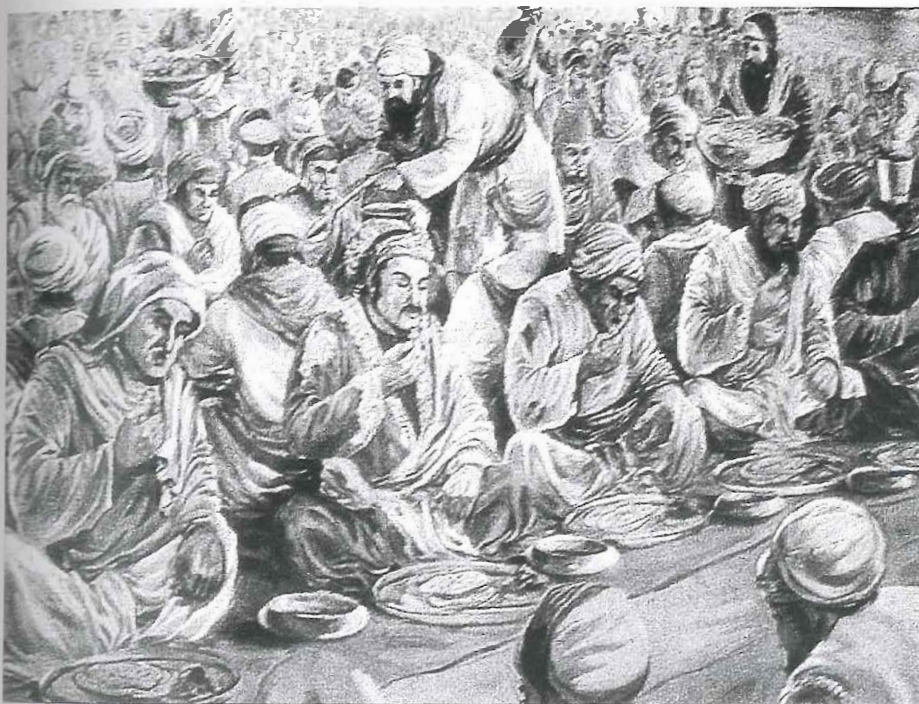


# LANGAR

A unique institution



It was Guru Nanak Dev Ji who took the bold step to introduce this custom, at a time when religious indifference was deeply engraved in Indian society. Guru Amar Das Ji later made Langar an essential part of the Sikh congregation. In that era, it was a brave move that transcended barriers of class, gender, race and religion. All were equal and a sense of togetherness was to be promoted, not shunned. The langar emphasised the brotherhood of all humans and cultivated humility.

The kitchen is endearingly and respectfully called *Guru Ka Langar*. The food at langar is simple and chapati is served with vegetable dishes and thirst is usually quenched with water. Puddings and/or fruit is served as a sweet dish. Volunteers serve the food. The above portrait shows

Emperor Akbar eating in the langar during the time of the third Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Amar Das Ji.

The food (*Parsad*) is vegetarian on account of tradition, metaphors and terse verses of some of the Gurus, and Bhagats (*mystics*) such as Kabir, in the Guru Granth Sahib (and the prohibition by the sixth Guru -Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji<sup>2</sup>). But Guru Nanak Dev Ji also highlighted that meat abstention alone could not achieve spiritual progress and that flesh was not inherently sinful or impure.

Langar continues to exemplify the highest ideal of Sikh ethics: *seva*, which translates as dedicated voluntary service. Langar is unique to Sikhism and Sikhs cherish the opportunity to serve, and the kitchen is in every Gurdwara all over the world.

"By saying prayers over meat or any other forbidden foods, they are not made acceptable O Nanak, from false talk, only falsehood is obtained."

Only the fool quarrels over the question of meat or not eating meat. He does not have the true wisdom or know meditation. What is flesh and what is not flesh and what is sinful and what is not?

Guru Nanak  
S.G.G.S. Rag Maihar, p.1289

## Gurdwara

"Doorway to God". The Sikhs place of worship to the One, formless God. A copy of the Guru Granth Sahib is kept and given the status of Guru, as for Sikhs it contains the Word and is the embodiment of the Guru. The congregation (*'sadh-sangat'*) meditates (*'dhan'*) and reflects (*'vichar'*) on the teachings of the Gurus and the divine Name (*Nam*). Hymns are sung (*'kirtan'*) from the Holy Scripture in praise of the Almighty. Langar is served - to all.

<sup>1</sup> Kabir (d.1518 AD) A mystic whose compositions are included in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib - over a 1000 verses (541 hymns) are attributed to him.

<sup>2</sup> Sri Hargobind Sahib Ji's *Hukamnams* No:3 (*Hukamnams*: edicts by the Gurus)