

Faith Guides for Higher Education

Sikhism



A Guide to Sikhism

Eleanor Nesbitt



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Series editor: Gary R. Bunt

Copy editor: Julie Closs

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Published by the Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
(formerly PRS-LTSN)
Higher Education Academy
School of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Leeds
LS2 9JT

First Published November 2005

Reprinted July 2007

ISBN 0-9544524-6-1

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Printed by Alden Group Limited, Oxford, UK

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PREFACE TO THE FAITH GUIDE SERIES

In the 2001 National Census, over 70% of the UK population identified themselves as belonging to a religious community; and the issue of religion is rarely out of the news, often being discussed in relation to highly-charged controversy and emotion. There is often a lack of understanding as to what a religion is, and what it means to be a member (or not) of a specific faith group. Confusion can result in all walks of life and higher education (HE) is not exempt from this. Indeed, institutions are increasingly, and with varying degrees and different levels of success, seeking to respond to and understand specific faith requirements, as they relate (or not) to particular areas of higher education, in continually changing contexts. This series of *Faith Guides* from the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies will not necessarily solve all the controversies or confusion, but may bring some answers to some of these basic questions, through providing individuals, departments, and institutions with resource information on issues relating to teaching people of faith in a higher education environment.

The introduction of the *Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003* suggested a broader social commitment in the UK to the creation of culturally inclusive places of work. Following their introduction, not only is there an ethical and moral duty to consciously avoid discrimination on the basis of religion and belief, but there is now a statutory duty. Both the Home Office and the Department for International Development have expressed their commitment towards working more closely with faith communities and encouraging interfaith dialogue. All these developments suggest a need for staff in UK higher education institutions to develop the skills and knowledge that reflect this growing concern for cultural and religious literacy in British society. This series offers an accessible route into this area of knowledge. By providing concise guides, all those involved in the higher education academic process have an opportunity to quickly acquire a basic awareness of issues, in a format as free from jargon as possible.

The Subject Centre has brought together a broad range of subject specialists who can draw upon their personal experiences of and interactions with specific faith groups and individuals, acquired through their own academic work, and in some cases utilising personal experiences as members of a particular tradition. The guides detail students' feelings about modern life on campus; information obtained through the authors' longstanding teaching experience and, in some cases, informal focus groups set up to garner student opinion.

The rich variety of issues contained in this series of guides acknowledges substantial diversity within and between faith groups, in particular in relation to identity issues and ideas about what it means to be religious. The format for each guide has some stress on a commonality of themes, but has allowed authors the opportunity to explore themes that are individual and specific to a particular world view. Editing this series has raised some interesting issues, and it is acknowledged that it is not possible to accommodate perspectives as varied as Buddhism, Islam and New Age

in the same format—and that there are disparate (and occasionally conflicting) perspectives within diverse faiths, not all of which can be referred to within a series of concise guides. This series is not intended to be a ‘politically correct’ tool, but seeks instead to support the enrichment of the teaching and learning experience for all those engaged within the higher education sector. It is based on the idea of encouraging awareness and understanding of the cultural and religious dynamics of student experience in higher education, with a view to supporting the development and sharing of good practice.

In tackling these concerns, the guides seek to provide a basic introduction to religious world views, before tackling some general issues associated with students and staff from specific faith backgrounds, and their interactions in the higher education sector. It also provides advice on where to go for further information. The series will thereby save the reader time and effort in locating significant source material and advice on higher education issues associated with faith communities and individuals.

This series will be expanded to accommodate further religious (and other) world views, including some of those related to the religions contained in the initial set of titles, and updates to the present volumes will also be provided in due course—so feedback to the present series would be particularly welcomed. The editor is grateful for the input of all the authors in the evolution of this series, and to members of the Subject Centre and its Advisory Board who provided significant contributions at every stage of the production process.

All web links listed in this guide were correct and verified at the time of publication.

Further information and resources on issues relating to diversity can be found on our website at:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/themes/diversity/index.html> .

Gary R. Bunt, Series Editor

enquiries@prs.heacademy.ac.uk

NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

Eleanor Nesbitt is Reader in Religions and Education at the Warwick Religions and Education and Research Unit of the Warwick Institute of Education. She specialises in the religious socialisation of young people of Christian, Hindu and Sikh background, and in qualitative research methods. Her publications relating to Sikhism include *A Very Short Introduction to Sikhism*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), *The Religious Lives of Sikh Children: a Coventry-Based Study*, (Leeds, Community Religions Project, University of Leeds, 2000), and *Guru Nanak* (with Gopinder Kaur) (Norwich, Religious and Moral Education Press, 1999) *Sikhs in Britain: An Annotated Bibliography* (with D.S.Tatla) (Coventry, Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 2nd revised edition 1994).

I. INTRODUCING SIKHISM

The writer's experience of students and staff on one university campus in a city with one of the UK's largest local Sikh populations indicates that there is still a widespread lack of awareness about Sikhs and their faith—the faith with the fourth largest number of adherents in this country. The challenge in writing these guidelines is to provide helpful information that doesn't create or harden stereotypes.

