
UNIT 4 SIKHISM

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to give an introduction to Sikhism. By the end of this Unit you are expected to understand:

- the origin and development of Sikhism through the successive ten Gurus
- the structural as well as conceptual framework of the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, and its cosmopolitan vision
- the ethical aspects of Sikhism, ethical code of conduct, status of women and contributions of Sikh women to spirituality
- the practical implications of Sikh teachings
- the role of Sikh institutions
- the Sikh ceremonies, rituals and festivals
- the Sikh literature and Sikh socio-religious movements

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the history of Punjab, Guru Nanak appeared at a time when there was complete disintegration not only social and political but also moral and spiritual. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, has presented a microscopic portrayal of society in his compositions. He was totally aware of his surrounding atmosphere, religious as well as non-religious. He condemns the external paraphernalia of religion with all its religious rites, ceremonies, sacrifices, pilgrimages, idol-worship and ascetic practices which enhance human's ego and deprive one of highest spiritual truths. He denounces the empty religious rituals and reacted strongly against the formal ways of worship of orthodox priestly class of Islam and Hinduism. Guru Nanak condemns the rulers for their failure to administer justice to the subjects, for enslaving the peoples' mind and perverting their sense of self-respect (GGS.471-72). To him, the progress of nations

is linked up with the moral life led by them and, therefore, the degeneration of the Lodhi rulers was a consequence of their moral degradation and wrong deeds.

4.2 ORIGIN OF SIKH RELIGION AND GURUS

The Sikh religion originated with the advent of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh Religion, and developed through the successive Gurus who appeared in the form of same divine light and reached its climax with the creation of Khalsa by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. The ten Gurus are Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkrishan, Guru Teg Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh. Here we will give a brief account about the first and the tenth Gurus.

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikh religion was born at village Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and belonged to Bedi *gotra*. According to the popular legends, Guru Nanak had divine knowledge from the time of his birth and got revelation in Bein River near Sultanpur. After that he started his peregrination towards east, south, north and west and settled at Kartarpur where he stayed for 17 years. Guru Nanak’s three important precepts are: first, contemplation of One God (*nam-japna*); second, earning one’s livelihood (*kirat karna*) and sharing one’s earnings with others (*vand chhakna*). Guru Nanak repudiated the orthodox practices and rituals of both the communities and stressed on the practice of truthful living. To demolish caste- system he insisted on common kitchen and built the first *dharamsala* or chapel of the Sikhs at Kartarpur.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the tenth Guru, was the son of Guru Teg Bahadur and was born at Patna. He was fond of literary and artistic activities and had fifty two eminent poets working with him. He incorporated the hymns of Guru Teg Bahadur in the Holy Granth and installed Guru Granth Sahib as the living Guru. He confronted the Mughal Empire and struck a blow to the power of Aurangzeb. He sacrificed all his sons but refused to embrace Islamic faith. The spirit of the integration of the sacred and the secular was carried on by Guru Gobind Singh in the creation of the Khalsa in the year 1699 through the baptismal ceremony of *amrit* (nectar). The Guru had conferred on his followers not only the individual identity expressed by the five symbols but also the corporate identity of ethno-religious, ethno- social and ethno-political nature. The five emblems prescribed for the order of the khalsa, *keshas*, *kangha*, *kachha*, *kirpan* and *kara*, popularly referred to as the five K’s are an indispensable part of the order of the khalsa. The distinct philosophy and a new way of the Khalsa was certainly a deviation from the prevalent Indian and Semitic traditions.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) How would you define the succession of Guruship in Sikhism?

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2) What do you know about the Creation of Khalsa?

