



A STUDY OF PARALLEL CONCEPTS IN THE  
BELIEFS OF SIKHISM AND ISLAM WITH  
REFERENCE TO SIKHISM IN MALAYSIA

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the parallel theological concepts in the beliefs of Sikhism and Islam, particularly Sikhism in Malaysia. The understanding of selected theological concepts in both religions are examined and analyzed to find out where they concur and where they differ. Another aim of this study is to discover how religion is generally practised among Malaysian Sikhs. Finally, relationship between Sikhs and Muslims throughout history and in this country is briefly examined in this study. The theological concepts that are analysed in this study include the concept of divinity, concept of authority, concept of man and humanity, concept of creation and universe, and concept of spirituality. Data for this qualitative study were collected through library research, some personal interviews and observation. The data were carefully examined and analyzed to discover similarities and differences in the belief concepts between the two religions. One of the results of the study indicates that there are elements in both religions that are indeed similar or parallel. However, the study found that despite similarities and parallels in these concepts, differences and contradictions in the understanding do occur in the theological concepts of both religions. Upon close analysis, the study discovers that these concepts are fundamentally different and indeed they are based on different foundations and lead to different goals. The study also found that Sikhs and Muslims in Malaysia could have closer and unique relationship because they share so many similarities in terms of religious concepts, terminologies, culture and history.

## خلاصة البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من المفاهيم الدينية المتوازية في المعتقدات السيخية والإسلام خاصة السيخية في ماليزيا. وقد تم فحص وتحليل المفاهيم الدينية المختارة من كلا الدينين لمعرفة نقاط الاتفاق والاختلاف بينهما. هدفت الدراسة أيضاً إلى اكتشاف كيفية ممارسة الدين بين السيخ الماليزيين، وأخيراً العلاقة بين السيخ والمسلمين عبر التاريخ في دراسة عابرة لهذا البلد. تضمنت المفاهيم الدينية التي تم تحليلها في هذه الدراسة مفاهيم منها: مفهوم توحيد الألوهية، ومفهوم المصادر الدينية، ومفهوم الإنسان والإنسانية، ومفهوم الخلق والكون، ومفهوم الروحانية. وقد تم تجميع البيانات المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة عن طريق البحث في المكتبات، وبعض المقابلات والملاحظات الشخصية. وتم تحليل وفحص البيانات لاكتشاف التشابهات والاختلافات بين المفاهيم المعتقدية بين الدينين. وأشارت إحدى نتائج البحث إلى أنه يوجد تشابه أو أمور متوازية في كلا الدينين وبالرغم من هذه التشابهات والتوازيات في كلا المعتقدين إلا أن الاختلافات والتضادات في الفهم موجودة بالفعل بين المعتقدات الدينية في كل الدينين، وبالتحليل الدقيق اكتشفت الدراسة أن هذه المفاهيم تختلف بشكل جوهري وتقوم بالفعل على أساسيات مختلفة وتؤدي إلى أهداف مختلفة. كما وجدت الدراسة أيضاً أنه يوجد علاقة فريدة وثيقة بين السيخ والمسلمين في ماليزيا حيث أنهم يتشاركون في العديد من التشابهات في المفاهيم الدينية والمصطلحات والثقافة والتاريخ.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

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**A STUDY OF PARALLEL CONCEPTS IN THE BELIEFS OF SIKHISM AND  
ISLAM WITH REFERENCE TO SIKHISM IN MALAYSIA**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

GSPJ	Gurdwara Sahib Petaling Jaya
InSPiRE	Institute of Sikh Philosophy, Research and Education
MGC	Malaysian Gurdwaras Council
PBUH	peace and blessings be upon him
S.W.T.	<i>Subhānahu wa Ta'ālā</i>
SGGS	Sri Guru Granth Sahib
SNSM	Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia
SRM	Sikh Reht Maryada

## TRANSLITERATION RULES

### Consonants

ب	b	ط	ṭ
ت	t	ظ	ẓ
ث	th	ع	‘
ج	j	غ	gh
ح	ḥ	ف	f
خ	kh	ق	q
د	d	ك	k
ذ	dh	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	و	w
ص	ṣ	ء	’
ض	ḍ	ي	y

### Vowels and Diphthongs

— a	— ā	— ى á	ة In pause form ah
— i	ي — ī	— ي ay	ة In construct form at
— u	و — ū	— و aw	

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This work is an analytical comparative study between Sikhism and Islam with particular attention as practised in Malaysia. The focus of the study will be on the parallel theological concepts between these two religions and other related matters to these concepts. To do so, the primary sources for both religions will have to be understood.

