



"ENLIGHTENED PATHS: EXPLORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF SIKH GURUS"

¹DR.SUMAIRA SAFDAR, ²MUHAMMAD AYAZ RAFI, ³JUNAID ASGHAR, ⁴MUHAMMAD AWAIS

¹Assistant Professor. Department of History, Govt. Khadija Umar Associate College for Women Tench Bhata, Rawalpindi.
sumairasafdar@hotmail.com

²PhD History Student, Department of History, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. Research Fellow, South Asian Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany.
iyazrafi2005@yahoo.co.uk

³PhD History student, Department of History, Government College University, Faisalabad
Junaid.augusta@gmail.com

⁴PhD History student, Department of History, Government College University, Faisalabad
awaism21@gmail.com

Abstract

Enlightened Paths: Exploring the Life and Legacy of Sikh Gurus delves into the profound journey of Sikhism through the lives and teachings of its revered spiritual leaders, the Sikh Gurus. This article offers a comprehensive examination of the rich tapestry of Sikh history, highlighting the pivotal role played by each Guru in shaping the faith and guiding its followers towards spiritual enlightenment. From the visionary insights of Guru Nanak Dev Ji to the martial valor of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the article traces the evolution of Sikhism's philosophy, practices, and ethos. Through a blend of historical narrative and theological exploration, it illuminates the enduring legacy of the Sikh Gurus, their unwavering commitment to equality, justice, and compassion, and the profound impact of their teachings on Sikh society and beyond. "Enlightened Paths" invites readers on a transformative journey of discovery, celebrating the timeless wisdom and inspirational legacy of the Sikh Gurus. Sikhism is one of the youngest religions of the world and has its roots in the land of Punjab. Sikhism was an effort to transform Hinduism and Islam and rely in monotheism. The origins of monotheism can be drawn from the tradition of Sant and Sufis. According to the encyclopedia of religion, it is defined as "religion of Sikhs who live in Punjab and adjacent areas". One of the most prominent characters of Sikhism is "brotherhood" which is centered on religion rather than race or ethnicity. The word 'Sikh' is derived from Sanskrit 'Shishya' means 'disciple'. A.S. Sethi claims that the word is Sekho which means a person who is dedicated to truth. Sikhs follow ten Gurus beginning with Guru Nanak and ending with Guru Gobind Singh¹. In 1708, after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, personal Guruship ended. Afterward, the Sikhs celebrated the Adi Granth (Holy Book of the Sikhs) as their Guru². Two words are used interchangeably such as Sikh and the Singh. Loehlin said that "Sikh means learner, and Singh means Lion³. He considers these two terms rightly explain the difference between the two. The main features of Nanak's preaching were the unity of God, brotherhood, denunciation of caste system and the rejection of idol worship. Nanak tried to create a strong bond between Hindus and Muslims into one brotherhood. Nanak said, there is no Hindu; there is no Musselman.

Key words: Monotheism, Saint, Sufis, Adi Granth, Guru

McLeod states that the beginning of Sikhism started from Guru Nanak and ended with the last of the

¹ Pshaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003):

² Harbans Singh, *The Message of Sikhism* (Punjab: Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee, 1968): vii

³ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 17



tenth Guru Gobind Singh in 1708. This point was of fundamental importance, the following paramount events happened during this fourth dimension⁴.

1. The first event was when the successor by Guru Nanak was formally engaged in the leadership of the community.
2. The second significant event was the assemblage of the authentic canonical Scripture, *Adi Granth* (First Word) by the fifth Guru Aqun Dev.
3. The third consequence was the foundation of the *Khalsa* (Pure) in 1699. It was executed by Guru Gobind Singh.

According to Dhillon Sikhism is divided into two stages.