4.3 SIKH SCRIPTURE: GURU GRANTH SAHIB

The *Adi Granth* was compiled by the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev in 1604 at Amritsar. It got its title the Guru from the compiler himself and this was confirmed and ceremonially conferred on the scripture by the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh in 1708. Besides the compositions of first five Gurus and the ninth Guru, compositions of Bhagats and Muslim saints are also incorporated in the Holy Scripture. The compositions of each Bhagat are as follows: Bhagat Kabir (224 hymns, 237 slokas and three long compositions viz. Bawan Akhari, Pandhre Thiti, Sat Var), Bhagat Namdev(61hymns), Bhagat Ravidas(40hymns), Bhagat Trilochan (4hymns), Sheikh Farid(4hymns and 112 slokas), Bhagat Beni(3hymns), Bhagat Dhanna(3hymns), Bhagat Jaidev(2hymns), Bhagat Bhikhan(2hymns), Bhagat Surdas(1line), Bhagat Parmanand(1hymn), Bhagat Sain(1hymn), Bhagat Pipa(1hymn), Bhagat Sadhna(1hymn), Bhagat Ramanand(1hymn). There are also compositions of seventeen bhatts or bards which are in the form of panegyrics in the praise of first five Gurus. The names of these bards are as follows: Mathra, Jalap, Bal, Harbans, Talya, Salya, Jalya, Bhal, Kalh, Sahar, Kal, Jal, Nal, Kirat, Das, Gayand, Sadrang and Bhikha. Besides, the compositions of Baba Sunder, the author of an eulogy, the *Ramkali Sad* and the eulogistic ballad (*Var*) of Satta and Balwand are also included in the Granth. The criterion for selection of the compositions of Bhagats was *nirguna* religiosity and conformity to the basic tenets of Guru Granth Sahib. Though these bhagats belonged to different regions with diverse religious and cultural background, yet their main doctrinal themes are in conformity with the basic spirit of the scripture, nonetheless, the reflections of their religious background are maintained in the Holy Scripture. For instance, Bhagat Jaidev’s use of Vaishnava names of God such as *Hari*, *Chakardhar*, *Govinda* (GGS,526) and Sheikh Farid’s adherence to *Shariat*’ day of judgement, fear of *dozak*, *satan*, (GGS. 1377) etc reveal their respective religious background.

The arrangement of hymns in Guru Granth Sahib is not subject-wise but it is in accordance with the *Ragas* (musical measures). The hymns to be sung in a particular *Raga* are placed together and further arranged as such, *Chaupadas* (four verses), *Ashtpadis* (eight stanzas), *Chhants* (six lines verses), *Vars* (ballad form) etc. At the end of the *Granth*, the Guru has given an index of all *Ragas* and *Raganis* and their families. The total number of *Ragas* is thirty-one and the compositions of the Bhagats are in twenty-two *Ragas* and are placed at the end of each *Raga* section. The hymns, *Ashtpadis*, *Chhants* and *Vars* of the Gurus come first in the order of succession and then the hymns of the Bhagats in the same format, followed by *Sahskriti Slokas*, *Gatha*, *Punhe* and *Chaubolas* of Guru Arjan Dev and couplets of Bhagat Kabir and Sheikh Farid, *Savaiyas*, couplets of Gurus, *Mundavni* and *Raga-Mala*.

4.4 TEACHINGS OF SIKH RELIGION

God: Sikhism believes in the monotheistic concept of One God who is Transcendent and Immanent; Impersonal and Personal; *Nirguna* and *Sarguna*. The uniqueness of God is manifest in different ways. He is the only one God and there is no other second. This absolute supremacy of God is apparent in the denial of the doctrine of incarnation, concept of *trimurti* and idol- worship prevalent in the Hindu society. One God is defined as Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer, having all metaphysical attributes such as Omnipotence, Infinity and Eternity. He is also described as Sovereign, Ineffable, Fearless and Benevolent. Though the stress in the Holy Scripture is on the unique, incomprehensible, *nirguna* and *nirankar* aspect of God, yet He is portrayed in His *Sarguna* aspects: 'From Formless, the Lord assumed the Immaculate Form and from attributeless, He became with attributes (GGS.,940). This reconciliation of the transcendent and immanent aspects of God is found in the whole scripture and is explicit in the *Mulmantra*. Hence God is described as the peerless, incomprehensible and unapproachable entity devoid of any caste and creed but dwelling in the innermost depths of man's heart.

