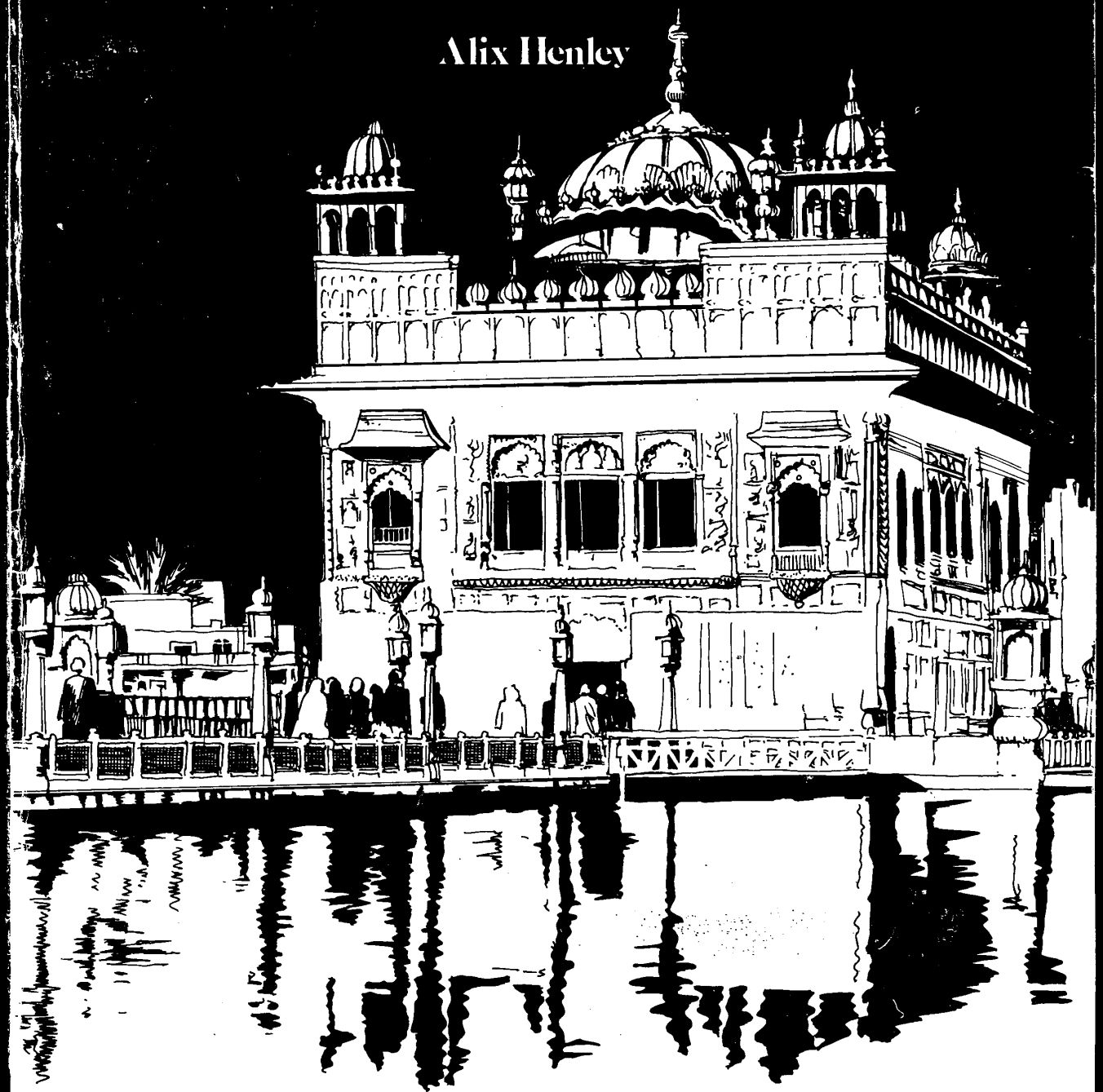
Caring for Sikhs and their Families: religious aspects of care

Alix Henley



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The development and production of this book have been paid for by the Department of Health and the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London. It is part of a series of materials produced for health workers and other people working with Asian patients and clients. The first two publications in this series were two training packs: *Asian Names & Records*, containing training materials for records staff, receptionists, ward clerks, nursing staff, and other people who make or keep records and need to know how to address Asian people correctly and acceptably; and *Asian Foods & Diets*, containing training materials for general nursing and medical staff, health visitors, midwives, catering staff and dietitians who provide food or give dietary advice to Asian people.

This book, *Caring for Sikhs and their Families*, follows *Caring for Muslims and their Families*. A third book, *Caring for Hindus and their Families*, will shortly be available. Each book contains a final chapter aimed specifically at trainers and tutors who wish to use it as a basis for training input. The three books were developed for health workers in all disciplines who work with Hindu, Sikh or Muslim patients or clients, but are also relevant to people working in social services departments, schools, and other institutions and agencies.

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ASIANS IN BRITAIN

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All quotations in this book from the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh Holy Book, are taken from *The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, translated and edited by Kushwant Singh and published by Allen & Unwin (now out of print).

Alix Henley
April 1983

Contents

1. General introduction

Religious beliefs and practices are central to the lives of many Asian people in Britain. They tend to become even more important at times of personal crisis and isolation such as during illness and in hospital.

An informed understanding of the religious beliefs and values of each individual patient is clearly essential to the provision of good care. No health worker would consciously refuse a patient's request that was connected with his or her religious beliefs or practices. But where health workers do not know very much about a patient's religion they may easily give unintentional offence, especially in the press of daily business.

For example, health workers in Britain know the significance of prayer books and crucifixes, and how to avoid causing unnecessary offence when preparing Christian patients for surgery. They may be less confident when, for example, a child comes into hospital with a leather pouch attached to his arm, or a Sikh patient protests when being shaved for an operation.

The way that British institutions organise health care has also grown up to fit in with the traditional ways of British society, largely based on Christian practices; for example, we try to send patients home over Christmas, Christian chaplains make regular rounds of hospital wards, and Christian services are held on hospital premises. When patients in hospital wish to make confession, to receive communion, or to baptise their babies, ward staff generally understand what to do, and, equally important, are immediately sympathetic to requests. Non-Christian patients often find it more difficult to get help in fulfilling their religious duties merely because these duties are unfamiliar to staff. This increases patients' feelings of isolation and unhappiness.

Few British health workers, or other professionals in the caring services, have been given the opportunity to understand much about the beliefs and practices of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. This may inhibit their ability to offer comfort to Asian patients and their families. It may also mean that when patients request special facilities, or refuse to do something for religious reasons, they are regarded with suspicion or irritation by health workers.

Asian people in Britain

For everyone – adults and young people, people who came to Britain as adults, and those born and brought up in Britain – religious beliefs and practices are likely to become particularly important at those times of illness and stress when they may also be most dependent on the caring services.

People from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa now living in Britain came from societies in which religion and religious practices are generally taken for granted. Religious events are the main social events, and religious observances are a normal part of day-to-day individual and community life. Social and religious values are intertwined and most people do not distinguish them: every act has religious significance, and people judge themselves and others accordingly.

The extent to which individual settlers maintain their religious beliefs and practices in Britain varies a good deal.

In the early days of immigration most people felt under great pressure to conform, and to become as inconspicuous as possible in an alien society. This often led them to abandon external religious practices and observances. For example, many Sikh men, in the early days of immigration, cut their hair and removed their turbans, because it was believed that this would make it easier for them to get jobs.

As the wives and children of the early settlers began to arrive in Britain, the quality of life within their communities started to improve. The different communities organised places in which to gather and worship and began to employ permanent religious functionaries to lead prayers and to perform ceremonies that had previously been neglected. As their communities became more established and organised, it became easier for people to practise their religion and to

feel supported in their beliefs. Many communities also set up evening or weekend schools where children could learn the basic elements of their parents' faith and could learn to read the holy books.

This movement increased with the arrival of Asian people from East Africa, who had already had the experience of recreating their communities and religious identities in a foreign country. They were familiar, for example, with the practical details of administering and organising temple, gurdwara and mosque communities, and of organising religious ceremonies and festivals, within a wider society that did not share their beliefs. People from East Africa often took over the administration and organisation of religious facilities in Britain.

Diversity

There is naturally a great diversity of religous beliefs, practices and attitudes among those Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in Britain who came to this country as adults, just as there is among British Christians. Some people are extremely devout and find the focus of their lives in their religion; others have discarded most external signs and practices while retaining a strong faith; others have little or no faith but may still retain many of the practices and values of the religious traditions in which they were brought up.

Among young Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims brought up in Britain there is again as much diversity of religious belief and practice as among their Christian peers. However, their education in British schools and in a Christian-based society with a strong secular emphasis is most unlikely to have helped them towards any knowledge or understanding of their parents' beliefs. Racist and negative attitudes among the majority community towards minority cultures may also have affected their attitudes towards their parents' religion and origins. The degree of young people's understanding and faith will therefore depend largely on their parents and on the provision made by their own community. Some young Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are well informed about their faith and are very devout. Others who are not may nevertheless wish to retain some of its practices, particularly when they are ill or in hospital.

This book

The information contained in this book concentrates on those features of Sikh religious practice that are likely to be particularly important for health workers and other professionals in hospital and in the community, setting them in the context of the religious beliefs and values from which they spring. It is intended to provide a basis of knowledge from which to discuss with practising Sikhs their needs and wishes in an informed and sensitive way, and with greater confidence. It is likely to be especially relevant to those Sikhs who arrived in Britain as adults.

2. What is Sikhism? Where do the Sikhs in Britain come from?

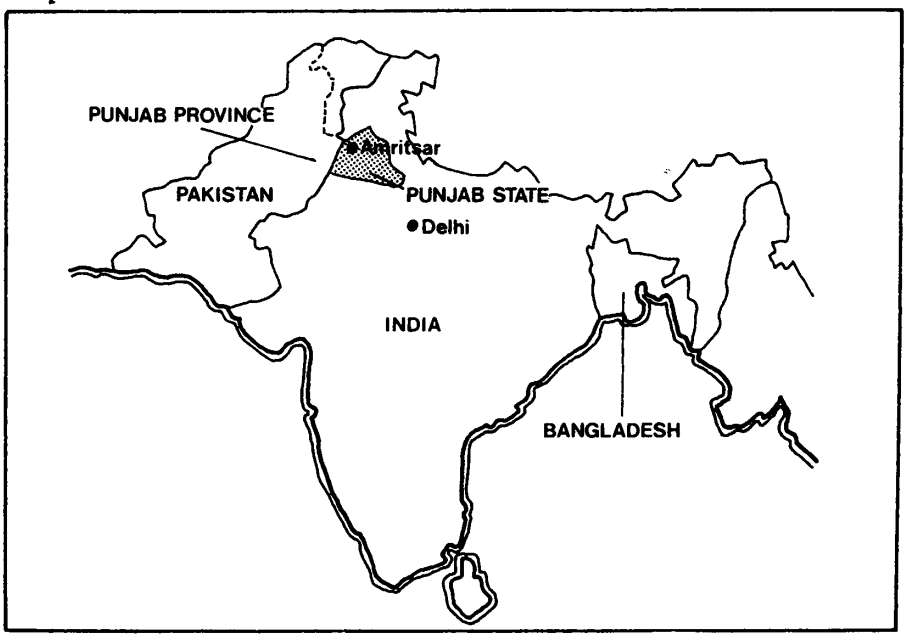
2.1 Sikhism

Sikhism is the English name for the Sikh religion. The Punjabi name is Sikh dharam* or Sikh math. Sikhs are followers of the Sikh religion.

Sikhism began in the sixteenth century as an offshoot of Hinduism, and eventually became a religion in its own right. It was founded by Guru (teacher) Nanak in Punjab in north-west India.

