

Course: Bolī and Virṣā**Unit: Celebration Ideas for Grades 6-8****Lesson Number: Optional (1- 4 days)****Gurū Nānak Sāhib's Prakāsh Pūrab****Grade 6**

- During class time, get students to write personal letters to Gurū Nānak Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਹਿਬ) thanking him for his teachings, etc. Students can express their admiration, their understanding of Gurū Nānak Sāhib's teachings and their gratitude for Gurū Nānak Sāhib's service to humanity. Invite parents and community members to the school and get students to share these letters with their parents and peers in an assembly.

Grade 7

- Get students to come up with a creative way of teaching younger students (Kindergarten to Grade 2) about Gurū Nānak Sāhib and his life. They can choose a couple of stories about Gurū Nānak Sāhib and teach the younger children (some ideas include performing a play, putting together a picture book, developing a puppet show etc.). Students must plan content, develop a plan, provide information to parents of younger children, and implement their plan. This will help them with their coordination and leadership skills.

Grade 8

- Have students develop a workshop for parents on the message of Gurū Nānak Sāhib. Have them begin with their understanding of what they learned from the Singh Sabhā Movement in reasserting the values of the Gurūs. Students should take into consideration rituals that have crept into Sikhī presently and in their workshop highlight those as well as provide recommendations for change based on Gurū Nānak Sāhib's message.

Bandī Choṛ Divas**Grade 6**

- Students can make a Bandī Choṛ (ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋੜ) memorial album in which they can record stories, lectures, poetry and kīrtan (ਕੀਰਤਨ). All students will need is a recording device. Get students to design an album/ CD cover and a flyer announcing its release. Students can market their CD to their school community or local neighborhood/ *gurduārā*.

Grade 7

- Get students to put together a film of Bandī Choṛ greetings. They can go around the school and video-tape school administrators, other students, teachers, etc. explaining what Bandī Choṛ means to them and how they celebrate the special day. The video can be played at an assembly, or students can go from class to class showing their project to the rest of the school.

Grade 8

- Introduce students to various organizations that promote justice and protection of human rights such as Amnesty International, Association in Defence of the Wrongfully Convicted or Ensaaf. Get students to research some of the projects that these organizations are engaged in and get them to come up with a fundraising event that will raise money for these organizations. Get students to write a letter to the organization telling them about Gurū Harigobind Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਿਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ), his role in freeing the prisoners of Gavāliar

(ਗਵਾਲੀਅਰ) and his commitment to justice. The letter should ask the organization what their primary needs are. Based on the response to the letter from the organization, students should strategize on how to work together to fulfill the most important need.

Holā Mahallā

Grade 6

- One of the traditional ways of celebrating Holā Mahalā (ਹੋਲਾ ਮਹਲਾ) is by reciting poetry and ḍhaḍī vārāṁ (ਢਾਡੀ ਵਾਰਾਂ). In both their Bolī and Virṣā curriculum students are exposed to ḍhaḍī vārāṁ and other poetry. Get students to put together a “darbār” (ਦਰਬਾਰ) in which they recite poetry that they wrote for the occasion or in their classes. This poetry can be in English or in Pañjābī. Teachers can invite parents and other members of the community to come and listen to their readings.

Grade 7

- Holā Mahalā is a time when Sikhs practice their martial arts skills. In order to get students to appreciate the excitement and physical activity that this celebration represents, get students to organize a Play Day for the entire school. Get students to organize competitive games and activities that all students will be able to participate in. If possible, include some sports that are normally performed during Holā Mahalā, such as archery, wrestling, gatkā, etc. Students should develop a plan and identify the kind of resources as to what they will need, and provide that plan to the school administrators. They should be ready to defend why they need certain resources.

