

# SIKH ARTEFACTS

## Chauri

### CHAURI fly whisk



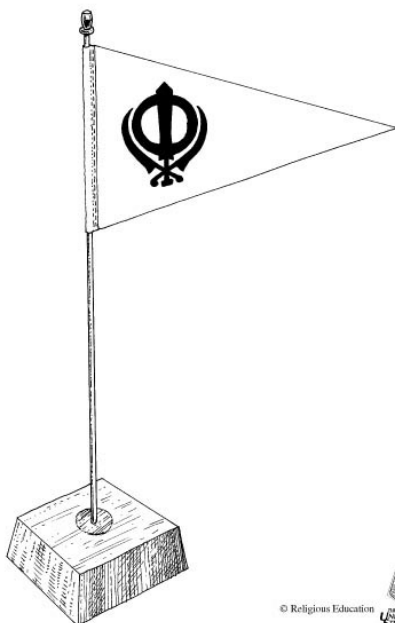
The chauri is a fan or fly whisk . The handle is normally made of precious metals or wood. The fan itself is traditionally made of yak hair, the tail hair of a white horse, or peacock feathers, but you will find that natural fibres such as cotton or silk are common and modern versions use nylon. It is waved by the person reading the Guru Granth Sahib in order to show respect for the holy book. It is a traditional Indian symbol of authority, and Indian rulers or Hindu gods are often shown being fanned with a chauri.

Within the Sikh tradition a chauri is kept beside the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scriptures. As the scriptures are being read, the reader or an attendant will periodically wave the chauri over the scriptures. This is a sign of respect for the authority of the Guru Granth Sahib which is treated like a living Guru or teacher. Each morning the Guru Granth Sahib is carried in procession and placed on a stool, a

traditional Indian symbol of authority reflecting a society where the person of authority sat on a stool and others sat on the ground. Other ways in which respect is shown to the Guru Granth Sahib is by worshippers prostrating themselves in front of it and by its being returned in a ceremonial procession each evening to its resting place

## Nishan Sahib (Sikh flag)

### FLAG with stand



Gurdwaras may be recognised by their Sikh flag which will be flying prominently. The term 'nisan' means 'flag' and 'sahib' is a term of respect. The flag is saffron, triangular and shows the **Khanda** which is one of the chief symbols of the Sikhs. The Khanda is a combination of three important symbols:

- (a) double-edged sword (also known as a Khanda), for the one God who is Truth and Creator. It is also the sword of true knowledge, freedom and justice. The sword also represents the two sided nature of the Sikh Gurus who combined the qualities of saint and soldier. These swords are used to prepare **amrit** for Sikh initiation ceremonies
- (b) surrounding the sword is a circle or **chakkar (chakra)**. Because a circle has no beginning or end it represents the infinite nature of God - showing that God is one, without beginning or

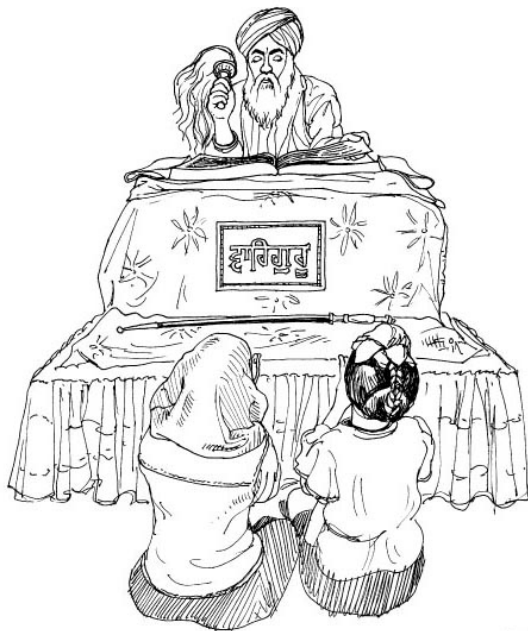
end. It also signifies the unity of the Sikh brotherhood (the **Khalsa**) and the unity of humanity, united within the circle of God's rule.

- (c) The double edged sword and the circle are supported by two **kirpans** or swords, one of which represents the spiritual power of God's message as expressed through the Gurus and the other the need to fight against oppression and injustice. Together they symbolise religious and political power and remind Sikhs of their role as defenders of truth.

The Nisan Sahib is attached to a flag pole which is covered in saffron coloured cloths. Each year at Baisakhi, the festival which celebrates the forming of the Kalsa or community of baptised Sikhs, the flag pole is taken down and ritually washed before it is wrapped in new cloths and has a new Nisan Sahib attached to it.

## Guru Granth Sahib

### GRANTHI reading GRANTH



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When the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, died in 1708 he told the Sikhs that henceforth they were to be guided by the words of the Scriptures as if they were a living Guru. The scriptures are known as the Guru ("teacher") Granth ("large book") Sahib ("Sir" - a sign of respect). The scriptures are treated with the utmost respect, as if they were a living person. Any room in which the holy book is kept is regarded as holy and at night it is laid to rest in a bed in a room known as **Sachkand**. Normally you only find Guru Granth Sahibs in gurdwaras as it is costly and time consuming to keep one in its own room in a home.

