

BEING A SIKH

S.S. KAPOOR



Hemkunt

Khalsa College London
University Building, 35 Pinner Road
Harrow, HA1 4ES, U.K.
Registration No. 2081264
Charity No. 26012

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S.S. KAPOOR

Director Principal
Khalsa College, London



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Introduction

The word Sikh means a disciple and comes from the Sanskrit word *Shishya*. There are more than sixteen million Sikhs living all over the world of which twelve million live in Punjab, India. There are also Sikhs living in other parts of India, East Africa, Britain, Denmark, West Germany, USA, Canada, Iran, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Australia and Newzealand.

There are about a quarter of a million Sikhs in Britain, making the largest Sikh community outside India.

The Sikhs respect every religion, their scriptures and their Prophets. They themselves follow the path shown by their ten Gurus (Prophets) and believe in the *Shabads*, the 'word' revealed to the Sikh Gurus by God. The *Shabads* are preserved in their sacred scripture known as Guru Granth Sahib.

The Sikh Gurus have laid down comprehensive rules and commandments to be followed by a Sikh. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, transformed Sikhs into the Khalsa brotherhood. He declared the fulfilment of God's orders and the completion the mission of the Sikh Gurus. He nominated Guru Granth Sahib as the future Sikh Guru.

The message of Sikhism is universal love and brotherhood, selfless and truthful living, caring for the poor and the unfortunate, and devotion and love to God.

A message from Guru Granth Sahib

**"I have shed the concept of 'mine' and 'yours',
since I started the company of the saints.**

There is no enemy and no stranger,

All humanity is one.

Whatever God does, believe in it,

Saints say—this is the real truth.

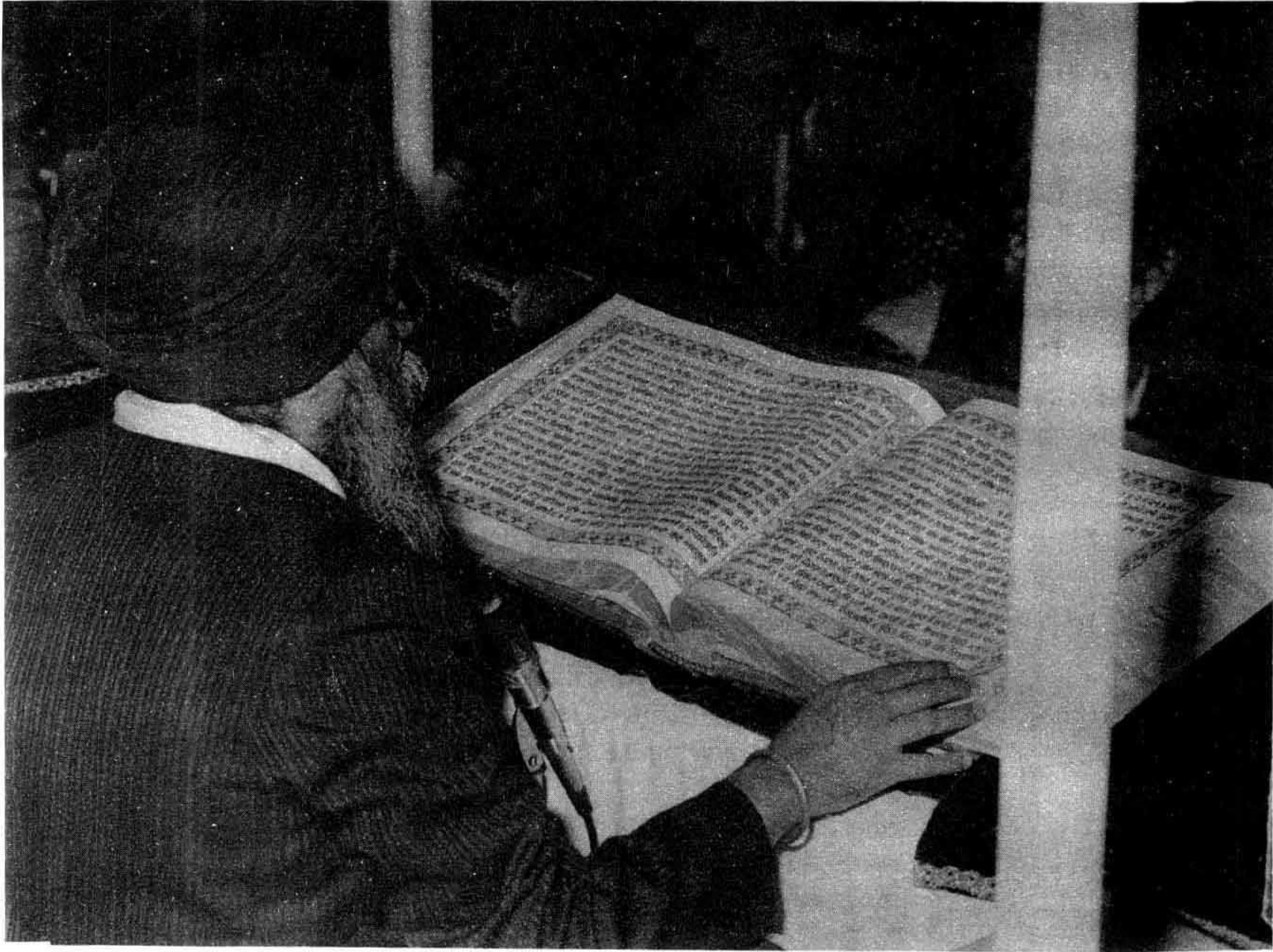
He is omnipresent,

**O Nanak, if you have the faith you can be one with
Him and be always happy."**

(Guru Arjan, Guru Granth Sahib page 1299)

A message from Dasam Granth

**"Every one must listen,
I am telling you the truth.
Only those who love,
Can be one with God."
(Guru Gobind Singh, page 14)**



Sikh Sources

The quotations in this book come from a large range of Sikh Sources. The main sources, however, are the following

A. Guru Granth Sahib

For Sikhs, Granth Sahib is not only the Holy Book but also the living *Shabad Guru*. The last Prophet of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, instructed his followers before his death that after him there will be no human Guru and that the Sikhs would honour "Granth Sahib" as their spiritual teacher and "Five Khalsa" (Five Baptised Sikhs) as their temporal leaders. Guru Granth Sahib was compiled by the Fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji. He started the work of compilation in August 1601 and completed it in August 1604. The original manuscript sealed and signed by the fifth Guru is intact and is in the possession of the descendants of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind. The place where it is stored is a private residence in the Village Kartarpur. A second version of the Granth was compiled by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1706. He included the Hymns of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, in the original Granth as edited and compiled by the Fifth Guru.

For the Sikhs Guru Granth Sahib is a Revealed Book. The contents of which were revealed to the Sikh Gurus and other Saints.

Guru Granth Sahib is a very comprehensive book of 1430 pages. It contains hymns written in a variety of languages. The main languages, however, are Punjabi, Lehndi, Dakhni, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic.

Guru Granth Sahib is perhaps the only sacred book available to the present day reader and historian which was written and signed by the author and editor himself. All other Holy books of different religions were written long after the death of the prophets.

B. The Dasam Granth

Dasam Granth is the second sacred book of the Sikhs. This book contains hymns written by the tenth Sikh Guru. The Granth was compiled by one of Guru's contemporary, Bhai Mani Singh, in 1711, three years after Guru's death. In its present form it contains 1428 pages and its hymns are composed in Braj, Hindi, Punjabi and Persian languages.

C. The Sarb Loh Granth

The authorship of this Granth is not known. Many writers, however, claim that most parts of this Granth were written by Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

D. The Janam Sakhis (The Hagiographies)

The stories of Gurus' birth and lives of the Gurus are called *Janam Sakhis*. They are not biographies but hagiographies because they mean literature of the lives and legends of the Saints. There are quite a large number of such Sakhis available in English.

E. The works of "Bhai Gurdas" I and II, the works of "Bhai Mani Singh and the works of other contemporaries of the Sikh Gurus.

A large number of books written in both prose and poetry about the lives and life style of the Sikh Gurus by their contemporaries are also available. However the most important of them are the books written by Bhai Gurdas I, a contemporary of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru; Bhai Gurdas II, Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Nand Lal contemporaries of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.

F. The 'Hukam Namas'—letters written by the Gurus

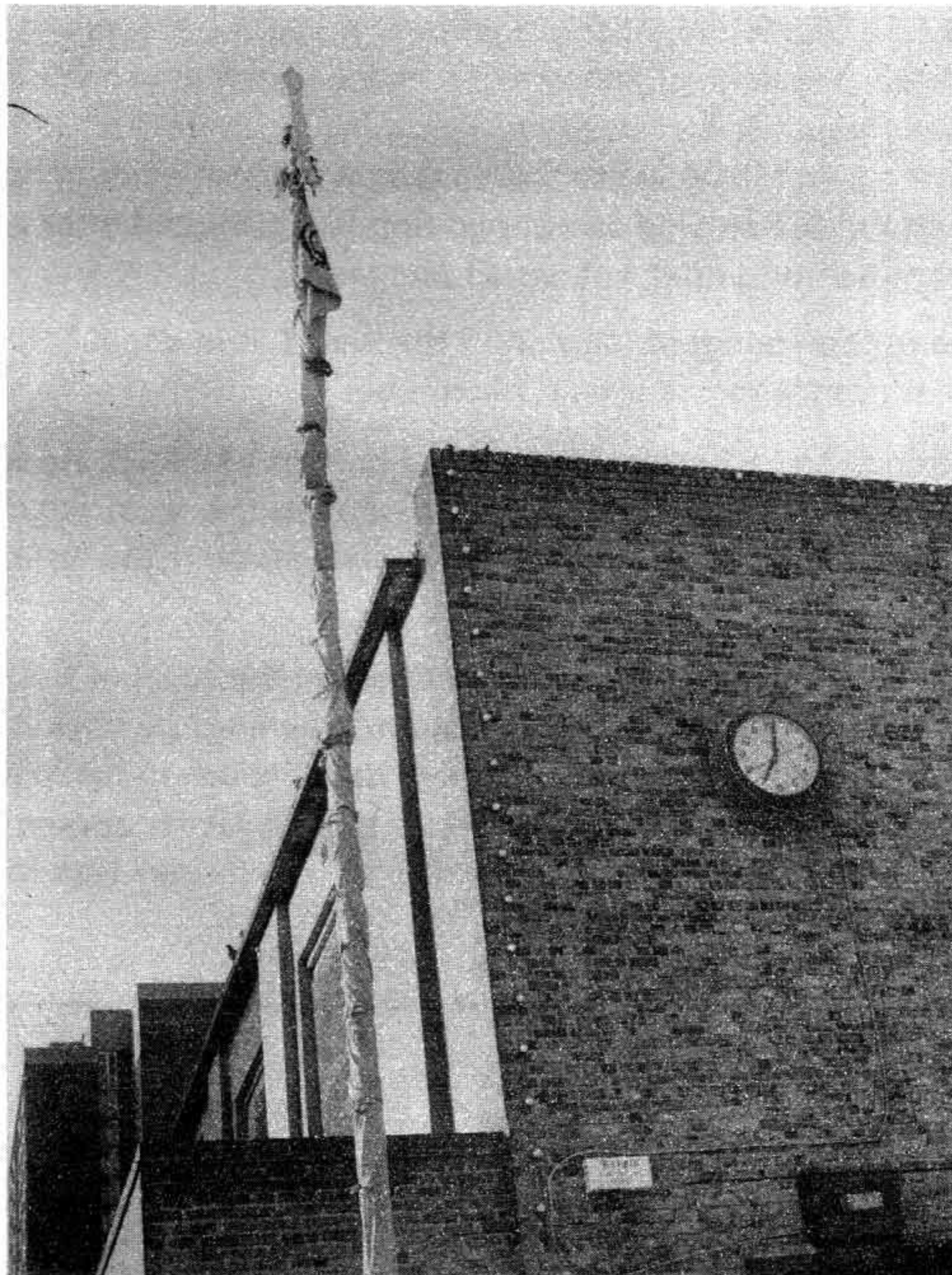
After a great deal of research the Shrimoni Gurdwara Parbandak Committee (The supreme body controlling the Sikh shrines) published a book in 1967 which contains copies of the letters written by the Sikh Gurus to their followers. So far the following letters have been discovered from the descendents of various Sikh families, Libraries, and Museums etc.

Guru Hargobind — 3 Letters
Guru Harkrishan — 1 Letter
Guru Tegh Bahadur — 30 Letters
Guru Gobind Singh — 31 Letters

Being A Sikh

A Sikh believes in the fatherhood of God, brotherhood of mankind and *Sarbat Da Bhala* (good of every one). Everyday at the end of the Sikh prayer a Sikh says, "O Nanak in the name of God every one should prosper and be happy". The foundation of the Sikh faith is laid on the love of God and good of the fellow beings. Being a Sikh means that you have faith in the teachings of the ten Gurus and you accept Guru Granth Sahib as the *Shabad Guru*.

The Sikhs greet each other by saying 'Sat Sri Akal' (God is the truth) or 'Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh' (Khalsa belong to God and God is always victorious). The words Sikh and Khalsa are synonyms, though religiously speaking a Khalsa is a baptised Sikh. Sikhism is concerned, in micro sense, with a person's life



as an individual and in the macro sense, with his corporate life as a member of the Sikh community. In the micro sense Sikhism is concerned with the study of the Sikh scriptures, living according to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and involving oneself in the active service of the community. In the macro sense it is concerned with *Sangat and Pangat*, *The Amrit* (Baptismal Ceremony) and the supremacy of *Akal Takhat*. Five of the historical Sikh shrines have been designated as Takhats. A Takhat means a throne. The high priests of the Takhats form a committee which have the authority to issue commandments for the Sikh nation and which can also punish the religious wrongdoers. Akal Takhat, a shrine built by Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru of the Sikhs is the supreme of the five Takhats. The other gurdwaras designated as Takhats are, Takhat Patna Sahib (place where Guru Gobind Singh was born in 1666 AD), Takhat Kesgarh Sahib (Gurdwara where the Khalsa was baptised by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 AD), Takhat Damdama Sahib (shrine where Guru Gobind Singh prepared the present version of Guru Granth Sahib in 1704 AD) and Takhat Hazoor Sahib (the Sikh temple where Guru Gobind Singh breathed his last).

The sequence of a Sikh's daily congregational prayer is, listening to *Kirtan* hymns sung by the *Raagis* (musicians), followed by the prayer which ends with "*Nanak Nam Chardi Kala Tere bhaney Sarbat Da Bhala* (Supreme is the word of God, may God bless every human being) and listening to the *Hukam*, a random reading from Guru Granth Sahib. At the end of the service sweet pudding is distributed after which every one joins in the community dinner known as *Langar*.

Sikhism is one of the youngest religion in the world. It is about 550 years old. The total world Sikh population is about 14 million.

Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak who was born in 1469 AD. He was the son of a village *Patwari* (Revenue Officer). The guru went to the local school and studied Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic languages. He also studied the Hindu and Muslim scriptures.

According to the Sikh history books he was taken to the court of God by the Angels, when he was 28 years old. There God commanded him to go back to the world and spread the word of God. Guru Nanak travelled upto Mecca in the West, Tibet in the North, Sri Lanka in the South and to Bangladesh in the East. He spread the message of universal love, truthful living and honest earning. Guru Nanak was followed by nine other Sikh Gurus.

Guru Angad : (1504-1552)

He became Guru after the death of Guru Nanak in 1539. He rationalised the Punjabi language as it is known today. He encouraged people to learn Punjabi and recorded both Guru Nanak's and his own hymns in that language. Most of his Shabads known

as *Slokas* are included in a hymn known as *Asa Di Var* read every morning in the gurdwaras.

Guru Amardas : (1479-1574)

The third Guru Amardas, taught his followers the importance of the spirit of selfless service, simple living and hardworking.

The *Anand Sahib*, a hymn which is recited at the end of every Sikh service was composed by him.

Guru Ramdas : (1534-1581)

Guru Ramdas established the sacred city of Amritsar. He wrote the most famous hymns of *Lavan (the ceremony of bliss)* which are read at the time of the Sikh marriage.

