EDITORIAL

DEFINING SIKH TERMS A. Sikh, Sikhi, and Sikhism B. Gurbani, Gurmat, and Nanakian Philosophy

Ithough the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar [6], and other institutions have prepared the Glossary of Sikh Terms, all of these differ with each other; therefore, there is a necessity to have a standardized *Glossary of Sikh Terms*. The Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS) has also prepared a Glossary of Sikh Terms in which most of the commonly used terms in *Sikhi* (Sikhism) have been defined and/or explained according to information available in Gurbani and academic fields [5]. The Glossary is updated occasionally by Prof Devinder Singh Chahal of the IUS.

Recently when I read an article, *The Label that Defines Us: On My Mind*, by Prof I J Singh on Sikh Diaspora Discussion Group, GLZ Discussion Group, and other Internets I noticed that well established terms, 'Sikh', 'Sikhi' and 'Sikhism' have not been understood properly by Prof Singh [7].

A. 'SIKH', 'SIKHI' AND 'SIKHISM' Prof I J Singh [7] writes about 'Sikhi' as follows:

"Sikhi is the path of the Sikh Gurus, but it places the onus on us, the followers of that path. Relabeling it Guruism or Nanakism may exalt the founder, but would diminish the essence of the journey and curtail the role of the follower. In the final analysis, it is fitting that the word "Sikhism" places the emphasis on the followers who walk the path. It seems to me that this was exactly the point when Guru Gobind Singh founded the institution of the Khalsa by initiating the first five Sikhs in 1699, and then himself accepting initiation from their hands."

Prof Singh is confusing the readers about the use of two terms: "Sikhi "and "Sikhism" by saying that re-labeling of "Sikhi" as "Guruism" or "Nanakism" may exalt the founder, but would diminish the essence of the journey and curtail the role of the follower. It indicates that he does not understand what "Sikhi" means in Gurbani since he is suggesting the use of "Sikhism" as a more befitting term instead.

The above statement of Prof Singh encourages the Sikhs especially the *Biprans* (Who work against Nanakian Philosophy) to demean the importance of the Founder, Guru Nanak, of Sikhism. Such misunderstanding are

arising due to improper understanding of Nanakian Philosophy embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak, which has been further strengthened by the Sikh Gurus who succeeded to the 'House of Nanak'.

I read a couple of discussions on Sikh Diaspora Discussion Group (SD) concerning whether to call it 'Sikhi' or 'Sikhism". The only appropriate discussion came form Dr Avtar Singh Dhaliwal who quoted Gurbani to convince that it should be 'Sikhi' which should be used instead of anglicized form 'Sikhism' on SD discussions (SD May 6, 2006).

Although Dr Dhaliwal had already explained about 'Sikhi', I would like to elaborate it further according to my understanding of Nanakian Philosophy:

The words 'Sikh' and 'Sikhi' have been used many times in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS [1] with different spellings and with different meanings. Before drawing any conclusion, it is very important to look into the meanings of 'Sikhi' and 'Sikh' in Gurbani rather than in Sanskrit or at any other place.

1. Sikhi' means teachings (philosophy):

ਸਿਖੀ^੧ ਸਿਖਿਆ^੨ ਗੁਰ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ^੩ ॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪ–੪੬੫. Sikhi¹ is the teachings² of the Guru's philosophy³. AGGS, M 1, p 465 [1].

Who is the Guru in the above phrase?

Nanak has been identified as the GURU by Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas and Guru Arjan in their Bani, which has been incorporated in the AGGS at page # 150, 435, 882, 612, and also by Satta Balwand at page 967 [4].

Another example for 'Sikhi':

ਗੁਰੂ ਸਮੁੰਦੁ ਨਦੀ ਸਭਿ ਸਿਖੀ ਨਾਤੈ ਜਿਤੁ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿਰਖੁਥੇ* ਨਾਵਨਿ ਨਾਹੀ, ਤਾ ਸਤ ਚਟੇ ਸਿਰਿ ਛਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪ–੧੫੦.

Guru Nanak is advising about the importance of water to

the skinhead Jogis, who remove hair from their head, hate to use water, and don't take shower. Therefore, keeping in view the importance of water in one's life Guru Nanak is advising them to follow his Sikhi:

Oh Skinhead! Guru is like a sea of all the principles (all the rivers) of the Sikhi, only practicing this Sikhi (bathing in these rivers - principles) one gets honor in this world, otherwise it is like an ash in the head (state of desperation).

AGGS, M 1, p 150.

