CHAPTER VI
CHAPTER VI

SIKHISM IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT : PERCEPTION AND PRACTICE

The presence of the Sikhs at Barkola is made felt by the attire of their menfolk, who wear turban and keep their hair uncut and beard long. This attire distinction and their clustering mainly in one hamlet of the village make them clearly distinguishable from their non-Sikh neighbours. They are also noticeable at Barkola because of their having two gurdwarae. The gurdwarae can be recognized from a distance, because each of them has tall flag poles, wrapped in yellow socks and triangular flags with the Sikh symbol consisting of quoit (chakra) with double edged dagger (khanda) in the centre and two daggers (kirpan) crossing beneath. This symbol is called khanda. Another striking feature of the Sikhs of Barkola is that in the case of most of the Sikh houses, the top of the front wall of the front house is decorated with the khanda.
As pointed out earlier, the first Sikh who had come and settled at Barkola was Subedar Ram Singh. Though he was a Sikh, he married two Assamese Hindu women and the present generation of Assamese Sikhs of Barkola trace their descent from Subedar Ram Singh. Subedar Ram Singh gradually became attracted towards Hinduism, presumably because of the influence of his Hindu wives. This helped Subedar Ram Singh to mingle with the Hindu neighbours. Because of his isolation from his co-religionists, Subedar Ram Singh was more associated with the Hindu neighbours. It is said that though Subedar Ram Singh was not formally a Hindu, he practised a number of Hindu rites and rituals. Thus, during the early period of the nineteenth century, the Sikhs of Barkola had nothing of the Sikh religion except the names. It has been gathered that Subedar Ram Singh had erected a shrine for the Sikhs near his house at Barkola and worshipped Hindu goddess Durga at that shrine. Even animals like goat, duck, pigeon were sacrificed to the goddess in that shrine. A big sacrificing iron sword

1 Since Subedar Ram Singh performed puja (worship) in the shrine, he was nicknamed by the villagers as pujari (priest). Even to this date Subedar Ram Singh's direct descendants at Barkola are referred to by others as members of pujari family.
used by the early Sikh settlers at Barkola in at present possessed by one of the Sikhs of Barkola, who traced his descent from Subedar Ram Singh.

During the 1830s, quite a number of Sikh traders migrated from Punjab to parts of Nagaur district (Robinson 1841: 313). A few such traders used to visit Kamapur and Barkola on business tours. The Assamese Sikhs, who had chosen to marry the Assamese girls, behaved in the manner of their Hindu neighbours and they were ignorant about Sikh religion. This way of life of the indigenous Sikhs baffled the Sikh traders from Punjab. These Sikh traders persuaded the Assamese Sikhs to discard Hindu customs and to take to Sikh religious practices instead. Their contact with the Sikh traders made the Assamese Sikhs realize that their way of life was far from the Sikh way of life. A few Sikh villagers also met some learned Sikhs from Punjab who had come to Assam to pay a visit to the gurdwara at Dhubri. These learned Sikhs also tried to introduce the local Sikhs to the doctrines of Sikhism. In 1921 Atma Singh of Barkola, who was in service in Punjab, returned to his native village and tried to introduce his co-villagers to the doctrines of Sikhism and also tried to teach them Gurbani. As a result of the persuasion of the Sikh traders and learned Sikhs, the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola removed the idol of
goddess Durga from the shrine erected by Subedar Ram Singh and placed the Granth Sahib on the alter. Afterwards, the shrine was shifted to its present site and was converted into a gurdwara towards the middle of the nineteenth century. Another gurdwara was constructed by the Sikhs of Barkola following a few years of the establishment of the first gurdwara. The latter gurudwara was constructed by those Sikhs of the village, who considered that the former gurudwara was constructed on the plinth of a Hindu shrine. The Sikh villagers of Barkola refer to the former gurdwara as Purana (old) gurudwara and the latter as Natun (new) gurudwara. The new gurdwara is also referred to as 'Barkola Bari Sangat'. It has been observed that in their day-to-day life, while they chat among themselves, the Sikhs refer to their gurdwara as namghara, the Granth Sahib as Bhagavata (a greatly revered religious scripture of the Hindus) and the granthi i.e., the keeper of the gurdwara as pujari (priest). But when the villagers discuss religious matters with an outsider, they refer to their religious temple as gurdwara, their principal holy scripture as Granth Sahib and the keeper of the gurdwara as granthi. Only five elderly Sikhs of Barkola including the two granthis can laboriously read Gurumukhi in which the scriptures of
Sikhism have been written. But none of these Sikhs can write well in Gurmukhi. Their ability to read Gurmukhi rarely couples with an understanding of the language. The Sikh villagers who can read Gurmukhi are proud of their abilities. There is no Assamese version of the Granth Sahib which the local Sikhs could read and thus learn about their religion. On the other hand, there are a number of books in Assamese on Hinduism and Vaishnavism. These books have influenced the local Sikhs in imbibing elements of Hinduism into their socio-cultural life. Moreover, the Assam Vaishnavism has many parallels to Sikhism. That is why the earliest Sikh settlers in Assam were absorbed into the local population (Neog 1984: 163-173; Singh 1967: 242).

It appears that the present generation of the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola has not been able to completely wean themselves away from the Hindu social life. The Sikh villagers of Barkola practise many rites and rituals and

2 However, there are a few books on the life of a few Sikh Gurus like Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh in Assamese. Occasionally articles are also published in Assamese magazines and newspapers on the life of the Gurus, history and migration of the Sikhs to Assam and so on. For details see, Singh 1980, 1982; Singh 1984.
observe taboos prevalent among their Hindu neighbours. It has been gathered that during the early part of the 1950s a few Sikhs from Punjab, who were well versed in the Sikh religion, paid visit to the gurdwaras at Dhubri and in other places of Assam. During their stay in Assam, they also visited Barkola, met the local Sikhs and persuaded them to observe Sikh religious beliefs and practices. It may be mentioned here that Giani Jail Singh, the then chief minister of Punjab and Mr. Surjit Singh Barnala, the then Union agriculture minister, visited Barkola in 1975 and 1977, respectively. Both these dignitaries addressed public meetings at Barkola which were attended by the Sikh and non-Sikh villagers. Later on as a result of their efforts the SGPC deputed a sewadār (worker) to teach Gurmukhi at Barkola. Giani Jail Singh also ensured the establishment of a library at Barkola. The SGPC has contributed books on Sikh history and Sikhism to this library. Later on, in 1985, the government of Assam donated some books to this library. At present this library is known as Guru Nanak Library.

