

CROSSROADS: Journal of Global Perspectives

E-ISSN: 3071-3838 P-ISSN: 3071-382X

Volume 1, Issue 2, June 2026

<https://doi.org/10.67729/qtw5zr41>

Sikhs Before Sikhism: Exploring the Historical Roots of a People

Dr. Parmod Pahwa

Researcher and Analyst.

Abstract

The history of Sikhism is commonly narrated beginning with the life of Guru Nanak in 1469. While this approach is appropriate for understanding Sikhism as a religious tradition, it overlooks the deeper historical and cultural roots of the people who later became Sikhs. This article examines the pre-Sikh past of Punjab, exploring the ancient civilizations, ethnic communities, and spiritual currents that shaped the region long before the emergence of Sikhism. By situating Sikh identity within the broader civilizational history of Punjab, the article argues that Sikhism represents both a complete revolution and a cultural continuity. Understanding this deeper context enriches our appreciation of Sikh identity and its place within the long historical evolution of Punjabi civilization.

Keywords: Punjab; Sikh history; Indus Valley Civilization; Bhakti movement; Sufism; Punjabi identity; Guru Nanak; Khalsa; cultural continuity.



Papers are published under Creative Commons license with attribution required (CC BY 4.0). Permission is given to anyone to quote sections from the paper with attribution.

1.) Introduction

The history of the Sikhs is often told beginning with the life of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikh Religion. While this is appropriate when discussing Sikhism as a distinct religious tradition, it leaves unanswered an equally compelling historical question: *Who were the Sikhs before Sikhism?*

At first glance, the question appears paradoxical. Yet historians increasingly recognize the distinction between a religious identity and the cultural, ethnic, and geographical communities from which it emerges. No spiritual tradition arises in a vacuum. Sikhism, too, developed within a rich civilizational landscape shaped by centuries of cultural exchange, migration, and spiritual ferment.

This article explores the deeper historical roots of the Sikh people by examining the ancient and medieval history of Punjab — a region whose cultural patterns shaped the very soil from which Sikhism later blossomed.

2.) Punjab as a Civilizational Crossroads

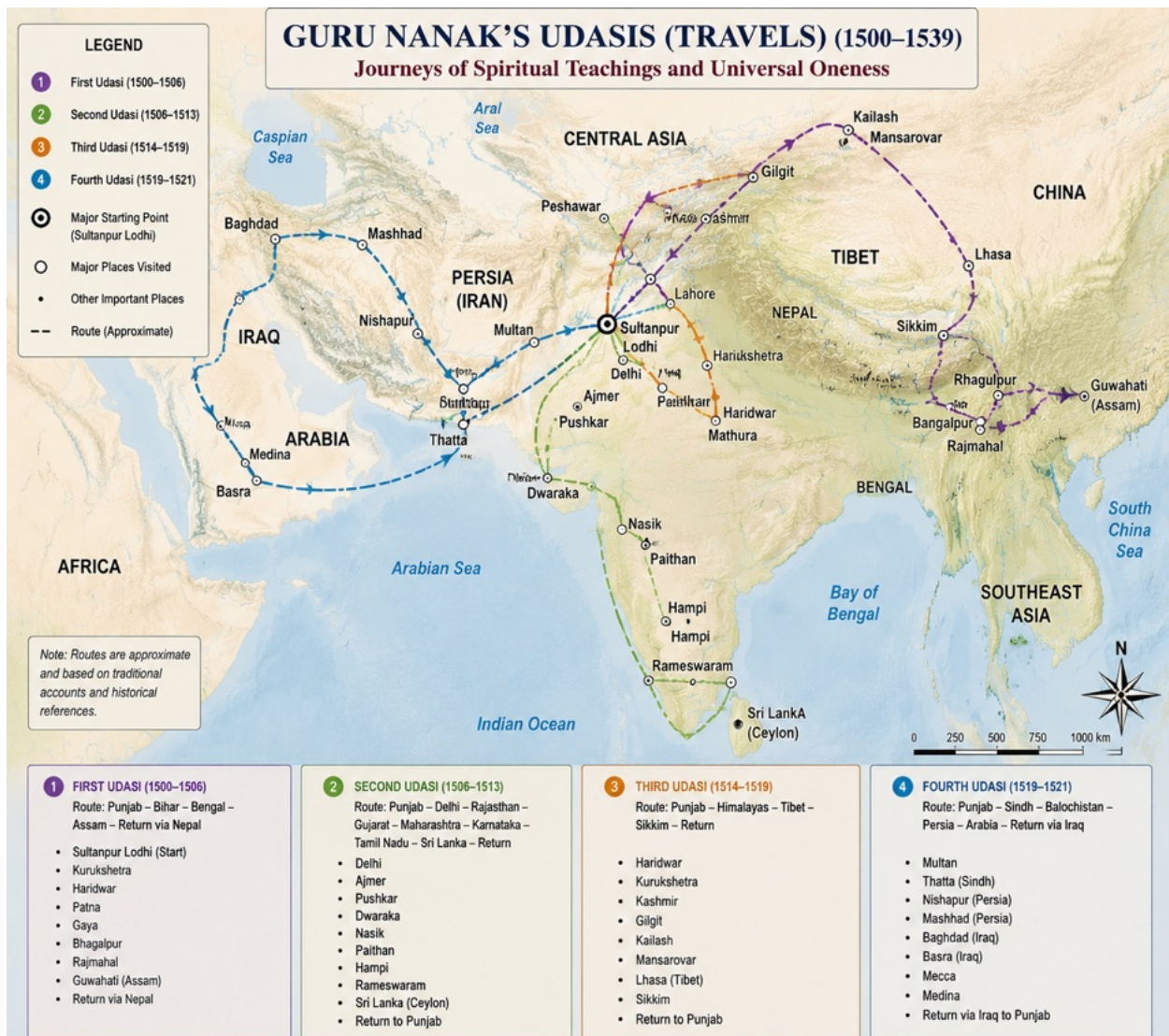
Punjab - the *Panj-āb*, or land of five rivers — has historically served as the gateway to the Indian subcontinent. Its geography made it a corridor for successive waves of migration, trade, and conquest. From the Indus Valley Civilization to the Vedic period, from Persian and Greek incursions to Turkic and Mughal rule, Punjab absorbed and transformed diverse cultural influences.