Grade 8

- Organization of laṅgar (ਲੰਗਰ) is an important part of Holā Mahalā festivities and of Sikhī in general too. Get students to organize a Laṅgar Day for the community. It can be the school community, the local neighborhood or other schools/ community centers (brainstorm with your students about the ideal location for the laṅgar; it should be in an area where they will be able to get the most exposure to people of other communities, specifically those who need it). They should participate in planning the menu, in preparation of the laṅgar, making signboards announcing free laṅgar in celebration of Holā Mahalā, encouraging people of all communities to partake the food in paṅgat (ਪੰਗਤ), and in serving the food. Get students to write a paragraph about the celebration which they can distribute to people who come to the Laṅgar Day. Identify student speakers who would explain the importance of Holā Mahalā and laṅgar to groups of visitors. This event can also be organized as an open house.

Sikh Women’s Day

Grade 6

- Have students create a tribute to Sikh women. They can do this through developing an interview questionnaire in which they focus on the inspiration that Sikh women have got from being Sikh. Once each student has interviewed 2-3 Sikh women, have them work in groups of 4-6 to develop a play that highlights this inspiration. These plays can be conducted for the rest of the school students or for the school community at large.

Grade 7

- International Women’s Day began almost 30 years ago to celebrate the progress made in advancing women’s rights and to assess the challenges that remain. Have students conduct some research on a women’s shelter in your community, and as a class spend some time with

these women to tell them inspiring stories about Sikh women. If you feel that your students are mature enough, allow them to hear the challenges that these women have faced at the women's shelter.

Grade 8

- Have students conduct 'an education on women health issues' day for the school community at large. They can get information online and should consider trying to get someone to talk to the saṅgat about the various issues. The day should also include presentations by students on inspirational Sikh women.
- Another option is to get students to look at various Sikh organizations and individuals who have made a significant impact in the local community for the work they have done in empowering women. Have students showcase these organizations and encourage the community to get involved with these.

Introduction to Sikh (ਸਿੱਖ) Celebrations

Every community observes certain holidays and participates in different celebrations. Usually these holidays are a time of celebration, remembrance and reflections on the perseverance of a certain community. The South Asian community has several holidays that are shared by different communities, yet each community has its own reason for a particular holiday or celebration. As educators it is important to be familiar with the different celebrations, so that we can help students share their selves with each other to build unity in diversity. It is, therefore, even more important to be aware of celebrations that happen to coincide around the same time as the majority community's celebration and to be clear in the distinction of purpose. The Sikh community, for example, celebrates Divālī (ਦਿਵਾਲੀ), often known as Bandī Choṛ (ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋੜ), for very different reasons than the Hindū (ਹਿੰਦੂ) community. Below we provide a few Sikh celebrations that often go unnoticed or if celebrated are often celebrated without understanding the special motivation and message behind it.

Gurū Nānak Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਹਿਬ)

Gurū Nānak Sāhib¹ was the founder of the Sikh religion – Sikhī² (ਸਿੱਖੀ). Born in 1469 in the Western Pañjāb (ਪੰਜਾਬ) village of Talvaṇḍī (ਤਲਵੰਡੀ) to a simple Hindū family, his father Mahtā Kalyān Dās (ਮਹਤਾ ਕਲਿਆਣ ਦਾਸ) was an accountant with the local Muslim authorities. From an early age Gurū Nānak Sāhib made friends with both Hindū and Muslim children and was very inquisitive about the meaning of life. At the age of six he went to the village school to learn languages, literature, and science.

Gurū Nānak Sāhib was married, at the age of 16, to Sulakhaṇī (ਸੁਲਖਣੀ), daughter of a pious merchant. Gurū Nānak Sāhib loved his wife and they had two sons Srī Cand (ਸ਼੍ਰੀ ਚੰਦ) in 1494, and Lakhmī Cand (ਲਖਮੀ ਚੰਦ) 3 years later. He then took up a job as an accountant in charge of the stores of the Muslim governor.

The next stage of his life began in 1499 with extensive travels to spread the message of One Universal Integrative Force. Accompanied by his Muslim *rabāb* (ਰਬਾਬ) player Mardānā (ਮਰਦਾਨਾ), Gurū Nānak Sāhib undertook long journeys to convey his message to the people in the form of musical renditions. With a mix of intellect and candid humor, he was able to effectively get the message across to people to concentrate and contemplate on the Divine Force that brought all together.

