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Candidate session number

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Examination session (May or November)

MAY

Year

2012

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: WORLD RELIGIONS

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE CORE
SCRIPTURAL TEACHINGS OF SIKHISM PERMIT THEM
TO MARRY OUTSIDE OF THE RELIGION?

Candidate's declaration

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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

THE CANDIDATE QUICKLY SETTLED ON THIS QUESTION AFTER BEING FASCINATED BY THE SHK REPRESENTATIVES AT THE COLLEGE'S INTER-FAITH CONFERENCE.

THE CANDIDATE MADE EXCELLENT USE OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EVIDENCE, VISITING GURDWARAS AND LIBRARIES IN WASHINGTON D.C. AS WELL AS ARRANGING INTERVIEWS AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BASED ON PROLIMINARY RESEARCH.

THE CANDIDATE THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THIS RESEARCH EXPERIENCE.

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To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number

Achievement level

Criteria

	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	2	2	2	
B introduction	2	2	2	2	
C investigation	4	4	4	4	
D knowledge and understanding	4	4	4	4	
E reasoned argument	4	4	4	4	
F analysis and evaluation	4	4	3	4	
G use of subject language	4	4	3	4	
H conclusion	2	2	2	2	
I formal presentation	4	4	4	4	
J abstract	2	2	2	2	
K holistic judgment	3	4	4	4	
Total out of 36	35		34		

Name of examiner 1: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____

Name of examiner 2: _____
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Examiner number: _____

Name of examiner 3: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: _____

IB Cardiff use only: B:

IB Cardiff use only: A: 104465

Date: 23/5

Extended Essay in World Religions

To what extent do the core scriptural teachings of Sikhism permit them to marry outside of the religion?

Candidate Number:

May 2012

Word count: 3,978

Abstract

This essay explores the question: **To what extent do the core scriptural teachings of Sikhism permit them to marry outside of the religion?** The primary focus of the paper is on the interpretation of scripture and how it influences an individual Sikh adherent's personal decisions.

The paper is structured to first provide background information regarding Sikh scripture. The Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikh Rehat Maryada are analyzed in depth in order to illustrate Sikh teaching on marriage. The essay then differentiates between Sikhs in the diaspora as opposed to those living in India and discusses their differences in practice with regard to marriage. The experiences of Sikh youths will also be addressed. Finally, the essay will use interviews as a source to examine inter-faith marriage.

For my research, I used extracts from the Guru Granth Sahib (compiled as sections of the Adi Granth), the Sikh Rehat Maryada, as well as secondary sources including academic books, encyclopedias and internet publications. In addition, I framed several questions based on this library research and organised and interviewed several Sikhs who have authoritative views on marriage in Sikhism, or have personal experience of interfaith-marriages.

The paper concludes that the variety of adherents to Sikhism, for example, Sikhs in the diaspora, Sikhs in India, Khalsa Sikhs, and non-baptized Sikhs may each interpret scripture differently and thus, have different beliefs with regard to marriage and interfaith-marriages.

Word Count: 231

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Additionally, I would like to thank _____ for his support throughout the process of writing the essay.

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To what extent do the core scriptural teachings of Sikhism permit them to marry outside of the religion?

Introduction

This paper examines the question: **To what extent do the core scriptural teachings of Sikhism permit them to marry outside of the religion?** While the question is often discussed in the context of scripture, this paper will focus on how those scriptural core beliefs are enacted by Sikhs today. The examples used to answer this question come primarily from Sikhs in the diaspora. This question is important because it sheds light on the relationship between the influence of orthodox teaching as well as cultural norms on interpretation and practice in the context of a personal decision. Sikhism was chosen as the religion of focus because it is interesting to examine how it has dealt with challenges from a growing diaspora and religious heterodoxy in its homeland. In other words, Sikhism grew in a specific place - the Punjab region of India - where Sikh, Hindu and Muslims communities often interacted. Today it is an important question because Sikhs live throughout the world, and often as minorities.