Soul: There is an identical relation between God and soul which is mentioned as 'the Lord abides in the soul and the soul in the Lord.' (GGS,1153) The aim of man's life is to rediscover the real nature of self which is in no way different from God but indulgence in mundane aspirations reinforce his ego and strengthens this false notion of separateness. The problem of ego-consciousness is expatiated in Guru Granth Sahib in a different way. Ego (*haumai*) is considered as the greatest malady but cure of it also lies in it and that is by realizing its true nature (GGS, 466). The stress is on the transcendence of man from self-centeredness to God-centeredness and the identification of his finite consciousness with the cosmic consciousness. Realizing the true nature of soul, one understands the real nature of God.

Divine Will: In the Sikh religion, the concept of Divine Will (*hukam*) as an imperative has a specific metaphysical significance. Divine Will is all-pervasive and immanent and manifests itself in different ways which are incomprehensible to human mind. Not only the creation but also the sustenance of the universe is in accordance with the Divine Will. The Divine Will (*hukam*) is ineffable and inscrutable and cannot be described in words. None can define the limits of Divine ordinance as well as the deeds of Divine Being which are unaccountable. Whatever originates in Divine Will also merges in Divine Will. The main impediment between man and God is man's assertive nature i.e. *haumai* or feeling of I-am-ness which leads to duality and causes confusion. By attuning to Divine Will, one cultivates all the qualities which bring about spiritual, moral and ethical enlightenment of man.

Divine Grace: It is often referred in the scripture as *kirpa*, *karam*, *Prasad*, *mehar*, *daya* or *bakhsis*. One cannot understand God through cleverness but He can be realized through Grace. Some men are destined for grace (*bakhshish*) and others are condemned to whirl about in transmigration in accordance with their deeds of past actions (GGS, 1). Grace is a mystery but it is earned by way of prayer and devotion. Grace is an overwhelming experience, beyond description (GGS,5) and is mentioned in the *Japuji* as *Prasad* or Grace without which realization may not come. To emphasize grace two terms are taken from the Muslim terminology i.e. *karam* and *mehar*—one from the Arabic and the other from the Persian. There are several expressions in the scripture indicating that not only by efforts alone but by the divine grace is the self inclined to prayer and devotion (GGS,6). Nonetheless, grace is not an arbitrary endowment, reserved for some and not for the others.

Salvation: The Sikh religion repudiates the speculations of the Indian thinkers about the future plane of existence and stresses that heaven and hell are just the mental states to be experienced here and now. The immortality of soul is also conceived in the sense of realization of eternity of values in the temporal world. The prevalent notions of traditional ethics regarding karma, transmigration and release are not taken in the same sense but the idea of inevitability of retribution for actions is defined in moral terms as coming near to God or going away from God due to one’s own deeds. Karma and rebirth are closely related with the moral life of man. The mystery of the origin of man, cause of his bondage and the ultimate goal of his life are explicitly stated in the scripture. Man’s birth and death are due to man’s desires and those who contemplate on the Divine Word remain detached from the worldly entanglements and can get emancipation. It is admitted that human life has passed through innumerable existences, the number of eighty- four *lakhs*, which neither increases nor decreases is acknowledged in Guru Granth Sahib (GGS,156). The cycle of birth and death continues and in every birth, man goes on performing action in accordance with his past deeds. These accumulated deeds (*kirat karma*) determine man’s present life and his way of performance of action.

Real perfection lies in restoring man to his original self which is possible by realization of and identification with the impersonal consciousness which is the foundation not only of the psycho- physical complex of the individual but of the whole world. In the mundane life, people usually adopt wrong values of life under the influence of *maya*. So long as consciousness is egocentric, all thoughts, feelings and actions are directed towards furthering the interests of the ego but by surrendering to the Divine Will through contemplation of word (*sabad*) of Guru, the divine preceptor, there remains no dichotomy between the subject and the object.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) How would you define the cosmopolitan spirit of Guru Granth Sahib?
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- 2) What are the basic tenets of Sikhism?
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4.5 ETHICS OF SIKHISM

