

Origins of Sikhism

The religion of a warlike sect of India, had its origin in the Punjab. Its centre is in the holy City of Arístae, where their sacred books are preserved and worshipped. The name Sikh signifies "disciple", and in later times the strict observants or elect were called the Khalsa. The founder of the sect, Nanak (now called Sri Guru Nanak Deva), a Hindu belonging to the Kshasthya caste, was born near Lahore in 1469 and died in 1539. Being from childhood of a religious turn of mind, he began to wander through various parts of India, and perhaps beyond it, and gradually matured a religious system which, revolting from the prevailing polytheism, ceremonialism, and caste-exclusiveness, took for its chief doctrines the oneness of God, salvation by faith and good works, and the equality and brotherhood of man. The new religion spread rapidly and, under the leadership of nine successive *gurus* or teachers soon became an active rival not only to the older Hinduism, but also the newer Mohammedanism of the reigning dynasties. The "disciples" were therefore somewhat ill-treated by the governing powers. This persecution only gave fresh determination to the sect, which gradually assumed a military character and took the name of Singhs or "champion warriors"; under Govind Sing, their tenth and last *guru* (b. 1660; d. 1708), who had been provoked by some severe ill-treatment of his family by the Moslem rulers, they began to wage active war on the Emperor of Delhi. But the struggle was unequal. The Sikhs were defeated and gradually driven back into the hills. The profession of their faith became a capital offence, and it was only the decline of the Mogul power, after the death of Aurungzeb in 1707, which enabled them to survive. Then seizing their opportunity they emerged from their hiding places, organized their forces, and established a warlike supremacy over a portion of the Punjab round about Lahore. A reversal took place in 1762, when Ahmed Shah badly defeated them and defiled their sacred temple at Amritsar. In spite of this reverse they managed still to extend their dominion along the banks of the Sutlej and the Jumna Rivers, northwards as far as Peshawar and Rawalpindi, and southwards over the borders of Rajputana. In 1788 the Mahrattas overran the Punjab and brought the Sikhs under tribute. Upon the Mahrattas supervened the British, who received the allegiance of a portion of the Sikhs in 1803, and later on, in 1809, undertook a treaty of protection against their enemy Runjeet Singh, who although himself a prominent Sikh leader, had proved overbearing and intolerable to other portions of the sect. Various other treaties between the British and the Sikhs, with a view of opening the Indus and the Sutlej Rivers to trade and navigation, were entered into; but as these agreements were not kept, the British declared war on the Sikhs in 1845. By 1848, partly through actual defeat, partly through internal disorganization and want of leaders, the Sikh power was broken; they gradually settled down among the rest of the population, preserving only their religious distinctiveness intact. According to the census of 1881 the number of Sikhs was reckoned at 1,853,426, which in the census of 1901 rose to 2,195,339. At the time of writing the census of 1911 is not yet published. Their sacred books, called the "Granth" (the original of which is preserved and venerated in the great temple of Amritsar) consists of two parts: "Adi Granth", the first book or book of Nanak, with later additions compiled by the fifth *guru*, "Arjoon, and with subsequent additions from later *gurus* down to the ninth, and contributions by various disciples and devotees; secondly, "The Book of the Tenth King", written by *Guru* Govind Sing, the tenth and last *guru*, chiefly with a view of instilling the warlike spirit into the sect. The theology contained in these books is distinctly monotheistic. Great and holy men, even if divinely inspired, are not to be worshipped-not even the Sikh *gurus* themselves. The use of images is tabooed; ceremonial worship, asceticism, and caste-restrictions are explicitly rejected. Their dead leaders are to be saluted simply by the watchword "Hail guru" and the only material object to be outwardly revered is the "Granth", or sacred book. In practice, however, this reverence seems to have degenerated into a superstitious worship of the "Granth"; and even a certain vague divinity is attributed to the ten *gurus*, each of whom is supposed to be reincarnation of the first of the line, their original founder -- for the Hindu doctrine of transmigration of souls was retained even by Nanak himself, and a certain amount of pantheistic language occurs in parts of the sacred hymns. Salvation is to be obtained only by knowledge of the One True God through the *Sat Guru* (or true spiritual guide), reverential fear, faith and purity of mind and morals -- the main principles of which are strictly inculcated as marks of the true Sikh; while such prevailing crimes as infanticide and *suttee* are forbidden. They place some restriction on the killing of animals without necessity, but short of an absolute prohibition. Peculiar to the sect is the abstention from tobacco, and in part from other drugs such as opium -- a restriction introduced by *Guru* Govind Sing under the persuasion that smoking was conducive to idleness and injurious to the militant spirit. At the present time an active religious revival is manifesting itself among the Sikhs, having for its object to purge away certain superstitions and social restrictions which have gradually filtered in from the surrounding Hinduism.

