

Punjab's Muslims: The History and Significance of Malerkotla

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Malerkotla's reputation as a peaceful Muslim majority town in Punjab is overall true, but the situation today is not merely a modern extension of the past reality. On the contrary, Malerkotla's history is full of the kind of violent events and complex inter-religious relations more often associated with present-day communal conflicts. This essay is a thick description of the community and culture of Malerkotla that has facilitated the positive inter-religious dynamics, an exploration of the histories that complicate the ideal, and an explanation of why Malerkotla has successfully managed stresses that have been the impetus for violence between religions in South Asia.

When the Punjabi town of Malerkotla appears in the news, it is often with headlines such as "Malerkotla: An Island of Peace," (*India Today*, July 15, 1998), or "Malerkotla Muslims Feel Safer in India," (*Indian Express*, August 13, 1997), or "Where Brotherhood is Handed Down as Tradition" (*The Times of India*, March 2, 2002). These headlines reflect the sad reality that a peaceful Muslim majority town in Indian Punjab is *de facto* newsworthy. This is compounded by Malerkotla's symbolic importance as the most important Muslim majority town in the state, giving the area a somewhat exalted status.¹ During a year and a half of research I asked residents whether the town's reputation as a peaceful place was true and I was assured by most that this reputation is not merely a media or politically driven idealization of the town. Indeed, the term most frequently employed to characterize the communal atmosphere is *bhaichara*, meaning brotherhood or brotherly affection. Malerkotla residents seem genuinely to believe that their hometown enjoys an unusual amount of community harmony and inter-religious friendship. The local perception reaffirms the public reputation of this mid-size industrial town (pop. 106,802) as a near utopia of inter-religious harmony.

Remarkably, this ideal reflects the reality, at least in terms of the recent history of the area. At the time of Partition in 1947 the town did not experience the bloodshed and violence that devastated the rest of the state. During subsequent periods of communal tension in India, Malerkotla has transcended tensions and overcome the strains of violent events such as the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 or the riots in Gujarat in 2002. Such potentially precipitating incidents often provide the impetus and pretense for violence and social conflict.² Yet the peace in Malerkotla during these periods is not simply an extension of the pre-1947 status

quo. On the contrary, throughout the history of Malerkotla as a kingdom (1454 to 1948) there have been numerous instances of inter-religious conflict ranging from wars to riots. Such a past history of antagonism may easily be an exacerbating factor in communal conflict, yet we shall see that Malerkotla's past does not inhibit its generally positive inter-religious dynamic. Another commonly cited challenge to communal relations is the degree of economic competition. In Malerkotla there is a substantial majority of Muslims (about seventy percent) but they by no means have a monopoly on either economic or political power. Thus, although two of the most commonly identified exacerbating conditions that make communities "riot-prone" or open to inter-religious conflict – a history of inter-religious conflict and competition in the economic and political arenas – are present in Malerkotla, peace has by and large prevailed since 1947. Precipitating incidents and their subsequent tensions have been easily and quickly dissipated. This essay will provide a synopsis of Malerkotla's history, situating the territory within the broader context of Punjabi and Indian history. Through this historical excursus, the peace in Malerkotla during and after the Partition of the subcontinent will appear even more surprising. It will become clear that historically, Malerkotla is no utopia and that the present peace is the product of active efforts on the part of local authorities and residents to make the unique history of the town a symbolically significant resource for community building and pluralism in the present.

The Past was a Sovereign Country

Founded in 1454, Malerkotla was a princely state until 1948 when, in the aftermath of India's independence from Britain, these autonomous units were dissolved. At the time of its dissolution, Malerkotla was 167 miles square with a population of 85,000. The rulers of the kingdom were Pathan Afghans distantly related to the Afghan clan of the Lodhis, the last dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate prior to the advent of Mughal power in 1526. According to local histories the first Lodhi Sultan, Bahlol, granted the territory to the progenitor of the Malerkotla ruling family, the Sufi saint Shaikh Sadruddin Sadar-i Jahan, popularly known as Haider Shaikh. The original settlement was called Maler which remains the name of a neighborhood that surrounds the tomb of the founding Shaikh. Kotla came into being in 1659 when a descendent of Haider Shaikh received permission from the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) to build a fortified city. After this period the *jagir* or land grant originally endowed by Bahlol Lodhi was confirmed as a hereditary state and the ruler was given the title of Nawab. As the Mughal Empire declined after the death of Aurangzeb, Malerkotla increasingly sought independence from Delhi and allied with Ahmad Shah Abdali (d. 1773) whose forces dominated the region of Punjab in the mid-eighteenth century. In the late eighteenth century Malerkotla alternated between alliances and battles with the surrounding larger Sikh states such as Patiala, Nabha, and Jind. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh consolidated his power in the northern Punjab under in the early nineteenth century, Malerkotla and these

