

years, they stage a great celebration to bathe the image with *ghee*, or melted butter.

Their reputation for honesty and morality have made the Jains excellent businessmen. Ironically, however, as one commentator notes, "a group that began with asceticism and poverty has become, by virtue of its respect for life, one of the wealthiest classes of India."⁴

Sikhism

Historical Background

Sikhism, the religion of the Sikh community, originated in the Punjab region of India around the sixteenth century. Some scholars view Sikhism primarily as a reform movement of Hinduism; others see it as an outstanding example of religious syncretism—a blend of Hinduism and Islam.⁵ The Sikhs, however, reject such interpretations of their religion as misrepresentations. To its followers, Sikhism is not simply the reworking of two older religions, but a new, divine revelation and, consequently, a genuinely independent religion.

In the seventeenth century, the Sikhs became involved in politics, with the result that they earned the displeasure of the ruling Mughal dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) many of the Sikhs, including one of their *gurus*, were executed. They reacted with armed resistance, which fostered military characteristics that they retain to this day.

The fact that the Sikhs are an adventurous and enterprising people perhaps accounts for the numerous Sikh communities found outside India. Wherever they have gone, they have installed their Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, in their homes and in their temples (*gurdwara*). The Sikhs are mainly distinguishable by their beards, long hair, turbans, and steel bracelets, but some, especially those who live in large

Western cities, have shaved off their beards, cut their hair, and discarded the turban. Whether or not they retain these external symbols of their faith, Sikhs show their devotion to God in daily prayer and similar religious observances. Equality and democracy are the two outstanding characteristics of Sikhism, and its code emphasizes truth, good behavior, and moral courage.

While Sikhs are mainly concentrated in the province of the Punjab (presently divided between Pakistan and India), a considerable number have emigrated, especially since India's independence and partition in 1947, to Great Britain, Europe, and the Americas.⁶

Guru Nanak

The founding of Sikhism is attributed to Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who was born of Hindu parents in the village of Talwandi, some sixty kilometers (forty miles) from Lahore, India. The earliest source materials on Nanak were written fifty to eighty years after his death. Most scholars, however, have rejected these sources, relying instead on the accounts of historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and on the records of Mughal court historians.

Nanak's father was the village clerk and his mother was a pious woman who was devoted to the family. Nanak was a reflective boy, and at an early age studied both the Islamic Qur'an and the Hindu Shastras (scriptures). He was also greatly influenced by Kabir (1440–1518), a Muslim poet who taught the oneness of God, the union of humankind with God, the consubstantiality between Hinduism and Islam, and the irrelevance of formal creeds and dogmas.

Tradition asserts that Nanak's marriage, which took place while he was still in his teens, was unhappy. Even though two sons resulted from this marriage, Nanak left his home and, in traditional fashion, wandered around India in search of truth and wisdom. He is also

Jainism and Sikhism

