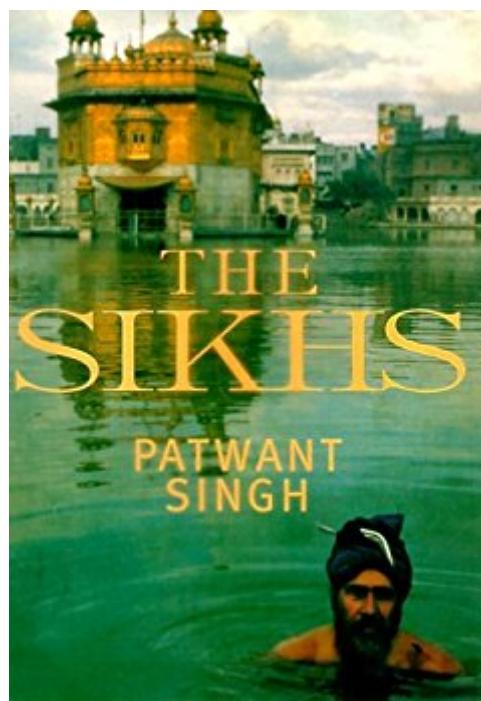


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The Sikhs



Synopsis

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak founded the Sikh faith in India. The Sikhs defied the caste system; rejected the authority of Hindu priests; forbade magic and idolatry; and promoted the equality of men and women -- beliefs that incurred the wrath of both Hindus and Muslims. In the centuries that followed, three of Nanak's nine successors met violent ends, and his people continued to battle hostile regimes. The conflict has raged into our own time: in 1984 the Golden Temple of Amritsar -- the holy shrine of the Sikhs--was destroyed by the Indian Army. In retaliation, Sikh bodyguards assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Now, Patwant Singh gives us the compelling story of the Sikhs -- their origins, traditions and beliefs, and more recent history. He shows how a movement based on tenets of compassion and humaneness transformed itself, of necessity, into a community that values bravery and military prowess as well as spirituality. We learn how Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru, welded the Sikhs into a brotherhood, with each man bearing the surname Singh, or "Lion," and abiding by a distinctive code of dress and conduct. He tells of Banda the Brave's daring conquests, which sowed the seeds of a Sikh state, and how the enlightened ruler Ranjit Singh fulfilled this promise by founding a Sikh empire. The author examines how, through the centuries, the Sikh soldier became an exemplar of discipline and courage and explains how Sikhs -- now numbering nearly 20 million worldwide -- have come to be known for their commitment to education, their business acumen, and their enterprising spirit. Finally, Singh concludes that it would be a grave error to alienate an energetic and vital community like the Sikhs if modern India is to realize its full potential. He urges India's leaders to learn from the past and to "honour the social contract with Indians of every background and persuasion." From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

In the wake of the September 11th tragedy, Sikh-Americans have been the target of misguided attacks due to their appearance. An appearance comprised of articles of the Sikh faith - a turban and unshorn beard. Patwant Singh's book provides a vivid account of the origins, beliefs and subsequent history of this 500 year old, egalitarian faith that originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent. The book explains the significance behind the unique identity of the Sikh people - their turbans and beards - and brings to mind the sad irony that they are being mistaken, by some in the US, for the very Islamic fundamentalism that they have been fighting against since their beginnings. The Sikhs are disciples of Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh faith, who was succeeded by nine other Gurus (spiritual masters). Guru Nanak likened all religions to different travelers aiming at one and the same destination but following different paths and diverse ways.

Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth and last living Guru who lived from 1666 to 1708. It was this tenth prophet, that gave the Sikhs their present form and appearance, which was a culmination of the constant endeavor, struggle and sacrifices of the Gurus as well as of their innumerable followers. In Singh's analysis of Sikh relations with Hindus, he points out that the monotheistic and egalitarian principles upon which the Sikh faith was founded proved to be in direct conflict with the philosophy and thought of the "caste-conscious" ruling Hindu-Brahmins i.e. Indira Gandhi. Singh's point is not a new one; there have been other faiths in Indian history that have been repressed by the hands of Brahmin ideology.

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