



CONTEMPORARY SIKHISM IN THE CONTEXT OF  
MALAYSIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE  
SIKH COMMUNITY IN SELANGOR

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the Sikh's understanding and practice of Sikhism in the context of Malay-Muslim majority society, Malaysia. It is assumed that the multi-religious and multi-racial nature of Malaysian society somehow would affect the Sikhs' understanding and practice of their religion. The difficulties in practicing and getting Sikh education are among the issues in the practice and understanding of Sikhism in the Malaysian context. Apart from the understanding and practice, it is of equal importance of the Sikhs' perception on Muslims and Islam in Malaysia is also investigated in this study. This study shows that the privileged status of Islam in Malaysia causes some concerns and complaints on the part of several adherents of Sikhism. This study has been able to highlight this issue objectively and emphatically. Using in-depth interview method, (30) Sikhs have been interviewed from the low, the middle and the higher income groups as well as their religious experts. The objective of this explorative study is to identify the Sikhs' condition as a religious community in a majority-minority context with Islam as the privileged religion. It is aimed at preserving and promoting good inter-religious relationship and understanding among Malaysian communities so that the non-Muslim religion can continue to be practiced in peace and harmony, as provided by the Constitution of Malaysia. It is discovered that in terms of practice, the Sikhs are following the Sikh *Rehit Maryādā* (The Sikh Code of Conduct) of the *Khālsā* Order of the Tenth *Gurū*, Gobind Singh (d.1708) though not fully successful in observing the Sikhs' Article of Faith i.e. the Five Ks and abstaining from the *Chār-kurehit* (Four Taboos). Some members of the Sikh community also express some difficulties and obstacles they face in practicing their religion in Malaysia while to some of them, Malaysia is considered as the second home for Sikhism after the Punjab. In terms of understanding of the fundamental concepts, the Sikhs are united in their understanding of the Oneness of God as well as the position of *Gurūs* and *Gurū Granth Sāhib*. However, they have differences of opinion with regard to other concepts like the concept of karma (human action) and views on some of the *Khālsā* Code of Discipline.

## خلاصة البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة عن فهم العقيدة السيخية وممارستها لدى طائفة السيخ في المجتمع الملايوي ذي الأكثرية المسلمة بماليزيا، حيث إن تعدد الأديان والأعراق فيها قد يؤثر في فهم عقيدة السيخ وممارستها. تعد صعوبة التطبيق للشعائر الدينية للسيخ والحصول على تعاليمها من القضايا التي تتعلق بالفهم والتطبيق في المجتمع الماليزي، فضلا عن معرفة رأي السيخ وتصورهم تجاه الإسلام والمسلمين بماليزيا، لأن الإسلام هو الدين الرسمي للدولة، وبسبب هذه الميزة لماليزيا بأنها دولة مسلمة، فقد يسبب ذلك كله ظهور بعض الشكاوي والنقد خاصة للسيخ. تسعى الدراسة إلى معرفة أوضاع مجتمع السيخ بماليزيا، إذ إنهم من الأقليات في المجتمع الماليزي ذي الأكثرية المسلمة، وتسعى أيضا إلى تعزيز العلاقة الوثيقة بين الأديان الأخرى والحفاظ عليها في بلد متعدد الأعراق والأديان، وهذا شيء فريد من نوعه، حيث تتمتع ماليزيا بالسفافية والأمن والأمان وفقا للدستور الماليزي، واستطاعت الدراسة تسليط الضوء على تلك القضية بموضوعية وبشدة تامة. أثبتت الدراسة منهج المقابلة المباشرة لثلاثين فردا من طائفة السيخ من مجموعات عدة، منها مجموعة ذات دخل عال، ومنها متوسط الدخل، ومنها قليل الدخل، فضلا عن مجموعة ملتزمة بعقيدة السيخ أو ما يطلق عليهم المتدينون. توصلت الدراسة إلى نتائج مهمة، وهي: في جانب التطبيق لعقيدة السيخ، فإن طائفة السيخ يمارسون شعائريهم وفقا لمبادئ: (سيخ راهت مريادا) لغورو العاشر وهو غورو "كوبيند سينغ" المتوفى عام (١٧٠٨م)، وعلى الرغم من وجود هذه المبادئ إلا أنهم لم يطبقوها بشكل تام، حيث لا يلتزمون بأركان الدين الخمسة للسيخ وهي: (خمس كافات)، ولا يتبعون الموانع الدينية الأربعة في عقيدة السيخ، وأن بعض السيخ يُعدون ماليزيا وطنهم الثاني بعد البنجاب بالهند، ولكنهم يجدون بعض العوائق والصعوبات في تأدية طقوسهم الدينية، ومن جانب الفهم لأساسيات الدين، فقد وجدت الدراسة أن طائفة السيخ متفقة جميعها في فهم عقيدة وحدانية الإله، ومتفقة على مكانة الغورو (الأنبياء) عندهم، وغورو جرات صاهيب (الكتاب المقدس)، ولكنهم يختلفون في فهم بعض النظريات الأخرى، كنظرية التناسخ، وبعض القواعد السلوكية.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*Dedicated in humble gratitude to*

