

Sikhism after Nanak

HPRS4003 Asian Religious Traditions

Guru Nanak and the Founding of Sikhism

- Sikhism founded by Nanak – best viewed as standing within the Sant tradition.
- Religious community established by Nanak at Kartapur.
- Emphasis on the divine Name as the way to liberation. Work considered a form of divine service.
- Nanak succeeded by 9 other (human) gurus, beginning with Angad.

Guru Angad (Born 1 March 1504, Guru 1539-52)

- Converted to Sikhism during the Kartarpur period.
- Noted for his practice of meditation and abstinence, and for his generosity and wisdom.
- Held the community together and maintained its spread and growth.
- Credited not only with collecting the hymns of Guru Nanak together for the first time but also with the invention of the Gurmukhi script.

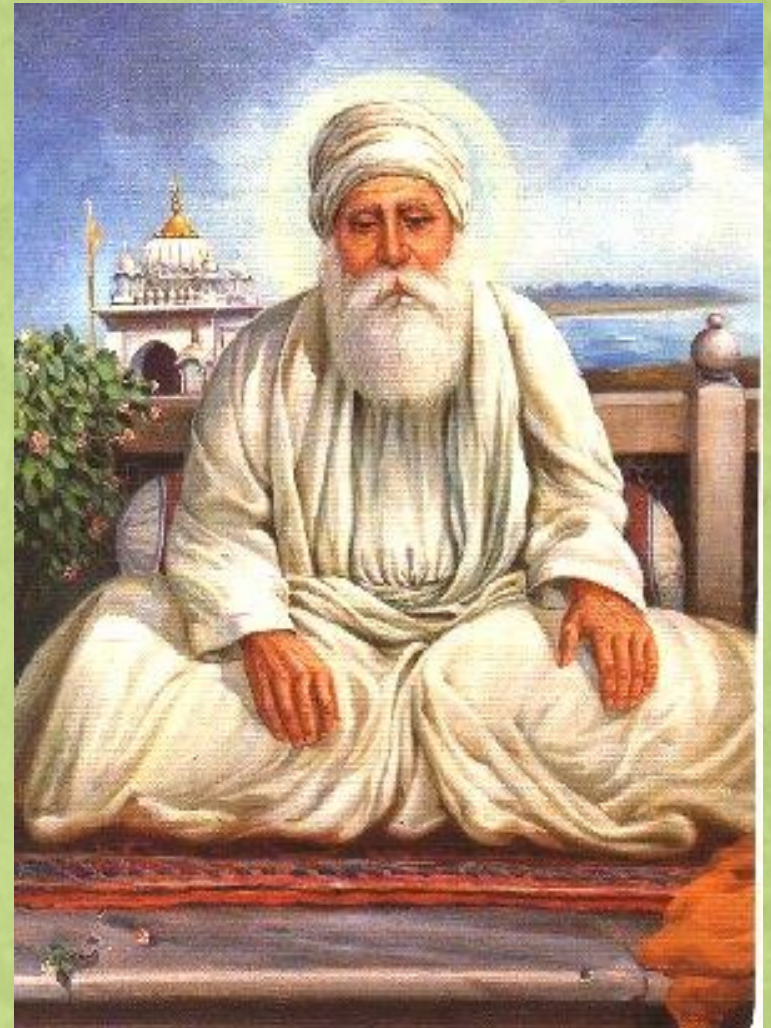


Gurmukhi Script



Guru Amar Das (Born 5 May 1479, Guru 1552-74)

- Overheard his nephew's wife, the daughter of Guru Angad, singing a ***shabad*** (hymn) of Guru Nanak and was subsequently converted to the Sikh faith.
- Chosen to succeed Guru Angad at the age of 73.
- Initiated the tradition of commanding Sikhs to appear in his presence at the Hindu festivals of Vaisakhi and Divali.



The Emperor and the Guru

- India under Mughal rule from the 16th-19th centuries.
- The Mughal Emperor **Akbar** (1542-1605) features prominently in the lives of the third, fourth and fifth Gurus.
- One famous story tells of Akbar visiting Guru Amar Das at the village of Goindwal.
- *Pehle pangat, piche sangat* ('First eat together, then worship together'). The tradition of the **langar** or free kitchen.
- A means of emphasizing the unity and equality of humankind dating back to the First Guru.