In India there are now between ten and eleven million Sikhs (less than two percent of the total Indian population). About eight million of the Sikhs in India live in the State of Punjab where they form the major religious group. Al-

Map 1: The Indian subcontinent



* See the Appendix for a rough guide to pronunciation of Punjabi and other words.

most all Sikhs are Punjabi in origin, and Sikhism has remained essentially a Punjabi religion.

2.2 Sikhs in Britain

The families of most of the Sikhs in Britain emigrated directly from Punjab. Some came from East Africa (see Map 2) and a few from other ex-British colonies such as Singapore.

Table 1: Sikhs in Britain

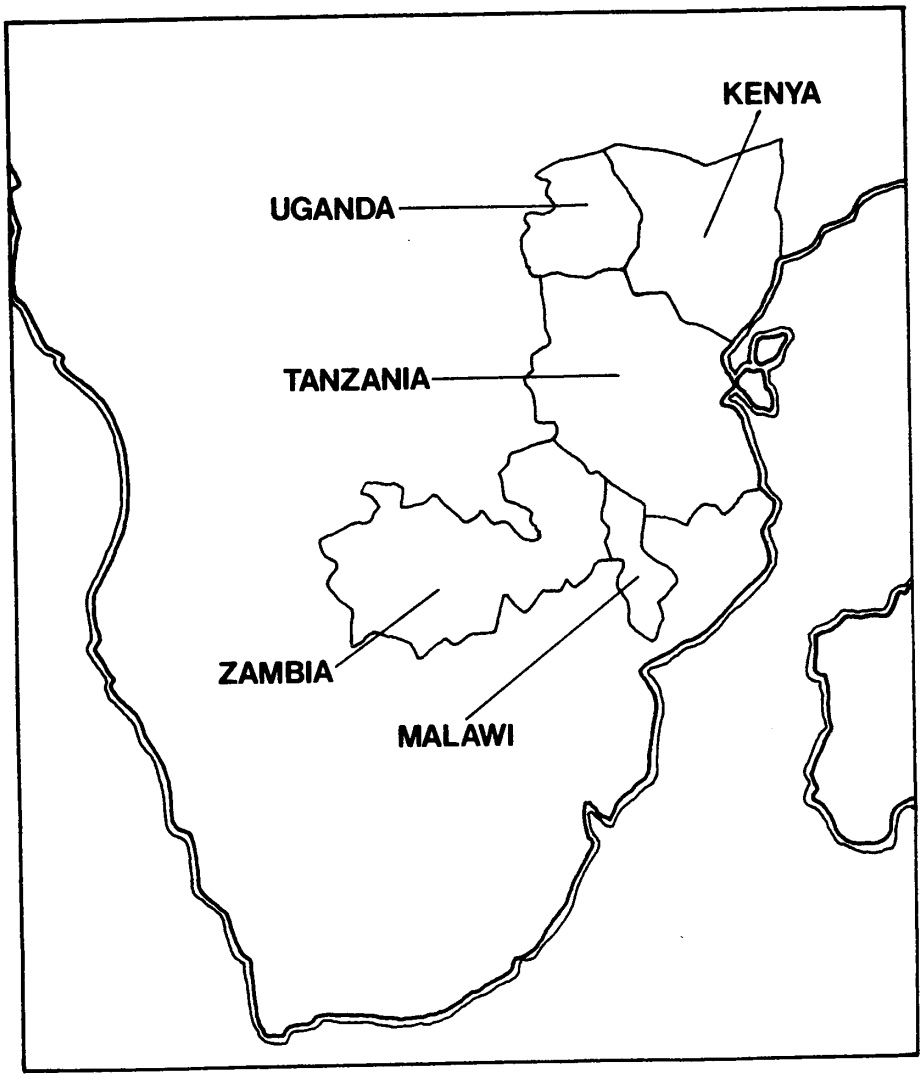
From	May be referred to as	First language
Mainly from *INDIA: Punjab State*	Punjabi Sikhs	Punjabi
A few from *EAST AFRICA*	East African Sikhs	Punjabi
The families of East African Sikhs originally emigrated from Punjab (both India and Pakistan, see 4.5 below).		

The Sikhs have a longstanding military tradition which began with their need to defend themselves against Mughal oppression in the seventeenth century. This military tradition was maintained under British rule: in the British Empire almost thirty percent of the British Indian Army was Sikh. Sikh soldiers fought with the British in the trenches on the German and Turkish fronts during the First World War, and all over the world with the Allies in the Second World War.

During and after the period of the British Empire, Sikhs travelled and settled in many different countries, mainly in those areas under British rule. There are now Sikh communities in, for example, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, East Africa, Canada and California, as well as in Britain. Most of these communities maintain strong links with each other as well as with Sikhs in Punjab.

Sikhs from East Africa were generally more westernised and more accustomed to the procedures of urban life and to a British-style bureaucracy when they arrived in Britain than those who had come straight from rural Punjab. They had

Map 2: East Africa, showing the countries from which the main groups of Asians came to Britain



also already experienced the processes of migration and settlement, and of maintaining their own culture and identity abroad.

For these reasons, although most of them arrived later, East African Sikhs were often faster to set up formal religious organisations in Britain than Sikh communities from India.

Sikhs from India and from East Africa have tended to settle, worship and socialise separately and often see themselves as separate communities.

3. What Sikhs believe

Sikhs, like Christians, believe in one personal God. He is Eternal and is the Source of all Being. He is the Creator of the Universe. Sikhs believe that anyone who worships one God has found the Truth.

Some of the most important Sikh beliefs about God are summed up in this prayer:

THE JAPJI
OR, THE MEDITATION
(Morning Prayer)

PROEM

There is one God,
Eternal Truth is His Name;
Maker of all things,
Fearing nothing and at enmity with nothing,
Timeless is His Image;
Not begotten, being of His own Being:
By the grace of the Guru,* made known to men.

Jap: The Meditation

AS HE WAS IN THE BEGINNING: THE TRUTH,
SO THROUGHOUT THE AGES,
HE EVER HAS BEEN: THE TRUTH,
SO EVEN NOW HE IS TRUTH IMMANENT,
SO FOR EVER AND EVER HE SHALL BE
TRUTH ETERNAL.

* Guru with a capital G in these translations refers to God, the True and Perfect Guru. Guru with a small g refers to a religious teacher.

Sikhs stress the need for each person to develop their own individual relationship with God, seeking truth and leading a virtuous life. Each individual must learn about God both from their experience in God's world and through prayer and meditation. Devout Sikhs grow closer to God by meditating on His Name.

O man, nothing shall go with thee from this world,
Except thy devotion to God!
The delights of this world are as dust.
Nanak, true wealth is repeating God's Name!
(Guru Arjan Dev. *Guru Granth Sahib*)

Their goal is to strive to be more God-centred and less self-centred and so to come to understand God. Sikhism rejects ritual and over-formal worship in the belief that they prevent individuals from developing a direct and loving personal relationship with God.

If the mind is unclean, all else is unclean;
And ceremonial washings cannot wash the mind.
This world is the realm of illusion:
There are few who grasp the Real.
O my mind, remember the Holy Name!
That is the precious gift of the Guru* to men.
Were a man to learn all the postures of the most austere Yogis,
And mortify all his senses,
Not so would he cleanse the mind, or discard self-will.
There is no cure for the mind's sickness
But taking shelter at the Guru's feet.
To meet the Guru is to experience
A change of outlook that cannot be described.
Saith Nanak: From the mind of him who dies to self
Through meeting the Guru, and is reborn through the Guru's Word,
All uncleanness is removed.
(Guru Amar Das, *Guru Granth Sahib*, page 558)

Sikhs, like Hindus, believe in reincarnation: each soul must go through many cycles of birth and rebirth in the world. The ultimate aim of each soul is to reach perfection

* See note on previous page.

and so, through God's Grace, to become united with God and avoid rebirth into the world.

Reincarnation is tied in with belief in *karma*, the cycle of reward and punishment for all thoughts and deeds. Every individual's present existence is directly determined by their behaviour in their past life, and how they live now will decide the manner in which they will return in their next life. However, Sikhs also believe that a person's karma can be changed and improved through the Grace of God.

There can be no peace for man
So long as he thinketh that of himself he can do anything;
He shall wander from womb to womb in a cycle of births;
So long as he deemeth one man a friend and another an enemy,
So long he shall have no rest for his mind;
So long as man is in love with the illusory goods of the world
So long shall Dharmraj, the Justiciar king, continue to punish him.
It is by God's Grace that man can be freed from bondage;
And by the Guru's Grace, saith Nanak, pride and self-will are removed.

(Guru Arjan Dev. *Guru Granth Sahib*)

In contrast to Islam and Hinduism, there are few detailed regulations covering practical aspects of life for Sikhs. However, all initiated Sikhs should wear the five signs of Sikhism at all times (see 5 below).

As a central part of their religious duty, Sikhs should live honest lives, trusting God and doing His Will, doing right, working hard, using material things properly, fulfilling family and community duties, and giving generously to those in need.

It is not through thought that He is to be comprehended
Though we strive to grasp Him a hundred thousand times;
Nor by outer silence and long deep meditation
Can the inner silence be reached;
Nor is man's hunger for God appeasable
By piling up world-loads of wealth.
All the innumerable devices of worldly wisdom

Leave a man disappointed; not one avails.

How then shall we know the Truth?
How shall we rend the veils of untruth away?
Abide thou by His Will, and make thine own,
His Will, O Nanak, that is written in thy heart.

(Guru Nanak)

There is a strong ideal of service to others, not only to those within the Sikh community, but generally. By living rightly and serving others by prayer and worship, and by loving and trusting God, every devout Sikh makes their own personal relationship with Him.

Behold the birds of the air,
They build themselves no granaries;
They construct no tanks of water,
They depend on the forest trees,
And on the natural pools.
The Lord provideth them all.
Thou alone art! Thou alone art!

(Guru Nanak, *Guru Granth Sahib*, page 145)

On the whole, the Sikh religion, with its emphasis on action (rather than religious ritual), hard work, and active involvement in the community, has led most Sikh communities in Britain to be more outgoing than other Asian groups. As Sikh communities become larger and more established, it is also becoming easier for devout Sikhs to follow their religious code. Many Sikhs are now readopting important practices, such as the wearing of turbans, and daily family prayers, that were abandoned during the difficult early days of settlement in Britain.

4. The beginnings of Sikhism

4.1 Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak (1469–1539) was the founder of the Sikh religion. 'Sikh' means disciple or follower.

Guru Nanak, who was born a Hindu, wanted to get away from what he considered to be the excessive ritual and priestly domination of sixteenth-century Hinduism and to go back to the essentials of religion: to each individual's personal relationship with God, and to a virtuous life as the only path to salvation. He spoke out against various abuses of his time such as idolatry, ostentatious worship, superstition, the oppression of women, the rigid caste system, and the elitism and power of the Hindu priestly (Brahmin) caste.

Let no man be proud because of his caste.
For the man who graspeth God in his heart
He, no other, is the true Brahmin:
So, O fool, about thy caste be not vainglorious!
From vainglory emerge too many of the mind's evils!
Though they say there are four castes
One God created all men:
All men were moulded out of the same clay,
The Great Potter hath merely varied the shapes of them.
All men are mixed of the same five elements,
No one can make any element less in one, more in another.
Man is born in chains:
Without meeting the True Guru,
He cannot attain liberation.

(Guru Amar Das, *Guru Granth Sahib*, page 1128)

Sikhism has no ordained priesthood or official priestly hierarchy. All Sikhs are equal and the members of each community run their community and their worship themselves.

Guru Nanak saw ritual and caste restrictions as coming between man and God. He stressed the need for every individual to develop their own loving relationship with God and to trust in God's protection and help.

