

WORLD RELIGIONS



# SIKHISM



KANWALJIT KAUR-SINGH

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**Kanwaljit Kaur-Singh**



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*Cover: A Sikh couple  
outside their home in  
south-west London.*

*Page 1: Sikhs walking  
through the main gateway  
to go into the Golden  
Temple.*

*Page 3: The Harimandir  
Sahib, more commonly  
known as the Golden  
Temple, in Amritsar.*

## Acknowledgements

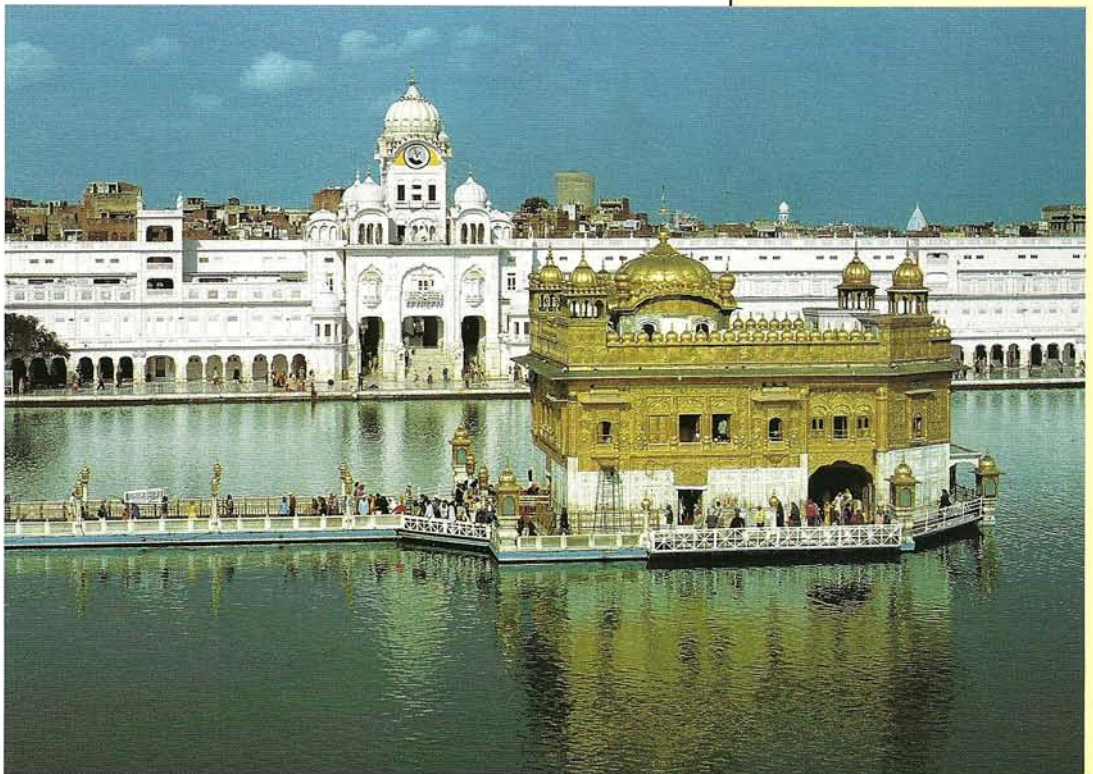
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## GURUS

In Indian languages the word 'guru' means 'teacher'. Sikhs use the word only for the founder of their religion, Guru Nanak, his nine successors and the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh book of scriptures. For Sikhs, the word means a spiritual guide who teaches God's message to humanity.

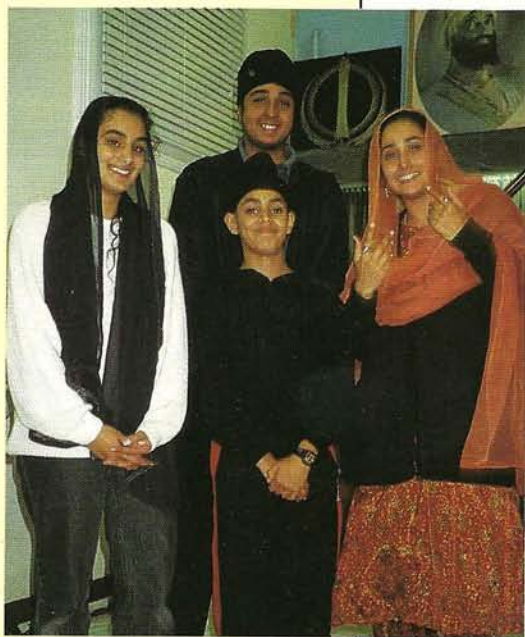
# INTRODUCTION

Guru Nanak started Sikhism in the fifteenth century in the Punjab area of northern India. Today this is still where the majority of Sikhs live, but there are also many in other countries around the world. Male Sikhs are easily recognized by their turbans and beards. Sikh females have un-cut hair, left loose or tied neatly in a bun at the back of the head.

The basic and most important beliefs and ideas of Sikhism are:

- ☪ that there is only one God
- ☪ that all human beings are equal
- ☪ that all religions should be accepted
- ☪ that men and women are equal
- ☪ that it is good to serve others

Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus who followed him all taught about these ideas, and practised the teachings, to show their importance in daily life.



Sikhs believe in one God, who is neither male nor female, but is imageless, formless, is not born and never dies, and is present everywhere in the universe. God the creator has made one humanity. No person is high or low by birth, and it is their actions that make people good or evil. The idea that all humans are equal is fundamental to Sikhism.

Sikhs think that different religions are different paths leading to God, and that no single religion is the only true one. We should respect other people's beliefs. For

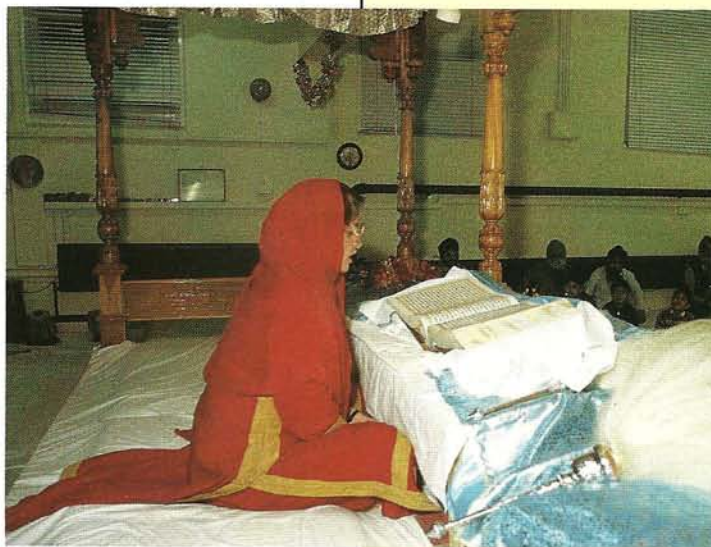
*Sikh young people at the gurdwara.*

Sikhs, showing respect for other faiths goes as far as laying down one's own life for the sake of others. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, did this. He was executed for defending the rights of Hindus to follow their religion.

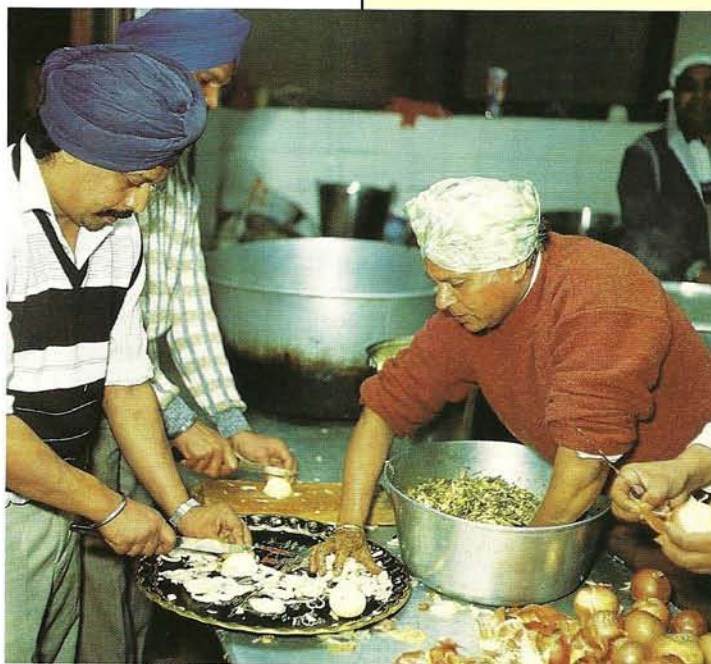
Guru Nanak chose who would follow him as the next Guru, and each Guru chose his successor in the same way. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, did not pass his Guruship to a person, but to the Sikh scriptures. This is why the Sikh book of scriptures is called the 'Guru Granth Sahib'. It contains the writings of the Sikh Gurus and also of followers of other faiths.

Sikhs believe that the highest authority is God, and that God's truth is revealed through the Guru Granth Sahib. Because the Guru Granth Sahib takes the place of the living Guru, it is treated with the utmost respect. It is central to Sikh daily practices, ceremonies and festivals.

Anyone can come to pray at the Sikh place of worship, called the 'gurdwara'. Regardless of their social status, all worshippers sit on the floor. There are no places or areas kept especially for certain people. Men and women are given equal positions, and both take part in leading services and conducting ceremonies.

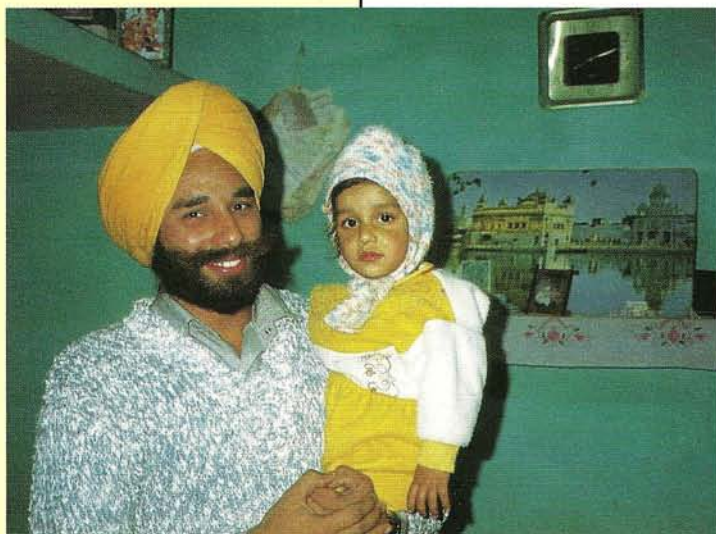


*A Sikh woman reading the Guru Granth Sahib in the gurdwara.*



*Preparing langar in the gurdwara.*





*At home in Amritsar.  
Nearly every Sikh family  
has a picture of the  
Golden Temple at home.*

Each gurdwara contains a 'langar', a common kitchen, and after every service, all the members of the congregation eat together. This puts into practice the idea that everyone is equal. Men and women from the congregation, of all classes and colours, prepare and serve the food.

One of the most important and best-known gurdwaras is the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. It was built during the time of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, in 1588. When the building was finished, the Guru installed the Guru Granth Sahib there. In 1803, the Sikh Maharaja (prince) Ranjit Singh covered the top half of the building with gold leaf, and so the gurdwara got its present name.

There are three principles on which Sikhs try to base their lives:

- ❧ Nam Japna – remembering God
- ❧ Kirat Karni – earning their living by honest means and hard work
- ❧ Vand Chhakna – sharing with people who are less fortunate than themselves.

As an example of sharing and serving, Sikhs remember the story of Bhai Kanahya. During a battle between the Mughal emperor's forces and Sikhs, Bhai Kanahya was providing drinking water to the wounded. Some Sikh soldiers complained that he was giving water to the enemy's soldiers. He was charged with helping the enemy and brought before Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru. He explained to the Guru, 'I do not see a friend or a foe, but only human beings.' The Guru was pleased with this and blessed Bhai Kanahya for his true Sikh spirit of service.

