

### Key concepts

- It could be argued that the ten Gurus who shaped Sikhism all believed women should be equal to men. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and the first of the ten Gurus, said that there would be nothing at all without a woman since everything is conceived from her. Therefore, if she has such a vital role, why would anyone wish to condemn women?
- Guru Amar Das, the second Guru, condemned polygamy and the act of sati, the ritual burning of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre. He believed that all women should be educated and have the same access to education as men. He also thought that women should wear what they wanted and refused to meet with women who kept purdah.
- The last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, gave all Sikh females, regardless of their age or marital status, the name of Kaur meaning that they would not have to take their husband's name if they married. He also forbade female infanticide or contact with those that did this. Guru Gobind Singh encouraged women to be warrior-like and to fight against those who persecuted them because of their faith.

- In the 15<sup>th</sup> century it could be argued that this was very progressive as he taught that women should be given full access to the religion. They were free to preach, lead services and to pray without needing to consult a man first.
- God's creation is considered holy. There is no suggestion of inferiority amongst the role women can play and neither is a woman's intelligence doubted.
- Apart from commanding women not to wear a veil, Sikhism makes a simple yet very important statement regarding dress code. This applies to all Sikhs regardless of gender.

- The role of feminism and its relationship with Sikhism are supported by the views of Dr Mohinder Kaur Gill, Dr Gurnam Kaur and Kanwaljit Kaur Singh.



### Key quotes

'From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all.' (Guru Nanak – AG 473)

"Women and men, all by God are created. All this is Gods play. Says Nanak, all thy creation is good, Holy." (Guru Granth Sahib, p.304).

"All human beings are equal from birth. There are only two classes of human beings (man or woman) viz., manmukh and gurmukh. Those who follow the path of the Guru, obey the will of God, the divine ordinance are called gurmukhs, and those who follow the path of their own mind, act according to their ego running away from the Guru, the Shabad (the Word), are manmukhs (egoists)." (Dr Gurnam Kaur).

### Key words

Ten Gurus	Nanak	Guru Amar Das	women	purdah
Kaur	infanticide	creation	gender	feminism
dress	inferiority	role	ritual	holy

### Issues for analysis and evaluation

#### Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that feminism has all been a part of Sikhism, while others would argue that feminism is a modern concept.

Some would argue that men and women can never be equal in Sikhism.

#### Key questions

Is it possible to have different roles and still be considered equal?

Is Sikhism a feminist religion?

Are there any alternative explanations or conclusions to be drawn from the debate?