Langar



Guru Ram Das (Born 24 September 1534, Guru 1574-81)

- The son-in-law of Amar Das. Took the title **Ram Das** ('slave of God') upon receiving the guruship.
- Founded **Amritsar** ('pool of nectar'), the centre of Sikh religious life.
- Worked to shape the Sikhs into a coherent community distinct from Hinduism by initiating certain social reforms.
- Composed the wedding hymn which is now a major part of the Sikh marriage service.



The Golden Temple, Amritsar



The Golden Temple, Amritsar



The Golden Temple, Amritsar



Guru Arjan (Born 15 April 1563, Guru 1581-1606)

- The first Guru born a Sikh. **Arjan's** guruship saw the full flowering of Sikhism.
- Completed the excavation of the pool at Amritsar and built the original gurdwara there.
- The most prolific of the Gurus in terms of hymn-writing.
- Largely responsible for compiling the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Martyred at the hands of the Mughals.



Guru Harogobind (Born 14 June 1595, Guru 1606-44)

- Under **Hargobind's** guruship, Sikhism underwent radical change, becoming increasingly militant.
- Introduced the idea of the double-edged sword (***miri-piri***) as symbolising two kinds of power: *piri* (spiritual power) and *miri* (military power).
- Forced to abandon Amritsar and move to Kiratpur on the edge of the Shivalik hills.



Guru Harogobind



- Besides developing the concept of *miri-piri*, Harogobind restored those *dharmshalas* (rooms for devotional singing) which had fallen into neglect, provided a pennant for his troops (the ***nishan sahib***), instituted the use of the kettledrum amongst his troops, and is reputed to have pioneered the use of the term '**gurdwara**'.

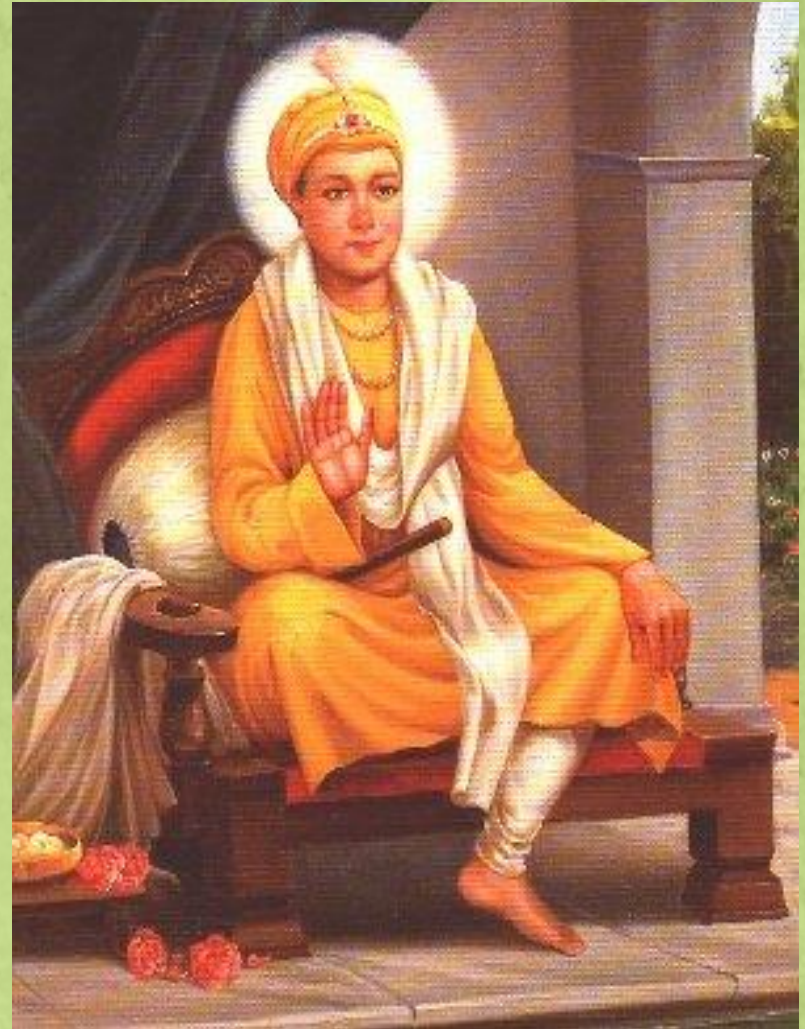
Guru Har Rai (Born 30 January 1630, Guru 1644-61)

