
UNIT 23 SIKHISM

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 The Origin and Growth of Sikhism
 - 23.2.1 Socio-cultural Context
 - 23.2.2 Guru Nanak's Life and Message
- 23.3 Development of Sikhism
 - 23.3.1 Creation of New Society
 - 23.3.2 Development of Sikhism
- 23.4 Sikh Worship and Rituals
 - 23.4.1 The Worship Pattern
 - 23.4.2 Life Cycle Rituals
 - 23.4.3 Baptism Among the Sikhs
- 23.5 Sikh Code of Conduct and Reform Movements
 - 23.5.1 Code of Conduct
 - 23.5.2 Movements of Socio-Religious Reform
 - 23.5.3 Impact on Indian Society
- 23.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.7 Key Words
- 23.8 Further Readings
- 23.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

23.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with Sikhism, its religious belief system and development and functioning as a religious society in India. After reading this unit you should be able to

- explain the socio-cultural background of the emergence of Sikhism
- describe the model of Sikh society as shown by Guru Nanak
- discuss the development of Sikhism over a period of time
- explain the pattern of worship and ritual life among the Sikhs
- analyse the broad features of the religious reform movements as emerged in Sikhism.

23.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 19 of ESO-02 we discussed various aspects of the social organisation of the Sikh society in India. You may like to see that unit before you start reading this unit on Sikhism. As a student of sociology, you would be interested to know the socio-cultural background on which Sikhism emerged in India, its development and functioning. You also would be interested to know the reform movements as emerged in Sikhism. All these aspects are discussed in this unit keeping in view the plurality of Indian culture. This unit has been written from the socio-historical perspective.

It begins with a brief discussion on the socio-cultural background from which Sikhism emerged in India. In the initial section (Section 23.2) we also discuss the philosophical foundation of Sikhism as depicted in the life and message of Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak established a model of the Sikh society. We discuss that model in section 23.3. Sikhism has undergone various stages of development. We discuss these developments in the context of the arrival of the Gurus in Sikhism. Sikh society follows a distinct pattern of worship. They follow distinct rituals and baptism.

We discuss these aspects in section 23.4. Lastly we discuss Sikh code of conduct and movements of religious reforms in Sikhism. Here we discuss only the Nirankari, Namdhari and the Akali movements briefly as examples for your understanding.

23.2 THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SIKHISM

In this section we shall deal with the social background of the development of Sikhism and the belief system around which Sikhism revolves.

23.2.1 Socio-cultural Context

Sikhism was born at a time when there was a growing conflict amongst the two dominating religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam of India. Guru Nanak the founder of the Sikh faith is generally depicted as a reconciler of the two conflicting traditions. This is how the Guru is still fondly remembered in Punjab:

“Nanak Shah Fakir, Hindu Ka guru, Musalman Ka Pir”.
(Baba Nanak, the great man of God
The *guru* of the Hindus and the *pir* of the Musalmans).

While early chronicles of the Sikhs have generally described this faith as the offshoot of the Bhakti movement, some modern Western scholars tend to describe this as a part of the Indian Sant tradition. Without denying that Guru Nanak and the movement that he started was greatly influenced by the Bhakti movement in which he was born, a careful study of the Sikh religion and philosophy shows that it had distinct features of its own. That is why it developed into a full-fledged religious movement soon after its birth. This is the reason why in this block, a separate unit has been devoted for discussing its teachings and their relevance for the followers of Sikhism in particular and for others in general.

The work Sikh is derived from the Sanskrit word Shishya, meaning disciple or learner. Thus those who followed Guru Nanak, the founder, came to be known as the Sikhs. In the Sikh faith reverence for the Guru (Preceptor) is the cardinal quality and devotion to their teachings a sacred duty. Great emphasis is laid in Sikh way of life upon practising moral and spiritual values. These values are mainly related to honesty, sharing and doing away with the distinction of high and low/rich and poor.