- The first in the sixteenth century, when the faith originated;
- second in the seventeenth century,

when it blossomed and finally became a third entity among the Hindus and Muslims⁵ The development of Sikh religion can be traced into twofold developments. The first phase of development is from “Guru Nanak down to the year 1604 when the compilation of the *Granth Sahib* was completed”⁶ after the execution of the fifth Guru Arjun the Sikhs gradually became a military order. The first idea of militarism arose within the Sikhs during the Guruship of the 6th Guru Horgobind. The beginning and end of the seventeenth century were essential for two important institutions, i.e. ‘*Miri*’, ‘*Piri*’ and ‘*Khalsa*’. In the word of Banerjee “the whole character of the movement changed when a peaceful sect turned into a military order and the devotee developed into the soldier saint the second phase of development ran from 1605 to the year 1699 when the *Khalsa* were created by Gru Gobind Singh. The first Sikh Guru, Nanak was a reformist and can be compared to King Luther and John Calvin in the Christian world. The central teachings of Guru Nanak are confined in the verses known as *Japji Sahib*, which is the morning prayer of the Sikhs. *Japji* demonstrates the spiritual, ethical principles for the recognition of higher realm of reality. It is a unique expression of the identity of metaphysics and ethics achieved by a thinker. His other compositions are *Asaa-di-var*, *Siddha- Goshti* and *Onka. Asaa-di-var* consists of the sociological aspects of Guru’s thought. Nanak was accepted by both Hindus and the Muslims alike as a representative of the god who had revealed himself as human to guide humankind. Nanak was a lot more popular among both and conversations between Guru and Mardana sheds light on this very prospect:

Before he breathed his last the Gru asked him as to how should his mortal remains be disposed of and it is then that Mardana replied that he was neither a Mohammadan nor a Hindu and therefore his remains should neither be treated according to Mohammadan rites nor according to Hindu rites but should be thrown into the river.”⁷

Nanak visited all important centers of pilgrimage in India and elsewhere, in addition, he visited the Shrines of different religions. The Everyman Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy states, “Nanak’s intention had been not to unite Hinduism and Islam, but to begin a new religious Nanak visited all important centers of pilgrimage in India and elsewhere, in addition, he visited the Shrines of different religions. The Everyman Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy states, “Nanak’s intention had been not to unite Hinduism and Islam, but to begin a new religious⁸ Being a monotheism, Nanak strongly believed and preached the Oneness of God. *Ek Onkar* and the brotherhood of mankind. He described ‘God’ as ‘*Sargun*’ as well as ‘*Nirgun*’. The main characteristic of Guru Nanak’s religion is its stress on the ethical aspect of societal life. This is, however, the indispensable aspect of all the religions. Nanak attached great importance on *Nam*. By repetition of *Nam*, according to Nanak, one can conquer his evils. Three important commandments of Nanak are ‘*Kirt Karo*’, i.e. ‘do your duty’,

⁴ W.H. Mcleod, 112-114

⁵ D.S. Dhillon, *Sikhism Origin and Development*, 154

⁶ I.B. Banerjee : *Evolution of the Khalsa*, VoL I (Calcutta: Jayanti Chatterjee: 1979): 3

⁷ S.S. Sahota, *The Destiny of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Sterling Publications: 1971): 77

⁸ Nanak visited all important centers of pilgrimage in India and elsewhere, in addition, he visited the Shrines of different religions. The Everyman Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy states, “Nanak’s intention had been not to unite Hinduism and Islam, but to begin a new religious

'*Nam Japo*', i.e. 'repeat the Name of God' and '*Vand cako*' i.e. 'give in charity.' Nanak believed in equality and consequently he turned down the distinction of castes in society and established '*Langar*' or 'Community Kitchen' as a pragmatic measure to break the barriers of castes in society⁹ '*Sangat*' or 'holy assemblies' is also an important institution started by Guru Nanak¹⁰ Another important aspect of Guru Nanak's religion is that by living a householder's life one can attain redemption. Guru Nanak rejected the orthodox view of Laws of Karma and reinterpreted it by providing more room for freedom of man. The works of Guru Nanak not only provide the doctrinal base of Sikh religion, but also promoted its institutional growth and development by setting up *Sangats* (holy con-claves) He travelled extensively for over thirty, years in India and around the world, he visited Arabia, Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, Tibet, Burma and Ceylon