*Professor M. Kamāl Ḥassan*

*My parents*

*Late Muḥammad 'Uthmān El-Muḥammady (Allāh yarḥamu-hū)*

*Mariam Binti Ḥussien*

*Late 'Abdul Ḥamīd Bin 'Abdul Ḥalīm (Allāh yarḥamu-hū)*

*Āmnah Edress,*

*My husband*

*Abū Faiṣal Fahd 'Abdul Ḥamīd*

*My children*

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the unfortunate results of the infamous September 11 attack is that the perception of religions in general, has undergone something of a paradigm shift. “Instead of standing for virtue and piety, peace and harmony, the world religions also came to be inextricably associated with evil, aggression, and terror”.<sup>1</sup> The debate on whether religion and secular dimensions of modern life can be reconciled, and whether the different religions of the world can ever coexist in harmony became a mainstream global intellectual and political discourse of great significance.<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that the “very future of religion itself has sometimes seemed to be uncertain and or, at least suspected”.<sup>3</sup>

Although all world religions in general seemed to be indirectly affected by the September 11 event, Islam in particular, was rigorously associated with all sorts of terrorist acts. The “Islamophobia” which emerged in the Western world out of this phenomenon has spread throughout the world. At the same time, some incidents in the Muslim world seem to exacerbate the preconceived ideas of many non-Muslims towards Islam. What has happened in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule was an example. The ancient Buddha statues of the Hazaras<sup>4</sup> were destroyed by the Taliban in Bamiyan also in 2001.<sup>5</sup> This kind of brutal and senseless action by some members

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<sup>1</sup> Arvind Sharma. (ed.). *The World's Religions After September 11* (Praeger Publishers Publication: New York, 2008), vol. 1, in the publisher's perspective.

<sup>2</sup> One of the outcomes of such concern is the work under title *The World's Religions After September 11*, a compilation of the congress papers presented in commemoration of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Centre which has been published by the Praeger Publishers Publication, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Publisher's perspective on *The World's Religions After September 11*, vol. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Hazāra* is one of the Afghan's principal ethnics who speak the language of *Darī* which is a branch of the Persian.

<sup>5</sup> Dilipkumar, “The story of Bamian Buddha – How Marvels were Created and Massacred,” <<http://www.hazarapeople.com/2011/01/02/the-story-of-bamiyan-buddhas-how-marvels-were-created-and-massacred>> (accessed 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2011).

of the Taliban has evoked a wide range of negative reactions from world communities including some Muslim scholars who strongly condemned such an “uncivilized act.” In the Muslim scholars’ perspective, this act was totally opposing the value of *tasāmuḥ* (religious tolerance) which is an integral part of the Islamic worldview. This incident therefore, had absolutely aggravated the negative perceptions that non-Muslims have about Islam especially after the September 11, 2001.