Asia was the birthplace of ‘Merchant Capitalism’ – a form of Capitalism in which merchants and traders exchanged goods throughout Asia. “The rudiments of capitalism did not begin in Europe during the ‘Middle Ages’ but rather developed centuries earlier in China, the Indian Ocean and only later in western Europe” (Peters, 2019). The merchants and traders were more interested in trade than history. They never formally documented the trade routes they opened. They probably also wanted to protect this commercially sensitive knowledge from others. Understandably, no merchant will talk about their sources and markets. “This form of trade-based globalization represents

a very early form of merchant capitalism, among the first along with Middle Eastern cities like Babylon and the Greek-city states, that predated western forms and has largely been ignored by western scholars because the sources are scarce and in ancient languages and text, and because history has been Eurocentric focusing on Marco Polo and his friends, that occurred much later” (Peters, 2019)

“The first merchants who reacted to these political embassies [nomadic tribes] by organizing expeditions up to China were in the first century bce from the Indo-Iranian borderlands, from Gandhara (nowadays northern Pakistan) and then Bactria (northern Afghanistan), soon to be united during the first century CE in the Kushan empire” (Peters, 2019).

It was not just goods and services that flowed along the trade routes. It was also knowledge and ideas. “Trade along the so-called Silk Road economic belt included fruits and vegetables, livestock, grain, leather and hides, tools, religious objects, artwork, precious stones and metals and—perhaps more importantly—language, culture, religious beliefs, philosophy and science” (History.com Editors, 2025). These trade routes facilitated Guru Nanak’s *Udasis* (travels) from Punjab to all corners of the known world.



Source: generated by the author from list of some of Guru Nanak's udasis (travels).

Note: historical accuracy not claimed

as Guru Nanak is known to have visited more places than the map depicts.

The same trade routes also facilitated European and Chinese explorers visiting South Asia. European travelers visited Punjab well before Guru Nanak. One such explorer Francisco Pelsaert (1590-1630) travelled in this region for Dutch East India Company. He wrote about his experiences in the book 'Jehangir's India' (Pelsaert, 1925).



Source: generated by the author from list of travelers and their routes.

Historical accuracy is not claimed. Intent is to illustrate rich exchange of ideas and goods.

The population of Punjab consisted of numerous tribes and communities, including *Jats*, *Khattris*, *Aroras*, *Rajputs*, *Gujjars*, *Kambojs*, and others. Over centuries, these groups developed a shared cultural identity centered around the Punjabi language, agrarian life, clan-based social structures, and regional customs.

Many of the families that later embraced Sikhism traced their ancestry to these pre-existing Punjabi communities.

Punjab was never a monolithic isolated inbred culture. It has always been a pluralistic and inclusive culture that has been connected with rest of the world for at least 500 years. Goods, services, and ideas have been freely exchanged.

3.) The Indus Valley Civilization and the Deep Roots of Punjabi Identity

The region now known as Punjab was home to one of the world's earliest urban civilizations: the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), also known as the Harappan Civilization (c. 3300–1300 BCE). Major sites such as *Harappa*, *Rakhigarhi*, and *Banawali* lie within the broader Punjab region (World History, 2026).