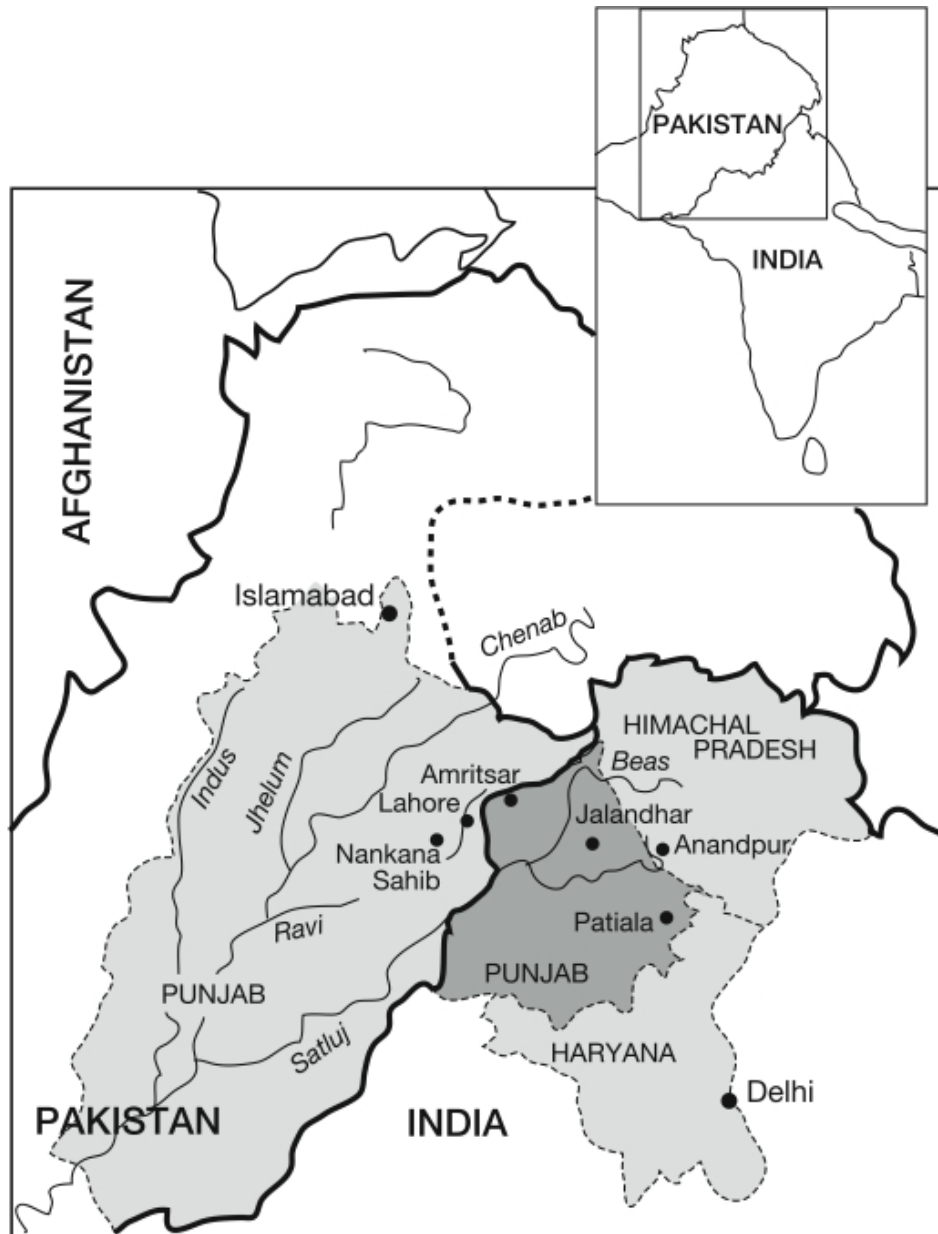
Since many people's conception of a Sikh is of a turbaned and bearded man, it is important to remember that half the Sikhs on campus are likely to be women and that many men who identify themselves as Sikhs do not conform to this appearance. Equally, one must not forget that there are differences between Sikh religious rules and many Sikhs' cultural patterns. Also, many Sikh individuals' chosen ways of behaving will be different from both these in all sorts of ways. Some specific concerns of individuals are likely to arise from factors similar to those affecting their peers from other South Asian backgrounds. At the same time, Sikhs students' needs will for the most part be those of students more generally.

In other words, this summary advocates alertness for particular needs and sensitivities, without making hard and fast assumptions. Individual Sikhs will have their own ways of balancing different expectations, and may well be experimenting on campus with a new lifestyle. This can mean identifying very conspicuously as a Sikh (more so than one's parents) or it can mean shying away from Sikh family tradition and asserting one's freedom. Students appreciate sympathetic support as individuals without being pigeon-holed under the label: 'Sikh' and so being assumed automatically to have one set of requirements.






While this—and what follows—is intended primarily for members of university staff (academic, support, chaplaincy and counselling) whose remit includes catering for the needs and interests of Sikh students, it also raises issues for the way in which Sikhs and Sikhism are represented (or omitted) in certain academic courses. Colleagues engaged in religious studies, cultural studies, history and South Asian studies should already be aware of the risks of misrepresentation and the partisanship of source material. For readers of this document whose role includes teaching about Sikhs and Sikhism the central message is the importance of emphasising the diversity, as well as unifying elements, and of stressing change as well as continuities.

The original meaning of the word Sikh is 'learner'. Of particular significance to religiously minded Sikhs are the teachings of their ten human Gurus (spiritual teachers) and the volume of scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs' faith has its origins in the north of the Indian sub-continent. It was here (in fact in present-day Pakistan) that Guru Nanak was born in 1469. Sikhs began to settle overseas at the end of the 19th century, but the majority still live in the Indian state of Punjab, and almost all Sikh families maintain aspects of distinctively Punjabi culture (see the Cultural Issues section), notably the Punjabi language. Britain, the USA and Canada have the highest number of Sikhs outside India.