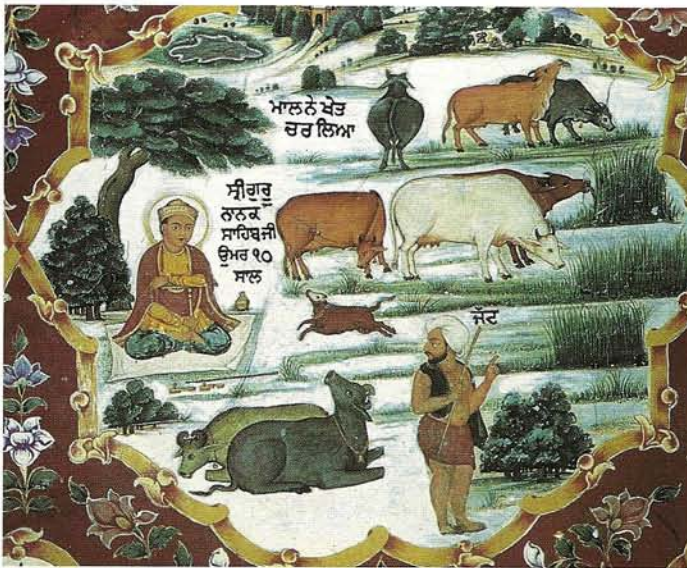




# THE STORY OF SIKHISM

## **Guru Nanak**

**G**uru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in 1469 CE (Common Era; see page 47), at Talwandi in north India. Since then, the town has been renamed Nankana Sahib, and it is now in Pakistan. Nanak was born a Hindu. His father was Mehta Kalu, his mother was Tripta, and he had a sister called Nanaki. As a young boy, Nanak showed great interest in listening and learning about God and people. He worked as a cattle grazer and then as an accountant, and spent a large amount of his wages on feeding the hungry and poor.



*A painting of Guru Nanak, who started to think about God as he was looking after cattle.*

From an early age Nanak was unhappy about the religious practices around him. There is a story of how he received God's message when he was thirty years old.

## HINDUS AND MUSLIMS

At the time that Guru Nanak was born, Indian society was suffering political, social and religious disputes. People called the Mughals were invading India from the north. Most people in India were followers of the Hindu religion. The Mughals were Muslims and were determined to convert Hindus to Islam.





*An artist's impression of the ten Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak is at the top centre, the second to the fifth Gurus on the left, the sixth to the ninth Gurus on the right, and Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, bottom centre.*



One morning, he went to bathe in the river. He disappeared for some days and people thought he must have drowned.

Three days later he reappeared but remained silent for one day. Then he announced: 'There is neither Hindu nor Muslim, only God's path. I shall follow God's path.' He explained that he had been taken to God and been blessed. God had asked Nanak to rejoice in His name and to teach others to do so.

Guru Nanak made four long journeys to spread his message about God's Truth and the way to lead a truthful life. He taught that all human beings, black or

white, rich or poor, high or low, men or women, are equal in God's eyes. He said that God is not interested in religious labels. What matters is the way people behave.

The Guru taught that women are equal to men, and wrote: 'How can we call her bad, who gives birth to great people?'

## ***A succession of Gurus***

Guru Nanak believed that it was important to teach by example. He said: 'Truth is high, but higher still is truthful living.' He decided to start a succession of Gurus, who would practise the teachings. He appointed Guru Angad Dev to be the Guru after him, and each Guru after that chose the next one.



## ***THE TEN HUMAN GURUS***

**1499-1539 Guru Nanak, the first Guru –** the founder of Sikhism.

**1539-52 Guru Angad Dev, the second Guru –**

He improved the Gurmukhi script for writing Panjabi, which was the language of ordinary people in the Punjab. All the Gurus wrote in Panjabi, and so the scriptures became available to everyone. Guru Angad Dev also encouraged sport.

**1552-74 Guru Amar Das, the third Guru –**

He organized the growing number of Sikhs into groups, and established centres, with men and women as leaders, for spreading the Guru's message. He opposed the caste system, which divided Indian society, by encouraging all people to sit together to eat in the langar.

**1574-81 Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru –**

He founded the city of Amritsar and encouraged tradesmen to settle there. It soon grew into a great trading and religious centre. Guru Ram Das also composed many 'shabads' (hymns), including 'Lavan', which is the central part of the Sikh marriage ceremony.

**1581-1606 Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru –**

He built the 'Harimandir Sahib', which is now known as the Golden Temple. He also collected the writings of the first four Gurus, his own and those of many Hindu and Muslim holy people, and compiled them into the 'Adi Granth', more commonly known as the Guru Granth Sahib. The Mughal emperor Jehangir tried to force the Guru to become a Muslim, and also to make changes to the Guru Granth Sahib. When the Guru refused, he was tortured to death.

**1606-44 Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru –**

He wore two swords, one symbolizing the spiritual power of God's Truth and the other showing his readiness to use actual physical power to defend the weak and the helpless. His claim to have both spiritual and physical power brought the Guru into conflict with Jehangir, who imprisoned him. When the Guru was released, he refused to go unless fifty-two 'rajas' (princes) were also set free. In the end, the fifty-two rajas were allowed to leave the prison holding the Guru's cloak (see page 44).



## THE TEN HUMAN GURUS

### 1644-61 Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru –

He opened free hospitals and dispensaries offering medical services to the sick and the needy.

### 1661-64 Guru Harkrishan, the eighth Guru –

He continued serving the sick during a smallpox epidemic in Delhi. He caught the disease and died at the age of eight.

### 1664-75 Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru –

He travelled far and wide to preach God's message. He was executed by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb for his belief in the basic human right of people to worship as they choose.

### 1675-1708 Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last human Guru –

He created the 'Khalsa' (see page 12), and fought many battles to defend his community. His two older sons died in battle, and the younger two were walled up alive for refusing to accept Islam. Guru Gobind Singh passed the Guruship on to the Guru Granth Sahib, so ending the line of human Gurus.

*Note:* The dates given are for the Guruship of each Guru.

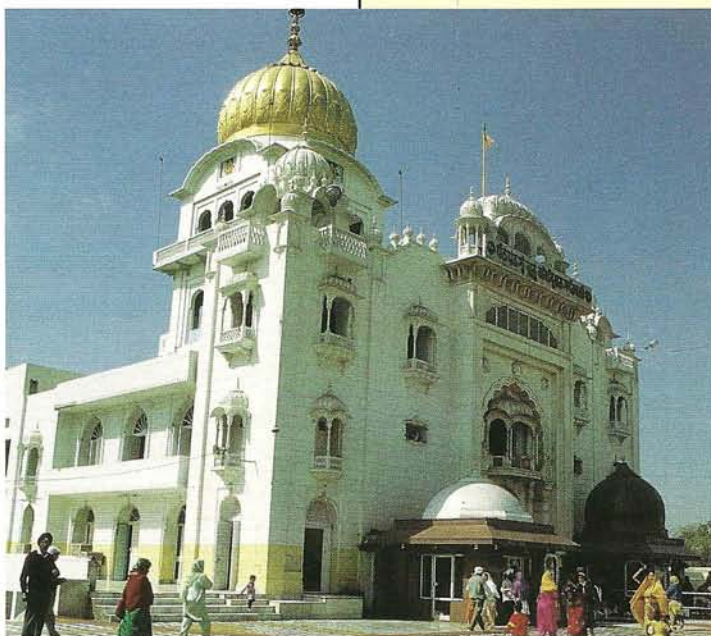
*Baba Buddha used to sit under this tree while supervising the building of the Golden Temple. Baba Buddha was a highly respected Sikh who had met Guru Nanak when he was only nine and who performed the rite of bestowing Guruship to the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth Gurus.*





## ***The Mughal empire***

In 1526 the Mughals conquered northern India and established their empire, with its base in Delhi. They continued to expand the empire throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first emperors including Akbar (1556-1605) allowed followers of different religions to worship as they wished. However, the emperors who followed him, such as Jehangir (1605-27) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707), were determined that all the people living in the empire should convert to Islam. Hindus and Sikhs were persecuted and many were killed for refusing to give up their religion. Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, were both put to death for standing up for religious freedom.



*The Gurdwara Bangla Sahib in Delhi was built on the spot where Guru Harkrishan, the eighth Guru, looked after victims of smallpox and died from the disease himself.*

### ***THE MARTYRDOM OF GURU TEGH BAHADUR***

The Sikh Gurus taught that it is a fundamental duty of every human being to respect the religious beliefs of others. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, set an example for this by laying down his life to uphold the rights of Hindu believers. At this time, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) was forcing Hindus and Sikhs to accept Islam, and killing many of those who refused. Some Brahmins (members of the Hindu priestly class) from Kashmir asked Guru Tegh Bahadur for help.

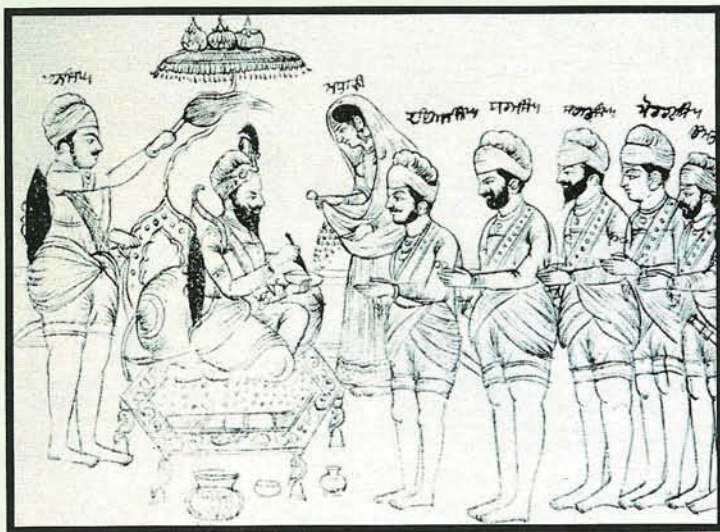
The Guru believed that all people had the right to worship as they wished, and so he agreed to intercede on behalf of the Hindus. He went to Delhi to speak to Aurangzeb, but the emperor would not listen to his plea for religious tolerance. Instead, he imprisoned, tortured and later publicly beheaded the Guru.



## THE CREATION OF THE KHALSA

Following the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh decided to organize the Sikh community so that Sikhs would be able to defend themselves.

In 1699 CE, crowds of Sikhs had gathered in Anandpur for their new year festival, Baisakhi. The Guru welcomed them and praised them for their devotion. Then he drew his sword and asked for the head of a Sikh who was prepared to give his life for the faith. There was silence. At the Guru's third call, a Sikh stepped forward and offered his head. The Guru took him into a nearby tent and then returned, his sword dripping with blood. He repeated his demand four more times, and four more men offered themselves. The congregation saw each man being taken into the tent. After some time, the Guru appeared again, with the five men all still alive. The Guru explained that this had been a test of their courage and willingness to die for their faith and the Guru. The Sikh community had passed the test.



*The Panj Piarey are ready to receive amrit. Guru Gobind Singh's wife, Mata Sundri, is giving him sugar crystals, and he says to her: 'Your contribution has made the ceremony complete.'*

He called the five men 'Panj Piarey' (Five Beloved Ones) and performed a ceremony called 'amrit' to initiate them into the 'Khalsa', the Sikh community. Thousands more men and women also took amrit and joined the Khalsa on that day. The men were given the title 'Singh' (lion) and the women were given the name 'Kaur' (princess). The Guru told them all to wear the 'five Ks' as symbols of their faith. This uniform would identify them. Even in moments of weakness, they could not then deny their faith.



The Mughal empire disintegrated during the eighteenth century. Towards the end of Mughal rule in the Punjab, the emperors offered rewards to anyone who could bring them the head or any part of a Sikh's body. Sikhs left their homes and hid in the jungles for safety, refusing to abandon their faith even in the face of torture and death. From 1708 to 1739 was the period of the worst suffering in Sikh history.

### ***Sikhs as rulers***

From 1739, foreign armies invaded India on many occasions. Sikhs fought and defeated the invaders at the north-west frontier, and eventually they established their own independent states in this area. Twelve of the states became powerful, and were known as the 'Misals'.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the ruler of one of the Sikh states. He fought the other Sikh chiefs, to unite all the states, and went on to defeat other rulers and to declare himself emperor of a huge area of India in 1799. He treated people of all religions equally. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs filled important posts in his empire.