While the paper uses a wide variety of research methods, it relies primarily on interviews, books, and publications to address the research question. In order to discuss and answer the question, the paper will first examine how Sikh scripture deals with marriage. It will look at the Sikh holy Guru Granth Sahib¹ and the Sikh Rehat Maryada (the Sikh Code of Conduct), as well as secondary sources which illuminate the meanings and interpretations of these texts. Secondly, the paper will discuss the experiences and practices of modern day Sikhs. It will discuss the diversity within modern Sikhism, and how various Sikh groups interpret marriage. Finally, the paper will use interviews to examine the extent to which Sikhs who marry non-Sikhs continue to practice their religion and deal with community reactions.

As a whole, these three portions will attempt to examine both the intricacies of Sikh religious teaching on marriage and interfaith-marriage, as well the social realities of inter-faith marriage in the Sikh communities of the 21st century. As

¹ The Guru Granth Sahib is the Holy Scripture of the Sikh religion. The name references the fact that the book is considered an immortal Guru in the Sikh religion; it was named by the last mortal Guru. In academia, it is often referred to as the Adi Grath, a previous name which today usually indicates that the book is being used for academic purposes despite its religious status as a living Guru. When visiting the District of Columbia Public Library, I only had access to some sections of the Adi Grath, which combined makes the Guru Granth Sahib. In this paper, all quotes taken from sections of the Adi Granth will be referenced as Guru Granth Sahib for sake of consistency. For more information see Mircea Eliade's, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 1, pp. 28-29.

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footnote

such, this paper will examine how Sikhs deal with the religious implications of the increasingly common practice of interfaith-marriage.

Status of Sikh Scripture Explained

It is important to understand the history of Sikh scripture because it informs many Sikh understandings of the definition of marriage within their religion. In Sikhism, the words and hymns of the Gurus are considered sacred, holy and true. In the early 16th century, when Sikhism was young, Sikhs shared these hymns as a community but they were never compiled. However, the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, recognized that as the Sikh community grew there was a greater chance of confusion over the origins of some hymns and collected the original verses of all the Gurus. In AD 1603, Guru Arjan Dev, started compiling the original version of the Adi Granth² which became the most sacred of the Sikh scriptures. He completed it in 1604.³ However, a century later in AD 1705, the tenth and last mortal Guru completed the final additions and editing of the Adi Granth, and renamed it the Guru Granth Sahib.⁴

Traditionally, in Sikhism, Gurus led the community and were thought to possess the Truth, and a Guru named his successor as he neared death.⁵ However, Guru Gobind Singh ended this succession of personal Guruship by declaring the Granth Sahib as the "Eternal Guru" and his official successor in AD 1708⁶. This transition changed the way in which Sikhs view their religion. Under the influence of the ten Sikh gurus, religion was personal in that it was embodied in a living human being. However, with the declaration of the Granth Sahib as the Eternal Guru, Sikhs were left with a literary work to direct them in their faith. Thus, in modern Sikhism, the teachings relating to marriage in the Guru Granth are the ultimate source of truth on the subject but there are major debates over its interpretation.

However, the Guru Granth Sahib is clear that its word is final and is not open to compromise:

"All other teaching but that of the Sat Guru is false... they utter the name with their tongue, but they do not understand what they say."⁷

In other words, any Sikh teaching which is not in accordance with the Guru Granth Sahib is to be rejected by the community as categorically untrue, even if it claims to be from a holy source.

² Trumpp, Ernest, 2004. "Adi Granth." [Online] Available at:

<http://www.coronetbooks.com/books/a/adig2446.htm> [Accessed 27 June 2011].

³ For more information see W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi's, *Sikhism: Beliefs and Practices*, pp. 44-45.

⁴ For more information see Mircea Eliade's, *Encyclopedia of Religion 1*, pp. 28-29.

⁵ Owen Cole, W., Singh Sambhi, P., 1999. *Sikhism: Beliefs and Practices*. p. 16.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 44.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 47.