The SGPC sewadār Harbhajan Singh was sent to Barkola in 1979. He now teaches Gurmukhi in a local L.P. School known as Guru Nanak L.P. School. It appears
that the students have gained little proficiency in Gurmukhi. In this school Gurmukhi is taught to all students irrespective of religion. Harbhajan Singh is consulted by the Sikh villagers whenever necessary in matters relating to their religion. Most of the Sikh religious beliefs and practices prevalent among the Sikhs of Barkola have been handed down through generations.

The Sikh children of Barkola get the opportunity to learn about their prayers in the village gurdwaras and thus they become familiar with the Sikh hymns. The non-Assamese Sikh teacher of Guru Nanak L.P. School also teaches about the Sikh hymns to the students. This process of religious instruction is also aided by the tales of the Gurus life and a familiarization with the portraits of the Gurus. Such religious training characterizes the medium by which these Sikhs identify with Sikhism.

THE VILLAGE GURDWARAS

Both the gurdwaras at Barkola are situated towards the south of the village and are located within the hamlet predominantly populated by the Sikhs. The
distance between the two gurdwaras is approximately a quarter of a kilometer. The old gurdwara stands on a plot of land belonging to Bijnan Singh, aged 79 years—the great grandson of Subedar Ram Singh. The other gurdwara is situated on a public plot of land belonging to the Sikh villagers.

In their structure both the gurdwaras are Assam-type houses with corrugated iron-sheet roofs. The old gurdwara is smaller and less spacious in comparison to the new gurdwara. Each of the gurdwaras possesses a well within its compound. The old gurdwara building consists of two rooms. In one room the Granth Sahib is kept and prayers are offered, and the adjacent small room serves as a store-room. The new gurdwara building has a hall of moderate size. This hall is used for prayers. The Granth Sahib is kept in the adjacent small room. As pointed out earlier, both the gurdwaras have their own flags, triangular in shape and yellow in colour, sermounted with the khanda, the Sikh religious symbol.

In each of the gurdwaras of the village, the Granth Sahib is placed on a wooden pedestal (asana)\(^3\)

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\(^3\) Asana in Assamese literally means 'a seat'. It also refers to a pedestal where a sacred book or an idol of a deity is kept.
covered by white silken or cotton clothes. The walls of both the gurdwaras behind the anna is are decorated with a number of sarudoia japis (traditional head-gear of the Assamese females). Articles like sarudoia japi, sarni (platter on stand) and gamocha (hand woven Assamese towel) are integral parts of Assamese culture. These articles are used by the Assamese people in a variety of formal and informal social functions and these have important social significance. In each of the gurdwaras a doba (large kettle - drum) is kept inside. The doba is beaten, whenever required, to call the Sikhs to the gurdwaras for congregation. It may be noted here that in each of the namghara of the Hindus, atleast one doba is kept which is beaten regularly in the morning and in the evening and also whenever necessary to call the Hindu villagers for congregation. In both the gurdwaras colourful conopies (chandratop) are tied beneath the ceiling over the Granth Sahib. Each of the gurdwaras possesses a harmonium and a dholok (drum). It has been observed that when festivals like Holi, Diwali, etc., are observed in the gurdwaras, the Sikh villagers sing religious hymns playing the harmonium and dholok.
Of the total 100 Sikh households of the village, 15 are associated with the old gurdwara and the remaining 85 households are associated with the new gurdwara. The members of the 15 Sikh households except one are the direct descendants of Subedar Ram Singh. The Sikhs of the remaining 85 households also claim their descent from Ram Singh which is of course a disputed issue. The division among the Sikh of Barkola in terms of their association with the gurdwaras has, however, little significance in their day-to-day life. It appears that the creation of these divisions on the part of the Sikhs of Barkola has resulted from the attempt to maintaining their separate identity as the direct descendants of Subedar Ram Singh from the other Sikhs of Barkola. Nevertheless, much of of the social intercourse, including marriage relations, frequently involves persons from the two divisions of the Sikhs.

Each of the gurdwaras of Barkola has a committee to look after the affairs of the gurdwaras. This committee is called gurdwara committee. Each committee is made up of adult male members chosen unanimously by the people of a particular group. All matters relating to the gurdwaras are the concern of the committee. Table 16 shows the age, occupation,
It is evident from table 16 that the old gurdwara committee consists of 4 members and the new gurdwara committee of 5 members. The age of the committee members varies between 25 years and 79 years. A gurdwara committee once constituted carries on for a number of years. New members might be included into the committee as and when someone leaves the committee, because of ill health or his death. The Sikh households associated with each of the gurdwaras monthly contribute a donation. The donation varies from Re. 1.00 to Rs. 11.00 depending on the economic condition of the households. However, the households are expected to contribute more during the festivals.

The president of the old gurdwara committee, Biyan Singh is also the granthi of the gurdwara. The granthi is 79 years old. Biyan Singh is one of the few elderly Sikhs of the village who knows about the Sikh rites and ceremonies. He can only manage a smattering of Gurmukhi but he can read the Granth Sahib with an amazing fluency. Biyan Singh is respected by all the Sikh and non-Sikh villagers of Parkola. He is a wealthy cultivator,
Table 16
Age, Occupation, Educational Background and Offices of the Members of Gurdvara Committees of Barkola.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Old Gurdvara Committee</th>
<th>New Gurdvara Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Office</td>
<td>Educational Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>1 Asst. Secy.</td>
<td>H.S.L.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>1 Secy.</td>
<td>H.S.L.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-55</td>
<td>1 Treasurer L.P.</td>
<td>Cultivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 and above</td>
<td>1 President L.P.</td>
<td>Cultivator (granthi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 4 5
whose sons and daughters are well educated. One of his sons is a college lecturer and another is a police inspector.

Hari Singh Gill is the president of the new gurdwara committee and is also the *granthi* of this gurdwara. He is 62 years old and is a cultivator. He also knows about the Sikh rites and ceremonies.

Everyday prayers are held in the morning and in the evening in the gurdwaras. The *granthis* recite the prayers. Not all the Sikhs attend such prayers regularly. It has been observed that only 3 to 10 persons attend the evening prayers regularly. Large number of Sikhs come to both the gurdwaras on Sikh festivals. Almost all the Sikhs attend the gurdwaras during the birth and death anniversaries of Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh and during the festival like Holi and Diwali. During such festivals the gurdwaras are decorated with garlands made of coloured papers, earthen lamps and candles.