23.2.2 Guru Nanak's Life and Message

Sikh belief system was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1539). A precocious child, Nanak had a deeply meditative cast of mind and hence all attempts to engage him in wordly pursuits failed. Guru Nanak was a contemporary of three Lodhi rulers — Babbar Lodhi (1451-1489), Sikandar Lodhi (1489-1517) and Ibrahim Lodhi (1517-1526). The Guru also saw the foundation of the Mughal Empire being laid by Babar, who was succeeded by his son Humayun during the life span of Guru Nanak. In his hymns Guru Nanak refers to the times and makes pointed references to the omissions and commissions of the Lodhi and Mughal rulers. Guru Nanak refers to the army of invaders whom he calls as “crowd of sins in a bridal procession” demanding the hand of the bride called India. Right from childhood he was engrossed in spiritual pursuits. Prevalent hypocrisy in the name of religion greatly upset him. Nanak delighted in serving the poor and needed. A story is told that his father gave him some money and sent him to neighbouring town to do some profitable business. On the way Nanak met some Sadhus who had not eaten for many days. Nanak purchased eatables with the money his father gave and ate the hungry Sadhus. When Nanak's father asked him as to what he had done he replied, that he had made a “most profitable bargain”. On noticing that Nanak was not interested in

business his father sent him to Sultanpur Lodhi, a town in the Kapurthala District of Punjab. Here Nanak was employed as a storekeeper by the local ruler. This duty was discharged by Nanak with great rectitude.

i) Enlightenment of Nanak

It was during his stay in Sultanpur that Nanak got his enlightenment. According to popular traditions one morning when Nanak went for a dip in the river Beas flowing nearby he was absorbed in thoughts of God and, as is narrated by the Biographers, in this state he was ushered into the Divine Presence. Blessed by the Almighty, Nanak came out of the rivulet to preach holy name of the God. The first words that Nanak uttered after his enlightenment were, "There is no Hindu, there is no Musalman". At a time when Hindus and Muslims were engaged in sectarian conflicts these words heralded Nanak's new mission of reconciliation of the two.

ii) Message of Nanak

Nanak, the Guru was accompanied by a Muslim musician named Mardana on long journeys to preach his gospel of love and truth. He travelled to different parts of India and other countries and visited religious centres of Hindus and Muslims. Through dialogues he convinced people that good actions alone could ensure salvation. While in Mecca he was asked who was superior, a Hindu or a Muslim, to which the Guru replied that without good actions both were of no consequence. "Truth is high but higher still is truthful living", said he.



Guru Nanak the founder of Sikhism.

The Guru was moved by the sufferings of the population that he could not help taking even the creator to task:

“Though *Khurashan* has been shielded by Thee,
 Though terror has struck at the heart of Hindustan,
 Thou, O Creator of all things,
 Takest of Thyself no blame;
 Thou hath sent *Yama* disguised as the great Moghal, Babar.
 Terrible was the slaughter
 Loud were the cries of the lamenters.
 Did this not awaken pity in Thee, O Lord?
 Thou art part and parcel of all things equally, O Creator;
 Thou must feel for all men and all nations.
 If a strong man attack the another who is equally strong;
 Where is the grief in this, or whose is the grievance?
 But when a fierce tiger preys on the helpless cattle,
 The Herdsman must answer for it”.

The Guru was particularly moved by the helpless and pitiable condition of the young women who were reduced to slavery by the invading army and thus described the condition in one of his hymns:

“The tresses that adorned these lovely heads,
 And were parted with vermilion,
 Have been shorn with cruel thears:
 Dust has been thrown on their shaven heads.
 These beauties lent charm to the couches they reclined on,
 Now they are dragged away, with ropes round their necks;
 Barbarous soldiers have taken them prisoners and disgraced them”.

The following hymn of Guru Nanak in *Majh-di-Var* best described the time of Guru Nanak:

“The *Kalyug* is a dagger, the rulers are butchers;
Dharma has taken wings and flower away.
 The dark night of falsehood reigns supreme, and
 The moon of truth appears not to have risen anywhere”.

iii) Guru Nanak's Philosophy

Guru Nanak preached strict monotheism and described the Creator as *Ikk* (one), without a second. Guru Nanak's philosophy of God is best described in *Japji*, the primal creed. His teachings were strictly monotheistic, without scope for the worship of any deity or human teacher. Contrary to medieval Indian practice of denouncing the world for spiritual elevation, Guru Nanak believed that the world was worth living in. “This world is the abode of God and the Tune One lives therein.” Guru Nanak believed that it was possible to live pure among the impurities of life. “As the lotus like the detached in waters, as the duck floateth care-free on the stream, so both one cross the Sea of Existence, his mind attuned to the Word. One liveth detached; Enshrining the One Lord in the mind, shorn of hope, living in the midst of hope.”

