

Religions

Baha'i

NUMBERS IN NEW ZEALAND 3111 (1996)

ORIGINS

The Baha'i faith, one of the youngest of the world's religions, developed in Persia (Iran). Its founder, Baha'u'llah (1817–92), is regarded by Baha'is as the most recent in the line of Messengers of God that stretches back beyond recorded time and includes Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Christ and Muhammad.

The central theme of Baha'u'llah's message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in one global society. God, Baha'u'llah said, has set in motion historical forces that are breaking down traditional barriers of race, class, creed and nation and that will, in time, give birth to a universal civilisation. The principal challenge facing the peoples of the earth is to accept the fact of their oneness and to assist the processes of unification.

A worldwide community of some five million Baha'is across most of the world's cultures is working to give Baha'u'llah's teachings practical effect.

BELIEFS

Baha'u'llah taught that there is one God whose successive revelations of His will to humanity have been the chief civilising force in history. The agents of this process have been the Divine Messengers, whom people have seen chiefly as the founders of separate religious systems but whose common purpose has been to bring the human race to spiritual and moral maturity.

Humanity is now coming of age. It is this that makes possible the unification of the human family and the building of a peaceful, global society. Among the principles that the Baha'i faith promotes as vital to the achievement of this goal are:

- the abandonment of all forms of prejudice;
- assurance to women of full equality of opportunity with men;

- recognition of the unity and relativity of religious truth;
- the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth;
- the realisation of universal education;
- the responsibility of each person to independently search for truth;
- the establishment of a global commonwealth of nations;
- recognition that true religion is in harmony with reason and the pursuit of scientific knowledge.

OBSERVANCES

Baha'u'llah taught that prayer is one of the most important ways to cultivate spiritual growth and development.

Other spiritual obligations include meditation and fasting. Baha'is fast every year from the second to the twentieth of March. During this period they abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. It is considered to be a time for deep reflection and spiritual renewal. Baha'is celebrate their New Year at the end of the fast on 21 March. They abstain from gambling, alcohol and drugs.

In all of the faith's spiritual practices, there are essentially no rituals, priesthood or clergy. The individual is accordingly responsible for his or her own spiritual progress.

Baha'i adults and children gather every nineteen days for spiritual devotion, administrative consultation and fellowship. During the devotional programme selections from Baha'i writings are read aloud, followed by a general discussion, allowing every member a voice in community affairs.

IN NEW ZEALAND

About 20 per cent of the Baha'is in New Zealand are from the ethnic sector.

Buddhism

NUMBERS IN NEW ZEALAND 28,131 (1996)

ORIGINS

Buddhism is one of the five major world religions. Its founder was an Indian prince named Siddhartha Gautama (Siddhatta Gotoma) who lived in the sixth century BC. He was neither prophet nor god, but founded this spiritual tradition on the personal attainment of enlightenment. The word 'Buddha' means the enlightened or awakened one.

BELIEFS

Buddhists believe that absolute awareness can be achieved through the study and practice of the Buddha's teachings and that Nirvana (Nibbana), a state of pure being, can be reached.

The Buddha taught that liberation from human suffering is the ultimate human goal. It can be achieved by:

- wise thoughts and actions;
- the elimination of selfishness, greed, hate and other forms of self-delusion;
- self-empowerment, attained by cultivating a calm, compassionate and generous mind.

The Buddha believed that life is like a wheel, a never-ending circle. People move through life stages from birth to death and back to birth, a continuous series of suffering. This circle can be broken, however. According to Buddha's teaching, there are four Noble truths:

- There is nothing truly satisfying in this world. Life leads to unhappiness and suffering, nothing lasts, everything is transitory.
- People suffer because they have desires. People are grasping, greedy, self-centred and unsatisfied. This divides them and brings conflict and unhappiness.
- These feelings can, however, be eradicated by not becoming attached to anything, including oneself.
- One can follow the eight right ways to achieve clarity or enlightenment. These are the pursuit of right conduct, right effort, right intentions, right livelihood, right meditation, right mindfulness, right speech and right views.