The Scriptures are written in **Gurmurkhi**, a script devised by Guru Angad Dev (second Guru) specifically to write down the scriptures. All copies of the Guru Granth Sahib nowadays have 1430 pages. The scriptures consist of 4956 hymns written by six of the ten Gurus. They also contain 938 hymns by non-Sikhs, both Muslim and Hindu,

which are known as the bhagat bani. It is assumed that the Gurus collected these materials in an anthology as a practical affirmation of the basic Sikh belief that it is wrong to confine God to any particular religion.

### Stool and Cover for the Holy Book

When the Guru Granth Sahib is open in the gurdwara it rests on a small stool or bed made up of three cushions and a special quilt which are together called the **Manji Sahib**. This is tilted to make the angle easier for the reader. There is a canopy over the Manji Sahib which also helps signify the importance of the Guru Granth Sahib. This is known as the

**channani.** When the Guru Granth Sahib is closed on the Manji Sahib it is covered by an embroidered cloth called a **rumala**. The scriptures will also be wrapped in rumalas when they are moved around the gurdwara.

## Sikh Book of Hymns and Prayers

It is not normal for Sikhs to have copies of the Guru Granth Sahib at home. If they do, it must be given its own room and treated with the same respect and attention as is the holy book in the gurdwara. Sikhs who cannot give the Guru Granth Sahib this kind of personal care will probably keep a **gutka** instead. This is a small book that contains the verses Sikhs read or recite daily. Sikhs will wash their hands before opening it and when the book is not in use it will be wrapped in cloth and kept in a special place such as a top bookshelf.

## The Five Ks



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In 1699 Guru Gobind Singh founded the **Khalsa**, the community of Sikhs who had undergone the **Amrit** initiation ceremony..

According to Sikh tradition this was to ensure that Sikhs could recognise each other and develop a strong sense of community but also to ensure that, at a time when Sikhs were being persecuted, non-Sikhs were not harmed through mistaken identity. Over the years these signs took on a range of symbolic meanings. Though these meanings may have evolved through the centuries, they each highlight an important aspect of a Sikh characteristic or quality. As a member of the Khalsa a Sikh must wear five symbols which are referred to as the **5Ks**:

- **Kesh** The uncut hair (head, face, body). Sikhs do not cut their hair as they

consider it to be God given. They keep their hair very clean.

- **Kangha** The small wooden comb which keeps the hair tidy. It is a reminder to Sikhs to keep their lives well-ordered. Just as Sikhs require to comb their hair to keep it controlled and in order, so they require to discipline their lives so that they can live orderly lives and develop the spiritual side of their nature
- **Kirpan** The Kirpan is a short sword, most Sikhs carry one about 15cms long. It signifies honour, dignity, bravery, the readiness to fight for truth and justice. and the Sikh duty to defend the weak and oppressed and to uphold the truth. It should never be drawn in anger, but only in the service of God, and once drawn it is not re-sheathed without the shedding of blood. It may vary from a miniature one worn around the neck or embossed on the kangha to a full length sword. At the time when Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa, the kirpan was used in battle. Over the years it came to represent the spiritual warfare in which all Sikhs should be involved..
- **Kara** The Kara is a steel bracelet worn on the right wrist (unless the wearer is left-handed). The circle of the bracelet is a symbol of God and of the unity of the Khalsa. Steel symbolises strength and fighting for right. The circle is an ancient symbol with many layers of meaning. As a circle has no beginning or end, it has been interpreted as a symbol of the eternal nature of God who has no beginning or end. It has also been seen as a symbol of the unity and equality of the Khalsa since all may wear it, and being plain, all can afford to buy one. At a different level, it may be seen as symbolising the bond which exists between the community of Sikhs and God. The steel is a reminder of the strength of the bonds which unite the Sikhs together and to God and also of the strength which they must have when fighting against injustice.
- **Kachs** (kaccha, kaachera) Short trousers or long underpants tied with a drawstring. They allow freedom of movement in battle (unlike the dhoti). Because they allow this freedom of movement in battle, they have been interpreted as a symbol of the readiness to fight for those who cannot defend themselves and for the Sikh religion. The Kachs also symbolise purity and modesty, and remind Sikhs to be faithful to their marriage.. A third suggestion is that the change in style of dress which they represented was a symbol of the new ideas and way of life being introduced by Sikhism.

## Turban Length

### TURBAN with Turban Badge



The turban (keshki) is often wrongly thought to be one of the 5Ks. It is worn in imitation of the Gurus themselves. The turban cloth may be from 2 to 4.5 metres long and will be starched. Underneath the turban, hair is combed into a bun and secured with a cloth called a **patka**. The turban cloth is then folded lengthways, (this may be held in the teeth when tying). About 15cms of cloth is draped over the left shoulder, the rest is wrapped around the head from left to right and the end tucked in at the forehead and spread to cover the top of the hair. The draped piece tucks in at the back. There is no

significance in the colour of the turban, although occasionally this may indicate adherence to a particular political party. A white turban may indicate mourning and a red one will be worn for weddings. The colour saffron is also particularly associated with Sikhism.

