things with him which all commence with the letter kakka (i.e. k.)”, otherwise he should not consider himself as ‘his disciple’.²⁵ Furthermore, the Khalsa was instructed that, ‘temples, shrines, and burning places are not to be worshipped, nor are other religions to be praised. The Vedas, Shastras, Puranas and Quran are not to be minded, neither the Pandit nor the Mulla. All Hindu and Musalman rites are to be discontinued; the Hindu ceremonies at the time of birth, marriage and death should not be observed. No *tilak* should be applied to the

forehead, nor should the sacred cord nor a rosary be worn, circumcision should not be practiced'.²⁶

Surely, these are the principles laid down by the Guru himself for the Khalsa way of life. And, one may ask how for these doctrines were observed by the Sikhs/Singhs during the early 19th century. Before proceeding further, it must be noted here that in these writings epithet Sikh, Singh, Khalsa and Akali appears to be interchangeable. The difference between a Sikh and a Singh is very slight. For instance, Malcolm observes that, 'the Sikh merchant, or cultivator of the soil, if he is a Singh, differs little in character from the soldier, except that his occupation renders him less presuming and boisterous. He also wears arms, and is from education, prompt to use them whenever his individual interest, or that of the community in which he lives, requires him to do so'.²⁷ However, dominance of the khalsa and strict adherence to the Khalsa ideals has been underlined by these authors. For example, Ward asserts that "in the Punjab, the Khalsas are most numerous. A chief to prove the courage of a Khalsa, some time seizes him, and threatens with punishment if he will not shave his beard. Should he refuses, he beats him; if this does not change his purpose, he proceeds as though he were about to kill him. If he resolve to part with life

rather than with his hair, he sets him at liberty, as a good Khalsa".²⁸ Similar kind of incident has been recorded by Malcolm which shows the dearness of the Sikhs to their symbols, particularly their attachment to the *kes* (hair). He records that "three inferior agents of Sikh chiefs were one day in my tent; one of them was Khalsa Singh, and the two other of the Khalasa (non-baptised) Sikhs. I was laughing and joking with the Khalsa Singh, who said he had been ordered to attend me to Calcutta. Among other subjects of mirth, I rallied him on trusting himself so much in my power. "why what is the worst" said he, "that you can do to me, when "I am at such a distance from home?" I passed my hand across my chin, imitating the act of shaving. The man's face was in an instant distorted with rage, and his sword half drawn. "You are ignorant", said he to me, "of the offence you have given. I cannot strike you, who are above me, and the friend of my master and the state but no power", he added, "shall save these fellows", alluding to the two Kalasa Sikhs, "from my revenge, for having dared to smile at your action". It was with greatest difficulty, and only by the good office of some Sikh chiefs, that I was able to pacify the wounded honour of this Singh".²⁹ Nevertheless, both the sexes allowed the hair of their body to attain its full growth. And, the

turban was/is an essential part of the head dress of men. Their affection to it was dearer than life. In this regard, Victor Jacquemont commenting on the head dress of the soldiers of Maharaja Ranjit Singh holds that “the Poorbeas wore Shako as the head dress, but the Sikhs would rather die than wear such a head dress”.³⁰ ‘*Kachh*’ (breeches) too formed an integral part of their apparel. Also, they refrained from the use of *tobacco* in any form. They did not take beef but *Jhatka* was eaten by them. Their customary way of exclamation was *Wah Guru Ji Ki Fateh*. However, the superiors were addressed as *Khalsa Ji* i.e. member of the *Khalsa Panth*.³¹ Trumpp holds that observance of these regulations separated the Sikhs totally from the other communities and formed them into ‘a distinct body which as such should also be known by outward signs’³². However, all the writers under analysis have mentioned one way or the other the observance of five Ks by the baptized Sikhs and not five arms as has wrongly been mentioned by Malcolm and later on accepted by some of the 20th century historians like W.H. Meleod J.S. Grewal and others who contend that these symbols were made essential part of the Khalsa way of life by the Singh sabahities to construct distinct Sikh identity.³³

