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Date

Monday 25 June 2018



A guest post from Satwant Rait, with thanks to the Sikh Elders Service for their contributions to discussions on Sikh remembrance

There is no Sikh religious dictate in terms dressing up, but there is a Punjabi cultural tradition of wearing a suit and in Sikh tradition the mourning colour is white. Almost all Sikh women cover their head with a white scarf. It is an indication that someone has died in that family. Sikhs generally follow Punjabi cultural traditions when it comes to dressing.

The mourning wear comprises a Punjabi suit made up of salwar (baggy trousers), kameez (long tunic) and dupatta (long and wide scarf). It is not uncommon to see many women now only wearing a white scarf in combination with light coloured suits. To wear a saree, one needs a petticoat which is a sort of underskirt with a tape to tie around the waist and the saree is tacked under the tape. Women also wear a blouse which reaches down to near the belly button. A saree is six yards long and forty-five inches wide.



Every culture has a unique way of remembering their loved ones. Sikhs are no exception to this. When someone dies in the family, women cover their head with a white scarf. The family, relatives and friends gather and talk about the person. A religious ceremony is held and speeches are made on the funeral day highlighting the contributions of the deceased. Family members often choose something from the belongings of their loved ones to keep with them in memory of them. Possessions are divided within the family.

Relatives can choose what they want or what the dead person wanted to give them. Unless they suddenly pass away, individuals will generally specify to whom they would like their personal possessions to go.

Ashes are scattered in the running water of the deceased's choice. There is a purpose-built platform at Burley Mills Weir for the scattering of Sikh and Hindu ashes into the River Aire at Leeds. It is a cultural dictate that the Holy Scripture is recited after ninth months and in between nine and eleven months for the deceased and the normality of the family.

Sikhs celebrate the anniversaries of their Gurus by holding akhand path (reciting of the Holy Scripture within forty-eight hours in relays) in gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship). On the final day speeches are given on their life and contributions. Kings, emperors and political leaders are remembered generally through the media highlighting their life, achievements and contribution to the panth (Sikh community). In exceptional circumstances their statues are made. There is a statue of the young prince Dalip Singh, son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh at Butten Island, Thetford, Norfolk, near the Elveden Estate where he lived in Britain. Sikhs hold prayers and seminars for their war heroes. As Sikhs have settled in western countries, they have tried to establish permanent memorials for the Sikhs who lost their life fighting. For example, many Sikhs lost their lives in the two World Wars on behalf of the British Empire, and this is often not remembered.

You can see Satwant Rait's mourning costume (pictured above) in our Remembrance exhibition at Abbey House Museum, Leeds, until December 2018. More information [here](#).

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