Buddhists believe that everything they do and think has a result, called Karma (Kamma). The quality of one's life determines the conditions of rebirth, which ceases only upon the attainment of Nirvana. For a Buddhist there is no soul or ego to be reborn but, instead, Karmic forces are carried forward at death.

The Buddha provided The Five Precepts for lay people to live by. They are to undertake not to:

- kill or harm any living thing;
- steal;
- be involved in sexual misconduct or other indulgence;
- lie or misrepresent the truth;
- take drugs or drink which will cloud the mind.

DIVISIONS OF BUDDHISM

During the third century BC, Buddhism divided into two main streams: Theravada and Mahayana. A third stream, Vajrayana (Tibetan Buddhism), came later from the Mahayana stream.

Theravada is the conservative stream, which preserves the earliest teachings and traditions of the Buddha and Sangha, the community of monks. It stresses that Nirvana can be reached only by the few who follow the way strictly and renounce the world. It has a very individual emphasis. Theravada is sometimes termed 'Southern Buddhism' as it is the main stream of Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand.

Mahayana, Eastern Buddhism, is found in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Mahayana has a few significant differences from Theravada. The Buddha, Gautama, is treated as a Divine Being, and other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas — Beings who are able to enter Nirvana but who delay in order to help others — are also recognised. These Beings respond to requests for help from those truly seeking the path. This allows ordinary Buddhists to attain Nirvana while continuing everyday life.

OBSERVANCES

Buddhists observe a lunar calendar with regular holy days. Rites of passage begin before birth and continue

throughout life. A triple celebration of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and attainment of Nirvana is celebrated in late May/early June. Because Buddhism involves such a diverse group of people, rites often reflect the culture of the practitioners.

IN NEW ZEALAND

Buddhism in some form has been part of New Zealand's religious diversity since the Chinese gold-prospectors came here in the 1850s and 1860s.

In the 1950s and 1960s numbers of New Zealanders became interested in Buddhism, and since the founding of the Buddhism Society of New Zealand in 1956 lay people in a number of centres have held regular meditation sessions.

Over the years monks and lay teachers from several Buddhist traditions have visited New Zealand to support local groups. New Zealand now has resident monks and teachers in several centres who cater for Buddhists who are either New Zealand-born or immigrants. There are also both Theravadan and Mahayana temples and monasteries in this country, as well as support groups and societies catering for a range of Buddhist needs and practices.

Chinese, Cambodians, Sri Lankans and Thai are the largest Buddhist groups in New Zealand. About 90 per cent of all the Buddhist people in New Zealand are from the ethnic sector.



A Buddhist at prayer at a temple in Auckland. (PHOTO: NZ HERALD)

Hinduism

NUMBERS IN NEW ZEALAND 29,293 (1996)

ORIGINS

'Hinduism' is the term used to identify the very ancient religion of the Indian people. Its beginnings go back nearly five thousand years, and it is still one of the five major world religions.

The Hindu religion does not have any one prophet, nor does it worship any one god. It is not a single religious system but rather has a variety of traditions which maintain a degree of unity because the overriding principles are based on Sanatana Dharma, the eternal laws of nature. These are to be found in the teachings of the Vedas, Tripitakas and the Jain Agamas.

Hinduism is a way of life and culture.

BELIEFS

Hinduism teaches that God is one but, as God has many different attributes and functions, many names may be used. God may be celebrated in many forms, which may be male, female or animal.

God cannot be fully defined because that would be limiting. Humans are unable to comprehend God fully. Indeed, total knowledge of God is impossible. People therefore require many names, symbols and images to enable them to discover God for themselves. This freedom of thought and worship has led to the misconception that Hinduism has many gods.

Hindu people have some common values and rules of behaviour. Mother Earth, one's mother and father, ancestors and teachers are respected. Truth and righteous living are upheld, as are honesty, forgiveness, fearlessness, non-violence and service to others.