Nevertheless, role of Gurbani in the devotional life of the Sikhs, be it the case of an individual or the Sikh Sangat, has been underlined and emphasized. Since, Guru Granth Sahib is considered the very fountain of Sikh beliefs and practices,³⁴ therefore, these writers asserts that the Sikhs regarded Guru Granth Sahib as an embodiment of Sikh Gurus, for it contains their precepts. They respected and venerated it as they used to venerate the Sikh Gurus while they were living in this world.³⁵ In this context, they deliberated on the issues such as: its canonization, language, origin and status, ideals, etc. above all the nature and status of the Deity which has been asked to be worshipped through the medium of Gurbani, enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. However, almost all of them are unanimous in attributing its origin to Guru Nanak besides underlying its vernacular character. For example, Malcolm holds: "The Granth, the whole of the first part of which is ascribed to Nanak, is written, like the rest of the books of the Sikhs in the Gurmukh (Gurmukhi) character"³⁶. Commenting upon the religion of Guru Nanak and the nature of Sikh scripture as well as of the Deity which is expounded in Guru Granth Sahib, William Ward maintains that Guru Nanak propagated the doctrine of the Divine unity and to promote the

spirit of devotion amongst his followers' "Nanuku composed a number of sacred hymns in praise of the Deity, which have a place in the *Adee Grunthu*; in which work repeating the name of God is enjoined on the Sikhs".³⁷ The God of Guru Nanak or the nature of the Deity which Sikhism exhorts to worship is "an invisible spirit and is to be conceived of as being active and passive with and without qualities". 'He is Truth, the creator and governor of all things, omnipresent, free from fear and from enemies, immortal, everlasting, self-existent. He is Truth; he existed in this form before the foundation of world, and he remains the same while the world exists and after it shall be destroyed. He is to be known by means of spiritual guide'.³⁸ Wilson has also noticed 'the divine unity as the basic tenets of Sikh Gurus', enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib.³⁹ However, the Sikh Scripture is a revealed literature having Divine origin and status. Its canonization in 1604 C.E. by Guru Arjan Dev provided an authentic text – a text which separated the Sikhs from the mass of the Hindus and supplanted the authorities of the Vedas by enabling a common man to read it in his own mother tongue.⁴⁰ Above all, its compilation furnished, 'consistent form and order' to Sikh religion besides giving, 'fixed rules of religious and

moral conduct'. In addition to this, Guru Granth Sahib is the only source of Sikh beliefs and practices.

Study of these writing clearly reveals that the personal Guruship ended with Guru Gobind Singh. It is also affirmed that Guru Gobind Singh appointed Guru Granth (Sahib) as the 'Guru Eternal' of the Sikhs at Nanded in 1708 C.E.⁴¹ Thus, Guru Granth Sahib became the only object and medium of worship and the Western scholars under study are in unanimity in affirming that the Sikhs worshipped God alone through the medium of their Scripture. They do not admit any idol or image in places of their worship.⁴² In this context, observations of William Ward are worth noting. He holds that 'Images of Nanuku are never made, though paintings of him are to be seen in many places. And, this is not inconsistent with Guru Nanak's exhortation who 'dissuaded his disciples from expecting any benefit from the worship of idols, and other ceremonies connected with the Hindoo mythology'.⁴³ However, their only form of worship is the repetition of the name of God, Supreme Being, eternal Truth, the Creator of the universe.⁴⁴ Malcolm attests that, "their Dharamsala, or temple of worship, are in general, plain buildings. Images are, of course, banished. Their prescribed forms of prayer are, I believe, few and simple. Part of the

writings of Nanak, which have since been incorporated with those of his successors, in the *Adi Granth* are read, or rather recited, upon every solemn occasion".⁴⁵ Commenting upon the devotedness of an individual Sikh, William Ward observed that the *Japji* (Sahib) was read or repeated daily by every Sikh, after bathing. If a person was unable to read or repeat the whole of this *Bani*, he would repeat only five *pauris* of it. He goes on saying that not all the Sikhs possessed a copy of this *Bani*; but many of them could recite it from memory. Those who had leisure and opportunity used to read portions of the Scripture daily, and repeated certain words in the form of petition. But those who did not have access to the Scripture, used to repeat the name of Guru Nanak or Guru Gobind Singh, and addressed prayers to one of the two, once or twice a day. This daily worship was performed either in the dwelling houses or in a separate place devoted to religious uses.⁴⁶

