

The Religious Lives of Sikh Children:
A Coventry Based Study

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Series Preface

The Community Religions Project was initiated in 1976 in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds in order to encourage research on religions in the West Yorkshire area. In the years that followed it extended its interest to religions in other parts of Britain, its primary focus remaining the manifestation of religious communities within particular localities or regions. Research has been undertaken by staff members, doctoral students, and those working on relevant undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations. Research funds have been obtained from a number of grant-awarding bodies. Since the Project's inception it has published research papers and, from 1986, a series of monographs.

In this monograph on the religious lives of Sikh children, Eleanor Nesbitt revisits the issues addressed by Alan James in his 1974 book, *Sikh Children in Britain*. Based on an ethnographic study in Coventry, she reports on the nurture of eight to thirteen year old Sikhs with particular reference to the interpretive account of Clifford Geertz. Diversity within the Coventry Sikh community and a process of change are both noted. Together, they challenge the view of Sikhs often presented in religious education curriculum books, an observation which Nesbitt explores in relation to young Sikhs' use of the word 'God', their experience of *amrit* (holy water) and their understanding of the concept of 'Sikh'. In her concluding chapter, Nesbitt identifies the processes at work in the Sikh community. With reference to Richard Fox's notion of 'culture in the making' (1995), she stresses that Sikh tradition is continuously shaped by the individual decisions of Sikh children and adults.

Dr Nesbitt's study was undertaken in the Institute of Education at the University of Warwick and was supervised by Professor Robert Jackson. She was awarded her PhD in 1995.

Kim Knott, Community Religions Project

For my husband, Ram Krishan Prashar

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A note on words from Indian languages

This thesis includes many words from Indian languages, in most cases from Panjabi. These have been italicised on each occurrence in the text, unless, like 'Guru', 'gurdwara' and 'Guru Granth Sahib' they are widely current. Transliteration follows accepted academic guidelines, but 'v' and 'w' are used interchangeably, as are 'l' and 'ph'. Full diacritic marks (distinguishing 'd' from 'cl' etc.) are not used, but in the glossary a macron over 'a', T and 'u' respectively indicates that these vowels are pronounced as 'a' in English 'far', l' as in 'elite' and 'oo' as in 'pool'. Without a macron these vowels are pronounced respectively as 'If in English 'mull', 'T' in 'mill' and 'u' in 'pull'. Proper names and caste names are capitalised and in roman script. *Whalsa'*, *Tanth'*, *BabaUir* and the titles of sections of Sikh scripture are both capitalised and italicised. Plurals of Indian words are rendered in the English way by adding 's' to the Indian word, except where a subject is quoted using the appropriate plural (in 'e' or 'an'). 'Panjabi' denotes the language, 'Punjabi' is employed for the word in its other usages.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

As a teacher in a Coventry secondary school with many Sikh pupils, several experiences heightened my awareness of the complex relationship that existed between these young Sikhs' experience of their tradition and the Sikh content of the religious education curriculum. Three examples will illustrate this point. During a classical studies lesson an eleven year old Sikh girl was drawing a picture of Briareus, the monster with a hundred arms, untying the god Zeus. She asked, 'Can I draw my mother's god? He has lots of arms too?'¹ Clearly this did not fit easily with text book statements that Sikhs believe in one formless God and so I assumed her mother was Hindu. Equally problematic was the realisation, on marking another class's examination scripts, that while the non-Sikh pupils had written that Sikhs believed **in** one God, the Sikh pupils had written that Sikhs believed in ten gods. Moreover, when telling me about their holy book Sikh pupils used the word '*bani*' rather than (the text book term) 'Guru Granth Sahib'.

Evidently, particular instances of the type mentioned above might be peculiar to a minority of children, or indeed to just one child. However, they suggested that there was a difference between lived experience and the presentation of this in the curriculum books. As such they might be examples of the differences between normative and operative religion or between official and folk religion (Bowman 1992). They might also be evidence of change, possibly change precipitated by the circumstances of living in diaspora and of an overlap between Hindu and Sikh tradition within individual families' experience. Moreover, it was evident that religious educationists needed to

reflect upon language. Were young Sikhs simply using the word 'God' for the concept 'Guru'? A further possibility was that the word 'God' (or 'god') carried a different range of meaning for young Sikhs whose mother tongue was Panjabi from either the capitalised or uncapitalised English term as generally used. Taken together, such instances might also be pointers to the need for re-conceptualising 'Sikhism'.

Reflection suggested that ethnographic study of the religious lives of young British Sikhs might reveal a situation significantly, or at least perceptibly, different from the representation of the religious world of Sikh children in the literature which informs the religious education curriculum. Secondly, examination of this ethnographic data might raise questions regarding the representation of faith traditions in religious education.² Furthermore, ethnographic exploration of the local 'field' might lead to the development of hypotheses regarding religious culture and its transmission which could be tested in other locations or by other methods (Bott 1957).

This monograph examines the nurture of young British Sikhs. I use 'nurture' to serve as an analytic term used to describe the processes whereby children acquire their parents' and elders' religious beliefs and practices or some adaptation of them. This follows a usage pioneered in the context of the Christian tradition by Bushnell (rep 1967) and developed by Hull (1984). The term was employed in a study of the transmission of religious culture within Hindu communities in Britain (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993). Nurture is a metaphor from plant and animal life, suggestive of the caring maintenance of a gradual, natural development.

Observation suggested that nurture be sub-divided into two types, namely formal and informal. Here 'formal' refers to the planned, organised teaching of young people, involving deliberate strategies (Jackson and Nesbitt 1986). An example is the provision by Sikhs of supplementary classes for Panjabi language and devotional music. 'Informal' nurture refers to the many less conscious ways in which adults steep children in aspects of their faith tradition. For example values such as deference or specific behaviours may be intrinsic to family life without being singled out for conscious transmission. In practice these ideal types of formal and informal nurture are inter-related.

The term nurture is almost synonymous with enculturation as used by Bullivant (1978:186) quoting Herskovitz (1948). Enculturation is defined as the transmission of a society's culture to each successive generation, a single process whereby the individual masters and manipulates his [*sic*] universe. Culture Bullivant described as comprising for the individual 'a complex set of precepts, cognitions, conceptions and other "information" derived from his social group, its culture, and the spatial and temporal environment in which both are located'. This understanding of culture needs to be modified by Fox's view

of culture as 'ongoing social battle' (1988: xii) with the emphasis on the dynamics of change through social confrontation and individual decision making.

'Nurture' will include significant occasions (e.g. birthdays), the influence of the Punjab 'homeland' and media (e.g. the video and computer) which differentiate this generation's nurture from their parents'. This diversity, fluidity and transformation are evident in successive chapters and are discussed in chapter twelve.

The importance of discovering more about the nurture of young Sikhs was underlined by three phenomena. Some older Sikhs expressed fears that children were losing touch with their tradition (e.g. Sihota 1991:7-8). Some concerned adults - within and without the *Panth* (Sikh community) - recommended that English be used for 'teaching Sikhism to the young' (Sambhi 1984:318), or for services in the gurdwara (Kalsi 1992:188; Cole 1994c:114), and that passages from the Guru Granth Sahib should be read in English translation as well as in the original (Cole 1993:23-26). Some young Sikh adults articulated alienation from a tradition which they could not understand in the way that they had encountered it.³

My fieldwork in 1979 to 1980 among Sikhs in Nottingham (Nesbitt 1980a) and Kalsi's in Leeds and Bradford (Kalsi 1992) suggested that a significant factor in the nurture of children in Coventry might be their *zat* or *zat-baradari* (endogamous community or caste). The part played by *zat-baradari* in the Coventry research is outlined in chapter two. Another assumption with which I commenced the Coventry fieldwork was that Sikh nurture would manifest clear evidence of change since my earlier research in Nottingham and since James's observations in Huddersfield (1974). Continuities and change are noted throughout and discussed in chapter twelve.

Outline

This monograph argues that ethnographic research shows that, even within a community that is relatively homogeneous in terms of *zat* and other respects, and even with 'subjects' of whom the majority attended the gurdwara and supplementary classes related to their tradition, the religious world of young Sikhs is more diverse than is suggested by its portrayal in religious education curriculum books. This diversity, it is argued, is not new and it must be interpreted in the context of earlier studies both of Punjab (e.g. Oberoi 1994) and of the British diaspora (James 1974). The diversity and change evident from a study of young Sikhs' religious lives requires a reconsideration of the meaning of faith tradition. For this Fox's analysis of 'culture' (1985), itself forged in the field of Sikh studies, is especially apposite.

After a brief summary of the Sikh tradition and of Sikh settlement in Britain, illustrated by settlement in Coventry, comes a survey of the literature on the Sikh tradition and on the Sikh diaspora in Britain, especially research conducted in Coventry. In addition to this literature attention is paid to studies of the religious lives of young people, and to research on the lives of young British Sikhs in particular. Chapter two describes the research methodology. The value of ethnographic research is discussed, its strengths and limitations being taken into account. The design of the research is considered, including the question of gaining access to the field. Ethical issues, such as confidentiality, which are intrinsic to ethnographic research, receive attention. Details are provided of the principal research methods used, namely interviewing and participant observation and of the contribution made by maintaining a photographic record.

The next section (chapters three to eight) reports and discusses the ways in which the young people were nurtured in their tradition. Increasingly Sikhs (or at least a minority of Sikhs) distinguish between, on the one hand, their Sikh tradition (*Gurmat, Sikhi or Sikh dharam*) and, on the other hand, pervasive elements of Punjabi culture, such as the overriding imperatives of family honour (*izzat*) and the many wedding practices common to Hindu Punjabis. This discrimination and the relationship between being Punjabi and being Sikh are discussed in chapters eleven and twelve. However, many adults and children perceive no line between being Sikh and being Punjabi (see chapter eleven). Moreover the distinction between social and religious is, as James pointed out, 'a distinction [which] is meaningless for a Sikh, at least until he [*sic*] is influenced by Western culture and education' (1974:31). Accordingly the chapters on informal nurture (three to five) and festivals (chapter six) adopt the wider view of Sikh tradition as encompassing (or indivisible from) elements of Punjabi culture. Nevertheless, more space is devoted to the incontrovertibly religious aspects of subjects' lives, such as prayer (chapter four), than to the more generally cultural, such as female dress (chapter eleven).

Chapters three, four and five focus upon informal nurture, the less conscious or deliberate ways in which children absorb aspects of their parents' faith tradition, while chapters seven and eight focus upon formal nurture in supplementary classes. This sequence results from the priority of home and family in the transmission of religious culture as suggested by research among Hindus (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993; Logan 1989a) and Christians (Nesbitt 1991b). Writers on Christian nurture make the point that 'the classroom is no substitute for the family' (Cliff 1986:322). Chapter three focuses on the home - in particular the roles of parents and other relatives in the processes of 'informal nurture'. Here change and diversity are evidenced by diet and religious iconography in the home. The significance of Punjab as a place to visit and from which visitors arrive is also considered. Configurations of practice and new group boundaries emerge within the tradition, visibly mapped

by domestic iconography. The contribution of the family's devotional practices both at home and outside, particularly in the gurdwara, is considered in chapter four.

Chapter five examines the contribution of both first hand experience and accumulated knowledge of life cycle rites to the young Sikhs' experience of life. In chapters five and six Baumann's analyses of syncretism and of ritual contribute to understanding the processes underway (1992, 1993, 1994). The distinction between informal and formal nurture, while analytically helpful, is hard to sustain when examining young people's experience of festivals. As a result the complex relationship of the nurturing processes involved in their participation in festivals is explored in chapter six, so leading into discussion of formal nurture in chapters seven and eight which concentrate on a major diasporic development, the more formal aspects of the nurturing of young Sikhs into their family's culture and faith tradition. For example the gurdwara (place of worship) is not only the centre for congregational worship and communal meals, but also the venue for supplementary classes in Panjabi and devotional music. Similar classes are also held in community centres and schools and attention is paid to the content of their curricula. Elements of Sikh tradition are mediated through children's day school curriculum and collective worship as well. The part played by Sikh youth camps also receives attention.

In chapter nine the different meaning of 'God' for subjects, for the ethnographer and for writers of RE curriculum books leads to discussion of Geertz's 'experience-near' and experience-distant' distinction (1983:57ff). In chapter ten the focus is upon ways in which the sacred is mediated. Also explored is the difference between the meaning which *amrie* (like 'God') has for young Sikhs and its meaning for the writers and many non-Sikh readers of curriculum books.

Chapter eleven continues to explore the relationship between the experience of young Sikhs and the presentation of the religious world in the literature by bringing together the following dimensions of young British Sikhs' perceptions of themselves as Sikhs, their bilingualism, their names and their relationship to the visible symbols of Sikh allegiance. Two orders of 'Sikhness' emerge and these are considered in the context of definitions by Sikhs, by scholars and by writers of curriculum books.

In chapter twelve the diversity evident in the religious lives of Sikh children in Coventry is examined in order to detect processes at work in Sikh diaspora society. After relating this scenario to Oberoi's analysis of nineteenth century Sikh society and James' portrayal of Sikh children in Britain a generation before, attention turns to the presentation of Sikh children's religious world in the curriculum books. After considering the pressures to which writers are subject, it is suggested that the nature of faith traditions needs

to be rethought in line with Fox's critique of 'culture' as used in earlier anthropological writing.

The Sikh Tradition and Community

World-wide the number of Sikhs may exceed twenty million (Weller 1997:605). The name 'Sikh' designates a community differentiated by its religious faith from others. Originally meaning 'learner' it denotes the followers of ten spiritual teachers (Gurus) who lived in north India between 1469 and 1708. A central belief is that the present form of the Guru is the scriptural volume containing the compositions of six of these teachers and other contemporary poets. According to tradition a distinctive rite of initiation and a code of conduct, including external evidence of commitment (the five Ks), were instituted by the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh in 1699. Initiates were called *Khalsa* or pure. The relation of *Khalsa* to Sikh identity is complex (McLeod 1989a).

With very few exceptions Sikhs originate from the Punjab, the land of five (*panj*) waters (*ab*) i.e. the tributaries of the Indus river. Since the partition of India in 1947 they have regarded the truncated Indian state of Punjab as their spiritual homeland and the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) in Amritsar is especially venerated. For one hundred years, for economic advancement, increasing numbers of Sikhs have lived outside India, particularly in countries formerly ruled by the British (Tatla 1999).

Apart from the small number of non-Punjabi converts, Sikhs share a common Punjabi culture, including values, mother-tongue and cuisine, originating from Punjab. Since 'Punjab' is the conventional transliteration into the roman alphabet this spelling is maintained throughout this thesis when referring to the geographical area and to the modern Indian state and in the cognate adjective 'Punjabi' when referring to people and culture. However, in consistency with academic principles of transliteration, the form 'Panjabi' is used to denote the language.

Sikhs in Britain

a) Statistics

In the absence (until and including the 1991 census) of a question on religion in the UK census, scholars and community leaders have had to rely upon informed guess-work in calculating the probable number of Sikhs in Britain (Knott 1987). While some estimates by Sikhs far exceed these figures, scholarly estimates approximate 300 to 500 thousand (Weller 1997:605). Of these, over 41 per cent are in the 0-19 age group (CRE 1985:4). Whereas in the present state of India, the country with by far the largest Sikh population, Sikhs make up only 1.9 per cent of the total population (which is 80 per cent Hindu) in Britain the number of Sikhs approximately equals and may even outnumber the number of Hindus. Britain has a larger Sikh population than any country except

India. Of the million or so Sikhs outside India, those resident in Britain, Canada and the USA account for more than 75 per cent (Tatla 1999:41). In Britain, unlike North America, almost all Sikhs are people of Punjabi origin as, with only a handful of exceptions in Britain, non-Punjabis have not adopted the Sikh faith.

b) Distribution

Most British Sikhs live in England where their numbers are greatest in the larger seaports (such as Bristol and Southampton) and the industrial conurbations of Northern England (eg Leeds and Bradford in Yorkshire), in the Midlands (e.g. Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham) and in the Greater London area (e.g. Southall in Middlesex). In Scotland the only Sikh communities are to be found in Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. In Wales only Cardiff has a sizeable Sikh population, described by Thomas and Ghuman (1978), Ghuman (1980) and Gural Singh (1995), and in Northern Ireland Sikhs are very few.

c) Political History and Present Situation

The reasons for Sikh settlement in Britain can be understood only in relation to the history of the British empire and the needs of industry in Britain following the second world war. The social organisation of Sikhs in Britain must be seen in the context of the stratification of Punjabi society which consists of structurally distinct, because endogamous, *zats* or 'castes' (Nesbitt 1989).

The British government annexed Punjab, the Sikhs' homeland which spans the present border between Pakistan and India, in 1849. Five years later Duleep Singh, the son of the defeated Maharaja, came to live in Britain (Alexander and Anand 1980; Chakrabarty 1988). Later Queen Victoria employed a Sikh, Ram Singh, to design part of her residence on the Isle of Wight off the south coast of England (C.A. Singh 1986). In 1911 the Maharaja of Patiala visited London and contributed money for the establishment in central London of the first gurdwara in Britain (Nesbitt 1989:76).

Until the second world war Sikhs in Britain were either students from wealthy families or, much more numerous, pedlars from the Bhatra *zat*. Most Bhatra Sikhs came from Sialkot (now in Pakistan) and they settled chiefly in British seaports (Nesbitt 1980a). In the two world wars, Sikhs from Punjab constituted a significant percentage of Britain's Indian Army.⁴ In 1947 India achieved independence and underwent partition (in which the Punjab was divided) and thousands of Sikhs fled east from the new state of Pakistan to India. With this background Sikhs needed little encouragement to emigrate in search of better financial prospects. Sikhs of the largest Punjabi *zat*, the Jats, were peasant farmers whose farmland had been fragmented through inheritance (Pettigrew 1972, 1975). In the 1950s and 1960s thousands of Jat men, mostly from the area around Jalandhar, emigrated to Britain to fill vacancies in

factories, foundries and the public transport services (Ballard and Ballard 1977). After a few years these migrants were joined by wives and children from India. The prospect of return to India faded as family life and tradition took root.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s many Sikh families also left the newly independent states of East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in particular) to settle in Britain when policies of Africanisation threatened to debar non-nationals from higher education and the professions (Bhachu 1985). Britain was a natural choice as many Sikhs possessed British passports and had been educated in English. These families were almost all from the Ramgarhia *zat*, people whose hereditary occupations were masonry, carpentry, and iron working (Saberwal 1976). Between 1897 and 1901 indentured labourers from these families had been recruited in Punjab to build the East African railway. As Bhachu points out, Ramgarhia Sikhs arrived in Britain from East Africa with several generations of experience of commercial and professional life and of setting up social and cultural facilities in an alien environment.

d) Sikh Organisations

Sikhs in Britain have no single national representative body, although some of their organisations operate nationally. For example, the Sikh Missionary Society UK was set up in Southall in 1969, mainly to provide information in Sikhism (Grewal 1987 and chapter seven below). Locally the gurdwaras are the principal Sikh institutions and 'focal points of their community life' (Ramindar Singh 1992:17). Establishing a gurdwara is a high priority for local Sikh communities. There are over two hundred in Britain (Weller 1997). These are open to all for worship but the committee is in many instances of a particular *zat*, as the word Bhatra and Ramgarhia in the names of some gurdwaras indicates (Kalsi 1992). Associated with the gurdwaras are classes in the Panjabi language for the British-born generation, as well as ladies' circles and sports clubs and other organised activities (Babraa 1981:43-51).

An important role is played by resident and visiting spiritual leaders, who are known as *sants* or *Babas* (LaBrack 1987, Tatla 1992b). These charismatics have been leavening the British *Panth* at least since the 1960s (James 1974:42-43)⁵ evidencing the continuity of popular belief that 'blessings from a holy man could rectify worldly misfortune, ward off evil and help overcome human shortcomings' (Oberoi 1994:119). They inspire individuals to fresh commitment, often with their own distinctive emphasis - on vegetarianism for example (Cole 1994c:111). Their followers have built gurdwaras which are run not by elected committees but by the *sant* concerned.⁶

From the 1950s until the 1970s Sikhs were actively involved in the politically left wing Indian Workers Associations (John 1969, King 1994, Tatla 1999:92ff). They also formed organisations based on the politics of Punjab,

e.g. the Akali Dal and joined the Indian Overseas Congress (Tatla 1993, 1999). Some joined the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, a devotional movement inspired by Bhai Randhir Singh (1878-1961) (Trilochan Singh nd. and Gur-Dave Singh 1992:32-33).

The turbulence of Punjab during the 1980s profoundly affected the Sikh diaspora. The storming of Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, the Sikh's spiritual nerve centre, in 1984 by the Indian army caused incalculable grief to Britain's Sikhs.⁷ Their political reaction emphasised existing caste divisions as the Jats most strongly supported demands for a separate state, Khalistan.⁸ The International Sikh Youth Federation was set up in Britain in September 1984 (Tatla 1993). Like the Babbar Khalsa, an offshoot of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, it supported separatist demands.

e) Influence of Sikh Settlement on the Cultural Activity of the United Kingdom

Punjabi classes organised by Local Education Authorities and the provision of Punjabi books in the public libraries in areas of high Sikh settlement are indications of some institutional accommodation of Sikh residents. Another is many schools' inclusion of Sikhism in the curriculum of Religious Education, a statutory subject (chapters seven and eight). As one of six 'principal religions' practised in Britain identified by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (subsequently the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) model syllabuses, 'Sikhism' may in future be taught even more widely than it is at present.

Cases of discrimination against individuals wearing the turban sporadically attract media attention.⁹ Local controversies in the late 1960s over whether Sikh bus conductors could wear turbans were resolved in the Sikhs' favour (Beetham 1970). In 1976 Sikhs won exemption from the legal requirement to wear a crash helmet by the Motor Cycle Crash Helmets (Religious Exemption) Act (Sacha 1988:2). In 1983 the House of Lords made a historic ruling that a headmaster's refusal to admit a Sikh boy to his independent school, unless he removed his turban, was a contravention of the Race Relations Act as 'Sikhs are more than a religious sect. They are almost a race and almost a nation'.¹⁰ An exemption to the 1989 Employment Act made it legal for turbans to be worn on construction sites (Cole 1994a:162). In 1993 European regulations, the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations (1992), came into effect in Britain, arousing protest from Sikhs as these rules enforce the wearing of hard hats and ban turbans from many workplaces.¹¹ Thus the turban symbolically marks the interface between Sikhs and all other communities in Britain.

f) Sikh-Related Religious Movements

Although the teaching of the Gurus condemns caste discrimination, members of Punjab's two most oppressed *zats*, traditionally linked with refuse removal and the preparation of hides, have felt unwelcome in gurdwaras run by other castes (Kalsi 1992). As a result, the Mazhabi Sikhs in Britain tend to worship with their caste fellows in Valmiki temples and to honour Rishi Valmiki, a figure widely revered in Hindu tradition, as the special deity of their community (Nesbitt 1990a, 1990c, 1991, 1994b).¹² The Ravidasis particularly venerate the mediaeval saint, Ravidas, and they, too, have their own gurdwaras (Juergensmeyer 1982; Leivesley 1983; Nesbitt 1990c, 1991).

Some Sikhs are criticised by others (e.g. Indarjit Singh 1984:4) for following the widespread Hindu practice of acknowledging a living guru. In Britain these include many followers of the Radhasoami Guru who is based at Beas in Punjab (Juergensmeyer 1982, 1989; Kalsi 1992:73-78). The Namdharis in Britain also venerate a living Guru (referred to by Namdhari subjects in Coventry as 'Satguru') (Kalsi 1992:66-73). Both these movements stress strict vegetarianism. Differences in opinion concerning the *sants* and *Babas* reflect this Hindu/Sikh divergence over the desirability - indeed possibility - of having a living human guru and are central to the issue of authority in the *Panth*.

The boundaries marked by the turban and other external symbols, by *zat* and by living spiritual masters are among those discussed later, in relation to determining the criteria for inclusion of subjects in this study (chapter two), in the subjects' experience of their faith tradition (chapters ten and eleven) and in relation to the representation of Sikh tradition in religious studies and religious education (chapter twelve).

Sikhs in Coventry

On the basis of Coventry's electoral registers an Ethnic Minority Digest has been published since 1986 (Forward Planning Division 1989). Available figures suggested that five per cent of Coventry's estimated population may be Sikh. According to the 1991 mid year estimate from the Registrar General (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys) Coventry's population is 305,600. 48 per cent (i.e. nearly half) of the people of Asian religion (Hindu, Sikh and Muslim) are Sikh according to the Forward Planning Division (oral communication December 1994). In 1989 this figure was 8,382. This is based upon electoral registers. However surnames are an unreliable guide to faith communities, electoral registers are incomplete lists of those eligible for inclusion and minority groups may be disproportionately under-represented (Anwar 1990). Moreover, only individuals aged eighteen and over are included. This last fact alone means that the number represents only about sixty per cent of the actual number of Sikhs in Coventry. A very rough estimate suggests approximately 15,000 Sikhs in Coventry or five per cent of the

population. There is also the question (discussed in chapter two) of how a Sikh is to be defined.

Sikhs are not evenly distributed city wide, but are most numerous in certain wards north of the city centre, especially Foleshill (between 2,137 and 2,755 according to Forward Planning Division 1989). It is in this area that most of the specifically Asian retail businesses are located and here, too, that most places of Sikh worship are situated. Sikh children in some primary schools are a majority, with percentages of South Asian pupils nearing one hundred per cent in some schools. In other schools in Coventry Sikhs are in a very small minority.

Unlike Britain's major sea ports and some inland cities (including Birmingham and Nottingham) Coventry was not settled by Sikhs of the Bhatra *zat* which pioneered Sikh migration to Britain between the world wars. This means that Coventry's first major body of Sikh settlers were young men of the Jat *zat* who came to Coventry in the 1950s. The majority of Sikhs in Coventry are Jats, and their family roots are in the Jalandhar *doab*, the tongue of land between the rivers Beas and Satluj in the Indian state of Punjab.

A few individual Sikhs had settled in Coventry before the 1950s. Mr Peter Khalsa claims to be 'one of the first four Indian people to come to Coventry', arriving at the age of 27 in 1935 (Coventry Reminiscence Theatre 1990:59-61). Another of the first Sikhs in Coventry was Tara Singh, father of Manjit Singh, a former president of the Lanchester Polytechnic College's (now Coventry University's) Student Union (Ferguson 1984). On his arrival in 1937 he worked, like Peter Khalsa, as a door-to-door salesman and Tatla records that there was an Indian Workers Association in Coventry from 1938-1947 (1999:92).

By 1966 Coventry's Sikh community probably numbered about 5,000. This estimate is based upon Winchester (1973:8). The major division was structural rather than economic or denominational: most Sikhs were from the Jat *zat*, with a large minority from Ramgarhia families. Inter-marriage was (and remains) extremely unusual (Thompson 1974:245). Both sections of the community established a gurdwara in about 1963 - Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara in Harnall Lane West and the Ramgarhia Sikh Temple, Foleshill Road, respectively.

The 1960s were characterised by the arrival of wives from India, the consolidation of families, the establishment of these two gurdwaras and the commencement in both of Panjabi language classes for children. These were started in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara in 1965 and in Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara in 1968 (Nagra 1980). In the early 1970s the Local Education Authority also began to provide Panjabi classes and a 'head of Asian

languages' was appointed in one comprehensive school.¹³ Devotion to spiritual masters (*sants*) manifested itself in the establishment of two gurdwaras, Ajit Darbar and (in 1978) Nanaksar Gursikh Temple, the Nanaksar sub-tradition being the subject of Nesbitt 1985a. The persistence of caste consciousness resulted in two low status *zats*, the Valmiki (also in 1978) and the Ravidasis respectively, setting up distinctive places of worship (Nesbitt 1990a, 1990c, 1991, 1994b). The next decade was more turbulent. Satnam Singh Gill's murder in April 1981 drew attention to potentially violent local racism.¹⁴ An acrimonious rift in 1983 between followers of Ajit Singh led to the opening of the Guru Hargobind Gurdwara in 1986.¹⁵ Meanwhile mounting conflict in Punjab had repercussions especially evident in the factional struggle for domination of the management committee of the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara. In 1988 a Coventry Sikh was arrested on charges of 'international terrorism'.¹⁶

By the end of the nineteen eighties Sikh self-identity in Coventry was assuming a higher profile and the Sikh presence was more widely acknowledged. Two examples illustrate these related developments: a group of British-educated professional Sikh men started the Sikh Cultural Society which provided a cultural forum and classes for their children in a context which was Sikh without being gurdwara-based (see chapters seven and eight below). Secondly, in 1991 for the first time, illuminations were put up by the city council along the Foleshill Road to mark a Sikh religious anniversary (chapter six).

The last decade of the twentieth century saw several significant events for Coventry Sikhs: Baba Mihan Singh of Nanaksar gurdwara died in August 1994 and was succeeded by Baba Hamaik Singh. Divisions developed between the pro-Khalistani movements which had caught some Coventry Sikhs' imagination in the 1980s (see Thandi 1996:240-1). Following the fieldwork period a major cleavage was institutionalised with the departure of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha and Babbar Khalsa to the newly opened Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara. This left Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara to supporters of the International Sikh Students' Federation. In 1999, celebration of the tercentenary of the founding of the Khalsa - the community of initiated Sikhs - included a two day *mela* (festival) which drew thousands to the Memorial Park.

Earlier Studies of the Sikhs

a) Studies of the Sikh tradition

Europeans began writing about the Sikhs at the end of the eighteenth century (Nicholls 1984; Nesbitt 1990d). Singh (1991,1999) examines western scholars' representation of the Sikh religion from that period. In 1777 A.L. Polier published *The Siques* and in 1798 appeared George Forster's description of the Sikhs' religious tradition in his *Journey from Bengal to England*. In 1812 John Malcolm published his *Sketch of the Sikhs*; J.D. Cunningham's *History of the*

Sikhs came out in 1849, bringing its writer official disfavour for his sympathetic portrayal of the Sikh cause in the Anglo-Sikh wars. During the period of British rule over Punjab able and dedicated administrators, such as Ibbetson (1883), Rose (rep. 1970), McLagan and Darling (1930, 1932 and 1934), produced detailed accounts of the traditions and practices of many groups constituting Sikh society. In 1909 MA. Macauliffe produced his monumental *The Sikh Religion* in consultation with prominent Sikh intellectuals (rep. 1963).

While these studies by outsiders could justifiably be regarded as forerunners of contemporary works of history and ethnography, Sikh writing about their tradition was devotional and hagiographic (McLeod 1980a). However, in the early twentieth century, scholarly compendia, such as commentaries on scripture, were published by distinguished Sikhs (e.g. Nabha 3rd ed. 1974). Since Indian independence (1947) and, with the celebration of significant centenaries in Sikh history and the founding in India of higher education institutions dedicated to Sikh studies, academic research into Sikh history and society has multiplied (Nesbitt 1990d). The vast majority of the scholars concerned have been Sikhs. Among others Khushwant Singh (rep.1977 and 3rd ed. 1991) and Grewal (1990) have published full scale histories of the Sikhs.

McMullen (1989) is one of relatively few studies by a Punjab-based Indian scholar of contemporary 'popular religion'. This was based on quantitative rather than qualitative methods. He realised that formal interview techniques were counter productive but also that private interviewing was impossible.

Academic study of Sikh tradition and communities has, outside India, been concentrated in North America (the United States and Canada), and in the United Kingdom, areas with relatively high levels of Sikh settlement during the twentieth century. Sikh and non-Asian scholars have been almost equally involved. Much of the research has been historical. Of significance for their interpretations of the historical development of a distinct Sikh identity are McLeod (1976, 1989a and b), Fox (1985) and Oberoi (1994).

Some of the research has been anthropological - for example Hershman's studies of, respectively, Punjabis' treatment of hair - a foray into the theory of taboo with regard to bodily symbolism (1974) - and of women and impurity in Jalandhar and Southall (1977). Quite apart from its substantive relevance, Fox's critique of anthropological views of culture provides a theoretical basis for interpreting the Coventry data and for questioning the approach to the Sikh tradition in curriculum books informing religious education.

A lively source of diasporic research has been the Sikh diaspora communities themselves including work by Leonard (1992) on Mexican-cum-Sikh families in California which argues that, far from being marginalised, these Punjabi Mexicans' identities were invented and reinvented situationally, with their multiple identities serving as a resource. It is to the studies of Sikhs in Britain that we now turn.

b) Studies of Sikhs in the UK

In Britain research into Sikh tradition and local Sikh communities developed in the 1970s, following the major period of immigration during the preceding two decades. Aurora (1967) pioneered study of the British Sikh diaspora with his report of fieldwork in 'Greenend' 1957-1959, the period of Jat Sikh settlement from the Jalandhar *doab*. In many cases fieldwork in Britain was juxtaposed with fieldwork in the sending community (Hershman 1977; James 1974). Subsequent study of the same local community is reported in Helweg (2nd ed. 1986). Of the many studies of Sikhs in Britain listed by Tatla and Nesbitt (2nd revised ed. 1994) Ballard and Ballard (1977) is significant for its identification of four phases of settlement, and Bhachu (1985) for its focus upon 'twice migrants' - a community in fact as much defined by *zat* (as Ramgarhias) as by its experience of life in East Africa.

It is to authors of 1970s publications on minorities that we owe the catch phrases (and resultant images) for the children and young people as 'the halfway generation' (Taylor 1976) and 'between two cultures' (Anwar 1976a; Watson 1977). Taylor's title implies that the next generation (the one with which our research is concerned) will have come all the way 'out and up' to Englishness, though his prognosis takes into account the 'slowing' effect of marriage to spouses from the subcontinent and the factor of distinctive skin pigmentation (242).

In her study of young Sikh women in Nottingham Drury employed the concepts of structural pluralism, biculturalism and situational ethnicity (1989). Situational ethnicity is a concept emphasised by Barth (rep 1970) and Wallman (1979) which opposes Geertz's view of ethnicity as primordial (1963). The situational understanding allows for ethnicity to function primarily as a resource which 'can also simply be latent and ignored' (Rex 1986). Drury asked whether her subjects had modified or abandoned Punjabi and Sikh tradition, whether they were acculturated into British norms and values and whether they experienced culture conflict.

Drury's interest in inter-generational relations (1991) follows a long line of studies with this focus which have included Sikh subjects (Taylor 1976; Brah 1978 and 1979; Crishna 1975). Her quantitative methodology, involving many more subjects than the Coventry study, provides statistical data (e.g. on the maintenance of the five Ks) which is a useful framework for qualitative studies

such as this, although the lapse of a decade - including 1984 - between her findings and the present study plus the older age group of her subjects and the absence of males must all be borne in mind.

Kalsi (1992) provided a descriptive account of the Sikh communities of Leeds and Bradford with particular attention to caste (*zat*) as a structural principle and to the religious groupings and 'holy men' influencing the development of the Sikh tradition locally. This emphasis upon the significance of *zat* in the development of Sikh society in Britain corroborates the findings of my own research in Nottingham (Nesbitt 1980a). His rich ethnographic data invites further theoretical insights (Ballard 1994b). Ramindar Singh (1992) also focuses upon Sikhs in Bradford, and, like Kalsi, brings into play a vast personal experience of his field. He adopts a longitudinal approach in tracing Sikhs' transition from 'immigrants to citizens', although methodologically his work is open to criticism as an earlier statistical study is followed up by more impressionistic comparison.

Some studies focus on particular stages of the life-cycle: Dosanjh and Ghuman (1996) is a detailed study of Punjabi (mainly Sikh) child-rearing practices. Murray researched the identity formation of Sikh sixth formers in Birmingham (1991). Whereas psychology provided a basis for these two studies, Jhutti's work is informed by attention to the law (1999). She documents Sikh marriage practices plus including discussion of separation and divorce procedures.

Southall has hosted several ethnographic studies: Gillespie focused her ethnographic study upon 16 to 18 year old Southall Punjabis in an attempt to establish (1992) the role of television viewing in their interactions and understanding of themselves and others and (1998) the patterns of clothes consumption in Southall as signifiers of difference in a Punjabi (largely Sikh) youth culture. Baumann's field work in Southall provides material for his analysis of syncretism as constituted by the processes of 'convergence' and 'encompassment' (1993 and 1994) and of ritual in relation to implicated constituencies (1992). By interrogating the 'dominant discourse' of Sikh 'culture' and 'community' as relatively homogeneous his insights (1996) provide a context for this monograph's focus upon the diversity of young British Sikh's experience vis-a-vis published representations of Sikhism. Barrow's focus is Sikh spirituality in three *sangats* (congregations) in Southall (1995, 1999).

Barrow's portrayal of a charismatic leader's influence on devotees is one of several studies to open up the reality of religious diversity within the *panth*. Work by Geaves (e.g. 1998) and Chohan (1999), examining two exorcist traditions, further challenges 'official' representations of Sikh belief and

practice as well as problematising the concept of Sikhism as a bounded world religion.

Studies of the impact of the 'Punjab troubles' of the 1980s and early 1990s on British Sikhs include Tatla (1993 and 1999). Tatla introduces a fresh perspective by formulating and exploring the concept of Sikhs as a diaspora, in the sense not of exiles (as in the original Jewish case) but as a people united by a homeland trauma - in the Sikhs' case by the invasion of the Golden Temple in 1984 and its violent aftermath. Barot (1995) is a case study of the impact on Indians in one location, Bristol, while Goulbome (1991) provides a comparative approach (1991) to diaspora political activity.

c) Studies of Sikhs in Coventry

Given that approximately five per cent of Britain's Sikh population live in the West Midlands city of Coventry it is unsurprising that Coventry Sikhs were the subjects of several studies of the transmission and adaptation of culture. Research on Sikhs in Coventry can be divided in several ways, by discipline, e.g. geography (Winchester 1973 and 1974/5) and anthropology (Thompson 1970, 1974). Another classificatory criterion is the theoretical perspective, whether a concern with settlement (Winchester 1973 and 1974/5), mother-tongue (Nagra 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1985; Smith 1982a, Smith, Morawska and Reid 1984 and Tatla 1992) girls and women (Girdhar 1980; Hoel 1982; Meadows 1977) or economics (Thandi 1999).

i) 1970-1979

Winchester (1973 and 1974/5) did not use the term Sikh. However as the majority of the 'coloured population' whom he studied as an urban geographer were in fact Sikh (as eg. Forward Planning Division 1989 suggests) his studies are relevant. He used the two models of the ghetto and assimilation in his examination of the spatial integration of West Indian and Asian residents in Coventry. He noted a decline in the white population accompanying the growth of 'the coloured population in these areas'. In particular he referred to 'the railway triangle', 'the area formed by the London to Birmingham, Coventry to Nuneaton and the eastern loop railways'. At the time of my field work this was still the area with a concentration of Sikh population higher than any other, as indicated by map 4 in Smith (1982b). However significant 'out-migration' (of the type reported by Singh in Bradford) had occurred in the years between Winchester's research and mine (1992:8).

Thompson (1970 and 1974) conducted nine months fieldwork in Coventry between 1968 and 1970, endeavouring to determine the extent to which the social relations of Punjabi immigrants are with natives and to what extent they are with Punjabis. Thompson also compared the patterns of social relations of first generation migrants with those of subsequent generations, and compared the social behaviour of young second generation immigrants with

that of other young immigrants who had more recently arrived in the immigrant situation. He discussed second-generation Sikh youth's conformity to and deviation from their parents' values and norms' and looked at the importance of village kinship ties, the role of chain migration in the maintenance of the family and the social norms of marriage. He proceeded to examine the status of sons and daughters, the part played by education, the formation of the peer group and the role of the Punjabi language. Thompson concluded his *New Community* article with the words:

The greatest unknown factor in analysing the second generation situation is just how much they will conform to their parents' conservative expectations when the young Punjabis actually born here outnumber those born in Punjab and those more recently arrived here. (1974:248)

This was the situation for the young people whom I studied.

Paige (1977) built his anthropological work on Thompson's. His fieldwork, conducted from 1970 to 1972, concentrated on male Punjabis born between 1 September 1951 and 31 September 1956. He met these fourteen to nineteen year olds, all from two Coventry secondary schools, in their schools or gurdwaras, youth clubs, pubs, parks, colleges and factories and increasingly avoided meeting them at home. He investigated their educational aspirations and achievements in comparison to those of their white peers. He highlighted the paradox of bright white boys wanting to leave school without taking their Certificate of Secondary Education, while duller Punjabis wanted to stay on although the schools were encouraging them to leave.

Meadows (1977) reports research which was carried out 1975-1977 on Asian girls in Coventry and Loughborough. Funded by the Young Women's Christian Association of Great Britain, the research was pragmatic, designed to enable the YWCA to meet the needs of Asian girls. The fieldworkers looked at two Coventry co-educational schools and at two girls schools. On the basis of their contacts they felt that the girls fell into five main categories, ranging from 'those who are quite content and happy with their life situation as they are' to those 'who have very strict parents...and therefore have adopted a rebellious behaviour'.

Different as they are all these studies share certain features. They focus on young people, but of an older age group than the subjects of the research reported in this thesis, and in each case their subjects were of only one sex. These young people are now parents of the generation which provided my subjects. In no case was religious nurture central to the research, although the researchers' concerns were pertinent to the transmission of Sikh tradition.

ii) 1980-1999

Studies of Coventrian Sikhs from 1980 have included studies of women (Girdhar 1980; Hoel 1982; Homan 1986 and Sohal 1989) and of employment (Flintoff and Robinson 1982/3; Basi 1994, Thandi 1999). Closer to the interests of the current research, because of the relationship between language and faith tradition (chapters seven, eight, twelve) are studies of mother tongue maintenance (Linguistic Minorities Project 1983; Smith 1982a and 1982b, Smith, Morawska and Reid 1984) and mother tongue classes (Nagra 1979 and 1980, 1981, 1982, 1985; Tatla 1992) and my own studies of three distinctive (*zat*- and *sant*-based) worshipping communities (Nesbitt 1985a, 1990a, 1991 and 1994b). Tatla (1992) briefly summarises the language needs of Sikhs in Coventry and the provision of Panjabi teaching by gurdwaras and the Local Education Authority. Linguistic Minorities Project (1983), Smith (1982a and 1982b) and Smith, Morawska and Reid (1984) are working papers produced by the Linguistic Minorities Project. The first reports the procedure for locating speakers of (*inter alia*) Panjabi, by using computer analysis of the electoral register. The second reports the results of this computerised scan plus the complication inherent in the schools language survey which depended upon questionnaires administered by teachers. Smith, Morawska and Reid (1984) includes a chapter on 'Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati and Bengali in Coventry' (40-71). The teaching of Panjabi in Coventry has been studied in detail by a Sikh teacher of Panjabi, Nagra, who argued that there was a growing need for Panjabi classes and that there were many weaknesses in the current provision (1979, 1980, 1982, 1985).

Nesbitt (1985a), a detailed account of the sub-tradition or *sant*-succession represented in Coventry by the Nanaksar gurdwara, was one of the first studies highlighting the vast, but contested, influence of *sants* on the contemporary Sikh tradition, a subject subsequently discussed by LaBrack (1987), Tatla, (1992), Kalsi (1992) and illustrated by Barrow's Southall case study (1999). Chohan's concern is with an exorcist tradition which looks to the legendary Vadbhag Singh. Since the Ajit Darbar in Coventry is the British development of this tradition, Chohan's research provides a key to devotional practice at this *sant*-inspired gurdwara (1999).

d) Studies of Sikh Children and Young People

As noted above several studies have focused upon or included young Sikh adults (Drury, Paige, Taylor, Thompson for example). Children were also the subject of studies during the 1960s and 1970s. These early studies of Sikh children were of two kinds. On the one hand, Bell (1968), Burgin and Edson (1967), Morrish (1971) as well as Scott's patronising account (1971) exemplify early accounts by outsiders who were interested by the conspicuous presence of recently arrived 'immigrant' children. On the other hand, drawing upon their personal memory of Punjab, their fluent Panjabi and experience of migration to Britain, Sikh scholars investigated aspects of Sikh children's lives more

rigorously. Dosanjh (1966 and 1969) studied problems in the educational and social adjustment of Punjabi (mostly Sikh) children in Derby and Nottingham. This included such topics as children's dress (including the turban) and Sikh attitudes to religious assemblies in school. Dosanjh (1976) applied the Newsons' questionnaires on child-rearing practices to 200 Punjabi parents (69 per cent Sikhs) in Nottingham and Derby. He mentioned residual traditions (e.g. surrounding childbirth) in his account.

As an educational psychologist Ghuman conducted a comparative examination of the 'thinking process' of 'British Punjabi' ten to twelve year old Jat Sikh boys, a matched group of English boys and a group of Jat Sikh boys in Punjab. Ghuman concluded that variations in the scores of the three groups in intelligence tests resulted from their social environment and not from genetic difference (1975). Julka (1978) explored the bilingualism of Sikh pupils and like Ghuman compared the test results of a Nottingham sample with those of a sample in Punjab. Dosanjh and Ghuman (1996) suggests continuities and change, in a comparative context, over the decades following Dosanjh's earlier studies.

Alan James's work remains a classic portrayal and an inspiration for this Coventry study, but the children whom he describes, like the subjects of other studies, are the parents of today's Sikh children (1974). Like the Coventry subjects (and Aurora's and Helweg's in Gravesend) most of James's Huddersfield Sikh children came from Jalandhar-based Jat families. His perception of diversity and change within the *Panth* provides a basis for the observations in the following chapters. In his account of Sikh families in Huddersfield James pointed to the complexity of forces at work in children's identity-formation:

Between the contradictory demands and pressures [i.e. of Sikh community and wider society] the personality of the child is itself developing creatively, and he [*sic*] is unlikely to submerge his own identity entirely in either the family or the wider group. (1974:103)

More recent accounts of the lives of Britain's Sikh children are Larson (1987, 1988, 1989) and Nesbitt (1991). Larson (1989) showed Sikh children learning about parameters of expected religious behaviour through their lively interaction with South Asian peers from other faith communities. In my study I focused upon children growing up in two *zat*-defined communities for which Hindu and Sikh identities are often secondary and less absolute than their *zat*-based identity (1991). Festivals, holy men and the media were among factors considered in their exposure to their complex Punjabi religious tradition.

In 1992 Steedman published a revised version of an earlier reflection on 'Amarjit', a Sikh pupil. Her revisions suggest the shift which has occurred

between the 1970s and 1990s in scholarly accounts of South Asian communities in Britain. Whereas (1985:148) Amarjit 'moved inquiringly and confidently between the two cultures she had access to' in the revised version she was 'creatively using her knowledge of two language systems' (1992:100).

Accounts of Sikhs' religious nurture have been for the most part few and small in scale. Examples include Davies's MA study (see 1997) which discusses the role of *kirfan* (devotional music) classes in the development of young Sikhs' skills and sense of identity, and Hadwen's MPhil thesis on Sikh religious nurture in Bradford (1995).

Studies of Nurture in the Faith Traditions

Most of the literature on the nurture of children into their parents' faith traditions has focused upon Christian families. It has been largely quantitative and psychological. Hyde (1990), is the most comprehensive survey of the empirical research that has been carried out on religion (including Hindu, Jewish and Muslim traditions in addition to Christianity) in childhood and adolescence - much of it in North America. Primarily psychological in approach and content this research review draws on some eighteen hundred studies of individual religious development and provides excellent contextual essays. Qualitative research is outweighed by quantitative and Sikhs are striking by their absence from this survey.

Moreover, much of the earlier research on children's religious nurture has taken place in a single context or in contexts of a single type, such as the school. This is true, for example, of a study which included Sikhs (Gates 1976). Some scholars have concentrated upon religious nurture in institutions of one type such as voluntary aided ('church') schools (Francis 1987, O'Keeffe 1986) and a Jewish school in Australia (Bullivant 1978). Demonstrating yet another kind of singularity, some studies have been concerned with only one aspect of children's belief such as life after death (Anthony 1971).

With a deep knowledge of Gujarati Hindu tradition in India Pocock conducted a pioneering study of the formal religious nurture of young Hindus growing up in a Swaminarayan community in London (1976). His methods ('commuter anthropology') and the questions he raised (e.g. of the relation between mother tongue, theological concepts and the diaspora) are pertinent to the Coventry study. Dwyer's tight comparison of two Leicester Hindu organisations' supplementary classes provides useful comparative data in the field of minorities' provision of formal nurture (1988). Bigger (1987) and Logan's accounts of Gujarati Hindu nurture in London (1988a and b, 1989 a and b) also contributed to the study of Hindus' nurture in Britain. Jackson and Nesbitt adopted an interpretive anthropological approach in providing a series of 'ethnographic snapshots' of the experience of eight to fourteen year old Hindus in Coventry (1993). In this study we explored many aspects of formal

and informal nurture, and 'multiple cultural competence' emerged as an appropriate conceptualisation of the subjects' striking versatility in adapting creatively to diverse cultural contexts. Apart from the studies of the religious lives of young British Hindus, two Norwegians' research: Stene's anthropological studies of the nurture of Coptic Christians in Egypt and London (1991 and 1995) and Ostberg's work with Pakistani children in Oslo (1999) have adopted a similar methodology, and Ostberg has developed the theoretical discussion by arguing for the terms 'integrated plural identity' and 'potential religiosity'. To this diasporic research on religion in children's lives further insights are contributed from two earlier perspectives - one psychoanalytical, the other aesthetic - on the development of young people in India (Kakar 1981 and Lannoy 1971).

Culture, Identity, Ethnicity and Faith Tradition

All these studies and the research reported in this thesis need to be set in the context of anthropologists' understandings of culture, social psychologists' understanding of social and personal identity, scholarly discourse on ethnicity and (in religious studies) faith tradition.

To culture, as summarised by Fox, several models have been applied, and in each case culture is conceived 'as a structure, a system, that constrains and constitutes individuals and that persists in doing so over time' (1985:188). Without covering Fox's ground in examining earlier concepts of culture, I will simply draw attention to insights of particular relevance to the present study. Firstly there is Fox's suggestion that 'culture only exists as it happens' (197) - it is constantly in the making. Secondly, there is Simard's argument that all contemporary cultures are caught in a 'nouvelle matrice culturelle', the global, pluralist matrix of modernity (1988). In this poly-centred multicultural world, probably to an unprecedented extent, the culture of individuals and groups will be constituted of never ending choices and decisions in a context of 'dominations, subordinations, contradictions, oppositions and confrontations' (Fox 1985:210). Jackson (1997) discusses these and other ideas of culture in relation to debates about religious education, multicultural education and racism.

The significance of Tajfel (1981), Weinreich (1989) and Kelly (1989) in understanding social and personal identity formation is summarised in chapter eleven. Both Tajfel's emphasis upon individuals' categorising and comparing groups in a complex society and the temporal dimension of Weinreich's and Kelly's model of ongoing construction and reconstruction of identity fit with Fox's and Simard's concepts of culture. A fresh approach to the conceptualisation of South Asian identities, based upon diasporic music, was attempted by Kaur and Singh (1994).

Discussions of ethnicity can be located by reference to Barth's 'situationist' stand (rep.1970) and Geertz's 'primordial' position, whereby language, culture and kinship patterns are among certain 'givens' (1963). Ethnicity in relation to the study of the religious lives of minority diaspora young people is discussed in Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:172-174).

The term 'faith tradition' or 'tradition' in the present study is derived from Cantwell Smith who replaced the reifying concept of 'religion' with the concept of individuals of faith and a cumulative tradition (1978). Combining this understanding with the insights of the social psychologists mentioned above and Geertz (1973 and 1983), Jackson proposed a model 'that would offer a looser more personal and organic picture of religious tradition than that presented in some versions of phenomenology and which took account of the situational character of ethnicity and of social and personal identity' (1994). Accordingly:

a matrix was constructed in which the most generalised 'whole' is the religious tradition, which although constructed differently by different outsiders, is a reference point for individuals and groups. Next there are 'membership groups' of various kinds, each evolving situationally in relation to other groups. Then there is the individual, deeply influenced through the membership of groups and identifiable as part of the wider tradition, and yet being personally unique. (125)

This served as a working model for the present study (see chapters three and twelve).

Curriculum Books

Throughout the Coventry research the presentation of the religious lives of young British Sikhs in curriculum books was taken into account. By curriculum books is meant the books, by both Sikh and non-Sikh authors, that are available from mainstream publishers. These books have all been published with children of school-going age in mind as readers. Some (e.g. Bennett 1990; Butler 1993; Clutterbuck 1990; Coutts 1990; Emmett 1994; Sambhi 1989; Thorley 1989) include questions and suggested activities. The many books produced privately by Sikh writers (for example under the auspices of the Sikh Missionary Society UK) with young Sikhs in mind are not included although, as it is a Coventry publication, MGSS (1978) is included. Nor (apart from Langley 1993) are the many books discussed in which the Sikh tradition is included alongside others. The curriculum books considered are: Aggarwal (1984); Arora (1986); Babraa (1981, 1989); Bennett (1984, 1985, 1989, 1990); Butler (1980); Butler (1993); Chambers (1995); Clutterbuck (1990); Cole (1980, 2nd ed. 1985), Cole and Sambhi (rep 1977, 1980, 1986); Coutts (1990); Davidson (1982); Dhanjal (1987); Draycott (1996); Emmett (1994); Famcombe

(1978); Harrison (1986); Kapoor (1982, 1985); Lyle (1977); McLeod (new ed. 1986); Penney (1988); Sambhi (1980, 1989); Singh and Smith (1985); Solomon (1980a and b); de Souza (1986); Thompson (1985); Thorley (1989).

These can be divided into books for primary school and books for secondary school, although - whatever the intended age group - the text and pictorial content of most books span several key stages. Solomon's works (1980a and b), picture books introducing a Sikh family, are clearly appropriate for infants whereas Dhanjal (1987), an illustrated dictionary, can readily be used throughout secondary education. Nesbitt (1988) discusses the genre in more detail and, additionally, includes fictional works for young readers featuring Sikh characters.

Before reporting the Coventry findings, and considering how these relate to the representation of Sikhs in the curriculum books, however, attention must be paid to some methodological aspects of the research - the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES

- 1 See Nesbitt (1979 and 1980c) for reflection on such experiences in the context of classical studies. The recent Coventry data suggests that the 'god' in question was possibly goddess Ambaji (Mata). See chapters three, four and nine.
- 2 The terms 'tradition' or 'faith tradition' are used following Smith (1978).
- 3 During the writing of this thesis a Sikh student from Coventry commented, regretfully, on how little she had learned about her tradition as a child.
- 4 In 1947 Sikhs comprised over 33 per cent of the military (Satindra Singh 1980).
- 5 For a list of local newspaper references to visits by Sikh *sants*, the earliest (1963) being the political leader, Sant Fateh Singh's visit to Coventry, see Nesbitt (1985b:1 1).
- 6 For an example in Southall see Barrow (1999).
- 7 This trauma provides the thesis for Tatla's discussion of diaspora (1993 and 1999).
- 8 However Gurpal Singh noted that in Wales Khatri were stronger supporters of Khalistan than Jets (1995).

- 9 Most recently of those involving school children was the suspension and reinstatement of a Strathclyde boy suspended for wearing his *kirpan* (sword) (India Mail, 8 September 1994).
- 10 Lord Templeman's ruling was widely reported e.g. in Sheffield Morning Telegraph 25 May 1983.
- 11 See India Mail 11 and 14 January 1994 and Coventry Evening Telegraph 25 February 1983.
- 12 The name Mazhabi literally means religious.
- 13 This was J.S.Nagra (information from order form for Nagra Publications).
- 14 See Morning Star 20 April 1981, 9 May 1981, Birmingham Post 9 May 1981.
- 15 See Coventry Evening Telegraph 23 August 1983, 25 August 1983, 27 September 1983, 31 January 1984, 25 February 1984, 26 October 1984.
- 16 Inderjit Singh Reyat's arrest was reported in Coventry Evening Telegraph

Chapter 2 Methodology

Ethnography and Religious Nurture

Anthropologists provide a theoretical perspective by their discussion of such key concepts as culture and offer substantive data on Sikh communities in Punjab and the diaspora. Also, *par excellence*, among social scientists, they have refined ethnographic method. Ethnography refers not only to the writing of an anthropological study but also to the methodology employed. The ever-increasing literature on ethnographic methodology includes Burgess 1982 and 1984, Fetterman 1989, Hammersley and Atkinson 1989, Spradley 1980. In essence ethnography involves a preponderance of non-quantitative, qualitative methods - primarily participant observation and interviewing. Visual anthropologists have developed multiple uses of photography, for example, for cultural inventories and the analysis of human relationships (Collier and Collier 1986; Larson 1988). The relative strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods are discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson and in Burgess (1982) and the tendency to polarise them is challenged by Brannen (1992 especially 3-37).

For religious studies and religious education the value of the ethnographic approach (both in methodology and interpretation), and of Geertz's interpretive anthropology in particular, has been argued by Jackson (1993,1994,1997). To the study of nurture, ethnographic methods, sensitively applied, bring a holistic approach responsive to individual nuancing.

Phenomenology has influenced this Coventry study insofar as sensitivity to subjects and their worldview is regarded as crucial (van der Leeuw 1938). However, as pointed out by Jackson, this sensitivity also requires tools for understanding the 'grammar' of another's 'language' (1993). Following Jackson, I have adopted Geertz's interpretive anthropological approach (1973, 1983). This emphasises the need for a balance between what he calls 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' concepts, a mode of analysis which is discussed by Jackson (1997).

The present study has also been influenced by the advocates of reflexivity (Clifford and Marcus 1986 and Crapanzano 1980) and by feminist perspectives (Roberts 1981; Epstein 1987; Knott 1995, 199-218) although these are regarded as correctives to other perspectives rather than as the dominant framework for this study.

The Research

a) The Fieldwork Plan

The Coventry research deployed several methods in parallel and was conducted in venues of broadly three types (school, home and place of worship). This diversity of approach (characteristic of much ethnography) would differentiate the research both from quantitative, sociological studies of Sikh tradition which were based on a single method, e.g. structured interviews (Drury 1990; McMullen 1989) and from qualitative, anthropological studies of the perpetuation of South Asian tradition which were conducted in venues of a single type. e.g. the temple-based supplementary class (Dwyer 1988) or the temple (Nye 1992). This multiple approach was adopted after trialling in earlier research (Nesbitt 1991, Jackson and Nesbitt 1993) because of the depth and richness of data which it produces.

As outlined below, it was decided to tape record individual semi-structured interviews with forty-five young Sikhs (the 'subjects'), aged between eight and thirteen, in their primary and secondary schools. Of these young people a smaller number would be selected for follow up as case studies who would be interviewed in their homes. Participant observation, in for example gurdwara congregations, and in the Panjabi classes which some of them attended, would facilitate the selection of the young people for initial interview and the smaller number for follow up as 'case studies'. It would also suggest questions to be asked and provide a means of checking the young people's statements with their observed experience. Photographs (colour transparencies) would be taken in the field as a record of their involvement and to generate commentary from the subjects of case studies.

b) Establishing Contact

I already had many local Sikh contacts (from a wide range of membership groups), some of them from as far back as 1977. This local knowledge extended to India where (1974-1977) I had taught relatives of some Coventry Sikhs and (1974-1977 and 1984) visited famous historic gurdwaras whose significance to Sikhs in Britain was noted by James (1974:44). I also sought out gurdwaras specific to particular groups - the Namdharis' base at Bhaini Sahib, gurdwaras of the Nanaksar sub-tradition (Nesbitt 1985a) and the Delhi base of Baba Ajit Singh.¹ Local Sikh acquaintances included former pupils and evening class students and members of the Punjab Research Group.² My knowledge of Sikh tradition in Coventry was already contextualised by in-depth knowledge of Sikh communities in Nottingham 1979-1980, the subject of my earlier research (Nesbitt 1980a), by contact with many other Sikh communities through being invited to speak at Sikh youth camps, and by my research for Tatla and Nesbitt (1994) and its earlier 1987 edition. My awareness of local organisations was supplemented by access to the list drawn up by the Multi-Faith Directory Project at the University of Derby, now available as Weller (2nd ed 1997:605-650). While photographing a large scale celebration of Guru Gobind Singh's birthday in January 1992 (chapter six) and by visiting the city's five gurdwaras, contacts were made or renewed with Sikhs, particularly with those engaged in teaching Panjabi language or religious music.

Thirty-five questionnaires were sent out requesting information on Panjabi classes and Sikh religious music classes to both schools and Sikh organisations (appendix A). These included seven Sikh organisations listed by the Multi-Faith Directory Project at the University of Derby, four gurdwaras, and twenty-two schools where, according to informants who included the Local Education Authority's co-ordinator for mother-tongue teaching, Panjabi classes *were* running. These questionnaires requested information on classes on Panjabi language and Sikh religious music. Several visits were paid to Panjabi classes in three primary schools and in one secondary school, to a music class in one primary school and to three music classes and three language classes in the gurdwaras. Weekly and special acts of worship were observed, as were the activities including classes for children arranged by the newly established Sikh Cultural Society.

c) Preliminary Selection Criteria

The focus of the research upon the interplay of processes of both formal and informal nurture suggested that all or the majority of the young people should be attending supplementary classes in aspects of Sikh tradition. A countervailing concern was how representative such children would be of their total Sikh peer group. It was initially decided to include a majority of subjects who attended supplementary classes and a smaller number who were less involved for purposes of comparison.

In renewing and making contact with religious membership groups decisions had to be made regarding the definition of Sikh for the purposes of this study. The question was whether individuals' self-definition of themselves as Sikh was a sufficient criterion or whether a filter of adherence to certain devotional norms should be used. Given the general consistency of the Guru Nanak Parkash and Ramgarhia gurdwaras with norms widely agreed by Sikhs and established in the literature, the question arose whether other congregations in which *keshdhari* Sikhs (Sikhs with uncut hair) also participated could also be included.³ Initially three issues had to be resolved: whether to include the Valmiki and Ravidasi, two *zat-baradaris* with their own places of congregational worship; whether - provided they defined themselves as Sikh - to include participants in the Radhasoami Satsang and the congregation of the Bawa Balaknath Temple; and, lastly, whether to include devotees who worshipped at the Nanaksar Gursikh Sikh Temple and the Ajit Darbar.

i) Valmiki and Ravidasi

The Valmiki and Ravidasi constitute two clearly defined, endogamous minorities among Punjabis in Coventry. My own and other people's research in these two communities in the Midlands (Leivesley 1983; Nesbitt 1990a and b, 1991; Purewal 1976) provided a basis for reaching a decision. Many Valmiki and Ravidasi boys and men have uncut hair and turbans, and to the question 'What is your religion?' most Ravidasi and many Valmiki reply 'Sikh'. As I have described in detail elsewhere, worship in their Coventry places of worship, although not in every location, conforms - especially in the Ravidasi case - to Sikh convention (Nesbitt 1990a, 1991, 1994b). For example in both buildings the focus of worship is the scriptures, and in both everyone present is required to cover their heads. The fact that the basis of membership is members' shared *zat-baradari* is parallel to the basis of the Ramgarhia and Bhatra gurdwaras in Britain.

Since I already had extensive data on the religious nurture of young Valmiki and Ravidasi it was decided not to renew contact with the Maharishi Valmik Sabha or the Guru Ravidas Sabha Temple for the selection of subjects for the present study. However if, among young people who had been selected via other gurdwaras, supplementary classes and schools, any individuals subsequently identified themselves as Ravidasi or Valmiki as well as Sikh, they would not be excluded. In the event one boy, participating in a music class in the Guru Hargobind Gurdwara proved to be a Ravidasi Sikh. My data from earlier study of Valmiki and Ravidasi children who identified themselves as Sikh is referred to in the present study, but is clearly marked as coming from that research.

ii) Radhasoami 'and Balaknath

My earlier research had also included participant observation in both the school hall where the Radhasoami *satsang* met each Sunday morning and in the Bawa

Balaknath temple during both evening and Sunday morning congregational worship. A literature search also revealed details of Radhasoami history and philosophy and its relation to the Sikh *Panth* (e.g. Juergensmeyer 1982 and 1989) and of the popular worship of Balaknath (Sharma 1970). I have described local Radhasoami worship and included a photograph of the Coventry Balaknath temple as well as a subject's account of visiting the Walsall temple in Nesbitt (1991: 36-37). In each case the style and content of worship differed significantly from Sikh norms, and although most of those present were Punjabi, by no means all would have identified themselves as Sikh.⁴ Consequently it was decided not to approach the Radhasoami *satsang* and the Bawa Balaknath Temple for participant observation or in order to find potential subjects. However if any subjects who were drawn from other membership groups proved to have links with these groups they would not be excluded. None did.

iii) Nanaksar and Ajit Darbar

In the case of the Ajit Darbar, the members of whose *sangat* regard themselves as unequivocally Sikh, it was decided to conduct participant observation and to select young people for initial interview but not as case studies. The same decision was made with regard to Nanaksar, but as many young Sikhs subsequently proved to attend this gurdwara as well as others, it features in the experience of subjects of both initial interviews and case studies. At least one of the case studies (Jasvir) had also visited the Ajit Darbar on several occasions.

My ambivalence over the inclusion of subjects from these two gurdwaras reflected tension between two concerns. On the one hand *sants* are a significant factor in the development of Sikh tradition in the diaspora (Tatra 1992; LaBrack 1987). On the other hand they and their followers are denounced by many Sikhs as non-Sikh or anti-Sikh, since Guru Gobind Singh bade his followers to 'consider the holy Granth...as the only true spiritual guidance' (Indarjit Singh 1984:4). For example Raspreet and Ravinder's father said:

The owner of Ajit Darbar is called 'Maharaj', 'Babaji'. There is no place for this in Sikhism. The Gurus said, 'We are ordinary and we are giving you a message... The well-off go and give things, the poor can't please them...We have hundreds of Babas. Anyone can set up a *nishan sahib* [Sikh pennant] and sit on a stage. If you have a problem and it's solved it's to their credit, and if it's not solved it's because you were bad in your previous life.

In some cases even fatal violence has resulted.⁵ In Coventry Ajit Singh has attracted particularly fierce denunciations. (For discussion of this exorcist tradition, stemming from the semi-legendary Vadbhag Singh whose picture and religious centre in India are evident in the Ajit Darbar, and of Ajit Singh's role see Chohan 1999.) The decision to include subjects from these gurdwaras

stemmed from a realisation both of the significance of the *sant* phenomenon to any adequate understanding of the perpetuation and modification of Sikh tradition in Britain and of the paucity of published studies. It was also shaped by first-hand experience of both congregations (including, as mentioned above, visits in India to both Ajit Singh's gurdwara in Delhi and to Nanaksar gurdwaras in Delhi and Punjab (Nesbitt 1985a).

By including the Ramgarhia Gurdwara it was hoped that subjects would include members not only of the more numerous Jat *zat*, but also of the significant minority of Ramgarhias. The factor of some Ramgarhias' allegiance to the Namdhari movement was not taken into account when deciding criteria for selecting subjects because there is no place of Namdhari worship in Coventry. The association between Ramgarhia *zat* and Namdhari allegiance stems from the fact that Baba Ram Singh was a Ramgarhia.⁶ Namdharis regard themselves as Sikh but are viewed critically by many Sikhs because of their open allegiance to a succession of living Gurus (Weller 1997:672-673; Ahluwalia 1965; Kalsi 1992; Sanehi 1974 and 1976). When two subjects of initial interviews revealed that their family was Namdhari the data was considered as evidence of a plurality of orientation and practice within the *Panth*, not as negating subjects' identification of themselves as Sikh. Labelling Namdharis (and Radhasoamis) as 'heretical sects' as James does (1974:43) is to side-step issues concerning self-definition as Sikh and the evolution of the *Panth*. The fact that the Namdhari subjects' family regularly attended the Ramgarhia gurdwara and also respected Ajit Singh illustrates the importance of emphasising the multiplicity of possible patterns of allegiance if one adopts the 'membership group' model of faith traditions. This was also the line taken when two Jat subjects (both of whom had been selected as case studies) subsequently indicated that, in addition to worshipping in the gurdwara they also attended the Hindu Temple.

As fieldwork commenced further decisions had to be made about the criteria for selecting subjects for initial interview, as case studies or, indeed, for inclusion in the photographic record. Here the issue was not so much the importance of the five Ks as the significance of the 'Sikh look' (Gell 1994 and see chapter eleven). This was epitomised by the insistence of members of one gurdwara committee that I should only photograph 'children who are true Sikh, with the top-knot'. A decision was made to focus on *keshdhari* children in photographs, especially in the Ramgarhia gurdwara, but to interview some boys or girls with short hair among the subjects of the initial interviews. (In fact all the girls had long hair, although some trimmed it.) However, the subjects of case studies would all be *keshdhari*, although one girl was included because she satisfied other criteria even though some of her hair had been cut in a fringe. Even having determined to focus upon Sikhs 'with the Sikh look' in the case studies, in several cases other close relatives proved to be shaven and short haired. Had I tried (supposing I had been able) to rule out subjects whose close

relatives included *non-keshdhari* Sikhs very few children would have been eligible.

d) The Interviews With Adults

Participant observation and interviews with the young Sikhs were augmented and contextualised by both semi-structured interviews and conversations with teachers in supplementary classes, parents and community leaders such as members of gurdwara management committees. Semi-structured interviews were tape recorded with five adults (four teachers of Panjabi language and one social worker) who were concerned with formal transmission of the Sikh tradition. (See appendix **D**.) In addition points made by Sikh parents and community leaders during conversation were noted down immediately afterwards.

e) Selection of Sikh Children For Interview

The forty-five initial interviewees were mostly selected from those encountered during fieldwork visits. On my first or second visit to a venue (such as a language class) I explained to the pupils the nature of my research and asked for volunteers whose parents were likely to agree to their being interviewed. The response was generally enthusiastic. Interviewees were selected for a balance of age and gender.