- The grandson of Harogobind.
- Under the guruship of **Har Rai**, the *Panth* retreated into obscurity for at least 25 years.
- Frequently described as 'tender-hearted', although he demonstrated fierce devotion to the words contained in the Sikh scriptures, one which resulted in the rejection of his own son, Ram Rai.



Guru Har Krishan (Born 7 July 1656, Guru 1661-4)

- Succeeded his father, Har Rai, at just 5 years of age.
- Taken to Delhi where he contracted smallpox and died, but not before nominating a successor, his great-uncle who lived in Bakala ('Baba Bakale').



Guru Tegh Bahadur (Born 1 April 1621, Guru 1664-75)

- **Tegh Bahdaur/Degh Bahadur** ('Brave sword/cooking pot').
- During his guruship, Hindus and Sikhs experienced severe repression under the sixth Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb (1658-1707), e.g. demolition of temples; forcible conversion to Islam; imposition of burdensome taxes on non-Muslims.
- Tegh Bahadur travelled extensively, seeking to rally the Sikh community.



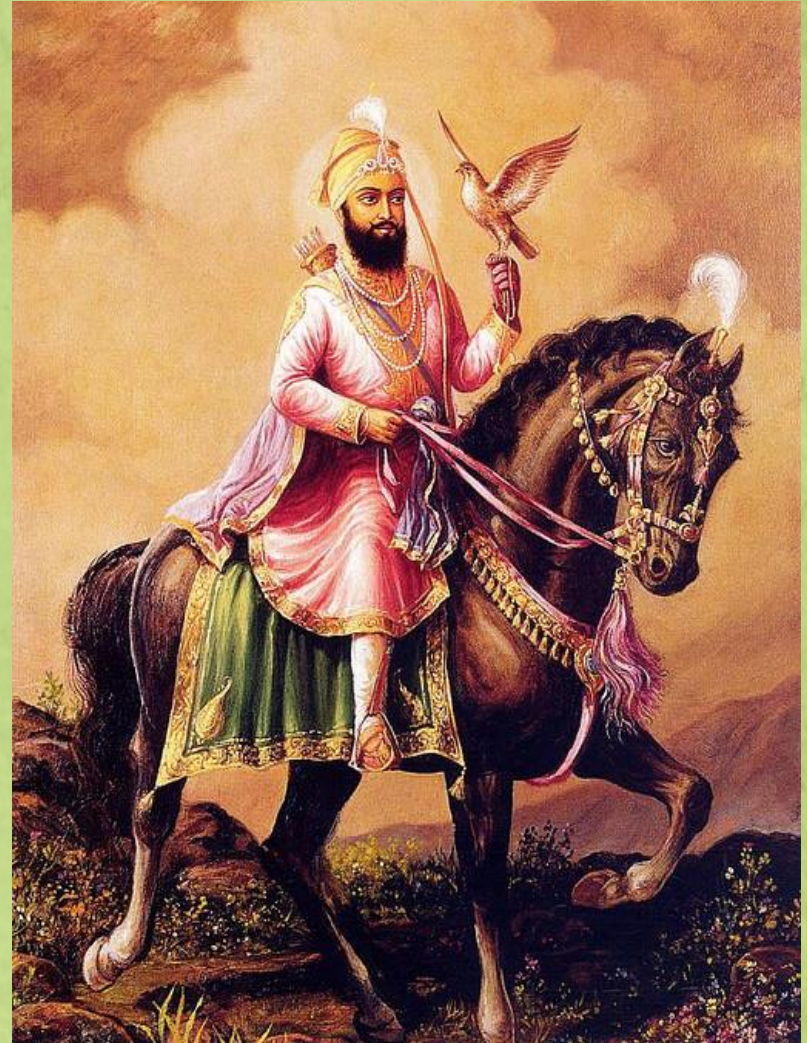
Tegh Bahadur Becomes Sikhism's Second Martyred Guru



- Responding to a plea from persecuted Brahmins in Kashmir, Guru Tegh Bahadur led a delegation to the Mughal court where he and his companions were put to death when they refused to convert.