The Sikh villagers pay their respect by saluting to the gurdwaras whenever they happen to pass alongside or reach the entrance of the gurdwaras. Both male and female Sikhs of Barkola visit the gurdwaras.
They put off their shoes when they enter into the gurdwaras. No Sikh can enter into the gurdwara without covering the head. Persons without turban enter into the gurdwara by covering their heads with a handkerchief or gamocha. The Sikhs of Barkola also allow non-Sikhs to enter into the gurdwaras. Women neither enter the gurdwara nor touch the Granth Sahib during menstrual period. It is tabooed to drink liquor or smoke inside the gurdwara. Even a person under the influence of intoxication is not allowed to enter into the gurdwara. There is no distinction in the sitting arrangement in the gurdwaras. The gurdwaras have mats and carpets for this purpose.

Before entering the gurdwara, the Sikhs take off shoes and after entering they kneel down before the Granth Sahib. Then they stand up with folded hands (hat jor kara), bow their heads and salute the congregation by uttering once in the following way:

Waheguru ji ka khalsa,
Waheguru ji ki fateh.

Though all the Sikh villagers of Barkola can utter this greeting fluently, only a few elderly Sikhs could explain the meaning of the greeting to this investigator.
The karah prasad (food offerings) is distributed among the congregation after the prayer. It is a kind of pudding prepared in an iron vessel from wheat flour (chujli), sugar and ghee mixed in equal quantities. Following the recitation of the thanksgiving short prayer, consisting of six stanzas, the man who officiates the function stirs the karah prasad with an iron sword. Before distributing it among the people, the officiating person set apart a small quantity from it for punj-piyare. Then it is distributed among the congregation.

In the morning and at night, earthen lamps (chaki) with ghee, prepared from the milk of cow, with wicks of cotton yarn placed inside the lamps or candles are lighted inside the gurdwaras. Joss sticks and incense are also burnt in the morning and in the evening.

The village gurdwaras are the nerve centre of socio-cultural life of the Sikhs of Barkola. The Sikh villagers' loyalty to their gurdwaras is very strong. They go to the gurdwaras not merely to offer prayers. The gurdwaras also provide them ample opportunities to meet one another, exchange views,
discuss matters relating to the developmental activities of the village, agriculture, marriage, politics and so on. The gurdwaras may also be considered to some extent as agencies of social control among the Sikhs of Barkola. Whenever the Sikhs assemble in the gurdwaras to offer prayers, they generally chat with one another before and after the prayers. The village gurdwaras are the centres of various activities like discourse, teaching, scriptural reading and story telling of the Sikh Gurus in which many of the Sikh villagers participate.

THE GRANTH SAHIB

Like other Sikhs, the Sikhs of Barkola also pay utmost respect to the Granth Sahib. They pronounce the name of the scripture as 'Granth Sahib'. They do not touch the Granth Sahib without taking bath, and washing hands and feet.

The Granth Sahib is daily opened in the gurdwaras in the morning and closed in the evening by the granthis. When the Granth Sahib is opened for the first time in the morning, the first stanza on the left page is read by the granthi. If the passage be in
continuation to that on the previous page, the page is
turned over and the granthi reads from the beginning
of the stanza on that page. That is the passage must
be read as a whole. A chowar (fly-flicker) is always
waved over the Granth Sahib by a villager deputed for
the purpose while it is recited. Except the Granth
Sahib, no other scriptures are kept in the wooden
pedestal in the gurdwaras.

According to the Sikh villagers of Barkola,
the Granth Sahib has life and it feels cold or warm
like any other living being. The villagers never refer
to the Granth Sahib as a book, because they say that
"a book has no life, but the Granth Sahib has". The
Granth Sahib is wrapped in a white cotton cloth in
summer and in a warm cloth in winter. During summer,
the villagers, one after another, use to fan the Granth
Sahib with a big fan. Apart from the warm cloth, a
small quilt is spread over the Granth Sahib during
winter. Three small cotton pillows with white satin
covers are placed on the pedestal. When the Granth Sahib
is opened, two pillows are placed on sider and the third
one in the front. An elderly Sikh villager narrated the
following incident to indicate that the Granth Sahib is
a living being.
Few years back, one winter evening after closing the Granth Sahib, the granthi of one of the gurdwaras forgot to cover the Granth Sahib. While sleeping, at midnight suddenly the granthi awoke and remembered that he had left the Granth Sahib uncovered. Immediately he took a bath and went to the gurdwara to cover the Granth Sahib. Reaching the gurdwara, he was surprised to find that the Granth Sahib was properly wrapped with a warm cloth. This is supposed to be done by the Granth Sahib to protect itself from cold.

During the rituals relating to birth, marriage and other functions such as after the completion of the construction of a house, getting a job, etc., some villagers sometimes carry the Granth Sahib from the gurdwara to their homes. When the Granth Sahib is carried from gurdwara to the house of somebody, a person walks alongside all the way sprinkling water from a small metal-pot (ghot) to purify the path through which the Granth Sahib is carried, followed by another person carrying the Granth Sahib on his head on a cot. And, another carries a chowar in his right hand fanning the Granth Sahib. All these three persons go along bare foot.
The cotton clothes (1.35 cm. x 1.35 cm. in size) with which the Granth Sahib is covered, is generally offered by the Sikh villagers. Such clothes are offered by the Sikhs following the weekly reciting-session (saptahik path) of the Granth Sahib. Such clothes are also offered following an akhand path (non-stop recitation) by the Sikhs.

To the Sikhs of Bakhola, the Granth Sahib is the most sacred scripture. To them the Granth Sahib is animate. The Vaishnavas (the followers of Vaishnavism founded by Sankardeva) of Assam also consider the chief works of Sankardeva as an object of worship. Like the Sikhs treating the Granth Sahib as the Guru and equating it to the Guru, the Vaishnavas of Assam have also made the chief works of Sankardeva (Kirtan, Dasa or Bhagavata and Guwahati) and Madhavdeva (Bhakti Ratnavali and Nam Gosa) the objects of worship. The Vaishnavas also consider these chief works standing for these two Gurus. The kirtan ghar or namghar, the Assamese Vaishnava temple, is an ordinary house having rectangular space like the inside of a Sikh gurdwara and in it the object of worship is not an idol but a large pedestal containing one or more of the works of the Gurus. This is called Guru asana (the seat of the Guru) and it has striking
parallel in the worship of the Granth Sahib.

