



Dear Lucy,

Yesterday, I went to the Gurdwara in Ilford and, before you ask, a Gurdwara is the place of worship for Sikhs, followers of Sikhism. I learnt so much about Sikh traditions such as the five 'K's: Kara (a bracelet that symbolises God's eternity), Kachera (large pants that everyone wears to show equality), Kirpan (a dagger that represents defending what is right) Kanga (a comb for tying up the Kesh) and Kesh (uncut hair). All Sikh men wear these things whenever or wherever they can.

Women have clothing traditions to- when I went to the Gurdwara I followed these traditions to show respect. As I went in, I took off my shoes, washed my hands and face (men do these things too) and I covered my head. Then I went into the Darbar Sahib (the main prayer hall) and I went up to the Guru Granth Sahib to make an offering. The Guru Granth Sahib is the holy book of the Sikhs and is treated as if it were a person. It even has its own bedroom! This, alongside all other Sikh traditions comes from a very long time ago...

Sikhism began in what we now call India/ Pakistan (the Punjabi areas in South East Asia) in around 1500CE. It all began when Guru Nanek Dev Ji, the first Guru and the founder of Sikhism, began teaching a religion that seemed to be like a cross between Hinduism and Islam, but was, however, extremely different from both. As each Guru died, another followed, teaching the same as the previous, so that by the time of the fifth Guru (Guru Arjan Dev Ji) Sikhism was well established. Unfortunately for Sikhism, he was considered a threat to the county and was executed for his faith in 1606. The sixth Guru, to protect the religion, forged an army and fought many battles for his faith. For a while, all was peaceful for Sikhs, but in 1675, Moghal Emperor Aurangzeb (the ruler at the time) arrested the ninth Guru (Guru Tegh Bahadur) for his beliefs. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last living Guru, recreated the Sikhs as a military group of men and women called the Khalsa in 1699, with the intention that the Sikhs should for ever be able to defend their faith. Gobind Singh established the Sikh rite of initiation (called khandey di pahul) and the 5 Ks- you know already about those! Now it is the Guru Granth Sahib-a book! - that does the teaching.



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