Since *zat-baradari* membership is relevant to particular families' outlook, as studies of Bhatras have shown, on girls' education (Ghuman 1980; Nesbitt 1980) it should also be noted that the majority of the subjects were Jat, at least four were Ramgarhia and at least one was Ravidasi. Exact figures are not possible for reasons given below. Ramgarhias were less numerous than hoped because all the children from the Ramgarhia gurdwara who volunteered for interview were Jat by *zat*, Ramgarhias being drawn only from outside supplementary classes.

Early in the fieldwork, therefore, the decision was taken to focus on the diversity within a predominantly *one-zat* (Jat) group rather than to focus upon *zat* as a major variable. This decision was taken partly on the basis of earlier research and partly because of the Coventry situation. The Nottingham fieldwork had suggested the likelihood of greater differentiation in nurture between the Bhatras and Sikhs of other *zats* than between Jat and Ramgarhia. Bhatras, a *zat-baradari* which is culturally distinct in some ways, account for a high proportion of the Sikh community in many British cities (Nesbitt 1980a, 56-78; Kalsi 1992: 92-95). However, as Bhatras have not settled in Coventry no Bhatri children could be interviewed and including them was out of the question. Nor did any potential subjects arise (or at least identify themselves as being) from the much smaller Khatri, Saini or other *zats* to be found in the local Sikh community (Kalsi 1992; Griffiths 1994: 76ff). It quickly became clear that both Jats and Ramgarhias attended both the Ramgarhia gurdwara and other

gurdwaras, so that any correlation between *zat* and gurdwara, as far as subjects were concerned, was also ruled out.⁷ The young people's surnames did not all indicate *zat*: in both Amandeep's case and that of the eleven year old boy quoted below their surnames were the name of a village: 'In India there's a place called B, so we got my name from my grandmother and my granddad — he's captain of it, and that's how I got my name, B.'

Not all subjects knew their caste. For reasons that I could not discover one ten year old boy, with an unmistakably Ramgarhia surname, informed me that he was Jat and so could only marry a Jat.

In considering the religious lives of Sikh children in Coventry it was important to ascertain whether they were first, second or third generation, i.e. whether they had been born outside Britain, or whether their parents or grandparents had migrated to Britain (Drury 1989:36). This was not a selection criterion but fieldwork revealed that the situation was varied, with one subject himself a migrant, some subjects born to parents who had both migrated to Britain after having received all or some of their education in India, some born to parents one of whom had been educated in India and the other in Britain. In a minority of cases a parent had migrated from East Africa. The sketches of the subjects of case studies provide this information for individuals concerned.

Location was another factor in the selection of subjects, as residential areas in Coventry, and so school catchment areas, vary in terms both of ethnic mix and socio-economic status. My interviewees included both children from families in the north of the city where South Asians, Sikhs included, form a much higher percentage of the population, and from the south where Sikhs were far fewer.

Ascertaining the numbers or percentages of Sikh pupils in any Coventry school was more complex than anticipated. To take the example of one primary school, for the first three years pupils' religious allegiance was listed. For the top four years classification was by ethnic origin. Since the school's relocation from one site to another the proportion of white to ethnic minority pupils had increased from 10:19 in year six to 19:21 in reception. Where numbers in a school were very low subjects gave them. For example one eight year old girl stated that there were only two other Sikhs in her school.

It was realised that these young people might have a stronger connection with Sikh religious practice than those from families whose children were not enrolled in supplementary classes. As a result the parents of all Sikh pupils of eight or above in one primary school and all in one year of a secondary school in the south of the city, where Sikhs formed a lower percentage of the population than in the north, were contacted.¹ However in the primary school almost all were male, and only two of the Sikh pupils concerned were not

involved in gurdwara activities each week. The attempt to widen the range of families via the secondary school resulted in only two pupils being interviewed, and both of these proved to be attending Panjabi classes. Parents and children who felt uninvolved in such activities may have decided not to reply to the letter which they received inviting their participation in the research, since the letter (appendix B) suggested the researcher's interest in the Sikh faith.

It is difficult to assess what proportion of young Sikhs are involved locally and nationally in such classes, or indeed in gurdwara attendance. As Dwyer noted with reference to Hindus in Leicester, clearly only a minority are involved (1988:105). *The* total of students in the two largest Panjabi classes, those at the two largest gurdwaras, probably does not exceed three hundred. Concerned Sikh adults in Coventry perceived: 'there has been a steady decline in the numbers of children (and young adults) attending Gurdwaras [*sic*] especially in the last seven years.' (Sikh Cultural Society 1991a:2) At a meeting in March 1992 of the Sikh Cultural Society on mother-tongue provision, the Asian language co-ordinator did not release any figures, perhaps because of their political sensitivity for concerned Sikhs. It is possible that the replies and experiences of subjects who had not received this level of formal nurturing would have differed (Drury 1989) but this is not ascertainable from the present data. Given the importance to the investigation of obtaining as full a picture as possible of formal nurture further efforts to contact uninvolved children were not undertaken (contrast Drury 1998:168-170).

It is also possible that because of the large numbers of Sikhs in Coventry, as compared to other minorities in the city and to Sikh communities in other cities, there is locally a relatively high level of gurdwara-centred activity including attendance at gurdwara-based classes. The young people's high level of participation may be more representative of the local Sikh population than of Sikhs from a wider cross-section of geographical locations.

f) Day School as Venue

The initial interviews were tape recorded between April and June 1992 in fifteen schools (county and Church of England aided). There were five reasons for deciding to conduct these interviews in school. Firstly, this venue would legitimate the research and give it a certain standing in the eyes of subjects and their parents. Secondly, I could ensure certain conditions: privacy for a one to one interview with few (or no) sensory links with Sikh tradition. In the absence of peers or elders, both the interviewees and I would be free to discuss topics in the question schedule (marriage and death for example) which might be more embarrassing in front of others. Thirdly, the research would be brought to the attention of school heads and teachers which might bring mutual benefit (for example teachers' comment on the pupils concerned). Fourthly, I might also see evidence of the inclusion of Sikhism in the curriculum, as happened in one secondary school where a display of pupils' work on Vaisakhi greeted me in the

foyer (chapter six). Fifthly, I had conducted fieldwork, including interviews, in schools during earlier research and had always found these interviews complemented the data derived from interviews in subjects' homes (Nesbitt 1980, 1991; Jackson and Nesbitt 1993).

Permission for interviewing pupils in their day schools was obtained from the Local Education Authority, and subsequently from the head teachers and parents concerned. The Local Education Authority co-ordinator of mother-tongue teaching insisted that I contact each head teacher separately because of the recent move to LMS .⁹

g) The Case Studies

Of the forty-five subjects eleven were selected for subsequent interview at home as case studies. The criteria (regarding balance of gender, age and, if possible, *zat* and the significance of the 'Sikh look') have been mentioned. Other factors taken into account in selecting subjects for case studies were their readiness to communicate - extrovert disposition and articulate use of English - and their certainty of their parents' willingness to host interviews in their homes. I excluded several potential subjects who had mentioned that their parents had separated in case research in the home was perceived as intrusive. This factor had not occurred to me while planning criteria for the selection of subjects as it had not arisen in my earlier study of the Sikh tradition (Nesbitt 1980a) or of nurture in other communities in Coventry (Nesbitt (1991), Jackson and Nesbitt (1993). Moreover the dominant impression given by earlier authors is of family cohesion (e.g. Sambhi 1986).

The subjects of the eleven case studies were drawn from eight families and included seven girls and four boys. Their dates of birth ranged from 7 November 1978 to 25 September 1982. All were Jat except for one Ramgarhia and one of unknown *zat* (see above). All were associated with one or more of the city's gurdwaras.

Each was interviewed on an average of 3.5 occasions between June and September. They kept diaries, and these provided cues for eliciting their experience of religious nurture. They also spoke about the pictures and trophies for *kabaddi* and other sports in their houses, and about such occasions as a *satsang* (religious gathering), *akhand path* (continuous scriptural reading) and *aphsos* (mourning session).

The home setting (with its iconography, discussed in chapter three) provided a greater wealth of data on the young people's nurture than the school context could provide. However there were also some drawbacks. For example, in the domestic setting usually several siblings (in some cases including siblings not selected for case study) were present during interviews and sometimes a parent or other relative was also present for some or all of the

interview. While the resultant conversation and interaction provided a fuller impression of the family than individual interviews could have done, some interviews also suffered adverse effects. For example one girl who had been unselfconsciously informative when interviewed privately at school could do little more than giggle when her sister was present. Another was silent when her father was there, quietly serving me with refreshments. This revealed much about roles and expected behaviour within the family, but limited the subject's responses to questions. In another case his mother whispered 'correct' answers to her son when he was in doubt, so providing an insight into her perceptions.

It was likely in several instances that asking to conduct interviews without family members present would have heightened suspicions about the nature of the exercise. From a guest, present by the permission of senior family members, such a request might have seemed impolite. By including parents and other relatives, impoliteness was avoided, their fears were allayed (except in one case) and much extra data was gathered.¹⁰ In all cases where relatives were present a much stronger picture of the family and its role in religious nurture emerged. In cases where the adults present were competent in English their presence inhibited me to a greater extent than when they were unable to follow spoken English. Those relatives who felt inadequate in English tended to stay out of the room. In two cases my visits to the house were seen by a parent as an opportunity to talk through the problem of unemployment. The number of persons present during or throughout the home based interviews can be tabulated as follows family by family.

Figure 1
Persons present during home interviews

2 families	Fieldworker + subject(s) + occasional adult (English-speaking or non-English-speaking)
3 families	Fieldworker + several children including subjects
1 family	Fieldworker + subject + English-speaking adult
1 family	Fieldworker + several children including subject + non-English speaking adult(s)
1 family	Fieldworker + several children including subjects + several English-speaking adults

h) Photography

Cues were also provided for interviews with these young people by a selection from the four hundred colour slides taken during fieldwork. These photographs included pictures of supplementary classes and gurdwara worship and of

traditional and innovative ways of celebrating the festival of Vaisakhi. They record the postures and gestures of religious devotion at both private and public events. This is an application of the 'focus interview' (Powney and Watts 1987:28-32). As Collier and Collier discovered: 'When native eyes interpret and enlarge upon the photographic content, through interviewing with photographs, the potential range of data enlarges beyond that contained in the photographs themselves.' (1986:99)

The young people enjoyed watching (and sometimes working) the portable viewing apparatus, especially when they recognised people in the photographs. Thus the introduction of photographic images eased the relationship between the fieldworker and subjects, for, as Collier and Collier pointed out, with both interviewer and interviewee focusing on the photograph, this becomes the subject and the human subject no longer feels that s/he is such.

I have examined issues surrounding the photographing of acts of worship (with particular reference to Christian and Hindu nurture) in Nesbitt (1993d). This article argued that the photographic record was intrinsic both to eliciting data from subjects and, subsequently, in sensitising and informing pupils and educators in the religious education curriculum. The implications which Sikh leaders ascribed to photographing their community are illustrated by one gurdwara committee's concern that only *keshdhari* children be photographed and by Sikhs' sensitivity to pictures in earlier curriculum books (e.g.. MOSS 1978).

i) The Ethnographer

Ethnography is incomplete if it does not include some reflection upon the effect of the ethnographer's personal history and assumptions on his/her research questions (LeCompte and Preissle 1993:122ff). LeCompte and Preissle give examples of researchers being attracted to a theory because it is compatible with conceptual frames and preferences they already have. In the case of the present research, for example, my involvement in sub-traditions of the Christian faith, and my academic training in theology predisposed me to be interested in young Sikhs' concepts of 'God', 'God' being an English word with a particular history in western, Judaeo-Christian civilisation.

The ethnographer also inevitably affects, however minimally, the field of study and some instances of this are given below (Barker 1987:148). The fact that somebody is engaged in observing and reporting some aspect of their lives is likely to make subjects view this aspect differently, perhaps to regard the activities involved more positively. Some of the ethnographer's questions, or the assumptions which subjects imagine underly these, may make them look at familiar areas of their daily lives in a new or more critical way. The presence of an outsider may alter their conscious or unconscious behaviour. For example they may be more circumspect in what they do or say and they may use the

fieldworker's language where otherwise another language would have been used.

The age, race, gender, marital status, linguistic competence and other attributes of the ethnographer contribute to the subjects' perception of him or her and in turn influence the data which is gathered (LeCompte and Preissle 1993:145-147). I have discussed the significance of these in my own case with regard to earlier research among Sikhs (Nesbitt 1980a:37-43).

Gender is particularly significant in determining individual roles, although the degree varies from one community to another (Golde 1970; Roberts 1981). In South Asian communities this is often more marked than in western society as a whole, and the level of segregation, especially in places of worship, may be correspondingly higher. For the female ethnographer there are implications in conducting fieldwork among South Asians not only in South Asia (Jeffery 1979; Papanek 1964; Pettigrew 1981; Beteille and Madan 1975) but also in Britain. For example Sikh men and women in British congregations sit on different sides of the central 'aisle' in the gurdwara and social life is influenced by gender-based social norms (regarding the consumption of alcohol, for example, as mentioned in chapter six). Such norms needed to be taken into account when planning and conducting participant observation.

Because of their relevance to perceptions and relationships in the field, some autobiographical details are relevant in this description of the research methodology, **but** these are tempered by my awareness of the danger of overburdening ethnography with personal details. Although there are merits in foregrounding the ethnographer throughout the report, in this monograph autobiographical information will appear only in this chapter, to inform a critical reading of the text. I embarked on the fieldwork as a forty-year old English woman, who was already known to many Sikhs in Coventry through previous work as a teacher and visitor to the gurdwaras. As a result of employment in north India, earlier research among Sikhs in Nottingham (Nesbitt 1980a) and marriage into a Punjabi family I was already familiar with many aspects of Sikh community life - notably with worship in the gurdwara, I could speak Hindi, read Gurmukhi and had some understanding of spoken Panjabi. My changing and diverse roles in local Punjabi society generated ongoing self-examination in which the concept of *sanskar* ('processing' including life cycle rites) was particularly helpful (Nesbitt 1994a).¹¹ My Quaker commitment has stimulated me to reflect upon both the resemblances between Sikh and Quaker insights (Nesbitt 1980b) and upon the implications of being a Quaker for conducting ethnographic research among religious communities (Nesbitt 1993b, 1999).

j) Language

Because all the subjects spoke English it seemed appropriate to conduct interviews in English, although I prompted and probed on occasion with Panjabi words. With some older relatives I used Hindi cum Panjabi, but the interviews with 'leaders' were mainly in English and this affected the selection of interviewees. I recognise that the medium is not value-neutral, as demonstrated by Punetha, Giles and Young with Panjabi-speaking subjects (1988). That translation of some terms from Panjabi to English is problematic is central to the discussion of concepts of 'God' and 'Baba' in chapter nine.

k) Participant Observation

In addition to frequent attendance at acts of congregational worship and classes in which subjects participated, I attended a *satsang* in one subject's home, Rakhri (annual thread tying) in another and spent a day at a Sikh youth camp in which one subject participated. For religious events in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib I wore Punjabi suits, sat with the women and girls and when conversation arose this was principally with females.

Despite a strategy of unobtrusiveness my purpose in attending was made clear, with the result that on occasion a leader drew attention to my presence and the course of events changed. For example, during my second visit to the Ramgarhia Panjabi class, a teacher informed the assembled children and teachers, 'A distinguished visitor, Eleanor Nesbitt, is studying your attitudes, show your good aspect'. Moreover I was requested to make a short speech (in Hindi), which I did. In this instance, the fieldworker's presence was announced not only for general information but in a bid to maximise pupils' good conduct.

Not only did my presence affect the field, although only occasionally so markedly, but the research environment affected my reactions.¹² Quite apart from the deliberate decision to conform as far as possible to the behaviour and demeanour expected of women in social and religious contexts, some constraints were internalised. For example, again in the Ramgarhia gurdwara, at an evening children's *kirtan* programme a Sikh woman suggested that I sit on the men's side of the aisle so that the photographs I was taking of the young musicians and singers would not be obscured by worshippers moving in the foreground to pay their respects to the Guru Granth Sahib. The prospect of moving a few metres to this indubitably preferable vantage point filled me with embarrassment. Understandingly the woman resolved my misgivings by asking her small daughter to sit with me on the men's side.

l) Analysis

Full transcripts of all the interviews were word processed. Since the interviews followed the same sequence, comparison of responses to specific questions was straightforward. However many of the most illuminating statements (e.g. about *amrit*) arose during conversation on another topic (e.g. 'what you do each

morning?'). Also different subjects used different terms for the same phenomenon, e.g. 'Bible', *Tabajr* and *'maharaḥ* for the scriptures. Thus over-reliance on either computer-assisted word-search or on a question by question approach was avoided.

More generally, analysis focused on the processes, both formal and informal, of religious nurture and upon the content in terms of awareness of Sikh beliefs, practices and other aspects of the tradition. This led first to an examination of subjects' self-ascribed identity and of the extent and role of the Panjabi language in this (chapter eleven). The research photographs, field notes and documents, such as work sheets from supplementary classes or documents produced by gurdwaras, augmented and contextualised the interview transcripts and were sources of triangulation (Burgess 1984:144-145).

In line with Geertz's interpretive approach my 'experience-distant' concepts were not allowed to obscure subjects' experience-near' concepts - such as *path* (chapter four) - through which their religious world could be better understood. At the same time, following Fox's emphasis on culture as constantly in the making (constituted of individual decisions in the face of opposing tendencies), evidence of individual choice and cultural change was noted.

Since one assumption at the outset of the enquiry was the likely discrepancy between the ethnographic data and the representation of the religious world of Sikh children in the literature informing the religious education curriculum, the analysis was conducted throughout with this in mind. Four areas emerged as particularly relevant because of their prominence both in the literature and in subjects' accounts. These were subjects' understanding of the word 'God' (chapter nine), their experience of *amrit* (chapter ten) and of Vaisakhi (chapter six) and their relationship with the five Ks (chapters ten and eleven). Accordingly, as examples of the complex relationship between literary representation of the world of Sikh children and the picture suggested by the ethnographic data these areas of subjects' experience were subjected to further examination.

'God' was both a folk term (featuring in the young Sikhs' conversation) and an analytic term, i.e. part of the ethnographer's conceptual tool kit (Spradley 1980). The danger of equating subjects' underlying 'experience-near' concept with my own concept (for which I used the same word) becomes clear in chapter ten in relation to underlying Panjabi concepts. Since *Baba* appeared to be the closest in its range of meaning their usage of this term received particular attention. The frequent conjunction of references to *Baba* and references to *amrit* led to further reflection, suggesting the concept of the sacred (or potent) and of ways in which this was mediated (as explored in chapter ten).

The Vaisakhi festival is examined by reference to Baumann's (1992) critique of Durkheim (1915) and serves as a 'key event' (Fetterman 1989).

Examination of the young Sikhs' familiarity with the five Ks, the symbols of Sikh allegiance, and of their attitude to them suggested several possible approaches. One was to look simply at the incidence of knowledge of what the five Ks were and at the frequency with which particular Ks were maintained. This quantitative approach had been adopted by both Drury (1989) in Nottingham and McMullen (1989) in Punjab. Drury supplemented this with more qualitative data as she probed with further questions regarding, e.g. the reason for maintaining or abandoning the *kesh*. She correlated their responses to her subjects' marital status and 'generation'. McMullen interviewed using multiple choice questions on the relative importance of the Ks to each other and the type of significance they had (e.g. 'part of Sikh identity'). He correlated responses with sex, age, education, caste, 'sectarian background' and 'income-occupation', so showing for example that 'more older than younger people (19.8 per cent) ascribed religious rather than sociological significance to the five Ks'.

In the present study such variables as age, gender, socio-economic class, family's migration history, *zat* and allegiance to *sants* were borne in mind while reviewing the data, but the aim was to produce 'ethnographic snapshots' of particular subjects' experience of the Ks in their nurture as Sikhs, not tables of percentages from which generalisations could be reached. In view of the emerging centrality of 'encounter with the sacred' in these young Sikhs' experience, and the recurrence in their conversation of the Ks in association with Sikh identity, their attitude to the Ks was examined from these two angles.

Analysis of the data was further advanced by concurrent examination of the literature. In particular Steedman (1985 and 1992) suggested the value of reflection on the capacity of individual incident to yield bodies of meaning, regarding linguistic and gender issues, for example. This extended the potential of the 'ethnographic snapshot' as a tool in analysis.

Romaine (1989 and Chana and Romaine 1984) deepened my understanding of the bilingualism of the subjects. In relation to bilingual subjects' use of 'God' this analysis of code-switching necessitated further reflection (in chapter nine) on the appropriateness of Geertz's 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' concepts in the English-Panjabi bilingual situation of the Coventry Sikh subjects. Meanwhile, Glinert's definition of some languages used in Britain, notably for ritual purposes, as 'quasilece encouraged my looking more closely at the 'Panjabi' which elders wished to perpetuate (1993).

More importantly, from the point of view of data analysis, their work also afforded an analogy for exploring what I provisionally (following Drury)

regarded as the subjects' biculturalism'.¹³ Romaine's discussion of the linguistic phenomenon of 'code-switching' encouraged me to examine 'biculturalism' for a parallel - indeed cognate - phenomenon. Code-switching (in a definition derived from Gumpertz 1982) is 'the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems' (Chana and Romaine 1984:447). This can involve alternation and/or mixing between the grammatical systems of English and Panjabi. Analysis of my data was informed by the concepts of a 'syntactic structure' and smaller units ranging from morphemes to clauses. I interrogated the data for cultural/religious parallels to 'borrowing' (embedding elements e.g. lexical items from one language in the syntactic structure of another) and code-switching in the more specific sense of more complex integration of the two languages (see chapters five, six and twelve).

Drury had employed both the concept of biculturalism and the Barthian concept of situational ethnicity (Barth rep. 1970) for her theoretical framework. These and her concept of social structural pluralism were useful concepts, subsumed by the notion of multiple cultural competence (see chapter one). Drury's concepts of adherence (or conformity) and abandonment were less useful as they presupposed an agreed givenness and uniformity of interpretation of the Khalsa code, and an equation of this with 'traditional Sikh norms and values', which does not stand up to historical scrutiny (see e.g.. Oberoi 1994 and discussion in chapter twelve below).

From a more distanced reflection on the cumulative data there emerged a sense of the young people's strong self-identity as Punjabi and as Sikhs amid a plurality of trends, both mutually reinforcing and mutually contradictory. I detected and began to formulate a typology of the processes underway in local Sikh society (and so in Sikh nurture). These I started to plot with reference to the individual decision-making (over, e.g. appearance or language use) as evidenced by the data. All these lines of thought necessitated a re-sifting of the total data, so providing the foundation of chapter twelve. As the importance of this individual decision-making to the concept of culture (Fox 1985) and so of religious tradition became clear I re-examined the data from this theoretical perspective.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues in social scientific research have been discussed by Bott (1957), Jarvie (1982) and Homan (1991) among many others, and the practical implications have been codified in professional guidelines (e.g. ASAC nd; BSA 1989). With regard to the Coventry study confidentiality was paramount in reporting the data. The subjects of the case studies are referred to by pseudonyms and it is hoped that families' and key informants' anonymity has been preserved. This has been balanced against the danger of distorting the data by withholding or altering information.

A major concern has been the sensitivity of a vulnerable minority to exposure and the possible subsequent misuse of material. Members of Sikh communities feel resentment at being the objects of western, orientalist scholarship, victims of occidental discourse (Said 1978; Arvind-pal Singh 1994). The homeland trauma, climaxing in 1984 (Tatla 1993 and 1999), has intensified sensitivity to the perceived erosion of Sikh identity. My concern was sharpened by awareness of Sikh fears of western scholars' and western-trained Sikh scholars' deconstruction of the Sikh past and sacred text.¹⁴

The Subjects of the Case Studies

a) Sarbjit was a ten year old girl living with her parents, elder brother and baby sister in a terrace house in the north-west of Coventry. Her father had come to England from Punjab as a young man and he was a 'fork lifter' in a car factory. 'He's a video filmer as well', producing video films of marriages. Since 1985 he had worn a turban and he currently held office in one of the gurdwaras. Sarbjit's mother stayed at home and knew little English. Sarbjit spoke Panjabi with her mother but with her father and brother she also spoke in English. Both parents had shown their commitment to their tradition by being initiated with *amrit* (chapter five). By *zat* they were Jat. Sarbjit attended a Church of England primary school where Sikhs were in a dwindling minority. She had been learning Panjabi at the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara Sunday morning class since the age of four. She attended worship in four local gurdwaras.

b) Amandeep was a nine year old girl who lived with her mother, father and two younger sisters in the south-east of Coventry. Her father was a printer and her mother was looking for paid employment. Her relatives lived in Delhi, America and Britain. Her father had worn a turban but not within her memory. 'We've got loads of photographs.' Her *zat* was not mentioned, and the surname which she used did not indicate *zat* as it was the name of her father's ancestral village. At home Panjabi and English were the family's shared media. Amandeep attended a county primary school. She was learning Panjabi and harmonium (*baja*) at the Guru Hargobind Gurdwara and greatly enjoyed dancing classes which she attended at two venues. She enjoyed playing on her mountain bike, went horse riding when she could and had been to gymnastics classes.

c) Amarjit was a twelve year old boy. The front of his house, which was in the north of Coventry, was an off-licence.¹⁵ Sharing the house with him and his younger sister were his father's parents, his mother and father, his father's brother and his wife and their newborn baby. The family took it in turns to serve in the shop. His parents were Ramgarhia by *zat*. His father and paternal grandparents had migrated from Kenya, his mother from India. Like all the male members of the household Amarjit had uncut hair, covered in his case by a *rumal* (handkerchief). The language of the home was Panjabi. Amarjit went to

evening classes in Indian music and had previously attended Panjabi classes at a local primary school and at the Ramgarhia gurdwara, which - together with Nanaksar gurdwara - he attended for worship.

d) Ravinder and Raspreet, sisters aged twelve and eleven years respectively, were Jat by *zat*. With their four elder sisters, their younger (short-haired) brother and their parents they lived in the south of Coventry in a semi-detached house. Father had come to England from Punjab at the age of fifteen and their mother had come when she was thirteen. He was studying and mother went out to work. Both parents were *keshdhari* and had taken *amrit* in England. Father ran Panjabi classes, accompanied singing in the gurdwara on his harmonium and had previously held elected office on its committee. At home Panjabi and English were both spoken. Ravinder was a pupil at a coeducational comprehensive school, Raspreet still went to the local county primary school. They attended Panjabi language classes at the nearby community centre and were learning to play the harmonium at the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara.

e) Davinder and Daljeet were thirteen year old Jat twin brothers. They lived with their parents in the north of Coventry. Their father worked in a car factory and their mother in a clothing factory. Both parents were *keshdhari*, wore turbans and were members of the Khalistan-oriented group, Babbar Khalsa, with which their sons strongly identified. With their parents the boys spoke only Panjabi. The brothers' school was a single-sex comprehensive, They had recently stopped attending Panjabi classes at Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara.

f) Jasvir was eleven, and lived north of the city boundary. She had two younger sisters and two infant brothers. Her father, formerly a driver, was an international *kabaddi* player; both parents were looking for work. Her father was short-haired. Her parents, Jats, were born in Punjab (her father in Jalandhar district). The only language of the home was Panjabi. Jasvir's school was a local first school. She went to classes in Panjabi there as well as in the Ramgarhia gurdwara where she was also learning to play the harmonium. Her family worshipped in the Ramgarhia, Guru Nanak Parkash and Nanaksar gurdwaras and occasionally at Ajit Darbar.

g) Satwant was eleven and lived with her brother and sister, her parents and her father's mother and brother in a house in the north of Coventry. Her father, who had been in Britain for twenty-four years, worked as 'second to the manager' in a manufacturing company and her mother sewed in a clothing factory. Her father and brother were short-haired. The family spoke Panjabi and some English at home - with the parents speaking Panjabi and the children often replying in English. Satwant's school was the local county primary and she went to classes in self-defence and martial arts. Her family (Jats by *zat*) participated in worship at the Ramgarhia Gurdwara, Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara and the Nanaksar Gursikh Temple.

h) Gurdial Singh and Gurvinder Kaur, aged twelve and ten respectively, were brother and sister. They lived with their two younger brothers, their parents and their father's sister and parents in a house in the north of Coventry. Their father, who was born in India, had come to England aged fifteen and now worked as a taxi driver. Their mother, also born in India, had come over at thirteen and worked in a factory. Their father wore a turban. The children spoke Panjabi with their mother and used more English with their father. Gurdial and his younger brothers wore a *patka* (tied head covering). His school was a co-educational comprehensive, his sister's a county primary. They went to Panjabi classes on Sunday morning in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara and also learned Panjabi in weekly evening classes which were held in a local primary school. The family - Jats - attended three local gurdwaras - Ramgarhia, Guru Nanak Parkash and Nanaksar.

This chapter has considered the potential contribution of ethnography to the understanding of religious nurture. It has outlined the research methodology employed for this study and concluded with descriptions of the subjects of the case studies. The next five chapters report the processes and content of the young people's nurture in the Sikh faith tradition, beginning with home and family.

NOTES

- 1 The Namdharis' spiritual leader lives at Bhaini Sahib, District Ludhiana, Punjab. Ajit Singh's home and gurdwara (Ajit Singh Darbar) are in a residential area north of the Jamuna river.
- 2 The Punjab Research Group was founded in Coventry in 1984 as an interdisciplinary forum for research on Punjab, including the British diaspora.
- 3 *Keshdhari* is the term for Sikhs who have uncut hair, following the ruling of Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Principal among such norms was the centrality of the Guru Granth Sahib and the absence of influence by any *sant* (charismatic but controversial leader).
- 4 Worship in the Radhasoami *satsang* consists largely of listening to lectures in spiritual practice. In the Balaknath temple the *Baba's* diagnosis (in trance) of worshippers' maladies is central. Since my Coventry field work Geaves's discussion of Baba Balaknath worship has further problematised boundary-drawing between Hindus and Sikhs (1998).
- 5 For example the murder in India of Nirankari Baba in 1978 (Joshi 1984; Tully and Jacob 1985) and the murder in 1987 in Southall of Darshan Das (Birmingham Evening Mail 12 November 1987; Times 13 November

1987; Nesbitt 1989:77). One informant suggested that ostracism of Nanaksar was less strong only because of its greater strength in numbers, wealth and the spectacle it offered.

- 6 Ram Singh (b.1816), the founder of the Namdharis, was a carpenter. Members of the wood-working and other skilled artisan *zats* identify themselves as Ramgarhia.

- 7 Finding Jats at the Ramgarhia gurdwara (and Ramgarhias at Guru Nanak Parkash, a gurdwara strongly associated with the Jats) and general 'multiple attendance' differed from my expectations based on 1979 Nottingham findings (Nesbitt 1980a) and on Kalsi (1992). Local factors may be responsible. In any case (as I noted in 1980) Ramgarhias and Jats do not segregate themselves as Bhatras have tended to do. My findings are corroborated by Ramindar Singh's in Bradford:

People attend any of the five gurdwaras according to their convenience and the relative attractiveness of the service on particular occasions.
(1992:18)

- 8 A university student (oral communication Nov 1994) commented on the markedly stronger Sikh presence locally and in the school since her admission ten years previously.

- 9 LMS (Local Management of Schools) refers to the restriction of Local Education Authorities' powers (from 1 April 1990) under the 1988 Education Reform Act, whereby school governing bodies became responsible for control of their budgets and for staffing.

- 10 The suspicion of me in this isolated case had a political basis.

- 11 *Sanskar* in the sense of the Sanskrit *samskara* as refining or processing.

- 12 cf Barker's mention of the atheist researching the Jesus Army who found himself convinced that Satan had invaded a woman who rejected his literature (1987:140).

- 13 At the time of analysis and writing I was unaware of Ballard's choice and exploration of this analogy (1994a:30-33)

- 14 See editorial of Sikh Reformer, 4, 1993 for comment on the controversy surrounding Pashaura Singh's doctoral thesis. As an example of Sikh condemnation of recent scholarship, particularly Hew McLeod's, see Giani (1994). For a response see McLeod (1995). Helweg (1996) and O'Connell (1996) provide overviews of the antagonism.

- 15 Although drinking alcohol is prohibited by *Khalsa* discipline and contrary to Sikh ethics (Sambhi 1985) it is not unusual for Sikhs (including *keshdharis*) to run off-licences. See, e.g. Butler (1993:58).

Chapter 3

Family and Home

Introduction

Writers on the nurture of children in the Sikh faith - and in other faith traditions - emphasise the necessary and actual importance of the family environment and informal nurture.' It is because it is in the family that children absorb most of their parents' tradition that this study of young Sikhs' religious lives commences with the home. Whereas the provision of supplementary classes (chapters seven and eight) marks a change which post-dates settlement in Britain, informal nurturing marks continuity with pre-migration norms (James 1974:46). In this chapter adult relatives' role in Sikh nurture is considered with particular reference to two ways in which their influence is expressed. These are their selection of pictures in the living room and their selection and treatment of food. This chapter, accordingly, explores the nurturing role of home and family under the headings of parents and other relatives, iconography and diet, before suggesting their relevance to the conceptualisation of the evolution of Sikh tradition.

Interactions with specific relatives - in Britain and India - differentiated one young Sikh's experience from another's, although certain motifs recurred. Moreover the diversity of nurture is exemplified by differences over cuisine and dietary taboos and differences in domestic iconography, indicating the variable relationship of Sikhs with a Hindu cultural matrix. This provides evidence of the dynamism of religious tradition as the sum of individual decisions (Fox 1985). It also points up the curriculum books' avoidance of issues raised by allegiance to *sants*.

Parents and Other Relatives

Speaking at a conference of the Sikh Cultural Society (see chapters seven and eight) and consistently with the literature mentioned in chapter one, Shinder Thandi identified the family as the major means of cultural transmission and Sikh institutions as secondary. However, in practice, attempts to separate the influence of the two (and indeed of other institutions such as the school) are unrealistic (see subjects' accounts of their occasional homework on Sikh topics, with a task being set by a teacher and stimulating the child to ask questions at home and to consult books).

Certainly, any understanding of the complex processes involved in nurture requires an examination of the role of mothers, fathers and other family members - especially those living in the same house as the Sikh child concerned. Subjects' households differed in their composition. For grandparents to be living in the same house, as in Amarjit's case, was exceptional and two girls and one boy were growing up in one-parent families with their mothers. Most subjects lived in nuclear families, consisting of the subject and siblings, their father and mother.² However children mentioned changes in the number of residents, not only with the birth of younger brothers and sisters, but also as uncles and aunts got married and grandparents died. So one eight year old girl answered the question 'How many people live in your house?' by saying:

There used to be seven, but I'm afraid one died. There's my grandad, my mum, my dad, my sister, me and uncle B, but you can cross 13 out because he's got his new house. He's already moved. It was my grandmother [who died]. That was a very long time ago.

Subjects had internalised certain expected patterns of family life - most clearly evident in comments (chapter five) about marriage. Thus a nine year old girl articulated her assumption that the youngest son has to live with his parents and care for them:

My dad can't live with his mum and dad because he's got a younger brother... If there's no brothers and only girls the girls have to go [at marriage] even though they haven't got a brother.

a) Parents

Not only did the young people often refer to their mother's roles in the family but two of the adults who were interviewed stated unequivocally that mothers had a greater burden of responsibility for their children's upbringing within the Sikh tradition. For example, while acknowledging the shared responsibility of both parents one teacher expressed the view that: When the children leave home...the father is always going to say to the mother, "You haven't taught them proper manners".' Another adult informant concluded from her long

professional contact with Sikh families that 'mothers are paying more attention' to raising their children in accordance with Sikh tradition.

Some of the young people indicated that, as their mothers knew little English, it was through conversation with them that they practised their Panjabi. A ten year old boy referred to his mother telling him stories of 'Holi...the ten-headed monster, Ravan...the Sita and Ram story'. A nine year old boy mentioned that his mother had a greater knowledge of Sikh devotional passages than his father. Of the '*paurian*' (stanzas) of Japji Sahib he said: 'My dad hardly knows a little, my mum knows all of them.'

However, the young people's descriptions of daily life in their families made frequent reference to the involvement of their fathers in perpetuating their religious tradition. An eleven year old Ravidasi boy felt he owed his knowledge of Sikh tradition mostly to his father and to his maternal grandmother. To take another example (chapter four), Ravinder described how her father read *path* (i.e. passages of scripture) each morning so that all the family would hear it as they began the day. Her father expressed the view that in earlier generations Sikh fathers had exerted more influence on their children and added:

I think the father can still play an active role. In Hindu homes mother [is] often [the] one who is doing the religious thing at home. But in Sikh homes that's not important. It could be either, it could be both. A father's much more likely to be a strict Sikh and a mother's much more likely to be a sort of follower.

Especially in cases where both parents had publicly demonstrated commitment to their faith by taking *amrit* (see chapters five and ten), their children described their shared devotion. Quoting Ravinder again: 'My mum and dad are really religious, like when the *maharaj* comes they really devote to it, like they do the *pani* and *dhuf*.'³ Hers was not the only family in which a firmer orientation towards Sikh discipline had occurred within her lifetime (see chapter twelve).

Adults also mentioned their feelings of inadequacy in passing on their tradition. One informant mentioned that some parents came to Panjabi classes because they felt bad that they could not read Panjabi, when their children were learning to do so. One teacher, a Ramgarhia, reflected: was born in Africa and I lived in Africa, so I don't know much about India.' She had however benefited from attending a Sikh school, where Sikh tradition was incorporated in the curriculum. A twelve year old girl attributed some of her difficulty with learning to read and write Panjabi to her parents' illiteracy in their mother tongue: 'My mum and dad don't read Panjabi so there's no-one in the house that I can sit down with.'

As noted in chapter eight, the British educational system was perceived by several adult informants as promoting Christian teaching to the detriment of other traditions. This perception might encourage parents to make a deliberate effort to perpetuate their Sikh tradition. In the words of one adult:

I don't think the state school will ever help them to learn these things, because as you know they are more interested to teach them Christianity, but I think parents have got to take more interest in all these things.

However, she expressed the view that, given their tendency to regard teachers' words more highly than their parents', young Sikhs were unlikely to respect Sikh requirements fully unless schools took the lead in promoting them for Sikh pupils.

b) Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles

Amarjit, Gurvinder and Gurdial and several of the other young people lived as part of a joint family. In such cases, with one exception, it was the father's parents who lived with them. Thus Amarjit's paternal grandparents, father and mother, father's brother and sister-in-law, his sisters and baby cousin shared the house. Several young people's grandparents lived locally, although not in the same house. Some boys and girls spoke about an aunt or an uncle who lived with them. A ten year old boy did so in the context of morning devotions and, when she was asked who had taught her most about her religion, his sister said 'my aunty' and was more explicit about the early morning routine:

My aunty gets up first. She does her *path* (scriptural reading). She's got a little holy book and she reads and there's a calendar photo of God and she does it in front of the calendar... We just sit down there. My aunty reads all of the book and when we stand up we do this special thing - we say it all out and then I say it with her.

Whether or not they lived in the same household, relatives contributed to the young people's religious nurturing in a variety of ways: a ten year old boy said 'aunties' were the source of his knowledge about his religion and a nine year old boy said his '*bibi*' ('my aunty') was going to bring him a *kara* (steel wrist band) from India. Amarjit mentioned how much he had learned from his maternal grandmother in Birmingham. One eight year old girl felt that she had learned most about her religion (including Panjabi language) from her 'nan' who lived the other side of Coventry. Of her homework from the Panjabi class she said: 'You can read it to your nan if you know the words and if you don't your nan will teach you.' When she stayed with her she slept with her and shared the early morning visit (at 6 am) to the Ramgarhia gurdwara. A nine year old girl was one of several subjects who referred to their paternal

grandparents ('my *Bibi* and *Baba*') in connection with the five Ks — 'My dad's mum she's got the five Ks'. As well as grounding children in devotional practice and exemplifying the Sikh code, grandparents might tell them about Punjab's history - especially the partition in 1947. One ten year old boy had heard from them: 'how was India in olden times, when Pakistan and everything they were all together and suddenly they had a fight.'

Visiting grandparents, aunts and uncles could also mean travelling to India, although Ramindar Singh's observation of Bradford showed a decline in such visits, largely for economic, job-related reasons (1992:62). One ten year old boy had paid frequent visits to his maternal grandparents,

[I went] when I was a little kid. I used to go on the front of my mum's brother's motorbike. All the cousins used to be on the back.

Thus such visits could reinforce family ties, and these might include ties with relatives domiciled in Britain as well as in India. A ten year old girl recounted:

My mum's sister went, her family and my family went. You meet lots of people, animals, peacock — it's at my grandma's house - on top of it.

Visiting relatives in India also afforded opportunities to see Sikh holy places. A Namdhari boy had been to the Namdharis' historic centre at Bhaini Sahib. More generally Amritsar featured in subjects' memories, A nine year old girl recalled:

We went to three *pind* [villages]...My *bua* [father's sister] lived there and my two sisters [i.e. cousins?]....last year January we went for six months...We went to nearly all the gurdwaras and I think the best gurdwara was Amritsar because it's got nice water and I know a bit about it, like when he threw the head it landed...on the holy book thing, Guru Granth Sahib .⁴

Similarly a ten year old girl and a ten year old boy described the beauty of the Golden temple in Amritsar, To quote the girl:

When I was three years old... I went to see the Golden Temple. When I saw it it was so beautiful I can't believe it... and it's all surrounded by this really pure water.

Satwant's visit had left a strong impression of rural Punjab:

[Punjab] is a nice place. Last year I stayed in K..., stayed over there and helped with the animals, went to different places like Jalandhar and Phagwara... It was brilliant.

Clearly, conversation with older relatives in Punjab and visits to sacred and historic sites had strengthened the young people's hold on their tradition. A thirteen year old girl said that she had learned about her religion: 'because I've been in India and my grandfather, he's quite a lot into religion, and he used to tell me stories at bedtime.' Satwant, too, felt that in Punjab she had learned a great deal more about the Sikh tradition:

Like because I didn't know who the ten Gurus were before and I didn't know how to speak proper Panjabi. I learned it from there. I went to Amritsar.

Overseas travel was a frequent feature of family life. There was a two-way traffic with India as grandparents and other relatives came to Coventry on visits. Moreover maintaining contact with relatives also meant travel to other countries, such as Canada and Germany, for weddings for example, so impressing children with the global dispersion of the Sikh community and the importance of attending relatives' wedding ceremonies.

From the Coventry data it is clear that in general parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles contribute to the nurturing of young Sikhs in their faith tradition, although in different families individual children attributed their grounding in the tradition to different relatives. In the following sections two aspects of adult relatives' influence upon children in the family will be explored - iconography and cuisine.

Iconography

Collier and Collier include a photograph of a calendar picture of Jesus Christ with a tuft of eagle feathers and rosette 'suggesting an [American] Indian presence' and, referring to 'the cultural inventory', they explain that: 'The value of an inventory is based upon the assumption that the 'look' of a home reflects who people are and the way they cope with the problems of life.' (1986:45)

The visual impact of the homes of Sikh subjects in Coventry suggests that religious pictures were statements of their self-identification with a faith tradition. Earlier fieldwork among families of several faith traditions, including families of Punjabi, 'English' and other ethnic backgrounds, had shown that in South Asian homes generally (to a much greater extent than in most English homes) religious pictures communicate religious allegiance (Nesbitt 1993c). Moreover, several of the young Sikhs' accounts of domestic worship (chapter four) suggest that for some Coventry Sikhs representations of the Gurus (and of a living master) have a devotional function.

Reporting research among Sikh families two decades ago in Nottingham, Dosanjh noted the sparsity of non-Sikh pictures, and the preponderance of representations of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh (1976:44-45). Similarly on the walls of the living room in the houses of all the subjects of my Coventry case studies hung examples of characteristically Sikh popular iconography, framed and unframed, including trade calendars, of the genre illustrated in McLeod (1991) and Swain (1974).

Two living room interiors illustrate this: in her downstairs front room one Panjabi teacher had Sikh pictures (including calendars), a clock which was decorated with pictures of Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Nanak and the Golden Temple and small pictures of the Golden Temple and Guru Gobind Singh on a fireside shelf. In Amarjit's living room a framed one thousand piece jigsaw puzzle of Harmandir Sahib (from W.H. Smith) adorned the chimney breast and there were smaller pictures of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh on the walls. Raspreet and Ravinder had pictures of Gurus in 'every single room'.

Domestic iconography encompassed more than the uncontroversially Sikh pictures of the best-known Gurus and the best-known gurdwara. As Lall too documents with illustrations (1999) particular constellations of devotion (or at least cultural identity) in the young people's homes included pictures from the Hindu pantheon, portraits of living spiritual masters and indications of political sympathy. Thus one ten year old boy (with a Ramgarhia name though he defined himself as Jat) described a picture, possibly of Lakshmi.⁵ In Jasvir's and Satwant's homes there were pictures of Sheranwali Ma, the goddess Durga victoriously riding her tiger and another picture at Satwant's showed Hanuman, the 'monkey-god'. In Jasvir's home there were also pictures of a holy man 'Sant Baba (Jwala Singh Maharaj). A ten year old girl who attended the Ajit Darbar referred to

sarup — it's like a picture of Babaji. We've got three of them. We've got Baba Ajit Singh in the living room and we've got Guru Nanak Dev Sahib Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Similarly, the Namdhari boy mentioned having photos of the Satgurus. In Satwant's home were displayed pictures of Bhagat Singh and Mahatma Gandhi and a map of India (which she had bought for her father).⁶ In Amandeep's living room hung a popular representation of the tragic lovers, Sohni Mehinwal, symbolic of Punjab's heritage of story spanning religious divisions.⁷ The words 'Khalistan *zindabad*' (long live Khalistan) were displayed in the house of one eleven year old Jat boy, evidence of family conviction of the need for a separate Sikh state. A portrait of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale with General Subheg Singh behind him, Joginder Singh and Bhai Jasvir Singh plus a picture of Guru Gobind Singh in Sarbjit's house carried the same message.⁸ Earlier research had revealed portrayals of Rishi Vahnika and

(Guru) Ravidas characterising the caste-specific allegiance of Sikhs from the Valmiki and Ravidasi *zats* (Nesbitt 1991:27-29).

This earlier research had also made clear that while children recognised religious pictures and knew that they are associated with their faith tradition, they could not necessarily identify them by name, partly because of the convention of referring to them by an honorific (such as *Tabajr*) rather than - less respectfully - by name (Nesbitt 1991:27). A Panjabi teacher's observations also pointed to the danger of assuming that, because of their exposure to domestic iconography, children would 'know' anything about the Gurus or their tradition. She recalled a Sikh pupil asking her who a picture of Guru Nanak showed.

She didn't know nothing about it...Then I taught them all about them: 'We've got ten Gurus and this is the first one', and one day I went to their house and there was ten Gurus, and I said, 'Look, you've got it. Didn't you know that?' She said, 'I didn't know at all'.

However pictures influenced subjects' concepts of 'God' (chapter nine) and they knew that respect must be shown. Ravinder recalled:

I was at an *akhand path* and there was this...ordinary magazine which had comic strips of Guru Gobind and all that, and I just put it on a chair and this woman looked at me... and picked it up and put it right on top of the shelf.⁹

Thus pictures not only reflect who people are but shape their behaviour and 'reflect the geography of [their] inner world' (Swain 1974:127). They visually map the diversity of the *Panth* in which young Sikhs are growing up. However, suggesting that they indicate 'membership groups' (Jackson 1997) in the tradition would be to suggest an over rigid demarcation of Sikhs' fluid, overlapping political and devotional orientations and it would leave out of account the transformational aspect of culture. The same point can be made about food-consumption patterns, and it is to these that we now turn.

Diet

a) Introduction

In their very different way the foods children eat are artefacts and, no less than iconography, represent an inner world of theological and moral belief in addition to providing that physical sustenance of which religious nurture is an analogue. From the anthropological standpoint foods (how they are prepared and eaten, on what occasion and which are to be avoided) are rich cultural symbols)⁰ For communities of Indian origin cooking and eating mark

significant boundaries based upon people's understandings of the faith traditions which they demarcate.

Fieldwork showed the extent to which young children were accustomed to receiving, distributing and eating food in culturally acceptable ways which were distinct from those current in the surrounding western society. For example, when visiting the gurdwara, after paying their respects to the Guru Granth Sahib they would go to the bowl of *karah prashad* and wait to receive a portion in their cupped hands. Holding it in the palm of the left hand they would sit cross legged in the congregation, lifting the sweet dough to their mouths with their right hand. I I Sikhs have written much about another food-related institution, the *langar* ('free kitchen'), as a statement of human equality.¹² Both the *karah prashad* and *langar* are prepared in the gurdwara to the sound of *shabads* and only by people who have bathed first.¹³

Davinder's answer to the question 'What is special about being a Sikh?' was 'You don't eat meat - but some people can - and [you] go to gurdwaras'.¹⁴ This reply suggested both the significance of food in his perception of his tradition and the confusion in practice.¹⁵ Guru Nanak symbolically accepted all meats as clean when he cooked venison at a Hindu pilgrim site.¹⁶ But meat-related taboos persist in the *Panth* and are often perceived as indices of Sikh commitment. The *Rahit Maryada* (Code of Discipline) requires *amritdhari* Sikhs not to eat *halal* meat. Discussion of the dietary implications of the Sikh faith tradition can be found in Nesbitt (1997). In this section, because of their prominence in the Coventry data, the following aspects of subjects' experience of food are considered: dealing with food in the home, the mixing of cuisine, reservations about beef, vegetarianism, periodic abstentions and limits to commensality.

b) Dealing With Food

Unlike some Hindu and many Christian children the Sikh subjects, with the exception of Amarjit (chapter four) did not speak of saying grace or offering a mealtime prayer (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:102-103). Nor, in families which included *amritdhari* members, did anyone mention - with reference to domestic meals - the practice (also observed at the time of the *Ardas* in the gurdwara) of 'say[ing] a prayer over a portion from each dish and then gently draw[ing] the kirpan over the food to give it God's blessing' (Bennett 1990:15).

A Panjabi teacher reprimanded her daughter for letting the ladle that she was using to serve food touch somebody's individual plate. This slip drew attention to the unspoken assumption that, if the ladle touched a serving of food or an individual's plate utensil which came into contact with cutlery contaminated by saliva, any food subsequently touched or served with it would be *jutha* (contaminated, impure) (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:58).

As noted in chapters five and six respectively birthday cake is fed to the child concerned by hand by those present just as *mithiai* (Indian confectionery) is on certain special occasions and the Ramgarhia Panjabi class's Vaisakhi cake (chapter six) was cut with a *kirpan*. In these instances the combination of an occasion (whether dictated by western or Sikh culture) with a western food and a South Asian (or more specifically Sikh) way of dealing with it highlighted processes of change.¹⁷

c) Punjabi Food and 'English' Food

Subjects were aware of foods as cultural markers. For example for breakfast Amandeep reported: 'Sometimes we have cornflakes and sometimes we have this Indian *paratha*.'¹⁸ Her weekly diet included two types of cuisine and she distinguished these unhesitatingly as 'English' and 'Indian'. About evening meals she said: We only have an English dinner two times. The other days we have *roti* with *sabzi*.¹⁹ Similarly Ravinder explained:

My young sister and my older sister we take it in turns to make something to eat for everyone - English meal like beans on toast. Then we watch TV. Then we do our homework. Then my mum and my two elder sisters and me have to make *roti* and *dal* - *sabzi*, *dal*, curry, anything.²⁰

Subjects expressed preferences, Ravinder missing '*roti dal*' if the family went 'to Cornwall or Wales for a week'. Faced with the prospect of staying in a non-Punjabi home a ten year old boy said: 'It'd just be boring... if they're English they eat all this English food and I miss out on my food...' Amandeep voiced two dietary differences between the English and 'ourselves'.

We've got more sort of sweets...they [English] buy their food from frozen shops. We make it ourselves.

However, subjects were used to having English food both at home and outside, and enjoyed it, and for Christmas it was regarded as appropriate (chapter six). For example for one eleven year old boy's father Christmas day was the one day when he was persuaded to eat meat:

Christmas we have ...roast dinner and my dad he has to eat and it's only once he eats. We don't force him; he just...has it to be with everyone else.

Special food (usually Punjabi) enriched their sense of special occasions: Indian sweetmeats (*mithiai*) were a popular element in celebrations and Sarbjit described wedding food:

We go to the club to have *samoses*, these triangle things with potatoes and peas in them, and you eat them with sauce or *khatai* [i.e. tamarind sauce], it's this sort of brown thing with water and herbs in it.

d) Taboos and Restrictions

Whereas some of the young people were free to eat anything, others mentioned dietary restrictions. These all involved non-vegetarian food, ranging from the exclusion of all egg, meat (and fish) to their periodic exclusion or the avoidance of beef or of meat killed in an unacceptable way.

i) Beef

A ten year old boy regarded the ban on beef-eating as a matter of 'family' and 'religion'.

We can't eat beef because that's against our law, our religion. No-one eats beef, like some children, they just go to the temple. It's like my mum goes that in our family our cousins, no-one eats beef. So we know that we don't eat it because we aren't used to it either.

In keeping with a wider Indian (Hindu) abstention from beef some subjects did not eat this meat, although their reasons were more confused and varied than those of Hindu subjects of the same age (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:59-62). Amandeep realised that the reasons were religious, although her words would fit Krishna better than any of the Gurus ('our gods') 2'

Beef, I think it's because one of my gods had a cow, and he likes cows really a lot, and we're not allowed to eat it.

Gurvinder's nine year old brother said 'beef to Sikhs [is] *papi*' [sinful]. By contrast Ravinder saw cow-slaughter in the more economic terms of her family's Jat (peasant fanner) background to which fear of a recent western scourge was added:

We're not allowed to eat beef. Is it because people in India feel that killing is like killing their money?...Or it's like don't eat it because you might get mad cow disease.

Betraying a diversity of practice according to both place and individual, Satwant (who was also Jat) explained:

We like keep cows over there [in India] so they can milk us so beef is made out of cows so we're not allowed to eat. [Here] sometimes we don't but my dad does, he eats it so we copy him. My mum doesn't. She wouldn't cook it.

Jasvir's explanation echoed many Hindu children's (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:61): 'We're not allowed to eat beef even if we eat meat because a cow's like our mother.' Amarjit's opinion (and that of a nine year old boy) was a blend of the religious and the practical:

You know the holy cow and we are not allowed to kill cows because they give us milk.

I do eat meat, not beef, because cows give you milk and our Gurus said, 'Don't keep cows to get beef out because they give you milk already.'

An eight year old girl suggested that the taboo was based on health considerations: 'We're not allowed to eat beef because if we eat beef sometimes we can get ill and poorly and get chickenpox and we have to stay home.' However she related it to 'religion' when she emphasised: 'I wouldn't do a thing like that [marrying someone of another religion] because if we get married to that person he could eat beef, ain't it?'

Davinder's parents would not allow any meat into the house but at school he avoided not meat in general but beef in particular.

Many subjects were ignorant of any reasons for the prohibition on beef which their families observed. Three said that they had forgotten the reason. What is clear is the persistence, to varying degrees, of an underlying 'Hindu' respect for the cow.

ii) Weekly Abstentions

Gurvinder introduced the further factor of a pattern of weekly abstention when she said:

We're not allowed to have beef. We're not allowed to eat meat on Tuesday or Thursday. We're not allowed to have them on Sunday, but usually we have some, not a lot.

An eight year old girl disclosed: 'We're allowed to eat all of them but on Thursdays and Sundays we're not allowed to eat meat or eggs.'

Reasons for this weekly discipline were not made explicit by any of the subjects, except by connecting the Sunday ban with going to the gurdwara. Thus Gurvinder's nine year old brother explained by saying 'God doesn't eat meat that much'. But these restrictions conform to patterns of *vrat* and deity worship in Punjabi (Hindu) society (Nesbitt 1991:24, Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:65-70, Nesbitt forthcoming). Although no subjects referred directly to Karva Chauth, Amarjit's aunt observed this *vrat*, fasting from sunrise to

moonrise for her husband one day in the year.²² However, Raspreet and Ravinder's father was highly critical of behaviour derived from Hindu practice:

People mix worship with worship of the devil. Like all over Punjab there are little shrines for the dead. They think the spirit's alive and worship them. Not eating food on a special day is because of the elders.

iii) Mode of Killing

By contrast with these culturally Hindu norms one eight year old girl's allusion to 'Pakistani meat' was consonant with the ruling (in the *Rahit Maryada*) that *amritdhari* Sikhs must not eat *lutha*', meaning meat of an animal that had been killed in the Muslim way. Having said that she ate a lot of meat including beef 'to make me healthy', she explained:

Our prophet said, 'Don't eat meat, but you can eat meat except for Pakistani meat because Muslims like meat a lot and they get the animal, they kill it and it just makes it suffer. But we must eat, like you have to bang it on the head and then just kill it so it won't do any harm at all.

iv) Vegetarianism

Some subjects or members of their families were strictly vegetarian, avoiding all meat and eggs. A nine year old girl pointed to the factor of gender (cf Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:62): 'Most ladies in Punjabis, most of my cousins that are ladies are vegetarian.' In some cases the reason was deference to a living master's ruling (see Nesbitt 1991:24 and Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:60). This was the case for the Namdhari subjects. Similarly a ten year old girl referred to Baba Ajit Singh at the Ajit Darbar when she said:

We go to a Sikh temple and we get this sort of person who comes and we pray to him and my dad used to eat meat but we don't eat meat because my dad started going to the temple and that's how we became vegetarian.

A ten year old boy had received *amrit* (blessed water) for his asthma from another holy man and so 'can't eat egg or stuff like that', i.e. non-vegetarian food.

Strict vegetarianism meant observing dietary discipline at school (and accepting a considerable reduction in choice at lunchtime) as well as at home. Thus Jasvir said: 'Mostly we get cheese....she's got to prepare all the other dinner.' Likewise Sarbjit said:

I do eat food from school, but I've told them I'm a vegetarian. They give me vegetarian food. Sometimes they give *samoses*.

Sarbjit's family, like several others, had undergone a change in practice:

Me and my brother used to have [meat] when we were children because my mum didn't have *amrit chhakia* [i.e. hadn't been initiated with *amrit*] then, neither did my dad. Like my dad used to eat meat then as well, but now he's into Sikh religion.

In her case, and that of *amritdhari* Sikhs such as her parents, vegetarianism was essential to their interpretation of the Khalsa code of discipline. One lad's *amritdhari* mother allowed her own health to deteriorate rather than take the requisite medicines. She also refused tea and 'shop food' (as opposed to food which she prepared at home), but a Panjabi teacher, who was also an *amritdhari*, took some egg, fish and meat to avoid iron deficiency. Clearly, among *amritdharis* too, there was a variation in the interpretation of dietary rules.

Young people could be vegetarian for reasons other than their parents' commitment to an interpretation of the Khalsa code or their more broadly cultural (Hindu) attitudes. So, a twelve year old girl, whose family ate meat including beef, said:

I don't think our religion meant to eat various meats, but everyone does. I gave it up last year because I couldn't stand it any more - animals being killed.

A mixture both of practice and rationale in her household was summarised by Raspreet:

The Sikhs don't eat egg and meat because I think they say you're not supposed to...My mum and dad don't eat meat. Neither does R. She gave it up - not for the same reason - because she thinks it's really cruel, and J just wanted to be skinny, so she just gave up meat.

Pragmatically, an adult informant introduced a secular perspective on vegetarianism among Sikhs:

First of all, this new trend, people think it's not a healthy food anyway. There's a lot of other things you can eat as well. Meat is not a necessity to live on. One thing is people are becoming more health conscious, and secondly I don't see Asian parents I've seen

eat meat more than once or twice a week, so giving up meat is nothing for them.

This diversity of practice and of the justification for it closely parallels data from young Hindus in Coventry (Nesbitt forthcoming).

e) **Limited Commensality**

The institution of the *langar* symbolises the removal of caste-based segregation, since high and low sit together for the corporate meal. This is explicit in *Rahit Maryada*:

No invidious distinction is to be made between man and man, between a Sikh and a non-Sikh, between a caste-man and a so-called outcaste, when making seating arrangements or serving food in the Guru's kitchen. (Sikh Missionary Resource Centre nd:36)

However the *Rahit Maryada* states that it is a *tankhah* (minor offence) for an *amritdhari* Sikh to eat 'in the same dish with a person unbaptised or an apostate', so limiting the principle of commensality (38). Davinder's parents were not only *amritdhari* but also belonged to the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, a devout group whose members endeavour to avoid eating with others: 'They're really strict, they won't eat anything off people... they eat out of wooden bowls or... they just eat out of their hands.'²³ However, the basis of this restriction was not necessarily the nature of the fellow guests or of the occasion (see chapter five) but the fact that, as his brother pointed out, the food was 'made in hotels where people are touching meat'.

f) **Comment**

Sikh children's food consumption suggests that some cultural boundaries are falling. Evidence of this was their eating 'English' cake, snacks and cereals and their consumption of meats including beef. Their experience also suggests the influence of Hindu norms, persisting beyond a family's Sikh self-identification, and despite migration to the west and schooling in Britain. Moreover, their experience indicates the tendency for increasing abstention (from non-vegetarian food) in some families, in association with *amrit chhakna* and with allegiance to living spiritual masters. In the eyes of many these are incompatible tendencies, illustrating dynamic tensions within the *Panth*. The assertion of Khalsa Sikh identity, at least in its food-related implications and their interpretation, no less than the veneration of *Babas*, suggests a wider (Hindu) matrix. Sarbjit's father articulated a concerned awareness of this fact when he said he would not be strict about refusing food from a *non-amritdhari* Sikh 'because we do not want to go back to Hinduism'.

References to *langar* and *karah prashad* (in chapters four, five and six) and to birthday cake and to a Vaisakhi cake (in chapters five and six) will lend further support to including diet in this examination of the role of family and home in the nurture of Sikh children. Viewed together the examples in these chapters will suggest the close relationship between the consumption of food and particular ritual activities. They also symbolise a contrast in Coventry Sikh culture between continuity (*langar* and *karah prashad*) and change (cake). Food and the behaviour associated with it (as in avoiding waste in the gurdwara) figured prominently in subjects' accounts of their experience. Moreover, as illustrated by their awareness of the problem posed by cakes made with eggs for vegetarians or on a Sunday, many young Sikhs perceived dietary rules as integral to being a 'proper Sikh' (chapter eleven).

Thus their experience of food shows that young Sikhs are being nurtured amid opposing trends and amid both the dissolution and strengthening of boundaries. As individuals they are also asserting independent choices with regard to vegetarianism.

Critical Discussion

Sikh children's homes and families shape their religious nurture. While commonalities of experience are clear, symbolised by the pictures of Gurus and the Golden Temple, equally clear, even within the largely Jat Coventrian Sikh community, is the diversity of outlook and practice. Both iconography and dietary norms disclose the influence of the wider north Indian (Hindu) context on Sikh behaviour. This is evident in the case of families which acknowledge and accommodate worship of the goddess and those to whom this would be unthinkable non-Sikh. Of the latter some have demonstrated their Sikh allegiance (and rejection of what is Hindu) by initiation into the *Khalsa* (*amrit chhakna*) and a pro-Khalistani political stance. Yet, paradoxically, the restrictions on diet and commensality observed by one such group, the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, can also be understood as expressions of an unmistakably Hindu paradigm.

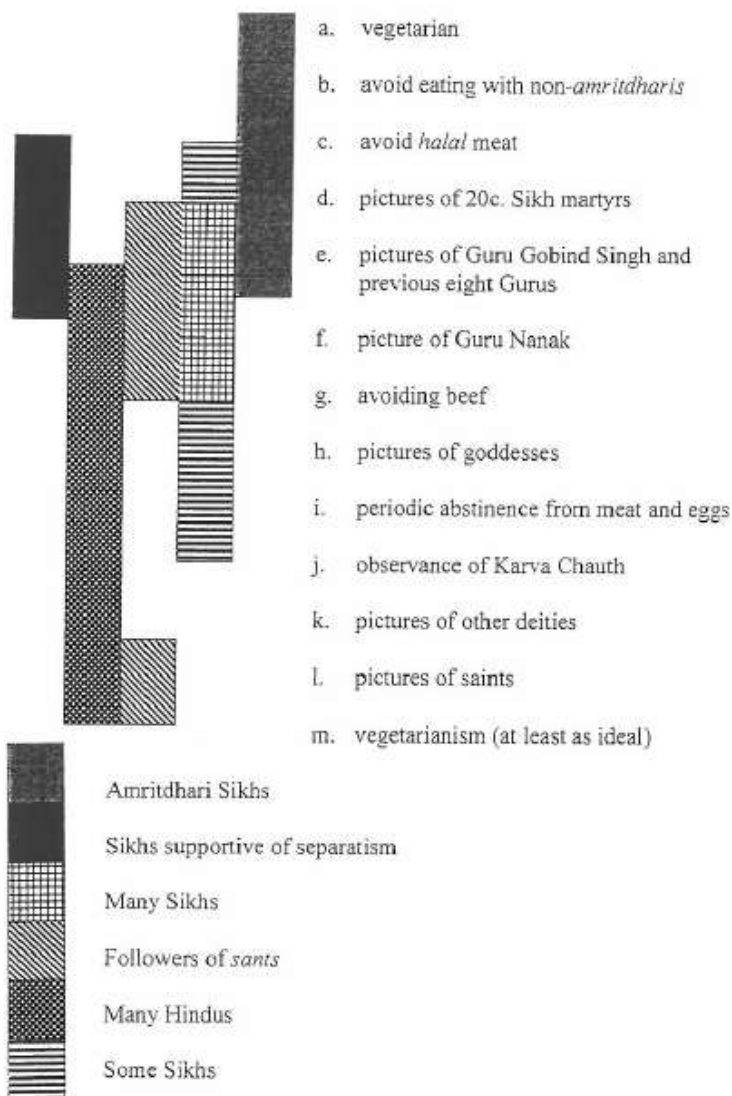
Field work suggested that patterns of food preparation, consumption and avoidance correspond to some extent with patterns of domestic iconography and that both distinguish the experience of one family from another. Furthermore extensive fieldwork would be needed to establish a correlation between having pictures of the goddess and following a sequence of weekly abstinence, or between strict vegetarianism and having pictures of a living *Baba* in addition to the Gurus.

Both arguably suggest the need to understand the Sikh tradition as a number of 'membership groups' (Jackson 1994, 1997). However, given the variability of combinations of diet, iconography and other factors such as *kes*h (chapter eleven), this needs to be supplemented with the model below of a

spectrum of Punjabi cultural behaviour. (See figure 2, p. 64.) This too must be viewed as representing a fluid situation.

Figure 2

Diagram suggesting relationship between domestic iconography, dietary norms and self-identification with a faith tradition among British Punjabis.



This diagram is only intended as an approximation, not as establishing rigid categories

NOTES

- 1 See chapter one. On Sikhs Ramindar Singh observed that:
The limited knowledge [Sikhs] have about Sikhism and Sikh socio-cultural practices is mainly acquired informally through social events in the family and community (1992:38).
- 2 Any assumption that nuclear households mark a break with tradition needs to be tempered (but critically) by Ramindar Singh's comment that:

what is shared by all members of a South Asian family, even when living in a nuclear family unit for all intents and purposes, are 'obligations' towards aged parents and grandparents, married sisters and their children and other social groups such as relatives and 'biradri' or 'bhaichara' (the nearest group of people of the same caste in the village). (1992:9)
- 3 *Maharaj* is the honorific term used by the family for the Guru Granth Sahib, *pani* refers to the water sprinkled in front of the volume as it is carried (chapter ten) and *dhuf* means incense — probably joss sticks.
- 4 For the story and popular iconographic representation of Dip Singh's miraculous feat see McLeod (1991:38-39 and 124).
- 5 As goddess of wealth Lakshmi's picture is popular in Hindu homes. The boy's mention of an elephant in the picture suggests Lakshmi, often depicted between elephants.
- 6 Bhagat Singh (1907-1931), hanged for the killing of a British policeman, is remembered as a martyr of the struggle for India's independence.
- 7 See Gurbaksh Singh (1973:9-45).
- 8 For Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and Subheg Singh see Joshi (1985). Joginder Singh was Dhindranwale's father and Bhai Jasvir Singh his nephew.
- 9 In many South Asian homes religious books are shown respect by being placed on a high shelf.
- 10 See for example Douglas (1966).
- 11 South Asians generally use the right hand for eating. Since the left hand is associated with polluting tasks, to use the left hand for sacred food would be especially disrespectful.

