

EDUCATION GUIDE ON THE SIKH FAITH

BY THE WORLD SIKH ORGANIZATION OF CANADA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Section One: Learning About the Sikh Faith and Sikhs in the Classroom	3
Building a Connection with Families	3
The Sikh Faith and Sikhs in the Curriculum	4
Sikh Heritage Month	5
Teacher Classroom Tips	7
WSO Resources	7
The Kakaar Guide	7
The Sikh Faith eModule	7
The Sikh Library Collection	8
The Experience of Sikh Students in Peel	10
Section Two: Issues Faced by Sikh Students	11
Recommendation for Educators and Administrators	13
Relevant Policies	13
Section Three: The Sikh Faith	14
Sikh History and Core Beliefs	14
Initiated Sikhs and the Five Articles of Faith	15
The Gurdwara	16
Language	16
Punjab and 1984	17
The Farmers Protest	19
The Sikh Calendar	20
Frequently Asked Questions	21
Glossary	27
Recommended Readings	28
The Farmers Protest	28
References	29

INTRODUCTION

We would like to begin by acknowledging that we are visitors to this land, and we are on the traditional territories of many Indigenous Peoples and Nations, spanning across both unceded territories and signed treaties. We do not state this to signal a particular understanding of the complexity of issues. As settlers on this land, the Sikh community is grateful for the opportunity to grow here. We recognize and affirm the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous peoples to be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities.

There are nearly 25 to 30 million Sikhs around the world. In Canada, there are roughly 600,000 Sikhs. 10,000 Sikhs reside in Québec, 50,000 in Alberta, 250,000 in Ontario, 300,000 in British Columbia, and the rest of the population is spread throughout the other provinces and territories.

Canadian Sikhs have made significant contributions to the public sphere of Canada while promoting equity, honesty, and selflessness through charitable work, interfaith dialogue, and policy & political work.

Despite the contributions and the presence of the Sikh community in Canada, Sikh children have consistently faced issues of bullying, harassment, and discrimination due to their religious beliefs and practices. A need for understanding and the integration of the Sikh faith in school curriculums and activities contributes to these issues.

This guide aims to promote the inclusion of Sikh content and perspectives in schools across Canada while facilitating the awareness of the Sikh faith and Sikhs in the classroom.

SECTION ONE: LEARNING ABOUT THE SIKH FAITH AND SIKHS IN THE CLASSROOM

Building a Connection with Families

The World Sikh Organization of Canada (WSO) would like to highlight the importance of building a strong relationship between educators and Sikh families. It is crucial that the voices of Sikh families are heard. Families contribute to an important understanding of how the Sikh faith is practised within a student's household. Families can also explain the Sikh faith and identity to their children's educators and classmates.

Sikh families have also often found themselves struggling to find the proper resources to address issues of bullying and harassment their children face in school. It is important that key stakeholders and educators engage in dialogue with Sikh families to better understand the issues at hand and work towards solutions that are meaningful.





The Sikh Faith and Sikhs in the Curriculum

There are a number of learning opportunities about Sikhs and the Sikh faith to deepen student experiences in the curriculum.

The Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada has created a variety of lesson plans that cover a large scope of subjects. These lesson plans can be used from grades K-10. You can access these lesson plans [here](#).

Each provincial curriculum is designed with unique examples of its peoples and history. There are distinct examples of provincial Sikh history that can allow students to learn and know the local contexts.

Teachers can refer to curriculum concepts that are covered under each provincial-based program of studies to ensure that cross-curricular concepts can also be applied.

The following is a list of some topics and activities that can be included in the curricula:

- **Sikhs in the World Wars**

There are ten Canadian Sikhs known to have fought for the Canadian Forces in World War One. Private Buckam Singh was the first Sikh to enlist in Canada's military in World War One, and the Peel District School Board opened a school honouring this history. Teachers can have students conduct research on Sikh contributions during the World Wars, in both a Canadian and international context. Educators can also screen [Canadian Solider Sikhs: A Little Story in a Big War](#). It is a documentary capturing the journey of 10 Sikh soldiers who enlisted to fight for Canada in World War One. Click [here](#) to read more.

- **The History and Contributions of Sikhs in Canada**

The Komagata Maru ship arrived in Vancouver on May 23, 1914, carrying 376 British subject passengers, primarily Sikhs from Punjab, and was not allowed to dock for 2 months before finally leaving and returning to India. The Komagata Maru incident of 1914 still remains a very important historical moment in Canadian history as it was the first time Canada turned away migrants due to racism. Educators can use this opportunity to include the voices of their Sikh students and their families by sharing their history and experiences in Canada.



• Influential Sikh Figures

There are a number of influential Sikh figures from Canada. Lt. Col. Harjit Singh Sajjan became the first Sikh to command a Canadian army regiment in 2011, and he is the current Minister of National Defence. Jagmeet Singh became the first racialized person to lead a major Canadian federal political party. Rupinder Kaur is an internationally renowned poet and illustrator who grew up in Brampton, Ontario. Educators and administration can make influential Sikh visible in their schools throughout the year. This can be done through informal discussions, class projects, presentations and assignments.



Sikh Heritage Month

On April 30, 2019, the Canadian government enacted the Sikh Heritage Month Act, designating the month of April each and every year as “Sikh Heritage Month”.

The month of April has been designated as Sikh Heritage Month to “...provide an opportunity to reflect on, celebrate and educate future generations about the inspirational role that Sikh Canadians have played and continue to play in communities across the country”.

The Toronto District School Board also officially adopted Sikh Heritage Month in March of 2016. Schools across Canada can follow suit to formally adopt the month of April as Sikh Heritage Month. This is an important step to feature Sikh voices in your classroom and in your school community.



Schools can adopt the following activities during this month and throughout the year:

- Read interesting facts about the Sikh community and faith during daily announcements as a way to celebrate Sikh heritage and promote cultural understanding.
- Collaborate with local and national organizations and community partners such as the [Sikh Feminist Research Institute – SAFAR](#), [Sikh Foundation Canada](#), [World Sikh Organization](#), [Seva Food Bank](#) and [Laadliyan](#).
- Feature Sikh community members in your school this month and throughout the year. This may include prominent Sikh figures like Jaswant Singh Khalra (social justice activist), Justice Palbinder Kaur (Judge of the Supreme Court of British Columbia), Jasmin Kaur (author and illustrator), Harnarayan Singh (sports announcer and journalist), Gurpreet Chana (musician) and Inder Bedi (entrepreneur and founder of Matt & Natt). You can also invite the guardians of Sikh students to share their experiences and beliefs.
- Arrange a visit with the local Gurdwara to learn more about the Sikh place of education, service and congregation while engaging with Sikh students and their families.
- Highlight books about Sikhi and Sikhs in the library to celebrate diverse Sikh lives, identities, experiences and realities and ensure these books are readily available in school libraries. Equity departments can also host book readings across the board with authors included in the resources below.
- Host Sikh-oriented events such as Langar Day to learn about the significance of Langar. This is an opportunity for students to showcase their religion while engaging with their classmates, teachers, and administrators.