The Sikhs in Afghanistan, however, seemed to have reacted in a positive manner concerning the Taliban’s rule. The Sikhs left Afghanistan during the Soviet Union’s era but then have back when the Taliban came to power. Some Sikhs in Jalalabad confessed that they felt completely safe in Afghanistan; the only home they have ever known.<sup>6</sup> A leader of the Sikh community in Jalalabad optimistically regarded the common grounds between Sikhism and Islam, especially on doctrinal principles, has bridged the gap between them. Believing and trusting in One God (*Ek Oangkarh*) is the main principle in both religions share in common, although some differences apparently could be identified. The Sikhs in Afghanistan also seem optimistic that “the Taliban practiced no discrimination against them”.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in general, the post September 11 environment has not been conducive for peaceful and harmonious relationship between Islam and other faiths. In the Malaysian context, Islam is seen as a dominant religion as it is clearly stated in the Malaysian Constitution, Article 3 that “Islam is the religion of the Federation”. Islam is being protected by the government of Malaysia, and its privileged position is well-known. This privileged status of Islam, however, has resulted in the emergence of some negative comments against its position as the religion of the Federation. Such

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<sup>6</sup> Baldauf Scott, “Sikhs Set Example for Getting along with the Taliban,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 13, 2001, <<http://www.themodernreligion.com/jihad/afghan/sikh.html>> (accessed 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

comments in the environment certainly would not help in promoting good inter-religious relationship between Islam and other faith systems, whereas, for fifty seven years since the Independence in 1957, all religious communities in Malaysia have been living in peace and harmony without such biased complaints against each other. However, there is no doubt that there have been some elements of politicisation of the issue in order to garner political support during the general elections. This politicisation has unfortunately affected inter-religious relationships in Malaysia.

In light of the current social and political environment in contemporary Malaysia, this research will explore the Sikh community's understanding and practice of the Sikh religion in present day Malaysia. It is assumed that under the present political situation and as a consequence of September 11 event, in which the image of Islam at the world level is considerably blemished, inter-religious coexistence in this multi-racial and multi-religious society, at certain levels, seems to be negatively affected by the image of Islam in the post September 11 period. In situation such as this, all religious communities may have become more self-conscious to ascertain their religious identities and security of their traditions though they were probably not so enthusiastic about it before. This new religious consciousness and heightened concern about religious identity and rights, if coloured by the prejudices and negative perceptions projected by the world media, could be a stumbling block to a more peaceful and harmonious relationship between the minority non-Muslim communities and the majority Muslim community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a detail account of this growing religious assertion by non-Muslims in Malaysia please refer Ahmad F. Yousif, "Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: An Islamic Response to Non-Muslim Concerns," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 21:4: 34, [https://www.google.com/webhp?source=search\\_app#q=Islamic+Revivalism+in+Malaysia%3A+An+Islamic+Response+to+Non-Muslim+Concerns%2C+The+American+Journal+of+Islamic+Social+Sciences+21%3A4.+](https://www.google.com/webhp?source=search_app#q=Islamic+Revivalism+in+Malaysia%3A+An+Islamic+Response+to+Non-Muslim+Concerns%2C+The+American+Journal+of+Islamic+Social+Sciences+21%3A4.+) (accessed 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2013). Also Susan E. Ackerman and Raymond L. M. Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovations and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Forum Enterprise,

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Sikhs are a community of Sikh religion (*Sikhhi*) or Sikhism which was born in the state of Punjab five hundred years ago. It is the newest religion in the world which emerged against the background of Islam and Hinduism during the Moghul period. But the Sikh community, however, spread all over the world including Malaysia. Although it is the youngest religion of the world and having around 22 million followers all over the world,<sup>9</sup> it is generally referred as the fifth largest religion of the world in terms of followers,<sup>10</sup> exceeding the number of the followers of Judaism.