- 12 For example fagjit Singh (1981:133).
- 13 For the requirement to sing hymns see Rahit Maryada translated in Cole and Sambhi (1978:174).
- 14 This is reminiscent of the tendency of Hindu children and young people to link their tradition with meat taboos. See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:57), Jackson and Nesbitt (1990:4), Nesbitt (forthcoming).
- 15 Ramindar Singh represents Sikhs as having 'no serious restrictions in the choice of food, except that they are forbidden to eat meat prepared in a ritual slaughter (halal). However, Sikhs, like Hindus do not eat beef. This gives no hint of the actual range of practice and reasons for it.
- 16 An episode recounted by Cole (1984:183).
- 17 For a photograph of a child being fed with birthday cake South Asian style (in this case in a Muslim family) see Barratt (1994:22).
- 18 A *paratha* is made like a chapati, but with butter and sometimes a filling of spicy vegetable added.
- 19 *Roti* can both refer to chapatis and to the meal as a whole, chapatis being regarded as a staple. *Sabzi* refers to any spiced vegetable dish.
- 20 Whether 'curry' in the English sense or the Punjabi dish *karhi* (a soup of yoghurt and chickpea flour) is not clear. *Dal* (usually of broth-like consistency) can be made from a wide variety of lentils.
- 21 Krishna consorted with the cowherds' wives and is depicted with a cow. None of the Gurus is connected so closely with cattle.
- 22 See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:67).
- 23 With Punjabi food this is possible as the chapati serves as plate as well as a means of lifting the other food and as a food itself.

Chapter 4 Worship

Introduction: Worship as Informal Nurture

This chapter takes a central strand in religious activity and nurture - worship - and (on the basis of the young Sikhs' reported experience) identifies 'experience-near' concepts (e.g. *path* and *langar*) spanning subjects' experience. The ensuing account suggests that, far from exemplifying the passing on of a static or unambiguously defined faith tradition, worship shows it to be organic and fluid, consistently with Fox's understanding of culture (1985:xii).

As defined in chapter one informal nurture refers to the many ways in which (quite apart from any planned programme of instruction) children encounter and absorb aspects of their parents' faith tradition. Emerging strikingly from subjects' accounts of their day to day experience was their participation in acts of religious devotion both in the home and in the gurdwara. It is their involvement in these acts of daily, weekly and more occasional worship which is the subject of this chapter.

Some important aspects of worship are left to later chapters. Accordingly life cycle rites and birthday celebrations are dealt with in chapter five. The domestic iconography discussed in chapter three and the festivals to be described in chapter six are also intrinsic to young Sikhs' experience of worship. Likewise subjects' formal training in devotional singing and in reading and writing the script of the scriptures, though clearly germane to this

chapter, is not examined until chapters seven and eight. Central to the concept and experience of worship is the sense of encounter with the other, the sacred or the divine. Discussion of this is reserved for chapter nine which includes an examination of subjects' use of language when referring to 'God' and chapter ten.

In this chapter the English word 'worship' (denoting my own 'experience-distant' concept) covers devotions both at home and in the gurdwara. It includes personal, family and congregational acts of worship. But the words most frequently employed by the young people to refer to such activities were *path* (literally 'reading') and *satsang*, meaning a religious gathering. *Path* always meant reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, whether from the complete volume or from a *gutka* (compendium of scriptural passages used in daily prayer). *Path* could be a continuous, forty-eight hour reading of the scripture, the term for which is *akhand path* (uninterrupted reading). Although in some circumstances the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib in its entirety is broken up over a period of about a week subjects never referred to this practice by the relevant terms, namely *sahaj path* or *sadharan path*.¹

Subjects' usage of the word *satsang* always referred to gatherings in the home.² *Kirtan* designated the singing of hymns, congregationally and with instrumental accompaniment. *Shabad* denoted an individual hymn, a passage from the Guru Granth Sahib. Since subjects spoke of *shabad* and *kirtan* principally in the context of their music classes, their experience of worship as the musical rendition of scriptural hymns is examined in chapter eight. As these terms suggest, consistently with curriculum books' presentation of Sikh tradition, the young Coventrian Sikhs experienced worship as centred upon the Guru Granth Sahib, the source of most of the verbal content of both private and corporate worship.

By relying heavily upon the young people's verbatim accounts and (in the case of monthly worship at Nanaksar gurdwara) on my field notes, it is hoped to convey the immediacy and specificity of Sikh children's religious lives. I recognise that the processes of selecting quotations and writing fieldnotes already entail ethnographic intervention (Geertz 1973).

Domestic Worship

a) Daily Routine

Although James observed that 'a majority of Sikhs in Britain have abandoned their observance' many subjects described religious activity occurring in their homes before they left for school (1974:33). However the wealth of accounts below should not obscure the fact that two subjects may have spoken for many young Sikhs when they said that no morning prayer took place in their families.

One thirteen year old girl described starting the day by showing respect for other members of the family and by saying the opening passage of the Guru Granth Sahib (*Japji Sahib*) which is prescribed for morning worship (Doabia rep 1980a:2-57).

We greet each other when we get up [saying] '*Sat Sri Aka*'³...I used to do *Japji Sahib*; I do it when I get the chance to. It's a part of the Granth Sahib, the Gurus' teachings. I read it out to myself, out loud. I know a bit and I say that...I learned it from India because I started it at India.

Many of the young people referred to hearing an older relative 'doing a prayer' or 'doing *path*'.⁴ (They used 'prayer' and '*path*' interchangeably.) However most were not informed in such detail as the eight year old girl quoted below, nor did their parents devote so long to their morning devotions:

[Dad] does his prayer ...around four o'clock in the morning.⁵ It takes him round about an hour and a half. He says five prayers. One is called *Japji Sahib*, one is called *Jap Sahib*, one's called *Benti*, one's called *Sawaiyye* and the other's called *Anand Sahib*.⁶ I know *Japji Sahib* and *Jap Sahib*. [I say them] round about seven o'clock. I read the *Jap Sahib* but not the *Japji Sahib* [from] a little book, like for juniors, but my dad he reads the holy book [i.e. the *gutka*].

This young woman said subsequently that her main reason for seeing herself as a Sikh was 'when I see my dad praying, and that makes me feel really lucky that I'm not a British in my school'. Her father was not alone in commencing his prayers so early. A ten year old girl said her mother 'does it about four o'clock in the morning' and Daljeet said: 'My mum and dad wake up about four o'clock. Then they have a bath and then they do their prayers - read out of a little book.'⁷ Ravinder's father also began the day in this manner: 'We don't do a prayer, but my dad does *path*...in the living room so the whole house can hear it, and he sits in the living room and reads it so everyone can hear.' Her sister, Raspreet, said:

My dad's always telling me that every morning you should get up and you should do your *panch paurian*, which is like five prayers you say in the morning. The first one's the easy one which is *ik onkar satnam*, the first one, and I'm not sure about the second because Ravinder reads two and then I read three and then she reads *slok* [verse], which is like the end of the prayer.⁸ You always must read it at the end of the prayer.

Although, as these accounts make clear, in most cases the morning prayer was the *Japji Sahib*, one twelve year old girl (from the Ajit Darbar) said, 'I either do *shabad* or I do *path Sukhmani Sahib*'. *Sukhmani Sahib* is a hymn by Guru Arjan Dev (AG 262-296, Doabia rep.1980b).⁹ A boy from the Ajit Darbar would say '*Dhann* Guru Nanak and just what I want the day to be like' (a combination of sacred formula and a wish or petition in his own words).¹⁰

Gurdial could recite the first three *paurian* of the *Japji Sahib* at top speed, and speed was admired and emulated by subjects. Raspreet and Ravinder praised their father for doing it 'really really quickly'.

The young Sikhs became familiar with the words of their morning prayers in mutually reinforcing ways. A Panjabi teacher described how each morning her daughter sat behind her as she recited the *path* and begged her mother 'speak *uchi*' [i.e. loudly] so that she could learn the words. Another eight year old girl would join her *masi* (maternal aunt). After her *masi* had said the *Ardas*:

Then you sit down and you just stay like that for a little while, and then you open the holy book and then when you've finished it you put it back and you hold it in your hand. Yes, and then you just say the *ik on kar* again and then you say *antarjami* — that's a different prayer that me and my aunty do.¹¹

Young people had learned the words not only from close relatives but also from books. Thus one ten year old girl explained how she had committed to memory 'the first *pauri*' (opening stanza of *Japji Sahib* which starts with the *mul mantar*): 'I learned it off a book, and then you have to try and say it off by heart.' Gurdial acknowledged a religious factor in the learning process:

My mum told me to read it and if I read a part of it you like get a blessing from God and he makes us learn more and then we get to know all of it. So every day I read it and every day I can add a bit more on.

Interviewees were familiar with the respectful treatment required by the *gutka*. Satwant explained:

First you've got to wash your hands before you touch it and then... my mum has a ... clean *kapra* [cloth] and she puts it on, ties it, and then she puts it in another one and then she puts it in another one and then she puts it away.

In other families, including Satwant's, a devotional tape-recording usually of the *Japji Sahib* - was played. These audio-cassettes were available

on sale at the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara on Sundays as well as through local Indian retailers. A Panjabi teacher described the daily use of such an audio-tape in her household, suggesting that the efficacy of the sacred words did not depend upon the occupants being fully awake:

First thing in the morning we have a bath and my husband always puts the tape on. That's the morning prayer. Everybody listens. [They] may be asleep [but] actually they could hear it, there's a sound, there's a music...that's not a pop star music...And we always we got a holy bible in our home and we always bow it in the morning before we go anywhere.

Similarly Amandeep said:

Sometimes we listen to that pray music...we got it from the temple...We play it when my mum's making breakfast.

Listening to the tape was not necessarily a passive matter - like the book, or in conjunction with the book, it could assist those memorising the words. In Sarbjit's words: 'Every morning you have to do a bath and then put a tape on and talk, say along the words.' Likewise a nine year old girl described how her father:

says the whole prayer with a tape. He plays the tape and he's got a little book that says it and he can read it.

Recurrent features of the young people's accounts of their experience of early morning prayer were the preliminary of bathing, which is now less difficult than when James noted that 'few Sikh houses at present have "instant" hot water systems, so there is a strong discouragement to piety in this respect' (1974:33), wearing clean clothes; the audible repetition of *Japji Sahib* (sometimes only the opening *mid manta*", sometimes several stanzas, sometimes followed by other prescribed scriptural passages) and the playing of a devotional tape. From what these young people said it was clear that they learned, by example, from adults - usually from one adult in particular in each family concerned - but also with the help of the cassette or a book.

Some mentioned the use of *amrit* (holy water), which was sprinkled and drunk as part of their morning devotions, and the burning of *dhuf* (incense sticks). The meaning of *amrit* and the significance of this sacred substance in subjects' nurture are explored in more detail in chapter ten. The association of *amrit* with prayer is evident from the description given by one Panjabi teacher of the daily routine:

We always have it [*amrit*] in the morning, everybody, even the children...before they've eaten anything, and sometimes, my daughter she gets lazy...and I always notice the glass is not here, it means she hasn't said her prayer.

Similarly Raspreet said:

When we get up my mum goes round the house with *amrit* which is — it's *pani* [water],... it's blessed water and you're supposed to splash it round your house every morning... with this long stick called *dhuf* and it lets off smoke and this smoke is also blessed as well and it's supposed to bless your house every morning.

A ten year old girl demonstrated how her mother would circle the smouldering incense stick in front of each religious picture ('the photos of every god'). Some Sikhs use other aids to praying such as a rosary: thus a ten year old boy spoke of the wrist beads which he wore on a circular wire band:

It's actually a *kara*, but you start from this big one and you read out the prayers and when you get half way then you start another prayer and they go back to the normal place. 28 [beads]. Just move the beads round and you read it in your mind.

Jasvir and her family used longer rosaries:

[My mum's] got three of them [prayers] to do in the morning... One she does a *mul mantar* round a necklace...118 [beads]¹²...we only do it 100 times...my other two sisters do fifty times...we've got the same necklaces, but then my mum just puts like a thread round it so they know where to go up to.

A nine year old girl used

a *mala* ... made out of silver or gold [on which] we say '*Satnam*, *Satnam*' or we say the first *pauri* of our holy book.

A Namdhari subject described the *mala* made of knotted white wool which all his family used for their daily repetition of *Vahiguru*, *Vahiguru* (God) on each knot.¹³

Ravinder and Raspreet's evenings were punctuated by the evening prayer (*Rahiras*) recited by devout Sikhs (Doabia rep. 1980a: 198-249). On one of my evening visits to the house they told me:

He's doing *Rahiras*. You can hear it. We have to do it after 6 pm... We do listen to it sometimes. When we're playing on our computers, if he's going to do his *Rahiras* you just sit quietly on the computer while he does his *Rahiras*... It lasts half an hour to an hour.

Night-time prayer was also familiar to some subjects. The eleven year old son of *amritdhari* (initiated) parents said that he prayed both morning and night by repeating *Vahiguru*, testifying that 'it keeps me calm'. At bed-time Satwant also recited a calming formula - the *mul mantar*:

Ik onkar satnam gurprasad jap', it carries on like that.¹⁴ I know the prayer because we say the prayer every night...when we go to sleep I say it five times and go to sleep...¹⁵ I do it five times and then if I can't go to sleep I carry on doing it.

Likewise she recognised a connection between her parents' praying and the enhancement of well-being: 'They pray every night - my mum, if we get poorly, she reads the *path*.' As with morning prayer, the tape recorder aided devotion. An eleven year old boy said:

Mainly at night we do it, the first part of the, you know, the *bani*...¹⁶ My dad puts on cassettes and we sit down and listen to it...fifteen minutes or half an hour in the front room. That's where we got our stereo.

Night-time prayer in some cases included additional ritual features: the lighting of little oil lamps and the burning of incense sticks. A ten year old boy described how each night his mother would make a *jot* (*diva*, oil light) out of flour, water and cotton wool. When twisted the cotton wool became a wick which was steeped in ghee and set in a small 'cup' made of stiff chapati dough. This was subsequently disposed of by throwing the pastry cup in a public pool in a nearby park.¹⁷ An eight year old girl's mother would take a lighted joss stick into all the rooms and then 'pray to' a picture of Guru Gobind Singh, using a book.

By contrast her own heartfelt personal prayer involved no formal recitations or aids:

My dad's divorced so every night ...I sit in my bed and say my prayers. So I don't like read a book like my mum does... I say in Indian, I say, 'Oh please would you bring my dad back and make it all happy'.

Unlike the Panjabi teacher quoted above, the young people who were interviewed did not have the Guru Granth Sahib at home, except infrequently as will be described below. Their 'prayers' were those passages from the Guru Granth Sahib which are printed in the *gutka* entitled *Nitnem* (daily prayer) (Doabia rep.1980a; McLeod 1984:86-104). Homage was (in some homes) paid in front of pictures of the Gurus but could not be paid to the present form of the Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib. But Jasvir knew the difference that having a copy installed in the house would make to daily routine, as her aunty had

got a Guru Granth Sahib in her house. She reads it. It's just like a bedroom, right, she's got a bed there and when it's night she [puts] them in the bed, the Guru Granth Sahib.¹⁸ You're not allowed to put your shoes in that room. She's got all pictures of God and everything.

b) Weekly Routine

Domestic worship in some families followed a weekly pattern. For example the Ravidasi boy said: 'On Sunday morning we put on a tape — it's songs about Guru Ravidasji.' Two nine year old subjects' parents lit incense sticks and made *prashad* on Sundays. In some families one evening a week was characterised by a distinctive mode of worship. A ten year old girl's experience of a distinctive weekly act of domestic evening worship was shaped by her parents' devotion to Baba Ajit Singh:

On Mondays we have *jot* - like sort of my mum makes [it] out of *ata* [wholemeal flour] and she says 'Dhann Guru Nanak' while she does it...then she puts *jot da ghe* [ghee for the oil light] into it.¹⁹ Then she gets cotton wool, sort of rolls it up, she puts it in, then she lights it and we put it in a plate and we put it on the fireplace below Guru Gobind Singh Ji's *sarup* [picture], and then sometimes we sit there and say 'Dhann Guru Nanak' in our head quietly until the *jot* finishes. It depends how much *ghe* we've put in. Sometimes we all sit in the living room, have *amritjal* [holy water] and *prashad*.

A nine year old girl described the same procedure, adding that they might sing a *shabad*, *Uchha tere Babe* 'glory to you, Baba].

Satwant's family devotions once a week did not have a Sikh focus, but conformed to widespread Punjabi Hindu practice (see Jackson and Nesbitt [1993:64] for parallel Valmiki observance). This was veneration of the goddess (Mata - literally 'mother'):

On Tuesdays we always put a *diva* on because that is a *mata* 's day. It's like every Tuesday and we have to put a *diva* and *dhuf*

[incense stick] in it and we go round the house and give that around, and we have *prashad* in it and we give them out as well... *Prashad* can be *mashri* [sugar crystals] and it can be the *prashad* that you get in the gurdwara...and we give them out. I often do that because I think it's fun giving it out. [First] you got to like wash your hands and face. You've got to take your shoes off, you've got to wear something over your head and then afterwards, I normally have the *dhuf* and my sister behind me she has the *anarit*, and she does that around the house. She sprinkles it around the house.

In conformity with the strong Singh Sabha/Akali strand in Sikh tradition and probably with majority practice, curriculum books omit any suggestion of any Sikh's worship focusing upon the goddess or upon living *sants* as embodiments of the Guru.²⁰ Yet it is just such examples which must both inform discussion of the parameters of Sikh tradition and which illustrate a diversity continuous with Oberoi's reconstruction of nineteenth century Sikh society (1994).

In addition to the daily and weekly cycle some young Sikhs are aware of a monthly cycle: *Sangrand*, the day of the new zodiac sign, is in Punjab the traditional day for a larger congregation in the gurdwara than on other days.²¹ Although the date is written up each month on blackboards in the entrance of many gurdwaras, only Raspreet and Davinder mentioned *sangrand*. Davinder mentioned more people than usual coining to the gurdwara and 'they make food at home as well - *prashad* or something'. In answer to a question on what she enjoyed Raspreet also related it to the domestic context:

They're supposed to be like *sangrand*, which is the beginning of the month and what happens on that day is supposed to be happening all through the month, like if you're really happy, you'll be happy, Mum told me. You celebrate it at home.

c) Special Occasional Worship

i) Hosting the Guru Granth Sahib

For a special occasion, such as Satwant's elder brother's birthday which fell during the fieldwork period and is described in chapter five, the Sikh scriptures would be hosted at home in a room cleaned and prepared for the purpose, with sheets spread over the carpet and a canopy suspended above the cushions on which the scriptures were to be installed (Bennett 1990:58). The scriptures would either be read over a longer period, with breaks (if it was a *sahaj* or *sadharan path*), or continuously for forty-eight hours. A *chauri* was waved frequently above the open volume. This symbol of respect to the Guru is often made from the white silky hair of a yak's tail. Hence Jasvir's reference to a *chauri* made from 'each of the Gurus' beards' and the following description by a nine year old girl:

I think it's the Guru's hair from the beard and they wave it around... The person that's reading it sometimes waves it.

While the Guru Granth Sahib was in residence certain rules of conduct (mentioned by subjects and given below) were in force, as in the gurdwara. The family concerned were responsible for organising continuous attendance upon the scriptures and upon visitors. As far as behaviour in the house was concerned, females all wore Punjabi suits, no non-vegetarian food was consumed and (in Ravinder's words) if the Guru Granth Sahib was installed in a downstairs room: 'You're not allowed to sleep directly on top of the *maharaj*.'²²

On arrival (usually by car), and departure from the house, the volume was carried, appropriately wrapped in its cloths, on someone's head (Bennett 1990:60). Davinder provided details of such an occasion. This was his experience:

Akhand path...we had it at my old house because we'd never had it before and we were about to move...You've got to have a clean - white sort of blanket on the floor and you have...a palki [stand].

A ten year old girl reported: 'When we started to live in our new house we had our God to come to our house, and the holy book too, and my dad carried it on his head.' In Ravinder and Raspreet's home the honouring of the Guru Granth Sahib (*Maharaj*) was an annual propitious happening.

Ravinder said:

Maharaj - Guru Granth Sahib - it comes to our house for a week or so. Every year - Christmas holiday to New Year - we have it in...to bring good things into the coming year. We invite my mum's side, my dad's side...We'd have to behave quietly, we'd do things without being told. This year we had *satsang*. We had it two days, and there were men - *bhais* and *gianis*, and everyone coming in hour after hour, and my mum had to sit down and make tea for them and give *prashad*...²³*and had to like take them there all through the night.*

Raspreet amplified her sister's description:

It's kind of like a celebration - you get to keep the *maharaj* for one week and you have it for six days and during the six days you have to read, you have to finish the whole book. You'd keep it in a clean room with sheets and have a stand for it, because like people cover their heads, so does the book, and every two hours people

like have a *ral* which means they read it two whole hours and at the end of seven days we have a *bhog*, which is we celebrate reading the whole book and lots of your relatives and friends come down and help you celebrate it. Then you listen to it and then you have *shabad* and *kirtan* which is songs and then somebody comes to pick it up, to collect the *maharaj*, and it goes to someone else's house.

Moreover, as explored further in chapter ten, water was sprinkled on the floor in front of the Guru Granth Sahib when it was carried into and out of the room, just as it was in the gurdwara. In Ravinder's words: 'It's like when the *maharaj* is coming through the door they splash it so, like, the man or the person who's walking through the door is walking over clean *pharsh*, floor.' The nine year old girl explained:

Then when they come in they have a cup and someone standing [with] the cup and they spill some when they come in - little drops of water... Once I was standing with a cup and the holy book comes and this man gives you five pounds in your hand and you keep it.

Similarly special and sanctifying was the occasional visit of Satguru to a young Namdhari's home.

He explained:

You have to get things ready, cover the seats so he can sit on a clean thing. We bow our heads. Then he went upstairs, did something in the room.²⁴

Subjects were involved in the many contingent practical arrangements on these occasions.

Jasvir explained that when the scriptures came: 'We have to help with the people, stay upstairs and give the *prashad* if anybody comes up...they give you a certain amount to read for children [from the *gutka*].'

ii) Saying the *Ardas*

Two nine year old sisters described prayer before a journey:

In our religion, when someone goes on a long journey we always do the *Ardas*. If it's we going my granddad does it. If it's my granddad or grandma going then it's my dad does it.

At the end of such an *Ardas* the person reciting it would say:

'We're going on a journey. God keep us safe... and then after that everyone goes 'Vahiguru'.

Likewise Davinder mentioned that at the end of *Ardas* thanks might be offered for passing a driving test. Such petitions and thanks might be offered on a visit to the gurdwara. Sarbjit's father was glad that when she and her brother needed help they went to the gurdwara to pray: Satwant for a baby sister, her brother for good GCSE results. Satwant explained: 'You put your money down and you stand up and say something - what you want to come true.' That wishes expressed during *Ardas* do come true was affirmed by one nine year old girl:

Miss, I think the *Ardas* is magic because our car once stopped... My granddad did it, then the car started,.. Our doctor said, 'Your dad's not going to get better until six weeks, and my brother done the *Ardas* and my dad got better in just one week... So all our family thanked God and we went to the temple.

Worship in the Mandir

Two subjects (both Jat) mentioned going with their families to the Hindu temple in Coventry to worship Mata (Mother, the term frequently used for 'the Goddess' in her many forms). Jasvir said:

We just believe in her. You know we believe we get measles from her. We go to the temple, we give a red *chunni* [gauzy scarf] and then fruit and anything else we want to.

This traditional Punjabi association of the mother goddess with pock diseases is examined by Hershman (1977:63) and Oberoi (1994:162-165) and appears residually in several communities of North Indian origin in Britain (Nesbitt 1991:39, Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:50). Her *murti* (image) in the Hindu Mandir, the temple to which Jasvir referred, is adorned with a red and gold *chunni* (as pictured in Jackson and Nesbitt 1999). Jasvir received 'fruit, a red *chunni* and a few pencils' as one of the *kanjakan at an all night jagran* hosted at the *mandir* for everybody's luck'.²⁵

Satwant mentioned the goddess (Ma) as she is usually represented in Punjab, 'riding on a tiger' - the literal meaning of Sheranvali.

Mata is somebody, it's the same as God and there's Sheranvali Ma and some others. We sit in front of them and pray. In the *mandir* they play music. I've done that before. We go to the one near LC and we tried once down our house. My brother was playing the *dholki* [a drum], and we were sitting there singing and my mum

came in as well and we were giving her *prashad* as well. We usually go to the *mandir* on Tuesdays.²⁶

One of the Panjabi teachers who were interviewed also said that she liked going to the *mandir*, but pointed out that Sita, Shiva and other deities were 'below the Guru Granth Sahib'. This sort of accommodation of spiritual authorities or divinities by ranking (as opposed to the out and out dismissal by some Sikhs of Hindu deities) is widespread in Indian society (cf the Ravidasi boy's statement in Nesbitt 1991:35).

Worship in the Gurdwara

a) Occasional Worship

For all the young Sikhs the gurdwara was the location for congregational worship and some families hosted *akhand paths* not at home but in the gurdwara. Daljit would sometimes stay overnight in the gurdwara to help. A ten year old boy, who insisted that families hosted *akhand paths* ('family festivals') from time to time 'just because you're supposed to have one' explained what would take place:

Someone's festival like for their family..., a *langar*. We get invitations and we send it to my relatives and friends and they come down and hear the prayers. Then after that we all go home. Then we eat some *samosas* and *pakorras*.

b) Daily Worship

For some members of some families the morning's devotions included visiting the gurdwara. A nine year old boy explained: 'In India you have to go every day in the morning. You can [here] but we don't normally.' However, when they heard the door shut in the morning Ravinder and Raspreet knew that it must be ten past seven and that their father was leaving for the Guru Hargobind Gurdwara where he played *tabla* for the *kirtan*. The eleven year old son of *amritdhari* parents sometimes accompanied his mother to the gurdwara before going to school and one ten year old boy said his mother would spend the afternoons in the gurdwara either in the prayer hall or in the kitchen: 'She normally sits there: sometimes she'll make chapatis for the people who sit there.'

Which gurdwara the young people and their relations visited, and the frequency, depended partly upon how near the gurdwaras were to their houses. This was the case for one eight year old girl whose visits to the Nanaksar gurdwara fitted around seeing her 'nan' in the north of Coventry.

c) Weekly Worship

Whereas Hindu congregational worship is sometimes cited as a result of the diaspora situation, Sikhs were enjoined to attend the holy congregation

(*sadhsangat*) by the Gurus.²⁷ Although some of the young people or members of their households went daily to the gurdwara and some (like one twelve year old girl) went very infrequently (for example only to attend weddings), for many visiting the gurdwara was an at least weekly occurrence. Apart from attending classes that were held in the gurdwaras on other days of the week, for most the day for going to the gurdwara was Sunday because of its convenience in Britain for most people (Cole 1994a:30). Saturdays were also mentioned and the Namdhari subjects' family visited the Namdhari gurdwara in Birmingham on Saturdays and the Ramgarhia gurdwara in Coventry on Sundays.

Ritual activity on a Sunday morning began several hours earlier, and in the event of an *akhand path* being in progress (see below) had carried on through the previous night, but most people arrived after 10.30 am. By noon the hall would be packed with people, sitting cross-legged and barefoot on the carpeted floor facing the *palki* [stand]. The women and girls were in suits, with their heads draped in a *chunni* and the boys and men had covered their heads with a white handkerchief folded diagonally and the ends knotted at the nape of the neck, except for the *keshdhari* men in turbans and boys with top-knots covered by either *rumal* or *patka*.

The young people knew what behaviour was expected both in the prayer hall where the scriptures are enthroned and in the dining area, the *langar*.²⁸ In Sarbjit's words:

First we go in and take our shoes off, wash our hands and cover our head. We do our *mattha tek*, and then afterwards the man gives you *prashad*, and then after that you listen to what they're reading from the holy bible and then eat your *roti* and then you can go home.²⁹

Mattha tek (*mattha tekna*) means kneeling or prostrating oneself and touching the floor with one's brow (*mattha*) in humble reverence to the Guru Granth Sahib. Subjects could see how even babies and small infants were laid down, face downwards, as Sarbjit's sister was, holding her doll, when her mother paid her respects on arrival in the *divan* (gurdwara prayer hall). The *prashad* mentioned above was *karate prashad*, a sweet dough prepared in the *langar* kitchen from wheatflour, ghee and sugar syrup.³⁰ A ten year old boy elaborated:

We go straight away in, we follow this carpet, we kneel down, put money in, say something, put our hands together, kneel on the floor and then we can say anything like 'Bless us and give us anything'. Then you go to sit down - the men and the children sit separate. I sit on the men's side, my mum sits on the ladies'

He further indicated a specific rule: 'I can't stick my legs out in front of them because that's bad luck...like we sit in assembly, we just have to cross our legs.'³¹

Next the young Sikhs and their families would sit down to listen to the *path* (the reading from the scriptures). If it was a festival day they would hear relevant stories, hymns and expositions of these from the *ragis* (musicians) on the dais to one side of the scriptures. They might also hear after the corporate prayer (the *Ardas*) announcements of donations received by the gurdwara. In the thirteen year old girl's words:

They usually do the *path* — they're just talking about how much contributions they've been given and on special occasions they tell you all about the history and everything, and sometimes they tell you stories about the Gurus, most of the time.

While some subjects expressed boredom at sitting in the *divan*, for others it was clearly more enjoyable. One eight year old girl was unequivocal: 'I like going to the gurdwara...and looking up and seeing the Guru Granth Sahib because it's all surrounded by real gold - lovely.'

In the *langar* corporate dining also entailed discipline born of respect for the Gurus. Once again interviewees' strong association of food behaviour with their 'religion' is evident. Speaking of religion itself as a discipline one adult mentioned that anywhere else her daughter would pick the onion out of the food, but that in the gurdwara she had to eat the food and not show disrespect. This rule made a clear impact on young Sikhs. For example a ten year old boy summarised what happened in the gurdwara in these terms: 'I have Indian food and *prashad* — it's where people can't throw it away.'

Gurvinder, too, reported her mother's insistence that she only take what she could eat 'so you don't put [i.e. throw] it away'. For Jasvir the *langar* meant not only eating and avoiding waste but also helping to cook the *dal* (lentils), to peel the onions and turn over the chapatis. Such work in the gurdwara is highly regarded as *seva* (voluntary service), a principle advocated by the Gurus.

Especially for subjects attending the Ajit Darbar, visits to the gurdwara might extend overnight, whether at the weekend or midweek, and they might take up the weekend almost in its entirety. During their time at this gurdwara subjects played an active part in the worship. While an adult was seated reading the scripture during the weekly *akhand path*, a child would sit at a lower level, also facing the congregation, 'on the *ral*', reading from the *gutka*.³² To quote one ten year old girl:

Then I go on to the *ral*...we sit there and we have the *Japji Sahib* and we read it in our mind....Some people can't read Indian properly and they can read it in English, English letters...Then somebody takes me off the *ral* and somebody else sits on... normally sit for half an hour.

She valued this informal involvement which in the Ajit Darbar (as discussed in chapter eight) also extended to the singing of *shabads* in front of the congregation to lead the *kirtan*. Like one adult informant from another gurdwara, she differentiated the Ajit Darbar from other gurdwaras in the following terms:

In the gurdwaras most of the time there's only the dads doing the *shabads* and the children aren't doing them, and they haven't got a little *ral* on the side and there's [only] certain people who can sit on the *ral* [whereas in ours] anybody can do it if they've had a bath.

Thus, in this congregation, children felt no sense of exclusion from leading worship. They learned what to do, including the requirement of bathing beforehand, by frequent participation.

Meanwhile subjects were aware of activity continuing in the *langar* kitchen and outside in the grounds of the Ajit Darbar where male devotees tended the thriving rows of onions, spinach and *batu* (a vegetable resembling cabbage). Peach and apple trees, rose bushes and conifers had also been planted, all in accordance with Ajit Singh's expressed wishes.

A ten year old girl described how everyone in her family bathed and changed their clothes on a Wednesday evening before going to the Ajit Darbar where, after paying their respects (*mattha tek*), they could play or do their homework. During the evening the Guru Granth Sahib ('*Babaji*', see chapter five) was carried to an upstairs room for the night:

They do *Babaji* - put *Babaji* to sleep...You go upstairs...We get a glass, put water in it...sprinkle water on to the floor...[they] put *Babaji* into a sort of bed...It's got a bed and there's *Babaji's* chair, *Babaji's* cushion things... There's a sheet on the bed, then the Guru Granth Sahib, then there's a quilt on top.

Thus, in this act of reverent committal subjects could take part as sprinklers of water in order to purify the way for the Guru Granth Sahib.

At this gurdwara, too, subjects were introduced to a form of *mattha tekna* peculiar in Coventry to this gurdwara. On arrival devotees removed their

footwear and respectfully circumambulated the base of a free standing *nishan sahib*, to the left of the pathway to the main door. In a glass stand a *diva* burned daily beside the mast.

Quite apart from the celebration of *gurpurbs* on the Sundays following their date in the religious calendar (see chapter five), subjects' experience of worship on some other Sundays might have an exceptional character. For example, one Sunday the Babbar Khalsa, a militant group fighting for an independent state of Khalistan, held its national meeting in the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara. The inside walls of much of the building were hung with portraits of members who had died during the campaign, each captioned with the name of the deceased, prefixed by 'Shahid Babbar' (which translates literally as martyred lion).

d) Gurdwara Iconography

The visual impact and iconography of the gurdwaras distinguished them from other public buildings. Religious pictures, while not the focus of worship, contributed to young Sikhs' experience of visiting the gurdwara. On the back wall of the upstairs prayer hall of the Ramgarhia gurdwara there were two pictures, each in an oval, dark wooden frame, one of Guru Nanak and one of Guru Gobind Singh plus a notice in English requesting silence. Downstairs the *langar* hall was surrounded with recently painted pictures from Sikh history.³³ The foyer of the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara was dominated by pictures of persecution and torture, including pictures of atrocities against Sikhs in the 1980s. By contrast, at Nanaksar there were no pictures of martyrdoms and Guru Gobind Singh figured far less prominently than Guru Nanak (portrayed cross-legged), Baba Nand Singh and Baba Ishar Singh.³⁴

In the foyer of the Ajit Darbar there was a photograph of the multi-storey building captioned 'Tangarsthan Dera Wadbhag Singh'. Behind the *palki* on the back wall of the prayer hall were pictures of Wadbhag Singh, of Guru Nanak as portrayed in the Nanaksar gurdwara, of Harmandir Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh and Baba Ajit Singh. In an adjoining hall his photograph was garlanded and entitled 'His Holiness' and there was a picture of a nimbate, bearded 'Guru Wadbhag Singh Ji'.³⁵ Iconography distinguished one gurdwara from another, although representations of the first and last Gurus were common to all. Only in Guru Nanak Parkash were there pictures of the twentieth century 'martyrs', including Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale: only in Nanaksar and Ajit Darbar was Guru Nanak depicted cross legged with the *padam* (mark of a divine incarnation) on his upturned sole. Only these two gurdwaras displayed pictures of their (non-militant) twentieth century *sants*.

e) Monthly Worship

The monthly *Sangrand* (see 2b above) was traditionally the occasion for larger congregations. However, the monthly acts of worship in which some of the

young people were involved were of two different kinds, both characteristic of particular groups within the *Panth*. One eleven year old boy's mother, a member of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, attended the *rain sabai kirtan* (all night *kirtan*) which was held each month in a gurdwara or private home. First, for this continuous nocturnal session everyone bathed, then the divine name, *Vahiguru*,³⁵ was chanted for two hours and this was followed by the *nitnem* and *Asa di Var* (McLeod 1984:105-110). This might entail learning a technique. Davinder observed:

The other *rain sabais* they may say *Vahiguru* but they don't get you to say it properly, so they grab you from the waist. They make you say it properly so you don't get puffed out.

More subjects, including Gurdial, Gurvinder, Amarjit, Satwant and Sarbjit were involved in the celebration of *purnimashi* (full moon referred to as *masiya*³⁶ by Gurdial) at the Nanaksar gurdwara. This monthly commemoration of Guru Nanak's birth on the night of the full moon (*purnimashi*) is peculiar to gurdwaras established by *rants* of the Nanaksar succession which began with a devout Sikh, Baba Nand Singh of Kaleran. (See Bhai Gurmukh Singh [nd] and Nesbitt [1985a]). The celebration often drew several thousand participants, many arriving from other parts of England. To quote a ten year old boy:

I think it's when you get a full moon...go to the temple. There's normally God there and you can listen there.³⁶

Full details of the liturgy are given in Doabia (1981:39-42). The following account is drawn from fieldnotes for June 15th 1992 when several subjects were present among the congregation that thronged the one-time cinema building. The evening unfolded as a much-loved liturgical drama with multi-sensory impact. The account is included to illustrate a diversity of worship absent from the curriculum books' presentation. Terminology (*bahingam*, *purnimashi* - see below), the officiants' dress, the musical style and liturgical content, the use of flowers and perfume, and most strikingly the scale (the great size of the *sachkhand*, *chauri* and *rumalas*, the quantity of *amrit* and the number of *ragis*) distinguish this from worship in other gurdwaras and suggest processes underway in the *Panth* (see chapter twelve) while exemplifying the fundamental concepts of *path* and *kirtan*.

Two terms require explanation: *sachkhand* (literally 'the stage of truth' or 'heaven') is the name given to the upstairs sanctuary in this gurdwara in which the scriptures are laid to rest each night.³⁷ *Bahingam* (from the Sanskrit for a bird, i.e. a detached being) is the name for members of the celibate male entourage of the Baba who wear distinctively tied white turbans and tunics (*chola*). They serve (for example as musicians) in the gurdwara and are especially in evidence on *purnimashi*.

At 5.15 pm. *path* was in progress. The *sachkhand* curtains had been drawn back. A trickle of people were coming down the centre 'aisle' Nearly everyone carried a bunch of flowers (some looking as if they were from the garden) or a *rumala* or milk or food. The *bahingams* were installing themselves in rows at right angles to the gathering congregation. Two, each with an upright sword, placed themselves on each side of the 'aisle'. The *path* ended at 5.20 pm and music (only instrumental) began. The *bahingams* had white turban and bare legs (below calf), but some of the musicians (all men and boys) wore an ordinary black *patka* or turban. The boys played small cymbals very energetically. One of the *bahingams* recited *Japji*, then there was a *shabad anak aya*' (Guru Nanak has come). Periodically a *bahingam* would gather up the flowers and *rumalas* and carry them out of the far door.

At about 5.45 pm Gurvinder, Gurdial, their mother and little brother arrived. At 6.45 pm the *Ardas* was said. The instruments started up loudly and at 6.55 pm all sat. People surged up to 'o *mattha tek*', packing the aisle. At 7.25 pm *Japji* was read by a *pathi* (reader) from the Guru Granth Sahib; people quietly chimed in with the words. At 7.40 pm the *bahingams* sat down again and at 7.45 pm brisk music started - briefly. At 7.50 chanting of the *mul mantar* began while people were still piling up the central aisle. A man started distributing flower heads to people in the front, who held individual blooms in their cupped hands. The men behind the Guru Granth Sahib were spreading huge (bed-sheet-sized), floating *rumalas*, each thrown open with verve. The smell of chrysanthemums was unmistakable. At 8 pm the people in the front few rows got up, surged forward and threw their flowers towards the Guru Granth Sahib, most blooms landing on the carpeted area between the *bahingams* and the ladies right in front.³⁸ A *bahingam* moved about spraying scent. Everyone was singing a rhythmic song, repeating 'Baba'. At 8.05 pm the downstairs curtain closed across the Guru Granth Sahib while singing of 'Baba' continued. 8.10 pm, everyone stood (the curtain was still closed) and sang 'Baba deo darshan' [Give us a glimpse of yourself, Lord]. After another *Ardas* at 8.38 pm the curtains opened to reveal a shiny, mainly orange *rumala* over the scriptures and a huge blue and yellow garland. (When the curtains had last been open the *rumala* had been white and the garland red.)

By nine o'clock people were leaving. Meanwhile more and more people (though by no means all of those present), moved up to the left hand corner of the prayer hall. All of them (women and children - no men) had one or more empty milk- or pepsi-bottle and each would come back with the bottles full of water in plastic bags. (This they regarded as *amrit* - see chapter ten). In a cupboard-like room, a woman sat by a bowl with a bucket, catching this water from a large new green plastic cylindrical tank. A man came round with a metal bowl, full of *karah prashad* so full of *ghi* that recipients' hands were coated in it, smelling strongly even after being rubbed with a tissue. Another *Ardas* followed at 9.10 pm, the curtains closed and hoovering began.

When interviewed later, the young people described the pressing crowds of devotees who arrived each month for *purnimashi*, the presence of 'God' (the *sant*, Baba Mihan Singh, who visited Coventry each year) and the fun of playing in the cavernous building.

Summary and Critical Discussion

As the above accounts of family *path* and *satsang* and other devotions show, young Sikhs were actively involved in a range of daily and less frequent worship, all - with the exception of the reverence demonstrated in two families for the Hindu goddess (Mata or Sheranvali Ma) - centred upon the words of the Gurus enshrined in the sacred volume, the Guru Granth Sahib. This meant treating the volume of scripture with extreme respect which was formalised in essential equipment (the canopy, *chauri* and *palki*) and procedures (waving the *chauri*, carrying the volume, wrapped appropriately, on someone's head, sprinkling water in its path).

Because of the exacting conditions required to house the volume adequately their families' reverence precluded rather than necessitated keeping a copy in their homes. Temporary hosting of the scriptures was arranged to mark significant events, such as moving house, and was itself a significant event (as in Raspreet and Ravinder's home). On these occasions subjects learned to behave as they would in the public gurdwara, since in both venues this behaviour was dictated by the need to honour the Guru according to long-standing norms. Their homes became temporary gurdwaras.

Worship involved young members of the household in attendance of various kinds when members of the community visited for a *path* or *satsang*. Those whose families had hosted the Guru Granth Sahib in this way knew and accepted the code of required conduct at such times. The behaviour concerned was imbued with symbolic meaning. For example the waving of the *chauri* symbolised the pre-eminence of the scriptures, since being fanned by an attendant has for centuries connoted princely or spiritual authority in the Indian climate, where the powerful were spared the discomfort of being too hot. But none of the young people mentioned the aetiology of these ritual acts, except for Raspreet's explanation for the stand (or more specifically the canopy) that 'just like people cover their heads, so does the book'. However her speculation fails to recognise the distinction between covering one's head to show respect and having a canopy held over one as a mark of others' respect.

Almost all the young people were used to reciting religious formulae, in most cases the *mul mantar*, the opening credal passage of both the *Japji Sahib* and the whole scripture. In this respect their mode of worship paralleled the repetition of revered formulae by Hindus (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993: 97-101). They translated '*path*' (scriptural reading) as prayer and this was mentioned far more often than petition in their own words (a usual sense of the word prayer in

English, especially in Protestant usage). Similarly the effect, which some mentioned, of reciting sacred words - soothed nerves and enhanced peace of mind - conformed to the experience of Hindu subjects (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993).

Resemblance to Hindu tradition was no accident since clusters of devotional and ritual elements which are often classified as Hindu or Sikh - as if these were discrete traditions - can be better understood as integral to a continuum of Punjabi religious belief and practice, as diagrammatically represented in chapter three. Not only did Sikh subjects learn religious behaviour which conformed to wider Indian norms for showing respect (such as circling lighted incense sticks or covering the head and removing footwear) but the devotional repertoire of home might include worship of the goddess exactly as practised in families which identified themselves as Hindu.

So, in Satwant's and Jasvir's case it was not a matter of their fathers 'being Hindu', but the continuing of a strong Punjabi tradition of devotion centred both on the Guru Granth Sahib and on the goddess. The powerful hold of the goddess on the Punjabi religious imagination is apparent in the poetry of Guru Gobind Singh (N-G Kaur Singh 1993: 118-149). These subjects' experience is also continuous with nineteenth century practice (Oberoi 1994:162).

Both devotion to the goddess and the worship of a living *Baba* alongside the Gurus (as described above) are strongly condemned by many Sikhs and were particular to the experience of only a minority of the subjects. However, both were integral to the experience of individuals who regarded themselves and their families as Sikh and who were active participants in the gurdwara. Consequently both phenomena are considered in chapters eleven and twelve in relation to tendencies within the *Panth* and to the representation of the religious lives of young Sikhs in curriculum books.

The Coventry data thus indicate the behavioural and affective aspects of their faith in the lives of young Sikhs. Their familiarity with showing reverence to the Guru Granth Sahib, and their respect for the *langar* food were unequivocal and universal. Moreover their enjoyment of *puṛnimashi* at the Nanaksar gurdwara and their feeling of security from repetition of *mul mantar* and other formulae are evident.

Equally clear is the diversity of subjects' experience of worship, even in a relatively homogeneous group. The following areas of diversity were observable: devotional orientation and devotional practice. Thus a minority revered Mata (the goddess) or a spiritual teacher in addition to the ten Gurus. Such masters included the Namdharis' Satguru, 'Guru' Ravidas and contemporary *sants*. As regards diversity of practice the scale of devotion at

the Nanaksar gurdwara invites comment. This is not just lavish spectacle but arises from belief that the scriptures are literally '*pragat guran ki deh*' the manifest body of the Gurus'. As such, the scriptures require bed-sheet sized *rumalas*, so establishing the scale.³⁹ As noted in chapter three, families also differed regarding the member who took the lead in the pattern of daily devotion.

Not only diversity but also change was apparent. There were the suggestions that gurdwara visits had become less frequent since settlement in Britain, and the increased impact of technology (tape-recorded *Japji Sahib*) and (at least by comparison with James's findings of a previous generation) ready hot water for morning ablutions. The influence of *Baba Mikan Singh* and *Baba Ajit Singh* illustrate the phenomenon of allegiance to *sants* which characterises Sikh communities and plays a large part in regenerating the tradition in the diaspora. This regeneration also involves diversification, as illustrated, for example, in chapter six by the accounts of Vaisakhi and the celebration of special anniversaries.

Observation of Sikh worship also suggests the necessity of recognising the possibility of multiple allegiance in the 'membership group' model of faith traditions, given the configurations of overlapping allegiance and gurdwara attendance. While a few Sikhs may attend one gurdwara (e.g. Ajit Darbar) to the exclusion of the others or define themselves in relation to a devotional or political grouping (as Namdhari, Akhand Kirtani Jatha or Babbar Khalsa) the lives of the Coventry Sikh subjects suggested that the fluidity and dynamism of the 'membership group' model must be emphasised: otherwise the term suggests a more static, bounded, formal situation than the Coventry Sikh scenario appears to be.

NOTES

- 1 Arvind-pal Singh outlines the varieties of *path* (1993).
- 2 However *satsangs* can take place in gurdwaras or elsewhere, including Malaysian beaches (Malhi 1995).
- 3 *Sat Sri Akal* can be roughly translated as 'Timeless Truth is Lord' and is the most widespread of Sikhs' distinctive greetings. See Kalra (1994).
- 4 Such linguistic constructions as 'doing *path*' receive attention in chapter twelve.
- 5 *Amrit vela* is aptly translated by Dhillon as 'the time of nectar, the time just before dawn when the sun has risen but cannot as yet be seen' (1988).

See Kalsi (1994) on amrit-vela (ambrosial morning)' as a 'sacred symbol in 'Sikhism' which he relates to ceremonial practice in Harmandir Sahib where 'the kirtan...starts at 4 am followed by the recitation of Asa di Var'.

It is considered as the most sacred time for meditation. Guru Nanak says: *amrit-vela sach naon wichaar*' (one must utter the True Name in the early ambrosial morning and must ponder over His Greatness). (AG 2) Reflecting on the qualities of a Sikh, the fourth Guru, Ram Das writes: 'He, who calls himself a disciple of the true *Guru* should rise early in the morning and contemplate on God's name'. (AG 305/6)

- 6 English translations of these passages (*Jap*, *Benti*, *Sawaiyye* and *Anand Sahib*) are given in Doabia (rep 1980a) and McLeod (1984).
- 7 *Snan* (bathing) before prayer from the scriptures is a requirement McLeod (1984:86).
- 8 Sikhs are bidden to 'repeat Guru Nanak's *Japji*, Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap*, and the Ten *Savayyas*' (ibid). The *Japji* consists of 38 stanzas (*pauris*). For the final verse (*slok*) see Doabia (rep.1980:56-57). *Ik onkar satnam* are the first three words of the *Mul Mantar*.
- 9 On the popularity of *Sukhmani Sahib* (the 'hymn of peace') McLeod observes: Although it is not a part of the regular *Nit-nem* many Sikhs include it in their early morning devotions. (1984:110)
- 10 '*Dhann* Guru Nanak' as an invocation is especially advocated by Ajit Singh and his followers. *Dhann* means 'may God bless you' (Gurcharan Singh et al 4th ed 1983:380).
- 11 *Antarjami*, God, 'the one who knows the hidden or inner desires of others' (ibid:39). Gopinder Kaur suggests (oral communication) that the subject was confused: the prayer in question *antarjami purakh bidhate sardha man ki pure / Nanak das ehai sukh magai, mo kau kar santan ki dhure*' is sung at the conclusion of *Kirtan Sohila* (Doabia rep 1980:272-273). It requests the fulfilment of one's heart's desires.
- 12 The 'necklace' (rosary) probably had 108 beads.
- 13 For analysis and history of the word '*Vahiguru*' see McLeod (1980b: 45-46).
- 14 She has left out the words between '*satnam*' and '*gurprasad*'
- 15 Five is a recurrent number in Sikh tradition (cf *panj piare* and five Ks). In Jasvir's camp, described in chapter eight, one lecturer enjoined his

audience: At night time do *Kirtan Sohila*. Then no dream will come and you will sleep well.

- 16 *Bani* ('utterance') refers to the Guru Granth Sahib.
- 17 For the use of water for the disposal of religious pictures and items by local Hindus see Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:95).
- 18 'Them' is a plural out of respect for the Guru Granth Sahib.
- 19 '*Jot*' denotes a *diva* or oil light. Instead of being made of clay it can be made out of dough, i.e. *ata* (chapati flour) and water.
- 20 Emphasis on the ten Gurus and the scriptures, to the exclusion of other objects for devotion, characterises Sikh tradition, as promulgated by its highest elected body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. This continues the reformist interpretation of the nineteenth century Singh Sabhas and the twentieth century Akalis (Oberoi 1994).
- 21 For *sangrand* (Sankranti) see Bedi (1971:75) and the description in Duggal (1991:87-93). Griffiths describes practice in a Crawley gurdwara (1994: 154).
- 22 The three-storey Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara has been designed in such a way as to avoid the possibility of walking above the Guru Granth Sahib, and so showing disrespect.
- 23 *Bhai* (literally 'brother') and *giani* (literally 'learned') are both terms of respect for Sikh scholars and readers of the scriptures.
- 24 The subject used the word '*charan*' signifying that he set foot inside each room to bless it (Gopinder Kaur, oral communication).
- 25 See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993) for *kanjakan* and *jagran*.
- 26 Like the weekly avoidance of meat (chapter three and Jackson and Nesbitt [1993:641) this indicates a Punjabi association between Tuesdays and the goddess.
- 27 See James (1974:35) quoting Guru Ram Das.
- 28 The word '*langar*' denotes the dining hall or area, the kitchen, the food prepared and eaten and the whole practice or institution of providing a free meal.
- 29 Here *roti* means the whole meal.

- 30 For instructions for making *karah prashad* see *Rahit Maryada* and (in more detail) Babraa (1981:25-26).
- 31 This shows disrespect to the scriptures. For this reason an English notice in Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara English tells people not to sit with their feet towards '*sachkhand*' (see 37 below). Paradoxically a celebrated *janamsakhi* story has Guru Nanak deliberately pointing his feet towards Muslims' holiest place as an acted parable of God's omnipresence (Khushwant Singh rep .1977:36).
- 32 '*Ral*' is Panjabi for 'turn' as in 'taking one's turn'.
- 33 The artist, Thethi, painted these in 1989, and had also produced a series of paintings for the Ramgarhia gurdwara, Southall.
- 34 The artist, Bhagat Singh, saw Guru Nanak through the power of Baba Nand Singh's meditation (Nesbitt 1985a). A photograph of this portrait and of pictures of Baba Nand Singh and Baba Ishar Singh appear in Doabia (1981) and the portrait is also included in Bowker (1997:78-79) and in Nesbitt and Kaur (1999). .
- 35 A member of the congregation said that Wadbhag Singh was from Guru Gobind Singh's family and stood against the Moghuls. He settled in the hills for a quiet life, but a demon had the area under his control. The demon accepted defeat and Wadbhag Singh put him in a cage. McLeod (1991:125 and 132) provides a picture and further details; Chohan (1999) provides the most detailed study yet available.
- 36 'God' refers to Baba Mihan Singh.
- 37 In Nanaksar gurdwaras the *sachkhand* is especially beautiful. Kalsi suggests that the *sachkhand* as an upstairs room developed only in the diasporic situation (1994). However this may not be true of Nanaksar gurdwaras, given Baba Nand Singh's emphasis upon veneration of the Granth as the manifest body of the Guru.
- 38 This also occurs elsewhere during the *bhog*, e.g. Ravinder and Raspreet described instances and I have witnessed this at Ajit Darbar.
- 39 The words *pragat guran ki deh'* first appear in the *rahitnama* (code of discipline) attributed to Prahilad Singh (McLeod 1989a:36).

Chapter 5

Sanskars and Birthdays

Introduction

This chapter continues the discussion begun in chapter four. At the substantive level the reporting moves from the role of worship in the nurture of young Sikhs to the role of rites that mark the individual's life-span. From the 'experience-near' concept of '*path*' vis-a-vis the 'experience-distant' concept of worship, consideration moves to *sanskars* in relation to life cycle rites. The continuing analysis of diversity and change is facilitated by Baumann's mapping of the complex relationship of 'western' and 'Indian' features in Southall Punjabis' birthday parties in his critique of Durkheim's understanding of ritual (1992). Meanwhile the focus throughout is upon the contribution of these events to the nurture of the Sikh subjects. References to accounts in curriculum books suggest further differences between the presentation in religious education of the religious world of young Sikhs and their lived experience.

In Hindu tradition events marking significant stages in individuals' lives are called *samskara*, a Sanskrit word denoting polishing or refining. A *samskara* is the processing, which distinguishes the human life span from the animal, and consists of birth, reproduction and death. *Samskaras* prepare a person for a new function by imparting qualities or removing taints (Olivelle:1987). For this the usual English translation 'sacrament' (as in Kanitkar 1984) is misleading because of its Christian connotations and very different etymology.'

In Punjabi tradition, whether Sikh or Hindu, the cognate word *sanskar* is used for the rites surrounding birth (*janam sanskar*), marriage (*anand sanskar*) and death (*maran sanskar*) (e.g. Sandhu 1977 and 1978 and *Rahit Maryada*). It also applies to initiation with *amrit* (*amrit sanskar*). However in conversation subjects used neither this term nor *amrit pahul* (Cole and Sambhi rep.1989, Cole 1994) but always some form of the verb *amrit chhakna* (see chapter twelve).²

'Rites of passage' (rites de passage) or life-cycle rites' are both the likeliest analytic terms and 'experience-distant' concepts for these *sanskars*. Coming from the work of van Gennep, the term '*rite de passage*' denotes a rite that accompanies the passage of the individual from one social status to another, for example from childhood to puberty (1960 [1909]). Van Gennep proposed three main stages, processes or sequences, namely rites of separation, liminality and reaggregation. This analysis is hard to sustain in the case of all the rites described in this chapter. Indeed, in the case of the birthday rites there is no passage from one status to another apart from the obvious fact that the child concerned has added a year to his or her age. Moreover *rites de passage* are generally understood to take place in a certain order, to occur only once and to be clearly defined within the community which performs them. However in reality some rites (notably the birthday party, but also the taking of *amrit*, and increasingly marriage) are repeated or at least repeatable (Kaur 1992:8).³ Furthermore, as the birthday celebration suggests, rites themselves are born and undergo transformations and (it may be inferred) can disappear.

RE curriculum books on the world's faith traditions describe such rites in parallel, with Bar Mitzvah, confirmation and the rite of *amrit pahul* appearing as readily comparable initiation rites or acts of commitment which occur at approximately the same point in the life cycle i.e. puberty (Langley 1993). According to Cole (2nd ed. 1985):

The amrit ceremony is the initiation ceremony at which young Sikhs, male or female, become members of the Khalsa...it is rather like a Christian confirmation... Most Sikhs are about sixteen or eighteen when they undergo the rite.

However this pressure to pattern traditions alike may stem from some syllabuses having been based on a Christian model, rather than from the authors of books on Sikhism.⁴ Thus, consistently with the Coventry data, Butler is at pains to point out that: 'The Sikh initiation ceremony is of special interest because some Sikhs never go through it, others do not go through it until they are quite old, and some go through it more than once.' (1993:40)

From the young Coventrian Sikhs' accounts of their experience there emerges a picture of individual lives punctuated by differing numbers of rites

performed for that individual, and (although naming takes place shortly after birth, and death is final for all) occurring in differing sequences. Moreover the occasions and modes of observance reveal significant changes within families.

Marriage emerged clearly as the complex of ritual about which interviewees knew most and which they foresaw as integral to their own futures. The taking of *amrit* in *amrit pahul* (*amrit chhakna*) was clearly of most significance for being a 'proper Sikh' (see chapter eleven). As a result these two rites receive the most coverage in this chapter.

This chapter reviews the young people's accounts of ceremonies following upon the birth of a child, the celebration of birthdays, turban-tying, the sequence of events intrinsic to marriage, their awareness of what occurs when someone dies and their understanding of the *amrit* ceremony. This is discussed last because its position in the individual's lifespan, if it occurs at all, varies markedly. Also, whereas when speaking of other rites the young people emphasised what took place, when speaking of *amrit chhakna* they concentrated instead upon the implications for the candidate's behaviour thereafter.

A birthday is not (in customary Panjabi usage) a *sanskar* nor (in anthropological convention) is it a rite of passage. However, unlike festivals, the other annual highpoints, it is specific to the individual and in subjects' experience it is an important marker of the passing years. Birthdays are included in this thesis for these reasons and because of their significance to young Sikhs. Moreover, whereas most non-Asian Britons probably regard birthdays as non-religious occasions, many Sikh children's birthdays are celebrated in a distinctively Sikh manner (i.e. with an *akhand path* or *satsang*) as compared to the secular ritual constituting most British birthday celebrations. Moreover, like the festival of Vaisakhi - the subject of chapter six - birthdays serve as 'key events' exemplifying a complex of processes at work in the nurture of young Sikhs which are further explored in chapter twelve. They provide a 'window on evolving Asian-English culture' (Larson 1989). In them 'a new culture comes of age' (95).

Birth and Naming

What follows is not intended as a report of research on the *sanskars* and birthdays, but as evidence of the contribution of these occasions to young British Sikhs' nurturing in their tradition.

a) Distributing Sweets

Many practices surrounded the birth of babies in Punjab. These were not distinctively Sikh and many have died out with modern medical practice (Gideon 1962; Dosanjh 1976), although traditional forms of rejoicing, such as distributing sweetmeats, continue (Cole and Sambhi 1978:113). When an

eleven year old boy's sister gave birth to a boy her in-laws brought *laddus* (round sweetmeats traditionally given when a boy is born) to his house.⁵

b) *Amrit*

According to most curriculum books on Sikh tradition the first rite of passage is the marking of the infant's tongue with *amrit*.⁶ This follows *Rahit Maryada*:

At the birth of a child any Gursikh relation or friend may pour some water in a small iron (steel) cup and add some Patashas [sugar sweets] or honey in it and stir the same with a Kirpan while reciting the first five Pauries (Stanzas) of the Japji along with the prologue given at the very beginning of this Bani. A few drops of this holy water be poured into the mouth of the child and remaining be taken by the mother. (Sikh Missionary Resource Centre nd:31)

However, no subjects mentioned knowledge of this and in discussion with Sikh informants only one adult corroborated the practice, though not as widespread. This supports Griffiths's findings of a low incidence of this in Crawley (1994:158) and raises questions about the relationship between a faith's representation in curriculum books and the lived reality.

c) *Rumala*

Parents may also give a *rumala* for covering the scriptures in the gurdwara and receive a *rumala* that has been used to cover them (Nesbitt 1980a). No-one mentioned the presentation of a *rumala*, although this does not mean that this had not occurred when they or their siblings were born.

d) Naming

Curriculum books describe the procedure for choosing a forename with an initial determined by a random opening of the scriptures (Cole and Sambhi 1978: 112-113 based on *Rahit Maryada*).⁷ Some of the young people showed some familiarity with this practice. Obviously they could not remember how their own names had been selected, and many had never witnessed such a ceremony. In any case it is not always very clear to children present in the gurdwara that this is taking place in the front. Six subjects were emphatic that the religious rite had not occurred in their case, as for example this nine year old boy: 'My *taya* — he's my uncle, dad's brother - he just chose my name.' Fifteen had no idea how their names had been chosen.

However, thirteen young people were sure that their names had been chosen to begin with an initial which was identified by opening the scriptures at random. Some, who had never seen this take place, knew what the procedure had been in their own case, as exemplified by this thirteen year old girl:

First you take the baby to the gurdwara... they do it to all the Sikh children... They open the Granth Sahib and the first letter on the left hand page... is the letter that your name starts with.

Other accounts included Jasvir's who said: 'You go in the temple and this man looks on the left hand side of the Guru Granth Sahib...and then he picked one letter 'T' and then all my family just gave Jasvir.' Sixteen of the young people indicated that they were familiar with this method, seven that they were not.

Although some did not know who had selected their name (whether after consulting the Guru Granth Sahib or in some other way) sixteen knew which relative's choice of name beginning with the requisite initial had been accepted, for example 'dad' (two), 'mum' (three), mum and dad' (two), 'brother' (one), 'father's brother' in the case of four subjects, one of whom specified that it was his *taya* (father's elder brother), 'dad's mum' (one), 'grandmother' (one), 'grandparents' (one), 'grandfather' (one), 'mother's brother's wife' (*mama*) in Satwant's case, 'cousin' (one) 'whole family' (one). One ten year old boy said:

My mum didn't choose them or my dad, but my dad's mum chose them...but you can go to the temple and then...you sit there and they just talk to the people telling them what it's for, who's going to get their name and everything.

Amandeep provided details of how she thought the selection had been made:

My mum and dad chose them because they had their brothers and sisters here. They had a raffle or something like that, when they put all the names they want into a box. Yes, and Amandeep got chosen out of that. That was my mum and dad's choice because they had a joint choice. They all began with A.

One nine year old twin girl suggested that each twin's name had been arrived at differently:

We went to the temple when I was born and looked through the book and then we found S- and then my cousin thought - all my cousins thought that it was a nice name so they had it.⁸ We went to the registry office, my cousin noticed K- and she said, 'Look, S- and K-', so my dad said, 'Yes, that's fine' so he chose it. She got it from the holy book and I got it from the registry book.

Changes of practice within families during our subjects' lifetime were apparent with regard to naming procedures as in certain other respects. For example Ravinder's account of how her elder sister's names were selected, and

her younger sister's description of the naming of their younger brother suggested a change, possibly the result of their parents' increased religiousness, possibly because this was their first son after several daughters, probably both. Ravinder said:

I don't know why their [elder sisters'] names were chosen. I know they didn't have Guru Granth Sahib properly done because my mum and dad didn't go to gurdwara regularly then.

This was supplemented by Raspreet's information:

My brother's name was chosen at the gurdwara because they weren't sure whether to call him Rajpal or Rupinder, so what they called him is Rajpal and his second name is Rupinder ...They went to the gurdwara and they asked, 'What shall we call our baby boy?'

Similarly Sarbjit reported that 'my brother just named me' whereas in the case of her younger sister:

We went, after my mum was going to come straight home, the day, we went straight to the temple and we told the man who owns the temple, the *giant*, and we asked him if he could read the Guru Granth Sahib, and the first letter he reads, that's the letter... We've got a film of it.

In her family's case it was certainly the increase in her parents' religious commitment, not the gender of the baby, which dictated a change in the naming process.

The prevalence and significance of the gender-specific second names, Kaur (for females) and Singh (for males), which are proclaimed in the gurdwara with the chosen forename are discussed in chapter eleven.

As far as the young Sikhs' awareness of naming procedures was concerned there was clearly divergence over consulting the Guru Granth Sahib and simply selecting an appealing name without this preliminary. Secondly their names had been chosen by family members in nine different relationships to the individuals concerned (if 'grandparents' included both maternal and paternal grandparents). This diversity was also apparent within individual families, for instance with regard to siblings close in age.

e) Akhand Path for Child's Birth

Dosanjh found that 14 per cent of the Sikhs in his sample tad *akhand path*' or offered 'romala [*sic*]...and money for a prayer to be said in the name of the

child' (1976:146). He also commented that 'sex discrimination is shown in the attitude of a few parents who hold *akhand path* only in the case of boys'. Among the smaller number of Coventry subjects several mentioned the birth of a boy in the family as a reason for hosting the scriptures and a *satsang* at the house, and only Amarj it mentioned the birth of a girl (his younger sister) in this connection. Jasvir listed three occasions for *akhand paths* in her home:

Once my brother was born...once it was my dad's brother's wedding. He used to live at our house. Once for my other brother, when he got home [from the hospital].

As a ten year old boy explained;

My mum said after she had a girl after my sister like - and she wanted a boy and my dad wanted a boy - and she prayed to God that if he gives me a boy she'd go to the temple and she'd do *satsang* for the things, make *roti* for all the people that come there.

The timing of this in relation to the birth varied. Although he was ten this still had not taken place, owing to intervening vicissitudes, but it was firmly anticipated.

Birthdays

In answer to the question 'what kind of occasion do you enjoy most?' some young people mentioned birthdays and birthday parties. Dancing predominated in some accounts. For example, an eight year old girl said:

We celebrate a lot and then we start dancing in the garden sometimes - Indian [dancing]. The people in our religion - well not religion - family, they live quite close to us and we call those over.

Gurdial said: 'When it was my little brother's birthday party [dad] had this sort of *ghughra* — it's like a skirt...and he was dancing'.

Food was uppermost in other reports of birthdays. A ten year old girl said: 'We do a party at our house; we eat fish and chips and meat and other things too', and a nine year old boy said: 'We only had a little barbecue and I invited my dad's older brother and my auntie and my dad's younger sister.'

While the marking of individuals' birthdays is a result of western (especially peer) influence these brief descriptions clearly, as Baumann argues on the basis of his fieldwork in Southall (1992:106-110), do not portray a conventional British birthday party. For example the gathering of (elder) relatives and community members to dance an Indian dance is dissimilar from the invitation of class fellows to play traditional party games. Moreover the

food (perceived as English and so appropriate by the Punjabi family) is not the fare commonly served at children's birthday parties in the wider non-Asian society. However for the young Sikhs (like the nine year old boy quoted below) parties and cake marked a celebration as 'English': 'We just celebrate like an English person because that's more kind of celebrated, because in an Indian way you don't have no cake.'

While cake figured in some accounts as an obvious borrowing from mainstream modes of celebrating birthdays, religious considerations could affect the level of cake consumption. As the eight year old girl pointed out, on a Sunday most of the adults wouldn't eat the cake because it contained egg. (As noted in chapter three abstinence was associated with going to the gurdwara, a holy place where only strictly vegetarian food could be consumed and where abstinence from non-vegetarian food and from alcohol were expected on the day from those attending.) Another way out of this dilemma was to have an eggless cake, as mentioned by a nine year old girl.⁹

A less complicated adaptation of western practice was the giving of presents to the child whose birthday it was, a break with earlier practice (Singh and Smith 1985:32). This was mentioned by an eleven year old boy:

It's like they don't tell me what they've bought for me. Instead they give it to me you know on that day, but this year I chose it for myself because I'm getting older, and they're asking me what I want really.

Similarly Amarjit mentioned another easily accommodated detail - balloons: 'We put balloons up and we have a exciting times.'

The tasty food, fine new clothes, presents and balloons were perceived as being 'English', even if taken as a whole the party differed markedly from non-Asian birthday parties.

In addition to these more secular ways of celebrating, some families arranged an *akhand path* either in their own house or in the gurdwara.¹⁰ An eight year old girl and her ten year old brother associated birthdays primarily with *akhand path*:

If it's someone's birthday and they want *akhand path* that means that they want to listen and give all stuff like in the kitchens. You've got to give stuff out to the people and you've got to just go upstairs and you got to sit right at the front.

In other words celebration of a birthday meant that the family concerned provided the *langar* which was served in the gurdwara and members sat close

to the scriptures. The thirteen year old girl said: 'We're thinking of having [the Guru Granth Sahib at home] probably for a special occasion, like somebody's birthday or something.' When Jasvir's family hosted an *akhand path* for her brother's birthday she took her turn in reading the *gutka* alongside the adults' reading of the Guru Granth Sahib.

The thirteen year old girl saw the reason for the *akhand path* as 'just to announce it'. However, as some comments on *akhand path* and the presence of the scriptures in chapters four and ten show, this is also perceived as auspicious, a means of blessing the individual and his or her family. Daljit said: 'We had one a couple of weeks ago [for] my brother's eighteenth birthday. It just brings good luck.'¹¹

Satwant's elder brother's eleventh birthday fell during the fieldwork period and was celebrated by a *satsang* at their house, as it had been several years before, the last time that the family had hosted such an event. At midday the Guru Granth Sahib arrived by car from the Ramgarhia gurdwara and their father carried it into the house on his head. Prior to its entry Satwant's *mami* (mother's brother's wife) had sprinkled water throughout the house. The living room furniture had been removed or stacked at the back of the room, white sheets had been spread over the carpet and a dark blue *chanani* (canopy made of cloth) had been suspended by strings from the ceiling of the bay. Her mother had begun cooking for this day two weeks previously.