Guru Gobind Singh (Born 22 December 1666, Guru 1675-1708)

- The Tenth and last human Guru, usually known as **Gobind Rai** before 1699, was a person who, according to Sikh tradition, combined the qualities of his predecessors.
- Occupies an important role in Sikh history and tradition, and is associated with a number of key innovations in the *Panth*.



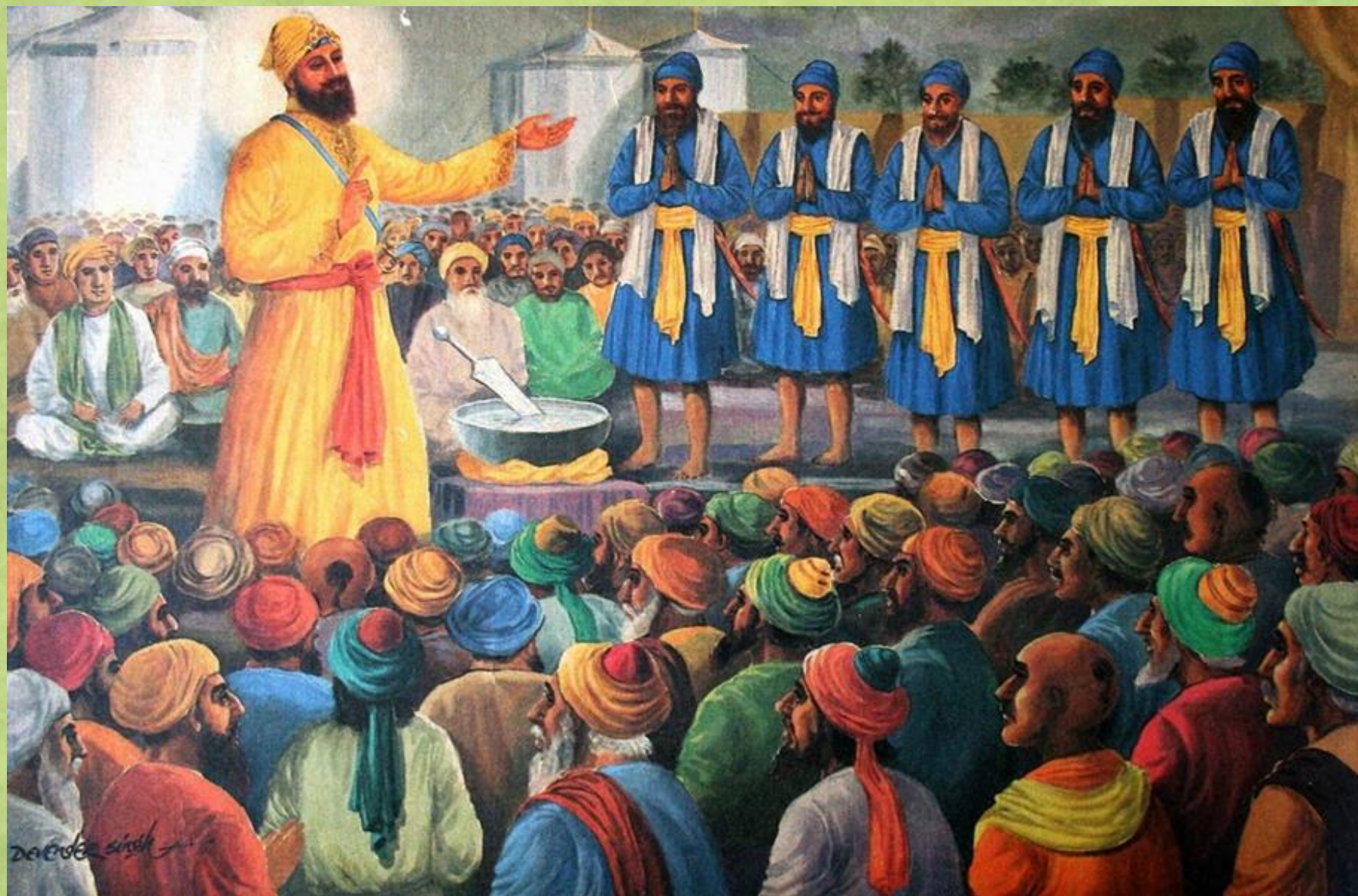
The Inauguration of the *Khalsa*

- This significant event took place during the Spring festival of Vaisakhi in 1699.
- Guru Gobind Rai called for a Sikh assembly at his headquarters in the town of Anandpur.
- The guru emerged from his tent brandishing a sword and demanded the head of a loyal Sikh.



The Inauguration of the *Khalsa*

- After the last of the 'beloved five' had entered the tent, the Guru emerged with them.
- The next morning, the five were given nectar made from water and sugar crystals prepared by the Guru and his wife in an iron bowl and stirred with a two-edged sword. The Guru then received the same initiation, followed by many thousands from all castes.



