

**Grade: 6**

**Course: Virṣā (ਵਿਰਸਾ)**

**Lesson Number: 21**

**Unit Name: Comparative Politics**

**Title: Introduction to the Sikh (ਸਿੱਖ) Decision-Making Process**

### **Standards**

#### **Standard 7: Comparative Politics**

- Students can compare and contrast the differences between Sikh decision-making and Sikh conflict-resolution processes with those in the Western system of governance.
  - Students identify the key functions in the Sikh processes and are able to compare and contrast with what they learn in school. Mock debates and forums should be used as activities to teach the students.

### **Objectives**

1. Students will learn about the Sikh decision-making process and the Sikh conflict-resolution processes.
2. In particular, students will learn about the institution of the Sarbat Khālsā (ਸਰਬਤ ਖਾਲਸਾ) and the method of passing a *Gurmatā* (ਗੁਰਮਤਾ).

### **Prerequisites**

- Students do not need to have any prior knowledge about the topic.

### **Materials**

- Board or chart paper and writing materials
- Photocopies of a handout on the Sarbat Khālsā and *Gurmatā*
- Photocopies of the Group Decision-Making Activity

### **Advanced Preparation**

- The teacher should go over the various websites and books included in Teacher Resources.

### **Engagement (10-15 minutes)**

- Greet students and give them a couple of minutes to settle down.
- Explain to students that even though Sikhs do not have a country of their own, the corporate body of the Sikh Panth (ਪੰਥ) does make decisions for the collective Sikhs.
- Explain that just as other nations have their own system of government and decision-making, the Sikh community also has its own decision-making process.

### **Exploration (35-40 minutes)**

- Distribute the handout explaining the institutions of the Sarbat Khālsā and *Gurmatā*.
- Read the section on Sarbat Khālsā and *Gurmatā* out loud to the class and explain any terms or concepts that they have difficulty in understanding.
  - One concept that should be clarified and emphasized is the idea that the *Gurū* is embodied in the corporate body of the Sarbat Khālsā in the presence of the Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ). The teacher should clarify this idea by reminding students that when Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib created the Khālsā, he bowed down before the body of Sikhs (at that time, the Pañj Piāre - ਪੰਜ ਪਿਆਰੇ) in the presence of Gurū Granth Sāhib and

asked them for Ammrit (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ).

- Another point that should be emphasized is the fact that, in the Sikh Panth, major decisions are supposed to be made with the consent of the entire community. All members of the community must agree to a unanimous agreement in order for a decision to be made. The decision thus made, can not be overturned by any one person, committee or organization.
- In order to illustrate this concept of unanimous decision-making, ask students to complete the following activity:
  - Ask students to imagine that they are stranded on a tropical island that has only some resources for food and water but nothing else. On a piece of paper, get them to write down two things that they would take with them in order to help them survive.
  - Once everyone has written down two items, get all students to get into groups of five, and get each group to decide on the two most important things that the group would take with them, using everyone's suggestions.
  - Give the class about ten to fifteen minutes to arrive at a decision. The group's decision has to be unanimous. Allow enough time for a discussion surrounding this after the activity.
  - After 15 minutes you must decide if more time is needed or if the class can come together for discussion. If you want to extend the activity, you may let the students keep debating the finish this lesson the next class period.

#### **Explanation/Extension (5-10 minutes)**

- Once students have completed the decision-making activity above, get them to answer the reflection questions included in Teacher Resources. If the students have not finished the questions by the end of the class, ask students to complete the responses at home.
- Get students to share their decision and their answers to the reflection questions in a large class discussion.
- Let them share the difficulties and eases in doing this. Let them discuss what they did to arrive at a unanimous decision.
- Reiterate the difficulty, as well as the importance of reaching a unanimous decision. It requires a great deal of perseverance and compromise and, though it takes a great deal of time and effort, the benefits of such a decision are also immense. Reaching a unanimous decision precludes the chance of anyone saying later that they didn't agree with it.

#### **Evaluation (On-going)**

- Students should be evaluated on their understanding of the difficulty of arriving at a unanimous decision. This understanding will be demonstrated in their responses to the reflection questions.

### **Teacher Resources**

- Singh, Bhagat. *Institution of Gurmatā*. 31 December 2006.  
<http://www.sikh-history.com/sikhhist/institutes/gurmatta.html>
- Method of Adopting a Gurmatā. The Panthic Weekly. 26 January 2007, *Khālsā Press*.  
<http://www.panthic.org/news/132/ARTICLE/2270/2006-02-26.html>
- The Sikh Rahit Maryādā (Code of Conduct), All About Sikhs. 26 January 2007, Gateway to Sikhism. [http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/rehat/index\\_01.htm](http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/rehat/index_01.htm)

### **Sarbat *Khālsā* – ਸਰਬਤ ਖਾਲਸਾ**

Sarbat *Khālsā* can be defined as the corporate body of Sikhs (ਸਿਖ); it is the “integrated conscience” of the entire Sikh people imbued with the spirit of the Divine. While the ten *Gurūs* were alive, their personality was the ultimate binding factor for Sikh congregations. As the Sikh faith spread, the binding force of these Saṅgats (ਸੰਗਤ) became the *Gurū*’s word (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ - Gurbāṇī) as the *Gurū* and the Word became inseparable. The spirit of the *Gurū* was believed to mystically reside within the congregation of Sikhs. This assumption of high authority eventually culminated into the collective whole - the *Panth*. Thus, the Sarbat *Khālsā*, as the *Gurū* Panth (ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ), along with the *Gurū* Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ), is held to be the true and eternal spiritual successor in the line of personal *Gurūs* ending with *Gurū* Gobind Singh Sāhib. As an institution, the Sarbat *Khālsā* is the highest organ of the *Khālsā* Commonwealth representing its “integrated will,” which no Sikh – member or leader – can defy. The Sarbat *Khālsā*, meeting in the presence of the *Gurū* Granth Sāhib, is the supreme sovereign body with deliberative and executive powers that is duly authorized to direct the affairs of the community.