Guru Arjan Dev : (1563-1606)

Guru Arjan Dev compiled the holy Granth Sahib and founded the most sacred shrine of the Sikhs *The Harmandir Sahib* (now known as Golden Temple). More than two fifth of the hymns preserved in Guru Granth Sahib are composed by him. His most famous hymn, however, is *Sukhmani Sahib (the song of peace)*.

Guru Hargobind : (1595-1644)

The Guru introduced the idea of *Miri* (temporal power) and *Piri* (spiritual power). Before Guru Hargobind the Sikh movement was a pacifist religious movement. Guru Arjan was tortured to death for spreading and propagating a doctrine which was not wholly Islamic, for a large number of Muslims were embracing his faith and for his message of love and peace did not fit in the political game of the rulers of the time. Guru Arjan, before his death, instructed Guru Hargobind to protect the infant religion of Guru Nanak and not to get it crushed and destroyed by the fanatical designs of the Mughal King. The Guru thus merged the *Bhakti Movement* (meditation or spiritual aspect) of Guru Nanak and his successors with the *Shakti Movement* (the power or temporal aspect) as instructed by his father. As a result the Guru wore two swords—one to symbolise *Miri* and the other to denote *Piri* at his coronation as a Sikh Guru. He also introduced the idea of congregational worship.

Guru Har Rai: (1630-1661)

The seventh Guru rationalised the organisation of the Sikh movement. He toured various places of Punjab and spread the message of the Sikh Gurus. He said that the Guruship was like a tiger's milk, which could only be contained in a golden cup. Only he who was ready to devote his life thereto was worthy of it.

Guru Harkrishan : (1656-1664)

The eighth Guru spread the word of sacrifice, love and humility. A very important Sikh shrine—*Bangla Sahib* stands in his memory in New Delhi. He is also known as a child Guru for he became Guru when he was only 5 years old and died when he was only eight.

Guru Tegh Bahadur : (1621-1675)

He sacrificed his life for the protection of the Hindu religion. He was arrested and beheaded at *Chandni Chowk* in old Delhi. He raised his voice against injustice and tyranny of the Mughal Rulers. His most famous Hymns are his *Slokas* which make the closing hymns of Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh : (1666-1708)

Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and last human Guru of the Sikhs. He initiated a new baptismal order and created *The Khalsa Panth*. He also wrote a code of conduct for a true Sikh. He sacrificed all his sons and his own life for the safety of Hindus and for the freedom of India. Then he gave a new identity to the Sikhs.

Though the Sikhs have ten Gurus but they believe that all the Gurus had the same light, spirit and soul. They believe that though the Gurus came at different times but they had the same message and the same mission. The whole Sikh religious pyramid is based on these beliefs. Guru Gobind Singh has reinforced this conviction in one of his hymns.

All Gurus had the Same Souls :

**In the house of the *Bedis* was born Nanak, the king of kings,
who brought joy to his followers and became their refuge
both here and in the hereafter (4)**

**The Nanak assumed Angad's form
and spread his religion far and wide.
Then, he was known as Amardas
as one light lights another. (7)**

**And when came time for the fulfilment of his blessing.
He was called Ramdas, the Guru (8)**

**Ramdas then merged in God
appointing Arjan as the Guru
and when Arjan ascended to the heavens,
he established Hargobind in his place (11)**

When Hargobind proceeded to the abode of God,
it was Harrai who was seated in his place.
After him came Harkrishan, his son,
and then it was Tegh Bahadur who succeeded him (12)
(Dasam Granth—bachitar natak chapter V)

A Disciple and a Learner :

Being a Sikh means a disciple and a learner, and Sikhism means the path of discipline and discipleship. The Sikhs took birth from amongst the sturdy people of the Punjab in the beginning of the sixteenth century as disciples of Guru Nanak who founded the Sikh religion. Guru Nanak protested against the exploitation of the people by the priestly classes and oppressive policies of the Muslim rulers. He rejected the multiplicity of Gods and Goddesses and emphatically asserted that there was but one God, God of the whole universe and of all mankind. He abolished the caste system and refused to acknowledge the superiority of the *Brahman*. He proclaimed that all men were equal before God and that there was no difference between man and man.

(from Sikhs and Sikhism by Dr. Ganda Singh page 1)

A Challenge of Times :

If Sikhism the youngest of the Indian religions with smallest numbers of followers, has emerged on the world scene then there has to be some special philosophy behind its success story. The philosophy of living pure, amongst the impurities of life, given by Guru Nanak and successive Sikh Gurus, provided the Sikhs, capacity to face challenge and ability to adjust to new situations at home and abroad.

(from the Sikh courier international spring-summer 1986)

Taking Amrit (Getting Baptised)

Anyone can be initiated into the Sikh religion if one can read and understand the contents of Guru Granth Sahib and is matured enough to follow the Sikh code of conduct. The baptism ceremony is known as "*Amrit Chhakna*". It is conducted in a holy place, any place sanctified with the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, preferably a *Gurdwara*. The ceremony is conducted by five baptised Sikhs known as *Singhs* or *Khalsa* who must be observant of the Sikh religious discipline and the Sikh code of conduct. A date and place is fixed for the baptismal ceremony and information to that effect is given in the local press. All the candidates interested in the initiation then formally apply for admission. The candidates are interviewed and if found worthy of initiation are called at the specified place at the fixed date and time.

The formal ceremony is conducted in the following way :

A. Guru Granth Sahib is opened in the ceremonious way. One of the five Khalsas selected for the Amrit ceremony offers the formal prayer in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib which is followed by a random reading from the holy book.

B. The entrants join in the formal prayer and sit cross legged when the verse from Guru Granth Sahib is being read. Then they stand in front of the congregation (if there is any) and ask their permission for admission into the Khalsa brotherhood. The permission is normally given by means of the religious call—*Bolay So Nihal Sat Sri Akal (Whosoever Would Speak Would Be Blessed—God Is The Supreme Truth)*.

C. One of the Khalsa then instructs the aspirants in the following way :

After taking Amrit you must :

1. Believe in the teaching of the ten Sikh Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib.
2. Recite five *Banis*-(*Collection of Hymns*) every day.
3. Wear the *five Ks*-i.e., uncut hair, sword, comb, underwear and the steel bracelet.
4. Live upon your own honest and sincere earnings.
5. Treat all human beings as equal.
6. Spread the name of God.

After taking Amrit you must not :

1. Deal with persons who have no belief in God
2. Take drugs, intoxicants and tobacco in any form
3. Have any faith in magic, superstitions, charms and rituals
4. Have any relations with minas (descendants of Prithi Chand, a brother of Guru Arjan who revolted against his father, Guru Ramdas, to have the Guruship for himself) Dhirmalias (descendants of Dhirmal, a grandson of Guru

Hargobind who also revolted against his father and grand father to inherit the Guruship) and child killers, a sect of Hindus who would kill their babies if they were girls.

After the general acceptance of the above instructions, the *Amrit* (the holy nectar) is prepared. A big iron bowl is filled with fresh water and some sugar pellets are put in. The water is stirred by all the five selected Khalsa with a double edged dagger. Five holy *Banis* viz., Jap Sahib., (composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji), Japji Sahib (composed by Guru Nanak), Sudha Swayas (composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji), Benti Chaupai (composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji), and Anand Sahib (composed by Guru Amardas) are recited while the water is being stirred.

After the completion of the five *Banis* a prayer is said and a random verse is read from Guru Granth Sahib. Then the *Amrit* is administered to each candidate, one by one, as follows :

Firstly, five sips of *Amrit* are poured into the hollow made by the palm of the right hand of each entrant to drink one after another.

Secondly, the *Amrit* is sprinkled five times into the eyes and heads of the candidates.

Finally, each candidate drinks a little *Amrit* from the same bowl until is finished completely.

After the administration of the *Amrit* in the above way, the *Bani Of Anand Sahib* is recited followed by the prayer and random reading of a verse from Guru Granth Sahib. At the end *Karah Parshad* (the sweet pudding) is distributed to all. The congregation then congratulates all the candidates for their admission in the Khalsa brotherhood.

Belonging to the Khalsa Brotherhood

Khalsa means belonging to a family of the saint soldiers. Guru Nanak founded the Sikh nation, Guru Gobind Singh organised this nation into the Khalsa brotherhood. The Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh is an embodiment of the greatest virtues—truth, justice, compassion, valour and fearlessness. The Khalsa as formulated by the tenth Guru was a group of fearless saints. An army of a very high moral character. Thus along with the spiritual teachings and saintly life-style of the house of Nanak, the tenth Nanak (Guru Gobind Singh Ji) infused in the followers of the house a new spirit of self-sacrifice, fearlessness, bravery, boldness, truthfulness, benevolence,



brotherliness and graciousness. According to the Guru, these were to be the requisites of the Khalsa. The Khalsa was to be a tough saint.

To the Khalsa his basic command was to worship one formless and deathless God. Khalsa is not to worship any images of humanbeing.

To create the Khalsa Guru Gobind Singh called a conference on 30th March 1699 at Kesgarh Sahib in Anandpur (Punjab). He ordered the delegates to come with their hair and beards unshorn. In front of a huge gathering he declared that he was going to transform the Sikhs into Khalsa brotherhood. He said he wanted only those people in the brotherhood who could fight the injustice and were not scared of death. He said that he wanted the head of one of his followers. Asking for a head for himself was an unusual demand. Few moments after the call a Sikh named Bhai Daya Singh stood up with folded hands and offered his head to the Guru. To the surprise of every one the Guru took him to the nearest closed tent. The congregation heard a thumping sound, then the fall of a heavy object on the ground and then a stream of blood coming out from the tent. The Guru came back on the stage with a sword covered with fresh blood. He said he wanted another head. One after the other he made five calls and five people without the fear of death offered their lives to the Guru. When the Guru had taken the fifth person inside the tent it took him quite sometime to come out. But when he did come out every one was surprised to see the five volunteers hale and hearty, dressed in beautiful yellow and blue robes decorated with various weapons. The Guru said they were the five bravest people who without question or hesitation had offered their lives to the Guru. He baptised them with *Amrit* and called them his beloved ones—*The Panj Piyaras*. He then bowed in front of them and asked them to baptise him as well.

Thus was created the brotherhood of Khalsa. Just as the Guru was the chosen Prophet of God, deputised to punish the wicked and vicious people, so the Khalsa was to act as the Guru's proxy and was to carry on the mission of the Guru for ever.

The public address of Guru Gobind Singh at the time of the creation of the Khalsa at Anandpur on 30 March 1699.

"I (Gobind Singh) wish you all to embrace one creed and follow one path, rising above all differences of the religion as now practised. Let the four Hindu castes, who have different *Dharmas (faiths)* laid down for them in the *Shashtras* (holy books of the Hindus), containing institutes of *Varnashramdharma* (the religion of the castes) abandon them altogether, and adopting the way of mutual help and cooperation, mix freely with one another.....let men of the four castes receive my baptism of the double edged sword, eat out of the same bowl, and feel no aloofness from, or contempt for one another. "...". When the Guru had thus addressed the crowd several brahmins and khattris stood up and said that they accepted the religion of Nanak and of the other Gurus..... about twenty thousand

men stood up and promised to obey the Guru as they had the fullest faith in his divine mission....”

(from Ahmed Shah Butalia’s letter sent to emperor Aurangzeb April 1699)

Belonging to the Khalsa brotherhood in the words of Guru Gobind Singh himself :

**“The Khalsa is my image, I reside in the Khalsa
The Khalsa is the army of the immortal God
The Khalsa is created by the command of God
So long as the Khalsa retains their identity,
I shall give them all the glory.
But when they deviate to the misguided ways
I shall withdraw my support.
I am honoured for I raised the Khalsa
at the God’s command otherwise there are
million like me, for whom no one cares.
(from Sarb Loh Granth)**

The Surgical Operation :

Guru Gobind Singh’s mission of binding people together in the Khalsa brotherhood was a surgical operation. He gave us a concept of unusual value. He was a man of astonishing originality. People often forget that Guru Gobind Singh’s message is offered as an interpretation of human experience and has an answer the problems of human living. What the Sikhs call the Khalsa, are the attributes inherently present in all human beings and are gifts of God, untouched and unexplored. The Guru shook them, he made them meaningful and realisable for all men by his personal actions and teachings.

(from the Idealman—by Dr. S S Kapoor, 1987)

Practising the Code of Conduct Rehatnamas

The *rehatnamas* are the books which contain the commandments issued by Guru Gobind Singh for observance by the Khalsa. Historically there are five such books all written by Guru Gobind Singh's contemporaries. The first two books are known as *Tankhanama* and *Prashan Uttar* written by Bhai Nand Lal. The other three books are known as *Rehatnamas* and are written by Bhai Chaupa Singh, Bhai Desa Singh and Bhai Prehlad Singh. The Sikh reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century produced a detailed code of conduct based on the original codes. This was published in February 1945 by the *Shrimoni Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee* (the supreme body for the organisation of the Sikh gurdwaras).

Extracts from the Original Code :

"Dear friend pay attention to my words. Such is the living of a Sikh. He should forsake everything else (which is derogatory) and concentrate on *Nam* (name of god), *Dan* (charity) and *Ishnan* (bath—cleanliness). That Sikh may be called fortunate, who joins *Satsang* (holy congregation) in the early hours of the morning. Whosoever goes to the holy congregation, but cannot concentrate himself, shall not get peace in this or the next world.

While listening to the praises of the Lord, whosoever engages himself in talk, will go to the abode of *Yama* (death).

He who does not care for the poor, will undoubtedly be punished.

He who goes to work without prayer, eats anything without offering it in the name of God, accepts anything after forsaking it will not receive any respect in the court of God.

He who does not like *Katha* (commentary of the religious books) and *Kirtan* (the singing of hymns), talks disrespectfully with a saintly Sikh, indulges in slandery and loses property in gambling will be severely punished by *Kal* (god of death).

(from *Tankhanama* by Bhai Nand Lal).

A Sikh should live and work according to the principles of Sikhism and should be guided by the following :

**“He should worship only one God
He should live a life based on the teachings of the ten
Gurus, Guru Granth Sahib, and other
scriptures and teachings of the Gurus.
Sikhs should believe in the oneness of the ten Gurus. They
should believe that the ten Gurus had the same light.
The gurdwara should serve as the Sikh’s central place of
worship
Sikhism should be distinct from other religions, but Sikhs
must in no way give offence to other faiths.
It is the duty of the Sikhs to teach Sikhism to their
children.
Sikhs should not partake of alcohol, tobacco, drugs or other
intoxicants.
Sikhs should only live on money that has been honestly earned.
No Sikh should gamble or commit theft.....”**

(from Rehat Maryada published by SGPC in February 1945)

Why Rehatnamas ?

Everything in this world moves under a rule. Even happiness and consolation comes if one follows rules and lives with discipline. *Rehats* are the rules which a Sikh must follow. Guru Gobind Singh called a Sikh who followed his instructions as a supreme being, and declared himself to be his disciple .today we have completely forgotton all the rules and the instructions laid down by the Gurus. We are trying to make our own rules. We are questioning the necessity of *Rehats*. But is it right ? No it is not right. We must follow the rules made by our Gurus blindly. Otherwise the religion will die.....