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, feuding among different parts of the Sikh empire led to its collapse within ten years. The British took the opportunity of annexing the large northern Indian province of Punjab. They deposed the twelve-year-old Maharaja Dalip Singh and made him present the famous Koh-i-noor diamond, which Maharaja Ranjit Singh had received from an Afghan prince, to Queen Victoria. The Maharaja was ordered to live in England, where he died in 1893.

### ***British rule, 1858-1947***

The British respected the Sikhs for their bravery and encouraged them to join the British army. However, the Sikhs became unhappy with the British government of India, the Raj, as the British allowed the historic gurdwaras to fall into the hands of non-Sikhs.

## THE FIVE Ks

The 'five Ks' can be called the uniform of Sikhs. They are worn by men and women.

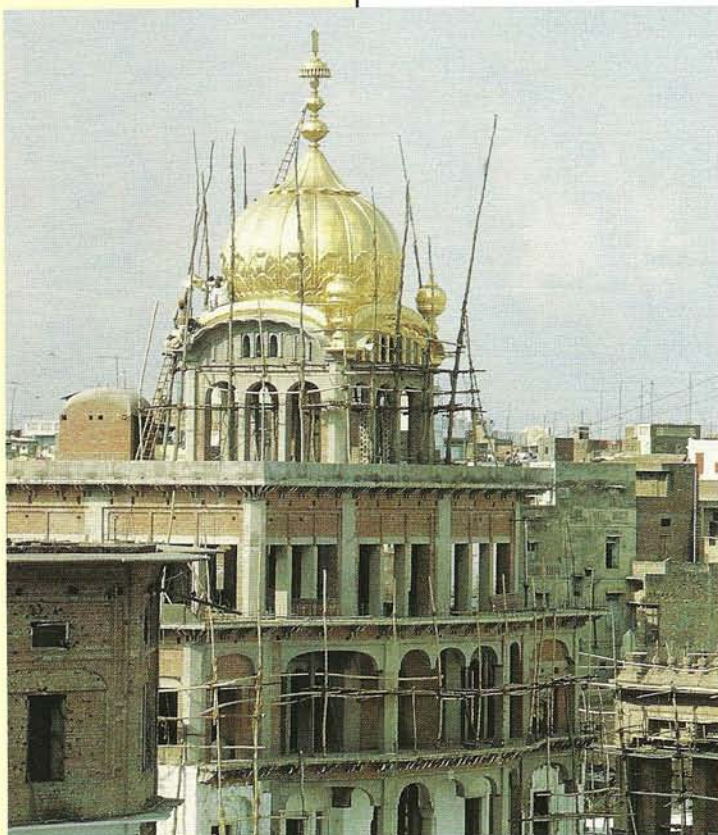
Kes – un-cut hair. Men tie their hair on top of their head and cover it with a turban.

Kanga – a small wooden comb, worn to keep the hair neat. It represents cleanliness.

Kara – a steel or iron bangle. It is not worn as jewellery, but as a symbol reminding Sikhs of their duty to do right.

Kachh – undershorts. They are a symbol reminding Sikhs of their vow of sexual purity and self-control.

Kirpan – a sword. This is a symbol of God's supreme power and also reminds Sikhs of their duty to defend the weak.



*Rebuilding the Akal Takhat after it had been destroyed during the attack on the Golden Temple in 1984.*

The Sikhs started to protest peacefully for the right to manage their gurdwaras, and this was finally granted to them, after twenty years, in 1925.

### ***Sikhs in independent India***

India gained its independence in 1947. The state of Punjab, where most Sikhs lived, was divided, one third becoming part of India and the rest becoming part of what is now Pakistan. At that point, many Sikhs went to live in other parts of the world.

From the beginning, the Sikhs in India felt that the Indian government and the Hindu majority (about 83 per cent) treated them unfairly. Sikh leaders started a protest campaign to try to get their grievances resolved. In 1984, in response to Sikh unrest, the Prime Minister of India at that time, Indira Gandhi, ordered an attack on the Golden Temple and all the other Sikh historic gurdwaras. The attack took place on the day Sikhs were commemorating the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. The government said that the reason for the attack was that there were Sikh terrorists hiding in the Golden Temple. No explanation was given for the attack on thirty-six other gurdwaras which happened at the same time.

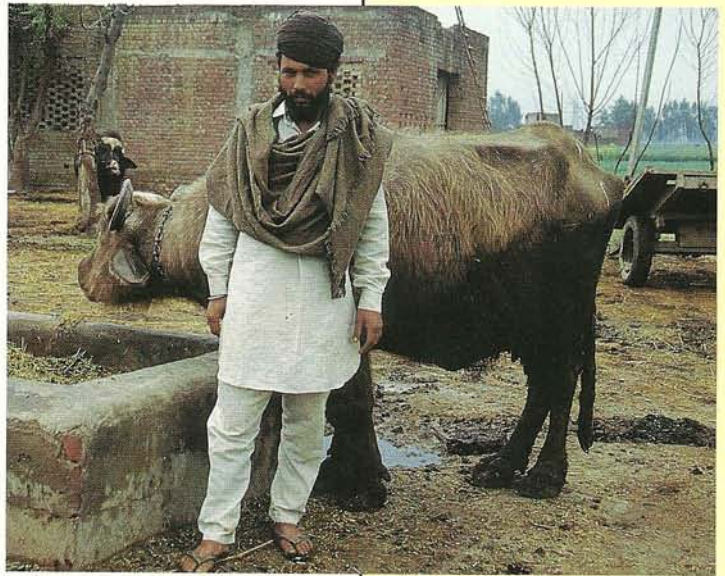
During the attack, thousands of Sikhs were killed. The Golden Temple and the Guru Granth Sahib were badly damaged. The Sikh reference library containing manuscripts and original writings of the Gurus was destroyed. Priceless jewels were looted, other artefacts





were burned, and the 'Akal Takhat', one of the most important holy places in the Golden Temple precincts, was almost demolished. The attack, and the following torture of Sikhs, deeply outraged the whole Sikh world.

Since then the gulf between Sikhs and the Indian government has widened, and many Sikhs are campaigning to establish their own independent state.



*A Sikh farmer in the Punjab.*

## **SIKH GRIEVANCES**

The following are some of the grievances of Sikhs since Indian independence:

Punjab is one of sixteen Indian states. Each state was given the right to have its own official language, but in practice it was only after twenty years of protest, during which thousands of Sikhs were jailed, that the state of Punjab received this right. Sikhs still do not have an independent identity in the Indian constitution, but are referred to as Hindus.

The capital of Punjab, Chandigarh, has still not been given to Punjab, in spite of many promises. The city has the status of a union territory, which means that it is directly controlled by the central government.

Punjab is sometimes called the 'breadbasket' of India, as it produces three-quarters of the country's total wheat. The central government pays Punjabi farmers, who are mostly Sikhs, less for their wheat than it pays to farmers in other states.

Similarly, electricity generated in Punjab is sold more cheaply to neighbouring states, and these states are also allowed more power than the Punjab itself. As a result, the Sikhs in Punjab have to work harder, and at unsociable hours, to use power to irrigate their land.



# THE WORLD OF SIKHS



*A carpenter in Amritsar, with pictures of the Gurus in his box.*

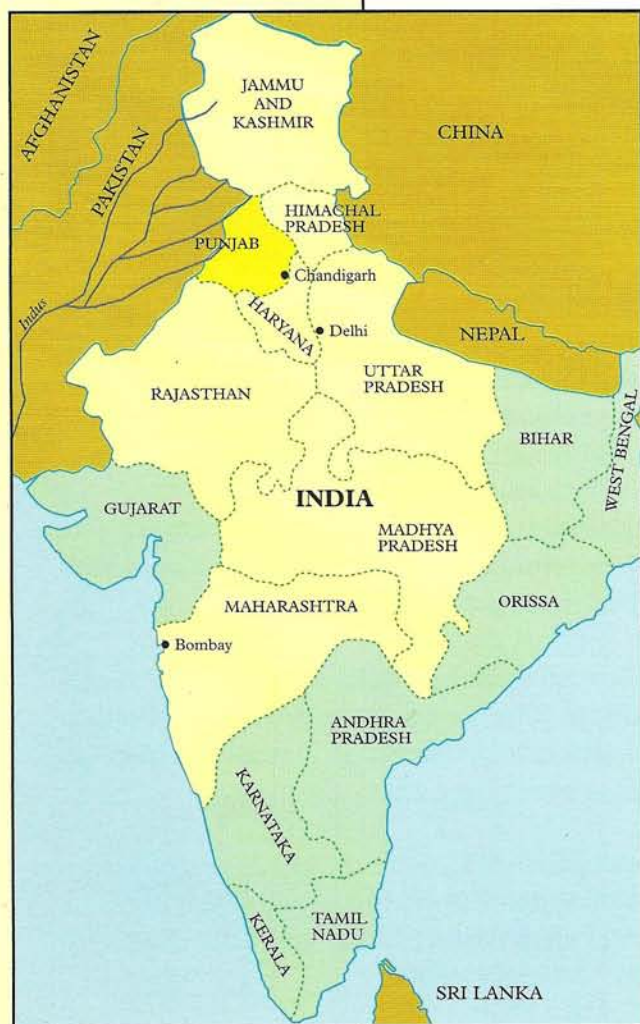
## *Sikhs in India*

Sikhism began in the Punjab area of northern India. Today Punjab is one of the sixteen states of India and it is sometimes called the 'homeland of Sikhs', as the majority of Sikhs in the world (approximately 14 million) still live there. Their language is Panjabi. The

Panjabi word 'Punj' means 'five' and 'ab' means 'water', so 'Punjab' is the 'land of five rivers'. The river waters make the land fertile, and most Sikhs in the Punjab are farmers.

In 1947, when India became independent, the land of the Punjab was divided. One third of it remained part of India, as the state of Punjab. The rest became part of a separate Muslim state called West Pakistan. Over two million Sikhs left their homes and lands in West Pakistan. They could not all settle in the Punjab, and many went to other Indian states such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Jammu and Kashmir. Sikhs today are 2 per cent of the total population of India.

*Some 60 per cent of Sikhs in India live in the state of Punjab, and 20 per cent in Chandigarh.*





## ***Sikhs throughout the world***

At the beginning of the twentieth century the British ruled India and East Africa. They took skilled Indians including Sikhs from the Punjab to help build railways in East Africa, and so Sikhs came to live in what are now Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. They achieved success in various businesses and professions and became prosperous.

When the East African countries became independent, from the 1960s, Sikhs living there faced many difficulties. The military dictators and other rulers did not want the Indians to carry on enjoying their prosperity. In 1972, General Idi Amin, the President of Uganda at that time, actually forced all Indians including Sikhs to leave the country. Most of the Sikhs in Africa had British passports, and so, in the unsettled atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, many of them moved to Britain. Large numbers also went to Canada and the USA.

More recently, the Ugandan government has invited the Indians back to the country and has returned all their lands and other properties that had been taken from them. Today Sikhs are respected in East African countries and their language, Panjabi, has the status of one of the main languages there.

*A street in Amritsar.  
This city has always  
been a centre of the  
Sikh religion.*







*Many Sikhs in the West work as doctors.*

At the end of the twentieth century, Sikhs can be found worldwide. Some have made their homes in Australia, South East Asia (including Singapore and Malaysia), Africa, the USA, Canada, Britain, and some other European countries. In Western countries Sikhs have sometimes suffered because of the racist attitudes of the host communities.

### ***Sikhs in Britain***

There are about 400,000 Sikhs in Britain, most of whom live in large cities. They have come mainly from India and East Africa. Wherever Sikhs have settled, they have collected money to buy either land, where they can build a gurdwara, or an old building, which they can turn into a gurdwara. There are more than 200 gurdwaras in Britain now.