Sikhism took birth in the East, in Punjab, India, five centuries ago. The followers, called Sikhs, have spread all over the world not as conquerors of new lands, as the Europeans did four centuries ago, but as seekers of new opportunities in life. With them, the Sikhs carried their unique appearance and their unique philosophy. Sikhs migrated to the West in the latter part of the 19th century. Wherever they went, they established their community and religious centers, the Gurdwaras. In the first two decades of the 20th century, Gurdwaras were founded in Stockton, USA, Vancouver, Canada, and London, UK, to name a few. Now, virtually all large cities in the West have a Gurdwara; many have many more than one. The management committees of Gurdwaras in North America formed the Sikh Council in 1979. They wished to explain how the principles of the Sikh faith are suited for adoption by a person of any background, in any country. The desire to spread this universal message is what gave rise to this text. Sikhs today have a reputation as brave, fearless saint-citizens, who defend, rather than attack, the rights of the weak. Sikhs have become some of the world's most accomplished sportsmen, scientists, businessmen, politicians, soldiers, and saints. Learning of their rich legacy will help Sikhs feel a sense of pride in their identity and will also help non-Sikhs understand their traits and their inspiration.



Age of Sikhism: The history of Sikhism began with the birth in 1469 CE of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Guru of the Sikhs. The initiation (baptism) ceremony and other traditions of the religion were formalized by 1699 CE.

Size of Sikhism: Sikhism is the fifth largest world religion. Among all world, regional, and atheist traditions, Sikhism is the ninth largest religion. Sikhs currently number approximately 25 million across the globe, placing Sikhism below Buddhism and above Judaism in terms of size.

Role of Women: Sikhs view men and women as being completely equal. Women are expected to participate in daily and religious life in the same way as men. Barring or discouraging women from any activity or position based on sex is against the principles of Sikhism.

Role of Clergy: In Sikhism, every person is fully responsible for leading a moral life. Sikhs do not believe an intermediary can supplicate on one's behalf to God. Hence, Sikhs have no priestly class. Those educated in religious affairs or with a special insight on God are free to teach or guide others, but they cannot claim to have a monopoly on access to God. Religious services are usually conducted by a Giani, literally, one who is educated in religious affairs. However, members of the congregation are also expected to be active participants.

Conception of God: Sikhs do not view God as a man in the clouds or any other form of human being, male or female. The concept of God in Sikhism is of oneness with the entire universe and its spirit. God is found not by searching in remote places, but by eliminating ego, which is said to allow a deeper, more accurate perspective on the nature of reality.

Life after Death: Sikhs believe that upon death one merges back into the universal nature, just as a drop of rain merges back into the ocean. Individuality is lost. Sikhs do not believe in heaven or hell. Heaven can be experienced by being in tune with God while still alive. Conversely, the suffering and pain caused by ego is seen as hell on earth. Sikhism views spiritual pursuits as positive experiences in and of themselves that transcend death, not as sacrifices made in order to collect a reward that is waiting until after death.

Religious Texts: The only authenticated text of the Sikhs is Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, a 1430-page text containing hymns written directly by Guru Nanak Dev Ji and later Gurus. This text was ratified by Guru Gobind Singh Ji as the final authority on Sikh spiritual doctrine. Later, other texts such as Dasam Granth were incorporated into Sikhism's practice, but these texts are of much less importance and their authenticity has been disputed.