iv) Three Principles of Nanak's Teaching

Guru Nanak's teachings can be summed up on three simple Punjabi words, *Naam Japna*, *Kirti Karni* and *Wand Chakna*. Translated into English this means “always remembering God, earning one's livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruits one one's labour with others”. 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.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The work *Sikh* was derived from the word *Shishya* originally derived from:
- Sanskrit
 - Parsi
 - Pali
 - Punjabi
- ii) Write a note on enlightenment of Nanak in about six lines.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- iii) What are the three principles of Guru Nanak's teachings?

.....

.....

.....

.....

23.3 DEVELOPMENT OF SIKHISM

In this sub-section we shall deal with the model of the Sikh society by Guru Nanak and development of Sikhism over a period of time.

23.3.1 Creation of a New Society

Sociologically you would be interested to know how a new society is developed based on religious faith and how it controls the behaviour of its followers. Guru Nanak helped develop a new society. Let us see how he defined the code of conduct and behaviour patterns of the member of that society. Towards the last phase of his life Guru Nanak settled at a small village on the banks of river Ravi (now in Pakistan) and called it Kartarpur, i.e., God's abode. There he worked on the field and shared his earning with others. A community of disciples grew up at Kartarpur but it could not be described as monastic order. On the other hand, it was a fellowship of ordinary men and women engaged in normal occupations of life, earning their livelihood through honest means and sharing the fruit of their labour with others. But what was remarkable about Kartarpur was that this provided a model of loving which was to become the basis for the development of Sikh society and Sikh value systems in the days to come. Herein the Guru and his followers got up before dawn and after ablutions performed their prayers. The spiritual routine being over, the Guru and his followers partook the sacred food from the community kitchen and then attended to the day's work. In the evening they again assembled

at a common place and performed their evening prayer and shared food. Before going to bed they all recited *Kirtan Sohila*, songs of acclaim.

Box 1

The Sikh Gurus laid great emphasis on early rising and remembering God. This new philosophy of life with its emphasis on early rising, working hard and always remembering God created a new society in which there could neither be any exploiters nor exploitation and exploited. The emphasis on honest living and sharing one's earnings with others laid the foundations of an egalitarian order. The Sikh Gurus brought about a happy union between the spiritual and temporal domains.

23.3.2 Development of Sikhism

As you saw in the case of other religions that over a period of time various developments took place in the religious philosophies enriching the content of the same. Similarly various developments have taken place in Sikhism over a period of time.

In the processes of these developments various institutions had evolved in Sikhism. 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.

The second Guru, Guru Angad Dev, evolved a distinct script called *Gurmukhi* (coming from the mouth of the Guru) which became the sole medium for sacred writings of the Sikhs. It is in this script that the *Guru Granth*, the holy book of the Sikhs, is written.

The Third Guru, Guru Amar Dass, strengthened the Sikh movement by starting the institutions of *Manjis* and *Piris*. There are positions which important male and female Sikh missionaries occupied in their respective areas. For obliterating the caste distinctions, which then plagued the Indian society, the Guru made it obligatory for all the visitors to eat in the community kitchen before they could see him. There is a strong Sikh saying that the contemporary Mughal Emperor Akbar who went to see the Guru at Goindwal had to eat in Langar while sitting in one line on the floor among with his nobles and servants. The Emperor was so much impressed by the Guru's strict practice of equality that he donated a village on which the modern city of Amritsar came up later during the time of the fourth and fifth Sikh Gurus. The Guru also got many *baolis* (small tanks) constructed to help his followers take morning bath which is considered important for purification of body and mind. The Guru evolved simple and meaningful rituals for the Sikh community.

The Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Dass, laid the foundation of the holy city of Amritsar, which later developed as the spiritual capital of the Sikh faith. By inviting artisans and traders and by encouraging them to settle there the Guru also laid the foundation of a big trade and industrial centre which developed around the newly founded city.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev, son and successor of Guru Ram Das, built the Harmandir, which is popularly known as the Golden Temple and compiled and installed the Holy Book the *Guru Granth*, therein.

The Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind built Akal Takhat, the Throne of the Immortal, and declared it as the centre of Sikh temporal authority.

The Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai continued the mission of his predecessors and

appointed the Bhai families of Bagrian and Kaithal to look after the missionary work.

The Eighth Guru, Guru Har Kishan 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.

The Ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur set a unique example of religious freedom by sacrificing his life for the protection of Tilak, Janju the sacred marks of the Hindu religion. This is described by the *tenth Guru* "as a unique event in this age of Kaliyug". Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom proved to be a turning point in Sikh history.

In order to defend dharma, Guru Govind Singh, *the tenth and last* of the Sikh Gurus, created the order of the Khalsa. On the Baisakhi day of the year 1699, the Guru called an assembly of the Sikhs at Anandpur, in the Shivalik hills. While



Guru Nanak with the other nine Gurus of Sikhism depicted around him.

addressing a packed audience the Guru demanded the heads of five Sikhs. The five who offered themselves and were subsequently initiated into the Sikh faith are popularly remembered in the Sikh prayer as the *Panj Piare* or the five beloved ones. These five beloved ones came from different directions and belonged to different traditional Indian castes, three of them belonged to the so called low castes. After being renamed and each getting the surname of Singh, meaning Lion, they were enjoined to support the five symbols of the new order — unshorn hair, a comb, short breeches, a steel bracelet and a sword.

A significant development in the history of the Sikh faith was Guru Gobind Singh declaring the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book, as the Guru eternal for the Sikhs. Compiled by Guru Arjun Dev, the Sikh Holy Book is a unique example of ecumenical spirit of the Sikh faith. The Guru Granth contains 5,894 hymns, the largest number of them (2, 216) having been contributed by the fifth Guru himself. Apart from the hymns of the Sikh Gurus, the Guru Granth also contains the composition of the Muslim and Hindu saints some of them belonging to the so called lower caste of the Hindu society. Equal respect to all religions is best demonstrated when the devout bow before the Holy Book which contains the hymns of saints from different religious dominations.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Who among the following Gurus laid the foundation of the Holy City of Amritsar?
 - a) Guru Har Rai
 - b) Guru Ram Dass
 - c) Guru Teg Bahadur
 - d) Guru Govind Singh

- ii) Who compiled Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy book of the Sikh?
 - a) Guru Ram Dass
 - b) Guru Teg Bahadur
 - c) Guru Govind Singh
 - d) Guru Arjun Dev

- iii) Guru Granth contains the hymns composed by
 - a) Sikh Gurus exclusively
 - b) Sikh Gurus and the Hindu Saints only
 - c) Sikh Gurus and the Muslim Saints only
 - d) Sikh Gurus and the Hindu and the Muslim Saints.

23.4 SIKH WORSHIP AND RITUALS

The Sikhs, follow a distinct pattern of worship. The Sikh Community is centered around various rituals. In this section we shall discuss the distinct pattern of worship followed by the Sikhs and few of their life cycle rituals.

23.4.1 The Worship Pattern

Against the prevalent Hindu practice of worshipping the idols, The Sikh Guru advocated worship of *Akal* (Timeless God). The Sikh temple, called *Gurudwara*,

is not a mere place of worship but also serves as a shelter for the shelterless, iron-
 fort for the destitute and refuge for the helpless where all the visitors irrespective
 of their religious affiliations are served free food and given shelter and protection.
 In the centre of the Gurudwara, Guru Granth, the Holy Book, is installed on a high
 pedestal; the idea being that the holy book occupies a place higher than the followers
 who sit on the floor. Since complete equality is preached and practised, there is no
 special place marked for important persons in the Gurudwara.

There are Gurudwaras in different parts of India, which are historic because of
 their association with the Gurus. There are other Gurudwaras throughout the world
 wherever there are Sikhs. These are not historic but are built by the followers to
 serve as centres for their religious worship attended by large gatherings. The
 Nishan Sahib, huge yellow triangular flag, with Sikh symbol of *Khanda*, marks the
 Sikh religious place.