ਸਿਰਖੁਥੇ* (Skinhead): The cult of people who pluck their hair from the head and live on alms of others and lead life without any goal.

2. 'Sikh' also means 'Sikhi'

ਮਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਤਨ ਜਵਾਹਰ ਮਾਣਿਕ ਜੇ ਇਕ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣੀ ॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਜਪੁ ੬, ਪ-੨

By listening (accepting and practicing) even one of the basic principles of the Guru's teachings one's mind becomes impregnated with gems, jewels, and rubies (wisdom).

AGGS, Jap 6, p 2.

ਸਣਿ ਸਣਿ ਸਿਖ ਹਮਾਰੀ ॥

ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਕੀਤਾ ਰਹਸੀ ਮੇਰੇ ਜੀਅੜੇ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਵਾਰੀ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ੧੫੪,

Oh Man! Listen and listen again to my teachings! Only the good deeds will be rewarded (not any other rituals performed).

This life is the only life since you will not get this life again.1. Pause.

AGGS, M 1, p 154.

Here '*Hamari*' means (mine). Nanak as Guru says: Listen to the philosophy of mine.

In the following phrase Guru Amardas explains that 'ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਿਖ 'means 'Teachings of Guru Nanak'.

ਏ ਮਨ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣਿ ਹਰਿ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਗੁਣੀ ਨਿਧਾਨ ॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੩, ਪ-੫੧੨.

"Hey Mind! Listen to the teachings of the Guru (Nanak), You will attain wisdom and treasure and realize God (Har)."

AGGS, M 3, p 512.

Here 'Guru' is for Nanak and 'Har' is for God.

Guru Amardas confirms the principle of Guru Nanak since Sat Guru is Nanak who has promulgated true philosophy:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਾਚੀ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣਾਈ ॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੩, ਪ -੧੧੭.

The True Guru (Nanak) has promulgated the true

philosophy.

AGGS, M 3, p 117.

Now Guru Arjan himself is requesting Guru Nanak to impart us (everybody) your teachings (philosophy), which could eliminate our superstitions from our minds and creates love for the company of noble people:

ਨਾਨਕੁ ਸਿਖ ਦੇਇ ਮਨ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਿ ਭੂਮੁ ਜਾਲੇ ॥੧॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ਪ, ਪ-੭੯.

Oh Nanak! Impart us your teachings (philosophy), which could eliminate superstitions from our minds and create love for the company of noble people. 1. AGGS, M 5, p 79.

Please note here that *Kaka* of Nanak is with *onkar* (_) that means Nanak himself not as a pen name (Mahla) or God. However, *Kaka* without *onkar* in Nanak in the previously mentioned phrases also means Nanak himself not as a pen name or God, the fact, which is usually ignored by many scholars while interpreting Gurbani. As soon as one becomes familiar with Nanakian Philosophy in its real perspective then it is easy to understand Gurbani in its real perspective. For details on this topic see Chahal [3].

3. 'Sikhi' (Plural of 'Sikh') means the Sikhs: Here Guru Amardas clarifies that 'Sikhi' is plural of 'Sikh' meaning persons who listen to the teachings of Guru Nanak:

ਉਪਦੇਸੁੰ^੧ ਜਿ ਦਿਤਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ^੨ ਸੋ ਸੁਣਿਆ ਸਿਖੀ^੩ ਕੰਨੇ । ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੩, ਪ−੩੧੪.

The Sikhs³ listened with ears to the teachings¹ (philosophy) that was promulgated by the True Guru² (Nanak).
AGGS, M 3, p 314.

ਸਤਿ ਗੁਰੂ (Sat Guru) in the above phrase has been used for Guru Nanak since Nanak is accepted as 'Sat Guru' as follows:

ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰੂ^੧ ਗੁਰੂ^੨ ਹੈ ਪੂਰਾ^੩ ਮਿਲਿ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ^੪ ਨਾਮ^੫ ਧਿਆਇਆ^੬ ॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੪, ਪ−੮੮੨.

Guru Nanak is the Guru¹ of Gurus², is the Complete³ and True Guru⁴ by meeting him (Sat Guru) one can realize/comprehend⁶ God⁵."

AGGS, M 4, p 882.