View of Other Religions: Sikhs believe they have no right to impose their beliefs on others or even to cajole members of other religions to convert. Such practices are strictly forbidden in Sikhism. Sikhs are required to defend the freedom of worship of other religions just as they would their own. Sikhs do not believe that followers of other religions are doomed in the eyes of God regardless of their personal character and behavior, nor does being born into a Sikh family guarantee salvation. However, this does not mean Sikhs view all religions as being similar. The philosophy, practice, and history of Sikhism are unique and seen as clearly distinct from any other religion.

Eligibility for Participation: All individuals, regardless of race, gender, or nationality, are free to become Sikhs. Young children who are not yet capable of understanding the philosophy of Sikhism and making their own decisions are not eligible to be initiated into the faith until they have grown older. One does not have to be a Sikh to participate in Sikh religious services and activities. Members of other religions are welcome.

Outlook: Like the Jewish faith which has been subject to extreme historical persecution, Sikhs have faced extreme pressure from a variety of groups. Being a small but vocal minority, they were nearly wiped out by Muslim invaders on multiple occasions and again later by the British Raj during the colonization of India. More recently, they have suffered a great deal from attacks by Hindu fundamentalists. However, they have always seemed to rebound strongly and overcome such horrors. Sikhs played the leading role in ending both the Mughal imperial rule and the British Raj of India. Sikhs today are thriving and remain one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Practitioners of Sikhism can now be found in every major city in the world.

Sikh Gurpurab Calendar

Until the 13th of March, 1998, the Sikhs used a Hindu lunar calendar to determine their feast days. They now use their own Nanakshahi calendar which started on 14 March 1999 Gregorian (1 Chet, year 531 Nanakshahi) and aligns with the Gregorian calendar as follows. The era (1 Chet 1 Nanakshahi) is the date of the birth of the 1st Guru, Nanak Dev, in the Punjab in 1469. Although there is an obvious relationship with the Hindu Solar Calendar, the Sikh Organization states that these dates are fixed relative to the Gregorian calendar.

The Nanakshahi calendar is used for all the Gurupurabs (*festivals marking events in the lives of the Gurus*) except the birthday of Guru Nanak which continues to be celebrated according to the Hindu Lunar calendar on Katik Poornamashi. Events such as Maghi and Hola Mohalla continue to be celebrated according to the relevant calendars. Some Gurupurabs are considered more significant than others. These are the ones that commonly appear as holidays. Gurupurabs mark the culmination of Prabhat Pheris, the early morning religious procession

which goes around the localities singing shabads (*hymns*). These pheris generally start three weeks before the festival. Devotees offer sweets and tea when the procession passes their homes. The celebrations start with the three-day akhand path, in which the Guru Granth Sahib (*the holy book of the Sikhs*) is read continuously from beginning to end without a break. The conclusion of the reading coincides with the day of the festival. The Granth Sahib is also carried in procession on a float decorated with flowers throughout the village or city. Five armed guards, who represent the Panj Pyares, head the procession carrying Nishan Sahibs (the Sikh flag). Local bands play religious music and marching schoolchildren form a special part of the procession. Free sweets and langar (*community lunches*) are also offered to everyone irrespective of religious faith. Local volunteers serve it with a spirit of seva (*service*) and bhakti (*devotion*). Sikhs visit gurdwaras (*Sikh temples*) where special programmes are arranged and kirtans (*religious songs*) sung. Houses and gurdwaras are lit up to add to the festivities.

