

FUNCTIONS, DUTIES AND QUALIFICATIONS OF A GRANTHI.

By Dr. K.S Dhillon, M.A. (Boston)
Director of Religious Affairs
Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar, Medford, USA.

For posting on Gurdwara Website: www.gurunanakdarbar.net

This article provides an understanding of the duties, functions and qualifications of a *Granthi* (Sikh Priest) in accordance with the *Gurmat Rehat Maryada – Sansthi Jeewan* Section (Spiritual Code of Conduct - Institutional Aspects) issued by the Akaal Takhat. (The Supreme Authority of the Sikhs)

1.0 Broad Functions.

The word *Granthi* comes from *Granth* (the Holy Scripture). So in the very basic sense, a *Granthi* deals with a variety of aspects of the *Granth* – its Parkash (installation every morning at dawn), Semapti (its closure at dusk), Paath (its reading, rendering, its interpretation, its teaching, and the propagation of its messages to the Sangat (congregation.)). He/She is in attendance to the *Granth* at all times.

A *Granthi* is also a spiritual leader. He /She leads congregation in prayer, performs the Kirten (musical rendition of the Scriptures), Katha (Discourses), Ardas (Prayers), and inspires and provides spiritual direction and upliftment to the Sangat (congregation).

A *Granthi* is also a religious minister. He/She performs all the Sikh ceremonies from birth, baptism and death.

A *Granthi* is a spiritual counselor. He/She provides spiritual counseling to individuals and families.

Finally, a *Granthi* is a teacher and role model. He/She is expected to spend a good deal of time teaching children, young adults and adults. He/She is to teach Kirten (spiritual music), Tabla (spiritual rhythms) Gurbani (poetry of the scriptures) and Punjabi (the language of the Holy Books).

2.0 Duties.

In accordance with the above functions, a *Granthi* typically performs the following duties at a Gurdwara.

- A. Conduct weekly Sunday *Diwans*. (Prayer Meetings). The Sunday Diwan Service typically begins at 9 am and concludes at about 2 pm. The *Granthi* recites Banees from the *Granth Sahib* such as the Amrit *Banees* and Sukhmani *Sahib*. The recitation of these prayers is followed typically by two hours of Gurmat Kirten during which he/she renders verses from the Holy Book in the Original Ragas, Taalas and Musical Scores in which the Scripture is composed. The *Granthi* uses a musical instrument such as a harmonium,

- Mandolin, Sitar or Tanpura accompanied by a Tabla (rhythm) player to do the Kirten.
- B. Gurmat Katha This is typically a half hour sermon cum discourse, which is based on the messages of the Holy Guru Granth Sahib.
 - C. Conduct Sanskars such as: Birth Ceremonies, Engagement Prayers, Wedding Ceremonies, Baptism (Amrit Sanchaar), Funerals, Ardas and other blessings.
 - D. Conduct Gurbani classes. These are Scripture study classes for adults and young adults.
 - E. Conduct Kirten (Spiritual Music) and Tabla (Spiritual Rhythm) classes. These classes provide instruction in Gurmat Kirten, Sangeet, Vocal and Tabla in order to allow members of the Sikh faith to appreciate the true nature of the content and style of the Scripture.
 - F. Conduct Punjabi Classes. These classes allow children to learn the Punjabi Language as it is applied in the Scriptures.
 - G. Conduct the Parkash (Opening of the Holy Book) and Semapti (closing) prayers daily. The Prakash is to be done at dawn with recital of Japji Sahib and Semapti at dusk with recital of Rehras and Kirtan Sohela.
 - H. Partake as an Akhand Pathi in Akhand Paths. These are 48-hour non-stop readings of the 1430 page Holy Book and the Granthi leads 4 other members of the Congregations who each take turns lasting 2 hours.
 - I. Provide spiritual counseling to members of the Sangat of the Gurdwara as and when necessary.

3.0 Qualifications of a Granthi.

Due to the varied nature of their work, Granthis require multi-disciplinary training – particularly in Classical Music, Punjabi Arts and Literature and Philosophy. Given that the concept of a central Seminary to train Granthis does not exist, Granthis acquire their training from a variety of sources – Sangeet Academies, Linguistic Study and Work Experience.

A Sikh Granthi is expected to have the following educational, professional, spritual and personal attributes.