In India the turban was once a sign of authority worn by rulers only. Guru Gobind Singh wore the turban to show that Sikhs are powerful men and unafraid.

Sikh boys usually begin wearing a turban once they can tie it for themselves (about ten years). Younger boys will normally wear just the patka. Women normally cover their hair with a scarf known as a **chunni** or **dupatta** although some baptised Sikh women choose to wear a turban.

It is well known that there have been special difficulties for turban wearing Sikhs in this country e.g. in jobs which require certain uniforms and the motor cycle crash helmet law.

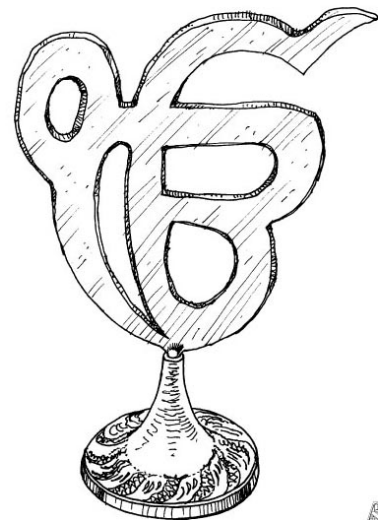
For many Sikhs the turban is a powerful symbol of their faith, though it should be noted that the use of the turban is not limited to those who belong to the Sikh tradition.

When a Sikh dies his turban is passed on to his eldest son. To receive a turban is regarded as an honour.

### EK ONKAR symbol

#### Ik Onkar

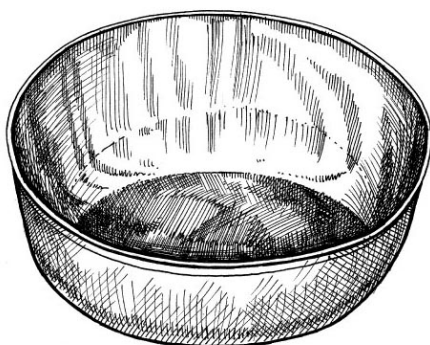
**Ik Onkar:** This symbol consists of the two words which begin the Mool Mantra. It means "There is one and only one God". The Ik Onkar symbol is found in many places, e.g. free-standing in the gurdwara, on the canopy over the Guru Granth Sahib, as a wall decoration in the home. It is the term most frequently used by Sikhs about God. It stresses the unity or oneness of God, a distinctive feature of Sikh belief in an Indian society dominated by Hinduism in which God is traditionally manifested in a multitude of forms. The Mool Mantra is the statement of belief which sums up the core of Sikh theology and which can be traced back to Guru Nanak.



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#### Kara Parshad

##### BOWL FOR KARAH PARSHAD



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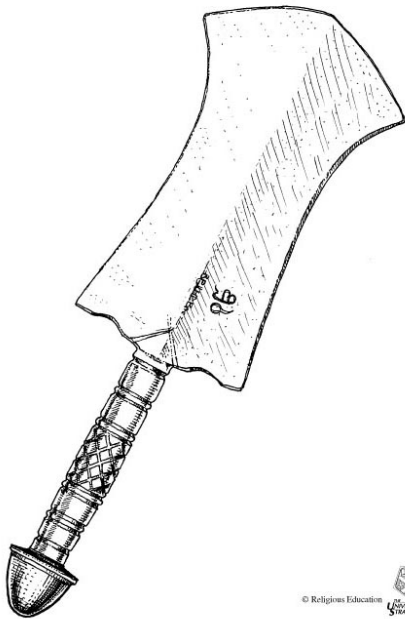
**Kara parshad** is a sweet food which is offered to all who attend worship in the gurdwara.

Those who prepare it bathe beforehand and recite hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib as they make it. When cooked, it is covered with a white cloth which is sprinkled with water as a symbol of cleanliness. It is then placed near the Guru Granth Sahib. During the prayers at the end of worship it is stirred with a kirpan or sword. It is then given to all who are present as a sign of their equality and unity.

Offering kara parshad also makes sure that no one leaves the Guru's presence empty handed.

The ingredients for kara parshad are donated by members of the congregation, often to commemorate special events in their family life.

## KHANDA



## Khanda

**Khanda** is a term used to describe both the Sikh symbol, which is a double edged sword surrounded by a circle and supported by two kirpans or scimitars and also the double edged sword itself. The double edged sword represents the two sided nature of the Sikh Gurus who combined the qualities of saint and soldier. Both edges of the blade must be equally honed. This represents the need for a balance between the qualities associated with saint and soldier.

## Recipe for Kara Parshad

Ingredients (sufficient for one class): 400 grams of semolina, 400 grams of sugar, 400 grams of unsalted butter (ghee if you can get it), cup of water.

1. Melt the butter over a low heat
2. Add semolina and cook until golden brown – about seven minutes – warning: keep stirring, or it will stick to the pan!
3. Mix in the sugar thoroughly and add the water. Cook slowly until the mixture thickens.
4. Serve warm in the hand