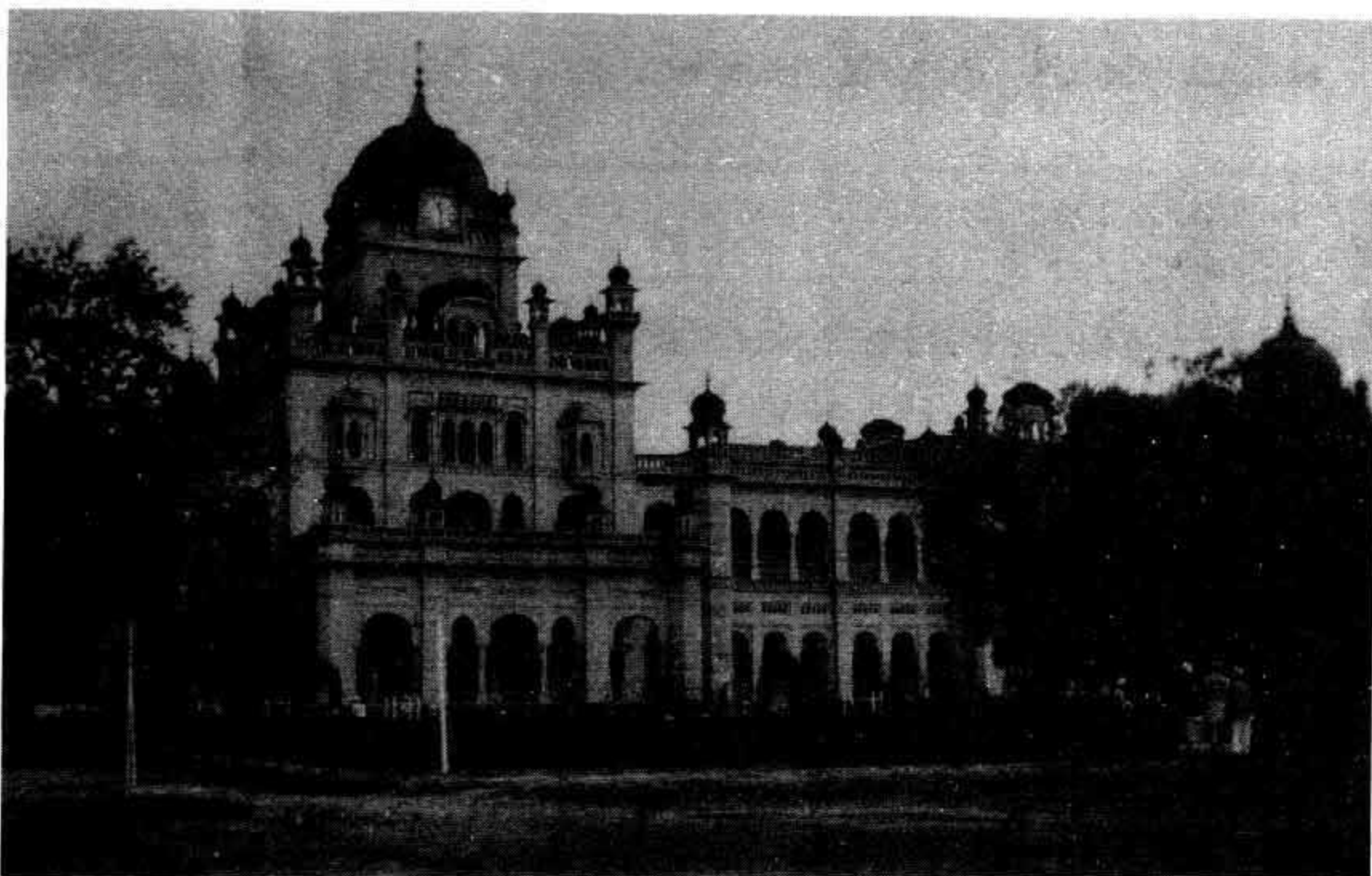
(from *Rachhia Rehat* by principal Satbir Singh, 1974)

Studying Punjabi and Sikh History

Punjab is the homeland of the Sikhs. This is the land where the Sikh movement was started. About 70 percent of the world Sikh population lives in Punjab. The culture of India is the culture of this land. The vedas were written here, Bhagvad Geeta was narrated here and Guru Granth Sahib was compiled here. The language of this region is known as Punjabi and historically it is as old as the vedas. However, the modern alphabet of the Punjabi language was first written by Guru Nanak and was later formalised by Guru Angad. Most of the Sikh religious books are written in Punjabi. The script is also sometimes known as *Gurmukhi*—meaning coming from the mouth of the Guru. For the Sikhs Punjabi is the sacred language.

The Sikh Gurus laid a great emphasis on learning. With every Sikh temple they built a school which they called as a *Taksal*. In the times of the Sikh Gurus the brahmins had declined the right of learning to non-brahmins and had kept this privilege to themselves. The Sikh Gurus broke this barrier. They brought knowledge to the door step of every learner.

It is obligatory for every Sikh child to learn Punjabi and to learn to read Guru Granth Sahib. To get baptised one of the pre-requisite is the ability to read and understand Guru Granth Sahib.



Khalsa College, Amritsar

The knowledge of history keeps the nations alive. The Sikhs are very conscious of this fact. In gurdwaras and Sikh schools special provision is made for the Sikh children to learn their history and the language.

In Britain, USA and Canada the Sikhs have opened sunday schools and evening classes to teach children their heritage. In England Khalsa college London is the pioneer in this field.

REFERENCES :

Education Recommended by the Sikh Gurus :

Education is a must for a Sikh. Every Sikh must do his best to send his children to school. Guru Angad, the second Guru, stressed mental as well as physical development through education, sports and discipline as the important characteristics of a Sikh. In his Hymns he said :

“Salvation can only be gained by education and knowledge and not by futile acts or rituals like piercing ears etc.”

“Make feet out of fear, hands out of love and eyes out of education; Nanak Says, in this way, O wise woman shall you meet the bridegroom (God).”

**“In the morning during the fourth watch
they who remember God feel delight
they love to go to streams for exercise and bath.
And endeavour to learn and understand about the true name
in their hearts and lips...” they are the true Sikhs.**

(from Guru Granth Sahib pp 139, 146 and 903— Hymns of Guru Angad)

Education an Essential part of the Sikh Movement

The teaching of Punjabi and the religious studies were made an essential part of the Sikh movement by Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Hargobind, however, formalised it. During his times a school was opened as an annexe to every gurdwara. The Guru in his own discourses stressed the need of learning and understanding.

Once the Guru met a holy-man named Samrath Ramdas. He was surprised to see the involvement of Guru Hargobind in activities like education, army training and social reforms. He asked the Guru, “I hear that you are the successor of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak had renounced the world, while you wear the swords, keep horses, run schools and community classes, and people call you, ‘the true king’. What kind of a Sadhu are you? Guru Hargobind replied :

**“Saintliness within, worldliness without;
arms are for the protection of the poor and for the destruction of the enemy;
education is for the knowledge of scriptures,
Nanak gave up the world, and
he (Hargobind) gave up worldliness”.**

Few days later, the Guru met another person known as Shah Daulat. He asked the Guru, ‘how can a Hindu be a *fakir* ? How can you be a religious man, when you do the worldly acts, have a wife and children and possess worldly wealth ? the Guru replied,

**“A wife is her man’s conscience,
his children continue his memory
and wealth give him his sustenance
as for a fakir, he is neither a
Hindu nor a Mussalman.”**

**(for a short history of the Sikhs by Teja Singh & Ganda Singh,
1950—quoted from Janam Sakhis dated 1708)**

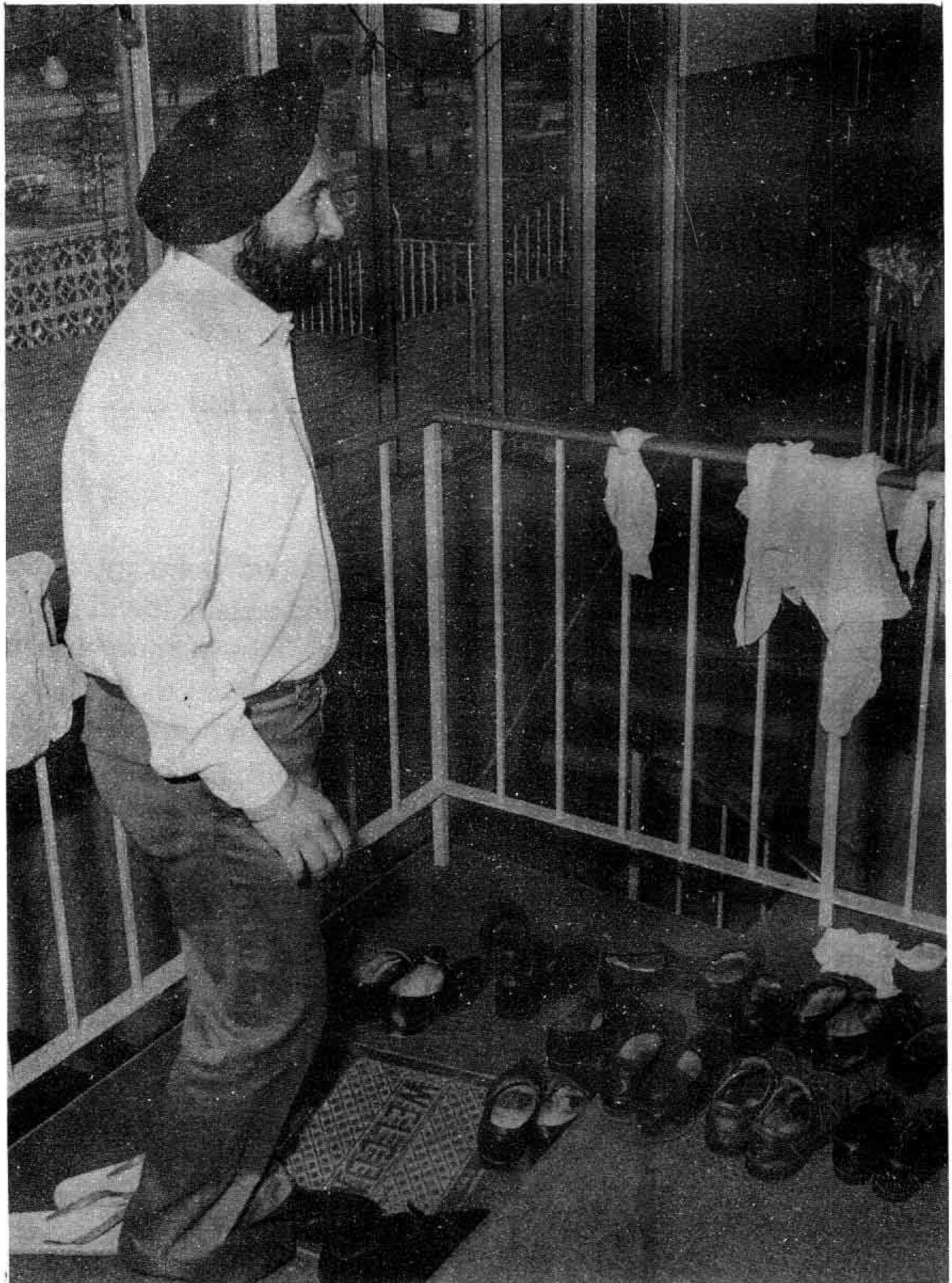
Life Long Ambition :

When I first joined Khalsa College London, two years ago I could not read or write Punjabi although I was able to speak and understand it without difficulty. Within one term I was able to make short sentences, after the second term I could read and write complex lines and after a year was able to present myself for the ‘O’ level Punjabi examination. I am now able to fulfil my initial ambition—to read and understand Guru Granth Sahib and thus lead a life as per the instructions of the Gurus. There is no end as to the divine knowledge one can gain from Guru Granth Sahib and it is my ambition to impart all that I have gained to anyone who desires to know ‘what is in Guru Granth Sahib’. None of this would have been possible if I had not enrolled in the Khalsa college.”

(by Gurkamal Jit Singh Milkhu’s—from Khalsa College London’s newsletter April 1988)

Going to Gurdwara

The word gurdwara means 'the house of God'. In Sikhism congregational prayer is as important as the individual prayer. The first gurdwara was made by Guru Nanak and he called it a *Dharamsala* meaning a place for the religious people. Every Sikh Guru after Guru Nanak built gurdwaras wherever they went. Harmandir Sahib popularly known as the Golden Temple was completed in 1604 AD. For a Sikh this is the holiest of the holy. In the Sikh prayer a Sikh always requests God to give him strength



and opportunity to go to Harmandir Sahib. This shrine has four doors meaning that this house of God is open for everyone. Whatever the caste, colour or faith of the devotee he/she can come and pray in this place.

Most of the Sikh shrines are historical. They were built by their Gurus. Thus a pilgrimage to such shrines is an ambition of every Sikh. On visiting these gurdwaras a Sikh feels the presence of the Guru himself who actually built it.

Almost all historical Sikh gurdwaras are built by *Karseva* meaning voluntary service. The tradition of the *Karseva* had started from the times of the Gurus. Once, emperor Akbar offered a large sum of money and a plot of land to build a Sikh shrine. Guru Amardas, the fourth Sikh Guru, politely declined the offer and said that he would like his Sikhs to build Sikh shrines from the public funds rather from an individual source. Since then the gurdwaras have been built by voluntary donations and service. A gurdwara is more precious to a Sikh than his own life.

In India most of the Sikhs visit gurdwara before going to their work. In Britain and other western countries a Sikh tries to visit gurdwara at least on the occasions of *Gurpurbs* i.e. the Sikh festivals relating to the Gurus.

Outside every gurdwara is the *Nishan Sahib* (flag). The colour of the flag is yellowish-orange. In Punjabi it is known as *Kesri*. In the centre is the sign of a *Khanda* the Sikh emblem. The *Khanda* consists of two swords, symbol of *Miri* and *Piri*, a double edged sword, indicating that one should fight with all possible means to uproot evil; and a *Chakra* (circle) showing the oneness of God. All devotees must take off their shoes and cover their heads before they enter the gurdwara. In every gurdwara there are special arrangements to keep the devotees' shoes in safe custody and provide all those who need with a scarf to cover their heads. Inside every gurdwara the centre-piece is the *Takht* meaning a throne. This is a raised stand for Guru Granth Sahib, which is ceremonially opened every day in the early morning and ceremoniously closed every evening after the sunset. Guru Granth Sahib is always covered with clean clothes. There is always a canopy to cover the area where Guru Granth Sahib is kept during the day. The devotees bow to Guru Granth Sahib when they enter the gurdwara and sit on the floor which in the western countries are carpeted and covered with white sheets. Sitting on the floor is customary in the Sikh religion. This denotes the humility of the devotee and his place below the Granth Sahib. Every devotee gives some offering, which can be money or food or clothing or any other thing, when he/she bows to Granth Sahib. The offerings are needed to run the gurdwara and to finance the community kitchen and the school attached with the gurdwara.

Near Guru Granth Sahib is always a *Chaur* (a feather fan) and a baptised Sikh must always sit in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. No candles, incense, statues or bells are allowed and no one may bring tobacco or alcohol inside the gurdwara.

A normal service, in a gurdwara, starts early in the morning with *Asa Di Var* a hymn written and composed by Guru Nanak. It is followed by other hymns from Guru Granth Sahib. The singing of hymns from Guru Granth Sahib with musical instruments is known as *Kirtan* and is the essential part of the Sikh service. After the kirtan lectures on Sikh history are delivered by Sikh scholars followed by *Anand Sahib* a hymn composed by Guru Amardas. This hymn is always read by every Sikh before the conclusion of the service. After *Anand Sahib* the congregation stands up and a Sikh leads in the prayer while others stand still with closed eyes and folded hands facing Guru Granth Sahib. After the prayer Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random and a hymn is read by the Sikh sitting in presence of the Granth Sahib. The reading of the hymn formally concludes the service. After every Sikh service two offerings are given to the congregation. The first one is called *Kara Prashad* (sweet pudding) and the second is the *Langar* (food, dinner or lunch depending on the time of the day). Providing langar is also a Sikh tradition which dates back to the times of Guru Nanak. Most of the Sikh shrines in the west do have arrangements to cook food at the premises. At other places where such arrangements do not exist people take turns to bring food for the congregation.

REFERENCES :

The installation of the first copy of Guru Granth Sahib at Harmandir in 1604.

Baba Budha, a very devout Sikh who anointed the first five successors of Guru Nanak i.e. from Guru Angad to Guru Hargobind, was appointed as the first high priest of Harmandir Sahib when the maiden copy of Granth Sahib was installed in the holiest of the holy shrines of the Sikhs in 1604 AD. When the initial service was completed and Guru Granth was opened at random the very first Hymn which was read from the Granth was :

**"Whenever you start a work,
take the blessings of the almighty god,
He will grant you success in your effort,
if you make Him your witness in the task.
You should live a life in the company of the holy and noble
people.
The all powerful and indestructible God is kind and always
protects his saints
Nanak, always sing his praises
and He will save you."
(hymn by Guru Arjan—from Guru Granth Sahib).**

The Designs Of The Gurdwara :

“The design or form of gurdwara varies from place to place according to circumstances. There is the scarcely noticed village gurdwara, small, rectangular and squat like nearby houses, and there are the similarly undistinguished converted house in Britain. On the other hand, there are the magnificent gurdwaras of Punjab owing something to Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar or the Gurdwara of Taran Taran. These may have a bathing place, a sarovar as one of their features, but not all do; Rakab Ganj and Sis Ganj in Delhi are only two of the most famous which lack such a tank. Neither this, nor a lavish building is essential, in fact puritanical voices may be raised against both arguing that they detract from the true focus, the Granth Sahib, and that the bathing tank is more appropriate to a Hindu temple than to a gurdwara. The one external feature which all gurdwaras should possess is the Nishan Sahib, the flag staff from which flies an orange pennant often being the *Khanda* symbol of Sikhism.