The Sikh ethics stresses not on the theoretical aspect of morality or a mere description of moral life but is indeed concerned with the moral praxis and codes of human conduct. Spiritual realization is not possible without virtuous life and the latter is a continuous process of perfection and is highly commended in the Sikh religion. The stress is laid on the practice of universal moral norms such as wisdom, courage, contentment, justice, humility, truthfulness and endurance etc. These moral norms are desirable not only for the cultivation of inner harmony but also for promoting inter-personal relations at the cosmic level. It is held that the external paraphernalia of religion with all its religious rites and ceremonies, sacrifices and pilgrimages, offering of alms and charity is worthless, if devoid of divine name. The performance of these activities enhance man's ego and create barrier between man and God. The rigidity of mind and innumerable efforts done by man in the form of righteous deeds cannot enable him of divine communion. (GGS, 787) The religious and social malpractices of persons belonging to different strata of society are pointed out to show them the right way of life. For instance, the Brahmin is he who has divine knowledge, practices austerity, contemplation and self-control, does righteous deeds in a spirit of self-culture and contentment; the kshatriya is he who has excellence in deed as well as the qualities of compassion, charity and beneficence; and the Muslim is he who has faith in Allah, submits to Divine Will, loses one's self and is merciful to all creatures. (GGS, 1411, 141).

STATUS OF WOMEN AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SPIRITUALITY

The Sikh Gurus have accorded an equal status to women who are the foundational basis of the Sikh religious life. The great works and achievements of the Sikh women in the social, religious and administrative spheres cannot be undermined, while evaluating the religio-historical progress of the Sikh religion. The prominent women, who occupied a conspicuous place in Sikhism, belonged largely to the Guru's family either as mother or as daughter or as wife or as sister. They have contributed for the Sikh religion in several ways viz. looking after the domestic affairs of their family during the missionary tours of the Gurus; assisting them in the implementations of ideals; accompanying with the Gurus during their preaching; helping the Gurus in making an impartial choice of successor for Guruship; doing works of social welfare; offering sacrifices of the Guru – husband, of sons and of grandsons for the cause of the Panth; and serving as beacon lights to the Panth. The most significant roles such as Bebe Nanaki's sisterly affection, Mata khivi's Langar organisation; Bibi Bhani's spirit of service, Mata Gujri's sacrifice, Mata Sundari's guidance to the Sikh community, Mata Sahib Kaur's designation as the mother of the Khalsa, Mai Bhago, the first woman General, Bibi Deep Kaur, the Warrior, Bibi Sharan Kaur's devotion for religion, Bibi Rup Kaur, the first author of Sikhism, Sardarni Sada Kaur, Sardar of the Kanhiya Misl's patriotism and bravery etc. are unparalleled instances in the history and development of the Sikh religion.

The nucleus of Sikh community life is based on the ontological principles laid down by the Gurus. The basic tenets of Sikh philosophy are belief in One God; belief in the teachings of the ten Gurus; belief in Guru Granth Sahib; belief in the necessity of *amrit*, *khande di pahul*. The main pillars of Sikh thought are daily contemplation and prayer (*nam-simran*), work hard (*kirat karna*) and sharing one's wealth with others (*vand chhakna*).

To implement the scriptural prescriptions about human conduct, there are found injunctions in Sainapati's *Gur Sobha*, formal codes of conduct by Bhai Chaupa Singh

and Prahlad Singh, *Tankhahnama of Bhai Nanad Lal* and the Sikh Code of Conduct (*Rehat- Maryada*) compiled and issued by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee on 3 Feb, 1945.

The Sikh community is bound strictly by the instructions laid down by the Gurus in the observance of ceremonies and modes of worship. Besides *kirtan*, one more significant feature of congregational worship is *katha* (discourse), lectures, *divans* etc. organized on special occasions. The function of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee is to organize *divans*, lectures on *Gurbani* and on the life of Gurus and events of Sikh history especially during *gurpurab* celebrations. It has also set up Sikh missionary schools and colleges, Sikh religious libraries, Sikh museums. To serve mankind, it has set up hospitals, *serais* or *dharamsalas* on the name of the Gurus.

The unique tenets of the Sikh polity are *sangat* (holy congregation), Guru Granth and Khalsa Panth (plural executive), the *Gurmatta* (collective will of the people) and the *Sarbat khalsa* (democratic and egalitarian polity). The significant issues of the Sikh Panth relating to socio-religious and political problems were discussed in the *Sarbat Khalsa* which used to meet at Akal Takht on the occasion of Diwali and *Baisakhi*.