Lord, Thou mighty River, all-knowing, all-seeing,
And I like a little fish in Thy great waters,
How shall I sound Thy depths?
How shall I reach Thy shores?
Wherever I go, I see Thee only,
And snatched out of Thy Waters I die of separation.
I know not the fisher,
I see not the net
But flapping in my agony I call upon Thee for help.
O Lord who pervadeth all things,
In my folly I thought Thou wert far,
But no deed I do can ever be out of Thy sight;
Thou who art All-seeing, all things Thou seest:
I am not worthy to serve Thee,
Nor do I glory in Thy Name.

(Guru Nanak, *Guru Granth Sahib*, page 25)

Guru Nanak emphasised the religious value of living a virtuous disciplined life, active in one's family and community. The ethics of Sikhism stress involvement in the world, the community and the family, and the importance of serving others. Asceticism, celibacy, self-imposed suffering and deprivation, and withdrawal from the world are not valued.

Guru Nanak is deeply admired by Sikhs as a perfect example of piety and holiness. He is regarded as a man chosen by God to reveal His message.

4.2 Guru Nanak's successors

Following Guru Nanak, there was a succession of nine gurus who consolidated in various ways what Guru Nanak had originated.

Guru Nanak	1469–1539
Guru Angad	1504–1552
Guru Amar Das	1479–1574
Guru Ram Das	1534–1581

Guru Arjan Dev	1563–1606
Guru Hargobind	1595–1645
Guru Har Rai	1630–1661
Guru Har Krishan	1656–1664
Guru Tegh Bahadur	1621–1675
Guru Gobind Singh	1666–1708

During the period of the last six Sikh gurus, the expanding Sikh community was increasingly persecuted and harassed by the Mughal emperors who ruled northern India at that time. Military strength and bravery in defence of ideals became an important part of Sikh tradition and remain so today. Stories of the sufferings and bravery of the Sikhs under Mughal rule figure largely in Sikh history.

As Sikhism developed, the basic ideas of Guru Nanak were strengthened; emphasis was laid on social reform, on improving the position of women, and on protecting the oppressed.

4.3 Guru Gobind Singh

The tenth and last living Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, attempted to weld the Sikhs into a visible community and to strengthen them as a military fellowship by giving them five symbols which all initiated men and women should wear: uncut and unshaven hair and beard, a comb to fix the hair, a steel bangle, a symbolic dagger, and special undershorts.

Guru Gobind Singh himself also wore a turban, and the turban has become the best-known mark of a Sikh man.

In order finally to eradicate caste consciousness from the Sikh community, Guru Gobind Singh also asked Sikhs to stop using their family names, which indicated their position in the Hindu caste system. Instead, he asked all men to use the name Singh as their last name, and all women to use the name Kaur (see Section 14 on the Sikh naming system).

Guru Gobind Singh also instituted a form of adult initiation into Sikhism which has in some ways a parallel function to Christian confirmation. The initiation ceremony is known in English as taking Amrit (see 5). The Sikh festival of Baisakhi in April commemorates the formal institution of the Sikhs as a community with the first ceremony of Amrit and the proclaiming of the five symbols of Sikhism by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Guru Gobind Singh died in 1708. Before he died he stated that he would have no human successor. After his death spiritual authority among the Sikhs would pass partly to the Guru Granth Sahib (the Sikh Holy Book), and partly to the Sikh community itself.

All ten Sikh gurus are revered as saints. Many Sikh families have pictures in their homes of the ten gurus and of events in their lives.

4.4 Sikhism in Punjab after the ten gurus

The growing Sikh community suffered a good deal of persecution after the death of Guru Gobind Singh. However, about 100 years after Guru Gobind Singh's death, a Sikh military leader, Maharajah Ranjit Singh, finally drove out the Mughal Emperors from Punjab. He established his rule there, founding an independent Sikh state, which stretched from Kashmir up to the Khyber Pass on the North West Frontier of what is now Pakistan.

Maharajah Ranjit Singh ruled for about 40 years. When he died in 1839 Punjab once again became vulnerable to outside forces. It was finally annexed by the British in 1849.

4.5 The Partition of Punjab, 1947

In 1947, when the British left India, they divided it to form two states: Pakistan (then East and West Pakistan) with a largely Muslim population; and India, with a largely Hindu population, but also containing sizeable Sikh, Christian and other minority religious groups.

The line of Partition drawn in 1947 to divide India and West Pakistan cut right across Punjab, the Sikh homeland, dividing it in two and leaving the larger part in West Pakistan. This division of Punjab between India and Pakistan uprooted many Sikh families who had been living in the area that became part of West Pakistan. They were forced to move their families and all their possessions to within the new boundaries of India. The Partition line also left several places of particular significance to Sikhs, such as the birth-place of Guru Nanak, now called Nankana Sahib, in Muslim Pakistan. It destroyed Sikh hopes of ever regaining an independent Punjab for themselves.

The partition of India was accompanied by great violence between Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand and Muslims on the other. Perhaps half a million people were killed in a massive movement of about 12 million people in both directions between the newly created states. Many Sikhs now living in Punjab State in India were born in what is now Pakistan, and some Sikh families now living in Britain are among those who were uprooted by Partition in 1947.

4.6 Amritsar

The city of Amritsar, in Punjab State in India, is regarded by Sikhs as holy. It was founded by the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das, in the sixteenth century and rapidly became a religious centre for Sikhs, particularly during the festivals of Baisakhi and Diwali. In Amritsar stands the Golden Temple, covered in gold leaf, built by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh guru, and restored by Maharajah Ranjit Singh. The Golden Temple is a place of pilgrimage for devout Sikhs rather as Rome is for devout Roman Catholics.

5. The five signs of Sikhism and the turban

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Sikh guru, gave all Sikhs five signs, known as the five Ks, by which Sikh men and women could be identified and united.

Kesh	–	uncut hair
Kangha	–	a comb
Kara	–	a steel bangle
Kirpan	–	a symbolic dagger
Kaccha	–	special undershorts

Each of the five Ks has a symbolic meaning. The turban traditionally worn by Sikh men has also become an important symbol of Sikhism.

The turban and the five Ks are probably the most important practical aspects of Sikhism for most health workers. Some Sikhs, particularly women, also eat a strict vegetarian diet. The importance of all these to individual Sikhs will vary, and health workers should be alert to individual wishes and worries, discussing with each patient what he or she feels is most important.

Sikhs in Britain differ a good deal in how far they adhere to the five Ks: for example, many men have abandoned the kesh and kangha; most men and women have retained the kara and kaccha. A few have given up all the five signs, but in Britain some Sikhs are now beginning to readopt them, affirming the continuing importance of their religion. Some devout Sikhs will wish to wear the five Ks all the time and will never remove them completely, even when they are ill, in bed or washing. They will feel strongly that none of them should ever be removed without very good reason. Some Sikhs are reluctant to go to a hospital or clinic in Britain in case they are forced to remove a religious item by someone who does not understand its significance. Sikhs

when they die are normally cremated still wearing the five Ks, and men wearing the turban.

Initiated Sikhs

Some adult Sikhs devote themselves more closely to their religion and undergo a special kind of initiation or confirmation known as taking Amrit. Amrit is water and sugar mixed during the ceremony by five devout and initiated Sikhs who sing hymns of blessing while they mix it. Taking Amrit combines in some ways the significance of Christian communion and confirmation.

A Sikh who has taken Amrit and made the accompanying vows of Sikh discipline must adhere to certain Sikh practices very strictly: he or she must say special prayers every day; must wear the five signs of Sikhism (and the turban for men) at all times; must not drink alcohol or smoke; must not eat halal meat; and must follow a strict ethical code. Some Sikhs who have taken Amrit are strict vegetarians.

If Sikhs who have been initiated and taken Amrit remove any of the five Ks except when absolutely necessary, or break any of the other prohibitions, they usually have to go through the Amrit ceremony again and may be given a penance to perform by the community.

Because of the significance of the turban and the five Ks to many Sikhs, and particularly to those few in Britain who have taken Amrit, it is very important, if any of them must be removed, to discuss this with patients and their families and to ask what to do. It is usually quite possible to reach a conclusion satisfactory to both sides.

5.1 Kesh: uncut hair and beard

In Asian tradition the head is regarded as the most sacred part of the body. Guru Gobind Singh forbade the cutting or shaving of any hair on the body or the head, and the long hair (kesh) of the Sikhs is regarded as sacred and should be treated with respect. Most devout Sikh men and women never cut their hair, nor men shave their beards. The hair and beard must always be kept clean and tidy.

Many adult Sikh men and women in Britain have hair which, when loose, reaches down to their waists.

Men

In Britain many Sikh men have cut their hair and shaved their beards. They were often advised to do this in the early days of settlement in the belief that by so doing they might become less conspicuous and more acceptable to English employers. However, many Sikh men are readopting the kesh and the turban as well as the other signs of Sikhism now that their communities have become more established. Some young British-born Sikhs are also beginning to adopt kesh and the turban for the first time as a sign of their Sikh identity.

A Sikh man with long hair wears it fixed in a bun (jura) on top of his head, usually concealed under a turban. Both the hair and beard must be washed regularly. The hair is dried loose and combed out well before rolling up on to the head.

Most Sikh men wear their beards rolled up. A proprietary hair-fixer may be used to fix it. While it is setting a man may wear a piece of muslin to set it in shape. A few men always tie their beards up neatly with a net, even in bed. Long beards must never be trimmed or shaved unless absolutely necessary. A few devout Sikh men always wear their beards loose.

Women

Most Sikh women never cut or trim their hair. They usually wear it fixed in a bun or in a single plait. Young women before marriage may wear their hair in plaits, or sometimes loose.

Traditional Sikh women may cover their hair with a scarf (called a dupatta or a chuni) as a sign of modesty. A woman in hospital may wish to cover her head with her chuni if visitors come to see her, especially older male visitors. A very few orthodox Sikh women may cover their hair with a tight black (or occasionally white) turban.

Children

Sikh boys with uncut hair usually wear it plaited and tied in a bun (jura) on the top of the head. Over the jura boys generally wear a small white cloth, a rumal, or a patka, a larger square of cloth, often muslin or poplin. Very young boys may wear their hair in two coiled plaits pinned to the back of the head.

Young Sikh girls usually wear their hair loose or tied back in a plait or pony tail.

Many Sikh parents in Britain decide to cut their children's hair. However, if a child's hair has been kept long it has the same significance as that of an adult and must be treated with the same respect.

Application

When someone is ill in hospital or at home, it is important to keep their hair as clean and neat as possible, and usually to keep it covered. It is perfectly acceptable for nursing staff to wash the hair and beard. It may be possible to ask a visiting family member to show staff how to fix the hair up, how to tie a turban, and how to fix a long beard.

Conservative Sikhs may become very distressed if hair on the head or on any part of the body is shaved or cut except for good medical reasons or in an emergency. It is most important always to explain the need to the patient or their family beforehand.

The prohibition on cutting or shaving hair specifically bans the use of razors and scissors. Where it is essential to remove body hair it sometimes may be more acceptable to devout Sikhs to use a depilatory cream. Discuss this with the patient.

5.2 Kangha: comb

A man or a woman with uncut hair fixes it on their head in a bun (jura) kept in place by a kangha, a small wooden or plastic semi-circular comb, about two inches in diameter. Devout men and women who wish to carry a kangha but do not wear a turban may carry the kangha in a pocket, or may wear a miniature kangha on a chain around their neck. A kangha should not be removed without permission.

Application

Patients may wish to keep the kangha nearby when they are in bed or wearing hospital gowns. Be aware of this and discuss any problems with the patient.