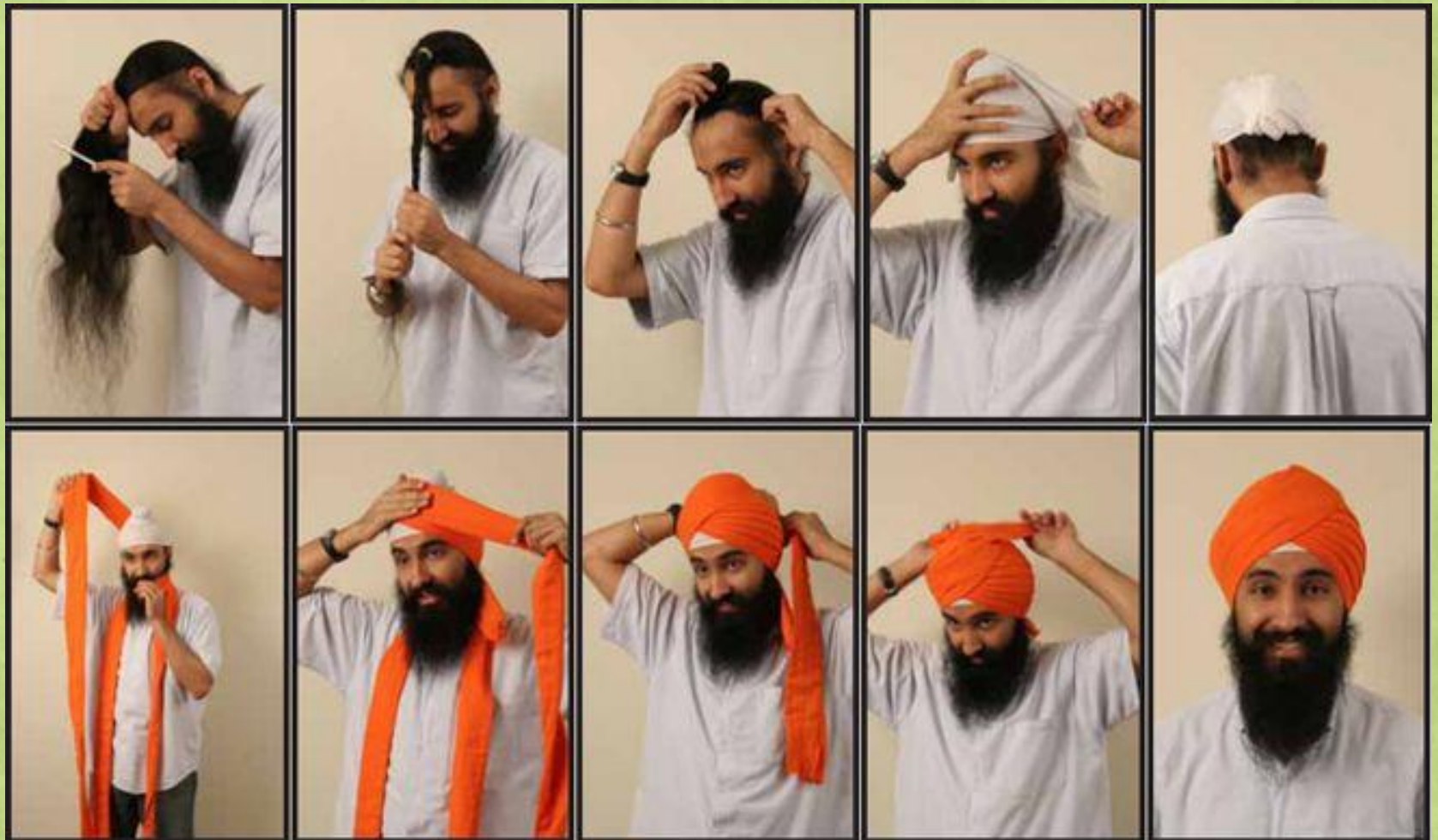
Landmark Features of This Event

- An initiation ritual.
- Use of the name '**Singh**' ('lion') for male and '**Kaur**' ('princess') for female initiates who were now deemed warriors; they constituted the ***Khalsa*** ('Pure Ones').
- Use of a salutation which proclaims victory to god and the *Khalsa*:
'*Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh*'
- Guru's instructions to adhere to the **5 Ks** and to observe certain rules and taboos.

Symbols of Sikh Identity: *Kesh* and *Kanga*

- Orthodox males and females wear long uncut hair (*kesh*) wrapped in a turban. A small wooden comb is worn in the hair at all times (*kanga*).
- Combed and turbaned uncut hair: a sign of holiness and strength; also, a marker of distinction from both Hindus and Muslims.
- Being used to keep the hair neat and tidy, the *kanga* symbolizes physical and spiritual cleanliness.

Symbols of Sikh Identity: *Kesh* and *Kanga*



Symbols of Sikh Identity: *Kara* and *Kirpan*

- Sikhs traditionally wear a metal bangle (*kara*) and carry a ceremonial sword (*kirpan*).
- The *kirpan* symbolizes the call to uphold justice and protect the weak; the *kara* is a sign of infinity and therefore of God.



Symbols of Sikh Identity: The 'Five Ks'

- Together, the *kesh*, *kanga*, *kirpan*, *kara* and a fifth item, the *kachera* (undergarments), make up the 'five Ks' of Sikh identity.



The Khalsa

- A casteless body of Sikhs, identifiable by the five Ks, brave in battle, always ready to protect the vulnerable.
- Followers of a code of conduct (***Rehat Maryada***) that requires rising early, bathing, reading the Sikh hymns, and meditating on the Nam.
- Prohibitions or taboos to be observed by members: intercourse with Muslim women; consumption of alcohol and tobacco; consumption of halal meat; worship of Hindu deities.