To maintain the community discipline and to decide about collective decisions, executive council of five chosen ones is made who represent the whole community and all important matters are referred to this council which takes decision by *sarab- samiti* (unanimity) or *bahu- samiti* (majority-decision). Those who have failed to keep the discipline have to undergo penance (*tankhah*) which is some act of physical nature such as washing utensils, cleaning the floor etc. which the penitent must perform himself and must accept without any question. The liturgical texts from the Holy Scripture such as *Japuji*, *Jap Sahib*, *ten Savayyas*, *Sodar*, *Rahiras* and *Kirtan- Sohila* are meant for daily recitation by the individual members of the khalsa and *Sukhmani* and *Asa di Var* are recited and sung collectively every morning in the *Gurdwaras*.

The main festivals celebrated by the Sikh community are Baisakhi, Diwali and Holla Mohalla. Guru Arjan Dev ordained the celebration of Baisakhi at Harmandir as contrary to the Hindus practice at Haridwar. This festival is socio-political and religious occasion and is important for the Sikh community, being associated with the creation of khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh community celebrates the important anniversaries or gurpurbs such as Guru Nanak's birthday, Guru Gobind Singh's birthday, Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev and also Guru Granth Parkash Divas.

4.6 SIKH INSTITUTIONS

The highest aim of life is realization of spirituality and its expression through human conduct. It is clearly evident in the practice of three cardinal precepts i.e. *kirat karma* (honest labour), *nam-japna* (contemplation of divine name), and *vand chhakna* (sharing with others). These precepts are simultaneously functional both at the individual level as well as at the social level. The Sikh religious institutions such as *Gurdwara*, *Guru*, *Sangat*, *Langar*, *Dharmsal*, etc., encourage the concept of community worship and provide a model for an egalitarian society.

Gurdwara is also a central institution of the Sikh community. The word *Gurdwara* was first used by Guru Hargobind, meaning thereby home or abode of the Guru where Guru Granth Sahib is installed. The congregational worship and Guru Granth Sahib are essential features of the Sikh community life. A theo-political status to the

Gurdwara especially to the Golden Temple has been accorded since the times of Guru Hargobind who installed the Akal Takht adjacent to the Golden Temple to set up an example of the integration of the spiritual and the temporal authority. Besides the Golden Temple, there are Historical *Gurdwaras* and Community *Gurdwaras* built up by the Sikhs to meet their social and religious needs. The Historical *Gurdwaras* are built on important sites in the Sikh history viz., Sis Ganj in Delhi, where Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred and Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur where Guru Gobind Singh installed the Khalsa. However, the five *Gurdwaras* have special sanctity and are known as *takhats* (thrones of the Guru). These are the Akal Takht at Golden Temple, Amritsar which is sovereign and supreme seat and from where important edicts concerning community are issued; Patna Sahib, the birth place of Guru Gobind Singh; Anandpur Sahib, the origination place of Khalsa panth; Nander Sahib, where Guru Gobind Singh became one with the Infinite, relinquishing his body and Damdama Sahib.

The central *Gurdwara* for the Sikh community, all over the world, is Golden Temple where recitation of *bani* and *kirtan* is performed the whole day. Every *Gurdwara* is open to all, irrespective of caste, creed and status. One has to take off one's shoes, wash hands and feet and cover head as a token of respect for the Guru. Everybody can participate in the *kirtan* and *ardas* and can take offerings (*prasad*) and eat cooked food in the community kitchen (*langar*). All the community ceremonies, festivals and *gurpurbs* are celebrated in the *Gurdwaras*.

Guru (Divine Preceptor): The word Guru literally means one who removes darkness and is an enlightener and the first and foremost Guru, according to Guru Nanak is God Himself, meaning thereby the Word of God as the Primal Guru. After Guru Nanak, no doubt, there continued a tradition of guruship through the successive Gurus but Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, formally vested the authority of the Gurus in *sabad* Guru and conferred the status of Guru to Guru Granth Sahib. For the spiritual aspirant, the most imperative need is to contemplate on the *sabad* of Guru and to lead his life in accordance with the teachings of the Guru.