### 1.2 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Sikhism is a comparatively new world religion which started in India. It is a non-Semitic religion and is in fact an Arya<sup>1</sup> and non-Vedic religion. Some scholars consider it as an offshoot of Hinduism and Islam. It was founded and established by Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539 C.E.) at the end of the 15th century. A Sikh is one who learns and follows the path of liberation taught by Guru Nanak and his nine successors who lived in the Punjab between 1469 and 1708 C.E.<sup>2</sup>

According to Tan Sri Dato' Seri Darshan Singh Gill, Sikhism is the youngest religion in the world and it is the fifth largest in term of number of followers.<sup>3</sup> However, other sources mention that Sikhism is now a religion that has the eighth<sup>4</sup> or

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<sup>1</sup> 'Arya/Ariya' is an ancient Sanskrit term for Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians and Buddhists. The term has a variety of meanings, usually in spiritual contexts.

<sup>2</sup> W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, *A Popular Dictionary of Sikhism* (Surrey, U.K.: Curzon Press, 1990), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Darshan Singh Gill, *Sikh Community in Malaysia* (Malaysia: MPH Group Publishing Sdn. Bhd, 2009), 24.

<sup>4</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major\\_religious\\_groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups)>. (accessed on 28th February 2011).

ninth<sup>5</sup> largest following in the world and according to Barrett's latest publication; it estimates 23 million Sikhs worldwide.<sup>6</sup> About 80% of the world's Sikhs live in the province of Punjab, in India and about 2% of India's populations are Sikhs.

Islam, on the other hand, is a religion that has a long history of development. Islamic teachings were delivered by the chain of a number of prophets. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last prophet who was born in Mecca had completed the delivery of the teachings of Islam to humankind.

Belief and submission to Allah Almighty, the one and only God, and belief in His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), are the foundations of this faith. Muslims are also to believe in all other Prophets of God who had come to humankind during the span of human history, sent to the various nations, preaching in the languages of their communities. The final or the seal of these Prophets was Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who not only was meant for his nation, but also for the whole of mankind and till the end of time; thus was he the Seal of the Prophets. Islam is now a religion that has the second largest following in the world. It is estimated that there are about 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide or about 21% of the world populations.<sup>7</sup>

In Malaysia, Sikhs came from India with the British colonization particularly to Taiping and Penang to serve as security forces, such as policemen to maintain law and order there. Many others followed later. Normally, wherever they settled down, they built their temple, *gurdwaras*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Sikhs have become part of the Malaysian community. Darshan Singh Gill states that there are about 80,000 Sikhs in Malaysia.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <[http://www.adherents.com/Religions\\_By\\_Adherents.html](http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html). (accessed on 28th February 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. (accessed on 28th February 2011).

<sup>8</sup> *Gurdwara* is the name given to the place of Sikh worship, literally the doorway to the Guru.

<sup>9</sup> Gill, Ibid., 57.

The study on Sikhism is very helpful and much needed for a congenial coexistent and social well being in Malaysia.

A number of scholars and historians consider Sikhism as a syncretic<sup>10</sup> religion. Among those who believe so is the editor of the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, where he mentions that “Sikhism - a religion founded by the 15<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> century Indian reformer Guru Nanak who combined elements of Islam and Hinduism”.<sup>11</sup> Michael J. O’Neil and J. Sydney Jones also state that Sikhism’s origin has been the subject of considerable debate. Some historians argue that Sikhism was a combination of other Indian religions, including Hinduism, Islam and local Indian beliefs and practices.<sup>12</sup> According to Ramesh Chander Dogra and Gobind Singh Mansukhani, the Guru’s mission in life was to reconcile the Hindus and Muslims and to enable them to live together harmoniously.<sup>13</sup> Meredith Sprunger in his article says that Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikhism, attempted to integrate the best of Hinduism and the best of Islam into a new inclusive religion.<sup>14</sup> Some others claim that Sikhism adopted from Islam the belief in the existence of one invisible God and from Hinduism it adopted the belief in Karma and reincarnation which means that

