

UPSC Preparation

Sikhism

The word Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit word **Shishya**, meaning **disciple or learner**. The Sikh religion originated with the advent of **Guru Nanak**, the founder of the Sikh Religion. It was developed through the successive Gurus who appeared in the form of the same divine light and reached its climax with the creation of **Khalsa** by the tenth Guru, **Guru Gobind Singh**.

History of Sikhism

- Sikhism was born at a time when there was a growing conflict amongst the two dominating religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam in India.
- Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, is generally depicted as a reconciler of the two conflicting traditions.
- Guru Nanak got his enlightenment in **Sultanpur** in **1496**.
- After enlightenment, he travelled extensively to spread the message of love and brotherhood.
- The number of Guru Nanak's followers increased through the sixteenth century under his successors.
- They belonged to a number of castes, but traders, agriculturists, artisans and craftsmen predominated. They were also expected to contribute to the general funds of the community of followers.
- By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the town of Ramdaspur (Amritsar) had developed around the central Gurdwara called Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple). It was virtually self-governing, and modern historians refer to the early seventeenth century Sikh community as 'a state within the state'.

About Guru Nanak

- Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, was born in **Talwandi** (near Lahore in Pakistan), now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and belonged to Bedi gotra in 1469.
- Guru Nanak received his early education in **Sanskrit** and **Persian**.
- He was one of the greatest saints of the Bhakti movement.
- Guru Nanak (**1469–1539**) was the first Guru.

- He travelled widely before establishing a centre at Kartarpur (Dera Baba Nanak on the river Ravi).
- Regular worship that consisted of the singing of his own hymns was established there for his followers.
- Irrespective of their former creed, caste or gender, his followers ate together in the common kitchen (**langar**).
- The sacred space thus created by Guru Nanak, known as **dharmsal**. It is now known as **Gurdwara**.
- The three important percepts of Guru Nanak are:
 - Contemplation of One God (nam- japna);
 - Earning one's livelihood (kirat karna) and
 - Sharing one's earnings with others (vand chhakna).
- To practise his teachings of equality, Guru Nanak started the twin institutions of **Sangat** and **Pangat**, emphasizing that all sit in a congregation and while partaking food from the community kitchen should sit in one line without distinction of high and low or rich and poor.
- Guru Nanak preached through *kirtans*, *bhajans* and *ragas*.
- Before his death in 1539, Guru Nanak appointed one of his followers as his successor.
- His name was Lehna, but he came to be known as Guru Angad, signifying that he was a part of Guru Nanak himself.

To know:

- Nankana Sahib is the popular name for the birthplace of Guru Nanak. It was renamed Nankana after the Guru.
- It was renamed Nankana after the Guru.

Teachings of Sikh Religion

The teachings of Sikh Religion are as follows:

- **God** - Sikhism believes in the monotheistic concept of One God, who is Transcendent and Immanent; Impersonal and Personal; Nirguna and Sarguna.
- **Soul** - There is an identical relation between God and soul, which is mentioned as 'the Lord abides in the soul and the soul in the Lord.' The aim of man's life is to rediscover the real nature of the self which is in no way different from God, but indulgence in mundane aspirations reinforce his ego and strengthens this false notion of separateness.

- **Divine Will** - In the Sikh religion, the concept of Divine Will (hukam) as an imperative has a specific metaphysical significance. Divine Will is all-pervasive and immanent and manifests itself in different ways which are incomprehensible to the human mind. Not only the creation but also the sustenance of the universe is in accordance with the Divine Will.
- **Divine Grace** - It is often referred to in the scripture as kirpa, karam, Prasad, mehar, daya or bakhsis. One cannot understand God through cleverness, but He can be realized through Grace.
- **Salvation** - The immortality of the soul is also conceived in the sense of realization of the eternity of values in the temporal world. Karma and rebirth are closely related to the moral life of man.

The Ten Sikh Gurus

There were a total of ten Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak was followed by nine successive Gurus who not only continued his precepts and ideals but made significant contributions in evolving different institutions for the Sikh community.