3.1 Educational.

The most important educational qualification relates to classical music – with a specialization in vocals, Ragas (musical scores) and Tabla Taals (musical rhythms). The reason for this is simple – the entire Sikh Scripture or Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib – is rendered in poetry complete with musical scores and rhythms. This 1430 page book is composed in 31 Ragas and countless taals drawn from the Karnatik (South Indian) and Hindustani (North Indian) versions of Classical Music. Good training in Sangeet (classical music) and years of experience is required to be able to render Gurbani (compositions of the Guru Granth) in the manner they were originally composed and written. The Granthi thus needs Vocal Training, Raag Training and Tabla training up to a diploma or degree level at a Sangeet (classical /spiritual music) Academy. In addition he/she needs to master a musical instrument of his choice to accompany his renditions of

the Scripture. The usual instruments taught in Spiritual Sangeet Academies are the Harmonium, Mandolin, Rebab, Sitar and Tanpura.

In addition, a Granthi needs good literary, oratorical and personal skills. He/She needs to understand the languages of the Holy Book – which is mainly a special kind of Punjabi used some 5 centuries ago. He/She needs good presentation skills to deliver effective discourses. He/She needs personal skills for all the teaching and instruction required of him. Personal skills are also necessary for the counseling that he/she is called upon to do. Beginning in the 1990s, the Sikh Missionary College, affiliated to Shromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, Punjab has started training Granthis in the basic aspects. The core curriculum of this 2-year program is Sangeet, Punjabi Language, Katha and Ceremonial. Younger Granthis – trained in this College are now being made available, though they are unable to meet the demand for Granthis even for Punjab.

3.2 Professional Qualifications.

A Granthi must spend a few years as an Assistant to a reputable Granthi both to hone his educational skills as well as to learn the ceremonial aspects of his duties. An Assistant Granthi must have Tabla (Percussion Drum used in Classical Spiritual Music) skills so that he/she may accompany the Head Granthi during Gurmat Kirtan – the rendering of verses from the Holy Book in the Original Ragas, Taalas and Musical Scores in which the Scripture is composed - the most important aspect of the Prayer Meetings.

An Assistant Granthi usually picks up the ceremonial aspects of the Granthi's job in a few years of tutorship under a Head Granthi at a Gurdwara with a medium to large size congregation.

A Granthi should ideally have worked at least 3 years as an Assistant Priest before becoming a Granthi. Due to the increasing demand for Granthis in Sikh Gurdwaras all over the world, Granthis have begun to forego this aspect of their training – opting instead to join smaller Gurdwaras as Granthi and then progressing to larger congregations.

3.3 Personal Attributes.

A Sikh Priest is mandated to be a Ghristi - be married and have a family life. In this way he/she appreciates the roles, duties and obligations of members of the Congregation – who are mostly families.

He/She is to have a high moral life and value attributes such as sharing, service, commitment, empathy and spirituality. He/She is expected to be a role model for the community.

He/She is expected to be a team player. Gurdwara projects and activities are almost always run by volunteers as charitable and non-profit organizations. An ability to work with and inspire these Sewadars (volunteer service providers) to keep going is an asset any Granthi can have.

3.4 Spiritual Attributes.

A Granthi is mandated to be an Amritdhari (Baptised) practising Sikh. One of his functions as described in Section 2 (c) above is the conduct of Baptism. The Gurmat Rehat Maryada specifies that only a Baptised Sikhs can conduct this ceremony, hence the importance of his spiritual attribute. He is expected to be a Nitnemi (imbued in daily prayer) and adhere to the Gurmat Rehat Maryada – Sakhsi Sansthi Jeewan Section (Spiritual Code of Conduct – Individual Aspects) issued by the Akaal Takhat.

Sources:

1. Guru Granth Sahib, Amritsar: Shromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee and Akaal Takhat, 1980.
2. Sikh Code and Conduct, Amritsar: Shromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee and Akaal Takhat, 1956.
3. Santokh Singh, PhD, Philosophical Foundations of the Sikh Value System, Illinois: Gurmat Publishers, 1982.
4. Gopal Singh, The Religion of the Sikhs, Delhi: Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, 1976.
5. Macauliffe, M.A., The Sikh Religion, vols 1-VI, New Delhi, 1978,
6. Field, Dorothy, The Religion of the Sikhs, Delhi, 1976.
7. McGregor, W.L., History of the Sikhs, vols 1-& 2, Patiala, 1970.
8. McLeod, W.H., Evolution of the Sikh Community, Delhi, 1975.
9. Jurgensmeyer, M., and N.G. Barrier (eds,) Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on Changing Traditions, CA: Berkeley, 1979.