

# [Equality is promoted in sikhism](https://assignbuster.com/equality-is-promoted-in-sikhism/)

The word Sikh means “ student” in the Punjabi language. Sikhs are students and followers of Guru Nanak (b. 1469), the founder of the Sikh tradition.

Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine Gurus or holy teachers. Since 1708, the Sikh Guru has been their religious scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib.

There are over 20 million Sikhs worldwide, making Sikhism the fifth largest organized religion in the world.

(http://www. sikhnextdoor. org/students/learn)

This essay will attempt to evaluate ways in which equality is promoted, to achieve this, is vital to overlook at some of the teachings of Sikhism .

One of the main aspect of Sikh practical response to equality can be found in the teachings of the Gurus starting with Nanak, the first Guru, who after he had a powerful mystical experience, in which he received a divine calling to bring people to an awareness of God, said “ there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim”. This brief statement give us a glimpse of a new starting process towards equality, starting from understanding oneness ( Shackle and Arvind, 2005, pg. 43.).

The teachings of the Gurus are not set as philosophical treaties or codes, but as poetry with a strong devotional prominence, which is designed to be sung or recited. Sikhism does not derive from any established creed, it does not fight any preceding one. Sikh philosophy and religion are enlighten from within the Indian heritage. Far from dissociating it completely from Hinduism , they have accepted the Hindu pantheon of Gods without any dispute. Lakshmi, Durga, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu are celebrated deities in the songs of the gurus. There is no attempt to deny their existence or divinity. The effort is only to put them as lesser deities serving the supreme Lord. (KAUR RAIT, 2005, pg. 17)

Sikhism preaches a message of devotion and remembrance of God at all time , truthful living, and equality of mankind. Because of this Sikhism is open to all through the teachings of its ten Gurus enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book and the living Guru Sri Guru Grand Sahib .

The Sikh philosophy and teachings put great emphasis on the importance of putting others before oneself. “ where self exists there is no God. Where God exists there is no self”.(Guru Nanak)

It promotes a classless society, giving more importance to virtue than wealth. The status of an individual should be determined by deeds or merits not by class position. All should be treated as equal irrespective of their material resources.

Guru Arjun Dev said, ” The wisdom of God looks upon all alike, such as the wind that blows alike for the commoner and the King”.(W. H. McLeod, 1999, pg. 32)

The Sikh concept of equality applies naturally to both man and women and is promoted through the teachings and practises of the Gurus.

Sikhism advocates sex equality and accords women an equal place in society.

At the emerging of Sikhism the Gurus condemned practices prevalent in India in the fifteenth century which undermined women, such us the veiling of women, sati and female infanticide. Sikhs allowed women to remarry, and Guru Nanak condemned the custom to wear the veil. in India sati and female infanticide were only legally abolished in the nineteenth century.

Sikh Gurus allowed women free, unrestrained and equal participation in the spiritual as well as social life, in fact they give women what should always been theirs anyway; full equality to participate to religious services, to be equal partners in marriage and family life. If some of the men protested that women were ignorant, the Gurus said let them express their ignorance. Sikhism is a practical religion and has nowhere ignored facts. It recognises that women can speak out of ignorance, but so can man. (Nanak, 2006, pg. 150.) The achievement of equality is further demonstrated in the ceremonial custom of the Khalsa a form of baptism. New Members, male and female alike are committed to upholding the Rahit (Sikh code of ethics and rituals) and help the community.

The importance to Sikhs for equality is also manifested in the Langar Meal (Community Kitchen) is part of the act of worship and is a very important aspect of Sikh life, it was instituted for a social issue , as the society was divided into many castes and the difference between Hindus and Muslims. It was made mandatory by Sikh Guru that only when one would sit down at the same level as the other and eat together that one can join the Sangat (Company of Holy). Thus, the cooking, cleaning of dishes and serving of food happens with everybody involved irrespective of their background. All of them sit on the ground, as it is consider to be leveled and eat food. These public activity were considered unimaginable amongst the principle of the class conscious Indian society. Where according to purification system, sharing of food, drink and utensils touched By someone from a lower caste was considered as made impure. (Nesbitt, 2005, pg 32.)

The practice of Langar meal is still in effect at Gurudwara (Sikh place of worship). Another given name for langar is Pangat, Sikh families consider it’s a privilege to provide the langar and serve it to others.( Mayled, 2002, pg. 12)

On human rights, Gurus principles of equality was a natural thing that came from their faith. God loves us without distinctions of caste, creed, colour and sex.

Equality implies tolerance of differences, existing in dress, food, custom and so on.

For Sikh the state as a vital role to play in the formation of an ideal society. It is always stressed that whoever roles over the state should always be a dispensers of justice and equality and must never wield their authority despotically. They are responsible to God the Supreme Sovereign, for all their actions. They are only agent commissioned to govern in the manner of Plato’s; with justice, kindness, sympathy and promote the welfare of their people. They are to conduct their functions, as a mandate from God.

To this last view the Sikh Gurus gave a revolutionary turn by emphasising that whoever rules is not responsible to God alone, but to the people as well, for whose good they are set up by God. Therefore if a ruler deviates from the path of justice and duty, it is just to offer resistance to his wrong doing.( O. P. Ralhan, 1997, pg. 72)

The Sikh religion teaches that life continues after death in the soul and not in the physical body. Therefore the last act of giving and helping others through organs donation is both consistent with and in the spirit of Sikh teachings. (Benedetti, 2008, pg. 57)

To resume we can definitely say that from the beginning, Sikhism give women equality with men not only in religion`s affairs. Both attend services as equal members and conduct services, to work together

In preparing and serving for the communal meal. They share equal responsibilities in all the social and cultural activities at the gurdwara.

Sikh women and men take part on equal terms as president, secretaries, and activities organizers.

The Sikh Gurus never said that man and women should play exactly the same role in every area of life. They thought that men and women should respect and value equally the different roles that each undertakes. In the Sikh marriage vows emphasis is on mutual faithfulness, and this again brings to our minds in another practical contest the word equality (Singh, 1998, pg. 22.).

In view of all that has been presented so far, to many of us the ideal of equality to which Guru Nanak appealed the people in the fifteenth century significantly could serve as a model in our own day an age, and could give a new meaning, a new direction, a new authenticity to our own cause of equality chartered only in recent decades in the west.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

* ENRICO BENEDETTI , 2008, Living Donor Organs, McGraw Hill companies USA
* CHRISTHOPHER SHACKLE and ARVIND PAL SINGH MANDAIR, 2005, Teaching of the Sikh Gurus, Published by Routledge, 70 Madison Ave, New York.
* KANWALIJT KAUR SINGH, 1998, Sikhism for today, oxford University Press, Oxford, England
* NESBITT E., 2005 , Sikhism A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England
* NIRMAL NANAK, 2006, pg. 150, Sikh philosophy and religion, New down press group publisher, Slough, Berkshire, England
* O. P. RALHAN, 1997, The great Gurus of the Sikh, Anmoul publications, New Delhi India.
* SATWANT KAUR RAIT, 2005, Sikh women, Trentham books Limited, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire, England.
* W. H. MCLEOD, 1999, Sikhs and Sikhism, Oxford University press, New Delhi) http://www. sikhnextdoor. org/students/learn. html ACCESSED ON 7/04/2010