Gurū Nānak Sāhib returned home 12 years after his first long journey. He then set out on a 2nd journey, traveling as far south as Sri Lanka. Upon his return North he founded a settlement known as Kartārpur (ਕਰਤਾਰਪੁਰ) on the western banks of the Rāvī (ਰਾਵੀ) river. On his 3rd great journey Gurū Nānak Sāhib traveled as far North as Tibet, and on his 4th journey in life Gurū Nānak Sāhib, dressed in the blue garb of a Muslim pilgrim, traveled to the west and visited Mekkā (ਮੱਕਾ), Madīnā (ਮਦੀਨਾ) and Baghdād (ਬਾਗਦਾਦ).

While returning home from his journey he stopped at Saidpur (ਸੈਦਪੁਰ) in western Pañjāb. This was during the invasion of the first Mughal Emperor Bābar (ਬਾਬਰ). Gurū Nānak, Mardānā and many other men and women were taken prisoner by the Mughals. While in jail Gurū Nānak sang a divine hymn about the senseless slaughter of the innocent by the Mughal invaders. Gurū Nānak Sāhib was not afraid to use the divine hymns as his communication tool to speak up against unjust torture and killings. Upon hearing these, the jailer reported it to Bābar who, realizing that Gurū Nānak was a great religious figure who spoke the truth, asked the Gurū's forgiveness and set him free, offering him

a pouch of hashish. Gurū Nānak refused saying that he was already intoxicated with Divine Love. After having spent a lifetime of traveling abroad and setting up congregations, Gurū Nānak Sāhib returned home to Pañjāb. He settled down at Kartārpur with his wife and sons. He believed in a casteless society without any distinctions based on birth-right, religion, or sex. He institutionalized the common kitchen called Laṅgar (ਲੰਗਰ) in Sikhī. Here all sit together and share a common meal, whether they are kings or beggars.

In 1532, Gurū Nānak Sāhib was approached by a follower by the name of Lahiṇā (ਲਹਿਣਾ). He was a great devotee of the Hindū goddess Durgā (ਦੁਰਗਾ). Once Lahaṇā met Gurū Nānak Sāhib and listened to the divine word, he understood Gurū Sāhib's message. He left his previous beliefs and became an ardent disciple of the Gurū. Lahaṇā's devotion to Gurū Nānak was absolute and over time he became Gurū Nānak Sāhib's most devoted disciple. Gurū Sāhib then blessed Lahaṇā with a new name, Aṅgad (ਅੰਗਦ) (a part of me) and anointed him as his successor. When Gurū Nānak Sāhib gathered his followers together for prayers, he invited Aṅgad to occupy the seat of the Gurū. Thus Gurū Aṅgad Sāhib was ordained as the successor to Gurū Nānak Sāhib. On September 22, 1539 Gurū Nānak passed away.

After Gurū Aṅgad Sāhib, the merit based Gurūship continued to be passed on to eight others till, after the tenth master, Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ), the eternal Gurūship was passed on to the Gurū Granth Sāhib (Sikh scriptural canon) and for the interpretation of it, the Gurū Khālṣā Panth (collective community of all initiated Sikhs) being given the responsibility. Though the ten Gurūs were ten different individuals, their message and methodology were the same—to connect and be in harmony with the Divine. Each Gurū played a great role in shaping Sikhī into what it is.

Thus, having spread the words of revolution throughout his lifetime, Gurū Nānak Sāhib successfully challenged and questioned the existing religious tenets and laid the foundations of Sikhī. Once the foundation was laid, the succeeding Gurūs continued to guide the people of South-Asia to realize their purpose in life as sovereign individuals.

Sikhs celebrate the message of Gurū Nānak Sāhib daily, but there are many organized celebrations around the time of his birthday. Adults and children alike congregate at the *Gurduārā* (ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ) (Sikh place of worship and learning) to participate in the singing of divine hymns, listen to stories of Gurū Nānak Sāhib's life and to remind each other of Gurū Nānak Sāhib's message of harmony with the Truth. Communities also participate in helping the needy by providing meals, money and more importantly by being with the needy to fulfill Gurū Nānak Sāhib's message of equality.

