

Sikhism in canada essay



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Eventually, to decrease the number of Sikhs entering Canada, a law was formed in 1908 stating that each Sikh must pay a fee of \$200 before entering our country: “ From 2, 623 immigrants allowed into Canada in 1907, only 6 were allowed in 1908. ” (Brar 1) this was an unexpected, dramatic decrease that affected the many Sikh families who had planned on moving to Canada as refugees.

The first female Sikhs to arrive to Canada was in July 1911, twenty four years after the arrival of the first Sikhs. These female Sikhs arrived on the West coast of the country in Vancouver B.

C. They were the wife and daughter of Hira Singh, who were both arrested at the docks with unjust deportation. “ By denying Sikhs their wives and children it was hoped that within a few years most of the Sikhs in Canada would return to their homeland. ” (Brar 1) Even though our country allowed 1, 037 Chinese and Japanese women in Canada in the year of 1920, only 9 Sikh women were allowed entry.

The government of B. C. also passed a bill in 1907 stating that Sikhs no longer had the right to vote in the province.

This was yet another way that Canada had hoped to convince the Sikhs to return to their home land.

As the Sikh population gradually grew in Canada, they realized that it was very different to live here and formed their own communities, separate from others who lived here. This community became very close and relied on one another for all necessary needs. In 1907 the Sikh community had their first

death. As a custom to their religion, they were to cremate the body, but in Canada there were not allowed any crematoriums. The government first tried to convince them to bury the body in a Christian cemetery.

In spite of their best efforts, the government failed to have the body buried, and the Sikhs carried out their own religious tradition in the woods away from any other human activity.

A Look at the Sikh Beliefs Along with their ritual of cremating the bodies of friends and family, the Sikhs also have very many other interesting beliefs, one of which is the Gurdwara. The Gurdwara is a temple where Sikhs go to worship and pray, comparable to a church in Christianity. The first temple in Canada was opened in 1908 on Second Avenue, Vancouver B. C.

In the temple there is a book of holy scriptures called the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Although the original copy of the holy text was destroyed in a battle in 1762, a new copy was made and is now considered the official version.

This holy text is kept under a canopy in the temple for all to see. Worshipers sit on carpets while listening to readings, prayers and hymns from this holy text. The Sikhs pay much appreciation to their holy beliefs and traditions.

They randomly open the holy scripture to a page and the first letter of the first word on the page becomes the first letter of the child's name. The parents then pick an appropriate name that begins with that letter.

In addition to the name the family picks, the name Singh must be added to a boy's name and the name Kaur must be added to a girl's. These names have special meanings to the Sikhs. In 1699, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs decided

to separate from the caste of most Indian religions and make Sikhs unique, so the prefixes for male and female names were decided upon and have been a tradition of the Sikhs ever since.

Singh stands for lion and Kaur stands for lioness. Kaur was also given to Sikh Women to establish an identity independent of their father or husband. In the Christian religion baptism occurs at the same time as the naming of the child, Sikhs do it differently.

Their baptism is conducted after the child has hit puberty. This ceremony contains the drinking of amrit (sugar water) that is stirred with a dagger. This tradition dates back to 1699 when the leader of the Sikhs was looking for five reliable people to become members of spiritual democracy.

The leader had asked the Sikh village if there was anyone who loved him enough to give him their head. Five members came forward and were beheaded in the leader's tent. The leader then emerged from his tent with blood on his sword and five followers dressed in golden robes behind him.

He then stirred clean water and sugar cakes in an iron bowl with his bloody sword and proclaimed that the Sikhs would sprinkle the water over their eyes five times in honor of the new democracy and the leader of the Sikhs.

The drinking of amrit at the time of baptism indicates that the children being baptized now understand the history of their religion and will show the utmost respect to their leaders and to God himself. Another ceremony which is important to the Sikhs is marriage, also known as Anand Karaj meaning 'blissful union'. There is no divorce in the Sikh religion. Weddings are

conducted in the Gurdwara or in the family home where members are present as a witness to the marriage. Marriages are typically arranged by families, not by the two people who are to be wed.

The word arranged could be misinterpreted and lead people to think that the marriage is dependent entirely on the parent's decision this however is not true. The two families who are to have their children wed must confront their children and allow them to interact and get to know each other before becoming husband and wife. If the children are completely against the marriage, then it will not take place. This being said, a marriage based on wealth and riches needs no consideration from anyone and can be completely arranged by the parents.