Hindu people believe that each soul is potentially divine and destined to become perfect at some stage. Life is the journey of discovery one takes in search of perfection. 'Atman' is the term used to denote 'self', the changeless essence of one's being: immortal, divine, and eternal.

Hindus believe that the real nature of the human soul can only be known through scriptures and personal experience. Spiritual disciplines lead one to this realisation.

They also believe that we are born many times, and that each time we reap the results of our previous life.

This is the Law of Karma. As our future depends on what we do in this life, we are responsible for our fate. Through the pain and pleasures derived from many reincarnations, we finally achieve our true nature, Atman, and become one with God, Brahman. We then achieve Moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Brahman is the Ultimate Reality, the Hindu notion of the all-encompassing God (not to be confused with Brahmin, the priestly Hindu caste). The Hindu people worship one God manifest in many forms. The Universe came out of Brahman, is sustained by it and ultimately merges in it. It is unique, pure, infinite, beyond time and space. It is omnipresent and within each one of us. If a devotee is sincere, God will reveal the truth through any form of worship. This makes Hinduism a non-proselytising religion.

OBSERVANCES

'Puja' is worshipful communion with God. At home it is performed daily before a deity or shrine. There are many Puja rituals. They include the use of perfumed substances, flowers, fresh fruit, incense and lamps. They are designed to enable the focused worshipper to recognise the omnipresence of God and offer service. The worship is aimed at achieving a calm and relaxed state in which the worshipper can seek enlightenment.

Marriage and the family are very important. Marriage is the sacred duty of every normal, healthy person. Husband and wife have equal rights, with the same prestige and power. Marriage starts the second life stage, considered a most important one. This is the most productive stage, when family and community responsibilities are at their greatest. The other life stages — student, retirement and renunciation — are affected by this time.

Arranged marriages are not uncommon. They are organised by parents and require the co-operation of all parties. The elders, who are wiser in the ways of the world, help young people to select suitable mates. They compare age, education, health, physique, temperament, likes and dislikes, and other known qualities that will ensure a good union. If the couple

agree to the choice the marriage will take place. Every effort is made to support a marriage, as divorce is not a desirable option. Should it occur, however, remarriage is allowed.

Death occurs when the body dies but not the soul. It is the passage of a soul to another body. Funeral rites include body preparation, cremation, the dispersal of ashes, purification of the home and commemorative ceremonies. The whole family and the community are involved.

Drugs and alcohol are forbidden. Nothing should be taken that results in loss of self-control or that overburdens the body's mechanisms. Such practices result in the retardation of spiritual progress.

Hinduism maintains a holistic attitude to health, involving body, mind and soul. Spiritual practices are beneficial to health as they help create a stress-free mind and body.

Cows are considered to be sacred. Many Hindus are vegetarian.

FESTIVALS

Hindu religious, historical and seasonal festivals vary in their observance, importance, and sometimes their timing in different localities.

Diwali, also known as Deepavali, the Festival of Lights, is the most popular Hindu festival. It is celebrated in October/November according to the lunar calendar. It signifies the victory of divine forces over those of evil. At Diwali, homes and public buildings are decorated with brightly coloured lights. People give gifts of sweets, clean their houses and wear new clothes.

IN NEW ZEALAND

Indians of the Hindu religion began arriving in New Zealand towards the end of the nineteenth century. They have maintained their beliefs through Puja, both in their homes, in groups and in the temples which have been built in the main centres.

Ninety-six per cent of all the Hindu people in New Zealand are from the ethnic sector.



A New Zealand mayor receives a *raakhi* (Holy Thread) from the Indian community: used to symbolise universal brotherhood, the *raakhi* here emphasises loyalty to the Indians' new home.

Islam

NUMBERS IN NEW ZEALAND 13,548 (1996)

ORIGINS

Islam is one of the five major world religions, the second largest after Christianity, with over one thousand million believers. The word 'Islam' means obedience or submission to the will of Allah.