Nevertheless, living in diasporas, it is inevitable that diasporic communities have learned to live in the given socio-cultural contexts with certain values being shared and adapted so as to fit in with the respective local environments. In the case of the Sikh community – at least to the researcher’s point of view – their dilemma for being a minority group in general is generally due to their conspicuous outward appearance they have to maintain in observing the Five Ks.<sup>11</sup> It is their distinguished identity which was intentionally marked by *Gurū* Gobind Singh (1666 – 1708 A.D.) during the *Vaisākhī* 1699, which had made the Sikhs known even among thousands. This distinguished identity would be unquestionably maintained by devoted Sikhs. In addition, global challenges might also impact upon the perspectives of some ordinary Sikhs which indirectly affect the religious practices and identity, although the sacred doctrines would remain intact.

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1990), 6; Olaf Schumann, “Christians and Muslims in Search of Common Ground in Malaysia,” in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 2, no. 1 (December 1991): 264.

<sup>9</sup> M. Kamal Hassan *et al*, (eds.) “Religions and Beliefs” in *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Didier Millet, 2005) 10:116.

<sup>10</sup> Darshan Singh Gill, *Sikh Community in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: MPH Group publishing Sdn Bhd, 2009), 24.

<sup>11</sup> The Five Ks is five items that a baptized Sikh has to observe or a Sikh in general. Each item started with letter “k”. They are *kara* (iron bangle), *kesh* (unshorn hair), *kachchera* (underwear), *kanga* (comb), and *kirpān* (small dagger).

Some studies on the Sikhs in Malaysia also seem to confirm this presumption.<sup>12</sup> The dilemmas of the Sikhs are discussed at the academic level, in conferences, seminars and workshops. At the Southeast Asian level, the most recent one is an international workshop on “Sikhs in Multicultural Southeast Asia: Negotiating an Identity”.<sup>13</sup> Among the most important issues discussed are dilemma and religious identity. Internal conflicts and issues on unification also seem to bother the Sikh community in Malaysia. This condition is seen as a predicament which, if it is not properly handled will result in devastating consequences to the Sikh community as Sandhu rightly put that “the Sikhs in Malaysia are not only “a society in transition” but are also at critical societal cross-road which, a wrong turning or inappropriate action could lead to disastrous consequences”.<sup>14</sup>

Historically, the Sikhs in Malaysia are Punjabis whom originally migrated from the state of Punjab in pre-partition India. After the partition in 1947, Punjab was divided to two parts; Punjab of India and of Pakistan. The history of the Sikh migration in Malaysia “can be traced back to the British colonial era when some exiled Sikhs arrived in Malaya after the annexation of the Punjab by the British in 1850s”<sup>15</sup> which led to the end of the Sikh Kingdom. For the first time in Punjab history, the state was ruled by a Sikh King known as *Maharaja* Ranjit Singh (1780–1839 A.D.) for forty years from (1799 – 1839 A.D.). After the fall of the Kingdom,

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<sup>12</sup> See Sarjit Singh Gill, “Peranan Gurdwara dalam Pembentukan Identiti Sikh di Malaysia,” (unpublished PhD thesis, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2005); Sarjit Singh Gill, “Gurdwara and its politics: current debate on Sikh identity in Malaysia”, *Sari* 26 (2008): 243-255; Sarjit S. Darshan, “Diaspora dan Masalah Identiti Sikh di Malaysia”, *Jurnal Akademika* 55 (July 1999): 183-192; Kernal Singh Sandhu, “Sikhs in Malaysia: A Society in Transition”, in *Indian Communities in Southeast Asia*, K. S. Sandhu and A. K. Mani (eds.) (ISEAS: Singapore, 1993), 558-567.

<sup>13</sup> This workshop has been organized by the ISEAS with collaboration with the University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 12 – 13 May, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> K. S. Sandhu, “A Society in Transition”, 567.