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<sup>10</sup> The word syncretic usually refers to connections of a special kind between languages, cultures and religions (Eliade, Mircea, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Macmillan Library Reference USA, New York, 1995, vol. 13, p.218). It is the combination or reconciliation of different beliefs in religion, philosophy, etc, or an attempt to affect such compromise (*Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, Second Edition, Prentice Hall Press, New York, 1983, p.1850.) It consists of the attempt to reconcile disparate or contradictory beliefs, while often melding practices of various schools of thought. The concept of syncreticism can be used to describe either a state or a process and most frequently used in the history of religion and philosophy. A syncretic religion means a religion, system, morals and philosophy that emerge through the process of reconciliation, fusion (a term is used by Doniger, Wendy, in *Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of World Religions*, 1999, p.1048.), as well as combination, amalgamation, blending, mixing, or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties.

<sup>11</sup> Eliade, Mircea, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1995, vol. 3), 226.

<sup>12</sup> Michael J O’Neil and J. Sydney Jones, *World Religions* (Thomson Gale, 2007, vol. 2), 419.

<sup>13</sup> Ramesh Chander Dogra and Gobind Singh Mansukhani, *Encyclopedia Of Sikh Religion And Culture* (Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1997), viii.

<sup>14</sup> <[www.urantiabook.org/archive/readers/601>.\\_sikhism.htm](http://www.urantiabook.org/archive/readers/601>._sikhism.htm) (accessed on 25th January 2007).

man's actions in this life will decide his fate in the next incarnation or rebirth. They claim that Sikhism is a combination of elements from Islam and Hinduism.

However, some other scholars regard the syncretism issues in Sikhism as debatable. Some even reject any effort to consider Sikhism as a "blended religion". They argue that Sikhism is a religion that emerged on its own and was founded by Guru Nanak without any influence from other religions.<sup>15</sup> They insist that Sikhism is not simply the reworking of two older religions, but a new revelation and consequently a genuinely independent religion.<sup>16</sup> To them, any claim regarding syncretism in Sikhism is considered as a humiliation and an offensive act against Sikhism. The authors of the [realsikhism.com](http://realsikhism.com)'s website insist that Sikhism is an independent religion and is not derived from other faiths. They state that, even though some beliefs can be similar, Sikhism has nothing to do with the beliefs of other faiths including Hinduism and Islam.<sup>17</sup>

Every now and then claims and counter-claims are made from outside the religion about Guru Nanak professing Hinduism or Islam. Vishva Hindu Parishad<sup>18</sup> is the protagonist of the first proposition whereas the Ahmadiya<sup>19</sup> advanced the second theory.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the discussion about the matter is still continuing until today. One can find a number of statements made by many Sikhs denying any influence either from Islam or Hinduism into Sikhism and others stating the opposite.

Whatever the truth of the matter is, with regards to Sikhism and Islam, there are many similarities although there are also many differences too. Regarding the

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<sup>15</sup> O'Neil and Jones, *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>16</sup> S.A Nigosian, *World Faiths* (St. Martin Press, 1990), 339.

<sup>17</sup> <<http://www.realsikhism.com/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1248368734&ucat=7>>. (accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011).

<sup>18</sup> International Hindu Organisation founded in India in 1964.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmadiya is a religious revivalist movement founded in India near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, originating with the life and teaching of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908).

<sup>20</sup> *The Sikh Review*, March, 1991.

teachings of Sikhism and Islam in particular, it is found that there are similarities between them in many areas. These similarities can be found in concepts, philosophies, theology, spirituality, beliefs, practices, ethics and morality.

This work is an attempt to study and analyse the elements of similarities between these two religions in depth. The findings obtained through this study will provide a good foundation in building a better understanding for both religions.

