

Sikh Studies Movie Night: Indian Horse

Topic: Truth and Reconciliation & Sikhi Connections

Introduction: Why Truth and Reconciliation?

On September 30, Canada observes the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This day honors the children who never returned home and the Survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. Residential schools were government- and church-run institutions that operated in Canada for more than 150 years. Indigenous children were taken from their homes and forced to abandon their languages, cultures, and traditions, often experiencing neglect, abuse, and trauma.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created to listen to Survivors' stories, uncover the truth of what happened, and share 94 Calls to Action for Canadians to build a more just future. This day exists to remind all Canadians of the past, to honor those harmed, and to commit to reconciliation—walking together in truth, respect, and healing.

It is a national holiday because the impact of residential schools is not just Indigenous history, but Canadian history. It calls on everyone to learn, reflect, and take responsibility.

Connecting Sikhi and Indian Horse

- Truth (Sat): Sikhi teaches us to stand for truth, even when painful. The TRC and the movie both emphasize telling the truth about injustice.
- Human Dignity (Ik Onkaar): Sikhi teaches that all humans are equal, made in the same Divine light. Residential schools denied this principle, but reconciliation is about restoring dignity.

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- **Freedom of Faith and Culture:** Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji gave his life to protect others' right to practice their own faith. In contrast, residential schools forced children to abandon theirs.
- **Resilience & Chardi Kala:** Despite trauma, Saul Indian Horse's story shows courage and resilience—just as Sikhs are called to live in high spirits even through suffering.
- **Community Healing (Sangat):** Sikhi emphasizes Sangat (community support) for healing. Reconciliation calls Canadians to stand together with Indigenous peoples to heal.

Sikh Pioneers in Canada and Truth & Reconciliation

The story of Truth and Reconciliation can also be connected with the history of Sikh pioneers in Canada, especially in British Columbia. Early Sikh immigrants faced racism, discrimination, and exclusion. They were not allowed to vote, faced barriers in employment, and were denied many basic rights. Like Indigenous peoples, Sikhs experienced being treated as outsiders in their own home.

One important fact is that Sikhs gained the right to vote in Canada in 1947, after many years of struggle. However, Indigenous peoples in Canada were not given the right to vote federally until 1960. This shows how Indigenous peoples faced even greater systemic discrimination and exclusion.

Both histories, of Indigenous peoples and Sikh pioneers, remind us of the importance of standing against racism, valuing human dignity, and working toward justice and equality for all.

Sikh History Connections

The story of residential schools and Indigenous peoples connects with Sikh history in many ways. Just like Indigenous children were taken away from their families, in Sikh history when invaders came to India, they kidnapped children and young girls, taking them away from their homes and even selling them in faraway markets such as Kabul. Another example is Maharaja Duleep Singh, who was taken away from his family, land, and culture, and forced to live as someone far from his Sikh roots. Both Indigenous and Sikh communities have experienced the pain of being separated from family and culture.

Sikhs also faced torture and attempts to erase their identity at the hands of rulers. Many were killed in cruel ways, but they stayed strong, keeping their faith, language, and dignity. These examples show us that when we stay connected to Sikhi—through our language, faith, and Sangat—we find the strength to endure even the hardest times.

The lesson for us is clear: resilience comes from holding on to who we are. When we stay true to our roots and support each other in Sangat & community, we can survive injustice and grow stronger together with the strength found in Seva, Simran, Sangat, Gurbani, Sikh history, and Maryada.

Reflection Questions

About the Movie (Critical Thinking & Sikhi Perspective)

1. Why do you think Saul's love for hockey was so important in his life?

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2. What emotions did you feel watching the scenes at the residential school? Why?

3. How did Saul's relationship with his culture affect his healing?

6. How did the movie change your understanding of residential schools?

7. What lesson do you think young people today can learn from Saul's story?

8. Sikhi teaches 'Ik Onkaar'—all humans are equal. How does this relate to the mistreatment of Indigenous children in residential schools?

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9. Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji sacrificed his life for the freedom of religion. How does this inspire us to respect Indigenous peoples' right to keep their culture and traditions?

10. What does Sikhi teach us about resilience (Chardi Kala), and how do you see that in Saul's story?

11. How can Sikhs and other Canadians practice seva (selfless service) to support truth and reconciliation today?