An authoritative definition of Sikh in religious terms is appended to these guidelines.



Key:

-  Historic Sikh homeland ('greater Punjab') (also includes darker shaded area)
-  Post-1966 Indian state of Punjab
-  National borders
-  State borders
-  Disputed India/Pakistan border

Map of historic Sikh homeland
By permission of Oxford University Press

HISTORY OF SIKHISM AND KEY DIVISIONS

Sikh history spans over five centuries, if the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 is taken as the starting point. Listed below are key points and periods in this history. In brief, the period of the ten Gurus was followed by a century (the 18th) of conflicts and then 40 years of stability under the sovereignty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. British rule of Punjab, the Sikhs' homeland, followed (1849-1947). During this period Christian missionary activity, British legislation and administration and the recruitment of Sikhs for the army were factors in Sikhs' sense of what it meant to be a Sikh. Since the late 19th century successive influential Sikhs have emphasised the distinctiveness and separateness of Sikhism from the Hindu tradition out of which it grew. The 20th century saw unprecedented overseas migration, with the largest Sikh populations outside India being in the UK, Canada and the USA. It also saw an unprecedented concentration of Sikhs in a single area, the Indian state of Punjab as defined in 1966. (Before 1966 there had been no state in which Sikhs constituted the majority.) In the 1980s and 1990s many overseas Sikhs supported the campaign for a Sikh state, Khalistan, which would be independent of the Indian government. The issue of Sikh identity continues to surface recurrently in the diaspora, often in Sikhs' collective response to institutions' refusal to allow Sikhs to carry a kirpan (sword—see below) or to wear a turban.

1469-1708 Unbroken succession of Gurus, from the birth of Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh's death.

1526-1707 The Muslim rulers of North India were the six 'Great Mughals' (from Babar to Aurangzeb).

1604 Guru Arjan installed volume of scriptures in the gurdwara (temple) built on the site of today's 'Golden Temple', Amritsar (Punjab, India).

1606 The martyrdom of fifth Guru Arjan Dev.

1675 The martyrdom of ninth Guru Tegh Bahadar.

(These events impelled their respective successors to take up arms against oppression.)

1699 Guru Gobind Singh's inauguration of the Khalsa (the body of particularly dedicated Sikhs—see below).

1799-1839 A Sikh, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, ruled the whole of Punjab—this period is often hailed by Sikhs as a golden age.

1849-1947 the British ruled Punjab, having deposed Maharaja Ranjit Singh's heir.

From the 1890s many Sikhs served overseas in the British Indian army or as builders of the railway in East Africa.

Between the two World Wars Sikhs of the Bhatra (now sometimes called Bhat) community settled in the UK.

1947 India gained independence from Britain and was partitioned into India

and Pakistan. Pakistan was allocated most of Punjab and almost all Sikhs moved across the new border into India.

1950s and 1960s Major migration, initially of young men, from Punjab to UK cities.

1966 saw the further subdivision of India's Punjab state into three states including a Sikh-majority Punjab with Punjabi as its official language.

1960s and early 1970s Immigration of Sikh families from East African countries eg Uganda and Kenya.

1984 The Indian government's storming of the Golden Temple marked a flashpoint in escalating tensions (1980s and 1990s) in Punjab, with Sikh demands for greater autonomy from India.

2004 Major worldwide celebration of the 400th anniversary of the first installation of the Sikh scriptures (in Amritsar).

THE 10 GURUS

The teaching of Guru Nanak's nine successors continued his original message. This message is expressed in the poems by him, by four other Gurus and by other saint-poets that make up the holy book, Guru Granth Sahib. Traditional popular stories about the Gurus' lives also illustrate their teaching. Some key points are:

- God is one.
- The Gurus are one in spirit.
- Sikhs should combine being constantly mindful of God with carrying out the responsibilities of family life.
- Individuals can attain union with God through God's grace and by serving others.
- Once ego takes over, humans give in to lust, anger, greed, materialism and pride.

Devotional picture showing the oneness of the Gurus: Guru Nanak, the nine human Gurus who succeeded him, and (bottom centre, below the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh) the Guru as scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib.



KHALSA AND NON-KHALSA SIKHS

All communities are diverse, and include different interest groups. It must be stressed that Sikhs are strongly unified by their shared identity as Punjabis and by a sense of religious community (eg attending marriages celebrated in the presence of the enthroned Guru Granth Sahib). Clearly, however, Sikhs divide into those who are visibly distinctively Sikh (men with turban and beard, plus a few turban-wearing women) and those who are not. In fact the kara (steel wrist band) is a visual clue to the Sikh identity of many more. Note that while all Khalsa Sikh males (and some females) wear turbans, all males who wear turbans are not amritdhari ('baptised'). The fact that a male looks Sikh does not mean that he will necessarily be maintaining the Khalsa discipline (and so avoiding alcohol) nor that he will be vegetarian.

Much that is published about Sikhs assumes that all who identify themselves as Sikh are Khalsa Sikhs. Khalsa Sikhs commit themselves to a life of discipline following their initiation (often called 'baptism') with sweetened water (amrit). Sikhs refer to this rite as 'taking amrit' and, when they speak of 'proper Sikhs' they usually mean amritdhari ('baptised') Khalsa Sikhs. Their uniform is referred to as the **Five Ks** or panj kakke. This is because K is the initial of the Punjabi words for five characteristic signs which distinguish Khalsa Sikhs. These signs are required of both men and women:

1. **Kesh**—uncut hair
2. **Kangha**—wooden comb worn in the hair
3. **Kara**—steel wristband (The English word 'bangle' makes it sound like optional jewellery.)
4. **Kirpan**—sword
5. **Kach**—special shorts which are worn as underwear (Also spelt as eg kachchh, this rhymes with the English word 'much'. The increasingly preferred term is kachehra (kachchahira)).