<sup>15</sup> M. K. Hassan *et al*, “Religions and Beliefs”, vol. 10:118.

his son *Maharaja Dalip Singh* (1838 – 1893 A.D.) converted to Christianity in 1853 and spent the rest of his life in England until he died in France in 1893.<sup>16</sup>

Sikhs were also brought in Malaya by the British as members of the British security forces in 1873.<sup>17</sup> They served the British by 1880s and settled and “established themselves in urban areas”.<sup>18</sup> However, “the flood of young Sikhs’ arrival in this region was after the First World War where they were seeking opportunities in trade, transportation businesses, money lending, security services and other areas”.<sup>19</sup> Economic and political factors in the Punjab were certainly one of the main reasons for this migration to Southeast Asia between 1880s and 1920s and to other parts of the world.<sup>20</sup> However, “Sikh population in Malaysia is the biggest in Southeast Asian countries and it is rather widespread”.<sup>21</sup> According to Dusenbery, “estimation of Sikhs in Malaysia amounted to 40,000 people, and they mostly live in big cities like Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Ipoh, and Johor Bahru”.<sup>22</sup>

Sikhs who live in different parts of the world definitely have to adapt themselves to fit in with their respective geographical environments in terms of politics, socio-cultural ambiance, language as well as sensitivity of that particular locations involved. This is because the challenges are different from one place to another. In Malaysia, it is assumed that the Sikhs’ life and practices of their tradition and religion are influenced by the elements of multi-cultural and multi-religious context of a Muslim-majority country. Therefore, it is assumed that being associated

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<sup>16</sup> Kushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 8<sup>th</sup> impression, 1989), 2:87.

<sup>17</sup> Darshan S. Gill, *Sikh Community in Malaysia*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> M. K. Hassan *et al*, “Religions and Beliefs”, vol. 10:118.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> A. Verne Dusenbery, “Diasporic Imaging and Conditions of Possibility: Sikhs and the State in Southeast Asia”, *SOJOURN*, vol. 12 (1997): 226-260.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

and acculturated with other communities, by and large, affects their social and religious practices as well as their perception towards other religions as well.

Secondly, the post 9/11 world politics has damaged the image of Islam and put the Muslims in a negative light through the Western media and the U. S. political and military campaigns in the Muslim world. This may also influence the Sikh perception of the Muslims and Islam in Malaysia. Therefore, this study attempts to understand the contemporary Sikh community's understanding and practice of Sikhism in these circumstances and to know their perspectives on Islam which may have been influenced by the changes in contemporary Malaysia and in the world at large. This research tries to answer the following research questions:

- 1.1.1 How do the Sikhs of Malaysia understand and explain Sikhism in the current world situation?
- 1.1.2 How is Sikhism practiced in the Malay-Muslim majority society Malaysia?
- 1.1.3 What are the difficulties that the Sikhs face in practicing Sikhism in the Malaysia?
- 1.1.4 What is the general perception of the Sikhs to Muslims, Malays and how do the developments after 9/11 affect Sikhs' perception of Muslims in Malaysia, especially in view of the negative stereotyping of Muslims as terrorists in the Western media?
- 1.1.5 How does the Sikh community perceive and play its role in leading a life of peaceful coexistence with others in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society in Malaysia?

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study aims at:

- 1.2.1 Exploring the Sikhs' understanding of their religion in the Malaysian context.
- 1.2.2 Investigating the practice of Sikhism in the Malay-Muslim majority context Malaysia.
- 1.2.3 Investigating the difficulties that the Sikhs face in practicing Sikhism Malaysia.
- 1.2.4 Identifying Sikhs' view on Muslims and Malays in general and, as of the September 11 aftermath.
- 1.2.5 Exploring the Sikhs view and contributions towards peaceful coexistence in the ambiance of the multi-cultural and multi-religious society in Malaysia.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

The research questions need to be addressed and studied for a few reasons. First, the Sikh community has not been adequately studied by the Muslims in Malaysia. It can be said that very limited study of the Sikh community and matters related to their religion and community has been conducted by Muslims in Malaysia. Previous studies on Sikh community generally have examined their historical aspect, social and cultural dilemma as a minority ethnic group in present-day Malaysia. These studies also have been conducted mostly by the Sikh researchers and not Muslim Malays. To the researcher's knowledge, no field work research has been conducted so far to explore religious dimension of the Sikhs in Malaysia in particular, which, in fact forms a very important aspect as part of promoting and creating interreligious