(by Dr. Cole—Sikh worship in gurdwara—from the Sikh courier international 1985)

Why Do I Go to Gurdwara ?

I live in Southall. Every sunday I go to gurdwara. I rise early in the morning, take bath and say my prayers. At about 11 am I go to the gurdwara. I love listening to the *Kirtan* (hymn sung by the *Raagis* (musicians). After the service I go to the community kitchen and help others to make *Chappatis*. In London, Southall gurdwara is the only Sikh shrine where *Langar* is available at all the times from morning to night time. After service I take my food with others, in the langar. In the afternoon I go to the Punjabi classes run by the gurdwara. I go back home at about 4 pm. On a *Gurpurb* (birthdays of the Sikh Gurus) I go to gurdwara on friday morning when the congregation starts the *Akhand Path* (the non-stop reading of the Granth). On saturday evening I serve where people keep there shoes before going in the temple. With others I look after the shoes till the devotees come out and demand them back. On sunday the *Akhand Path* normally finishes at about 7 a.m. The kirtan starts just after that.”

(from Surjit Khurrana's diary—May 1988)

Reading Guru Granth Sahib

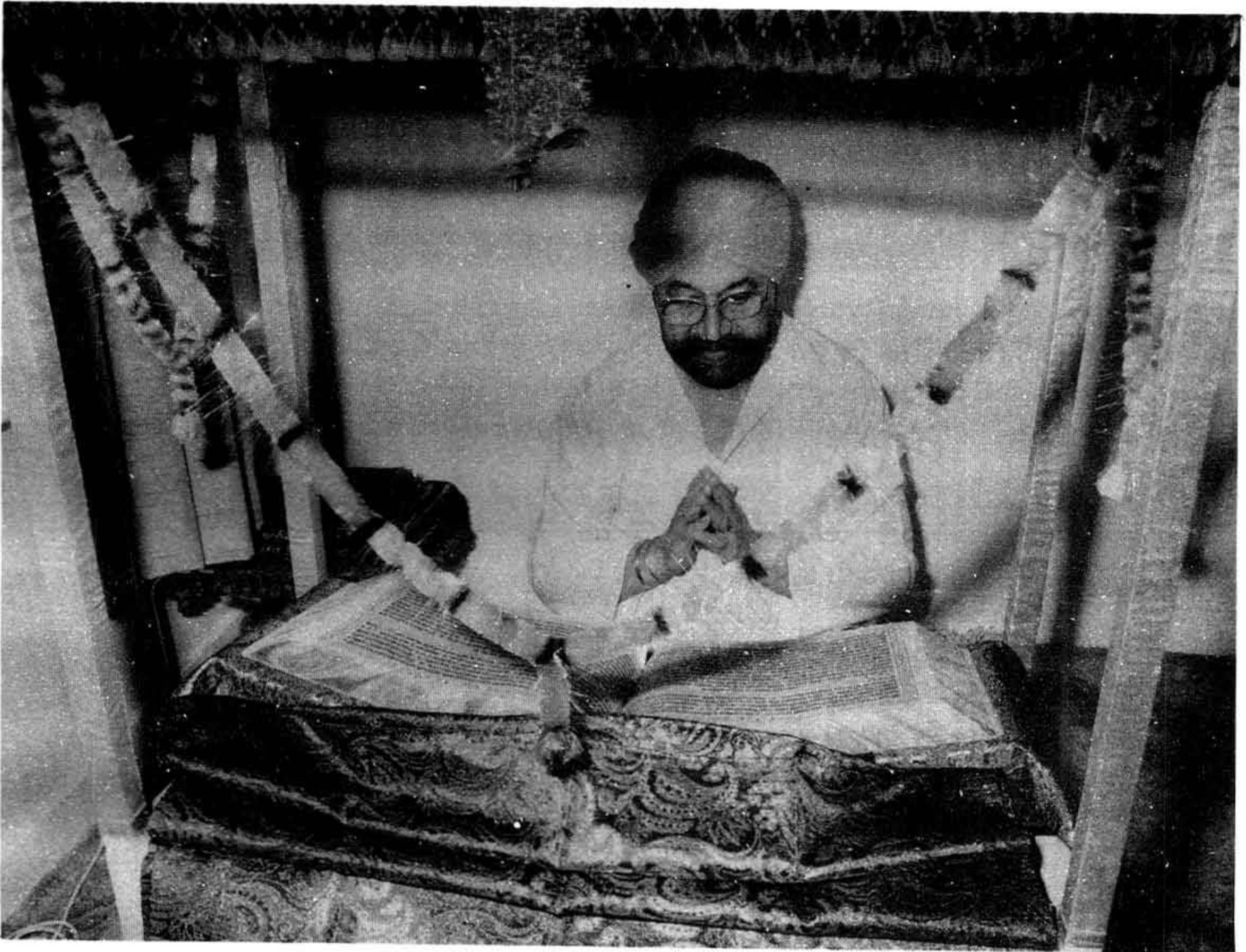
Guru Granth Sahib is the sacred book of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru conferred Guruship on the Granth Sahib in 1708 AD. Before his death he declared that after him there would be no human Sikh Guru. Henceforth the Sikhs should look to the revealed word preserved in the Granth Sahib for their spiritual guidance. Thus to a Sikh, Guru Granth Sahib is not only a holy book but also the *Shabad Guru*.

Every Sikh must learn Punjabi to be able to read the Granth Sahib. Guru Granth Sahib contains 1430 pages. The Sikhs have produced *Gutkas* (a small pocket-sized book) which contains few important hymns from Guru Granth Sahib. Every Sikh must possess a Gutka if he does not possess Guru Granth Sahib. Another smaller version of the Granth Sahib is known as *Panj Granthi* (a small size book which also contains important hymns from Guru Granth Sahib). The holy books must be kept with reverence and utmost respect. The house-hold who can devote to keep the separate prayer room in the house, keep Guru Granth Sahib in that room wrapped in clean coverings. Every day a member of the household gets up early in the morning, takes bath, puts on clean clothes, covers his head and then goes to the prayer room. Guru Granth Sahib is taken out from the cupboard and is carried on the head to the centre of the room and is put on the *Throne* (a cot small bed) specially made for the Granth Sahib. The Granth Sahib is taken out from the wrapped sheet and is put on the throne. New coverings, four in number are used to cover Granth Sahib. Two of the coverings are normally one metre square and are known as *Roomalas*, one of which is spread under the Granth and the second is put over the Granth. The other two coverings, which are normally 500 cm square and are known as *Palkan*, are hung on either side of the Granth.

After opening and setting the Granth Sahib on the throne one member of the household reads at random a hymn and then stands in front of it with folded hands and offers the prayer, asks for the forgiveness of wrongs committed the previous day and requests for blessings for the times to come. He then bows to the Granth Sahib and distributes the parshad.

Other households which have no appropriate provision to keep a copy of the Granth Sahib at home keep either a *Gutka* Or a *Panj Granthi*. They normally do their *Path* (religious service) in a quiet corner of the house.

Special arrangements are made when a child starts reading the Granth Sahib for the first time. This is a special occasion in a household. Normally friends are invited to join in the service. The head of the household leads the prayer and asks God to bless the child and give him strength and knowledge to read the Granth Sahib



correctly. The Punjabi word for this ceremony is *Guru Di Charni Lagna* (to come in the shelter of the Guru).

The original script in which the Granth Sahib was written is Gurmukhi. Now the Granth is available in many languages including English. Granth Sahib contains the hymns of the first five Gurus, the ninth Guru, 15 saints, 11 bhatts (Gurus' court poets) and 3 other disciples. All hymns have been arranged in musical metres. The first copy of Guru Granth Sahib was dictated by Guru Arjan Dev and written by Bhai Gurdas, an uncle of the Guru. This copy was installed in the Harmandir in 1604. The copy fell into the hands of the Sikh enemies and is still with their descendants. A second copy was then dictated by Guru Gobind Singh and written by Bhai Mani Singh, a friend and classmate of the Guru. This book was completed in 1706. The only difference in the first edition and the second edition is the inclusion of the hymns of the ninth Guru by Guru Gobind Singh. One of the contemporaries of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Baba Deep Singh, made four copies of this edition. The original copy signed by Guru Gobind Singh was taken by Ahmed Shah Abdali, an invader who came from Afghanistan in 1757, to Kabul. The copies made by Baba Deep Singh are intact and are placed in

various Sikh Gurdwaras. One such copy is in Harmandir Sahib. The modern versions of Guru Granth Sahib are the copies of the edition prepared by Guru Gobind Singh.

References :

Instruction To Say Prayers Every Day :

Japji Sahib is a long hymn composed by Guru Nanak. It contains 38 *Pauris* (stanzas/couplets). This is the first hymn recorded in Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjan. Most of the Sikhs remember this hymn by heart. This is one of the prayers a Sikh reads every day. In the opening verse of *Japji Sahib* Guru Nanak gives the attributes of God :

**“There is only one God
He is the Truth
He is the Creator
He is Fearless
He is without enmity
He is beyond births and deaths
He is Indestructible, Omnipotent and Omnipresent
The humanity needs the protection of such a Lord.”**

In the next verse Guru Nanak Poses a question and then gives its answer which later he develops in *Japji Sahib*.

Question—

How can a man break the barriers of falsehood and be one with God ?

Answer—

“A person can have union with God if he obeys His commands—if he starts his day by uttering His *Name* (prayers), performs honest, right and felicitous acts during the day and ends his day with thank-giving prayers.”

(from Guru Granth Sahib pp 2-3)

The Timings :

The arrangement of hymns in Guru Granth Sahib is according to the musical notations in which they can be sung. The hymns have been collected under various musical metres except Japji and Sloaks and Swayyas. The arrangement, however is as follows;

Japji, Rehras, Sohila, then hymns—grouped in 31 *Ragas*, Sloaks & Swayyas and Ragmala.

A Sikh service normally starts with hymn "Asa Di Var" composed by Guru Nanak. The musical metre in which it is written requires it to be sung in the early morning.

(a critical study of Adi Granth by Dr. S S Kohli, 1961)

30 November 1987

Dear Dr. Kapoor

I am writing this letter from inside the prison cell. I, with my many friends, am in a....jail and have been sentenced to death. For the last one year we have been waiting for our last moment to come. In the beginning we did become scared of death but then we requested the authorities to give us *Gutkas* to read the hymns. The jail authorities are very co-operative and helpful. They have provided us with the *Gutkas*. We read the hymns every morning and say our prayers. Now we are not scared of death..... The reading of hymns from the Gutka has given us strength and courage. Now life and death has no meaning for us. We are eagerly waiting to be one with God, who had sent us in this world.....

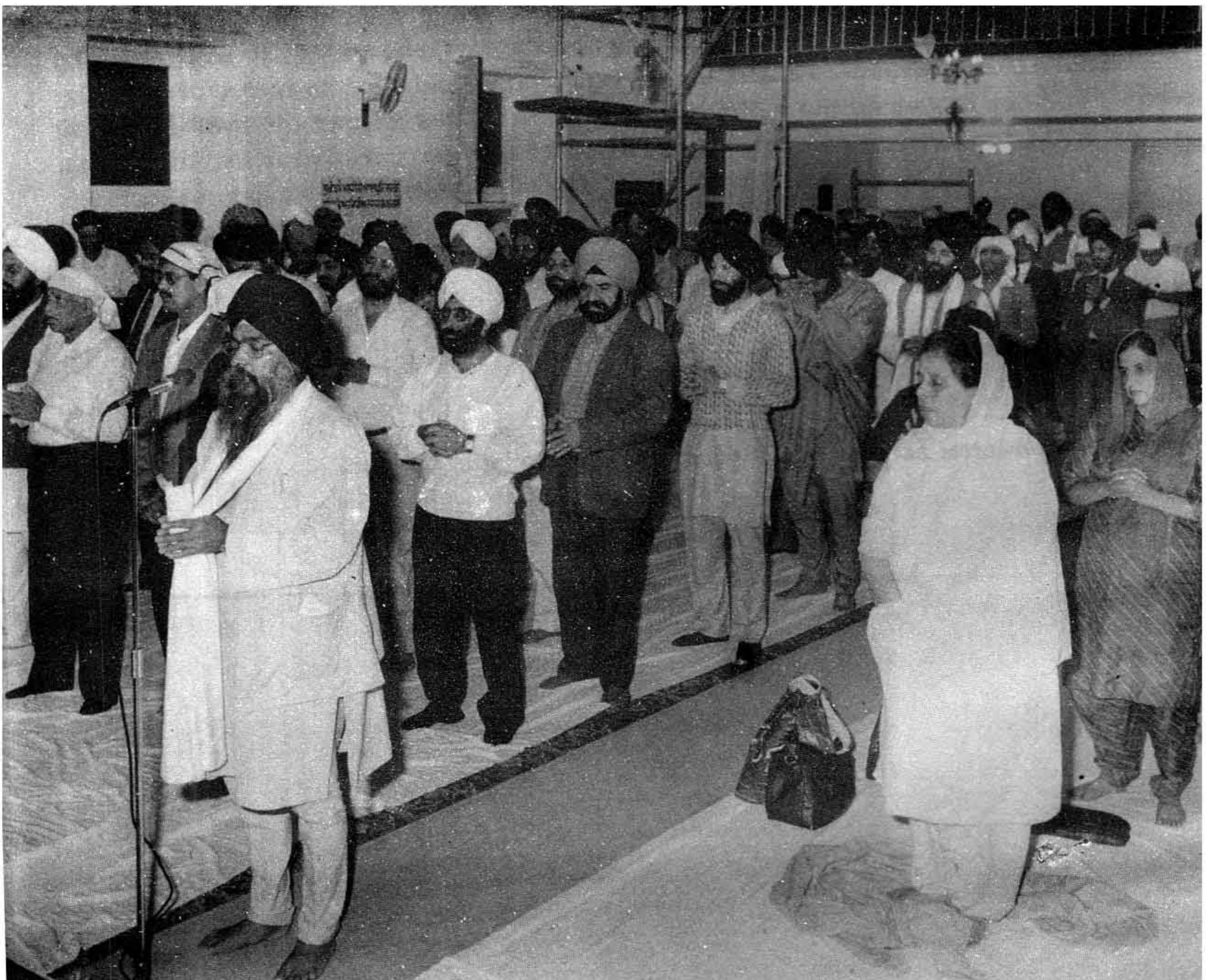
Yours Sincerely

A Sikh Prisoner

(from a letter sent to the Principal, Khalsa College, London)

Praying

Prayer is the essential part of any Sikh service. Every religious and social function like marriage, house warming, naming ceremony of a child, celebration of success in examinations end with the Sikh prayer. The prayer has three parts. First part was composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji and the other parts were later added by the Sikh scholars. The prayer has set wording and must be read in that order. No Sikh is allowed to change the wording of the first part which was composed by Guru Gobind



Singh Ji. The other parts, specially the last part where God is thanked for his blessings can be changed and adapted according to the nature of the occasion.

A Sikh prayer is always said in the standing position facing Guru Granth Sahib. In a Sikh service at the gurdwara, every rendering except the prayer is said while the congregation is sitting. During the prayer every one keeps his eyes closed, concentrates on God and keeps his hands folded.

