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Gurdwara and Its Politics: Current Debate on Sikh Identity in Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Semua fungsi orang Sikh, sama ada yang kolektif atau individual, umumnya dilakukan di Gurdwara setempat, yang boleh memainkan peranan penting dalam membangunkan komuniti Sikh. Memandangkan Sikhisme adalah kepercayaan yang tidak membenarkan perbezaan antara ugama dan politik, maka pada 1988, majlis pusat Gurdwara yang dikenali Majlis Gurdwara Malaysia sudah ditubuhkan untuk menyelaras fungsi kesemua Gurdwara. Berdasarkan penyelidikan kami, adalah didapati bahawa kebanyakan Gurdwara di Malaysia menghadapi cabaran yang serupa. Peranan unggul Granthi Sahib sebagai pakar rujuk keagamaan sudah diragui. Granthi Sahib dan Jawatankuasa Pengurusan Gurdwara (GMC) dilanda delima berhubung peranan itu. Punca konflik itu telah diterukai dalam rencana ini. Ada juga konflik antara GMC dengan Granthi Sahib disebabkan pengaruh daripada ahli jawatankuasa dan penyalahgunaan kuasa mereka dalam hubungan dengan pakar rujuk agama. Oleh itu, sifat peranan Majlis Gurdwara Malaysia dalam menangani ketegangan itu yang selanjutnya memberi kesan kepada pembentukan identiti orang Sikh akan dikupas.

Kata kunci: Gurdwara, Majlis Gurdwara Malaysia, Jawatankuasa Pengurusan Gurdwara

ABSTRACT

All Sikh functions, collective as well as individual, are generally performed in local Gurdwaras, which can play an essential role in developing the Sikh community. As Sikhism is a faith which recognises no division between religion and politics, in 1988 a central council of Gurdwaras called the Malaysian Gurdwaras Council was established to coordinate the functioning of these Gurdwaras. Based on our research, we found that, most of the Malaysian Gurdwaras face similar challenges. The ideal roles of the Granthi Sahib as a religious specialist are in question. The Granthi Sahib and Gurdwaras Management Committee (GMC) are in a dilemma about their roles. The reason for this conflict is explored in this paper. There are also conflicts between the GMC and Granthi Sahib due to committee members' influence and their abuse of power in their relations with religious specialists. Therefore, the nature of

role of the Malaysian Gurdwara Council in addressing these tensions which in turn affect the formation of Sikh identity is discussed.

Key words: Gurdwara, Malaysian Gurdwara Council, Gurdwara Management Committee

INTRODUCTION

The question of identity is an important subject for academic discussion. It covers a wide range of important issues pertaining to the complex process of 'becoming', frequently referred to as a classic notion of 'identity formation'. The complexity of this process of 'becoming' is confounded and compounded by the inter-connections between the formal, conscious and organized processes of institutional development, and the informal, unconscious and spiritual ways in which people come to know themselves. Outward religious practices and inward beliefs are always important factors that define human beings. All these identity markers in turn fashion responses to how others understand and accept identity and how interactions between those of different identities are structured and created. A comparison with other prevailing traditions sharpens the process of self-definition because identity formation is relationed and processed. In fact, every encounter with a new society or a new culture brings with it new self-discovery (Pashaura Singh 2004: 77). According to Pritam Singh Gill (1990):

Gurdwara have become an integral part of the Sikh community and they have been so from its very birth ... Gurdwaras produce Sikhs and Sikhs produce Gurdwaras. Gurdwaras are the memory of their Gurus, whom they can never forget.