Table 1 Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine Gurus:

Angad	1504 - 52 (Guru 1539 - 52)
Amar Das	1479-1574 (Guru 1552 - 74)
Ram Das	1534 -1581 (Guru 1574 - 81)
Arjun Dev	1563 - 1606 (Guru 1581-1606)
Hargobind	1595 - 1644 (Guru 1606 - 1644)
Har Rai	1630 - 1661 (Guru 1644 - 1661)
Har Krishan	1656 - 64 (Guru 1661 - 1664)
Tegh Bahadur	1621 - 1675 (Guru 1664 - 1675)
Govind Singh	1666 - 1708 (Guru 1675 - 1708)

Guru Angad Dev Ji, the second Guru was born in a small village in Ferozpur district on March 31st, 1504. Guru Angad Dev Ji, the second Guru of Sikhism, made profound contributions to the development and expansion of the Sikh faith during his lifetime. He was deeply influenced by the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and became his devoted disciple. Upon Guru Nanak's passing, he succeeded him as the leader of the Sikh community. Guru Angad Dev Ji is renowned for his efforts in organizing the Sikh community and spreading the teachings of Sikhism. He introduced several reforms and initiatives to strengthen the Sikh faith, including the establishment of langars (community kitchens) to promote equality and service to humanity. One of his most significant contributions was the standardization of the Gurmukhi script,¹¹ script, i.e. the language spoken by the Guru.

The third Guru Amar Das was born on 5th May, 1479 A.D. He comprehensively organized the Sikh Gurdwara, and remained the religious leader of the Sikhs for about twenty-two years. Throughout his time, he concentrated on the social reforms. Guru Amar Das introduced new

⁹ Langar' (community kitchen) is an important institution introduced by Nanak, D.S. Dhillon, Sikhism Origin and Development, 203-205

¹⁰ S. Dhillon, Sikhism Origin and Development, 198

¹¹ Guru Angad modified the script existed at the time of Guru Nanak, which has been known as the Gurmukhi Script.



ceremonial forms for birth and death. Most notably, he strictly forbade the practice of Sati¹² and put every effort to liberate woman from the practice of Purdah¹³ Other social reforms made by third Guru Amar Das were remarriage of widows, and inter-caste marriage, etc. He divided the whole country inhabited by his followers into twenty-two missionary units or *Manjis*¹⁴ as they were called. The literal meaning of the word '*Manji*' is '*Charpoy*' or '*Cot*'. As Guru Amar Das, preached his sermons by sitting on the *charpoy*, likewise his devotees were also preached their duties in remote places by sitting on a *charpoy* or cot. The necessity of the *Manji* system was explained by Dhillon as: "in those days it was not possible for them to visit the Guru frequently for the sake of joining the Sangat. Guru, therefore, appointed his preeminent devotee to impart his teachings to the followers who were at far-off places."¹⁵

Guru Ram Das (Fourth Guru: 1574-81), was a *Khatiri* and of the Sodhi sub-caste. He was the son-in-law of third Guru Amar Das. Guruship was purely based on merit till the time of Guru Ram Das. However, subsequently the fourth Guru it became hereditary and meritorious. Guru Ram Das was born in Lahore in the year 1534 A.D. He founded the religious capital of the Sikhs, known as *Ram Das pura*, later known as Amritsar. The most significant development during his period was the construction of big tank which was given the name 'Sar of Amrit'. To cater the expenses of the big tank Guru Ram Das appointed agents known as "*masand*" for the collection of money from people in different areas.