In addition to the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhs accept the Sikh Code of Conduct, known as the Rehat Maryada, also as official doctrine. The Rehat Maryada provides Sikh individuals and Sikh communities with specific guidelines on how to confront personal, social and political challenges.⁸

Beginning in 1931, an organization known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) worked to create a standardized Rehat to ensure that all Sikhs were abiding by the same basic codified law.⁹ The temporal authority for Sikhs adopted the Rehat Maryada after its publication in AD 1945. The document attempted to achieve a level of conformity among Sikhs in terms of personal and social practice. The document includes nine main points, one of which is "Sikh ceremonies" which addresses the topic of marriage.¹⁰

Unlike the Guru Granth Sahib which is more concerned with the spiritual definition of marriage, the Rehat Maryada deals with specific actions that Sikhs should take as they prepare for marriage. It states that:

"A Sikh's daughter must be married to a Sikh."¹¹

In other words, in Sikh tradition and conduct, it is inappropriate for a Sikh woman to marry a man of another faith. The Code of Conduct is silent on the opposite phenomenon: this indicates that at some point in Sikh history, it was acceptable, though not necessarily commendable for Sikh men to marry outside the religion provided their wives converted.

The code of conduct reinforces its opposition to interfaith marriage of a female Sikh when it states:

"When a girl becomes marriageable, physically, emotionally and by virtue of maturity of character, a suitable Sikh match should be found and she be married to him by Anand ('Blissful Union') marriage rites."¹²

The Guru Granth Sahib and the Rehat Maryada coexist as two separate entities. While the Guru Granth Sahib is both a "living Guru" and a collection of devotional

⁸ Singh, Gurmukh, 2009. "BBC Religions: Weddings." [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/ritesrituals/weddings.shtml> [Accessed 26 June 2011].

⁹ "Sikh Rehat Maryada: The Code of Sikh Conduct". 2011. Gateway to Sikhism Website. [Online] Available at: <http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/sikh-rehat-maryada/sikh-rehat-maryadathe-code-of-sikh-conduct> [Accessed 26 June 2011].

¹⁰ For more information see online publication of the "Rehat Maryada." Available at: <http://www.gurunanakdarbar.net/sikhrehatmaryada.pdf>

¹¹ Sikh Code of Conduct, Chapter XI, Article XVIII. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.gurunanakdarbar.net/sikhrehatmaryada.pdf> [Accessed 25 June 2011].

¹² Ibid.

hymns and poetry which allow the reader to find communion with God,¹³ the Rehat Maryada exists solely to provide guidelines against which all Sikh individuals and communities around the world can measure themselves.¹⁴

The existence of the Rehat Maryada, a Sikh Code of Conduct separate from the scripture, implies several things. For one, the document is presented as a set of guidelines rather than rules that would lead to consequences if not obeyed. This suggests that a Sikh who does not strictly adhere to the guidelines will not be banished from the religion. In other words, a Sikh woman who marries a man of a different faith will continue to be considered a Sikh among communities who recognize the Rehat Maryada as a guide rather than law. In contrast, the scripture of the Guru Granth Sahib is to be interpreted literally whenever possible and no alterations are to be made.

Baptism and Scripture

The Rehat Maryada defines a practicing Sikh as “any human being who faithfully believes in the baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion.”¹⁵ This makes reference directly to the Khalsa, the community of practicing baptized Sikhs,¹⁶ which was formed as an elite brotherhood whose direct dedication to the Guru was formalized through baptism.¹⁷

This raises the question of whether Sikhs who are in the Khalsa interpret the Rehat Maryada or the Guru Granth Sahib more strictly than those who are not in the Khalsa, and suggests that some Sikhs may interpret teachings on marriage differently in differing contexts.

Khalsa Sikhs were discussed in my interview with Harish Lalwani, a volunteer at the National Gurdwara in Washington D.C. According to Lalwani, “baptized Sikhs are much more religious and thus, have many more requirements, especially in the way in which they prepare food and pray.”¹⁸ Lalwani noted it is more challenging for a baptized Sikh to live a religiously focused life with someone who is not a baptized Sikh. Often, he reflected, a Khalsa Sikh will try to influence their spouse to become more religious and to even get baptized. They

¹³ “Sri Guru Granth Sahib”. 1998. *The Sikhism Home Page*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sikhs.org/granth.htm> [Accessed 29 June 2011].

