

Explain the essential features of a gurdwara religion essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A Sikh gurdwara may simply be a terraced house or a marvellous temple like that in Amritsar. A Gurdwara is a Sikh place of worship and gathering which is open to anyone, regardless of their colour, beliefs or gender: ' Know that we are all born from the same clay'. The Gurdwara is important because it is home to the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) It is also the place of worship and the langar, a community centre for the sangat (Sikh community) and the place where ceremonies such as marriage take place. The Guru Granth Sahib is very important because it is today's Guru for Sikhs, and it was appointed eternal by Guru Gobind Singh (the previous guru). It also contains all the teachings, the history of the religion and also the Gurbani (words of god). Guru Nanak started the first Sikh assembly in a dharamsala (inn), where he sang hymns, and taught. He also insisted that all followers should be willing to worship, and eat together. The second Guru, Guru Angad, brought up the idea of educating young people, by teaching Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script. Children would gather to learn the script of the Guru's hymns. Har Rai said that dispensaries should be there to give free medicines to the poor. Guru Har Gobind gave the places of worship the name ' Gurdwara' from two Punjabi words: ' Guru' (god) and ' Dwara' (doorway). Gurdwara literally means ' doorway to god' and the meaning is symbolised through the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. This is the basic history of how a gurdwara came to be. All gurdwaras look different, and they can be any shape or size.

A gurdwara is marked by a Nishan Sahib which is the symbol of the Khalsa army and it is a sign that this is the place of the Guru and the Khalsa. It is a kesri (saffron) coloured flag on a very tall pole so that the place of worship

can be seen from miles away. The pole is also wrapped in a kesri coloured fabric as the colour symbolises courage and sacrifice. The Khanda (Symbol of Sikhism) is printed onto the flag, and it's consisted of 4 weapons. The double edged sword is a symbol of the teaching that Sikhs must fight for truth, the two kirpans represent the spiritual and earthly worlds, and the chakra or circle reminds the Sikhs that god is one. This reminds everyone that Sikhs have had to fight to defend their religion. Above the door of the entrance to the Gurdwara is the most important concept within the Guru Granth Sahib - the Mool Mantra. This is a verse about the nature and work of God, and Guru Nanak spoke this verse after he came back from heaven. The purpose of the Mool Mantra being above the door is so that as soon as you enter the Gurdwara, or even before, you're already thinking about god. Also the Ik Onkar (another Sikh symbol) is usually above the door. It means ' God is one'. Having this above the door links to Guru Nanak's teaching: Nam Japna, thinking about god at all times. As it says in the Guru Granth Sahib ' Pray, pray, pray and obtain peace'.

When entering the gurdwara you are expected to remove your shoes and cover your head as a sign of respect towards the Guru Granth Sahib. There is always a cloakroom, whether it is a room or simply a shelf or space set aside where you can leave your shoes. This is because no dirt should go into the diwan hall. Also shoes are usually made of leather, and respecting the beliefs of Hindus, Sikhs also believe that you shouldn't kill cows. It would be very disrespectful to take leather into the diwan hall. There are also washrooms separate for males and females, where hands are washed and in some

gurdwaras there are also feet washes. People should be clean if they're to enter the presence of the Guru, as a sign of respect.

The Diwan hall (Darbar Sahib) is probably the most important room in the gurdwara because it is the place of hymns, the place of prayers, and the place of worship. The feature that attracts your eye is the takht (throne) in the centre of the room. The reason there is a throne is because the Guru Granth Sahib is treated like a human Guru. It is treated like royalty. There is a Palki (gold canopy) over the Manji Sahib (platform) on which the Guru Granth Sahib is placed. Again the canopy is gold to treat the Guru like royalty. It is to show that the Guru Granth Sahib is treated like a living Guru giving an audience. Romallas are also brought as offerings by the sangat (community) to cover the Guru Granth Sahib as a sign of respect. A Sikh volunteer sits behind the Guru Granth Sahib holding a Chauri (made from horse hair attached to a wooden or steel handle), and he or she waves it from time to time as a token of respect. The chauri is a symbol of the authority of the living Guru. Approaching the Guru Granth Sahib on a red carpet one is expected to bow down and touch the floor as a sign of further respect towards the eternal Sikh Guru. The red carpet is a symbol that the present Guru is treated as royalty, and that it is special. As you walk down the carpet you think of God. In front of the Takht there is a golak (collection box) where offerings of cash are usually made to help carry the expenses of running the gurdwara and community work. These offerings are voluntary and not compulsory. The offerings are made to show respect to God. There is also a platform for the Ragis (musicians) to elevate them the better to hear their music and Shabads (hymns), but not as high as for the Guru Granth