harmony in this plural society. The researcher assumes that this lacking on part of the Malays probably has distanced them from other communities in Malaysia, including the Sikhs. That is why other communities in Malaysia regard the Malays as the community whom does not care about others, and even do not want to know others. It is a cause of concern that the ignorance of the Malays about others will affect the state of peace and harmony of the country in the near future. Therefore, this respective study by a Muslim Malay student will provide useful knowledge on contemporary Sikh community in terms of their understanding of their religion, the way the religion is practiced, the obstacles that they face which are probably caused by Muslim ignorance of “others”, and also how they look at others from their religious perspective. In addition to contributing to the body of knowledge about the Sikhs by Muslims, it also will contribute to the enrichment of the discipline of comparative religion in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), as the Department of *Uṣūl al-Dīn* and Comparative Religion aspires to be a centre of excellence in comparative religion.

Apart from this, the researcher also considers as vital the observation by McLeod, one of the prominent Western scholars of Sikh studies with regard to the significance of research on Sikhism and the Sikh community. McLeod views that although there are more Sikhs in the world than the Jews statistically, when one surveys the field of scholarship on Sikhism, the position is dramatically reversed.<sup>23</sup>

He says:

One need only consider the number of Sikh scholars or foreigners working on the Sikh studies, and compare it with those in Jewish Studies, to become more uncomfortably aware that the Sikhs receive nothing like the attention which they deserve.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> W. H. McLeod's, "Researching the Rehit," in *Sikhism and History*, edited by Pashaura Singh and N.G. Barrier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30-43

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Second, in the context of a multi-religious society Malaysia, every religious community should have common knowledge of other religious traditions. People should know some similar aspects that all religions share such as common values and moral principles. By understanding the common ground of different religions, a better appreciation of both Islam and Sikhism, by the Muslims and the Sikhs alike, could also be expected. This can be realized through a mutual understanding of common teachings, values and moral principles found in both religions. And for the Muslims in particular, they should know the understanding and perception of other religious communities towards Islam equally in order to achieve peaceful and harmonious relationship with one and another. Finally, this study by a Malay-Muslim lecturer in comparative religion aims at understanding the Sikh religion in Malaysia the way the adherents themselves see it, explain it, internalise and practise it. She is therefore not interested to highlight the differences that may exist among the Sikh communities regarding religious beliefs, and in spite of the differences between Islam and other religions, she is keen to underscore the common values or moral principles which would serve as a basis for strengthening inter-religious relationship in Malaysia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Sikh community and religion founded by *Gurū Nānak* (1469-1539) including its philosophy and conception, textual studies, historical and cultural problems at diasporas has been researched by prominent Sikh scholars in the field such as Daljeet Singh (d. 1994), Kharak Singh, J. S Grewal, Surindar Singh Kohli, Pritam Singh Gill, Harbans Singh, and Kushwant Singh, Patwant Singh (d. 2009) and Western scholars

such as – earlier among them – M. A. McAuliffe (d. 1913),<sup>25</sup> J.D. Cunningham (d. 1851),<sup>26</sup> M. Juergensmeyer,<sup>27</sup> which are among the prominent names in the field of historical studies of Sikh community. While the contemporary scholars of Sikhism include W. H. McLeod (d. 2009), Harjot Oberoi, Pashaura Singh, Piar Singh (d. 1996). Louis Fenech<sup>28</sup> and Tony Ballantyne<sup>29</sup> and N. Gerald Barrier<sup>30</sup> on the other hand, are among the post-modern scholars of Sikh studies who may appear to be at present considerably controversial. From purely historical, textual and conceptual studies on Sikhism, however, after the event of mid 1984 which is coded as the “Operation Blue Star”<sup>31</sup>, “Sikh studies acquired a new impetus and urgency.”<sup>32</sup> That event also brought the Sikhs, “for the first time, as the focus of world attention and the subject of mainstream political science.”<sup>33</sup>

Recently, discussion on Sikh dilemmas not only in the diasporas, but also in the Punjab started to gain the attention of many scholars. In the case of Malaysia, the area of Sikh studies seems to have focused more on the historical and sociological aspects rather than the religion *per se*. This section therefore, will be reviewing those

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<sup>25</sup> Max Arthur McAuliffe, *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co. (Pvt) Ltd, 1985), 5 Volumes.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Dewey Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* (Rupa & Co. 2002: 8<sup>th</sup> impression, 2008). This book is among the earliest works on history of the Sikhs. It was first published in 1849.