Teacher Classroom Tips

- **Every Sikh Student Practices Their Faith Differently**

One really important thing to recognize is that every Sikh child in your classroom practices their faith differently from every other Sikh child. While they may share core beliefs, how they express those beliefs, through appearance, language, prayer routines, and cultural practices, can vary widely based on their family background, community traditions, and personal journey.

It is crucial we recognize that there is no "one-size-fits-all" Sikh experience. Assuming uniformity can lead to unintentional erasure of individuality.

Take the initiative to ask questions respectfully, create safe spaces for students to share their experiences, and be open to learning. Seek out guidance from families and community members when appropriate. Small steps in understanding go a long way in making students feel seen, valued, and empowered.

- **Learn the proper pronunciation of names and some of their language**

A great way for educators to be more inclusive to students is to learn how to pronounce every student's name appropriately and accurately. Putting in an extra effort shows you care. In the same plight, the pronunciation of 'Sikh' is as it is spelled, it is not 'See-kh'. 'See-kh' is the colonized way of pronunciation.

- **Student-Led Conversations**

Teachers can curate assignments that provide students with an opportunity to talk about their faith and experience. Assignments can include writing a report on a religious holiday, or issues affecting their community. Students can also present on the Sikh Articles of Faith. This may include conversations surrounding the Dastaar (Turban) or the significance of the Kes (unshorn hair).

WSO Resources

The WSO has produced a number of resources that can be easily used in a classroom setting for educational purposes. It is important school communities are well versed and informed about the issues many Sikh students face in order to properly respond.

1.The Kakaar Guide

The Kakaar Guide provides an in-depth review of what the Sikh Articles of Faith are and their importance, jurisprudence regarding them and a number of frequently asked questions. This guide also includes information on the Supreme Court case, *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, (2006) which ruled that a Quebec child could wear his Kirpan at school and that the Kirpan is not a symbol of violence and that it does not pose an undue hazard. This landmark ruling allows the Kirpan to be worn in schools across the country, with appropriate policies in place.

2.The Sikh Faith e-module

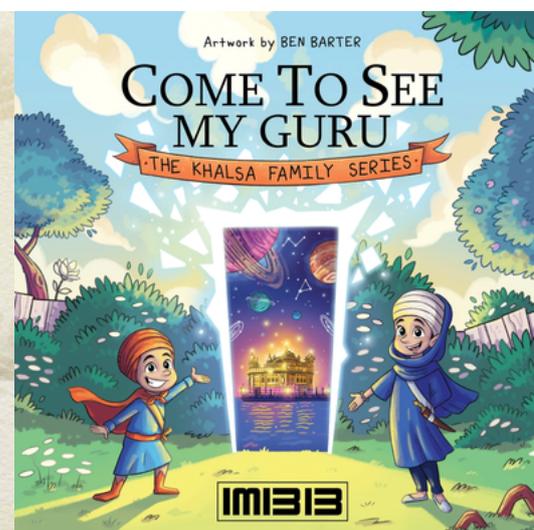
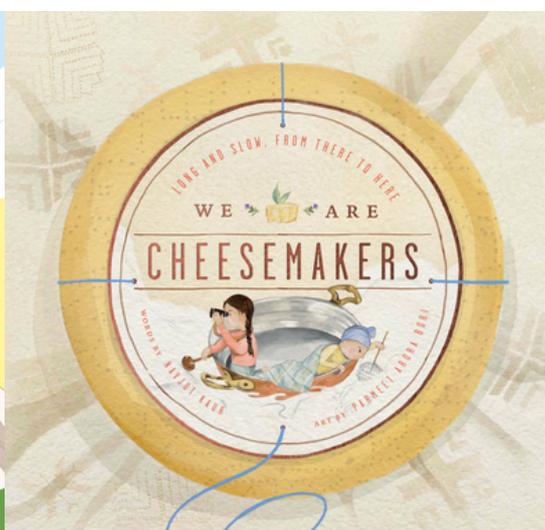
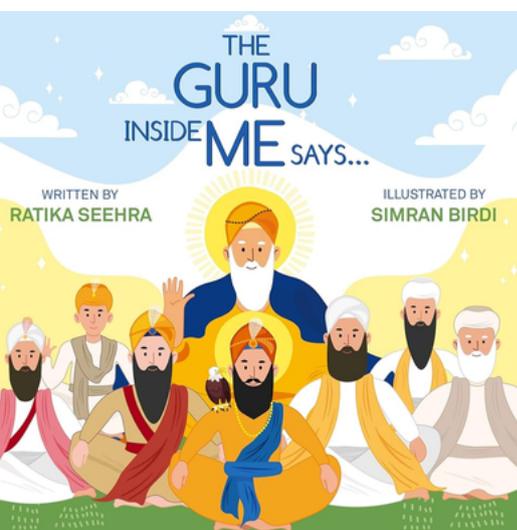
The Sikh Faith e-module contains similar information available in this report, but with imagery and Sikh students and community members narrating, we encourage school districts across the country to replicate or use this e-module in their communities.

3.The Sikh Library Collection

The Sikh Library Collection provides a number of books for educators to include in their classrooms and in their library collections. These stories celebrate the Sikh faith and identity, and they can be used to create a space that is inclusive of Sikh students.

Children's Books:

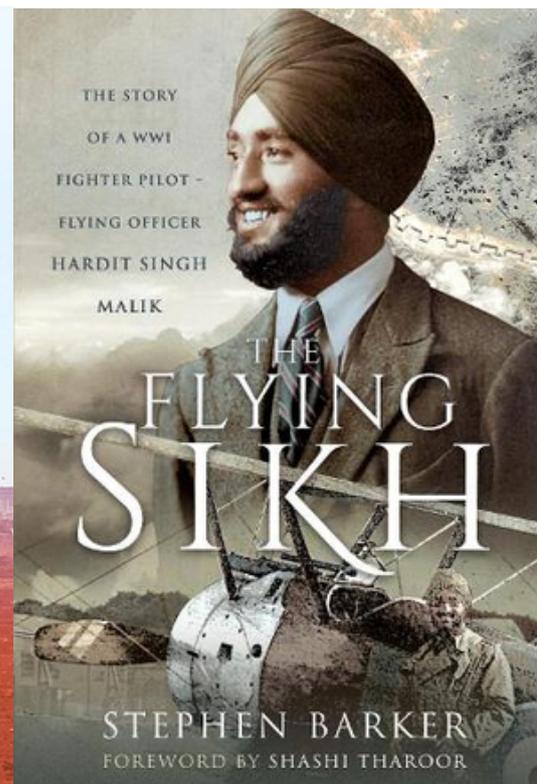
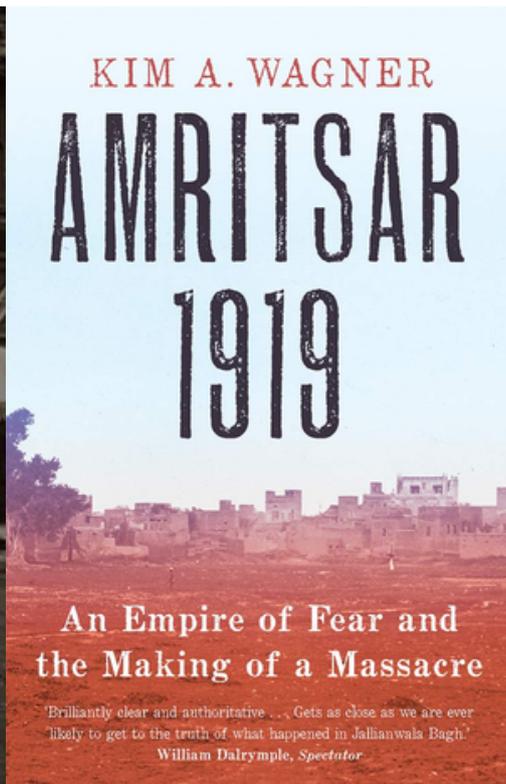
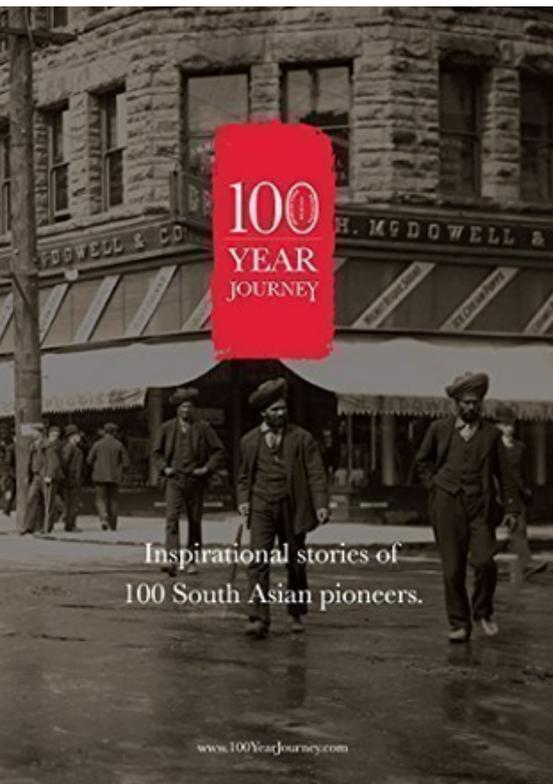
1. Daya's Journey of Learning: Langar & Seva, by Harkirat Sharda
2. One Amazing Sikh at a Time, by Seerat Kaur Gill
3. The Guru Inside Me Says, by Ratika Seehra
4. 100 Year Journey (I believe it was Mehfil Magazine who released this, not sure)
5. The 52 Princes: The Untold Diwali Story of Bandi Chhor Divas, by Sunny Osahn (only caveat is that the art is not child friendly & some kids might find the illustration scary)
6. Veer Dey Rang, by Simj Boparai
7. The Enchanted Garden of Talwandi, by Jessi Kaur
8. Kamal's Kes, by Baljinder Kaur
9. We are Cheesemakers, by Navjot Kaur
10. My Story about 1984, by Manmeet Kaur
11. Guru Nanak the Magnificent, by Baljinder Kaur
12. Guru Nanak Dev Jee, My Nana Jee and Me, by Paramjit Singh Viridi and Hapreet Kaur Bassan
13. Guru Angad Dev Jee, My Nana Jee and Me, by Harpreet Kaur Bassan
14. A Vaisakhi to Remember, by Simran Jeet Singh
15. The Adventures of Mahi and Daya: Discovering the Spirit of Vaisakhi, by Harpreet Kaur Mandair
16. Come to See My Guru
17. The Guru's Song Adventures
18. Laxmi's Mooch by Shelly Anand - the guide also mentioned body hair being a reason for bullying. This is a great book that should be provided to teachers/librarians that touches on this topic; however, the author is not a Sikh. I include it because it's very helpful in teaching little ones about body hair and is a good resource.



Books for Grade 6 and Above Students:

Here is a list of books for students in grade 6 and above. It could be helpful for teachers and students looking for books for class projects or book assignments:

1. Becoming Canadians - Pioneer Sikhs in their Own Words, by Sanjeet Singh Jagpal
2. Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire by Priya Atwal
3. 100 Year Journey by Mehfil Magazine
4. The Tragedy of Komagata Maru - The Sikh Challenge to Canadian Immigration Policies, by Dr. Puran Singh
5. Amritsar 1919 by Kim A. Wagner
6. An Uncommon Road - How Canadian Sikhs Struggled Out of the Fringes and into the Mainstream, by Gian Singh Sandhu
7. Thousands of Heroes have Risen: Sikh Voices of the Great War 1914-1918, by Sukhwinder Singh Bassi
8. The Flying Sikh, by Stephen Barker
9. Sophia - Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary, by Anita Anand
10. Karma Khullar's Mustache, by Kristi Wientge
11. The Kaur of 1984 by Satnam Sutirath Wazir (this one perhaps for high school)



Link references that would be helpful for school assignments and for teachers to easily access for a lesson, or again for SSA discussions:

1. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/indian-army-personnel/>
2. punjabww1.com - you can search by names and villages to see who went to fight with the British colonies. This link doesn't load on phones/tablets. Only laptops/desktop computers can be used.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/10/records-of-320000-punjab-soldiers-from-first-world-war-uncovered>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/14/excerpts-guardian-reporting-first-world-war>
5. <https://shmc.ca/events-exhibitions/the-battle-of-vimy-ridge>
6. The **Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada** offers downloadable lesson plans organized by grade level, making it easier for educators to integrate Sikh history and perspectives into their classrooms. To support teachers, it would be helpful to include **a direct link to this resource**: <https://shmc.ca/educational-resources>, so they aren't required to search through multiple pages.
 - a. Just below the lesson plans, there's a helpful link to "123: What the Facts", which provides key statistics and figures about Sikhs in Canada. This can be a valuable resource for classroom discussions, SSA programming, and Sikh Heritage Month activities.
 - b. Additionally, a YouTube video featured beneath the lesson plans offers a quick visual overview, which could further support educators in engaging students effectively.