Sahib. They will sing Shabads and will play their harmoniums and tablas (instruments). The Khanda symbol and the Mool Mantra will again be in the Diwan hall. This is reminding Sikhs of their history and the nature of God. There might be some pictures of the previous ten Gurus, but some Gurdwaras do not have them because they believe that the Diwan hall should be simple, and free from distractions. Sikhs believe that you shouldn't worship Gurus; they are not more important than God, and by having pictures of the Gurus they might be a focus of worship instead of God. Gobind Singh also said: ' Those who call me Supreme Being shall fall into the pit of hell'. All people irrespective of their status sit on the floor as a sign of equality, as opposed to chairs. Because as it says in the Sikh holy book ' Everyone has the same human form, everyone has the same soul'. The Guru Granth Sahib is always installed on a higher level to show respect to the much honoured Guru. One may enter or leave the congregation at any time. Men and women do not sit together but on separate sides of the room, both at an equal distance from the Guru Granth Sahib. The granthi is a person who reads the Guru Granth Sahib and can be a man or a woman, to show equality. It is their job. Nanak also taught that everyone should do a job that benefited society - Kirat Karna.

Another sign of the book being treated as a living Guru is that it has its own bedroom (Babaji's room) where it is ' put away to sleep'. Babaji is a respected way of calling elderly people. The ceremony of laying the Guru Granth Sahib to rest is called Sukhasan. The book will always have a four poster bed, to show how authoritative it is, and how it is honoured. On the bed the Guru Granth Sahib will be covered by Romallas which are beautiful

cloths donated by the sangat as a sign of respect to the book. The Ik Onkar symbol will be in the room, as will flowers and decorations. There will be more than one copy of the holy book, since some people will want to borrow the book for ceremonies such as marriage, and funerals. These spare copies will also be kept in the Babaji's room. This room will be the most beautifully decorated room in the gurdwara, and it will also be the highest. Again this is to respect the book, and to treat it as a living, human Guru. The Babaji's room is one of the most important rooms in the gurdwara.

An essential part of any gurdwara is the langar (Kitchen and dining area). The Guru designed an institution in which all people would sit together, on the floor as equals, to eat the same simple food. It is here that all people high or low, rich or poor, male or female, all sit together to share and enjoy the food together. In the langar all sit on the floor and food is cooked and served by volunteers, this food is available at all times. Everyone can do sewa (help) by washing the dishes, cleaning up, helping to cook; everything is counted as sewa and by doing so you are fulfilling a part of your duty. It is very good to do sewa because like it says in the Guru Granth Sahib, to be a good person, you've got to help others: ' the hands of the Gurmukh are blessed for they toil in the service of God and the Sangat'. This links to another one of Nanak's teachings: Kirat Karna - helping others. Only vegetarian food is served so that no person is offended and all religions can sit together to share a meal. There could be some tables and chairs, but even while eating everyone should sit at the same height to show equality. Speakers will be connected to the Diwan hall, so that those making langar

can listen to the bani (the service). Gurdwaras aren't just a place of worship, but a place of gathering and community as well.

Most gurdwaras will have a classroom which looks like any typical classroom with desks and chairs. Children will come here usually once a week to learn about their religion and the Sikh history, to learn Punjabi (if not their first language) and to learn the written form of Gurmukhi. The teachers are called giannis. There may be some guest/visitors bedrooms that are even open to non-Sikhs who are too poor to afford other accommodation. Nanak believed that an important quality to develop in Sikhism was that of hospitality, welcoming visitors, Sikhs and non-Sikhs. Also there will be a dispensary, which is a free clinic usually found in poorer areas of the world, e. g. India. Har Rai believed that the sick and the poor should be given free medicines as service to the humanity. This is again linked to Nanak's teachings, Vand Chakna (Charitable thinking).

The main purpose of the gurdwara is to be a place where Sikhs can study the Guru Granth Sahib and to praise God. It is also used as a community centre for youth clubs and women's meetings. The gurdwara also serves an education centre and teaching local Sikhs about their faith and language. Any traveller is welcome to a free meal at the Gurdwara and can find temporary accommodation here. Respect and honour is shown to the Guru Granth Sahib and to God in every way possible, and the importance of the Guru Granth Sahib is fully demonstrated.