### **1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

The study of Comparative Religion has become an important field since hundreds of years ago and becoming increasingly important in recent years. In Islamic history, the interest in other religions is motivated by the Holy Qur'ān itself where the claims and rituals of some religions are challenged. In contemporary times, the study on religions of the world is seen as an attempt toward better understanding among the various religious communities for a congenial co-existence.

The discussion on parallel concepts among religions is considered as a part of the new approach in the study of comparative religions. Previously, during the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Hijrah Calendar, most Muslim scholars tended to refute and attack in their discussions of other religions. Most discussions about other religions were motivated by the eagerness to prove the truthfulness of Islam and at the same time rejecting others. Some examples of such Muslim scholars were al-Imām al-Bāqillānī,<sup>21</sup> Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalūsī<sup>22</sup> and Ibn Taymīyyah.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In his book, *Tamhīd al-Awā'il wa Talkhīs al-Dalā'il*, (Beirūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> In his book, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Mīlāl wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Niḥāl* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Salām al-ʿĀlamīyyah, 1929).

<sup>23</sup> In his book, *al-Jawāb al-Sahīḥ li man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ* (al-Qāhirah: Maṭba'at al-Madanī, 1960).

The later and contemporary approach of studying other religions tends to be more moderate and objective. Al-Bīrūnī for instance takes an objective and methodological approach to the study of religions. His approach is more to understand objectively about others as what the adherents of these others perceive their belief.<sup>24</sup>

There are elements in every religion that can be considered as “universal”, that certain religions agree with up to a certain level. Elements related to ethics and spirituality for instance, are among the most common similarities. Indeed, some religions, while being different, do share some common values and concepts.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the study of theological aspects in Sikhism and its parallels to Islam is very relevant and is a matter of interest today. This study becomes even more meaningful in the attempt to understand religious consciousness in the two communities, particularly in Malaysia.

Bradley Clough says in his writing about the importance of Comparative Religion: “That helps build an atmosphere of religious tolerance and appreciation of religious diversity. Students learn a lot about themselves in the process of comparison and start to see religions in relation to each other”.<sup>26</sup> Knowledge about what other people believe and practice religiously has become increasingly more important and especially so in multi-religious countries like Malaysia.

Unfortunately, some people feel that Sikhism is a neglected religion in some parts of the world including Malaysia. Surindar Kohli Singh declares that Sikhism as the youngest religion of the world always has not been understood and appreciated by

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥan Muḥammad, *Kitāb Tahqīq Mā li al-Hind Min Maqūlāt Maqbulah fī al-‘Aql aw Mardhūlah* (Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1983). And his other book: *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīyyah ‘an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyyah, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Religion and Pluralistic Co-Existence* (Malaysia: IIUM Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>26</sup> <<http://www.aucegypt.edu/publications/gateway/september2003/compprofessor.htm>>.

the people of the world even now.<sup>27</sup> Max Arthur Macauliffe in the preface of his book on the Sikh religion says that: "...bring from the East what is practically an unknown religion".<sup>28</sup> Even in Malaysia, although the Sikhs are obvious by their appearances but their religion is quite unknown to many. Sometimes, because of their unique appearance and nature of their jobs, with long beard and work as policemen and soldiers, some Malaysians consider them as fierce and austere persons. Moreover, in this country, Sikhs are mistakenly identified as Bengalis. Former Perak's Menteri Besar, Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin for example, referred to Sikhs as Bengalis when wishing them happy Vaisakhi<sup>29</sup> at a function in Perak.<sup>30</sup> Sikhs deny that they are Bengalis because they are actually Punjabis.

According to Macauliffe, ignorance of Sikhism is mainly due to the difficulty of the Indian dialects in which the sacred writings are written. For examples, in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, hymns are found in Persian, Mediaeval Prakrit, Hindi, Marathi, Old Punjabi, Multani and several local Indian dialects. In several hymns, the Sanskrit and Arabic vocabularies are freely drawn upon.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, in addition to this difficulty, the ignorance is also as a result of their minority status and the exclusiveness of this religion and its community.