References :

A Set Sikh Prayer :

A prayer which is offered by every Sikh whether in gurdwara or at home, whether it is a social occasion or is a religious fete has set words :

Part I —composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji

**“Always remember the all powerful God
to whom Guru Nanak always remembered
who protected Angad Guru, Amardas
and Ramdas**

Who was worshipped by Arjan, Hargobind and Harrai

**Who was revered by Sri Harkrishen whose sufferings were
dispelled by Him.**

**Who was cherished by Tegh Bahadur and whose Name brings
in all the wealth and happiness**

(from Dasam Granth — Var. Bhagauti)

Part II —composed by Sikh scholars

(i) **Hail almighty God
who was worshipped by Guru Gobind Singh Ji and who is
ever helpful**

**And whose name is contained in Guru Granth Sahib,
wherein every hymn is His praise**

(ii) **Hail the merciful God and remember all the sacrifices
made in His God and for His faith by *Panj Piyaras* (five beloved ones)
Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Sahib
Singh and Bhai Mohkam Singh and four sons of Guru Gobind Singh—
Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh
Singh and forty liberated ones and by other martyrs and followers who
worshipped You O God, and all others who shared their earnings, who
gave charity, who wielded sword against injustice.....**

(from Rehat Maryada published by SGPC—February 1945)

**Hail the most benevolent Lord,
let the whole Khalsa offer His prayers
let the whole Khalsa bring to His mind and Name of the wonderful Lord
and as he thinks of Him, may he feel completely blessed
May God's protection and grace extend to all the
bodies of the Khalsa wherever they are
May the Lord's glory be fulfilled and His dispensation prevail
May victory attend our charity and arms
May God's power help us
May the Khalsa be always victorious
May the Sikh choirs, banners, mansions abide for ever.
May the kingdom of justice come on earth.
May the Sikhs be united in love.
May the hearts of the Sikhs be humble, but their
wisdom exalted, their wisdom protected by the Lord
Himself.....say *Waheguru* (the God is Great)**

**O true Lord, O beloved Father we have sung your sweet hymns, heard
your life-giving word, and have discoursed on your manifold blessings.
May these acts draw our souls towards you
Save us O-Father from the vices like lust, anger, greed, attachment and
ego and keep us attached to your feet.**

**O kind Father, O Benevolent Lord, O Generous Custodian O Caring
Guardian O Compassionate Parent through your mercy we have spent our
day in peace and happiness;**

Grant that we may, according to Your will, do what is right.

**O God give us light, give us understanding, so that we may know what
pleases you**

Forgive us for our sins. Help us in keeping ourselves pure

Bring us into the fellowship of only those men of love,

in whose company we may remember your name

Through Guru Nanak Your Name forever be remembered by all

And may all humanity prosper by your Grace.

(from Nitnem Gutka (daily prayer handbook))

Getting Married

Marriage is a very sacred institution amongst the Sikhs. *Grihst Jeewan* (married life) is considered a gift from God. The Sikh marriage ceremony is known as *Anand Karaj* (ceremony of bliss). The Anand marriage act was passed in 1909 AD. It is the only form of marriage recognised by the Sikh religion. A Sikh marriage is one of consent. The bride and groom have the right to accept or reject the proposed partner.

A Sikh marriage is not a private affair of two individuals. It is a union of two families. Though bride and the groom has the ultimate say in the finalisation of the marriage agreement. The family influences play a very important part in the Sikh marriage.

The Sikh marriage ceremony is divided into :

1. Thaka Or Roka i.e., Pre-engagement ceremony where both parties agree for marriage. In the presence of Guru Granth Sahib a prayer is said by the elders and some gifts are exchanged. In a social sense it is a gentlemen promise between the two families—that they have agreed to be bound in the marriage ceremony.

2. Mangni (engagement) This is first pre-marriage official ceremony. The parents of the bride go to the parents of bridegroom with lot of presents and sweets. In the presence of Guru Granth Sahib a prayer is offered and the parents of the bride give to the bride-groom a *Gutka*, a *Kara* (steel bracelet), a comb and a sword (few families also choose to give some cash as well).

3. Anand Karaj—(the marriage ceremony) The ceremony is divided into the following parts;

A. The arrival of the Barat (bridegroom party)—the barat is received by all the relatives of the bride at the doorsteps of the hall where the marriage ceremony is to take place.

B. A Shabad "*Hum Gar Sajan Aaye*" (a hymn from Guru Granth Sahib—saying— "in our house our friends have come, God has united the two families") is sung followed by the Sikh prayer.

C. After the prayer the ceremony of Milni (i.e. the union of the relations of the two families) is performed. First of all the father of the bride-groom steps forward and is embraced by the father of the bride. Then the brothers and uncles etc. do the *Milni*. Each time a *Milni* takes place. The relations of the bride give some gift to the relations of the bridegroom.



D. Breakfast/Snacks— After the milni the barat is taken to a specially organised hall for snacks or breakfast.

E. The Anand Karaj— After snacks/breakfast everybody goes to the main hall where the marriage is to take place. In the centre of the hall is always the throne of Guru Granth Sahib. Few *Shabads* are sung by the *Raagis* (the musicians). And then the parents of the bride and bridegroom are requested by the *Raagis* to bring the bride and the groom into the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. The bride and the bridegroom sit in front of Guru Granth Sahib facing the Granth Sahib. Few more *Shabads*, relevant to the marriage ceremony are then sung by the *Raagis*. The father of the bride, then offers her *Palla* (fringe of her scarf) to the bridegroom to be knotted with his own scarf. This ceremony symbolises the offer of the daughter by the father and her acceptance by the bride-groom. The raagis, then sing the marriage hymns from Guru Granth Sahib. There are four marriage hymns. They are read first by the *Granthi* (person sitting in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib) and then sung by the *Raagis*. After a marriage hymn is first read by the Granthi, the raagis start singing it in the prescribed tune. During this period of singing the bridegroom and the bride go around Guru Granth Sahib, then bow to it and sit back in await of the second round. Four hymns require four rounds. The reading and singing of the prescribed marriage hymns and taking rounds around Guru Granth Sahib is known as *Lavan*. At the end of the fourth *lavan* the marriage is declared completed by the raagis. The Anand Sahib is then read and the whole congregation stands for the prayer. At the end of the prayer, the Granthi thanks the almighty God for this union and prays to give the couple a long and happy married life.

F. After the Anand Karaj and the prayer a number of other sub-formalities are fulfilled. They are :

- i. The relations of both families garland the bride and the groom.
- ii. The friends of the two families sing the *Sehra* and *The Sikhaya* (specially written poems for the occasion.) The *Sehra* gives instruction to the groom and is normally read by his friends or brothers while the *Sikhaya* gives instruction to the bride and is read by her friends or relatives.

G. Lunch— After the completion of the marriage and the religious service every one moves to a different hall where the lunch is served by the parents of the bride.

H. Doli (the farewell) In the evening before dusk the mother or sister of the bride, dresses her with best clothes and ornaments to bid her farewell. In a specially decorated palanquin, these days normally a car, the bridegroom and his family takes the bride away to their home.

References :

The Sequence of Hymns which are Read/Sung at the Time of Marriage :

A. When the bride and bride-groom are brought in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib

1. **“Whenever you start any work,
take the blessings of the almighty God.
He will grant you success in your effort,
if you make Him witness in your task.
You should move in the company of the holy and noble people.
The powerful and indestructible God is kind and always protects His saints.
O Nanak, always sing His praises
and He will save you.”**

(Guru Granth Sahib page 91)

B. The Sikh prayers— Two prayers are always said in a marriage ceremony. In the first prayer, which is said before the *Lavan*, only the bride and her parents and the bride-groom and his parents stand and join in while in the second prayer, which is said after the marriage ceremony, the whole congregation joins in.

C. At the time when the nuptial knot is tied :

**“O Nanak, from my heart I have forsaken the praise and slandering of others; I have also abandoned all the false worldly connections and affairs.
I have found all relations to be momentary and deceptive and now I have come to you and have given myself to you forever.”**

(Guru Granth Sahib page 963)

D. At the time of marriage— The *Lavan*

(the main idea of the four lavans)

- a. The lord has impressed the fundamental duties of the marriage life.....
hold fast to righteousness.....
- b. The lord has selected your partner for you.....now promise to live an
humble, God fearing, clean Holy and Pious life.....
- c. The Lord has awakened in you the love and excitement of unison....love
your partner from your heart. It is with the blessings of God and His saints
that you two have been tied in the nuptial knot....throughout your life sing
the praises of God and His saints.....

- d. The God has illuminated your heart and you have been united with your partner. God is love and love is life. Promise to live a life of sweetness and compassion. Now you are declared a man and wife.....

(from Guru Granth Sahib pp 773-774)

The First Sikh Marriage

The marriage of Guru Arjan Dev with *Mata* Ganga Devi was the first marriage according to the Sikh tradition. It took place in 1589 AD.
(from the history of Sikhs by Professor Satbir Singh, 1960)

An Arranged Marriage :

My marriage is an arranged marriage. I saw my husband only for few minutes, before marriage, when he came with his parents to see me at our place. Only few glimpses were exchanged. We did not talk anything. There was no opportunity to talk anyway as all the family members were sitting with us. After my husband's family left, my mother asked me if I have liked the boy. I did not know what to say. My silence was taken to be my acceptance. It is now six years that I have been married. Though I had completely different dreams still, I do not know why, I love my husband. We both have accepted each other. Sometime, when I am alone I do think about a life of friendship and courting before marriage.

(from the diary of a wife now married for six years, 1988)

Having and Loving Children

The children are the gift of the *Waheguru* (the Sikh name for God). The birth of a child is a proof that God has not yet forsaken us and had lost hope of this world. The Sikh families love to have children. All the Sikh Gurus, except Guru Harkrishen who died at the age of eight, were family men and had children. Family planning is not a taboo in the Sikh faith. These days most of the Sikh families living in the urban areas of India and in the western countries have an average family of three children. Others living in the villages have large families. Before the partition of India the wealthy Sikh families living in the north-west frontier had very big families. Even amongst the Hindu families there was a tradition of giving one child to the Sikh faith. Thus most of Hindu families from north-west frontier had one Sikh child in their household. This tradition dates from 1815 when Maharaja Ranjit Singh conquered north-west frontier and laid the foundation of the Sikh empire.

The Sikhs love both their sons and daughters. At the time of the Sikh Gurus it was common amongst certain sects of the Hindus to kill their child at the birth if it was a girl. The Sikh Gurus launched a strong movement against this immoral and criminal practice. In one of the Sikh commandments the Gurus said that the Sikhs will not socially mix with families which practise infanticide.

The Sikh Gurus also very strongly criticised the common practice, in the Hindu families, of not allowing the re-marriage of a widow and the custom of *Satee* (throwing in the funeral pyre of the dead husband his living widow) system of the Hindus. The Gurus banned these unethical practices in the Sikh faith.

Thus for a Sikh a son or a daughter both are the gifts of the *Waheguru* and are loved and cared without any distinction of their sexes. The children are cared and looked after even after they are married.

The Sikh children are taught to recite the daily prayers from their early childhood. In many Sikh families children are not allowed to have their breakfast without first saying their prayers. At the age of puberty the children are encouraged to get baptised and become the members of the Khalsa brotherhood.

Forty days after the birth of a child both the mother and the child are taken to the gurdwara where in the presence of the Sikh congregation the parents give their child to the Sikh faith. They make a promise with God that their child will grow up to be a Sikh, will follow the Sikh traditions and will protect the Sikh faith even at the cost of his life.

Most of the Sikh families celebrate the birthdays of their children in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib and thank God for all His bounties.

At the age of five when the hair of the child are long enough for plaiting then a *Val Gundan* (setting the hair) ceremony is performed in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. The mother or the elder sister of the child wash the child's hair in the morning and then in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. The hair are set either as plaits at the back of the head or as a *Toora* (knot) at the top of the head.

At the age of thirteen a *Dastar Bandana* (turban tieing) ceremony takes place. In the presence of Guru Granth Sahib the elders of the village or the family tie the first turban on the head of the male child. This ceremony is celebrated with great pomp and show. A great feast is arranged for all the guests and in the evening music and dance programmes are normally held.

Throughout child's education the parents' guidance plays a very important part. Normally the parents wish their children to follow their parental professions.

The Sacrifice of Four Children for the Sake of Millions:

Gugu Gobind Singh had four sons. The older two—Baba Ajit Singh, aged 17 and Baba Jujhar Singh aged 14 died heroically fighting against injustice and tyranny of the Mughals at Chamkaur Sahib on 22nd December 1704 AD. The younger two—Baba Zorawar Singh aged 8 and Baba Fateh Singh aged 5 were buried alive by the muslim governor of Sirhind on 27 December 1704.

When after the above unbearable tragedy, *Mata Sundri*, the wife of Guru Gobind Singh, asked him where her sons were, the Guru pointed toward the congregation and said,

**"For the sake of these children
I have sacrificed my four sons
what is the remorse if I have lost four
many thousand of my children are still alive."**

(from a history of the Sikh people by Dr. Gopal Singh, 1979)

Longing to Have a Child :

One day *Mata Ganga*, the wife of Guru Arjan Dev came to him and asked for his blessings so that she could conceive and have a child. The Guru said that only God could bless some one with a child. Few days later *Mata Ji* came again and asked for the same blessings. Guru Arjan told her to go and visit the Sikh saint Baba Buddha, who lived few miles away. The Guru said that if Baba Buddha could bless her then she

would conceive and would have a child. Mata Ganga ordered her servants to prepare the best food. She asked her driver to prepare the coach. Next day she left for Baba Buddha with maidens and baskets full of luxurious food. Baba Buddha refused to see her. She was angry. She came back to the Guru and narrated him the whole story. The Guru asked her how did she go to Baba Buddha. She told him that she got the best food prepared for him and she went to him on a decorated coach with her maidens. The Guru smiled and said that the way she chose to visit the saints was wrong. One should go to the saints in humility and not in pride. He told her to cook the food with her own hands and go to see the saint on foot rather than in a coach. *Mata Ji* obeyed Guru's order. Next day she got up early in the morning, prepared the food with her own hands, put the basket of food on her head and went to see the saint. Baba Buddha welcomed *Mata Ganga* and while eating the food he broke an onion.

With his fist and said that she was going to have a brave son who would crush the enemy's heads like that. Later she gave birth to Guru Hargobind who defeated the Mughal forces in all the battles he fought with them for the protection of faith and religion.

(from Janam Sakhis—Guru Hargobind)

The Guru And Their Children :

<u>Name of the Guru</u>	<u>Sons</u>	<u>Daughters</u>
Guru Nanak Dev	2	—
Guru Angad Dev	2	1
Guru Amardas	2	2
Guru Ramdas	3	—
Guru Arjan Dev	1	—
Guru Hargobind	5	1
Guru Har Rai	2	—
Guru Harkrishen (died young not married)		
Guru Tegh Bahadur	1	—
Guru Gobind Singh	4	—

Sikhism is a religion of a household. Like their Gurus the Sikhs love their children very much.

(from the Geneology of Sikh Gurus—dated 1708)

Respecting Parents

One of the commandments of the Sikh Gurus was that one should love and respect his parents. The first four Sikh Gurus were not related to each other but from the fifth Guru onwards the Guruship remained in the family. The test for the Guruship, however, was obedience, humility and love for God. Guru Angad was a disciple of Guru Nanak, he was selected for the Guruship for his obedience, Guru Amardas was selected by Guru Angad for his commitment to service; Guru Ramdas was selected for Guruship for his unqualified submission to the Guru's orders. Guru Arjan was the youngest son of Guru Ramdas. He was preferred to his older brothers on the basis of his love for God and acquiescence to Guru Ramdas. Guru Hargobind was the only son of Guru Arjan and was selected for Guruship for his obedience and love to his father. Guru Harrai was the grandson of Guru Hargobind and was selected for Guruship on the basis of his subjection to Guru's orders. Guru Harkrishen was the younger son of Guru Harrai and was made Guru for his wisdom and nearness to God. Guru Tegh Bahadur was the grand-uncle of Guru Harkrishen and was selected for Guruship for his divine quality. The last Guru Gobind Singh was the only son of Guru Tegh Bahadur and was selected for the Guruship for his observance, obedience and submission to his father's and to God's will.

Love and respect for God and parents is one of the pillars of Sikhism. Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikh code of conduct have special instruction for the children to love their parents.

Most of the Sikh families in Punjab lived a life of joint family, where the head of the family made all the decisions. The spirit of living together taught the children the ethics of love and obedience for their elders. But with the breakdown of the joint-family concept the nerve of obedience is certainly under threat.