¹⁴ The Sikh Code of Conduct. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.gurunakdarbar.net/sikhrehatmaryada.pdf> [Accessed 25 June 2011].

¹⁵ Ibid. Chapter I, Article I.

¹⁶ “The Khalsa”. 1998. *The Sikhism Home Page*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.sikhs.org/khalsa.htm> [Accessed 28 June 2011]

¹⁷ Woodhead, Linda. Fletcher, Paul. Kawanami, Hiroko. and Smith, David. *Religions in the Modern World*.

¹⁸ Lalwani, Harish, 2011. *Discussion on marriage in Sikhism*. [Interview] Washington D.C., June 2011.

may, he claims, say things such as: "Why are you cutting your hair?" or "Why are you not cooking food the way I am?"¹⁹

Inter-marriage and Scripture

There are several references to marriage throughout the Guru Granth Sahib that may influence the view and perspective of Sikhs on the subject. Although the Guru Granth Sahib does not prescribe particular actions that Sikhs should take within marriage, it does describe the way Sikhs should approach the concept. For example, the scripture advises that once a marriage is performed, the members will know God:

"My marriage has been performed, O my father. As Gurmukh, I have found the Lord."²⁰

In other words, marriage is a union with God that allows a Sikh man or woman to better know the nature of divinity.

The scripture is much more specific on the issue of the role of a female Sikh in a marriage than the role of a male Sikh. For example it states:

"The bride should know no other man than her husband ... she alone is of good family, she alone shines with the light who is adorned with the love of her husband."²¹

Like the Rehat Maaryada, this speaks to the question of female intermarriage - presumably a female Sikh would not be so blessed with the "light" if she left the religion - but is silent on the issue of how a man should treat a marriage.

While these lines in the Sikh holy book do not specifically speak to the question of marriage outside of the religion, they do describe the way Sikhs should conceptualize marriage. As it is a holy process designed to bring a Sikh closer to divinity, it seems likely that marriage outside of the religion would limit one's ability to know God. In other words, because marriage is conceptualized as a *religious* ceremony within Sikhism, marriage outside of the religion may not be as spiritually fulfilling as marriage within Sikhism.

Sikhs in India and Sikhs in Diaspora

The homeland of Sikhism is the Punjab in modern day North West India and South East Pakistan. Until well into the modern era, the majority of Sikhs who settled outside of the Punjab were traders who settled in other regions of India or

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Sri Guru Granth Sahib Translation". p. 78. 2011. [Online] Available at: <http://www.sikhs.org/english/eg7.htm#p77> [Accessed 26 August 2011].

²¹ Owen Cole, W., Singh Sambhi, P. *Sikhism: Beliefs and Practices*. p. 116.

Can you give the reference in the Guru Granth Sahib? Otherwise, say "Cite as Owen Cole, ..."

in lands to the West.²² Sikhism's recognition as a world religion is associated with the large and growing diaspora.

Beginning in the late 19th Century, Sikhs began moving to Malaysia, Hong Kong, and other British colonies. Additionally, Sikhs began to discover opportunities along the west coast of North America. Approximately 450,000 Sikhs reside in the UK, 200,000 in Canada, 150,000 in the U.S., and 100,000 in other locations throughout the world, primarily in the former British Empire.²³

Because of the diaspora, some conversions to Sikhism have occurred, despite the fact that Sikhism as a faith has never actively sought converts. In the 21st Century, Sikhism has witnessed a growing number of non-Indian adherents. When questioned on his decision to convert to Sikhism, Gurusewak Singh Khalsa, who was born to parents of American/European descent, said:

"I have found that there is a lot more openness, freedom, and acceptance in the Sikh teachings compared to other religions."²⁴

The conversions to Sikhism have further complicated the concept of marriage. As Lalwani noted, some Sikh parents want their children to marry within the religion in order "to protect cultural traditions". In the diaspora, parents "may want their children to marry within the religion to protect connections to their historical homeland".²⁵ While marrying a convert would be considered marrying within the religion, it does not achieve this goal of protecting certain cultural traditions that may in fact be independent of the religion itself. The same is true of Sikhs who chose to marry non-Sikhs but later secure their spouses conversion.