4. The Experience of Sikh Students in Peel

Bullying continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing young Sikh students. This report brings a better understanding of these challenges. Similar research and efforts can be taken by schools across the country to better understand the struggles and challenges of Sikh students while taking action to address these issues.

SECTION TWO: ISSUES FACED BY SIKH STUDENTS

Initiatives driven by diversity, equity, and cultural intelligence can reduce bullying, racism, and harassment. According to surveys conducted by the WSO on the experiences of Sikh students in the Peel District School Board, many students reported being teased and bullied for their Sikh identity. Policy and diversity initiatives within the Peel District School Board have contributed to reducing bullying rates. This includes an increase in Sikh faith-based events in schools, such as Langar Day, which help combat misrepresentation and stereotypes. The WSO has also collaborated with the Board to produce a Sikh-focused e-module, while the Board has developed a number of training materials on cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Despite these efforts, survey findings reveal that bullying and racism remain significant issues for Sikh students. These results help educators and practitioners better understand the nuanced and persistent nature of identity-based bullying.

In light of the recent targeted attacks on Gurdwaras in Brampton, the WSO has relaunched its student surveys to assess whether the environment for Sikh youth has changed in response to growing community concerns. These efforts are also being supported by Anti-Sikh Hate Town Halls—community forums organized by the WSO to hear directly from parents, students, and educators about their experiences and challenges. The renewed data collection will help identify whether bullying or discrimination has increased and guide the next steps in advocacy, education, and institutional accountability.

The WSO continues to assist young students in overcoming challenges tied to their Sikh faith. In addition to grassroots advocacy and community consultations, the organization is also pursuing legal avenues to challenge systemic discrimination, such as its ongoing legal opposition to Quebec’s Bill 21, which disproportionately impacts members of visible faith communities, including Sikhs.



Initiatives driven by diversity, equity and cultural intelligence can reduce bullying, racism and harassment. According to surveys conducted by the WSO on the experience of Sikh Students in the Peel District School Board, many students report being teased and bullied for their Sikh identity. Policy and diversity initiatives within the Peel District School Board have been a driver for reducing bullying rates. This includes an increase of Sikh faith-based events in schools, such as Langar Day, to combat misrepresentation and stereotypes. The WSO has also worked in collaboration with the Board to produce an e-module and the board has produced a number of training materials on cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Despite the reduction in bullying rates, the surveys reveal that bullying and racism still remains a significant issue for Sikh students. The findings in this research can be used to assist the wider community of practitioners to better understand the dynamics of bullying.

The WSO continues to assist many young students to overcome problems and discrimination due to their Sikh faith. In addition, the WSO is taking legal steps to address the ongoing plight being faced by different faith groups, especially Sikhs, in the fight against Quebec's Bill 21.



The following are some examples of bullying Sikh students by students, teachers, and administration:

- Teased for speaking 'differently' due to their or their family's English proficiency
- Girls with visible facial and body hair being referred to as boys and having their long hair pulled
- Teachers and administrators continuously misgendering students due to their appearance and visible articles of faith
- Articles of Faith being touched inappropriately and without consent by other classmates
- Classmates inappropriately forcing students to eat meat or placing it in their presence with complete disregard of personal space and dietary preferences
- Labelled as 'terrorists' or 'dangerous'
- Being physically and mentally attacked
- Cyber-bullying

Recommendation for Educators and Administration

- All staff and students should engage with the e-module to familiarize themselves with the Sikh faith.
- Where possible, teachers should include literature, assignments and presentations on the Sikh faith and Sikhs.
- Educators and administrators should directly involve community members, especially families, to implement bullying prevention efforts.
- Data should be collected on instances of bullying and harassment that occur both virtually and in-person, to thoroughly understand the experiences of the student and whether the incident has been addressed appropriately and resolved.
- When working with families, it is important teachers take into consideration potential cultural barriers and language barriers to appropriately address the situation. Many Sikh students are also intentionally labelled as ESL to get more funding when they are proficient.
- If using technology with avatars, make sure there are options for representation for Sikh students. This can include the option for Dastaars, braids and Patkas. If the representation doesn't exist, advocate for the technology to have it, or pick a different platform.

Relevant Policies

Legal Protection of Sikh Articles of Faith in Canada

Sikhs in Canada have the legal right to freely wear their Articles of Faith in both public and private settings.

The wearing of the Sikh Articles of Faith must by law be accommodated to the point of undue hardship, a very stringent standard.

Thus, Sikh students who choose to wear any of the Articles of Faith, such as the Kirpan or the Dastaar, must be accommodated.

Families and community stakeholders should be involved in discussions about accommodations.

The Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Multani v Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* (2006), carries the most weight in regards to accommodations of the Kirpan in public spaces, including schools. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court ruled that an absolute prohibition on the Kirpan could not be justified.

The Court disagrees with the assertion that the Kirpan is a weapon and states that an argument to that effect is "contradicted by the evidence regarding the symbolic nature of the Kirpan, it is also disrespectful to believers in the Sikh religion and does not take into account Canadian values based on multiculturalism."

A Kirpan restriction "would stifle the promotion of values such as multiculturalism, diversity, and the development of an educational culture respectful of the rights of others." Thus, Kirpans must be accommodated at all schools across Canada, with accompanying policies.



SECTION THREE: THE SIKH FAITH

Sikh History and Core Beliefs

The Sikh religion is the youngest of the world's major religions. Sikh means learner or student. It was founded by Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji who was the first Guru of the Sikhs. He was born in Punjab, current-day Pakistan in 1469 C.E. at a time of great religious intolerance and inequality. Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji taught the Three Pillars of Faith:

1. Naam Japna - Remembrance of God
2. Kirat Karni - Earn an honest living
3. Vand Shakna - Sharing with others

Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji was an accomplished poet and musician. He travelled extensively teaching his message of the universality of one God and the equality of all people. Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji was succeeded by nine human Gurus. The final human Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji bestowed the Guruship upon Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji is a compendium of the writings of the Sikh Guru's, and other divinely inspired Saints and poets.

In addition to teaching the Three Pillars of the Sikh faith, the Sikh Gurus taught about the fundamental equality of all human beings and that men and women are equals and share the same rights. Sikhs believe that God resides within each soul and the purpose of human life is to become one with God through loving devotion, meditation and selfless service to all of humanity.



Initiated Sikhs and the Five Articles of Faith

In 1699, the ninth Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, founded the Order of Khalsa on Vaisakhi, a day traditionally celebrated as a spring harvest festival in Punjab. Khalsa means the sovereign and it is the collective body of all initiated Sikhs. The initiation ceremony is called Amrit Sanchar, and it includes drinking Amrit (holy water). Sikhs who are initiated are called 'Amritdhari'.