Indus Valley civilization (Wikimedia, 2026)

3.1 Urban Sophistication

The Harappans built:

- Planned cities
- Advanced drainage systems
- Standardized weights and measures
- Thriving craft industries
- Long-distance trade networks

“Some pre-Harappan settlements grew into cities containing thousands of individuals who were not primarily engaged in agriculture” (Ali, 2021). Cities allowed division of labor and an advanced economy based on town planning, pottery, and trade. Trade requires accurate weights and measures based on the easy-to-use decimal system.

“As seen in Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, and therefore the recently discovered Rakhigarhi, this urban arrange[ment] enclosed the world's initial urban sanitation systems. Among town, individual homes or teams of homes obtained water from wells. From a space that seems to own been put aside for bathing, waste material was directed to coated drains, that lined the foremost streets. Homes opened solely to inner courtyards and smaller lanes” (Ali, 2021).

3.2 Cultural Continuities

Archaeological evidence suggests continuities between the Indus Valley people and later Punjabi society:

- Agricultural patterns
- Craft traditions
- Settlement patterns
- Folk motifs and symbols

A traveler from modern day Punjab will feel right at home and familiar throughout most of the Indus Valley Civilization. Similar cuisine, language,

customs, preferences, and culture. In fact, people from modern day Punjab would like nothing more than to have freedom of travel through most of Indus Valley civilization as they see in it echoes of the past that they have lost. A traveler from modern day Punjab will feel right at home and get emotional in Balochistan a thousand km away. It feels like homecoming for them. “A unified culture emerged throughout the world, delivery into conformity settlements that were separated by as much as 1000 km. and muting regional variations” (Ali, 2021).

“This was a flourishing culture, with creative and technological development, and no sign of slavery or exploitation of individuals” (Ali, 2021). This suggests that Sikhism did not evolve in the dark or in vacuum or out of nowhere. It had its roots in the ‘flourishing culture’ and ‘creative and technological development’ of the Indus Valley civilization. This is expected as impactful ideas do not just emerge out of nowhere. They are the outcome of hundreds even thousands of years of cultural sophistication and development.

Sikh philosophy is considered a humane religion. Its central tenet is *sarbat-da-bhala* (prosperity-for-all). Sikh philosophy does not believe in prosperity for the few or exploitation of the weak and poor. This was in practice to some extent in the Indus Valley Civilization – ‘no sign of slavery or exploitation of individuals’ (Ali, 2021).

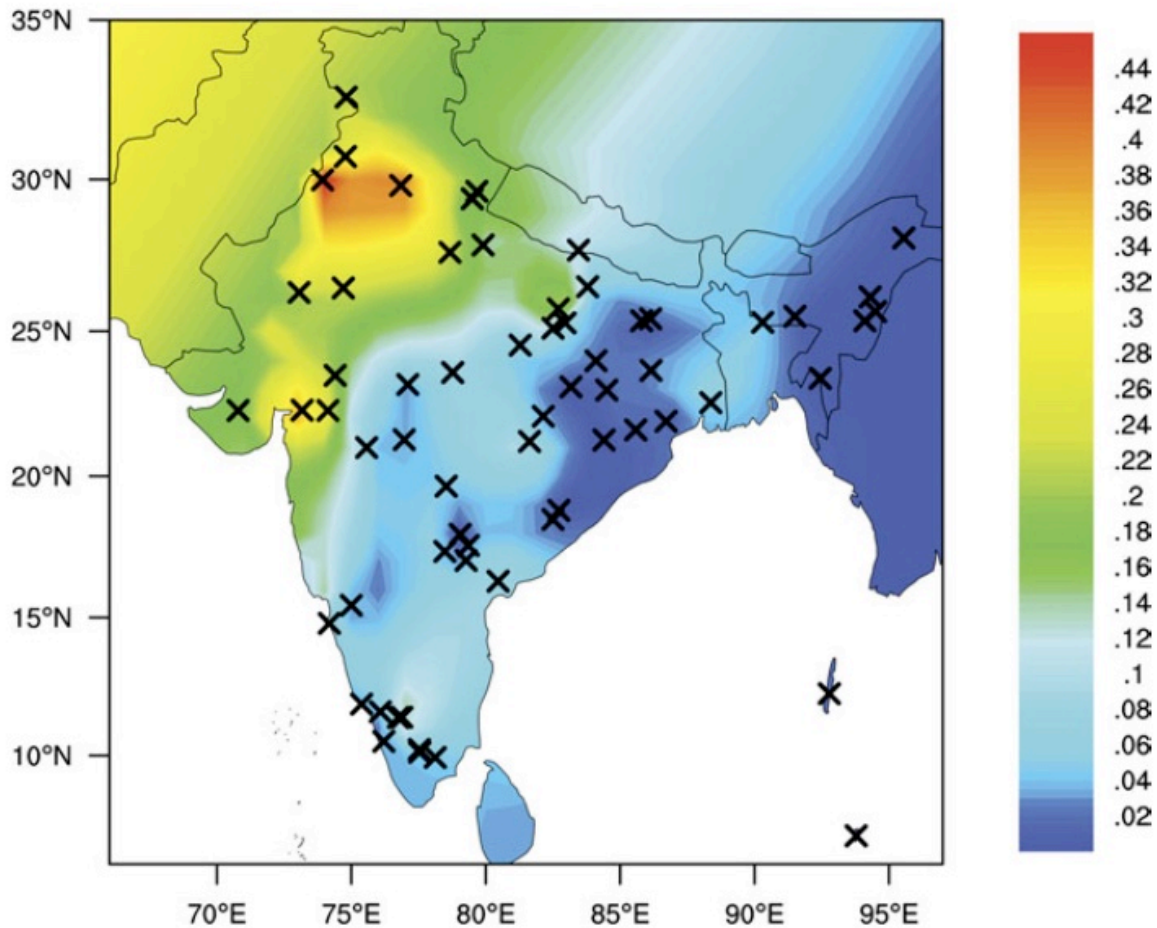
Another interesting aspect of Indus Valley Civilization was that “There’s no conclusive proof of palaces or temples — or, indeed, of kings, armies, or priests” (Ali, 2021). Sikh philosophy also carries this over. There is equality of all men *and* women. No one person is above others. There is no ‘King’ or priestly class or caste system in Sikh philosophy. There are no grand palaces for Kings or anyone. “Indus civilization cities were exceptional for his or her apparent egalitarianism. As an example, all homes had access to water and drain facilities. One gets the impression of a colossal, bourgeois society” (Ali, 2021). Sikh philosophy carries on this tradition of egalitarianism.

