

Key concepts

- The literal meaning of the Punjabi word gurdwara is 'the residence of the Guru', or 'the door that leads to the Guru'. This defines the religious function of the gurdwara.
- In a modern gurdwara, the Guru is not a person, but the book of Sikh scriptures called the Guru Granth Sahib. It is the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib that gives the gurdwara its religious status, so any building containing the book is a gurdwara.
- There are four doors into a gurdwara, known as the Door of Peace, the Door of Livelihood, the Door of Learning and the Door of Grace. These doors are a symbol that people from all four points of the compass are welcome, and that members of all four castes are equally welcome. This expresses the right of all to worship freely.
- Anyone who is competent can lead the worship. Worship in the Sikh tradition does not depend on the presence or guidance of people who are regarded of being of a higher status.

- It is a place for congregational worship in the presence of the Guru. It is also a place for private and individual worship, where Sikhs express their faith and devotion.
- On special occasions important rites of passage such as naming ceremonies and marriages take place here. It is also a focal place for celebration of key festivals. These are key features of being a Sikh.

- The langar as a food kitchen was an essential part of any gurdwara in its provision of free meals for all people regardless of caste or religion in the local community in the Punjab. This is an important expression of the Sikh belief in equality. It enabled the followers of Guru Nanak to practise his ideal of sewa which was selfless service to others. The serving of food is a practical expression of this concept. The organisation and serving of langar to the members of the community provides the opportunity to practise sewa in the present day.
- It's a place where children learn the Sikh faith, ethics, customs, traditions and texts. It is also a community centre especially in the Sikh diaspora.



Key quotes

'In Your Sanctuary, they are saved, O Creator Lord; You unite them in Union with Yourself.'
 'Peace prevails within; they are pleasing to Your Mind.'
 'Without the True Guru, no one finds permanence and stability.'
 'True is His Door, and True is His Court, His Royal Darbaar.'
 'Singing the Glorious Praises of the True Lord, in the true melody, I am immersed and absorbed in Truth.'
 'One who intuitively chants God's Glorious Praises day and night - his light merges into the Light.'

[Adi Granth 1068]

Key words

Gurdwara	Guru	grace	caste	worship
Devotion	selfless service	Punjab	sewa	equality
langar	diaspora	faith	Guru Nanak	community
Guru Granth Sahib				

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that the gurdwara is more of a social institution than a religious one.
 Others would argue that the main role of the gurdwara is unquestionably religious.
 Some would argue that the religious and social complement each other in the role of the gurdwara.

Key questions

To what extent does Sikhism need the gurdwara?
 Are there differences in terms of importance in the practices that take place in the gurdwara?