5.3 Kara: steel bangle

Almost all Sikhs, even those who have cut their hair, wear a steel bangle, kara, on their right wrist. (Occasionally the

bangle is gold.) Left-handed people usually wear the kara on their left wrist. Originally this was to protect the wrist against a bow-string, but nowadays its circular shape serves to remind Sikhs of the unity of God, and of the community of Sikhs. The kara is also a constant and visible reminder to Sikhs that all their actions must be righteous. An adult Sikh should never remove his or her kara. Even non-practising Sikhs may become extremely upset if their kara is removed.

Sikh children usually wear a kara from a very early age, and relatives may give a tiny kara, often gold or silver, to a newly born Sikh baby.

Application

Before any surgery the kara should be covered with tape (like a wedding ring) if at all possible. It should not be removed. In those rare cases when removal is absolutely unavoidable the reason should be carefully explained. The patient may be able to keep the kara on the other wrist or possibly in a pocket or under a pillow.

5.4 Kirpan: symbolic dagger

The kirpan symbolises the Sikhs' readiness to fight in self-defence and to protect the oppressed and needy. It may vary in length from a very small symbolic dagger to a three-foot sword. It is worn under the clothes in a cloth sheath (gatra) slung over the right shoulder and under the left arm at waist level. Left-handed people usually wear the kirpan and sheath the other way round.

In Britain, most Sikhs wear only a small symbolic kirpan or wear a kirpan-shaped brooch or pendant. Some Sikhs may have a kirpan engraved on one side of their kangha (comb). A few Sikh men and women in Britain wear a small kirpan, usually about six inches long, all the time. People may wear a full-sized kirpan in the gurdwara (Sikh temple) on formal religious occasions. The children of very devout Sikhs may wear a miniature kirpan from an early age.

Application

Sikhs who wear a kirpan will wish to wear it all the time even when in bed or showering. (The sheath of the kirpan is

usually wound round the neck when showering so that the kirpan itself remains dry.) Some people may take their kirpan off when they go to bed and put it under the pillow, others keep it on. In the past health workers have removed kirpans from patients thinking that they were dangerous weapons, and so have caused real distress. Sikhs who wear a kirpan may also be deterred from attending clinics if they fear that they will be laughed at or mocked by staff. In cases where a kirpan cannot be worn, the patient should be allowed to keep it within reach. Discuss any problems with the patient.

5.5 Kaccha: special undershorts

Kaccha are undershorts worn by Sikh men and women. They remind Sikhs of the duties of modesty and sexual morality. They may also originally have been adopted because they were more practical in battle than the traditional dhoti (a length of cloth wrapped round the lower half of the body) or loose pajama, and were part of a fighting man's uniform. The legs of traditional-style kaccha reached down to the knees. Nowadays most people wear ordinary underpants instead of the traditional style but still regard them with the same importance.

Devout Sikh men and women never remove their kaccha completely and wear kaccha day and night. If it is necessary to remove them for operations, examinations or childbirth, many Sikhs would prefer to leave one leg or ankle in the kaccha. This is normal practice, for example, during childbirth in Punjab and causes no inconvenience. When changing, many Sikhs are careful never to remove their kaccha completely. One leg is put into the new pair before the old pair is removed. Kaccha may be kept on while showering and the wet pair changed for a dry pair afterwards.

Application

Kaccha should not be removed unnecessarily: conservative patients may wish always to keep their kaccha on, or at least round one leg. Discuss with the patient what to do if there is a problem.

Even less devout Sikhs may be most reluctant to undress completely, particularly in unfamiliar surroundings such as a hospital.

5.6 The turban

Over the long hair (kesh) and the comb (kangha) all devout Sikh men wear a turban (pagri). All the Sikh gurus wore turbans and the turban has become almost the most important external symbol of Sikh identity and honour. It must be treated with care and respect. A very few Sikh women also wear turbans.

Although the turban is not one of the five signs laid down by Guru Gobind Singh, it is extremely important to Sikhs as a visible badge of their identity. Wearing it has the force of a religious edict. British law takes this into account by stating for example that Sikhs on motor cycles can wear turbans instead of crash helmets. People in hospital will usually wish to keep their turbans on and may be very distressed if they are unnecessarily removed.

The turban is usually in two parts, an outer turban and an inner one, though not all Sikhs wear an inner turban.

The outer turban is usually five to six yards long and two to three feet wide. It is starched before tying to stiffen it into the correct shape. Most people tie a fresh turban every day. A few men may remove their turban each evening without untying it and wear it for two or three days, starching and tying a fresh turban as often as necessary.

The small inner turban, the choti (small) pagri, is about three foot by one foot and protects the outer turban and keeps it clean. The inner turban is usually washed and changed every day, particularly if, as is common in tropical countries and is still done by many Asians in Britain, oil is rubbed into the hair and scalp to keep them healthy.

The colour of the turban usually has no significance though certain groups and sects may tie their turbans slightly differently and may wear a particular colour. There are also certain colours for special occasions, e.g. pink or red for weddings, white for funerals. Older people usually wear either white or dark blue turbans. Many East African Sikhs wear black turbans.

Application

In public a Sikh man with uncut hair always covers his head with a turban. When relaxing or in bed he may remove it and wear just the inner turban or a cloth (rumal or patka) to cover the bun of hair (jura) on his head. A patient may

wish to put his outer turban on again if people come to visit him. Even if the turban is removed the hair must always be kept neatly fixed on the top of the head.

The turban, like the hair it covers, is regarded as sacred and is treated with reverence. If it must be removed it should be handled carefully, with two hands, and placed somewhere clean and safe near the patient. It should not be put in a bag with other things or left lying around or be put on the floor.

If a patient cannot remove or retie his turban himself discuss what he would like done. It may be possible to get a family member to come and help him, or to show nursing staff what to do. If it is not possible to fix the turban most men will wish at least to have their hair covered.

Young boys may wish to emulate older men by beginning to wear turbans very early. The same care must be taken.

6. The Guru Granth Sahib

The Holy Book of the Sikhs is called the Guru Granth Sahib. It is also sometimes known as the Adi (first) Granth. Granth means collection or anthology. Before he died, Guru Gobind Singh, the last living guru, entrusted the Guru Granth Sahib to Sikhs as their guru (teacher) and guide for the future. There would be no more human gurus. The Guru Granth Sahib is now therefore the main religious authority for Sikhs. It is the focal point of the gurdwara (Sikh temple) and the basis of all Sikh ceremonies. It is treated with tremendous reverence and love and is regarded as a unique and wonderful treasure of great beauty.

The Guru Granth Sahib is usually consulted for advice at important times; a page is opened at random and a paragraph recited to see what guidance it gives on difficult issues. It is also consulted when deciding the name of a child. (See section 14 below for more about Sikh names.)

The Guru Granth Sahib is written in Punjabi in the Sikh alphabet, Gurmukhi, and is a collection of extremely beautiful devotional hymns and poems by six of the Sikh gurus and by other non-Sikh philosophers. Almost all the hymns and poems were set to music by Guru Arjan Dev who compiled it.

All Sikhs should learn the Gurmukhi script in order to be able to read and understand the Guru Granth Sahib. In Britain many gurdwaras run evening and weekend classes for Sikh children in their mother tongue to enable them to read the Guru Granth Sahib and to join in and follow services.

6.1 In the gurdwara

The Guru Granth Sahib occupies the most important place in the gurdwara (Sikh temple) and is always the focal

point for the congregation. It is placed on cushions on a decorated raised platform (manji) with a canopy (palki) over it. At night it is usually removed and kept in a safe place covered with a decorated cloth. A fly whisk (chauri) is usually waved over the Holy Book by one of the congregation all the time it is open, as a sign of respect for its authority.

Anyone entering the gurdwara bows in front of the Guru Granth Sahib before sitting down. No one sits with their back to the Guru Granth Sahib in the gurdwara. Most people sit cross-legged so that the soles of their feet should not point at the Guru Granth Sahib as they sit.

Physical and spiritual cleanliness are closely linked in Asian culture. Everybody must wash before they pray or read the Guru Granth Sahib. Washing facilities are always provided at a gurdwara.

Reciting hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib to music makes up the main part of Sikh congregational worship. Major festivals and events are often celebrated with an akhand pat, a non-stop recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib by a relay of several devout Sikhs. The Guru Granth Sahib is about five times as long as the Holy Bible and a non-stop reading takes about 48 hours. Instead of an akhand pat, families may arrange a sadarn pat, in which the Guru Granth Sahib is read right through but only during the day, or in the evenings. This takes a week or more. Representatives of the people who arranged the reading must be present throughout the reading.

6.2 At home

A few families may have a complete copy of the Guru Granth Sahib in their homes but a special room (usually upstairs) must be set aside for it where it can be treated with reverence as in the gurdwara, and above which no one will walk. The Guru Granth Sahib must be raised above the floor. Everybody must remove their shoes and cover their heads before entering a room which contains the Guru Granth Sahib. Nobody should enter this room without doing so, and without permission.

6.3 Prayer books

Many Sikhs have their own prayer books (gutka) contain-

ing selections from the Guru Granth Sahib. Prayer books are kept carefully and are wrapped in a small clean cloth, often of silk, or kept in a case for protection.

Sikhs in hospital, especially women, may have a small gutka beside them or under the pillow, containing a selection of suitable hymns to be read in the morning and at night. This should be treated with respect. It must not, for example, be put at the foot of the bed near the patient's feet, nor allowed to fall on the floor. Nothing else should be put on top of it. It should only be touched with clean hands.

7. The gurdwara

7.1 The functions of the gurdwara

Sikhism is essentially a community-based religion. Congregational worship at the gurdwara (Sikh temple) is very important. Ceremonies such as engagements, weddings, name-giving, and ceremonies for the dead also take place at the gurdwara and are very much community events. Non-Sikhs are always welcome at a gurdwara.

In Britain the role of the gurdwara as a meeting place for the whole community is increased. It becomes a clearing house for information and an important centre for social functions. Families go together to the gurdwara for services and to meet other members of the community. Every gurdwara is a place of hospitality for travellers. Anyone in need, Sikh or non-Sikh, may eat and sleep free at the gurdwara and eat in the langar, the communal kitchen. There are often special rooms in the gurdwara in which travellers seeking shelter may sleep. Some gurdwaras in Britain now serve daily meals for unemployed people.

7.2 Entering the gurdwara

Each gurdwara usually contains a prayer room, in which the Guru Granth Sahib is kept, facilities for washing, a kitchen and a communal eating area for shared meals, and usually a small library. In Britain there are often also rooms for children attending classes.

The prayer room is generally bare with no seats. The congregation sits on the carpeted floor. There may be pictures of the ten Sikh gurus on the walls. The focus of the room is the platform (manji) on which the Guru Granth Sahib is placed during the day.

Outside the gurdwara is a yellow flag with the symbol of

Sikhism. Like a steeple, this is intended to mark the position of the gurdwara for people far off. People entering the gurdwara may touch the flagstaff and bow as a sign of reverence. The flagstaff may also be on the roof of the gurdwara building.

Before going into the gurdwara everyone must remove their shoes and cover their heads. Men or boys who do not wear a turban cover their heads with a hat or a handkerchief. Some people wash their hands and feet.

On entering the gurdwara each person walks to the dais on which the Guru Granth Sahib is lying and bows low, touching the ground with the forehead. Some people give an offering of money or food for the communal lunches (langar) and for the poor. Everyone then takes their places in the gurdwara sitting on the floor. By tradition men and women usually sit separately. Everyone sits with the soles of their feet pointing away from the Guru Granth Sahib, as a matter of courtesy.

Any tobacco or cigarettes must be left outside the gurdwara. Smoking was specifically forbidden by Guru Gobind Singh and many Sikhs find smoking disgusting and offensive.

7.3 Congregational worship

Many Sikh families in Britain attend services at the gurdwara for several hours every Sunday and on special festivals. Some Sikhs, especially women and the elderly, also go to the gurdwara on other days in the early mornings or in the evenings.