Sikh religion and philosophy were a cultural continuity of the informal values of the Indus Valley civilization. The religion formalized what people intrinsically believed in and practiced. This is expected. Religion, Great Leaders, and even Messengers of God recognize and work with people's prevailing beliefs. Formalized ideas and religion have to fit with people's existing beliefs. It cannot be superimposed on people with different views. Nor can an ideology which works in one region be transplanted as such to people with different civilizational values.

3.3 Ethnic Lineages

Genetic studies indicate that the people of the Indus Valley contributed significantly to the ancestry of North Indian populations, including Punjabis.

Ability to digest milk grants people ability to digest protein. It is associated with healthier growth of the person and the community. Research has shown that people of Indus Valley and specifically Punjab have higher ability to digest milk due to higher percentage of DNA that drives this.



*Mapping genes for lactose digestion.
Source: (Irene Gallego Romero, 2011)*

We don't have a DNA test for honesty or cultural values or martial spirit. But we have a DNA test for lactose tolerance (milk digestion). This suggests uniqueness of Sikhs in Punjab, and ethnic differences between Indus Valley Civilization and India/Hindustan.

It also suggests that institutions and values from one civilization cannot simply be superimposed on another civilization. "Institutions Cannot Be Transplanted" (Bhandari, 2026). There is no universal truth. Many civilizations do not believe in the so-called 'universal truth' e.g. universal human rights.

Can free markets, liberal democracy, female emancipation, human rights, or anti-caste frameworks be applied to societies in the Third World?... People in

the West often mistake their own inherited assumptions—about rights, fairness, individual dignity, and the rule of law—for universal truths that others will naturally accept once the proper legal structures are in place. It often does not occur to them that other societies may operate with radically different, even opposite, value systems... This is second-hand modernity: the adoption of institutional language and form without the habits of mind that make those institutions work. (Bhandari, 2026)

Yet, people continue to believe in transplanting models from one civilization to another. What works in China won't work in India. What works in Punjab cannot work elsewhere. People simply cannot be converted from one model of thinking to another.

4.) Spiritual Currents Before Guru Nanak

South Asia including present-day India and Pakistan was deeply fractured. “Subcontinent was deeply fragmented by rigid caste hierarchies, religious orthodoxy, and social inequalities” (Sahu, 2011).

By the medieval period, Punjab had become a vibrant spiritual landscape where multiple traditions coexisted.

4.1 Hindu Traditions

Punjab was home to diverse Hindu practices, including worship of Shiva, Vishnu, Devi, and local deities.

4.2 Islamic and Sufi Influence

Sufi mystics emphasized divine love, inner devotion, and human equality. “The Sufi movement, brought to India through Islamic mysticism, stressed universal love, tolerance, and service to humanity over rigid formalism”, and “Baba Farid opening khanqahs (hospices) and dargahs as inclusive spaces where people of all faiths and castes found solace and equality” (Sahu, 2011).

The verses of Baba Farid (1188-1265), later included in the Guru Granth Sahib, reflect this shared spiritual heritage.