After the partition of Punjab in 1947, many Sikhs lost their land. They could find no employment in India, but there were job opportunities in Britain, and as members of the British Commonwealth, Indians including Sikhs were free to move to Britain. When they arrived, they faced many difficulties. Some British people do not try to understand why Sikh men wear turbans, and young boys are teased because their hair is in plaits or they wear a 'patka' (small turban). Sometimes Sikhs have been refused jobs because they wear a turban, or their employers have insisted that they cut their hair or wear a helmet or a cap. One school would not allow a Sikh boy to attend wearing a turban. Fortunately, common sense has generally prevailed. Prejudice in some areas has often been balanced by sympathetic understanding. For example, the law requiring all motor cycle riders to wear crash helmets was amended to exempt Sikhs.



Sikhs in Britain have made some changes in their religious practice. As Sunday is a public holiday, it is a convenient day for Sikhs to attend the gurdwara. The celebration of a festival, even if it falls during the week, is moved to the weekend. Religious processions, which are an important part of festivals in the Punjab, are not common in Britain. Perhaps because of the poor weather, Sikhs in Britain often use gurdwaras for weddings and death ceremonies, whereas, in India, they would hold these in the open air. There have been some social changes, too. Sometimes the extended family system breaks down, and divorce, rarely heard of among Sikhs, is becoming more common.

### ***Sikhs in North America***

There are about 200,000 practising Sikhs of Indian origin in Canada, and another 250,000 in the USA. Sikhs went to Canada in the early 1960s, when anyone who found a job there was allowed to stay. In the 1970s Canadian policy changed and people had to obtain an entry permit before they could move there. Sikhs in Canada live mainly in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Edmonton and Calgary. They have important positions in all types of businesses and professions. There are about 125 gurdwaras in Canada.

In the USA, Sikhs settled first in Stockton, El Centro and Yuba City in California. Now there are large numbers of Sikhs also in other big cities such as Washington and New York, but the main areas where Sikh communities live are on the west coast. There are about 90 gurdwaras scattered all over the USA.

*Sikhs took part in a multi-faith procession, during a meeting of world religions in Chicago.*

3HO

Sikhism in the USA is being influenced by a steadily growing movement known as 3HO, the Healthy, Happy and Holy Organization. This was started by Harbhajan Singh, known as Yogi Bhajan. In 1969, some Americans became converts to Sikhism, through contact with this organization. They were given 'amrit'. There have been other conversions since.





## GURBANI

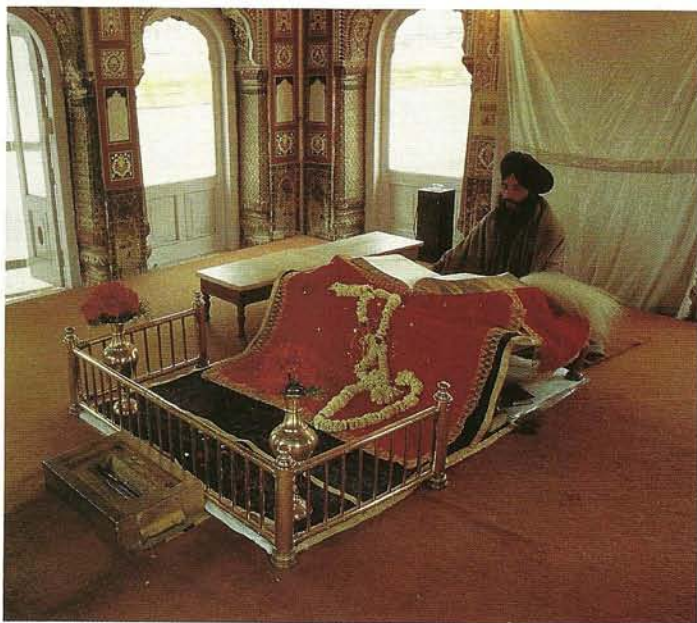
The writings in the Guru Granth Sahib are called 'Gurbani', meaning the 'Word of the Guru'.

The Guru Granth Sahib is written in the Panjabi language, and the script used is Gurmukhi. All copies of the Guru Granth Sahib are exactly the same and have 1430 pages. They may be printed only by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the governing body of the Sikh gurdwaras of Punjab. There are English translations, to help understanding, but they are never used in place of the original Panjabi version.

3

# THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB

Sikhs believe that God's truth is revealed through the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, which are contained in the Guru Granth Sahib.



*The Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh book of scriptures, in an upper room of the Golden Temple.*

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, collected together all the writings of the first four Gurus. To these he added his own writings and those of Hindu and Muslim holy people whose views were in accord with Sikh teachings, to make the 'Adi Granth'. The word 'Adi' means 'first' (both in time and in importance) and 'Granth' means 'collection'. Later on, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, added the writings of Guru Tegh Bahadur and decreed that Sikhs should follow the Adi Granth as their next Guru. Therefore the Adi Granth became known as the Guru Granth Sahib.

## THE MOOL MANTRA

The Guru Granth Sahib begins with the 'Mool Mantra', which contains Guru Nanak's description of God:

There is one and only one God  
Whose name is Truth.  
God the creator is without fear, without hate, immortal,  
Without form and is beyond birth and death  
And is understood through God's grace.

(Guru Granth Sahib p. 1)

This sets out the Sikh belief that there is only one God, who is the creator of all humanity. One can understand God by acting upon the Gurus' teachings. God's acceptance of the sincerity of our actions is called his grace. In the Gurmukhi script, the Mool Mantra opens with **ੴ**, meaning 'One God'.

### *Respect for the Guru Granth Sahib*

The Guru Granth Sahib takes the place of the living Guru among Sikhs, and so they treat it with great respect and the kind of reverence which would have been shown to the ten human Gurus. Sikhs do not worship the Guru Granth Sahib, but revere the 'Word' revealed through its 'shabads' (hymns).

Every morning in a gurdwara, the Guru Granth Sahib is brought from the small room where it is kept overnight and installed ceremoniously on a platform (the 'palki') with a canopy ('chandni') above it. It rests on cushions and is covered with a cloth called 'romallas'. A member of the 'sangats' (congregation) remains in constant attendance and waves a 'chouri' (fan) over the book, as a sign of its sovereignty.

*A Sikh waving the chouri as he reads the Guru Granth Sahib.*





## AKHAND PATH

On festivals and special family occasions, a chain of readers read out the whole of the Guru Granth Sahib, from beginning to end. This continuous reading is called 'Akhand Path'. It usually takes about 48 hours.



## EQUALITY

The following shabad expresses the Sikh idea that all human beings are equal:

God first created Light.  
From the Lord's play all living creatures came  
And from the Divine Light the whole creation  
sprang.

Why then should we divide human creatures  
Into the high and the low?

Friend, be not in error:  
Out of the Creator creation comes.  
Everywhere in creation the Creator is.  
The Lord's Spirit is all pervading!

The Lord, the Maker, has moulded one mass  
of clay  
Into vessels of diverse shapes.  
Free from taint are all the vessels of clay  
Since free from taint is the Divine Potter.

The True One pervades all things.  
All things come to pass as the Lord ordains.  
He who has understood the Divine Will  
Recognizes only the One Reality –  
And he alone is what a person ought to be.

(Guru Granth Sahib p. 1349)

God (the 'Divine Potter') creates all humans from the same material ('clay'). They may all be different ('vessels of diverse shapes'), but they are all without fault ('free from taint'). Therefore it is wrong to judge that some people are better or worse than others.

Everything that happens is according to God's will ('as the Lord ordains'). Anyone who understands this is a true follower of God.

Worshippers enter the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib without shoes and with their heads covered. They bow and touch their forehead on the floor before sitting down. These are all marks of respect.

Any man or woman may read the Guru Granth Sahib to the congregation, but quite often it is read by an appointed 'granthi' (reader), who performs ceremonies and leads prayers. After evening prayers, the Guru Granth Sahib is ceremoniously closed and put away again in its own small room.



*Ragees performing kirtan in Kampala, Uganda.*

### ***Other Sikh writings***

The Guru Granth Sahib contains the teachings of the first nine Gurus, but does not give all the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, and does not record the final phase of the development of the Sikh community. For these things, Sikhs turn to several other books.

The 'Dasam Granth' includes the writings of Guru Gobind Singh and of fifty-two poets who were in the Guru's service. 'Bhai Gurdas Dian Vara' is a source of information about the lives and teachings of the first five Gurus, and the 'Hukamnamas' are letters written by the Gurus to their followers. Sikhs who lived at the same time as Guru Gobind Singh wrote the 'Rehatnamas', to explain the Sikh code of conduct. In 1945, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee compiled the 'Rehat Maryada', which is a guide to the Sikh way of life.

## SHABADS

The whole of the Guru Granth Sahib is written in poetry, arranged in stanzas (groups of lines) called 'shabads'. The shabads can be sung, and many gurdwaras employ professional singers called 'ragees' to sing the shabads during services. Singing of the shabads is called 'kirtan'.







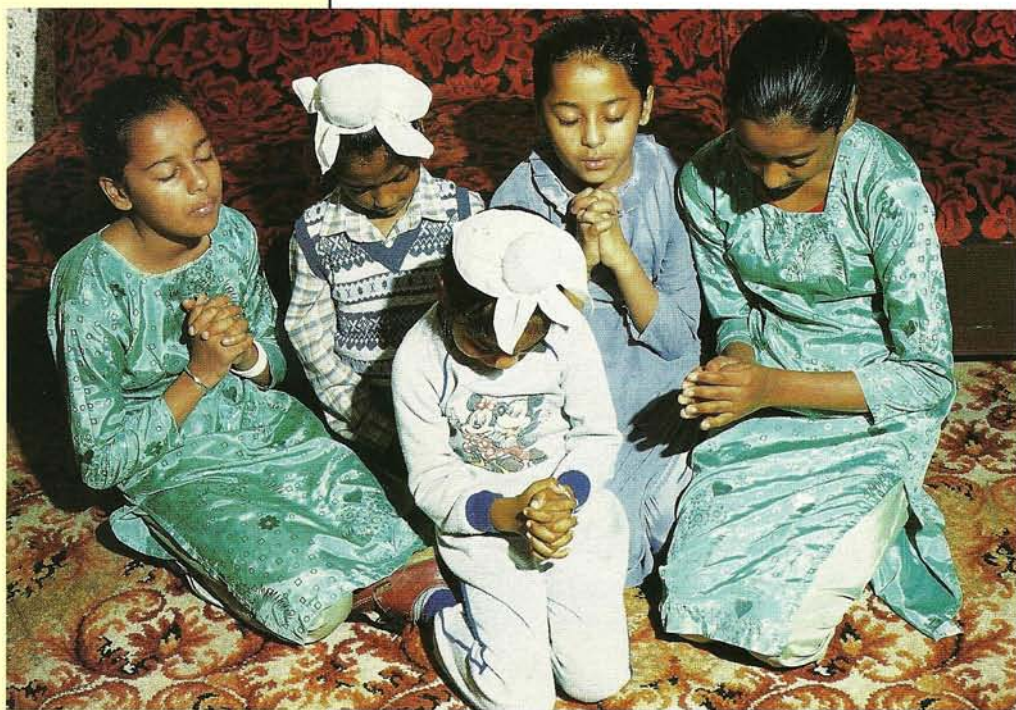
*Sikh children praying  
at home.*

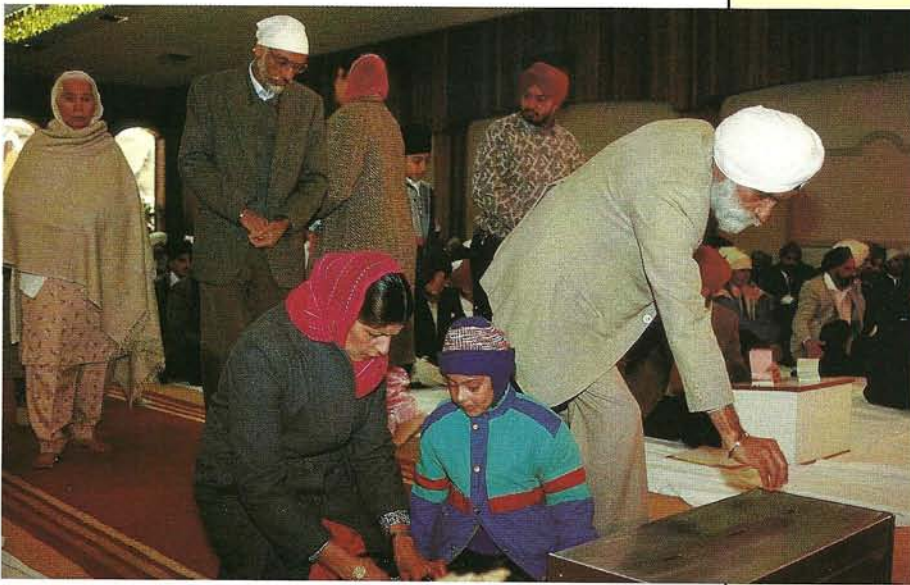
## HOME AND FAMILY LIFE

During the time of Guru Nanak, many people in India thought highly of 'yogis', men who cut themselves off from normal worldly activities and adopted a life of poverty and meditation, in the belief that this was a way for their spirit to be reunited with God. These men left their families and other ordinary human contacts. Guru Nanak pointed out that they nonetheless needed the help of people who did live in ordinary families:

'For food and clothes, these holy men still go from door to door begging.' (GGs p. 879)

Sikhs do not think that it is necessary to withdraw from normal life to find God.