Visitors from all sections of society can enter the Gurudwara after removing their
 shoes and cleaning their feet and covering their head. Doors of the Gurudwara are
 open to all communities. It is significant to point out that the famous Golden Temple
 at Amritsar has four doors indicating that it is open to all people from all the four
 directions and its foundation-stone was laid by a Muslim divine named *Mia Mir*.

23.4.2 Life Cycle Rituals

There are several rituals in the Sikh social life. Let us discuss some of these rituals
 briefly.

i) Child Birth

Soon after a child is born a set of five verses from the *Adi Granth* is recited.
 Unlike Hindu society where women during post-natal period are considered impure
 to enter the kitchen for nearly six weeks, in Sikh society a woman can resume her
 normal work as soon as she feels physically fit. Significantly, Sikhism rejects the
 orthodox Hindu Concept of pollution in this regard. It is considered undesirable to
 treat the mother as polluted. Pre and post-natal Hindu practices are simply discarded
 in Sikh way of life.

ii) Ceremony of Child Naming

Following the birth of a child in the family there is a naming ceremony generally
 performed on the first of *Baisakh* (traditional Indian New Year and the day of birth
 of the Khalsa). This is arranged in the presence of the Holy Book and congregation
 either at home or in the *Gurudwara*. The priest opens the Holy Book at random
 and the very first letter of the page is picked up for naming the child. All males
 have Singh (lion) and all females *Kaur* (princess) after their names. It rejects the
 caste name that signifies hierarchy as found in Hinduism.

iii) Marriage Rituals

In the Sikh society marriages are generally arranged by the parents. In some cases
 boys or girls find their own partners. But in all cases Sikh marriages are solemnised
 strictly according to prescribed norms wherein the bridegroom and his party called
Barat go to the house of the bride. To begin with there is *Milni*, a ceremony where
 parents and relatives from both sides meet and embrace each other and token gifts
 are offered. Later all other friends and relatives are feasted and then all enter
 specially arranged Pandal or gurudwara where *Anand Karaj* (the marriage ceremony)
 is performed by the priest with Sikh musicians singing relevant hymns from the
 Guru Granth and the couple circumambulating the Holy Book four times in a clock
 wise direction. The *Lavan*, hymns of marriage, convey highest moral and spiritual

ideals to the couple. The ceremony being over, all join in lunch and then the bridegroom and the party return home along with the bride. Back home the bride is received with some ceremonies. There is a great emphasis on simplicity and dowry is not a precondition in Sikh marriages. Extra-marital love and sex are not allowed in Sikhism. "Do not cast your eyes on the beauty of another's wife. Treat other women as thy mothers, sisters and daughters" says Guru Nanak.

23.4.3 Baptism Among the Sikhs

From Guru Nanak to the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur there was a system of initiating the followers by giving them *Charan-amrit* (water touched by the Guru's toe) to drink. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and the last Guru, changed this to *Khande-da-Pahul* (water stirred with double edged sword) which he used when he baptised the five beloved ones (Panj Piare) on the Baisakhi of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib. When boys and girls attain puberty and are old enough to understand the obligations of their religion they are baptised. The ritual connected with this ceremony is the same as performed by Guru Gobind Singh while creating the Khalsa. While baptismal ritual can be performed any time of the year, Baisakhi, the day of the birth of the Khalsa, is considered most appropriate. It is performed before an assembled congregation. Five baptised Sikhs are chosen to initiate the new converts. *Amrit* (nectar) is prepared by mixing sugar in water and by stirring it with a *Khanda* (double-edged sword) to the recitation of selected passages of the scriptures including Guru Gobind Singh's composition. The initiates then take the vows of the Khalsa faith. Each vow is read out loudly before the Guru Granth Sahib. Palms full with amrit are splashed in the face of the newly initiated Khalsas with the Sikh salutation of *Bole so Nihal* and *Siri Wahe Guru Ji Ka Khalsa Siri Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh*. Baptised Sikhs, both male and female, have to strictly adhere to the following symbols:

- a) **Keshas (Unshaven hair):** Sikhs are not supposed to trim, shave or cut any hair on any part of their body.
- b) **Kara (wrist-band or iron bangle):** All baptised Sikhs are strictly to wear Kara. Worn on the right wrist this is taken as a constant reminder that as a Sikh one has to follow the Sikh code of conduct and perform pious deeds.
- c) **Kirpan (sword):** This literally means "please protect me with thy sword". This was used as a ready weapon for self defence and for the protection of the meek and helpless.
- d) **Kangha (comb):** To keep the long hair neat and tidy. Sikhs are enjoined to keep Kangha always in their hair-knot.
- e) **Kachha (drawer-underwear)** was intended to keep the Khalsa always ready in the fighting dress and also, means a sign of chastity and strict morals.

