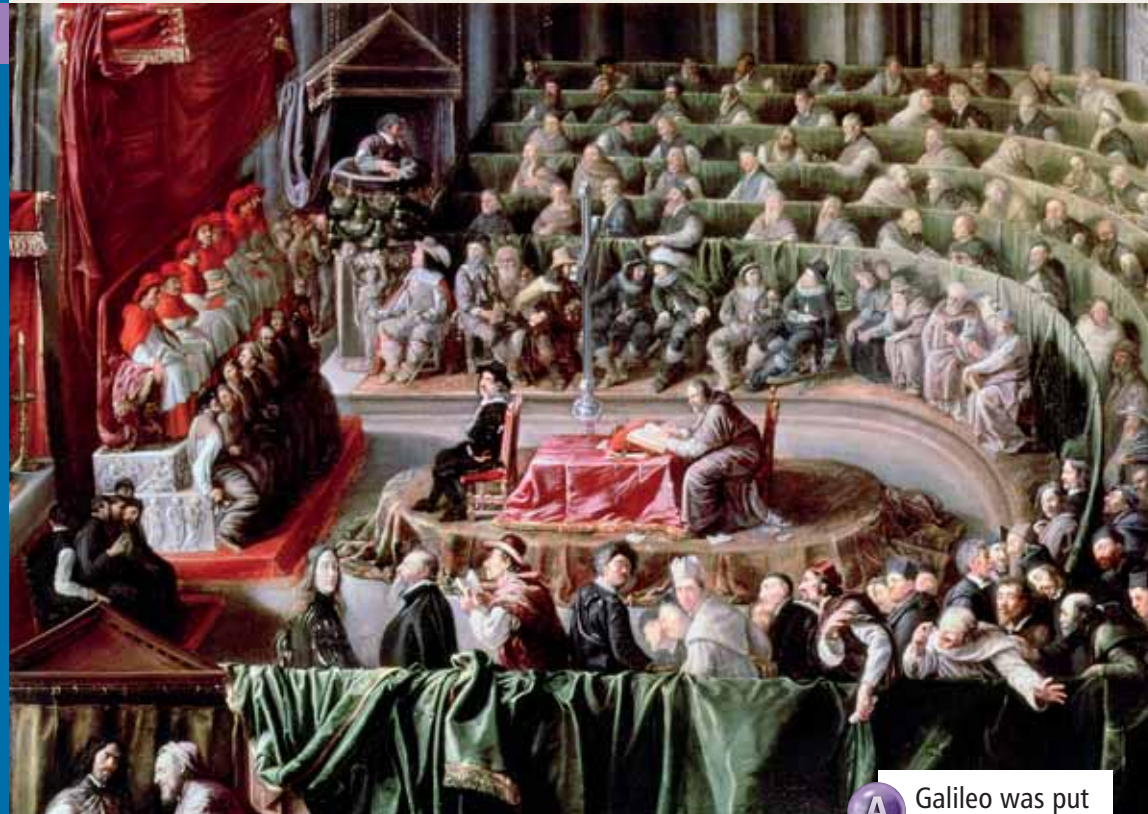


Sikhism and science

Religion and science have sometimes clashed over what is true and what isn't true.

objective

to consider the Sikh view on scientific truth



A Galileo was put on trial in 1633 when his writings about astronomy upset some people in the Catholic Church.

While these arguments were happening particularly in Europe, there were no similar arguments between scientists and Sikhs. In the Guru Granth Sahib, and in the teachings of the Ten Gurus, there are no claims about the movement of the sun or the planets. Nor in Sikhism are there to be found detailed claims about God's creation of life on earth.

The words of the Sikh holy book and of the Ten Gurus are really about spiritual, moral and religious matters. The passage in the Guru Granth Sahib that comes closest to telling the story of how the universe began describes things before creation, not creation itself.

Because of this, Sikhs do not have any difficulty with scientific ideas or theories. Sikhs, in general, welcome new scientific theories and new technological developments. This includes the theory of evolution, the Big Bang theory, the internet, mobile phones and interactive whiteboards.

'For millions of years there was nothing but darkness over the void. There was neither earth nor sky, only the Infinite Will. There was neither night nor day, sun nor moon and the Lord was in a state of trance.'

(AG 1035)



1 Explain why Sikh beliefs do not conflict with scientific theories about the creation of the universe.

Sikh scientists

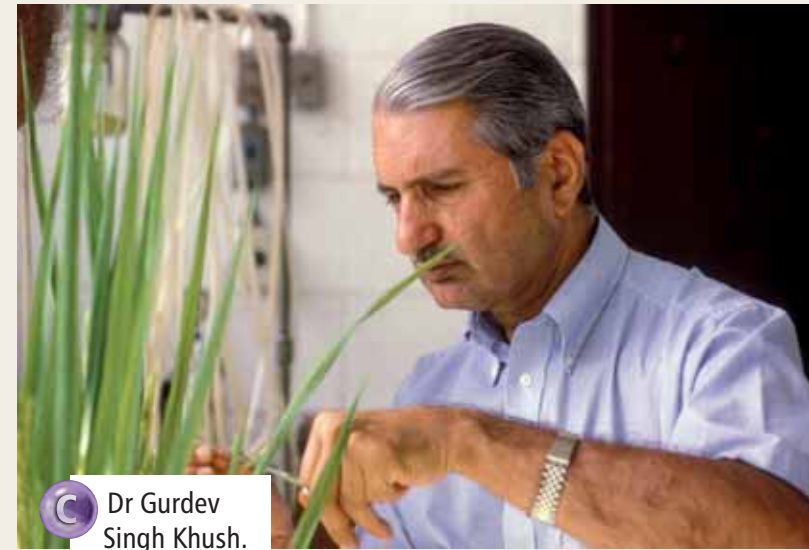
In fact, many Sikhs have welcomed science and are trained scientists. Many Sikhs use their skills and scientific knowledge as doctors, nurses, farmers, teachers, and as businessmen and women to help improve the lives of thousands of people.

