

### Key concepts

- Sikhism is a relatively young faith (500 years old) and it has no explicit injunction regarding fertility and assisted conception in either of its two main texts, the Guru Granth Sahib or the Rahit Maryada.
- For Sikhs, a human being is defined at the point in which the soul enters the body. Therefore, the key question is when according to Sikhism does the soul enter the body? Although there is some debate within the Sikh community regarding this question, most Sikhs believe that the life of a human being begins at conception.
- Most Sikhs greatly value having children. All Sikhs are expected to have a family, and technology can be used to bring this about. If a couple are having difficulties with infertility, this causes suffering and therefore many Sikhs would support the development within bioethics of fertility treatments for married couples.
- However, most Sikhs believe that all life is sacred because it is given by God. Therefore, many Sikhs interpret infertility as being the will of God. It may be considered God’s way of showing them that they are not meant to have children. In this respect, bioethics could be seen as going against the will of God.
- Bioethics is viewed by some Sikhs as encouraging immorality. In vitro fertilisation (IVF), which can involve artificial insemination of a woman with the sperm of a man who is not her husband, is morally wrong. It can lead to all kinds of suspicion and place considerable stress upon a marriage. This can sometimes result in divorce, which brings great stigma onto a wife especially. Perhaps for centuries it has been the custom in Punjabi communities for a childless couple to adopt, albeit unofficially, nieces or nephews. This solution, however, is becoming increasingly impracticable as the size of families falls as the result of family planning.
- Some Sikhs believe that the teachings of the Gurus could not have included modern technologies, but that they would have been accepted in some cases, especially if they were to cure diseases and help the disadvantaged. Therefore, doctors who engage in such treatments are demonstrating sewa.
- The views of D. S. Chahal, Dr Jodh Singh and W. O. Cole reflect the diversity of views within and outside Sikhism towards bioethics.



### Key quotes

*‘As God’s Pen has written on your forehead, so it shall be with your soul says Nanak, in the first watch of the night, by the Hukam of the Lord’s Command, you enter into the womb.’ – (Guru Granth Sahib p. 74)*

*‘By Divine Law are beings created; ...Others by His Law are whistled around in cycles of births and deaths.’ – (Guru Nanak, Japji)*

*‘Recognise the divine spark within you.’ – (Guru Granth Sahib)*

*‘Make your mind the farmer; good deeds the farm, modesty the water, and your body the field. Let the Lord’s Name be the seed, contentment the plow, and your humility is the fence. Doing deeds of love, the seed shall sprout, and you shall see your home flourish.’ – (Guru Granth Sahib p. 595)*

*‘Think about the future, look not on the past. Make the present life a great success. Because there is no birth again.’ – (Guru Nanak, Guru Granth Sahib p. 1096)*

### Key words

Soul	Conception	Fertility	Sacred	Immorality
IVF	Bioethics	Sewa	Stigma	Adopt
Technology	Will of God	Gurus	Rahit Maryada	Community
Guru Granth Sahib				

### Issues for analysis and evaluation

#### Key arguments/debates

IVF is compatible with Sikh teaching.

Not all Sikhs agree that IVF can be seen as compatible with Sikh teaching.

As new medical techniques emerge, it is conceivable that the debate will continue on what is permissible for Sikhs.

#### Key questions

Are the arguments in favour of IVF more cultural/social than religious?

Is ‘sanctity of life’ a valid objection to IVF?

How far is it acceptable to prohibit certain treatments entirely on an interpretation of God’s will?