

Special Issue

May (Week 3)

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All about The Sikhs of Peshawar

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: *Recently, two Sikh men were shot dead in Peshawar, Pakistan, in broad daylight when they were sitting at their shops. According to the local community, this was the twelfth such incident when Sikhs, a religious minority in Pakistan, were targeted by extremists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province alone. The tiny Sikh community living in Peshawar and surrounding districts of KPK is unique in many ways.*

‘Pashtun’ first

- The Sikhs in the Pashtun majority Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province trace their roots to the times when this entire region was part of Afghanistan.
- It was only in 1834 that Hari Singh Nalwa, one of the bravest generals in the Army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, annexed Peshawar from Afghan rulers and made it a part of the undivided Punjab.
- During the British rule, Peshawar and other north-western districts of Punjab were made a separate province called North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP).
- After the partition in 1947, NWFP went to Pakistan with Peshawar as its capital city.
- The NWFP province was renamed as ‘Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’ on the demand of Pashto language speaking ‘Pakhtun’ population by the government of Pakistan in 2010, to protect their unique identity just like Punjab for Punjabis, Sindh for Sindhis and Balochistan for Balochis.
- It is due to the proximity with Afghanistan that the Sikhs settled in KPK have striking cultural and linguistic similarities with Afghan Sikhs.
- Most Pashtun Sikh families were earlier settled in the districts of Kurram, Khyber and Orakzai– the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) on the border of Afghanistan-Pakistan border, which merged into KPK in 2018.
- However, as terrorism and persecution of religious minorities in these areas grew, they started moving to ‘comparitively safer’ cities such as Peshawar, Lahore, Nankana Sahib and other cities of Pakistan.
- So before being a ‘Pakistani’ or ‘a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh’, the people of KPK embrace their identity as a ‘Pashtun’, which comes before their country or religion.

Why Pashtun Sikhs are unique, how many remain

- Unlike other Sikhs settled in India and Pakistan, the Pashtun Sikh community is not very well-versed in Punjabi language (either Gurmukhi or Shahmukhi) and their main language remains Pashto and some can even speak Hindko and Urdu.
- Yet, they can read Gurbani (Guru’s teachings) written in Sri Guru Granth Sahib and follow Guru Nanak Dev.
- They wear Pathan suits and tie turbans in a different way and their daily food is dominated by Pashtun cuisine. Their cultural and linguistic heritage is closer to Afghan Sikhs.
- According to Ameer Singh, president, Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), there are just 15,000-20,000 Sikhs estimated to be left in Pakistan of which some 500 Sikh households are in Peshawar.
- While most Pashtun Sikhs live in Peshawar, some families are still living in border districts of Kurram, Khyber and Orakzai despite being the victims of targeted killings and rising terrorism.

Gurdwaras in Peshawar

- Sikhism made in-roads in India, Afghanistan and Pakistan when first Sikh master Guru Nanak Dev traveled across the Indus belt during his udaasis (travels) to spread the message of peace and harmony.
- However, in Peshawar and other Pashtun areas, it was during Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s era that Sikhism flourished and local community credits his commander-in-chief Hari Singh Nalwa for its spread.



- The city of Haripur in KPK was named after Nalwa. Most Sikhs here identify themselves with Nalwa. He is the force behind preaching of Sikhism in Peshawar and many had adopted Sikhism during that period. Many historical gurdwaras were also renovated during his regime.
- Most Sikhs who are currently living in Lahore, Nankana Sahib and other cities of Pakistan are also of Pashtun origin.
- Currently, there are two main gurdwaras operational in Peshawar city: Gurdwara Bhai Jogan Singh and Gurdwara Biba Singh.
- Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh is located in 'Mohalla Jogan Shah', a locality where most Sikh families live at present.
- The Sikh history in Peshawar goes back to the times of tenth Sikh master Guru Gobind Singh, whose disciple Bhai Joga Singh was from Peshawar.
- It is believed that Joga Singh's devotion was put to test by Guru Gobind Singh as in the middle of his marriage rituals, he received a message from the Guru to reach Anandpur Sahib from Peshawar. He left his lawan in between and left for Anandpur Sahib.
- The gurdwara built in the name of Joga Singh is a three-storeyed building in tight lanes of Peshawar with grand mirror architecture inside.
- Both gurdwaras were abandoned after the partition and were reopened years later. While renovation work at Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh was started in 1980, Gurdwara Biba Singh, with exquisite 300-year old marble and wood carving work was reopened only in 2016.
- The local Sikh community also runs two schools in Peshawar, Bhai Joga Singh Khalsa Dharmik School and Guru Angad Dev Khalsa Dharmik School, to teach Gurbani to Sikh children.

Killings and setbacks for Peshawari Sikhs

- Most Sikhs in Peshawar are from a financially weak background and run small grocery/spices/hakeemi (traditional medicines) shops.
- The recent killings of two Sikh men was the second such incident in the past eight months when killers barged inside a shop and opened fire.
- In September last year, a Sikh shopkeeper, Satnam Singh, was shot dead at his dawakhana (traditional medicine shop) in Peshawar.
- The Islamic State's Afghanistan affiliate, dubbed Islamic State Khorasan or ISIS-K, had claimed responsibility for the killing.
- Twenty Pashtun Sikhs had also died in one go in a train accident in 2020.