This paper examines the role of the Sikh Gurdwara¹ in the formation of Sikh identity in Malaysia. Two aspects are examined: the historical perspective and the transformation of these religious institutions. Collection of data was done through participant observation followed by in-depth interviews at various Gurdwaras in Malaysia, mainly at the Gurdwara Sahib Tatt Khalsa Diwan (GSTKD) in Kuala Lumpur and the Gurdwara Sahib Kota Kinabalu (GSKK) in Sabah. The involvement of the Sikh community in the religious affairs at the Gurdwara are governed by various reasons and motivations. These include fulfilling family needs, psycho-social considerations and the requirement to participate in religious events organised by the Gurdwara. There are two important groups at the Gurdwara: the *Granthi Sahib* (the religious specialist group) and the Gurdwara Management Committee (GMC). This research documents the various conflicts between both groups that cause disruption to the smooth flow of the Gurdwara's role as a religious institution in general, and in building Sikh identity in particular. For example, religious specialists brought in from India tend to emphasize ritual practices and religious observations, at the expense of the development of Sikh identity. Meanwhile, GMC members were found to be more concerned with perpetuating their own position. In the ensuing power struggles, more often than not, the protagonists overlooked the very purpose of the organization they represent.



The following discussion is divided into three parts. The first part takes a brief look at the Sikh Gurus and the practice of the 5Ks which is a religious and authority-defined identity. The paper then traces and describes the purpose of Gurdwara as a social and religious institution in the Sikh community. The final part analyses the present situation of Malaysian Gurdwaras that are under threat because of political 'harrassment' by local Sikh politicians. Our research findings show that, many Gurdwaras are neglecting their roles of disseminating knowledge and the virtues of Sikhism, particularly in the form of the Sikh identity. It is the premise of this paper that the ideal and fundamental teachings of the Sikh Gurus have been misunderstood by individuals who run the religious institution. The reasons for this is explored. It can be said that this ignorance exists because of the influence and vested interests of the GMC in performing their roles and duties as Sikhs. At present, the Gurdwara has become a political platform for GMC members who are engaged in the national politics. This problem is not only found in Malaysia, but also in their homeland in Punjab.

THE SIKH GURUS AND THE PRACTICE OF THE 5KS

Sri Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh religion, sought to establish harmony between diverse traditions and to make people aware that it was not traditions but "Truth" which should be followed in mind, action and speech. He was a pioneer sage, who revered the fundamentals of all great religions, established a middle path, and rejected the non-essentials, embracing the path of love in a practical way (Duggal 1993a: 16).

The second Guru, Angad (Guru 1539-1552) was followed by another disciple, Amar Das (Guru 1552-1574), who later nominated his son in-law, Ram Das Sodhi (Guru 1574-1581) as his successor. Thereafter, the office of Guru remained in the Sodhi family. Guru Ram Das was succeeded by his youngest son, Arjun Mal (Guru 1581-1606), who, before his death by torture in Lahore on May 30, 1606, nominated his son Hargobind (Guru 1606-1644). The seventh Guru, Har Rai (Guru 1644-1661), was Hargobind's grandson, who after his tenure, nominated his young son Har Krishen (Guru 1661-1664), who died of smallpox at the age of eight. Tegh Bahadur (Guru 1644-1675), who succeeded him, was the son of the sixth Guru, Hargobind. Before his execution in Delhi on November 11, 1675, Tegh Bahadur passed the succession to his son, Gobind Rai (Guru 1675-1708) (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica 1995: 284).

On 13 April 1699 after the morning prayers, Gobind Rai drew his sword and asked for five men to offer their heads for sacrifice. He took them behind a tent and reappeared before the congregation, his sword dripping with blood. He addressed the volunteers as the "five beloved," *panj piyare*, who were destined to become the nucleus of a new community, the *Khalsa* (from the Persian *khalis*, "the pure ones"). He baptized the five men (who came from different Hindu castes) by making them drink, from a single bowl, *amrit* (nectar) he had churned with a double-edged dagger. He gave them a new family name,



Singh (lion) and after his own baptism changed his name from Gobind Rai to Gobind Singh (Khushwant Singh 1987: 332).

