

Implementation of *Panch Kekaar* and *Khalsa* in Sikh Society in Kelantan , Malaysia

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Abstract

The *Khalsa* and the *Panch Kekaar* are the two main elements in Sikhism. Those who want to become a member of this group must respect some symbols of the Sikhism called *Panch Kekaar* which consists of five, namely *Kes* (hair), *Kara* (iron bracelet), *Kangha* (brush), *Kachera* (trouser) and *Kirpan* (sword). In order to see its significance in the Sikhism, a study of the Sikh community in Kelantan has been made and it is discovered that the respondents were less satisfied with *Panch Kekaar*. The study also found that not many of them fully exercise the *Panch Kekaar* in their lives.

Keywords: *Sikh Community, Khalsa, Panch Kekaar, Kara, Kachera*

Introduction

In the context of Malaysia, Sikhism is considered the 'minority' compared with the other religions because its followers are mostly North Indians. It is also not a missionary religion like Islam and Christianity. However, the Sikhism today has actually experienced many changes and developments over the leadership of ten teachers for 204 years (1504 to 1708) (Hughes, 1982) and most notably during the tenth and last guru - Guru Gobind Singh (1675-1708). He was the teacher responsible for introducing the *Khalsa* which is considered sacred in the Sikhism (Teja Singh, 1983). Starting with the establishment of the *Khalsa*, the Sikhs began to develop a distinctive identity that made the religion a growing faith in the world today.

Sikh Community and the History of its Existence in Kelantan

Kelantan was selected as a research location because the Sikh's community is a minority in the local Malays who practice the teachings of Islam. In the Islamic system of administration, the non-Muslims are given the freedom to practice their religion, tradition and culture and build their own place of worship without any interference. Therefore, the Sikh community certainly has the opportunity and space to practice their religion and culture.

In terms of population, Kelantan has a population of 1.6342 million people of diverse ethnic and religion (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Basic Population Characteristics by Administrative Districts 2009). However, the Sikh community in the state only consists of about 15 families and of these, only 3 families are originated from Kelantan (Harbindar Jeet Singh, 2000). This causes them to deal with the Muslim Malay community in a daily communication. Differences between the two religions and cultures will be tested. This research result should indirectly give the general representation of Sikh religious symbols in India and also in the world. This is because the practice of Sikhism in Kelantan in particular is generally similar to the practices of the Sikhism practiced in Malaysia and the world.

The Sikhs came to Malaya in the 19th century and they played an important role in the military and transportation sectors (Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara, 1980). The British government was responsible for bringing them to Malaya. This can be seen in the first British colonial policy in Malaya in the military field, especially from 1896 to 1919. In this policy, many soldiers in Malaya consisted of Sikhs. The selection was based on their physical strength and their turban (Rupert Emerson, 1979). Apart from the military field, the Sikhs were also the first Indian race that was involved in the tin mining industry. This took place in the 1930s, when the mining industry was monopolized by the Chinese (Arasaratnam, 1970).

The actual date of Sikhs' arrival in Kelantan is unconfirmed. However, there are records that in June 1915, the British Governor of Singapore sent a group of soldiers to Kota Bharu to end the resistance of Tok Janggut. The army consisted of 100 Sikh soldiers and a team of Malay volunteers. Since the Sikh soldiers were well-trained in war, Tok Janggut was eventually killed and his group was defeated in the battle. Apart from that, the existence of Sikhs in Kelantan can be seen in December 18, 1941 when the Japanese forces attacked Malaya. The Japanese landed in Sabak Beach, Kota Bharu, Kelantan and there was war between the Japanese and English troops, which included Sikh soldiers who were brought from Punjab, India. This was likely the beginning of Sikhs in Kelantan.

History of the Establishment of the 'Khalsa'

Literally, the word *Khalsa* comes from the Arabic word *Khalis*, which means clean, pure and natural. This word emphasises on the concept of honesty, integrity and security of conscience. As an undergraduate of the language, Guru Gobind Singh discovered some chemistry in the relationship of the five alphabets of *Khalis* (Kha, Alif, Lam, Sad and Alif), which refer to Punjabi state, which means land of five rivers (Archer, 1971). During the Moghul Empire, two Sikh gurus, Guru Arjun (May 30, 1606) and Guru Tegh Bahadur (November 11, 1675) were sentenced to death (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993) by Moghuls. Besides, Guru Gobind Singh himself was also against the caste system in Hindu religion that gave dignity to the Brahmin compared with the other castes (John Bailey, 1992). These two factors led him to introduce the *Khalsa*.