4.3 The Bhakti Movement

The *Bhakti* movement used *bhakti* (prayer, dedication, devotion) with the divine (God) as a way towards spiritual fulfilment. It had its origins in South India, particularly in Hindu communities. *Bhakti* saints such as Kabir and Ravidas challenged ritualism and caste hierarchies, promoting a direct relationship with the Divine (God).

These currents formed the intellectual and devotional environment in which Guru Nanak's message emerged. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, contains work by 35 people who existed before Guru Nanak (founder of Sikh religion). It has works of both *Sufi* Saints as well as *Bhakti* thinkers. This suggests that Guru Nanak saw value in what existed before, and the religion did not emerge in isolation. It built upon what existed before.

4.4 Nath-Jogis/Yogis and Sidhhas

'Nath' means leader. *Jogi/Yogi* are those who practice Yoga. This was a movement to make sense of life and spiritual fulfilment using Yoga and related concepts. *Nath-Jogi* practiced meditation, body decorations and ornaments, physical discipline, withdrawing from society, and empty rituals. *Sidhhas* were another group of people related to *Nath-Yogis*. *Sidhhas* were those who were accomplished and proven. They focused on supernatural powers and 'inner energy'.

Guru Nanak had discourses with them and told them that the real yoga is development of mind and conscious behavior in service of the community while living with family.

5.) The Punjabi Ethos: Culture Before Religion

Punjab possessed a distinctive ethos shaped by its geography and history. Punjabi identity is regional, cultural, civilizational, and linguistic. It is also not confined to small province Punjab. This identity spans almost all of Indus Valley civilization.

5.1 Resilience and Martial Spirit

Repeated invasions cultivated courage, collective defense, and adaptability. Prof. Teja Singh and Prof. Ganda Singh title a chapter in their book that ‘Suffering creates Power’ (Prof. Teja Singh, A Short History of the Sikhs, 2006). It was relentless harassment of proud people by external invaders as well as disingenuous priestly class and ruling elite that compelled them to rise to Power.

Francisco Pelsaert writes about South Asia during his travels in Mughal Empire under Mughal Emperor Jehangir (1569-1627).

“The land would give a plentiful, or even an extraordinary yield, if the peasants were not so cruelly and pitilessly oppressed... The rulers palaces are adorned internally with lascivious sensuality, wanton and reckless festivity, superfluous pomp, inflated pride... As regards the laws, they are scarcely observed at all, for the administration is absolutely autocratic... The manner of life of the rich in their great superfluity and absolute power, 'and the utter subjection and poverty of the common people' and poverty so great and miserable that the life of the people can be depicted or accurately described only as the home of stark want and the dwelling-place of bitter woe" (Pelsaert, 1925).

The emergence of martial spirit started under the Sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind (1595-1644). “Historians usually see at this stage in Sikh history a sudden change in the character of Guruship. The Guru who had been a *fakir* now assumed the position of a *saccha padshah* (or true king)... The whole movement, in fact, is represented as having been transformed from something peaceful and spiritual into a mere military camp” (Prof. Teja Singh, A Short History of the Sikhs, 2006). Guru Hargobind wore two swords which

represented this new outlook. This idea *miri-piri* of two swords represent a Sikh as both a *mir* (political ruler) and a *pir* (spiritual leader).

History tells us of an incident when Sikhs saw a magnificent white *Baz* (Hawk). They captured the Hawk. The Hawk turned out to belong to the Mughal Ruler Shah Jahan. Mughal soldiers came looking for the Hawk. Sikhs refused to give the Hawk. Guru Hargobind told his Sikhs that they are not only going to take the Hawk (Symbol of Sovereignty) but also take Mughal Empire. This subsequently led to armed attack against the Sikhs. Sikhs were outnumbered 10 to 1. However, Sikhs defeated the Mughals and Guru Hargobind killed Mughal leader Mukhlis Khan in battle after allowing him to attack him 3 times.

This incident and victory over the Mughal empire ignited the martial spirit in the Sikhs. It was a small victory in absolute terms over the Mughal empire but it was a huge symbolic victory over the Mughal Empire which controlled 25% of the World's economy and had a standing army of hundreds of thousands. For comparison, China and USA today control 25% of the world economy (DiscoverSikhism, 2026).

“There was something far greater involved in this warfare than a mere dispute over a hawk or a horse. A new heroism was rising in the land, of which the object, then dimly seen, was to create the will to resist the mighty power of the foreign aggressors, called the '*Toorks*' (who were ordinarily -' called '*Mussalmans*' when they behaved in good neighbourly manner)” (Prof. Teja Singh, A Short History of the Sikhs, 2006).

The credit for consciously initiating Sikh's Martial Spirit goes to the sixth Sikh Guru Hargobind. He was the first to actively militarize the Sikhs by training them, procuring finest horses and weapons, giving the concept of *miri-piri* (spiritual and temporal), and building the *Akal Takht* as the supreme authority for Temporal (Worldly) affairs. This was a transition of Sikhs from spiritual mastery to Temporal (Worldly) mastery as well.