In the following phrase Guru Amardas define the term 'Sikh' according to Nanakian Philosophy as follows:

ਜੇ ਕੋ ਸਿਖੁ, ਗੁਰੂ ਸੇਤੀ ਸਨਮੁਖੁ° ਹੋਵੈ ॥ ਹੋਵੈ ਤ ਸਨਮੁਖੁ° ਸਿਖੁ ਕੋਈ, ਜੀਅਹੁ^੨ ਰਹੈ ਗੁਰ ਨਾਲੇ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਚਰਨ^੩ ਹਿਰਦੈ° ਧਿਆਏ, ਅੰਤਰ ਆਤਮੈ^੫ ਸਮਾਲੇ ॥ ਆਪ^੬ ਛਡਿ ਸਦਾ ਰਹੈ ਪਰਣੈ^੨, ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਕੋਏ ॥ ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕੁ* ਸੁਣਹੁ ਸੰਤਹੁ^੮, ਸੋ ਸਿਖੁ ਸਨਮੁਖੁ⁴ ਹੋਏ ॥੨੧॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੩, ਪ−੯੨੦.

If one is a Sikh that should be facing (following) the Guru (Teachings).

If there is any Sikh like that, his mind² is always facing l (following) the Guru (teachings).

That person (Sikh) keeps the teachings³ in his/her mind⁴ and consciousness⁵.

He/she abandons ego⁶ and lives according⁷ to the teachings of the Guru and does not practice any other.

Guru Nanak* says: Oh noble person⁸! The One who is following¹ his teachings is a Sikh.

AGGS, M 3, p 820.

* Here Nanak is himself not as pen name since *kaka* of Nanak is with *onkar*.

4. 'Sikh' also Means 'Kesha' (Hair)

In Gurbani 'Sikh' also means *kesha* (hair) as used in the following verse:

ਮੂੰਡੁ ਮੁਡਾਇ^੧ ਜਟਾ ਸਿਖ*² ਬਾਧੀ ਮੋਨਿ³ ਰਹੈ ਅਭਿਮਾਨਾ⁸ ॥ ਮਨੂਆ ਡੋਲੈ ਦਹ ਦਿਸ ਧਾਵੈ ਬਿਨੁ ਰਤ ਆਤਮ ਗਿਆਨਾ ॥ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ^੫ ਛੋਡਿ ਮਹਾ ਬਿਖ^੬ ਪੀਵੈ ਮਾਇਆ² ਕਾ ਦੇਵਾਨਾ ॥ ਕਿਰਤੁ ਨ ਮਿਟਈ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਨ ਬੂਝੈ ਪਸੂਆ ਮਾਹਿ ਸਮਾਨਾ ॥੫॥ ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ੧, ਪ−੧੦੧੩.

Some people shave¹ their heads while other keep their hair in matted tangles*²; still some make a knot of hair in the center (bodi); some just keep silent³; however, they are proud⁴ of their actions.

In spite of performing such actions their minds waver and wander in ten directions without spiritual wisdom. Under the influence of Maya (illusion)⁷ they abandon the spiritual wisdom⁵ but are crazy to drink the deadly poison⁶ (adopt wrong philosophy).

The one, who does not understand the Laws of Nature, that the reactions of all actions (good or bad) cannot be stopped, are equivalent to beasts. 5.

AGGS. M 1, p 1013.

* ਸਿਖ = Here 'Sikh' does not mean that 'Sikh' as discussed before. Here it means "hair in matted tangles".

5. 'Sikhing' also means teachings. ਭੇਖੀ^੧ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਨ ਲਭਈ ਵਿਣੁ ਸਚੀ ਸਿਖੰ^੨॥

ਅਗਗਸ, ਮ ਪ, ੧੦੯੯.

By wearing certain garbs¹ God is not realized, it can only be realized through true teachings² (of Guru Nanak).

AGGS, M 5, p 1099.

The phrases at # 4 and 5 are to be noted carefully. In phrase # 4 Guru Nanak is emphasizing that keeping hair does not help to get salvation. It is only by conducting

good deeds. Then in phrase # 5 Guru Arjan expresses that wearing certain garbs does not help to realize God.

Prof Singh further says that: "In the final analysis, it is fitting that the word "Sikhism" places the emphasis on the followers who walk the path."

The above statement of Prof Singh indicates that 'Sikhism' is based on the followers who walk on the path. However, it is doubtful, how much the so-called Sikhs are following the 'Sikhi' in its real perspective.

In fact 'Sikhism' is an anglicized form of 'Sikhi' - the teachings (philosophy) of Guru Nanak, which is to be followed by the Sikhs in its real perspective.

Prof Singh is further demeaning the importance of Guru Nanak in founding of Sikhism with his following statement:

"Relabeling it Guruism or Nanakism may exalt the founder, but would diminish the essence of the journey and curtail the role of the follower."