Khalsa Sikhs' code of discipline is the **Rahit Maryada**. Some key points are:

- A Sikh must believe only in the teachings of the ten Gurus.
- The morning and evening prayers must be recited daily.
- Sikhs must attend public worship in the gurdwara.
- Tobacco and intoxicants are prohibited.
- Adultery is forbidden.
- Hair must not be shortened or removed.
- No meat may be eaten from animals that have been slaughtered in a sacrificial way—this technically rules out halal and kosher meat.

In practice many amritdhari Sikhs in the UK interpret this last rule as meaning that they must be strictly vegetarian (ie avoiding eggs, fish and animal fat as well as all meat).

However, most Sikhs are not Khalsa Sikhs (ie they are not amritdhari or 'baptised') and they refer to Khalsa Sikhs as being 'strict', 'pure' and 'proper' Sikhs. They may themselves have decided against (or deferred) 'taking amrit' because they are not (yet) prepared to observe the full discipline.

UK CALENDAR OF SIKH FESTIVALS

Lecturers and support staff need to be aware of the dates of major festivals. Until 2003 the Sikh calendar was based upon the Hindus' calendar (which is correctly known as the Vikrami calendar). As a result, most Sikh festivals were decided by the moon, while a few depended on the solar calendar. The lunar dates varied from year to year in terms of the secular (Gregorian) calendar.

In April 2003 the Nanakshahi calendar was authorised in Amritsar for use worldwide.

The majority of Sikh festivals will now be constant by the Gregorian calendar. Only three celebrations, **Hola Mahalla**, **Diwali** (also known by Sikhs as **Bandi Chhor Divas**) and the **Birthday of Guru Nanak** will continue to reflect the Hindu calendar (although they may not always coincide with this exactly).

Hola Mahalla falls in March (the day after Hindus' festival of Holi) Diwali/Bandi Chhor Divas is celebrated in late October or early November Guru Nanak's Birthday is celebrated in November.

Of the festivals which are now fixed by the Gregorian calendar the following are especially important:

Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday—5th January

Vaisakhi/Baisakhi, the anniversary of the Khalsa—14th April

Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev—16th June

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadar—24th November

The festivals are chiefly celebrated in gurdwaras, and Vaisakhi and the Birthdays of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh can involve street processions. Many gurdwaras observe the festival on the following Sunday. A continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib commences 48 hours beforehand, culminating with congregational worship on the morning of the festival day. The festivals are of religious significance and do not involve the giving of presents.

Note that Sikh societies may need a venue for an exhibition or other event at or near the date of a Sikh festival. Vaisakhi is likely to be marked in this way. This is particularly important for Sikhs on campuses which have no nearby gurdwara.

UK PRESENCE AND DIVERSITY

In Britain, according to the 2001 Census, Sikhs number approximately 336, 000. In other words Sikhs are the fourth largest faith constituency after Christians, Muslims and Hindus. As with other South Asian populations a higher percentage are in the 0-25 year age band than in the UK population as a whole. This, coupled with families' high aspirations and upward mobility, means that Sikhs are highly represented in the student population in relation to their numbers.

PLACES OF WORSHIP AND GROUPS WITHIN THE SIKH COMMUNITY

Sikh places of worship are called gurdwaras. 'Sikh temple' is a less acceptable term.

Gurdwaras are open to all (provided they dress and behave appropriately). This includes covering one's head, removing footwear, not being under the influence of alcohol and not bringing in any tobacco products. Gurdwaras, and influential groups in their congregations, differ in certain respects. For example, the committee (and congregation) may be from a particular hereditary group (caste) such as the Ramgarhia Sikhs or Bhatra (Bhat) Sikhs.



The Gurdwara in Edinburgh

Some gurdwaras are headed by a spiritual leader, known as a Sant or Baba. Their followers use the affectionate and respectful term 'Babaji' rather than using the Sant's name. Some Sants belong to a succession. The prominence of Sants and Babas is controversial among Sikhs.

Ramgarhias

For generations Ramgarhias specialised in work as bricklayers, masons, carpenters and blacksmiths, and so it was Ramgarhias that the British engaged in East Africa to lay the railways around 1900. When Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania placed restrictions on the opportunities of non-Africans in the 1960s many Ramgarhias migrated to the UK.

Bhatra Sikhs

There are Bhatra (Bhat) gurdwaras in the sea ports (such as Cardiff, Glasgow and Southampton) where most Bhatra families settled, as well as in some inland cities including Birmingham, Edinburgh, London and Nottingham. 'Bhat' is the name by which members of this community increasingly refer to themselves, in preference to 'Bhatra', although gurdwara titles still retain the form 'Bhatra'.

Jats

In the UK as well as in India, most Sikhs belong to the Jat caste. Jats are the numerically and economically dominant caste in Punjab.

Akhand Kirtani Jatha

The Akhand Kirtani Jatha consists of Khalsa Sikhs who, additionally, eat only from iron utensils, hold overnight hymn-singing sessions (rain sabhai kirtan) and female members wear a keski—a small under-turban tied over their hair (kesh). This is worn under the chunni, the scarf with which women cover their heads in the gurdwara.

