

# Kirpan

The Kirpan (IPA: ) (Punjabi: kirp n) is a ceremonial sword or dagger worn by all baptised Sikhs.

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh told his Sikhs at the Baisakhi Amrit Sanchar to constantly and regularly wear a Kirpan at all times. This was an article of defence which together with the other 4 Kakars formed the external visible symbols to outwardly display ones commitment to the Hukam of the tenth master. The five Kakars clearly and instantly identify a Khalsa Sikh. The Kirpan is worn on a cloth belt called a Gatra.

This injunction was primarily in order to protect the weak from tyranny and slavery, to maintain a state of harmony and security, to allow for the free development of trade, craftsmanship, arts & literature and to safeguard and protect the universal right of all beings to live their lives in a peaceful, stable and sheltered environment.

The kirpan has both a physical function, as a defensive weapon, as well as a symbolic function. Physically it is an instrument of "Ahimsa" or non-violence. The principle of ahimsa is to actively prevent violence, not to simply stand by idly whilst violence is being done. To that end, the kirpan is a tool to be used to prevent violence from being done to a defenceless person when all other means to do so have failed. Symbolically, the kirpan represents the power of truth to cut through untruth. It is the cutting edge of the enlightened mind.

A baptised Sikh, better known as a Khalsa Sikh is a "Sant-Sipahie" - a Saint-Soldier: A saint first and then a soldier. So to satisfy this term, one must first become a saint and then a Soldier. As a saint one must have total control over ones internal vices and be able to constantly be immersed in five virtues as clarified in the SGGS. Only then can a Sikh become a soldier. Also, the Khalsa is "Akal Purakh de fauj" - the Army of God. Guru ji clearly choose these words very deliberately - He did not state that the Khalsa was the army of the Khalsa or an army of the Sikhs or the army of Punjab - but an Army of God whose function was the protection and safeguarding of all the peoples of God.

## Further Details

The kirpan is the symbol crystallising the fact that when a Khalsa joins this army, he or she has left behind the docile environment of subservience and subordination and has joined the proactive and caring world of the fearless, brave and courageous defence force of Guru Gobind Singh. The recruits of this army have a dynamic and constant duty to protect and to fight for justice for all the people of the world and to side with the oppressed and offer assistance and support to all weaker inhabitants without any reference to their race, gender, caste, nationality, religion or beliefs.

The Kirpan is one of the Five Ks, of the Khalsa Sikhs. Kirpan literal means "weapon of defence" ("Kirpa" means "mercy" and "Aan" means "bless"), as opposed to the talwar, a weapon of offence.

Typically made from iron, kirpans range in blade size from 3 inches to over 3 feet and Sikhs in the west wear kirpans of about 3.5 inch blade size. Most Sikhs wear the kirpan under their clothes and most people observing a random Sikh would not be aware that they were carrying a kirpan. To the Sikhs, it is a highly important religious symbol; it is rarely used as a weapon.

Sikhs often protest the characterisation of the Kirpan as a weapon. Traditionally, a Sikh should never use the Kirpan in anger or for a malicious attack. However, a Sikh may use it in self-defence or to protect a person in need. Some Sikhs choose to learn the art of Gatka. This is a martial art devised by the Sikh Gurus that uses circular movements to effectively swing a kirpan.

The requirement that baptised Sikhs wear the kirpan has caused problems for believers in many areas, especially where the custom clashes with local laws against carrying weapons. In cases where safety regulations conflict with wearing the kirpan, such as boarding an airplane or entering a prison, Sikhs reluctantly comply with authorities. Some regulations allow the kirpan under certain restrictions; for example, rules in some California schools require that the kirpan be blunted and riveted into a sheath. This prevents any possible use of the kirpan as a weapon, but still allows it as a physical symbol of faith.