In Sikhism, God is known as Waheguru, the wonderful Lord. The Sikhs of Bokhila refer to their supreme Being as Waheguru. But in their day-to-day life, they also refer to their God by the name of Bhagaban, very much like their Assamese Hindu neighbours. When asked the Sikh villagers to describe their God, most of them describe God in the following manner:

He is the epitome of all virtues; He is Karta-purukh (creator of all things); Sayambhu (shelf created, self existent); Ojoni-akal (not subject to birth or death); Ananta (infinite); He is Sat (pure), all-knowing, all-giver, all-adorable, all-pervading, omnipotent and omniscient; He is Satnam (the eternal and absolute truth); He is an anuvab (inner feeling); He is the father of all created beings; He is not subject to time; He lives inside human bodies forming part of the atma (soul); He is Jagannath (Lord of the universe); He sends rain and sunshine. Most of the descriptions of God given
by the Sikh villagers fit in well with the definition of God given in their religion. Moreover, many of the descriptions of God of the villagers also fit in well with those given by the Hindu villagers of Barkola. The granthi of the old gurdwara of Barkola has said: God has been described in the Mool Mantra (basic creed) of Sikhism. Ram Singh of Barkola, aged 25 years, has told this investigator that their God is invisible, untouchable and He is eternal. There are also a few middle-aged Sikh villagers at Barkola, who do not seem to know much about God. But none among the Assamese Sikhs of Barkola deny the existence of God. The Sikh villagers invariably pronounce the name of God as Waheguru, Guru or Bhagaban, before taking to ploughing, sowing, harvesting, constructing a house, etc. The Sikh students have told this investigator that they pronounce the name of Waheguru in the examination hall before answering the scripts.

The Sikh villagers of Barkola refer to the name of God as Guru. When asked the villagers about the attributes of a Guru, most of the villagers pointed out the attributes similar to those of God. The common notion of the Sikh villagers about their Gurus is that,
they are the adorable Supermen who lead man on to good life-ways and help them attain salvation. A Sikh villager, Bijooy Singh, aged 35 years, a shopkeeper, has said that a Guru is not an *avatar* (incarnation) of God. He is the messenger of God who asks to pray God. It has been observed that most of the middle aged and elderly Sikh villagers of Barkola know that there are ten Sikh Gurus, but not all of them know the names of all the Gurus. They only know the names of the first, fourth, ninth and the tenth Gurus, i.e., Guru Nanak, Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh, respectively. Guru Nanak is known to them as the founder of Sikhism. Some of the villagers are also aware of the historical fact that Guru Nanak visited Assam. They know about Guru Tegh Bahadur, because he established the gurdwara at Dhubri. Most of the Sikh villagers have visited the gurdwara, which they consider as a pilgrimage. They know about Guru Arjan, who founded the Sri Akal Takht Sahib (Golden Temple or Swarup Mandir) in Amritsar. Guru Gobind Singh is known to the villagers for his enterprising heroic deeds. All the students, including the Sikhs and non-Sikhs of Guru Nanak I.P. School, know the names of the ten Gurus. One of their teachers, who hails from Punjab, has narrated to them about the
Sikh Gurus. However, the educated Sikhs of Barkola by and large have a fair knowledge about the Gurus.

Prayer is an indispensable part of the Sikh religion. The Sikh prayers are both personal and congregational. The Sikh villagers of Barkola offer four different types of prayers: *nitnam* (daily prayer), *akhand path*, *khola path* (free recitation) and *saptahik path* (weekly recitation). According to the Sikh villagers the hymns to be recited at each of these prayers have been prescribed by the Sikh Gurus. The prayers consist of repetition of the name of God and chanting hymns in His praise. Those who are baptised in Sikhism are expected to recite daily prayers three times a day, in the early morning, in the evening and at night before going to bed. At Barkola among the Sikhs, there are only 12 adult male Sikhs, who perform the prescribed daily prayers regularly.

On occasions like marriage and also sometimes at birth, success in examination, getting a job, etc., the villagers perform *akhand path*. Akhand path is held in both the gurdwaras and at the residences of the desiring parties. During *akhand path*, the Granth Sahib is recited non-stop from the first page to the last page.
within 48 hours. Such recitations are undertaken by adult-male Sikhs one after another. Khola path or free recitation is generally performed by a single person. During khola path, complete recitation of the Granth Sahib is completed by a person within a period which may vary from seven days to one month or even more. The recitation of the Granth Sahib during khola path is not continuous. Saptahik path is also organized among the Sikhs of Barkola. Like akhand path and khola path, saptahik path is also organized on the occasions like birth, marriage, and so on.

The Sikh villagers of Barkola put emphasis on pilgrimage. To them, there are three principal Sikh pilgrimages which they feel that they should visit as and when possible. These three pilgrimage-centres are Gurdwara Mataji of Chaparmukh, Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahibji of Dhubri and the Golden Temple of Amritsar. Both the granthis of two gurdwaras and a few educated Sikhs of Barkola have informed that the Sikhs in general consider the four takhts (thrones) as the four places of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. The Sikh villagers of Barkola frequently go to visit the gurdwara of Chaparmukh. Every year during the death anniversary
of Guru Tegh Bahadur, groups of Barkola Sikhs pay homage to the Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahibji of Dhubri. This investigator has met at Barkola 10 adult male Sikhs, who had visited the Golden Temple of Amritsar. Whenever a Sikh from the village determines on visiting the Golden Temple, the other Sikh villagers give him money to buy some articles like kara, kangha, kirpan, lithographed pictures of the Golden Temple and the Gurus. Any Sikh villager of Barkola, who visits Amritsar, generally brings such articles for distributing among the Sikh villagers. A large number of Sikh villagers of Barkola have also visited the Kamakhya temple situated in Guwahati. The villagers consider the Kamakhya temple as an important place to visit, because the temple was also visited by Guru Tegh Bahadur. They have also pointed out that the descendants of the propitiatory priest who had accompanied Guru Tegh Bahadur live at Kamakhya. This priest is said to have come from Punjab and was a Sikh. However, in due course of time the descendants of the priest had adopted Hinduism and became Assamese.