You Are My Father You Are My Mother :

The Sikh Gurus issued specific injunctions for their followers to respect their parents. In one of the letters which young Arjan Dev wrote to his father, Guru Ramdas, while he was in Lahore and was waiting for the instructions of his father to come back home in Amritsar, he wrote :

**"My heart is longing to see my father, my Guru
As the bird *Chatrik* craves for a drop of water,
I am yearning to be with you, your separation has made me very uncomfortable and sad,
to have your audience I can sacrifice my life many a times.**

**It is long since I saw you,
blessed is the place where you live, O my dearest father,
to have your audience I can sacrifice my life many a times.**

**There was a time when it was like a doomsday if we did not meet for a moment,
when will I see you again ?**

**I cannot sleep, I cannot concentrate without seeing you,
to have your audience I can sacrifice my life many a times.**



**They are the blessed who are with their parents, they find God in their homes.
O God bless me so that I am never separated from my father,
to have your audience I can sacrifice my life many a times.**

(from Guru Granth Sahib pp 96-97)

O Father You Are The Greatest Leader :

Kashmir is called the paradise of India. The Kashmiri brahmins were very learned and clever. They were the leaders and spokesmen of the Hindu religion in the times of emperor Aurangzeb. To convert all Hindus to Islam the emperor issued a proclamation that all Hindus should either willingly embrace Islam or they would be put to death. The governor of Kashmir called the leading pundits (another name for the word brahmins) and gave them the orders. They asked for a few months' time to consider the grave matter. One day they all went to God Amarnath's temple to seek his guidance. When they were praying they heard a voice which directed them to go to Guru Tegh Bahadur in Anandpur for help. The voice said that God has sent the Guru to protect the Hindu religion. The pundits sent a messenger to the Guru and fixed an appointment with him. When they came to Anandpur they were very well received by the Guru. They informed him of the state of things in Kashmir, they also informed him of the choice offered to them by the governor. The pundits' plight made Guru sad and thoughtful. Young Gobind Rai (later Guru Gobind Singh) was playing nearby. He saw his father in a very distressing mood, he said to his father, "O father, why are you so sad? Who are these people?"

The Guru replied, "They are pundits from Kashmir. They are face to face with life or death problem. They have come to me for advice. There seems to be only one way to save their religion. Some great holy man has to sacrifice himself to save them. How and where to find such a person. O God guide me and help me." Gobind Rai, who at that time, was only eight years old, at once replied, "O father for that sacrifice, who can be holier and more worthy than you? My dearest father, you have taught us the love for humanity. There is no body except you to put an end to this challenge." Guru Tegh Bahadur accepted his son's suggestion. He said to the pundits, "Go and tell your governor, Tegh Bahadur is our Guru, first make him a Muslim. We shall follow his example. I am sure he will accept this challenge. Leave the rest to me. I shall act as directed by God."

Guru Tegh Bahadur was later summoned to Delhi by emperor Aurangzeb. The emperor had accepted Guru's challenge. All the worldly concessions and rewards were offered to the Guru to break him. All the known threats and tortures were exercised before his eyes to frighten him. But the Guru did not move. At the end the emperor had no choice except to execute the Guru. The divine and firm personality of the Guru had given a shameful defeat to the emperor. The Guru was executed in Chandni Chowk in 1675.

A Tree Which Gives Shade

**"I cannot find a tree
which gives a better shelter than of a 'mother'
God has borrowed shades from her
to build the heavens.
All other plants, in this world,
wither when their roots go dry.
But this plant of 'Mother' withers
when her flowers (children) die.**

(from Savay Pattar (green leaves), by professor Mohan Singh, 1971)

Being At Home

A Sikh is essentially a *Gristhi* (a family man). His important family and social duties include education in religious and academic studies; responsibilities towards parents, wife and children; commitment towards home, public, social and national obligations.

He should work with honesty and sincerity and provide an honourable and decent living to his family. He should give a tenth of his earning (known as *Daswand*) for religious and social works.

Sikhs worship at home and in gurdwara. On every important occasion such as a birthday of a child, a Gurburb, the start of a new month (known as *Sangrand*) the first day of a new job, the retirement or the house-warming the family gets together in the prayer room and sing hymns from Guru Granth Sahib and join in the family prayer. God is thanked for all the blessings—and at the end of the *Parshad* is distributed. Later the family goes to the gurdwara.

Sikhs, by nature, are hospitable. Their homes and their kitchens are always ready to receive guests. In a number of Punjabi folklores there is a saying that they love their guests more than their lives.

The households of the wealthy Sikhs are more like guest houses. Their kitchens are always open for the holy-men, the poor and the guests. To give charity and look after the less fortunate is an essential feature of the Sikh faith.

A Sikh home, normally, has a specially reserved place for the *Path* and prayers. An exclusive prayer room, if one can afford, looks more or less like a mini gurdwara. It has all the essentials found in a gurdwara. No one is allowed to enter the room bareheaded or with shoes on.

Traditionally, the parents and the grand-parents tell their children and grand-children religious stories (known as *Sakhis*) before they go to bed. All family members read *Kirtan Sohila* before they sleep.

Afternoon sleep on week-ends is customary in a Punjabi household. In India, specially in the hot summers, it is a fun to sleep on the floor, after a heavy lunch of stuffed *Pranths* and *Lassi*. Most families enjoy an afternoon nap in this country as well.

References :

Honest Life And Truthful Living :

“Let transient life be your shop and the true divine name your merchandise. Let

alertness and purity be the warehouse and treasure in it the name of God. Deal only with the lord's dealers; take a fair profit and be happy."

"He alone has found the right way who eats what he earns through toil and shares his earning with others."

"He alone is the householder who disciplines his passions and begs from God the alms of meditation, hard work and self control."

"The body is the palace, the temple, the house of God; wherein he has put his infinite light."

(from Guru Granth Sahib pages—595, 1245, 952, 1256)

Home Life :

"The Sikh is a family man. One of the ideals held up before young men and women is that of being married and bringing up a family. Marriage is the fulfilment of life, especially if the couple is blessed with children."

"It is duty of a Sikh wife to obey her husband, to follow him wherever he goes. It is the husband's duty to provide his wife with a home."

"Sikh mothers believe that the responsibility for educating their daughters in home-craft is theirs and should not be left to the school. They realise that if their sons and daughters are to have Sikh values, beliefs and standard, the parents and other relatives must provide them. It is in family life that all these things are to be found."

(from a Sikh family in Britain by Dr. O Cole, 1973)

From the Diary of a Wife :

1.6.88

I am now married for nearly 4 years. Day after tomorrow is our marriage anniversary. I do not know if he remembers it. Last year there was a big fight on this day. I wish there is no fight this year. He is nice, I love him but he is very careless. He does not remember his promises. Yesterday, he forgot to bring provisions, I had no chappati flour in the house so I could not make chappatis. He was furious. Why woman are so coward? I believe in my faith so I respect him whatever he is. But sometimes in my heart I want to revolt against this rule. Why cannot we be equal. I know, our religion advocates equality of women with men. But the society we live in has made its own rules and have made woman inferior to man. I know Guru Nanak Dev Ji and other Gurus elevated the status of woman in the Indian society. But we are still being dominated by men but for how long..."

(from the diary of a Sikh married woman, 1988)

Enjoying Life And Saying "Thank You"

The Sikh religion puts no sanctions on enjoyment. It puts no ban on life's excitement. It recommends a life of '*Jiwan Mukat*'. The word *Jiwan Mukat* is a pillar stone in the Sikh way of life. It means that one should live a family life, a life of comforts and a life of all the amenities. But still one should be detached from all these pleasures and relations. One must sort out the priorities of life. The attachment with the worldly powers must not overcome the relationship with God. The saintliness in a human-being must dominate all other human aspects. Thus so far a man loves God and lives a truthful and honest life he is free to enjoy other challenges of life. The Sikh religion is not an 'Inhibiting Religion'.

The Sikhs celebrate a large number of social and family events. A Sikh marriage is always full of fun and thrills. For many days, before the marriage, the relatives of both the bride and the bride-groom get together and sing 'Marriage Songs' and do 'Folk and Local Dances' to express their happiness and to thank God for uniting the two families. Seasonal festivals are also celebrated with great festivities such as— "Basant" in January/February, when everyone wears yellow clothes, matching the colour of the dress with seasonable crops, flies kites and throws feasts for friends and relatives; "Lohri" again in January when young girls lit bone-fire at night-time and dance around it thanking God for giving them protection of parents and brothers and praying and asking the Lord to give them a loving and caring husband as well; "Hola Mohalla" which falls in March, when the families arrange sport events and evening concerts; "Baisakhi" which falls in April, a harvest festival, when the old and the young, the men and the women all wear new clothes, go to the gurdwara in the morning and assemble at the local grounds in the evening to sing and dance and rejoice the harvest of the crops; and "Diwali" which falls in October/November, when everyone cleans their houses, the businessmen close their accounting year and start the new books, friends exchange gifts and sweets and families play various indoor games in the house. In the evening everyone visits gurdwara to thank God for all his bounties and help.

References :

A Jiwan Mukat

“Contemplation of the true Lord brings illumination which enables one to live detached in the midst of life. Such is the distinctive greatness of the true Guru that through his grace and guidance one can attain salvation even while surrounded by one’s wife and children.”

“Let love be the soil, piety the water, and truth and contentment the bullocks. Let humility be the plough, consciousness the ploughman, remembrance of God’s name the watering and union with God the seed-time. Let God’s name be the seed and His grace the crop. (All these virtues constitute the true discipline)and the whole world seems false before it. If one acquires such self discipline by his grace, all separation ends in union.”

“All happiness and enjoyments come if God so wishes.”

(from Guru Granth Sahib—pages 661, 955, 373)

The Thanks and Devotion of a Sikh

A Sikh named Bhai Gonda served Guru Harrai, the seventh Sikh Guru with love and devotion. One day the Guru asked him to go to Kabul and preach the Sikh gospel over there. Kabul is a far away place in Afghanistan. In those days travelling was very difficult and dangerous. But Bhai Gonda accepted his duties readily and cheerfully. On reaching Kabul he built a gurdwara with the help of the local people and started preaching the name of God and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus to them. One morning he felt home-sick and remembered Guru Harrai very much. While saying the morning prayers, he fixed his thoughts on the Guru and clasped his feet tightly in his thoughts. Far away from Kabul, Guru Harrai sitting in his congregation felt the tight grasp of his follower. He sat firmly and did not move his feet. After the prayers the Sikhs requested the Guru to go to the langar and eat his lunch. The Guru did not move, he did not want to disturb his disciple. When the Sikhs grew uneasy and thought if something was wrong with the Guru, the Guru opened his eyes and told them, “My dear fellows, Bhai Gonda is in Kabul. He has clasped my feet, how can I withdraw them from him ? I must wait. The Guru remained sitting in that position for hours. At sunset Bhai Gonda woke up from his divine sleep and released the Guru’s feet. The Guru then got up and blessed Bhai Gonda for his devotion and sent a messenger to bring him back to the Guru.

(from Sakhis of Guru Harrai dated 1665 AD.)

The Delicate Touch

**"You touched, and I broke into song
Like a lyre freshly stringed
You left off, and I became silent
Like one who is dumb.
Magic abides in your hand;
Its touch fills me with life.
Part me not away from you
Ever—I am daily suppliant at your door!"**

*(from—the poetry of Bhai Veer Singh "Nit Arzoi"
(Every Day Request) in Matak Hulare, 1922)*

Eating Habits

The Sikhs enjoy good food and are heavy eaters. There are no listed forbidden foods for a Sikh except the 'Halal Meat' (the animal slaughtered in the Muslim style). The Sikhs are both vegetarian and non vegetarian, but in a gurdwara only vegetarian food is served in the langar. Even at home at the religious functions, like *Akand-Path* or other *Sadharan-Paths* no meat dish is ever served. The Sikh households like fresh food rather than frozen or tinned stuff.

According to the Sikh tradition it is the duty of the mother to teach her daughters the way of cooking Punjabi Food. A Sikh wife is expected to feed her family and be an expert cook. In almost every Sikh household a girl after attaining the age of puberty, starts helping her mother in the household duties including cooking and sewing etc.

Most of the Indian restaurants, in the Britain, cook and offer only Punjabi/Sikh food. The Punjabi food is both spicy and tasty. The *Pakor*as and *Samosas* are good vegetarian appetisers whereas *Seekh Kababs* and *Chicken Tikkas* are very popular non vegetarian starters. Various varieties of *Chicken Curries* and *Biryanis*, stuffed vegetables like potatoes, okra, brinjals, tomatoes, different kind of *Raitas* and various versions of *Chapaties* like plain *Chapaties*, *Prawntha*, *Stuffed Chapaties*, *Nans*, *Poories* and *Kulcha* are very famous Punjabi foods.

Punjabi sweets like *Kulfis*, *Jalebis*, *Halwa*, *Barfi*, *Rubri*, *Gulab Jamans* and *Rasgullas* are some of the popular names in a Sikh household. *Karah*, a mixture of semolina, sugar and water is another famous Sikh sweet. When this sweet is made for a religious ceremony and with religious rites then it is known as *Karah Prashad*. According to the Sikh tradition, the person who is to cook the *Prashad* must have taken a bath, must cover his or her head during the preparation and must continuously recite hymns from Guru Granth Sahib. The *Prashad* is made with equal measures of semolina, sugar and butter with treble measure of water. Semolina and butter are mixed and cooked separately and sugar and water are mixed and boiled separately. When the mixture of semolina and butter turns brown and starts giving cooking flavour then the boiling water mixed with sugar is poured into it. The total mixture is stirred till it is thick and the water is fully absorbed in the cooked semolina and butter. The *Prashad* is normally eaten while it is warm.

Out of soft drinks, *Lassi* (butter milk) and lemon squash are most popular in the Sikh families.

References :

“All food is pure, for God himself has blessed us with it for sustenance.”

“All Foods are heavenly, so is water, fire and salt. With the addition of the pure butter, food becomes purer and holier.”

“Eat whichever food you like except the one which breeds evil in your mind and thoughts.”

(from Guru Granth Sahib pages—472, 473, 16)

The Rich Man and the Poor Man :

Once on his journeys, Guru Nanak happened to come to a city known as Saydpur. There he stayed with one of his followers, a poor low-caste carpenter named Bhai Lalo. In the same city there lived a high caste rich man named Malik Bhago. One day Malik Bhago arranged for a big feast and invited Guru Nanak to be his guest. It was considered a great honour to be asked to dine with a man as rich and powerful as Malik Bhago. Guru Nanak refused the invitation. Malik Bhago noticed Guru Nanak's absence and went to see him personally. He requested the Guru to come and bless his house and the food. There were about hundred other people present in the feast when Guru Nanak reached Malik Bhago's house. The servants immediately placed the best food in front of Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak looked at the food and then looked around other people who were eating like hogs. When Malik Bhago saw Guru Nanak not eating his food he came to him and said, “You eat the coarse and stale *Chapaties* of a poor, low caste carpenter, and yet you are reluctant to eat my luxurious, fresh and well cooked food, why?”

Guru Nanak looked at Malik Bhago and took in his one hand the food from the plate. He then opened a small tin and took out from it the coarse and stale *Chapati* which he was to eat at Bhai Lalo's house. He held the coarse *Chapati* in the other hand. Then he looked around and attracted the attention of all those who were present there. He then raised his hands and squeezed both foods. From Bhai Lalo's coarse *Chapati* dripped milk, and Malik Bhago's rich food poured blood. Malik Bhago looked horrified. He asked Guru Nanak, “Why is there blood from my food and milk from Lalo's food.”

Guru Nanak replied, “Bhai Lalo's food was earned by honest and hard work. But your food was the product of extortion and oppression.”

Malik Bhago admitted his fault. He felt ashamed of his evil deeds and changed from his sinful ways to a life of devotion, honesty and charity.

(from Janan Sakhis—Guru Nanak Dev 1635 AD.)

Vegetarian or Non Vegetarian:

“The considered view of Sikhism whether one should or should not eat meat has been not to emphasise its importance. “Men out of ignorance, quarrel over this matter, not bothering to know what is flesh and what is non flesh, which food is sinful and which is not (Guru Granth Sahib page 1289). Guru Nanak felt that only such food should be avoided as may tend to produce pain and disorder in the body or generate evil thoughts and vicious longings in the mind. There is also evidence that Guru Angad and Guru Amardas did not prohibit the use of meat. Guru Gobind Singh also permitted the Sikhs to take meat but he prescribed that it should be *Jhatka* meat (prepared by beheading an animal in one stroke) and not *Halal* meat that is slaughtered in Muslim fashion.

