

Hardy Sikh prayer book revived after 100 years to help personnel practice faith in the field

News story

An operations-ready prayer book has been reintroduced for Sikh service personnel, reviving a tradition last seen in the British Indian Army during WW1.



The new prayerbook is waterproof and tearproof

Waterproof and tearproof, the Nitnem Gutka (Sikh Daily Prayers) is designed to be used in modern tactical environments. Nitnem translates to Daily Routine, and the collection of Sikh meditations will allow Sikh personnel to practice their faith at 3 different times of the day, wherever they are and in any conditions.

There is a long tradition of Sikhs carrying their religious text with them into conflict. In World Wars 1 and 2, Sikhs made up 20% of the British Indian Army. Over 120,000 Sikhs died and many more were injured from the trenches in France to the Jungles of Burma, and records from the time show Sikh troops with their prayer books in the deserts of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The National Army Museum holds a copy of the original prayer book, pictured here with the new versions.

Provided by the Defence Sikh Network, the modernised Nitnem Gutka is designed to be hardy so it can cope with use on operations.

- Made from a tactical nylon paper, called Polyart paper, it is water and tearproof, and is thread bound for ultimate strength.
- It comes in two versions –camouflage for Army personnel and blue for the Navy and Air Force.

- The Nitnem Gutka has been written in 3 languages; Gurmukhi the original form of Sikh text, Romanised English, and English translation to make the Nitnem Gutka as accessible as possible.
- It also includes instruction and guidance on how to keep the Sikh scriptures in accordance with Sikh scripture code of conduct.

[Watch the making of the new Nitnem Gutka](#)

Maj Daljinder Singh Virdee, who led the project, said:

I was inspired to undertake this initiative when I saw old images of Sikh soldiers conducting their prayers in uniform. It has been a two-year journey to get to this point but makes all the efforts worthwhile knowing that Sikhs in UK Defence no matter where they serve across the world in whatever conditions can connect to their faith and find spiritual support through this Nitnem Gutka, for generations to come”.

The project has opened the door for other faith communities in Defence to create a similar product, such as the Hindu Gita.

Further information

- Permission for conducting the project was sought from the highest seat of Sikh authority Jathedar Akaal Takht Bhai Harpreet Singh.
- Printing was conducted in the UK and was supervised throughout by the DSN and a UK Sikh Organisation called Respect Your Guru.
- This tradition was last seen during World War 1, where thousands of Sikhs fought and died fighting for the allies. Supported by the Ministry of Defence Diversity Inclusion team and community stakeholders, the Defence Sikh Network have produced a modern tactical version.

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