



TRUE FACES OF THE SIKHS

ARVEN DEOL

<https://www.learnreligions.com/sikhism-scriptures-and-prayers-2993140>

WHAT IS SIKHISM?

”Recognize the human race as one”- Guru Gobind Singh Ji

- Sikhism is a religion founded in Punjab in the 15th century. Founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Sikhism emphasizes on the belief of one God, equality of all people, and community service. Guru Nanak’s teachings were further developed by 9 successive Gurus, culminating with Guru Gobind Singh Ji who declared the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (central religious scripture) as the eternal Guru (McLeod, 2024).
- The core beliefs of Sikhism include faith in one God (Waheguru), the importance of living an honest life, and the necessity of helping others. Sikhs are encouraged to practice three fundamental principles: Naam Japna (meditating on God's name), Kirat Karna (earning an honest living), and Vand Chakna (sharing with others).
- Sikhism rejects caste discrimination, ritualistic practices, and superstitions, focusing instead for the equality of all human beings regardless of race, gender, or social status .This approach is demonstrated in the communal kitchen (Langar) found in every Gurdwara (Sikh temple), where free meals are served to everyone.
- The Khalsa, established by Guru Gobind Singh Ji in 1699, is a collective body of baptized Sikhs who adhere to a strict code of conduct and wear the Five Ks—Kesh (uncut hair), Kara (a metal bracelet), Kanga (a wooden comb), Kachera (cotton undergarments), and Kirpan (a ceremonial sword to protect others who face injustice/danger)—as symbols of their faith and commitment.
- Today, Sikhism has approximately 25 million followers worldwide, making it the fifth-largest organized religion. Its teachings of love, selflessness, and devotion continue to inspire millions, promoting a way of life that values spirituality and social justice (McLeod, 2024).



<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/sikhism.html>

SIKHS IN PUNJAB

- Punjab is the state where Sikhism had originated with farming being a primary source of income in this state..This image on the right demonstrates Punjab at its biggest size spanning into Pakistan and portions of Afghanistan.This was during the times of the Sikh Empire but after British colonization Punjab split into two where one portion ended up becoming Pakistan and the other became a portion of India in 1947.As a result of this many Sikhs were subject to having to move from their homes in the Pakistan side of Punjab and faced violence where women were sexually assaulted, and men were killed (McLeod, 2024).
- For the Sikhs that did move into India they later ended up facing another Sikh genocide in 1984 which sparked due to Operation Bluestar which was an operation to silence and eliminate Sikhs as they were beginning to stand up against being treated unjustly, because Sikhs were being treated as second-class citizens at this time with their farming water being drained to critical levels and their identity being stripped away from them (language, culture, and religious practices).The Indian government then attacked the Golden Temple which is a sacred religious site for Sikhs causing a massacre. Fueled by this enrage the prime minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated which led to the Sikh genocide of 1984.
- No matter where Sikhs reside, they are always treated as a minority where they feel they never have a true home and have always been mistreated where these wounds live within them every day.



SIKH MISREPRESENTATION IN SOCIETY



<https://m.facebook.com/singhstreetstyle/photos/a.141342562712091/394108440768834/?type=3>

- Within modern society even once we leave Punjab, Sikhs still face a looming issue of being labeled as terrorists in a post 9/11 world. After the events of 9/11, many Sikhs were targets for hate crimes due to our appearance. Sikhs were also a directly impacted community alongside Muslims due to Islamophobia (Reddy, 2022). Due to this even today Sikhs are often misidentified as Muslims voided them of their actual identity as being Sikhs. This racism and hate against Muslims is something that Sikhism is against as Sikhs core value is to stand against injustice, but Sikhs face a unique form of discrimination as they face hate crimes by being called terrorists but in addition, they also lose their own identity by being mistaken for another religion.
- Even within India, Sikhs are often labeled as terrorists amongst the Indian government whenever Sikhs speak up for the separation of an independent Sikh country to separate themselves from being exploited from the Indian government. Sikhs have endured the atrocities of 1947, 1984, and even today where Sikhs are being exploited over farmer laws, being wrongfully imprisoned, and being killed for speaking against these injustices. Notable examples of these killings are Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, and Jaswant Singh Khalra just to name a few of the thousands and counting (Singh & Kaur, 2023).

SIKHS IN BOLLYWOOD



<https://www.koimoi.com/bollywood-news/salman-khan-to-saif-ali-khan-5-times-bollywood-actors-played-sikh-characters-on-screen/>

- Sikhs are also constantly disrespected and misrepresented within Bollywood due to many non-Sikhs playing roles of Sikhs by wearing religious artifacts like it's simply a fashion statement such as the turban and kara just to name a few. The actors playing these Sikhs often showcase the Sikhs being goofy and comedic by including many crude jokes about Sikhs (Kaur, 2022). Within these films they also completely steal Punjabi Sikh culture by making remakes of our music, using our food, and our cultural clothing (Butter & Courteau, 2020). By stealing this culture, they end up remaking the culture to Bollywoodify it misinterpreting the whole meaning of being Punjabi and Sikh.
- With many non-Sikhs playing the roles of Sikhs it can often be seen as disrespectful and ruins the opportunities for real Sikhs to fill those roles genuinely. Due to this we see Sikhs remain a minority within India as they never receive the chance to take the big stages due to others playing the role for them.