By one o'clock invited friends and neighbours were coming in by the front door which was left ajar. They included Muslim women, a Hindu woman and Sikh women of various castes — 'Tarkhan' and 'Chamar' according to Satwant.¹² On entering the house they removed their shoes and, heads covered, came into the presence of the scriptures (open, partly covered by a *rumala*). The volume had been installed below the canopy and supported a little above floor level.

Each new arrival in turn bowed down in front of the scriptures and made an offering - pound coins, a five pound note and (in one case) a bag of plums -before sitting on the floor further back. Among those participating were Gurvinder, her mother and younger brother, Amatjit's mother and his two younger sisters.

The scriptures were attended by a group of six elderly women. While one held a *chauri* and read aloud from the volume, the others read the text (*Sukhmani Sahib*) from *gutkas*.¹³ Throughout the *satsang* Satwant's *mama's* son recorded the proceedings on video from close to the scriptures.¹⁴ Her father was the only other man in the room, as the husbands of the women inside chatted outside in the front garden.

When the *Sukhmani path* (reading of *Sukhmani Sahib*) ended the *gutkas* were gathered together and the open Guru Granth Sahib was covered with a *rumala*. Women nearest to the front played musical instruments - a harmonium, the tongs-like *chimta* and another percussion instrument to accompany their singing. Among the devotional songs was a hymn performed by Satwant and her friend and a *bhent* (hymn in praise of the Goddess) in which '*Mata di*' ('for Mother') was repeated energetically.

A round tray of food, covered with a tea towel, was brought in from the kitchen and placed near the Guru Granth Sahib.¹⁵ Everyone stood for the *Ardas*, led by one of the party of women who had read the *path*, who concluded with a long prayer. Satwant's brother came up to the scriptures and received a folded red cloth, a '*siropa*' (cloth of honour), from one of the presiding women.¹⁶ His mother walked out holding the *siropa* while Satwant's younger sister explained to me that the *satsang* would bring their brother 'luck at his secondary school'.

Karah prashad was distributed from a stainless steel bowl, Satwant gave everyone butterscotch and plums, and then *thalis* (steel trays) of Punjabi vegetarian food were served, Satwant bringing round water and bowls of *gulab jamun* (round syrupy sweets), followed by cups of sugared tea. Meanwhile the party of women readers filed out, having stood in prayer before the scriptures. The volume remained, closed and wrapped in a cloth, overnight until collection for a *satsang* in another house the next morning.¹⁷

As this account shows, Satwant's brother's birthday was the occasion for a religious event in which the boy concerned was only briefly the centre of attention or indeed present. The purpose was future luck or blessing rather than short-term enjoyment. Relatives, friends and neighbours attended, spanning the generations and a range of *am'* and faith tradition, though segregated by gender. Scriptural reading by the team of women was followed by devotional singing, which in turn gave way to a corporate Punjabi vegetarian meal.

Rather than reading subjects' experience of birthday celebration as the convergence to differing degrees in different families of 'western' partying and cake with Sikh religious observance (the *akhand path* or *Sukhmani path* and *satsang*), one needs to decode both the 'western' and the 'Indian' elements in these parties further as suggested by Baumann (1992:106-110).

With regard to the 'western' features he demonstrates the inversion of ritual (the guests feeding the child with cake at the point where in non-Asian British birthday parties the slices would be distributed to the guests) and the departure from wider British convention in inviting elders rather than the child's peers. Baumann also points out that, unlike the mainstream British custom of annual birthday celebration, in the Sikh adaptation of the practice

children may share birthday parties and some years may not be auspicious for celebration (1992:107-108).

The first point to make regarding the 'Indian' features of these young Sikhs' birthday parties is that the practice of celebrating birthdays has been introduced into their family tradition since migration from Punjab to the west. Dosanjh observed 'Punjabis do not celebrate birthdays' (1976:48). Nearly two decades later Kalsi, also a Sikh emigrant, noted 'The celebration of children's birthdays, particularly the 18th/21st, has become an important family ritual' (1994/1995:14-15). Their Punjabi resources for celebration include both the Sikh religious practice of holding an *akhand path* or *sahaj path* or a shorter reading (*Sukhmani path*) and the secular custom of men dancing the *bhangra* at harvest-time and marriages. However the music and dancing at birthdays (as at weddings), far from being of a traditional kind is a post-migration fusion, incorporated into a post-migration celebratory occasion.

One young Coventrian Sikh emphasised that *akhand paths* were held for boys' birthdays but not for girls':

'when you have to have one *akhand path* in your whole life, at least one. Not the girls - only the [boys] I don't really know [why].'

This observation suggests that in some young Sikhs' experience at least, the celebration of birthdays may, like the holding of an *akhand path* and the distribution of *laddus* to mark a boy's birth, emphasise a message of gender inequality that is implicit in certain aspects of Punjabi culture.¹⁸

Birthday celebrations were microcosms of the multiple cultural processes interacting in these young people's nurture as well as providing, in some instances, additional exposure to their religious tradition's core activity namely scriptural reading and hymn-singing. For this reason the phenomenon of Sikh children's birthday parties is discussed further, in conjunction with Vaisakhi, in chapter twelve. The blend of Sikh and Hindu elements in Satwant's brother's *satsang* informs the discussion of Hinduisation in chapter twelve.

Turban-Tying

Another solemn and happy occasion in the life of some Sikh boys is the formal tying of the turban in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib (Babraa 1989:44; Thorley 1989:29-30). The accounts given by two boys suggest a diversity of attitude and practice which is not apparent in curriculum texts.

One ten year old was currently short-haired and so did not wear a turban or any other head covering unless in the gurdwara. He did not perceive it as the single event marking a male *keshdhari*'s transition from covering his top-knot

with a *rumal* or a *parka* to adopting the adult's head-dress, the turban. Rather he regarded it as the recurrent rite each time he grew his hair after having had it cut.

First I have to grow my hair and for a little while I have to wear a cloth over it, and then afterwards go to the temple, and if I want to just [*sic*] I can do it at home, but if my mum wants me to do it at the temple, go to the temple...It's this kind of priest, because hes got a book in front of him, holy bible, and he's got this thing and he waves it around three times first...The women sit on one side, the men on the other side, and after that they start talking about the family who's come to get blessed, like who's going to get the turban.

A Namdhari boy described the 'round white turban' which he and his male relatives wore as 'different' and recalled a ceremony when he was nine when Satguru's brother 'did it on me'. His brother's turban had been tied by Satguru himself. At the time of tying it Satguru (or his brother) had whispered something concerning '*path*' in the boy's ear. However this young man wore the *pag* only to the Namdhari gurdwara and did not envisage wearing it to the Ramgarhia gurdwara until he was twelve.

Marriage

Most of the young people took it for granted that they would get married in early adulthood, whatever their misgivings.¹⁹ From frequent participation in marriage celebrations all were familiar with the course of events, commencing with the selection of a spouse. Most expected their parents to introduce their future partner and to approve the match, and this is supported by Jhutti's account of arranged marriage among Sikhs in Britain (1999). None of the young people expected or mentioned experience of a marriage of two parties who had not previously met - as is common practice among Bhatra Sikhs (Paramjeet Singh 1995) and as used to be the case in other castes.²⁰

i) The Selection of Partners

Ravinder knew that in her family marriages were arranged and mentioned '*bichole*' (go-betweens) and the role of the photograph in the decision-making:

This *bichole*, they give my mum and dad an idea. They're the in between people who sort of introduce you to your future husband. Sometimes they're relatives. Sometimes they're like your mum's friends, dad's friends. They give the photo to your mum, your mum shows it to you. If you don't like it, end of subject, start again.

Raspreet explained:

If I had an arranged marriage, which I think I would, he's got to have the same qualities as me and my mum and dad would choose the boy, and if I think he's OK and looks - also looks matter as well. You see a photograph, then you see him and talk to him. If he says 'yes' and you say 'yes', it's like a blind date and it all goes ahead slowly.

Talk about a girl's marriage could begin in her early teens. In the Ramgarhia gurdwara a Ramgarhia girl commented laughingly on her mother's conversation:

They're already talking about our marriage and we're only fourteen. We tell people to come to our house. They say, 'Yes, we'll come at your marriage'.

From an early age girls were aware of the procedures. An eight year old girl described the introduction of the potential couple:

Well, first you'll ask your friends like you know to help you. If they find a person they introduce you. You take them to a room and they chat about their job, and when they do come down they have to tell you if they like them. My mother and my dad has to choose.

Amandeep's ideas diverged from this:

I don't want my mum and dad to choose. If your mum and dad choose them, if I say no, it'll upset them.

She realised from knowledge of her family that marriage was the appropriate next step after completion of one's education: 'My uncle's got his degree, he's looking for a job, he's looking for someone to get married to.'

ii) Sequence of Events

Subjects' accounts indicated the successive stages of the marriage, of which the religious rite in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib - the *anand karaj* was only one element.²¹ Other elements (detailed by Kalsi 1992:148-165 and Jhutti 1999) were the engagement, the 'register wedding' (the civil marriage if this was held on a different day from the *anand karaj*) and the events in the week prior to this religious solemnisation (such as singing and dancing in the homes of the prospective bride and bridegroom) (Nesbitt 1980a), and the party and meal following the religious ceremony. However this summary suggests a greater uniformity of sequence and content than proved to be the case. For example, a marriage in the Ramgarhia gurdwara during the fieldwork period

incorporated the registration of the marriage in the religious rites in the gurdwara. Another possibility was for the registration to take place on the same day in a smaller room in the gurdwara premises.²²

An eight year old girl summarised the many stages of the religious solemnisation: her account telescopes the four distinct circumambulations, between which the couple sit down, into two double circumambulations:

First you sit down for a long, long time and someone in front of you are reading the holy book...you tie something round you and your husband and you have to walk around two times and you sit down and then he reads it again and then you got to go round two times again, and then it's over, and then you have to eat your dinner and go to your own homes... Sometimes after your weddings you have discos and parties.

One twelve year old girl's account refers to 'weddings' or 'the normal wedding' (the religious solemnisation), 'the register wedding' and a party after each.

Weddings can be a bit boring, because you have to sit there for ages, but I don't mind after or the register wedding, because you only have to go to the office and you have a party straight after. They call a group and it's normally in a club and everyone gets up and dances. Because on the normal wedding like you have to sit down for about two hours. They do [have a party afterwards].

iii) Pre-Wedding

Of events preceding the ceremony in the gurdwara subjects mentioned 'getting engaged'. A nine year old girl said: 'They usually get engaged and then you wear this wedding suit but not the proper one.'²³ An eight year old girl mentioned the distribution of invitations which should be in person if at all possible: 'Sometimes people come to our house and give us wedding cards.'

Gurvinder recalled the sequel to the register marriage ('the registration') which - despite its legal significance - is regarded as one of the sequence of rites, not as the principal one):

We don't chuck flowers, we chuck *chawal* - rice - and ...after the registration [my mum] threw rice behind this way and my *mama* was standing that way and when she chucked them it went into his mouth and everyone started laughing.

As this account shows, the civil ceremony has acquired Punjabi cultural accretions.

Satwant described the *jago* (literally 'wake up!' from the practice in Punjab of going out into the street and calling the neighbours to participate in the singing prior to the wedding):

We had a wedding and they had a *jago* as well. A *jago* is like a big sort of bell right and you get some flour and water and mix it and put it in there, put quite a few candles in it. You light them and put them on your head. You dance. I think it's a day before the wedding... My brother was playing the drum. My mum danced, my cousin danced.

A nine year old boy described the application of turmeric paste to the couple in their respective homes, at the *maian*, two days prior to the wedding:

We just go into the back garden of the man's house and then they put this yellow thing... and they rub it all over the skin of the husband and they get it to the wife as well at her house, and the man - the man that gets married, his mum has to put something on her, and while they're putting all that yellow stuff on they normally hold this thing over them. She's at her own house... it's kind of like a *chunni*... They hold it up and they throw this pot pourri thing over.

(The rubbing of the bride and groom with a turmeric paste - common to South Asian marriages across faith and regional boundaries - is supposed to improve the complexion.)

On the eve of the marriage ceremony in the gurdwara it is usual for the bride's *mama* (maternal uncle) or his wife in the bride's home to put the new red and white wedding bangles, washed in milk, on her wrists. A nine year old girl said: 'And when it's the day to get married they wear all these things like bangles and they have to put them in some milk.' Her hands would also be patterned with henna paste (*mehandi*) by her female relatives. Jasvir explained, 'If you're on the girl's side you do *mehandi* on her side' and that the bride would spend the night before the wedding in her wedding clothes.

The young Sikhs distinguished between 'the girl's side and 'the boy's side' when referring to the bride's and bridegroom's family's preparations. Like their Panjabi equivalents (*munda* and *kuri*) 'boy' and 'girl' are customarily used for 'man' and 'woman' in the context of discussing their (potential) marriages. Each 'side' had clearly differentiated roles, with the bride's family hosting the marriage, which was solemnised in a gurdwara in or near their home town. An eleven year old boy admitted: 'I like to go on the girl's side in the wedding, because I don't like travelling.' In his own parents' case, however, both had lived in Coventry. His mother explained that what mattered was that their

villages in Punjab were different as 'people in a family are all one family, the same blood' (Dosanjh 1976). Thus the events preceding *anand karaj* familiarised young Sikhs not only with the required sequence but also with the significance of relationship-specific roles.

iv) Gurdwara Ceremony (*anand karaj*)

Sarbjit described the breakfast provided by the bride's family before the ceremony as well as the ensuing religious rite):

When we go, first we go to the girl's house or the boy's house and then we go to the club to have *samosa*, like these triangle things with potatoes and peas in them...and we have tea and then we go to the temple, and like I was telling you when we go down that red aisle thing and sit down. And first they give a *rumala*, the girl and the boy do. It's like a cloth with money - you put it down. The girl and the boy when they come, first the boy does his *mattha tek*, and then he goes and sits with the men, and then in a few minutes he goes and sits in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, because the girl's going to come, and the girl's sisters and brothers bring them down to where the boy's sitting. And she does her *mattha tek* and gives the *rumala*. And then she sits down, and then the men are doing *kirtan* and they sing a *shabad*, and they have to go round the Guru Granth Sahib four times. And then ...they give like a sort of *har* [garland] (like sort of a strip with all these like tinsel and things on) and they give money.

An eight year old girl drew comparisons with 'English weddings' and translated *har* (garland) as 'necklace':

In English weddings they wear white dresses and they put like it over here to their forehead, but the [Indian] people put it over their face, and they don't give rings. They just go to the temple, one person reads the holy book. They have to go round it four times... At the end we put money on their laps or they put this like necklaces around their necks, but not really nice necklaces with gold and diamonds and silver - just like ones with glitter and things like that - shiny paper.

A nine year old boy pointed out that bridegrooms wore '*pagan*' (turbans) for the occasion.²⁴

The young people's participation depended upon the 'side' they were on and their relationship with the bride or groom. On occasion a boy had the special duty of being the groom's close companion. This nine year old boy referred in his account of the day's proceedings to his role as 'best man', a term

which hardly conveys the meaning of the underlying Panjabi word '*sarbala*'. This denotes the bridegroom's younger brother or cousin (never an older male relative) who attends him.²⁵

I was the best man this day... I have to stay with my uncle all day. I had to wear a kind of thing called a *kurta pajama*...²⁶ When he had the big bag of money then the rest of the thing that he holds goes round to the back on to the lady and she's got to hold it and then the ladies normally cry as they walk round because they have to leave the family.²⁷ As they walk round the men have to like, the first man that they go past he helps her to the next man and the next man to the next man. They're brothers and sisters, like two brothers of the man and two brothers of the lady.

Satwant said, 'My brother only likes the bit where... they have to stand up, right, to move the bride around it, and that's the bit.'

Both these subjects were referring to the duty of the bride's and groom's male relatives to show their support for her and for this union by encouraging her on her four circumambulations of the *palki* during each stanza of the *lavan* hymn of Guru Ram Das.²⁸ The only variation from the rite centred on the scriptures came from the Namdhari boy who described the groom (in his *kachhahira*) and bride (in white) 'go[ing] round the fire'.²⁹

Curriculum books, by giving the verses of *lavan* in English, obscure the fact that for the Sikh subjects the atmosphere, spectacle and action were dominant - not the verbal content, which they could not understand.

v) The Party

In most cases the rite in the gurdwara was followed by a 'party' in a neighbouring hall. Usually several hundred guests were present, a disk jockey or group provided extremely loud musical backing, speeches were made, people danced and, sitting at separate tables, men and women consumed Punjabi cuisine served by male members of the bride's family. Of the music and dancing an eight year old girl said, 'They play on keyboards and they play drums, but it's just like *bhangras* and I don't like that because I don't know how to dance any *bhangra*.' One eleven year old boy went to the 'parties' but not to the gurdwara ceremony, his enjoyment being enhanced by his father's musical involvement.

I like dancing, especially when my dad's singing...[He plays] the *baja*. There's a bass guitar, drums, keyboard and *dholki*...My dad makes [the words] up.

Special food and meeting friends were plus points, though some commented negatively and graphically on the men's over-consumption of alcohol. Jasvir was alone in telling me that the music was so loud that it made her feel ill. On the drinking and dancing the young people were exposed to very different parental points of view and practice. With the *amritdhari* parents of Sarbjit, Raspreet and Ravinder, Daljit and Davinder's parents strongly disapproved of some current trends.³⁰ One parent and teacher said: 'What I object to is the drinking and dancing in front of the children and I see that as a very bad influence.' Thus the excesses are precipitating change or polarisation, expressed in local Sikh practice. Kalsi noted simply that 'Sikhs have incorporated many features of the British culture', giving as examples the cutting of the wedding cake during the reception, the honeymoon and a growing tendency to set up home separately from the groom's parents' home (1994/1995:14).

vi) The Bride's Departure

The departure of the bride to her new home is tinged with sorrow for her and her family. In the words of a nine year old boy: 'Usually when they leave the people start to cry and then they start hugging the lady and then they usually give money to the man.' However, an eleven year old boy's perception was of the financial attractiveness of the event for any children present:

[The best bit is] when they throw the money on the car. They do that when the bride leaves her house to go to the other house...to the boy's house...10ps, 5ps, 1p, 2p, sometimes 50p, pound.

These young Sikhs took for granted that the couple would then live in the bridegroom's home. To quote the nine year old boy again: 'The lady goes to the man's house - like if the man lived in London and the lady in Coventry here, yes, and the man has to come all the way here and then the lady has to go all the way to London to live.'³¹

vii) Comment

Taken collectively, subjects' accounts of marriages indicate that they understood that a marriage was not a single ceremony but a succession of events over several weeks or months. These events included making gifts of money and the transformation of the couple's appearance - with turmeric paste, henna designs and clothes of a different order from every day - for example the bridegroom in a turban (even if not otherwise) and the *sarbala* in *kurta pajama*. They were aware of the different emotions associated with the sequence - notably sorrow when the bride was about to leave, and they were aware of the many parts to be played apart from the bride's and groom's. These depended upon one's relationship with the bride or groom, especially whether one was 'on the boy's side' or 'on the girl's side'.

Not only were there variations in the sequence and in the degree of separation between the registration and the religious marriage. Religious commitment and orientation could be manifest in differences of procedure and emphasis. For example Daljit drew a distinction between the 'Singhs' and 'usual people':

The Singhs - you know they've done *amrit* - after they've done that [circumambulated the scriptures] they just eat at the gurdwara and then they see the girl after at the house, but the usual people who drink and all the rest of it, they go back to the club and have parties.

The bride's dress would also be markedly different from the scarlet and gold finery customary at Sikh marriages: '[An *amritdhari* bride] just wears a suit, just you know a normal suit specially made, not a red dress or covered with loads of jewellery - they don't wear jewellery.' These divergent tendencies within the *Panth* exemplify processes identified in chapters eleven and twelve.

Death

The young Sikhs were aware of both the sorrow surrounding a relative's death and the behaviour that was expected. As with other major events the Guru Granth Sahib (*Maharaj*) was involved. Raspreet explained:

You're supposed to have a *maharaj* in your house to like clear the air in the house, because like I told you people have *bhogs* and they bring it to the house just to have it in the house because they want it. People sometimes have it in the house because somebody's died. Everybody mostly has it for a week. That's how long it takes to read it.

At such a time women's and girls' clothes must be appropriate in colour as well as in style, as Amandeep pointed out:

In funerals or when you're going to someone's house to talk to them, like, that's called *aphsos*. You have to wear white. I have to wear white as well. It's because if you wear all coloured things, that means you enjoy it... and I think it's because when they die they're dressed in white [the deceased]. If it's the funeral you have to wear white, but if you just going to see and talk to them you have to wear a white *chunni*.

The Ravidasi boy explained the purpose of the *path* held in the house, which followed a death: 'The *granthi*... reads the book that ensures that the person who has died has a clean life ahead of them without sin.'

Some young people were more vague because young children were not expected to participate either in the funeral (the ceremony at the crematorium and in the gurdwara afterwards) or in the *aphsos* or *masos* - terms used for the visits of condolence that adults are expected to pay to the house of the bereaved. A ten year old boy reported:

I don't get to go to see the person, the one who's dead. They do something if someone dies. They normally go to the temple and do this thing and I don't get to go because my mum goes, 'You're too small'...³² - My cousins, their dad and mum goes and they stay down my house.

Personal bereavement meant, however, that some of the youngest subjects could speak from first hand experience. For example this eight year old girl:

It's very sad for everybody who knows this person who's died and they cry and they cry. They have this *akhand path*... They talk about what happened to them... at your house... We heard that my mum's mother was very ill and in about two more days we had to go to India. So we went there and nearly after about two weeks she died, I'm afraid, and I felt so sad I can't just imagine it.

She described the follow-up of the cremation:

They get burned. The soul goes to heaven and the ash, the body is thrown away. You have to like put the ashes in this like bag. You have to tie it up and throw it in the river.³³

Similarly a twelve year old boy from Ajit Darbar said: 'Sikhs and Hindus normally bum them and send their ashes to one of the holy temples.' In the case of her paternal grandfather, Satwant knew that 'we took *Babaji's* ashes' to Hardwar, where for generations their ancestors' names had been recorded.³⁴

Some interviewees described the part that their older relatives played when an acquaintance died. The eight year old quoted below evoked the sequence of events whenever news arrived of the death of a relative in India.

My nan's normally inside. Like you know somebody died in India, so they're having *akhand path* - no not *akhand path* — it's sort of like when somebody dies everybody comes over to the... person who got phoned to first... She tells the other people. The other people go to her house and then she tells everybody what the story was.

References to 'tell[ing] everybody what the story was' and 'talk[ing] about what happened to them' convey the young subjects' grasp of the communal aspect of bereavement, in which a death is news to be shared and a motive for all acquaintance to pay condolence visits (*aphsos*).

Amrit Chhakna

As indicated above, in some curriculum books the suggestion is made that *amrit pahul*, or (in subjects' words) *amrit chhakna*, 'drinking *amrit*' or '*amrit chhaking*' (see chapter twelve for variants) is an initiation rite associated with puberty. But this masks the reality that probably only a small minority of Sikhs of school-going age go through the *amrit* ceremony (or indeed are expected to do so). Schools' resistance to pupils wearing a *kirpan* was cited by Sarbjit's father as a practical deterrent to her elder brother's desire 'to become a baptised Sikh'. While some Sikhs do take this step in early adolescence, and it would be extremely unusual to do so before, it is a rite, much less frequent than marriage, which can take place at any point during adulthood and (in the event of lapses from the required discipline) at several times in a person's life.³⁵ In some cases subjects referred to the initiation with *amrit* preceding the candidate's marriage, in others as ensuing.

The family, as opposed to individual, aspect of initiation was evident. For example Daljeet and Davinder's thirteen year old cousin said he would take *amrit*: 'when I grow up, but not yet, because my mum and dad are thinking of taking it so they want me to take it when I grow up.'

The broader range of meaning carried by the word *amrit* in subjects' experience is discussed in chapter ten. However those instances where taking *amrit* denoted the act of commitment to the code of discipline characterising Sikhs committed to Khalsa ideals are reported here. Since the rite is private most subjects could not provide eye-witness accounts, even if a close relative had been initiated very recently. Daljit, whose parents had taken *amrit* the previous year said, 'No one's allowed to see it' - but the relative invisibility of the actual ceremony may have added to the young people's sense of its special sanctity.

However Jasvir had seen her aunt's initiation the previous year:

First they tell you the rules, what you can eat and what you can't. They tell you to clean yourself for the week before you're going to do it, and they tell you all the rules what you have to do before you come to the temple once a day or whatever, it's up to you, and they tell you and then they just drink something.

This account suggests that preparation was required of the candidate for *amrit* and so contrasts with the more spontaneous decision to receive *amrit* which was

noted elsewhere by another scholar.³⁶ The Vaisakhi context of many *amrit* initiation ceremonies is outlined in chapter six.

Most frequently the young people mentioned the ceremony in the context of restrictions on diet and appearance. Dietary implications were frequently mentioned. So one eleven year old girl defined *amrit chhakna* as follows: 'that means you become a proper Sikh and you don't eat meat, you don't drink, you don't smoke, you don't eat eggs either.' Likewise, when asked, 'Is it OK for Sikhs to drink alcohol?' a ten year old boy said: 'But not for one that's Khalistan's or drunk Amritsar [i.e. *amrit*]...because they've drunk Amritsar and they're not allowed like to be drunk or eat [meat].'

Thus one eleven year old boy's mother would not drink tea 'because it's like alcohol' and would not eat [cooked] food from the shops because: 'A Sikh mustn't eat what someone else has started eating and cigarette person might have made it.' In consequence she cooked separately for herself to make sure that no one else had eaten from her food and that no smoker had handled it.³⁷

As their references to dietary restrictions suggest, the young people knew that receiving *amrit* in the act of initiation had radical, long term implications for personal discipline. Children spoke of this in the context of what makes a 'proper Sikh' (chapter eleven) both with reference to the lives of others and also with reference to themselves. In the words of one child: 'If I wear all these things and I do all this about drinking *amrit* and everything, I think that's good because I should stick to that because I'm a Sikh and that's what makes me think it's important being a Sikh and sticking to my religion.'

But Daljit's reaction to the dietary constraints imposed upon *amritdharis* was different: '[I] probably won't want to [take *amrit*] because [I'm] used to eating [meat] and it's hard to stop.'

Initiation with *amrit* had implications for appearance as well as for diet. To quote a nine year old girl:

My parents want me to be like same as my brother - to do *amritchhak*, to be good and not smoke and not drink. I'll be wearing a turban, I'll have the five Ks on. I'd have *Amrit*. I'll be a proper Sikh.

Thus aspects of dress (the turban) were mentioned in addition to the maintenance of uncut hair, a necessary (and the best known) part of Khalsa discipline. Nor was the turban seen by all as only a requirement for men (see chapter eleven). Sarbjit mentioned further restrictions on female dress:

Amrit chhakna is like if you want to be God's daughter and you can't cut your hair, you can't have earrings and you can't wear lipstick. Wherever you go you have to wear a *chunni* [gauzy scarf] and turban... One person from the temple gives you some water, he gives you a knife and you have to wear a suit all the time and you're not allowed to do rude things...You're not allowed to show anything of your body.

The following statements (among many others) are further evidence of children's equation of initiation with *amrit* with maintaining the external discipline of the five Ks.

You know the ten Gurus? They all drank *amrit*. People who like wear these knives, they have to drink...(nine year old girl)

You normally wear them [Ks] if you're like *amrit chhakia*. Is it like when you don't cut your hair at any part of your body and you have to wear one of them things, like you have to keep a *kara* with you. If it's women you can have like a turban and a *chunni* on top. Men, they have to wear a turban and have a *kirpan* and all that. (eleven year old girl)

Children's mention of the *amrit* of initiation also included references to lapses in the required code of behaviour and subsequent recommitment, as illustrated by this twelve year old girl's account:

You can't eat meat. You're not supposed to eat meat or smoke or anything...My mum's *bun* [father's sister] has, but she broke it. She ate meat or something.

A nine year old girl recounted how her brother lapsed unintentionally after having received *amrit*.

First he [speaker's brother] had it when he was little. By accident he broke it because he was going to buy some cheese pies, but by accident he bought some beef pies...he remembered... My mum told him that he just had beef, so for about five months he ate meat and then my brother decided that he'd do it again, so when he got to twenty he done it again [i.e. was initiated with *amrit*].

Thus the fact that few envisaged taking *amrit* in the foreseeable future does not imply a falling away from tradition so much as a realisation of the extent to which *amrit chhakna* (unlike, e.g. confirmation) would restrict what they ate and determine how they looked.

Chula

Sarbjit, Davinder, plus one girl and two adult Jat informants mentioned the administration of *chula*, the water that remains after the initiation of candidates with *amrit*. A Panjabi teacher said:

My own children, they had, not fully grown, when they're ten or eleven. We call it the *chula*, that they make it a pledge, when they grow up, they will be Sikh.

A community worker noted:

One girl said to me she had taken *chula*... She said I've taken that one because I like to join with the rest of my family... This is just an initial stage.

In the quotation below a nine year old girl distinguished between the full-fledged rite of *amrit* (when Sikhs commit themselves to maintaining Khalsa practice and principles) and the subsidiary rite of receiving *chula*: 'Her, and my brother and sister, they can't eat it [meat, fish, eggs] because my brother he's got the **five** Ks and me and my big sister we've drunk *chula*... It's when you drink the leftover *amrit*.' She went on to explain that their brother had *chula* when he was small and only had *amrit* when he was thirteen, 'You can't have it when you're small because you have to wear the five Ks'. Similarly Sarbjit mentioned 'having *chula*' as a means of repurification. She explained that currently her mother could not wear *kachhahira* (one of the five Ks):

because of my little sister; she had an operation, my mum did, and then if you have an operation you've got to do your *amrit chhakia* again, like you've just got to have a *chula*. [She'll do it] when my sister's big.

She herself had drunk the *chula* when she was 'about two or three':

When Mum and Dad were going to do *amrit chhakia* my mum took me up and I had water. They made me drink holy water and they put it on my face. [I] had to drink some.

Davinder spoke of drinking *chula* as a minimum requirement for the practice of *nam japna* (sessions of reciting the divine name *Vahiguru* continuously particularly favoured by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha).

Discussion

This chapter has (largely through their own words) shown the extent of subjects' involvement in the rites which mark significant points in the individual's life. In the experience of many, birthday parties are the most

enjoyable. However, marriage and initiation with *amrit* emerge, for different reasons, as the most significant. Taking *amrit* has the most profound consequences for the individual's lifestyle. Many of these young Coventry Sikhs' observations suggested the importance of kin, whether in selecting a baby's name or in assisting with all that marriage entailed. Their recurrent mention of *akhand path* makes clear subjects' perception of the centrality of the scriptures, not so much as a source of memorable teaching, but rather as a visible presence and - even more - as a regulated, audible happening.

As with worship generally (chapter four) subjects were not passively aware of *sanskars* and birthday events but (like Satwant and Jasvir at their brothers' birthday *satsangs*) they were actively involved, behaving in the required manner. Especially in the course of marriages they became aware of gender-related expectations.

This data has also indicated diversity of several orders. For example where procedures for naming a child are concerned parents decide whether or not to consult the Guru Granth Sahib. The solemnisation of marriages shows (in a minority of cases) religious diversification - on the one hand the Namdhari practice, on the other devout *amritdhari*' (including the Akhand Kirtani Jatha and Babbar Khalsa's) purging of perceived abuses - the Hindu-style finery and the consumption of alcohol.

Regarding interaction with western practice Baumann's analysis of birthday parties has already been examined. Using the analogy of language, the rites for the individual Sikh in Britain can also be analysed on the model of the code-switching identified by Romaine (1989). For example, in the case of the birthday party the 'grammatical system' is that of western convention while the mode of celebration is Punjabi. Or, it could be argued, the grammatical system is Panjabi, since in some cases the mode is altogether Sikh (an *akhand path*). Here the code-switching is of a different order to that represented by a 'party' where, however, the food or dance differ from the dominant British norm. Using the linguistic analogy this is an English sentence with words or short phrases of Panjabi incorporated. With the *amrit* ceremony - a distinctively Sikh act of commitment - the 'language' is both literally and metaphorically Panjabi. Both the birthday party and parts of the sequence of marriage-related activity can be likened to 'inter-sentential switching in which the languages are switched after almost every other word or two' (Chana and Romaine 1984:456). Underlying these processes are the individual decisions, themselves stimulated by the cumulative pressures identified in chapter twelve.

This diverse, fluid situation is a far cry from the image of the ageless, almost changeless *samskara*, a rite literally conducted in the immutable language of scripture (as described in Kanitkar (1984). Thus the experience of these young Sikhs suggests limitations in the presentation to be found in

curriculum books. Firstly most of these suggest a particular sequence of *sanskars*. This includes one (putting *amrit* in the baby's mouth) which is not generally known and another (*amrit chhakna*) whose implications make it rare for a schoolchild to take this step of commitment. Moreover the focus on the *lavan* obscures children's experience of marriage as a succession of (equally) necessary events. The inclusion in some books of English translations of the *lavan* stanzas obscures the fact that the young Sikhs are unlikely to have any cognitive understanding of the words.

Continuing this discussion the focus of the next chapter is on the changing role and content of annual festivals in the nurture of young Sikhs.

NOTES

- 1 Whereas 'sacrament' is derived from Latin *sacramentum*, meaning an oath, *sanskar* (refining; purificatory rite) shares its root with Hindi *sanskrit* (culture) and the word *Sanskrit* (refined language) itself.
- 2 *Pahul* is the *amrit* stirred with the *khanda*. See Nabha (3rd ed 1974:759)
- 3 Chapters two and three have mentioned marriage breakdown in subjects' families.
- 4 Joy Barrow, oral communication, December 1994.
- 5 Cole (1994a 53-54) suggests that 'modern Sikh parents...value a daughter as much as a son'. Contrast Sandhu (writing of two *tats*, the Ravidasis and Valmiki in Punjab) 'A boy's birth is a happy occasion but not a girl's' (1977:118).
- 6 Mangal Singh of Sikh Cultural Society had not seen this occur (oral communication, 19 November 1994). Clutterbuck (1990:48-49, (Butler (1993:38) and Thorley (1989:22) describe this, perhaps following Cole and Sambhi (1978:112), Cole (2nd ed 1985:83) and Sambhi (1989:18). Emmett has an artist's impression (1994:19) and Penney (1988:43), like Cole (1994:94), a photo. This passage is absent from McLeod's translation (1984:81).
- 7 According to *Rahit Maryada* 'the officiating *granthi* should propose a name beginning with the same letter as the first word of the randomly-chosen shabad' (ibid and Sikh Missionary Resource Centre nd:11) but the translation (ibid:31) and Cole and Samabhi (1978:113) omit the *granthi* proposing the name.

- 8 Her account suggests wrongly that the name itself was in the Guru Granth Sahib.
- 9 cf Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:62).
- 10 According to Kalsi a birthday:

Usually...begins with *sahei [sic] path* or *akhand path* (reading of the Guru Granth Sahib) at a *gurdwara* followed by entertainments at a community centre where gifts are received from relatives and friends (1994/1995:14-15).
- 11 Baumann (1992) and Kalsi (1993) mention the significance of certain ages. Presumably following western convention, Kalsi mentions eighteen and twenty one.
- 12 'Tarkhan' and 'Chamar' are terms disrespectful to the *zats* concerned, who prefer 'Rangarhia' and 'Ravidasi' respectively. I did not arrive early enough to note whether the Muslims paid respect to the scriptures on their arrival. Whereas Larson (1989:97) describes South Asian children of different faith communities mediating their traditions and social networks 'through these parties', in this case adults of different faith backgrounds were interacting.
- 13 Readings of *Sukhmani Sahib* are a popular (shorter) alternative to *akhand path*.
- 14 cf Jackson and Nesbitt (1994) for the role of video in the perpetuation of South Asian culture.
- 15 This is the customary way of blessing the food.
- 16 This is the customary way of honouring a distinguished visitor to a *gurdwara*.
- 17 Otherwise at this point it would be ceremonially carried out of the house.
- 18 Presumably this imbalance underlies Kaur-Singh's exhortation:

The celebration of a girl's birthday should be on the same scale as that of a boy's birthday (1994:156).
- 19 Many girls expressed sorrow at the prospect of leaving their parents. Cf Hindu children's expectations in Jackson and Nesbitt (1993).

- 20 Like Jhutti (1999), who insists — rightly in many instances — that western perceptions of arranged marriages are misguided, Kalsi apparently overlooked substantial, continuing Matra practice when he observed:

A fundamental change has occurred in the process of mate-selection among the Sikhs. Nowadays it has become a norm to consult and seek the agreement of boy and girl before finalising the marriage negotiations. Moreover, the boy and girl are introduced to each other and allowed to meet in order to ascertain their suitability as future husband and wife (1994/1995:14).

- 21 Paramjeet Singh expressed reservations about the tendency of curriculum books to omit what he saw as the other indispensable stages (oral communication).
- 22 Increasingly, gurdwaras are registered for marriages: see, e.g. 'Temple Official has Wedding Licence', *Multimag*, October 1991.
- 23 Moreover subjects' use of the words 'engagement' and 'engaged' obscures the fact that there are several stages designated in Panjabi by, e.g. *rokha*, *kurmai*, *mangant*, *chunni*, none of which exactly correspond to 'engagement'. See Nesbitt (1980a) and Paramjeet Singh (1995). Among curriculum books Bennett (1985) suggests the ritual build-up.
- 24 The *pag* is usually a propitious pink or red.
- 25 See Nesbitt (1980), Jackson and Nesbitt (1993).
- 26 *Kurta pajama* suits consist of a loose cotton or silk shirt (without a collar) worn over loose matching trousers of the same fabric.
- 27 'The thing that he holds' is a *palla*, a length of cloth.
- 28 For the words in translation see McLeod (1984:118-120).
- 29 Namdharis' marriages are distinctive for being performed (like Hindu ones) around a fire and for a stand against excessive expenditure as evidenced by the couple's simple dress and the custom of Satguru presiding over mass marriages.
- 30 Such views concur with the strong criticisms of the Sikh Cultural Society (1991b:13-14 and 16). More mildly Ramindar Singh writes:

Public drinking by Sikh women is rare but for many men this is a popular weekend pursuit (1992:10).

- 31 No allusion was made to the joking 'ritual' of tying threads and other traditional contests involving the couple and other relatives. See Nesbitt (1991).
- 32 Whereas 'going to the temple' is now a custom in Britain, Kalsi points out that it has no 'religious significance' and was initially a practical development to accommodate the number of mourners:
- In Punjab the gurdwara did not figure in the funeral. It was a pure place... As soon as the coffin arrives there it is opened to the public for a final darshan for a few minutes followed by ardas by the granthi invoking blessing for a safe journey to the crematorium, before moving on (1994/1995:15).
- 33 Sikhs continue the Hindu custom of disposing of the ashes in flowing water. Firth (nd) provides detail.
- 34 Hardwar is especially holy to Hindus. British estuarial water and (for its associations with Guru Hagobind's son) the river at Kiratpur Sahib (Punjab) are also used. *Rahit Maryada* simply describes 'the nearest canal or river' (Sikh Missionary Resource Centre nd:35).
- 35 I have witnessed this in Coventry when *amritdhari* Sikh women had lapsed by having their ears pierced or removing facial hair.
- 36 Joy Barrow (oral communication).
- 37 Fro Hindu parallels (e.g. among Pushtimargis) see Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:57). Smoking was banned by Guru Gobind Singh so is especially abhorrent to *amridtharis*,

Chapter 6

Annual Festivals

Introduction

Subjects' participation in annual festivals provides the basis of discussion in this chapter. Their centrality to cultural transmission has been widely noted (McKim Marriott nd.; Nesbitt 1980a; Logan 1988a). They figure prominently in coverage of the tradition in curriculum books of which some are dedicated to this theme (Davidson 1982; Kapoor 1985; Cole and Sambhi 1986; Babraa 1989).

In this chapter discussion of the nature of diversity and change within the *Panth* noted in chapters three, four and five, is developed firstly by reference to festivals shared with Hindus or with Christian/secular western society and secondly by detailed analysis of the Vaisakhi festival.' This serves as a 'key event' in which processes of formal nurture (chapters seven and eight) are strongly interwoven and diversity and change are evident. The importance of children's nurture to the development of the festival suggests the need (building on Baumann 1992) to consider children as a 'constituency'. Indeed most of this chapter is an account of the festival of Vaisakhi as subjects experienced it in April 1992.

There are six reasons for giving Vaisakhi celebrations this prominence. First, in subjects' accounts of festivals Vaisakhi figured more prominently than any other. Secondly, in terms of the history of the Sikh tradition Vaisakhi has unique significance as the day in 1699 on which the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, established a new community of followers, the Khalsa or pure, defined by their code of appearance and conduct and initiated with *amrit*, sweetened

water stirred with a double bladed sword.² For this reason the day which had been for centuries a Hindu festival of harvest thanksgiving is observed by Sikhs as a *mela* (literally 'fair') often described as 'the birthday of the Khalsa'. Thirdly, among the anniversaries of the *Panth*, Vaisakhi is not only celebrated in grand style (with an *akhand path*, *kirtan* and procession) but also has two distinctive features: the initiation of candidates into the Khalsa by *amrit chhakna* and the cleansing and reclothing of the flag, the *nishan sahib*.³ Fourthly, among Sikhs in Coventry, as elsewhere in the UK since the 1950s, the festival has become a 'focus of Sikh corporate identity' (Kalsi 1994:1995:12).⁴ Fifthly, several of the developments particularly involve children. For example Sikh leaders and local school teachers have developed the opportunity afforded by Vaisakhi for formal teaching and youth-centred activities. Thus in the study of the nurture of young Sikhs Vaisakhi emerged as one of the 'key or focal events that the fieldworker can use to analyse an entire culture' (Fetterman 1989:93). Sixthly, curriculum books afford Vaisakhi a major place (e.g. Clutterbuck 1990:36; Butler 1992:33; Cole and Sambhi 1986).

Vaisakhi is not described in isolation, but prefaced and contextualised by accounts (largely in subjects' own words) of their participation in three types of festival: firstly the *gurpurbs* or anniversaries of the Gurus which are distinctive of the *Panth*, secondly some annual celebrations which are peculiar to particular congregations and are related to *sants* not universally recognised by the *Panth* and, thirdly, certain festivals which many Sikhs share with Hindus (namely Divali and Rakhri) and with western society (Christmas). In the case of some major anniversaries (including Vaisakhi) details of celebration conform to a particular *sant's* requirements and this is noted.

Gurpurbs

Gurpurbs (literally the rising of a Guru), are annual commemorations of the births or martyrdoms of the Gurus, and they are all observed in a similar manner. Characteristic of all the *gurpurbs* is an *akhand path* in the gurdwara timed to culminate on the morning of the festival concerned or - as is more often the case in Coventry - of the Sunday following it.⁵ The *bhog* (conclusion of the *akhand path*) draws more people than attend on other Sundays. The programme of *kirtan* is longer than usual and it features visiting *ragis* who present *shabads* and stories appropriate to the occasion. Sometimes a procession, headed by the scriptures installed on a large vehicle, with a vanguard of *panj piare* in attendance, moves slowly along the road between the two biggest gurdwaras in Coventry (cf Kalsi 1994). This was referred to by subjects as *jalu'* (procession) or '*nagar kirtan*' (city[-wide] singing of hymns).⁶

The dates (by the secular, Gregorian calendar) of the *gurpurbs* change annually as they are calculated according to the lunar calendar. (This is not the case with Vaisakhi and a few other anniversaries which are calculated by a

solar calendar.)? The major *gurpurbs* are Guru Nanak's birthday which falls on the day of the full moon of the lunar month of *kartak* (usually in November), the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadar (eighteen days later), Guru Gobind Singh's birthday (which falls in either December or January), the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev (in June) and the installation of the scriptures in 1604 (*Shri Guru Granth Sahib da pahila prakash*) in August.⁸

The similar manner in which all these days are observed was apparent in subjects' accounts. For example an eight year old girl commented:

I know the prophets' birthdays...we celebrate a lot. We have a nice dinner. That's the most nice thing to me - a really nice dinner - rice, my favourite, *tilda rice*.

Conveying a similar impression of sameness, Raspreet mentioned what for her was a more wearisome aspect:

Sometimes there's the birthdays of all the Gurus and you always have to go to the gurdwara on that day in the morning at least. But sometimes we don't want to go because we're feeling tired - just before school at eight o'clock you go and come at eight thirty.

Sarbjit, however, singled out Guru Nanak's birthday:

God's birthday, that's on November 20th and they have a big celebration in every gurdwara, and sometimes they do a *nagar kirtan*, like a long walk...and you walk to different temples. Sometimes they have one of them and sometimes they celebrate at the temple. Like there's lots of people and they have different things to eat. They take the Guru Granth Sahib on a lorry.

Amandeep too spoke appreciatively of Guru Nanak's birthday which she associated with domestic celebration entailing special food and dress. 'We have sweets like *mithai* at home... [We wear] Indian suits, like if we're having a party or something.' and Amarjit mentioned having (eggless) cake in his gurdwara Panjabi class.

The martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev (roasted to death on a hot plate) in 1608 occurred at the hottest time of year in north India and is marked in India by the distribution of cooling drinks (Nesbitt 1980a). In Coventry the *shahidi din* (martyrdom day) provided an incentive for a programme of *kirtan* performed in the Ramgarhia gurdwara (in advance of the major commemoration) by pupils of the music classes. This is described in chapter eight.

In 1984 Operation Bluestar, the forcible entry of the hallowed precincts of the Golden Temple by the Indian army with many resultant fatalities, coincided with pilgrims' commemoration of Guru Arian Dev's martyrdom. In the Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara, on the Sunday following the date of this recent tragedy (June 3rd), and preceding the commemoration of the *shahidi din* (a week later because of its calculation by the lunar calendar), memories of the events of 1984 were reinforced by the meeting of an international militant organisation and an orange banner over the entrance emblazoned in roman capitals with 'Khalistan'.

While Guru Gobind Singh's birthday is a major *gurpurb* for all Sikhs, for some of the young Sikhs in Coventry the scale of the celebration of this day by devotees of the Nanaksar sub-tradition provided the dominant memory of the day. Wherever the *sant* was on this anniversary his devotees laid on spectacular celebrations of the *gurpurb*. When the *sant* spent Guru Gobind Singh's birthday among devotees in Canada or in his native village of Siahar (Punjab), the celebrations there were also remarkable in scale and pageantry.⁹ Of the 12th January 1992, a ten year old girl recalled:

When it was Guru Gobind Singh's birthday our God came from India. We went around two gurdwara and we had something to eat on the way and people threw flowers and they used to do this too [putting palms together in a respectful greeting] ...and there was two bands playing.

A ten year old boy said:

That man's about eighty something. He's Guru... He is a Guru but not one of the famous ones. I even saw where his cake was made, where my shop is, across the road - ten layers I think on his birthday... five for Guru Gobind Singh and five for himself.

A glass vehicle, with the bodywork of its infrastructure resembling blue and brown marble, had been specially designed and constructed to convey the Guru Granth Sahib (installed on a golden-domed *palki*), the seated eighty-seven year old *Babaji*, and attendant *bahingams* (of whom two stood with upright swords in the front).¹⁰ The interior was decorated with bunches of artificial flowers. As this beautifully crafted float - a transparent gurdwara on wheels - moved slowly along the road from the Nanaksar gurdwara it was preceded by the saffron-clad *panj piare*, each holding a saffron pennant, the *nishan sahib*. They in turn were preceded by two uniformed bands of (non-Asian) musicians, their heads uncovered. As the vehicle drew near them the throng packing the pavements and overflowing into front-gardens surged happily and quietly forward. Many touched the lower part of the vehicle and the singing of

shabads could be heard, punctuated by the traditional exchange '*Jo bole sonihal Sat Sri Akal*'.¹¹

Anniversaries of *Sants*

By devotees at the Nanaksar gurdwara Baba Mihan Singh was venerated as the living successor to Baba Nand Singh, a Sikh of remarkable piety.¹² As in gurdwaras of the Nanaksar sub-tradition elsewhere, the *barasi* (anniversary of Baba Nand Singh's death) was celebrated each year in August (Nesbitt 1985a:74).

Likewise in the Ajit Darbar the celebration of 'Babaji's birthday' was an annual highpoint. A ten year old girl provided the information that:

They have a framed picture of Baba Ajit Singh... and when it's God's birthday we take it down and put it on a chair that they use to sit on and then we put, we've made a birthday card up. It's got dried flowers on it. We put it next to it and we make a birthday cake. That's what we do once a year.

A nine year old girl spoke of:

When it's Baba Ajit Singh's birthday on the 24th of December. He wasn't [here] last year and they started *shabad* at seven o'clock and they end it on the morning on Christmas day about three o'clock, five or six o'clock, and they make cake and everything.

The practice of observing the birthday of living spiritual teachers and the death anniversaries of deceased *sants* distinguishes the gurdwaras established by the followers of certain *sants* from the others.¹³ It also parallels the celebration of 'Guru Ravidas's birthday' and Valmik Jayanti in the Ravidasi and Valmiki places of worship respectively (Nesbitt 1991) and the anniversaries of *avatars* and gurus in Hindu *sampradayas* (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:7941).

Festivals Shared With Hindus

Although in Punjab Vaisakhi predates Sikh tradition it is not generally celebrated among Punjabi Hindus in Britain. Accordingly this section comprises only Rakhri, Divali and Lohri. Vaisakhi is dealt with later in the chapter.

a) Rakhri

Rakhri (better known by its Sanskrit name of Raksha Bandhan) celebrates the bond between brothers and sisters of all ages, including 'cousin brothers' and 'cousin sisters' i.e. first cousins.¹⁴ Ravinder and Raspreet' brother received a lot of the ornamental threads (*rakhrian*). In his sister's words:

Oh, there's Rakhri, by the way. My brother he wears loads of *rakhris* on his arm. My mum - cos he gets pocket money - he has to save £5, £6 or £7, he has to give us a pound each.

The Namdhari boy received money for this purpose from his father. An eleven year old boy' account omitted the financial aspect!

We... keep *rakhrian*. It's a way of saying you love someone... It's like the sisters put like a rope on your arm and we give them *barfi*.¹⁵

A further account (this time from a Ramgarhia household) comes from the field notes. On August 13th, Amarjit and his sister put on smart new clothes and their mother braided their hair firmly. *Rakhris* had arrived from India by post - two with oval photographs of the sender (one a 'cousin-sister') stuck on the rosette. The 'ceremony' was a simple exchange between siblings (as illustrated in Nesbitt 1991:28), with none of the extra detail observable in some Hindu homes (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:47, Nesbitt 1991:21). While it was in progress everyone, including Mum and Dad who kept popping into the shop to serve customers, had an eye on the Indian film on TV Asia.

First the sister closest in age to Amarjit, then each of their two younger sisters in turn, tied her *rakhri* on Amarjit's right wrist, the youngest needing help to do so. Then each sister put some *gajrela* (a sweetmeat made from carrots and milk) topped with icing (from a plate of rectangular chunks) in his mouth. The youngest tried to post in a whole piece. Then grandma produced three ten pound notes and Amarjit coyly handed one to each sister. Each note, he later explained, consisted of five pounds from him and five from his baby cousin. After visiting some more cousins in Birmingham he totalled ten *rakhrian*, and the baby also received some.

However, despite its prominence for some families, not all subjects mentioned this festival and a Sikh teacher in another city argued publicly that Sikhs should desist from this festival as it was not Sikh.¹⁶

b) Divali

Many more subjects mentioned Divali, which together with birthdays and Christmas was rated as one of the highpoints of their year. For a ten year old boy Divali was a favourite occasion:

because we can light fireworks and go to people's houses and go temple and light candles. We go to people's houses and give all Indian sweets, and sometimes they give me money, that's if I go, and we make *samoses* and other stuff.

His eight year old sister affirmed:

I like Divali best because you can have parties at your house and you can celebrate Divali and if people come to meet you sometimes they give you Easter eggs and presents... We put little lights on, little candles.

No subjects referred to any ritual associated with Lakshmi or wealth such as those observed by some Hindus (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:83), and Sikhs of Bhatra caste (Nesbitt 1980a:75-76), although one ten year old boy's account is reminiscent of these:

My dad once made this little house for the candles. He made a house about one metre big and one metre width and lots of windows, and in the windows there's candles lighted... They only say one word. They say, 'Satnam' or they say, 'Satnam Sri Vahiguru'.

Divali is, like Rakhri, a festival shared with Hindus. Unlike Rakhri, but like Vaisakhi, it is recognised as a *meta* in the Sikh calendar. Moreover its place is publicly justified by reference to Sikh history since it is believed that on this day, by imperial edict the sixth Guru, Hargobind, was released from Gwalior gaol together with fellow prisoners whose release he had secured.¹⁷ To quote Jasvir: 'We celebrate Divali because Guru Hargobind came from [gaol] and Hindus celebrate Ram and Sita coming back as well.'¹⁸ The twelve year old boy from Ajit Darbar related the story. Amarjit knew only (and, as it happens, incorrectly) that 'Guru Nanak done something on that day'. The incorporation of Divali in Sikh religious tradition was symbolised by Amarjit's reference to lighting candles in the 'temple' and the account by a twelve year old boy of the celebration put on by the Ajit Darbar: 'We have a big bonfire...tea, because it's normally a cold night and we set off...bangers - about £300 all at once.'

c) Lohri

Subjects' awareness of Lohri, another festival common to Hindus and Sikhs, celebrated by families into which a son has been born during the previous year, was not explored (Dosanjh 1976:142-143; Nesbitt 1980; Jackson and Nesbitt 1993). Earlier research among Ravidasis and Valmikiis suggested that its celebration has waned in Britain (Nesbitt 1991:21). Only the *granthi's* son mentioned Lohri celebrated with '*naungphuli*' (peanuts) and '*reuri*' (sesame sweets) at the gurdwara.¹⁹

Christmas

By contrast Christmas, which had no place in Sikh tradition prior to settlement in Britain, has become an established feature of young Sikhs' year.²⁰ It is

included in this chapter because of subjects' frequent (and happy) references to it, because it exemplifies processes which are discussed in chapter twelve and because it further contextualises the development of the Vaisakhi festival.

Christmas was celebrated by subjects, with no hint in their accounts of the tension suggested by Alibhai (1987), as a family party with a tasty meal and the exchange of presents even in the families that were most strictly committed to Sikh tradition. For example Ravinder related:

We celebrate Christmas lightly, we don't do it religiously as Christ and all that. It's like a gathering and my cousins come down and give each other presents. We have a dinner and watch TV.

She explained that the food would include a vegetarian option such as lasagna for the four members of the family who did not eat meat. Similarly Sarbjit commented: 'You can get lots of presents and things (and eat] crisps - dinner like cheese pasties and things like that.'

The accounts of these two girls whose parents were *amritdhari* suggest a tendency for the Christmas festive food to be European rather than Punjabi, even when strict dietary rules preclude traditional non-vegetarian Christmas fare.

Receiving gifts was foremost in the minds of one ten year old (Ramgarhia) boy and a nine year old (Jat) boy who recalled respectively: 'Christmas day we open all our toys and on Boxing Day we can mess about. I like messing about,' and:

First of all I wake up before my mum and dad...The first thing they say, 'Do you want to have your breakfast or open the presents?' I just say, 'I'll open my presents'.

In other words there is no attempt at relating Christmas to religious ritual, as occurred with one Hindu family (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:82). Nor did the 'face to face' exchange of presents incorporate the pretence of Father Christmas visiting (Baumann 1992:105).

The inclusion of Christmas in the calendar of non-Christian minorities in Britain receives comment in a growing body of literature (Alibhai 1987; Baumann 1992, 1993, 1994; Kuper 1993; Larson 1989). Alibhai characterises Christmas as epitomising 'invasion' and 'exclusion' by a cruelly dominant culture. For Baumann the replication in Sikh homes of perceived aspects of the majority's celebrations illustrates 'convergence' (members of several faith traditions incorporating the practice of yet another) and the capacity for ritual to

be directed towards 'others' (those outside one's own ethnic or faith community).

Vaisakhi

a) Introduction

The more detailed chronicling of Vaisakhi which follows can now be seen in the context of other festivals and the changes evident in their contemporary celebration in Coventry: the transfer of congregational celebration of *gurpurbs* to the following Sunday, the opportunity they afford for a 'children's programme', the divergent particularities of ritual in sant-dominated gurdwaras, the continuing absence of gift-exchange. Gift exchange is a secular feature of the festivals of Christmas and Easter which Britain's Sikhs, like Hindus, share (without engaging in worship) with Christians - and so it provides an example of 'convergence' for Baumann (1994).

In Coventry in 1992, the gurdwara-based Vaisakhi celebrations spanned three weeks, comprising a sports day, competitions, cake-cutting, a procession, the ceremonial switching on of street illuminations as well as *akhand paths*, *amrit* ceremonies, renewing of the *nishan sahibs*, *kirtans*. The build-up began several weeks earlier in supplementary classes in schools and gurdwaras.

When describing Vaisakhi the young people spoke about the following aspects: its history, the sports, the procession and the washing of the flagpoles. The following diary of the festival draws on fieldnotes, the photographic record, interviews and printed ephemera mentioned below. Subjects' references to taking *amrit* were not generally based upon personal observation and are dealt with in chapters five and ten. To quote one example from many - some very detailed - on the history Davinder said:

Waisakhi day [our tenth teacher] he got the Sikhs together and said that this is the rule I've been sent down to tell you from God to tell you to keep, and he did the *amrit* and that and said, "Now no more should cut their hair and no-one should eat meat".'

b) Preparation in Supplementary Classes - March 8

In the Ramgarhia gurdwara the Sunday Panjabi class began with the headteacher announcing the sports day on the fifth of April and the procession on the twelfth. For this he said the girls must wear blue *chunnis*.²¹ While other pupils were learning Panjabi (as described in chapter seven) a group of teenage boys copied and enlarged a picture of Guru Gobind Singh from the cover of a booklet to a white board (sufficiently large to cover the back of a truck) marked out in pencil squares. Thus, paralleling practice in other faith traditions (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993, Nesbitt 1991b) festivals provided Panjabi classes with content and the classes facilitated preparation for the celebration.

c) A 'Spring Celebration' in a Secondary School - April 3

A secondary school in the north of the city, which was attended by two of the young people, held an evening Spring Celebration which the programme described as a celebration of Id, Vaisakhi and Easter. These two pupils opened the programme by saying *Vahiguruji ka khalsa sri Vahiguru ji ki fateh* and accompanying themselves on harmonium and *tabla* as they sang '*Vah vah Guru Gobind Singh ji*' in praise of the tenth Guru. This was followed by items of music, dance and drama including *bhangra* (of the more traditional type) and a 'family *bhangra* disco'.

Both the preservation of 'traditional' *bhangra* as a staged event and the fusion of *bhangra* with western disco music illustrate processes of change in the diaspora - processes in 'secular' Punjabi culture not paralleled in the 'religious' domain. At the same time the incorporation of praise of the Guru in a school cultural programme illustrates the practical multiculturalism of local educational policy.

d) Vaisakhi Sports Day - April 5

Several hundred Sikh adults and children gathered in a large sports hall for Vaisakhi Festival 1992'. This consisted of competitive events including a sack race, three legged race and a spoon race and sports for older participants. Contestants wore trousers (not Punjabi suits) and T shirts printed with the *khanda* emblem and 'Vaisakhi Festival 1992'. Announcements were all made in English. *Samosae*, *pakoras*, tea, coca cola and juice were available and a lunch of *puns*, spicy chick peas, yoghurt and *jalebis* was served. The winners of the sports events and other competitions (e.g. Vaisakhi-related drawing) received metal trophies 'like an ice cream stick with fire coming out' (a flaming torch) and medals in a prize-giving finale.

Meanwhile in an adjacent room was a display of Punjabi coins, pictures and books and an exhibition mounted by the City Library. This featured tapes and records of Panjabi songs, books and posters. Children coloured in outlines of *bhangra* dancers, played Panjabi snakes and ladders, tried to assemble a Punjabi family jigsaw and to trace their family history on maps of Punjab.

Participants received a ninety-six page souvenir brochure in which the many Vaisakhi-related items included reproductions of winning pencil drawings of Vaisakhi by children under nine, winning essays on Vaisakhi in Panjabi and English by older competitors plus photographs of all the winning entrants.

This event can be understood as the elders' attempt to present a traditional festival attractively for children, as perpetuation of a Sikh emphasis (from the time of Guru Angad) on physical fitness and contests (Khushwant Singh rep1977:52), or as an instance of Orans' rank concession syndrome'

whereby an aspect of majority culture is appropriated to signal an ethnically specific event (1965). The library service's initiative demonstrated institutional recognition of the need to build minority children's esteem for their cultural heritage.

e) Panjabi Class in a Primary School - April 9

In a primary school in the north of Coventry a peripatetic Panjabi teacher gave three pupils their weekly lesson. She told the story of Vaisakhi when 'Guru Gobind Singh made people Sikhs' and mentioned that it was also a harvest festival. She asked the class to name the '*panj kakke*' (five Ks), writing each in turn on the blackboard in Panjabi. She explained bilingually. 'He created a new religion which is called *Khalsa*, *Khalsa* means pure - clean, pure' and '*Khalsa panth da janam hoia*' (i.e. the *Khalsa Panth* was born). She continued, 'Like on Thursday here they're happy because they have wages, there they're happy with harvest. They give gifts and wear new clothes'.

Here, in the setting of a secular institution, a Sikh passes on culturally specific information and in doing so turns to local secular practice (pay-day) to convey to young British Sikhs the meaning of Vaisakhi.

f) Collective Worship in a Primary School - April 10

Satwant said subsequently that at Vaisakhi: 'We did a dance, *bhangra* dance, to it, we talked about the ten Gurus.' In her primary school (which was attended by several subjects) the theme of the morning's collective worship (to which parents were invited) was Vaisakhi - Id and Easter had been the themes of earlier 'assemblies'. Display boards exhibited pupils' drawings of the five Ks and the word 'Baisakhi' was surrounded by relevant pictures in felt tip. After greeting all present in Urdu, Gujarati and English, a group of children stood and read from individual cards about Vaisakhi before they all sang to keyboard, recorder and harmonium accompaniment:

Thank you Lord for Baisakhi day....right where we are.
 Thank you Lord for the crops we've reaped...
 Thank you Lord for all your gifts...
 Thank you Lord for Baisakhi day...
 Thank you Lord for this new year...

Next a girl read about the 'birth of the Khalsa' and slides of Guru Gobind Singh appeared on the overhead projector as children stood in turn to read the story of Vaisakhi day 1699 from their sheets: 'The Guru gave them a drink called amrit made of water and sugar'... 'All Sikh men should be called Singh'. One of the few boys with a topknot read out what the five Ks were before an English boy announced, 'Baisakhi is also new year. On April 12th Sikhs in Coventry will have a procession...On the 13th they will wash {the flagpole}... and worship their Guru'. In turn, pairs of children held **up** and read about each of the five

Ks, concluding with a *keshdhari* boy and girl proclaiming that 'hair is a gift from God'.

Next a (non-Asian) boy said 'Sikhs should live by a set of rules' and children held up cards including 'There is one God', 'Never lie' and 'All people are equal'. After a group had acted the story of 'the boy who cried wolf' another group sang, to harmonium accompaniment, a Panjabi song with the refrain 'Guru Gobind Singh *ji aye*' (i.e. Guru Gobind Singh came) and this was followed by a stick dance for the recent Hindu festival of Holi and girls, dressed in Punjabi suits, performing *bhangra*, with white hankies hanging from the second fingers of their left hands. A boy received a star for swimming, a girl received an Easter egg from the kitchen staff for helping. Then a ticket was drawn in a guide dog appeal.

Here formal nurture of young Sikhs occurs simultaneously with familiarising all pupils in seasonal details of Sikh (and Hindu) tradition. Contextualised by the format of school 'assembly' Vaisakhi is validated by the educational establishment. Meanwhile Vaisakhi provides a basis for moral injunctions (e.g. 'never lie'). The song 'Thank you Lord' suggests careful melding of the Sikh calendar and an originally Christian hymn form.

g) Cake-Cutting - April 12

The Sunday morning class at the Ramgarhia gurdwara was drawing to a close, with the head teacher firing questions from the microphone about Guru Gobind Singh and the 'first Vaisakhi' in 1699. A cake, covered in newspaper, was brought in. The children were asked to name the *panj piare* and replied, carefully prefixing each name by the title '*Bhaf*' and suffixing it with '*Ji*'. A senior teacher explained the deeper significance of the *panj piare*: the forenames of three, Daya, Dharam and Himmat signified essential human qualities namely compassion, faith and endeavour.

Then there were cries of '*Bole sonihal Sat Sri Akal*' as five teenage lads entered wearing turbans and an orange *kurta* over their ordinary trousers. Each also wore a sword about three feet long. The cake (made without eggs) was an oblong sponge with 'Vaisakhi' on it in brown Roman capitals. This was now at the kitchen-end of one of the tables and these *panj piare* stood in a row behind it while everyone said *Ardas* (without removing their shoes), and, when they reached the names of the original *panj piare*, they enunciated these very clearly. Next the five boys representing the *panj piare* cut the cake with a *kirpan*, all hands together. Then each in turn cried, '*Bole sonihar*' and everyone responded '*Sat Sri Akal*'. The cake was then sliced.

Questions and answers on Sikh history continued and the teachers gave each child a packet of salt and vinegar flavoured crisps, a KitKat, a packet of peanuts, a carton of Five Alive or mango juice and a slice of cake.

The Vaisakhi cake at the Ramgarhia gurdwara Sunday morning Panjabi class, like the wedding cake and the birthday cake mentioned in chapter five, suggested the incipient incorporation of a western practice, but in modified form. On the analogy of bilingualism invoked in the previous chapter, Vaisakhi is part of a Panjabi 'grammatical system' in which the discourse is embedded increasingly with English sentences, clauses and nouns. Moreover within English clauses are introduced Panjabi 'phrases', for the cake contained no eggs and it was ceremonially cut not with a knife but with a *kirpan*. This gesture was clearly reminiscent of the touching of the *karah prashad* with the *kirpan* when *Ardas* is said.²² Nevertheless cake and cake-cutting exemplify the convergence discussed by Baumann (1994).

h) Procession - April 12

At 3.45 pm, the unusually long *kirtan* was drawing to a close in the Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara with a speaker urging people to explain the meaning of Vaisakhi if the procession led to questions. Outside in the carpark a lorry was being decorated with tinsel to serve as a float and Sikhs were gathering. In the road the Warwick Corps of Drums stood ready to march and police in luminous jenkins moved about. The Guru Granth Sahib was borne on a man's head to the lorry for installation in it on a *palki*.

At 4.30 the procession formed, with a band initially playing Beatles tunes, followed by two rows of *panj piare* dressed in yellow with swords pointing heavenward. Behind them came the float bearing the Guru Granth Sahib attended by a *granthi*. Men and women, all with their heads covered, followed behind singing. After them came the Radio Harmony car, recording the occasion, the Warwick Corps of Drums and then a float from the Guru Hargobind gurdwara carrying members of the congregation including one of my interviewees, the *granthi's* son, playing his *tabla*. Next in the procession were children from the Ramgarhia gurdwara on a float, the back of which was covered with the picture of the first Vaisakhi which they had produced in their class.

i) Illuminations - April 12

The procession made a temporary stop in Foleshill for speeches in English and Panjabi and for the switching on of the illuminations. One speaker explained in English the meaning of Vaisakhi, a councillor addressed the gathering. Handouts, produced in both English and Panjabi by the 'Council of Coventry Gurdwaras (Sikh Temples)', were distributed to passers by.²³ These made clear that: 'We are to-day celebrating the Vaisakhi festival which is the first day of the Indian Vikrami year.'²⁴ The sheet outlined the events of Vaisakhi 1699 when five brave disciples of Guru Gobind Singh offered themselves for sacrifice and 'were administered Amrit (Baptism of the double-edged Sword)'. Guru Gobind Singh's commands to the Khalsa were given and an English rendering of the opening lines of his hymn, *Jap Sahib*.

The *Ardas* was said and at 6.40 the coloured light bulbs that hung suspended between the lamp posts were turned on by the 'Five beloved Ones'.²⁵ Attached to lamp posts along the Foleshill Road were discs, each with a Gurmukhi word in the centre such as '*Satnam*' and '*Vahiguru*' and with English explanations around the edge including 'God is great' and 'Khanda temporal, spiritual sword of equity'.

A ten year old subject summarised the procession as follows:

Sometimes they bring out trucks there, like they go on the back of the trucks, and they have this big photo of God in the truck, and they have a platform with...cloth and they sit there. It's good. You get to meet a lot of people who go on the trucks and everything, because half the way it's like going slow, and if you get fed up of going slow you can just jump off the truck and walk it. If you get really tired you just get back on the truck...I enjoy getting off and walking half way if it goes slow, and getting back on if it's going fast.

