**Student Handout**

**Traditions which may have influenced the thought of Guru Nanak**

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 to Hindu parents in the village of Talwandi, Punjab, which now lies in Pakistan.

Concerning his life events, one has to turn to the Janamsakhis, literally the ‘birth testimonies’ of Guru Nanak.

His attitude towards ritual is clearly illustrated at the age of 9 by his refusal to wear the sacred thread of Hinduism.

According to tradition, Guru Nanak disappeared under water for 3 days. After reappearing he is believed to have spoken the following words:

“There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim, so whose path shall I follow?

I shall follow God’s path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim”.

Sikhs believe that over the 3 days Guru Nanak underwent a mystical appearance. This marks the beginning of his efforts to unite religious people in the Punjab.

Many scholars are of the opinion that the utterance above is indicative that he never intended on starting up a new religion.

The uniqueness of the origin of the Sikh faith is disputed however by a number of definitions of origin:

1. **That Sikhism is a Hindu reform movement,**
2. **Sikhism is an offshoot of Islam,**
3. **Sikhism is a synthesis of both Islam and Hinduism.**

These three assumptions are based on the fact that Sikhism has many elements in common to those found in both Islam and Hinduism.

1. **Guru Nanak was an heir to the Northern Sant tradition.**

It is the Sant tradition which bears the closest similarities to Guru Nanak’s thought. According to scholars, Guru Nanak was, indeed, an heir to the Sant tradition of Northern India.