Experiences of Sikh Youths

According to Jaipreet Kaur, a Malaysian Sikh, the Sikh diaspora recognizes that many youth may struggle with their religious identity, as they are typically a minority.²⁶ In response, different organizations have initiated camps and programs to bring Sikh youth from around the world together. For example, the Sikh Youth Alliance of North America orchestrates retreats throughout the year to "inspire [Sikh] youth to fall in love with the Guru's message and put the principles into daily practice."²⁷

²² "Sikhism". 2011. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/543916/Sikhism> [Accessed 7 July 2011]

²³ Woodhead, Linda. Fletcher, Paul. Kawanami, Hiroko. and Smith, David. *Religions in the Modern World*.

²⁴ "White Sikhs"- Foreigners who Found Faith in Sikhism". 2009. [Online]. Available at:

<http://rt.com/news/white-sikhs-foreigners-who-found-faith-in-sikhism/?fullstory> [Accessed 8 July 2011].

²⁵ Lalwani, Harish, 2011. *Discussion on marriage in Sikhism*. [Interview] Washington D.C., June 2011.

²⁶ Kaur, Jaipreet, 2011. *Discussion on Sikh Youths*. [Interview] Email, June 2011.

²⁷ "Welcome to SYANA". *Sikh Youth Alliance of North America*. [Online] Available at:

<http://www.sikhyouthalliance.org/> [Accessed 2 July 2011].

For Sikhs youths who spend much of their time as a minority, events like these may be the first opportunity they have to form long-lasting friendships and relationships with people their own age in their religious community. In communities with large Sikh populations, this can also be done through the Gurdwara.

According to Kaur, children begin attending Gurdwara at a very young age and do so often and on a regular basis. Kaur noted that in addition to being an opportunity to practice the Sikh faith, Gurdwara is also a social affair. After prayers most families remain for a hot meal, and to socialize with friends and family. Gurdwara attendance allows young Sikhs to gain familiarity with their religious traditions, which will be important if they celebrate a religious marriage ceremony in a Gurdwara.

Sikhs who Marry Non-Sikhs

Lalwani did not marry outside of his religion. However, he emphasized that inter-faith marriage, according to his conception of the Guru Granth Sahib was not an anathema to the Sikhism, as Sikhs see mankind as one. Indeed, he argued that if Sikh parents feel uncomfortable with their children marrying outside the religion, it is largely a cultural and personal issue. He emphasized that "inter-faith marriage has become more common in Sikh communities in recent years."²⁸ Additionally Lalwani characterized Sikh marriage as a union of equals that brings each closer to God. Because of this, he argued that marriage to a non-Sikh could be challenging on a personal level but would ultimately be a spiritual opportunity for both partners. However, Lalwani cautioned that "marriage to Muslims is difficult or impossible, because Islam requires conversion for marriage."²⁹ According to the Islamic faith, Muslims who marry outside of their religion are bound for hell. It is stated in the Qur'an:

"Do not marry Unbelieving women (idolaters), Until they believe. ... Nor marry (your girls) To unbelievers until They believe. ... Unbelievers do (but) Beckon you to the Fire."³⁰

However, the Qur'an whilst stating that a Muslim woman may not marry a non-Muslim, a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim "chaste women among The People of the Book."³¹

²⁸ Lalwani, Harish, 2011. Discussion on marriage in Sikhism. [Interview] Washington D.C., June 2011.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Surah 2: 221.

³¹ Surah 5: 6. As full surah explains: "This day are (all) things Good and pure made lawful Unto you. The good Of the People of the Book Is lawful unto you And yours is lawful Unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) Are (not only) chaste women Who are believers, but Chaste women among The People of the Book."