In the 1960s, the satradhikar (the head of a Vaishnavite monastery) of Kamalabari satra (a Vaishnavite

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4 Kamalabari is situated on the north bank of Brahmaputra river in Jorhat district, Assam.
religious institution of Assam) paid a visit to Phulaguri, a nearby village of Barkola. On hearing that the satradhikar had come to Phulaguri, a batch of 30 elderly male Sikhs from Barkola went to Phulaguri to pay their respects to the satradhikar. As a mark of their respect, they also offered to the satradhikar an endi wrapper (a warm cloth, made indigenously from the yarn of endi cocoon), a gamocha, a bunch of betel nut and some betel leaves. The satradhikar also invited the Sikhs to visit the satra at Kamalabari. Accordingly, 10 elderly male Sikhs from Barkola went to Kamalabari. On returning, these Sikhs told their fellow villagers about how they were well received by the satradhikar during their visit to the satra of Kamalabari. Even to this day, these elderly Sikh villagers, who had visited Kamalabari, refer to their visit as a pilgrimage to Kamalabari satra and feel proud of it. Sri Pitambar Goswami, the satradhikar of Garmur, another Vaishnavite monastery situated at Majuli in Sibsagar district, Assam, had visited Barkola in 1970. He had also visited the namghars and the gurdwaras of the village and addressed a largely attended public meeting of the Barkola villagers.
SIKH RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND OBSERVANCES

Generally all the Sikh villagers lay stress on wearing kangha, kara, kachha, kirpan, kesh and sporting pagari (turban) by the males. However, all the Sikhs of Barkola do not follow this practice strictly. Only 6 elderly male Sikhs of Barkola regularly wear kachha, while other grown up boys and adult males wear general type of underwear. The two granthis regularly carry kirpans of 6 inches in length. Most of the male Assamese Sikhs keep a special kind of comb on which a small symbolic sword is inscribed and is kept under the bun of hair. There have been a few instances among the Sikhs of Barkola of trimming hair and shaving beard. One of the Sikhs who has trimmed his hair and beard has, however, regrown his hair and beard. A person who trims his hair or shaves is known as patit (apostate) among the Assamese Sikhs. Generally, a Sikh who does not observe Sikh religious taboo is considered a patit by the villagers. The Sikh villagers are of the opinion that, a patit is a person with whom other villagers should not keep any social contact. However, the practice seems to be in abeyance.

The educated and young Sikhs of Barkola tie their beard close to their face using hair fixers. They trim their beard at home with small scissors. The little girls among the Assamese Sikhs keep short hair. The Sikh villagers are of the opinion that such girls are too young to take care of their hair and with a view to keeping their hair clean and not allowing to develop lice, their hair is cut short. The Sikh womenfolk of Barkola invariably keep long hair.

The male Sikhs of Barkola wear kara on their right wrist. Only one male among them is found with the kara on his left wrist. Almost all the Assamese Sikh females wear kara. However, most of the unmarried Sikh girls of the village do not wear kara. Among the villagers, a kara is put on the hand of a child immediately after birth.

To the Sikh villagers of Barkola the wearing of pancha-kakar (five K's) is dependent on age. The children are expected only to keep long hair and wear the bangles. The wearing of kachha, kirpan and kangha is expected only after the initiation ceremony. Male and female Sikh villagers immediately before marriage

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6 See pp. 192-194.
go through the initiation ceremony. Once a person is initiated he or she is supposed to maintain five symbols of Sikhism throughout his life. It has been gathered that all the married Sikhs of Barkola have gone through the Sikh initiation ceremony. According to the Sikh villagers, if a person is not initiated before marriage, during marriage he or she will have to take a vow in front of the Granth Sahib to go through the initiation ceremony at the earliest possible opportunity following marriage. Those married males, who have gone through initiation ceremony, do not keep their head uncovered. While at homes, even when do not wearing turbans, such males cover their heads with gamochas. In 1982, a married male Sikh of Barkola was fined by the gurdwara committee for moving about without covering his head.

Jashobant Singh, aged 35 years, is a shopkeeper of the village. He is married and has two daughters. He used to move about the village without covering his head. The village Sikh elders asked him not to move the way he went along since such practice is considered irreligious. But Jashobant Singh turned a deaf ear to the Sikh elders. Finally, one day, the new gurdwara committee summoned Jashobant Singh (Jashobant Singh belongs to...
the new gurdwara of the village. The members of the committee in presence of Jashobant Singh discussed the matter in the gurdwara. The committee members opined that the act of Jashobant Singh of moving about without covering his head was a breach of Sikh religious taboo. Hence he was fined an amount of Rs. 50.00 by the committee. Jashobant Singh paid the fine to the committee. Following this, for a brief period Jashobant Singh used to cover his head while moving about. But after few months he again started moving about without covering his head. During the field work, this investigator also noticed him on several occasions moving about without covering his head. No further action has been taken by the gurdwara committee on Jashobant Singh, it gathered. □

Taking tobacco, smoking and drinking liquor are considered by the Sikhs as religious offences. A Sikh, they say, strictly supposed not to take tobacco and drink liquor, especially after going through the initiation ceremony. None of the two shops belonging to the Sikhs of Barkola sell cigarettes and bidis. The shop owned by Bijoy Singh has a small signboard with the writing in Assamese that selling and smoking of cigarettes and bidis are tabooed in the Sikh religion (Sikh dharmat bidi cigarette bikri kara aru khowa nishedh).
BELIEFS IN HINDU GODS AND GODDESSES

The Sikhs of Barkola have been in contact with the neighbouring Hindus since long back. Such contact has facilitated the percolation of a number of Hindu beliefs and customs into the Barkola Sikh society. Besides, the Assamese Sikhs have been, since long back, establishing marriage relations with the Hindus. We have already mentioned that the first Sikh settler of Barkola, Subedar Ram Singh, married two Assamese women. An analysis of the community background of total 205 married Assamese Sikh women (including the widows), distributed through 100 Sikh households of Barkola, shows that 45.85 per cent of the married women were Assamese Hindus before their marriage. Thus, the marriage among the Sikhs has been one of the significant factors in paving the ways for the percolation of Hindu beliefs and customs into the Sikh households. Besides, they live in face-to-face relations with the Assamese Hindus in the village.

Among the Hindu gods and goddesses, the Sikhs worship mainly Ai-bhagabati (goddess of pox), Krishna

(the eighth incarnation of Hindu god Vishnu), Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) and Siva (god of prosperity and destruction).