Amritdhari Sikhs commit to following the Sikh Code of Conduct, known as Rehat Maryada. This includes the daily discipline of meditation and prayer and also wearing the Five Articles of Faith, known as Kakaars, at all times. They are as follows:

1. **Kes** - unshorn hair representing the acceptance of God's will. The Kes are covered with a Keski or Dastar, a Turban or head-covering, representing spiritual wisdom. The Dastar is not formally considered one of the 5 Articles of Faith however, this remains a visibly distinct feature of Sikh identity and practice.
2. **Kanga** - a wooden comb representing self-discipline, worn in the hair to keep it neat and tidy.
3. **Kara** - an iron or steel bracelet worn on the wrist. The circle signifies the oneness and eternity of God, and to use one's hand for the benefit of humanity. Size varies, Kara's may be small or large.
4. **Kachhera** - cotton undergarment representing high moral character and restraint.
5. **Kirpan** - a small stylized sword that must be worn sheathed. It is restrained in a cloth belt to be worn next to the body. Most Kirpans range from 6-9 inches in length. The Kirpan signifies the duty of Sikhs to stand against injustice.

Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji also asked Sikhs to adopt shared surnames, 'Kaur' for women and 'Singh' for men. 'Singh' means lion and 'Kaur' means princess. Traditional last names indicate caste and social status. The call to adopt shared surnames was a means to signify equality of all people and to reject the prejudice associated with the caste system.

As with all faiths, Sikhs have different levels of observance and sub-groups. Amrit Shakna, formalized initiation into the faith is a personal decision that Sikhs make when they feel ready to do so. About 10-15% of Sikhs make that choice.



The Gurdwara

A Gurdwara, meaning the 'door to the Guru', is a place of congregation, worship and gathering for Sikhs. People of all faiths are welcomed to enter. A Gurdwara can be identified from a distance by a tall flagpole bearing the Nishan Sahib, the Sikh flag. Those attending worship at the Gurdwara, must remove their shoes and their heads must be covered before entering the building as a sign of respect for the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Also, it is appropriate to dress conservatively as it is required to sit on the floor if able.

The Gurdwara has a Darbar Sahib, congregation hall, where Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji is placed on an elevated throne and the singing of verses takes place. Upon entering the Darbar Sahib, you approach the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji and bow down as a sign of submission and respect.

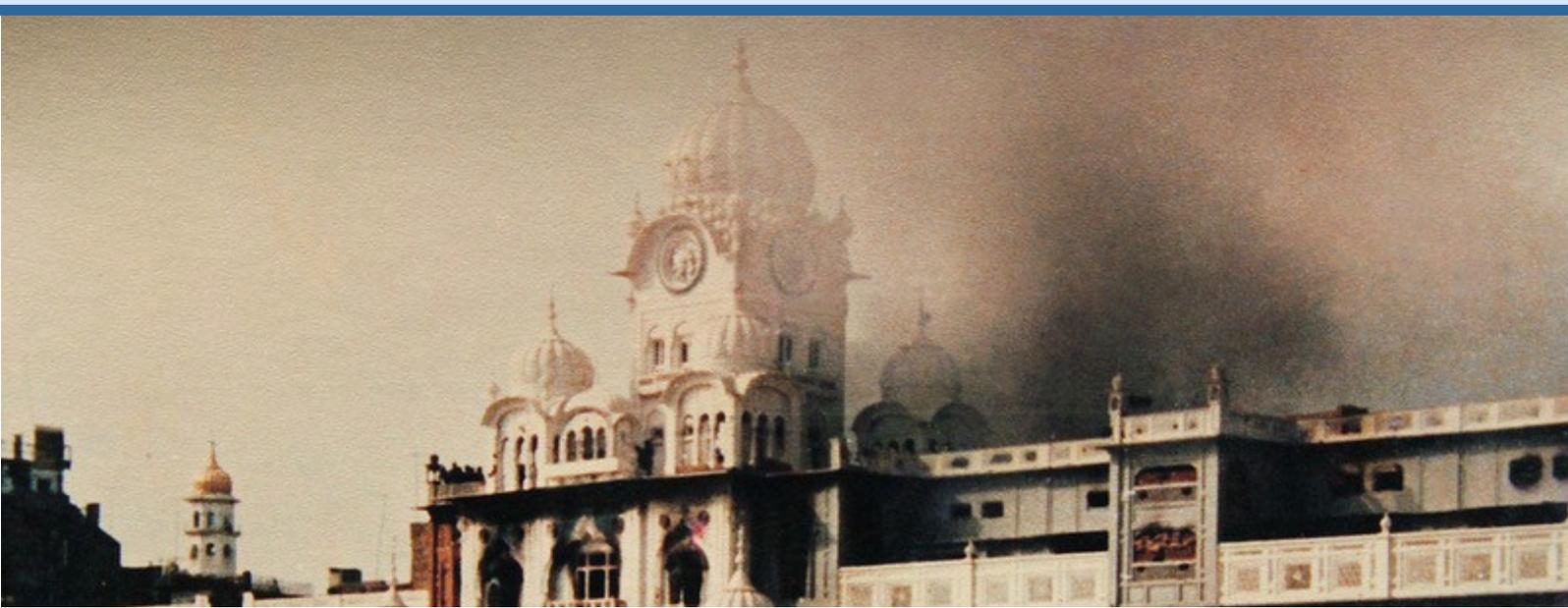
The Langar is a place where all are welcomed to eat vegetarian food served by the Sikh community. The concept of Langar is founded in Seva, which refers to selfless service for the welfare of all. Anyone can volunteer in Langar. The Sikh faith emphasizes that God is within us all, so by serving humanity, you are serving God's creation. In addition, when eating Langar, everyone is seated together on the floor as a symbol of unity and equity. It does not matter what your religion, caste, gender, or socio-economic status is, everyone is equal.

The Gurdwara is a main focal point for most of the important Sikh commemorations, and life events including initiation, marriage, and death ceremonies. Gurdwaras also often have facilities for the community such as libraries, gyms and play areas.

Language

Most Sikhs speak Punjabi, and it is one of Canada's top three immigrant languages. It is also the Canadian parliament's third language after English and French.

The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji is in the Gurmukhi script but contains many different languages such as Punjabi, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit and others.



Punjab and 1984

Of the 25-30 million Sikhs around the world, a majority live in the Indian state of Punjab. Punjab, the land of the five rivers, is home to about 16 million Sikhs, making it the only Sikh-majority state in India. The Sikh homeland is considered to be Punjab. However the Sikh faith is not tied to a single region or ethnicity. There are a number of flourishing Sikh communities around the world, with some finding their descent in other Asian regions, such as Afghanistan.