The establishment of the *Khalsa* in Sikhism began with "*Khande-di-Pahul*" which means "Baptism by the sword" (Fields, 1976) during the ritual organized by Guru Gobind Singh himself on March 29, 1699 at Fort Keshgarh (Banerjee, 1983). It was attended by all the Sikhism devotees from all over India. During the ceremony he was asked five lives of his followers as proof of their loyalty to Sikhism. Although there were many followers who volunteered, only five were selected. They were Daya Singh, Dharam Das, Himmat Rai, Mohkan Chand and Sahib Chand (Bailey, 1992). These five followers, however, were not sacrificed by Guru Gobind Singh because his primary goal was only to test their loyalty.

In this ritual, the five were asked to drink five scoops of Amrit and uttered "*Wahguru ji ka Khalsa, Wahguru ji ki Fateh*" which means "*Khalsa* belongs to Wahguru, victory belongs to God" (S.C. Jain, 1985). Amrit is pure water mixed with honey and stirred with a double-edged sword in a metal container. Five Banis or the names of the prayers in the Sikh religion were also muttered to the water. In addition, before they were certified as members of the *Khalsa*, they needed to wear five symbols that began with the letter K which were *Kes* (the hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kirpan* (sword), *Kachera* (pants) and *Kara* (bracelet). These five symbols were then called *Panch Kekaar* and became important symbols of the Sikhism (Banerjee, 1983). This *Pahul* ceremony was then performed on its followers throughout India and it spread fast because these five followers came from different regions in India. Apart from the *Panch Kekaar*, Guru Gobind Singh also gave the title '*Singh*' which means 'lion' for males and '*Kaur*' which means 'princess' for female at the end of their names (Fields, 1976).

Now, *pahul* ceremony is still practiced by the Sikh community which is generally divided into two categories: Sahij Dhari or 'public' and Kesh Dhari Singhs or 'the Sikh warriors'. The former, Sahij Dhari or the public are those who practice Sikhism but are not ready to become a soldier. They also do not wear *Panch Kekaar* or any sign that shows their faith. The latter, Kesh Dhari Sikh Singhs or the heroes are those who receive *pahul* or baptism ceremony and are ready to serve the community. They hold fast to the *Khalsa* and the practice of the five symbols of their lives. In the community of Sahij Dharis, amrit has been practiced since the baby was born (Jogendra Singh, 1978) while in the community of Kesh Dhari Singhs or Sikh warrior, amrit is practiced once their children grow up and are able to read and write teachers' writings as well as understand the teachings contained in Sikhism (Jogendra Singh, 1978). As explained earlier, the *Khalsa* was formed by Guru Gobind Singh who reacted to the killing of two Sikh religious teachers by the Moghuls. Thus, to take revenge against the Moghuls' tyranny, Guru Gobind Singh created the *Khalsa* as a militant movement and it was war-oriented.

However, the desired goals were not achieved (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993), and consequently many followers were killed, including four of his own children - Ajit Singh, Jujhar Singh, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh (Mansukhani, 1958). After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, *Khalsa* became weak and was placed under a new administration called 'misl' which means 'example'. Under this administration, the Sikhs made a donation drive to villages and towns to fund their attack on the Moghul Empire (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993). Thus, the *Khalsa* during the post-Guru Gobind Singh era have turned into a movement that emphasized issues of integration and consolidation of people regardless of race and caste (Jain, 1985). At the same time, this group has been considered the successor to the ten teachers of Sikhism.

The Responsibilities of 'Khalsa'

Every Sikh devotee who was baptized to become the *Khalsa*, was obliged to perform the responsibilities set as follows,

1. Devote, praise (*Nitnem*) and do daily devotion to God.
2. Compulsory obligation to the five symbols or *Panch Kekaar* and organize their lives in line with the teaching of teachers.
3. Once a *Khalsa*, they become brothers and there is no more caste system in society. They are also not allowed to attend any other religious ceremonies.
4. Obligation to follow all the Sikh rituals like birth, death and marriage.
5. Obligation to spend one tenth of the income for the benefit of religion.
6. Must train themselves to fight and ready to defend those who are weak.
7. Must obey the leader and the country.
8. Forbidden to believe in the myth, have hair cut, commit adultery, and smoke.