For example, Dr Harinder Singh Bedi is a renowned Sikh heart surgeon. His skill at open heart surgery has saved the lives of many people.

Another example of a Sikh scientist who has helped others through his knowledge is Dr Gurdev Singh Khush. Dr Khush is one of the world's experts on the science of plants. He has improved rice plants so that, instead of being able to grow only one tonne of rice on their land, farmers are able to grow five or even as much as eight tonnes of rice. As the world's population has grown, the work of Dr Khush has prevented the likely starvation of millions.



B Dr Harinder Singh Bedi.



C Dr Gurdev Singh Khush.

Science v. religion?

Although it is true that there have been no arguments between Sikhism and science, is it really true that Sikhs are not at odds with science? J.B.S.

Haldane, a famous British scientist of the twentieth century, claimed that religion and science will always be in conflict.

There can be no truce between science and religion.

(J.B.S. Haldane b.1892)

J.B.S. Haldane believed that the main source of truth in science comes from accurate and careful observation. In science, for something to be thought of as true, the idea would have to be rigorously tested. Experiments would have to be made and those experiments would be repeated by other scientists in order to check that an error had not been made.

This perhaps partly explains why science and religion so frequently clash. Some scientists do not accept 'religious truths' to be 'truths' at all because they cannot be observed, cannot be tested and cannot be checked by others.

2 Choose one of the statements below and write a few sentences stating whether you agree or disagree. Explain why. You could ask other people what they think and include their thoughts in your answer.

- 'Science has done more good in the world than religion.'
- 'Science is dangerous and, unless checked, could destroy human life on this planet.'

Caring for God's world

objective

to look at how Sikhs have responded to teaching about the environment

Sikhism teaches that we have a special responsibility to God to care for the planet. The earth and the whole universe are sacred as God created them. All life is in unity and in all life God is manifested.

When it comes to looking after the environment what do Sikhs do to put these ideas into practice? For many Sikhs, one important way in which they try to limit damage to the environment is by starting with themselves and their own lives. For many Sikhs, this means not living a life driven by consumerism.

Sikhs believe that they should strive for spiritual progress. The wish to have more and more consumer goods gets in the way of making spiritual progress. Guru Nanak made this clear in the following words:

Sikhs remain active in the world. They do not renounce the world for a life of dull poverty. But they reject a showy and mindless materialistic life. Many Sikhs live a fairly simple life and so the harm they do to the environment is kept to a minimum.

'Then why get attached to what you will leave behind... all your houses, horses, elephants and luxurious cars, they are just pomp and show. All totally false.'

(Guru Nanak)

- 1 'Many Sikhs live a fairly simple life.' List examples of the ways in which a Sikh may live a 'fairly simple life'.
- 2 Choose *one* of the following statements. Do you agree or disagree with your chosen statement? Explain why.

- 'Living a "fairly simple life" means living a life which is boring, flat and dull.'
- 'Even though we know about the damage we're doing to our planet, we're still not thinking about what we buy.'

Another way in which Sikhs have responded to worries about the environment is by installing solar panels in gurdwaras. In India, there are some 28,000 gurdwaras. All of these gurdwaras run a langar – a free kitchen. This means the Sikh community provides free food to thousands of people a day. The five largest gurdwaras in Delhi alone feed more than 10,000 people every day. Cooking food for such a large number uses up a lot of fossil fuel. Of course, even more fossil fuel would be needed if all of these people prepared their own food at home.

Sikh leaders tackled the problem by installing solar panels in eight of Delhi's largest gurdwaras. Solar panels provide a much more environmentally-friendly source of power. Gurdwaras in the villages and countryside are also being fitted with more fuel-efficient cooking equipment. This will help bring down energy use by 15%.

Some large purpose-built gurdwaras have surrounding land. In many cases, the Sikh community makes a special effort to cultivate this land, providing parks and gardens for everyone in the local community to enjoy.

Growing trees and plants in such areas makes a valuable contribution to the environment. Trees act as sponges. They soak up toxic carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the air. The carbon is stored in the tree. The tree then releases oxygen (O₂) into the air, which we need to breathe.



A Solar panels have been installed in the biggest gurdwaras in Anantapur.

- 3 All large buildings like gurdwaras, churches, schools, factories and offices use up valuable energy. With a partner, visit *one* local place of worship and try to find out how well they are saving energy. You might draw up a list of questions or things to find out. For example:

- Do they use low-energy bulbs?
- Are unnecessary lights switched off and saver switches used on photocopiers?
- Is there a box for recycled paper?
- Are urns and kettles overfilled?
- Is cycling or walking encouraged?
- Could solar panels or wind turbines be installed?

B Gardens around a gurdwara.