Muslims share some of their historical beliefs with Jews and Christians, but to them the most important event was the revelation of God's word to Muhammad in the early seventh century.

Muhammad began his preaching in Mecca but his popularity led to the politicians beginning a campaign of harassment against his teaching. He and his followers were eventually forced to move their community to Medina, in what is now Saudi Arabia. This journey was so important to Muslims that their calendar is dated from the time of the Hijrah or migration. Muhammad was accepted as a Prophet of God and respected as both a religious leader and a statesman until his death in AD 632. He is believed to be God's messenger. He is not worshipped.

DIVISIONS IN ISLAM

About 90 per cent of the world's Muslims belong to a sect known as Sunni. The remainder are Shi'a Muslims. Shi'ite Islam is dominant in Iran and is also found in other countries, such as southern Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain.

RELIGIOUS TEXT

The Qur'an (Koran), the holy book of Islam, is the word of Allah as revealed to Muhammad. It details Muslim beliefs and tells how a believer should live. Most Muslims try to learn to read it in its original Arabic script and to memorise at least some of the verses. (The word 'Qur'an' means recitation.)

OBSERVANCES

Muslims believe in the Five Pillars of Faith.

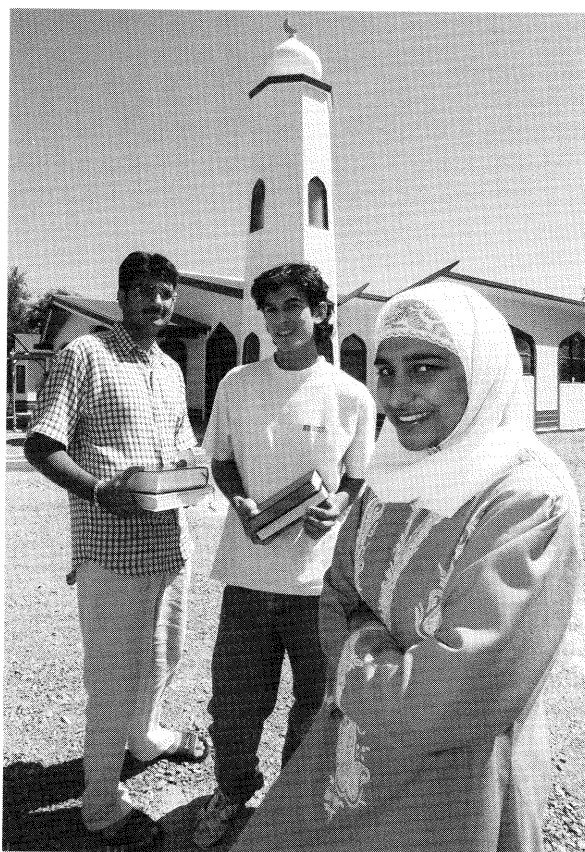
The first, shahadah, is the profession of faith — 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet' — which Muslims repeat several times a day.

The second is salah, prayer five times daily: at dawn, just after midday, mid-afternoon, just after sunset and after dark. Prayers are said in Arabic and

follow a fixed format. The face, arms, head and feet must be washed before prayers. Prayers may be said in any clean place but where possible adult males should go to the mosque for noon prayers on Friday. Women must cover their heads, and many men do so also. Prayers are said facing Mecca.

The third pillar is zakah, giving a set proportion of one's wealth to help the needy and support good causes.

The fourth is fasting in the month of Ramadan, when Muslims neither eat nor drink during the hours of daylight. It is a time for studying the Qur'an and practising self-discipline and charity. The age at which children begin to observe the fast during Ramadan varies between Islamic communities.



The Islamic Centre is a place for worship and learning.
(PHOTO: WAIKATO TIMES)

The fifth pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which should be made at least once in a lifetime if possible. It is called Hajj.

Muslims are expected to be honest, just, generous and ready to fight in defence of their beliefs if necessary. The Jihad is the inner struggle against evil in order to lead a good life. It can also mean the holy duty many Muslims feel to spread their faith.