They are also prohibited from pursuing any activity that contravenes the law, such as drinking alcohol and intoxicating drinks, to build the monument or statue in the tomb and make friends with the fallen (Mansukhani, 1958).

Relationship with the 'Panch Khalsa Kekaar'

Khalsa is a group based on the concept of race and a fighter by choice who cares about the laws and procedures that are suffering-based. They are not allowed to drink alcohol, to smoke and to be intoxicated. They also must obediently perform the prayer or Naam Japna and must fight for 'Dharmayudha' which is the battle for justice (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993). In term of philosophy, the ritual of *pahul* (baptism) in *Khalsa* is actually a symbol of rebirth. This means that they have started a new life and forsake their previous job which is a soldier, and to discard previously held beliefs and be replaced with *Khalsa* (Khushwant Singh, 1963).

The five *Panch Kekaar* which are the pillars of the *Khalsa* are closely related to the elements of psychology. Guru Gobind Singh, when he was nine years old, had suffered stress when he found that his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded by the Moghuls at Chandni Chauk, Delhi. The Sikhs who were abused by the Moghuls also suffered. Therefore, the existence of the *Khalsa* with the five symbols had changed the status of the Sikhs from the image of a 'sparrow' to a 'hawk'. In other words, the advent of the *Khalsa* and the application of the five symbols as the official uniform of the *Khalsa* is a result of dissatisfaction and revenge from Guru Gobind Singh on the Government of Moghul (Rataul, 1964).

Panch Kekaar, the Sikh religious symbols are means to discipline and are yardsticks to the Sikh's obedience and devotions to their religion. They will be proud to be a Sikh, despite having to sacrifice their lives (Khushwant Singh, 1963). However, the importance of symbols is not described in detail by Guru Gobind Singh since the baptism ceremony of the Sikhs (to become a member of the *Khalsa*) was conducted in a tense atmosphere. This situation does not give space to Guru Gobind Singh to explain the importance and purpose of these symbols to his followers. (Khushwant Singh, 1963). In addition, these symbols become their uniform and identity so that people can easily recognize the Sikhs - because from a distance, they can be distinguished from other religions. At the same time, it is also a symbol of brotherhood and unity among the Sikhs in the community (Khushwant Singh, 1963).

Panch Kekaar consists of five types of symbols that start with the letter 'K'. Five 'K's are :

- a. *Kes*
- b. *Kangha*
- c. *Kirpan*

d. *Kachera*

e. *Kara*

The following is a brief explanation of the five items :

a. KES

Kes refers to the hair and fur all over human body. It is an important symbol in Sikhism and it has deep meaning in the lives of its followers. It not only reflects their adherence to the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh, but also a belief that the *Kes* is a gift from God and a symbol of his elevation as the last Sikh teachers (Gyani, 1962).

b. KANGHA

The second symbol is *Kangha* (comb). This comb is made of wood, and it should always be placed in their turban. The comb must be respected by the Sikhs because it has close links to the *Kes* (Salim 1985). *Kangha* and the *Kes* are two symbols that complement each other because if the *Kes* is not washed, treated or combed, the hair will be untangled (Satwant Kaur, 1994). Thus, with the *Kangha* (comb), the Sikhs will always look neat and clean. This is why they are required to comb their hair at least twice a day. They believe that by doing so, they will remember that their hearts must always be purified so that it is clean all the time (Agus Salim, 1985). In addition, the Sikhs are obliged to put *Kangha* on their head as a symbol of discipline and system, as well as to prevent their hair from becoming tangled (Satwant Kaur, 1994).

c. KIRPAN

Kirpan or sword is another emblem that should be respected by the Sikh religion. The sword here refers to a sword with two points and worn by the Sikhs in their belt (Archer, 1971). It is a symbol of strength and a very valuable weapon for Sikhism. Those who hold and own this symbol are regarded as faithful followers and possess strong faith (Sabha, 1969). In addition, the *Kirpan* symbolizes knowledge, and the Sikhs are required to bring at least a small-sized *Kirpan* (blade) on their bodies as a symbol of their respect for knowledge (Gyani, 1962).