In relation to the local (non-Sikh) population the Vaisakhi celebrations provided an opportunity for disseminating information about the Sikh tradition through the handouts during the procession and via the radio coverage and newspaper reporting. Its significance in the eyes of the city council as an occasion for building harmonious race relations was evident from the presence of the councillor. Further civic recognition was symbolised by the illuminations and switching on ceremony - the first year that Vaisakhi had been acknowledged in this way.²⁶

j) Amrit Chhakna and Press Report - April 13

The following day (Monday) was Vaisakhi day itself and in the gurdwaras candidates were initiated with *amrit* (thirty-five in Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara) in private ceremonies. None of my interviewees was involved, but they knew the implications of this rite, as detailed in the previous chapter.

The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* carried an illustrated report of the previous day's procession. Readers were informed that: 'Vaisakhi celebrates the creation of the Order of the Khalsa by the 10th and last guru [sic] Gobind Singh in 1699.' Three of the five Ks were listed and the procession was described briefly. Thus, unlike most press coverage of Christmas this piece provided background information (for a largely non-Sikh readership) while accommodating Vaisakhi in mainstream British awareness.²⁷

k) *Nishan Sahib* - April 19

Gurdwaras in the Nanaksar sub-tradition differ from others by having no *nishan sahib*. However each of Coventry's other four gurdwaras has a *nishan sahib* and outside Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara and the Ajit Darbar there are two. At these gurdwaras, on the morning of the Sunday following Vaisakhi day, the flag pole was loosened from its moorings and carried down so that, lying horizontally, it could be carefully stripped of its pennant and of the tubular *chola* cloth in which the pole was wrapped. After loving washing with dilute yoghurt, rinsing with water and drying with towels, the pole was reclothed, a new pennant was tied and the *nishan sahib* reverently hoisted into its place for another year.

Many subjects described this, a twelve year old girl from the Ajit Darbar saying, 'It's when they change the *nishan sahib*'s clothes', a graphic translation of the Panjabi term *chola chardna*. Amandeep elaborated, mistaking the yoghurt for the lather of detergent:

They put the pole and they had loads of tables and they put the pole across it and then they got some buckets... and we had to wash it with our hands. It looked like fairy liquid or something ...and they had to dry it with loads of towels, and then they put it up. and then white they were doing all this things there was two ladies playing the *baja* and the *tabla* and they were singing Indian songs, and when they got people praying to it, and then we all went in and had something to eat.²⁸

At the Ajit Darbar girls from the Panjabi class were dressed in yellow. There were no *panj piare* and no women were allowed to wash the *nishan sahib* 'because it is holy and women may start their period' (according to a woman present).²⁹ Women, reverent in their demeanour stood watching the lowering, undressing, washing, drying and reclothing of the flag pole and sang a hymn to Guru Gobind Singh. The proceedings - recorded by one man on video - included detail distinctive of this congregation. The pole was topped not with the more usual composite *khanda* emblem comprising a *khanda* (double edged sword) with its blade surrounded by a *chakkar* (circle) and cupped by interlocking *kirpans* (swords) but by the *khanda* alone. After the pole had been dressed in its new *chola* a yellow 'tie' was taken from a suitcase of clothes for the *nishan sahib*. This was bound around the point where the *khanda* joined the pole. Over this a turban of dark blue cloth was wound, and a red *rumal* (kerchief) was tied below. *Sehre* (the streamers that cover a bridegroom's face) were attached with safety pins.³⁰ A *kalgi* (aigrette for a turban) and a garland of fresh flowers added to the adornments and the *nishan sahib* was sprinkled with fragrant saffron. Heady perfume was sprayed over it, before the *Ardas* was said. As the *nishan sahib* rose to its vertical position the crowd threw flowers

at its base, and as the mooring ropes were again tied to a tree everyone sang '*Jay Babaji*' (victory to *Babaji*).³¹

At Guru Nanak Parkash the departure from more widespread practice reflected not devotion to the wishes of a living *sant* but the political sympathies of a section of the *Panth*. Although most of the reverently jubilant crowd had moved inside the gurdwara once the *nishan sahib* above the facade had been restored to its rooftop position, a smaller number (most of them women) attended to the orange pennant emblazoned with '*Khalistan*' that flies from the side of the gurdwara. After *Ardas* had been said there were shouts of '*Khalistan zindabadr* (Long live *Khalistan*) and '*Raj karega Khalsa*' (the *Khalsa* shall rule).³² The *nishan sahib* was lowered onto tables, and its mast washed with yoghurt, then rinsed, dried and oiled before a *chola* was tied around it.

Thus, while details of the Vaisakhi celebration exemplify the consistent emphasis upon Vaisakhi 1699 as a major turning point in Sikh history and upon the *Khalsa* identity, also apparent are the smaller differences between gurdwaras. Accordingly, in the case of one gurdwara the second *nishan sahib* symbolised political allegiance, in the case of another the absence of any *nishan sahib* conformed to a *sant-led* sub-tradition (Nanaksar) and in a third instance (Ajit Darbar) the distancing of women and the adornment and perfuming of the *nishan sahib* demonstrated the influence of a *sant* and the persistence in his teaching of a Hindu concept of purity and pollution.

I) Cultural Programme - April 19

In the afternoon, the Sikh Cultural Society (see chapters seven and eight) held a Vaisakhi cultural programme in a community centre. Some of the young people competed in answering a '*Baisalchi quiz*' and there were colouring sheets to complete. While children were doing the quiz a video of Vaisakhi celebrations in Gravesend, with traditional style *bhangra* dances, was running. Later, on stage, there was a programme of *shabad* and devotional songs performed on stage by adults and children. In the course of this one member (a short-haired man) offered the children this explanation:

The *Khalsa* is God's army to fight the bad things in the world and live on a higher moral code. It's not just appearance but a man's way of life.

A prize was awarded for the competition and light refreshments were served.

The speaker's divergence from the emphasis upon *kesh* (uncut hair) (and the short hair not only of most Sikh boys but also of 'leaders' such as the speaker himself) point up another divergence within the *Panth*, to be discussed in chapter eleven. Once again an event reveals intertwining processes of Sikh

nurture, incorporating the medium of video, the strategy of enjoyable competitions and the communication of Vaisakhi's message through English.

m) Display in Secondary School - May 22
(when subjects there were interviewed)

In the foyer of Gurdial's secondary school in the north of Coventry still prominently displayed were pieces of work produced in the school's Panjabi classes: pictures and emblems of the *Panth*, an explanation of 'Baisakhi' and the prayers and Ks constituting Khalsa

Critical Discussion

This overview of Vaisakhi over a two and a half month period in Coventry reveals changes occurring within the *Panth* and in relation to the wider society, the people of Coventry. The continuing celebration of certain festivals common to Hindus highlights Punjabi cultures transcendence of faith tradition as shown in figure 1 (chapter three). The celebration of sant-related days and the impact of *sants* on the manner in which Vaisakhi and Guru Gobind Singh's birthday are observed further illustrates the diversity of the *Panth* and the processes of evolution underway. The data also highlight the centrality of children in the development of the festival in Coventry. Change of a different order is exemplified by the accommodation of Christmas celebration - an instance of 'convergence' (Baumann 1993 and 1994).

Most importantly for the central concern of this research, Vaisakhi emerged as an exemplar of the diversity of processes interacting in the nurture of Sikh children. Festivals have long provided channels of cultural transmission through ritual, story, fairs and the expressive arts (Marriott nd). In diaspora situations, minorities also pass on and reinforce significant history and behavioural codes more formally by teaching which is often centred upon major festivals (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993, Nesbitt 1991b). In the case of Coventry Sikhs in 1992, the festival provided children with the stimulus of highly visual liturgy centred on the renewal of the *nishan sahib* and with the solidarity of a massed procession in which they could participate fully. Moreover, an enjoyable event (the sports day), and education through the drawing and essay competitions and quizzes, were organised specifically for the children.

In parallel with this, schools (some at least) facilitated teaching about Vaisakhi and the Sikh tradition in Panjabi classes. However, these involved only a minority of pupils. The attention of all pupils in some schools was focused upon Vaisakhi through their morning assembly, through an evening function (the Spring Celebration) and displays of writing and artwork on this theme.

However, Vaisakhi remains a centrally religious occasion in a way that Christmas (for many westerners as well as Sikhs) is not. Like Christmas Vaisakhi is celebrated to coincide with a day of rejoicing whose origins predate the emergence of the faith tradition concerned. But the day's importance in the genesis of the *Panth* has eclipsed earlier modes of celebration. Only the mix of a *shabad*, older-style and disco-style *bhangra* music in the school 'Spring Celebration' were strongly reminiscent of Christmas-tide events in schools, with their blend of religious song and partying.

Vaisakhi 1992 in Coventry illustrated the capacity of a festival both for perpetuation of the sacred (the private rite of initiation into the Khalsa) and for mass dissemination (through the procession and local radio and press coverage). Concern to retain Sikh children's allegiance to their tradition and to steep them in its lore had motivated new departures. Meanwhile, through the Vaisakhi festival, teachers and the city library service sought to promote a well-informed plural society.

In this understanding of Vaisakhi, Sikh children emerge as one of several 'constituencies', to develop Baumann's critique of Durkheim's reading of ritual (Baumann 1992). Anthropologists have assumed since Durkheim that 'ritual is best understood as an act internal to the category or group that celebrates it or celebrates itself through it' (1992:98). However, on the basis of data from Southall, Baumann argues that rituals also implicate 'Others' and can even be addressed to them. In Coventry Vaisakhi 1992 conforms to the Durkheimian model as far as the ceremony of *amrit chhakna* is concerned. With the renewal of the *nishan sahib* one perceives some change and divergence within the Panthic constituency. The procession, involving local bands, a councillor and ceremonial switching on of street illuminations, was clearly 'public ritual'. Bystanders (in fact very few in number), were anticipated, addressed and provided with handouts. Children, in this analysis, are both insiders and outsiders, a part of the family but (unlike the older members of the community), in need of explanation and encouragement, much of it in English.

Together, the locally conspicuous Vaisakhi festival, the Sikh pupils in schools and a prevailing educational philosophy of multiculturalism result in educational initiatives - especially 'Vaisakhi assemblies'. Schools take on some responsibility for disseminating information about Sikh history and the Khalsa code of discipline, thereby promoting understanding between pupils of different backgrounds and contributing to the nurture of Sikhs in their faith tradition.

The formal nurture of Sikh children by concerned adults and the role of the school in this process are the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES

- 1 I have used the form Vaisakhi (not Baisakhi) in conformity with a trend among local Sikhs. In 1992 for the first time, the Vaisakhi T shirts logo began with 'V'. An informant explained that this corresponds with the pronunciation around Amritsar (13' being current in Jalandhar). See Haidrani, 1995.

Like Bhatia, many other eminent grammarians and sociolinguists believe that the Majhi dialect is the standard Punjabi because over the last three hundred years the central tract of the Punjab, including the two main cities of Lahore and Amritsar, provided the literary publications and intelligentsia in the undivided Punjab.

Another informant suggested that 'V' is preferred because in the Guru Granth Sahib '*Vaisakh*' is spelt in this way. Cole (1994a) reflects this change (cf. Cole and Sambhi 1986).

- 2 For one of the many published accounts see Khushwant Singh (rep. 1977:82-85) although, controversially, he suggests that goats were slaughtered rather than that the *panj piare* were miraculously beheaded and returned to life.
- 3 *Amrit chhakna* ceremonies occur (but much less frequently) on, e.g. Guru Gobind Singh's birthday. Kalsi (1994) provides a description of the reclothing *C chola chardna*). Of curriculum books Cole and Sambhi (1986) provides fullest coverage.
- 4 According to Kalsi (1994) 'it also laid down the foundation of first gurdwara and hoisting the Sikh flag...in Leeds in 1958'. Similarly recognising the significance of public Vaisakhi celebrations Cole wrote:

'There are annual reports in the press of processions where they had not been held in earlier years. They indicate communities that are becoming self-confident in the lands in which they have settled.' (1994a:82).

- 5 At Nanaksar gurdwara the *gurpurbs* are celebrated on the day itself.
- 6 This is the term used also of Hindu procession with an image prior to its installation in the temple.
- 7 Vaisakhi (together with *sangrands*, Lohri, anniversaries of two of Guru Gobind Singh's battles and the martyrdom of his two younger sons) is calculated according to solar months based on zodiac signs. It is uncertain whether an initiative to calculate all festivals from the year 2000 by the

solar (Gregorian) calendar will be accepted by the Panth generally (see e.g. *Hind Samachar* 18 July 1999).

- 8 Guru Nanak was however probably born in April. See McLeod (1968:9497).
- 9 For the celebration in Siahar see Nesbitt (1985a:74). There are Nanaksar gurdwaras in Vancouver, Toronto and Edmonton.
- 10 According to informants the driver was assisted by 'two television cameras'. The vehicle was allowed 'on the police chief's responsibility because it defied classification as e.g. a tank or a lorry' (Daman Singh: oral communication). Its photograph appeared in Contact (City Council) February 1992 issue 39.
- 11 Literally this exchange means 'Whoever says "Timeless Truth is Lord" is blessed'.
- 12 For his life see Gurmaldi Singh (nd) or (in English) Doabia (1981).
- 13 A *jantri* (Punjabi calendar) includes the anniversaries of two Nanaksar *sants* (Nand Singh and Ishar Singh) among others. Kalsi reports that:

The followers of Baba Puran Singh have established their gurdwaras in Britain. Their main gurdwara is in Birmingham... Apart from celebrating the anniversaries of Sikh Gurus, they also celebrate the anniversary of Baba Puran Singh... The anniversary of Baba Puran Singh begins with the organisation of five *akhand-path* signifying his sacred status. They have also started celebrating the anniversary of his wife called *Mata* (Mother) Charan Kaur, elevating her status to that of a holy person (1994).

- 14 For analysis of *rakhi-bandhan* see Mahmoud (1992 esp 41-42) who interprets the thread as a symbolic screen against incest, and the brother's gift as paralleling gifts to a priest for ritual services, since the sister executes a rite for her brother's future happiness. The gifts she receives in exchange are of a lower order having no value beyond their intrinsic utility.
- 15 Some young Hindus had shown similar difficulty in describing the thread. See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:86)
- 16 Since the ritual involves no deity worship and Sikhs and Punjabi Hindus share their understanding of incest and the sibling and cousin relationship any such reservations have little basis except boundary drawing.

- 17 McLeod (1991:68) summarises this popular story which does not however appear in Macauliffe (rep. 1963).
- 18 The double 'home-coming' theme was picked up by *Coventry Evening Telegraph* in its Divali spread (2 November 1994:17-19)
- 19 These are regarded as 'hot' foods, appropriate to winter according to traditional Asian classification of foods (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:59).
- 20 Drury found that eighty per cent of subjects 'celebrated their own festivals as well as Christmas' but most said they did not have turkey but ate a 'special Indian meal' with their families and enjoyed Indian sweets as well as mince pies and Christmas pudding. (1989:568-569)
- 21 'Uniform' was a recurrent motif e.g. for the Ajit Darbar Panjabi class (chapter seven) and Jasvir's camp (chapter eight).
- 22 According to Kalsi:

This ritual is called *kirpan bhaint karna* (offering food to the sword which symbolises God); it is mandatory and only then the *karah-parshad* is perceived as sacred and blessed by the Guru. (1994)
- 23 Members of the Council listed were the Guru Nanak Parkash, Ramgarhia, Nanaksar and Guru Hargobind gurdwaras. A list circulated at Divali 1994 also included Ajit Darbar.
- 24 Vikrami is the name of the era (from 58 BCE) on which many north Indian dates are based (Basham 1967:495). The lunar calendar year is usually reckoned from the earlier month of Chaitr or from Divali, but for Sikhs Vaisakhi is a new year's day.
- 25 An illustrated report used this term (Contact, 42, 4, May 1992).
- 26 The previous year illuminations were put up in August to mark the anniversary of the installation of the scriptures in Amritsar.
- 27 *Coventry Evening Telegraph* treatment of Divali follows this pattern e.g. 2 November 1994.
- 28 For the holiness of the *nishan sahib* see chapter ten.
- 29 This concern with purity and pollution suggests Hindu influence (see chapter twelve). Cole (1994a:143) discusses Sikh religious practice and menstruation.

- 30 These were apparently wiped in oil or ghee.
- 31 For the association of *Babaji* and the *nishan sahib* see chapter ten.
- 32 *Raj karega khalsa* can be understood as a political statement or as optimism that righteousness will prevail.

Chapter 7

Formal Nurture: Panjabi Classes

Introduction

Chapter six has signalled the mutual reinforcement of formal and informal nurture. In chapters seven and eight formal nurture is isolated as the focus of discussion. As a diaspora development it demonstrates the capacity of a tradition to adapt in 'an alien cultural milieu' (Burghart 1987). The provision of supplementary teaching exemplifies Fox's 'culture in the making' as adults consciously decide to provide instruction for their children and devise strategies for this.

As James noted:

there is no tradition of 'religious education' in the sense of explaining the religious and moral teachings of the Gurus or the historical facts about them. (1974:46)

But in the Coventry diaspora, twenty years later, several institutions were involved in the formal transmission of Sikh teaching and their role is outlined below. Formal nurture took place principally in supplementary classes (classes run outside school hours by concerned Sikhs). The classes were not religion classes in the way that Christian Sunday schools are, but fell into the two categories of language classes and music classes. This chapter focuses upon language classes, but only after introducing the range of institutions engaged in teaching young Sikhs aspects of their tradition. The contribution of different types of nurture to subjects' familiarity with their tradition is discussed at the end of chapter eight.

Very few gurdwaras in Britain have separate arrangements to give religious instruction to young Sikhs (Ramindar Singh 1992:38). However, this chapter and chapter eight argue the relevance of language and music classes to nurture in the Sikh tradition. Such classes may have been in Cole's mind when he wrote 'formal education in religion [is an] essential function of the British gurdwara' (1994c:110).

In order to contextualise the formal nurture taking place in Coventry this chapter commences with a brief survey of the wider national and international scene as it has evolved over a quarter of a century and, secondly, refers incidentally to formal nurture in other faith traditions.

Channels of Formal Nurture

a) Sikh Schools

On July 13th 1992, Jasvir was among the *sangat* (congregation) in Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara listening to a rousingly competent programme of *kirtan* presented by students of Akal Academy, a school founded in the north Indian state of Himachal Pradesh by a Harvard University graduate, Teja Singh, and inspired by Sant Attar Singh Mastuana. A group of girls (wearing turbans) demonstrated their skill in singing *shabad* to the traditional instrumental accompaniment of *damru* (small hand-held drum) and *saurangi* (violin-like instrument) and appealed for financial support for their educational foundation. Even in India, however, only a minority of Sikh children attend Sikh educational foundations: for the majority nurture in their faith is informal, mediated by their homes, local communities and gurdwaras.

At that time no comparable school existed in Britain (Ramindar Singh 1992:52), nor was there strong support among Sikhs for separate schooling, although the case for 'a Sikh public school in England' had been argued by Rajinder Singh (1979).¹ But on January 7th 1993 'Britain's first Sikh school' opened in Hayes? Guru Nanak College was not however the first Sikh institution to be formed in Britain dedicated to the formal nurture of young Sikhs in their faith tradition. For this one needs to look to the Sikh Missionary Society UK.

b) The Sikh Missionary Society, UK

In 1970 the 'Sikh Missionary Society, UK' was established in Gravesend, Kent (later moving to Southall), out of a concern for the education of British Sikh children in their heritage (Grewal 1987). The society produced and distributed free English publications on the Gurus and on living as a Sikh. Although publications were initially produced with Sikh children in mind, the uptake showed that non-Sikh teachers in British schools also welcomed this material. Through these 'teachers of multicultural studies' pupils (including Sikhs) could be informed about the Sikhs (Sacha 1983).

c) **Sikh Youth Camps**

In 1978 the Sikh Missionary Society, UK organised the first of many Sikh youth camps in Britain - another concern of this chapter (Nesbitt 1990b). This took place for a week in the Sikh Temple, Grays, Essex (Grewal 1987 and *Thurrock Gazette* 1978). This 'Sikh Youth Gurnat Camp for eleven to eighteen year olds' arose from the concern of some committed Sikh adults that the British born generation was distanced from its tradition because of the western environment and its greater facility with English than Panjabi. The Sikh Missionary Society ran annual camps thereafter in cities as far apart as Southampton and Bradford. Other Sikh organisations followed their example - for example in Hitchin they commenced in 1987 under the auspices of the Sikh Education Council - and the number of annual camps has grown. Typically these camps have a programme of activities which include listening to lectures on Sikh history, participation in *kirtan* and *Ardas*, competitions (e.g. in turban-tying or painting on a Sikh theme), sports and prize-giving. Barrow noted talks for children on 'being Sikh' and 'the importance of keeping good company' among the activities at a Sikh Naujawan Sabha Khalsa Camp in Bangor in 1994 (1995) and Bamrah provides a Sikh's overview of the development of Sikh camps (1998).

The British camps differ from those in India since the nature of diasporic experience made adults acutely aware of deficiencies in Sikh nurture which need to be remedied. They also differ from those organised elsewhere in the diaspora. For example, in Malaysia the camps cater for larger numbers and involve campers up to the age of thirty, so facilitating meeting between potentially suitable marriage partners. (Nesbitt 1990b:2; Malhi 1995)

In Coventry, none of the subjects attended a Sikh school (although one of their Panjabi teachers had done so in Kenya), only two subjects mentioned youth camps and only one (Jasvir) participated in one during the fieldwork period. As in most British areas of Sikh settlement, in Coventry formal nurture in Sikh tradition has consisted of supplementary classes - classes organised outside the normal school day - of two types: the Panjabi language class and the Sikh devotional music class. As elsewhere the classes have been set up in three kinds of venues - the gurdwara, the school and the community centre.

d) **Panjabi Language Classes**

The Panjabi language is generally perceived by Sikhs as essential to the perpetuation of both their faith tradition and their wider Punjabi cultural heritage (Tatla 1992:26). Panjabi is the mother-tongue of the vast majority of Sikhs, and the language most widely spoken among British Sikhs in many contexts - especially ritual and family ones. What is more the Gurmukhi script in which it is written is the script of the Guru Granth Sahib. The fact that the language of the scriptures differs markedly from contemporary Panjabi, and resembles Hindi at least as much as modern Panjabi, does not alter this

perception (Nesbitt 1993c).³ This is discussed at the end of chapter eight. The extent to which subjects associated Panjabi language with Sikh self-identity will be explored in chapter eleven. Attention in this chapter turns to the unambiguously religious motivation of the organisers of language classes and the unmistakably Sikh context, content and ethos of many of the language classes that were observed.

Language classes for children have been organised by concerned Sikhs in Britain - including Coventry - since the 1960s (cf James 1974:47). I reported the content of such a class from a Nottingham gurdwara (Nesbitt 1980a:189-191). Of the earliest provision in Coventry Nagra records: 'Guru Nanak Parkash Sikh Temple started its Punjabi school in 1968 with only five pupils and one teacher...after six months the number was 40.' (1979:50) Language classes in schools were started by Coventry's education authority before similar initiatives were taken by some other authorities (Nesbitt 1980a:102). It could be argued that those classes which are integral to the school day are not supplementary. However, they involve only a minority of Panjabi class pupils, and in some cases (see figure 3) they occur in lunch hours.

e) Music Classes

The term 'music classes' denotes those classes that enabled children to perform *kirtan*. This can be defined as 'singing the praises of God' and is the means whereby 'the soul drinks the musical nectar and immerses itself in the divine Name' (Mansukhani 1986:165).⁴ Classes provided instruction in playing the harmonium (*baja*) and the *tabla* (pair of drums) and in singing *shabads* (hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib). Almost the entire scripture is arranged in *rags*.⁵ In other words the Gurus' compositions were intended for singing and it was musical rendition which afforded the primary organising principle of the Guru Granth Sahib, alone among sacred scriptures. Underscoring this, in iconography Guru Nanak (following the *janamsakhi* tradition), is represented with his rabab-playing companion, Mardana. Consequently Sikh *divan* (congregational worship) consists largely of the singing and exposition of *shabads*, and (as noted in chapter six) festivals are marked by an extended programme of this type.

Thus music classes, no less than Panjabi classes, are regarded as central to the perpetuation of Sikh tradition in Britain and Davies (1997) provides ethnographic confirmation based on her fieldwork in Leeds. The importance for some young Sikhs of learning devotional music is acknowledged in some curriculum books: Babraa includes a picture of a group of young Sikh musicians and one member's account of learning and performing *kirtan* (1989:18-19). Indeed, both types of class may be integrated in a single 'Sunday School', as exemplified by the Ramgarhia Sabha Sunday School in Southall (Mohinder Singh 1998).

f) Further and Higher Education

Since the concern of this monograph is young Sikhs aged 8 to 13, only the briefest mention need be made to educational initiatives in further and higher education. In 1985 (also in Middlesex) 'the first Khalsa College outside the Indian sub-continent was opened in Harrow' with the objective of 'educat[ing] Sikh persons [not only children] in their mother tongue (Punjabi), India's national language (Hindi) and Indian and Punjabi culture and language'.⁶ This was a sixth form independent college, recognised by three examination boards and providing courses of one to two years' duration. More recently (1997) Khalsa College became the 'Sikh University' with one faculty, 'the international School of Sikh Studies' (*India Weekly* 22 August).

In addition to this development in the private sector, in several locations Sikh organisations have collaborated with Further Education colleges in developing vocational and non-vocational programmes which include Sikh culture. At university level, 1998 saw a pioneering initiative by Coventry University (School of International Studies and Law) and Coventry Sikhs with the establishment of a certificate in Higher Education/Diploma in Higher Education in Sikh and Punjab Studies and the stated intention of converting this into a BA programme.

The Institutions

After this survey of the principal channels of formal Sikh nurture this section looks at the institutions involved, namely the gurdwara and (in Coventry) the Sikh Cultural Society and at the contribution of the school and the library service.

a) The Gurdwara

The gurdwara (literally 'gateway of the Guru' and often referred to as a Sikh temple) is called this because it houses the Guru Granth Sahib. The gurdwara as an institution was foreshadowed by the *dharamsalas*, places for religious congregation from the time of Guru Nanak. Wherever a gurdwara is established it is 'not only a place of worship but also a community-centre' (Mansukhani 1986). Whereas in India Sikhs might serve the community through, e.g. a homoeopathic clinic in the gurdwara's precincts, in the diaspora Panjabi classes and *kirtan* classes have been set up to meet local need. This is not a departure from tradition as (according to Mansukhani) from the time of Guru Angad children gathered to learn the Gurmukhi script (1986:163). Babraa provides a photograph of a gurdwara-based Panjabi class in London (1981:48). The gurdwara's responsibility for such classes is clearly stated in the constitution of the Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara in force at the time of the research. Among the aims and objectives is: 'to advance the education of the Sikh community in the Sikh history, the Punjabi language and the Sikh culture and to administer teaching of the Punjabi language to the children.'

b) The School

As figure 3 shows, many classes were held in schools and some of these fell during the school day. Mounting demands by Sikhs for Panjabi classes in school were met by the increasingly multicultural awareness of LEAs. Some LEAs employed Panjabi language teachers, their salaries being part funded by the Home Office under Section H.⁷ From 1977 (with the establishment of the Minority Group Support Service) Panjabi teaching in school was formally coordinated.

Not only did some schools provide venues for Panjabi classes, but through their collective worship, religious education and provision of reading material they played a more active role in passing on aspects of the Sikh tradition.

Sarbjit's father's enthusiasm for the establishment of a separate single-sex Sikh school in Coventry, where pupils could 'wear their own clothes' was unusual. However some Coventry parents expressed the opinion that a grounding in the Sikh tradition could and should take place in the day school. Earlier research has suggested the contribution (positive and negative) which schooling makes to the religious lives of Hindu children and it is reasonable to suppose that Sikhs are in a similar position regarding their schools (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993).

At the time of the research schools were obliged by law to hold each morning an act of collective worship which was 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' (1988 Education Reform Act). This allowed for considerable flexibility and the inclusion of themes germane to or even specific to other faith traditions' When subjects spoke of 'assembly' it was to this act of collective worship that they were referring.

Religious education for pupils was also a statutory requirement, reaffirmed and redefined by the Act.⁹ Unlike the subjects that constitute the National Curriculum, religious education syllabuses were still to be locally 'agreed'. The Act required 'any new agreed syllabus to reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain'.

In fact Coventry's new agreed syllabus for religious education in Coventry was published in January 1992 and a handbook followed in May (Coventry LEA 1992). The Coventry agreed syllabus recognises the presence of Sikhs both in its text and illustrations (Coventry LEA 1992:11, 24). Sikhism is named among the 'principal faiths' about which religious education should 'provide pupils with the information they need in order to increase their knowledge and understanding...'

Moreover the 1988 Act placed a duty on every LEA to constitute a SACRE - a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (see Hull 1989:25-27). Of the four constituent groups one had to consist of 'such Christian and other religious denominations as, in the opinion of the authority, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area'. In Coventry, with its Sikh population far outnumbering both Hindus and Muslims, the SACRE should (and did) include Sikh members.

c) Sikh Cultural Society

This chapter also considers the Panjabi class which was set up by a local association, the Sikh Cultural Society, and the significance of such a phenomenon in charting the perpetuation of Sikh tradition in Britain. Members were in most cases Sikh men of Jat *zat*, aged about forty, whose education (in part or in entirety) had taken place in Britain.¹⁰ They shared a concern 'to analyse the situation' facing the Sikh community. On the one hand they were distanced by generation and experience from the elders dominating the gurdwara management committees. On the other hand they wished their children to grow up with a firm hold on their mother-tongue, a pride in their cultural heritage and an informed allegiance to the Sikh faith. In one member's words 'what we are trying to do is communicate that identity and give it credibility'. According to another member some individuals began to think about setting up an association in 1985 and it was eventually established formally in 1987. According to one of its publications the Society 'was conceptualised in September 1989' (Sikh Cultural Society 1991a:2).

The society emphasised three major qualities: a) Interest in the Panjabi Language, Culture and total commitment to the teachings of The Guru Granth Sahib, b) Intellectualism ... to challenge misrepresentations and engage in serious study, and c) Effort. (3). In its constitution, with 'youth and children' in mind one aim was defined as: 'To encourage the study of Sikh culture and... for this purpose to provide prizes, rewards and other distinctions within its powers.' (3)

The case for such a group, independent of both gurdwaras and the academic establishment, was argued by Shinder Thandi, a founder member of the SCS, in a paper for 'Sikh Identity in Transition', a conference organised by the SCS and the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Warwick, April 1991. After analysing the inadequacy of both the gurdwaras and the existing Panjabi language provision, as well as pointing to the failure of academic institutions to represent Sikhism 'correctly', (i.e. as a doctrinally unique, unified religion distinct from Hinduism), Thandi argued the need for Sikh cultural institutions (independent of both gurdwaras and the academic establishment) to raise the awareness of young Sikhs and to act as pressure groups and intermediaries with both.

Language Classes

a) The Level of Provision

As discussed in chapter two, supplementary classes probably involve only a minority of young Sikhs, but numbers would at best be guesses. Preliminary enquiry, the returns from the questionnaire (appendix A), participant observation and interviews with children and community leaders revealed the following weekly programme of Panjabi classes in Coventry.

Figure 3

Weekly Panjabi Classes

Sunday

10.45-12.15	Ramgarhia gurdwara
11.00-12.15	GNP gurdwara
1.30-3.00	Ajit Darbar gurdwara
6.30-8.00	Guru Hargobind gurdwara

Monday

12.35	Caludon secondary school
2.30-4.00	Southfields primary school
3.30-4.15	Broadheath primary school
3.15-4.00	Finham Park secondary school

Tuesday

10.40	Caludon secondary school
	Foxford secondary school (time not recorded)
12.00-1.10	Gosford Park primary school
2.30-4.10	Stoke primary school
6.00-8.00	Edgwick/Henley college
7.00-8.00	Ramgarhia gurdwara

Wednesday

	Foxford secondary school (time not recorded)
12.10-	Edgwick primary school
12.30 1.50	Caludon secondary school
2.30-4.10	Stoke primary school
2.45-3.30	Stanton Bridge primary school
3.15-3.55	Courthouse Green primary school
3.30-4.15	Broadheath primary school
6.00-8.00	Edgwick/Henley college
7.00	Ramgarhia gurdwara
	Cedars First school [not in Coventry but attended by Jasvir]

Thursday

	Foxford secondary school (time not recorded)
12.00-1.00	Stoke Park secondary school
12.10-12.30	Edgwick primary school
2.45-3.30	Stanton Bridge primary school
3.00-3.40	Frederick Bird primary school
6.00-8.00	Edgwick/Henley college
6.30-8.00	Cheylesmore Community Centre

Friday

12.00-12.30	Grangehurst primary school
12.35 3.30-	Caludon secondary school
4.00	Stoke Park secondary school

Saturday

Evening	Ramgarhia gurdwara
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In 1992 the overall provision of Panjabi classes in Coventry comprised thirteen weekly sessions in nine primary schools, seven weekly sessions in four secondary schools, seven in four gurdwaras, three evening classes in two community centres. The number may have exceeded this as information was not centrally available and not all questionnaires were returned. All but one of the school-based classes and all the gurdwaras are in the north of Coventry. Only the Sikh Cultural Society and one secondary school offered Panjabi tuition in the south of the city.

It should be noted that classes had a precarious existence: even during the fieldwork period classes were discontinued, e.g. a Saturday afternoon class in the Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara and a class at one girls' secondary school. Since fieldwork concluded other closures have occurred because of changes to the 'Section 11' funding which paid teachers' salaries)¹ However, a class has started in at least one more venue.

b) Institutional Auspices

The specific descriptions which follow provide material for the discussion at the end of chapter eight.

i) Gurdwara Language Classes

From 10.45 to 12.15 on Sunday mornings about 150 children attended classes in the *langar* hall of the Ramgarhia Gurdwara. Around the walls were original, recently executed paintings of episodes in Sikh history, captioned in Panjabi by the artist. These included for example the martyr Guru Arjan Dev sitting on a hot plate.¹² The teachers were volunteers or received a small payment in the order of £3.50 or £4.00. Conditions were challenging for the teachers as all the

ability groups were in one area. Moreover, the combined sound of the *kirtan* relayed from upstairs, voices from the foyer outside and the clatter of preparations in the adjoining kitchen necessitated the use of a microphone in plenary sessions. Furthermore, as an eight year old girl commented: 'Sometimes when there's visitors they have to put the screens in and we have to just wait until they've done it and then we start doing stuff.'

At Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara more than a hundred pupils attended a Panjabi class between 11.00 and 12.15. Their teachers included two junior school teachers and three with degrees from Punjab. The venue was the downstairs *divan* hall unless this was needed for a marriage, in which case the pupils crowded into a smaller upstairs room.¹³

Amandeep told me that 'On Sunday we learn Indian'. She was referring to the class at Guru Hargobind Gurdwara which took place on a Sunday evening (6.30 to 8.00). In Nanaksar Gurdwara no classes were held at the time of the research.

Although the Sunday afternoon classes in the Ajit Darbar were suspended for a few months each year because 'Babaji' had come and everyone was 'too excited', otherwise classes took place in a room adjoining the *langar* between 1.30 and 3.30 pm. Three men served as teachers and their pupils came from Wolverhampton and Leicester as well as Coventry. One of the organisers explained that during the class, in addition to studying Panjabi in small groups:

the children are asked to speak individually in Panjabi in front of everyone else. It's very frightening. They hate that bit!

The style and content of the classes cannot be adequately conveyed without description of proceedings. This is essential for informing the discussion of their contribution to religious nurture. What follows, therefore, are accounts taken from fieldnotes of a Sunday morning class in the Ramgarhia gurdwara and of an afternoon class in the Ajit Darbar.

On the morning of one field visit to the Ramgarhia gurdwara the *langar* was full at 10.30 with boys and girls sitting on benches along both sides of the long tables running lengthwise towards the kitchen. Proceedings began with the headteacher speaking, microphone in hand. He asked a series of questions such as 'What was Guru Gobind Singh's father's name?'. Hands were raised and one child would be picked to answer. After telling them that 'the first commandment is to wear turban' he removed his shoes and intoned the *Ardas*. The children also stood, stooping to touch the floor at the appropriate point. At the end the leader slipped his shoes on again.

The children were taught the Panjabi language in graded groups at their separate tables by eight teachers. By 12.15 the lesson was ending and once again the head teacher addressed all the groups together. Over the microphone he rebuked them for misbehaviour, then fired a brisk volley of brief Panjabi questions on Sikh history. Any child who was selected to answer came out and did so using the microphone. In turn they supplied the names of the *sahibzade* (sons of Guru Gobind Singh), 'Baba Ajit Singh Jr, 'Baba Ajit Singh Ji', 'Baba Jujhar Singh Ji', 'Baba Fateh Singh

The head teacher told them that •*Bhcie* meant brother and that '*Babaji hunda* [Babaji is/means] a wise person'. Still using Panjabi he bade them to stand with heads covered while a tape was played of the 'national anthem' sung to a rousing martial tune: *deh siva barn mohi ehai sabhu karman te kabhun na taron.*'¹⁴ The children joined in especially with the refrain '*Bole sonihal Sat Sri Ake*, and at its final occurrence they all touched the floor. They left the *langar* or remained to eat with their families as worshippers from upstairs poured into the room for their corporate meal.

On one field work visit to the Ajit Darbar most of the girls were wearing blue suits and *chunnis*, a uniform ordained by *Babaji*. In addition to children studying elementary Panjabi from the *Navin Panjabi* books (one to five), the most proficient pupils were tackling a *sakhi* (story) of Guru Hargobind. A boy came out and stood in front of the class, leading the others in repeating '*Dhann Guru Nanak*'. In Panjabi the teacher asked what this meant. After children had volunteered the answers 'It's Guru's name', 'Guru Nanak Sahibji is great', 'Everlasting' and 'True', the teacher affirmed that 'all are right, it means, "beyond description", "beyond praise"'. There is no word to describe them: *Beant* [without end], Almighty, Powerful, Kind.¹⁵ Next, one subject (a twelve year old boy), stood up, facing the others, and spoke at length in fluent Panjabi about the death of Guru Teg Bahadar. He began with the requisite words '*Sri Vahiguruji ka Khalsa Sri Vahiguruji ki fateh*' and the teacher asked the class the meaning of each word of this formula. He then explained Vahiguru as encompassing all four '*yugs*' (ages), with V standing for Vasudev or Vishnu, H for Har Har (i.e. Krishna), G for Govind and R for Ram.¹⁶ This type of interrogation and interpretation characterised the classes at Ajit Darbar.

ii) School Language Classes

Whereas in some schools classes were held during the school day, in others (as figure 3 shows) 'twilight' classes took place between three and four pm, after other pupils had left. As in the gurdwara classes, *Navin Panjabi* books were used. The teachers included peripatetic teachers, organised by a co-ordinator employed by the Education Authority, who visited several schools to teach.

In Satwant's school a class of seven to nine year olds had a twenty minute lesson, mainly in Panjabi medium. On a fieldwork visit each pupil had an A4 sheet of Gurmukhi characters - each with the equivalent roman letter(s) below. The teacher held up an orange and asked '*e ki hai?*' [what is this?]. The answer was *santra*' [orange]. In Panjabi she asked what the sounds were and wrote, letter by letter, the Gurmukhi characters for S T R on the board. GL for '*gol*' (football) and M TH for '*mitha*' (sweet) followed.¹⁷ An eleven year old boy (who had been attending classes for one month) described the more traditional initiation into the language: 'First we started off with *oura*, *aira* - the alphabet - and afterwards we started doing like easy words like *ghar* and *phal*...and in the house...name all the things that are around.'¹⁸

iii) Sikh Cultural Society Classes

At the time that fieldwork was underway the Sikh Cultural Society organised classes for children of six and upwards. An English adult and a Sikh couple (who wanted to become more proficient in reading *Gurbani*) had also enrolled. The students were divided into 'five or six groups', with two students preparing for the GCSE examination and four other classes. Teachers included the organiser, two other male members of the Sikh Cultural Society and two teenage girls (one of them a subject of the research). Concerning them the informant observed: 'The idea is basically to teach them to do that kind of service and community work...they learn while they're teaching others.' Raspreet summarised proceedings on Thursday evenings (6.30 to 8.00 pm):

[The teacher] goes over our homework and tells us if it was OK and what we should do to make it better, the letters and the shape of them and stuff like that, and then he'll give us sheets with words on... like he'll put '*hathr*' and you'll think 'That's an elephant', so you put a dash and put '*elephant*'..and at the end there are questions which you have to convert into Panjabi, like 'Where is my book?' and you write *kitab kithe*' ... and then he'll put spelling mistakes correct... and at the end of the lesson we have a *shabad* practice where my dad plays *baja* and everybody sings.

As an example of *shabad* practice', towards the end of one evening's session the classes sang together *Takha ek hamara suami*' [Our lord is a protection]. Twelve were proficient enough to read the words from duplicated sheets in hand-written Panjabi. The teacher first sang each line solo, then everyone joined in. At the end of the lessons the teachers told the groups about imminent festivals. Thus, when questioned during interview about her *kara* [steel wrist band] Raspreet said:

It's the *kara* — it's, he explained on Thursday, I can't remember now. It's an emblem of — it's supposed to be worn. It's like

saying, 'I'm a Sikh'. In the class we were talking about Vaisakhi and *kara*.

The organiser explained: 'Using three or four minutes at the end we tell them a short story, then give them some pictures to colour and there's a prize at the end...sometimes it's a packet of sweets.'

One week the central feature of the classes was a slide presentation of Sikh shrines in Pakistan, which included the narration of several stories, e.g. about the miraculous handprint on the rock at Panja Sahib which none of the pupils admitted to knowing beforehand.⁹ Everyone was then given a sheet with five multiple choice questions on the Gurus (e.g. 'Where was Guru Arjan Dev Ji martyred? 1. Lahore 2. Kartarpur 3. Nanded') and the Gurus' names to place in order.²⁰

The formalisation of the supplementary Panjabi classes was apparent from the admission/registration forms. The Ramgarhia admission form required the prospective pupil's name and address and the father's or guardian's signature and listed three 'rules and regulations'. The SCS form further asked 'any provision for Punjabi teaching at your school? If yes do you attend the Punjabi option? Do you attend any other Punjabi class?' At the bottom of the form was a space for 'admission assessment' as 'target 1' to 'target 4 level'. In other words, as with Christian Sunday schools, the underlying model was of the educational system.

d) Materials

Books were the staple resource for all the classes, despite the occasional use of other media such as slides. The Sikh Cultural Society class used one series of Panjabi Book produced in the UK and the series from India, *Navin Panjabi*.²¹ Two teachers mentioned utilising books published in India:

One of my pupils she went to India, and this book I got from India, she brought from India...I think that is a brilliant book.

One of the members he went to Punjab and he got us out ten different standards of books, starting from alphabet books to story books, novels.

The first teacher to be quoted realised the value of introducing other media - posters and videos:

I went to the market actually and I saw a big Jamaican fruit poster...And from India, whenever anybody goes, I always tell them to get me some birds and animal posters.

As yet her only video was one of Vaisakhi.

Teachers were handicapped by their often cramped, multi-purpose venues, lacking the necessary facilities for easy use of technology and with little or no storage space. The books which they used were either published for an Indian market or resembled these in many respects, as did the teaching style of some of the teachers. The prevailing conditions in some cases militated against sustained reflection or discussion.

e) Tests and Examinations:

Panjabi classes were graded by pupils' proficiency in reading and writing the language. As the organiser at Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara explained:

A test decides if [they] move to [a] higher class, i.e. they speak to me, they read to me, then [I] ask questions in Panjabi, then [they] answer it. Then I ask them questions in English and want them [to] know what to say in Panjabi, so that they can communicate in both languages, not only Panjabi.

Every four weeks teachers would test their class on the spelling of thirty or forty words and record the children's marks.

Suitable candidates in classes run by gurdwaras, schools and the Sikh Cultural Society were entered for the GCSE in Panjabi.²² For this, Nagra (1988) provided useful preparation. The GCSE included oral examination and one teacher mentioned using a tape of the examiner asking elementary questions like 'where do you live?', referring almost certainly to the audio-cassette accompanying Nagra's book.

f) Religious Dimension

i) Aims

Although these are described as Panjabi language classes their organisers and teachers - whether the venue was a gurdwara or elsewhere - (with one exception) regarded linguistic and religious teaching as inseparable. One said: 'I teach first Panjabi, then Sikh religion, history and traditions.' He regarded the religious content as essential because young Sikhs were not taught this at school. He expanded:

Sikh children should be Sikh as Christian children should be Christians. You teach Christianity in your school, don't you?²³
We don't have that facility, that's why I teach Sikhism.

The organiser of the SCS class described the aims in linguistic, ethical and devotional terms. Linguistically he aimed 'to do four things - teach them to speak and understand and read and write'. He perceived the class as catering

for children in schools with only small numbers of Punjabi children because of out migration from the north of the city. However he also portrayed their initiative as a deliberate effort to respond to the temptations of the children's potentially corrupting environment. There was for example the lure of *bhangra* dance sessions organised during school hours (Tatla 1993). On this he commented: 'The only way we can respond to it is by creating an environment where children can learn values, they can learn about their culture and, hopefully, it becomes fashionable then.'

The Sikh Cultural Society consciously incorporated Sikh religious values. For example the encouragement of senior pupils to teach others was an expression of *seva* (voluntary service), a central Sikh principle. By training pupils both to recite the *Japji Sahib* and to sing *shabad*, teachers were also introducing devotional material with the intention of involving children in gurdwara *kirtan* as, in the organiser's opinion: 'I think if you do a survey you'll find that only a very small percentage of Sikh children actually say their prayers.'

ii) Context

The Sikh environment distinguished the gurdwara classes from those that took place in secular venues. As noted earlier the classes in gurdwaras took place not in auxiliary accommodation or purpose-designed rooms but in areas furnished and used for *kirtan* and *langar*. The *palki* in the *divan* hall, the pictures of Gurus and (in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara *langar*) of centuries of Sikh history combined in a rich cultural context. Moreover the surrounding activities of food-preparation and devotional singing, though potentially distracting, added to the Sikh ethos. Amandeep and fellow pupils participated each week, at the end of their class, in *sukhasan* (the removal of the scriptures from their position on the *palki* and laying them to rest for the night).

Furthermore, in the gurdwara classes the dress of teachers and pupils was an expression of Punjabi tradition, reinforcing norms of modesty and deference. In the Ramgarhia Gurdwara class the girls were almost all in Punjabi suits, and of the boys the majority had topknots covered with a white hanky. By contrast, it was usual in the SCS classes for no child to be in Punjabi dress, with the girls in trousers or dresses and only one *keshdhari* boy, with a turban. Otherwise the only 'religious' detail was the *keshdhari* appearance of the organiser (wearing *kara* and wrist *mala*) and the presence of a man reading *Sukhmani Sahib*.

iii) Content

In content almost all the Punjabi classes which I visited, whatever the venue, clearly mediated aspects of the Sikh faith tradition. Books included moral injunctions and passages about Sikh history. To take one example *Navin Panjabi 2* concludes with 'ten truths' in Panjabi. These include 'Do not forget

to say, "*at Sri Akal*" when you meet someone', '*Har same Vahiguru ang sang rakho*' (i.e. the time keep God in mind). Book two of Kalra's series included a page on the Golden Temple, Sikhs' most revered place of worship (1972). Below a picture of the gurdwara were the words '*Sri Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, Panjab, Bharat vike hai*' (Sri Harmandir Sahib is in Amritsar, Punjab, India). Gurdial's school class had:

books about the Gurus and we read about them...We drew pictures and we wrote bits about Gurus and why they like gave their martyrdoms... It was Guru Arjan's martyrdom. We had to colour the picture in and then we stuck them on the wall...in the language block.

However neither books published in India or in Britain were exclusively Sikh in content. For example 'Mahatma Gandhi' was the subject of one exercise in *Navin Panjabi* 3.

iv) Teaching Sikh Ethics and Conventions

The teachers frequently exhorted their pupils to behave in a moral way. One envisaged his Panjabi classes as being 'about life...their responsibility towards the community...when they grow up'. Another said she always related Panjabi teaching with her view of the Sikh religion, i.e. putting *chunni* on, elderly people must be respected, doing *path*, paying respect - saying "*sat sri akal*" with hands together.' Another example of learning the appropriate way of addressing or referring to respected individuals is quoted from the exercise book of a pupil in the Ramgarhia gurdwara Panjabi class: 'Before a Guru's name we say *sri*' and after it *fi*' to show respect.'²⁴ Teachers also emphasised the Khalsa code - especially the need to wear the *kara*. To quote one nine year old girl from the class held in the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara:

At Sunday Panjabi school they told you should have a *kara*, and if you haven't got a *kara* on you're not allowed to Panjabi class. Everyone just buyed one because there's a stall outside.

As illustrated in the reports of individual classes above, Sikh devotion was an important element in the gurdwara-based classes and in those run by the Sikh Cultural Society. The class in the Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara routinely concluded with fifteen minutes assembly as an undivided group. The children were told about the Gurus, recited *mul mantar*, *Vahiguru* and the first stanza of the *Japji Sahib* (*pahili pauri*). Five or six pupils there could recite three or four stanzas.

The cultural and religious content of the school-based classes too was illustrated in chapter five by the account of the class in one primary school before Vaisakhi and by the foyer display of work on Vaisakhi by pupils of the

Panjabi class in a secondary school. Religious concepts were conveyed or reinforced both explicitly and more incidentally, e.g. a seven year old girl showed me her exercise book - a list of Gurmukhi words and English meanings including (ticked by the teacher) 'Guru is a God'.

At the Sikh Cultural Society's classes the references to the Gurus always ended with 'F'. Teachers used respectful euphemisms like 'breathed his last' instead of 'died' when speaking of the Gurus in English. During one lesson a teacher explained an honorific in English:

What does *sri* mean? It's like Mr and Mrs but also has a more religious meaning like 'your holiness' - not quite like that, but it's a respected name.

The SCS classes ended with the children practising *shabad*, so spanning the function of language and music classes and suggesting the unity (as perceived by the organisers) of the contemporary language and the language of the scripture. It is to music classes that we turn in chapter eight, which concludes with further discussion of Panjabi language classes.

NOTES

- 1 Rajinder Singh argued that such a school would symbolise the Sikh community's capability of 'carrying on (and passing on) its traditions', and that it could not be socially divisive, given Guru Nanak's teaching of universal equality. Raminder Singh summarises Sikh attitudes on this issue, as compared with Muslim and Hindu ones. 'Sias have not expressed any such demands as yet' (1992:55-56). See also the arguments voiced in 1970 (Helweg 1986:94-111).
- 2 See *Times Education Supplement* 26 February 1993. Cole also lists 'the Guru Gobind Singh school at Chigwell' (1994c:118).
- 3 Shackle (1981:viii) summarises the complexity of the language.
- 4 For 'name' *Inam* see chapter nine.
- 5 *Rag* is the Panjabi form of *raga* (literally 'colour'), a musical mode. See Mansukhani (1982) and Attariwala (nd and 1992) for analysis of *kirtan* music. Guru Arjan Dev said 'kirtan is the treasure of the jewels of bhakti', i.e. the supreme of nine stages of *bhakti* (devotion).
- 6 See *India Weekly* 18 December 1985. The name aligns it with Sikhs' 'pioneering, prestigious college in Amritsar'.

- 7 'Under section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act Local Education Authorities can apply for 75 per cent of the costs of employing extra staff for educational (and other) purposes in areas with large numbers of Commonwealth immigrants for whom special provision is required because of differences in language or customs' (Statham, Mackinnon et al 2nd ed 1991).
- 8 Hull (1989) explores the implications of the Act.
- 9 In the earlier (1944) Education Act the term used was 'religious instruction'.
- 10 One member, a GP, was profiled in 'Faith Requires Giving of Himself, GP, December 20 1991. Their dilemma was analysed by Shinder Thandi in a paper for a conference 'Sikh Identity in Transition' organised by the SCS at the University of Warwick, 4 April 1991.
- 11 The 'Section 11' grant was reduced to 57 per cent in 1993 and 50 per cent for 1994 (Lawton and Gordon 1993:164).
- 12 See Khushwant Singh (rep.1977:59-61).
- 13 Dwyer described a similar problem for the *shishu kunj* in Shree Sanatan Mandir in Leicester (1988).
- 14 The words are the concluding section of Guru Gobind Singh's *Chandi Charitra* (in *Dasm Granth*). Nikki-Guninder Singh provides the words in roman script, a translation and an interpretation (1993:148). The tune was popularised in the film 'Nanak Nam Jahaz Hai'.
- 15 'Them' is more respectful than the singular pronoun.
- 16 This explanation was also given to me by an officiant in Nanaksar (Punjab) in 1984.
- 17 The teacher had received training in India in 'the new basic language training' (perhaps that mentioned in Nesbitt 1980a:102-103) which she contrasted with the traditional way in which she had learned '*oura aira*'. In other words, instead of learning the Gurmukhi alphabet (which starts with the vowels *oura* and *aira*) before progressing to writing words, the pupils learned to associate objects with the consonants comprising the relevant word. N was not included in the word '*santra*', as, like vowels, it is indicated by a sign above the consonants. The vowel signs would be taught later.

- 18 `Ghar' (house) and `phar(flower) both have the vowel sound (not written) with which learners traditionally start.
- 19 For the miracle at Panja Sahib see McLeod (1980a:92).
- 20 The answer is Lahore. Kartarpur and Nanded are associated with Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh respectively.
- 21 Tatla (1993:123) provides details of the books generally used.
- 22 *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 14 September 1991 reported one SCS student's A grade at GCSE.
- 23 This perception of religious education is shared by many members of faiths other than Christianity and was voiced by an officer of the Shree Krishan Temple, summer 1994.
- 24 cf similar findings in Nottingham thirteen years before (Nesbitt 1980a:190).

Chapter 8

Formal Nurture continued: *Kirtan* class, camp and the contribution of the day school

Introduction

Although the Sikh Cultural Society's Panjabi classes concluded with a singing practice in which the pupils learned to sing *shabads*, this sort of practice usually took place in *kirtan* classes, another important element in young Sikhs' formal nurture in their tradition (see Davies 1997). This chapter examines these supplementary music classes and then looks at an example of a Sikh youth camp. It next considers the role of the day school in perpetuating Sikh tradition. These three phenomena - plus the language classes outlined in the previous chapter - are discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Music Classes

Some girls whom I interviewed were learning to play the harmonium (*baja*) and sing *shabads* while some of the boys were hoping to become proficient *tabla*-players. More unusually for a boy, Amarjit was learning the harmonium as his mother thought it would be easier for him.

Figure 4

Frequency of *kirtan* classes in gurdwaras, schools and community centres.

Monday

6.30-8.00

Guru Hargobind Gurdwara
Ramgarhia Gurdwara

Tuesday

7.00-8.00	Ramgarhia Gurdwara
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Wednesday

4.30	Edgwick Community Centre
6.00-8.00	Guru Hargobind Gurdwara

Thursday

6.30-8.00	Ramgarhia Gurdwara
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Friday

Evening	Ramgarhia Gurdwara
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Saturday

4.00-6.00	Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara
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In this section examples of the content of the classes are followed by mention of assessment and public performance.

a) Gurdwara

In the Ramgarhia gurdwara over a hundred pupils had enrolled in classes which were taught on different evenings by three different teachers. The following account conveys the style and content of one such class, taught by a highly acclaimed peripatetic teacher who was blind.

Children and adults came in small groups, turn by turn, into the upstairs library where the music master was sitting on the floor. When he asked a pupil's name the child would say, '*Sat Sri Akal, Unelej i*' and respond to him in Panjabi. With each harmonium player in turn he would go through a sequence of melody and *shabad* words or keyboard fingering exercises e.g. *ma ma pa sa dha pa...*¹ With the *tabla* players he demonstrated, with his voice or on the *tabla*, a *tabla* beat sequence e.g. *din na na din.*² When he ran through a sequence of notes his sighted helper would take the relevant child's notebook and write it down there. This the pupil then propped on the *baja* and referred to. Each pupil would play individually and the master would then correct him or her. The most advanced student played a fast, elaborate sequence on *tabla*. After a few minutes the individual lesson would end when the master put his hand on the back of the child concerned. He or she would then leave and be replaced by members of the next group. The teacher's manner was brisk, keen and warm. Exchanges of conversation were friendly, laughing and purposeful.

As with the language classes (to varying degrees) the setting and the required demeanour of the pupils reinforced expected Sikh norms. This included paying respects to the Guru Granth Sahib (*mattha tekna*) and might

also include performing *seva* (service). Describing the class in the Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara Ravinder said:

We learn *shabad*. Me and my sister do a little bit of *seva* by making tea for the professor because he comes straight from Leicester.

An eight year old girl explained what classes involved:

We go to the temple for harmonia [*sic*]. First we do our *mattha* [obeisance] and then we just go in our class, and like our sirs they give us some *baje* to take home. It's like a little keyboard but at the back of it you pump it.

Raspreet would

go to Saturday class at four o'clock and come home about six o'clock, and there's this man there called Professor Ji ... We call him Professor because he's really good at doing *shabad* and that, and then we learn our *shabad* and practise, then we go and do a *mattha tek*, which is like give a bit of money which goes towards the gurdwara and bow our heads in front of it and sit down and listen to it for a while.³ Then you also get this *prashad* which is like food, it's blessed food and then you have that and just go.

As the time of Amandeep's class in the Guru Hargobind Gurdwara coincided with *sukhasan* the pupils were involved in this. Amandeep reported:

He prays to the book, and then first he reads the book a bit and then he goes to the front and prays and then he goes down to the back, and then he walks with the book to the place where it's kept, and he sings the prayer saying...'Ram raje'.⁴ He does it every evening about eight o'clock.

Young people gave examples of the *shabads* and songs which they learned: 'a set *shabad* for Guru Amar Das's martyr[dom day]' and 'Guru Gobind, songs about him, national anthem, *Deh siva baru mohi ehai sabhu karman*..⁵ as well as *Satguru tumre*⁶ and '*Satbhai Satguru pure*' „meaning 'prophet - this life is yours'.? They could only progress to learning *shabads* after mastering 'all the *sa re ga ma* things', i.e. the basic scale exercises.

Ajit Darbar and Nanaksar

While *kirtan* in the Ajit Darbar was remarkable for the competence and involvement of children, and the *kirtan* on *purnimashi* night at the Nanaksar Gurdwara involved young boys playing cymbals as *bahingams* (see chapter

four), there were no formal classes in these gurdwaras at the time of the fieldwork.⁸ One of the leading members of the *sangat* at Ajit Darbar explained that whereas 'a man used to come from Birmingham and they used to pay [to learn to play] now they are learning by *Babaji's* grace'. When asked how they learned to perform one child said she listened to a tape, another acknowledged 'something in this place that makes you do it' and a third said 'a spirit'. A ten year old subject explained more pragmatically: 'When somebody else is doing their *shabad* we see which buttons [i.e. keys] they're pressing.'

b) School/Community Centre

School and community centre-based music classes included not only devotional but also more secular items. Gurvinder for example had learned, 'We shall overcome' in Hindi '*ham honge kamyab*'... explained by the teacher as 'a song in Hindi for all religions'. However, distinctively Sikh devotional items were also taught and, following this song, the Sikhs clustered to sing '*Sat Sri Akal Sat Sri Akal/Bole Sonihal Sat Sri Akal*', with the words '*Khalsa mero rup hai khas* etc' which they were practising for a performance in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara.⁹

c) Singing on Stage

Although in the other gurdwaras children did not play so prominent a part in the *kirtan* as in Ajit Darbar, singing on stage in the gurdwara was what teachers and pupils alike aspired to (see Davies 1997). An eight year old girl said, 'like to sing a *shabad* on my own... I am going to do it soon' and Sarbjit said:

I learn my *kirtan* on Saturday and I've sung three times, about two times on stage. First time I sang with my friend. We sang, '*Satgur tumre*' and that was with the class, and then we sang, '*Guru mero*' by ourselves, and first, the first time we were going to sing we felt really nervous, and then once you start playing you don't feel nervous.¹⁰

To ease the frustration of young singers and instrumentalists being marginalised or overlooked, for example in the extended musical programmes at the time of *gurpurbs*, occasional children's programmes were held in Guru Nanak Parkash and the Ramgarhia gurdwaras. The following account is of one such programme that was held in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara on a Saturday evening in advance of the *shahidi din* of Guru Arjan Dev.

At 7 pm the *Ardas* was being said and children were coming in. A man briefly announced that this was a children's programme for Guru Arjan Dev *Shahidi*. Each group of children: *tabla* player, *baja* player and singer - equipped with a book of words - were introduced from the microphone by the 'compere'. Each *tabla* player powdered his *tabla* from a talc bottle¹¹ The singer/baja-player in each case began by saying '(sri) *Vahiguruji ka khalsa sri*

Vahiguruji ki fateh'. After performing, each group was bidden to receive their '*siropa*' and another man distributed to each performer an unwrapped - mate pen.¹² In some cases, after receiving it, the girls immediately did *mattha tek* to the Guru Granth Sahib from where they were on the men's side, before returning to the women's side. During the singing a few people went up to the dais and placed a coin in front of the centre *baja*.

d) Examinations

In the Ramgarhia class, I was informed, examiners came every two years from India from Pracheen Kala Kendra, Chandigarh. Examinations took place in August and already three examinations had been taken by the Ramgarhia students.

e) General Observations

The pupils whom I encountered showed enthusiasm and some (for example one eight year old girl and Raspreet and Ravinder) sang confidently in front of the congregation. More instruments were needed but they were expensive. As a result an instrument library had been started by the Sikh Cultural Society (Sikh Cultural Society 1992:36). A teacher explained that this would perhaps have ten *tablas* and ten harmoniums. The strategy was to loan an instrument to a child for some months and then take it away for another child, in the hope that this would encourage children's parents to buy instruments when they realised how much their child was missing having an instrument.

Pupils acquired musical skills and learned *shabads* - passages from the Guru Granth Sahib. Moreover, for those who were learning in the gurdwara, the setting and demeanour of those around them reinforced other behavioural norms. Seeing people come up to the dais with gifts of money, they learned the expected way for members of the *sangat* to show their appreciation when *ragis* performed.

The language of the *shabads* differed from the Panjabi which subjects spoke or indeed studied in their Panjabi classes. When asked about the 'meaning' they replied in very general terms or translated into English the opening two or three words. This was not surprising since little or no explanation of the words was offered in the classes which I observed. Indeed a word to word English rendering would be difficult and even the gist is hard to capture in English. Furthermore imparting this type of cerebral understanding was not perceived as a priority. One teacher (a member of the Sikh Cultural Society) explained:

We deliberately don't tell the meaning. Guru Nanak said that *shabad* is Guru; my thinking is *chela* [disciple]. People were illiterate. The Guru locked knowledge up in the Guru Granth

Sahib. *Kirtan* opens it out like a wallet file. It's not a matter of head knowledge but *bhakti* [devotion].

This accords with some words of the Sikhs' seventh Guru, Har Rai:

As the grease sticks to the pot when it is emptied, so does the Guru's word stick to the heart... Whether you comprehend it or not, the word bears the seed of salvation. (Khushwant Singh rep 1977:70)

By learning the words and music, and so internalising them, regardless of the level of intellectual comprehension, subjects were continuing a tradition evident also in the wider Hindu tradition (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:98). It may also be noted that the *rags* themselves (quite apart from the words) 'kindle[s] the divine spark in man' (Mansukhani *et al* 1986:5). But related to this belief in the efficacy of the word, regardless of intellectual comprehension, is fear of mispronunciation. As an eight year old girl explained, 'If I get some words wrong in Indian sometimes people get punished...like if I...go to bed I could get horrible dreams'.

Camp

a) Introduction

Residential Sikh Youth Camps involve a smaller number of Sikh children than the classes, and are much less frequent, but they merit attention as they provide formal nurture of a duration, diversity and intensiveness unparalleled in the young people's experience.¹³

During the field work period Jasvir spent several days at a residential Sikh youth camp and Davinder was looking forward to a camp in Wales during the summer holiday. He described a camp his cousin had attended, run by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha. Activities had consisted of *nitnem*....*whole* day activities, at night *rahiras* and *kirtan sohila*...and they do sword fighting'.¹⁴ On the door of the downstairs *divan* in the Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara was advertised a Khalsa Camp for fifteen to thirty year olds organised in Cardiff by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha: 'to develop knowledge and experience of true Sikhism via formal and informal teachings, through lectures, discussions and seminars. Spiritual awareness, kirtan, Gurbani recitation and simran in the presence of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib at Amritvela. Healthy communal atmosphere. Sports facilities.' Davinder also mentioned a camp organised in Birmingham 'just for the youth' in which a member of the Sikh Cultural Society was involved.

b) Jasvir's Camp

From Monday 26 July until 1st August 'the sixth Gurmat camp' was held in a Walsall gurdwara. Campers were aged eight to fifteen and among them were

Jasvir and her two younger sisters. The week's programme (printed out on nine A4 sheets) included lectures (on festivals, the Sikh Gurus, 'prominent Sikh figures' - Bhai Mani Singh, Banda Bahadar, Bhai Vir Singh and Bhai Shahidi Azam Udham Singh - the 'life of Guru Amer Das Ji', 'Guru Nanak Dev Ji', 'conflict and Sikhism' and *simran*'), workshops (on 'British law and the Sikhs', 'Sikhs and the education system', 'equality issues' and five other issues), computing (Panjabi language learning programmes), sports activities (swimming, football, badminton, rounders) and sessions concerned with 'crime prevention', 'Sikhs in the twentieth century' and 'Sikhs and the army'.¹⁵ Every day included eating in the *langar* and participation in *divan*. The week ended with a day trip to Telford Adventure Park or the Derbyshire Peak District and a prize giving ceremony.

Participation in the camp entailed following a full and exacting schedule. Campers conformed to expectations of discipline and many girls wore the uniform colours of white and yellow. After a cup of tea or juice, each day commenced and ended with worship - an hour in the morning from 7.30 (followed by exercises and breakfast) and the *kirtan sohila* in the evening. For lectures they were divided into groups by age and gender. Having many of their lectures in the gurdwara meant that they showed respect to the Guru Granth Sahib in the traditional way on entering and leaving a class. Moreover eating in the *langar* involved its own discipline. All sat cross-legged in lines on the floor to eat, since all furniture had been removed on the recommendation of a visiting *sant*.¹⁶ Before commencing their meal the campers sang repeatedly and vigorously 'Satnam Satnam Satnam ji Vahiguru Vahiguru Vahiguru ji... japo...'¹⁷

Many sessions were lectures - in Panjabi or English - in which a speaker addressed and sometimes questioned a group of campers, sitting cross-legged on the floor in rows. The session in the gurdwara library introducing them, hands-on, to Panjabi teaching computer programmes made a popular change. In another session a leader established immediate rapport by offering an alphabetical quiz. For each letter of the (roman) alphabet campers had to call out words associated with Sikhism that began with that initial.

Certain values pervaded lecturers' presentations; a key cluster of related values were the uncomplaining endurance of horrific torture (illustrated by the story of Bhai Mani Singh) 'beginning with the tip of his fingers they were cut off joint by joint till his wrist', self sacrifice to counter *zulam* (tyranny) (exemplified by Guru Teg Bahadar and Banda Bahadar) and being a 'Sikh sipai' (a Sikh soldier) as demonstrated by Banda Bahadar. This could involve avenging atrocity violently (the heroic Udham Singh's murder of O'Dwyer).¹⁸ Honesty, too, was singled out for approbation. Key values also included 'help[ing] poor people' which, one teacher explained, was the symbolic meaning of the two swords around the *khanda* emblem. Another lecturer

emphasised the necessity of surrendering oneself to discipline in order to learn. He explained that Guru Amar Das's twelve years of *seva* (service) to his predecessor was necessary in order to balance the arrogance which could all too easily result from the feeling of being high as a result of *simran* (meditation). To this tendency humble service was the antidote. Some speakers' references to their own hard-won achievements suggested the legitimacy of pride in succeeding after a protracted struggle. Behaviour which speakers commended included early rising, bathing (*isnan*) and prayer — 'when you get up, before you go to school, wash your hands and face and definitely do *mul mantra da path* for whatever time you have [and] at night time do *kirtan sohda*'

Speakers enunciated certain beliefs. Concerning 'God' they said 'God is right from the beginning of the world. You can't say God was born on such a day' and 'God is one'. About the Guru a speaker said 'Guru is a spiritual teacher...to take us from darkness to light'. Regarding human society two points were stressed: the equality of all whatever their gender, caste or creed and, secondly, the fact that 'Guru Nanak said man by birth is not sinful, he becomes sinful by the company he keeps'. 'We have to choose between the path of goodness and badness' and 'keep the company of truthful people.' These emphases are intrinsic to the Gurus' teaching.

The statements that God could not take birth implied a criticism of Hindu and Christian belief and the claim that humans were not born sinful implied a distinction between Sikhism and Christianity, or at least its doctrine of original sin. Similarly one lecturer's assertion that pilgrimages, fasts and set ways of worship have very little merit for the soul implicitly marked a difference in emphasis between Sikh and Hindu tradition. In the former 'only God's name and good action, honestly earning a living and doing duty can uplift the soul'. One speaker's insistence that 'the Guru is not God' stood in contradiction of many subjects' articulation of their belief (see chapter nine). The leader of the alphabetical quiz (mentioned above) made unambiguous distinctions between Sikh and English usage.