SIKHS IN FASHION

- In recent years we have also seen brands such as Gucci utilize religious articles such as the Sikh turban as a fashion statement completely disregarding the religious value the turban has to Sikhs. Gucci utilized the turban as a prop as the turban is often an identity marker for Sikhs and unfortunately hate crimes. Sikhs were disgusted by this move by Gucci as they used a religious article for profit creating an example of cultural appropriation done by Gucci (Kaur, 2022).
- Actions like these cause many people within society to believe the turban is simply just a fashion piece that Sikhs wear like a hat when that is not the case, and the turban takes skill to tie and represents equality, honor, and spirituality as it is part of the identity of a Sikh (McLeod, 2024).



EFFECTS ON SIKHS

- Due to these misrepresentations many Sikhs are faced with discrimination across the world where they are mistaken for being terrorist, being a punchline for comedy, or being mislabeled for something they are not which leads to racism in workplaces, schools, and life in general. These misrepresentations further keep Sikhs as a minority as it causes a lack of opportunities for them never allowing them to fully be showcased for what Sikhs are. In addition, due to the misrepresentations on Sikhs we see more Sikhs leaving their religious identity to better fit into society by not wearing a turban, fearing racism for their appearance (Reddy, 2022).



<https://www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2021/fbi-updates-record-high-hate-crime-statistics/>

HOW CAN WE CHANGE THE MISREPRESENTATION?

- Providing opportunities for Sikhs within Bollywood by leaving Sikh roles for Sikhs to promote more diversity.
- Stop ripping off the culture and religious staples for profit.
- Understand the injustices present within India and around the world for Sikhs.
- Education for individuals to know the differences between Sikhs and non-Sikhs.
- Stop fueling hate on minority groups.
- Promoting Sikh artists to a bigger stage to share an accurate message of who Sikhs are.



<https://globalvoices.org/2022/07/05/sidhu-moosewala-a-prodigious-life-cut-short-but-its-not-the-end/>

WORKS CITED

Butter, P., & Courteau, R. (2020, December 3). *Bollywood failed Punjabi culture*. Her Campus. <https://www.hercampus.com/school/wilfrid-laurier/bollywood-failed-punjabi-culture/>

Butter and Courteau examine moments and examples in Bollywood of where Sikhs and Punjabi culture were misrepresented in film roles. This article provides a direct source to cite instances and supporting claims for my project to demonstrate Sikhs being misrepresented in modern media even within India.

Kaur, G. (2022, August 3). *The evolving dynamics of Sikh representation in pop culture*. Homegrown. <https://homegrown.co.in/homegrown-creators/the-evolving-dynamics-of-sikh-representation-in-pop-culture>

Kaur dissects moments and examples where Sikhs were wrongfully represented in pop culture with fashion, media, and overall societal views of Sikhs. Kaur provides ways Sikh representation is being altered to a positive light. This article can provide more insights into examples to be used to demonstrate negative representation but also provide ways I can provide what positive representation looks like as well for the Sikh Punjabi community.

McLeod, W. (2024, April 17). *Sikhism*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sikhism>

McLeod describes the religion of Sikhism in depths with the history, beliefs, and practices. This article can be utilized to help provide a basis to what Sikhism is about and its practices to provide evidence of misrepresentation occurring.

Reddy, D. B. (2022, March 3). *The saddening reality of Sikh representation*. Portola Pilot. <https://portolapilot.com/the-saddening-reality-of-sikh-representation/>

Reddy analyzes the hate crimes targeted towards the Sikh community due to misinterpretations and underrepresentation of the community. Reddy provides examples of how Sikhs were targeted during the aftermath of 9/11 due to misinterpreting them as Muslims. This article provides the effects of how misrepresentation can damage the Sikh community and how under representation can also lead to negative damage, which can be used to further develop my thesis for my project.

Mullins, L., & Hagan, A. (2020, July 2). *White actors playing other races diminishes opportunities, #oscarssowhite creator says*. Here & Now. <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/07/02/april-reign-white-actors-animation>

Mullins and Hagan breakdown the current state of Hollywood's diversity and how writers/directors are casting roles for people of that said race or ethnicity to promote diversity within Hollywood. Mullins and Hagan mention how having actors from playing someone of a different race can lead to less opportunities for certain races as well as lead to under representation. This article provides examples and the impacts of having actors play roles of different races within Hollywood which can be used to strengthen my argument for why non-Sikhs shouldn't play a Sikh role.

Parshar, H. (2022, August 25). *Portrayal of Punjabi people in Bollywood*. The Rising Panjab. <https://www.therisingpanjab.com/entertainment/article/portrayal-of-punjabi-people-in-bollywood>

Parshar explains the effects and impacts of Bollywood misrepresenting the Punjabi Sikh culture and how it is slowly becoming better. Parshar also delves into the differences between the Punjabi film industry and Bollywood. This article provides me a good source to attain more evidence and examples into building the argument of misrepresentation of Punjabi Sikhs.

Singh, S. J., & Kaur, G. (2023, December 5). *Why India is targeting Sikhs at home and around the world*. Time. <https://time.com/6342873/india-sikhs-persecution>

Singh and Kaur examine many cases into the wrongful killings of Sikhs by the Indian government while also touching on how these killings are not only in India but occurring worldwide. This article provides evidence for my claim on Sikhs being targeted by the Indian government.



REFERENCES