The Succession of Human Gurus Comes to an End

- Before his death, Guru Gobind Singh gathered his Sikhs and declared that the line of personal Gurus was at an end.
- From that moment, the functions of Guru were to be held jointly by the *Granth* and the *Panth*.



Martyrdom and Militancy

- Between the 15th and 17th centuries, we see the Sikh Panth develop from a group of disciplined devotees to fearless warriors.
- The idea of the saint-soldier or holy warrior became central to Sikh male identity.
- The life of the martyr, or *shahid*, is highly valued by Sikhs – the *shahid* is one who fights for his convictions, challenges oppressors, and seeks justice.
- Over time, a number of bands or clans of Sikh warriors developed under the leadership of local 'sardars'. These 'misls' were united into the Sikh Empire by Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) at the beginning of the 19th century (later dissolved by the British).

Summary: Changes to the Sikh Worldview

- What started out as a simple faith with minimal rituals became increasingly overlaid with ritual and layers of institutional structures.
- What started out as a universal and inclusive faith came increasingly to assert its distinctiveness, its separateness from (even antagonism to) other religions.
- The focus on mysticism and spirituality was overlaid with new emphases on martyrdom and militancy.

Suggested Reading (see folder on Moodle page)

- Kalsi, S. S., *Sikhism*, Religions of the World (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005), ch. 2.
- Mandair, A-P. S., *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), chs. 1-2.
- McLeod, W.H., *Sikhism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), chs. 1-3.