Namdharis

The Namdharis are a controversial group who regard their spiritual leaders as Gurus, continuing the line from Guru Gobind Singh. (This contradicts Sikh belief that after the death of Guru Gobind Singh the Guru is not a person but the volume of scripture, Guru Granth Sahib.) Namdhari men wear white turbans and strict vegetarianism is emphasised.

Ravidasis and Valmikis

Some students may not see themselves as exclusively Sikh or Hindu. There can be several reasons for this. In some cases these connect with their belonging to caste groupings which do not fit tidily with frameworks that assume sharp distinctions between being Sikh and being Hindu. For example, members of two communities which have experienced caste-based discrimination in India may be ambivalent about whether they are Hindu or Sikh. These are known as the Ravidasi community and the Valmiki community—and they have places of worship in some cities eg Birmingham and Coventry.

Feeling ran high regarding some Sikh-related religious groups during the 1980s and 1990s, a period of violence and political upheaval in Punjab. This turbulence intensified many UK Sikhs' political loyalties. Support for militant agitation for Sikh independence from the Indian state was most evident among UK Sikhs from Jat families, and in those gurdwaras where Jat families were in the majority.

Hereditary Communities

The castes (eg Bhat/Bhatra, Jat and Ramgarhia—see above) have no sanction or basis in Sikh religious teaching. In fact, the Gurus' teaching emphasised that one's hereditary ranking is irrelevant to being liberated. Here liberation refers to freedom from being born into one life after another (reincarnation).

Despite this teaching, and Guru Gobind Singh's insistence on a casteless Khalsa, the Gurus did not challenge the accepted practice of marriages being arranged within one's caste. Most families continue the ancient practice of 'arranging' (to some extent at least) their children's marriages. There is a strong preference for spouses to be members of the same caste. Unsurprisingly young Sikhs internalise stereotypes of other castes and certain cultural characteristics of their own. For example some Bhat/Bhatra students will know that they are expected to marry without having seen their prospective spouse until the wedding itself, whereas Sikhs from other castes may never have come across this degree of strictness in their own or their parents' generation.

Note that there are both Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs in all these hereditary communities.

OTHER FACTORS

Other factors that distinguish some Sikhs from others are the allegiance of some to spiritual leaders (sants and babas—see above) and their sympathy with Indian political parties.

Generational difference is not just a matter of age but also of whether an individual, his or her parents or members of an earlier generation lived in India or moved to Britain. Families may feel strongly bonded with others who lived in eg Kenya or Uganda for much of the 20th century before moving to the UK.

DEBUNKING COMMON STEREOTYPES

As mentioned above, if people have a stereotype of a Sikh this is almost always of a turban-wearing male. Often it does not occur to people to wonder whether a man who is not wearing a turban is a Sikh or whether a woman is a Sikh. Those who know about Sikhism may assume (mistakenly—see above) that any man wearing a turban is amritdhari, ie that he is observing the full Khalsa code. In many cases the fact that a man trims his beard, rather than allowing it to reach its full length, makes it evident that he is not amritdhari and so is not intent on following this discipline.

2. SPECIFIC ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MORAL, ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL ISSUES

GENDER

Sikh students are unlikely to seek segregation of the sexes in classroom or field trip activities. Sikhs often proudly point to gender equality in their community. It is certainly true that the Gurus' teaching honours women and that women can publicly read the scriptures just as men can. But, as in many other communities, many girls grow up knowing that their behaviour—especially mixing with the opposite sex—is more closely supervised than that of their brothers. Similarly there may be a greater expectation that they will learn domestic skills. In some cases this greater family pressure can stimulate a correspondingly greater need to test their personal freedom during their student years.



Sikh women standing outside a gurdwara

MARRIAGE AND DATING

Family honour continues to be a guiding concern in Punjabi families. (See section on Being Punjabi). In Punjabi the word for this is izzat (or ijjat). The opposite is of course shame and disgrace. Over the centuries families have felt the greatest dishonour when the reputation of their daughters is at stake. For this reason Sikh women may be acutely anxious about gossip about their behaviour getting back to their families.



A Sikh wedding procession; traditionally—and sometimes in the UK—the bridegroom arrives on a white mare.

Marriage and dating is an increasingly difficult area to comment upon. This is because families, and individual members of them, vary so widely in what they expect or are prepared to accept. From the notes above it will be clear that some young Sikhs will be well aware of family expectations of them to avoid sexual relationships before marriage and to marry only into a family which meets with parental approval.

If a Sikh woman becomes involved with a man who is not from a South Asian background he may have difficulty in understanding the acuteness of her dilemmas and her fears at being seen with him in situations which might be reported to members of her community. In some instances, someone who is not from a South Asian background may not appreciate the extent to which the Sikh partner in the relationship assumes that any liaison will be temporary before preparations for a marriage (to someone else), on the terms of older relatives, are set in motion.

Same sex relationships are unlikely to be acknowledged or approved of by Sikh families, although there is an increasing awareness of the fact that some individuals in society as a whole are gay.

Methods of finding appropriate partners are changing. In addition to introductions via family friends, and to meeting one's partner without such assistance, there are now specialist dating agencies. For example, one London gurdwara publishes monthly listings of 'boys' and 'girls'. These include date of birth, academic qualification (most are graduates), present employment and height. Other publications (and websites) provide information on the candidate's caste (eg Ramgarhia, Khatri) and what qualities he or she seeks in a prospective spouse. A search for eg 'Sikh matrimonial Khatri' will indicate the abundance of these sites.



A Sikh bride and groom standing in the presence of the canopy's volume of scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, which is at the heart of the ceremony. (The uprights support the wooden canopy over the scripture.)