Five emblems (*kakkar* or the 5Ks) were prescribed for the *Khalsa*. Firstly, to wear their hair and beards unshorn (*kesh*). Hair is not only regarded as a symbol of saintliness or holiness, but also as a proof of living in harmony with the Will of God. Secondly, *kangha* or the comb is a necessary adjunct for the hair. It should be on hand to keep the hair neat and tidy. It is therefore, fixed in their hair knot. Thirdly, to wear a steel bracelet (*kara*) on their right wrist as a symbol of poverty and pledge to their Gurus. Next, to wear *kachha* or *kachhahra*, the knee-length breeches meant to cover the private parts of the body. It is a symbol of moral restraint and conjugal fidelity. It keeps the wearer covered all the time and makes them move with briskness and agility. Lastly, to always carry the *kirpan* or sword to defend and protect the dignity or honor of others (Mansukhani 1997: 316-319). In addition to these 5Ks, the Sikhs must observe the following guidelines:

1. Not to remove hair from their body.
2. Not to use tobacco, or consume alcoholic drinks or other intoxicants.
3. Not to eat the flesh of animals slaughtered by several blow degrees as is done by the Muslims. They were permitted only *jhatka* meat that of an animal dispatched with one blow.
4. Not to commit adultery (Pritam Singh 1978: 223; Sikh Missionary Center 1990: 201)

At the end of his reign on 7 October 1708, Guru Gobind Singh handed over the stewardship of the *Sikh Panth* – the Sikh way of life – to the *Holy Granth* (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*). Those who wish to seek God, Guru Gobind Singh said, can find Him in the Holy Word (Duggal 1993b: 222-227). The lives of the Gurus demonstrate friendship across human frontiers - for example, the devotion of the Muslim Mardana and the Hindu Bala to Guru Nanak – and prove their readiness to accept the risk inherent in friendship. Guru Tegh Bahadur died in order to protect the Kashmiri Hindus' religious freedom. God is without enmity (*nirvair*), as Sikhs daily recite in the opening creedal statement of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, the *Japji* (Adi Granth: 1). A person who remembers God constantly will likewise feel hatred for no one. Sikhism emphasis's *seva*, which is service to all humanity regardless of colour, caste, class and creed.

The *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, though purely a religious work (1,430 pages), also throws some light on the social and political conditions of the time. The *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* serves as a symbolic representation of the Gurus, considered as only one Personality of Guru Nanak, the light of whose soul passed on to each of his successors. At present, the Word of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. In his last hymn Guru Arjan summed up the value of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* thus: "In this dish are placed three things – Truth, Contentment and Wisdom. These are seasoned with the Name



of God, which is the basis of all. Whosoever lives by it shall be saved” (Lajwanti 1985: 16).

Those whose daily life is a constant remembrance (*simran* or meditation) of God will express God’s will (*hukam*) in their actions. This is the shining message of the Gurus as set down in the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. Sikhs must recall God constantly (*nam japna*), work honestly (*kirt karni*) and share what they earn (*wand shakna*). Self-centredness (*haumai*) must give way to the Godward orientation of a *gurmukh*. The *gurmukh* is a person who shuns lust (*kam*), anger (*karod*), greed (*lobh*), attachment to things temporal (*moh*) and pride (*ahankar*) (Sarjit S. Gill 2003: 25).

THE PURPOSE AND ROLE OF THE GURDWARA INSTITUTION

The Gurdwara is the Sikh place of worship. It is called *Gurdwara Sahib*, which can be literally translated as “the Revered Gurdwara” - God’s place. A Gurdwara has no specific design. Usually, at the top, it has a central bigger dome and smaller domes on the sides. The identity of the place is marked by a saffron, triangular *Nishan Sahib* - the Sikh flag, with its symbols and a double edged sword atop, flutters on the building, or in its yard.

