

## My Sikh Divali

Hello! My name is Butta and I am a Sikh. Sikhs do not celebrate Divali, but the Sikh celebration of **Bandi Chor Divas** takes place at the same time so there are many similarities between the two festivals. Let me tell you about it.

As a Sikh I celebrate Divali because it was on that day in 1619 that Guru Hargobind Sahib arrived at Amritsar after he and 52 princes had been released from Gwalior prison. On that day, the Golden Temple was lit up with many lights to welcome him home and to celebrate his release. Ever since then Sikhs have continued this annual celebration by lighting lamps outside Gurdwaras and giving out sweets to everyone. Sikhs call this special day of remembrance **Bandi Chor Divas**. The word 'Bandi' means 'imprisoned', 'Chor' means 'release' and 'Divas' means 'day', and together 'Bandi Chor Divas' means **Prisoners' Release Day**.

We get ready for Bandi Chor Divas at home and at the Gurdwara.

### At home:

- Candles are lit to highlight that good will always overcome evil
- Fireworks are lit in celebration
- Prayers are read in remembrance of this time in Sikh history
- Prayer is said to God to help us in our everyday struggle with evil.

### At the Gurdwara:

- Candles and fireworks are lit in celebration
- Prashad is distributed, welcoming everybody and anybody into the Gurdwara
- Indian sweets which have been offered to the Guru are shared with everyone
- Langar (free food which is vegetarian) is served to make us understand that we are all are equal
- Prayers are said with everyone to God to help us not make mistakes.

**Butta Singh**



Butta Singh



## Classroom activities: my Sikh Divali

### 1. Why does Butta celebrate Divali?

Give pupils a copy of the account 'My Sikh Divali' on page 24. Ask them to work in pairs to:

- **highlight** any words or phrases that show why Butta celebrates Divali
- **agree a sentence** to answer the question: 'Why do Sikhs celebrate Divali?'

### 2. Exploring Divali as a celebration of freedom

Explain that the name 'Divali' comes from the ancient Sanskrit word 'Deepavali' meaning 'row of lights'. Ask pupils to:

- **suggest** why a 'festival of lights' is a good way of celebrating a festival of freedom
- **complete** a spider diagram around the word 'Freedom' to show what freedom means and why it is something to celebrate.

### 3. An organisation that works for freedom

Sit pupils in a circle, and soften any lighting. Ask them to relax and sit very still. A stilling exercise is useful here.

- **Read** the story behind the festival of Bandi Chor Divas (see below) and ask pupils to suggest what the story says about 'freedom' and 'justice'.
- **Show** pupils a candle inside a coil of barbed wire. Light the candle, and ask children to say the thoughts and questions that come to their mind. **Explain** that it is the symbol of Amnesty International, an organisation that exists today to help people whose freedom has been taken away for unfair reasons
- **Ask pupils to draw** an outline of the candle surrounded by wire, and to **record** key words and ideas about freedom and justice around it.
- **Ask pupils to decide** – Would Butta support Amnesty International? Why or why not?

### The story behind Sikh Divali – Bandi Chor Divas

In the time of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, the Emperor became very ill. He was told that he would only recover if a holy man prayed for his good health. The Emperor asked Guru Hargobind to stay in the fort at Gwalior to pray for his recovery.

This fort was also a prison, and whilst Hargobind was treated well, he was angered by how badly the prisoners were treated. Fifty-two Hindu princes had been unfairly imprisoned there. They were not given enough to eat and wore only rags. Hargobind did all he could to help them, but it was when the Emperor recovered and ordered his release that he saw his opportunity.

Guru Hargobind told the Emperor that he would not leave without the other prisoners. The Emperor could not understand the Guru and did not want to free the prisoners – but told him he could take as many prisoners as could hold on to his coat as he left.

The Emperor thought this would be only three or four at the most. Imagine his surprise when the Guru left with all 52 prisoners! The Guru, determined to help all of them, had made himself a very long cloak with 52 tassels. Each prisoner held onto a tassel and walked to freedom behind the Guru.



Guru Hargobind leads the 52 princes to freedom