Sangat (Holy Congregation): It literally means holy congregation and the institution of *sangat* in Sikh religion has far-reaching social implications as it inculcates the feeling of brotherhood, promotes equality and provides opportunity for service (*seva*). Guru Nanak himself has initiated this institution which was further expanded by his successors as is evident from the large number of *hukamnamas* addressed to various *sangats* by the Gurus. Guru Amar Das established 22 *manjis* or preaching districts and knit the *sangats* into an organized system. To strengthen this institution, Guru Arjan Dev initiated the *Masands* system to look after the *sangats* in their respective areas. This institution has played a vital role in history as a forum for discussion of common concerns, and planning as well as execution of programmes of social uplift.

Dharamsal (place to practice righteousness): It literally means a place for practice of dharma or righteousness. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, enjoined upon all *sangats* to erect or set apart a place to hold congregations regularly for recitation and contemplation of *bani* and these *Dharamsals* were supposed to provide accommodation and food to wayfarers and were precursors to the present day *Gurdwara* which came into vogue after Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Scripture, began to be installed in them.

Langar (Free community kitchen): It is a unique Sikh institution which has been established to represent the basic postulates of Sikhism that is earning with honest

labor and sharing with others. This institution of community kitchen has social implications in providing equality to all and sundry without any discrimination of caste, creed, religion and denomination

4.7 SIKH LITERATURE

Dasam Granth:

The sacred writings of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh are incorporated in the *Dasam Granth* which consists of the following works: *Jap Sahib, Akal Ustat, Bachitra Natak, Chandi Charitr, Chandi di Var, Gyan Prabodh, Chaubis Avatar, Mehdi Mir Budh, Brahma Avatar, Rudra Avtar, Sabad Hazare, Sri Mukh bak Savaiye, Khalse di Mahima, Sastra Nam –mala, Pakhyan Charitr, Zafarnama and the Hikayats*. Most of the Sikhs are reluctant to accept *Dasam Granth* as the work of Guru Gobind Singh because some of the compositions of the *Granth* such as *Chaubis Avtar, Chandi Charitra* and *Chritropakhyan* seem to them contrary to the Sikh precepts.

Biographies of the Sikh Gurus: These are based on the historical accounts of *Janam Sakhis* literature written about the lives of the Sikh Gurus in simple anecdote, parable and miracles; *Gurbilases* (recreating the lives of the Gurus in verse). These *granth*s are: *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*; Koer Singh’s *Gurbilas Patshahi*,¹⁰; Sukkha Singh’s *Gurbilas Dasvin Patshah*; *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka*, containing poetic accounts of the ten Gurus. *Mahima Prakash* , composed by lineal descendents of Guru Amar Das. Bhai Santokh Singh’s *Sri Gurpratap Suraj Granth*, a massive work depicts the lives of the ten Gurus in *braj* poetry.

Hagiographic Writings about the Life of Guru Nanak: The *Janam Sakhis* are the traditional biographies of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism, written during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in the Punjabi-*Gurmukhi* Script. They present the life of Guru Nanak either in the form of plutonium dialogues or in the form of anecdotes or stories delineating his greatness. Most of the *Janam Sakhis* were written in the land of five rivers which have been a meeting ground for different cultures and civilizations. The *Janam Sakhis* have mentioned various Sufis, Saints, Yogis, Vaishnavas and persons belonging to different denominations with whom Guru Nanak had lengthy discourses.

Check Your Progress III

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.
- 1) What type of role is played by the Sikh Institutions in the implementation of Sikh Teachings?
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2) What is the status of Women in Sikhism?

4.8 LET US SUM UP

To recapitulate, the Sikh religion, one of the major world religions, is a revelatory prophetic religion, which despite of its passing through critical phases has flourished due to its distinctive spiritual ideology and moral praxis which is evident from the significant historical instances relating to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Teg Bahadur and sacrifices of four sons of Guru Gobind Singh and the other Sikhs. Its Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, is not confined to the boundaries of space and time but encompasses the whole humanity in providing solace and bliss due to its cosmopolitan spirit, inter-faith dialogue, and concern for spiritual transformation of human and for providing perennial solutions to the emerging problems of human life. The implementation of ethical aspect of Sikhism through its institutions is highly commendable and indispensable for the equality and universal brotherhood.