All about the historical significance of Lumbini

(Source: [Indian Express](http://www.indianexpress.com))

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba together laid the foundation stone for the India International Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage in Lumbini, Nepal, birthplace of The Buddha, on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti.

Lumbini Garden

- Lumbini, located across the border from Gorakhpur in Rupandehi district of Nepal's Lumbini province, is believed to be the birthplace of the Shakyas prince Siddhartha Gautam, who became The Buddha after attaining Enlightenment.
- The Lumbini complex contains a number of holy sites, including the famous Mayadevi temple, which is dedicated to The Buddha's mother.
- Adjacent to the temple is a sacred pond in which Mayadevi is believed to have taken a ritual bath before giving birth to Siddhartha.



- Lumbini Garden is described in Buddhist literature as a Pradimoksha-vana (sin-free forest), containing groves of sal trees, beautiful flowers, birds, and natural landscapes.
- It was built by Anjana, king of the Koliya clan, for his queen Rupadevi or Rummindei, pronounced “Lumindei” in the Magadhi language, hence the name Lumbini, according to some historians. (Others believe the name was given by the emperor Ashoka later.)
- The Koliya were bound by matrimonial alliance with the Shakya clan of Kapilavastu, and jointly managed the garden. Mayadevi, who was the daughter of king Anjana, was married to the Shakya king Siddhodana.
- According to Buddhist literature, Lumbini was located on an ancient trade route passing through Kapilavastu (present location uncertain), Kushinagar (in modern-day Uttar Pradesh), and Vaishali, Pataliputra, Nalanda, and Rajgriha (all in today’s Bihar).
- There were shops, eating places, and resthouses for both the elite and common people along the route.

Siddhartha’s birth

- According to Buddhist legend, Mayadevi was passing through a grove of sal trees in Lumbini on her way to Devdaha from Kapilavastu, when she began to experience labour pains.
- The baby is said to have emerged from her armpit, and announced that this would be his last birth and that he would not be reincarnated.
- The birth of the Shakya prince Siddhartha Gautam is dated to 563 BC (480 BC according to some traditions).
- He is believed to have died aged 80 in 483 BC (or 400 BC). In 249 BC, the emperor Ashoka erected a pillar marking the place where the Buddha was said to have been born.
- Buddhist tradition has it that the ascetic seer Asita visited Kapilavastu during the birth celebrations of Siddhartha.
- Upon seeing the child, Asita announced that he would either become a great king or a great religious teacher.

Renunciation

- Siddhartha’s father Siddhodana wanted him to become a king and shielded him from sorrow, unhappiness, and any experience of death.
- The prince was brought up in the royal palace amid every worldly comfort and luxury.
- However, he grew increasingly dissatisfied, and on one occasion saw an old man, a sick person, a corpse, and an ascetic, which moved him deeply.
- One night soon afterward, when Siddhartha was 29, he went out of the palace, leaving behind his wife and newborn son, and accompanied only by his faithful charioteer Channa and horse Kanthaka, to live the life of a wandering ascetic.
- This event is known in Buddhist tradition as the Great Renunciation.

Enlightenment

- At age 35, Siddhartha Gautama began to meditate under a Bodhi tree on the outskirts of the town of Gaya, situated in the realm of Bimbisara, the king of Magadha.
- On the 49th day of continuous meditation, he is said to have achieved Enlightenment and understood the cause of suffering in the world. Siddhartha became The Buddha, the Enlightened One.
- Bodh Gaya is today one of the four great Buddhist pilgrimages, the others being Lumbini, where The Buddha was born, Sarnath near Varanasi, where he gave his first sermon, and Kushinagar, where he died (or attained Mahaparinirvana).
- The Buddha was greatly attached to Lumbini and visited the site, along with Kapilavastu, on several occasions during his lifetime, according to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.
- While on his deathbed, he is said to have advised his followers to visit Lumbini, along with the other three holy sites.



Historical site

- Cultural deposits dating to the 6th century BC have been discovered at Lumbini.
- The Chinese monks Faxian (Fa-Hien) and Xuanzang (Huien Tsang) visited the site in the 5th and 7th centuries AD respectively, and their accounts were used by antiquarians in the 19th century in an effort to locate Lumbini.
- The 3rd century BC was a watershed moment in the history of Lumbini and Buddhism.
- After witnessing the massacre in the war of Kalinga, the emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism and committed himself to promoting the spread of the religion.
- He visited Lumbini, and in 249 BC, built a large temple-like structure over the birthplace of Buddha and erected a sandstone pillar containing inscriptions to memorialise his pilgrimage.
- A portion of the pillar survives today, with 4 metres below the ground and 6 metres above.
- Descriptions of travellers suggest the original pillar was several metres taller, with an inverted lotus capital and an animal image on top, according to historians.
- The inscription on the pillar, in the Brahmi script of the language Pali, says Ashoka prayed at the birth site of The Buddha, and that pilgrims would be exempt from all religious taxes.
- In 1312, the Khasa-Malla king Ripu Malla engraved the Buddhist mantra, 'Om Mani Padme Hum' and his name on the pillar.
- However, Lumbini was forgotten for many centuries, until it was rediscovered in 1896, and excavations were conducted at the site.