These religious places were generally constructed with contributory funds from the Sikhs community. Except historic Gurudwards any apartment in a house, where Guru Granth Sahib can suitably be installed, would serve as a place of Sikh worship. The building is not altogether important but the presence of the Scripture.⁴⁷ In this context observations of Charles Masson are

quite relevant. He says that at Dera Ismail Khan there were only two retainers of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. They had occupied a big house in the town and in one of the apartments was kept Guru Granth Sahib which they 'preserved with great care and approached with reverence'. He continues, that 'Guru Granth Sahib is the only object of veneration for the Sikhs'. It was lodged on high pedestal in a spacious apartments in most of their villages. Not only the Sikhs, many *Banias* (traders) too used to visit Gurdwar and any one qualified among them could read the Scripture. Similar situation was noticed by Alexander Burnes at Multan where the Sikh population was confined only to administrative staff. He says that 'we found him (the priest) seated on the ground, with a huge volume in front of him, and a place covered with cloth, like an alter, at one end of the apartment. He opened the book at my request and repeating the words '*Wa gooroo Jee Ka fattee*' touched the volume with his forehead, and all the Sikhs in attendance immediately bowed to the ground'. He goes on to add that, "I need hardly mention, that the volume was the *Granth* or the holy book of the Sikhs, the reverence for it amounts to veneration, and the priest wave a *Churry* or Tibet cow's tail, over it, as if he were fanning a emperor".⁴⁸ However, Schonberg has very categorically revealed the

advantages which the Sikhs have, as compared to the other communities of India, particularly the Hindus, in regard to the form of prayer. 'Any one qualified, irrespective of caste, colour or creed could read 'Guru Granth Sahib' and address his prayer to God, whereas in Hinduism, the privileged Brahmins are alone allowed to read the Sacred books, they only enjoy the privilege of addressing the Almighty directly. But in Sikhism even the humblest man in society is taught to believe that his prayer is as acceptable before the throne of mercy as that of his more wealthy brethren".⁴⁹ Nevertheless, referring to the religious practices of the Sikhs William Ward observed: "Seeking the company of the holy persons, loving attachment to God, repetition of the name of God, rejection of the idols worship and ceremonies connected with it... reverence for the Sacred Compositions of the Gurus are some of the practices of the Sikhs'.⁵⁰ Besides reading, recitation of the hymns of Guru Granth Sahib (*Kirtan*) and their exposition (*Katha*) and performing *ardas* (supplication) constituted major mode of Sikh worship in their Gurdwaras.

Taking *Hukam* (Commandment) or seeking guidance from Guru Granth Sahib before undertaking an enterprise was/is another religious practice which was/is often observed by the

Sikhs; this encompassed spiritual as well as temporal issues. Not only an ordinary Sikh but a person like Maharaja Ranjit Singh too used to seek guidance from Guru Granth Sahib before making vital political decisions or launching an expedition against his enemies. In this regard Prinsep states that, 'it is no uncommon practice of Ranjit Singh, when he contemplates any serious undertaking, to direct two slips of paper to be placed before the Granth Sahib or sacred volume of the Sikhs. On the one is written his wish, and on the other the reverse. A little boy is often brought in, and told to bring one of the slips, and whichever it may happen to be, His Highness is satisfied as it were a voice from heaven.'⁵¹ Emily Eden too have recorded a deep faith of the Maharaja in the Oracle of Guru Granth Sahib.⁵² Similarly, Alexander Burnes have noticed a deep faith of the Sikh masses in an Oracle of their scripture. He refers to an oration of a priest in which he acknowledged before Guru Granth Sahib that whatever the Sikh enjoyed on this earth was the bounty of the Guru. When he enquired about the secret of their increasing power from a venerable Sikh chief, the old man replied: 'it had been predicted in their Granth'. Practices of holding *matta* (resolution) in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, called Gurmatta also stems from this belief in Guru Granth Sahib.