The only object of veneration in Sikh Gurdwaras is the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The Gurdwara is in fact that place of worship where *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* reigns. No images or idols are permitted inside a Gurdwara. In the Gurdwara, the Holy Volume is only opened ceremonially in the early hours of the morning after *ardas* or supplication-cum-reflection. It must be enthroned, draped in silks or other pieces of clean cloth, on a high seat on a pedestal, under a canopy. The *sanggat* (congregation) takes place in the presence of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, with an officiant, who could be a regular incumbent or anyone from among those present, sitting in attendance, with a *chaur* or whisk in his hand which he keeps swinging over it in homage (Harbans Singh 1995: 66).

A Gurdwara belongs to the Guru and the *Khalsa Panth*, Sikh world meaning the Sikh community. This is a place for everyone with no discrimination of color, caste, sex, faith, status, or nationality. Everyone can go there with full liberty. An ideal Gurdwara should have the facilities to make it a place where everyone is welcomed at all hours like an honored guest, and he or she is provided free of any cost, food, shelter, and a place to rest (including bedding for immediate and urgent need). Each Gurdwara may not be able to comply with all this due to local restrictions, or resources. There are many essential services offered by a Gurdwara, including:

1. *Prayer* - Worship of only one God (*Ik O’nkaar*) in the set and standard (traditional) Sikh-way, in the presence of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* - the Sikh Holy Scripture. Singing of the holy hymns is done, sermons are

- delivered, and an invocation to God for His mercy, and well-being of everyone is made (performing *ardas*).
2. *Guru ka Langgar* - community free food, served without any discrimination after the proceedings are over, is almost an integral part of all celebrations. This helps to encourage equality among human beings.
 3. *Selfless service* - A Gurdwara is a place to learn and practice selfless service (performing *seva*) to humanity.
 4. *Celebrations - Gurburbs*, anniversaries of Guru's birthday and occasional deaths, plus the anniversary of the first installation of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The festivals are celebrated with devotion, and great fanfare.
 5. *Akhand-Path* - As a set precedence, mostly an *Akhand Path* (continuous recitation of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* is done which is timed to take 48 hours and ends on the morning of the *Gurburbs* being observed, usually a Sunday).
 6. *Kirtan* - singing of the holy hymns, is performed by the *Ragis Jatha* (musician) with full participation by the *sangats*.
 7. *Katha (sermon)* is delivered, and it includes the history of the occasion. *Religious Education* - free religious lessons are conducted by the *Granthi Sahib* or members of the GMC.
 8. *Additional Programs* - Seminars, children's competitions, and some other programs may be organised.

Prayer, *Guru ka langgar* and selfless service are closely linked to attain an ethical life. Everyone is equally welcome to the prayer hall (*darbar sahib*), and to the *Guru ka langgar* - dining hall. All these services are free. Selfless service (*seva*) of any sort in the Gurdwara, or out in the public domain, has great significance, but first comes the service to the Gurdwara, *sangat*, members of the community, and it cannot be ignored or replaced with any other service outside. If anyone from outside your community needs a service urgently, it should be rendered with top priority ignoring your own people. However, especially for services which involve large amounts of resource and time, the needs of the personal community should not be ignored. There is no binding requirement and the choice is one's own. For one's daily and usual charities, one is the best judge and should not be under any obligations.

Contributions in cash or kind are welcome in a Gurdwara. These are accepted in the *darbar sahib*. For this, the cashier or treasurer will be contacted. Contribution is voluntary, and if possible, it may be liberal. It is preferred to contribute *daswandh* (tithe) – one tenth (1/10th) of one's income, for humanitarian purposes. Service, particularly to the Gurdwara and *sangat*, should be done with humility, and should not be categorized as charity. A very practical way is to keep some amount of money aside almost everyday for such purposes. Offerings made to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* in *darbar sahib* into a *Golak* or money box to serve this purpose well.