ALCOHOL AND SMOKING

It is widely acceptable among Punjabis for men to consume alcohol, but for women it is culturally less acceptable. By smoking a Sikh is often making a strong statement of rejection of tradition and family norms. But it is often during a student's years at university that he or she decides to mark this break with Sikh expectations.

Many Sikhs of both sexes (especially amritdharis) will abstain strictly from both alcohol and smoking of any sort. They will be uncomfortable in social situations where these are prominent. Many student social events assume that everyone wishes to meet in a bar and to drink. Those organising such events need to think more inclusively and provide a wider range of environments. This will spare committed Sikhs, and members of many other communities, the distress of feeling excluded or marginalised.

Similarly regarding accommodation, Sikh students will be helped by knowing if accommodation is non-smoking and that the catering provides for a strictly vegetarian diet (ie not cheese and egg-based).

CULTURAL ISSUES

DRESS

For many Sikhs there are no dress-related issues which call for particular attention.

There needs to be more general awareness of the five Ks (see above) and the turban. Khalsa Sikhs (ie fully committed Sikhs) are required to maintain all the Ks, including the distinctive shorts (kach) and the kirpan (short sword). This will affect their decisions about participating in certain sports and swimming. Many Sikhs who do not share the same degree of religious commitment will wear a kara as an identifying symbol. In some cases these are narrow steel 'bangles', but in others they are heavy and conspicuous.

Similarly, turban-wearing men include many who are not Khalsa. Increasingly, Sikh men are covering their hair with a cloth, tied at the back of the neck, rather than with a full turban.

BEING PUNJABI

It should be noted that Sikhs do not aim at the conversion of others. One implication of respecting other faiths rather than seeking converts is a strong distaste for attempts by members of other faith communities to win converts.

Another consequence of not seeking converts is that, with very few exceptions, Sikhs are from a north Indian cultural background and this is in the vast majority of cases Punjabi. Indeed many UK educated Sikhs equate being Sikh with being Punjabi (without realising that Hindus, Muslims, Christians and smaller numbers of Buddhists and Jains may also be Punjabi).

Whether or not they are individually fluent or literate in Punjabi, Sikhs identify with this language as a mother-tongue. Sikh students in conversation together sometimes intersperse English with Punjabi words and phrases eg 'munde' (lads) and 'kurian' (girls).

Traditional family food (served at weddings and in the gurdwara even if decreasingly at home) is also Punjabi. Wheat-flour chapattis and parathas accompany vegetables and pulses (eg varieties of lentil plus chickpeas and kidney beans), all cooked with a base of vegetable oil, onions and spices. Vegetables include spinach and mustard leaf sag as well as potatoes combined with egg peas, cauliflower or aubergine. Yoghurt and salad accompany the main dish, which is followed by sweets usually made of milk, sugar, chickpea flour, wheat flour or rice. Whether or not they are vegetarian, many Sikhs will avoid beef.

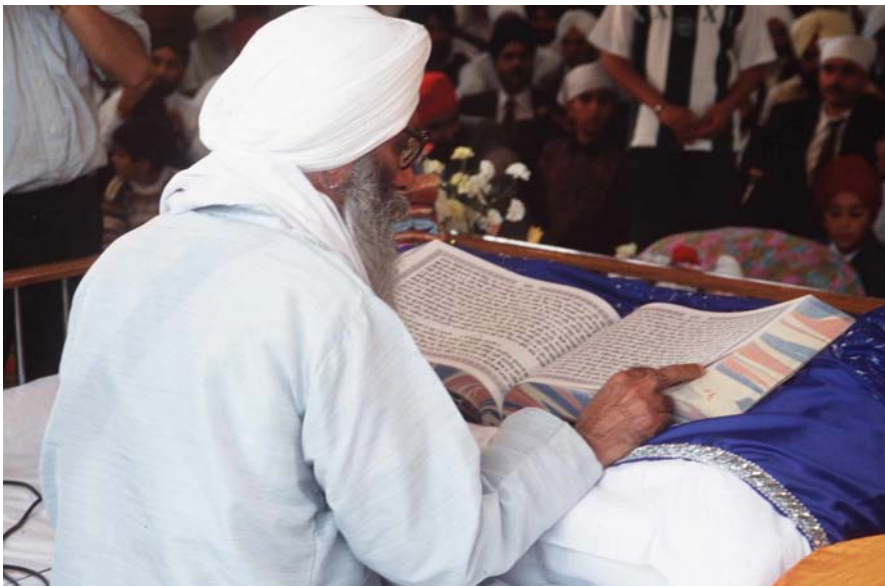
Being Punjabi means too that—on key celebrations at least—women frequently wear the Punjabi suit (salvar kamiz) with long scarf (chunni). It also means a strong identification by many young people with dance and music styles influenced by bhangra (which is, in its traditional form, the colourful, jubilant, swaggering male dance at weddings and harvest). However, amritdhari Sikhs are likely to distance themselves from this scene, which also involves the consumption of alcohol, and they may stress that only devotional music (shabad-kirtan) should be listened to.

UNISEX NAMES

Sikh names are shared by both sexes. Beware of assuming that an individual whose first name is, for example, Gurdeep or Charanjit will be of the same sex as someone else you have encountered with this name. Although Sikh families have family names (or 'got' names) they may not use these for official purposes. In fact Khalsa Sikh discipline requires Sikhs to avoid using these names, as they have connotations of caste (and so of a family's traditional standing as higher or lower caste). Khalsa Sikhs (and many others) will simply use their second name ie Kaur (if female) and Singh (if male) as their surname. Those Sikhs who do use their family name will usually use Kaur or Singh as their middle name. This means that a 'K.' or 'S.' between first and third name suggests that an individual with Indian names is a Sikh and also gives away his/her gender.