There is no fixed day for Sikh worship but in Britain Sikhs generally hold their main services on Sundays. Sikh weddings are often held on Sundays in Britain, though they can be on any day. Many families also go to the gurdwara on the first day of each Punjabi month and on the day of the full moon and of the new moon. (There are twelve Punjabi months, each with 28-32 days and adding up to 365 days in all. Punjabi New Year is Baisakhi – the first day of the month of Baisakh – and falls on 13 April.)

Congregational worship (diwan) usually consists of reading and singing hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib accompanied by musicians (ragi) playing drums and a harmonium. The singing of hymns is interspersed with sermons and explana-

tions of the hymns given by the granthi (prayer leader) or the giani (preacher) or by other members of the congregation.

Services in the gurdwara are largely unstructured and informal and are organised according to the wishes of the community. On Sundays they generally last three or more hours but few families stay for the whole service. Children run in and out or sit with their parents.

The service always ends with certain set hymns and prayers. Then all those present are given a small portion of karah parshad, a specially prepared and blessed cooked sweet made of equal quantities of semolina or flour, sugar, and ghee, mixed while prayers are said. This is taken with the right hand. The sharing of karah parshad emphasises the equality and fellowship of all Sikhs.

Sikh families may bring small pieces of karah parshad to relatives in hospital. Even if patients are on specially restricted diets it will be most important for them to be allowed at least a tiny portion of karah parshad. Families may also bring Amrit (see 5) from the gurdwara or, if a family member has been there recently, from the Golden Temple in Amritsar (see 4.6).

7.4 Eating together

As part of the gurdwara there is also a communal kitchen (langar) where food donated by worshippers is prepared by members of the congregation for the whole congregation to eat together at midday. Hymns are sung and prayers chanted while male and female volunteers prepare the food. In Britain a communal meal is usually only served on Sundays and major festivals. In India the larger gurdwaras are well-known centres of hospitality, and most Indian gurdwaras provide food every day.

The meal provided at the gurdwara is usually fairly simple, and consists of, for example, a dal, a vegetable curry, yoghurt, pickle, chapattis and a sweet. It is always vegetarian, to avoid offending vegetarian Sikhs. All visitors, Sikh and non-Sikh, are welcome to share the langar.

Under strict Hindu caste laws people cannot eat food prepared by members of castes lower than their own, and different castes cannot eat together. Cooking and sharing a communal meal together therefore stresses the equality of

all Sikhs and the Sikh gurus' fundamental rejection of caste. It also symbolises the belief that God provides both spiritually and materially: everyone leaves the gurdwara physically satisfied.

7.5 The granthi and the giani

Guru Nanak specifically spoke out against the existence of an elite group of priests. There is no ordained priesthood or religious hierarchy in Sikhism. Any initiated Sikh can lead prayers and read the Guru Granth Sahib in the gurdwara. While he is doing so he is a granthi (reader).

A man who preaches and explains the hymns to the congregation is known as a giani (preacher and scholar). A giani is a learned and devout man who has studied and meditated upon the meaning of the Guru Granth Sahib. On Sundays and special festivals a visiting giani from elsewhere in Britain or from India may preach to the Sikh congregation.

In Britain

Most gurdwaras in Britain employ a granthi as a permanent caretaker and reader. He is responsible for looking after the building, for attending to the Guru Granth Sahib, and for leading the recitation of hymns. In Britain the granthi may also have more of a formal priestly role than in India and may conduct services on a regular basis. His role is, however, practical and he does not necessarily assume spiritual or social responsibility for the congregation.

All Sikhs have equal spiritual authority within the community. Unlike the Christian priest therefore, but like Hindu and Muslim religious functionaries, the granthi does not usually have a pastoral role within the community. The job of visiting the sick, and comforting the elderly and the dying, belongs primarily to other members of the family and to the community.

7.6 The organisation of the gurdwara

The gurdwara is supported by donations from the Sikh community. Money is also given to the gurdwara on special occasions such as weddings.

Each gurdwara is run by a lay elected committee, headed

by a President and a Secretary. The committee administers the gurdwara, is responsible for paying the granthi and for organising functions, and may also deal with minor disputes within the community. Contact with local gurdwaras is usually best made through the Secretary.

Visitors to the gurdwara are always welcomed and, provided they obey the rules of etiquette and are suitably dressed, can participate in services and ceremonies.

In specific matters of policy and practice each Sikh congregation (sangat) usually makes its own decisions, based on its own interpretations of Sikh traditions and values. Major issues without a precedent may be decided for the world-wide Sikh community by the custodians of the five most important gurdwaras, all of which are in India.

7.7 Classes for children

In many gurdwaras in Britain there are classes for Sikh children to learn to read and write Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script, to play Punjabi music and so on. These classes (unlike the classes held for Muslim children) do not usually have a strong religious emphasis and are not compulsory for Sikh children.

8. Private prayer

Congregational prayer at the gurdwara is very important, but most Sikhs also pray privately either at the gurdwara or at home. It is important to wash or shower before one prays.

Many devout Sikhs get up very early (about 4 a.m. or even earlier) every day to pray and recite hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. They shower and then pray for one or two hours before having breakfast and going about their day's work. The very early morning is considered a good time to pray without distraction. Most devout Sikhs pray again in the evening before going to bed. These routines are maintained as far as possible by many devout Sikhs in Britain.

He who deems himself a Sikh of the true Guru
Should rise betimes and contemplate the Name.
In the early hours of the morning he should rise and bathe
And cleanse his soul in a tank of nectar,
As he repeats the Name the Guru taught him.
Thus he washes away the sins of his soul.
Then at dawn he should sing the hymns of the Guru.
And throughout all the busyness of the day
He should hold in his heart the Name.
He who repeats the Name with every breath
Such a Sikh is indeed dear to the Guru:
The Sikh that wins the favour of the Lord
Has received the gift of the Lord's Name from the Guru.
Nanak seeks to kiss the dust under the feet of such a Sikh
Who utters the Name and inspires others to do so!

(Guru Ram Das, *Guru Granth Sahib*, page 305)

Short family prayers may be held in the evening with readings from the Guru Granth Sahib. These are usually led by the mother, who is considered responsible for children's religious education.

Application

Devout Sikhs in hospital are likely to wish to maintain as much of their normal praying routine as possible and will need to wash before praying. Some people will wish to wash and pray before breakfast.

Privacy during prayer (possibly with bed-curtains drawn) will be appreciated. If patients cannot wash properly they may wish to make a symbolic wash by sprinkling a little water over themselves. A small bowl of water will be required. If possible, discuss patients' wishes with them when they come onto the ward.

Prayer beads

A few Sikhs use a mala, a string of beads or knots to help them keep count when they are praying. Devout Sikhs may like to have a mala near them all the time and are likely to bring one into hospital. A mala, like a gutka (prayer book) should be treated with reverence and respect.

9. Sikh families

9.1 Family duties

Guru Nanak stressed that men and women could come closest to God by being active members of their families, not by withdrawing from community and family life. Providing for the family and caring for all its members' emotional and spiritual well-being are religious duties for Sikhs. In Asian culture the family is traditionally the extended family, a much larger unit, and including people whom most British people would regard as distant relatives. For most Sikhs in Britain obligations to family members in the Indian subcontinent and in East Africa remain very strong.

As in Asian tradition generally, sons are considered responsible for the care and support of their parents as they grow older. This contrasts strongly with traditional British patterns. When a son marries he and his wife often remain with his parents and bring up their children there. In Britain, with smaller houses and greater job mobility, this happens less frequently, but generally at least one son and his family, usually the oldest, will remain with his parents.

Sikhs are expected to marry, and both men and women are expected to take an active part in bringing up children. There is a very strict code of sexual morality to protect families and communities. Premarital and extra-marital sex are forbidden. Deep shame follows the discovery of illicit liaisons, and this affects the whole family.

Parents and children generally attend the gurdwara together on Sundays and on other holy days and festivals. All those members of the extended family who can, must attend the gurdwara on certain very important family occasions, such as the ceremony of naming a child, a wedding, and on the tenth day after a family death.

When a relative is ill all family members have strong

responsibilities towards them. Everyone who can must visit a sick relative to give comfort and support. Female relatives will often take over the care of a child if its own mother is sick. If an older relative back in India is ill, family members may go at very short notice to look after them for long periods of time.

9.2 The roles of men and women

One of Guru Nanak's explicit aims was to raise the status of women. Men and women are considered equal in Sikh tradition and women have played an important part in Sikh history, particularly at the time of persecution by the Mughals. Ideally, women should play an equal role with men in Sikh worship, though in practice men usually take most of the major roles.

Sikh women are educated equally with men and have a good deal of freedom and authority, though, as among Hindus and Muslims, there is a system of etiquette which influences behaviour between the sexes in public. Socially and within the family, Sikh women should have equal authority with men, though the influence of Hindu and Muslim attitudes in Punjab and of a male-dominated society mean that, as in most societies, Sikh women are not always given equal rights, and that most decisions are ultimately made by men. In Britain Sikh women tended to be first among the women of all Asian communities to go out to work.

Traditional female virtues, such as decorum and modesty, are important to Sikh women, and are not seen as conflicting with equality of the sexes. In Asian cultural tradition, men and women do not mix socially and boys and girls are generally segregated from puberty.

10. Practical care

Sikh men and women should be modest about their bodies. Many Sikhs find any exposure offensive and shocking: co-operation and thought may be required from staff to avoid causing unnecessary embarrassment or distress. Older people are likely to be particularly sensitive in this matter.

10.1 Women

Sikh women should always cover their legs, breasts and upper arms. For a conservative Sikh woman to uncover her legs is as shocking and humiliating as for an English woman to be required to walk around in public with her breasts exposed. Backless hospital gowns, garments that leave the legs bare or have a low neckline, are immodest and humiliating for conservative Sikh women, particularly in the presence of strangers, especially men.

Most women do not expect to undress fully except when they are completely alone. In the subcontinent, women do not usually undress for a physical examination but uncover only parts of themselves at a time. This procedure may avoid distress for conservative Sikh women in Britain.

Clothes

Most Sikh women wear salwar kameez. The kameez (shirt) is a long tunic with long or half sleeves. The salwar are trousers. (The Urdu pronunciation is shalwar.) The width of the salwar (trouser) legs vary according to fashion, particularly among younger women. There is also a long scarf called a chuni, also called a dupattah, which should lie over the shoulders and across the breasts; a woman may pull one end of her dupattah over her head as a sign of respect and modesty in front of strangers, older people or

men.

Salwar and kameez are often worn as both day and night wear. They are loosened at night for comfort. Women coming into hospital should be informed that they may continue to wear salwar kameez if they wish, since this is more comfortable for them and avoids embarrassment over showing the legs or arms. Buying British-style nightdresses specially for a stay in hospital is often done but is an unnecessary expense.

Some Sikh women may wear a sari, particularly on special occasions. A blouse and underskirt are worn beneath the sari.

Sikh girls and women who wear Western dress will often wear trousers or long skirts to cover their legs.

Wedding bangles

When a Sikh woman marries she usually receives a number of glass or gold wedding bangles, equivalent in significance to a British wedding ring. These are never removed unless her husband dies, when they are removed and broken to symbolise her loss. Some women in hospital may be very reluctant to remove their wedding bangles if they are asked to do so. It may be impossible to remove them without breaking them. If at all possible, wedding bangles should be taped rather than removed if a woman is reluctant to remove them.

Wedding ring

Some Sikh women in Britain now wear a wedding ring instead of, or as well as, wedding bangles. This should be treated like the wedding ring of an English woman. Asian wedding rings, unlike traditional British wedding rings, usually contain a precious stone.

Bindi

A few Sikh women may wear a bindi, a small dot on the forehead. A bindi has religious connotations among Hindus but for Sikhs it is generally worn as fashionable decoration coloured to match whatever a woman is wearing.

