Media and Sikh Religion:
An Indian Perspective

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Introduction

The Sikh religion is among the recently founded (about 544 years ago) religions in India. The religion was founded by Guru Nanak who was born in 1469 near Lahore City of the Punjab province (now in Pakistan) and evolved over a period of about 150 years under the leadership of Ten Gurus.

The period and place of the birth of Sikhism had a very important role in the shaping of the Sikh philosophy. The period of the birth of Sikhism coincides with the arrival of the Mughals in India. The place of birth that is the Punjab Province was on the route of the Mughal invaders, who would loot the province on their way to and from India. This situation led to an intense interaction of the Sikhs with the Islam.

The founder Guru Nanak gave the basic tenets which remained unchanged, but each Guru took steps for consolidating and spreading the Sikh thought and way of life. The second Guru invented a distinct (Gurumukhi) script for writing and established schools for education. The third Guru established religious Centres all over Punjab for spreading the message by preaching and acting as liaison Centers of the religion. The fifth Guru compiled all the writings of the earlier Gurus and other Bhakts (saints of other faiths) into a Granth (Sacred book) to make it available at all religious Centres. The Gurus also dedicated themselves to the welfare of all sections of society. They undertook activities like

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building of water tanks and carrying out relief works during drought and famine and helping the farmers and the poor.

The message of universal brotherhood along with the welfare works led to the increasing popularity and acceptance of the Sikh philosophy.

This increasing popularity became a cause of envy for the ruling class and its preachers, who started oppressing the Sikh Gurus to prevent them from preaching and developing a following. The fifth guru was thus tortured and killed on flimsy and false pretexts. It became obvious to the Sikh Gurus that friction and clash with the ruling classes would be an unavoidable factor in times to follow. The sixth guru thus started to raise an army. To distinctly separate the religious teachings from the temporal/political issues, he built the Akal Takht (Throne of the Eternal) in front of the Harmandir Sahib. (Temple of God – more popularly called the Golden Temple). Harmandir Sahib was dedicated to religious activity and prayer. Akal Takht was a centre for deliberating on political and social issues.

The Sikh Gurus continued their welfare activities by building hospitals, providing relief in epidemics etc. and the discomfort of the ruling class kept growing. This resulted in the ninth guru again being accused on some false grounds and being beheaded at Chandani Chownk in Delhi, along with three other Sikhs. The purpose of such oppression was to spread fear amongst the other followers and the general population.

The tenth Guru responded to this oppression by deciding to create a community of fearless followers who would be ready to sacrifice their lives for justice for the community. He raised this community of followers on April 14, 1699 at Anandpur saheb (in Punjab) by asking for five followers to offer their heads to the Guru. He called this group of followers as “Khalsa” which means “under the control of the Supreme authority” (it also means Pure). He gave a distinctive identity to this group. The individuals would grow unshorn long hair and beard, would wear a turban, carry a sword etc. This personality was called the Sant-Sipahi (Saint - Soldier). A saint who followed the path to Almighty while living the life of a normal house holder and a soldier who was ready to sacrifice himself for justice, Truth, Equality and betterment of society. Thus came into being a very distinct and visible Sikh personality of a Sikh. The tenth Guru defined a code of conduct for the Khalsa called the Rahat Maryada (code of living).

The tenth Guru also ordained, before his passing away, that the Sikhs would regard the Granth as their Guru for all times to come and consider the Granth as Guru incarnate.

Basic Tenets:

The basic Tenets of the Sikh religion are as follows:

• There is one and only one God, who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of everything in the universe. He is the only Truth, Doer of everything, eternal, omnipresent, epitome of all virtues, without fear, without birth. He is the source of all knowledge, and is Kindness personified. He can be reached through the teachings and blessings of the Guru.
• The aim of human life is to attain a state of union with God.
• This union can be attained by “Simran” and Sewa” i.e. continuously remembering /uttering the Name of God, and performing acts of service to Humanity with all Humility.
• The above can be done while leading a normal family life. There is no need to give up family or do severe physical penance, fasting or rituals. The status of women and men is equal in all respects and they can attain unison with the Almighty by living a normal life as per the principles defined by the Guru.
• All human beings are children of one God. There is therefore a universal brotherhood. Consider all Humanity as one.
• The Almighty will judge the performance of a human being according to his deeds only. No other factor of caste, status,
up against injustice. This spirit of sacrifice for the community RELIGION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Sikhs

Adoption of new technology has been a very natural and integral part of the evolution of the Sikh religion. Kirtan (singing the prayer of the lord) and Paath (recitation of the scriptures) are important elements of the religious practice of the Sikhs. The Sikhs adopted the audio technologies at a very early stage. Live broadcasting of Kirtan on radio was undertaken as soon as it became available. Audio cassettes of recitation and Kirtan were very popular, and have now been replaced with Audio and Video CDs which are sold by the millions.

The Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and the web are widely used both at the global and local level. At the global level, a large number of websites make a huge amount of freely downloadable text and audio/video material. This material is widely used by Sikhs all over the world for recitation and listening to the Gurus word. They also provide translations into other languages, and large amount of support material to understand the Gurus teaching. This support material includes, dictionaries, interpretation by scholars etc.

A new search engine Ishermicromedia has became available. This can be used for searching any word or line from the Granth. This is now used in several Gurudwaras to display the verse which is being sung during live Kirtan. The congregation can thus listen to the Kirtan, read each line on the large screen and also read the meaning of the verse being sung. This greatly facilitates the understanding and comprehension of the religious verses. At the local level, groups of Sikh youth use internet to send mail messages about schedules of congregations. Even recordings of local singing are made available on pen drives. Finally there are sites that assist the youth in looking for jobs, and provide information on training programs etc.
The Sikh religion while spreading the message of universal brotherhood, leading a life of high virtue, serving the society standing up for Truth and Justice has encouraged the use of the latest ICT for the preservation and spread of its message and culture.

**HINDUISM AND INTERNET IN 2010-12**

An Essay on Websites, Blogs, Social Media, Censorship and ‘Internet Hindu’

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**Introduction**

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world, next to Christianity and Islam. The word *Hindu* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, (Indus) river in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. (Oxford English Dictionary) The word finds first mention the Rig Veda, believed to have been composed between 1700 and 1100 BCE. (HYMN LXXV. The Rivers)

The word *Hindu* was borrowed into European languages from the Arabic term *al-Hind*, referring to the land of the people who live across the River Indus. In this instance, Hindu refers to all Indians. By the 13th century, *Hindustān* emerged as the name for the ‘land of Hindus’ that, for the rest of the world, came to be known as India. 

Travellers, monks, and scholars spread awareness about the philosophy, traditions, and culture of Hindus particularly during the last two centuries, outside India through books, articles, and speeches. Debates over superiority of Hinduism over other religions, especially Christianity and Islam, have continued over the period through books and other publications. The Internet offered a new, inexpensive, fast,