Activity 1

You may be interacting with a number of your Sikh friends or neighbours. Based on your observation or experience write a one page note on the rituals the Sikhs as practised in your area. If possible, exchange your note with other students at the Study Centre.

23.5 SIKH CODE OF CONDUCT AND REFORM MOVEMENTS

There are significant codes of conduct for the Sikhs. Sikh society has also borne

witness to several reform movements. In this section we shall deal with these aspects briefly.

23.5.1 Code of Conduct

The behaviour patterns of the members of a society are broadly guided by the code of conduct regulating the behaviour of its followers. The Sikhs are supposed to follow the code of conduct called Rehat *Maryada* which has evolved over years. Among the few *don'ts* are eating *Halal* meat prepared in the Muslim way, removing hair from the body, smoking, use of alcohol and adultery.

As mentioned earlier Sikh Gurus condemned the traditional caste system and laid the foundations of an egalitarian society. Through the institution of *Sangat* and *Pangat* they tried to obliterate the distinctions between the so-called high and low castes as well as the rich and poor. By placing the hymns of the so-called low-caste weaver Kabir at par with the so-called high-caste Brahman Ramanand the Sikh Gurus set a unique example of equality and true spirit of ecumenism. However, because of the deep-rooted caste prejudices caste system has not fully disappeared from the Sikh society. While it is true that while sitting in the congregation or while partaking food from the community kitchen, (*Guru Ka Langar*), caste factors are not taken into consideration, caste still plays a domineering role in deciding matrimonial alliances and other social relationships. Apart from the broad caste divisions such as Jats, Khatri, Aroras and Ramgarhias, the converts from the so-called low-castes have not yet been fully assimilated in Sikh faith which does not recognise any caste system. The 'low-castes' remain 'low-castes' and have been given the separate label of Mahzabi Sikhs. When the Golden Temple and other Sikh shrines came under the control of the Udasi Mahants they fixed separate visiting hours for the Mahzabi Sikhs to offer their prayers in the sanctum sanctorum. They had to hire high-caste attendants to carry their Prasad to be offered in the temple. It was only during the Akali movements for Gurudwara reform that such restrictions were removed and control of the Gurudwaras passed on to democratically elected bodies. In spite of modernisation of the Sikh society inter-caste marriages are rare and rarer still are the examples of so-called high-caste Khatri marrying into the so-called Mahzabi Sikh family. Similarly there are divisions at religious and ideological levels. Some movements of religious reform among the Sikhs such as Nirankari, Namdhari and Akali, were started to purge Sikhism of unSikh-life practices.

23.5.2 Movements of Socio-Religious Reform

There have been several religious reform movements among the Sikhs to eradicate the above mentioned evils. These movements led to the development of various sects in Sikhism. In this section we shall be discussing only two to three socio-religious movements.

i) The Nirankari Movement

The first traces of differentiation of the Sikh faith were noticed during the days of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule in the Punjab. Baba Dayal, Founder of the Nirankari Movement, was the first among the Sikh religious reformers to have preached against the evils that had slowly crept into the Sikh social and religious life. He preached against idolatry, worship of graves, tombs and trees and belief in other complicated Brahmanical rites and ceremonies and exhorted his followers to worship one *Nirankar* (God). Though Baba Dayal was able to attract a number of followers known as, "*Nirankaris*" because of their belief in one Nirankar and who followed Sikh ceremonies in birth, death, marriage and other social usage, yet his movement could not make a very wide impact on the Sikh masses who still lacked educational awakening.