Similar views have been expressed by Charles Masson when he says: The *ardas* was concluded with a vociferous invocation to Guru Granth for victory and extension of the faith'.⁵³

Ablution in the sacred *Sarovar* at the Harmandir Sahib Amritsar was one of the most often performed religious practices of the Sikhs.⁵⁴ We find mention in Malcolms's work how this practice was continued by the Sikhs even at the risk of their lives, when Harmandir Sahib was under the surveillance of the Mughal/ Afgan Governments. He says that 'some performed this pilgrimage in secret, and in disguise, but in general, the Sikh horsemen were seen riding at full gallop, towards their favourite shrine of devotion. They were often slain in making this attempt, and sometimes taken prisoner, but they used, on such occasions, to seek, instead of avoiding, the crown of martyrdom, and the instance is never known of a Sikh, taking in his way to Amritsar, consenting to abjure his faith.'⁵⁵ However, Ward maintains that ablution at the time of Diwali was considered an act of highest merit and on this occasion, 'from all surrounding countries, two or three hundred thousand people are said to bathe in the sacred pool, with the same faith in its virtues as the Hindoos have in Gunga. On other occasions, people from all the neighbourhood came and bathe in this pool;

and those who live on the spot bathe in it daily. When the Sikhs bathe in any other place, they call to remembrance this pool, and pray for the blessings connected with bathing in Umritu-suru".⁵⁶

It is generally conceded that celebration of religious festivals particularly the Gurupurabs (birth and death anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus) were started with the foundation of Singh Sabha in 1873 C.E. but in this literature we find mention of the celebration of events even before 1873 C.E. For example, Ward holds: 'The Sikhs have a number of festivals, but they are all celebrated in a similar manner; the difference consists principally in degree of splendour attached to them: among other festivals are, the anniversaries of the birth and death of Nanuku..... and a great annual feast at Umritu-suru, called Deepu-mala".⁵⁷

However, study of the Nineteenth Century western historical writings reveals that almost all the important aspects of the Sikh way of life has been touched upon in one way or the other. From the observations of these writers one can easily surmise the origin and development of Sikh faith, beliefs and practices, mode and object of worship besides, the role of *Gurbani* in the devotional life of the Sikhs as well as in transforming the Sikh society. Nevertheless what emerges from their observations is that Guru

Granth Sahib is the only object of veneration for the Sikhs. These writers do not observe any preference to Dasam Granth over Guru Granth Sahib as has purposely been done by Malcolm and later on accepted by Mcleod, Grewal and some other 20th century scholars. The Sikhs admit none else than Guru Granth Sahib into their places of worship (Gurdwaras). They venerate it as an Emperor, for it embodies the precepts of their Gurus. Each word of it is considered as an order from the Guru. It is the only guide in spiritual as well as temporal matters. The Sikhs firmly believe in its teachings, for their application can transform human lives and thereby can create a better social order. Its role in the transformation of the Sikh Social world and perpetuation of Sikh identity has been amply noted by these writers. For instance, higher veneration for truth, universal philanthropy, equality amongst human beings, toleration towards other religions, non-existence of forceful conversion, conspicuous absence of the practice of Sati, encouragement to widow re-marriage, observance of monogamy and chastity etc. have been described as the major traits of the ideology of Guru Granth Sahib as observed by the Sikhs. It also becomes clear from their observations that five *banis* were recited while preparing *Khanda-di-pahul*. Also, we find

mention of five Ks in one way or the other rather than the five weapons and initiation of women in the same manner as men. Come what may, these writings shed much light on the role of the Sikh Scripture in the advancement and transformation of Sikh society. For example, observations of Prinsep, Burnes Hugel, Emily Eden etc. suggest that the authority of Guru Granth Sahib was recognized by the Sikhs in every sphere of life. Also, general character of Sikhs and Sikh priests as described in these writings speaks of the higher spiritual advancement of the Sikhs. Above all, Schonberg's description of the Sikh priest is an enunciation of the true Sikh character or Sikh identity in the 1850s. For instance, he observed that the "appearance of Sikh priest is exactly what one might expect in the minister of warlike people. The tall blue turban, bound with an iron head piece, the sabre always close girded to his side, his shield slung upon his back, and the long beard descending to his breast, gives to this warrior-priest a highly picturesque aspect".⁵⁸ Thus these writings gives us to understand that the Sikh identity was not created and established by the Singh Sabha in 1873 C.E. In fact, the boundaries had already been demarcated by the Sikh Gurus through the doctrines enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib and transgressors had been termed as

manmukh (non-believer), therefore, the question of construction of boundaries and creating identity by the Singh Sabha does not stands valid.