Under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who has been named as the 'Greatest Leader of All Time', the Sikh Empire was established. The Empire existed from 1799, with a mosaic of ethnicities, faiths and communities, until it was annexed by the British during the second Anglo-Sikh War in 1849. The region was the last to be annexed by the British.

With the departure of the British in mid-August, Punjab was divided into two regions of the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan in 1947. This division is known as 'Partition'. Its legacy is dark and disturbing. It is one of the largest mass migrations to occur in modern human history, with horrendous violence and slaughter.

During Partition, the vast majority of the Sikh community shifted to the region of Punjab in India. The relationship between the Indian state and the Sikh community, however, remained complicated. The Indian government denied the people of Punjab many rights and privileges afforded to other groups and states, and also diverted significant resources and river water to other states without compensation for the Punjab.

In June 1984, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ordered the Indian army to attack Sri Harmandir Sahib (also known as the 'Golden Temple') in Amritsar, along with multiple gurdwaras across Punjab.

Sri Harmandir Sahib is the most significant gurdwara in the Sikh faith. It is also home to the central religious authority for Sikhs, the Akal Takht. This attack, carried out between June 1-10, resulted in thousands of casualties, the destruction of historic sites and artifacts, and it left a permanent wound on the Sikh psyche.

On October 31, 1984, Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for the attack. The assassination triggered the 1984 Sikh Genocide in which Indian government officials facilitated and encouraged the mass killings of Sikhs in cities across India. Government officials provided mobs with voter lists to identify Sikh homes and also resources to kill such as kerosene, tires and iron bars.

In the period that followed from 1984-1995, the Indian government cracked down on Sikh activists in Punjab advocating for a separate Sikh state known as Khalistan. Human rights abuses took place on a mass scale including the use of torture, abductions and false encounters. False encounters are extra-judicial killings where individuals who are abducted or taken into custody are murdered by state and security officials and it is claimed that such murders took place during an 'encounter' (exchange of violence or fire) with police. Bounties were paid by the state for many of these killings. Various organizations such as Ensaaf, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, have brought to light the atrocities and human rights violations that occurred regularly for over a decade.

In many cases, families of those individuals suspected of either supporting or participating in the Khalistan Movement were illegally held in custody and tortured. Many such individuals and families fled Punjab to countries like Canada as refugees.

Those involved and responsible for these heinous crimes were most notably police officers, high-ranking officials, security service members and other security force members, who operated with impunity and were rewarded with cash and promotions. The report "Broken System" published by the Human Rights Watch in 2009, highlights the impunity police officers enjoy in India. Ensaaf and Punjab Disappeared have begun documenting not only the victims but their perpetrators and murderers as well.

Diaspora Sikh communities all around the world continue to remember and demand justice for the victims of state-sponsored violence and genocide. Sikh students across Canada have commemorated these events for years through academic work, remembrance days, and peaceful protests. This brief history gives context to how close this is to Sikh students. It is important to approach this matter with Sikh students with sensitivity and respect. Providing students with the space and platform to express their opinions in a safe manner, is important to hear their voices and experiences.



The Farmers Protest

Over the last few decades, the agriculture sector in India and Punjab specifically has faced significant declines and an epidemic of farmer suicides.

Farmers in India began protesting in September of 2020 after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government enacted three laws without what was felt to be sufficient consultation.

The first law allows farmers to do business directly with corporations and private buyers, without going through the Indian government. The government traditionally provided farmers Minimum Support Pricing (MSP), which ensures farmers against substantial falls in farm prices.

The second law pushes farmers, corporations and private buyers to negotiate with price assurances rather than regulated prices set by the government.

The third law seeks to modernize the food supply chain by removing certain commodities.

Agriculture is India's largest source of livelihood, but it has been a source of ongoing poverty. The rate of farmer suicides has also been troubling for years. Farmers fear that corporatization of the agriculture sector will only increase their troubles with the possibility of exploitation and lack of regulation from the government.

Farmers primarily from Punjab and Haryana regions have been gathered outside of New Delhi in protest since September, with several protests being held in other states as well. State officials have been dismissive of the peaceful protests. Police have used tear gas, batons, and water cannons against demonstrators. Demonstrators continue to protest despite the harsh realities of the pandemic, worrisome weather conditions, and violent police tactics.

The livelihood of many Sikhs in Punjab comes from farming. Farming is also a traditional practice for many Sikh households. Diaspora Sikh communities have continued these traditions in their new settlements. In solidarity with the community of Farmers in India, there have been a number of demonstrations and protests around the world, including Canada. While recognizing that the protest is not in connection to one religion, many Sikh students and families have been impacted by these current events. It is important to approach this matter with sensitivity and respect while providing access to mental health resources, and safe spaces.

For more information on the ongoing protests, please see the recommended readings.



The Sikh Calendar

Sikhs commemorate a number of different occasions according to the Nanakshahi calendar, which began with the birth of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (it is also named after him).

The Sikh New Year

The Sikh New Year begins with the month of Chet, which falls on March 13th or 14th. The Sikh New Year is marked with devotional singing, known as Kirtan, and prayers. Celebrations are traditionally held in the Gurdwara. Some Sikh families hold the same celebrations in their households. This day marks as a reminder and recommitment of Sikh values and traditions for Sikhs.

Vaisakhi

In 1699, the tenth Guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, founded the Order of Khalsa on Vaisakhi, a day traditionally celebrated as a spring harvest festival in Punjab. This is one of the most significant days commemorated each year in April. Sikhs gather in their local communities worldwide to remember their history and celebrate their unity.

Hola Mohalla

Hola Mohalla is a three-day festival held in Anandpur Sahib, exhibiting Gatka which is the traditional form of Sikh martial arts, Kirtan, and religious lectures. The tradition was started by Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji as a reminder of courage, strength and physicality for Sikhs. The festival takes place in the month of Chet, which is March. Sikhs who are unable to attend will hold similar celebrations in their local communities.

Bandi Chhor Divas

Bandi Chhor Divas, meaning prisoner release day, commemorates the day the sixth Guru, Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji was released from Gwalior Prison, along with 52 Kings. Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji and many others had been detained for several years though they were innocent. He successfully secured his freedom and the freedom of the Kings with cleverness and compassion. Bandi Chhor Divas falls on the same day as Diwali, and it is celebrated in similar ways but the celebrations are based on separate traditions and events. Celebrations to commemorate selflessness, freedom, and justice are held both in Sikh households and in the Gurdwara with candles being lit, Kirtan, and prayers.