Subsequent Sikh Gurus developed it further. Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) formally initiated some of the Sikhs into the order of the *Khalsa* - *sampuran*

(complete) *Sant-Sipahi* (Saint-Soldiers). The legendary Sikh General and Administrator Banda Singh Bahadar uprooted the Mughal Empire from Punjab in the Battle of *Chappar Chiri* (May 1710), and established the First Sikh Kingdom (1710-15).

Banda Singh Bahadar minted coins. The coins did not have images of Gurus in line with Sikh Ethos. The verses in Persian on the pure Silver coins of the First Sikh Kingdom paid homage to the ideas of Guru Nanak and gave them due credit.



ਸਿੱਕਾ ਮਾਰਿਆ ਦੋ ਜਹਾਨ ਉੱਤੇ, ਬਖਸ਼ਾਂ ਬਖਸ਼ੀਆਂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੀ ਤੋਰ ਨੇ ਜੀ।
ਫਤਿਹ ਸ਼ਾਹਿ ਸ਼ਾਹਾਨ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੀ, ਮਿਹਰਾਂ ਕੀਤਿਆਂ ਸੱਚੇ ਰਬ ਏਕ ਨੇ ਜੀ।

Translation:

*Coin stuck for the 2 worlds (spiritual and temporal), by the grace of ideology of Guru Nanak
Victory of Guru Gobind Singh, by the grace of the one God.*

These verses on the coin show the philosophical ideas behind the Sikh Kingdom – mastery of spiritual and temporal world (religious and business/worldly), credit to the ideological roots of Guru Nanak, victory not of

Banda Singh Bahadar but of Guru Gobind Singh, and recognizing the One God of all Humanity (Monotheism).

5.2 Agricultural Self-Reliance

Punjab's fertile plains fostered hard work, independence, and communal cooperation. Punjab has always been fertile land with fertile soil, abundance of glacial freshwater, year around sunshine, and hardworking people. There is history of agriculture and rearing animals for at least 3000 years. This ensured abundance of food. The world-famous Himalayan Pink Salt mines are also in Punjab – present day Khewra, Pakistan. There is no history of famines or endemic malnutrition.

Even today, Punjab, “With only 1.53% of geographical area of the country, the state contributed 31.22% of rice and 46.24% of wheat in the central pool (upto Jan 2024)” (Invest Punjab Blog, 2026). Centuries of sufficient food and self-reliance no doubt contributed to physical, mental, and spiritual development of people.

5.3 Community Solidarity

Village life encouraged panchayat-style decision-making and mutual assistance. *Sanjah Chullah* (shared communal oven) is one example of this. Baba Farid (1188-1265) had the practice of *khidmat-e-khalq* – serving humanity and serving the poor with food, shelter, and protection. (Sahu, 2011)

The Sikh institutions such as *sangat*, *langar*, and *Gurdwara* were likely influenced by these historical and cultural traditions.

6.) Guru Nanak and the Emergence of a New Vision

Guru Nanak articulated a message rooted in Punjab yet universal in scope. He emphasized:

- The oneness of God

- Equality of all humans
- Rejection of caste and ritualism
- Honest labor
- Service to humanity

The Sikh Panth evolved through the teachings of the ten Gurus, culminating in the formation of the Khalsa in 1699.

Nanakpanthis (literally followers of Nanak) were the followers of teachings of Guru Nanak (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2026). This was the original name of the Sikhs. Not all *Nanakpanthis* were Sikhs. They may not formally identify as Sikhs, and follow religions as well. Some were of other religion as well – including Hindus and Muslims. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, is studied side by side with other religious texts of Hinduism and Islam. Even today, a sizeable community of *Nanakpanthis* lives in Sindh and Balochistan, Pakistan, as well as around Punjab.

Nanakpanthi thought spread wherever Guru Nanak traveled. “Most of the places where Guru Nanak visited during these travels were important trade centers from where traders were bringing and taking goods and side by side by mingling with each other were spreading his message to all mankind” (Kaur, 2021). “Punjab through ages was a state with an extensive range of trade routes connecting it with other parts of the continent. This connectionism between the urbanization and the dissemination of the Sikh faith proved to be very conducive” (Kaur, 2021).

It is also worth noting that the *Nanakpanthi* ideology was open to all. “Nanakpanthi thought of 15th century which with the faith of followers from different regions of the continent without any distinction of caste, creed become hardcore Sikh Movement of 17th century” (Kaur, 2021). As *Nanakpanthi* ideology spread, the ideology itself also transformed into *Sant-Sipahi* (Saint Soldier) and later into the *Khalsa*.