SIKH MONTHS

Sikh Month	Begins
Chet	March 14
Vaisakh	April 14
Jeth	May 15
Harh	June 15
Sawan	July 16
Bhadon	August 16
Asu	September 15
Katik	October 15
Maghar	November 14
Poh	December 14
Magh	January 13
Phagan	February 12

Nanakshahi Date	Gregorian Date	Event
Chet 1	March 14	Accession of Guru Har Rai & Nanakshahi New Year Day
Chet 6	March 19	Guru Hargobind left this world
Vaisakh 3	April 16	Guru Angad Dev left this world Accession of Guru Amar Das Guru Harkrishan left this world Accession of Guru Tegh Bahadur
Vaisakh 5	April 18	Birth of Guru Angad Dev Birth of Guru Tegh Bahadur
Vaisakh 19	May 2	Birth of Guru Arjan Dev
Jeth 9	May 23	Birth of Guru Amar Das
Jeth 28	June 11	Accession of Guru Hargobind
Harh 2	June 16	Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, burnt alive at the stake. Kachi lassi (<i>sweetened milk</i>) is offered to the thirsty passers-by to commemorate

		his exit from this world.
Harh 21	July 5	Birth of Guru Hargobind
Sawan 8	July 23	Birth of Guru Harkrishan
Bhadon 17	September 1	Installation of the Guru Granth Sahib (<i>holy book of the Sikhs</i>) in the Golden Temple by Guru Arjan Dev
Asu 2	September 16	Guru Amar Das left this world Accession of Guru Ram Das Guru Ram Das left this world Accession of Guru Arjan Dev
Asu 4	September 18	Accession of Guru Angad Dev
Asu 8	September 22	Guru Nanak Dev left this world
Asu 25	October 9	Birth of Guru Ram Das
Katik 6	October 20	Installation of the Guru Granth Sahib (<i>holy book of the Sikhs</i>) as eternal Guru Guru Har Rai left this world Accession of Guru Harkrishan
Katik 7	October 21	Martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded.
Maghar 11	November 24	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, beheaded in Delhi by the Moghul emperor. Accession of Guru Gobind Singh
Poh 23	January 5	Birth of Guru Gobind Singh in Patna. He created the Khalsa (<i>Sikh Brotherhood</i>) and made it mandatory for them to have the five Ks - Kesh (<i>hair</i>), Kripan (<i>dagger</i>), Kada (<i>bracelet</i>), Kangha (<i>comb</i>) and Kachcha (<i>underwear</i>). During his time the warrior/yogi Maadhav Das, later known as Banda Bairagi successfully fought the Moghuls and finally died a martyr. Gobind Singh was a poet and archer and knew Persian, Arabic and Punjabi as well as Samskrit and Hindi,
Magh 19	January 31	Birth of Guru Har Rai
Other Observances		
Vaisakh 1	April 14	The Creation of the Khalsa (<i>Sikh brotherhood, "the pure"</i>)
Poh 8	December 21	Martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's Elder Sons, Ajit and Jujhar
Poh 13	December 26	Martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's Younger Sons

Sikh Events By Guru

Guru	Parkash (Birthday)	Gur Ghaddhi (Guruship)	Jyoti Jot (left this world)
1st Guru Nanak Dev	Katik Pooranmashi	from Parkash	Asu 8 September 22
2nd Guru Angad Dev	Vaisakh 5 April 18	Asu 4 September 18	Vaisakh 3 April 16
3rd Guru Amar Das	Jeth 9 May 23	Vaisakh 3 April 16	Asu 2 September 16
4th Guru Ram Das	Asu 25 October 9	Asu 2 September 16	Asu 2 September 16
5th Guru Arjan Dev	Vaisakh 19	Asu 2	Harh 2

	May 2	September 16	June 16
6th Guru Hargobind	Harh 21 July 5	Jeth 28 June 11	Chet 6 March 19
7th Guru Har Rai	Magh 19 January 31	Chet 1 March 14	Katik 6 October 20
8th Guru Harkrishan	Sawan 8 July 23	Katik 6 October 20	Vaisakh 3 April 16
9th Guru Tegh Bahadur	Vaisakh 5 April 18	Vaisakh 3 April 16	Maghar 11 November 24
10th Guru Gobind Singh	Poh 23 January 5	Maghar 11 November 24	Katik 7 October 21
Installation of the Guru Granth Sahib	in the Golden Temple by Guru Arjan Dev		



Sikhs consider themselves disciples of Nanak and his nine successors, who are called the Ten Gurus.