Gurpurab

Gurpurab is the celebration of the Guru's birth. Celebrations are held on each Guru's birth anniversary to reflect on their teachings and lives. The birth anniversaries of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji are celebrated more predominantly.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Plan of Action?

It is important to have a **plan of action**. Especially when a child is young and wearing a Dastaar, make sure that there is a plan of action if the Dastaar comes off in any situation, be it during physical activity, when removing winter clothing or whatever else. An older Sikh student may be called on to assist in tying the Dastaar again. This may also be used as a learning opportunity where you have a parent come in and do a tutorial. It is really important that the child does not feel like they are in trouble or they get sent to the office for the day. It is crucial that their well-being is centred on and the situation is handled with sensitivity and care.

Can I touch a student's article of faith?

Any touching of the Sikh articles of faith should only happen after obtaining informed consent. Most students would not object to individuals touching or examining the Kara, however, students may object to individuals unnecessarily touching their Kes, Dastaar, or Kirpan.

What if a student's Kirpan is showing?

In the case a student's Kirpan is visible, it is important to let the student know to conceal the Kirpan in a private manner. It may be the case that the student is unaware of the policy regarding Kirpans in schools. In the rare instance, this may happen, if a student's Kirpan has fallen out of its sheath, the student must be allowed to return it immediately.

How are Sikh Articles of Faith accommodated during physical education classes?

The Sikh Articles of Faith can be accommodated during physical education classes. In particular, when the Kirpan or Kara pose a safety risk, they can be covered and restrained. The Kara can be covered using an athletic band and the Kirpan can be restrained and tied around the waist.

Are there any concerns with respect to the Sikh Articles of Faith when a student goes on a field trip or class trip?

There are little to no concerns with respect to the Sikh Articles of Faith when a Sikh student goes on a field trip or class trip. Most if not all places in Canada accommodate the Dastaar and the Kirpan. If a venue has a specific security screening process or helmet policy, it is best to ask the venue beforehand if there are any special accommodations policies for the Kirpan or the Dastaar.

Why do Sikhs not cut their hair?

Religiously, Sikh men and women do not cut any of their hair. There are people who trim their beards however, it is not sanctioned by the faith. There are different other types of styling such as tying the beard but not all people do this. This is something that is based on personal preference and individual choice. The Sikh faith holds that everyone has their own choice and liberty to practice they may sincerely choose.

Why do Sikhs cover their hair with a Dastaar?

From the time of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the Dastaar has been synonymous with the Sikh faith. It has also been synonymous with the values of the Sikh faith which includes gender equality because all Sikh women may choose to wear the Dastaar as well. The Gurus were well before their time and declared that gender discrimination was wrong. For a practising Sikh, removing the Dastaar is inconceivable. Outside of the spiritual function, it also serves as a method of keeping a Sikh's hair in place. The Dastaar is not a hat, it cannot simply be removed. It is worn at all times. It is tied layer by layer. It is also important to note that people of different ages have different ways of practising. A younger child may have a Patka, which is a small square tied over the hair. In this sense, it may be easier and when they get older, then it is up to them at their age if they want to tie a Dastaar or not.

When do Sikhs start tying Dastaars?

Sikh students may begin tying a smaller Dastaar from a young age, as a Patka or Kaiski. The transition from a small Dastaar to a larger Dastaar may take place in middle school, high school or they may always be wearing it since childhood.

Does the colour of the Dastaar matter? How long does it take to tie the Dastaar and what is its length?

The colour of a Dastaar is based on personal preference. The time it takes to tie a Dastaar depends on the length or the title style of the Dastaar. It can take anywhere from 3 to 15 minutes. The cloth itself can vary anywhere from 3 yards to 8 yards.

What if a student's Dastaar falls off during physical activity?

If a student's Dastaar falls off during physical activity, they may be able to retie it on their own. In this situation, it is best if they are given a private room with a mirror. If the student is younger, it is best to contact their families and talk to them before such a situation occurs. If the Dastaar is a smaller Dastaar, such as a Patka or Kaiski, the teacher may be able to tie it because it is very simple to do so.

What arrangements can be made when students go swimming?

If swimming is a mandatory class activity, Sikh children may need extra time to wash and dry their hair or tie a Dastaar. Discuss the plans for swimming well in advance with the student and inform their families, so a plan of action can be put in place if the student requires assistance with tying their Dastaar afterwards.

What arrangements can be made when students with uncut hair go on an overnight school trip?

When students with uncut hair and Dastaars go on overnight school trips, they may feel that it could be an issue to manage their hair, especially if they are younger. It is important their families are kept in the loop, and this conversation occurs well in advance to tell the student or inform their families that the trip is overnight and they will have to do their hair and/or Dastaar. If the student is younger they may request the teacher or the supervisor to have some assistance and if they are older they should be able to do it themselves.

What can be done where a helmet is required but a student is wearing a Dastaar?

In the case a helmet is required on a trip or in any other instance and the student ties a Dastaar, the best option is to contact the student's family and see what you can do. Another option for students is to tie a smaller Dastaar so the helmet can fit on top. If a student refuses any of these options, the teacher can think of alternative activities for the student so the student does not feel left out.



Do Sikhs have dietary restrictions? What are traditional Sikh foods?

In regards to dietary restrictions, it is best to ask an individual, as some Sikhs who are observant and Amritdhari, refrain from eating eggs and meat, meaning they are Lacto-vegetarian. There are some Sikhs who eat meat if they are not religiously prepared in a Halal or Kosher manner. There should always be full disclosure if there is Halal or Kosher being served. Additionally, the family should be asked if the child can or cannot eat that meat. A vegetarian option should also always be available.

People of the Sikh formalized into the Sikh faith commit to not taking any intoxicants including liquor and they do not consume tobacco. There are also some Sikhs who will not eat outside food, including from the cafeteria, because they eat food that has been prepared while singing prayers. Sikhs may also eat a variety of foods, including traditional foods as well as western foods, as long as they meet the dietary requirements. Langar in the Gurdwara is traditionally Punjabi food, with western food being served sometimes. In a Sikh household, you will find a mix of Punjabi food and western food.

Are boys favoured over girls in the Sikh community?

According to the Sikh faith, everyone should be treated equally regardless of their race, gender, religion or nationality. According to a strict faith-based perspective, girls and boys are treated equitably. The Sikh faith is egalitarian however most Sikhs come from South Asia. South Asian culture is predominantly patriarchal so many Sikhs who come from India may treat their girls differently than their boys. Like other children in the classroom, Sikh Canadian children are also exposed to the patriarchy in Canada. The systemic devaluing of women and other genders in Canada may also be internalized and should not be solely attributed to the religion or ethnicity of the student.

Do girls have to cover their legs during physical education classes?