The religious laws of Islam, the Shari'ah, give guidance on all matters from personal to national. In some countries today there is little difference between the laws of the country and those of religion. Islam imposes strict penalties for crimes which are seen to threaten society.

Muslims must not eat pork or drink alcohol, gamble or lend money for interest. Meat should be halal-killed, that is, killed with a sharp knife which must penetrate the animal's neck. The butcher must say '*Bismillah*' ('In the name of God'). This shows the animal is killed only to provide sustenance. The blood must be drained from the carcass.

Modest dress is required. Women should cover their head, arms and legs. Some women also cover their faces when outside the house but there is no rule in Islamic scriptures insisting on this. Men and women do not mix freely, as anything which threatens family life is to be avoided.

Marriage and raising families are encouraged. Marriages may be arranged but the prospective couple have the right of refusal. Muslim men may have up to four wives as long as they can all be cared for and treated equally. A wife's duty is to look after home and family. Women are not encouraged to work outside the home. The man is responsible for providing for

the family, which is usually an extended one with each member expected to contribute to its well-being. Divorce is permitted but not encouraged.

Women's lives vary a great deal in different parts of the world today. In some Islamic states women may be kept in purdah, away from all men except their male relatives, and their education may be restricted. In other countries women may be encouraged to go to work and take part in politics.

Muslims are buried, not cremated, because they believe in resurrection of the body after death. Women do not usually attend funerals but they may visit graves after burial.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Id-ul-Fitr is the major event in the Muslim year. It marks the end of Ramadan and is marked by prayers at the mosque, celebrations with friends and family, special food, sweets and presents. Other major events in the Muslim calendar are Id-ul-Zuha, the Feast of Sacrifice; Muharram, marking the martyrdom of Muhammad's grandson; and Milad-un-Nabi, celebrating the birth of Muhammad.

IN NEW ZEALAND

In recent years many more Muslims have come to live in New Zealand from countries such as India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Fiji and the Middle East. A number of Islamic centres have been established, with mosques in Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington and Christchurch.

About 94 per cent of all Muslim people in New Zealand are from the ethnic sector.

Sikhism

NUMBERS IN NEW ZEALAND

2814 (1996)

ORIGINS

Sikhs follow the teachings of ten Gurus, or holy men, who lived in the Punjab region of India between 1469 and 1708. The first Guru, Nanak, was born when the main Indian religions were Hinduism and Islam. He rejected some of the teachings of both but looked for common ground which might bring the two groups together. In doing this he developed a new way of religious thought which was further developed by the ten Gurus over time. This became Sikhism.

RELIGIOUS TEXT

The Sikh Holy Book is called Guru Granth Sahib and it is written in a special script called Gurmukhi. The Holy Granth may be read by males or females. When being read in the Gurdwara Sahib (temple) it is placed on a special platform shaded by a canopy. Any room where the Guru Granth Sahib is kept is holy and must be kept clean. People entering this room must remove their shoes and cover their heads to show respect. On special occasions the book may be read in its entirety, which takes about 48 hours.

BELIEFS

Sikhs believe there is one God who created the universe and all within it. God is omnipresent and has never had a human form. They also believe that people have been reincarnated many times in forms as varied as plants, animals and so on, but only when one is born as a human can one respond to the love of God, who will show Himself to one when He considers that one's soul is ready. Sikhs therefore try to make themselves as ready as possible so that this revelation may take place. A Sikh must learn to love God more than the world and the gurus' teachings help people to attain this.