Vaisākhī (ਵੈਸਾਖੀ)

More than three hundred years ago on the Vaisākhī³ Day in 1699, Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ), the tenth Gurū of the Sikhs established the Khālṣā (ਖਾਲਸਾ) Order of the Sikhs, by initiating his Sikhs through an Amrit (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ) ceremony and then becoming initiated himself too. This event holds paramount significance in the history of the community. Sikhs derive their formal, consolidated identity from this day, including their distinctive physical appearance and the names Singh (ਸਿੰਘ) and Kaur (ਕੌਰ). Thus, Vaisākhī has a special spirit of unity, identity and commitment for the Sikhs.

On Vaisākhī day of 1699, Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib asked all his Sikhs to get together in Anandpur (ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ). It was common practice for the Sikhs to come together twice a year during Vaisākhī and Divālī (ਦਿਵਾਲੀ) as they coincided with harvest times. When everyone got together at Anandpur Sāhib,

Gurū Sāhib came in front of the congregation and asked for someone to give their head to him. At first people were confused, but then a brave man got up and offered his head. Gurū Sāhib came back with a sword with blood on it. He then asked for another head, and in the same way he asked for five heads. He brought back all five dressed in dastārs and other articles of faith that have since become an inseparable part of the Sikh identity. He called the five Sikhs the Pañj Piāre (ਪੰਜ ਪਿਆਰੇ)— the beloved five. The Gurū initiated the Pañj Piāre with Ammrīt (ambrosial nectar), which he made by mixing water and patāse (sugar like candy) while reciting divine hymns. He then asked them to initiate him into the Khālsā by giving him Ammrīt in turn.

The five articles of faith, commonly known as the 5 Ks among Sikhs, are worn by all initiated Sikhs today.

Sikh Articles of Faith⁴

- **Kes** (ਕੇਸ - hair) is a reminder to be saintly. Ammrīt requires keeping the hair as an article of faith of the Khālsā.
- **Kaṅghā** (ਕੰਘਾ - comb) is a reminder to be hygienic or clean.
- **Karā** (ਕੜਾ - bangle) is a reminder to exercise restraint and refrain from doing bad deeds. It reminds a Sikh of his/ her promise to Vāhigurū (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ) and that he/ she should not perform any act that is not good in its intent.
- **Kachahirā** (ਕਛਹਿਰਾ - underwear) has the moral significance of reminding a Sikh of the need to exercise self-restraint over passions and desires. It also demands ever-readiness to fight for justice.
- **Kirpān** (ਕਿਰਪਾਨ - sword) is the reminder to exercise courage and self-defense. It upholds dignity, self-reliance, and the capacity and readiness to defend the weak and the oppressed. It is a constant reminder to a Sikh to defend the truth and uphold Sikh values.

Vaisākhī is celebrated on April 14th every year. Today, Sikhs all over the world celebrate by organizing religious services, including the full reading of the Sikh scriptural canon, the Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ), prayers, singing of hymns and community service. Culturally, there are activities like martial arts exhibitions, parades, sports festivals, and song and dance. Families come together during this important festive occasion and some even exchange gifts.

Bandī Chor Divas (ਬੰਦੀ ਛੋੜ ਦਿਵਸ) (commonly known as Divālī)

Divālī is an Indo-Aryan festival of lights, celebrated by many South-Asian communities. The Sikhs celebrate Bandī Chor Divas (Emancipation Day) on the same day. There have been two significant events in Sikh history that are remembered on or around Divālī. Both these events are directly related to an individual's resolve to stand up for the rights and freedom of others, thus it is called Bandī Chor Divas (Emancipation Day).