¹ For e.g. Lord Clive, the first Governor of East India Company in Bengal began to show concern with Sikh affairs, though at diplomatic level. In a letter addressed to Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah on February 19, 1767, he expressed satisfaction and delight that Ahmad Shah Abdali had suffered defeat from the Sikhs. In another letter written to Shah Wali Khan, Prime Minister of the Abdali, he offered congratulations on the Shah's victory over the Sikhs, and thus 'freeing humanity from their tyranny: C.P.C. II.pp. 52, 145, 327, Quoted in History of the Sikhs by H.R. Gupta, Vol. III, pp. 341-42.

² Teja Singh Ganda Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Punjabi University, Patiala 1989, pp. 82, 173.

³ For Instance, James Browne was nominated as 'British Agent and the Minister' at the Court of Delhi on August 20, 1782. His object was to organize a confederacy against the threatening attitude of the Sikhs. Before he left Calcutta for Delhi, Warren Hasting, instructed him. "You must study the character, connection, influence and power of the several competitors for the possession of the King's favor or the exercise of his authority, the state, views and relations of the independent chiefs and states whose territory borders on his. However, this period marked the beginning of regular Anglo-Sikh relations. Also this is the period when a first regular treatise on the Sikhs; *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs*, was written by James Brown, which subsequently became the very basis of *Western Writings on the Sikhs*: C.R.C. William, 'The Sikhs in the upper Doab', *Calcutta Review*, LXI, 1875, p.40; Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1980, Vol. III, pp. 171-215; Ganda Singh (ed), *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Indian Studies Past and Present, Calcutta 1962, pp. 1-7; Two months before the appointment of Brown, Hastings had deputed George Forster to undertake a journey from Bengal to England and instructed him together information about the Sikhs. In his travelogue, Forster furnished an account of the Sikhs. Yet in another attempt, he employed Sayyid Gulam Hussain, a resident of Barailly to write a history of India with special reference to the Sikhs. He too completed his work in 1784, entitled: *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin*: H.R. Gupta, *Ibid*, pp. 343-44.

⁴ J.S. Grewal, "The Present State of Sikh Studies", *Miscellaneous Articles*, G.N.D.U., Amritsar 1974, pp.152-163; Darshan Singh, *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*, Sehgal Publishers, New Delhi 1991, pp. 8-9 (hereafter *Western Perspective*); See Also, Darshan Singh (ed.), *Western Image of the Sikh Religion: a Source Book*, National Book Organization, New Delhi, 1999, pp. X-XII (hereinafter *Western Image*).

⁵ G. Khurana, *British Historiography on the Sikh Power in the Punjab*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1985, p.16.

⁶ For instance from the publication of Captain Mathew's *Tour to Lahore* in 1809 CE to the Publication of Ernest Trumpp's *The Adi Granth or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs* in 1877 CE.