<sup>27</sup> Among M. Juergensmeyer’s writings are *Global Religions: An Introduction* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Delhi: New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing ‘the Game of Love’* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (USA: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> N. Gerald Barrier and Pashaura Singh, (eds.) *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change* (Delhi: Manohar, 2001); *Sikhism and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> In June 6, 1984 the holiest Sikh’s shrine “The Golden Temple” or “*Darbār Sāhib*” (The Divine Court), or “*Srī Harimandir Sāhib*” (The Divine Temple of God) was attacked by the Indian army under the command of the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi (1917-1984). The reason given by the government of India was to flush out extremist Sikhs who have taken refuge at the Golden Temple. The leader of the Sikhs extremists was Jurnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947-1984). He was been killed in this operation. Consequent of the event led Mrs. Indira Gandhi be killed by two of her Sikh bodyguards in October, 1984.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Shackle *et al*, (eds.), *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001),

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*.

literatures in order to see what has been done and published so far in this area. The scope of literatures reviewed is only confined to studies related to Sikh religion and its community in this region, and specifically in Malaysia.

Razaleigh Muhamat's analysis in *Monoteism Dalam Agama Sikh* is to understand and at the same time to find out the root for monotheism in Sikhism.<sup>34</sup> His conclusion obviously in agreement with the common perception among the Western scholars on the root of Sikh religious doctrines which has come from external elements. In other word it is viewed as a "syncretistic"<sup>35</sup> religion with elements drawn from external sources.<sup>36</sup> However, such observation was objected by Sarjit Singh Gill<sup>37</sup> who firmly asserts that "Sikhism is an independent religion which has no external elements especially in terms of its doctrinal sources..."<sup>38</sup>

Instead of focusing on doctrinal studies in Sikh religion, Sikh religious identity is also one of the most interesting areas to be explored especially, when the Sikhs of diasporas are to be considered. In Kelantan, Malaysia, a study has been conducted with regard to the Sikh identity but from a different perspective. The author, Aman Daima b. Mohd. Zain attempts to examine the significance of the *Panj Kakke* (Five

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<sup>34</sup> Razaleigh Muhamat @ Kawangit, "Monoteism Dalam Agama Sikh" (Unpublished MA thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1998), 136.

<sup>35</sup> "Syncretism" originally from the Greek term, introduced by Plutarch, meant simply the blending together of doctrines from various schools of philosophical or religious thought to make out of the blend a unified whole. However, it is now used in a pejorative sense, signifying a mere collection of viewpoints idly put together without adequate understanding of them or of their implications." As quoted from *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 598.

<sup>36</sup> W. Owen Cole, *Understanding Sikhism* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2004), 127.

<sup>37</sup> In the "Peranan Gurdwara dalam Pembentukan Identiti Sikh..." in page 126, Sarjit also seems to have responded to Kawangit concerning the issue of monotheism in Sikhism. His remark is that, most experts of comparative religion in the Malaysian context arrive at the same conclusion; it is that status of other religions is lower than theirs. Therefore, his question is that whether the area of comparative religion is just focusing on greatness of a religion more than others? In this regard, see also in Gurbachan Talib Singh, *Moral Core of Guru Nanak's Teaching* (Chandigarh: Department of Guru Nanak Sikh Studies, Punjab University, 1976), 19; Gurudharm Singh Khalsa, "The End of Syncretism: Anti-syncretism in Sikh Tradition", in *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, 93-107.

<sup>38</sup> For a different view on the basis of Sikh doctrine, see David N. Lorenzen, "Historical dictionary of Sikhism", *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 118, issue 3 (1998): 429.