Gurū Harigobind Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਿਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਾਹਿਬ) – The Grand Emancipator

Bandī Chor is a very special time for the Sikhs because we celebrate the return of Gurū Harigobind Sāhib from his unjust imprisonment in Gavāliar (ਗਵਾਲਿਅਰ) fort by Mughal Emperor Jahāngīr (ਜਹਾਂਗੀਰ). During his detention, the Gurū's well-wishers such as Bhāi Jethā (ਭਾਈ ਜੇਠਾ), and the Muslim mystic Hazrat Mīām Mīr (ਹਜ਼ਰਤ ਮੀਆਂ ਮੀਰ) rallied for Gurū Harigobind Sāhib to be released. Although Emperor Jahāngīr granted his freedom, Gurū Harigobind Sāhib refused to leave the prison because 52 other rulers were also being held captive unfairly. In protest, the Gurū insisted on remaining there for as long as the other prisoners were held there. At this, the emperor conceded that however many

prisoners could hold onto Gurū Harigobind's *Colā* (ਚੋਲਾ - Robe) at the emancipation would also be released. So a special *Colā* was stitched by the Gurū's well-wishers; it had 52 strips attached to it, to be held by each prisoner.

To celebrate Gurū Harigobind Sāhib's return, lamps were lit in Ammritsar (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ). Gurū Sāhib and this event have come to be known as Bandī Chor, which loosely translates as 'the release of the imprisoned' or 'the grand emancipator.' Since then this occasion is celebrated and commemorated.

Bandī Chor Divas is a time of celebration for Sikhs because Gurū Sāhib sacrificed and rejected personal freedom in order to defend the innocent and the exploited. Around this time we also think of the martyrdom of Bhāi Manī Singh (ਭਾਈ ਮਨੀ ਸਿੰਘ) who raised his voice against unjust treatment of Sikhs.

Bhāi Manī Singh

Bhāi⁵ Manī Singh was a contemporary of the tenth Gurū of the Sikhs, Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib. Their lifelong friendship began when they were children. Bhāi Manī Singh remained loyal and devoted to the Gurū his entire life. He also had the great privilege of spending some time with the Gurū at Damdamā (ਦਮਦਮਾ) where he hand-scribed a copy of the Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ) (the Sikh Scriptural Canon) while the Gurū dictated the *Bāṇī* (ਬਾਣੀ). After Gurū Sāhib passed away, Bhāi Manī Singh was appointed *Granthī* (ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ), custodian of Darbār Sāhib (ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ). He was well respected and admired by all.

For a number of years, Sikhs used to come together twice a year during Vaisākhī and Divālī. They chose these two holidays because they coincided with harvest times. This time allowed them to relax, celebrate a good harvest, but more importantly meet as a community and discuss important issues they were facing. During this time, the Mughal rulers (Muslim heads and Hindu administrators) had given orders to massacre the Sikhs. They made an extra effort to make sure that Sikhs could not congregate in large numbers. Due to this reason the Divālī festival had not been held in Ammritsar for some time. In 1738, Bhāi Manī Singh decided to ask for permission from the governor of Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) to hold the festival. The permission was granted on the condition that Bhāi Manī Singh would pay the government Rs. 5,000 after the festival. Bhāi Manī Singh had believed that he would be able to pay this amount from the offerings made by the Sikhs. He sent out invitations to Sikhs all over Pañjāb. Everyone was excited to attend the festival—many Sikhs began to leave for the journey to Ammritsar shortly after they learned about the Divālī festival.

However, Bhāi Manī Singh had not known of the governor's true intentions earlier. The governor claimed that he was sending a force of some officers to keep order during the festival but Bhāi Manī Singh knew that something did not appear right. The large force sent by the governor was under the command of Divān Lakhpat Rāi (ਦਿਵਾਨ ਲਖਪਤ ਰਾਇ) who hated the Sikhs and was a sworn enemy of them. The force wasn't sent to keep order, but to keep the Sikhs away from Ammritsar. Lakhpat Rāi and the governor were afraid of allowing too many Sikhs to congregate. They had decided to have the force march into the city on the day of the festival so that the Sikhs would become afraid and leave on their own. Bhāi Manī Singh destroyed their plan by sending out another letter telling Sikhs not to come to Ammritsar.