Al-bhagabati, popularly known as Ai, is believed to be the cause of pox among the villagers of Barkola. When any member of a family suffers from pox, he or she is kept in segregation in a separate room. The person including other members of the family observe taboos with regard to certain food like fish and meat. On an uneven date from the date of occurring pox, a few girls who have not attained puberty from the neighbouring households are invited to worship the deity. Ai is worshipped by offering uncooked food like soaked gram, green gram, etc., on the forepart of a plantain leaf. During worship, ai-name (the songs sung to appease the goddess) are sung by the gathering. Among the Assamese Hindu also, the goddess of pox, Ai, is propitiated in a similar fashion. Lord Krishna is believed in by the Sikhs and they pay respect to him. The Sikhs of the village, however, do not worship Krishna but abstain from tilling and other agricultural works on the Janmastami day (the birth day of Krishna, which is observed by the Hindus in the month of Bhada). Goddess Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, is also revered and worshipped by the Assamese
Sikhs. On the night of full-moon day of Kati (October-November), the Hindus worship goddess Lakshmi. In the same manner the Sikhs of Barkola also worship the goddess by ritual offerings consisting of soaked gram, green gram, ginger, coconut, etc., with various fruits and lighting clay-lamps on the forepart of plantain leaf. Such clay-lamps are placed by the Sikhs on the day of the worship of the goddess in the paddy fields, granaries, cowsheds, courtyard and even outside the dwelling-houses. On this day, the married Assamese Sikh girls observe fasting all day long. Lord Siva is also referred to by the Sikhs as Burahgosain (the old god) as their Hindu neighbours do. They sometimes make offerings to Siva to get back a lost cattle. Such offerings consisting of banana, unboiled milk, soaked gram and green gram, etc., are offered by the Sikhs in the village shrine of Siva.

Almost all the Sikh villagers of Barkola know the stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana - the two great Hindu epics. In the same manner they also know about gods and goddesses like Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman et al.

It has been observed that most of the Sikh villagers of Barkola, both male and female, can sing Assamese devotional songs as are generally sung by the
Assamese Vaishnavas. In almost all the Sikh households of Barkola, there are small plinths in one of the corners of courtyard in which a sacred basil (tulasī) plant is carefully planted. The Hindus, especially during the whole month of Kati (October-November), light a clay lamp by the side of the sacred basil plant. The Assamese Sikhs also follow this custom throughout the month of Kati. The Sikhs of Barkola do not consider it irreligious to believe in Hindu gods and goddesses and to show respect to Hindu shrines, temples, namghars or kirtan ghars.

PREVALENCE OF FOLK BELIEFS

The Assamese folk cultural traditions have exercised an appreciable influence on the Assamese Sikhs. Like the Assamese people they too believe in a number of benevolent and malevolent spirits (deo or hhut). They have a clear-cut idea about the sex, appearance, nature and abode of the spirits and demons. All the villagers of Barkola including the Sikhs believe that a large number of spirits and demons reside in different places of the village like the morass land near the village, the tanks within the village, in the trees allegedly planted by Subedar Ram Singh and in some other big trees (wood apple,
peepal, etc.) near the Siva shrine of the village. It is believed by the villagers that such demons and spirits are more harmful to pregnant women. It has been found that the Sikh villagers like other people of the village, approach the village bej (folk medicine man) for tabij (talisman), and dol-phohati (knotted-thread believed to have magical power, given by the folk medicine man) to protect their pregnant women from spirits and demons. There are two Koch medicine men at Barkola.

Like the Hindu neighbours, the Assamese Sikhs also observe various taboos connected with agriculture. During ambubashi, (a period in the month of Ahor) it is believed that the earth attains menstruation. The Sikh cultivators, like other cultivators of the village, do not till land and abstain from any other agricultural activities during ambubashi. On the days of ekadasi (the 11th day of the lunar half of the month), sankranti (the last day of Assamese calendar month) and amabashya (the day of conjunction of the sun and the moon) the cultivators, including the Sikhs refrain from tilling the land. One comes across the prevalence of a large number of folk beliefs and customs concerning cattle, plant, cosmic body, sex, virtue, auspicious day, luck,
house building, food, etc., in rural Assamese society. Such beliefs and practices are also prevalent among the Sikhs of Barkola.

FESTIVALS

The Barkola Sikhs observe a number of festivals. Some of the festivals are observed by the Sikhs only and some others are celebrated both by the Sikhs and Hindu villagers.

To the Sikh villagers of Barkola, their Gurupurbs are the most important festivals. Gurupurb is the anniversary of the birth or death of a Guru. They celebrate the birth days of Guru Nanak on the full moon day of Kati (October-November) and Guru Gobind Singh in the month of Puh (December-January), the martyrdom of Guru Arjan in the month of Kati (October-November) and Guru Tegh Bahadur in the month of Aghon (November-December). They also observe Baisakhi, one of the great Sikh festivals, corresponding to Assamese calendar month Bohag (April-May).

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8 For details of such beliefs, see Rajkhova 1973.
All the Gurupurbs are celebrated in the gurdwaras of the village. Two days before each of the purbs akhand path is organised in the gurdwaras. During the whole day of akhand path the Sikh villagers visit the gurdwaras at different hours of the day and join the prayer. On the day of the festival, two processions are taken out from the two gurdwaras by the Sikh villagers. All the male Sikh villagers and mostly the Sikh girls join the processions. Each of the processions is lead by an elderly male Sikh villager who carries the Granth Sahib on his head on a pedestal held aloft. Whenever possible, a truck is hired to carry the Granth Sahib during the procession. The Sikhs, who join the processions raise slogans like 'Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki fateh'; 'Bole so nihal, sat sri akal' (whosoever speaks 'God is true' will ever be happy), etc. Both the processions from the two gurdwaras proceed to Guru Nanak Library, join there and all the Sikhs in one procession move about through the main lanes and bylanes of the village. Afterwards, the procession bifurcates and the Sikhs proceed to their respective gurdwaras, where they seat and take roti and vegetable curry. In the evening, Janam-sakhis are read by the granthis of the gurdwaras, which is mostly
attended by the male Sikhs. During the Gurupurbs, the gurdwaras are decorated with coloured papers and flowers. In the evening, the gurdwaras are illuminated with candles and clay lamps. The Sikh villagers also illuminate their houses with candles and earthen lamps during the Gurupurbs.

On the day of Baisakhi also processions are taken out from the village gurdwaras. The Granth Sahib is also taken out in the procession. During this festival 5 younger male Sikhs are selected by the villagers to represent the panj piyare. These men who wear pajamas and loose shirts of yellow colour, kachha, kangha, kirpan and kara, lead the procession. During this festival also the gurdwaras are illuminated and prayers are also held there.

During the whole month of Bhada (August-September), the Sikh villagers assemble in the gurdwaras in the evenings, where the granthis read the janam-sakhis. They consider the month of Bhada as a sacred month. But none can explain, why this month is a sacred month. It may be pointed out here that the Assamese Vaishnavites also consider the month of Bhada as sacred because on the 9th day of Bhada, 1568 A.D., Sankardeva, the founder
of Assamese Vaishnavism, and on the 26th day of Bhada, 1596 A.D., his principal disciple Madhabdeva died. During this month, the Assamese Vaishnavites in their namghara and kirtanghara recite the devotional songs composed by Sankardeva and Madhabdeva. The Hindus and the Vaishnavite Tiwas of Barkola village also follow this practice.