FAMILY TIES

In common with others from South Asian backgrounds, Sikh students are likely to have strong bonds with relatives, whom outsiders may not regard as 'next of kin', within their extended families. The implications of this include the fact that the relative's illness or death may affect the student deeply. Also, the student may request several days leave if, for example, there is a reading of the scriptures following the death.



Sikh reading the Guru Granth Sahib

RACISM

In addition to the racism (overt or otherwise) experienced by members of other minorities, male Sikhs with turbans and beards have become more vulnerable to abuse (and occasionally violence) since the 11th September 2001. In the United States many Sikhs (approximately 300 at the time of writing) have been attacked on the assumption that they were Muslims and sympathetic to al-Qaeda or the Taliban. In Britain (and mainland Europe) Sikhs continue to be subjected to verbal abuse, eg calls of 'Osama bin Laden', as reported by an office-bearer in one Sikh student organisation.

On the subject of racism it is noteworthy that, following the ruling by the Law Lords in 1983 in the *Mandla vs. Dowell* case, Sikhs are covered as a community in the UK by Race Relations legislation.

USE OF LANGUAGE

Sikhs are used to accommodating to mainstream English and to trying to explain distinctive aspects of their lives in English, although there are no precisely equivalent terms. When 'outsiders' make the effort to use the appropriate terms this is appreciated and it avoids the risk of using words which have a negative ring to them. To take the example of the five Ks (see above) 'bangle' makes the kara sound more like an optional item of (usually female) jewellery. Sikhs are especially hurt to hear the kirpan referred to as a 'dagger', as this carries overtones of violent aggression and stealth. By contrast with these negative connotations, the kirpan is honoured and the word is close to the word for God's grace.

MUSIC

Young Sikhs will have a wide range of tastes in music. Some will be enthusiasts for popular styles, including mixes of Punjabi bhangra with contemporary pop. Among those who are Khalsa Sikhs some may emphasise the fact that music influences behaviour and spiritual well-being. This being so they will wish to avoid styles associated with parties and clubs and listen to Sikh religious music ie the singing of shabad.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

For many Sikhs university offers the opportunity for the first time to experiment with unfamiliar social activities. This includes Sikhs who respect their religious discipline. They may wish to visit a night club, but find that they are asked to remove their kirpan or (if it is heavy and prominent) their kara. Sikh students may have arrived from parts of the country where police and others are accustomed to Sikhs' requirements. If they are studying in an area where Sikh custom is unfamiliar they are more liable to questioning by police and to restriction on entry to clubs etc.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Despite a shared family heritage of Punjabi culture, Sikh students from the UK and North America may be comfortable with different norms from Sikh peers whose previous education was in India, or elsewhere. For instance, Sikh students from India or South East Asia may feel more lonely and ill at ease than UK Sikh students. They may suffer in silence, and also

lack the confidence to challenge and discuss in seminars, as education in India still tends to require rote learning and to instil deference to one's teachers. This is where Campus Sikh societies can be especially helpful as they make a priority of providing a home away from home for such students.

Students from India would benefit from receiving a list of local shops that sell Indian products—especially foodstuffs. They and other Sikh students need to be informed of local gurdwara addresses—it would be helpful if these could be provided through a link on the university website to 'places of worship'.

Both UK and international students will wish to participate in worship and the social aspect of Sikh life in a gurdwara. For students from India this provides an especially welcome opportunity to connect with aspects of their home environment. Sikh societies endeavour to make arrangements for transport to a gurdwara eg at the time of a festival.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

CHAPLAINCY USAGE

Currently university chaplaincies are opening up to support members of not only Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith, but also those from other faiths. This includes Sikhs. While they appreciate this inclusion, Sikhs are increasingly aware of apparent bias. Sikh students notice the amount of funding, noticeboard space and other facilities that a university makes available to other faith communities and to their associated societies and they expect to be treated fairly.

The expectation of being treated fairly is particularly true in circumstances where obvious concessions are being made to Muslim students, eg with the provision of designated prayer areas. One reason for this sensitivity is the fact that some Muslim organisations are perceived as keen to convert non-Muslim students of South Asian background and also to encourage Muslim men's liaisons with non-Muslim women. One Sikh (and Hindu) perception is that this is one-sided as Muslims are not prepared for Muslim women to embark on similar relationships with non-Muslim men.

Sikh students may wish to book a room once or twice a year for shabad-kirtan (shabad is pronounced as shubud, kirtan as key-r-ton.) This means a religious gathering in which people sing parts of the scriptures as hymns. To help everyone with the words a data projector may be used, and langar, a free vegetarian meal, concludes the event. Members of all communities are made welcome.

Many Sikhs come to university with only a fragile sense of what it means to be Sikh. In their search for information they will appreciate finding publications on their faith in both the library and the chaplaincy. Books could include titles such as *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* by W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi—see the bibliography in the Resources section. Sikh organisations may wish to check books. This is in part because of a series of misunderstandings between eminent scholars (both

Sikh and non-Sikh) and concerned Sikhs who distrusted historical and textual analysis of their tradition. However, if the chaplaincy can be an arena in which enquiring Sikhs can be helped to benefit from the work of dedicated scholars (many in North American universities) this will be of benefit to the community. Some copies of the beautifully produced publications which celebrate Sikh religion and culture will also be an enlightening resource for Sikhs and other enquirers. Specialist booksellers provide a wide selection. See the Resources section for a list of retailers.

