

Guru Nanak, Early Life, Teachings, Contributions, Legacy

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Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism, was a spiritual leader, philosopher, and social reformer. His teachings laid the foundation for a religion that emphasizes equality, selfless service, and devotion to one God. Guru Nanak's life and legacy continue to inspire millions worldwide.

His teachings were preserved through 974 hymns, which were later compiled into the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of Sikhism. With over 25 million adherents, Sikhism remains one of the major religions in India.



Guru Nanak Early Life

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born on April 15, 1469, in the village of Talvandi, now known as Nankana Sahib, located about 65 kilometres from Lahore. He was born into a Hindu family of the Bedi sub-caste of Kshatriyas, which had a tradition of Vedic learning.

- Guru Nanak was born to Mehta Kalu, a revenue collector, and Mata Tripta. From an early age, he showed deep spiritual inclinations.
- He studied under both Hindu and Muslim teachers, gaining diverse religious exposure. Though he initially followed a conventional life—marrying in Sultanpur and working as an accountant—his quest for truth remained strong.
- He met Mardana, with whom he started community singing and the Langar tradition, promoting social equality. Nanak often meditated in solitude, and at around twenty, he experienced divine enlightenment.
- A pivotal moment came when he disappeared into a river for three days and returned, declaring, *“There is no Hindu, there is no Mussulman.”*
- This marked his rejection of religious divisions and emphasis on humanity's oneness. His teachings laid the foundation of Sikhism, advocating devotion to one God, equality, and selfless service.

Guru Nanak Teachings

Guru Nanak Dev, the revered founder of Sikhism, preached a message centred on love, compassion, and unity. He emphasized the belief in one supreme God and advocated for the equality of all individuals, irrespective of their religion or social status. Some of his most profound teachings include:

- **Oneness of God:** Guru Nanak Dev preached that there is only one eternal and formless God who created the universe. He stressed that the ultimate purpose of human life is to realize and connect with this divine presence through devotion and righteous living.
- **Equality:** Guru Nanak strongly opposed discrimination based on caste, gender, or social status. He advocated for equal rights for all individuals, emphasizing that in the eyes of God, everyone is equal. His teachings promoted a just and inclusive society.
- **Service to Humanity:** Selfless service (sewa) was central to his philosophy. He encouraged his followers to help the poor and needy, considering it a way to worship God. According to him, true spirituality is reflected in acts of kindness and generosity.
- **Remembrance of God:** Guru Nanak emphasized prayer, meditation, and constant remembrance of God's name (Naam Japna). He believed that spiritual growth comes from devotion and mindfulness, which help individuals attain inner peace and divine wisdom.
- **Three Pillars of Sikhism:** He established three guiding principles—
 - **Naam Japna** (devotion through prayer and chanting God's name)
 - **Kirat Karni** (earning an honest living with integrity)
 - **Vand Chakna** (sharing wealth and resources with the community), all three form the foundation of Sikh life.
- **Interconnection of Spiritual and Secular Life:** Guru Nanak rejected the idea that spirituality and daily life should be separate. He taught that devotion to God should be reflected in honest work, ethical conduct, and active participation in society to create a more just world.

Guru Nanak Contributions

Guru Nanak Dev Ji's teachings centred on equality, compassion, and social harmony. He opposed caste discrimination, advocated gender equality, and promoted selfless service (Seva).

- **Social Harmony:** Guru Nanak emphasized that all humans are equal in God's creation (Ek Onkar Satnam) and promoted forgiveness and kindness.
- **Langar System:** He introduced Langar (community kitchen), where people from all backgrounds eat together without discrimination.
- **Sangat & Pangat:** These institutions encouraged collective decision-making and communal dining to break caste barriers.
- **Gender Equality:** Guru Nanak declared that men and women share equal grace from God and condemned practices like female infanticide.
- **Opposition to Inequality:** He denounced the caste system and ritualistic practices that perpetuated social hierarchies.

Guru Nanak Jayanti

Guru Nanak Jayanti, or GURPURAB, marks the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and is celebrated on Kartik Purnima (October-November). It honours his teachings of peace, equality, and service. The celebrations include Akhand Path (continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib), Nagar Kirtan (hymn processions), and Langar, promoting unity and selfless service.

Guru Nanak Death

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, passed away in **1539** at the town of Kartarpur, located in the Punjab region, which is now in Pakistan. Before his death, Guru Nanak carefully chose his successor, appointing **Guru Angad**, one of his closest disciples, to carry forward his mission and leadership.

- This succession was significant as it ensured the continuity of the Sikh faith and community, with Guru Angad taking on the responsibility of preserving and spreading Guru Nanak's teachings.
- Guru Nanak's appointment of Guru Angad as his successor established a tradition of Guru succession that would continue in Sikhism for the following nine Gurus.
- Each of whom would play an essential role in the development of the Sikh religion and its principles.

Guru Nanak Legacy

Guru Nanak's legacy is deeply ingrained in Sikhism through his profound teachings and institutions. He established Kartarpur Sahib as a spiritual centre, where he spent his final years preaching equality and devotion.

- His hymns became an integral part of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of **Sikhism**, emphasizing universal love and unwavering faith in God.
- Guru Nanak's influence extends beyond religious boundaries, inspiring people worldwide to embrace compassion, truth, and justice.
- His message of universal brotherhood and social equality continues to guide movements advocating for human rights and societal harmony.

Guru Nanak UPSC PYQs

Q1. Consider the following Bhakti Saints: (**UPSC Prelims 2013**)

1. Dadu Dayal
2. Guru Nanak
3. Tyagaraja

Who among the above was/were preaching when the Lodi dynasty fell and Babur took over?

- (a) 1 and 3
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3
- (d) 1 and 2

Ans: (b)

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