The Guru writes:

‘Living within the family one finds God.’  
(GGS p. 661)

All the Gurus except Guru Harkrishan, who died aged eight, were married and had children, and they encouraged their followers to marry.

### ***Extended families***

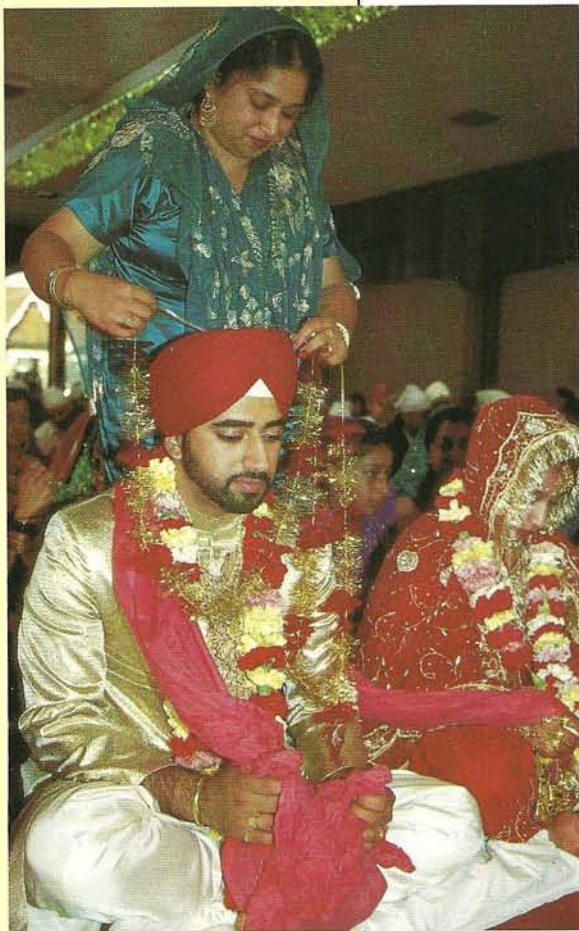
It is still common among Sikhs today for different generations and branches of a family all to live together. This traditional extended family system has its roots in Sikh teachings that different age groups should show each other respect and feel responsible for each other. In close-knit families, children accompany their parents when they visit friends and relatives, go to the gurdwara, and attend formal and informal events.

It is less possible for people to live in extended families today, however. People have to move away from home in search of employment. Also, in Britain for example, Sikhs cannot find accommodation that they can afford, to house their whole extended families. It is common therefore for grandparents, uncles and aunts, and brothers and sisters to live in separate houses, but all close to one another.

*When Sikhs go to the gurdwara, they give money for charity before they bow down to the Guru Granth Sahib.*







*The mother puts a garland on the groom after the wedding service.*



## ***Marriage***

Sikhism emphasizes the importance of marriage and teaches that, in a marriage, the man and woman are equal partners. The Sikh Gurus said that marriage is not only a civil or social contract, but also a spiritual union between two equal partners in which they support each other and enrich each other's lives.

Also, a marriage does not remain a private matter between two persons. Through the couple, two families become closely connected. Therefore, family and friends assist in finding suitable partners, although the couple themselves decide whether to marry. Sikh marriages of this kind are better described as 'assisted marriages' than as 'arranged' ones.

Sikhism gives guidance on responsibilities in marriage. The couple should try to make their union perfect and happy on all levels, physical, material, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. The husband and wife should stay absolutely faithful to one another and treat their marriage as permanent. In this way, they help ensure that the value of marriage is understood by other people in the future. However, the Sikh religion and tradition do not rule out the possibility of divorce if a marriage breaks down completely.

## ***Parents and children***

The older members of a family teach the children about Sikh history and the Sikh way of life, and try to show them the importance of love and respect and of being prepared to give up what they want for themselves in order to help others. Children go to the gurdwara with their families and learn to cook and serve meals in the langar.



The Gurus' teachings tell parents that their children are a gift that God entrusts to them. It is therefore the parents' duty to give their best to their children in all aspects of life, including religion. Sikh parents must show their children the principles of Sikhism and, when fulfilling their obligations towards their children, they must not expect anything in return.

The Guru Granth Sahib has teachings for children too. They should respect their elders and look after them when they are old and weak, as they cared for the children when they were young and helpless. The Guru says:

'Son, why do you quarrel with your father ? Due to him you have grown to this age.' (GGS p.1200)



*Two Sikh boys (centre and right) are serving langar with a Hindu friend.*

### ***Worship in the home***

Worship is a part of daily life at home. After their morning wash, Sikhs start the day by meditating on God and His attributes. There is no special posture in which Sikhs meditate. Young children are encouraged to repeat the name 'Waheguru' (Wonderful Lord).

## CLOTHES

Sikhs wear either Western or traditional clothes.

Men mostly wear Western-style trousers and jackets. Sometimes men wear the traditional 'kurta' (a long, loose shirt) and jodhpur-style trousers.

Women mostly wear Punjabi suits, which consist of 'kameez' (dress), 'salwar' (trousers) and 'dupatta' (scarf). These clothes are usually made of brightly coloured cottons, silks and chiffons. Clothes for special occasions are embroidered with silk, silver or gold threads.

Instead of a full turban, young boys sometimes wear a small turban called a 'patka' or they plait their un-cut hair and tie it at the back of the neck or on top of their head.



## ***BLESSING A BUSINESS***

We were invited by one of our friends, Mr Pushpinder Singh, to join him to celebrate the tenth anniversary of his successful business. Pushpinder has a large factory full of heavy machinery. He makes parts for tractors. He got an area of the factory cleared, and installed the Guru Granth Sahib there for Akhand Path. This continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib started at 9 am on Friday and was concluded 48 hours later on the Sunday morning of the celebration.

About 200 people attended the service in the factory, at Pushpinder's invitation. The ragees sang shabads of happiness and thanks. Ardas was said, thanking God for his bounty and asking for his blessings. Everybody joined in the langar before going home.

(Harinder Singh, London)

Sikhs use set passages from the Guru Granth Sahib for morning prayers. If time is short, they can recite these passages while they are getting ready for their day's work and going about their usual activities. There are also set passages for evening and bedtime prayers.

Some Sikh families set aside a room of their home where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept. They call this room their gurdwara, and they may all join there for prayer, in the mornings and evenings. Sometimes friends and relatives come too.

Sikh worship can take place anywhere. It involves very little ritual, and so no priests are needed to lead the worship. Any Sikh man or woman may conduct ceremonies, sing hymns or speak about the religion in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. In places in the world where there are not many Sikhs, there may be no gurdwara for them to attend. In such places, worship at home has a special importance.



# COMMUNITY LIFE

## *The gurdwara*

The name 'gurdwara' for a Sikh place of worship literally means the 'door of the Guru'. Some of the historic gurdwaras in India are splendid buildings, but a gurdwara can be set up in any place where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept. Whatever the building is like, a gurdwara has the Sikh flag, the 'Nishan Sahib', flying outside it.

A gurdwara building has two main halls, the prayer hall and the langar. Other rooms include a library, a classroom for Panjabi and music lessons, an office for committee meetings, and sometimes rooms for visitors to stay overnight. Alcohol and tobacco are not permitted in the gurdwara.



*Putting up the Nishan Sahib outside a new gurdwara.*

## HISTORIC GURDWARAS

Many gurdwaras in India were built in places where special events in the lives of the Gurus had taken place. These are described as the 'historic gurdwaras'.

The most famous one, known throughout the world, is the Golden Temple. Its foundation stone was laid by a Muslim, Mian Mir, in 1588.

Probably the second most important historic gurdwara is the Akal Takhat, built in 1609 by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, in the Golden Temple complex. Meetings of the Sikh 'Panth' (community) are held here, to decide on major issues affecting Sikhs.



## THE GRANTHI

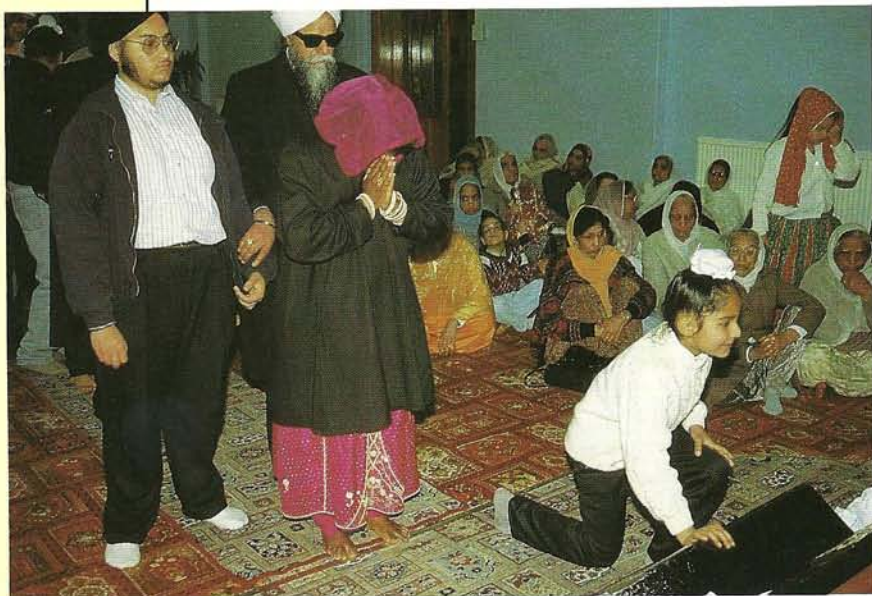
Any man or woman may lead the service or read from the Guru Granth Sahib. However, it is normal practice for a gurdwara to employ and pay a learned and respected member of the community as its 'granthi' (reader). The granthi generally leads services, reads from the Guru Granth Sahib and performs all ceremonies. In a small gurdwara, he or she may act as caretaker as well.

Sikhs and anyone else who wants to worship God can come to a service at the gurdwara and eat in the langar. Prayers are said in the gurdwara every morning and evening. There is no fixed holy day of the week for Sikh worship. However, in the West, the majority of Sikhs attend services on either Saturdays or Sundays, as weekends are more convenient for most people.