d. KACHERA

Kachera refers to the short pants worn by the Sikhs up to the knee (Khushwant Singh, 1963). It is more or less similar with the one worn by the soldiers but it is cut and sewn specifically for the Sikhs. It is a symbol of purity in married life and in Sikhism it is called Gristi Jiwan (Gyani, 1962). Historically, this Sikh symbol has been the attire of the Indians ever since. However, the design and fashion of *Kachera* has changed from one form to another as a result of external elements. Apart from providing a form of clothing to the Sikh devotees, *Kachera* also symbolizes life and mental health, free from traditional thinking (Satwant Kaur, 1994). Symbolic to this symbol is that a husband or wife will always be faithful to their spouse. In general, it can be considered a type of underwear that is worn by Sikh religious morality that seeks to protect, whether between husband and wife or between men and women (Harbindar Jeet Singh, 2000).

e. KARA

Kara is also an important symbol of the Sikhs. It is a steel bracelet and must be worn by every Sikh regardless of gender. *Kara* is emphasised by the Sikh devotees to prove that they are obedient Sikhs. It must be made of iron and should always be worn at all the time on the right or left arm. Those who wear *Kara* will guard themselves from doing evil, because if they plan to do evil with their hands, they will remember the *Kara* on their hand and remember the teachings of the Sikhism that forbid them to do evil. In addition, it will remind them to do good things like work hard, help the poor and those who need help (Mehander Singh, 2000). According to Harbindar Jeet Singh (2000), the Sikhs also believe that by wearing these bracelets, they will always remember the promises they made to God, when they first became the *Khalsa*.

Philosophically, *Kara* has two meanings in the life of Sikhs. The first is the iron ring which shows a circle symbolizes no beginning or end. This means that they believe in the social community that is universal. Thus, the application of *Kara* reflects an individual who has an attitude of tolerance towards all creatures, as well as the belief in the concept of human brotherhood. The second purpose is the iron itself which is a valuable thing in human life. Its hard nature shows that the Sikhs are people who have principles and will not bow to any threats and intimidation (Sahib Singh, 1967). That is why *Kara* is made of steel, not of gold or silver (Satwant Kaur, 1994). Here we can deduce that the five symbols have strong links with each other and each symbol has its own symbols and meaning. When the Sikhs are facing the enemy, they will make only one choice - whether to remove the logo from their bodies or move on to face the enemy. This courage serves as an impetus to them to defeat their enemies (Mansukhani, 1958). The five symbols are the duty of every Sikh devotee - male and female, except the turban that is dedicated to men only. For Sikh women, they must put the headgear on their heads during prayer ceremonies or when they want to enter the Gurdwara.

Although the five symbols or *Panch Kekaar* have the same status and interests of each other, the *Kes* has an advantage over the other symbols because it is the only symbol considered as a gift from God and it is readily available on the human body. These advantages are not found in four other symbols, for all the four symbols are introduced by Guru Gobind Singh, the last teacher who introduced the *Khalsa* in Sikh religion.

The Wearing of Turban

In addition to *Kes*, *Kangha*, *Kirpan*, *Kara* and *Kachera* which are regarded as important symbols of Sikhism, the Sikhs also have another special symbol which is a turban. Turban, or in Punjabi *Dastaar* has very close link to the five symbols. This relationship has its basis, for only Sikh devotees who are really loyal and brave are willing to wear the symbols of their faith and loyalty through the use of turban (Salim, 1985). With the turban, they can know each other more easily wherever they go. It also cemented the relationship between the *Khalsa*, in addition to raising the spirit and sense of pride among them. They are also regarded as holy in Sikhism (Sabha, 1969). Wearing a turban considered a test to measure the level of their loyalty and devotion to the religion. This test is important because it is not easy to become truly faithful to the religion. Wearing a turban and a beard and long hair provides an opportunity for the enemy to know them and this will harm themselves. Therefore, only those who are truly loyal and brave are able to wear a turban (Salim, 1985).