OBSERVANCES

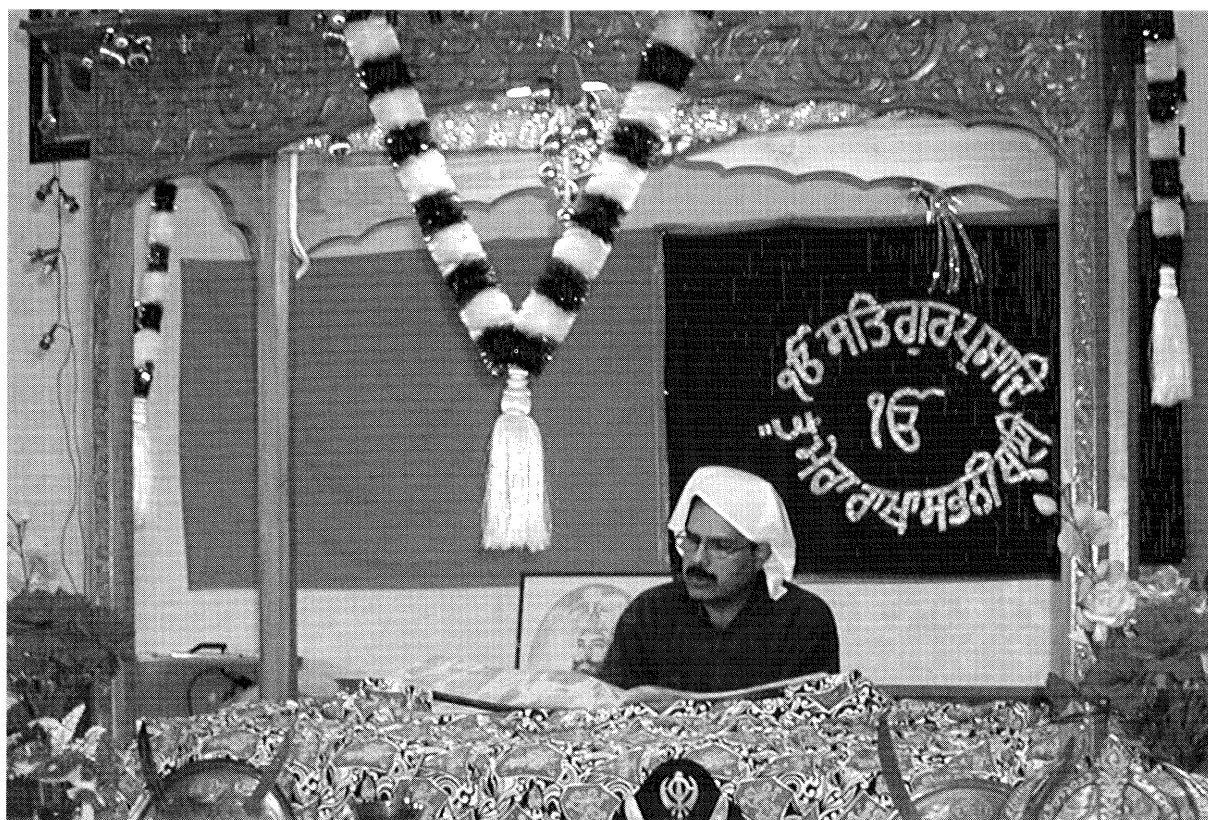
Many Sikhs belong to the Brotherhood of Sikhs, Khalsa. To join Khalsa one undergoes a special ceremony performed by any five Sikhs who are already baptised.

Sikhs wear or carry five symbols of their devotion to the Brotherhood. They are the five K's: Kesh and Keski, uncut hair and a turban to show wisdom; Kangha, a comb to show cleanliness; Kara, a steel wristband to show eternity; Kirpan, a sword to show strength; and Kacchehra, a pair of shorts to show action and goodness.

Sikhs should live life according to certain rules. They should study the scriptures and meditate about God. They must not eat meat killed in either the Jewish or Muslim way, as they believe this death is cruel. They may also not eat beef out of respect for Hinduism which believes cows to be sacred. Some Sikhs are vegetarians by choice. Sikhs must not smoke, drink alcohol nor take drugs except for medicinal purposes, as they slow the mind and body and make one vulnerable. Sikhs should not gamble nor steal, and should be loyal to marriage partners. They should live honestly, sharing time, energy and money with others. They believe everybody is equal.