Other jewellery and makeup

Sikh women may wear other bangles, jewellery and make-up but these do not normally have special religious signifi-

cance. If difficulties arise, discuss them with the patient herself or with her family.

10.2 Men

Conservative Sikh men will wish to cover themselves from the waist to the knees: nudity, even in the presence of other men, may be offensive.

Clothes

Most Indian men wear a Western-style shirt and trousers but some may wear traditional dress to relax in at home. Traditional Sikh male dress is a shirt (kameez) and loose trousers (pajama). Older men may wear pajama and a shirt with a high collar and buttons down the front (kurta), or a longer coat-length echkan. Many Sikh men wear a turban (see 5).

10.3 The five Ks

Most Sikh men and women will wear one or more of the five Ks described above: kesh, kangha, kara, kirpan, kaccha (see 5). These have important religious significance and should not be removed unnecessarily. If they must be removed this must be discussed with the patient.

10.4 Physical contact between men and women

Conservative Sikhs regard physical contact between a woman and a man who is not her husband as forbidden. To many older Sikhs the free and easy personal and physical relationships between men and women in Britain are signs of a morally corrupt society.

Even in a medical setting, some women will react strongly against any physical contact with men, as, for example, in an examination by a male doctor or in the presence of a man, or even with male ambulance drivers coming into the home. An internal examination by a man can be traumatic. Conservative women are likely to feel shocked and degraded by such contacts.

Sikh women should where possible be examined by women doctors and men by male doctors. Where it is impos-

sible to provide a female doctor to examine a female patient, a non-Asian doctor, who is not part of the culture of the patient, and so does not share her shame, may sometimes be less distressing than a fellow Asian.

Physical contact between members of the same sex, on the other hand, is perfectly acceptable, and can overcome barriers of language and unfamiliarity. Putting one's arm round a worried patient, for example, may give tremendous reassurance and comfort.

10.5 Washing

Most people in the Indian subcontinent take showers rather than baths. Many Asian people dislike baths and consider sitting in a bath full of water dirty. They do not feel clean unless they have washed under running water. Where showers are not provided people may prefer to use a small bowl to pour water over their heads. In British-style bathrooms this may cause problems with water splashing onto the floor.

Most Asian meals are eaten with the fingers. People who eat with their fingers will wish to wash their hands before and after a meal.

In Asia the use of the left hand is traditionally restricted to washing the private parts after using the lavatory. The right hand is generally used for eating, handling things, pointing and so on. It is important to remember this when, for example, fixing drips or placing food where patients can reach it. When handing something to a Sikh it is often considered courteous to use the right hand.

10.6 Menstruation and birth

Some Sikh women, particularly older women, influenced by strong Hindu traditions, may consider that they are unclean during menstruation and for forty days after giving birth. They may not touch the Guru Granth Sahib. They may not have intercourse. At the end of the period of uncleanness they normally take a ritual shower and clean themselves, their clothes and their room thoroughly. They then return to normal life.

11. Sikh dietary restrictions

11.1 Vegetarians and non-vegetarians

The only explicit Sikh prohibition regarding food is against eating halal meat (killed in the Muslim way). None of the Sikh gurus specifically prohibited the eating of meat but some Sikhs, particularly women, follow the strong Hindu tradition of vegetarianism. This includes not eating eggs, which are a source of life. A devout vegetarian Sikh who has eaten meat or eggs, even unknowingly, may wish to purify him or herself through a special religious ceremony at the gurdwara. Sikh vegetarians may have difficulty in getting suitable food in British institutions such as hospitals and schools.*

Of the non-vegetarian Sikhs, very few eat beef, since the cow is regarded as sacred and is protected in India. Some people will not eat pork since the pig is a scavenging animal in most tropical countries and its meat is often regarded as dirty. The processed pork foods available in Britain, such as prepacked sliced ham and sausages, may be more acceptable.

In Britain Sikh families have often become less strict about what they eat, and many men and children and young people eat chicken, mutton, fish and eggs. Sikh women tend to be more conservative about their food. In Punjab most Sikh women are vegetarian and in Britain many remain strict vegetarians. On the whole, Sikhs from East Africa are less likely to be vegetarian.

For each individual Sikh, dietary restrictions are a matter of conscience and religious belief. Although, as a group, Sikhs are generally less strict than Hindus and Muslims in

* For more details on Sikh foods and diets see *Asian Foods & Diets* in this series, available from the National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 2HN.

adhering to dietary restrictions, the dietary practices of each individual are still binding to him or her. Discuss with patients individually what they do and do not wish to eat.

11.2 Cooking, serving etc.

A strict vegetarian Sikh cannot eat meat, fish, eggs, or meat products. Any dish containing non-vegetarian ingredients is prohibited: puddings containing suet, cakes cooked in tins greased with lard or containing eggs.

Most people will also not eat any food that has been in contact with prohibited foods: a salad from which a slice of ham has been removed has already been contaminated; utensils that have not been washed since they last touched prohibited food contaminate any other food they touch; the same spoon cannot be used to serve minced meat for other patients and potatoes for vegetarians. In addition, since the name of a dish often gives no clue to its ingredients and since few older Asian people are familiar with British recipes, many people will refuse all but the plainest boiled or fresh vegetables or fruit. If a strict vegetarian does not know what is in a dish and what cooking fat was used he or she cannot eat it.

In cases where patients are unable to eat any of the food offered by the hospital and no other foods are available, it may be possible to provide simple but nourishing snacks until more suitable food can be found. Milk, fresh or dried fruit, salad, plain vegetables and nuts will almost always be acceptable.

11.3 Fasting

A very few devout Sikhs, particularly women, fast in the same way as Hindus, often on the first day of the Punjabi month or at the time of the full moon.

For Sikhs and Hindus fasting involves restricting oneself to particular foods, for example, only fruit, or only yoghurt or nuts, for a day. It is unlikely that Sikhs in hospital will wish to fast but for those who do it will be important to discuss what they can and can't eat.

11.4 Alcohol

Alcohol is forbidden to Sikhs. However, many less devout Sikh men drink, particularly in Britain where alcohol is easily available and pubs are social gathering places for men. This is severely disapproved of by conservative and devout Sikhs.

11.5 Tobacco

Tobacco was strictly forbidden by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, and many Sikhs, particularly older people, find smoking revolting and offensive. They may be offended by someone smoking in their home or in the same room, or by ashtrays near where they are eating. Tobacco in any form must never be taken into a gurdwara.

12. Family planning

12.1 Contraception

There are no religious prohibitions against family planning for Sikhs. However, some Sikhs, particularly in their early years in Britain, may not wish to use contraceptive methods, because the idea of family planning is unfamiliar to them or because of cultural traditions regarding the desirable number of children. In rural Asian societies a large family ensures family prosperity and survival and is regarded as a blessing. Traditional Sikh couples are likely to continue to feel that a large family is desirable and to see children as the focus of family life. Many younger Sikh couples in Britain are deciding to limit their families.

12.2 Abortion

Abortion is generally disapproved of. Women are only likely to consider abortion if their situation is desperate and deeply shameful, for example, if an unmarried woman becomes pregnant.

12.3 Infertility

The overwhelming importance of children, and especially of sons, in traditional Asian culture can have serious implications for couples in cases of infertility or related problems, for example, if a woman needs a hysterectomy.

The woman, in a couple, is generally considered responsible for the ability to produce children. A woman who cannot have children is very likely to feel that she has failed as a wife. Her husband and in-laws may in some cases reject her, and failure to produce a child may lead to a divorce.

Men may be extremely reluctant to attend infertility

clinics with their wives and may feel humiliated and angry at any suggestion that they are in some way responsible. Considerable tact and time may be required to overcome this problem.

The procedures of an infertility clinic are anyway likely to be completely unfamiliar and possibly very offensive. Patients whose English is not very good will need an interpreter. The interpreter should be of the same sex as the patient and should be married.

13. Sikhism and caste

Hindu society is divided into castes and subcastes, each division reflecting the place of origin, the traditional hereditary occupation, and the social status of its members. Social contact between people from different castes is traditionally prohibited, and people of lower castes are severely restricted.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, rejected the caste system completely, stressing to his followers that moral character is what matters to God, not the station into which an individual is born. Such features of Sikh practice as communal meals and sitting together on the floor in the gurdwara, go directly against the restrictions of the traditional Hindu caste system. However, most of the early Sikhs were converts from Hinduism, and retained a strong sense of caste differences.

The tenth and last living Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, attempted to eradicate caste awareness among Sikhs by abolishing the use of family names, which indicated caste position. He instructed all Sikhs to use the religious names Singh (for men) and Kaur (for women) instead of their family names. This is still normal practice in Punjab, particularly in rural areas.

Nevertheless, deeply rooted caste-awareness, which was built into the fabric of society in much the same way as class is in Britain, was difficult to destroy completely. An awareness of caste status has continued to influence Sikhs, particularly with regard to social life and obligations and to marriage.

In Britain there are Sikhs from several caste and subcaste groups, each of which has tended to settle and worship separately. Some groups are more traditional and orthodox in their religious practices and the characters of Sikh communities in Britain may therefore differ in this respect.

14. The Sikh naming system

14.1 Dropping the family name

An individual's family name traditionally indicates the caste to which they belong. To abolish awareness of caste, Guru Gobind Singh instructed Sikhs to stop using their family, i.e. caste, name, and to use only Singh (for men) or Kaur (for women) as last names. Traditionally, therefore, all Sikh men and boys use only a first name plus Singh: Amarjit Singh, Narinder Singh, and all Sikh girls and women use only a first name plus Kaur: Kuldeep Kaur, Narinder Kaur. This is normal practice in Punjab, though family names are sometimes used by Sikhs living in towns and cities.

Here is an example of a Sikh family using the traditional naming system:

Husband:	Jaswinder Singh
Wife:	Kuldeep Kaur
Sons:	Amarjit Singh Mohan Singh
Daughters:	Harbans Kaur Satwant Kaur

Records in Punjab are usually filed in order of first name. Further identification is achieved by noting the name of the husband or father:

Amarjit Singh son of Jaswinder Singh

Kuldeep Kaur wife of Jaswinder Singh

The use of a male or female religious title as a last name has caused much confusion in British records, which are based on the British naming system and rely on the last name for identification and retrieval, also expecting most families to share a last name.

14.2 Sikh names: the basic system

Most Sikhs have either two or three names, depending on whether they use a family name or not. Sikhs in Britain are more likely to use a family name.

Baljit Kaur Gill (F)

Ravinder Singh (M)

The *first name* is the personal name, as in the British system, equivalent to the British Christian name. It is used alone by family and close friends.

Most Sikh first names do not indicate sex, and can be both male and female. Sikh first names often end in -jit, -inder, or -want, e.g. Baljit, Ravinder, Kulwant.

The *second name* is a religious name, showing that the person is a Sikh and indicating sex. Boys and men have the religious name Singh (lion), and girls and women the religious name Kaur (princess).

The first and religious names are usually used together. The traditional Sikh polite form of address is first name + religious name, e.g. Baljit Kaur, Ravinder Singh (not title + family name as in the British naming system).

Many Sikhs use only their first name + Singh or Kaur. They do not use a shared family name.

The *third name* is originally a hereditary caste name, indicating the family's caste position. Since Sikhism rejects caste, Sikhs traditionally do not use a family name.

Where a family name is used it is carried down the male line as in the British system: a wife adopts her husband's family name on marriage and children take their father's family name.

14.3 Adopting a family name in Britain

In Britain many Sikhs have begun to use their hereditary family name again in order to fit in with the British system and avoid confusion in records, although this goes against religious tradition.