The fact is that nobody has re-labeled 'Sikhi' as 'Guruism' or 'Nanakism' the speculative terms of Prof Singh and Prof McLeod.

It becomes crystal clear from the above discussion that:

- 'Sikhi' as well as 'Sikh' means teachings (philosophy) of Guru Nanak.
- 'Sikh' does not mean merely Sisha as in Sanskrit or Sikho as in Pali as reported by Prof Singh. It has many meanings in Gurbani, particularly, it means 'teachings of Guru Nanak' and the one who follows 'Sikhi' (teachings/philosophy) of Guru Nanak. Therefore, the term 'Sikhism' has not been derived from 'Sikh', 'follower' or 'Shisha' as is considered by Prof Singh and others.
- In fact the word 'Sikhi' (not the 'Sikh') has been anglicized as 'Sikhism'. 'Sikhi' is a Punjabi word and 'Sikhism' is its English equivalent, which means teachings (philosophy) of Guru Nanak according to Gurbani incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS).

B. GURBANI, GURMAT, AND NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY

Prof I J Singh says:

"Sikhism or Sikhi, as Sikhs prefer to call it, is different. The Name of the religion has nothing at all to do with the Names of the founder-Gurus of the movement. Nanak was the first Guru, but I have never heard this faith called Nanakism. Nor is the Name of any of the succeeding nine Gurus ever used to identify the religion, though it is sometimes called the way of Nanak, but never in an institutional sense.

I am aware that one writer, Davinder Singh, has forcefully argued for Sikhism to be viewed as Nanakian philosophy. I don't know if he is aiming to reName the religion. I believe he is taking the lead from the way we identify schools of thought or philosophies; witness the Socratic method, Aristotelian logic, Platonic love or Hegelian philosophy, etc. In any event, Nanakian philosophy would be an inadequate term. It is true that Sikh tradition is, in its essential core, the worldview of Nanak, but the evolution and elaboration of that philosophy to maturity occupied another nine Gurus that followed Nanak during the course of two centuries."

Prof Singh is misleading the readers with his following statement:

"I am aware that one writer, Davinder Singh, has forcefully argued for Sikhism to be viewed as Nanakian philosophy. I don't know if he is aiming to reName the religion."

I have never declared or said that Sikhism should be reNamed as Nanakian Philosophy. I am also not aiming to reName the religion. It appears that Prof Singh is also confused about the use of the term 'Nanakian Philosophy' as he is confused with two other well accepted terms: 'Sikhi' and 'Sikhism'.

NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY

I have noticed that the term 'Nanakian Philosophy' is not being understood in its real perspective as is evident from above statement of Prof Singh . 'Nanakian Philosophy' is the philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in his Bani incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS), which has further been explained and strengthened by the Sikh Gurus, who succeeded to the 'House of Nanak', in their Bani, which is also incorporated in the AGGS. This term has already been defined as above in my previous article [2].

Therefore, 'Nanakian Philosophy' is a philosophy and 'Sikhism' is a religion. Whenever I write Nanakian Philosophy in my articles it means philosophy of Guru Nanak as defined above; nothing more nothing less. Moreover, Sikhi (Sikhism) is not a religion but has become so since it has been too much institutionalized like others by introducing a lot of rituals and code of conducts.

However, I do emphasize that 'Sikhi' (Sikhism), as explained in the AGGS, is the teaching/philosophy of Guru Nanak.

GURMAT

Prof I J Singh writes that: "... but it (Gurmat) does not sit well with him", explained by him as follows:

"In fact, McLeod feels that the suffix "ism" at the end of religions is not very meaningful; he would like to see Sikhism referred to as "Gurmat." "Gur" refers to Guru and "mat" could be translated as the way or wisdom, making Sikhism the path that hews to Guru's wisdom. Somewhat consistent with all this was an interpretation by a Sikh scholar at a conference, but it did not sit very well with me. He recognized that the Sikh message hews to the teaching of the Guru, and also that the word "Sikh" for the followers of this path is perhaps not easily understood by many, especially if they are non-Sikhs. So he suggested that the Sikh path should be redubbed "Guruism" instead. (I wonder what would the followers then be called Guruists or Guruites?) Never having heard such a proposition, I was baffled, though many in the audience thought that perhaps the idea was swell. But, as I pondered some more, I realized that the term Guru now no longer suggests only a supremely enlightened teacher, nor does it always speak of the Sikh application of the term. Gurus are now a dime a dozen. One can find a tabla or sitar guru, a guru in the kitchen, or one in the spa. Some might even think of me as a guru of anatomy, because that's what I teach. But when we speak of Guru Nanak or his successor Gurus, the term is very specific and unmatched in its meaning or reverence. So "Guruism" just would not do; it is too generic and unconnected to the message that we label Sikhi."