Another unique thing about the Sikh religion is their tradition consisting of the five K's. Penny 9 quotes Guru Gobind Singh in a statement he made to Afghanistan Sikhs: The Guru will be your support forever, I am much pleased with you all.

You must take the baptism of the sword from five; keep your hair uncut-this is the seal of the Guru. Never be complacent about the pair of shorts and the sword. Always wear on your wrist a steel bracelet, keep your hair neat and clean and comb it twice a day. Always read and recite the hymns of the Guru. Meditate on the name of the wonderful Lord- God alone.

Keep the symbols of the faith as the Guru has told you.

The 5 K's which are mentioned in this passage are: the Kesh, which is the belief of uncut hair, the Kangha which is a small comb that is used to brush

the Sikhs hair five times daily, Kara, a steel bangle or bracelet that is worn for protection. Also the Kachera which are short trousers that are worn as underwear, and the Kirpan which is a small sword which can vary from three feet to only ten centimeters. Out of all the traditions, beliefs and rituals that the Sikh religion contains, the Kirpan has caused the most controversy in our society.

Controversy over Religious Belief Even though some Sikhs in Canada have forgotten many beliefs, traditions and rituals, it is estimated that about ten percent of the quarter million Sikhs living in Canada today still follow their religion to the full extent. This includes the five K's, and the wearing of the ceremonial knife known as the Kirpan.

In a school in Montreal, Quebec a Sikh boy by the name of Gurbaj Singh Multani, who was only twelve years old, was prohibited from wearing his ceremonial knife, due to the possibility of violence.

Other schools in Alberta and Ontario allow the wearing of the ceremonial knife with no controversy because of its connection to religion. Why did Quebec act differently towards this religious belief? An incident that occurred while Multani was playing was the start of the controversy. Multani once accidentally dropped his Kirpan while playing during recess.

This frightened some people to see that a child in their school was carrying a knife. He was the same as every other child at his school and this sword could have been used as a weapon.

People did not think it was fair to treat him differently with a weapon because of his religion. Eventually, the school board became involved and suggestions were made to either seal the knife in the case so it could not be removed or seen as a threat, or to replace the real knife with a fake Kirpan and be worn, also sealed into the case. Multani's family did not find this fair and sued the school board. Multani first went to court on May 27th 2002 and the trial judge overturned the case allowing Multani to wear his kirpan as long as he did not use it as a weapon and followed other laws regarding the issue.

On March 4th 2004 the Quebec Court overturned the Superior Court ruling, and once again banned Multani from wearing his ceremonial knife. After being offended by the ruling of the Quebec Court, Multani's family took him out of public school and enrolled him into a private school where he was allowed to wear his Kirpan. Unfortunately, the controversy did not stop here. The trial eventually went to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The court tried to make both parties happy. " In this case, it is religious freedom vs. public safety. (B. A.

Robinson 1) The court finally decided that each individual school board would have to allow the wearing of the Kirpan, but could make their own decisions about restrictions. For example, B. A. Robinson says A public school board in Ontario requires the student to: Make a formal request of the school principal. Be a Khalsa Sikh (baptized member of the Sikh faith). Wear a Kirpan no greater than 17.

8 cm (7 inches) in length. Secure the Kirpan in a sheath. Wear the Kirpan under clothing so that it is not visible.

Although there was a big argument and dispute about the wearing of this ceremonial knife, there was never a case reported of a violent incident involving the Kirpan. This indicates that maybe the Kirpan was not as big a threat as some people thought. Religion is an important part of a person's life, especially to some, and most devoted Sikhs would not use their religion or the belief of wearing their Kirpan in an inappropriate manner.

Sikhs all over the world have been following traditions for hundreds of years. Although it is not one of the best known religions, those who follow it, cherish it.

In the past century Sikh population in Canada has increased and become more widely known. Today it is taught in many religion programs in schools, and it's not uncommon to find a Sikh Gurdwara in Canada. By making this religion known to the people of our country it is easier for them to be accepted by society, and not discriminated by others.

The Sikh religion has been taken into account for many occupations and activities. For example, in 1990 the first Sikh to wear a turban as an RCMP officer was Baltej Singh Dhillon.

In my military experiences it is ok for a Sikh to wear their turbans at cadets and in the Canadian Forces, even if it goes against the rules and regulations of some mess halls about wearing headgear, their religion is respected and exceptions are made. By allowing people of a different race or religion to

participate in daily activities while following their beliefs we are opening up more opportunities for them, and closing the doors on racism.

Canada is a multi cultural country where people can practice different religions freely. Although we were not always as open and welcoming to other religions, we have changed for the better.