The youngest son of Guru Ram Das was Arjun Mai, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs. At the beginning of his Guruship Arjun Dev completed the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Guru Arjun invited, a Muslim saint, Mian Mir of Lahore to lay the foundation of the temple in Amritsar. In 1590 A.D, 5th Guru Arjun Dev excavated another tank at Tarn Taran¹⁶ He likewise built a large temple at Tarn Taran, later it became an important place of pilgrimage. He also founded the towns of Tam Taran in Amritsar District and Kartarpur in Jullundur District. Guru Arjun also founded another town known as Horgobindpur, after the name of his son Horgobind. Among these contributions, Guru Arjun's greatest work was the assemblage of the *Adi Granth*¹⁷ the true holy scripture of the Sikhs. *Adi Granth* contains the writings of the first five Gurus of Sikh religion. Moreover, it includes the ninth Guru Arjun's composition '*Sukhmani Sahib*'¹⁸ the writings of sixteen Hindu and Muslim saints and *Faqirs* and the compositions of thirteen bhakts¹⁹ (bards).

After a longstanding anguish by the orders of Moghul Emperor Jehangir, Guru Arjun breathed his last on June 1606. The martyrdom of Guru Arjun was the turning point in the history of the Sikhs, he was the first Sikh martyr. After the murder of Arjun, his son Horgobind became the sixth Guru. Guru Horgobind guided the Sikhs in the spiritual and worldly matters for thirty eight years. During his reign, the history of the Sikhs took a different turn. Horgobind built the Akal Takht²⁰, a platform of about 12 feet high, which resembles the raised platform of the emperor. It was during this time when Sikhs were trained the use of arms, and he himself assumed two swords, '*Piri*' and '*Miri*'. According to Dhillon, '*Piri*' signified spiritual guide and '*Miri*' symbolised the 'Secular Authority'. Khushwant Singh also endorses the same view. Thus, in Sikhism the idea of militarism developed during the period of sixth Guru Horgobind. The Sikhs became a martial race from a purely religious sect.

Seventh Guru Har Rai was the grandson of Guru Horgobind. He was born on 26th February, 1630. Guru Har Rai had friendly relations with Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan.

¹² The Practice of 'Sati' is that when the husband died, the wife either voluntarily burnt herself on the pyre of her husband or was thrown into the fire without her consent

¹³ The Practice of Purdah was very common among the Muslims, though some Hindus also supported this system

¹⁴ D.S. Dhillon, 95

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Tam Taran' is the place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. It is about eleven miles south of Amritsar.

¹⁷ Khushwant Singh, 304

¹⁸ Sukhmani was the most popular composition of Guru Arjun ('the psalm of peace') *ibid*, P.61

¹⁹ *ibid* 306

²⁰ Akal Takht is "Just five hundred yards opposite to Harmandir", D.S. Dhillon, 112.



As a result of this friendly relation, Har Rai supported Dara Shikoh, to fight against Aurangzeb. Ram Rai the eldest son of Guru Har Rai misinterpreted the verses of Guru Granth Sahib to Emperor Aurangzeb which resulted in disqualification from Guruship. Therefore, Harikrishen the younger son of Guru Har Rai became the eighth Guru and remained a spiritual leader of Sikhs for seventeen years. Eighth Guru Hari Krishen was "born at Kiratpur in the year 1656. A.D. He was the youngest son of Guru Har Rai. Har Rai's eldest son was deprived of the guru-ship because of his heinous activities. Ram Rai reported the matter to the emperor Aurangzeb. It was for the first time in history that the emperor had to interpose with the matter of succession of Guru-ship. Then the Guru Hari Krishen was summoned to Delhi by the emperor. But he was stricken with smallpox and died in A.D. 1664.

Ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur was the youngest son of sixth Guru Horgobind. He was born in Amritsar in 1621 A.D. He was a man of solitary nature and devoted to peaceful activities with religious sermons and discussions. According to Sikh tradition, Tegh Bahadur with his wife and other companions visited the important religious places. Khushwant Singh says that Tegh Bahadur travelled through Agra, Allahabad, Benaras, Gaya and arrived in Patna. On his way towards eastern countries Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed at Dacca²¹ (presently Bangla Desh) for about a year. Guru was in Dacca when he received the news of the birth of his son in Patna²² During his eastward journey Tegh Bahadur also visited Assam.²³ In this context Khushwant Singh observes that "From Bengal the Guru went on to Assam. He spent nearly three years in the province before returning to Patna to join his family."²⁴ Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed on November 11, 1675 A.D.