The Practice of the Sikh Community on the 'Panch Kekaar'

Although Islam is the religion of the Federation, the 11th Malaysian Constitution provides that every person is entitled to profess, practice and develop his religion (Hashim, 1984). Therefore, the Sikh community certainly has the opportunity and space to practice their religion and culture.

Devotions of the Sikhs on 'Panch Kekaar'

Respondents

Table 1 shows that the respondent are 19 male and 16 female Sikhs in Kelantan. 13 respondents aged 14-20 years old, seven were 21-30 years old, eight were 31-40 years old and a total of seven respondents were 40 years old. Of these, 22 respondents (62.8%) passed tertiary education while the remaining 13 (37.2%) passed secondary education level (Table 2).

Table 1: Background of Respondents

PANCH KEKAAR	NUM. OF RESPONDENTS		PERCENTAGE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
14-20 Years	6	7	31.58	43.75
21-30 Years	4	3	21.05	18.75
31-40 Years	5	3	26.32	18.75
40 Years above	4	3	21.05	18.75
Total	19	16	100	100

Table 2 : Educational Background

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	NUM. OF RESPONDENTS		PERCENTAGE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Tertiary Education	13	9	68.42	56.25
Secondary Education	6	7	31.58	43.75
Total	19	16	100.00	100.00

i. The Male Respondents

All the male respondents said that they put *Kara* on their hands either on the right or left hand, while 15 of them admitted that they practice the *Kes*. About *Kangha*, those who do not wear a turban, do not wear *Kangha*, because *Kangha* is worn with a turban. However, although they do not use *Kangha* with the turban, they will use it to comb their hair every day. In this case, a total of 68.4% of respondents admitted that they practiced *Kangha* either with the turbans worn together or to comb their hair. On the practice of *Kachera*, 17 respondents or 89.4% wear it daily. Only one respondent gave the answer that he did not wear *Kachera*.

The study also found that a total of five respondents or 26.4% did not wear *Kirpan*. The reason is that it is not relevant anymore. It is only suitable during the leadership of the first ten teachers who were in war. The study also found that 31.6% or 6 respondents did not wear a turban. Through interviews with several respondents, most of them said that the Malaysian plural society made them embarrassed to do so. Some also said that the turban was personal, and it depended on the individual whether to wear or not to wear. However, they did not deny that the turban is an obligation to the Sikhs and is very encouraged by their teachers.

ii. Female Respondents

The study showed that all 16 female respondents practised all the *Panch Kekaar* in their lives. They are more forward than the male respondents because they were not influenced by the nature of shame. This is because the three symbols of *Kangha*, *Kirpan* and *Kachera* are not visible to other people - *Kangha* is in their hair bun, a small *Kirpan* is at the body, and *Kachera* is covered by their clothing. Only *Kara* and *Kes* are visible to the public. Yet, *Kara* is very small, while the *Kes* is not uncommon for a woman. As a result, there is no problem for them to practice. This is why they could observe all the *Panch Kekaar* compared with male respondents. Overall, the study found that not many people fully practice all of the *Panch Kekaar* in their lives except *Kara*. Some only practice five or four symbols. During the study in Sri Gurdwara Sahib, not many people wear the full set of *Panch Kekaar*, which is the official costume of the *Khalsa*. The most visible symbol missing is the turban. They just cover their heads with handkerchiefs when they pray at the Gurdwara. Turban is only worn by 37.1% of men, the lowest percentage.

Table 3: The Level of Adoption of The *Panch Kekaar*

PANCH KEKAAR	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS		PERCENTAGE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Kes</i>	15	16	78.94	100.00
<i>Kara</i>	19	16	100.00	100.00
<i>Kangha</i>	13	16	68.42	100.00
<i>Kachera</i>	17	16	89.47	100.00
<i>Kirpan</i>	14	16	73.68	100.00
<i>Turban</i>	13	16	68.42	100.00

Conclusion

This study shows the close relationship between the *Panch Kekaar* and *Khalsa* in the Sikh community in Kelantan, Malaysia. Although *Panch Kekaar* is considered an obligation by the Sikh devotee, many of them do not practice it. The Constitution of Malaysia gives freedom to all Malaysians to practice their own religion, but it is not used to the best by the Sikhs. The research also shows some internal and external factors affecting the Sikhs in Kelantan in practicing *Panch Kekaar*.

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Interview

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