The other two festivals – Diwali and Holi are celebrated by the Sikhs of Barkola with much enthusiasm. Diwali is celebrated in the month of Kati (October–November) and Holi is celebrated in the month of Phagun (February–March). These two festivals are also celebrated by the Hindus in general. The Hindus of Barkola also observe these two festivals. During the festival of Diwali, like their Hindu neighbours, each Sikh household is decorated with clay lamps, which are placed on split bamboo inserted horizontally into the trunks of two banana plants placed vertically on two sides of the entrance of the houses. During Holi, the Sikhs sprinkle coloured water on one another. During both these festivals, the gurdwaras of the village are illuminated with candles and clay lamps. In the evening during these two festivals, the Sikhs assemble in the village gurdwaras and the Granth Sahib is recited by the granthis.
Bihu is the national festival of Assam. It is celebrated all over the state by the Assamese people with varying rituals and customs. There are three Bihus: Bohag Bihu, Magh Bihu and Kati Bihu. Bohag Bihu, the most popular and colourful of the three, is celebrated from the last day of Chot through the first 7 days of Bohag (mid-April). Bohag Bihu is also called Rongali Bihu because of its association with merry making through singing and dancing. The Sikhs of Barkola also, like their Assamese neighbours, celebrate Bihu with much enthusiasm. Like their Assamese neighbours, the Sikh womenfolk also prepare varieties of cakes to entertain guests during the festival. Like the Assamese women, the Sikh women of Barkola also present home made gamocha known as bihuwan to relatives and friends, especially prepared for Bohag Bihu. The Sikh villagers, like their Assamese neighbours celebrate the first day of Bohag Bihu as Garu Bihu. On this day, they smear paste of turmeric and black-gram and mustard oil on the body, hooves and horns of the cattle giving them a wash in the nearby river. The Sikh boys in small groups visit the households singing Bihu songs and playing drums (dhols), bamboo clappers (takas) and small cymbals (tala) during
Bohag Bihu. Magh Bihu is celebrated in the middle of winter after the harvesting with bonfires, social gatherings and feasts. Magh Bihu is also known as Bhogali Bihu (enjoyment through feasting). Kati Bihu is the most insignificant of the three Bihus. It is celebrated from the last day of Ahin (September–October) to the first day of Kati (mid-October). Kati Bihu is also known as Kangali Bihu (literally 'the poor Bihu'). In this Bihu clay lamps are lighted near newly planted sacred basil plant (*Ocimum sanctum*) in the corner of the courtyard near the granary and in the paddy fields. The Sikhs of Barkola like their Assamese neighbours also lit clay lamps in Kati Bihu. During each Bihu in the evening the Sikhs assemble in the gurdwaras and the Granth Sahib is recited by the granthis.

RITES OF PASSAGE

The Sikhs of Barkola observe various rites and ceremonies connected with birth, initiation, marriage and death. In this regard one notices considerable impact of the Assamese Hindu folk beliefs and customs.

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9 For details of beliefs, rites and ceremonies connected with pregnancy, child birth, marriage and death among the Assamese Hindus, see Bardoloi 1983.
(a) Birth

A parturiant mother has a number of restrictions regarding diet, movement and work. She does not take pulse dish, chilli or pickles. She is not expected either to visit the cremation ground or to see a dead body. An expectant mother is tabooed of slaughtering any animal.

When the labour pain starts, the pregnant woman retires to her room. She is asked to sit on a cot covered with a cloth. A midwife is called whenever necessary during this period. Otherwise elderly and experienced women of the village attend a pregnant woman. Following the birth of the baby, the mother cuts the umbilical chord with a sharp bamboo split. The elderly women present during this time bathe the baby with tepid water and smear mustard oil. The baby is wrapped with a piece of clean but used cloth. Then a few drops of honey is placed on the mouth of the newborn. Generally, a person with virtue is asked to give the honey to the baby. The Sikh villagers believe that the child will be like the one who gives him or her honey. The baby is given mother's milk following a few hours of birth. After finishing with birth, generally
the mother herself buries the after birth by a rubbish heap. The baby is taken out of the house following four days of birth and the baby is held for a while facing the sun. This custom is called bajboloi-dowa.

The first ceremony in an Assamese Sikh baby's life is namkaran (naming) held following 11th or 13th day of birth. During the namkaran ceremony, the mother takes the baby to the village gurdwara accompanied by family members, relatives, and neighbours. The granthi of the gurdwara recites Japji Sahib from the Granth Sahib and pours a small quantity of kecha amrit (a fluid prepared by adding batacha, a kind of sugar cake, to water kept in an iron bowl) into the eyes and ears of the newborn baby. The falling of a few drops of kecha amrit on the ground, is believed to be a sign of hazardous future of the baby by the Assamese Sikhs. Therefore, they take much care, so that not a single drop of kecha amrit falls on the ground. Then the mother drinks kecha amrit. After that the granthi opens the Granth Sahib at random. The child is named beginning with the first letter of the first word on the top of the left page of the Granth Sahib. All the persons present during the naming ceremony approve the name by rejoicing. Then the baby is taken back home and all the
persons attending the ceremony are entertained.

Among the Sikhs of Barkola like the Sikhs in general, the suffix 'Singh' is added to the first name of a male and 'Kaur' to a female. The nicknames among the Sikhs of Barkola are very much similar to those given by their Hindu neighbours. Some common nicknames for males are Bhatti (brother), Kalia (the black one), Dhan (wealth), Chandan (sandal wood) and so on. Among the females some common nicknames are Bhatti (sister), Aiti or Aljani or Majani (damsel) and so on. Some names like Amarjit, Darshan, Dhyan, Gyan, Purna, Phul, etc., are the common names for both males and females.\(^\text{10}\)

(b) Initiation Ceremony

Among the Barkola Sikhs the initiation ceremony is generally performed before marriage. To the villagers, a person who has gone through the initiation ceremony is a perfect Sikh. The initiation ceremony is also performed to sanctify a patit (apostate) among the Sikh villagers. Such ceremony is also performed in the

\(^{10}\) Some names of the Sikh villagers are given in Appendix IV.
case of the non-Sikh girls, married to the Assamese Sikh males after the marriage.