The last Guru was Guru Gobind Singh. He changed the whole sense of life of the Sikhs. He was born in Patna on December 26, 1666, in the absence of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, who had left his family in Patna and gone on a missionary tour to Bengal and Assam. He was only nine years old when the charge of Guru-ship was given to him. He reorganized Sikh religion into a martial form. Gobind Singh was a great organizer and had the vision of a great leader. Like his grandfather Horgobind, Gobind also trained his followers the use of arms as well as the technique of fighting. Gobind built four fortresses, viz, "Anandgarh, Keshgarh, Lohgarh and Fatehgarh."²⁵ Then he sent five of his disciples to "Benares to learn Sanskrit and the Hindu religious texts."²⁶ Besides, the crowning event of Gobind's life was the creation of the 'Khalsa'²⁷ One day before 'Baisakhi'²⁸ in 1699, the Guru assembled the Sikhs at Anandpur. A special tent was fixed on the raised platform. After the Morning Prayer, Gobind Singh went inside the tent and remained there for some time. After some time, he came out with a sword moving in his hand and announced that his sword was eager for blood of five Sikhs. Then five Sikhs²⁹ one by one rose to offer himself. After quite a long time, Guru came out of the tent along with the five Sikhs. Then the Guru announced that 'five beloved Sikhs' *Panj Piyare* "were to be the nucleus of a new community"³⁰ known as 'Khalsa' or the pure ones'. The baptising ceremony or '*Pahul*'³¹ (Sikh initiation) was that Guru Gobind poured water mixed with sugar in an iron vessel, stirred it with by himself. The members of different castes drink out of the same bowl. This process of drinking from the same bowl indicated their initiation into the 'Khalsa' and renamed them with the suffix '*Singh*' (Lion) to male members and '*Kaur*' to female members. After offering '*Amrit*' to the five chosen Sikhs the Guru asked them to give him the same '*Amrit*' from the same vessel. They were surprised and expressed their inability to do so. Then the Guru told them

²¹ W.H. Mcleod, 112-114

²² "Gobind Singh was born at Patna in December 1667," A.C. Banejee, 163.

²³ J.D. Cunningham, A History of the Sikhs (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1918) 67

²⁴ Khushwant Singh, 72

²⁵ Khanda (double edged sword) and recited the compositions of earlier Gurus and those written

²⁶ Khushwant Singh, 74

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ 'Baisakhi' is the harvest festival of the Sikhs, observed in the first of Baisakh (April / May).

²⁹ The name of the five Sikhs were Daya Ram, Dharam Das, Mohkam Chand, Sahib Chand and Himmat Rai

³⁰ Khushwant Singh, 83

³¹ Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, Oxford, P.454, 1923.



“Die Khalsais the Guru, and the Guru the Khalsa.” Then the five beloved Sikhs baptized the Guru with ‘Amrit’. In this way Guru Gobind Singh transferred the authenticity of Guru to the Panth. As the outward sign of the disciples, members of the Khalsa were ordered to wear five K’s. These five K’s are known as *Panca-Kakara*, *Resh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kaccha* (short drawer), *Kara* (iron bangle) and *Kirpan* (small sword). The religious symbols, according to Neville, “expressing beliefs, function in various intentional contexts.”³² Besides these, members of Khalsa were asked to follow four common rules in their conduct, such as not to cut body hair, abstain from tobacco and any alcoholic drinks, refrain from adultery and eat *Jhatka*³³ meat instead of Kosher. From that time onwards Gobind Rai was known as Gobind Singh. That was the time which introduced new greetings “*Waheguru ji Ka Khalsa. Waheguru ji Ki Fateh*”. (The Khalsa are the chosen men of God; therefore, victory is for the God)