7.) From Community to Nation: The Rise of the Khalsa

By Guru Gobind Singh's time, Sikh identity had transformed into a self-conscious community with its own scripture, institutions, and ethical code. The *Khalsa* represented a disciplined collective committed to justice and spiritual sovereignty.

The Khalsa established their own Kingdom twice. From 1710-16 under Banda Singh Bahadar, and then again from 1799-1849 under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Both Sikh Kingdom carried on the foundational values of its civilization: 'flourishing culture, with creative and technological development, and no sign of slavery or exploitation of individuals'; spiritual heritage of inclusiveness and devotion to One God (Monotheism); egalitarianism, etc.

8.) Sikh religion and history as a socio-political revolution

Sikh religion was more than an evolution of the values and beliefs of people of the 3000 year old Indus Valley Civilization (IVC). It was a revolutionary new thought.

Sikhism, a revelatory religion, originated in the 16th century as *a new revolutionary force*, aimed at the spiritual rejuvenation, moral upliftment and the social emancipation of peoples. On the one hand, it confronted the dogmatism and religious formalism of the priest-dominated and caste-ridden society and on the other it challenged the political oppression of the contemporary rulers (Dhillon, 1992).

Sikh religion transformed and revolutionized the life and destiny of its followers. It did this by spiritual rejuvenation, moral upliftment, and social emancipation. It gave moral compass to people. It gave them both knowledge and confidence to act. They could act with conviction on the basis of knowledge and sound moral values. Sikh Gurus rejected all known religions of the time.

ਨਾ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ॥

(I am not a Hindu, nor a Muslim) (Guru Granth Sahib, 2026).

Sikh Gurus also spoke against empty knowledge that fills people with ego and false pride while benefiting no one.

ਪੜਿਆ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਸੁ ਲਬੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਾ ॥

Even a “learned one” is called foolish if he is filled with greed and ego (Guru Granth Sahib, 2026).

Indus Valley Civilization and North India before the spread of Sikh Religion was a place of ‘bitter woe’. European explorers in 16-17th century wrote about the pitiable condition of the people. This shows that the values of Indus Valley Civilization were *not* strong to uplift people or bring about their social, cultural, *and* political emancipation.

The utter subjection and poverty of the common people' and poverty so great and miserable that the life of the people can be depicted or accurately described only as the home of stark want and the dwelling-place of bitter woe (Pelsaert, Jahangir's India, 1925).

European explorers who traveled the same land 200 years later when Sikh religion was firmly established gave a completely different picture.

One is struck most with the gentlemanliness of it all... One is not dunned, or jostled, or insulted, or fawned upon... Instead there is a rich simplicity in this as in all Sikh shrines (Candler, 1910).

Another unique aspect of Sikh religion was oneness of religion and politics. From the time of First Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, there has been inseparability of religion and politics.

The Gurus regarded it as their moral duty to fight not only social injustice but also political oppression... They placed the Sikhs in the vanguard of a *socio-political revolution*-a revolution which captured the imagination of the people all over the country (Dhillon, 1992).

The high point of Sikh religion's transformative power was when the natives of Indus Valley Civilization established their First Sikh Kingdom (1710-15) under Banda Singh Bahadar. It was the first time that natives of this land established their Kingdom after more than 700 years of foreign rule under the Mughals from

Central Asia. Sikhs defeated the Mughal Empire who controlled 25% of the world's economy. For comparison, USA and China together constitute 25% of the world's economy today. A political achievement like this never happened before and has never happened since in the history of South Asia.

Religious underpinnings of Sikh Ethos

It is very important to *not* ignore the religion underpinnings of Sikh ethos. It separates them from others in South Asia. Sikh's identity is Sikh (ethno-religious), and Punjabi (regional, cultural, civilizational, and linguistic). Sikhs are descendants of the ancient 3000 year old Indus Valley Civilization, one of the original four ancient civilizations (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Chinese, and Indus Valley). Sikh religion is the only home-grown native philosophy of the people of Indus Valley Civilization. This identity cannot and should not be diluted.

It is worth emphasizing that the revolutionary ideals of Sikh religion developed by the 10 Sikh Gurus contributed in a big way to the spiritual, economic, and political rise of the Sikhs.

It was reserved for [Guru] Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those foundations which enabled his successor [Tenth Guru] Gobind to fire the minds with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in, race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes (Prof. Teja Singh, A Short History of the Sikhs, 2006)

There is a trend in the world towards secularism and deemphasize religion. People say they are spiritual but not religious. Where do their ideas of spirituality and morality come from? Does everyone create their own version of spirituality and morality as it suits their intelligence, background, and convenience? This trend towards secularism, self-made spirituality, and anti-religious or even un-religious is wrong at best and a deep conspiracy at worst.

Secularisation has posed even a bigger threat to the religious identity and future of small communities like the Sikhs. It has been looked upon as a subtle weapon to destroy all dissent (Dhillon, 1992).