### ***Gurmatā* (ਗੁਰਮਤਾ)**

A *Gurmatā* is a decree (declaration) of the *Gurū*, (a duly passed resolution that has received sanction of the *Gurū*). Therefore, it is a formal resolution. Currently, the Sikh Rahit Maryādā (ਸਿਖ ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ) states that a *Gurmatā* can be passed on the following issues: “fundamental principles of Sikh religion and for their upholding, such as the questions affecting the maintenance of the status of the *Gurūs* or the *Gurū* Granth Sāhib or the inviolability of *Gurū* Granth Sāhib, Amrit (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ), Sikh discipline and way of life, the identity and structural framework of the *Panth*.” The Sikh Rahit Maryādā further states “A *Gurmatā* can be adopted only by a select primary Panthic group or a representative gathering of the *Panth*.”

### **Activity: Making a Unanimous Decision**

Imagine that you are stranded on a tropical island which has some resources for food and water but no other facilities. What two things would you take with you in order to survive and why?

Get into groups of five and, based on the lists of all students, decide on the two most important things that you would take with you if you were stranded on a tropical island. The group’s decision has to be unanimous!

### **Reflection Questions**

Answer the following questions in complete sentences:

1. a) Did your group reach a unanimous decision?  
b) What strategy/strategies did your group use to come to this decision?
2. a) What were some difficulties that the group encountered when reaching a decision?  
b) How did you overcome these difficulties?

3. How did you feel during the decision-making process? (Were you listened to by other group members? Did you feel comfortable voicing your opinion? etc.)
4. Keep in mind that you only had five members in your group.
  - a) Would such an activity work in a larger group such as a Sarbat Khālsā?
  - b) What are some challenges that might have to be overcome in such a situation?

*Adapted from: Sarbat Khalsa Workshop, Sikh Research Institute, 2007*

### Sarbat Khālsā – ਸਰਬਤ ਖਾਲਸਾ

Sarbat Khālsā can be defined as the corporate body of Sikhs (ਸਿਖ); it is the “integrated conscience” of the entire Sikh people imbued with the spirit of the Divine. While the ten *Gurūs* were alive, their personality was the ultimate binding factor for Sikh congregations. As the Sikh faith spread, the binding force of these Saṅgats (ਸੰਗਤ) became the *Gurū’s* word (ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ - Gurbāṇī) as the *Gurū* and the Word became inseparable. The spirit of the *Gurū* was believed to mystically reside within the congregation of Sikhs. This assumption of high authority eventually culminated into the collective whole - the *Panth*. Thus, the Sarbat Khālsā, as the Gurū Panth (ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ), along with the Gurū Granth Sāhib (ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ), is held to be the true and eternal spiritual successor in the line of personal *Gurūs* ending with Gurū Gobind Singh Sāhib. As an institution, the Sarbat Khālsā is the highest organ of the Khālsā Commonwealth representing its “integrated will,” which no Sikh – member or leader – can defy. The Sarbat Khālsā, meeting in the presence of the Gurū Granth Sāhib, is the supreme sovereign body with deliberative and executive powers that is duly authorized to direct the affairs of the community.

### *Gurmatā* (ਗੁਰਮਤਾ)

A *Gurmatā* is a decree (declaration) of the *Gurū*, (a duly passed resolution that has received sanction of the *Gurū*). Therefore, it is a formal resolution. Currently, the Sikh Rahit Maryādā (ਸਿਖ ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ) states that a *Gurmatā* can be passed on the following issues: “fundamental principles of Sikh religion and for their upholding, such as the questions affecting the maintenance of the status of the *Gurūs* or the Gurū Granth Sāhib or the inviolability of Gurū Granth Sāhib, Ammrit (ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ), Sikh discipline and way of life, the identity and structural framework of the Panth.” The Sikh Rahit Maryādā further states “A *Gurmatā* can be adopted only by a select primary Panthic group or a representative gathering of the Panth.”

### Activity: Making a Unanimous Decision

Imagine that you are stranded on a tropical island which has some resources for food and water but no other facilities. What two things would you take with you in order to survive and why?

Get into groups of five and, based on the lists of all students, decide on the two most important things that you would take with you if you were stranded on a tropical island. The group’s decision has to be unanimous!

### Reflection Questions

Answer the following questions in complete sentences:

- Did your group reach a unanimous decision?
  - What strategy/strategies did your group use to come to this decision?
- What were some difficulties that the group encountered when reaching a decision?
  - How did you overcome these difficulties?
- How did you feel during the decision-making process? (Were you listened to by other group members? Did you feel comfortable voicing your opinion? etc.)
- Keep in mind that you only had five members in your group.
  - Would such an activity work in a larger group such as a Sarbat Khālsā?
  - What are some challenges that might have to be overcome in such a situation?

*Adapted from: Sarbat Khalsa Workshop, Sikh Research Institute, 2007*