Marriage is important to Sikhs. It involves the couple's families, who give advice on the choice of partner. The couple usually meet before the wedding. Both partners should be Sikhs. The Guru Granth Sahib is present at the wedding ceremony. The bride wears red, either a *shalwar kameez* (tunic and trousers) or a sari, a red head-scarf and gold jewellery. The groom may wear Indian or Western dress with his turban. The marriage is supported by families, who try to help resolve any difficulties, although divorce and remarriage are allowed.

Sikh children are brought up to maintain their beliefs and traditions, and parents are responsible for ensuring that they do so. A baby is given a first name at the gurdwara as soon as possible after birth. Prayers are said and followed by a random reading from the holy book. The first letter of this reading is chosen as the first letter of the child's name, which the family selects. Sikh first names may not indicate sex, but all boys have the last name Singh (Lion) and girls Kaur (Princess). These indicate that they belong to the Sikh family. At the naming ceremony the child will be given its first steel bracelet.



On special occasions the Sikh Holy Book, *Guru Granth Sahib*, is read in its entirety.

Sikhs have two main types of festival: those on the same day as Hindu festivals, but which have special meaning for Sikhs, and those which celebrate special days in the lives of the Gurus.

Sikhs believe that, since people live many lives, death is simply another stage. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is read in its entirety after a funeral, which is often followed by a feast when gifts are given to charity.

Many Sikhs run their own businesses as this is encouraged by Sikh teaching.

Women are of equal status to men in every walk of life. They may also be members of the Khalsa. They are entitled to lead religious groups, to take part in the recitation of holy scriptures, to fight in wars and to vote.

IN NEW ZEALAND

The first Sikhs migrated to New Zealand in 1890, and the New Zealand Sikh Society was founded in 1964. A Gurdwara Sahib was opened in Hamilton in 1977, and another in Otahuhu in 1986.

About 76 per cent of all Sikh people in New Zealand are from the ethnic sector.

Contacts and Resources

Department Internal Affairs

<http://www.dia.govt.nz>

Office of Ethnic Affairs

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Publishes *Ethnic Link* (quarterly)

Development Resource Centre

<http://www.drc.org.nz/about.html>

Hamilton Multicultural Services Trust

Interpreting Service

P.O. Box 4340

Hamilton

Phone 07-839-3902

Fax 07-839-6162

Email hmstis@xtra.co.nz

Migrant Voice (monthly)

P.O. Box 12-378

Wellington

Phone/fax 04-499-2620

Email migrantvoice@xtra.co.nz

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Private Bag 18-901

Wellington

Phone 04-494-8500

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Email enquiries@mft.govt.nz

Diplomatic and Consular List available from
Information and Public Affairs Division

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs

P.O. Box 833

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New Zealand Government

<http://www.govt.nz>

New Zealand Immigration Service

Phone (Auckland area) 09-914-4100

Phone (outside Auckland) toll-free 0508-55-88-55

Fax 09-914-4119

<http://www.immigration.govt.nz>

Office of the Race Relations Conciliator

Toll-free number 0800-808-440

Auckland office: P.O. Box 105-102

Auckland Central

Phone 09-307-2352

Fax 09-377-0123

Email akrro@xtra.co.nz

RMS New Zealand's Refugee Resettlement Agency (formerly Refugee and Migrant Service)

P.O. Box 11-236

Manners Street

Wellington

Phone 04-471-1932

Fax 04-471-1938

Email secretariat@rms.org.nz

Statistics New Zealand
<http://www.stats.govt.nz>

The Translation Service
Department of Internal Affairs
P.O. Box 805
Wellington
Phone 04-470-2920
Fax 04-470-2921
Email translate@parliament.govt.nz

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
PO Box 91-307
Auckland Mail Centre
Phone 04-914-4175
Fax 09-914-5265
Email nzlau@unhcr.ch

Wellington Community Interpreting Service
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Wellington
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Fax 04-384-6292
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Hindu	Tamil
Japanese	Thai
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Kurdish	Ukrainian
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