The atmosphere inside a Gurdwara is of reverence, peace, love, serenity, sanctity, humility, silence, equality, tolerance, and of selfless service. Everyone has to understand, adjust, and accommodate. In case of any trespassing, one should beg pardon from the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, *sanggat* and the individual. No one is prohibited from entering a Gurdwara, but it should be kept in mind that a Gurdwara is a place of worship according to the Sikh tenets - code of ethics, precedence, procedures, and routine. No one should engage in any meaningless, negative and undesirable criticism, argument, or interfere there, even if the problem is serious and demands immediate attention. The best is to bring any suggestions, complaints, or grievances to the notice of the GMC.

The GMC plays an important role in nurturing and disseminating religious teachings and the appropriate values to the Sikh community. The GMC often hires a professional *Granthi Sahib* as a religious specialist to conduct religious ceremonies and services in the Gurdwara. The majority of the *Granthi Sahibs* who work in Malaysian Gurdwaras today are brought directly from Punjab. Malaysian Sikhs are not interested in this job for various reasons but the main reason is related to the salary offered by the GMC. The income range is between RM800-RM1200 per month. Hence, the continuous dependence on the imported *Granthi Sahibs* has resulted in them making further demands. Some of them had a 'nation of intent' even before they landed in Malaysia; their next destinations to migrate to any developed country such as the United States, Canada or Britain. The minimum period of time they serve in Malaysian Gurdwaras are between six months to two years. The *Granthi Sahib's* 'silent' departures always cause major problems for the GMC to seek replacement. This problem is not something new in the Sikh community. Besides economic reasons, the *Granthi Sahib* migration is also due to the unprofessionalism of the GMC members who 'harass' religious specialists in many ways for their own benefits.²

THE PRESENT SENARIO OF MALAYSIAN GURDWARAS

With the passage of time, social pressures, male chauvinistic attitudes, and the ignorance of the essence of the teachings of Sikhism, the position of the GMC today has suffered a setback. Five major factors in the failures of the GMC are identified while conducting this research on Malaysian Sikhs.³ The Gurdwara institution was introduced for the purpose of collectively praying to God (*Waheguru*) and thereby achieving peace and preaching gender equality⁴ in all aspects of social life. But to what extent the GMC plays its role in the formation of Sikh identity is debatable.

The major setback of GMC roles in performing religious duties arises when the Gurdwara institution had become a political platform for some Sikhs to be engaged in, which in turn is associated with the Malaysian political arena. It is important to highlight that some of the GMC members belonged to and are linked



closely to various political parties, namely the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC established in 1946) and Malaysian Punjabi Party (MPP established in 1998). Sociologically speaking, both parties mentioned above are not on good 'terms and conditions' for various reasons. In this paper, we are not going to discuss the differences between these parties. It should be noted that Sikh politicians who are actively involved in the MIC or MPP have the ambition to be selected as GMC members. Once they have been selected, their next step and agenda is to recruit new members for their own party. Based on our observations and interactions with the local community, we found that the Gurdwara Sahib Petaling Jaya in Selangor and Gurdwara Sahib Tatt Khalsa Diwan in Kuala Lumpur are two Gurdwaras associated closely with the MPP and MIC parties.

Another classic example is one particular Gurdwara in Selangor state where the President has been actively involved in the MIC party for many years. He had organised various community development programs in 'his' Gurdwara with MIC sponsorship. Some local Sikhs interviewed were not pleased with the President's approach whom they felt abused the Gurdwara institution to gain popularity and political mileage in the national political party. The local community in the area is sensitive and stressed that the Gurdwara only focused on disseminating the knowledge and virtues of Sikhism and strictly refrain from political activity. The local Sikh politicians' strategy was indeed astute in recruiting their new members in the Gurdwara. They knew that the Sikhs gathered in the Gurdwara almost every week to participate in social and religious activities. Hence, the GMC members will benefit from this strategy as long as no verdict or directive is given by the Malaysian Gurdwara Council (MGC) pertaining to this subject.