Sikhism developed in the Nirankari movement with one of the followers Baba Avtar Singh starting a parallel movement of his own known as Sant Nirankaris.

ii) The Namdhari Movement

The Namdhari Movement, is popularly known as *Kuka* movement. Started by Bhagat Jawaharmal and Baba Balak Singh, the movement became a powerful force of religio-political revival among the Sikhs under one of the latter's disciples, Baba Ram Singh. Baba Ram Singh particularly enjoined upon his followers the worship of one God through prayer and meditation. The Rehatnamas (moral codes) prepared and enforced by him exhorted all his followers to be engaged at all time in the worship of God. He also preached against social evils such as the caste system, infanticide, early marriage and barter of daughters in marriage and popularised simple and inexpensive Anand Marriage. The teachings of Baba Ram Singh seem to have had a wide appeal to the Sikh masses. Contemporary European officials viewed the growing popularity of Baba Ram Singh's mission with serious concern.

Box 2

Baba Ram Singh's mission was specially marked by teachings of righteousness, tolerance and mercy yet some of his followers got out of control and in a fit of religious frenzy committed certain excesses which resulted in a clash with the Government. Some of his more orthodox followers who were excited over the killing of the cows, murdered the butchers at Amritsar, Raikot and Malerkotla and were, as a punishment, blown off from the cannon's mouth. Though there is a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether the movement was religious or political, there is no denying the fact that the official action against the *Kukas* created great hatred for the British rulers in the minds of the people in the Punjab which helped prepare the ground for the subsequent religio-political struggle for the Akalis in the early twentieth century.

iii) Akali Movement

Historically Akalis are the members of the suicide squads of the Sikh armies which first appeared about 1690 AD when the execution of two predecessors and continued persecution by the Mughals forced the 10th Guru of the Sikh (Guru Gobind Singh) to resort to armed struggle against the rulers. The Akalis are also known as *Nihangs* who traditionally wear blue dresses. In 1920s the Akali movement was again revived as a semi para military volunteers raised to oppose the British government. The Akalis represented the Sikh community to regain their control over the Gurudwaras, in the agitation for an independent Punjabi speaking, Sikh majority state. Thus the state of Punjab was formed in 1966. The Shiromani Akali Dal is a major political party in Punjab (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1985 : 185).

23.5.3 Impact on Indian Society

With its emphasis on unity of God and brotherhood of mankind Sikh thought greatly influenced the Indian Society. Through their condemnation of the caste system the Sikh Gurus were able to make a major dent in the traditional hold of caste. By emphasising equality of all religions and by including hymns from the Hindu Bhaktas and the Muslim saints the Sikh Gurus set an example of true *ecumenism*. By reconciling two conflicting traditions — Hinduism and Islam the Sikh Gurus gave a positive direction by emphasising transcendental humanism and spiritual values. The Sikh Gurus perceived that there was a real lack of love among people and therefore they laid great emphasis upon spiritual practices and preached philosophy

of the God, the supreme reality. At a time when debate about superiority of one religion against another has again started the following hymns of the third Guru help to resolve the religious conflict:

“Of all the religions the best religion is to repeat God’s name and to do pious deeds.”

Check Your Progress 3

i) Mention few don'ts as observed by the Sikhs as their religious code of conduct.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

ii) Baba Dayal, the founder of the Nirankari movement preached against:

- a) idolatry
- b) worship of graves, tree, tombs etc.
- c) belief in Brahmanical rites
- d) all of the above

iii) The Namdhari Movement preached:

- a) to popularise simple marriage
- b) dowry marriage
- c) caste system
- d) early marriage

23.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed various aspects of Sikh religious belief and the development of Sikh society over the years. We started with the socio-cultural and the philosophical foundation of Sikhism. There we discussed the socio-cultural contexts in which Sikhism was born with the life and message of Guru Nanak. We also discussed the model of the Sikh society as established by Guru Nanak in his life time. Development of Sikhism and the appearance of the ten Gurus are discussed briefly in this unit. The worship pattern of the Sikh society, their life cycle rituals etc. were also discussed. Lastly we discussed the Sikh code of conduct and religious reform movements in Sikhism. Here we presented the Nirankari, Namdhari and the Akali movements as examples of the religious reform movements in Sikhism.