Bhagat (saint) Kabir, however, favoured a vegetarian diet. He says; “If you say that God resides in all, why do you then kill a hen ?” (Guru Granth Sahib page 1350), “It is cruel to kill animals by force and call it sanctified food,” (Guru Granth Sahib page 1375).

Keeping in view the above, Sikh *Rehat Maryada* (code of conduct) is silent about meat. The general tradition is that the food offered in *Langars* is always vegetarian. The devout Sikhs also tend to be vegetarian while others prefer to take only *Jhatka* meat. The Sikhs do not generally take beef.”

(from—mini Encyclopaedia of Sikhism by H.S. Singha)

Dying and Mourning

The Sikhs believe that human life is the most important gift of God. The life is a reality and not an illusion as the Hindus believe. According to the Sikh thought a life first emerges from God and then re-merges in Him, as a spark comes from the fire and falls back in it and as the waves come out from the ocean and dip back in it. Between the emergence from God and reemergence in Him there is a long journey. There are numerous lives and there are different forms of lives.

According to the deeds of a person his next life is chosen. But it is only in the human life that a man can work towards reemerging in God. Only human deeds are judged in the court of God. The ultimate goal of every life is to go back to the realm of Lord, If the deeds of a person are not good then he will transmigrate in different lives, will suffer and then come back to human life to try again to reach the destination i.e. to remerge in God. In the human life a person must lead a religious life and carry out all the duties prescribed by the Gurus to get salvation or *Mukti*. The salvation or the end of life's journey can also be obtained by the grace of God. If he wishes he can pardon all the sins and call back a person to his realm.

When a Sikh dies, the dead body is cleaned, washed and properly clothed. The best clothes of the dead including the undergarments are put on the body. The other Sikh symbols i.e. the iron bracelet, the comb and the sword are placed near the dead. The hair are combed and tied neatly. If the dead is a male then a turban is also tied. The coffin is then taken to the cremation grounds. From the time of the death till the cremation the hymns are recited by the family. The last hymn said is *The Sohila*. At the cremation the funeral pyre is normally lit by the eldest son. The ashes are thrown in the nearest river. Some Sikh families prefer to send the ashes to *Paonta Sahib* or *Kiratpur Sahib*. An *Akand Path* is then arranged in the house of the nearest relative. At the end of *Akand Path* prayers are said for the re-mergence of the soul in God. The God is requested to shower his grace on the departed soul and to free it from transmigration. God's blessings are sought to end the human journey and its associated sufferings.

In the western countries, dead bodies are taken to the crematorium for the cremation and other religious and traditional rites are performed there.

References :

Real Love Is God's Love :

"In this world I have seen all kinship as false and fake everyone is engrossed in

acquiring comforts for his own
People are drunk with their egos,
and are attached with greed and passion.
When the end comes all companionship withers,
this is a strange custom.
This stupid mind does not understand,
despite being taught again and again.
Only those win over their difficulties and hardships,
who keep themselves attached with the name of God."

(from Guru Granth Sahib—page 536)

When the end came.....

"The news spread that Guru Nanak was ready to embark on his last journey. The disciples began to arrive in large numbers to see him. Hindus and Musalmans all came....the Guru went and sat under an acacia tree. The withered tree burst into bloom. New leaves and flowers appeared. Guru Angad touched his feet in adoration. Guru Nanak's wife was full of grief and wept. So did the other relations, family and disciples. Guru Nanak told them not to remorse or mourn. It was against his teachings. He pacified them and uttered a hymn;

**"Hail the Creator the Eternal Sovereign,
who has put each one in the world to his task,
When the span is run out and the measure is full,
the soul departs from the body.....
Remember the lord, brothers; this is the way all must go.....
who comes here must go;
vain is it to dwell in ego.
Only that grief is acceptable, O Nanak,
which is due to separation from God."**

As the shabad was finished, the Guru handed to Guru Angad the book in which were inscribed his hymns. Then Guru pulled the sheet over himself and lay down. Later, when the sheet was lifted, there was nothing but the flowers. Half flowers were taken by the Hindus to immerse in the holy Ganges and the other half were taken by the Muslims for the burial."

(from old Janam Sakhis)

A Message to Death :

That plant of heena which is to give me its leaves
to colour the palm of my hands, is still too young.
That elephant whose teeth (ivory) will be used
to make my marriage bangles, is also too young.
Oh Death ! please wait, I am not yet ready to go with you.

I have not yet sung the songs of marriage for my brother,
neither I have received the grains nor other gifts of his marriage,
neither I have seen the lovely face of my sister-in-law
nor I have enjoyed the swings and other young plays.
Oh Death ! please wait I am not yet free to go with you.

I have saved my tears and my pathos,
travellers want to be friendly with me, but
neither I have fallen in love nor I have selected my life partner,
Oh Death ! please wait, I am not yet free to go with you.

(from—Sawe Pattar—by Professor Mohan Singh. 1971)

Believing in Sikh Concepts

A Sikh lives by the rules made for him by the ten Gurus. The fundamental rules, concepts and the commandments are as follows :

(1) Worship Of God

- A. Worship only God and no one else.
 - a. There is only one God.
 - b. He is the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer.
 - c. He is the Truth, He is Fearless and is beyond life and death.
 - d. He is Omnipotent and Omnipresent.
 - e. He is both Abstract and Absolute.
- B. Make worship and prayer a part of your daily life.
- C. Do not make images of God.

(2) Truthful life and Honest Living

- a. Work hard and work with honesty.
- b. Lead a truthful life.
- c. Share your earnings with others.
- d. Help the needy and the poor.
- e. Love your children.
- f. Respect your parents.
- g. Do not harm others.

(3) Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man

- a. Believe that everyone is the child of God.
- b. Believe that all human-beings are equal.

(4) Rituals and Superstitions

- a. Do not believe in any rituals and superstitions.
- b. Do not believe in the worship of images and tombs.

(5) Social and Family Guidelines

- a. Do not take alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- b. Do not eat *halal* meat.
- c. Do not eat any food which inflames the passions.
- d. Be faithful to your wife.
- e. Be true to your parents and children.
- f. Love and respect your guests.

- g. Do not steal.
- h. Do not gamble

Guru Nanak and the other Gurus who followed him lived simple lives. They were all family men and had children. They all lived honest and dignified lives. They wanted their Sikhs to be like them. When Guru Gobind Singh the tenth Guru initiated the new method of baptism and created the Khalsa he prescribed five compulsory wearing for the Khalsa. He said that his Khalsa will always wear :

(6) The five Ks.

- a. Long and uncut hair (Kesh)
- b. A sword (Kirpan)
- c. An underwear (Kachcha)
- d. An iron bracelet (Kara) and
- e. A comb (Kanga)

(7) And the Sikhs will Always Believe :

- a. The oneness of the ten Gurus
- b. Guru Granth Sahib as the living Guru
- c. The command of five baptised ideal Sikhs as the command of the Guru
- d. The authority of the five Sikh Takhts and
- e. The holiness and supremacy of the Sikh shrines.

References :

The Truthful Life :

“The breath that goes out without remembering God, goes in vain.”

“Meditate on the grace and greatness of the true name.....”

“The true religion consists neither in abiding at the tombs or the crematorium, nor in going into a pseudo-trance. It neither consists in rejecting the world and becoming a *yogi* nor fasting or bathing at the holy places.

The way to true religion is found by living near to God and leading a truthful detached life.”

“Truth is the highest of all virtues, but higher still is the truthful living.”

“The ignorant fools worship stones and images, not realising that stones which themselves sink cannot ferry others across.”

(Guru Granth Sahib—pages 730, 598, 730, 62, 556)

Breach of the Sikh Rules :

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the emperor of Punjab. He ruled there for about forty years

(1799-1839). He was a very powerful king. The Sikh state, under his rule, spread from Jamrod (near Afghanistan) to Sutlej. He was a very devout Sikh. He practised the Sikh way of life. Once the emperor happened to commit a religious lapse. He developed intimacy with a dancing girl Mohran. Some time thereafter, he came to Amritsar to pay homage at the sacred shrine. Akali Phula Singh, the then high priest of Akal Takhat ran to the entrance of the gurdwara. He stood in Maharaja's way and said, "Stop. A sikh who has broken the Sikh way of life, as you have, cannot be allowed to enter the sacred temple. The Maharaja folded his hands and said in a humble tone, 'I admit my lapse, and beg the Guru's *sangat* to pardon me. I am prepared to suffer gladly the penalty that the sangat may impose upon me for this lapse.' After consultation with Sikh congregation, Akali Phula Singh announced that the Maharaja should be bound to the trunk of a tamarind tree in front of Akal Takhat and twenty one whip-strokes should be struck on his body.

The Maharaja, on hearing the sangat's verdict, bowed his head, went up to the tamarind tree and stood near it with his arms behind him. Ready to be bound to the tree and whipped. The lion of Punjab (the popular name for the Maharaja) was standing waiting for the whip-man when Akali Phula Singh said aloud, 'O Guru Khalsa, the Maharaja is willing to bear the penalty imposed on him. See, there he stands, ready to receive the strokes. He is repentant. This is enough. I appeal to the Guru Khalsa to pardon him.' The congregation readily agreed. The Maharaja was unbound and was allowed to enter the sacred temple.

(from stories from Sikh History Book VII by Kartar Singh and Gurdial Singh Dhillon page 162)

Religious Punishment to Two Sikh Political Leaders :

In fifties and early sixties Master Tara Singh was the leader of the Sikhs. The Sikhs were demanding a Sikh majority state the Punjabi Suba. On 18th December 1960 Sant Fateh Singh, a deputy of Master Tara Singh, went on a fast unto death over the Punjabi Suba issue. In January 1961, at the assurances of congress Master Tara Singh persuaded Sant Fateh Singh to abandon his fast. The government went back on its promise. On August 15, 1961 Master Tara Singh himself went on fast unto death. On the assurances of the government and the intermediaries Master Tara Singh also broke his fast on 2nd October 1961. The government, once again refused to implement its promises. The Sikh nation charged both the leaders for breaking up their fasts without achieving anything. The Sikh congregation decided that it was religious lapse. The promises made, by the two leaders, in front of Akal Takhat, were unfulfilled. The *Panj Piyaras* (five baptised Sikhs) imposed upon them a religious punishment for breaking the Sikh rules. Both leaders accepted the punishment with grace and performed all the duties put on them by the *sangat*.

(from a History of the Sikh People by Dr. Gopal Singh, 1979)

Longing for Good for Humanity

When a Sikh ends his prayer he says "O Nanak, God's name gives hope and success—may Lord bless the whole humanity". Sikhism by definition is a universal religion. Guru Nanak in his most important hymn *Jap Ji Sahib* emphatically says that all the worlds have one God whom we should never desert. God is Gracious and Kind. He is Benevolent and Giver. If you love Him and His creation He will love you.

According to the Sikh thought a Sikh must love the whole mankind and think every one to be the children of the same God. For a Sikh God is neither Muslim nor Hindu He is just God. It is the man who makes the difference and draws the line of distinction. Guru Gobind Singh said that the Hindu God "Ram" and the Muslim God "Rahim" were the same. The Hindu religious book "Purana" and the Muslim sacred book "Quran" had the same message; it was only through human error that they looked different.

Sikhism has a tradition of *Sangat* and *Pangat*. *Sangat* means the congregation in a gurdwara. Inside the temple every one sits on the floor. Whether a person is a king or a beggar, rich or poor they all sit together. They all get *Parshad* from the same bowl. *Pangat* means the people eating in the Sikh *Langar*. Thereto everyone sits on the ground or stands around the same table. The dinner is served either on leaves or in simple plates. Everyone eats the same food. No difference is made between the people on the basis of their religion, colour, wealth, sex, caste and status.

History is a witness that the Sikhs fought most of the wars to save the religion of the others and against the tyranny and injustice of the rulers. The Sikh Gurus loved Hindus as much as they loved Muslims, Buddhists and Christians. When Guru Nanak was chosen as God's Prophet his first sermon was "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman all are the children of God."

Universal Love :

"They who love God, love everybody"

"Those who do not love, do not know the taste of the beloved.

They are like a guest visiting a deserted house and returning empty and disappointed."

"All sins are pardoned if you love God and his creation."

"O my mind ! let your love for God and His men be like that of fish for the water. The more the water, the better she revels and feels peace of mind and body. But without water, she cannot live even for a moment."

(from Guru Granth Sahib page 557, 790, 786, 60)

Love for People or for Money:

In the times of Guru Amardas, there lived a merchant known as Ganga Das. During his bad days he came to Guru Amardas and asked for his blessings. The Guru told him to go to Delhi and start a business there. He instructed Ganga Das to remember God and serve his people. Ganga agreed to live and act as advised by the Guru. In a short span of time his luck changed and he became very rich. After sometime a poor brahmin came to the Guru and asked for financial help for the marriage of his daughter. The Guru gave him a letter and sent him to Ganga Das in Delhi. But wealth had turned Ganga Das's head. He read the letter and then said to himself. 'If I give money to this man, the Guru will send more persons for similar help. If I refuse to help



Langar

this man, the Guru will not send anyone again. 'Thinking thus, he refused to help the brahmin. The latter returned to the Guru and told him what had happened. The Guru gave him money from his own funds. After some time Ganga's luck turned against him. He lost everything he had. He said to himself, I disobeyed the Guru and refused to help the needy. This bad luck has come to me for that reason. I must go to the Guru and beg for his forgiveness.' He went to the Guru but did not have the guts to face him. He started serving in the Guru's kitchen. After some time, the Guru sent for him. He fell at Guru's feet and begged for his forgiveness. The Guru granted it to him but warned him never to forget God's name again, and never to refuse to serve and help His humanity. The Guru said that God dwells in His creation. If you love His creation and the humanity at large God will always protect you.

(from Stories from Sikh History Book II)

Friend of Humanity :

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh emperor of Punjab was a great friend of the poor and the old. His kingdom was a secular state. He made no distinction between a Sikh and a non Sikh. Many top ministers of his cabinet were non Sikhs. He loved his people more than his kingdom. During the period of his rule there occurred a famine in Punjab. He made special arrangements for the storage and free distribution of food-grains amongst his subjects according to the size of their families. Once the Maharaja dressed as a rustic went to a distribution centre. There he saw an old washer-man who had collected his ration but found it too heavy to carry. The Maharaja went to him and offered him to carry the bag for him. As the old man reached home, he turned round to thank the volunteer for his assistance. At that time, a soldier of Maharaja's army happened to pass by. He recognised the Maharaja and greeted him with the military salute. When the old man realised that the volunteer who had carried his bag was none but the Maharaja himself he fell at his feet and asked for his forgiveness. The Maharaja embraced the old man and said that he was a true Sikh and believed in the love for all the humanity.

(from Story of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, pages 41-42, 1981)

Living and Dying for Others

Gurdwara *Sisganj Sahib* in Old Delhi India is a Sikh symbol of living and dying for others. Guru Tegh Bahadur the ninth Guru of the Sikhs laid down his life for the protection and safety of the Hindu religion. Guru Tegh Bahadur with his four Sikh disciples were tortured to death at the place where now stands the *Sisganj* gurdwara

The teachings of the Sikh Guru unquestionably say that a true Sikh will live and die for the truth. The Sikh will not tolerate any injustice whether it is being inflicted to a Sikh or a non Sikh. In the thick of a battle when Guru Gobind Singh was surrounded by the enemy forces and the people were being cut like carrots a Sikh named Bhai Kanhaiya was looking after the wounded making no distinction between a Sikh or a Muslim. Few soldiers lodged a complaint to Guru Gobind Singh about the behaviour of Bhai Kanhaiya. Guru Gobind Singh smiled and said Bhai Kanhaiya was his true Sikh. The job he was doing only a true Sikh could do. He called Bhai Kanhaiya and embraced him and said to go and keep up the good work.

When Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh Faith, returned home after his long journeys to the then known world he purchased a large piece of land in Kartarpur village and started living as a farmer. He constructed a big inn for the comfort of the passengers and a large hall for the community kitchen. Every one was welcome to take shelter in his inn and to take food from his kitchen. He made no distinction between his followers and non followers. His tradition of looking after others was carried on by his nine successors.

During the partition of India in 1947, the Sikh chose to live with their Hindu brethren with whom they had 500 years old unbreakable social and family ties. In the massacre which followed the declaration of independence and the creation of Pakistan, the Sikhs stood firm in keeping their tradition of sacrifice and forbearance. Many thousands laid their lives in protecting their friends and their families.

References :

God Give Me This Blessing :

"O God ! grant me this boon that I should never deter from doing good and gracious deeds.

I should have no fear of enemy, and when I am forced to fight, I fight with conviction to win.

**Let only one command guide my mind, that I live only to praise you.
When the end of my life comes, I should die fighting heroically in the thick of a
righteous war."**

(from Dasam Granth—by Guru Gobind Singh page 99)

The Persecution :

The Sikhs have suffered very severe persecution at the hands, first of the Mughal government, then of the Afghan invader Ahmed Shah Abdali and lastly and most recently of the Indian Congress government. The Sikh history counts three main holocausts.

First Holocaust—1745

Under the command of emperor Zakaria Khan 20,000 innocent Sikh men, women and children were ambushed and put to death. Their only crime was that they were Sikhs and they believed in the freedom of religion whether it was Sikhism or Hinduism.

Second Holocaust—1762

In 1762 Ahmed Shah Abdali, the ruler of Afghanistan invaded India for the sole aim of destroying the power of the Sikhs. Ahmed Shah Abdali succeeded Nadir Shah who was murdered in 1747. From 1747 to 1769 Ahmed Shah Abdali led a number of invasions into India. He plundered and killed mercilessly. He destroyed the Hindu temples and took away the Hindu women with him as slaves. Most of the times he was checked and restrained by the Khalsa forces. In 1762 he vowed to completely annihilate the Khalsa brotherhood. On 5th February 1762 he ambushed 30,000 innocent men, women and children, at Kup, a village near Malerkotla, and cruelly murdered all of them.

Third Holocaust—1984

On 4th June 1984 the Indian Army under the direct instructions of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi invaded the holiest shrine of the Sikhs—the Golden Temple and killed more than 20,000 pilgrims who had assembled in the shrine to celebrate the death anniversary of Guru Arjan Dev. Guru Arjan Dev had laid down his life for the protection of religion and faith in 1660 AD.

From the Diary of a Martyr :

Bhagat Singh lived and died for his country. He was hanged in 1931. Before his death he wrote in his diary :

I am Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh. My faith has taught me to live in freedom and to revolt against tyranny and injustice. In few days I will be hanged but I am proud to die for a righteous cause. I pray to God that in every life I should die a death of a martyr. A song which Bhagat Singh always hummed was :

**On the funeral pyres of the martyrs,
there will always be fairs.
For the people who die for their country
this will be the only memorial.
O God ! when will that day dawn,
when this land and this sky will be ours.**

(from the diary of Bhagat Singh, 1931)

Respecting other Religions and Faiths

Sikhism has a tradition of respecting other religions and varying faiths. When Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs laid the foundation of Harmandir Sahib, in Amritsar, he asked a Muslim saint, Mian Mir, to lay the first stone. The Sikh holy book Guru Granth Sahib has in it the hymns of non Sikhs as well. Guru Nanak's two disciples who toured with him when he went to spread the name of God were Bala and Mardana. Bala was a Hindu and Mardana was a Muslim.

Both Hindus and Muslims were great friends of the Sikh Gurus. Harmandir Sahib (popularly known as Golden Temple) has four doors to enter in. Each door symbolises a different religion or a faith. Guru Arjan, when completed the construction of Harmandir Sahib, said that this shrine was the true house of God and all were welcome to come and worship in there.

Guru Nanak went to the mosques to pray with his Muslim friends and went to Hindu temples to worship with them. He taught that if you were a Muslim then be a true Muslim and if you were a Hindu then be a true Hindu. The perverse traditions of any religion were evil. He explained that how a Muslim could be a true Muslim and how a Hindu could be a true Hindu. He said that the love and truthful living were the basis of all the religions.

A True Man :

"Let compassion be your mosque, faith your prayer-mat and righteousness your Quran. Let modesty be your circumcision and uprightness be your fasting. Thus you will become a true Muslim."

"The Muslim praises his own faith and is self satisfied with his beliefs. But he too is not approved by God if he does not act upon the teaching of the true Master. Even if the way is shown to him, rare is the one who reaches there; for, without good deeds no one is admitted into heaven."

(from Guru Granth Sahib - Pages 140, 952)

The Aarti (Prayer) Of Guru Nanak At Jagannath Puri :

Guru Nanak travelled a lot to spread the message of God. In June 1512 AD he reached Jagannath Puri, a very important hindu temple in Orissa. Every year in the month of June/July the Hindus celebrate *Rath Yatra* (chariot festival) in this temple. Here Guru Nanak sang one of his hymns known as *Aarti*. In an *Aarti*—the Hindus put candles, incense, flowers and money in a plate and standing in front of the idol,

swing the plate and sing the hymns. There in the temple Guru Nanak sang a different type of *Aarti* which has become the model *Aarti* of the temple :

**“In the platter of cosmos
the sun and moon shine as lamps,
the stars are like the pearls,
the fragrance of sandal trees is the incense,
the breeze is the fan.
The wild flowers are the offerings
they are saying your aarti O Eternal God.**

**Thousand are your eyes, and yet you have no eyes;
Thousand are your forms, and yet you have no form;
Thousand are your feet, and yet you have no feet;
Thousand are your noses, and yet you have no nose;
This wonder play fascinates me.**

**In every heart is the same light, it is light of God;
It illuminates every soul, it gives life to everyone;
Through the God’s word,
The light is revealed within the soul.
What pleases the Lord,
Is the best *aarti*.**

**O Lord, my mind yearns for Your lotus feet,
as the honey-bee longs for the nectar of the flowers,
day and night, O Lord, I desire You,
give to Nanak Your water of mercy,
I am like a *Sarang* (bird); the cuckoo;
that drinks only heavenly rain drops;
let me recline in the light of Your name.”**

(from Guru Nanak-a biography by Dr. Trilochan Singh pages 228-229)

I Respect All the Religions Though I Practise Sikhism :

The Muslims call non-Muslims as *Kafirs* (infidels), the Hindus call Muslims and Christians as *Malech* (untouchables). But Sikhism does not undermine any faith. It respects all religions. In the holy Granth Sahib you find the names of ‘Rama’ and ‘Krishna’, ‘Allah’ and ‘Rahim’. The contributories of Guru Granth Sahib also include Muslim and Hindu saints. God is neither a Muslim nor a Jew He is just God, God of every one. The religions are the way to reach God. Every way has its own good patches and bad patches, but at the end they all reach the same destination.....”

(from a speech by Mrs. Poonam K. Kapoor - 23.1.1988)

Celebrating Sikh Festivals -

The Gurburbs

The celebrations of the anniversaries relating to the Sikh Gurus are known as *Gurburbs*. The Sikhs all over the world celebrate them with great enthusiasm and festivity. Though the Sikhs celebrate the birthdays of all the Sikh Gurus but the main and important *Gurburbs* are Guru Nanak's birthday, Guru Gobind Singh's birthday, Guru Granth Sahib's installation day and the martyrdom days of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur.

On Gurburbs colourful processions parade through the streets a day before the actual *Festival*. Two days before every *Gurburb*, an *Akhand Path* (continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib), is held in every gurdwara throughout the world. Relays of men and women undertake to do one or two hours reading. Normally it takes a minimum of forty eight hours non stop recitation to finish the reading of the holy Granth. The *Bhog* (the end of the reading) ceremony is held on the morning of the *Gurburb*. The service starts after this, at about 6 a.m., with the singing of *Asa Di Var*, a hymn composed by Guru Nanak.

This is followed by singing of other hymns, or *Kirtan*, from Guru Granth Sahib. The singing is often accompanied by musical instruments, a harmonium and a tabla (piano and drums). Then there are prayers, readings, lectures on Sikh life and history, and sermons. These are all related to the life of Guru whose festival is being celebrated. The *Ardas* (prayer) is followed by the distribution of the *Karah Parshad*.

After the service, which normally lasts unto 1 p.m., every one goes to the *Langar* for a meal. Both *Langar* and *Karah Parshad* symbolise unity and equality amongst Sikhs. At night time *Kavi Samelans* (poetry-reading gathering) are held, where the poets read their poems specially written for the occasion. The poetic symposiums are also followed by the *Ardas*, distribution of *Karah Parshad* and *Langar*.

All Gurburbs are fixed by the lunar calendar. The dates, therefore change every year. Normally Guru Nanak birthday is in November, Guru Gobind Singh birthday is in December/January, Guru Granth Sahib installation day is in September/October, Guru Arjan's martyrdom day is in June and Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom day is in November/December.

A Chart of Gurburbs and other Sikh Festivals

Sikh Calendar Months

Magh — (Jan-Feb)

Phagan — (Feb-Mar)

Chait — (Mar-Apr)

Vaisakh— (Apr-May)

Gurburbs

Birthday - Guru Har Rai

Birthday - Guru Gobind Singh

Birthday - Guru Angad

Birthday - Guru Arjan

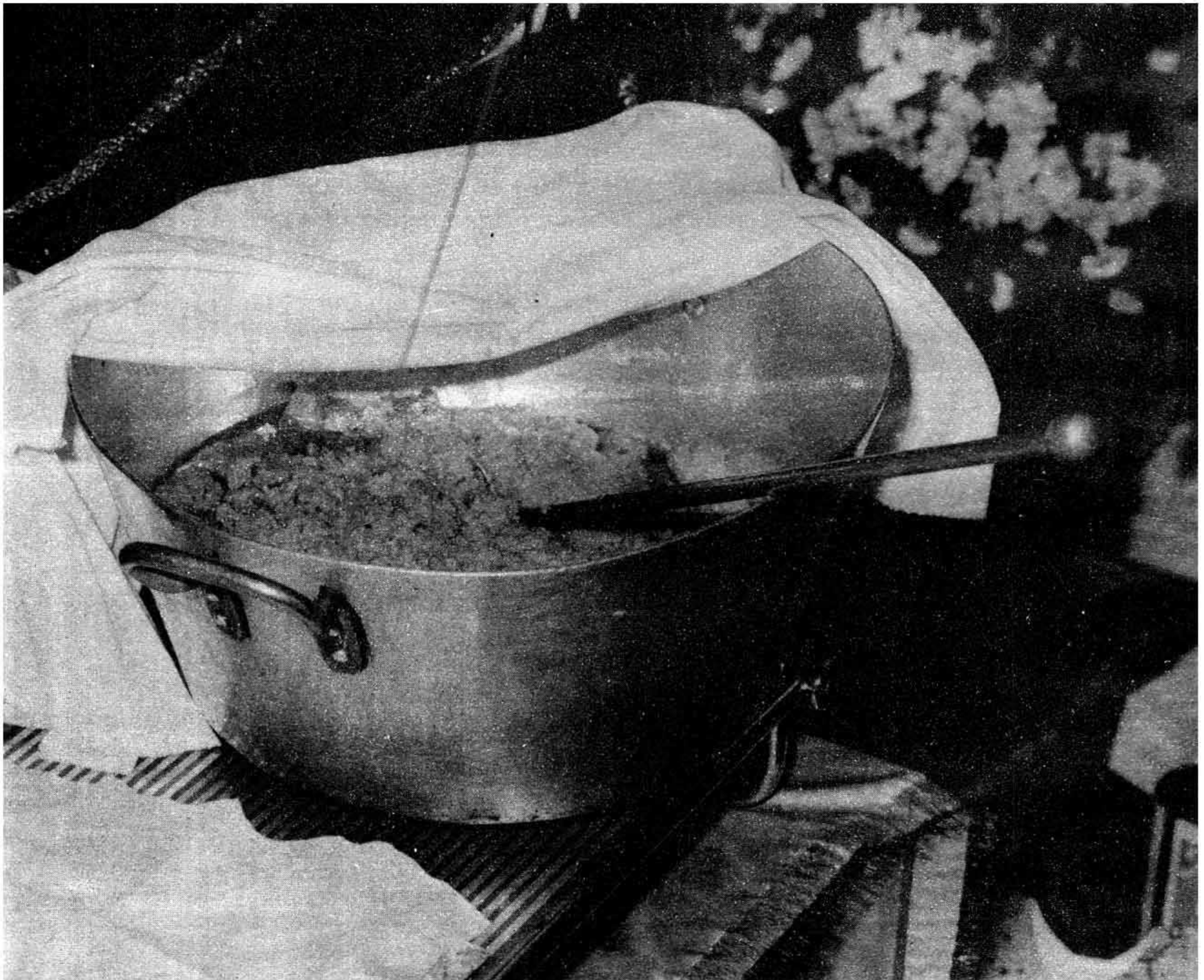
Birthday - Guru Tegh Bahadur

Other Festivals

Maghi¹ Basant²

Holla Mohalla³

Baisakhi⁴



Jaith — (May-Jun)	Birthday - Guru Amardas Martyrdom Day - Guru Arjan	
Har — (Jun-Jul)	Birthday - Guru Hargobind	
Sawan — (Jul-Aug)	Birthday - Guru Harkrishen	
Bhadon — (Aug-Sep)		Raksha-Bandhan ⁵
Asun — (Sep-Oct)	Birthday - Guru Ramdas Installation-Guru Granth Sahib	
Katik — (Oct-Nov)	Birthday - Guru Nanak	Diwali ⁶
Magar — (Nov-Dec)	Martyrdom Day - Guru Tegh Bahadur	
Poh — (Dec-Jan)	Birthday - Guru Gobind Singh	Lohri ⁷

-
1. Martyrdom day of *Chali (40) Mukte* (forty soldiers) who deserted Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib in a battle with the Mughals later came back under the command of *Mai (lady) Bhago* and died heroically at *Mukatsar*. A reference of this martyrdom is a part of everyday Sikh prayer.
 2. End of winter, people wear yellow clothes to match with the yellow blossomed flowers. Start of education day for the 5 years old ones.
 3. Sports day, started from the times of Guru Gobind Singh.
 4. The Birthday of the Khalsa, spring festival.
 5. Sisters' day—sisters tie a protection thread around the wrist of their brothers who in return take oath to protect their sisters all their lives. Brothers also give their sisters some presents.
 6. Festival of lights. On this day Guru Hargobind was released from the prison. On Guru's recommendation fifty-two other kings were also released. Guru Hargobind was imprisoned on a false charge by emperor Jahangir. He was kept at Gwalior prison. Later the emperor realised his mistake and issued orders of the immediate release of the Guru. The Sikhs celebrate this day with lights and fire-works.
 7. Festival of young unmarried girls. Around a bonfire they dance and thank God for the protection given to them by their parents and requests the almighty God for a boon to get loving husbands.
-

Difficult Words

Amrit-Nectar
Sarbat-All
Shabad-God's word
Guru-Prophet, Teacher
Bhai-Brother
Gurdwara-Sikh Temple
Nam-God's Word
Dan-Charity
Ishnan-Bath
Kirtan-Singing of hymns
Katha-Interpretation of the hymns
Gurmukh-A true Sikh
Taksal-School
Nishan Sahib-Sikh flag
Sangat-Congregation
Pangat-People eating in the community kitchen
Raagi-Musicians
Granthi-Priest
Granth Sahib-Sikh holy book
Dasam Granth-The holy book written by the tenth Guru
Janam Sakhi — Life stories of the Sikh Gurus
Khalsa-A Baptised Sikh
Sloaks-Couplets
Var-A long poem
Parshad-Blessed food
Karah Parshad-Sweet pudding (blessed)
Brahmin -A high caste Hindu.

Other Books on Sikkism

The Story of Guru Nanak
The Story of Guru Gobind Singh
Biography of Guru Nanak
The Story of Maharaja Ranjit Singh
The Stories from Sikh History I-VII

Japji
Hymns from Guru Granth Sahib
Hymns from the Dasam Granth
Introduction to Sikhism
Mini Encyclopaedia of Sikhism

Hemkunt