### *The prayer hall*

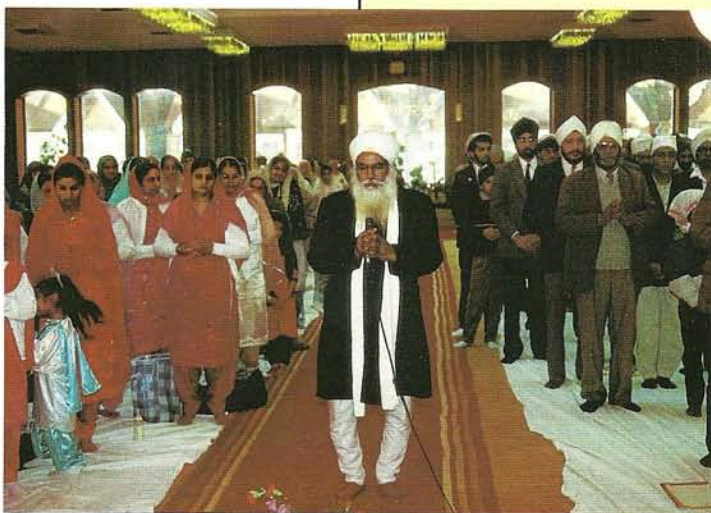
The focal point of every prayer hall is the Guru Granth Sahib, installed on its platform beneath a canopy. As a mark of respect for the Guru Granth Sahib, people must take off their shoes and cover their head when they enter the hall. Those coming to worship pay their respects to the Guru Granth Sahib by bowing and touching the ground with their forehead before they sit down. Generally they make a token offering of cash or food for the langar. Usually men and women sit separately, which is an Indian custom, but there are no hard-and-fast religious rules about this.

Worship consists of 'kirtan', that is, the singing of shabads from the Guru Granth Sahib accompanied by music on 'tabla' (drums) and harmoniums, and



*This young boy is bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib before going to sit with the congregation.*

readings from the Guru Granth Sahib or a related religious text. Usually the congregation sits and listens to the ragees singing kirtan. Then everyone sings 'Anand Sahib', the hymns composed by Guru Amar Das, the third Guru. After that, the whole congregation stands up, with hands folded, and listens to the common prayer called the 'ardas'. In this prayer, Sikhs first remember God, the Gurus and the Sikh martyrs, and then ask for God's blessings on all of humanity.



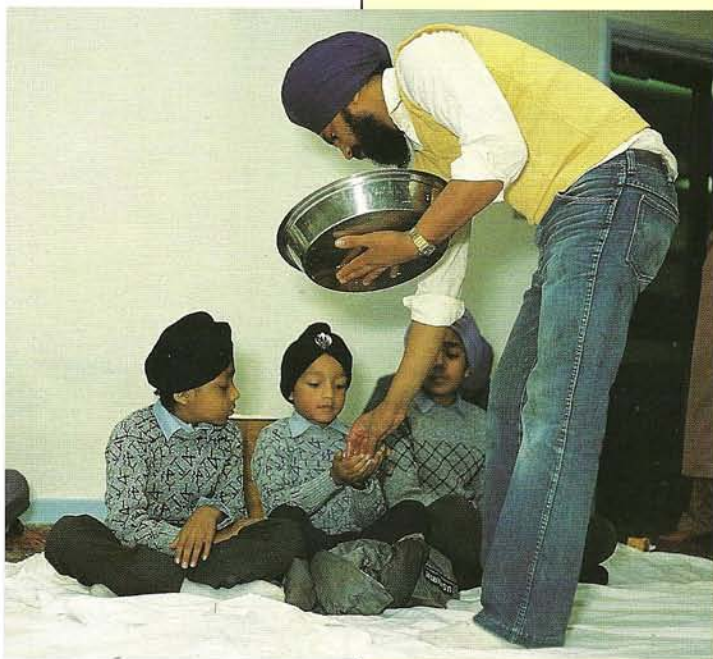
*Ardas is being said in the gurdwara.*

After the prayer, the whole congregation sits down and the 'hukam' is read. The reader opens the Guru Granth Sahib at random and reads out a shabad. This is regarded as the Guru's guidance for the day.

At the end of every service, 'krah prashad' (the holy sweet) is distributed to everyone, as a sign of the Guru's blessings and to show that everyone is equal. Krah prashad is a sweet made from flour or semolina, sugar, water and butter. The service is usually followed by sharing a meal in the langar.

A Sikh gathering for a service is called 'diwan'. Sometimes political and social issues affecting the community are also discussed at the gathering.

*Distributing krah prashad at the end of the service.*





## ***A GURDWARA IN MAKINDU, KENYA***

The morning service in the gurdwara at Makindu starts at 7.00 am and ends at 9.00 am. There is nothing unusual about this. What is out of the ordinary is the situation of the gurdwara and the make-up of the congregation.

This beautiful gurdwara is in a small village on the main road between Nairobi and Mombasa. It was originally built in 1905, by Sikhs who had been brought from India to Africa by the British. Their job was to clear the jungle and construct a railway line connecting Kenya's capital, Nairobi, to the east coast. In the jungle, these Sikhs had to fight both disease and wild animals, especially lions, and many of them lost their lives. It was in these conditions that they built a small gurdwara at Makindu.

Now the gurdwara has been extended into a magnificent building surrounded by halls, rooms and flats, where up to two hundred people can eat and sleep free. On many occasions more than three thousand people are fed in a single day. On the day I visited, about two hundred visitors of all faiths, colours and national-



ities sat in the langar after the service and ate a breakfast of 'dal' (curried lentil), 'parathas' (bread), yoghurt and 'matar paneer' (peas and cheese). There were white and Asian people of different religious backgrounds from England, a Muslim family from Canada, a group of Asian Hindus, five white young people from the USA and a couple from Germany who were staying the night. All the costs of running the gurdwara are covered by donations from Sikhs and others.

Sikhs have bought the land across the road from the gurdwara, in order to establish an eye hospital which is much needed in the area.

(Rema Kaur, London, England)



## The langar

The langar is the common kitchen or dining hall of a gurdwara, but the word 'langar' is also used for the free food which is served there. All people who attend a service at the gurdwara are expected to stay afterwards, to sit and eat together. This is a reminder that people of all colours, classes and faiths belong to the same family of humans and therefore should be treated equally. During the Mughal empire, even the emperor Akbar sat on the ground and shared the same langar as everyone else before he could see the Guru.

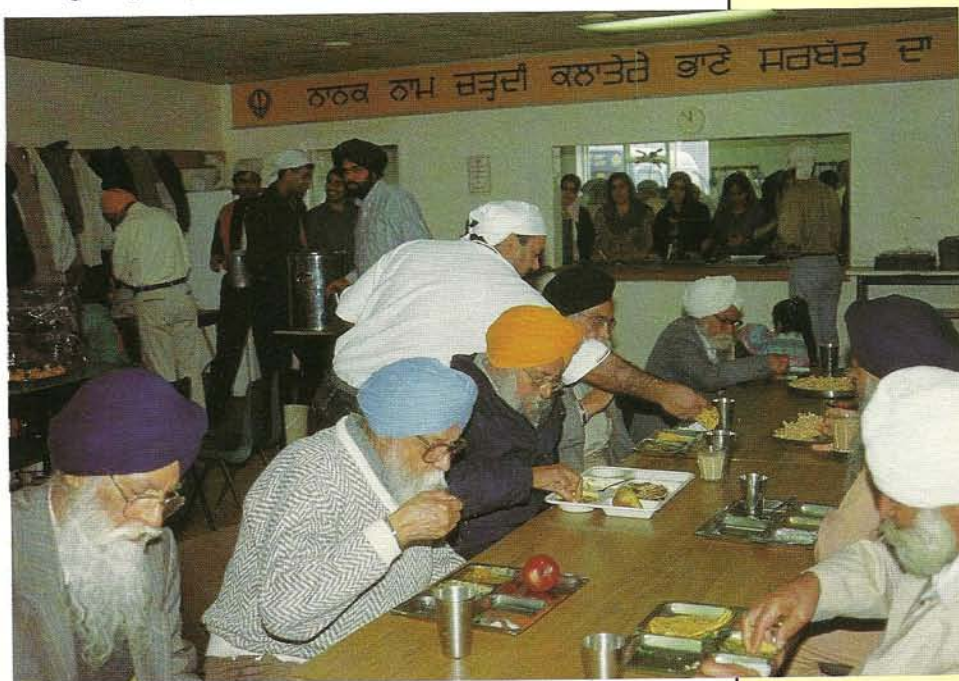
The langar is run by donations and voluntary labour. Volunteers from the community make and distribute the food. Most families take their turn to cook and serve it, and consider this an honour.

The food served, which is also known sometimes as 'Guru ka langar', usually consists of dal (lentils), a vegetable curry, 'raita' (yoghurt), rice and chapattis. The food is always vegetarian, so that everyone present is able to eat.

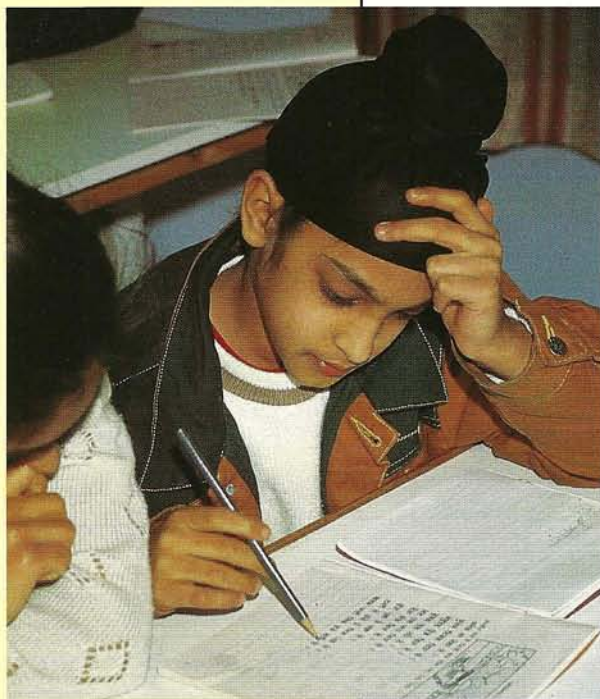
*Eating langar after a service.*

## SEWA

'Sewa' means serving others, which is one of the main principles of Sikhism. Sikhs are taught to give their time, money and skills to help others and to take pleasure in doing this, no matter how humble the job may be. Helping in the langar is one example of 'sewa'.







*Learning Panjabi.*

## **Panth**

The community of Sikhs who go to a gurdwara is called 'Panth'. All men and women are equal members in it and may take part in discussing issues concerning Sikhs and deciding on what action needs to be taken.

Sikhs believe that the community is an important influence in forming the character of its members. A community therefore tries to give its children a basic knowledge and understanding of Sikhism. Most Sikh gurdwaras organize Panjabi and music classes, where children and young people can learn to read and sing shabads from the

Guru Granth Sahib and other scriptures written in Panjabi. Many Sikh organizations hold seminars, conferences, lectures, and weekend or whole-week camps where lessons are given about the Sikh way of life.

In the West, Sikhs face some prejudice at school and when looking for jobs. For this reason, young Sikhs need a great deal of support from their family and the community to help them practise their religion without losing self-esteem.



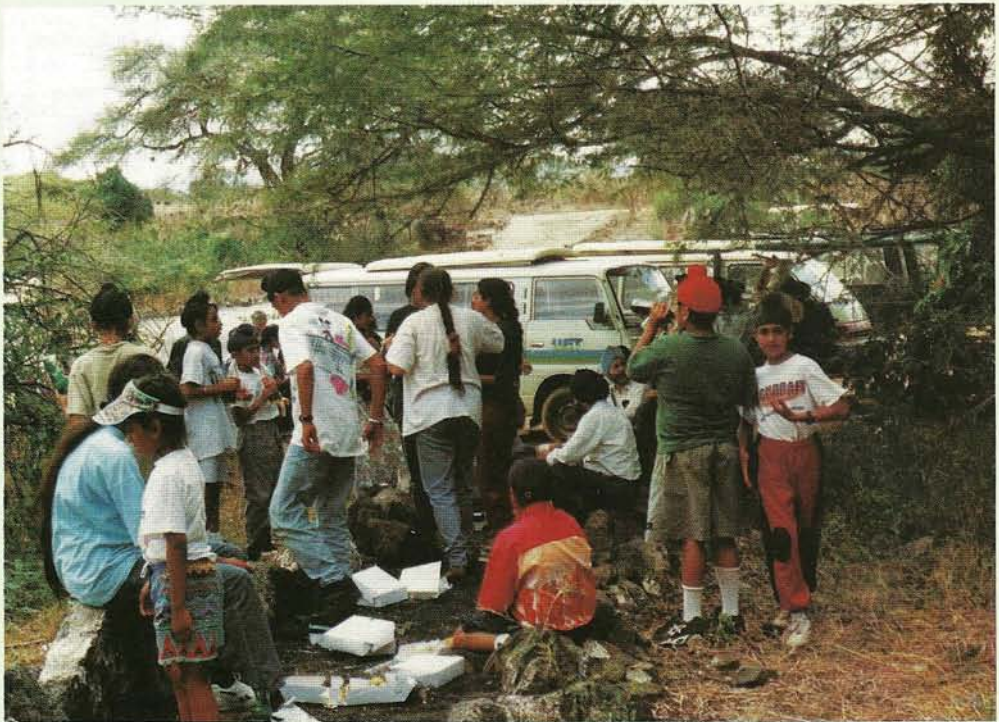
*Sikh children looking at Panjabi and Sikh history books.*



## PRIZE WINNERS

Chetna Kaur Brar, aged twelve, took part in a competition for young people, organized by the Sikh International Hemkunt Education Council. Competitors in four age groups (7–11, 11–15, 15–18 and 18–25) had to answer questions on Sikh history. First there were competitions in eight different zones, two in each of Kenya, the USA, Canada and Britain. The winners of each zonal competition, from each of the four age groups, went forward to the final international competition. Chetna was the winner in one of the British zones and so she travelled to Nairobi, Kenya, where the final was being held.

