**Student Handout**

**Issues of Identity in the Panth: Who is a Sikh?**

The problem of defining a Sikh as belonging to a sect of Hinduism is one which Sikhs faced throughout the development of their faith. Even after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs were regarded in a sense as Hindus.

The Sikh movement known as the Singh Sabha (late nineteenth century) was responsible for influencing Sikhs to establish a distinct identity of their own. The main concern of the Singh Sabha was to prevent the absorption of the Sikh faith into the larger fold of Hinduism. Furthermore, the movement aspired to discourage diversity within the *Panth*.

in the nineteenth century, the Sikhs were not just a people of the "Book", *brahmins* were being consulted, rituals were undertaken to prevent illnesses and to grant boons. But these accepted and popular customs of the Sikhs in the nineteenth century strongly contradicted *gurbani*.

At around 1902-1903, a number of the Sabh1s had affiliated into a central organization known as the Chief *Khalsa* Diwan. Generally, the Chief *Khalsa* Diwan, like the earlier Sabhas, tended to regard both *Khalsa* and *sahajdharis* as Sikhs. It was at a later period, with the establishment of the orthodox *Tat Khalsa* that the insistence was placed on the identity of a Sikh as being a *Khalsa* Sikh. The *Tat Khalsa,* is translated as "Pure Sikhs", is, therefore, the aspiration of the later Singh Sabhas who emphasized the *Khalsa* form. The *Tat Khalsa* emphasized that a Sikh is one who has undergone the initiation ceremony.

Those Sikhs who formally initiate into the *Khalsa panth* are known as *amritdhari* since they have taken *amrit* and agreed to live as an orthodox Sikh and to obey every rule in the *Rehat Maryada*. An *amritdhari* who has defied the rules of the *Rehat Maryada* is known as a *patit* and therefore no longer a "true" Sikh. A *sahajdhari* Sikh basically refers to an unitiated Sikh. The term is used for those who have not taken formal initation into the *Khalsa* but may follow the teachings of the Gurus.

According to the Rehat Maryada, there are generally four types of Sikhs:

1. *Amritdhari* – this a Sikh who has taken initiation into the *Khalsa* and therefore obeys all the rules and regulations of the *Rehat Maryada*.
2. *Keshdhari* – this is a Sikh who keeps his/her hair uncut.
3. *Sahajdhari –* unitiated Sikh.
4. *Patit* – an apostate: one who having had taken *amrit,* has broken the rules of the *Rehat Maryada.*