Name of the Guru	Description About the Sikh Gurus
Guru Nanak (1469 - 1539)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the first Sikh Guru. • He is the founder of Sikhism.
Guru Angad Dev (1504 - 1552)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the second Sikh Guru. • Guru Angad compiled the compositions of Guru Nanak, to which he added his own in a new script known as Gurmukhi. • Gurmukhi became the sole medium for the sacred writings of the Sikhs. • Guru Granth, the holy book of Sikhs, is written in Gurmukhi script.
Guru Amar Dass (1479 - 1574)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the third Sikh Guru. • He strengthened the Sikh movement by starting the institutions of Manjis and Piris.
Guru Ram Dass (1534 - 1581)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the fourth Sikh Guru.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, which later developed as the spiritual capital of the Sikh faith.
Guru Arjun Dev (1563 - 1606)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the fifth Sikh Guru. • He was the son and successor of Guru Ram Dass. • He built the Harmandir, which is popularly known as the Golden Temple, and compiled and installed the Holy Book, the Guru Granth, therein.
Guru Hargobind (1595 - 1644)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the sixth Sikh Guru. • He built Akal Takhat, the Throne of the Immortal, and declared it as the centre of Sikh temporal authority.
Guru Har Rai (1630 - 1661)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the seventh Sikh Guru. • He continued the mission of his predecessors.
Guru Har Kishan (1656 - 1664)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the eighth Sikh Guru. • He cured the victims of small-pox in Delhi and is remembered in the daily Sikh prayer as the one whose very sight dispels all miseries.
Guru Teg Bahadur (1621 - 1675)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the ninth Sikh Guru.
Guru Govind Singh (1666 - 1708)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is the tenth and last Sikh Guru. • The last Guru organised the Sikhs into a disciplined, military order of Sikh-saints called Khalsa (the pure). • He established the five symbols of Sikhism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kangha (comb), ○ Kesh (long hair), ○ Kada (iron bracelet), ○ Kachcha (underwear) and ○ Kirpan (sword or dagger).

11th Sikh Guru

- Nine gurus followed Guru Nanak and there is no living human successor, but the **Guru Granth Sahib**, the Sikh holy book, is considered the 11th Sikh Guru and eternal.
- Apart from the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, the Guru Granth Sahib also contains the composition of the Muslim and Hindu saints, some of them belonging to the so-called lower caste of the Hindu society.
- Therefore, the Sikh Holy Book can be considered as a unique example of ecumenical spirit of the Sikh faith.

Sikh Institutions

The disciples of Sikhism come to the sacred places to take the blessings of Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book and eternal Guru of Sikhs.

The most sacred Sikh Shrines and Heritage are listed and briefed below:

Takhts

- The worship places of Sikhs are known as the Takhts which literally means '**the seat of the divine power**'.
- There are only five Takhts.
- It is said that 'Takhts' are places where various social and political settlements were done by the Gurus.

The Five Takhts	Description
Akal Takht Sahib	It is founded by Guru Hargobind Singh.
Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib	It is a place where Khalsa panth originated.
Takht Sri Damdama Sahib	It is a place where the complete version of Guru Granth Sahib was written by Guru Gobind Singh.
Takht Sri Hazur Sahib	It is a place where Guru Gobind Singh last breathed. It is located on the bank of River Godavari in the 'Sanctified City' of Nanded in Maharashtra.

Takht Sri Patna Sahib	It is situated on the banks of the River Ganga.
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Gurdwaras

- Gurudwara stands for **‘the doorway to the master’**.
- In India, there are several Gurudwaras but only five Takhts.
- Lakhs of people, particularly the Sikhs, visit the Gurudwaras to commemorate the Gurus. Therefore, Gurudwaras hold significance from pilgrimage point of view.
- Two popular Gurudwaras in India are:
 - **Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab**
 - It is called the Golden Temple owing to the gilded dome that adorns the crown of the Gurudwara.
 - It is the most sacred for the Sikhs.
 - The town was founded by Guru Ram Dass, the fourth Sikhs Guru in 1577 on the land gifted by Akbar.
 - The fifth Guru Arjun Dev completed the temple.
 - When Maharaja Ranjit Singh covered the upper half of the temple, first with copper and then with pure gold leaf, it came to be known as the Swarna Mandir.
 - **Bangla Sahib in Delhi**
 - It is one of the most impressive and fascinating edifices in India and is intricately linked with the history of Sikhism.
- The other Sikh shrines in India include:
 - Gurudwara Paonta Sahib, Himachal Pradesh
 - Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, New Delhi
 - Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib, Delhi
 - Hemkund Sahib, Uttarakhand

FAQ about Sikhism

What are the 5K's that Sikh men are required to possess?

The 5K's that Sikh men are required to possess are Kangha (comb), Kesh (long hair), Kada (iron bracelet), Kachcha (underwear) and Kirpan (sword or dagger).

Who is a Guru in Sikhism?

A Guru is a Divine Preceptor. The word Guru literally means one who removes darkness and is an enlightener.

What is Langar and its significance?

Langar is nothing but a Free community kitchen. It is a unique Sikh institution that has been established to represent the basic postulates of Sikhism that is earning with honest labour and sharing with others. This institution of community kitchen has social implications in providing equality to all and sundry without any discrimination of caste, creed, religion and denomination.