For example, Jaswinder Singh might begin to use his family's hereditary name, actually the family's caste name, which is Dhillon. He becomes Jaswinder Singh Dhillon. Unless great care is taken, however, there is a danger that Sikhs who adapt their names in Britain will end up with

duplicate records: one under the name used on arrival in Britain, e.g. Jaswinder Singh, and another under the newly adopted full name, e.g. Jaswinder Singh Dhillon. Some people may end up recorded under different names in different departments.

Here is an example of a Sikh family in Britain in which all the members have adopted a hereditary family name:

Husband:	Rajinder Singh Grewal
Wife:	Swaran Kaur Grewal
Son:	Mohan Singh Grewal
Daughter:	Kamaljeet Kaur Grewal

In some Sikh families the younger members and those who have most contact with British institutions, generally the men, adopt a family name, while more conservative older members and women do not. For example, Mohan Singh Grewal's mother may be Swaran Kaur (not Mrs Grewal).

Here is an example of a Sikh family in which only the husband and the younger children (in this case born in Britain) use a hereditary family name:

Husband:	Baljit Singh Johal
Wife:	Surjeet Kaur
Sons:	Ravinder Singh Inder Singh Johal
Daughters:	Pritam Kaur Jaswant Kaur Narinder Kaur Johal

Care must be taken to marry up all the records of one patient, and to check, rather than assume, what name each person uses.

Some Sikh parents in Britain may give their children only a first name and a hereditary family name, omitting Singh or Kaur, e.g. Dilvinder Dhillon. In this case it is most important to record the person's sex since Sikh first names can be either male or female and do not indicate sex.

14.4 Using Singh as a family name

In a few cases where a family does not use a hereditary family name, Sikh women, following the pattern whereby

women adopt their husband's last names, may use the name Singh (strictly speaking a male religious title) as their surname: Narinder Kaur married to Jaswinder Singh, may choose to become, for the purpose of official records, Narinder Kaur Singh, or Mrs Singh. This is however fairly unusual since it makes nonsense of the Sikh naming system to use a male title for a woman. In such cases, remember to use the woman's full name, Narinder Kaur Singh, not Narinder Singh which is a man's name. Check also that she has *chosen* to use Singh as a surname and that she hasn't just been given that name in British records by accident.

Some children may, in the same way, use their father's last name, Singh, as a surname. Check again that this is what the family wishes and has not been imposed on them.

Singh is mainly used as a surname in this way by the few East African Sikh families in Britain, who have had contact with a British-style administration in East Africa.

14.5 Mr Kaur is never correct

Kaur can never be correctly recorded as a surname for a male Sikh, since there is no convention whereby men and boys adopt female last names. It is never correct to call a Sikh man Mr Kaur. Ask for his real surname immediately (either Singh or a hereditary family name).

14.6 Forms of address

Formal usage

The traditional Sikh polite form of address is First name + Singh/Kaur: Amarjit Singh, Satwant Kaur. In Britain it is acceptable to precede this with a Mr/Miss/Mrs/Ms.

Sikhs who use a family name in Britain can usually be addressed by title + surname: Mr. Gill, Mrs Sidhu.

However, because the names Singh and Kaur have a religious significance it is important to many devout Sikhs that Singh and Kaur are always used as part of their names, even if they have adopted a family name: Jaswinder Singh Gill, Amarjit Singh Gill. Use the person's full name unless you know that title + surname alone is acceptable.

Informal usage

For children or close friends use the first name alone, as in Britain: Amarjit, Satwant.*

* For more details on the Sikh and other Asian naming systems and specific guidance on how to record and use them, see the training pack *Asian Names & Records* in this series, available from the National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 2HN.

15. Birth and childhood ceremonies

Ceremonies may vary a good deal between different Sikh families and communities.

15.1 At the birth

There is usually no religious ceremony at the birth of a Sikh baby.

Some Sikhs influenced by Hindu practices believe in astrology. A few Sikh parents may wish to know the exact time of their child's birth in order to prepare an astrological chart for it. This may be referred to later in life, for example, when a marriage is being arranged.

15.2 At the gurdwara

When a baby is about forty days old its parents usually take it to the gurdwara with the family to pray and give thanks. At the same time they usually choose a name for the child. Prayers are said by the congregation. Amrit (see 5) is mixed and blessed. A drop of Amrit is put on the baby's tongue and the rest is drunk by the mother. (Like women from other Asian groups, Sikh women may wish to rest for the first forty days after giving birth, in order to regain their strength.)

To choose the baby's name the Guru Granth Sahib is opened at random and the first letter of the first word of the first complete paragraph on the left-hand side of the page is read out. A name is then chosen for the baby to begin with that letter, often by an older member of the family. The name is announced to the congregation. (Until this naming ceremony the baby will usually be known by a pet name.) The family then distributes food to the congregation in celebration and gives a donation to the gurdwara.

Some families may hold an akand pat, a non-stop reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, to celebrate a birth.

16. Marriage

For Sikhs, as for Christains, marriage is a sacrament as well as a social ceremony, and is very highly valued.

They are not truly husband and wife,
Whose bodies merely come together;
Only they are truly wedded
When two bodies have one soul.
(Guru Ram Das, *Guru Granth Sahib*, page 78)

In Asian tradition marriages are usually arranged by the families of the young people concerned, though this practice is being modified both in the subcontinent and in Britain. Young people nowadays play an increasingly important part in the choice of a partner and in the final decision. Nevertheless, marriage is seen very much as a union between and a matter for two whole families, not just as a private union between two individuals. As a result parents and older relatives usually play a key role.

It is considered normal and proper that every Sikh should marry and raise a family. It is also believed that a Sikh should marry another Sikh to avoid future conflict and tension. Marriages between Sikhs and Hindus do occur, depending on caste and subcaste position. Marriage between a Sikh and a Muslim is virtually unheard of.

In the Sikh community marriage is not permitted between two people from within the same sub-caste. All the members of one sub-caste share a hereditary family sub-name and regard themselves as one family. To marry within one's sub-caste would be considered equivalent to marrying a brother or sister.

Most Sikh communities give female dowries, although this is not strictly speaking part of Sikhism.

In Britain, because of the weather, Sikh weddings usually

take place indoors, often in the gurdwara, sometimes in a hall or a home. Like most Sikh events, a wedding usually takes place in the presence of a large congregation. During the short ceremony there are hymns and prayers and the bride and groom walk four times around the Guru Granth Sahib while the whole congregation sings a wedding hymn composed by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru. At the end of the service the whole congregation receives karah parshad (see 7.3). The bride traditionally wears a red and gold sari or salwar kameez and the groom's turban is usually yellow, orange or red. A wedding reception, often lavish, to which as many friends and relatives as possible are invited, follows the ceremony. As in British and most Asian traditions, the bride's family usually pays for the wedding.

In Britain some gurdwaras are registered for the celebration of marriages. However many Sikhs have a civil registry office wedding as well, either around the same time as the religious ceremony or several weeks beforehand.

Before the wedding there is also a formal engagement ceremony at which the two families exchange gifts. This usually takes place in front of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Both widows and widowers may remarry. Widows are more likely to remarry if they are young and have no children. In general, however, it is considered that widows should withdraw from the world and lead quiet, restricted, sober lives.

17. Divorce

Marriage is regarded by Sikhs as an indissoluble sacrament. Divorce has been permitted in Indian law since 1955 but is almost non-existent in conservative Sikh communities. In Britain the divorce rate among Sikhs is increasing, but divorce is still regarded by most people as shameful and only occurs when the marital situation is desperate.

There is a strong stigma attached to divorced people, particularly women. A woman who seeks a divorce may be risking social disapproval and rejection by her community. However, younger divorced women may marry again.

18. Death and cremation

18.1 Care of the dying

A devout Sikh who is very ill or dying may receive comfort from hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. If the patient cannot recite the hymns himself, the family or a reader (granthi) from the Sikh temple may read them instead. If no family members are present, any practising Sikh can be asked to give help and religious comfort; it is probably best in such cases for hospital staff to contact the local gurdwara, provided the patient wishes, and to ask someone to come and attend the patient. The hospital chaplain may be able to give help and advice in this matter.

18.2 Last offices

Generally, Sikhs are not particular about non-Sikhs touching the body, and health workers may therefore perform the normal last offices provided the family permits. However, in Asian tradition the family is responsible for all ceremonies and rites connected with death, and many Sikh families will wish to wash and lay out the body themselves. Where possible, consult the family about what they wish hospital staff to do.

If the family wishes to wash the body themselves, health workers should do the following: close the eyes and straighten the limbs; wrap the body in a plain sheet without religious emblems.

Normal Sikh practice is for the family to wash and dress the body. Every Sikh is buried wearing the five signs of Sikhism (see 5). Men are wrapped in a white cotton shroud with a turban; older women are wrapped in a white shroud and younger women in a red shroud.

The body of a still-born baby or a foetus miscarried in

late pregnancy should normally be given to the parents so that they can perform the normal funeral rites.

18.3 Post-mortems etc.

There is no religious prohibition against post-mortem examinations but it is important that cremation should take place as soon as possible. There is no prohibition against blood transfusions, organ transplants or any other medical procedure.

Suicide is generally regarded as tragic but not as a grievous and terrible sin. It does not require any variation in religious customs.

18.4 Cremation

Sikhs are cremated, not buried. The cremation should take place as soon as possible and in India it usually occurs within 24 hours of the death. A still-born baby or a baby who dies within a few days of birth may be buried rather than cremated.

In Britain there may be variations in the procedure preceding the cremation. Most commonly, the coffin is brought first to the family home and opened for a short time so that the family and all the assembled relatives can see the dead person for the last time. After brief prayers the family and relatives accompany the coffin to the gurdwara where there are more prayers before moving on to the crematorium. It is one of the important duties of the dead person's heir, usually the eldest son, to light the funeral pyre. He will probably expect to press the button at the cremation, and this can often be arranged.

The ashes are collected and scattered in a river or in the sea, or taken home by a family member to be scattered in a special holy place, often the River Sutlej at Anandpur in Punjab where Sikhism was founded.

After the cremation the family and relatives usually go back to the gurdwara for further brief prayers. They may wash at the gurdwara before going to pray. Most people will also take a full shower when they get home.

18.5 Mourning

In the days following the death the whole family is in mourning. Relatives and close friends will come to keep the family company and comfort them, and to share their grief and support them. Members of the close family, particularly women, may sometimes not eat until the cremation of the body has taken place. Women may wear white after the death as a sign of mourning.

After about ten days a ceremony – Bhaug – is held. This is preceded by a complete reading of the Guru Granth Sahib with the family, friends, and relatives present. The Bhaug ceremony may take place at the family home or at the gurdwara.

Coping with the unfamiliar organisational side of death and cremation in Britain can be extremely distressing for bereaved relatives. Practical help may be needed, for example in contacting undertakers and explaining what is required, contacting employers, dealing with paperwork and so forth.

19. Sikh festivals

The three most important Sikh festivals are Baisakhi, the birthday of Guru Nanak, and Diwali. Except for Baisakhi, the dates of Sikh festivals vary slightly from year to year. Most families attend the gurdwara for congregational prayers on all major festivals and anniversaries. In India the Guru Granth Sahib is usually carried in procession round the town on important festivals.

In Punjab both Baisakhi and Diwali are celebrated with holidays in the same way as Christmas in Britain. Diwali is probably the greater of the two festivals. Most Sikh patients in hospital would like to go home over these two holidays if possible, in the same way as many patients are allowed home over Christmas. Non-urgent tests, operations or investigations for Sikhs should be avoided as far as possible at these times. Routine home visits should wait where possible till after the festival.

Sikh patients in hospital during Baisakhi and Diwali may receive cards and presents. Family and friends may wish to visit them throughout the day bringing presents and special festive food. Patients who are on a restricted diet should be allowed a taste of these if at all possible. During Baisakhi and Diwali, relatives of Sikh patients may also bring sweets or cakes to share with all the other patients on the ward.