Lalwani suggests that Sikhs treat all of humanity the way Muslims seem to treat "People of the Book," an argument that is supported by some Sikh scripture:

"Let it be known that mankind is one, that all men belong to a single humanity. So too with God, whom Hindu and Muslim distinguish with differing names. Let none be misled, for God is but one; he who denies this is duped and deluded."³²

Furthermore, scripture states:

"There is no difference between a temple and a mosque, nor between the prayers of a Hindu or a Muslim. Though differences seem to mark and distinguish, all men are in reality the same."³³

However, the implication of this belief is that Sikhs regard their religion as the only one which leads to God- all other paths lead to death and rebirth:

"Vain is their effort without knowledge of truth; fire is the fate which awaits them."³⁴

Thus, death awaits those who do not acknowledge the One God; as such, if one marries outside the religion, it is possible that one would cease to follow the One God, and as such be condemned to death and rebirth.

Lalwani's general observations about the possibility of marriage outside of Sikhism held true in interviews with Sikhs who inter-married. However, it seemed that he may have understated the possibility of a negative parental reaction to inter-marriage. Several of the Sikhs interviewed on their personal experiences with inter-marriage struggled to receive parental approval.

According to Pauline Sidhhu, from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, it is not common for Sikhs to marry outside of the Sikh religion. However, Sindhu married a Hindu. Sindhu said part of her decision to marry outside the religion came from her Sikh belief that marriage should be "based on mutual trust, love and piety to God."³⁵

In AD 1984, Sidhhu eloped with a Hindu man of South Indian origin. She had a typical Hindu wedding ceremony in a Hindu temple with prayers conducted by a Hindu priest. Sidhhu's decision to marry outside of the Sikh faith was not received well by her father. She was ex-communicated by her father and had nothing to do with her family for 22 years, although her father contacted her new

³² The Dasam Granth: Section 14, taken from W.H. McLeod Textual Sources *For the Study of Sikhism*. p. 57.

³³ The Dasam Granth: Section 15, taken from W.H. McLeod Textual Sources *For the Study of Sikhism*. p. 57.

³⁴ The Dasam Granth: Section 18, taken from W.H. McLeod Textual Sources *For the Study of Sikhism*. p. 58.

³⁵ Sidhu, Pauline, 2011. *Discussion on Marriage in Sikhism*. [Interview] Email, July 20, 2011.

family in his old age. Sidhu returned to her home along with her husband and grown daughters and was received by her father with “love, warmth and smiles.”³⁶ Sidhu felt that her father may have regretted the fact that he let tradition get in the way of accepting her marriage.

When asked to comment on the community’s current response to interfaith marriage, Sidhu stated that in her experience, there is a high level of disapproval. However, she noted that the community is more open to the idea today than in it was back in AD 1984 when she was forced to elope.

Being a Sikh, who married a man of another faith, Sidhu was faced with the task of deciding under what faith to raise her children. Sidhu wanted to keep her family religiously united, and in pursuit of this effort, decided to convert to Hinduism and raise her children to be Hindus. Sidhu reflected: “In my eyes, Hinduism is as good religion as any.” Despite Sidhu’s decision to follow Hinduism, she still mouths Sikh prayers naturally.³⁷

Sidhu’s siblings who married outside of the faith had similar experiences. Sidhu grew up in a family of eleven, and two of her sisters also married outside of Sikhism. Her eldest sister married a Muslim Malay and her youngest sister married a British Christian. Sidhu’s youngest sister, who had a good relationship with her father decided to keep her marriage a secret until the day her father passed away. Sidhu’s elder sister, Avtar Kaur, who married a Muslim, had to elope to do so. She had a simple Malay wedding that included the exchanging of vows before a witness following Islamic rites. When Kaur was married, she took on the Muslim name of Nurafah and converted to Islam. Kaur stated that, “upon marriage I accepted my new religion because I believe all religions are good.”³⁸

Furthermore, Kaur raised her five children to be devoted to their Islamic faith; “they went for religious classes as children and they pray five times a day.” It took a long time for Kaur’s father to forgive his daughter for converting to Islam. However, Kaur noted that at this point, her children have “mixed with their Punjabi cousins and hence know that they are part Punjabi.” She believes her children are true Muslims who respect the religions of others, including that of their Sikh cousins.