Practising Sikhs are asked to dress modestly, however, interpretation of this is left to the individual. Many Sikhs may feel uncomfortable showing their legs and may choose to wear leggings or pants. When it comes to swimsuits, some Sikh girls may feel uncomfortable wearing a swimsuit, so they may choose to dress more modestly or wear a t-shirt on top. For some Sikh girls, the keeping of hair means they will have dark body hair which is negatively perceived. As mentioned before, they may experience more bullying because of it. Body positivity, especially with respect to body hair, should be encouraged.

How do Sikhs mark holidays and special occasions?

The Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji is read from start to finish in a ceremony called the Akhand Path. This usually takes about 48 hours, and happens from Friday to Sunday. As a result, students may take the Friday off to attend. The Akhand Path can happen either at home or at the Gurdwara. On Vaisakhi, thousands of Sikhs go to a parade called the Nagar Kirtan, and follow the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji in procession while singing hymns. Many non-Sikhs also attend to see the vibrant colours and enjoy the free food. Many municipalities have Nagar Kirtans - check your city, town or area for more information.



Be aware of holy days for all faiths

Knowing all the faiths that are in your classroom is important. It is also important to recognize the significance of these days. In the instance of evaluations, you may choose to avoid these days to be accommodating and respectful. In younger grades, this is an opportunity to look at families as partners, and have them come in to talk about these days and why they are honoured.

Do Sikh Students require time to pray during school hours?

All Sikh students do not require time to pray during school hours. Traditionally speaking, prayers take place either during early mornings, at sunset or before an individual goes to sleep. This being said, some students may choose to still pray or meditate during school hours; however, this is not mandatory.

Is Bhangra a Sikh religious dance?

Bhangra is not a Sikh religious dance. It is a Punjabi folk dance but some Sikhs may choose to participate in bhangra, while others may not due to religious or personal decisions.

What is Sikh music?

Sikh music is based on scriptures that are written in traditional raags. Devotional singing is referred to as Kirtan. A lot of students know how to play instruments such as the Harmonium and the Tabla to accompany the singing of traditional Sikh music. Other traditional instruments include the Dilruba and the Sarangi.

GLOSSARY

Amrit: Initiating Nectar that is prepared with a mixture of water and sugar that has been stirred with a double-edged sword while reciting excerpts from the Sikh scriptures.

Amritdhari: Initiated Sikhs

Amrit Sanchar: The ceremony to be initiated into the Khalsa

Darbar Sahib: Congregation hall in a Gurdwara

Dastaar: Refers to a Turban

Gurdwara: Meaning the 'door to the Guru', is a place of congregation, worship and gathering for Sikhs

Kachhera: A cotton undergarment and one of the Articles of Faith

Kanga: A wooden comb and one of the Articles of Faith

Kakaars: The Five Articles of Faith

Kara: An iron or steel bracelet and one of the Articles of Faith

Kes: Unshorn hair and one of the Articles of Faith

Khalsa: It means the sovereign and it is the collective body of all initiated Sikhs

Kirat Karni: Earning an honest living

Kirpan; A small stylized sword and one of the Articles of Faith

Kirtan: Devotional singing

Langar: The place where all are welcomed to eat vegetarian food served by the Sikh community

Naam Japna: The remembrance of God

Rehat Maryada: The Sikh Code of Conduct

Vand Shakna: Sharing with others

RECOMMENDED READINGS

The Farmers Protest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvKWm9Vjhzs>

This is a Global News clip discussing the impact of the protest both in India and Abroad.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHpZV7ro7IU&t=3s>

This Vox informational video breaks down the protests from the beginning and the reasons. It adds historical context to the history of farming in India and how the new legislation will impact farmers and agriculture in the country.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/india-farmers-protests-100-days-1.5939743>

This video was made when the protest marked 100 days. It discusses the current situation, as well as what is next. It also mentions how the legislation is unclear.

<https://time.com/5938041/india-farmer-protests-democracy/>

This is a Time Magazine article discussing India's human rights violations and fleeting title as a democracy.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/27/world/asia/india-farmer-protest.html>

This New York Times article breaks down simple questions such as who is protesting, why they are protesting, and why these protests have been met with violence.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/india-government-must-stop-crushing-farmers-protests-and-demonizing-dissenters/>

This Amnesty International article calling on the Indian government to stop the arrest of peaceful protestors exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

https://edition.cnn.com/2021/02/05/asia/indian-farmers-camp-dst-intl-hnk/index.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=igstoryCNN&utm_content=2021-02-08T22%3A58%3A25/

This CNN article outlines and details life for Indian farmers in the protest camps.

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7621907/india-farmers-social-media/>

This Global News article discusses the social media crackdown of activists and journalists, and how the Indian government is limiting freedom of speech.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/10/asia/india-farmers-protest-explainer-intl-hnk-scli/index.html>

This CNN article breaks down the new laws and why farmers are feeling abandoned and compelled to protest.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56111289>

This BBC article discusses how India is using a sedition law to criminalize any dissent or dissatisfaction toward the Indian government.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/opinion-indian-farmer-protests-1.5837097>

This CBC article outlines the farmer's reasons for the protest, how it is not only about land but the linkages with culture, religion, and language.

REFERENCES

Buchignani, N. (2020, August 11) *Sikhism in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sikhism>

Canadian Sikh Heritage. Retrieved from <http://canadiansikhheritage.ca/passage-to-canada/>

Gray, D.R. *Canadian Soldier Sikhs: A Little Story in a Big War*. Retrieved from <https://www.omnityv.ca/on/pa/docs/canadian-soldier-sikhs/>

Punjabi Now Third Language in Parliament of Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.immigration.ca/punjabi-now-third-language-in-parliament-of-canada>

Queen. L. (2021, March 29) *'I was able to change the world': Newmarket Sikh student get patka head wear added to avatar program*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/local-newmarket/news/2021/03/29/i-was-able-to-change-the-world-newmarket-sikh-student-get-patka-head-wear-added-to-avatar-program.html>

Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada. *Educational Resources*. 10.1080/17448727.2015.1087681
<https://shmc.ca/educational-resources>

Singh, D.S. (2015, September). *The Third Ghallughara: On the Sikh Dilemma Since 1984*. The Sikh Coalition. *Sikhism: An Educator's Guide*. Retrieved from <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Sikhism-educator-guide.pdf>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015) *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation*.
https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wpcontent/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf

Written and Produced by
The World Sikh Organization of Canada



World Sikh Organization of Canada

1181 Cecil Avenue,
Ottawa, Ontario,
K2H 7Z6

info@worldsikh.org // [ph: 416.904.9110](tel:416.904.9110) // www.worldsikh.org // [@worldsikhorg](https://www.instagram.com/worldsikhorg)