The initiation ceremony performed among the Sikhs of Barkola either to sanctify an apostate or to convert a non-Sikh is the same and is invariably held in the village gurdwara. For its performance a group of pani piyare is selected by the villagers. The persons who constitute the group wear the 5 symbols of Sikhism and seat with their left knees up and the right knees on the ground round the iron vessel in which they prepare the amrit by adding batacha to water, stirring the water with a khanda. During the ceremony, the granthi recites passages from the Granth Sahib. One of the 5 piyare designated takes out amrit from the vessel and gives it to the person to be initiated, sanctified or converted. The sanctified person takes vows to wear the 5 Sikh symbols; not to eat halal (the slow process of slaughtering animal favoured by the Muslims) meat; not to commit adultery; and not to take any intoxicating object. The vows are pronounced loudly, so that the congregation can hear it.

In 1968, a young male Sikh of Barkola trimmed his hair and saved his beard. This Sikh was asked by
his co-villagers to regrow his hair and beard and to wear a turban. But the young Sikh turned a deaf ear to the villagers. Finally, the villagers were successful in persuading him to go to the gurdwara and to go through an initiation ceremony. This was possible because this Sikh was in the need of a job and an elderly Sikh promised him to help in getting a job, provided he regrows his hair and beard.

The non-Sikh girls married by the Sikh villagers are taken to the gurdwara, following the marriage by their husbands and they are made to receive anrit in the manner mentioned earlier. Such women are given Sikh names on the same occasion by following the procedure of naming prevalent among the Assamese Sikhs.

(c) Marriage

Marriage customs among the Sikhs of Barkola have many similarities to those prevalent among their Hindu neighbours. A Sikh marriage differs from a Hindu marriage only in minor details. The most significant difference is that the Sikhs recite verses from the Granth Sahib to perform a marriage. A Sikh bridegroom goes to the bride's house accompanied by his friends and
relatives. The wedding takes place at the bride's house at night. After the bridegroom has taken seat in front of the Granth Sahib, kept on a pedestal, the bride is taken out of the house and made to seat on the left of the bridegroom. A *granthi*, who sits near the Granth Sahib gives a sermon to the bride and the groom about the happy conjugal life. Then the *granthi* recites marriage hymns from the Granth Sahib, following which an elderly person, usually the father of the bride, ties a knot of the ends of the wrappers worn by the bride and the groom. Like the Assamese Hindus, this knot is also called *lagun gathi* (the knot of the auspicious moment) by the Assamese Sikhs. The groom with his bride following him circumambulate the Granth Sahib four times. Prior to the circumambulation, the groom recites 4 stanzas of *layan* (nuptial songs composed by the fourth Sikh Guru Ram Das). Simultaneously the *granthi* recites the Granth Sahib. The elderly person who ties the knot of the wrappers places the right hand of the bride on the right hand of the groom towards the end of the marriage ceremony.

(d) Death

The Sikhs of Barkula perform different ceremonies on the occasion of death. The corpse is
cremated by the Sikh villagers. However, dead body of the infants are buried. Immediately following a death, the dead body is covered with a clean piece of white cloth. Before cremation, the corpse is bathed with water mixing with leaves of sacred basil, dog grass and turmeric paste. Then the dead body is dressed in new clothes including a white turban and other four symbols of Sikhism, i.e., kara, kangha, kachha and kirpan. Dead bodies of the females are also dressed after bath with newmekhlaobadar and blouse and adorned with kara, kangha and kirpan. If a woman dies leaving her husband, her forehead and the parting of hair is decorated with vermillion. Except the nose-gear (nakphul), all other ornaments are taken out of the dead body of a woman. The dead body is carried to the cremation ground on a bamboo bier. The bier is generally carried by four close male relatives of the deceased. The dead body is cremated on a pyre made of fire-wood. The corpse is placed on the pyre facing the head towards east. Generally the eldest son of the deceased lits the pyre. At the time of lighting fire to the pyre, generally the Sikhs who attend the cremation recite the ardas. When the cremation is over, the people again recite the ardas. The ashes and the charred bones are gathered on the same day and are
immersed in the nearby river. It is gathered that in the
recent past a few Sikhs of Barkola went to Hardwar to
immerse in the Ganges the charred bone of their
deceaseds.

Four different post mortuary rites are
observed by the Sikhs of Barkola on the 4th, 10th, 13th
and 14th days following a death. On the sixth month
following a death and also annually they observe death
ceremonies. On the 4th day, the persons who attend
the cremation are invited and entertained with curd.
On this day, a wooden pedestal is constructed in the
house of the deceased to keep the Granth Sahib inside a
room. The granthi recites the Granth Sahib on this
occasion. This ceremony is called oshatha by the Sikh
villagers. The Granth Sahib is generally kept in the
deceased’s home till the tenth day following a death.
On the tenth day another ceremony is performed on the
household of the deceased. During this ceremony also,
the persons who attend the cremation are entertained
with flat rice (ghira), milk and jaggery. Following
this ceremony the Granth Sahib is taken back to the
gurdwara.
On the 13th day following a death, the Sikhs observe another ceremony known as karam. During this ceremony the family members of the deceased and the villagers are invited to attend a prayer in the morning. The congregation is entertained with light refreshment. On the 14th day a feast is arranged with meat and fish dishes in the house of the deceased in which the villagers are invited. This ceremony is known as mashohuwoni (touching of fish). From this day only, the members of the deceased family can take fish, meat and egg. During the post mortuary ceremonies held in the 6th month and one year following a death, the Granth Sahib is recited in the deceased's house. On such occasions fellow villagers are invited and entertained with light refreshment.

So far some aspects of the religious life of the Sikhs of Barkola have been touched upon. The preceding discussion implies that the religious life of the Sikhs villagers is broadly guided by the principles of Sikh religion. However, some of these principles appear to be their own interpretation of the principles of Sikh religion of the villagers. Elements of both Hinduism and indigenous folk cultural beliefs
and practices have appreciable influence on the religious life of the Sikhs of Barkola. In the village context it is the gurdwara centering which their religious life continues. Thus, the Sikhs of Barkola have been able to maintain their identity largely through their religious organizations.

The situation obtaining among the Sikhs of Barkola is, by and large, similar to that of the Sikhs of Daleke, a small village, situated at a distance of nearly 8 km. from Tarn Taran in Amritsar district in Punjab which is known as the "cradle of Sikhism". Singh (1961 : 191-219) has observed considerable impact of different religions on the Sikhs of Daleke. These Sikhs also worship different tribal and Hindu gods and goddesses and Muslim pirs and faqirs.