

RAISING THE GAME

SIKHISM AND VAISAKHI:
AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE



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Image: Angus Kirk

SIKHI: THE BASICS

INTRODUCTION

Sikhi (called Sikhism in the West) developed in the late 1400s in what is modern day Pakistan and India, having been founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji (born in Pakistan in 1469). Today it has 30 million followers, making it the world's fifth largest religion. The word 'Sikh' means disciple.

Some core tenets of Sikhi are devotion and remembrance of 'God' at all times, along with truthful living, equality for everyone; and the denunciation of superstitions and blind rituals. Sikhi is open to all through the teachings of its ten human Gurus and the current Sikh scriptural Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In Sikhi, the word Guru refers to a divine guide leading Sikhs from dark (Gu) to light (Ru). Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birthday (marked around November) is one of the biggest annual Sikh celebrations, along with Vaisakhi, which is celebrated in the month of April on the 13th/14th.

SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a set of sacred scriptures considered the current and ongoing living scriptural Guru of the faith, with status above that of any other person on earth. Sikhs treat Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji in regal fashion with specific protocol. All Sikh scripture is mandated to be treated in sacred fashion, wherever it is inscribed.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a collection of devotional poetry from the Sikh Gurus themselves and also dozens of respected spiritual figures from across South Asia, compiled in specific musical format. The spiritual poetry is all based on the importance of meditating on the True Guru (God). Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji also contains moral and ethical rules for development of the soul, spiritual salvation and unity.



The Sikh Khanda, a symbol widely associated with the faith

SIKHI: THE BASICS

GURDWARA

The Sikh place of worship is known as a Gurdwara, which translates to 'the gateway through which the Guru could be reached'. Any place where the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is installed and treated with due respect can be referred to as a Gurdwara, including a room in someone's house. There are three main functions which are carried out in all public Gurdwaras.

- **Kirtan:** devotional music from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib
- **Katha:** education on Sri Guru Granth Sahib's scriptures
- **Langar:** free community kitchen for all visitors without restriction

Along with these functions, Gurdwaras around the world also serve their communities in many ways including having libraries, schools to teach children

about Sikhi, and charitable work of all kinds for all, on behalf of Sikhs.

BASIC SIKH BELIEFS

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's teachings are often summarised through three basic guidelines for Sikhs:

- **Naam Japna:** translating as "chant the name", referring to meditating on God through reciting, chanting, singing and constant remembrance all ways of knowing 'God' (love and service)
- **Kirat Karni:** translating as to work sincerely, referring to advocacy of honest living through physical and mental effort while accepting both pains and pleasure as God's gifts and blessings
- **Vand Chakna:** translating as sharing wealth with others, referring to being as selfless as possible



Image: Marathon

Gravesend Gurdwara in Kent, UK

VAISAKHI

ORIGINS

Sikhs celebrate Vaisakhi as the creation of the Khalsa. It is not the 'Sikh New Year' or a harvest festival for Sikhs.

The Khalsa is the collective of Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs who are the army of the Sikh nation. The Khalsa was created to fight oppression and uphold freedom and basic needs for all (food, clothing, health and education). Every Sikh should aim to join the Khalsa one day.

The Khalsa was created in April 1699 during the harvest period in India (Vaisakh). The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, tested His followers by seeking volunteers to sacrifice themselves. The first five who stepped forward proved their devotion and were formed into the first Khalsa (also known as the Punj Piare, five beloved).

On the day the Khalsa was formed, Guru Gobind Singh also set out the five articles of faith that Sikhs follow:

- **Kes:** unshorn hair, as a gift of God and a mark of Sikh identity
- **Kanga:** a small comb for the hair
- **Kara:** an iron bracelet, which signifies a reality with no beginning and no end, and is also symbolic of a Sikh's commitment to the ideals of faith
- **Kirpan:** a sword, indicative of resolve and commitment to justice
- **Kashera:** knee-length breeches, in keeping with the disciplined life-style of a Sikh

The Khalsa has a distinct form so they are easily identifiable. They are always armed with a Kirpan (sword) and have royal surnames: Singh (Lion) for men, and Kaur (Princess) for women. The Dastaar (Sikh turban) worn by members of the Khalsa reflects their regal sovereign nature.



Image: Michael Clark

The Khalsa on parade at Vaisakhi celebrations in Birmingham

VAISAKHI

HOW SIKHS CELEBRATE THE FESTIVAL TODAY

Sikh communities celebrate Vaisakhi festivals by holding public processions and sharing joy with other communities.

A major feature of the celebration is a Nagar Kirtan, where Nagar means 'town' and Kirtan refers to the singing of Sikh devotional music.

The Nagar Kirtan is a way for Sikhs to bring all of Sikhi to display for the public, with Guru Granth Sahib Ji leading a procession going through a town/city with Sikh practices such as langar, Sikh martial displays, kirtan and more all part of the procession.

Nagar Kirtans are led by five members of the Khalsa representing the Punj Piare of 1699.

Since the Guru's writings are poetry, Sikhs sing them as songs so they can see the world through the Guru's enlightened eyes. Singing, both in groups and individually, allows Sikhs to experience a divine connection to 'God' and live within this frequency.

People of any religion or status are welcome to join a Nagar Kirtan, with many often coming to sample langar and enjoy the stunning sights and sounds.

All Gurdwaras must serve langar for free to visitors regardless of race, religion or social status. The three main reasons for this are to fight hunger, promote equality in action, and to teach compassion. This practice has been taken to the streets of most major cities by Sikhs trying to ensure langar reaches the most needy.



Image: Anguskirk

A demonstration of the Vaddah Chakar, a Sikh martial arts weapon, during the 2010 Vaisakhi Festival in Southampton

ALLYSHIP GUIDE FOR CLUBS

TIPS FOR SIKH INCLUSION IN CRICKET

1. Although there is no specific religious day or time for Sikhs, it is worth asking Sikh club members if fixture times clash with their worship; and if there are any other restrictions to consider.
2. Sikh religious festivals are based on the lunar calendar. Some of these festivals fall during the cricket season and might impact on participation. Consult with members of your community around these festivals.
3. Khalsa (Amritdhari/Initiated) Sikhs are expected to keep the five Ks with them at all times, including the Kirpan (small sword). The Kirpan is allowed to be worn in UK Parliament, and worn daily by Sikhs working in schools, hospitals and more.
4. Practicing Sikh adults wear a dastar (Sikh turban) to cover their uncut hair, whereas some (mainly younger boys) may wear a topknot instead.
5. Sikh players should be allowed to wear long sleeves and trousers to respect their modesty, if they choose.
6. Many Sikhs are vegetarian and do not drink alcohol. Consider providing a selection of vegetarian food including food that doesn't contain eggs, and non-alcoholic drinks for any social events.

A Khalsa Sikh will make appropriate adjustments with the kirpan for sports participation. Requesting Sikhs to remove any such item is inappropriate.



Image: Getty

Ravi Bopara, one of only two Sikhs to have represented England

FURTHER READING

LIST OF RESOURCES

- <http://www.sikhs.org>
- <https://sikhri.org/>
- www.sikhcoalition.org/
- <https://www.sikhnet.com/>
- <https://www.sikhpa.com/>

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