- ⁷ Darshan Singh, *Western Perspective*, pp. 136-37.
- ⁸ William Ward, "Account of the Sikhs", Darshan Singh, *Western Image*, p.65.
- ⁹ The Baron Erich Von Schonberg, *Travels in India and Kashmir*, Hurst and Blackett Publishers, London 1853, 2 Vols., Vol. II, p. 155 (hereafter Travels).
- ¹⁰ Captain Mathew, Asiatic Annual Register, 1809; p. 422; Baron Charles Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab*, Language Department Punjab, Patiala 1970, pp. 282-82 (hereafter Travels); John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs*, London 1812, pp. 181-82; Ward, *Western Image*, p. 64; H.T. Prinsep, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh with an account of the Religion, Laws and Customs of Sikhs*; Language Department Punjab, Patiala, 1970, p.2; W.L. Mcgregor, *History of the Sikhs*, London 1846, 2 Vols, Vol. I, p.74. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, Low price Publication, New Delhi (1990-First 1849), p. 63; Ernest Trumpp, *The Adi Granth or the Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi 1997 (first 1877), p.xci, Schonberg, *Travels*, II, pp. 156-57.
- ¹¹ Mathew, *Ibid*, p. 422; Hugel, *Travels*, p.282.
- ¹² Trumpp describes it, not as two-edge-sword (khanda) but dagger, *Ibid*, p. xci.
- ¹³ According to Trumpp, the Bani used from Dasam Granth at the time of the preparation of *Pahul* was *Akal Ustal*; *Ibid*, p.xc; while Prinsep and Hugel have quoted *sawayias* from the same Granth which were recited while preparing the *Pahul*, Prinsep, *Ibid*, pp. 171-172; Hugel, *Travels*, p.282.
- ¹⁴ Hugel, op cit.
- ¹⁵ Prinsep, op cit.
- ¹⁶ According to Trumpp, 'Sherbat' (amrit) was sprinkled on the body of the neophyte and not on the beard: *Ibid*, p. xci.
- ¹⁷ William Ward, *Ibid*, p.64.
- ¹⁸ Schonberg, *Travels*, Vol. II, pp. 157-58, William Ward, *Ibid*, 64.
- ¹⁹ Malcolm *Ibid*, p. 186
- ²⁰ Cunningham, *Ibid*, p. 65.
- ²¹ Trumpp, *Ibid*, cxiii.
- ²² William Ward, *Ibid*, p.64; Cunningham, *Ibid*, pp.314,315.
- ²³ Malcolm, *Ibid*, pp. 183-85.
- ²⁴ Cunningham, *Ibid*, pp.63-64, 66, 317-18,321.
- ²⁵ Trumpp, *Ibid*, p.xci.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*, p. xciv.
- ²⁷ Malcolm, *Ibid*, pp. 131-32.
- ²⁸ William, *Ibid*, p. 64.
- ²⁹ Malcolm, *Ibid*, pp. 180-81, F.N.*
- ³⁰ Victor Jaquemont and A. Soltigkoffe, *The Punjab: A Hundred Years Ago* (Tr. and Ed.), H.L.O. Garrett, Language Department Punjab, Patiala 1971, p.9.
- ³¹ Charles Masson, *Narrative of various journeys in Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab, including a residence in those countries from 1826 to 1839*, 3 vols., OHP Karachi 1974 (first 1842), vol. I, pp. 419, 24,25,34,51; Cunningham, *Ibid*, p. 318; Malcolm, *Ibid*, pp. 129,138.
- ³² Trumpp, *Ibid*, pp. xciv, xci.
- ³³ W.H.Mcleod, *Sikh of the Khalsa: A History of Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford 2003, pp. 40,204, 206-07, 209, 212, 249; J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh: A Biographical Study*, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1967, pp. 187-88.
- ³⁴ Schonberg, *Travels*, ii, pp. 156-57.
- ³⁵ William ward, *Ibid*, p. 62.
- ³⁶ Malcolm, *Ibid*, pp.168-69.
- ³⁷ William Ward, *Ibid*, pp. 60,66.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, p.66.
- ³⁹ H.H. Wilson, *Civil and Religious Institutions of the Sikhs*", *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, Sushil Gupta Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1958, p. 56.
- ⁴⁰ Trumpp, *Ibid*, pp. ix-xx-xi.
- ⁴¹ Cunningham, *Ibid*, p. 74, Mathew, *Ibid*, pp. 430-31, Trumpp, *Ibid*, p.xci.
- ⁴² Hugel, *Ibid*; p. 82; Malcolm, *Ibid*, 168.
- ⁴³ William Ward, *Ibid*, p.60.
- ⁴⁴ Cunningham, *Ibid*; pp. 38,39, 329-36; Charles Masson, *Ibid*, I, pp. 46, 424, Malcolm *Ibid*; pp. 168,188.

-
- ⁴⁵ Malcolm, *Ibid*, p. 168.
- ⁴⁶ William Ward, *Ibid*, pp. 63-64, 68-69.
- ⁴⁷ Charles Masson, *Ibid*, pp. 46, 424.
- ⁴⁸ Alexander Burnes, *Travels with Bokhara*, John Murray, London, 1835, 3 Vols. Vol. I, pp. 101-2.
- ⁴⁹ Schonberg, *Ibid*, Vol II, pp. 156-57.
- ⁵⁰ William Ward, *Ibid*, p.343, quoted in *Western Perspective*.
- ⁵¹ Prinsep, *Ibid*, p.153.
- ⁵² Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, London 1866, 2 Vols, I, pp. 7-8
- ⁵³ Charles Masson, *Ibid*, p.424.
- ⁵⁴ Malcolm, *Ibid*, p.118.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 87-88.
- ⁵⁶ William Ward, *Ibid*, p.65.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 64-65.
- ⁵⁸ Schonberg, *Ibid* II, p.157.