The Gurdwara plays an important educational role, particularly in the advancement of the Punjabi language and its literature. The recent situation where the Gurdwaras focus is on real politics needs a major overhaul and restructuring for the benefit of the Sikh community. We have attended a few Annual General Meetings (AGM) held in the Malaysian Sikh Gurdwaras and organisations, and we observed that many arguments, frustrations and misunderstandings often lead to disharmonious interaction between one family and the other party involved in the conflict. We also observed that some Sikhs would "fight" to hold the key position in the Gurdwaras. The committee members or politicians would then apply to get awards and recognition from the government such as J.P. P.J.K. and Datukship. This group identify themselves as a *sevadar* (servant, to serve others) in the Gurdwaras. It leads one to question the practice of the concept of service (*seva*) in the Sikh community perspective.

None would discuss strategies in promoting community development through programs for example, help to motivate Sikh youths to participate in the social programs such as education, arts, sports, and religious activities in the Gurdwara. This appears to be what is lacking among the Sikh politician in

Malaysian Gurdwaras. It should be noted that the roles of Gurdwaras can only be achieved with strong participation and commitment from the Sikh community, especially in the context of the sincerity of GMC members.

It is important to highlight here that majority of the members of the GMC are senior members of the community. Only a handful of young people were selected to participate and contribute in the GMC. The conflicts and disputes between the senior members and youth are not new in the Sikh community. Personal and other outside disputes are imported into the Gurdwara as a means to attack or criticize rival groups or individuals. Some of the GMC who intend to become leaders, resort to unnecessary condemnation of other Sikh brothers. Besides that, during the AGM election time, votes are bought by offering low inducements and the strong desire to occupy chairs of authority are replacing the intention to do *sewa* only. These negative tactics and propaganda are widely used and practised by the Sikhs in their Gurdwara. We also observed that factionalism is preferred to righteousness and religious duty because the personal lives of many of the leaders do not measure up to Sikh ideals. At the end of the cross roads, by selecting these kinds of leader, to administer the Gurdwara institution the Sikh community will continue to suffer and neglect the importance of Sikh identity in their everyday life.

The political situation in the Gurdwara is also based on a masculine ideology. Males dominate the GMC. Women are left in the *Guru ka Langgar* to cook and prepare meals. We also rarely hear of women being elected into the Gurdwara committees. For instance, out of 21 seats of the GMC members in the Gurdwara, women usually only get two or three seats. They are also seldom represented in the Committees of Sikh Associations or Clubs. This shortcoming should be overcome by inaugurating active ladies' sections in all associations, clubs and Gurdwaras. Men always control most of the high positions in Gurdwaras and associations. We observed that most of the GMC members were not concerned the welfare of the association neither were they focused on unity among the Sikhs. They are more concerned, about maintaining their position. The majority of them also have little knowledge of the fundamentals of Sikhism. However, due to their high status and wealth they are elected into the GMC.

CONCLUSION

We believe that Malaysian Gurdwaras Council (MGC)⁵ can play significant roles in educating the GMC members on the do's and the don'ts in the Gurdwaras as written in the Sikh Code and Conduct (*Sikh Rehat Maryada, SRM*)⁶. To do that, firstly the MGC members must focus on their constitution and serve with full responsibilities. The MGC members need to avoid internal and external politics in the local Gurdwaras and their own respective organisations. On the other hand, members of the GMC must be well versed and practise the SRM while

performing their service in the Gurdwara. This is the basic code and conduct for Sikhs to practise and obey.

In 1999, the MGC distributed a free copy of the *Sikh Rehat Maryada* to the Sikh community with notes highlighting that “All member Gurdwara Sahibs and *Parbandhaks* (Committee) and the Sikh *sanggat* of Malaysia are earnestly requested to read, understand, practise in the *Sikh Rehat Maryada* among the *sanggat* with the assistance of the *Granthi Sahibs*. This will be for the progress and *chardi kala* (betterment) of the Sikh *Panth* (community) in Malaysia.