Sikh patients in hospital at these times may like to celebrate together in much the same way as would English people in hospital abroad over Christmas, and will be grateful for recognition that this is a special festive time for them. It may be possible to discuss in advance the significance of Baisakhi or Diwali and what provision Sikh patients would like. Staff and other patients should be encouraged to wish any Sikh patients Happy Baisakhi or Happy Diwali.

19.1 The Sikh year

13/14 April	*Baisakhi* Sikh New Year's Day, commemorates the formation of the Sikh community by Guru Gobind Singh and the institution of Amrit in 1699. Celebrated by prayers in the gurdwara, songs and (particularly in India) processions. Relatives exchange presents and new clothes. Also celebrates the beginning of the Spring Harvest in Punjab.
May/June	*Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev*, the fifth Guru, in 1606.
August	*Rakhri* (same as the Hindu festival of Raksha Bandhan) Celebration of the bond between brothers and sisters. Sisters buy or make tinsel bracelets which they tie on their brothers' wrists. Brothers give gifts in return and promise to support and protect their sisters all their lives. Bracelets may be sent by post between sisters and brothers in different countries.
August/September	*Installation of Guru Granth Sahib* as the successor to the living Sikh Gurus by Guru Gobind Singh.
October	*Dusehra* Indian national holiday to celebrate an episode in the legend of the Ramayana. Family visits and parties, fireworks and re-enacting of the event in theatres and in the open air.
October/November	*Diwali* Festival of light and deliverance for both Sikhs and Hindus it also commemorates the release of Guru Hargobind (the sixth Guru) from Mughal imprisonment. Gurdwaras and homes

	are lit up with coloured lights, candles or small oil lamps. There is congregational worship in the gurdwara. Children receive presents. The date may vary by one or two days from the date on which Hindus celebrate Diwali.
November	*Birth of Guru Nanak*, the founder of Sikhism.
December	*Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur*, the ninth Guru, in Delhi in 1675.
December/January	*Birth of Guru Gobind Singh*, the tenth and last Guru.
February/March	*Hola Mohalla* Five-day Spring festival, at the same time as Hindu festival of Holi. Family celebration.

The precise dates of Sikh festivals can usually be obtained each year from the local gurdwara, your local Community Relations Council or from the Commission for Racial Equality, Elliot House, 10-12 Allington Street, London SW19 5EH (01-828 7022).

20. Note to trainers

This book is not necessarily intended as the basis of a training session, though it can be used as such by people who wish to run a session specifically on aspects of Sikhism and on caring for Sikh patients. It may also be read purely as a source of background information which can then be fed with other information into more general training sessions for health workers.

20.1 Running a training session on the care of Sikh patients

Religious practices and prohibitions make little sense out of context. The religious practices of non-Christian patients are too often seen merely as difficulties, problems, and sources of inconvenience for health workers – not the ideal starting point for a supportive relationship or for mutual respect. For many Sikh people their religion is the focus of their lives. Consequently, some introduction to the basic ideas behind Sikhism and Sikh practices is essential if health workers are to be equipped to work sensitively and knowledgeably with their Sikh patients and clients.

The type and length of training session to be run will depend on the time available, the amount of knowledge the trainees already have, and whether there is a significant Sikh population living locally. Most non-Sikh trainers and tutors will also be naturally and justifiably reluctant to conduct a training session about a religion of which they are not followers. For this reason Sikh outside speakers who can speak of their own faith and practices and from their own experience should be brought in wherever possible.

20.2 Suggested aims and content of a training session

Aims

- to give trainees a basic understanding of and respect for the fundamental ideas and values of Sikhism
- to discuss how far these ideas and values are likely to be important to Sikhs in Britain
- to describe Sikh religious practices likely to be important to trainees in their work with patients and clients, and to discuss their practical implications
- to enable trainees to discuss Sikh beliefs and practices sensitively with Sikh people from a basis of some knowledge and confidence

Content

(Precise content will depend on the needs and situations of trainees.)

1. Where the Sikhs in Britain originated
2. Brief historical outline: development of Sikhism, roots in Hinduism, Guru Nanak and the other human gurus, Mughal oppression, Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru Granth Sahib, Sikhism as a Punjabi religion
3. The main beliefs of Sikhism: belief in one God, belief in reincarnation, the need for an individual direct relationship with God, rejection of caste, raised status of women, importance of actions rather than ritual, spirit of community
4. The five Ks and the turban: their significance, practical implications for health workers
5. Possible dietary restrictions: implications for health workers, food in hospital and during illness, provision
6. The Sikh naming system: its origins, adaptation in Britain, avoiding confusion
7. Family and community values: men and women, marriage and divorce, family planning, the role of the gurdwara in the community and the values it stresses

8. Birth and childhood ceremonies: provision in hospital
9. Care of the dying: family involvement, last offices, guidance for hospital staff
10. The major Sikh festivals and their significance: Sikh patients in hospital
11. The local Sikh community: local gurdwaras and other Sikh organisations

20.3 Using outside speakers

Speakers should be asked to spend a good proportion of the session on topics connected with health care and on practices that are likely to be important in caring for people in institutions.

It is important to discuss the aims of the session with them beforehand, and any questions or problems that trainees are likely to raise during the session.

It may be useful to ask the speaker to read quickly through this book to help focus on the issues that are likely to be important, and to raise and discuss issues on which he or she disagrees. A speaker should bear in mind the regional and class differences that exist between Sikhs living in Britain and the need to outline possible variations in practice among local communities.

Local Community Relations Councils, community organisations, colleges or Industrial Language Training Units may be able to suggest suitable speakers. Sikh nurses, doctors or other staff might also be available to speak. In addition, use any Sikh trainees in the group as speakers or as additional contributors.

Where it is not possible to get a speaker to come and talk to trainees, it may at least be possible for the trainer or tutor to visit Sikh patients and families before the session and talk to them about their religious beliefs and practices, the effect of living in Britain on their way of life, the difficulties they face in contacts with the Health Service, what they would like health workers to know about their religion, and how they would like Health Service provision to take account of their religious needs and practices.

APPENDIX: Glossary of Sikh terms and approximate guide to pronunciation

Most of the Asian words in the text are in Punjabi.

The pronunciation of some words is difficult to indicate in English spelling, but the spellings below give a very rough guide. Pronunciation may vary to some extent from area to area. The stressed syllable in each word is italicised, as in *Eng*land and exp*ect*.

Vowels

'ȧ' very short – as in 'material'
'a' short – as in 'must' and 'funny'
'aa' long – as in 'mast' and 'farm'
'o' rounded 'o' between 'pot' and 'port'
'u' short – as in 'put' and 'foot'
'oo' long – as in 'pool' and 'flu'
'e' short – as in 'pen' and 'fetch'
'i' short – as in 'skip' or 'fist'
'ee' long – as in 'beat' and 'weep'
'ai' as in 'flight', 'right' and 'kite'
'ay' as in 'pain' and 'rain'
'au' as in 'found' and 'round'

Consonants

'r' usually pronounced quite strongly
'kh' pronounced hard, 'k' followed by 'h' – as in 'back home'
'gh' like 'kh' but far back in the throat
'th' not pronounced as it is in English. It is a hard 't' followed by 'h' – as in 'hot house'
'dh' 'd' followed by 'h' – as in 'hard hat'
'ss' or 's' as in 'miss' and 'soon'

Aspirated consonants are not generally indicated.

Adi Granth (Sikh Holy Book)	*aa*di grant
Akhand pat (non-stop reading of the Guru Granth Sahib)	akh*a*nd paat
Amrit (holy nectar + initiation ceremony)	*a*mrit
Amritsar (the Sikh holy city in Punjab, India)	amr*i*tsar
Anandpur (place where Sikhism was founded)	an*a*ndpur
Baisakhi (Sikh New Year's Day)	bais*a*ki
Bhaug (Sikh ceremony)	bog
Chapatti (flat bread)	chap*a*ti
Chauri (fly whisk)	ch*au*ri
Choti pagri (small or inner turban)	cho ti p*a*gàri
Chuni (long scarf)	ch*u*ni
Dal (dish made of pulses)	daal
Dharam (duty, way of life)	dh*a*ràm
Dhoti (traditional Indian equivalent of trousers)	do ti
Diwali (Sikh festival)	diw*a*li
Diwan (congregational worship)	diw*aa*n
Dusehra (Indian national festival)	dàsse ra
Dupattah (long scarf)	dup*a*ta
Echkan (coat-like male garment)	*e*chkàn
Gatra (sheath)	g*a*tra
Ghee (clarified butter)	ghee
Giani (preacher)	gi*aa*ni
Granthi (prayer leader)	gr*a*nti
Gurdwara (Sikh temple)	g*u*rdwara
Gurmukhi (Sikh alphabet)	g*u*rmuki
Guru (teacher)	g*u*ru
Guru Amar Das (third Sikh guru)	g*u*ru *a*màr d*a*s
Guru Angad (second Sikh guru)	g*u*ru *a*ngàd
Guru Arjan Dev (fifth Sikh guru)	g*u*ru *a*rjàn dev
Guru Gobind Singh (tenth and last Sikh guru)	g*u*ru g*o*bind sing
Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Book)	g*u*ru grant s*a*hib

Guru Har Krishan (eighth Sikh guru)	guru har krishàn
Guru Har Rai (seventh Sikh guru)	guru har rai
Guru Hargobind (sixth Sikh guru)	guru hargobind
Guru Nanak (founder of Sikhism)	guru naanàk
Guru Ram Das (fourth Sikh guru)	guru raam das
Guru Tegh Bahadur (ninth Sikh guru)	guru teg bàhadàr
Gutka (small prayer book)	gutka
Halal (meat killed according to Muslim law)	halal
Hindu	hindu
Hola Mohalla (Sikh Spring festival)	hola mohalla
Holi (Hindu Spring festival)	holi
Japji (meditation)	japji
Jura (hair tied on top of head)	joora
Kaccha (martial underwear)	kacha
Kameez (long tunic)	kàmeez
Kangha (comb)	kanga
Kara (steel bangle)	kara
Karah parshad (blessed sweet distributed to Sikh worshippers)	kàraa pàrshaad
Karma (the cycle of action and reward, fate, destiny)	karma
Kaur (female Sikh title – follows first name)	kor
Kesh (uncut hair and beard)	kayss
Kirpan (Sikh dagger)	kirpaan
Kurta (shirt)	kurta
Langar (communal kitchen & meal)	langàr
Maharajah Ranjit Singh (Sikh leader)	maharaaja ranjeet sing
Mala (string of beads)	mala
Manji (dais)	manji
Mughal (Muslim dynasty)	mooghàl
Muslim	musslim

Nankana Sahib (birthplace of Guru Nanak)	nank*a*na s*a*hib
Pagri (turban)	p*a*gri
Pajama (loose cotton trousers)	paj*aa*ma
Palki (canopy)	p*a*lki
Patka (cloth square to cover hair)	p*a*tka
Punjab (area divided between India and Pakistan)	panj*aa*b
Punjabi (person or language from Punjab)	panj*aa*bi
Ragi (musician)	r*aa*gi
Rakhri (festival – Sikh name)	r*a*kri
Raksha Bandhan (festival – Hindu name)	r*a*kshabȧndȧn
Rumal (cloth to cover hair)	rum*aa*l
Sadarn pat (complete reading of the Guru Granth Sahib)	sadh*a*rȧn paat
Salwar (female trousers – in Urdu Shalwar)	sȧlw*aa*r
Sangat (Sikh congregation, assembly)	s*a*ngȧt
Sari (female dress)	s*aa*ri
Sikh (disciple)	sik or seek
Sikh dharam (Punjabi name for Sikhism)	sik dh*a*rȧm
Sikh math (Punjabi name for Sikhism)	sik mat
Singh (male Sikh title – follows first name)	sing

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