In Malaysia, the study of the various religions in the nation is very important and in fact necessary due to the multi racial and multi religious components of its nation. There are many studies about Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, but unfortunately, not many studies have been conducted in Malaysia on Sikhism.

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<sup>27</sup> Surindar Singh Kohli, *Outlines of Sikh Thought* (New Delhi: Punjabi Prakashak, 1978) 3.

<sup>28</sup> Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion; Its Guru, Sacred Writings and Authors* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> Vaisakhi is the spring harvest festival in the Punjab. It usually falls on 13 April according to Gregorian Calendar dating.

<sup>30</sup> *The Star*, 24 June 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Macauliffe, *Ibid.*, 1.

Many aspects of the life and beliefs of Sikhs are still a mystery to most Malaysians. Indeed, it is very difficult to find Malaysians who are not Sikhs who understand and study Sikhism in depth. Therefore, it is felt that there is a need to conduct a study of Sikhism in an objective and academic manner so as to understand properly the Sikhs as fellow citizen of this nation. This study is even more meaningful to Muslims if a comparative analysis is made to Islam, in particular, to understand the similarities and differences between the two religious theological concepts; and this is what will be attempted in this work. More discussion on this matter is in the literature review at the end of this chapter.

#### **1.4 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The purpose of this study is to examine selected theological concepts in Sikhism and to analyse the similarities and differences in the understanding of these to such as understood in Islam. Thus, the common theological concepts in both Sikhism and Islam will be analyzed and studied. However, other relevant aspects such as the historical background, doctrines, philosophies and rituals will also be examined and analysed in so far as they are interconnected with these theological concepts.

The concepts that will be analysed in this study are the concepts of God and Divinity, authority, man, creation and spirituality. These five concepts are selected because they represent the main elements in the beliefs of Sikhism and Islam. For this purpose, the following questions will be used as guides:

1. What are the beliefs and the theological concepts of God and Divinity in Sikhism and in Islam?
2. What are the authorities in religion in Sikhism and in Islam?
3. What are the concepts of man in Sikhism and in Islam?

4. What are the concepts of creation in Sikhism and in Islam?
5. What are the concepts of spirituality in Sikhism and in Islam?
6. How and where do these concepts converge?
7. How and where do these concepts diverge?

## **1.5 OBJECTIVE**

The objectives of this research are:

1. To understand fundamental theological concepts of Sikhism as practised in Malaysia.
2. To understand fundamental theological concepts of Islam.
3. To identify and evaluate elements in the Sikh's theological concepts which are parallel to Islam.
4. To identify points of convergence and divergence in the theological concepts of these two religions.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY**

This is an analytical comparative study between Sikhism and Islam with focus on their parallel theological concepts. Data will be collected through library research, interviews and observations. In order to identify and analyse these parallel concepts, the theology and theological concepts of both religions will be studied and examined. Objective and systematic study will be attempted in order to understand both religions as accurately as is feasible.

According to al-Bīrūnī, in order to create a “scientific study” on religions other than one's own, the researcher must equip himself with the proper attitude and aptitude, and to be conscious of the difficulties involved. Criteria such as strong

intellectual honesty, high regard for justice and truthfulness, objectivity and accuracy need to be possessed by a researcher.<sup>32</sup> Thus, in this research on Sikhism and Islam, the authentic sources of information and data will be relied upon. As such, data about Sikhism will be taken from Sikh sources and data about Islam will be taken from Islamic sources.

The primary source for the Sikh religion is the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). It is a collection of devotional practical compositions (*sabads*) written by six of the ten Gurus and by other Sikhs as well as some Hindus and Muslims. The scripture is available in two recent English versions under the title *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* translated by Gopal Singh<sup>33</sup> and Manmohan Singh<sup>34</sup>. The latter writer also compiled in a separate volume the hymns of Guru Nanak which was issued by the Language Department, Punjabi University, Patiala. However, according to W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, neither of these translations is very satisfactory.<sup>35</sup>

For this study, the translation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib composed by Manmohan Singh will be relied upon for reference and citation. This translation is widely used and accepted in Malaysia and the rest of the world by Sikhs. It is written in eight volumes and was published by The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar in the year 2002 for its fifth edition.