The MGC claims their organization as the representative body of the Sikhs as it is elected by representatives of all the registered Gurdwaras in Malaysia. The Gurdwara committees are elected by the local *sanggats*. The MGC Constitution requires it to serve as a central forum to promote religious, cultural, social, educational and economic interests of the Sikhs. Clause 3.18 of the Constitution, the council is required to represent the Sikh community in Malaysia on all matters pursuant to the Constitution. The MGC thus has a vital role to play, to safeguard the interests of all Sikhs in Malaysia. Therefore, the MGC needs to ‘check and balance’ the roles of the Malaysian Gurdwaras, especially the religious institutions which are registered under this body.

The *Granthi Sahib* and religious preachers (*Ragi Jathas*) play important roles in educating the Sikhs about various issues in the SRM. They should emphasize this subject matter in their sermons and lectures in Gurdwara and also relate this matter to the present situation in Malaysia. There are not many “religious specialists” in the Gurdwara who would like to debate and share their views on the SRM. There is an urgent need for these so-called “religious specialists” to be more liberal and rational on the current issues. This is essential because many Sikhs, especially the younger generation, have little knowledge of the basic tenets of Sikhism. The GMC and Sikh organizations too need to focus their activities on youth development. They should also organize more seminars and conferences on the issues related to social institutions such as religion, family, education, economy, politics, and information technology to educate the Malaysians in general and the Sikhs in particular.

We believe many Sikhs in Punjab and the diaspora are experiencing the same issues and problems related to the roles of Gurdwaras. We have observed and narrated how *Gurdwaras* and its politics are focused on the Sikh society. The purpose of Sikh worship is to praise God and develop the spirituality of the individual and the community, but in real life it is a different story. Thus, scholars in various perspectives can continue to debate this issue of the Gurdwaras roles in Sikh society.

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NOTA KAKI

1. The Gurdwara is a place of worship for the Sikhs. Wherever there has been a sizeable population of Sikhs, a Gurdwara has been built. All Sikh ceremonies, collective as well as individual, are generally performed in Gurdwara. These include naming a child (*janam sanskar*), initiation (*amrit sanskar*), marriage (*anand sanskar*) and death (*antam sanskar*). The source of reference for all these ceremonies is *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, the Sikh Holy Scripture. In short, the Gurdwara acts as the centre of community activities.
2. For a detailed study on the role of gurdwara, see Sarjit Singh. 2005. *Peranan Gurdwara Dalam Pembentukan Identiti Sikh di Malaysia: Satu Kajian Perbandingan*. Tesis Ph.D, UKM.
3. For a detailed reference on Sikh Bibliography in Malaysia see Sarjit S. Gill, 2002. *Bibliografi Komuniti Sikh di Malaysia (1937-2002)*. *Sari* 20: 169-179. This article documents past work on the minority Sikh community in Malaysia. It is the result of seven years of travel and research. Among others, the writer went through various materials in libraries, museums and archives nationwide, including in Sabah and Sarawak. It is hoped that this small endeavor will be of assistance for on-going and future research into minority communities, especially the Sikhs in Malaysia.
4. For a brief study of gender equality among local Sikhs, refer Sarjit S. Gill (2003), *Malaysian Sikhs and Gender Issues*, *Akademika* 63: 45-55.
5. The Malaysian Gurdwaras Council (MGC) organisation which was formed in 1988⁶ has its ordinary members all legally constituted Gurdwaras in Malaysia. At present, there are about 80 Gurdwaras out of a total of 119 registered under MGC. The remaining Gurdwaras are not registered for various reasons. The MGC Constitution shows each member of the Gurdwara is entitled to send two representatives to the General Meeting. The Executive Committee of the Council is then elected by these representatives from the Gurdwaras. Legally constituted Sikh organisations are eligible to become associate members of the Council but they have no voting rights and cannot hold office in the Council.
6. For a brief study of the contents of the *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, refer to Charanjit Kaur, 2002. *Teks Sikh Rehat Maryada: satu kajian mengenai kod tingkah laku penganut agama Sikh*. Graduation Exercise, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

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