Satinder Cheema from Sirsa, Haryana, is a third Sikh who can speak to the experience of marrying outside of her religion, although she had a very different experience. Cheema married a Hindu, but was married in a Gurdwara Sahib with a Sikh wedding ceremony. Cheema noted that while inter-faith marriage is uncommon, it is more accepted for a Sikh to marry a Hindu because Sikhs

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kaur, Avtar, 2011. *Discussion on Marriage in Sikhism*. [Interview] Email, July 24, 2011.

believe their religion is derived from Hinduism. She emphasized that the first Sikh Guru was Hindu.³⁹

The idea that Sikhism originated in Hinduism and that it was therefore more appropriate for Sikhs to marry Hindus than people of other religions is never expressly spelled out in the Guru Granth Sahib or the Rehat Maryada, but seems to be accepted. In addition to Cheema's experience, Lalwani cited several instances of Sikh-Hindu intermarriage. Because many Sikhs speak Punjabi as a native language and there is also a large Hindu Punjabi speaking community, intermarriage with Hindus may protect cultural and linguistic heritage. Although there is also a large Muslim Punjabi community, the fact that Islam mandates conversion makes intermarriage with that community less appealing.

Cheema said that neither ^{she} her nor her husband changed religious ideologies for one another in order to maintain their relationship. Because she believes Sikhism derived from Hinduism, she feels that the two religions work well in unison. However, Cheema acknowledges some challenges resulting from possessing a different religion than her husband. She stated that, "my husband and I have been raised with two different ways of life, and thus, two different perspectives. At times, this can pose a contradiction in how we should raise our children."⁴⁰

A notable example of this is the different conception of Sikhs and Hindus about the role of hair. While Sikhs believe that cutting hair harms the eternal soul, Hindus shave their children's heads at birth. Cheema and her husband struggled with this decision after the birth of their children, eventually deciding not to shave their children's hair because it was of such vital importance to basic conceptions of Sikhism. Cheema introduced her children to both religions and will allow them to explore both or either in more depth.

Conclusion

The Guru Granth Sahib does not often speak directly to the question of intermarriage and Sikhism; the Rehat Maryada does, but is more loosely followed and interpreted by many modern Sikhs. Perhaps for this reason, there are a plethora of different interpretations about the importance of marrying within Sikhism. This great diversity in beliefs on marriage mirrors the great diversity within Sikhism. Despite the fact that Sikhism grew in a relatively small region, it is today a religion with a global scope, and its adherents chose many different ways to honour their religious beliefs.

Khalsa Sikhs and non-baptized Sikhs may conceptualize marriage differently because their religion plays different roles in their personal lives. In other words, although both may be in theory permitted to marry outside of their religion,

³⁹ Cheema, Satinder, 2011. Discussion on Marriage in Sikhism. [Interview] Email, July 19, 2011.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Khalsa Sikhs may find such a marriage much more difficult because they have strict religious habits that may be difficult to maintain when living with a non-Sikh.

Similarly, diaspora Sikhs and Sikhs in India might confront different parental perceptions about marriage outside the religion. Because Sikhs living in India, especially in Punjab and Haryana typically have regular contact with a large number of other Sikhs their own age, their parents may react with confusion when they chose to marry outside the religion. Although parents living outside of India (or in regions of India where Sikhism is not common) may oppose inter-faith marriage, they are more likely to be familiar with the concept, as the practice seems more common in the diaspora.

However, it is important to remember that even these observations of Sikh experience are generalized and do not always hold true. The experiences of Sindu, Kaur and Cheema are all different and influenced by their personal circumstances and decisions. Indeed, perhaps the most notable aspect of Sikhism and inter-marriage is the extent to which generalized conclusions cannot be drawn. As in many religions, in Sikhism pluralism of interpretation dominates.

Finally, even though Sikhs embrace the existence of other religions and recognize that other religions believe in only the 'One God,' scripture states that to become a baptized Sikh is the one and only path that will lead to God. Of non-Sikhs, they say "Death and rebirth is the fate which awaits them."⁴¹ Thus, to not follow the path of Sikhism by marrying outside of the religion will ultimately lead to the cycle of death and rebirth.