She was now competing with seven others, from different countries. First, second and third medals would be awarded. All the participants had prepared for the questions they had to answer by studying books on Sikh history which the Education Council had prescribed. When the results were announced Chetna found that she had come second and won a gold medal, a certificate and an ornamental brass clock. There was disappointment and jubilation among the participants. Chetna was delighted to have come second, as in the previous two competitions held in Canada and in the USA she had not reached any of the first three positions.



*Competitors also had an opportunity to enjoy some outings from Nairobi.*





## A SIKH LIFETIME

Sikhs have ceremonies to mark important events in their personal, family lives, such as the naming of a child, the time when a boy starts to wear a turban, marriage and death. There is also a specifically religious ceremony, called 'Amrit Chhakna', by which a person is initiated as a Sikh.

The idea behind the ceremonies is to seek God's blessings and to renew one's spirit of devotion and service. All ceremonies are held in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib and follow the form of a normal service of worship, including the singing of shabads suitable for the occasion and reading of the ardas and the hukam. Krah prashad is distributed and langar is provided for all the guests.

*This family has just chosen the baby's name, using the first letter of the hukam.*

### ***The naming ceremony***

A family welcomes the birth of a baby boy or girl as a gift from God and celebrates this at the naming ceremony.

When the mother is well enough, the family either goes to the gurdwara for the celebration or arranges for it to take place at home. In either case, the ceremony is performed in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Sometimes a continuous reading of the whole Guru Granth Sahib, 'Akhand Path' (see page 22) is completed, to mark the occasion.



## ***NAMING SIMRAN SINGH***

When Mandeep's son was seven days old, she and her husband took him to her parents' home for his naming ceremony. It was to be a small family occasion. The baby's grandparents were just finishing a reading of the complete Guru Granth Sahib, so the service started with the reading of its last three pages. After singing of shabads, the ardas was said. Then the hukam was read, which was 'O Lord I seek only your protection.' (GGS p. 714). The first letter of this shabad in Panjabi is 'S'. The baby's name was therefore to begin with that letter. After many suggestions, the family decided to call him Simran Singh.

During the service shabads of thanksgiving are read and sung. They include one that Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, composed on the birth of his son, Hargobind, who became the sixth Guru:

'The True Lord has sent the child. The long lived child has been born by good fortune.

The Sikhs sing God's praises in their joy.'

(GGS p. 396)

The usual service takes place and, at the end, when the Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random for the hukam, the family listens for the first letter of the first word of the shabad that is read and chooses a name for the child that begins with that letter. As soon as they have decided on the name, they announce it to the congregation. Girls' names are followed by 'Kaur' (princess) and boys' names by 'Singh' (lion), as instructed by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru (see page 12). Most Sikh names can be used for both boys and girls. For example, you might know a girl called Mandeep Kaur and a boy called Mandeep Singh. Sometimes a family name is added, which could be the name of the area from which the family originally came.





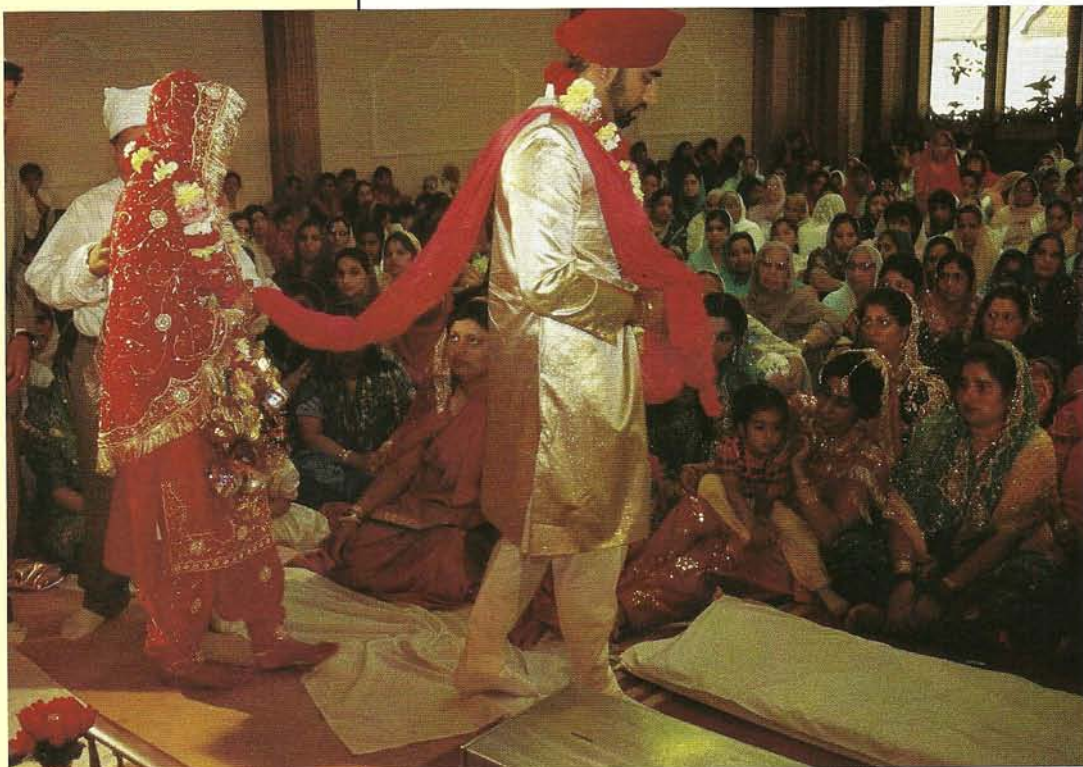


## ***The marriage ceremony***

The Sikh marriage ceremony is called 'Anand Karaj', which means the ceremony of joy. Marriage in Sikhism is considered not just a social or civil contract but also a spiritual union. The love between wife and husband is compared with the love and longing of the human soul for God.

The bride and groom sit in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. The person who officiates at the ceremony (who may be a granthi, but can be any Sikh man or woman) asks them and their parents to stand while the ardas is said. This is both to seek the Gurus' blessings and to show the parents' and the congregation's approval of the marriage. Then the officiator explains the significance of Sikh marriage, in which husband and wife are equal partners. The couple are reminded of their duties to each other and their obligations to society at large.

*Walking round the Guru Granth Sahib. This bride and groom are wearing traditional Punjabi clothes.*



After this short lecture, the bride and groom are asked to show their assent to the marriage by bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib. The bride's father places one end of a 'pala' (scarf) in the groom's hand and the other in the bride's. The pala symbolizes the soft but strong bond between husband and wife, and the couple hold on to it throughout the rest of the ceremony.

The Guru Granth Sahib is opened and the marriage shabad, 'Lavan', is read. The granthi reads the first verse and then it is sung by the ragees. The couple rises, still holding the ends of the pala. They walk slowly round the Guru Granth Sahib, with the groom leading. On reaching their starting position, they bow to the Guru Granth Sahib and sit down to hear the second verse being read. As before, the ragees then sing the verse and the couple walks round the Guru Granth Sahib. This is repeated for the remaining two verses, after which the service continues as usual.

### ***The death ceremony***

When someone in their family dies, the Guru Granth Sahib reminds Sikhs that:

'The dawn of a new day is the message of a sunset.  
Earth is not the permanent home.' (GGS p. 793)

Sikhs are told to avoid shows of grief, to find comfort in reading the Guru Granth Sahib, and to accept God's will.

In India the weather is hot and arrangements for refrigeration of bodies are not common. Therefore bodies are cremated within a day or so of death. In the West, there is usually a longer time between death and cremation, depending on the availability of the crematorium.

On the day of the cremation, the body is washed and dressed in the five Ks and brought home for family and friends to pay their last respects. Then it is taken to the crematorium in a procession or motorcade.

## LAVAN

The first verse stresses the importance of married life, for serving God and truth. It discards the idea that a person who dedicates his life to God should remain single.

The second compares the joy of finding a marriage partner with the joy of the soul when God is present in a person's life.

The third says that, just as the couple's love for one another makes everything else seem unimportant, so for the soul that has found God, all other things are unimportant by comparison.

The fourth says that the marriage is now complete, in the same way as the soul reaches perfect union with God.



## DEATH AND REBIRTH

Sikhs believe that death is not the end. The person's soul is born again. This is called the transmigration of souls.

Human birth is an opportunity to find and be united with God. If a person misses this opportunity, then he or she has to go into the cycle of birth and death again.

Sikhs are taught that each human being has free will to choose to be good or bad. The family into which you are born is decided according to 'karma' (good or bad actions in the previous life). By leading a good life and serving the needy, you can improve and come closer to God.

*Four of the five Ks:  
undershorts, comb, bangle  
and sword.*

At the crematorium, the 'kirtan sohila' (shabads for evening prayers) are recited and ardas is said to ask for peace for the departed soul. The ashes are usually thrown into a river or the sea.

Finally there is a ceremony called 'Bhog' (the completion of life's journey). The family has probably marked the occasion of the person's death with a complete reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, performed at intervals, at home or at the gurdwara. This is called the 'Sehaj Path'. The last five pages are read at the Bhog ceremony and then the usual service takes place.

### ***The amrit ceremony***

The amrit ceremony is the ceremony of initiation into the 'Khalsa Panth' (the Sikh community). Any man or woman who is prepared to accept the rules governing the Sikh community has the right to receive 'amrit'. Sometimes amrit is called 'khande ka pahul', which means nectar prepared by dissolving sugar crystals in water by stirring them with a double-edged sword. The double-edged sword reminds Sikhs that the members of the Khalsa should be 'saint-soldiers' – women and men who are prepared to use arms to defend the weak and oppressed without feeling bitterness towards their enemies. There is no minimum age for taking amrit, but young people are advised to take amrit when they understand the meaning of the vows they have to take.





*The khanda symbol consists of a double-edged sword, for God's power as Creator, a circle, for continuity, and two swords representing the spiritual and the political elements of the universe.*

Those taking amrit come to the ceremony wearing the five Ks (see page 13). It usually takes place in the gurdwara and always in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Five people conduct the ceremony, representing the Panj Piarey (the five beloved ones) who became the first members of the Khalsa when it was established by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru (see page 12). Another Sikh is present to read the Guru Granth Sahib, but apart from that the amrit ceremony is not witnessed by anyone else.

At the start, one of the Panj Piarey explains the rules and obligations of being a Sikh. Those receiving amrit agree to accept these obligations and then the ardas is said and a shabad is read from the Guru Granth Sahib opened at random. Clean water and sugar crystals are put in a steel bowl. The Panj Piarey stir the water with a double-edged sword, while reciting five prayers. After the prayers, those taking amrit receive it in cupped hands and drink it five times. The amrit is also sprinkled five times on both their eyes and hair. The ceremony ends with the usual service.