For the Islamic literature, the main primary sources are the Holy Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth (Tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For this purpose, the

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<sup>32</sup> Sachau, *The Chronology*, chapter (al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-Āthār*, chapter 1), and Sachau, Alberuni's India, chapter 1 (al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-Hind*, chapter 1). For analysis, see Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionswissenschaft* (Malaysia: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 2003), 76.

<sup>33</sup> Delhi: Gurdas Kapur & Sons, 1962.

<sup>34</sup> Amritsar, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

<sup>35</sup> Cole, and Sambhi, *The Sikhs Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Portland or Sussex Academic Press, 1998), xv.

English translation of the Holy Qur'ān by 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī<sup>36</sup> will be used in this research. Major books of *tafsīr* (commentaries) such as *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr and *Fī Zilālī al-Qur'āni* by Sayyid Qutb will be referred to. Literature from the Ḥadīth will be based on the books of Ḥadīth written by outstanding *muhaddithīn* such as Imām al-Bukhārī, Imām Muslim, Imām al-Tirmidhī, Imām Abū Da'ūd, Imām Ibn Majah, Imām al-Nasā'ī and other Muslim scholars.

In order to create an objective study about other religion, firstly, one needs to become objective in his or her judgments. Al Farūqī mentions that to really know other religion and culture, one must first disengage from one's own beliefs,<sup>37</sup> i.e. to try to understand the issues from the adherents' perspectives. To achieve this, one should allow the religion that one studies and the community of the religion to speak for themselves and avoid one's personal interpretations and judgments. It is only at the level of analysis, will personal judgement come in. Still, since different people believe in religion differently,<sup>38</sup> this study will not attempt to eliminate the differences. Moreover, as stated, the focus of this research will be on identifying the parallel concepts and similarities between Sikhism and Islam. In the attempt to make the understanding of Sikhism in this study truly representing Malaysian Sikhs, the writings about Sikhism will be sent to Sikhs' authorities for verification of the contents.

The researcher agrees with W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi that terminologies used by the adherents of the religion should be maintained in writing

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<sup>36</sup> 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Holy Qur'an; Original Arabic Text with English Translation and Selected Commentaries* (Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media Sdn. Bhd, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Ismā'il Ragī Al Farūqī, *Christian Ethics: a Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Ideas* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Kamar Oniah, *Religion and...*, 2.

about other religions. In the case of Sikhism, it is difficult to decide how the vocabularies should be translated, for example, *amrit pahul* is not baptism and the *kara* is not a bangle or a bracelet.<sup>39</sup> The same problem occurs when explaining the Islamic theological terminologies where, for example, *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadr* is not predestination and *jihād* is not holy war. In the writing of this research, the Sikh words will be retained as much as possible in the hope that the researcher can attempt to enter the world of Sikhism rather than try to bring it into his own. The same approach will be used when writing about the Islamic theology.

Every religion and religious community perceives religion differently. Thus, every religion defines itself differently and has its own worldview and its own value systems. Likewise, it has its own theology(s), scriptures and sacred texts, doctrines and dogmas, rites and rituals, and customs and practices. True, there are many exciting similarities and common items, but at the fundamental levels, i.e., the faith items, they are different as noted by Kamar Oniah.<sup>40</sup> As such, Sikhism defines religion quite differently from Islam and thus each religion understands faith quite differently too. Indeed, each religion defines 'Truth' in its own way and therefore the slogan that "There are many paths to the same truth" may sound catchy and romantic, but it is not a truth. This is because each religion defines "Truth" differently.<sup>41</sup>

In order to get accurate information on how Sikhism is practised in Malaysia, collecting data from the field is necessary. Observations and interviews will be conducted. Gurdwaras and Sikh organizations in Malaysia such as the Sikh Naujawan Sabha Malaysia (SNSM), the Malaysian Gurdwaras Council (MGC), the Institute of Sikh Philosophy, Research and Education (InSPiRE) and the Gurdwara Sahib Petaling

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<sup>39</sup> Cole and Sambhi, *The Sikhs Religious...*, Preface.

<sup>40</sup> Kamar Oniah, *Religion and ...*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.