Since no festival was held, Bhāi Manī Singh refused to make the payment. This was also a declaration of sovereignty. The governor had Bhāi Manī Singh arrested for failing to make the payment. He was taken as prisoner, to Lāhaur, in chains. There, he was brutally tortured. He was given the opportunity to save himself by converting to Islam. Bhāi Manī Singh remained calm and refused to convert.

Orders were issued that his body should be cut to pieces, limb by limb. As the executioner was about to begin, Bhāī Sāhib sat serenely. His focus was on Vāhigurū (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ). Bhāī Manī Singh attained martyrdom about one month after the day on which the Divālī festival was to have been held in 1738. Bhāī Manī Singh reflected the teaching of the Gurū's in his life. His martyrdom signifies the importance of the right to assemble freely. Sikhs remember the great leadership and sacrifice of Bhāī Manī Singh during this time.

As children become more aware of this important celebration, have them start to create and exchange greeting cards for this celebration. In this way they educate their family and friends about the significance of these important days.

Holā Mahallā (ਹੋਲਾ ਮਹੱਲਾ)

Holā Mahallā is an annual festival that is held in the month of March. This celebration was started by Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib in 1701. It was a day where Sikhs practiced their military exercises through mock battles. The battles were followed by music and poetry competitions. This tradition has continued even today. These days many *Nihāng*⁶ (ਨਿਹੰਗ) Singhs continue to carry on the tradition of celebrating Holā Mahallā in the traditional way that Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib used to. They display their skills with arms through the means of mock battles. *Nihāngs* also are proficient at horseback riding. Not only can they ride bare-back, but they can also stand on two horses as the horses are going at lightening speeds.

Holā Mahallā attracts thousands of people from all over the world each year. Sikhs from near by villages come to Anandpur Sāhib to help with the *sevā* (ਸੇਵਾ) (selfless service of making food, cleaning the facilities, washing dishes and taking care of visitors).

This amazing occasion has become a three day event where different activities take place each day. There is a separate day to watch the astounding skills of the *Nihāngs*. Then there is a day that is focused on the *Darbār* (ਦਰਬਾਰ) (the Gurū's court) where different *Rāgīs* (ਰਾਗੀ) (devotional singers) come to perform Kīrtan (ਕੀਰਤਨ) (singing of Sikh hymns) along with religious and political speeches.

These three days are filled with excitement, devotion and food. Locals and non-locals look forward to this event each year because it reminds them of the skills that our Gurūs passed on. It is wonderful to be able to see some Sikhs continuing to carry on the tradition of our Gurūs. In the western world this special festival is slowly becoming more and more popular. Some *Gurduārās* are celebrating it by having *Gatkā* (ਗਤਕਾ) (Sikh martial art) demonstrations, having folk singers share history through songs, and Sikh Olympics for the children.

Reference:

1. Sāhib, literally master, is used as a reverential suffix to exhibit the sovereign nature alongside the name of a Gurū (Sikh prophet or divine teacher).
2. Sikhī is commonly mislabeled Sikhism. The '-ism' often connotes different theologies within a larger doctrine. Sikhī does not fit under this as it does not have a set of different theologies or doctrines.
3. Vaisākhī is the beginning of the year in the traditional calendars of South-Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma and Bhutan). This is not the case for Sikhs. For Sikhs according to Nānakshāhī calendar, Vaisākhī is on the 14th of April, but it is not the beginning of the New Year, Cet-March 14th is.
4. Though these are explanations, all explanations are incomplete. There is no analytical or utilitarian explanation that does justice. A Sikh accepts the 5 Ks as "gifts" from the Gurū.

Even those who haven't given the public commitment through Ammrit, accept these as ideals that all Sikhs aspire to.

5. Bhāī, literally meaning brother, is a term often used as a form of respect or endearment.
6. Historically, *Nihāngs* have exhibited unparalleled commitment towards safeguarding the Sikh sovereignty, especially in confronting the imperial forces.