However, on occasion speakers drew on their knowledge of the Christian tradition in order to affirm a belief in the miraculous or to explain an institution. Referring presumably to the story of Jesus's resurrection and to the disappearance of Guru Nanak's body before it could be either buried or cremated, one argued that if Jesus could disappear then there was no reason to disbelieve in the account of Guru Nanak's disappearance. Guru Amar Das's institution of *manjis* was likened to 'Christians'...bishops and cathedrals.¹⁹

Furthermore English terms were used by speakers for Panjabi concepts with no precise English equivalent (see chapter twelve). Thus campers heard that 'Mata Sundari made Bhai Mani Singh head priest' and the words 'nectar' and 'baptised' were used for *amrit* and *amrit chhakna*, although in the

alphabetical quiz 'hymn' and 'holy man' were rejected by the leader as English words alien to Sikhism.

At least one lecturer emphasised the equality of the sexes, saying that 'woman has different functions but equal power'. Certainly the camp suggested that functions were generally different, with only women working in the gurdwara kitchen. Moreover teachers and organisers were male while most of the helpers were female. Nevertheless, though in separate groups, the male and female campers followed the same programme of activities.

Campers were introduced to techniques for devotional activity. One camper (a girl) described the *simran* session. For this they had had to sit for half an hour, holding their hands up, with the thumb and first finger touching - and so forming a circle - and their wrists supported on their knees. They had to repeat *Vahiguru*'. At the end the leader asked them what they were thinking about.

While concerned with Sikh history and traditional values the camp accommodated aspects of modernity and a western lifestyle. For example, unusually, the *langer* included ice cream. For breakfast campers had cereals, fried bread and beans as well as *parathas*. The computer sessions in the library introduced children (and teachers) to the latest technology dedicated to Panjabi language teaching.²⁰

Sikh Tradition in School

a) Introduction

As outlined in chapter seven, the inclusion of some treatment of faiths other than Christianity in the schools which young British Sikhs attend has a statutory basis in British law, and Sikhs are members of the Coventry SACRE. Thus in some young people's schools an acknowledgement of the Sikh tradition was discernible not only in the provision of Panjabi classes but also in acts of collective worship (assembly), in religious education lessons, in other parts of the curriculum and more generally in the schools' ethos. The case for deliberate inclusion of Sikhs in both the overt and hidden curriculum has been argued by Cole (1982b).

Both the extent of this acknowledgement by the school and its character varied considerably. Those subjects (such as Sarbjit) whose school had very few Sikh pupils encountered less of their tradition at school than those in schools with a significant Sikh intake. An eight year old girl in a school in the south of Coventry with only one other Sikh pupil complained:

They've never talked about Panjabi. They've never talked about how they went to battle, nothing about [Sikhs]... not even about Pakistan... because we always have things about Europe.

However the fact that a school had a large number of Sikh pupils did not necessarily mean that they felt that their tradition was taken into account. Raspreet's school (also in the south) had a rising percentage of Asian pupils, including Sikhs, but she felt that only Christianity was promoted. She complained that in religious education:

It's really boring because all we learn about is Christ, Christ, Christ, and some people don't want to learn about this Christ person, and **I** think they should mix religions. We should learn about Hindi, Urdu and stuff like that. I'd like to try and tell people, 'Why don't you learn people about Sikh religion?' Not necessarily just because I'm a Sikh but other religions as well, so we get to learn a mixture and it could become useful in life.²¹

b) Collective Worship

The morning 'assembly' could be, as seen in chapter five with reference to the festival of Vaisakhi, an occasion for a specifically Sikh presentation. Divali provided another opportunity: primarily a Hindu celebration it is, as mentioned in chapter six, widely enjoyed by Sikhs. One assembly described by Gurvinder was almost certainly related to Divali since the story which she recounted (actually about Guru Hargobind, not Guru Gobind Singh) is one which Sikhs tell to account for their Divali rejoicing. She related:

We did an assembly about our religious [*sic*] when **I** think it was Guru Gobind Singh was in gaol and he said that he wanted everyone in gaol to come out like all the princes and princesses and...everyone can get hold of his cloak. He was like taking them out of gaol and saving them and so at night he attached more cloth on to his cloak, and the next day everyone got hold of it, and every single person in gaol was freed.

Amandeep's recollections of Divali illustrate how collective worship could provide an opportunity for young Sikhs to share something of their more broadly South Asian culture with other pupils.

Divali, I do a dance with my friend at school. It's a Sikh friend, but sometimes I do it with English people because I can teach them, My friend Carol does it with me sometimes. We plan doing it on Divali day. Last year we did it two times, because we did it to the class and then we had to do it in the assembly.

Subjects expressed pleasure and pride at the inclusion of their tradition. Jasvir reported:

We did in the fourth year. We showed pictures, stories of the Gurus, what you do and things like that. I felt very proud of myself.

Sarbjit, who said that she had never learned anything about her religion in her (Church of England) primary school, described how a year or two previously a teacher had:

brought all these Sikh things in like a *kangha*, that comb, a bracelet, one of those...She told all the Sikhs to come out and sit on the bench that she'd put out.

That the inclusion of Sikh stories and artefacts in assembly could educate young Sikhs in their own faith, as well as informing non-Sikh pupils, was suggested in one ten year old boy's response to a picture of Guru Nanak which he was shown during interview: 'I think it's Guru Nanak...seen it in assembly once'.

The Ravidasi boy attributed his detailed knowledge of stories of Guru Nanak's disappearance and commission and the institution of the five Ks to reading. Also did in assembly about my religion - I told the story of the Sikhs... and the meanings of the five Ks'. Thus assembly had reinforced his knowledge and boosted his confidence in his tradition.

Even if subjects did not encounter their tradition in assembly there were other ways in which it could be affirmed by the school. A twelve year old girl said that in assembly in her (Church of England) school there was no mention of Sikhism:

Just songs and stuff and sometimes this man comes from the church... We never really talk. We're just like given trophies and certificates and talking about the toilets because the water was turned off and it's all brown and you're not allowed to drink it.

But, she added, there had been a school visit: 'Last year we went to Gurdwara - Nanaksar - I had to bring the books.' Thus, in a school where Sikh tradition was far from prominent and there were only two Sikh pupils an initiative by the school had given her some responsibility and introduced her to a gurdwara markedly different from the one to which she was accustomed.

c) Religious Education

In the experience of some of my Sikh interviewees religious education lessons provided a framework for some study of the Sikh faith tradition. An eleven year old boy said:

We have like educational programmes coming on weekdays and we watch them usually at school - what they do at the gurdwara. When we're watching the video they ask all the Sikhs around what you've learned and everything.

Teachers might be directive, as in one nine year old girl's experience: In Mrs M's class we talked about religion, we talked about Sikh. We had to draw Guru Nanak's face and write all the Gurus' names.

Alternatively RE lessons might simply provide an opportunity to which Sikh pupils were free to react in different ways. Whereas Daljit recalled: 'In Religious Education we had to do a project about somewhere a church or a place where people go to worship: I'm doing about the gurdwara', Ravinder reported: We were able to choose a religion to study in RE. People said, 'Let's do Sikhism' in my group, but I said, know everything about that', so we chose Muslims.

In a thirteen year old girl's RE lesson a teacher's enquiry about the meaning of pupils' names led to their questioning their parents. (Most Sikh forenames have religious significance.) The thirteen year old girl knew the meaning of hers because in Religious Education 'we were doing the symbolic meaning - they just told us to ask our parents'. As with assembly, festivals provided another entry point in religious education. Once again an assignment prompted the subject concerned to make enquiries at home. Ravinder recounted, 'I did an essay for RE about Vaisakhi...I asked my dad'. RE lessons were also an opportunity to share religiously significant food as when the twin nine year old sisters 'brought *prashad* in' for their class.

The presence of a Sikh member of staff could be a decisive factor (or be perceived by children as decisive) in the inclusion of Sikh tradition in the curriculum. Talking about another class this young person continued: 'This lady, Mrs G, she's teaching them Sikh because she's a Sikh.'

d) The Rest of the Curriculum and Resources

Not only religious education but also a technology project on home, family and community had enabled the thirteen year old girl to write about her tradition. 'First I did something about my family and how we spent our time and what happened like during the day and then at the end, last chapter, I did something on Sikhism.' Jasvir's teacher incorporated pupils' visits to Punjab into their curriculum by issuing work books entitled 'My Visit' to children going on 'extended visits abroad'. With its page to describe a wedding, for example, this was a recognition by the school of the value of such experiences. Some of these accounts suggest that the subjects themselves and their families were their school's resource for introducing the Sikh tradition. However some at least also made books on Sikh tradition available through their libraries.

e) Ethos

Even if South Asian, as opposed to specifically Sikh, culture was mediated by the school Sikh pupils felt more comfortable. One ten year old girl's school had introduced pupils to secular elements of childhood in India. Her teacher had taught the pupils how to play '*sher* and *bakri*, goat and tiger, a game like fig, from a book'. Amandeep happily mentioned that 'we usually have a Ram and Sita dance'.

Conversely Raspreet had witnessed a Hindu pupil humiliated and reduced to tears because an irate teacher had not understood that the colour on his hands was *mehandi*, a vegetable pigment applied for decoration at the time of a relative's wedding (for its significance see Nesbitt 1991:17). Such an experience was unsettling for pupils of South Asian origin, whatever their faith tradition.

The Library

Supplementing the resources of the school (and home) were the public libraries. A thirteen year old boy mentioned his approach to a project on the ten Gurus which he had done in his first year at secondary school: 'My mum and dad helped me and then I got a book about them because I go to the library and I got one about Vaisakhi and the five Ks.' Several subjects referred to books from public libraries in Coventry and Bedworth as sources of knowledge about their tradition. The eleven year old Ravidasi boy spoke enthusiastically of a book he had borrowed called 'Guru Nanak and his Mystic Teachings'. Davinder and Daljeet visited the library as part of their Saturday routine. Gurdial knew that: 'the holy book was written by Guru Arjan before he got tortured...[because] I read books - I get a book from the library' and Satwant said:

I like reading story books, especially religious ones, because you learn a lot. I've read about the ten Gurus, about Ram and Sita, some of them in Panjabi, books from the library, from different places.

The library service actively promoted its resources for ethnic minorities. During the fieldwork period not only did the library service mount the exhibition and competitions for Vaisakhi described in chapter six, but also the librarian charged with special responsibility for minority groups conducted one Sunday morning class in Guru Nanak Parkash Gurdwara, so bringing Panjabi books and cassettes to the notice of teachers and children.

Critical Discussion

The facts that Sikh means a pupil, and that central to the faith is the concept of the book as teacher (Guru), suggest that formal nurture of the young in the tradition might also have a prominent place. At the time of my Coventry fieldwork the deliberate, organised imparting of valued aspects of the Sikh

tradition to Sikh children took place most unambiguously in Panjabi language classes and music classes that were held in three gurdwaras and in some schools and community centres. As chapter seven has shown, the Panjabi classes convey and reinforce various aspects of the Sikh faith tradition in a variety of ways. None of the organisers (except for the one avowedly 'secular' teacher in one community centre) would have sought to separate religion from language, even if (as observed in Bradford) 'Sikh religion is not taught as part of the curriculum in these classes' (Ramindar Singh 1992:19). Ironically, whereas the provision of formal nurture is itself a significant change in Sikh tradition, much of the provision was in the early 1990s strikingly unchanged from two or three decades before.

Like culture itself the supplementary classes run by encapsulated ethnic minority groups can be viewed as 'an outcome... of individual and group confrontations, placed within a field of domination and inequality' (Fox 1985:199). However, the Coventry data also suggests some diversification and the potential for future change. The lack of change may be characterised (as it was by Shinder Thandi at the conference mentioned in chapter seven) as a failure.

Despite the dedicated service of the teachers, there were many signs that the formal nurture of young Sikhs was less than ideal. Thandi claimed that young Sikhs had been failed by their 'religious education', i.e. the formal nurture in their own faith. This failure had a number of causes: there was no structure for teaching basic principles and the medium used was ineffective. Material was presented via outdated books and methods and as a result children were neither interested nor motivated. He pointed to 'inadequate Panjabi language development' (the result of outdated and inappropriate teaching methods and materials), the underfunding of resources, the lack of parental support and a shortage of qualified language teachers. The outcome of this failure was, Thandi suggested, that Sikh children were 'unaware of the contents and values of the scriptures'. They were adopting 'malpractice and ritualism' and a constraint was imposed upon the community's development.

The struggle of dedicated teachers in Nottingham, portrayed with comment fourteen years previously (Nesbitt 1980a:99-101), also typified the Coventry situation. At that time I had noted the difficulty of teaching groups with very uneven ability and proficiency. The Coventry classes were however divided into groups by age and competence. Nevertheless, the erratic attendance, unsatisfactory books and methods continued. This was largely because of the low priority given by either the gurdwara management committees or the Local Education Authority to providing salaries for teachers, money for books and audio-visual resources, and (in the case of the gurdwaras) adequate accommodation.

Schools' provision was also inadequate and very variable from school to school. In secondary schools Panjabi was by no means on a par with French (the European language on offer) in terms of timetabling or resources.²² Classes after normal school hours are a deterrent to pupils who might otherwise enrol, but classes in school hours that conflicted with other subjects or recreation would also reduce the number of students. Of the adults who are fluent and literate in Panjabi few have teaching qualifications recognised by the Department of Education and Science. Punjabi teachers educated and qualified in Britain sometimes perceive dangers to their career prospects in undertaking what is widely regarded as a marginal ethnic subject. Very few of the Punjabi teachers qualified in Britain have been trained in language teaching methods. This results in a shortage of eligible candidates and a lack of high level competition for those posts which are available.

Thus Thandi's criticisms of the formal nurture of Sikh children were to some extent supported by the data. However, they also obscured a necessary distinction, and unless this is addressed the Sikh tradition in Britain will probably continue to be dependent for *granthis* and *gianis* on those educated in Punjab. In taking for granted the centrality of Panjabi language to Sikh nurture Thandi assumed a near identity of the two which is dealt with in chapter eleven. What needs to be distinguished is the relationship between, on the one hand, contemporary Panjabi as an 'ethnic vernacular' and, on the other hand, 'the sacred language of the Sikhs' as a 'quasilect'. This is the term applied by Glinert to Hebrew in the British Jewish diasporic community (1993). In other words, though not quite fulfilling Glinert's criteria, the language of the Guru Granth Sahib and the *Ardas* needs to be regarded as a language analogous in its usage to the New Testament Greek of Greek Cypriots' liturgy, to the Arabic of non-Arab Muslim communities or the Hebrew of the Jewish diaspora (250). Since the language of the scriptures is not the currency of present-day interchange but is preserved in liturgical and devotional contexts there is clearly a strong parallel.

Thandi's reference to the desirability of young Sikhs knowing 'the contents and values of the scriptures' suggests that he had in mind some intellectual grasp of the *Gurbani*. So too does his condemnation of 'ritualism'. Sikhs, however, run no classes for children in the language of *Gurbani* comparable to the classical Hebrew or Arabic classes of the Jews or Muslims in Britain. This may be the result of a fallacy - that Panjabi classes either can or do equip pupils both to understand and use the contemporary language and to read and understand the 'classical' language. Moreover, teaching children to sing *shabads* without (in many cases) translating them into modern Panjabi or into English bears out the view that cerebral understanding of text is unnecessary. Despite the precedents in Hindu tradition for this view of the sacred *mantra*, it is at odds with Guru Nanak's rejection of Sanskrit for the readily comprehensible *santbhasha* of his time.²³ By failing to induct children

into a cognitive as well as affective relationship with the *shabads* that they hear and sing, and with the *paths* that they hear or recite, older Sikhs may be separating children from their scripture/Guru every bit as much as the *brahmins* and Sanskrit of Guru Nanak's day separated their ancestors from engaging with their religious heritage.

However, the Sikh tradition has repeatedly shown pessimistic forecasts to be premature and ill-founded - for example, history has gainsaid Macauliffe's opinion, expressed a century earlier, that:

The old gyanis or professional interpreters of the Granth Sahib are dying out, and probably in another generation or two their sacred books will, owing to their enormous difficulty, be practically unintelligible even to otherwise educated Sikhs. (rep 1963:viiviii)

In relation to young Sikhs' formal nurture, two points must be borne in mind. Firstly, the centrality of *kirtan* in practice has to be acknowledged, although if the growing generation of Sikhs in Britain can only sing the *shabads* without expounding them they will remain dependent for any exposition on *ragis* and *granthis* educated in India. Alternatively they will have to turn to English translations and commentaries which, currently, play no part in their tuition. Such aids would be particularly appropriate to young people in a higher age group.

Secondly, stories about the Gurus - many from the *janamsakhis* - are told in these classes. Subjects recounted such stories during their interviews - for example a ten year old boy's narration of the story of Malik Bhago (see chapter nine).²⁴ For these stories the classes were but one source, with relatives and books reinforcing their input.

Moreover the considerable achievement of the classes must be acknowledged. Classes introduced children to skills such as playing the *tabla* or forming the characters of the Gurmukhi alphabet. They also offered and reinforced information - the names of Sikh heroes, for instance. GCSE passes in Panjabi testify to their academic success with some pupils.

Comparison with Christian Sunday Schools and Hindu supplementary classes is also instructive. Because of the greater cultural homogeneity and uniformity of devotional practice classes differed from each other less than did the Hindu supplementary classes (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993). At the same time, materials for introducing children to their scriptures and the heroes of their faith were less highly developed in terms of professional educational expertise than much Christian Sunday school material.

In common with both the Hindu and Christian teachers and organisers their Sikh counterparts demonstrated enthusiasm and dedication which must influence those children with whom they interact. Moreover, as with the supplementary classes in other traditions and ethnic groups, attendance at classes builds solidarity and a sense of shared experience. Classes such as these reinforce children's sense of self-identity in terms of ethnicity, faith tradition and mother-tongue. In the case of Panjabi speakers it is these classes and the alphabets which they teach which distinguish Sikhs from Panjabi-speaking Hindus, Muslims and Christians (Nesbitt 1980a:101).

When asked how she had learned most about her religion, Sarbjit answered, 'My parents and my Panjabi class'. Similarly Raspreet said: 'My dad's told me some of it and also I learn more about it at my Panjabi class because at the end of the lesson you have something like a religious talk.' In their cases, as with most of the subjects, and all the case study subjects, informal and formal nurture combined. One nine year old boy said unequivocally that he had learned most about his tradition from his Panjabi teacher. The account of Vaisakhi in chapter six has already suggested the prominence of such classes in some young Sikhs' encounter with their tradition and the mutual reinforcement that is possible between teaching in the gurdwara and in the day school.

The supplementary classes also provided evidence of present and potential change. First, the various interactions of Panjabi and English (further discussed in chapter twelve) were noteworthy. The medium of instruction in the classes suggested the development of a form of Panjabi-studded English and English-studded Panjabi. In different classes a different balance of English and Panjabi prevailed. The class in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara was conducted largely in Panjabi, whereas English characterised the Sikh Cultural Society class. The reasons probably included the nature (Sikh or secular) of the venue, the educational background of the teacher concerned and the level of fluency general among the pupils. At Jasvir's camp, when campers were asked which language they wanted a session to be conducted in, the unanimous request was 'English'. In each case the English used in classes was extremely respectful in every reference to the Gurus. Moreover it was laden with untranslated Panjabi words: *fakir*, *mahant*, *samadh*, *shabad*, *seva*, *granthi*, *shahidi din*, *janeu* ('string') in one Sikh Cultural Society class. (English translations appear in the glossary.)

Since James' observations in Huddersfield and my research in Nottingham, four developments are indicative of potential change in the *status quo*. One is the possible contribution of the growing number of youth camps. The second is the possibility of attractive, computer-based teaching methods. The third is the establishment of groups such as the Sikh Cultural Society which can, from a basis of parental concern and professional competence, cater for the

needs of young Sikhs, provided that adequate resources of time and funding are forthcoming. Fourthly, in Ajit Darbar children's participation in *kirtan* and the discussion with them of spirituality are notable. So too Barrow (1995) describes the prominence given to developing children's spirituality in a '*sant gurdwara*' in Southall. It would be interesting to compare more widely the approach to nurturing Sikh faith in such gurdwaras and those run by committees, rather as Dwyer compared Hindu nurture in a non-sectarian temple and a sectarian (i.e. *sampradaya-specific*) one (1988).

NOTES

- 1 For the *swaras* [notes] of the octave see Judge (1993:18).
- 2 For the *tabla* beat see Shepherd and Sahai (1992).
- 3 'Professor' is widely used as an expression of respect for a teacher in Punjabi contexts.
- 4 '*Ram raje*' occurs in the line '*Tithe jaye beha mera Satguru so than sohava Ram raje*' ('wherever Satguru goes is sanctified'), sung as the scriptures are carried out (Gopinder Kaur oral communication).
- 5 The subject has confused Guru Amar Das (who was not martyred) with Guru Arjan Dev.
- 6 *Satguru tumre kaj suvare*' means 'May Satguru help you to fulfil your tasks'.
- 7 Only this subject used 'prophet' to translate 'Guru' which was widely translated as 'God' (see chapter nine).
- 8 Re Ajit Darbar an informant from Nanaksar gurdwara noted:

Children younger than thirteen doing very sweet *kirtan*. They let children take over, without limiting time. In other temples if children come to the stage they say, 'One *shabad* - just ten minutes'. [At Ajit Darbar] they don't teach but encourage them doing it on their own initiative.

- 9 Probably children participated with a greater frequency than Sambhi suggested: 'Occasionally groups of young Sikhs are also seen performing *kirtan* in the Gurdwaras'. (1984:316)

Khalsa mero rup hat khas' - words of Guru Gobind Singh - mean 'the Khalsa is my very self.'

- 10 'Guru *mero*' means 'my Guru'.
- 11 The talc stops fingers from becoming sweaty and slipping.
- 12 This was an alternative to the conventional presentation in a gurdwara of a cloth.
- 13 This parallels Hindu experience. See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:158-160).
- 14 Sword fighting, especially associated with the Hola Mahon festival at Anandpur, is a prized Sikh tradition.
- 15 For the eminent Sikhs Mani Singh, Banda Bahadar, Vir Singh, Udham Singh see respectively Khushwant Singh (rep 1977 vol 1: 24; 101ff; vol 2:313-316; vol 2, 166).
- 16 This symbolic return to traditional practice has also taken place in other British gurdwaras. Field work preceded the 1998 *hukamnama* (edict) banning chairs and tables, which resulted in violent controversy in e.g. Canada and New Zealand (Nesbitt 1999).
- 17 This is 'praise to God whose name is Truth', *japo* - meaning 'repeat' - introducing each repetition.
- 18 Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, had approved the massacre in Amritsar ordered by General Dyer on Vaisakhi 1919.
- 19 For *man*) is (literally 'bedstead' cf 'cathedral's Greek root meaning 'chair') see Cole and Sambhi (1978:21-22).
- 20 'Maboli [lit. 'mother-tongue] systems' was established in Birmingham.
- 21 Her view conforms with those of Sadh parents observed by Ramindar Singh:

Sikh parents have from time to time expressed their concern about the absence of teaching of Sikhism in schools in general and instructions in Sikhism for their own children. On the whole, they have argued in favour of multi-faith education for the benefit of all children, including their own. (1992:54)
- 22 Under the 1988 Education Reform Act the national curriculum includes (among the 'foundation subjects') a 'modern foreign language', but 'the other living languages of Britain,[i.e. other than Welsh] in some schools

representing a majority of children, are to be relegated to 'Schedule 2' as options to be offered as an alternative to the required 'Schedule 1' European Community working languages' (Modern Languages in the National Curriculum DES 3/3/89). This is quoted by Flude and Hammer (1990:184) as an example of the 'narrowly white and English concept of "national"'. However, since 1990, Panjabi has been one of the nineteen languages acceptable in the national curriculum, the schedules having been discarded (3.S.Nagra oral communication February 1995).

- 23 See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993) for contemporary Hindu practice and Hoens (1979) for the efficacy of the word - *mantra* and *japa* - in ancient Hindu tradition.
- 24 See McLeod (1980a) for this *janamsakhi* story.

Chapter 9

Apprehension of the sacred: God and Baba

Introduction

Previous chapters, whether focusing on formal or informal nurture, have suggested the diversity of religious practice, even in a relatively homogeneous group of young Sikhs. This chapter continues the theme of a spectrum of diversity by examining not practice but concepts. Starting from subjects' usage of the English term 'God', it explores its conceptual content, finding a key to better understanding in 'Guru' and 'Baba', terms which have recurred in quotations from subjects in previous chapters, rather than in such terms as '*Akal Purakh*' and '*Vahiguru*' which are translated as 'God' in many English works.¹ As anticipated in chapter one, ethnographic research discloses considerable discrepancy between the concepts of young Sikhs and the presentation of their religious world in the literature.

Faith traditions testify to the existence of a spiritual power that transcends, but also infuses, the material world of mundane human experience. In more Durkheimian terms, religions distinguish between the sacred and the profane (1915). In Otto's understanding, believers are open to the numinous (1950). 'Supernatural', 'divine', 'holy' are among terms in popular English usage, each implying a distinction from the 'natural', the 'human' and the 'unholy'.

The nurture of children in a faith tradition may therefore be assumed to give them glimpses of the sacred or some sense of the numinous, or even to introduce them to some 'divine power', however it is imaged or conceptualised.

The language which they use is likely to make distinctions between two or more orders of being or to indicate levels of experience (e.g. in English usage, 'spiritual', 'mental' and 'physical').

Already in earlier chapters the introduction of *kirtan*, prayer and the Guru Granth Sahib has suggested an affective dimension of young Sikhs experiencing emotions associated with religious faith. These emotions might include a sense of solidarity with a worshipping community, the feeling of awe or respect in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, the sense of reassurance that petition may be heard and answered. The young people's frequent reference to 'God' was the starting point for an exploration of the corresponding conceptual dimension of young Sikhs' experience. When, in the course of being interviewed in English, children used the words 'God', 'blessed' and 'power' in numerous contexts what did they mean?

Another possible approach would have been to focus upon words from Sikh scripture and tradition which are often translated as 'God' in English (e.g. *Vahiguru*) and to have questioned subjects about these. Instead, springing from the prominence of the terms 'God', 'Guru' and '*Baba*' in the interview data, this chapter examines subjects' use of the word 'God' and its conceptual relationship to the Panjabi words 'Guru' and '*Baba*'.

God and Baba

a) Sikh Adults' Use of 'God'

Before reporting young Sikh subjects' use and understanding of the term 'God' it is important to note the usage of Sikh adults with whom they had contact. In speaking about God to the researcher and in the course of teaching Sikh children (in English) during the fieldwork period, Sikh adults used the word consistently with Sikh teaching as represented in both Sikh literature and school curriculum materials. Their statements included:

God helped me a lot.

There is some supernatural power which I give the name of God.

God is one; he doesn't like nationalism.

Only God's name and good action can uplift the soul.

However, (from this outsider's viewpoint at least) some inconsistency was also evident: whereas, on the one hand, teachers expressed themselves as above, another teacher explained: 'Guru Nanak is God: God is one but, like humans are different colours, Hindus have Krishna [variant of Krishna], Sikhs have Guru Nanak'. Moreover, as noted in chapter seven, in her exercise book one child attending the Panjabi class in her primary school had written in a list of Gurmukhi words and their English meanings 'Guru is a God' and this had been ticked. But, by contrast, another teacher (at irasvir's camp) emphatically corrected children who said 'God' for Guru and stressed the oneness of God as

indicated in the formula *ik onkar* by the use of a single digit rather than the word 'one', which is divisible into several letters.

Grammatically, speakers varied in referring to God as either 'he' or 'they'. Since the plural pronoun conforms to the convention in Indian languages of using a plural to show respect (as with French '*vous*' and, originally, the English 'you'), this should not be taken to indicate polytheistic belief.

b) The Children's Usage

During their initial interview all subjects were shown the *ik onkar* symbol and were asked what it meant. In almost every case they said *ik onkar* and translated this as 'one God'. In subsequent conversation they frequently mentioned God. They spoke of God as interacting with them, either benevolently or to punish. The eleven year old Ravidasi boy spoke of his mother loving God and of God forgiving people. Of himself he said, 'I have a religion. At least I can turn to a God'. Another child spoke of respecting God and listening to him, and two mentioned thanking God. A ten year old girl said: 'God makes you do it right and if you need help, say God's name, he'll help you.'

Young Sikhs accepted that God's intervention could, as the following account shows, be particular and with visible result:

My mum had it [*amrit*, holy water] once from India. No-one drunk it and a few weeks later it was vanished and my mum goes, 'God's probably going [i.e. saying], 'You're not going to drink it so I'll take it away from you'.

Subjects frequently spoke of God's activity in their lives in connection with prayer - both as personalised petition and, as in the second example below, repetition of a sacred formula or name for the divine, e.g. *Vahiguru*.

I pray to my God every night. [God says] 'Yes, I'll make your wish come true'. (ten year old girl)

If anybody prays to God all the time they get all powerful. (nine year old boy)

God, according to another subject, speaks to people 'in your mind', telling them, for instance, not to be naughty, and an eight year old girl revealed that:

When I am asleep, when I pray God I have a feeling that God comes into me...He says like, 'What's the matter?' in my

ear...When I was stuck on my mathematics...he helped me and he gave me B with a line under and that's a good score.

God was, moreover, connected with educational success by Gurdial who said: 'If you believe in God more you grow bigger and faster and your brain expands and you can memorize things.' Subjects mentioned, too, that God made rules and might punish them for bad deeds such as swearing. This, and God's role of rewarding good deeds, were mentioned particularly in connection with dying, as by this nine year old girl: 'The body stays here but the soul of them goes up to God...and if they're so good and they love God really, really a lot God will keep them.' This understanding of God as supportively interventionist and reinforcing a moral code did not preclude the Sikh - and especially Akhand Kirtani Jatha - emphasis upon *nam simaran* (mindful repetition of God's name) described in chapter four as indicated by Daljit:

Do the Guru's prayer and get their God into their minds to remember. They remember it by saying *Vahigune* all the time for about ten minutes.

c) God as a Translation of Guru

However, reflecting the conceptual diversity which was apparent in their elders' English usage, the young people made it clear to varying degrees that 'God' was a translation for 'Guru'. They directly equated 'God' and 'Guru' both when asked the meaning of 'Guru' and when asked the meaning of 'God'. The assumed interchangeability of the two words is also evident respectively from two young people's references to *gurpurbs* as 'God's birthday', and from descriptions of incense burning and *path* in front of a 'photo of God' (i.e. a calendar picture of one of the ten Gurus). Rationales for expected behaviour were based on the same equation.

Sikhs ain't allowed to smoke. Our Gods ain't smoking, that's why.
(ten year old boy)

You have to have something on your head because most of the Gods had something on their head because they had long hair.
(nine year old girl)

There was a particularly strong equation of Guru Nanak and 'God'. All the children were shown a picture of Guru Nanak and asked what it portrayed. The following responses are typical: 'It's Guru Nanak - he was a God.' and 'the first God, Guru Nanak'. This tallies with Gates's findings (1976). He included thirty-nine Sikhs among the 1163 six to fifteen year old children whom he studied, and examined their written answers to exercises as well as the transcripts of oral interviews with them in order to find out about their concepts of God. There were thirty-two Sikhs among the children whom he asked to

draw a picture of God. He noted that 'the thirty-two Sikh drawings were mostly in the form of Guru Nanak'.

My interviewees also applied 'God' to Guru Gobind Singh - both the tenth Guru of Sikh history and (in one case) to the tenth Guru believed to be alive today:

Then another God came...the next God that came ...God made them into Sikhs. (eight year old girl)

You put it [*kara*, i.e. steel bangle] on your wrist, it's to remind you of God, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. (nine year old girl)

Speaking about Hemkunt, a pilgrimage place in the Himalayas associated with Guru Gobind Singh in an earlier incarnation, Davinder said:

They can hear God actually. They can leave these clothes there, they can hear all the water going on and hear him do it. People are amazed at that - God getting dressed and then while he's having a bath and that the water's on, they can't see him.²

Many references to 'God' were to pictures ('photos' as both adults and children called them) of the Gurus. Amarjit explained how such pictures came to be painted:

They pray to him, they pray, then God showed their picture and sometimes, like they draw it. They pray and a picture like God comes like in their mind and they see it. Then they try and draw him and put it on the wall.³

God was understood as visible to those who have practised *nam simaran* in a sustained way, as emphasised by Davinder:

They say God is everywhere... If you do *nam simaran* a lot you can see God_ My mum was telling me once, she never used to do *path* or anything, then once in her mind she saw a light flashed...she saw sort of God picture...

An eleven year old boy reflected at the greatest length on the relationship between the concept of Guru (for which he used the word 'messenger') and what he called 'the real God':

We've got ten Gods plus the eleventh, the holy book, and that is really what I like about [my religion]. We've got eleven Gods and we know which one we can pray to - the one that is, the one who

actually made us...Guru Nanak and the other ones are messengers from the real God. I don't know [who the real God is]. He ... is with us and he tells Guru Nanak ...what we should do when we are Sikhs. That's the same [God] for every religion. The person who's hearing your prayers is the one you pray to, so it's up to you. If you want to pray to the eleven Gods you can. If you don't want to you can pray to the real one. So it goes from us to Guru Nanak and Guru Nanak passes on to the real God.

His thought develops even in the process of articulating it, with a hierarchy or line of communication between us and the 'real God' emerging. Other subjects did not show this level of conceptual discrimination.

Given that the scriptures are believed by Sikhs to be the living Guru it is not surprising that some subjects equated God not only with the ten historic human Gurus but also with the 1430 page volume of hymns which is central to all corporate Sikh acts of worship. A ten year old boy not only gave 'the name of the Sikh God' as 'Guru Granth Sahib' but he used the phrase 'under my God's bed' for under the *palki* (stand) on which the Guru Granth Sahib is installed. Describing the evening rite in which the scripture is laid to rest a ten year old girl reported: 'First we do a prayer to God and then we change his clothes.'

However some of the young Sikhs' distinctions between 'God' and Guru (not unlike some Christian children's of God and Jesus) should also be noted. Referring to the *janamsakhi* story of Malik Bhago, a ten year old boy explained that Guru Nanak squeezed blood from the rich man's *roti* 'by his magic from God because he was really good'.

d) God and Babaji as Equivalent Terms

Alternatively, these instances suggest that the young people were frequently using 'God' to translate 'Guru'. This explanation of the ways in which they employed the word *does* not however fully explain the examples which follow. To do so one needs to consider the word '*Baba*' or '*Babaji*', a term which is also used for the Gurus including the Guru Granth Sahib.⁴ It is also used in other ways. The word *Babaji* (the *ji* is honorific) is a respectful term for addressing and referring to elderly men and means (paternal) 'grandfather'. Two youngsters used '*Babaji*' in this way.

In Sikh tradition '*Baba*' is a title not only for senior men but also for certain greatly revered boys who died young, notably the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh (the *sahibzade*).⁵ In contemporary usage '*Babaji*' is the usual way in which devotees address or refer to a living spiritual leader or *sant*. Although this is not part of official Sikh belief and is condemned by many Sikhs, there is a tendency for *sants*, charismatic spiritual masters, some of

whom are believed to have healing power, to be regarded as if they were not only preachers of the Gurus' teaching but as Guru themselves.⁶ A ten year old Ramgarhia boy, who had needed a cure for his asthma, recalled the following visit to a *sant*. In keeping with Indian conventions for showing respect, subjects never referred to them by their names but only as '*Babaji*'

We went to Wolverhampton once and we went to this God's place,..[he gave my mum] water to drink every day.... she went to God and he goes that he [the boy] has to drink this and he can't eat egg or [non-vegetarian] stuff like that.

As explained in chapter one, Coventry, like some other cities with large Sikh communities, not only has gurdwaras that are managed by elected committees, but also gurdwaras established by the followers of living *sants* whose authority is unquestioned in matters such as their running and organisation. One is the Ajit Singh Darbar, where devotees revere Baba Ajit Singh. The other is Nanaksar Gurdwara Gursikh Temple, where Baba Mihan Singh is venerated. Thus a twelve year old Jat girl referred to Baba Ajit Singh's managerial role in the gurdwara in connection with rules about the kitchen and the starting of Panjabi classes.

It should be pointed out that the word '*Babaji*' was not used by all subjects during their interviews, and that it recurred particularly in conversation with devotees of Baba Ajit Singh. The scepticism felt by many Sikhs about human *Babajis* is apparent in Davinder's reference to a follower of Baba Mihan Singh. 'He was one of that lot who believe in that guy'. However, whether subjects used 'God', '*Babaji*' or both, a similar spectrum of meaning underlay both terms.

The following quotations show that those subjects who said *Babajr* did not simply use the same word '*Babaji*' for two distinguishable entities, God and Ajit Singh, Milian Singh or another *sant*, but that they (and their parents) believed that the *sant* was indeed God in respect of supernatural powers. Asked what God looked like a ten year old girl replied, using 'he' and 'they' interchangeably: 'He wears shiny shoes and they usually have a turban and they're not old, they're seventy or something and they are like jackets with ties and they wear black or maybe trousers.' She also said: 'We've got a person like we've got a God to us that we always appreciate and we actually do pray to him.' One girl also emphasised Ajit Singh's supernatural powers: '*Amritjal* [holy water] - *Babaji* gave it to us to protect us from evil things and everything and the *prashad* - the sugar lumps- *Babaji* touched it and said it's for our *parai* [studying] at school.' Her friend understood this (apparently human) *Babaji* to also be God who decides individuals' afterlife: 'If they say '*Dhann* Guru Nanak' really, really a lot, *Babaji* makes them somebody special. If they've been really bad into an animal or insect.'

Mihan Singh was referred to as '*Babaji*' with similarly superhuman powers.

He's really old. He should be around 200. (twelve year old boy)

Have you seen when *Babaji* comes?...Everyone says he's got power in him. He's seen Guru Nanak Dev Ji. (Satwant)

They listen to what somebody like *Babaji* says because they're special... like if somebody's feeling sick they would ask him to give some special water.

The fact that subjects saw 'God' (a term and concept which we have already shown that most subjects equated with 'Guru') and *Babaji* as equivalent terms and concepts is further borne out by their use of '*Babaji*' to mean Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, the ten Gurus in general and the Guru Granth Sahib. For example two ten year old girls who worshipped Baba Ajit Singh said:

Babaji killed one and then there was blood on his sword and they, everybody,... said that he's mad and then *Babaji* went back into the room and then he turned them all alive and made them into *panj piare* [five loved ones, the first five initiates].

The person that we pray to is a bible that's called *Babaji*...we've only got one God that's our holy bible.

Babaji's been put on your head like they have to carry them. (This refers to the fact that when the volume of scripture is moved it has to be carried, carefully wrapped in cloth, on a devotee's head.)

Not only was the same word used for all three (Guru, Guru Granth Sahib and living *sant*) but the actual living *sant* (*Babaji*) was equated with both the Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib. This is particularly apparent in mentions of *Babaji's* room' and 'putting *Babaji* to sleep' as the quotations below illustrate:

It's like a picture of *Babaji*. We've got three of them. We've got Baba Ajit Singh in the living room and we've got Guru Nanak Dev Sahib Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

And then they do *Babaji*, put *Babaji* to sleep and then they take *Babaji* upstairs... On top (of the door) there's *Babaji's sarup* [form i.e. picture] It's got a bed and there's *Babaji's* chair, *Babaji's* cushion things, *Babaji's sarup* - like Guru Gobind Singh. (ten year old girl)

That all these *Babajis* (or manifestations of *Babaji*) were equated with 'God' is suggested by this answer to 'Have you ever heard God speaking to you?'

Yes, just some days, because you know when it's when we go into *Babaji's* room we do our *mattha tek* [obeisance] and then sometimes I ask if they're all right and sometimes they reply, 'Yes% [I just hear a voice saying] '*Hanji*' [yes]. (twelve year old fat girl)

Not only did some children say explicitly that the Panjabi word they would use for 'God' was '*Babaji*', but their diverse (from the standpoint of English usage) use of '*Babajr*clearly paralleled the contexts in which they said 'God'.

e) Multiple Usage of 'God' and '*Babaji*' by Individual Children

Although not all subjects used the word 'God' in as many (from an outsider's standpoint) ways the excerpts below from an interview with a nine year old boy (not a devotee of a living *Baba*) illustrate the not unusual conceptual span of individual usage.

- 1) My God was never borned and he never dies.
- 2) My God picked all the money...My God wasn't a Muslim.
- 3) If anybody prays to God all the time they get all powerful.
- 4) This man — he's a priest, God, right...he growed bigger and bigger... The God picked the baby up.
- 5) Under my God's bed...because my God ate all of it in his mouth.

Here in 1) God is understood as in *mul mantar* whereas in 2) 'God' is used for Guru Gobind Singh. In 3) 'God' may have been meant in a transcendent sense consonant with the *mul mantar's* stress on oneness or could equally well have any or all the senses evident in 2), 4) and 5). In 4) the boy is recounting the story of Vasudeva carrying Krishna which he had seen in the Mahabharat (Hindu epic mentioned below) on television.? In 5) he uses the term 'God's bed' for the stand (*palki*) on which the Guru Granth Sahib rests and suggests that he shares the widespread belief that a deity or the Guru Granth Sahib physically consumes food which is offered by devotees.⁸ This spectrum of usage (with the absence of 4) and the addition of 'living spiritual master' can be paralleled in some individuals' usage of '*Babaji*'.

Jasvir, a frequent participant in gurdwara worship and Panjabi classes, growing up in a home in which pictures of Mataji (the goddess), saints and

Gurus were displayed, articulated the oneness (in their parental capacity) of gods and Gurus:

Guru Gobind Singh said we are all one, it does not matter what kind of type you are... All the Gods are Mums and Dads. They're just like our father and mother, all of them, we treat them like fathers and they treat us like children. I mean all of them [Gurus, Mataji, including] Jesus.

Understanding the Young People's Concept of God.

Examination of the young Sikhs' apprehension of the sacred through their usage and understanding of 'God', 'Guru' and *Tabaji* shows firstly their unanimity in taking for granted the existence of 'God'. The relationship between 'God' as translation for *conkar* and God as 'Guru' or 'Baba' is left unclear, with only the most articulate attempting to spell out the possibility of God as both one and many (or at least as ten or eleven).

When considering the broad spectrum of subjects' use and understanding of the word 'God' it must be remembered firstly that interviews revealed that in every young person's home adults spoke Panjabi and in many homes English was used by none or only a minority of the adults (chapter eleven). As a result Sikh children were hearing about cultural and spiritual matters in Panjabi in the home as well as in the gurdwara. When they used the English word 'God' it is reasonable to assume that they were translating concepts which they had absorbed not through English but through their mother-tongue. This makes it easier to understand why it is that the Sikh children's most frequent use of God was not overtly monotheistic but as a translation of 'Guru', or of the even more inclusive Panjabi word 'Baba'. 'God', a word drawn from a language other than their mother-tongue, has been given the conceptual content of the mother-tongue folk term 'Baba'.

Thus bilingualism (including as it does code-switching) introduces a complicating factor to Spradley's analysis of terms as 'analytic' or 'folk' terms. Both insiders and outsiders may share a term - in this case 'God'. What needs to be examined is the experience-near concept which it expresses. This, as demonstrated above, can only be clarified by searching for the Panjabi terms for which it is serving as synonym. There is in English no term encompassing an equivalent spectrum of meaning.

However, secondly, it is possible that when using the term 'God' Sikh children invest it with something of the meaning that it has for a western, English-speaking society, shaped as this has been by the Judaeo-Christian tradition and European philosophy. When Sikh children hear the English word 'God' it is often from westerners and it is possible that their understanding and usage of the word is also coloured by western culture without their realizing

this. Although the Coventry Sikh findings differ from the Christian findings significantly (for the Christian children, including South Asians, the equation of God with *BabajilGuru* was not a factor) there are clear similarities (Nesbitt 1991b). Many of the Sikhs' statements about God in the context of prayer, punishment and judgement resembled statements from their Christian peers.

However, as discussed in relation to the afterlife in Hindu and Christian children's belief, the similarity may long have been part of Indian tradition and does not necessarily demonstrate Christian or Western influence on children of a diaspora minority.⁹ The emphasis on God as one certainly need not be seen as owing anything to surrounding Christian belief, given the importance of *ik onkar* and its dominant interpretation (see below). Whether subjects' unanimity in translating *ik onkar*' in this way stems from home, school or supplementary class is not clear from the data.

Thirdly, also discernible, for example in Jasvir's statement quoted above about 'all the gods', is the Hindu ethos which permeates the wider Indian context in which Sikhism arose and in which it continues to exist. The children had watched episodes of the televised Hindu epic, *Mahabharat*, with enthusiasm. When they referred to Hindu gods, whether distinguishing them from 'our Gods' or identifying them with 'my God', they conveyed an assumption of shared or cognate heritage which was absent in, for example, one boy's reference to learning in RE about 'the sun god and religion about Christians'. Simultaneously emphasising God's oneness and a plurality of 'Gods' is unproblematic in the Hindu context.¹⁰

'God' in the Literature

In published English language accounts of God in Sikh tradition there is no whiff of this plurality. 'God' and 'Guru' are clearly distinguished and '*Babaji*' does not figure, although increasingly the '*sant*' receives a mention (Butler 1993; Dhanjal 1987). The most prominent assertion about Sikh belief is that God is one or that there is only one God. Many curriculum books contain Guru Nanak's *mul maraār* (root formula, credal statement) in Gurmukhi script with an English translation. This composition, with which the Guru Granth Sahib begins, is repeated daily by many Sikhs (see chapter three). It commences with *ik onkar*, a combination of a digit (*ik*, i.e. one) and a syllable (the *onkar*, *om*). The potency of *am* in India's religious traditions predates Guru Nanak by many centuries. *Ik onkar* is rendered in most curriculum books as 'God is one' or 'there is (only) one God', although James's translation reads 'the Absolute is One' (1974:32), McLeod's rendering was 'This Being is One' (1968:163) and Nikky-Guninder Singh has 'One Reality is' (1995:1).

The *mul mantar* lists the attributes of the supreme reality: whose name is truth and who is the creator, without fear, without enmity, timeless in form, not incarnated, (and known by) the Guru's grace. Only recently - and by a British

Sikh - has the possibility of interpreting this in a non-theistic way been put forward.¹² Although in the original language no exact equivalent for the English word 'God' is used, this appears in most English renderings, often repeatedly.¹³ Moreover, although the language of the original is strikingly gender-free, in English the words 'he' and 'his' recur.¹⁴

In the religiously abundant north Indian vocabulary of the Sikhs' ten Gurus, however, many words for the ultimate reality, from Muslim and different Hindu traditions, were equally current, each with its own connotations. Examples are *Rab*, *Khuda*, *Hart* and *Parmatma*.¹⁵ It was presumably to avoid any one term with its particular nuances acquiring prominence among his followers that Guru Nanak simply referred to the ultimate as *nam* (name).¹⁶ While *nam* is usually translated in English as 'Name', for the other terms, and often in their absence, 'God' is the most frequent rendering.¹⁷ *Vahiguru* is a word currently used by Sikhs as a direct translation of 'God' but in this sense post-dates the Gurus' compositions.¹⁸ Speakers of contemporary Panjabi continue to use a range of words for the supreme being. The text book presentation is of a unitary God, bereft by English translation of the intertextuality - the rich patina of cultural association - of the Gurus' many words for the divine, and conceptually distinct from the Gurus and from the concept of Guru (Cole 1982a).

Lest it be supposed that twentieth century western scholars have imposed 'God' on Sikh sources, it must be remembered that linguistic and theological interaction between Sikh and European traditions spans several generations.¹⁹ In the late nineteenth century members of the Sikh 'elite' (educated in some cases in missionary-run foundations) were constructing a Sikh theology, possibly influenced by this early conditioning.

Ethnography and Sikh Children's 'God'

This ethnographic inquiry into some young Coventrian Sikhs' understanding of 'God' shows the diversity of their religious worlds, exemplified by Davinder and Daljit's familiarity with the practice of repeating *Vahiguru* and belief in the continuing presence of the tenth Guru in Hemkunt, Jasvir's 'all the Gods', *Babajis* in the experience of followers of *sants* and the general belief in a beneficently interventionist being with superhuman powers.

Concerned Sikh elders might regard this scenario as evidence of widespread popular misconceptions fitting with a discredited Hindu paradigm and encouraged by (false) *Babas*. To the psychologist subjects' understandings of 'God' may exemplify stages in conceptual development.²⁰ While the development taking place in some individuals' thinking was apparent in the transcripts of their reflections, the range of adults' usage of the word 'God' and of their attitudes to *Babas* - from scornful rejection to self-sacrificial veneration - must also be taken into account. Certainly the findings vindicate the

ethnographic method in uncovering the multi-faceted Sikh world inhabited by young Sikhs and the points of contact and divergence between this and the text book image of their religious nurture.

The importance of Geertz's distinction between a term and a concept (cf. his example of 'caste') emerges clearly since these bilingual subjects used the term 'God' for a concept other than the ethnographer's concept of 'God' (Jackson 1993; 1997). In a predominantly English-speaking society, whose religious ideas have been forged by the Christian tradition, 'God' is a widely used term. It served me initially as, in Spradley's language, an analytic term until it became clear that my concept of God differed significantly from subjects' experience-near concept of God. I then employed the more general term 'the sacred' both as an analytic term and as an experience-distant concept.

By taking this approach this chapter (in line with those describing formal and informal nurture) has broken free from the structure of standard introductions to the Sikh tradition, with their emphasis upon a certain normative interpretation. The aim has been to facilitate new lines of thought by following the direction of these particular, recent, local ethnographic data. This should be of particular interest to Sikhs concerned with nurturing children in their tradition.

This chapter has highlighted the complex of concepts represented by 'God' in western understanding, 'God' in English language publications on Sikh tradition, 'God' in subjects' (and their elders') usage and by 'Guru' and 'Baba'. Building on this basis, chapter ten suggests that the ways in which the sacred is mediated also diverge from textbook accounts. Central to its argument will be the concept of *amrit* in the curriculum books' accounts and in the ethnographic data.

NOTES

1 E.g. McLeod (1984:154).

2 They also believed in Guru Gobind Singh's imminent return:

On this *katha* tape... it said that.. when a lot of Sikhs are going to start dying the tenth Guru will come again,... He's going to live again because he didn't go to Anandpur Sahib, to Harmandir Sahib, so he's going to come back to fight for what it is... and he's going to fight for Khalistan.

3 This resembles the account of artist Bhagat Singh at Nanaksar in Nesbitt (1985a).

- 4 Bennett (1990) (probably alone among curriculum books) reflects this usage.
- 5 Also Guru Hargobind's sons (who died in early youth after displaying supernatural powers) were styled Baba Atal and Baba Gurditta.
- 6 This can occur even if the *sant* concerned makes no such claim (Cole 1994c:111).
- 7 Mahabharat, directed by B.R.Chopra, ran for 93 weeks (1991-1992) on BBC TV.
- 8 This belief is marked among followers of the Nanaksar *sants*. See Nesbitt (forthcoming b) and Doabia (1981).
- 9 For a comparative study of Hindu and Christian children's beliefs in heaven, hell and reincarnation see Nesbitt (1993a). For further reflection on apparently overlapping assumptions see Nesbitt and Jackson (1992).
- 10 Hindu tradition accommodates belief in the one reality (*Brahman*) and many deities, which are understood as manifestations or aspects of this reality and, individually or collectively, worshipped as supreme.
- 11 E.g. Arora (1986:20), Butler (1993:16), Sambhi (1989:70).
- 12 Arvind-pal Singh (oral communication).
- 13 Butler (1993:17), Clutterbuck (1990:19), Thorley (1989:8).
- 14 One recent exception is Clutterbuck (1990:19). *Mul mantar* contains nouns that are grammatically masculine, e.g. *purakh*, but no equivalents to the English language's gendered pronouns and possessive adjectives. See Nesbitt (1994c).
- 15 *Rab* (from Arabic) and *Khuda* (Persian), were used by Muslims, whereas *Parmatma* (supreme soul) and *Hari* (Vishnu/Krishna) are Hindu in origin.
- 16 See Delahoutre (1989:40-42). For example McLeod (1968:195-196), Cole and Sambhi (1993:32-33).
- 17 E.g. McLeod (1968).
- 18 See chapter four, note 13.

- 19 See Oberoi (1994) and Dhillon (1990) (John Parry oral communication).
- 20 Hyde (1990) provides many examples.

Chapter 10

Mediating the sacred: *Amrit*

Introduction

Faith traditions provide adherents not only with a conceptual map and vocabulary but also with channels of empowerment. These are means of accessing the power of which such concepts are an expression. The transfer and spreading of this sacred power are conveyed in English by words like 'blessing'. The practice of prayer and meditation (even in non-theistic systems) assumes that some source of enabling is at hand, for example within the individual subconscious.

Standard textbooks on Sikh tradition present the Guru Granth Sahib as the living presence of the Guru, the source of spiritual authority central to Sikh life, and the five Ks as definitive sacred symbols. From the Coventry data subjects' perceptions of the importance of the five Ks to Khalsa initiates (chapter eleven) and the centrality of the scriptural volume (as borne out especially by subjects' experience reported in chapter four) emerge indisputably. These channels of the sacred are briefly reported from the Coventry data. Moreover, the role of story (another verbal dimension of tradition) in young Sikhs' cognitive awareness of the supernatural element in their tradition is clear. During the research period alone the young people heard and recounted many stories of the Gurus' superhuman powers.¹

However, in the present chapter it is *amrit*, a recurrent motif in their accounts, which receives most detailed examination as a medium of sacred power, strongly associated with the concept of '*Baba*' as discussed in chapter

nine. The young people's experience and understanding are examined against the background of their comment on the implications of the rite of *amrit chhakna* (chapter five) and with reference to the literature by both Sikh and non-Sikh authors.

Kesh

The human body, whole and unshorn, is a distinctively Sikh expression of the sacred (Nesbitt 1997). In particular *kesh* (uncut hair) represents the physical integrity, the purity and power of the Khalsa, the *sant-sipahi* (saint-soldier). A twelve year old girl (a devotee of Baba Ajit Singh), referred to 'God' with a respectful plural pronoun in verbalising the relationship of *kesh* to 'God':

My dad said that we should be glad for what God's given us, because God's everywhere, and that means they're in our hair as well, aren't they? So if you cut part of you that means you're cutting God and that hurts them as well.

The further significance of *kesh* in subjects' understanding of 'being Sikh' receives attention in chapter eleven.

Kara

Of the other *panj kakke* the *kara* was the most widely maintained by the subjects, although many were not wearing it when interviewed. For many, nonetheless, it had a talismanic significance which is reported in this chapter since 'giving good luck' too transcends the 'natural' order. Some subjects spoke of their *kara* as a medium of supernatural power and of its protective function. Jasvir who, unusually among the subjects, was wearing three *karas* stated:

If you're not a princess you don't wear one of the symbols.² You must, if you are a princess, wear a *kara*...It means that you're kind of strong...I just like wearing them. I never take it off for games or swimming.

Gurdial also linked the *kara* with strength and swimming:

Guru Gobind Singh he made them and said, 'If you wear them God will always be with you. [If I didn't wear it I'd feel] a bit like tired... I even wear it swimming so I don't feel tired.

'The *kara* 'protects their arm if they fall down' (Satwant) and Amandeep explained: 'It's like something to protect you when you're in trouble...God protects you with that.' Amarjit (who said he did not have a *kara* that fitted him) said: 'If you wear it it brings you good luck...Bad spirits [will] just go

away...and if you're having an accident it won't kill you but it'll save you from the accident.'

Moreover, an eight year old girl provided graphic detail of the *kara* as a

Weapon of self-defence:

That protects you. At the temple you go and you wear like a *kara* and when anyone's next to you like a stranger they say, 'Come on, get in my car' and you're wearing *kara* and that means you're not scared...if the stranger takes you to his house...if he does anything that *kara* on you it will protect you... You can just bang it on his head. That's steel and it can hurt people, so you can get away and that protects you.

(Some syncretism of the Sikh tradition with warnings in school to children to beware of strangers was evident in this account.)

Three other children's comments suggest their belief that the *kara* could impart protection (but not in this physical way) against threatening situations - nightmares or punishment for a confession of guilt. A *granthi's* son said, 'Some people nearby they're scared at night and they give them *kara* and they're not scared'. According to another boy, 'If you don't wear it you get nightmares but if you do wear it you don't get nightmares' and a ten year old girl told me, 'It gives me good luck, like if I get in trouble and I tell the truth but I don't get in trouble'.

However, the fact that two of these three interviewees were not actually wearing a *kara* needs to be borne in mind when assessing the extent of their belief in its efficacy. Its important role in young Sikhs' perception of Sikh identity is discussed in chapter eleven.

Word As Contact With The Sacred

The young Sikhs' accounts indicated the capacity of both spoken and written language to mediate power. Already chapter four has suggested the efficacy of prayer (usually the recitation of *path*) in the perception of young Sikhs. A nine year old boy said, 'If anybody prays to God all the time they get all powerful' and a ten year old girl said that she felt God talking to her: 'every day because I pray to my God every night. [God] says, 'Yes, I'll make your wish come true'. I make a wish every day.' For Baba Ajit Singh's devotees repetition of the formula ' *Dhann* Guru Nanak' (interpreted by a teacher in chapter six) offered access to power. A ten year old girl elaborated:

I say like 'Help me to get to sleep', something like that [in] Panjabi. Before I pray I say '*Dhann* Guru Nanak'...and sometimes

if I've got nothing to do I say '*Dhann* Guru Nanak'...Sometimes if you have a races in sport you say '*Dhann* Guru Nanak' then, and once I said *Dhann* Guru Nanak' and I came second.

This is reminiscent of Satwant's repetition of the *mul mantar* to go to sleep (chapter three), of the 'magic' of reciting *Ardas* (chapter four) and a Hindu child's trust in the efficacy of a *mantra* for highjump (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:97).

Presence of Guru Granth Sahib

Chapter four (and subsequent chapters) have described the centrality of the volume of scripture, correctly installed and reverently treated, to daily worship and to exceptional ceremonies - *sanskars* and *gurpurbs*, for example. Where the volume was installed it was also read. Both through predetermined readings (such as the passages designated for morning and evening devotions) and through random reading (*vak*, *hukamnama*) the scripture influenced lives. Jasvir's expression, 'you want God to put his foot in the new house' was an especially illuminating image for a scriptural reading held in the home: 'If you just like have moved in a new house and you want God to put his foot in the new house or you want a baby they'll give you some *path*.'

Ravinder's family hosted the '*maharaj*' each winter, and she described the changed mood in the house: 'It's a happy occasion, it's happiness in the house - nobody argues.' This was not merely a temporary shift in emotion: 'If you put 'em in the house, then it's like that it blesses the house.' The changed feelings resulted in part from the discipline involved. A girl from Ajit Darbar said:

You feel everything has changed, because you have to have a bath every day. You have to keep yourself clean. You really feel fresh.

This girl also explained the protective power of the scriptures' presence:

Some people have them [i.e. the Guru Granth Sahib] because they want to keep illness out of their house, to kill the illness. My mum was ill and we had *akhand path*. After that she was quite fine and now she's all right.

The empowering authority of the scriptures was articulated by a Panjabi teacher who testified:

Guru Granth Sahib gives you power...When you've got a problem you can tell a small lie, but must ask *maph* [forgiveness] from Guru Granth Sahib.

Thus the Guru Granth Sahib could grant pardon as well as blessing. The eleven year old quoted in chapter ten (on 'messengers' and 'the real God') affirmed that the Guru Granth Sahib heard prayers addressed to it:

because it's [as] if .. Guru Nanak was alive and he is like a book, but when we pray to him he hears it. The person that writ the book, that was Guru Gobind Singh .1i, he's going to be, you know, in it, he's going to be the one hearing what all of us [who] are sitting round him are praying...and in return it's not the person who's reading it..., it's actually... Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh .11 who's saying it out to us, back.

Here the interchangeability in his thinking of Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh and the Guru Granth Sahib, as discussed in the previous chapter, is obvious and (for him) unproblematic. Sikh literature provides many instances of the Granth Sahib's authority as Guru and of the needful human behaviour towards the Guru Granth Sahib (e.g. Doabia 1981). Interviewees also spoke of the power of the Guru Granth Sahib in association with a popular medium of sanctity and empowerment, *amrit*, and this is now explored in depth, showing as it does a major difference of emphasis from the curriculum books' presentations of *amrit* in the religious world of young British Sikhs.

***Amrit* in Young Sikhs' Experience**

'Holy water' and '*amrit*' were not the subject of prepared questions in the semi-structured interviews but many of the subjects used these terms unprompted in answer to questions on their daily routine, on the five Ks (external signs of Sikh commitment), or when recounting a visit to India, in addition to talking about the role of *amrit chhakna* (chapter four). References were so frequent that during analysis of the data the transcripts were submitted to a computer search for mentions of '*amrit*' and 'water'. Of the forty-five interviewees, thirty-two spoke about *amrit*, three without using the word and two, presumably confusing two similar-sounding words, calling it 'Amritsar', the name of the Sikhs' most revered city. Thirteen made neither direct nor indirect mention of *amrit*. *Amrit* was the word for sacred or sacralising water most often employed by the subjects in English conversation. Followers of Baba Ajit Singh used the variant '*amritjar*'. The words '*jar*' and '*pani*' - both meaning 'water' - were used less frequently to refer to water in this devotional context.

Apart from one boy, whose name was Amrit, subjects mentioned *amrit* or holy water in the following contexts: their daily routine (morning and evening); spiritual masters known as *Babas* (in particular in association with illness and examinations); procedures centred on the Guru Granth Sahib both in the gurdwara (being laid to rest in the evening) and in their home (being brought in for a special occasion); travelling in India; Guru Gobind Singh; Sikhs who maintain the discipline of the five Ks. (Chapter five has examined

subjects' perceptions of the implications of the rite of *amrit chhakna*.) Examination of the appearances of *amrit* in the Coventry data shows that most references would provide an answer to one of five underlying questions:

- i] What transforms water into *amrit*?
- ii] Where do you get it from?
- iii] Why do people use it?
- iv] How is *amrit* used and treated?
- v] What is the effect of using it?

Because of their closeness the first and second question and the third and fifth will be examined together.

a) The Transformation

The manner in which, say, Coventry tap water becomes *amrit* is mysterious but, when asked to do so, children who had referred to *amrit* indicated the following ways. Firstly, as suggested by a prohibition in *Rahit Maryada*, (see Sikh Missionary Resource Centre, nd:24) water is believed to become *amrit* by standing under the Guru Granth Sahib.³ A ten year old girl, whose family collected holy water from the Ramgarhia gurdwara, said: 'I've not seen them make it holy but I know it's holy water.' An eleven year old girl explained:

It (*amrit*) bes [i.e. is]...in a big thing like and there's water in it...and someone has to do **the** *path* [reading] and it's a holy book where they read out and all that. When it's all finished, all that goes into the water and that's why we call it *amrit*.

She did not mention whether the container was left open during the reading, a practice which suggests that any lid would act as a barrier to 'all that' going to the water. Nor is it clear to what 'all that' refers. Popular usage suggests that the utterance of the Gurbani (the Gurus' utterances which comprise the Guru Granth Sahib) releases an energy which is absorbed and subsequently mediated by the water rather as an audio-tape captures sound for subsequent transmission. To quote one Panjabi teacher: 'They leave it open, the jars, and when they *say* prayers three days, *akhand path* they call it, and all the prayer goes into it, so that makes the holy water.'

Secondly, *amrit* was mentioned in connection with a spiritual teacher (*Baba*). Subjects mentioned collecting the water from Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Mihan Singh. When asked how the water became special Gurdial said: 'He [*Babaji*] like prays on the water to do whatever job the person say, that's how it's different.' Here the image is of a person of known spiritual power charging (in both senses of the word) a specific allocation of water to carry out a specific function. This can be compared with the instance of Sathya Sai Baba cited in Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:124).

A third way in which water is transformed into *amrit* was mentioned by another twelve year old boy, referring to a practice unique in Coventry to the gurdwara which is presided over by Baba Ajit Singh:

You know where the *nishan sahib* [Sikh pennant] is, there's a bucket of water to clean that up [i.e. the concrete base of the *nishan sahib*] every Sunday. They throw water to clean it up and then, when it comes down, everyone calls that holy water. They put it in bottles.

Fourthly, there was a suggestion of a transforming effect on the water which is used for purifying the path of the Guru Granth Sahib when it is carried on the reader's head (e.g. to its night-time place of rest). A ten year old girl said: 'You use ordinary water (to flick in front of the Guru Granth Sahib) but I think it's because it turns into *amritjal* (while you're doing that.) I don't know (how).' She described what happened each evening in the gurdwara.

When *Babaji* [i.e. the Guru Granth Sahib] (goes) to sleep we get a glass, put water in it...and then we just go upstairs, do the *jal da chhitta*, that is, we sprinkle the water onto the floor, then go upstairs and put *Babaji* into a sort of bed.

A ten year old girl who attended the same gurdwara, did not use the word *amrit* in this context, but similarly described flicking the water: '*Babaji's* been put on your head...we have to give fresh air to them...and then you have a glass of water and you splash it in front of them. I do it quite a lot of times.'

Subjects also mentioned holy water in connection with Sikh pilgrimage places in India. They did not use the word *amrit* - although a Valmiki girl did in a comparable instance (Nesbitt 1991:25) - but their accounts suggest (as in the pilgrim-cum-tourist literature mentioned below) that through association with a site where a Guru or saintly person lived the water is imbued with healing power. The eleven year old girl quoted above reported:

It's a big well and I think it's Guru Nanak Dev Ji's wife or sister — I'm not sure -... that's her *kuan* [well]. We went there last year and we drank some water. It had come out of the well.

Two nine year old sisters had visited a temple associated with the spiritual line of Baba Ajit Singh.⁴

When I went to the holy place where there's water coming out of the mountain and I had to stand in it and I had to have a deep breath and then go in and then when we had it then they allowed us to get bottles and fill them and at the temple the water was

coming from...there's lots and lots of steps ...men, women they climb down.

In the story of Guru Gobind Singh's initiation of the *panj piare* (the 'five beloved ones', his first followers to be initiated as Singhs), the Guru made *amrit* by stirring water, to which his wife had added sugar sweets. He used a *khanda* [two-edged sword] to do this while repeating certain prayers. This is the practice re-enacted by present day *panj piare* at the ceremony for initiating new members of the Khalsa.⁵ However, few subjects described this transformation. Historical confusion is evident in the following summary offered by one of the nine year olds:

Guru Gobind Singh's the same as Guru Nanak because he made the holy water, he made the five beloved ones, he was the first Sikh, he was the first man ever to make that *amrit*, he invented it.

What emerges clearly from these accounts of transformation, taken as a whole, is the fact that water becomes holy and is imbued with power or, more specifically, becomes *amrit* if it is in close physical proximity to the Guru or, to quote Patwant Singh, *amrit* 'can also mean water sanctified by the touch of the sacred' (1988:32). The Guru may be one of the historical human Gurus or the scripture which is the living Guru. This may mean the open volume (during a *path*, i.e. reading), the closed volume (as when it is conveyed to someone's house or to its nightly resting place) or the spoken content (as during a *path* or an initiation ceremony). In the latter case the *panj piare* represent the Guru just as the first *panj piare* did when Guru Gobind Singh received initiation from them in 1699 and, moreover, all the words which they utter as they stir the sweetened water are from the Guru Granth Sahib or from a composition of Guru Gobind Singh.

In the case of water empowered or sacralised by contact with the base of the *nishan sahib* it has to be remembered that Sikhs treat the *nishan sahib* in a manner sometimes reminiscent of Hindus' treatment of a *murti* (image), bathing it in yoghurt and reclothing it.⁶ The power associated with it was evident from people's eagerness to touch those touching it at the ceremonial reclothing of the pole. Ravinder recalled: 'This woman grabbed hold of R's hand and touched it and then stuck it to his forehead, because everyone's supposed to be blessed.'

The *nishan sahib* may provide an outward symbol of the Sikh community, the *panth*, which itself was, like the *granth*, invested with Guruship (McLeod 1976:16). In gurdwaras established by the entourage of a *sant* (spiritual master, *Baba*) it relays an additional message of the distinctiveness of the *sant*.⁷ Since for his devotees, but not by other Sikhs, the *sant* is almost equated with the Guru, it is natural that contact with both the *sant* and with the *nishan sahib* at his gurdwara is believed by his followers to transform passive

water into potentially active *amrit*. Significantly, when describing the early morning washing of the base of the *nishan sahib* a ten year old girl used the words 'washes the *Baba* - the *nishan sahib*'.

One characteristic attributed to the water thus transformed is that, unlike most water - but like *Ganga jal* (Ganges water) in the experience of Hindus - *amrit* will not 'go green' (Nesbitt 1991:25). In other words the power is physically effective not only in countering disease but also in averting the growth of organisms in the water.⁸

b) Where Do You Get Amrit From?