I could agree with him that 'Gurmat' and 'Guruism' are not specific terms since 'Guru' is not defined in these term. The word 'Gurmat' appears in Gurbani many times and 'Guru' has also been explained in the Gurbani that Guru is Nanak as discussed previously. Therefore, 'Gurmat' means 'mat' (teachings/philosophy) of Guru Nanak. According to Bhai Kahn Singh 'Gurmat' is defined as: Guru's precepts; principles; tenets; code of conduct; Sikh religion; Sikhi, Sikhism [8, 9]. Here again it is a broad term and Guru has not been specified.

However, I have read and heard people arguing that since the Granth is the Guru, therefore, 'Gurmat', meaning the 'mat' (teachings and philosophy) found in the Guru Granth is very appropriate term. It means the term 'Gurmat' is the 'mat' (teachings/philosophy) of 6 Sikh Gurus plus that of many Bhagats, Sants, Sufis, and Bhatts. Therefore, the 'Gurmat' is a composite philosophy of many Gurus, Bhgats, Sants, sufis, Bhatts, etc. However, it cannot be called philosophy of Granth since Granth has no philosophy; the philosophy always belongs to a person who may be a Guru or a Bhagat. Some may say that the philosophy has been communicated by the same God to all these Gurus and Bhagats still it belongs to the individual Guru or Bhagat

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who has represented it to the humanity. This fact has been clearly identified in the AGGS. The Bani of Sikh Gurus has been identified with the number of their succession to the House of Nanak as Mahla 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9. The Bani of Bhagats has been identified as 'Bani Bhagat Kabit Ji ki', and the Bani of other Bhagats, Sants, Sufis with their names. And Swayiay of Bhatt's have been identified with Mahla number of each Sikh Guru and the name of the Bhatts comes in their Bani. So we have to use a term, which is very specific and self explanatory so that the readers immediately can guess what the term means.

Many Sikh scholars also argue that since the Bani in the Granth is from God if it is so then every author in the Granth is the Guru of the Sikhs. This leads to the conclusion that Kabir was the first to write the Bani of God before all the Sikh Gurus, therefore, Kabir will be claimed as the founder of Sikhism if we, the Sikhs, continued to undermine the contributions of Guru Nanak, who gave us unique and original philosophy.

Are the Sikhs ready to accept it?

GURBANI

It is very pertinent to examine the term 'Gurbani' as explained by Bhai Kahn Singh [9]:

"The Bani (Sabd) uttered by the mouth of Guru Nanak and his successor (to the House of Nanak) Satgurus under the intuition of the Almighty is called Gurbani.

He further emphasized in a note that although Bhai Gurdas uses this term for the Bani of all other Atam Gianis, however, this term is reserved, especially, for the Bani of our Satgurus.

(**Note**: In general the Bani of Sikh Gurus, which has not been incorporated in the AGGS, is also considered Gurbani' by the Sikh en masse. However, the authentic Bani of Gurus is available in the AGGS.)

CONCLUSIONS

From above discussion it can be easily concluded that:

- 'Sikhi' is a very specific term for the philosophy promulgated by Guru Nanak.
- 'Sikhism' is an anglicized form of 'Sikhi', which is

- very appropriate term to be used in English language.
- 'Nanakian Philosophy' is the philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak incorporated in the AGGS, which has been further explained and strengthened by the Sikh Gurus in their Bani, which is also incorporated in the AGGS.
- There are many meanings for 'Sikh': 'Sikh' means as 'teachings/philosophy' of Guru Nanak and also the one who follows the 'Sikhi'.
- The Sikh terms used in Sikh literature need to be defined very specifically and precisely so that these terms are understood properly by every writer and reader.
- The intrinsic values of 'Sabd', 'Guru', 'Sabd Guru', and 'Granth Guru' have already been explained by Chahal [3] in his book, *Sabd Guru to Granth Guru*.
- 'Gurbani' means Bani of the Sikh Gurus.
- 'Gurmat' means 'mat' of the Gurus.
- 'Gurbani' and 'Gurmat' needs to be defined specifically and precisely.

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