23.7 KEY WORDS

- Amrit** : Baptismal nectar.
- Kachha** : Drawer or big size underwear.
- Kango** : Comb

Kara	: Iron bangle
Keshas	: Unshorn hair
Khalsa	: The word Khalsa, literally meaning God's own is used for baptised Sikhs.
Kirpan	: Sword
Kirt Karni	: Honest Labour.
Langar	: Free meal served in the Gurudwara.
Nam Japna	: Meditation
Nishan Sahib	: Yellow colour Sikh flag.
Sangat	: Congregation
Wand Chhakna	: Sharing one's earnings with others.

23.8 FURTHER READINGS

Khushwant Singh, 1986. *History of the Sikhs*, (Vol. I and II) Princeton University Press: Princeton.

Harbans Singh, 1985, *Heritage of the Sikhs*, Manohar: New Delhi.

Mohinder Singh, 1988, *The Sikhs*, National Institute of Punjab Studies: New Delhi

23.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) a)
- ii) Guru Nanak was engrossed in spiritual pursuits since his childhood. One morning when Nanak went for a dip in the river Bein he was absorbed in thoughts of God and in this stage he was into the divine presence. First words that he uttered after his enlightenment were "there is no Hindu, there is no Musalman".
- iii) The three principles are — always remembering God, earning one's livelihood through honest means, and sharing ones fruits of labour with others.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) b.
- ii) d.
- iii) d.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Among the few don'ts are eating Halal meat prepared in the Muslim way, removing hair from body, use of alcohol and adultery.
- ii) d.
- iii) a.

- Ameer, A., 1978. *The Spirit of Islam*. Idarah-1 Adabiyar: New Delhi.
- Aron, R. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thoughts*. vol. II Penguin: London.
- Barton, A.G., 1990. *The Religion of the World*. Olympia Publication.
- Besant, A., 1966. *Seven Great Religions*. The Theosophical Publishing House: Madras.
- Babb, L.A., 1991. "Satya Sai Baba's Miracles in Madan T.N. (ed.) *Religion in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.
- Caillat, C., 1987. "Jainism". *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Macmillan Publishing Company: New York.
- Chopra, P.N., 1980. 'Hinduism and Buddhism' in P.N. Chopra (ed.) *Our Cultural Fabric: Buddhism in India and Abroad*. Ministry of Education and Culture, Govt. of India: New Delhi.
- Cleman, C. (ed.), 1988. *Religions of the World*. Manas Publication: New Delhi.
- Gomez, L.O., 1987. 'Buddhism in India'. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Macmillan Publishing Company: New York.
- Hittebeital, 1987. 'Hinduism'. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Macmillan Publishing Company: New York.
- Hackmann, H., 1988. 'Buddhism'. In Cleman, C. (ed.) *Religions of the World*. Manas Publication: New Delhi.
- Kader, A.A., 1989. *The Conception of God in Islam*. Islamic Centre: Washington.
- Macquarrice, J., 1966. *Principles of Christian Theology*. SCM Press: London.
- Madan, T.N., 1989. 'Religions in India'. DAEDALUS Vol. 118 No. 4. 115-145.
- Madan T.N., (ed.) *Religions in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.
- Muzumdar, H.T., 1986. *India's Religious Heritage: A Cultural History of India*. Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
- Pradue, P.A. 1972. 'Buddhism'. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Vol. 182. Macmillan and Free Press: New York.
- Prabhu, P.H., 1979. *Hindu Social Organisation. A Study of Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations*. PPH: Bombay.
- Singer, M. 1968. "Modernisation, Ritual and Beliefs Among Industrial Leaders in Madras City," In A.K. Singh (ed.) *Modernisation in India*. Asia Publishing House: Bombay.
- Singh, H., 1985. *Heritage of the Sikh*, Manohar: New Delhi.
- Singh, K., 1986 (rpt.) *History of the Sikh* (Vol. I & II). D.K. Agencies: New Delhi.
- Srinivas, M.N., and Shah, A.M. 1972. 'Hinduism'. *International Encyclopedia of*

the Social Sciences. Vol. 5-6, Macmillan and Free Press: New York.

— 1992. *Living in a Revolution and Other Essays*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

Takle, J., 1988. *The Faith of Islam*. Deep and Deep : New Delhi.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica 1985. Buddhism. Encyclopedia Britannica Inc: Chicago.

...1985, *Jainism*, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc: Chicago.

Weber, M. 1948 (1972 rpt.). *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by T. Parsons. Allen and Unwin: London.