## SIKH OBLIGATIONS

The duties of a Sikh may be summarized as:

- ☪ to recite the five sacred prayers daily
- ☪ to give up all caste and class differences
- ☪ never to do the four forbidden acts, which are: to cut your hair; to use tobacco, alcohol and other harmful drugs; to commit adultery; and to eat halal meat (that is, meat killed according to Muslim religious practice).





## THE SIKH CALENDAR

The times of Sikh festivals are calculated according to the lunar calendar, which is used in India.

The main Sikh festivals, which are described in this chapter, fall in the following months on the international calendar:

**Baisakhi** – April

**Diwali** –  
October/November

**Birthday of Guru  
Nanak** –  
October/November

**Birthday of Guru  
Gobind Singh** –  
December/January

**Martyrdom of Guru  
Tegh Bahadur** –  
November/December

**Martyrdom of Guru  
Arjan Dev** – June

7

## FESTIVALS

Festivals, which are also called 'Gurpurabs' (Gurus' days), give Sikhs a chance to rededicate themselves to their faith. On these occasions, Sikhs celebrate important events connected with the Gurus' lives by saying prayers in their gurdwaras and sometimes by taking part in processions.



*Panj Piarey lead the procession to celebrate Baisakhi.*

They give money and other offerings to charities, and participate in sewa, providing free services to people in need. On Gurpurabs some Sikh doctors give free blood tests, dentists offer free dental check-ups, and other Sikhs may cook and distribute free food to the poor. In a gurdwara in the USA, Sikh doctors examined over four hundred patients free of charge on one festival day, and free meals were also provided.

There are a large number of Gurburabs. Only the main ones are described here. Even the anniversaries of the Gurus' martyrdoms are positive celebrations, because the Gurus' sacrifices remind Sikhs of their own duties to society.

All the festivals are celebrated with Akhand Path, the continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, which is completed on the morning of the festival day. This is followed by the singing of shabads, talks about the importance and meaning of the festival, and then the usual Sikh service. In India, people usually observe the festivals by taking the Guru Granth Sahib in procession through the city or village. The Guru Granth Sahib is carried on a float covered with flowers, and Panj Piarey head the procession.

## ***Baisakhi***

Baisakhi is an Indian New Year festival, which usually falls in April in the Western, international calendar. It was on the occasion of this festival that Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, introduced and conducted the first amrit ceremony.

A tradition on this day is to renew the Nishan Sahib, the Sikh flag, which flies from each gurdwara. A service led by five Sikhs representing the Panj Piarey is held outside. The flag post is taken down and the 'chola', the flag cloth, is removed. The flag post is washed, covered with a new chola and re-hoisted. The ceremony ends with saying the ardas.

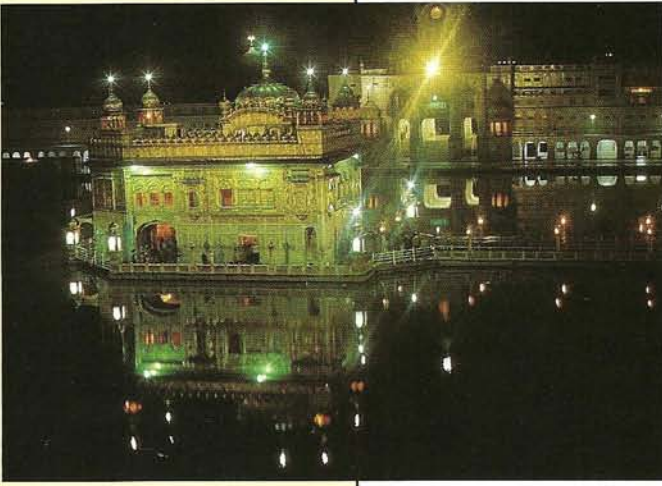
At most gurdwaras the amrit ceremony is performed on this day. Also, there are competitions in many subjects, such as sports, martial arts, music, poetry, essay writing and public speaking.



*A new flag is ready to be flown.*

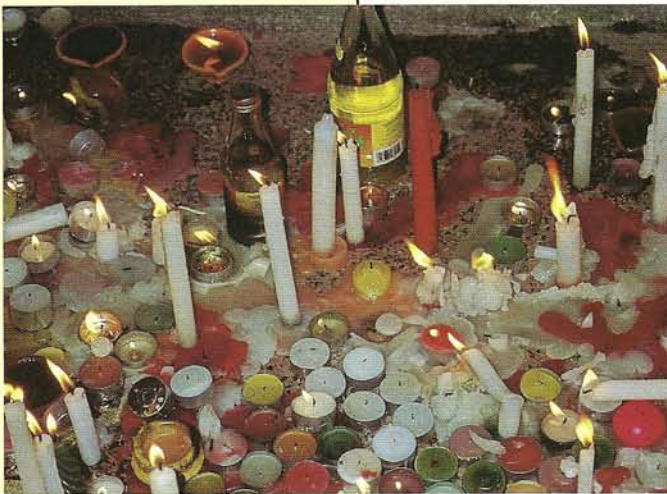






*Illuminations at the Golden Temple.*

*Candles lit for Diwali in London.*



## ***Diwali***

'Diwali' means the 'festival of lights'. On Diwali day Sikhs celebrate the arrival in Amritsar of Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, after he had been released from prison. The Mughal emperor Jehangir had imprisoned the Guru, on the charge of raising an army and committing treason against him. When the case was examined, the

charge was found to be baseless and the Guru was released. In the same prison the Guru had met fifty-two Hindu princes or 'rajas', who were also innocent. When he was released, he refused to accept his liberty unless the rajas were also set free. He was told that as many princes as could pass through the narrow passage of the jail and out into the outside world, while holding on to his cloak, would be freed. The Guru asked for a cloak which had fifty-two tassels, and by each holding on to one of these, all the rajas managed to get their freedom.

To celebrate the story, Sikhs illuminate the whole of the Golden Temple complex and there are wonderful displays of fireworks. The treasures and weapons used by the Gurus are also exhibited at this festival time.

## ***The birthdays of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh***

Sikhs celebrate the birthdays of the founder of the religion and of the last Guru in human form with great spirit. In Punjab, gurdwaras, shops, offices and houses are lit with candles. Children are given new clothes and have a day off school to join in the festival processions.



In these processions, the Guru Granth Sahib is installed on a beautifully decorated palki (platform). Panj Piarey lead the procession, followed by Sikhs singing shabads, schoolchildren joining in with their music bands, and young people giving displays of martial arts.



Special celebrations are held at Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, which is now in Pakistan.

*A float is being prepared to carry the Guru Granth Sahib in a procession to celebrate Guru Nanak's birthday.*

### ***The martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur***

At this festival, Sikhs remember Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, who sacrificed his life for the religious freedom of all people (see page 11). Large numbers of Sikhs gather in the Gurdwara Sis Ganj in Delhi, where the Guru was beheaded by the orders of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

## ***THE MARTYRDOM OF GURU ARJAN DEV***

It is June, the hottest month of the year in Punjab. Everywhere, especially in Amritsar, roadside stalls have been set up from which Sikhs are serving passers-by with free cool, refreshing drinks. There are stalls offering all sorts of fizzy and other sweet drinks.

These Sikhs are remembering the thirst of their fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, who was tortured to death by having hot sand poured on to his near-naked body, in the heat of an Indian June in 1606. This Guru stood for tolerance and the right of all people to worship as they choose. He taught that no one religion is the only true religion. For saying this, he was martyred and his followers were persecuted.

It is in keeping with the Guru's teachings on tolerance that Sikhs commemorate the anniversary of his sufferings by attending to the thirst of all people, whatever their race and belief.



# Glossary

To show how words are pronounced, some letters have been underlined in the words in this Glossary.

chh	there is no equivalent sound in English. It sounds like the 'ch' in 'church', but with the 'h' held a little longer.
u	sounds like 'u' in 'bull'
a	sounds like 'a' in 'am'
<u>a</u>	sounds like 'a' in 'car'
i	sounds like 'i' in 'sit'
<u>i</u>	sounds like 'ee' in 'meet'

**amrit** literally, nectar. This is made by stirring sugar crystals into water with a double-edged sword, while certain passages from the scriptures are read.

**Amrit Chhakna** the Sikh rite of initiation into the Khalsa.

**ardas** a formal prayer offered at most religious services and occasions.

**chandni** a canopy placed over the Guru Granth Sahib, used as a mark of respect.

**chouri** a fan made of yak hair or nylon, which is waved over the Guru Granth Sahib to show respect for the scriptures.

**diwan** a congregational gathering for worship.

**granthi** reader of the Guru Granth Sahib, who officiates at ceremonies and may also act as a caretaker of the gurdwara.

**gurdwara** Sikh place of worship.

**Gurmukhi** 'from the Guru's mouth'; name given to the script in which the scriptures and the Panjabi language are written.

**hukam** random reading taken for guidance from the Guru Granth Sahib.

**kachh** traditional underwear/shorts; one of the five Ks worn by both male and female Sikhs.

**kanga** comb worn in the hair; one of the five Ks.

**kara** steel bangle; one of the five Ks worn by both male and female Sikhs.

**Kaur** literally, princess; a name given to every Sikh female. The name was given by Guru Gobind Singh, to elevate the position of women.

**kes** un-cut hair; one of the five Ks.

**Khalsa** the community of the pure; the Sikh community.

**Kirat Karni** earning one's livelihood by one's own efforts.

**kirpan** sword; one of the five Ks. (The term 'dagger' should be avoided.)

**kirtan** devotional singing of compositions from the Guru Granth Sahib, the Dasam Granth and the Bhai Gurdas.

**krah prashad** a food made of flour, sugar, butter or ghee (purified butter) in equal proportions. It is shared at the end of Sikh gatherings to symbolize equality.

**langar** Gurus' kitchen; the gurdwara dining hall and the food served in it.

<b>lavan</b>	the part of a marriage ceremony where the couple walk round the Guru Granth Sahib. Also, the name of the four verses from the Guru Granth Sahib which are said at the ceremony.
<b>Nam Japna</b>	meditation on God's name, using passages from scripture.
<b>Nishan Sahib</b>	Sikh flag flown at gurdwaras and at other Sikh buildings. The flag is saffron-coloured, triangular, and has the khanda symbol on it.
<b>palki</b>	the structure in which the Guru Granth Sahib is ceremonially installed.
<b>Panj Piarey</b>	the five beloved ones; the first five men initiated into the Khalsa.
<b>Panth</b>	the Sikh community.
<b>patka</b>	a head-covering used by boys before they start wearing a turban.
<b>ragee</b>	Sikh musician who leads and sings compositions from the Guru Granth Sahib.
<b>romallas</b>	cloths used as coverings for the Guru Granth Sahib.
<b>sangat</b>	congregation or assembly of Sikhs.
<b>sewa</b>	service, an essential part of the life of every Sikh.
<b>shabad</b>	hymn from the Guru Granth Sahib.
<b>Singh</b>	literally, lion. A name used by all Sikh males.
<b>Vand Chhakna</b>	sharing one's time, talents and earnings with the less fortunate.

## Book List

Olivia Bennett, *Listening to Sikhs*, Unwin Hyman, 1990 (Useful information on what it is like to be a Sikh.)

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## Note on Dates

Each religion has its own system for counting the years of its history. The starting point may be related to the birth or death of a special person or an important event. In everyday life, today, when different communities have dealings with each other, they need to use the same counting system for setting dates in the future and writing accounts of the past. The Western system is now used throughout the world. It is based on Christian beliefs about Jesus: AD (Anno Domini = in the year of our Lord) and BC (Before Christ). Members of the various world faiths use the common Western system, but, instead of AD and BC, they say and write CE (in the Common Era) and BCE (before the Common Era).



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# WORLD RELIGIONS

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People following each one of these religions live all over the world, sometimes in countries quite different from the place where the religion began. What are the key beliefs, ideas and practices which unite the people of each religion, wherever they are? And, on the other hand, how have different communities of people adapted the details of the religion to their own particular way of life? The information, personal examples and illustrations in these books answer both these questions.

*Angela Wood, the series consultant, has worked for many years as a Religious Education teacher, lecturer, teacher trainer, education adviser and inspector.*

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