Word Count: 3,978

⁴¹ "3.3.1 Bhai Gurdas: Section 3, taken from W.H. McLeod, *Textual Sources For the Study of Sikhism*. P. 64.

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Interviews

As said by Avtar Kaur, a practising Faith Member, interview conducted via email on July 24, 2011.

As said by Harish Lalwani, a practising Faith Member, at the National Gurdwara of Sikhism in Washington D.C. in June of 2011.

As said by Jaipreet Kaur, a practising Faith Member, interview conducted via email in June of 2011.

As said by Pauline Sidhu, a practising Faith Member, interview conducted via email on July 20, 2011.

As said by Satinder Cheema, a practising Faith Member, interview conducted via email on July 19, 2011.

Appendix

Interview with Avtar Kaur conducted on July 24, 2011:

1. Are you married? If yes, did you marry a Sikh and what sort of ceremony did you have?
2. What do you think the most important Sikh teaching on marriage is?
3. Is it common for Sikhs to marry outside of the religion? Do you have friends and family who have? What has been the response of the community?
4. What do you think important Sikh teachings relating to raising children are? If you have children, how do you influence their religious growth?
5. What is the response of the Sikh community to people who have converted to Sikhism in order to marry into the community? Are conversions to Sikhism common?

Interview with Harish Lalwani conducted in June of 2011:

1. What does your scripture say about marriage? How do you interpret it? How strict is the scripture followed?
2. Is it possible to convert someone because you want to marry him or her?
3. Is it considered a sin for a Sikh to marry a non-Sikh?
4. Can a Sikh marry a non-Sikh in a Gurdwara?
5. What other religions are Sikhs willing to marry into?
6. Is the man or woman in the relationship more inclined to marry outside of Sikhism?
7. Would family members accept those who have married outside of the Sikh religion or would the member be ostracized?
8. Are members of the Khalsa looking to marry another member of the Khalsa?
9. Will a baptized Sikh marry a Sikh who has not been baptized?

Interview with Jaipreet Kaur conducted in June of 2011:

1. Is there a high rate of Gurdwara attendance among Sikh youths?

2. To your knowledge, do Sikh youths in the Diaspora and in India attend religious classes and services that promote religious education?
3. Have you found that Sikh parents encourage their children to integrate into the area around them?

Interview with Pauline Sidhu conducted on July 20, 2011:

1. Are you married? If yes, did you marry a Sikh and what sort of ceremony did you have?
2. What do you think the most important Sikh teaching on marriage is?
3. Is it common for Sikhs to marry outside of the religion? Do you have friends and family who have? What has been the response of the community?
4. What do you think important Sikh teachings relating to raising children are? If you have children, how do you influence their religious growth?
5. What is the response of the Sikh community to people who have converted to Sikhism in order to marry into the community? Are conversions to Sikhism common?

Interview with Satinder Cheema conducted on July 19, 2011:

1. Did you have a Sikh or Hindu wedding ceremony? Did family members from both religions attend?
2. Were you married in Gurdwara Sahib?
3. Is it common for Sikh's to marry outside of the religion? (Do you know of other Sikhs who have married outside the religion?)
4. Did you or your husband consider changing religious ideologies for each other?
5. Did you raise your children to be Sikh or Hindu?
6. Did you feel ostracized or looked down upon in any way by family members or members of your religious community?
7. Have you found there to be any challenges of living with a person of a different religion? (Does it affect how you worship? Do you accompany your husband when he worships?)

A very impressive essay. The clearly focused research question has led to a well researched essay with judiciously selected material. Knowledge and understanding of a high order are demonstrated. The analysis of foundation texts of Sikhism and of the interview data is also admirable. Contemporary tensions within Sikhism are sensitively suggested.

Perhaps for future research the candidate undertakes the institutional differences within the religion should be further explored. E. Nesbitt, "Sikhism: a very short Introduction". OUP, 2005, pp. 126-134 is a good summary.

I concur w/ the first reviewer but do think more analysis of the Sikh understanding of marriage ~~and~~ would strengthen the essay. The essay is also occasionally ambiguous or self-contradictory.