The bookshelves in the chaplaincy centre need to stock copies of the scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, in English translation. It is not appropriate to seek to house the 1430 page volume of scripture (printed in the Gurumukhi script) that is central to Sikh worship. This is because there are strict requirements for attending to the scriptures appropriately. Suitable versions include an anthology of passages from the scripture translated by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh and a brief selection by Jatinder Singh and Kanwar Ranvir Singh. See the Resources section for details. For a wider ranging collection of Sikh sources see W.H.McLeod *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism*, Chicago (1990) of which Cole and Sambhi (see above) say 'Its value cannot be exaggerated.'

COUNSELLING SERVICE

Sikh students sometimes make use of the university's counselling service. University counsellors need to be aware of cross-cultural issues. In some cases a Sikh student will prefer to speak to a counsellor who is not from an Asian background, eg because of fears of being judged for perceived misdemeanours or sexual orientation or anxieties about confidences seeping into his or her home community. At the same time Sikh students may well prefer to have the option of speaking to a counsellor from a Sikh, or at least a South Asian, family. This is because many assume that an outsider is unable to appreciate certain experiences (such as racism) and certain cultural pressures—particularly those relating to dating and marriage.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Sikhs as a community have confidence in their track record of hard work and adaptability. Some will have concerns about possible discrimination, especially in relation to the turban. Since the 1970s a succession of legal rulings has allowed Sikhs to wear the turban in lieu of other regulation headwear. However, for example in engineering, they may fear that employers will be reluctant (eg for insurance-related reasons) to employ in certain environments those who will not wear a hard hat.



Selling Sikh symbols—mainly kara and khanda badges—in a gurdwara

3. RESOURCES

APPROPRIATE ORGANISATIONS

SIKH MISSIONARY SOCIETY

10 Featherstone Road
Southall
Middlesex
<http://www.gurmat.info.sms>
info@sikhmissionarysociety.org

This is one of the longest-established Sikh organisations in the UK. It provides information on all aspects of Sikhism, organises Sikh youth camps and has an extensive resource centre, library and bookshop.

BOSS

British Organisation of Sikh Students
2 Chignal Place
West Ealing
London W13 0TJ
07940 431925
<http://www.boss-uk.org>

SOURCES OF PRACTICAL HELP

In addition to these two national organisations, local gurdwaras and Sikh organisations can be contacted. These are listed in Weller's Religions in the UK Directory (see below). Many Sikh students particularly appreciate being put in touch with local gurdwaras and support groups.

The university's Sikh Society will try to provide practical help. For example it may organise trips to gurdwaras for Sikh festivals or set up exhibitions, eg for Vaisakhi, in the Students' Union.

USEFUL WEBSITES

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/themes/diversity/index.html>

This area of our website contains further information and resources on issues relating to diversity.

The following websites provide information for those enquiring about Sikhism:

<http://www.sikhs.org>

This attractively presented site, produced by a Canadian Sikh, provides brief, well-illustrated introductions to Sikhism under the headings: origin and development, philosophy and scriptures, resources and way of life.

<http://www.sikhnet.com>

This is an extensive site, produced by a 3HO Sikh (ie from the community of North American converts to Sikhism). Its diverse contents include notices of local UK Sikh activities and a thesis on a Sikh place of pilgrimage, Sri Hemkunt Sahib.

<http://www.re-xs.ucsm.ac.uk>

If you click on 'world religions' and then on 'Sikhism' you will have an annotated guide to the best sites eg BBC guide to Sikhism, glossaries etc. This very user-friendly site is a gateway provided by St Martin's College, Lancaster, with the needs of religious education and religious studies teachers and their students especially in mind.

BOOK RETAILERS

DTF Books

117 Soho Road
Birmingham
West Midlands B21 9ST
0121 5151 183
<http://www.dtfbooks.com>

Jaya Books

3 Aylesbury Road
Wing
Leighton Buzzard LU7 0PD
01296 682071 fax 01296 682671

Star Publishers Distributors

112 Whitfield Street
London W1P 5RU
020 7380 0622 fax 020 7388 2662
indbooks@aol.com

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Selections from the Sikh scriptures in translation:

Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur, *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco 1996).

Singh, Jatinder and Singh, Kanwar Ranvir, *The Game of Love* (New Delhi: Sanbun 2003). (Small selection represented at <http://www.gameoflove.org>)

Other publications:

W.Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, *The Sikhs, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (Brighton: Sussex Academic 1995) (2nd ed).

London Borough of Redbridge SACRE *Briefing Paper 3: Sikh Appearance and Identity* (London Borough of Redbridge: SACRE 1999).

(A carefully negotiated, practically-based briefing paper on Sikhs for teachers. This gives advice on matters such as whether a kara can be removed for sport.)

McLeod, W.H., *Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press rep. 1990).

Weller, P. *Religions in the UK Directory 2001-03*, (Derby: University of Derby in association with the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom 2001).

APPENDIX

DEFINITION OF A SIKH FROM THE RAHIT MARYADA (CODE OF DISCIPLINE)

The code is reproduced in part in Cole and Sambhi (see above) pp. 200-208 and McLeod (above) pp. 79-86.

A Sikh is any human being who faithfully believes in:

- One Immortal Being
- Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh
- The Guru Granth Sahib
- The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and
- The baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru

and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the many Sikhs who have responded to questions over many years, and—most recently—to Arvinder Singh Garcha, Satinder Singh Luthra, Harjeet Kaur Nijjar, Jagvir Singh and Balbir Kaur Sohal for their help.