Rise of Sikhs in just 300 years from moral failings, to spiritual rejuvenation, to political power is a lesson for the world.

Man, in his search for utopia, has not yet invented a form of political machinery which the ingenuity of the devil would not find a way of exploiting for evil ends. But in a world, ridden by materialism and plagued by poverty, social injustice and racial discrimination and oppression, religion, and morals can still play an important role in bringing humanity into a greater experience of love, freedom, peace and justice (Dhillon, 1992).

Conclusion

The ancestors of the Sikhs were the people of Punjab - farmers, artisans, traders, warriors, and mystics - who inhabited the region long before the birth of Sikhism. Guru Nanak transformed this environment by offering a new vision that ultimately gave rise to one of the world's youngest and most dynamic faith traditions.

Sikh religion and philosophy were a cultural continuity of the informal values of the Indus Valley civilization. The religion formalized what people intrinsically believed in and practiced. This is expected. Religion, Great Leaders, and even Messengers of God recognize and work with people's prevailing beliefs. Formalized ideas and religion have to fit with people's existing beliefs. It cannot be superimposed on people with different views. Nor can an ideology that works in one region be transplanted as such to people with different civilizational values.

The values of Indus Valley Civilization were *not* strong to uplift people or bring about their social, cultural, *and* political emancipation. It is very important to *not* ignore the religion underpinnings of Sikh ethos. It separates them from others in South Asia.

While many people of the Indus Valley civilization do not formally practice Sikh religion, they have similar civilizational values and way of living. This is why Sikhs and Punjabis traveling a thousand km through the Indus Valley even as far

as Balochistan or Sind feel they have come home. This is a unifying factor that can be the basis of people working together for peace and prosperity.

Understanding this deeper history enriches Sikh identity and situates Sikhism within Punjab's long civilizational journey.

Bibliography

- Ali, J. (2021, May). *Indus Valley Civilization*. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3852871
- Bhandari, J. (2026). *Institutions Cannot Be Transplanted*. Retrieved from <https://jayantbhandari.com/institutions-cannot-be-transplanted/>
- Candler, E. (1910). In *Mantle of the East* (p. 111).
- Dhillon, P. G. (1992). In *Religion And Politics - A Sikh Perspective* (pp. 2, 42, 43).
- DiscoverSikhism. (2026). *Legendary Sikh Battle of Amritsar 1628*. Retrieved from https://www.discoversikhism.com/sikhism/sikh_battle_of_amritsar1628.html
- Guru Granth Sahib. (2026). *Sikh Samridhi*. Retrieved from <https://sikhsamridhi.com/en/read/shabad/NFg2/WTQ1Mg%3D%3D#:~:text=ਨਾ%20ਹਮ%20ਹਿੰਦੂ%20ਨ%20ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ%20॥>
- History.com Editors. (2025). *Silk Road*. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/articles/silk-road>
- Invest Punjab Blog. (2026). *PUNJAB- THE FOOD BOWL OF INDIA*. Retrieved from https://investpunjabblog.com/2024/08/02/punjab-the-food-bowl-of-india/#_ftn1
- Irene Gallego Romero, C. B. (2011, Aug). *Herders of Indian and European Cattle Share Their Predominant Allele for Lactase Persistence*. Retrieved from https://academic.oup.com/mbe/article/29/1/249/1749245?utm_source=chatgpt.com&login=false
- Kaur, D. (2021). *An Apologue Guru Nanak: Globetrotter or a Pioneer*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/51148718/An_Apologue_Guru_Nanak_Globetrotter_or_a_Pioneer
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2026). *Nanakpanthi*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Nanakpanthi>
- Pelsaert, F. (1925). *Jahangir's India*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.03304/page/n5/mode/2up>
- Pelsaert, F. (1925). *Jahangir's India, the Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.03304/page/n5/mode/2up>

Peters, M. A. (2019). *The ancient Silk Road and the birth of merchant capitalism*. Retrieved from
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131857.2019.1691481#d1e78>

Prof. Teja Singh, P. G. (2006). In *A Short History of the Sikhs* (pp. viii, 1, 35, 44).

Sahu, N. (2011, Sep). *Bhakti and Sufi Movements as forces of Social Change*. Retrieved from <https://www.ijesh.com/j/article/view/114>

Wikimedia. (2026). *The Ancient Indus Valley*. Retrieved from
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilisation#/media/File:Indus_Valley_Civilization,_Mature_Phase_\(2600-1900_BCE\).png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilisation#/media/File:Indus_Valley_Civilization,_Mature_Phase_(2600-1900_BCE).png)

World History. (2026). *Map of Indus Valley civilization*. Retrieved from
<https://www.worldhistory.org/uploads/images/322.png?v=1773059717-1773059836>