Like the first Sikh Guru Nanak, Gobind Singh also believed in the authenticity of the Adi Granth and never granted the same sacredness to his own works. The work of the last Guru Gobind Singh is *Dasam Granth*³⁴ Like the former Gurus in Sikhism, Gobind Singh also attached great importance on ‘Nam’, i.e. repetition of the Name of God and rejected the Division of castes in society. Khushwant Singh observes about the change of Guru Gobind Singh as the “only change Gobind brought in religion was to expose the other side of the medal. Whereas Nanak had propagated goodness, Gobind Singh condemned evil.”³⁵

In conclusion, “Enlightened Paths: Exploring the Life and Legacy of Sikh Gurus” unveils the remarkable journey of Sikhism, guided by the luminous presence of its revered spiritual leaders, the Sikh Gurus. From the profound teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, emphasizing the oneness of humanity and the importance of selfless service, to the martial valor and sacrifice of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who instilled courage and resilience in the Sikh community, each Guru has left an indelible mark on Sikh history and consciousness. Through their exemplary lives and transformative teachings, the Sikh Gurus have not only laid the foundation of a dynamic religious tradition but also provided timeless wisdom and guidance for navigating the complexities of life with compassion, humility, and devotion. As we reflect on the rich legacy of the Sikh Gurus, it becomes evident that their teachings continue to resonate deeply in the hearts and minds of millions, inspiring a global community to walk the path of righteousness, equality, and spiritual enlightenment. “Enlightened Paths” stands as a testament to the enduring power of Sikhism’s guiding lights and invites readers to embrace the profound teachings of the Sikh Gurus in their own spiritual journeys.

Bibliography:

- [1] Ahmad, A. *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*. Oxford University Press: 1964.
- [2] Allan, J. & Dodwell, H. H. *Cambridge Shorter History of India*, Delhi. S. Chand & Co, 1969.
- [3] Ali, K. A. *Study of Islamic History*. Calcutta: Eureka Book Agency, 1963.
- [4] Banerjee, B. I. *Evolution of the Khalsa, Vol I*. Calcutta: Jayanti Chatterjee, 1979.
- [5] Banerjee, A.C. *Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh*. New Delhi. Rajesh Publications, 1978.
- [6] Bradley, G. D. *A Guide to World Religions*. New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963.
- [7] Cunningham, J.D. *A History of the Sikhs*. Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1955.
- [8] Chaturvedi, P. *Uttari Bharat Ki Sant-Parampara*. Allahabad: Leader Press, 1964.

³² R.C. Neville, ‘Religious Philosophies and Philosophy of Religion’ in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 38, London. P.171,1995

³³ R.C. Dogra & Dr. G.S. Mansukhani, *Encyclopedia of Sikh Religion and Culture*, P. 238, 1995,

³⁴ Dasam Granth is the collection of the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh

³⁵ Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Vol. I, P. 88, 1977



- [9] Dass, N. *Songs of the Saints from the Adi Granth: Translation and Introduction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- [10] Dhillon, S. B. *Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition: Myth and Reality*. Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1996.
- [11] Dhillon, S. D. *Sikhism origin and Development*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1988.
- [12] Grewal, J.S. *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1972.
- [13] Grewal, J.S. *Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Persian Chroniclers*. Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1970.
- [14] Grewal, J.S. *Guru nanak in history*. Chandigarh: Punjab university press, 1979.
- [15] Grolier. *The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition, Vol. 24*. New York: Americana Corporation, 1984.
- [16] Hans, S. *A Reconstruction of Sikh History from Sikh Literature*. Jalandhar: ABS Publications: 1988.
- [17] *The Sikh Review*, Volume 44, Issues 511-516. Michigan: The university of Michigan, 1996.
- [18] Vaudeville, C. *Kabir, vol. I*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- [19] Vaudville, C. A. *Weaver Named Kabir*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- [20] Verma, K. R. *Kabir: Biography and Philosophy*. New Delhi: Prints India, 1977