It is not surprising that subjects whose families attended gurdwaras established by the followers of a charismatic leader reported collecting *amrit* for domestic consumption from '*Babaji*'. In the case of Baba Ajit Singh both a reserve at the house where he stayed on visits to Coventry and water direct from rinsing the base of the *nishan sahib* were mentioned. One of the ten year old girls said: 'My mum and dad go to B Avenue, that's where *Babaji*'s house is, and *Mataji* -I think she's with *Babaji* - and so we usually get it off her.' The other explained:

Babaji, he gives it (*amritjal*) to us on Sunday morning when they clean, wash the *nishan sahib*. They get the sort of *amrit* water that comes off it and then they put it in a sort of bucket or something.

Allusions to collecting *amrit* not from a *Baba* but from under the Guru Granth Sahib occurred in interviews with a ten year old boy whose father officiated as custodian of a gurdwara: 'Some people want to borrow it and they get like a bottle...they drink it.' Thus an eleven year old girl explained that the *amrit* used for the initiation ceremony of *amrit chhakna* is:

something like under the Guru Granth Sahib....My mum gets it from the temple. She gets a bottle, they give it and they put some stuff in and then you take it home.

(It was unclear what she meant by 'some stuff'.)

c) Reasons for Using Amrit and its Effects

The reasons which subjects volunteered and the effects that they mentioned were all good and desirable in their eyes. They clustered around empowerment, healing and exorcism, purification, academic success and protection from harm. An awareness of the transformative, empowering effect of the *amrit* with which Guru Gobind Singh initiated his Khalsa is clear in this ten year old girl's account of the event in 1699:

Babaji...tuned them [five volunteers] all alive again and made them into *panj piare*, and then he made strong *amriyal* and he put something in it and then a bird came, got a bit - it was just a little bird - and then when he had it there was an eagle. I think it was in a tree, and then the little bird went and killed it.

Accounts of the initiation of the *Khalsa* often include this story of the sparrows which overcame eagles after drinking from the bowl of *amrit* which Guru Gobind Singh and his wife had prepared.⁹

In all the following quotations the children refer not to the effects of receiving *amrit* in the ceremony of *amrit chhakna* but to holy water which had been sacralised in the other ways described above. A ten year old girl said that after drinking *amrit* you 'feel good'. This could mean the healing of specific ailments, as: 'Sometimes, like, I had a throat ache and when I drank it – *amritjal* - it made it go away and it was OK' and the asthmatic boy explained: 'I have asthma, and she [mum] wanted to get rid of it and she went to the god and he goes that he has to drink this and he can't eat egg or stuff like that.' Similarly a twelve year old boy reported: 'Other people would find out from other people to come to Ajit Darbar, and then they would come if they were ill, they would take *Babaji's amritjal*, then they would be all right.' Similarly:

Babaji...they would ask him questions, like if somebody feeling sick they would ask him to give some special water...He gives them the water, and they go and give their child or whoever it is and they get better.

Although she did not use the word *amrit* a nine year old girl connected bathing in holy water at a temple in India and belief in a *Baba* with exorcism.

Some ladies had like had spirits, ghosts in them that were troubling them, they went under the water and they got a bit better and when we went out they said you could take water so we took water for my dad, Miss.

Presumably, with a holistic view of body, mind and spirit, holy water or *amrit* is experienced as equally effective in 'psychiatric' and 'physical' illness (Krause 1989; Nesbitt 1997).

The discussion between Ravinder and Raspreet reported below suggests that the water which is sprinkled ahead of the Guru Granth Sahib when it is carried into someone's house is sometimes referred to as *amrit* before as well as after being used in this way.

A. Then also when the *maharaj* (scriptures) is getting taken into another house..

B. You do *chhitte*

A. You get *amrit* or just pans

B. It's *amrit*, you have to do *chhitte*, so the path is clean

Here the purpose and perceived effect is purification. According to Kalsi (1994), 'the ritual of sprinkling water symbolises the act of sanctifying the space over which the Guru Granth Sahib is being taken'. It is perhaps significant that a root meaning of the word Khalsa, the community initiated with *amrit*, is 'pure'.

Another benefit attributed to using (drinking) *amrit* was academic success. An eleven year old recalled: 'Yes, my cousin went to the gurdwara and he prayed and drank it, and then he got I think it was three straight A's and he's gone to Sheffield University.' In a similar vein a girl mentioned *amrit* in association with *prashad* [in this case sanctified sugar crystals], saying that '*Babaji* touched it and said it's for our *parai* at school'. *Parai* means studying; the consumption of substances empowered by Babaji's touch would make her study more diligently and successfully at school.

A twelve year old devotee of Baba Ajit Singh said, '*Amritjal* - Babaji gave it to us to protect us from evil things'. On *amrit* as a source of protection a nine year old girl, describing the evening at home, said:

What my mum does is she like gets some *amritjal* and fills a glass with *amritjal* and then she starts like splashing it on the house to keep it nice and safe. She does it outside as well ...on the pavement...near the gate.

Her ten year old sister volunteered the view that 'I think it's to keep robbers out - outside, because we've got a path outside and we do it there'.

In relation to the fear of intruders the use of *amrit* can be understood as having the psychological effect of allaying fear, as suggested by the words of a Punjabi woman referred to in Nesbitt (1991:25). Alternatively subjects may have regarded it as literally marking a boundary within which no harm could befall.¹⁰ A nine year old boy said, 'We always drink that to remind us of God' while the twelve year old boy suggested that, 'It's just meant to mean like good luck' and a twelve year old girl said (using the plural of respect): 'We drink our *amritjal* to thank *Babaji* because for what they've given'.

Taken together subjects' responses to the question 'Why?' and their descriptions of the effects of using *amrit* suggest that physical healing, success in examinations and protection from harm can all be mediated from the Guru (sometimes via a *sant*) to the devotee through the medium of *amrit*.

d) The Uses of *Amrit*

i) Drinking

Most of the references to *amrit* above are to two applications, namely drinking and sprinkling. The young people spoke of both as daily occurrences in the home. Describing what happened in the morning, after prayer, an eleven year old girl said:

Then you're supposed to drink *amrit* which is *pant* [water] you put round the house...it's just a small cup and everyone has a bit out of it.. just pour it into different cups because when you're a Sikh you're not supposed to spread germs.¹¹

In contrast with this hygienic footnote an eleven year old girl said: 'I drink every morning, just a little bit; all of us share one glass.' One of the ten year old girls from the Ajit. Darbar simply related, 'we drink it in the morning before we come to school'. The other went on to describe what happened on days when she had stayed overnight in the Ajit Darbar Gurdwara: 'Then in the morning when we wake up we have a bath and then we have some *amritjal* and we eat and then we sit on the *ral* [i.e. take turns reading the scripture].' *Amrit* is added to other drinks as well and consumed. Informants mentioned drinking it in orange juice and in tea.

They mentioned drinking *amrit* in the evening as well as in the morning. Thus a ten year old girl who attended the Ramgarhia gurdwara said:

Afterwards (after bedtime prayers) we drink this sort of water. It's called *amrit*. First you put water, then you ...get special water [at the gurdwara] and you put it into the water you've already got, and it's holy and you drink it after you've done your prayers. You pour some and you count five and you stop drinking. We only drink it five times.

In all these cases *amrit* referred to holy water, but not to 1) in Figure 5 below, i.e. the water sweetened with sugar and stirred during prolonged invocation by the *panj piare* for ritual administration of the *amrit* of initiation.

ii) *Chhitta* (splashing)

In such a ceremony *amrit* is not only drunk but 'splashed' or sprinkled on the candidate's hair and eyes. As is evident from earlier quotations, when talking too of the unsweetened holy water, *amrit*, that is used on a more regular basis the children often mentioned splashing (*chhitta*). 'Splashing' is the translation of *chhitta* in such phrases as '*jai da chhitta*'. Ravinder wrote in her diary: 'I have been woken up by *amrit* splashed on my face this is done so that the house is splashed with goodness.' Raspreet elaborated:

When we get up my mum goes round the house with *amrit* which is — it's *pant* [water], it's water and it's kind of like blessed water and you're supposed to splash it round your house every morning...We've got two big bottles in the cupboard downstairs and you're supposed to splash it round with this long stick called *dhup* (incense) and it lets off smoke and this smoke is also blessed as well and it's supposed to bless your house every morning.

One of the ten year old girls said that at home in the evenings the family would,

tidy up the house, do *jai da chhitta*, like we get *amriyal* - I think we get a bit of *amritjal* and we sprinkle water all over the house - any time. But we tidy up our house before we do it - like toys up on the floor.

Several children had also mentioned that water is sprinkled before the Guru Granth Sahib. As a nine year old girl explained in more detail:

Amrit's when ...they come in, they have a cup and they spill some when they come in, little drops of water, and then someone stands with a cup. Once I was standing with a cup and the holy book comes and this man gives you £5 in your hand and you keep it and they give you £5 or some coins in a cup.

Only Satwant mentioned sprinkling water in connection with worship of Mata (see chapter four). Such instances of the sprinkling of holy water suggest the cultural continuum of north India and indeed a much wider affinity of practice.

e) Required Behaviour

The children stressed hygiene and cleanliness as vital for anyone who was in contact with *amrit*. For example, reporting his father's daily routine, a twelve year old boy said: 'First he'll have a bath, then he'll throw the holy water with his fingers, like spread it all round the shop and round the house.' Likewise a ten year old girl mentioned: 'We've got to have a bath before we have it.'

Apart from bathing, or at least having clean hands before handling *amrit*, the followers of Baba Ajit Singh would recite the sacred formula '*Dhann* Guru Nanak' (Great is Guru Nanak) before drinking the holy water.

We drink it every single day before we come to school. About half a glass we have sometimes. We say *Dhann* Guru Nanak' before we drink it.

A twelve year old Sikh girl from the same gurdwara explained: 'We do *Dhann* Guru Nanak' for a bit, about five times, then we drink our *amritjal*.'

Moreover, if those concerned are not already vegetarian, this daily drinking of *amrit* may be preceded by abstention from meat and eggs as is required before receiving the sweetened *amrit* of the initiation rite (see chapters three and five).

As with holy water in Hindu tradition, children mentioned that the *amrit* is put in a clean container and that it may be added to tap water, thus increasing the quantity without diluting the efficacy and purity of the *amrit*.

In order to appreciate the significance of subjects' experience and understanding of *amrit* its coverage in the textbooks needs to be reviewed. This in turn must be set in the context of the wider body of literature on the Sikh tradition.

Amrit in the Literature

a) *Amrit* in Sikh Literature

In his interpretation of verses by Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das and Bhai Gurdas, Kapur Singh cogently draws together the *amrit* of the ancient cosmic ocean myth, the *amrit* of 'the Name of God in the heart of man', of 'communion and union with God' (re-discovered by the Guru) and the 'Mystery of Baptism' (1989:180). In the Guru Granth Sahib, according to Guru Shabad Ratan Prakash, the word *amrit* occurs 216 times (1970:61-64). Shackle provides the following definition from the compositions of Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE): 'the liquor of immortality, nectar', used metaphorically to convey the ideas of both immortality and sweetness, especially in connexion with loving meditation on the divine name.' (1981:20)

Indeed 78 of the 216 occurrences of *amrit* are in conjunction with '*nam*' (see chapter nine). Although literally and philologically *nam* is the same as 'name', and in particular 'the divine name', this rendering does not do justice to its centrality as the essence of ultimate truth for which all other names are diminishing. Nabha, in his classic reference work, Gurushabad Ratanakar Mahan Kosh, succinctly provides the following double definition of *amrit* (the English rendering is mine):

a substance suitable for drinking, whose effect is to prevent the occurrence of death. Amritjal given by the tenth Guru which is partaken at the time of becoming a Singh. (1974:76)

Cole and Sambhi also provide a twofold definition, albeit historically inverted, since the post Guru Gobind Singh usage with which the writers commence postdates the earlier Gurus' use of the term in their hymns:

nectar. This is made from water into which sugar crystals (patashas) have been stirred with a double-edged sword, a khanda,

while certain scriptural passages are recited. It is used in naming and initiation ceremonies. Guru Nanak stressed the concept of amrit as Nam or Shabad, the name or word of God, rather than something material. (1990:37-38)

The translated quotations which Cole and Sambhi provide illustrate the *amrit* motif in the Guru Granth Sahib. The first is from Guru Nanak, the second from his successor, Guru Angad:

God's word is true and sweet, the stream of nectar [*amrit*]; whoever drinks it is emancipated (AG 1275) ...There is but one amrit, the Name, there is no other (AG 1238). (Cole and Sambhi, 1990. 37-38)

Figure 5

Dictionary Definitions of Anuit in Sikh Usage

AMRIT = liquor of immortality and sweetness, i.e.

- 1) sweetened water of initiation/naming
- 2) NAM

In their coverage of Sikhism the curriculum books in use in British schools, whether written by Sikh or non-Sikh, generally omit 2) the conceptually more difficult equation of *amrit* and *nam*. Their writers introduce *amrit* as 1) the sweetened water with which Sikhs are initiated at a ceremony variously called *amrit sanskar*, *amrit pahul* and *khande-di-pahul*, with a secondary mention of the *amrit*, sweetened water, with which (according to so many curriculum books) a baby's tongue is touched when he or she receives a forename. With the exception of Dhanjal (1993:13) no other usage of the term is included.

This is in conformity with the Sikh Code of Discipline, the *Rahit Maryada* which, significantly for this study, also states that practices such as placing water under the bed on which the Guru Granth Sahib rests are forbidden - *manji sahib hetthan pant rakhna... iho jiho karam manmat han* (Sikh Missionary Resource Centre, nd:4)

b) Devotional Writing and Pilgrim Guides

Apart from the scriptures, reference books, text books and standard works on Sikhism, such as those quoted above, there are also devotional publications and tourist guides to historic Sikh sites. An example of devotional writing is Doabia's book about the *sant*, Baba Nand Singh (Doabia 1981). This includes the *sant's* teaching about initiation with *amrit*. For example:

Unless Amrit is taken, one cannot call himself to be the son of Guru Gobind Singh Ji or a true sikh [*sic*]. Dogs, with collars on their necks, cannot be killed by the officials...Similarly a sikh, who wears the 'Collar' of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, by taking Amrit, cannot be touched by the angels of death. (1981:25)

A 'tank' (rectangular pool) of water is an important element in most of the historic gurdwaras. In many cases the water has reputedly miraculous origins (as at Panja Sahib in Pakistan); and healing qualities (as at Bangla Sahib in New Delhi, for example) or assists the bather in attaining release from the bondage of reincarnation (e.g. Baoli Sahib at Goindval). The tourist-cum-pilgrim literature available at these places includes Narinderjit Singh's guide to the Golden Temple, Amritsar which can serve as an example of this genre.

The writer narrates the story of how the pool at Guru-ka-Chak (subsequently Amritsar) was renamed Amrit-Sarovar (nectar tank) following the miraculous healing of a crippled man in the time of Guru Ram Das. He distinguishes this 'incident' from the older 'mythological' stories about Amritsar's water. For example he mentions that: 'Lord Rama had fought a battle with his sons, Lova [*sic*] and Kusha, at this place and that nectar was sprinkled upon them to revive them.' (1982:9) In another story the gods hid a pot of the nectar which had resulted from their churning of the sea (see above). In yet another account God brought water from the 68 Hindu pilgrimage places to this spot to reward King Ikshwak (12-13).¹²

Thus earlier Hindu myths attesting the divine credentials of the water are included to support the supernatural qualities of water which owes its power to its association with a Sikh Guru. Moreover the Sikh story is in keeping with a widespread belief in Hindu and other faith traditions (sometimes supported by scientific investigation) that at certain places water mediates healing.¹³ Significantly Patwant Singh plays down such stories (1988:31). However Dhanjal (1993), a British curriculum book, narrates in detail the story of how the *amrit* healed Rajani's husband (34).

The instances given above suggest a popular understanding of *amrit* which includes but goes beyond the usage of 'official' voices for the community. It would seem that the spiritual meaning of *amrit* in the Guru Granth Sahib is balanced by popular insistence on *amrit* as a natural element with supernatural qualities.

Figure 6

Amrit in Sikh Writing

AMRIT = liquor of immortality and sweetness, i.e.

= 1) holy water and = 2) NAM

1) = a) sweetened water of initiation

b) local water associated with Guru and possessing supernatural qualities

c) *Amrit* in the Hindu Tradition

Amrit, whose etymological offspring include the Greek 'ambrosia' and the English 'immortal', is the Sanskrit term for undying or deathless, translated by Patwant Singh as 'the elixir of life' (1988:32). Hindu literature includes many references to *amrit* in a physical and metaphorical sense. Perhaps most famously *amrit* was won by the *devtas* (gods) after competing with the *rakshases* (demons) in churning the ocean of milk (Ions 1967:48; O'Flaherty 1975:270-280). Contemporary belief and practice concerning holy water, including *amrit*, in the Coventry Hindu community is described by Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:63,124).

Examination of the ways in which the Sikh subjects used the word *amrit* shows both diversity and the shared underlying assumption that *amrit* is a purifying and empowering liquid. The usage overlaps with but does not exactly replicate the spectrum of meaning to be found in Sikh literature (figure 6).

The children's usage corresponded to widespread, longstanding belief in *amrit* as holy water, including both the sweetened water used in initiation ceremonies (as described in chapter five) and local water associated with a Guru and possessing supernatural qualities. However, no subject mentioned *amrit* in connection with infants or naming procedures, although (as noted in chapter three) some referred to children receiving *chula*, water left over from the ceremony of initiation with *amrit*. Nor did any subject indicate awareness of the spiritual, metaphorical usage as a synonym for *nam*. Their usage could be represented as follows:

Figure 7***Amrit* in British Sikh Children's Usage**

AMRIT = 1) transformed and transforming water

- 1) = a) sweetened water of initiation in 1699 and sweetened water of contemporary initiation *Ichula*
 b) water empowered by proximity to Guru/Guru Granth Sahib/a *Baba/nishan sahib*

d) *Amrit* in Curriculum Books

Dhanjal (1993) appears to be alone in giving any meaning for *amrit* other than the sweetened water of the initiation rite or that put on the new-born baby's tongue. Examples of books which provide an illustrated double spread on 'taking *amrit*' or 'Arndt Sanskar' are Butler 1992:40-41) and Draycott (1996:26-27), and chapter five has already provided some critical comment on misleading tendencies in curriculum book allusion to *amrit* - both the fallacy of assuming that this rite parallels rites of initiation or confirmation for young people in other faith communities and the apparent infrequency of giving *amrit* to babies.

Critical Discussion

Whereas unfamiliarity with scriptural language may impose a barrier between young British Sikhs and the verbal content of worship, *amrit* retains its immediacy and accessibility. The children see, taste and feel it and experience the ensuing sense of well-being. As a non-verbal channel of empowerment it is as potent in the diaspora as in Punjab.

The Coventry research suggests that as far as the tapping (sometimes literally) of sacred and sacralising power is concerned, the diversity of popular Punjabi religion described by Oberoi in nineteenth century Punjab has survived, not however as a diversity of identity but as a multiplicity of symbolic meaning (1994). In this world which Sikh children inhabit the *kes*, *kara* and *bani* (the Guru's word in the scripture) also span the lived experience and conceptual dichotomy of Guru and disciple, of divine protection and human insecurity. *Amrit* is not only the tenth Guru's water of baptism or the 'nectar of *Nam*', but is also water which is imbued with the potent purity of *Ganga jal* or which as a medium for the power of miracle-working saints - saints who would in Muslim terminology be *pirs*.¹⁴ In its current meanings *amrit* demonstrates how the rich tradition of popular Punjabi religious belief and practice is now on offer in Sikh guise from Sikh practitioners. For many young British Sikhs it is an unproblematic feature of their tradition.

Continuing the exploration of diversity and of divergence from the dominant impression given by curriculum books, chapter eleven looks at

subjects' identification of themselves as Sikhs and their definitions of being Sikh. In this context the *kara* and *kesh* are revisited.

NOTES

- 1 Examples - mentioned in other chapters - are the stories of Malik Bhago, of Panja Sahib and of Vaisakhi 1699.

- 2 Jasvir is using 'princess' for Kaur.

- 3 Kalsi notes:

At the *akhand-path...a jote* [sic] (traditional lamp)...remains burning for forty-eight hours symbolising eternal light. Usually a large vessel full of water is placed near the *Guru Granth Sahib* at the start of the ritual of *Akhand-Path*. After the *bhog..the* water contained in the vessel is believed to have been transformed into *amrit...and* it is received by members of the family and congregation as *parshad* (blessed food). The medium of transformation is the *gurbani* (sacred word of the *Guru*) which is described by the third Guru, Amar Das as 'Sweet is the Nectar-Name of the Lord, but rare is the one who tastes the Word' (AG 113-14). (1994)

- 4 Baba Ajit Singh pays great regard to Wadbhag Singh (see chapter four note 35).

- 5 See Navdeep Singh:

The Amrit administered at the Sikh ceremony of baptism, is a transforming or alchemical substance which by partaking of it is the conscious acceptance of death whereby one's personality and everything associated with it perishes and that initiate is 'resurrected' as Khalsa (1992:7).

- 6 Kalsi says 'this ritual is symbolic of giving bath to a living holy person' (1994). According to Mangal Singh of Sikh Cultural Society the *nishan sahib* can both mean Sikh *dharma* and Khalistan.

- 7 Gurdwaras of the Nanaksar tradition, moreover, are distinctive for dispensing with a *nishan sahib* (Nesbitt 1985a). See chapter six for distinctive treatment (garlanding and perfuming) at Ajit Darbar at Vaisakhi.

- 8 In contrast Joy Barrow (written communication 6-2-94) reported a middle-aged Sikh woman's statement that *amrit* is drunk even if 'the *amrit* had gone stale'.

9 Macauliffe wrote:

The Guru, in order to show his Sikhs the potency of the baptismal nectar which he had prepared, put some of it aside for birds to drink. Upon this two sparrows came and filled their beaks with it. Then flying away they began to fight, the chronicler states, like two rajas struggling for supremacy, and died by mutual slaughter. (rep 1963, 5, 94)

10 cf. the circle drawn around Sita in the *Ramayana*. Only by trespassing outside this was she vulnerable to harm.

11 The speaker is referring to the widespread Hindu (and Sikh) distinction between *jutha* (impure) food and that uncontaminated by contact with saliva. See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:57-58).

12 Kalsi wrote:

Some traditions trace its origin back to the pre-historic times and declare it to be a place of religious importance having in its womb an *amrit kund* (reservoir of nectar). The legend is associated with the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. (1994)

He then relates the story of 'Luv and Kush' reviving their father and immersing the rest of the *amrit* in the nearby pond which became a reservoir of *amrit*.

13 Joginder Singh et al (1980) is an article in a more academic vein arguing for the therapeutic value of bathing in Sikh holy places.

14 In an undated written communication Sharon Imtiaz describes how in Azad Kashmir she received - together with an amulet - a glass of water to drink. On this a *pir* had said a prayer.

Chapter 11

Sikhs and 'Proper Sikhs'

Introduction

Religious education curriculum books project a particular view of what it means to be a Sikh, in some cases actually defining the term as a disciple or follower of the Gurus and then providing outlines of beliefs and practices (e.g. Arora 1986; Colitis 1990). Sikh children's perception of their faith tradition and the degree to which they identified themselves with it are integral to the study of their nurture. Moreover, the definition of 'Sikh' is a concern in the *Panth* and evokes scholarly debate (McLeod 1989a). This chapter examines the reasons which subjects gave for regarding themselves and other relatives as Sikh, since these provide an insight into their perception of the Sikh tradition and community. These are considered in the context of scholarly definitions, of the curriculum book presentation of what it is to be a Sikh and of authoritative definitions (e.g. in gurdwara legislation) from India.

A conversation between Raspreet and Ravinder illustrates an ambiguity (also inherent in other faith traditions) over whether being Sikh is hereditary or a matter of appropriate belief and behaviour:

If you're born a Sikh, then obviously you are a Sikh aren't you?
But if you want to become a Sikh, if you believe, really believe in
Guru Nanak and everything...

If they look like Sikhs I would call them Sikhs, I reckon.

It doesn't matter what your background is, it's what you believe now. If you become *amrit chhakiya*, then you are a Sikh. What you believe now is important, what you believe[d] then is not.

I reckon it doesn't matter. You can be *amrit chhakiya*, or you can look like a Sikh. You can not even believe in the religion but you're still a Sikh.

Despite the contradictions three factors in Sikh identity are clear, namely being born into a 'Sikh' family, appearance - Ravinder also used the term '*pagivala* Sikhs', i.e. 'turbaned' Sikhs - and, thirdly, initiation with *amrit*.¹ Birth into a 'Sikh' family, 'looking like Sikhs' and being *amrit chhakiya* appeared in turn as both necessary and sufficient conditions for being Sikh.

Emerging from many of the young people's comments and reflections was a distinction between two orders of 'Sikhness'. Such a distinction was often made in connection with the five Ks, with people's appearance or with *amrit* or when speaking of functionaries in the gurdwara. It also arose in association with the topics of India and 'caste'. This two-tier Sikhism is looked at in relation to bipolar distinctions recurrent in the scholarly literature such as '*pakka* Sikh' and '*pattle* ('fallen')', (James 1974:48), '*Keshdhari* Sikhs' and '*Sahijdhari*, shaven, Sikhs' (49); '*lesadhari* (hirsute)' and '*sahajdhari* (those-who-take-time-to-adopt)' (Khushwant Singh 1977:89); '*Sahajdhari* and *Khalsa* Sikhs' (Oberoi 1994:298); *Khalsa* and *Panth*. This contrast continues in some school books with, e.g. *amrit-dhari* and '*sahapdhari*' (late developer') in Butler (1993:41).²

Beginning with the interviewees' unanimous identification of themselves as 'Sikh and Punjabi' attention moves to the significance of Panjabi language in this self-perception and in their own experience and to the importance of a Sikh name (Singh or Kaur) before considering the pertinence of appearance and the defining role of the five Ks. The greater importance attributed to some Ks than others is one feature of young people's distinction between Sikhs and 'proper' Sikhs. The chapter concludes with discussion of the relationship between these young British Sikhs' understanding of being a Sikh and other understandings as presented in confessional writing and in religious education and religious studies literature.

Before embarking on this course, however, it is necessary also to locate this particular local study in relation to the social psychologists' discourse of social identity formation. Tajfel has pointed to the individual's categorization of groups in a complex society. This categorisation and the related comparisons between one's own group and others 'contribute in turn to some important aspects of their definition of themselves, of their social identity' (1981:165). Weinreich recognised Tajfel's contribution but warned of the

dangers of single theories attempting to provide an explanation for all the socio-psychological processes of identity maintenance. Instead, drawing on the work of Erikson, Hauser (for the concept of identity foreclosure) and Kelly's personal construct theory (1989), he attempted to explain how the self is constructed and reconstructed through the organisation and reorganisation of bipolar categories related to value systems and used by individuals to give meaning to the world (1989). Murray also took Erikson's psychological model and argued that, with its Western background, it assumed stages in identity formation which did not take into account the reality that for many Sikh youngsters maturity was preceded not by rejecting tradition but by identifying with it.

In relation to subjects as young as those of the present study Tajfel's analysis emerged as most appropriate. Young Sikhs in Coventry grow up among members of other South Asian minorities, including Punjabi and Gujarati Hindus, Muslims from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, and alongside peers of African-Caribbean and other minorities as well as the larger 'white' community. Their self-identity develops in this context of multiple others. Larson has already illustrated the ways in which young South Asians in Southall developed awareness of their own faith tradition through interaction with peers from other traditions (1987 and 1989). Further research would be necessary to find out how, moving from one cultural domain to another and faced with such pressures as racism, subjects will continue in future to construct and reconstruct their selves (as Weinreich suggests) and whether their 'maturity' is increasingly preceded by a rejection of their tradition or not.

Young Sikhs' mentions of physical appearance, and the distinctions which they drew between themselves and members of other South Asian communities suggest that categorisation and comparison were indeed taking place consistently with Tajfel's theory. Thus, some of the Coventry subjects said that their skin pigmentation marked them as Sikh. An eight year old girl explained: 'They [two Gurus] said the people that are brown they should be Punjabi or Sikhs, and then God made them into Sikhs.' Such comments showed young Sikhs defining themselves as 'brown' primarily by reference to the *gora* (white) majority, rather than by reference to South Asians of other faith traditions. In this quotation 'brownness' is then related to the historical Gurus.

That comparisons with members of other South Asian communities also contributed to their perception of being Sikh is, however, evidenced by the following observations on what was special about being a Sikh. Satwant remarked:

Like you get to eat what you want, not like Muslims, they're not allowed to eat sausages and things like that. They all can't cut

their hair when they get older, they can trim it but not really cut it, Muslims. [Sikhs] can.³

Ravinder informed me:

We don't worship monuments, like I think it's in Hindu, when they have I think it's a monkey dressed in robes...They have statues in the house and worship them and have photos.⁴ And Muslims pray generally but they don't have books to pray. They don't worship people - Guru - Guru Nanak and all that. They worship, they pray Allah, but Sikhism, we worship a book in a way - Guru Granth Sahib.⁵

A seven year old girl (whose brothers were however short-haired) knew that 'Hindus can cut their hair but we can't'.

These distinctions were based upon behaviour, including diet, ways of worshipping and freedom to cut one's hair. It is interesting that Satwant saw Muslims - girls presumably - as more circumscribed than Sikhs with regard to cutting their hair.⁶ This fits with the seven year old's statement quoted above and with an eight year old girl's statement 'I'm not allowed [to cut my hair] but when you're married they say that you're allowed to cut your hair'.

In each case below subjects' actual conformity to the characteristics of 'Siktness' which they volunteered is also discussed. Thus not only the recognition that 'Singh' meant being Sikh, but also actual practice regarding names receives comment. Further, not only their perceptions of the centrality of Panjabi language, but also their familiarity with it is explored. Moreover, not only the young people's perception of the importance of the *fora*, but also the fact that when interviewed many were not wearing one is reported. The relationship between the girls' and boys' own appearance or behaviour and their perception of the visual or behavioural characteristics of Sikhs (or 'proper' Sikhs) is basic to the discussion of the emergence of a two-tier Sikh identity.

It was not only questions directly concerned with identity that resulted in relevant data. However the interviewees' responses to one question were particularly revealing. All the young people unhesitatingly identified themselves as Sikh and as Punjabi when asked which of the following terms they would use to describe themselves: African (since many UK Sikh families migrated from such East African countries as Uganda and Kenya around 1970), Asian, British, English, Indian, Punjabi or Sikh. They then provided reasons for their selection. The reasons which the subjects gave for feeling Sikh and Punjabi included unalterable factors such as 'I'm born like that', 'brown colour', being Indian, 'my mum/dad are Punjabi/Indian', grandparents were Sikhs and 'most of our family was born in India'. Other reasons which they

volunteered exemplified aspects of achieved identity. For example one girl felt 'Punjabi because I've lived in Punjab, most of my life, in Chandigarh'. Others gave the reasons that they spoke Panjabi or were learning Panjabi. Faith-related reasons included 'Sikh because that's my religion' and 'going to the gurdwaraitemple', a point which was elaborated in one instance by 'I listen to Guru Granth Sahib, I play harmonium'. Other reasons included '[I] believe in Guru Nanak', 'my dad wears a *pag*' [turban]; wearing /care/Sikh bangle (amplified in two cases by reference to avoiding meat and in one by 'we wear *chunnian* whenever we go to the gurdwara'); 'because our Guru made us like Sikhs. All the ladies they've got Kaur in their middle name, but all the men have got Singh in their middle name'. A similar range of reasons for feeling that they were Indian were given by those children (thirty-eight) who also identified themselves with this term.

Speaking Panjabi

Earlier chapters have already focused upon some of these concomitants of Sikh/Punjabi self-identification - namely the family, diet, visits to the gurdwara and to Punjab. To give one example of the identification of Sikh with Punjabi/Panjabi. Gurvinder said:

Q. When somebody says to you, 'What is the name of your religion?' what do you say?

A. I say, 'Punjabi'.

The strong association which they made between being Punjabi, speaking Panjabi and being Sikh is the basis for the following reflection upon their bilingualism. Ravinder observed: 'If they were different religion they wouldn't be the same language.' A ten year old boy said that in a non-Sikh home he would miss 'my language people'. Similarly, Gurvinder's nine year old brother explained **that** with a person of another religion: 'I wouldn't know the religion, because if I said something in Panjabi they'd come up to me and say, 'What?' and then I'd have to speak it in English.' A nine year old girl (who had said 'Sikh' and 'Punjabi' meant the same) subsequently said, 'My grandpa... explains it to me in easy Sikh...short words'.

That here 'Sikh' could equally validly have been represented by 'Panjabi', is suggested by other young people's statements. Like many Hindu children, these young Sikhs tended to equate religion and language (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:29-31). Thus, the symbolic function of language for an ethnic/religious minority, even when its communicative function is limited, has been documented among, for example, Israeli native speakers of Hebrew and their children in Melbourne (McNamara 1988:70).

However, in the case of the Coventrian Sikh subjects their linguistic competence was also striking. As noted, in chapters seven and eight especially,

the Panjabi language is prominent in the young Sikhs' religious nurture, both formal and informal. They were united by a marked degree of linguistic versatility despite considerable variation in fluency both in Panjabi and English. This section can do no more than summarise their proficiency in Panjabi. (Particular attention will be paid in chapter twelve to the influence of mother-tongue and the demands of specifically Sikh subject matter upon their use of English during interview.)

It must be borne in mind that the language use of Punjabis in Britain has already received extensive study but usually in isolation from their religious self-identification and from other aspects of competence (Tatla and Nesbitt 1994:60-65), Punetha, Giles and Young's linking of language to values being an exception (1988).

The young Sikhs' aural comprehension of Panjabi was tested with a brief excerpt from a tape recording of a story in Panjabi. Comprehension ranged from inability to recognise any words correctly (3) to full understanding and ability to provide an accurate English translation (12).⁸ This should only be seen as an approximate indication of competence in Panjabi since 'where testing contexts violate expectations about domain congruence, the bilingual's performance may be impaired' (Romaine 1989:30). In some cases children gave a convincing-sounding account in English which bore almost no relation to the Panjabi original. Their degree of comprehension of a sample of printed Panjabi (the title of a book of stories) also varied from inability to recognise any characters of the alphabet (9), through recognition and correct identification of individual letters (9) to fluent reading (16) and almost word-perfect English rendering (3). During fieldwork in children's homes and Panjabi classes a clearer sense of the children's oral/aural competence in Panjabi emerged. In all but one of the homes visited in the case study Panjabi was the only or dominant language which children used with their parents. In the other home English was the only medium in use between parent and children during the fieldworker's visits. Despite the strong presence of Panjabi in their homes young Punjabis found difficulty in pronouncing consonants not found in English (e.g. the retroflex 'r' in '*ghore*' [horses] according to a member of the Sikh Cultural Society).

Of the forty-five children who were interviewed in school forty-four said they spoke Panjabi at home and only one boy said he spoke only English. They had learned Panjabi from parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents, and from living in India, and (in one case) from going to school in India. However, at the Sikh camp (chapter eight) participants loudly and unanimously voiced their preference for English rather than Panjabi language as the medium for instruction when a lecturer asked them. This is particularly interesting in view of the subjects' equally strong identification of themselves as Punjabi and the strong link they made between being Sikh and speaking Panjabi. Forty-four

said they spoke English (as well as Panjabi) at home, with another boy reporting that he used English only with friends.

As chapters seven and eight have shown, for Sikh adults the perpetuation of the Panjabi language was the dominant aspect of formal nurture in the tradition. Elders who were interviewed gave several reasons why children should learn Panjabi, and not all took its survival into future generations for granted (see Ramindar Singh 1992:57).⁹ According to Davinder and Daljit's uncle knowledge of Panjabi was vital for understanding in the family, for example if parents were to pass on their experience. He also expressed the view that:

Crime is increasing because family links are finishing. Panjabi language is a link for children with their community. Therefore it is important in school and good for the whole community.

For children Panjabi might exercise a different, strictly situational, appeal. Ravinder observed: 'Sometimes, like, my sisters - we - see this really weird person and start talking Panjabi' [i.e. so as not to be understood].

To use too much English in some circumstances simply meant that other people (e.g. grandparents) would not understand. To use Panjabi elsewhere would mystify English-speakers:

When I went to India I had to speak in Panjabi with everyone. That's when I was mixed up with the English and Panjabi. When I went to India I started speaking English and nobody would understand... When I came back here I started speaking Panjabi with English people and they kept saying, 'Oh no, I don't know what that means'. (Eleven year old Sikh boy)

But children learned too, that speaking Panjabi among non-Punjabis ran the risk not only of leaving one's audience baffled but also of inviting mockery or abuse.

I'm different really because..if I say something here in Panjabi in school all these other people's friends they just take the micky out of me because they don't understand it. (Ten year old Sikh boy)

Likewise an Indian accent or idiom provoked abuse. One thirteen year old girl recalled her painful experience of school when she returned to Britain after several years in Punjab:

They picked on me because I was new, the way I spoke, and some people said, 'Why don't you just go back to your own country?' That really hurt me.

A ten year old boy articulated the connection between cultural domains, language and teasing:

in school I stick with all these other guys, like English and Hindus and everything. When I get to the temple I stick with my own religion and I know what I'm doing. Here [in school] if I say anything in Panjabi they don't understand it and they take the micky out of it. And if I say it in the temple they just say, 'Yeah, I know'. Here they think, 'He's a dodo' in school. 'I ain't going to speak to him'.

This boy's statement clearly shows his awareness of 'my own religion' as distinct from 'English and Hindus and everything', and his association of Panjabi language with a particular place, the 'temple'. It is also an example of his 'multiple cultural competence' as he switches his language and behaviour from one location to another (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993).

As seen in chapters seven and eight, from adult Sikhs' perspective, acquaintance with the very different language of the scriptures was also a part of familiarity with Panjabi. The level of the young Sikhs' competence in this regard, and the pertinence of Glinert's analysis of 'quasilece', have been mentioned in chapter eight.

Name

As noted above one subject mentioned the names Kaur and Singh as distinctive markers of a Sikh. The origin of the names Singh and Kaur is firmly dated in popular Sikh history to Vaisakhi day 1699, when Guru Gobind Singh renamed those who had been initiated into the *Khalsa* in the *amrit* ceremony and exchanged his own name Rai for Singh.¹⁰ As such these names belonged to the *amritdhari* (and so by popular extension to *keshdhari*) Sikhs.

However, in contemporary and longstanding practice, those who regard themselves as Sikh use Kaur and Singh regardless of whether they have long or short hair, let alone whether they have been initiated in this way or even envisaged being, and when a baby's name is announced in the gurdwara, the chosen forename is followed by Kaur or Singh. Certainly it was true that the young people had either Kaur or Singh as second name.

However, only for one girl and for one boy did Kaur and Singh respectively serve as surnames.¹¹ (One girl also had Singh as her surname.¹²) In religious terms the significance of these names was that while designating

gender they did not, like the *got* names that they were supposed to replace, indicate the bearer's *zat*.¹³ With the reinstatement of family names, Kaur and Singh are less prominent than in the past, since they come to serve not as final names (surnames) but as middle names.¹⁴ According to the principal of one primary school: 'Sikh children don't use Singh and Kaur now. [We have] names like Mann on the register.' Probably, as noted by Drury, it is Sikhs' perception of the confusion likely for schools and other authorities when 'faced with a large number of women who all shared the same name' which has precipitated this change (1989:210-211). Thus my interviewees experienced the names Singh and Kaur as present but inconspicuous and unproblematic signifiers of their Sikh identity. The meaning of Singh (rendered 'lion' in the books) was given as 'tiger' by several, Amarjit included.

Appearance

a) Girls

Whereas complexion (mentioned above and in connection with racism in chapter twelve) was an unalterable aspect of being Sikh, hair style and dress could also be distinctive (or perceived as being such) but entailed varying degrees of latitude and variation. The girls all had long hair - many said that it had never been cut, although Amandeep had a fringe and a twelve year old girl said, 'My mum trims mine every couple of months'.

She showed her awareness of the Sikh religious basis for having long hair by making a connection between growing one's hair and 'one of the gods'.¹⁵ More specifically a nine year old follower of Baba Ajit Singh articulated the reason for avoiding haircutting in religious terms: 'because God made our hair and we can't cut it', and another devotee's explanation in terms of avoiding 'cutting God' appeared in chapter ten.

Dress also distinguished all the girls for all or some of the time from non-South Asians. It was part of being Sikh (as one subject's reference to 'wearing *chunnian* at the gurdwara' shows) but not a major or immutable part. Female subjects all wore Punjabi suits on some occasions. Some of those at primary school wore Punjabi dress at school as well as at home. For example Sarbjit was always dressed in this way and an eight year old girl said that at school she wore: 'Suits. I don't wear skirts. I haven't got any. Because my mum doesn't like them.' Jasvir told me: 'I'm not allowed to wear skirts at home, have to wear suits. Our mum just doesn't like our legs being bare.' Sarbjit's father attached importance to her wearing Punjabi clothes - or at least trousers rather than skirts - at her secondary school. However at Satwant's school, with its high percentage of Punjabi pupils, only one girl in the Panjabi class was wearing a suit.

Older Sikhs differed in the importance they attached to their daughters' and grand-daughters' clothes. A twelve year old girl reported:

My dad comes from a stricter side than my mum. His mum thinks I should wear more Punjabi suits at home, but I don't like them. I wear them to temple and weddings. That's the only time I'd wear them.

For, as with Panjabi language, dress was felt to be appropriate in some contexts but acutely embarrassing in others. Raspreet articulated the embarrassment she would feel if her English friends saw her in Punjabi clothes. Age and awareness of her elder sisters' fashionable clothes were probably factors in Raspreet's concern to be seen in smart, western-style clothes. Some girls only wore *salvor*, *kamiz* and *chunni* for going to the gurdwara and for other events at which the Guru Granth Sahib was present. These included periods when the scriptures were installed in the house for a reading over two or more days (see *satsang*, *akhand path* and *sahaj path* in chapter four). Sikh convention requires that both males and females cover their heads in the presence of the volume of scripture. Thus Ravinder mentioned in this regard: 'We'll have to always wear a suit like...downstairs you have to keep your head covered.'

Amandeep mentioned wearing suits for birthdays and family parties - in other words in a familiar Punjabi context such clothes helped to mark the specialness of the occasion, and were not simply required in devotional contexts. As mentioned in chapter five she also showed awareness of the particular dress expected of mourners.

Such clothes were less specific to Sikhs than the turban. No female subjects were wearing turbans when interviewed. Of the female subjects only two (twin sisters) mentioned that they wore turbans and then only on such occasions as Vaisakhi, and only one girl did so at Jasvir's youth camp. Daljit and Davinder's mother was among several subjects' mothers who did. However Sarbjit was aware of the choices involved.¹⁶ The exhortation of the leader during the alphabetical quiz (see chapter eight) reminded (or informed) girls that being Sikh entailed their wearing a *dastar* (turban):

For Sikhs *dastar* is the proper thing to cover the head. I ask you to seriously consider wearing *dastar* like *bibi* there. Can you imagine a Singh in a *chunni*? And girls and boys are equal in Sikhism.

b) Boys' and Men's Appearance

However, despite conventions for girls' hair and dress which distinguished them and older female relatives from the non-Asian majority and despite this minority insistence on (and adoption of) a turban by girls, subjects more often defined 'Sikhness' with reference to boys' and men's appearance. The significance of 'the Sikh look' is explored by Gell (1994). Her fieldwork among young second generation Sikhs in Bedford 'revealed the extent to

which appearance represents ethnicity as a concrete condition of existence for young Sikhs today'. After quoting the musings of a nineteen year old man she reflected:

One could say that for this young male Sikh, in common with most others, the Sikh appearance has become the critical threshold between being 'Sikh' or not, between self-effacement and self-assertion, between being someone, a dutiful son, an affectionate grandson, a responsible elder brother, to being anyone - British, Italian, Hindu, Muslim.

An eight year old girl articulated the religious and historical reasons for males to wear the *pag* (turban):

I know why you have to wear *pag* because my dad told us a *sakhi* once and Guru Gobind Singh Ji, I think, he gave himself or his children - something like that - and he - because there was a war or something, and then Guru Gobind Singh asked somebody how many Sikhs were there, and the man said, 'I don't know' because they all looked the same, and then Guru Gobind Singh Ji said 'Well, now all the Sikhs are going to wear turbans'. And so whenever you see somebody walking down the street, when somebody asks you, 'Is that a Sikh or a Hindu or a Muslim?' when you look on their head and they're wearing a turban you say 'Sikh'.

Gurdial and Gurvinder emphasised that to 'keep your hair' was the necessary condition for being a 'proper Sikh' and that if faced with the choice that confronted Guru Gobind Singh's sons (to be bricked up alive or to have their hair cut) they would choose to be bricked up alive.¹⁷ But the obverse side of its perceived centrality to Sikh identity is the agonising that its maintenance entails. Adults might perceive the availability of both jobs and spouses as limited by the *kesh*.¹⁸ For example Sarbjit's father remarked:

The thing is a lot of the girls who have been brought up in this country - I think I'll say eighty per cent of them... have become modernised and they would prefer a cleanshaven to a *keshdhari Sikh*.¹⁹

But for my much younger subjects reasons included both the convenience of short hair and the taunting that long hair invited. A ten year old boy said: 'My mum decided to cut it because it was too long and all the shampoo used to go in my eyes.' He insisted that he had enjoyed the extra attention that his hair had brought him:

Before [I had my hair cut] everyone used to go, 'Here comes the turban guy' and everything, 'Here comes the Sikh' and they used to take the micky out of me. And I used to go, 'Oh, be quiet'... It's good because if you've got a turban they just speak to you and mess around with you. When you ain't got one they just treat you like a normal person, and you just hate it when they do that.

However teasing and bullying were pressures on many boys to have the *kesh* removed (Gell 1994). An eleven year old boy (whose father wore a turban) had had his hair cut because fellow pupils 'used to call me "monkey" and everything'. Daljit, now turbaned but until recently short-haired, said that his turban made no difference and that the insults stemmed from colour. Others disagreed. An eleven year old boy quoted above expressed acute embarrassment at the prospect of any English people seeing him with a handkerchief on his head (customary head-covering in the gurdwara for those male Sikhs who do not have turbans, *patkas* or *rumals*). One teacher described sorrowfully how children would knock her son's turban off. She told him to 'tell them "this is our Guru's crown". Now he's cut his hair but says he'll grow it again before he gets married'.

Nine year old sisters reported that some people call boys with topknots 'turnip', 'topknot turnips' and 'tomato head'.

Diversity of practice between and within the young people's experience was apparent. For example two brothers were shorthaired and said their brothers and father were too. A nine year old girl said that of her relatives only an uncle had long hair and turban. Concerning turbans Amandeep disclosed:

My granddad wears it. He hasn't got long hair. He just wears it because he's got a bald patch. He just wears it for weddings and to the gurdwara. And there's my *taya* [father's older brother] - most of them, they're all in India. They've got turbans.

Gurdial wore a turban, his younger brothers had *patke* and Gurbinder's hair had never been cut. Amarjit, his father, uncle and grandfather were also all *keshchhari*. Davinder and Daljit both wore turbans, but this was a recent change. To quote Daljit:

We must keep our hair. I had it cut before my mum had *amrit*, then I kept it. My mum and dad said it doesn't look right if you're like that.

c) Jewellery

Subjects felt more comfortable about indicating their Sikh identity by wearing items that were movable and of a type accepted in the wider society. The ten year old boy (whose hair had undergone several transformations) said:

I wear a ring when I go out. I got this [wrist rosary] and I got the other *kara*, that's normally plain. I got a badge and I got a sticker and I got loads of things... It's really to show my religion and to show I'm a Sikh.

He described his ring as having 'a sign on it'. Rings engraved with the *ik onkar* sign were readily available from the Sunday stall in Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara and referred to by one nine year old girl as her 'Guru Nanak ring'.²⁰ The ten year old continued:

We've got other signs — it's a *khanda*, and my sister's got that. She wears it in her earring... and when you get a badge you normally get that on it.

A ten year old boy mentioned both the *ik onkar* ring and 'God's picture on a necklace'. On the purpose of wearing such pendants he volunteered 'it's the same as a ring and a *kara*'. Jasvir mentioned that 'necklaces' indicated that the wearer was Sikh. Hers had a picture of Guru Gobind Singh and a *khanda* respectively. Thus, although these outward indications of Sikh identification need to be distinguished historically from those that are intrinsic to Khalsa discipline, the five Ks, some subjects mentioned them together as being of a kind.

d) Kara

Traditionally, as one of the five Ks, it is the *kara* which fits into this category of the widely acceptable and also easily movable marker of Sikh identity. Chapter ten suggested the talismanic power which some of the young people attributed to the *kara*. Many mentioned wearing the *kara* as a characteristic of a Sikh, and in Panjabi classes the need to wear one was emphasised. In Guru Nanak Parkash gurdwara *karas* were distributed to pupils who did not have one. The Panjabi teacher announced unequivocally, 'Without a *kara* you are not a Sikh'. A nine year old girl said she was wearing one because this was a requirement at her class. A nine year old girl's reasons for wearing a *kara* show that reasons were cumulative rather than mutually exclusive: 'Miss, the first thing is it shows that we are Sikhs, the other thing is it shows we have respect to God and the other thing is it means it gives me good luck.'

For many short-haired male subjects the *kara* was their only K. A combination of *kara* and *kesh* (as in the family of one ten year old follower of Baba Ajit Singh) was also a frequent combination for boys as well as girls.

However, here again, the emphasis was ideal rather than borne out in practice. Many subjects were not wearing a *kara* when interviewed. Their reasons are given below - first Satwant's:

I have [a] *kara*. I've left it at home. We were like playing outside and I scratched my brother on the face with it and my mum told me to take it off while we were playing and I must have forgot to wear it.

Amandeep explained: 'I've got one, but I don't wear it to school - I didn't wear it today because my mum and dad wash it sometimes, and they washed it today.' Ravinder acknowledged: 'We're supposed to wear a *kara* but I don't wear one because it's too tight for me.' An eight year old girl 'had a bath and I've left it at home' and her nine year old brother reported that his ten year old friend had been told of in school for playing with his *kara*. He in turn explained his lack of *kara* by saying: 'It's just because it can hurt someone and you might catch on something and fall down. It's safety, init? No one minds [taking it off].'

A nine year old boy had lost his and a ten year old girl's reason was that: 'My arms get a rash, that's why I can't wear it any more.' A ten year old girl and her two sisters had outgrown theirs and were awaiting replacements from their father.

Taken together these reasons indicate a relaxed attitude to maintaining what was for many their only K or (if their hair was uncut) one of their only two. This is particularly striking given that none of the subjects admitted to any embarrassment about being seen wearing the *kara* (as contrasted with their feelings about being heard speaking Panjabi or being seen in Punjabi clothes) and that it resulted in no bullying (unlike the boys' *pag* and *kesh*). Moreover no-one mentioned a ban in school, although Sarbjit's teacher had forbidden her to wear 'jewellery' until its significance was explained. But it had to be removed for some school activities and this may have put some young Sikhs off wearing it (Drury 1989:196). An eleven year old (the Ravidasi) who did not wear his *kara* said: 'We're allowed at school, but when we come to school we have to keep on taking it off and it kind of gets too tight, so I just wear it sometimes.'

Jasvir (quoted in chapter ten) linked the *kara* with being a princess (which is, following Khushwant Singh 1977:83, together with 'lioness' the favoured rendering of 'Kaur'), with resultant empowerment (see chapter ten) and personal liking for the *kara* as additional factors.

Degrees of 'Sikhness'

a) The Ks

Speaking of the other three Ks subjects introduced a clear gradation of Sikh allegiance. Thus Jasvir associated the *kachhahira* with *amrit* initiation: 'Short thing, you can't take off even if you have a bath so if you want a bath you put one in one leg...that's when we have *amritchhak*,' The twelve year old boy from Ajit Darbar pointed out the practical inconvenience, requiring years of practice since: 'they can't even take them off, even when they're having a bath. There's a way of changing into a different one without taking one off.'

A ten year old boy related the *kirpan* with being a 'priest' or being 'blessed' and with advanced age and spending one's time in the 'temple':

If you were a priest, he wears it. Some people do wear them if they have been blessed or something... My cousins in Slough, their great-granddad he's got one, a *kirpan*, a small one, one that fits him. He's a priest and he only goes to the temple, and his wife, she just goes to the temple to see him.

Subsequently he said:

My granddad, he's got all of them. He's got the turban and he's got everything. He wears everything. He drinks that water. He doesn't eat egg, meat or fish, doesn't eat beef...*Sadhu* is name for it.

With reference to his paternal grandfather a nine year old said: 'My *baba* [keeps the five Ks]. He works in a temple in Dudley.' Similarly the twelve year old boy from Ajit Darbar described people with the five Ks as: 'people that live in temples all the time and people that don't really work, who stay at home, those kind of people.'

An eight year old girl regarded the five Ks as both attributes of adulthood and signifiers of the 'real Sikh'.

When we grow up we have to wear the five Ks. One is called *kara* for self-defence on your wrist and it reminds you of God, another is called a *kirpan*. It's a little sword. Every Sikh must be right-handed and it's for self-defence. A *kangha* is like to tie your hair. It's a little comb...My dad has all of them because he wants to be like a real Sikh.

So too the Namdhari boy who said, 'If you want to be a proper Sikh you're going to wear the five Ks'.

The tendency to distinguish categories of Sikh also characterised many statements about *kesh* and *pag*. For example, the ten year old boy who had been alternately short- and long-haired explained (with imperfect logic) that: 'Singh' is for if you've got a turban...I used to have a turban so I'm still Singh.' Similarly, with reference to the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, Gurdial said: 'He said not to cut it because all Singhs should have hair, fullsize hair to be a proper Singh.'

Whereas they defined the turbaned male as 'Singh' and 'proper Singh', other young people used 'proper Sikh' and 'true Sikh', 'real Sikh' and 'pure Sikh'. Thus a ten year old boy said his parents wanted him to be 'like a proper Sikh with long hair'. His nine year old brother explained that: 'like real Sikh, that means you have all the things what my God's got, like weapons and all them and special clothes.' A twelve year old devotee of Baba Ajit Singh mentioned: 'You swear an oath that you'll be like a proper Sikh and keep a sword and everything.' The ten year old Ramgarhia Namdhari boy stated, 'If you want to be a proper Sikh you're going to wear the five Ks'. A nine year old girl described her picture of herself aged twenty: be wearing a turban. I'll have the five Ks on. I'd have *amrit*.be a proper Sikh.' A twelve year old girl admitted, 'I'm not that true Sikh because [I] don't carry the five Ks' and an eleven year old boy said:

Pure Sikh means that if one member of your family has a turban, he's pure because he's got a turban... If one person wears it the whole family is a pure Sikh.

Noteworthy here is the vicarious 'purity' of the relatives of the turbaned Sikh.

b) *Amrit Chhakna*

For one nine year old girl 'doing proper Sikh' was synonymous with *amrit chhakna*. Describing the relationship between her brother and her uncle she said: 'The other thing is my brother's done like you know proper Sikh, and [my uncle's] smoking, drinking.' She continued:

My parents want me to be like same as my brother, to do *amrit chhak* and be good and not smoke and not drink. Miss, they want me to be the same and be a proper Sikh, and Miss, I want to be a proper Sikh as well.

c) *Zat*

Curriculum books are careful not to offend (but also often simplistic *in* how they present caste vis-a-vis Sikh tradition, emphasising that the Gurus' teaching opposed caste discrimination. Realistically Cole and Sambhi (rep.1977:27-28) remark 'Sikhism in the twentieth century is not actually free from caste'. Recent scholarly observers of local British Sikh communities identify *zat*/caste

as the primary basis for internal differentiation (e.g. Baumann 1996: 109-116). Some of the young people referred to *zat* membership as if (at least in conjunction with maintaining the five Ks) it conferred a higher degree of Sikhness'. The Ravidasi boy explained:

There's three castes. The first one is... I've forgotten. The second one is Jat and the third is the Chamar. And the first one are true Sikhs, like they carry the Ks at all times... they say their prayers. I'm not one of those. I'm not high caste.

Whereas he equated his low caste with not being 'true Sikh' subjects from higher *zats* equated theirs with being more Sikh.

The importance of being Ramgarhia in Ramgarhia Sikh eyes has been illustrated by Kalsi (1994).²¹ Something of this comes through the statement by a member of the Ramgarhia gurdwara committee that 'if kids are in the Ramgarhia school they are as good as *amritdhari* kids'. Amarjit explained:

That means we are in the Sikh culture, but we're another kind of religion to other Sikhs... They wear different kind of turbans. [Ramgarhias] wear the red proper one. It goes straight, straight, then it's got a spike up the end.²²

Thus, once again, appearance - and specifically the turban - is perceived as central to Sikh identity by a young Sikh, and this is linked to the caste identity as Ramgarhia.

As explained in chapter two, the majority of my interviewees were Jat by *zat*, and where any connection between caste and Sikh identity was made it favoured Jats over Ramgarhias. For example, Ravinder was shown a picture of the *panj piare* in a festival procession and asked what sort of people they must be. Instead of describing them (as anticipated) as Sikhs who observed the *Khalsa* discipline, including the five Ks, Ravinder immediately said that 'of course' they would be Jat. A thirteen year old girl explained:

We're Jats, they're top of the caste. We don't usually believe in caste, but we're Jats and there's Ramgarhie, Churhe.²³ I don't really know a lot about this, but I've just been told we're Jats. Jats are people who work in the field.

Davinder linked *zat* membership with going to a 'Jat gurdwara' or a 'Tarkhan gurdwara'. The disrespectful term suggested the Jat sense of superiority. Jasvir classified Jats (her *zat*) as Sikh, whereas Tarkhans (again the less respectful term for Ramgarhias) were (merely) Indian.

If there's a Jat and a Tarkhan, a Tarkhan is a carpenter and a Jat is a farmer. The Tarkhan is the Indian and the Jat is a Sikh.

Ravinder, too, referred to the other major *zat-baradari* in Coventry as 'Tarkhan' and she discriminated between Jat and Tarkhan not on the traditional basis of land ownership and landlessness or farming and carpentry, but by reference to the Jats' closer bonding with Punjab.

Tarkhan, either they are from Africa, but they're Sikh like they're born in Africa or they've been in Pakistan, but they're Sikh, so they're Tarkhan, and Jat Sikhs is when they've been born in Punjab... I know a Tarkhan, she's a close friend to us. She knows Gujarati, Hindi and Panjabi. She's African and she went to India and then she came to England. And so she's quite different. [Jats] are not so likely to have lived in Africa.

Similarly a ten year old boy (who said he was Jat, even though his surname was a Ramgarhia one) said of another boy with a Ramgarhia name: 'He's not a Sikh: he says his mum was born in Africa.' He proceeded to explain that there were:

loads of religions like Jat and everything...I think I'm a Jat. It [means] coming from India if your parents came from a different part. I'm not that sure but I think that's what it is. Or it's probably the religion.

d) The India Connection

Thus, regardless of 'caste', closeness to 'India' - and so to Punjab - differentiated 'real Sikhs' from 'Sikhs'. Speaking about his father a nine year old boy said that he:

was born in India and he's got Indian passport...that makes him a real Sikh and everything. But my mum, she is a Sikh, but she wasn't born in India: she was born in Dudley.

e) 'Sikh' Designating *Khalsa*

In parallel with the emergent classification of, on the one hand, 'Sikhs' and on the other 'proper' and 'real' Sikhs, another tendency among the young people and their elders was to reserve 'Sikh' for this second, more committed, more conspicuous Sikh, while referring to others by different terms. So, for example, a member of the committee in the Ramgarhia Gurdwara referred to *keshdhari* males as 'Sikhs' and to those with short hair as 'other nationalities'. Likewise, when describing marriage practices, Sarbjit said:

That's like not a Sikh wedding - a Sikh's different to that. Like they don't go round the Guru Granth Sahib four times...I think Sikhs do, but they wear no jewellery, and they have a yellow suit on instead of a red one...The girl's dad said, 'If you're going to give money to them it's going to go to the temple ...On the other sort of weddings, not Sikh weddings, they have like lots of people, about 700 or something, ...they do come to the temple, but they have like alcohol and meat and egg.

She had no term to describe the majority of people who by their own definition are Sikh (but not *amritdhari*) and so used the phrase 'the other sort of wedding' for the majority's practice. Thus Amarjit Singh (1992:27-28) insists that most who think they are Sikhs are 'non-Sikhs' as 'the most important thing that defines Sikhs is the practice of Sikhism'. In these comments is discernible a move to reserve the term Sikh for members of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha or at least *amritdhari*, *keshdhari* adherents to *Khalsa* discipline.

Critical Discussion

In a book designed for GCSE pupils Dhanjal wrote perceptively that:

Sikh identity is a modern concept and is still developing. Many different kinds of people would say that they are Sikhs, but they are not all alike...Thus it is possible to find people with no external symbols who drink and smoke and who claim to be Sikh extremists...the Sikh identity is strong among Jat Sikhs and is often more of a political identity... (1987:61)24

Some curriculum books, however, explicitly or implicitly provide a more unitary picture of Sikh identity and of the religious world of young British Sikhs. In some instances the acknowledgement that, e.g. 'Not all Sikh children will choose to take amrit' (Clutterbuck 1990:59), is coupled with a tone of exhortation or reproof, e.g. 'they should still follow the code for living' (59). This is to overlook the complexity of Sikh identity which is no new phenomenon.

For example, even authoritative definitions of Sikhs in Indian legislation and Sikh codes of conduct mark changes in emphasis and inclusiveness. Thus, as McLeod points out, whereas the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 defined a Sikh as 'a person who professes the Sikh religion' the Delhi Gurdwara Act 82 of 1971 added to the necessary profession of the Sikh religion the clause 'and keeps unshorn hair' (1989a:93 and 98).

'Sikh' means a person who professes the Sikh religion, believes and follows the teachings of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only and keeps unshorn hair. For the purposes of this Act,

if any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he [*sic*] shall be deemed respectively to be or not be a Sikh according as he makes or refuses to make in the manner prescribed by the rules the following declaration: - 'I solemnly affirm that I am a Keshdhari Sikh, that I believe in and follow the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only, and that I have no other religion'. (98)

What emerges clearly from what subjects said about Sikh identity and from their actual practice is the strong association with Punjab and Panjabi and with one or more of the five Ks. Equally clear is that where possible subjects displayed the identifying marks of being Sikh only in certain situations. This is where the male's *kesh* and *pag* (or other covering for the *kesh*) are (like skin colour) sources of ambivalence, since they cannot be donned and doffed at will. Thus the full-time, visible maintenance of all five Ks and the turban (together with some further identification marks — e.g. the second name and the association with Punjab/Panjabi) becomes the qualification for a Sikh of a special type.

In view of these findings the tendency of curriculum books to present Sikh children as distinguished by the five Ks needs to be rethought. For example one finds such assertions as 'Most Sikh children wear the panj kakke' (Clutterbuck 1990:35). Text book emphasis (visual as well as verbal) upon the five Ks in presenting the world of young Sikhs needs to be reconsidered with reference to the degree of importance which the subjects attached to the five Ks.

Here the curriculum books' writers and photographers are faced with a real dilemma. On the one hand to describe Sikh children primarily in terms of their maintenance of the *kesh* and the other Ks is to depart from the real situation at least in Britain. Even among Sikhs who attend supplementary classes and frequently worship in the gurdwara many have only one or two of the five Ks. On the other hand to portray Sikh children as short-haired or as lax in this observance would meet with strong opposition from concerned Sikh elders.²⁵

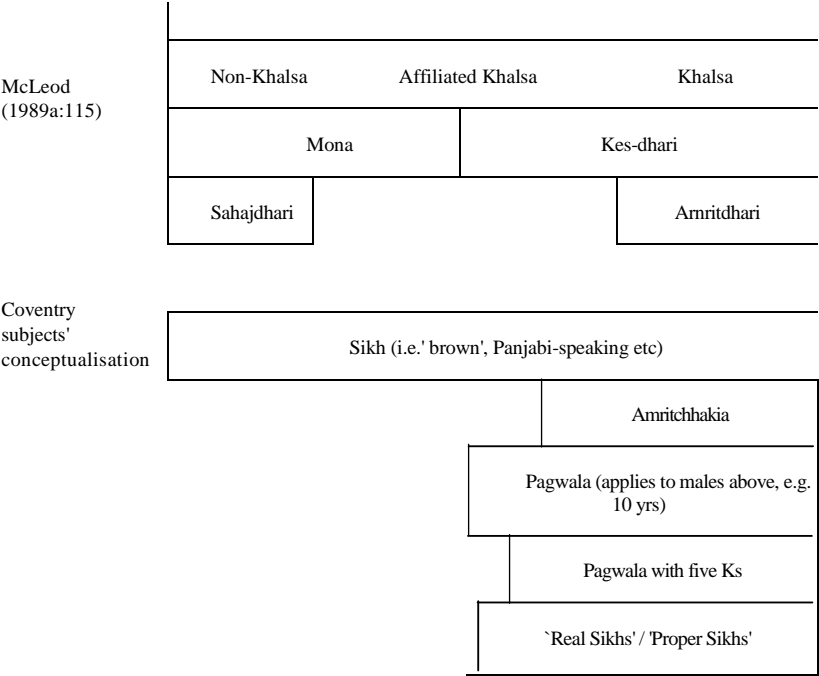
Considerations which must be taken into account by students and teachers of religious studies and religious education are, firstly, the divergence (in all faith traditions) between norms and actual practice; secondly, the differences of opinion among the most committed and devout concerning exactly what the norms are and, thirdly - differentiating the Sikh case from most others - the significance of what Gell termed 'the Sikh look'. This is epitomised by the male, *keshdhari* and *pagwala*, often displacing in Sikh estimation the less visible aspects of commitment.

Another contribution of a local ethnographic study is to provide a bridge not only between the lived experience of particular subjects and the portrayal of their world in influential literature, but also (as Geertz demonstrated) between experience-near and experience-distant concepts. In this case subjects had a concept of different degrees of 'Sikhness' which paralleled the bipolar distinctions of the literature. However they did not use the terms *Khalsa*, *amritdhari* or *keshdhari* for one category, nor did they apply the terms *patit* (lapsed, i.e. from being either *keshdhari* or disciplined *amritdhari*), *mona* (shaven) or *sahajdhari* (or its frequent rendering 'slow adopter', i.e. of *Khalsa* discipline) to Sikhs who had cut their hair or otherwise fell short of the grade. Instead, for the more visibly observant their terms were the English 'proper Sikh', 'real Sikh' and the Panjabi '*pagwala*' and '*amrit chhakia*'. Only in a small minority of cases did they apply 'Sikh' only to those Sikhs who were committed to the *Khalsa* code.

McLeod attempted a diagrammatic answer to the question 'Who is a Sikh?', incorporating the categories current in the literature. When examined in relation to this diagram these young Sikhs' concepts are similar but not identical to those he employs (1989a:114-115). McLeod suggests that the spectrum stretches from 'Khalsa' to 'affiliated Khalsa' to 'non-Khalsa', with the category of 'kes-dhari' applying both to all 'Khalsa' and some 'affiliated Khalsa' Sikhs and the term 'mona' applicable both to the 'non-Khalsa' and to those 'affiliated Khalsa' Sikhs who are not 'kes-dhari'. Only 'kes-dhari' Sikhs (both 'amrit-dhari' and non-'amrit-dhari') can be 'patit'.

In this analysis young Coventry Sikhs' concept of '*pagwala*' corresponds to 'kes-dhari' (but only adult men) and '*amrit-chhakfanirit-chhakia*' to 'amrit-dhari'. 'Proper' and 'real' Sikhs includes the *amrit-chhak/amrit-chhakia* and corresponds to those 'kes-dhari' Sikhs who maintain the other four Ks and are strongly associated, often as 'priest', with a gurdwara.

Figure 8
Diagram showing conceptual relationship between McLeod (1989a:115) spectrum of Sikh identity and Coventry subjects' conceptualisation.



As with figure 2 (Punjabi religious behaviour) this must not be viewed as static, with bounded groups. Unless such models (and the individual membership groups model for faith traditions) are understood as dynamic and changing, as evidenced by subjects' frequent mention of growing and cutting hair, the nature of Sikh tradition and of nurture in it will be obscured. Chapter twelve focuses upon the dynamics of change in young Sikhs' religious world.

The use of English words such as 'priest' (for a *granthi*) and the references which some subjects made to members of their families 'becoming Sikh' are among the phenomena - and their implications - which will be examined in chapter twelve.

