**Student Handout**

**Sikh Practices**

Correct performance of majority of Sikh practices stated in the *Rehat Maryada.*

Each morning, all orthodox Sikhs rise between 3 am - 6 am, take a bath, and will then recite the *Japji*. This is followed in the evening by the *Rehras*, and finally in the late evening, before going to bed, by the *Kirtan Sohilla.*

Sikh Worship:

Main focus of Sikh worship is the *gurdwara*. Male or female may constitute the congregation, either may conduct the service. The whole family including small children take part in service at *gurdwara*.

Birth:

Customary to give gifts at the birth of a baby. Baby may be taken to the *gurdwara* when a few days old. The *granthi* places a few drops of *amrit* on the baby’s tongue. The remainder is drunk by the mother.

Naming ceremony:

The *Guru Granth Sahib* is opened at random, the first letter of the first word of the hymn on the left page will be the first letter of the baby’s name. For a boy, the name ‘Singh’ will be added to the first name, for a girl the name ‘Kaur’ will be added.

The Initiation Ceremony:

Also known as *‘Amrit Sanskar’*.

The rite must be performed by five men or women who symbolize the original *panj-pyare*, to re-enact the original ceremony. The five must be *amritdhari* and devout members of the community.

 The *Guru Granth Sahib* is opened and the Sikh teachings are

explained to the initiates. Prayers are said before preparing *amrit*

and a sixth person acting as *granthi* reads from the *Guru Granth Sahib.*

*Panj-pyare* kneel around steel bowl called *batta* which placed on

pedestal (*sonera*). They sit in the heroic posture (*birasan*), with the right knee on the ground and the left knee kept upright. They place sugar crystals in bowl and one by one stir

it with small *khanda* (double-edged sword). The five keep their hands on the bowl

unless their turn to stir to it. During this *shabads* from the *Guru Granth*

*Sahib* are read.

When *amrit* is ready, a prayer is said and the initiates come froward one by

one, kneeling in the same manner as the *panj-pyare*. Each is asked to recite:

*Waheguru ji ka khalsa, Waheguru ji ki fateh.*

*Amrit* is put into cupped hands of the initiate 5 times and is drunk by him/her.

*Amrit* sprinkled 5 times onto hair and eyes of initiate.

Initiates drink *amrit* that is left by sipping it from the bowl.

*Mul Mantar* is recited 5 times by the *panj pyare* and repeated each time

by the initiates.

Initiates are told of their duties as Khalsa Sikhs, and told they must at all times

keep the 5K’s.

The list of rules and regulations which form the *Rehat Maryada* are read out, as well as the four major prohibitions, known as *kurahits*, these are:

 (1) Not to cut the hair.

 (2) Not to eat *halal* meat.

 (3) No extra-marital sexual intercourse.

 (4) No using of tobacco.

Other rules also include not consuming alcohol, or any other intoxicants, not to eat with non-initiated Sikhs, not to dye the hair, and not to give or receive cash dowries.

Non-observance of the rules causes the initiate to become a *patit*, an apostate.

The Marriage Ceremony:

Importance of the extended family, union of two families rather than two individuals.

Sikh marriages are “assisted” rather than “arranged”.

Importance of family life emphasized by the gurus.

Marriages are endogamous in relation to one’s caste, *zat* (*Jati* in Hindi), that is a *jat* will marry a *jat,* a *ramgharia* will marry a *ramgharia*, and so on.

Marriages are exogamous in relation to one’s *got* (g*otra* in Hindi) and is usually the surname.

Death Ceremony

Cremation takes place, remains are scattered into the nearest river.

The body is washed and clothed and dressed in the 5K’s. Funeral pyre is lit by the eldest son, a brother or nephew.

Continuous reading (*akhand path*), or a reading with breaks (*sahaj path*) of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is undertaken after the cremation.

No fasting or other rituals take place.

Festivals

Sikh festivals are divided into two:

 *Melas* - these are Hindu festivals in origin but are given new interpretations

 and are important Sikh gatherings during the year.

 *Gurpurbs* - these are essentially Sikh in origin and relate to Sikh history such

 as the births and martyrdoms of the gurus.

Family Religion

The householder stage (*grihasta*) is the ideal in Sikhism. Sikh family life is based on the extended family. Special terms are used for the people in the family:

 *chachaji* - father’s younger brother

 *mamaji* - mother’s brother

 *masiji* - mother’s sister

 *puwaji* - father’s sister

 *taiyaji* - father’s elder brother

 *bhabiji* - brother’s wife

The ending ‘*ji*’ indicates a title of respect.

Sex

Sex outside marriage is strictly condemned.

No rules about contraception, it is up to the couple to decide.

Abortion

There are no specific teachings about abortion in Sikhism.

If the birth will bring shame on the family, then abortion is the only solution – IZZAT.

Drugs/Alcohol/Tobacco

The *Rehat Maryada* explicitly states that a Sikh should not smoke, drink or use drugs. This is usually ignored by male Sikhs! who openly consume alcohol at a Sikh wedding reception.

The ban on alcohol is to particularly observed by the *amritdhari* Sikhs.

Vegetarianism

There are no objections for Sikhs to eat meat, the only rule is that the meat being eaten is not *halal*. Sikhs can eat beef, but out of the Hindu respect for the cow, the majority of Sikhs will not eat beef.

Food prepared for the *langar* in the g*urdwara* is always vegetarian.

Dress

Traditionally, Sikh women usually wear the Punjabi dress known as *salwar kameez*, this is a tunic and baggy trousers, also known as Punjabi suits. Will also wear the dupatta, a type of scarf. It is forbidden for Sikh women to practice *purdah* (veiling).

Saris are also worn by Sikh females. The *Guru Granth Sahib* states:

 wearing clothes which cause pain to the body or breed lustful

 thoughts [should not be worn]. (AG 16)