4.9 KEY WORDS

- Anecdotes

: An anecdote is a short tale narrating an interesting or amusing biographical incident. An anecdote is always based on real life, an incident involving actual persons, whether famous or not, in real places.
- Baptism

: Baptism (from Greek *baptizo*: “immersing”, “performing ablutions”) is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which one is admitted as a full member of a community.
- Ordination

: In general religious use, ordination is the process by which individuals are set apart as priests to perform various religious rites and ceremonies. The process and ceremonies of ordination itself varies by religion and denomination.
- Parable

: A parable is a brief, succinct story that illustrates a moral or religious lesson. It differs from a fable in that fables use animals, plants, inanimate objects, and forces of nature as characters, while parables generally feature human characters.
- Paraphernalia

: Originally, paraphernalia was the separate property of a married woman, such as clothing and jewelry ‘appropriate to her status,’ but excluding the assets that may have been included in her dower. The term originated in Roman law, but ultimately comes from Greek *parapherna* (“beyond the dower”).

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4.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress-I

- 1) Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh Religion, enunciated the monotheistic aspect of God and denounced the empty religious rituals and reacted strongly against the formal ways of worship of orthodox priestly class of Islam and Hinduism. His mission was carried on by the successive Gurus namely, Guru Angad Dev, Guru Amardas, Guru Ramdas, Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkrishan, Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh who abolished the tradition of personal guruship and conferred the status of Guru to Guru Granth Sahib.
- 2) The creation of the khalsa took place on 30 March, 1699, the day of *Baisakhi*, through the baptismal ceremony carried on by Guru Gobind Singh, when the five

beloved ones were baptized in the order of the khalsa by *amrit* made from water and sugar crystals prepared in an iron bowl and stirred with a two-edged sword.. The Guru had conferred on his followers not only the individual identity expressed by the five symbols but also the corporate identity of ethno-religious, ethno- social and ethno-political nature. These five symbols are *keshas*, *kangha*, *kachha*, *kirpan* and *kara* popularly referred to as the five K's and are an indispensable part of the order of the khalsa. The distinct philosophy and a new way of the khalsa was certainly a deviation from the prevalent Indian and Semitic traditions.

Check Your Progress-II

- 1) The inclusion of the compositions of the Bhagats, the acknowledgement of their spiritual status and the preservation of their individual identity provide an ecumenical outlook to the Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib and is also indicative of its catholic and cosmopolitan spirit. Another aspect of this cosmopolitan spirit of the Holy Scripture is evident in the provision of an interfaith dialogue in the scripture which provides a platform for discussion about religious matters with respect to their separate identities.
- 2) The nucleus of Sikh community life is based on the ontological principles laid down by the Gurus. The basic tenets of Sikh philosophy are belief in One God; belief in the teachings of the ten Gurus; belief in Guru Granth Sahib; belief in the necessity of *amrit*, *khande di pahul*. The main pillars of Sikh thought are daily contemplation and prayer (*nam-simran*), work hard (*kirat karna*) and sharing one's wealth with others (*vand chhakna*).

Check Your Progress-III

- 1) The major Sikh religious institutions are *Gurdwara*, *Guru*, *Sangat*, *Langar*, *Dharmshal* etc. which encourage the concept of community worship and provide a model for an egalitarian society. The Sikh Gurus repudiated vehemently the social hierarchy based on caste system and preached their divine message of Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of mankind irrespective of caste, creed and religion. These teachings are simultaneously functional both at the individual level as well as at the social level and are carried on through these institutions.
- 2) To elevate the status of women, the Sikh Gurus, through their holy compositions and through the examples of their practical lives, have taken steps for the socio-religious equality of women. They condemned the custom of sati, female infanticide, adultery and seclusion of women by being in veils (*purdah*). On the other hand, they commended married life by giving it religious sanctity and allowed the remarriage of widows. The implementation of the ideals of the Sikh Gurus has been carried on by the participation of the Sikh women in the socio-religious field as is evident in the Sikh history. The women had made great contributions in serving and organising the community kitchen (*langar*), working as missionaries, sacrificing themselves and their families for the Sikh community, fighting bravely in the battle-field and offering guidance to the Sikh community in the critical periods.