NOTES

- 1 *Pagwala* is a colloquial, sometimes dismissive term, as in:

many 'modern' girls would not wish to stick out like a sore thumb among their western friends, accompanied by a 'Pagh-wala' [sic] (Kaur and Singh 1992:23).
- 2 Despite the frequency of such renderings of *sahajdhari*, Flood translates it as 'one who possesses or upholds the innate (truth)' (1995:96-97).
- 3 For similar comparisons made by Hindu and Christian subjects see Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:28,57) and Nesbitt and Jackson (forthcoming).
- 4 The monkey dressed in robes may refer to Hanuman, the ideal devotee of Lord Rama in the Ramayana.
- 5 The perception that 'we worship a book' is criticised by Cole (e.g. 1982:99). Indarjit Singh condemns 'humanising or deifying it' (1984:5).
- 6 This may be because of the relatively more conservative character of the local Mirpuri community as compared with some Muslim communities.
- 7 She based this on the fact that her uncle had recently got married and removed his *kesh*.
- 8 The number in brackets indicate the number of subjects concerned. For the value of numbers even in a non-statistical context see Garner (1991:155).
- 9 Similarly Ramindar Singh wrote:

Punjabi is still the dominant language spoken within family and community settings. However, the children speak Punjabi with their parents and other adults generally in those situations where discourse in English is not possible (where an adult does not understand English). They rarely use Punjabi among themselves. Their comprehension of Punjabi is generally much better than their speech. Therefore, it appears that Punjabi as a language of common discourse would last only during the lifetime of the present adult generation (1992:57).

- 10 Among the many accounts of this event examples are Macauliffe (rep.1963:95) who mentions only Singh, not Kaur, Cole and Sambhi (1978:36), Khushwant Singh (1977:83).
- 11 Although these numbers have no statistical validity it is interesting to compare them with Drury's finding that 25 per cent of her subjects in Nottingham fifteen years previously used Kaur as a surname (1989:211).
- 12 The practice of women adopting 'Singh' results from dominant British assumptions that a woman takes her father's or husband's surname. See Cole (1994c:112) for instances among nurses, and the bibliography of this thesis (Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh, Charanjit Ajit Singh and Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh) for compromises.
- 13 Although some 'surnames' have been formed from village names or personal characteristics, the majority are *got* names. Some *got* names are common to more than one *zat* - in Coventry Sidhu is an example - but by far the majority are well known among Sikhs as specifying a particular *zat*.
- 14 The South Asian press in Britain carries frequent announcements of 'change of name' whereby the bearer changes his surname from Singh to the family's *got* name.
- 15 As shown in chapter nine 'gods' refers to the ten Gurus.
- 16 i.e. whether to wear a turban , and if so whether to do so with or without a *chunni*.
- 17 For the story of this martyrdom at Sirhind see Jagdish Singh (1977).
- 18 See Kalsi (1994) and Ramindar Singh (1992).
- 19 Sukhvinder Kaur and Arvind-pal Singh comment on the 'steadily increasing rejection of keshdhari boys by their female counterparts' (1992:22).

- 20 One informant's daughter wore such a ring to help her in her examinations.
- 21 The higher tendency of Ramgarhias to maintain the *kesh* on arrival in Britain (Kalsi 1994) has reinforced this view. Alternatively one may interpret the insistence on Ramgarhia identity as 'an example of the supremacy of caste status over one's religious identity'. In support of this contention Kalsi quotes from the application form for membership of the Ramgarhia Board which includes the declaration 'I am a Ramgarhia'.
- 22 Amarjit mentioned the Ramgarhia style which incorporated a '*fifth...* coloured cloth and you just tie it behind your ears'.
- 23 Unlike 'Ramgarhie' the label 'Churhe' (sweepers) is deeply offensive to members of the *zat* concerned.
- 24 This statement (especially the linkage of smoking with Sikh identity) is open to strong criticism by committed Sikhs.
- 25 Coventry education Authority withdrew MGSS (1977) in response to local Sikh protest at a photograph of a 'Sikh' who was short-haired.

Chapter 12

Conclusions

Introduction: Processes Underway

The ethnographic study in Coventry reported in previous chapters has shown that at the centre of young Sikhs' religious lives is the Guru - both the Guru Granth Sahib (as visible and audible presence) and the ten Gurus (in iconography and story) most frequently represented by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. Annual celebrations such as Vaisakhi emerge as salient events, when story, spectacle, awareness of solemn commitment and publicly affirmed corporate identity converge. The Panjabi language and Punjab - a place to visit and a homeland, spiritual and cultural - are integral to Sikh children's nurturing in the *Panth*. Their nurture in their tradition is both formal and informal. Supplementary classes are largely a post-migration innovation, but they have changed relatively little in the past generation, although chapter eight noted the potential for change of the youth camps and the incipient use of computer technology. Birthday and festival celebrations suggested complex interactions between Sikh and non-Sikh society, for which models advanced in earlier studies (such as biculturalism and convergence) proved useful stimuli to further conceptualisation. Vaisakhi demonstrated that concern for nurturing the young in the tradition is a powerful force for change.

Thus examination of the nurture of young Sikhs has also provided an insight into the dynamics of the Sikh tradition in diaspora and how members perceive themselves. This chapter endeavours to identify the processes that are underway and to discuss them in the light of earlier studies of the Sikh tradition (Oberoi 1994; James 1974). Moreover it is suggested that observation of the young people's use of language indicates the microcosmic changes constituting

cultural change. After endorsing the concept of 'culture in the making' (Fox 1985) as the sum of individual decisions (including linguistic decisions), attention turns to the implications of ethnographic study for the representation of 'world religions' and the presentation of the religious lives of Sikh children in the curriculum books used for religious education. Some areas for future research are identified.

The processes underway in the generation of my Coventry interviewees' parents give rise to the religious environment in which they are nurtured. These can *be* represented as a two way movement, the two ways being, on the one hand, towards an assertion of *Khalsa* identity and, on the other, towards a distancing from *Khalsa* identity. Twenty years earlier James had suggested that both 'westernization' (1974:98) and 'outdoing parents in religious fanaticism' (102) might characterise the behaviour of young Sikhs in Britain.

In the following analysis the assertion of *Khalsa* identity is associated with 1984 and *sants* and with uprooting from Punjab. The distancing is examined in relation to westernisation (the impact of Christian and secular institutions), Hindu influence, secular Asian culture and racism. The two way movement is further identified as a tension, corporate and individual in the Sikh psyche. Resultant 'situational ethnicity' strategies are examined in the context of 'Sikhness' as ethnicity.

A Two-Way Movement

a) Assertion of *Khalsa* Identity

Raspreet and Ravinder spoke of their parents 'becoming Sikhs'. Raspreet said:

You just have to go to the temple at least once a week and slowly become a Sikh, as they did, because my Dad he grew up in India. He became a Sikh there....Afterwards he became a Sikh properly, wearing a turban. That was in England.

Daljeet and Davinder's parents had taken *amrit* recently and joined the Akhand Kirtani Jatha. Sarbjit's father 'converged him]self into a Sikh' in 1985 on his return from visiting Sikh religious sites in Pakistan. Jasvir and some other subjects were aware of relatives who were likely to take *amrit* in the future. Of the British-reared members of this parental generation twenty years before James had written - in loaded terms: 'One could even see Sikh youth outdoing their parents in religious fanaticism; they might initiate a movement ... to revive or purify the Sikh religion.' (1974:102)

i) The Impact of 1984

In fact where such changes have occurred they result from several contributory processes. James could not foresee the traumatic events of 1984 or their impact on Sikhs globally. Tatla (1993 and 1999) has suggested the profound impact of the events of 1984 upon the Sikh diaspora. The invasion of the Harmandir Sahib was experienced as a collective trauma by Sikhs, who had never before so keenly realised their religious allegiance and their bonding as a faith community. The young people in this study were too young to recall the invasion of the Golden Temple. Only two voiced awareness of the continuing aftermath of violence in Punjab: Davinder looked forward to participation in the demonstration outside the Indian High Commission in London 'to protest against the Sikhs getting killed in India'. He had attended a Babbar Khalsa conference in Southall, following the killing of Sukhdev Singh, a Sikh militant:

Our man, top one. Someone must have grassed on him... They cut their legs, everything, tortured him... They had him for three days, then they killed him.

Sarbjit was well aware of continuing police brutality against Sikhs in Punjab: 'The police from India, because they're very strict and they like hit my *phuphar* (uncle) ...and hit him and beat him up.'

Her father was not alone among adults interviewed who saw the crisis of 1984 as directly responsible for many Sikh adults' new-found, fervent commitment to their faith which they demonstrated by taking *amrit* and maintaining the Khalsa discipline including the five Ks.¹

When I came here I had my hair cut. I stayed like this up until 1985. I think it was really the situation...in India. Not only me, I think hundreds of other youths came back and learned that you must be what you are instead of trying to hide yourself under something else.

Another adult informant observed:

In Coventry a lot of people are turning towards their religion because they have noticed - I won't be wrong if I say since 1984 when we got these riots which turned young people towards their religion.

She had not felt moved to take *amrit*, but of her own experience she said: 'After that 1984, the riots, which made me realise as well and shook me and so I started going to the gurdwara as well.' Davinder reported that his dad:

went to one of those conferences of Babbar Khalsa, he was the only one who had a haircut. He stopped drinking, then he stopped cutting his hair, then he wore a turban and just had *amrit*.

Clearly, whether this change had come about as a response to the trauma of the 1980s or not, the young Sikhs were used to adults conspicuously strengthening their commitment and so becoming more visibly and consistently Sikh - becoming 'proper' or 'real' Sikhs.

ii) *Sant* Influence

In some instances such conversion, or a shift to vegetarianism, for example, was - and subjects perceived it as being - directly attributable to the influence of a *sant*, such as Baba Ajit Singh or Baba Mihan Singh. However, any suggestion that *cants* were universally associated with positive transformation would be misleading. By Ravinder's and Raspreet's father and others the *sants* themselves were regarded as preying on the gullible. Satwant's palpable shock at my mention of Baba Ajit Singh conveyed a similar message.

iii) Migration

These two influences towards adopting a *Khalsa* identity were probably strengthened by the continuing impact on some Sikhs (subjects' parents and grandparents) of migration from Punjab and settlement in a society where the networks of home needed to be reconstituted and where Sikh tradition would only exist if created by the newcomers. To quote one adult informant: 'I wasn't religious-minded myself; but this isolation from my country turned me towards my religion and I learned more things in this country.'

b) Distancing from *Khalsa* Identity

However to present a picture of unidirectional personal change towards *Khalsa* discipline would be to misrepresent the processes at work in the religious world of young Coventrian Sikhs. Similarly their frequent references to the drunken disorderliness of male relatives, especially after weddings, and the condemnation of such behaviour by both children and their elders were an indication of an absence of religious discipline, *Khalsa* or otherwise, in many cases.

i) Westernisation

Chapters five and six, with their description of birthday parties and Christmas, could be interpreted as pointing to Sikh assimilation into mainstream society, whether regarded as Christian, secular or post-Christian. Alternatively such details as the Vaisakhi cake could be taken to show Sikhs integrating elements of mainstream British culture into a firmly Sikh framework. However, as Baumann has pointed out from his Southall data, the reality is more complex. For example a ritual (Christmas celebration, birthday party, Vaisakhi festivity) may take place for a complex clientele, and its overt meaning to one

constituency (e.g. Sikh families) may not be its intended meaning for a non-Sikh majority, whether present, however sparsely (at the Vaisakhi switching on), or absent (from the family Christmas meal). Clearly 'Westernisation', even in these specific instances of Christian/secular influence on the celebration of festivals, is far from simple.

ii) Secular Asian Influence

Equally evident in community events outside the gurdwara was the attraction of a distinctively South Asian (indeed Punjabi) culture which had been deeply affected by western contact. Kaur and Singh (1994), Banerji and Baumann (1990) and Baumann (1990) are scholarly responses to the phenomenon of ever evolving *bhangra* music, featured by Sullivan (1993). As suggested in chapters five and six, this dominates many celebrations. For many young Punjabis it plays a significant role in their self-perception as British South Asians (Nesbitt 1991:31-32; Kaur and Kalra 1996). Thus, in addition to the religious and political organisations which provided a sense of community for the Punjabi settlers, there is now a music and dance scene, strongly Punjabi in its appeal but (in the view of many Sikhs, e.g. Ravinder and Raspreet's father and other members of the Sikh Cultural Society) threatening traditional moral values and eroding language, music and dance forms.

iii) Hinduisation

The Coventry study also revealed overlap, varying from family to family, with Hindu Punjabi practice, in the celebration of the festivals of Rakhri and Divali, in regard for the goddess, Mataji, and in avoidance of beef. Writing in 1966, Khushwant Singh noted that: 'the relapse into Hinduism forms a recognisable pattern and is more evident among the rich and educated classes of Sikhs.' (rep.1977 vol 2: 302-3). He took the example of the people of Sindh for whom 'Hindu ritual is fast displacing the Sikh' (302-3). To this Dhanjal has riposted 'How it might be possible to lapse from the comparative simplicity of Sikhism into the complexity of Hinduism has never been explained' (1987:62). Ramindar Singh's response to Khushwant Singh's anxiety was:

Traditionally, Sikhs have the intense internal fear of being eventually swallowed up by the dominant Hindu religion and its practices in India. But, in Britain this fear is unfounded as Hinduism is also a minority religion.(1992:16)

Both writers miss the point that Sikhs who immigrated to Britain had been nurtured in an environment in which what are often distinguished as 'Hindu' elements were as familiar a part of life as what are perceived to be uncontroversially 'Sikh' elements.

The Coventry data yields three responses to such dismissals of Khushwant Singh's fear of relapse into Hinduism. Firstly (as in Satwant's

father's case and as illustrated by Oberoi's account of nineteenth century Punjab), devotion to Mataji has continued strongly in some families - it is not a question of 'lapse' or 'relapse'. Secondly, as I have argued with reference to the body (Nesbitt 1997), since 'Hindu' is the term used for the dominant socio-religious idiom of north India, when *sants* instigate reform of Sikh tradition it is in an idiom which can immediately be recognised as Hindu. An example is the insistence on vegetarianism, or the Nanaksar *sants*' assurance that the Guru Granth Sahib consumes something of the food offered before it.

Thirdly, as evidenced by Ravinder and Raspreet's father's criticism of some Sikhs' keeping *vrats* and by the scornful dismissal by Jasvir's camp leader of some of the responses to his alphabet quiz, some Sikh elders are concertedly rejecting what they themselves perceive to be Hindu. Their aim is to purge the *Panth* of such hangovers. However, as pointed out by Owen Cole with reference to *akhand paths*, some of the practices which Sikhs espouse as most distinctively Sikh can equally be argued to perpetuate essentially Hindu attitudes and practices (1982:92).

In fact this is inevitable if the Hindu tradition is broadly defined, as many scholars would define it (with substantial Hindu support), as roughly synonymous with those religious and social developments, indigenous to India, which have not been otherwise defined as Sikh, Buddhist or Jain. When examining Hinduising tendencies within the *Panth* one's definition of 'Hindu' must be recognised at the outset. Certainly, even if the definition of Hindu is narrower than this, the religious world of young Sikhs cannot be fully detached from a Hindu matrix and reference to this is necessary in interpreting aspects of their tradition. At the same time no single relationship between Hindu and Sikh tradition accounts for the diversity of the young Coventrian Sikhs' experience.

iv) Racism

As noted in chapter eleven one element in some Sikhs' attempts to distance themselves from *Khalsa* requirements by making themselves less conspicuous is the continuing recurrence of racism. Its results were observed and predicted by James (1974:101). Racism is especially relevant in the case of young Sikhs, equating as they do ethnicity (e.g. country of origin, skin pigmentation, language and custom) with faith tradition. Children indicated no awareness of any systematic discrimination but some had been victims of verbal abuse and bullying, and such experiences are likely to affect children deeply (Brah 1996:9). Their growing realisation of prejudice affected their attitude to their culture and community - for example to the language they spoke. It was partly in response to racism that, as recorded in chapter eleven and later in this chapter, all the subjects were accustomed to using Panjabi and English in different situations and to mixing them to different extents in different domains.

When asked if they experienced any problems relating to being Sikh/Punjabi and, at the same time, in some sense British only one child, an eleven year old boy, attempted to articulate any:

I can't understand why [God's] put me in this country and I am Indian... Sometimes it's hard being a Sikh because if you're left out like when you're playing with an English boy and your friends say all around you are English and you feel left out when you're a Sikh. But when like I pretend I'm an English, that's when I like going in, not left out.

During interviews both the children and elders referred to instances of bullying and discrimination. Amandeep said, 'At school sometimes people call me racist names. It's quite upsetting', and an eleven year old girl, also at primary school, said, 'Sometimes people make fun of my colour and things like that'. Sarbjit felt sad that 'if you walk into the gurdwara big grown-ups shout at you things like "Paki"'. Gurdial had experienced an English person swearing at him simply for talking to an Indian friend 'about going to the temple'. A Sikh child's poem published in Britain (Runnymede Trust 1997) and a Canadian writer's novel (Divakaruni 1997) compellingly corroborate this evidence of the bullying experienced by some Sikh pupils.

Throughout the research period one *gurdwara* suffered repeated criminal damage from white local residents and the following year an arson attack on it was reported nationally as well as locally (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 3 May 1993). The father of one child mentioned recent experience of increasing racist abuse.

It is uncertain whether children experienced more racism in parts of the city with higher or lower percentages of South Asian residents. The local research among Hindus suggested that children in schools with lower proportions of South Asian pupils were more likely to suffer abuse.² However in her study of young Sikh women in Coventry Sohal maintained that:

Students from the school that had a high percentage of minority ethnic children were very aware of issues relating to racism and sexism and were far more in touch with issues on life as opposed to the small percentage... that went to a school which had a low percentage of minority ethnic pupils (1989:6)

Children's comments linked racist abuse with their appearance (skin colour and turban), with language (speaking Panjabi or Indian accented English) and with their place of worship. For example a nine year old girl explained that 'Sometimes people tease me because I'm brown and call me "Paki",' and Sarbjit said: 'It's like some people at school call me names like "Paki" and

everything...V's a Hindu, but they've been calling, making funny jokes about us.'

The effect of racism may be an instinctive desire to minimise one's visibility and distance oneself from a *Khalsa* identity. Conversely, however, racism also provides elders with a further incentive to maintain Sikhs' pride in their tradition. One father and teacher said:

I personally feel that if people didn't have that history and tradition and those values, that people like the Asians, living in the UK, who are easily recognised from the colour of their appearance, could become very very dangerous creatures indeed, because they will feel resentful and hurt, and they may sort of .. lose [the] value of society altogether.

He expressed the view that the younger generation feel this isolation more acutely:

because they feel more equal than we did. We didn't feel as equal... My father still... feels that this country's let him come here and he's very grateful to them. Even the children in the playgrounds they are calling each other Pakis and that's it, because they're looking at the present through a white eye - but when they see that they're not accepted as that, no matter how hard they try, it's that level that the vacuum sort of arises.

Thus, in this view, racism resulted in a greater need for formal nurture in the tradition and so provided an impetus for provision by concerned adults.

c) Polarisation Within Corporate and Individual Psyche

i) Sikh Awareness

Taking account of the opposite tendencies and pressures towards *Khalsa* allegiance and towards playing down distinctiveness as Sikhs one perceives Sikh subjects being nurtured in a torn and contradictory environment. This is summed up by the editorial of the *Sikh Reformer* which suggested that after 1984 there had been hopes for the unity and development of Sikh culture in UK but,

Contrary to hope and expectation, the political upheavals of the post-1984 era, did relatively little to stem the growing decadence of cultural and traditional values, particularly amongst the youth... The growing sense of alienation amongst the youth was felt more acutely as certain sections of the born-again orthodox community adopted a 'holier than thou' attitude towards their apostate brethren (Sikh Cultural Society 199 lb:1).

ii) A Response: Situational Ethnicity

As suggested above and exemplified in chapter eleven, many young Sikhs are probably uncomfortable with maintaining outward signs of their Sikh identity in all situations. Drury too concluded that young Sikh women in Nottingham displayed a situational ethnicity as far as diet, dress and language were concerned (1989). The extent to which 'Sikhness' (as opposed to 'Punjabiness') is an ethnicity is debatable. The extent to which in British society being a Punjabi Sikh as opposed to, say, being an Irish Catholic can be situational is limited.

iii) Limitations of This Concept

Firstly there are the 'givens' of complexion which mean that for most young Sikhs the choice is between being Sikh and being 'Asian' rather than being invisible in 'white' society. The potential for racism persists whichever strategy is adopted. Secondly being a Sikh (as shown below) means for many looking like a (male adult) Sikh. The *kesh* and turban cannot be donned and doffed at will - or at least not so quickly as the young people could switch from one language to another.

The religious world of young Sikhs arises from this interplay of seemingly contradictory processes. It is caught in contradictory tensions and responsive both to the Punjab homeland and social change in Britain. In this monograph several models have proved their usefulness, among them Robert Jackson's 'membership groups' for the better understanding of the nature of faith traditions and Baumann's 'convergence' in the discussion of rites and festivals and (from linguistics) code-switching. To rely too heavily upon any one construct is to over-simplify what is under discussion. Moreover, by conjuring up an image each model is liable to distort as well as illuminate. Since diversity and change have been striking features of the Coventry Sikh situation Fox's attempt to cut anthropological models of culture free from static, bounded conceptualisations (a danger acknowledged in Jackson's model) has proven to be especially apposite.

What if anthropologists presumed that culture as a system of meaning emerged from the sum of social relationships composing a society - that it arose and endured only as men and women struggled to make it?...There is no weight of tradition, only a current of action. (Fox 1985:196-197).

With this view of 'culture' (and faith tradition) in mind, subjects' language, itself relational, fluid, evolving and to some extent situational, repays analysis. Subjects' use of English is both a factor in and an analogy for the interaction between majority western and Sikh minority culture.

Insights from the Young Sikhs' Use of English

a) English Words/Sikh Meanings

i) Religious Terms

Subjects' statements reported in earlier chapters have shown them interpreting Sikh tradition through English words and western concepts to themselves, among themselves and to outsiders. Examples of this have been 'bible', 'holy bible' and 'holy book' for the Guru Granth Sahib: a ten year old boy provides an instance: 'He's got a book in front of him, holy bible.' Temple' for gurdwara, 'priest' for *granthi*, (as in a nine year old boy's 'the priest told her the names of the children'), 'baptise' for *amrit chhakna* are further frequent examples.

If these are the metaphors, the following are the similes, where subjects carefully explained a distinctively Sikh event by explicit reference to a Christian event. Raspreet said:

You know how people have themselves christened, we don't exactly have that. We just like go to the gurdwara and we have like celebrations and we read the *maharaj* and have *bhogs* and stuff like that.

Likewise the ten year old boy described the naming procedure by saying:

It's the same kind of thing as when you're a Christian you get water on your head. It's just like that but you don't get water over your head.

Of the *kara* Raspreet said, it 'shows that you're a Sikh, like Christians wear crosses'.

On the former convention - using English words for Sikh phenomena which actually have no English word to express them - one can take the line, as Cole and Sambhi do, that 'English ... must be able to embrace within it amrit ceremony (if not amrit sanskar), jathedar and gurdwara' and that 'to refer to a Sikh *granthi* as a priest or initiation as baptism is only to set the student travelling in the wrong direction' (1990:28). However, as ethnographer one has to acknowledge that such usage has become entrenched and widespread among Sikhs, that writers of religious education books have played their part in this (e.g. McLeod [1986:54] has 'baptism' for *amrit chhakna* and Cole [1985:59] uses 'baptized' for 'initiated with *amrit*') and that in the process the English words are taking on more areas of meaning. Similarly, as discussed in chapter nine, subjects used 'God' to denote 'Guru' or 'holy person' and as a translation for '*Baba*'. Just as a mainstream cultural object (e.g. cake) is incorporated by Sikhs into a new context and so widens its applicability, so too with English words in the vocabulary of young Sikhs and their elders.

Meanwhile the subjects' capacity for comparison and interpreting to the listener is more self-conscious. It is akin to the interpretive anthropological approach and shows young Sikhs' capacity to observe one cultural domain in relation to another and their burgeoning skills in cultural translation.

ii) South Asian Usage

Another type of linguistic interaction was the children's consistent use of an English word in a distinctively un-English way that is current among English speakers of north Indian origin. Thus, as noted in chapter three, they called the chromolithographic reproductions of pictures of the Gurus 'photos'. Unlike children from non-Asian families they used 'brother' and 'sister' to refer to 'cousin' (as in chapter five) and also mentioned their 'cousin brothers' and a 'cousin sister', terms not used by the indigenous community. When Satwant said 'my mum's real brother', this was a usual way of distinguishing 'brothers' (in the narrower, more literal non-Asian sense) from cousins.

b) Incorporating Panjabi Words

At the same time (at least with sympathetic hearers), as evidenced in many quotations from the young people, they straightforwardly planted Panjabi words in English sentences. This is usually a noun which either replaces the English equivalent (*pag* for turban) or which - in line with Cole's exhortation above - has no exact equivalent (*kare* for the steel 'bangles' which are one of the five external markers of Sikh commitment). Another characteristic is 'code-switching' as described in chapter one. This varies in frequency depending upon context.³

One feature of this interaction evident from some children's speech is the use of the English verb 'do' followed by a Panjabi noun (often one with no English equivalent) to form a verb on the Panjabi model of a noun followed by the verb *karna* ('to do' or 'to make'). Thus one girl used the phrases 'doing *Babajr*', 'do our *mattha*' and 'do the *jal*' in quick succession to mean respectively 'putting the Guru Granth Sahib in its resting place for the night', 'kneel in front of the Guru Granth Sahib, touching the floor with one's forehead, in homage' and 'sprinkle water on the floor as a religious act'. A related linguistic device (noted in chapter ten and eleven) that recurred in the children's speech was 'do *amritchhak*' for 'be initiated with holy water as an observant Sikh'. Another child said 'have *amritchhak*' and it was also transformed into an English verb as 'to *amritchhak*' and '*amritchhaking*'.

c) Language and Values

Bilinguals' mixing of codes exemplifies linguistic change. Moreover it not only indicates social change but also constitutes the atomic detail of that change. Furthermore subjects' usage articulates underlying values, and, I shall suggest, **it** maps changes in these values and provides evidence of individual decision-making as the basis of culture.

The example of 'cousin-brothers' and 'cousin-sister' above arise from a Punjabi social context in which family relationships are extremely important in themselves and also serve as the model and provide the vocabulary for other relationships. Cousins are regarded as siblings and friends are regarded as kin and addressed accordingly (Jackson and Nesbitt 1993:44-45). Children are expected to show respect, especially towards older relatives and religious authorities, by using the suffix *ji*. In many cases Coventry Sikh children who were interviewed prefixed the names of the Gurus with '*Sri*' and (less frequently) followed them with '*Sahib*', whether they were speaking English or Panjabi. They referred to and addressed the teachers of their supplementary classes as 'uncleji' and 'auntyji', so showing continuity with Dosanjh's subjects twenty years earlier who would not address their elders by their first name or surname (1976:59). These widely used compounds of English with *ji* convey an affection and respect lacking from the more familiar or more formal ways of addressing one's teachers in Britain in a non-Asian context.

Culture as Individual Decision-making

A quotation from Raspreet's answer to the question 'What language do you speak at home?' illustrates how one child's language consciously expresses this respect, so important in Sikh tradition. Importantly for this discussion of the processes at work in Sikh culture disclosed by ethnographic research into Sikh nurture, what she said also shows how, in conversation with peers, the usage (and arguably the underlying value) is changing. She explained:

English and Punjabi sometimes — it's like a mix, like I'd say, 'Mummyji, do you want me to make some *roti*?' - stuff like that 'Mummy' sounds like a bit babyish, and 'Mum', I don't call her that because 'Mummyji' is respect, 'ji' is respect, to respect your mum and dad...and it's like 'Guru Nanak Dev JP, we call him that for respect... That's what you're supposed to call your elders. But you're supposed to also call your sisters *bahinjr*, if they're older than you. I've got a lot of older sisters but I don't call them *bahinji*', I just call them by their names: Jagdish, Paramjit, like that.

Here, Raspreet's use of language shows conscious decision on her part between not only words but between the value systems that they express. This serves as a linguistic example for the case that the study of Sikh nurture in Coventry

reveals their tradition not only as an interplay of processes but as an infinity of individual decisions by the children and their elders. This I have argued with reference to diaspora Punjabi culture - Hindu, Sikh and Christian - elsewhere (Nesbitt 1995). This also illustrates the need to relate any differentiation between contemporary 'membership groups' with the dimension of change over time. Bell's observation on language style is no less relevant to other aspects of culture: 'Language style shifts synchronically for the individual, diachronically for the individual over time and diachronically for the whole group.' (1984:151)

Other excerpts from transcripts suggest choices, e.g. those facing girls over the appropriate covering(s) for their head (albeit much less frequent than the male Sikhs' decisions regarding *kes* and head-covering). One is the camp leader's advocacy of *dastar* (turban) for girls (chapter eleven). The other is Sarbjit's reflection during interview (quoted earlier):

Amrit chhakna is like if you want to be God's daughter and you can't cut your hair, you can't have earrings and you can't wear lipstick. Wherever you go you have to wear a *chunni* and turban like other people do... Some people think it's good to wear a turban and *chunni* on top of it. They think it's best to do that, but some people think it's not, it's a waste of time.

These passages indicate two related choices facing girls who take seriously their Sikh allegiance. Firstly there is the choice between wearing a *chunni* (traditionally and still the most widely adopted head covering for Sikh women) and wearing a turban - with or without a *chunni*. Secondly, encompassing this, there is the decision whether, 'if you want to be God's daughter', to 'take *amrit*', so demonstrating commitment to a strict code of dress, diet and devotional practice.

Thus the Coventry data yields microcosmic instances of Fox's observation that: 'The forces prompting realignment come from people learning and choosing and, perhaps more often, struggling to learn and choose over time.' (1985:196-7) Young Sikhs and their elders constantly make cultural choices, decisions between alternative ways of being. In each instance factors of individual personality and normative pressure from the Sikh community, or some part of it, or from non-Sikh society, or from a part thereof, can be detected.

Both individually and collectively these decisions mark interfaces between groups - whether groups differentiated by gender, generation, genealogy or some other factor. By examining subjects' statements which convey or comment on disjunctions and cultural alternatives one exposes not so much firm boundaries between membership groups as the moving contours of

evolving configurations. This is the dynamic, diachronic dimension needed to supplement any overly synchronic analysis of a faith tradition into 'membership groups'.

Data reported in earlier chapters regarding language, values, symbols, icons and celebration has indicated boundary formation within the local *Panth* on the basis of individual and family preference. This in turn can be related to pre-migration Punjab, post-migration Punjab, contemporary UK. Thus the Namdhari subjects' experience needs to be understood partly in the context of the Namdhari movement in nineteenth century Punjab, Khalistani iconography needs to be set in the context of the history of Sikh separatist movements since Indian independence. Sarbjit's conversation about female headcovering, like Davinder and Daljit's parents' initiation and their eating code, needs to be seen in relation to the teaching of Bhai Randhir Singh and the Akhand Kirtani Jatha.

However, the danger persists of simply replacing a unitary Sikh or *Khalsa* tradition to which (in Drury's terms individuals willingly or unwillingly conform) by a multitude of sub-traditions. What is at issue here is whether individuals are mere carriers of culture which adults pass on to their offspring and pupils or whether it is individuals, and their successive decisions - major and minor - which constitute what we call faith traditions or cultures. Recognition of the contrary forces at work and the individual's capacity for decision-making supports Fox's suspicion that anthropologists have in the past stereotyped the 'others' as mere carriers of culture, by pressing them pan-cake flat under a tyranny of culture' (1985:xi). In Fox's assessment earlier anthropological 'conceptions of culture all presume that culture exists in advance of human history and action'. Instead:

Cultural stability and persistence result only from the successive reproductions of similar fields of forces, they therefore come about because of culture's continuous construction and reconstruction, not because it has stopped and remained stable (1985:xi).

One must recognise with Simard (1988) that our cultural field is no longer necessarily integrated but is plural and polycentred. Herein is the inadequacy of the concept of biculturalism, implying as it does (no more than) two (discrete) cultures. Fox's and Simard's understandings are compatible with James's sense of the future of Sikh tradition expressed in uniquely developing individuals.

Between the contradictory demands and pressures the personality of the child is itself developing creatively... there is the possibility of really positive, creative development within the Sikh community over two or three generations, change generated

within the community, not forced on it by outside pressures.
(1974:103)

However the Coventry data suggests that to make an over-easy distinction between 'the [Sikh] community' and 'outside' pressures is to overlook the complexity of the interactions (now many decades old) between Sikh tradition and, e.g. 'western society' or 'Hindu' tradition.

The Historical Dimension

Here it is salutary to recall the historical background to the complex interactions taking place in the diaspora in the 1990s. Firstly, taking James's observations, one has a picture of the previous generation of Sikh children in Britain, including many of today's Sikh parents, growing up as Punjabis in Britain. The Sikh tradition in which they are now nurturing their children is at least a product of their own composite cultural experience, whichever direction they have taken. Secondly, the Sikh tradition in Punjab a century earlier was already marked by multiple interactions with the west. For example the very tendency of Europeans to 'map' colonised inhabitants 'under the epistemic category of religion' affected how 'indigenous elites' classified themselves (Arvind-pal Singh 1994).

Oberoi reconstructs a complex nineteenth century Sikh world characterised by Sanatan' practices (many shared with Hindus) and the Singh Sabhas' reforms. In the religious lives of young Coventrian Sikhs in the last decade of the twentieth century echoes of these two interpretations of the tradition are discernible, but it is misleading to draw exact parallels. For example, in their role and influence, the *Babas* resemble the 'Bhais, Sants and Babas' venerated by 'Sanatan Sikhs' of the nineteenth century (1994:116). The Tat Khalsa condemnation of the veneration of living gurus finds a resonance in some Coventry subjects' parents' denunciation of *Babas* (ibid:384). These very continuities and resemblances challenge Oberoi's statement that 'the older pluralist paradigm of Sikh faith was displaced forever and replaced by a highly uniform Sikh identity' (25).

Young Sikhs' Religious World - The Curriculum Book View

It is the mark of a 'world religion' to encompass diversity of emphasis and outlook. Yet this is not evident in the presentation of Sikh tradition in some curriculum books. This tendency has persisted in RE books on the Sikhs despite the fact (acknowledged by Fox) that anthropologists had become more analytical of their assumptions, more wary of racist or at least orientalist tendencies. A survey of the published materials on 'Sikhism' used in schools suggests a similar phenomenon, a stereotyping and locking into a 'religion' of a kind which anti-racists have cited in their criticisms of multiculturalism.

a) Development

As the Coventry data shows, the Sikh tradition figures, if marginally, in the syllabus of local schools. This limited recognition in the curriculum has developed with the multiculturalism which followed immigration to Britain (Nesbitt 1988). In keeping with this multicultural perspective the underlying principles of Religious Education (until 1988 the only statutory subject on the curriculum) were also being rethought. According to most Local Agreed Syllabuses for Religious Education published since 1975, a major aim of the subject has been to increase pupils' understanding of world faiths.⁴ This involved the teachers not only in communicating such information as key concepts, distinctive rituals and faith history but also in enabling pupils to empathise with the religious experience of others. Sikhism is examined in the General Certificate of Secondary Education and by one examination board at 'A' Level (Cole 1987; Buddle 1987).

This recognition of the Sikh tradition both by multiculturalists and by religious educationists stimulated the publication of curriculum books. Many of these - especially for the primary school age range - focused upon individual children growing up in Sikh families in Britain (e.g. Lyle 1977; Aggarwal 1984). As such their approach is particularly relevant when considering the contribution which ethnographic study can make to the production of curriculum materials.

b) Cumulative and Particular Representations

As suggested in chapter five there is the tendency in religious education's presentation of Sikh tradition to suggest a sequence of life-cycle rites, although individual experience of *sanskars* is much more disparate, and the blessing of the baby with a *kirpan* would appear to be exceptional. As suggested in chapter eleven the text and pictures in RE books give a cumulative impression of Sikh children as possessors of the five Ks or certainly as living in a society where their maintenance is the norm. There appear to be several reasons for the discrepancy between the diversity of Sikh children's religious world (as captured by ethnographic study in Coventry) and the monolithic tendencies of the portrayal in religious education courses.

i) Sikh Anxieties

As indicated in chapter eleven one of these is the anxiety of Sikh leaders. They are keen, as members of a sensitive minority, to combat any perceived erosion of their tradition. While this erosion is in part attributed to the pressures of life in the west in the late twentieth century - for example the competing attractions of the entertainment industry or the freer sexual mores of western youth - there are also fears of the damaging, even deliberately damaging approach of western-trained scholars to Sikh tradition, as noted in chapter two. The presentation of Sikhs in curriculum books is one small way of shoring up the defences, and reminding pupils from Sikh families of Sikh principles and the

requirements of *Khalsa* membership. As such the production of curriculum books, or collaboration in their production, continues the aims with which the Sikh Missionary Society began its publication programme in the 1970s.

One result is to present a particular interpretation as what Sikhs should do (or believe). For example 'Children should also be persuaded to wear *kaccha* from an early age' (Sambhi 1989:28) and 'A Sikh should wear the uniform of the Khalsa' (29). As research has consistently shown, however, the *kachh* is worn by only a minority - few apart from the *amritdharis*.

Moreover, whereas such statements are in the form of recommendations or exhortations, in many instances what (by a particular interpretation) Sikhs *should* do is then presented as what Sikhs *actually* do. Thus the statement 'The Guru Granth Sahib is not worshipped as God, but is respected and honoured as a living teacher' begs several questions (Clutterbuck 1990:11). The meanings of the words 'worshipped' and 'God' are not examined and the fact that there are devout Sikhs (adults and children) who would be more likely to express their devotion by saying that they *did* worship the Guru Granth Sahib as God is omitted. Generalised pronouncements on what 'Sikhs believe' also appear (Kapoor 1982; Singh and Smith 1985:16; Penney 1986:16).

Curriculum books emphasise, sometimes to the exclusion of all other Sikh identities, the *Khalsa* identity of the *keshdhari* (and when old enough) *amritdhari* Sikh, so marginalising those, including many very devout Sikhs, who define themselves unhesitatingly *as* Sikh without conforming to the (entire) *Khalsa* discipline.

However, generalised criticism of curriculum books for a monolithic 'normative' presentation of Sikhs would be misleading. A search through many of these publications does convey clues of the diversity of young Sikhs' religious lives. For example Olivia Bennett's books portray the minority Bhatra community, albeit without any mention of this (1984, 1985, 1990a and 1990b). Harrison's family (from Coventry) are arguably at least as visually unrepresentative as depictions of Sikh families as uniformly *keshdhari*, since father, mother and both children have short hair (1986). Butler (1993:58) heads a final section of his GCSE book 'Sikhs who are different' and proceeds to mention the 'Akhand-Keertani Jatha', *sants* and western converts and to distinguish three categories of 'non-amrit-dhari Sikhs'. DeSouza portrayed the lives of three dissimilar Sikh families and attempted to elucidate the Khalistan question. Dhanjal, as might be assumed from her exposition of Sikh identity' quoted in chapter eleven, did not dodge such issues as diversity within the *Panth* and Singh and Smith noted the changing celebration of birthdays outside India. Cole and Sambhi (1980:4) had pointed out: 'No two people are alike, so when you read about Sikhs in this book don't think that any Sikh you meet will fit any picture which you form.' The authors went on:

If you meet a Sikh in Britain he [*sic*] will probably not wear *kaccha* and he won't be carrying a *kirpan*. He may even be clean-shaven and have cut his hair short. (5)

ii) Christian Presuppositions

However, in delivering the RE syllabus another factor may influence the portrayal of young Sikhs' religious world. This is the Christian heritage of the United Kingdom. Chapter ten supplied as an example the way in which Christian use of the word God has affected the rendering of such words as *onkar* in English, and the difficulty which Sikh children's appropriation of the word 'God' for '*Baba*' then presents. Another example is the tendency for the *sanskars* to be presented as counterparts of rites in the Christian life cycle. This may well explain the persistent appearance (noted in chapter five) of the ceremonial touching of the infants' tongue with *amrit* despite the fact that (although it appears in the *Rahit Moyada*) even deeply committed Sikhs and their offspring have not come across this practice.

In making these observations I am not belittling the difficult and delicate task of presenting the Sikh tradition in syllabuses and curriculum books. However I am arguing that religious educationists should be aware of these complexities. This is necessary in the interests of providing pupils with a realistic account of a faith tradition as dynamic and diverse. It is also crucial for enabling Sikh pupils from diverse backgrounds to perceive their own experience as valid, rather than as deviant or defective. In fact, such was the concern of one Sikh Religious Education Co-ordinator at her (short-haired) son's being told by his primary school teacher that he was not Sikh, and at noting the increasing number of 'living gurus' were absent from the curricular portrayal of Sikhs, that she devoted a term's Farmington Millennium Award to researching how the gap between lived Sikh reality and Sikhism in RE might best be bridged (Lall personal communication and 1999). As Lall argues, if the development of pupils' spirituality is to be at the core of Religious Education then they must feel able to express a diversity of experience which the rigidly Khalsa stereotype of Sikhism in the books prevents most teachers from acknowledging.'

Positive Contribution of Ethnographic Studies

a) Challenging Teachers' Assumptions

One practical result of a local ethnographic study is its challenge to prevailing classroom orthodoxies. It can stir settled, unquestioning assumptions about the nature of Sikh tradition and show generalisations up as unwarranted. The teacher is then open to new information and ready to explore more freely.

b) A Pedagogic Method

In the 1980s Grimmitt (1982) recommended teachers to encourage pupils to share with one another their knowledge and personal experience of religion. Gates (1982) urged teachers to select some of their material from the life experience of children and young people belonging to different religious traditions in Britain. Jackson (1994; 1997) has mapped the possible integration of ethnographic fieldwork with pedagogy. More recently Lail has suggested a nine-pronged strategy for making RE more responsive to intra-faith diversity and so better able to affirm pupils' spiritual development (1999:51-54).

c) Pieces of a Jigsaw

In reflecting upon the coverage of Sikh tradition in curriculum books in the light of the Coventry study - a recent, local ethnographic snapshot - I am not suggesting that such a picture be used to replace or downgrade existing presentations or that all pupils' learning be ethnographic in its philosophy. Rather I am arguing, firstly, for the need for more pieces of ethnographic fieldwork to inform and supplement these presentations. Secondly, it is important that pupils be alerted to the dangers of generalisation and stereotyping. For example, the curriculum book coverage of the lives of young Sikhs in Britain is not only predominantly Khalsa-oriented but also predominantly male. Thirdly, the nature and texture of faith traditions, as constellations of membership groups, needs to be conveyed. The interpretation of a religious 'worldview' (whether by an ethnographer or a pupil doing religious education) involves examining the relationship between individuals and groups, using the wider tradition as a general reference point (Jackson 1994:125). Moreover *the* dynamic, pluriform and evolving nature of children's religious worlds needs to be conveyed. An encouragement to pupils to reflect upon the diversity of 'western' or 'Christian' individuals, families and societies may provide the necessary introduction to this.

Clearly ethnographic research has comparable implications for the presentation not only of Sikh tradition but of all faith traditions and of the concept of faith tradition. These implications fit uncomfortably with some parents' expectations that religious education be religious instruction or that the paramountcy of 'orthodoxy' rules out the sympathetic recognition of diversity.

d) Pointers for Future Research

For Sikh studies reflection upon the Coventry research suggests a number of hypotheses to be tested by either quantitative or qualitative research. On the assumption that when Sikh communities are becoming established locally the gurdwara may encompass a spectrum of caste, political and devotional loyalties (Gurpal Singh 1995), but that with increasing local numbers fission occurs (Barot 1994), one hypothesis is that the lives of young Sikhs may vary considerably from one town to another and from one gurdwara to another within that area. A second hypothesis is that differences of social class and

geographic region (e.g. between London and the provinces) will affect the religious lives of British Sikh children in different ways. Thirdly, the Coventry data (supported by Barrow 1995) suggests the hypothesis that the nurture of children in '*sant*' gurdwaras may differ in kind from that general in gurdwaras run by elected committees. A study parallel to Dwyer's among Leicester Hindus would test this hypothesis (1988).

Aspects of religious nurture which need further exploration are the role of traditional story in the religious lives of young Sikhs (James 1994:60) and the role of the media including videos of community events. The relationship between gender and nurture, for example in relation to the values proclaimed by Sikhism's exponents and widespread Punjabi convention, is another area awaiting further study. A follow-up study of the Coventry subjects - or a longitudinal study elsewhere - is needed to investigate the development of young British Sikhs' perception of themselves in relation to Sikh tradition.⁷

Final Discussion

Previous chapters have suggested diversity within the *Panth* and divergence in some respects from the dominant presentation of Sikhs and their tradition in the curriculum books. Generalisation and stereotyping came in for criticism, although in the awareness that these tendencies promoted a normative account of Sikh teaching and lifestyle which is favoured by many concerned and committed Sikhs. In particular, individuals' appearance, the incidence of the five Ks and the frequency of particular rites (*sanskars*) - notably the blessing of a baby with drops of *amrit* and initiation through *amrit chhakna* - exemplified these points. Subjects' understanding of 'God' and experience of *amrit* provided further evidence of diversity and discrepancy. Each instance points to - and is better understood in - the context of the macro processes already identified in this chapter. For example features of subjects' lives as disparate as food, hair length and concepts of God need to be deciphered in the context of Sikhs' cumulative interactions with the Hindu matrix of their tradition and with western, Christian-influenced institutions. Moreover each of these processes is constituted of micro decisions made by individuals.

Recurrently language has been the focus of attention and it is appropriate that this study should conclude with a summary of its evident relevance to the study of Sikh nurture. All the subjects were bilingual in the sense of using two languages, although their relative proficiency in each and the extent to which they communicated in Panjabi or English varied. In chapter five this bilingualism provided a model by analogy for cultural interaction. Then chapters seven and eight focused upon the centrality of teaching Panjabi in adults' programmes of formal nurture, with chapter eight also arguing the need to differentiate between contemporary Panjabi and the sacred language as quasilect. Abundantly clear was the perception of Panjabi language and Sikh *dharam* as inseparable. Chapter eleven further demonstrated subjects' strong

identification of themselves and their faith with Punjab and Panjabi, even though many found English easier to understand.

In chapters nine and twelve English rather than Panjabi came to the fore. Firstly the complex relationship was tackled between 'God' (a word honed by centuries of European Christian tradition) and the Panjabi terms which fed into the concept for which subjects used this word. Secondly the shift to English usage, for example when addressing or referring to other people, was shown to illustrate a shift in values. Rather than bilingualism serving simply as an analogy for biculturalism it demonstrated cultural change in its atomic detail.

While focused upon nurture rather than sociolinguistics the Coventry study suggests the validity of yet another line of research, namely a cross-generational study (a qualitative parallel to Li 1994 on language choice among Britain's Chinese) of the relationship between Sikhs' (including 'proper Sikhs') religious concepts, ritual observance and linguistic strategies. In their selection of terms — 'priest' or '*granthi*', '*amrit pahul*', '*amrit chhakna*' or 'baptism', '*God*', '*Tahiguru*' or '*Warn*', 'Sikhism' and 'Hinduism' - and the meanings they provide or assume, the curriculum books are, albeit minimally, contributing to young Sikhs' conceptualisation, articulation and experience of their tradition. For, as observed at Jasvir's camp (where one teacher was using worksheets photocopied from a curriculum book) and as mentioned by young Sikhs themselves, curriculum books are themselves a part of nurture in the Sikh tradition which they describe.

NOTES

- 1 For a similar testimony see Emmett (1994:44).
- 2 See Jackson and Nesbitt (1993:33).
- 3 Spann (1988) found that switching occurred more markedly between minor contacts, whereas good friends and comparative strangers preferred the use of one language (Tatla and Nesbitt 1994:65). See also Ramindar Singh (1992:57).
- 4 Birmingham 1975, Hampshire 1978, Berkshire 1982.
- 5 This paper was prepared at Brunel University and is available from the Farmington Institute for Christian Studies, Harris Manchester College, Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TD tel. 01865 271965.
- 6 Such a follow up study would parallel the longitudinal study of young Hindus (see, e.g. Nesbitt 1998).

Appendix A

Letter sent via schools to Sikh parents

Dear

During the next three months, with the headteacher's permission, **I** am visiting local schools to talk to Sikh pupils. This is because our students (future teachers), need to know about the experience of children of different faiths.

If you are willing for me to interview.

Please return the reply slip below.

Thank you for your help,

Yours sincerely

Eleanor Nesbitt

Appendix B

Interview Schedule for Sikh Children

[based on Knott 1992:53-56]

Session One (in schools)

- 1) Hello. What is your name? Do you know what mine is? I'm Eleanor Nesbitt. I used to teach in Coventry. At the moment I work in the university in the department where people learn how to teach RE. You can help us by talking about yourself and your religion.
- 2) Some names have meanings. Do you know if your names have any meaning in English?
- 3) How were your names chosen?
- 4) Do you mind if I tape record our conversation today?
- 5) How old are you? Can you tell me your date of birth?
- 6) What year/class/tutor group are you in here in school?
- 7) What language do you speak at home? Do you or your parents ever speak any other languages? Can you tell me what these tapes are about? [Play short section of two tapes: Guru Nanak's birth, Elephant and Mouse.] Can you read these? [Show graded examples of Gurmukhi] Can you tell me what they mean in English?
- 8) The next thing I want to ask you about is your home and family, your parents, brothers and sisters. How many people live in your house? What do your mum and dad do?
- 9) Now let's talk about what an average weekday in term time might be like for you from the first moment someone gets up in your house.

Meals and food, food customs and taboos

Language (proportion of English: Punjabi)

Dress, normal and ceremonial including hair (Are parents *keshdhari*?)

What are the five Ks? How do you know? Which do you have? Why? Why not? Always? Does anyone in your family have all these? Does anyone in your family have more of these than you? Fewer than you?

Are they important? Why?

Religious practice in the home - Prayers/reading any holy book? *Akhand path*? Who? When? Where? Together? Alone?

Going to school or work

What other members of the family do

Relations with family during day/evening

The school day - lessons, meals, activities

Friends

Going home

Evening activities - sport, homework, clubs, supplementary classes, nightlife

Family attitudes to going out

TV and video - favourites

Independence

Privacy

What newspapers, magazines do you take in the house?

Any religious papers?

What comics do you read?

What do your parents buy for you to read?

- 10) How do weekends differ from weekdays? (prompt as above) (gurdwara, language classes, weddings). Can you talk me through your normal weekend?
- 11) Can you tell me anything about these:
 Picture of Guru Nanak
Ik om kar
Kara
- 12) What kind of occasions do you enjoy most?
 Festivals? Marriages? Trips out? Holidays? Visits to relatives?
 School events?
- 13) Can you tell me about some of the things you like most? And some you dislike?
 Is there anything you are really afraid of?
 Anything else?
- 14) What do you feel about smoking? Why? Is it worse for Sikhs to smoke?
 What do you feel about alcohol? Why?
 What do you feel about taking drugs? Why?
- 15) What do your parents feel are the most important qualities for you to have?
 Would your parents agree about them?

- 16) What do you think you'll be like when you're twenty? Do you have any pictures in your mind of what you might be like and what you might be doing?

College?

Employment? Is there anything you can't do because of your religion?

Marriage?

Material prosperity

Happiness

Family responsibilities - parents, children etc.,

- 17) How do you feel about being married one day?

Have you an ideal age in mind when it would be good to be married?

How do you think you'll meet the person you marry?

Who do you think will choose? (Do you mind this?)

What kind of a person do you hope to marry?

Would you marry a non-Sikh?

Have any of your brothers or sisters got married?

Does that make you more or less keen to get married?

- 18) Thinking further into the future, do you ever think about death?

What do think and feel about it?

What do you think will happen to you when you die?

Do you believe in ghosts?

Any other sort of life after death?

Has anyone you know died recently?

How did this affect you?

Tell me what you did

- 19) Is religion important to you?

Why/why not?

What would you miss in a non-Sikh household?

(Probe and follow up whatever is mentioned, plus God and spiritual experience)

- 20) Is religion important to your parents?

Why/why not?

In what ways? Beliefs? Practices?

Do they practice at home or in a place of worship?

Explore any differences between parents and children or any shared views.

Why are your views different from/so close to theirs?

- 21) Have you or any member of your family taken part in a special ceremony that made you into a Sikh or into a better Sikh? What was this called?

How old were you? Can you describe it? Tell me how you felt/how you think you will feel.

- 22) Which of these do you identify with/are you?

European, British, African, Sikh, Asian, English, Indian, Punjabi, any other. What makes you feel like this?

Are you happy about this or do you have any problems?

- 23) Do you think about (any country other than UK which child mentions)?

Tell me your thoughts about it.

Have you ever been there? Would you like to go?

If so why, and for how long? Permanently? If not, why not?

Do you ever think about whether you are (e.g. Indian or British)?

Are there any advantages or disadvantages related to this? (Explore complexities of identity, language, parental traditions, schoolwork, friends etc).

- 24) What name would you give to your religion?

What makes you think of yourself as a Sikh? Would you say that you belong to any particular group within Sikhism?

- 25) What do you think is special/different about being a Sikh?

- 26) Which gurdwara do you have links with? What sort of connection? What is its address?

Does anyone in particular look after the gurdwara?

Would you like to do this?

How often do you go?

For how long have you been going?

Do you look forward to going?

- 27) Finish this sentence: **I** would know more about my religion if ..

How do you think you have learned most about your religion?

From the gurdwara? How?

extra classes?

home?

grandparents?

parents?

other relatives? which?

any special person?

visiting India?

books?

videos?

school?
RE lessons?
friends?

In any other way?

- 28) WOULD YOUR PARENTS MIND IF I CAME TO YOUR HOUSE WITH SOME MORE QUESTIONS? WHAT IS YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER?

Thank you very much.

Session Two (with subjects of case studies at home)

- 29) Do you study religion at school?
Does it include Sikhism?
Can you tell me something about it?
Do you enjoy it?
In what ways?
- 30) What do you think about people who belong to religions other than your own? Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism...
What do you think about people who belong to different gurdwaras?
- 31) Do you think your life is planned for you in advance, that is, sort of, written down somewhere?
(Role of God, of own behaviour in this or previous lives, fate etc.)
Do people have power to make personal choices about what they do?
- 32) Do you think it is possible to know what will happen to you in future? Is it right to try to find out?
Have you ever had your fortune told? By what method?
Has it ever come true?
- Do you read your stars? What do you think of them? True/false?
Helpful/unhelpful?
- 33) Is there anything which you particularly remember from the past?
- 34) Do you think you've changed as you've got older?
- 35) Do you think you'll be like your parents are when you are older?
Why/why not? In what ways?

- 36) Who makes decisions about the important things in your life, e.g. the school you attend?
What other people influence what you do? (Parents, teachers, government, religious leaders, anyone else)
- 37) Can you tell me three things which inspire you? Make you feel great, switch you on?
- 38) Do home, school (friends and teachers), people who speak in the gurdwara all encourage you to behave in the same way, to believe the same things?
- 39) Here is a piece of paper with a list of personal qualities in alphabetical order. Would you circle those you think describe yourself and underline those you would like other people to use to describe you?
- Bad-tempered Competitive Conformist Cooperative Cruel Generous
Hardworking Honest Humble Humorous Kind Lazy Mean Optimistic
Original Patient Pessimistic Self-confident Selfish Self-sacrificing
Serious
- Now reread the circled items. What makes you say that? Is it your parents - are they like that? Or your day school or the extra classes you attend?
- 40) Tell me what happens when you go to the gurdwaras.
- 41) Tell me about any extra language or religion or music classes that you attend.
- 42) Tell me about any youth club.
- 43) How often do you read your holy book or hear passages from it? Is the holy book different from other books? How? Would you treat it any differently? Are there any other books which are almost as (different, holy, special?)
- 44) Have you ever been called names or treated badly or unkindly? Can you describe your experiences? Why do you think you were treated as you were?
- 45) Do you ever call other people names or bully them? Why? Why not?
- 46) What do you think are really cruel or wicked things to do?

What happens to people who do things like these? Before they die/after they die? In every case?

- 47) Do you think there is a hell? What is it like? Why do you think that? What do you think about reincarnation? Do you think people are born again as human beings or in any other form?

What can you tell me about the devil/evil?

- 48) Can you give me some examples of what you think are very good deeds?

What happens to people who do these? Always?

- 49) Is there a heaven? Why do you think so? What is it like?

- 50) Why do some people suffer a lot? Why do you think this?

- 51) Some people refuse to fight. They say that war is always wrong. What do you think?

- 52) Do girls and boys usually like the same sort of things? Are girls or boys better at some things? Which?

Do you like cooking? Do your brother/sisters do more cooking than you do? Is that as it should be? Do you think girls and boys should be able to do the same jobs when they leave school?

Session Three (with subjects of case studies at home)

- 53) What makes someone a Sikh? Birth? An experience? Teaching? Environment? How can you tell if someone is a Sikh? How they treat others?

- 54) What would you miss most if you were to live in a non-Sikh household? What would a non-Sikh notice especially in your home?

- 55) How should Sikhs behave towards people who are not Sikhs? Can Sikhs learn any thing from non-Sikhs? Can they share anything special with them?

- 56) Tell me about any discussion which you have had with friends on a religious subject.

- 57) Does prayer play any part in your life? Can you tell me when you would pray, where, what sort of words you would use, who you address your prayers to, how long you've been praying.
- 58) Do you ever say grace before meals? When? Where? What words do you use?
- 59) Are there any places which are important for Sikhs? For you? Have you been to any of them? Describe what they are like. If you've not been how do you know what they are like?
- 60) Are there any pictures or pieces of music which mean a lot to you? Are any of these religious?
- 61) What are your favourite hymns? At what age did you learn them and from whom?
- 62) What are your favourite prayers? At what age did you learn them and from whom?
- 63) What are your favourite stories about the Gurus and Sikh history? Which people in these do you like best?
- 64) Do you have any favourite saints? Any favourite stories of saints? Tell me about them. How did you hear about them?
- 65) Do you watch any religious videos? TV programmes? Have these affected what you believe or taught you anything? What?
- 66) Tell me your idea of God. Where? Shape/qualities. What names do you use for God?
- 67) Tell me what these words mean to you:

Guru, Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, Gurbani, nam.
- 68) What is your favourite festival? What do you do?
- 69) What other festivals do you keep? Tell me about them.
- 70) Are there any days when you are expected to go without particular foods? Which? Why?
- 71) Are there any days when you are expected to be sad?

- 72) Is there anything you'd like to say about being a Sikh?
- 73) What do you think about church schools? Should there be Sikh schools?
- 74) Tell me about these pictures [Show series of slides taken during the fieldwork]

Glossary

akhand kirtani jatha	(lit. continuous hymn-singing group), non-political organisation emphasising allegiance to Khalsa code
akhand path	continuous forty-eight hour reading of Guru Granth Sahib
amrit	lit. 'undying', holy water
amrit chhakna	to take <i>amrit</i> , i.e. in the rite of initiation with holy water
amritdhari	one who has been initiated with <i>amrit</i>
amrit vela	'the time of nectar', the time (just before sunrise) for meditation
aphsos	mourning
ardas	formal Sikh congregational prayer
ata	coarse wheat flour
Baba	respectful title, e.g. for revered man, paternal grandfather
Babbar	fierce lion
Babbar Khalsa	militant organisation fighting for establishment of independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan
bahingam	celibate male attendant of <i>sants</i> associated with Nand Singh of Nanaksar
bahinji	'respected sister', respectful way of addressing a woman of one's own age or a little older
baja	harmonium
Balaknath	a saint revered by many Punjabis. He is depicted as a blue youth

bani	utterance, referring to <i>Gurbani</i> , the Gurus' utterance, the scripture
barfi	white fudge-like sweetmeat made by condensing milk
Bawa	variant of ' <i>Baba</i> '
bhai	brother, title of respect, e.g. for officiant in gurdwara
bhakti	devotion
bhangra	Punjabi folk dance and contemporary music and dance derived from it
Bhatra	Sikh <i>zat</i> which first established itself in Britain
bibi	woman, respectful form of address, auntie, paternal grandmother
Brahmin	member of India's hereditary priestly caste
Chamar	member of leather-worker caste
chanani	canopy placed above the Guru Granth Sahib as a sign of respect
chauri	symbol of authority (e.g. of the Guru Granth Sahib), usually consisting of yak tail hair in a handle
chawal	rice
chhakna	to partake
Churha (pl. Churhe)	member of the <i>zat</i> associated with the most menial employment
chunni (pl. chunnian)	lightweight scarf worn with Punjabi suit
dal	lentils cooked with spices
damns	hourglass-shaped drum, held in the hand
darshan	being in the benedictory presence of a spiritual personality or his/her representation

dastar	turban
dhann	(used in invocation) may God bless you; great is...
dharam	religion
dholki	large wooden drum, held horizontally and beaten at both ends
dhuf /dhup	incense, i.e. joss-sticks
diva	oil light used in worship, consists of raw cotton wick in unglazed clay bowl
Divali	late autumn festival of lights
doab	land between two rivers
fakir	Muslim holy man
fifti	cloth under turban, showing as contrasting triangle above forehead
five Ks	five external signs of Sikh allegiance
gajrela	sweetmeat made from carrots and milk
ghi	ghee, clarified butter
ghore	horses
Giani	'learned', title for officiant in gurdwara
gora	'white person'
got	exogamous clan within endogamous <i>zat</i>
granth	volume (of scripture)
granthi	reader of the Guru Granth Sahib
gulab jamun	lit. rose plum; a round, syrupy fried sweet
Gurbani	'Gurus' utterance', hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib

gurdwara	Sikh place of worship
Gurmat	the Guru's teaching, Sikhism
Gurmukh	script of the Guru Granth Sahib, used for Punjabi
gurpurb	anniversary of Guru's birth or death
Guru	spiritual master, one of the ten founding fathers of the Sikh tradition
Guru Amar Das	the third Guru b.1479-1574
Guru Arjan Dev	the fifth Guru b.1563-1606
Guru Gobind Singh	the tenth Guru b.1666-1708
Guru Granth Sahib	Sikh scripture
Guru Nanak	First Sikh Guru b.1469-1539
gutka	compendium of scriptural passages
gyani	<i>giani</i> (see above)
har	garland
Hari	Lord, Vishnu
hukamnama	edict, i.e. random reading from scriptures for guidance
ik on kar	God is one. Opening words of scripture, constitutes a Sikh symbol.
isnan (snan)	bathing
izzat	family honour
jago	'wake up!', evening festivity prior to a marriage
jagran	vigil (spent singing hymns to the goddess)
jal	water
janam	birth

janeu	thread with which Hindus of high caste are invested
Jap	`Recite', Guru Gobind Singh's composition known as Jap Sahib
Japji (Sahib)	Guru Nanak's composition, opening passage of Guru Granth Sahib
Jat	<i>zat</i> of peasant landowners, economically dominant in Punjab
ji	suffix conveying respect
jot	light, i.e. burning wick
kabaddi	a team game, requiring speed and strength
kachh	one of the five Ks, shorts worn as underwear by women and below western clothing by men
kachhahira	term preferred by many Sikhs for <i>kachh</i>
kakka (pl. kakke)	K in Gurmukhi alphabet. There are five Ks.
kanjakan	young girls required in certain form of worship of the goddess
kapra	cloth
kara (pl.kare)	steel wrist band, one of the five Ks
karhi	savoury soup made from yoghurt and chickpea flour
karna	to do
katha	exposition, homily
Kaur	second name of female Sikhs. Literally 'prince' but usually translated as princess.
kesh	uncut hair, one of the five Ks
keshdhari	a Sikh whose hair (and beard) are uncut

Khalsa	lit. 'pure' or 'owing allegiance to no intermediary'. Sikh(s), especially <i>amritdhari</i> Sikh(s)
khanda	double edged sword, the Sikh emblem which combines this with two <i>kirpans</i> and a <i>chakkar</i> (circle)
khatai	sourness, acidic sauce
Khuda	God
kirpan	sword, one of the five Ks
kirtan	hymn-singing
Kirtan Sohila	passages from Guru Granth Sahib for recitation at night and at funerals
langar	corporate meal in the gurdwara, the kitchen where it is cooked and the canteen where it is eaten
lavan	circling of scriptures by couple during marriage ceremony
Lohri	festival (usually January 13), especially celebrated if a boy has been born into the family during the year
mahant	pre-1925 custodian of gurdwara
maharaj	literally 'great king', title of respect, used by some Sikhs for the Guru Granth Sahib
mala	circle of prayer beads, rosary
mama	mother's brother
mandir	Hindu temple
maran	to die, death
mashri	large white sugar crystals, distributed, e.g. in Hindu temples
masi	mother's sister
masiya	full moon

mata	mother
mattha	forehead
mattha tek(na)	prostration before the Guru Granth Sahib
mehandi	henna, paste from the powdered leaves used to decorate hands
mela	a fair, a festival which is not one of the <i>gurpurbs</i>
mith[i]ai	sweetmeats (mostly made from milk and sugar)
mona	clean-shaven
mung phali	peanut
musulman	Muslim
nagar kirtan	'town hymn-singing', i.e. street procession during festival
Namdhari	Sikh belonging a nineteenth century movement stressing, e.g. vegetarianism and a continuing line of living Gurus
nitnem	`daily rule', i.e. prayers said in daily devotion and the <i>gutka</i> containing these passages
padam	mark on body of saint, indicating he is an incarnation of God
pag (pl. pagan)	turban
pagwala	'turban-wallah', male wearing a turban
pakka	proper, fully finished
palki	palanquin supporting the Guru Granth Sahib
palla	length of cloth linking bride and groom
pani	water

panj	five
Panjabi	mother-tongue of most Sikhs, official language of Indian state of Punjab. See also Punjabi.
panth	the Sikh community
papi	sinful
paratha	chapati made with butter and sometimes stuffed with spicy vegetable
Pannatma	God
path	reading, i.e. reading passages of Guru Granth Sahib, 'prayer'
patka	headcovering for <i>keshdhari</i> boys
pat(t)it	fallen, lapsed
pauri (pl.paurian)	stanza, e.g. of Japji Sahib (Lit. 'stairs').
pharsh	floor
phuphar	father's sister's husband
pind	village
prashad	blessed food
Punjabi	associated with, originating from Punjab. See also Panjabi.
purnimashi	the full moon night
Rab	God
rabab	rebeck, a stringed instrument
Radhasoami	international movement, led by north Indian spiritual masters. Members meditate and are vegetarian.

rag	Sanskrit ' <i>raga</i> ', combination of notes, associated with mood, season or time of day, on which musical composition is based
ragi	musician performing in the gurdwara
Rahiras	evening prayer consisting of nine hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib
Rahit Maryada	Sikhs' Code of Discipline authorised by their highest elected committee
rain sabai	nightlong
rakhri (pl.rakhrian)	Panjabi for <i>rakhi</i> (protective thread) and Raksha Bandhan (August festival for sisters to tie threads on brothers' wrists)
ral	turn (for reading the scriptures)
Ramgarhia (pl. Ramgharie)	preferred title of <i>zat</i> traditionally employed in construction
Ravidasi	follower of saint Ravidas, member of his caste
reuri	hard sweet studded with sesame seed
roti	chapati, also used for a cooked Punjabi meal
rumal	handkerchief
rumala	cloth covering the Guru Granth Sahib when open but not being read
sabzi	term used for any cooked, spicy vegetable dish
sachkhand	'realm of truth', term used for Guru Granth Sahib's night-time resting place
sadharan path	reading of the entire Guru Granth Sahib with breaks
sadhsangat	holy congregation, <i>sangat</i>
sahajdhari	often used of those who identify as Sikhs but without adhering to the Khalsa code

sahaj path	<i>sadharan path</i> (see above)
sahib	lord, title of respect
Sahibzade	title for Guru Gobind Singh's four sons
samskara	Sanskrit 'processing', life cycle rite
sangat	congregation
sanskar	Panjabi form of <i>samskara</i> (see above)
sant	charismatic Sikh leader
santbhasha	the north Indian vernacular used by mystic poets of Guru Nanak's time
sarbala	bridegroom's companion, a young male relative
Satgur[u]	True Guru, living head of Namdharis
satnam	whose name is truth, divine name repeated in prayer
satsang	religious gathering
Sat Sri Akal	'True is the Timeless Lord', Sikh greeting
saurangi	violin-like instrument
seva	voluntary service, especially in the gurdwara
shabad	'word', any hymn from the Guru Granth Sahib
shahid	martyr
shahidi din	anniversary of martyrdom
Sheranvali Ma	the mother on the tiger, i.e. the goddess, Amba
Sikhi	Sikhism
sim(a)ran	'remembering', i.e. repeating God's name as meditation

Singh	'lion', second name of male Sikhs
siropa	cloth given in gurdwara as token of respect
sri	term of respect - usually for men
sukhasan	'comfortable seat', the evening ceremony of carrying the Guru Granth Sahib to its place of repose (<i>sachkhand</i>)
Sukhmani Sahib	much-loved composition by Guru Arjan Dev
tabla	one of pair of hand-beaten drums, usually refers to the pair
Tarkhan	carpenter, of carpenter <i>zat</i> , i.e. Ramgarhia
Tarkhanwala	belonging to Tarkhans, Ramgarhia
tilda	preferred rice
vah(i)	praise to...
Vaisakhi	April festival commemorating initiation of first Khalsa Sikhs in 1699
vak	random reading from Guru Granth Sahib for guidance
Valmiki	chosen title of <i>zat</i> (see below) ranked below all other <i>zats</i> in Punjabi society
zat	Sanskrit <i>jati</i> , hereditary caste community
zat-baradari	` <i>zat</i> -brotherhood', term used colloquially for above
zindabad	long live!

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