neighboring Sikh States in the Cis-Sutlej region accepted British protection in 1809, thereby preserving their territorial integrity and some degree of autonomy. In 1947 three simultaneous events – the end of British power, Indian independence, and the Partition of the subcontinent – left Malerkotla as the only significant Muslim principality in East Punjab on the Indian side of the new border. With the dissolution of princely states in 1948, Malerkotla joined the administrative unit known as Patiala and the East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). PEPSU was dissolved in 1954 and the territory of Malerkotla was absorbed into the Punjab State, District Sangrur and the area known as Malerkotla is reduced to the town alone. Surrounding villages still look to Malerkotla as the largest local center of industry and commerce, and the center of the district's government. One of the strongest connections is to the spiritual center of the town – the tomb of Haider Shaikh.

The Coming of Haider Shaikh

Both oral and written histories of Malerkotla usually begin with the arrival of the Sufi saint, Shaikh Sadruddin Sadar-i Jahan. In a history of the dynasty written by Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of Malerkotla, the Shaikh is described as a Sherwani Afghan from Khurasan, “a very pious man of much celebrity in his time.”³ Haider Shaikh, as he is popularly known, was sent to the region from Multan by his spiritual preceptor.⁴ He settled on the bank of a small river to engage in religious devotions. According to numerous sources, in 1451 Bahlol Lodhi encountered the saint on his way to conquer Delhi at which point he established the Lodhi Dynasty (which lasted until 1526).⁵ Bahlol Lodhi asked the saint for the blessing that he would be victorious in the war. After conquering Delhi, the Sultan returned and in 1454 married his daughter Taj Murassa Begum to Shaikh Sadruddin, and gave her a number of villages in the region as a marriage portion.⁶ The saint and his Afghan wife had two children – a daughter, Bibi Mangi, and a son, Hassan. In 1458, Haider Shaikh also married the daughter of Rai Bahram Bhatti, the Rajput ruler of Kapurthala, a nearby principality, and had two more sons, ‘Isa and Musa.⁷ The saint died on 14 Ramadan, 922 hijri/1515 C.E.⁸ The eldest son Hassan was denied the inheritance of the *jagir* (land grant), having fallen out of favor with his father.⁹ Thus, after Haider Shaikh's death, ‘Isa inherited the *jagir*, Musa became a dervish and did not marry, and the descendants of the disowned Hassan became the caretakers, or *khalifahs*, of the saint's tomb. Although ‘Isa inherited the bulk of the state, a portion went to Hassan and his heirs, setting a precedent of dividing the *jagir* among the male heirs that would result in constant disputes persisting to this day.

Under Akbar, Maler (as it was still known at that time) was a part of the Delhi Suba,¹⁰ subsidiary to the Sarkar of Sirhind.¹¹ Six generations after Haider Shaikh, Bayzid Khan became the first true ruler of the territory, after he was awarded the title of Nawab by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Under Bayzid the estate was enlarged, and he received permission to build a fortified city in 1657, which came to be called Kotla, meaning fortress.¹² Bayzid supported Aurangzeb in his campaign

against his elder brother Dara Shikoh for the throne at Delhi. Having thus gained great favor with the court, he was allowed to build the walled city and to strike coins. According to a history written by Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of the kingdom, Bayzid was also responsible for the building of the tomb shrine for their forebear Haider Shaikh.

Sher Mohammad Khan and the *ha da narah*

The most famous ruler in Malerkotla's history is Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, who ruled from 1672 until his death in 1712. This was a particularly critical period in the history of Punjab as the growing popularity and authority of the Sikh Gurus brought them into increasing conflict with the Mughals. Following the torture and subsequent death of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, at the order of the Emperor Jahangir, hostilities between the Sikhs and the Mughals grew. Periodic battles with the Mughals and later the invading Afghan armies of Ahmad Shah Abdali¹³ continued. During these wars Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan and the Malerkotla forces played prominent roles.

Interestingly, in spite of his support for Aurangzeb and the Mughal regime in their battles against the Sikhs, most available sources, including numerous Sikh histories from the nineteenth century onwards, emphasize only one event in Malerkotla's history: the *ha da narah* or "cry for justice."¹⁴ The *ha da narah* was given by Sher Muhammad Khan after a particularly vicious battle with Guru Gobind Singh. After the Guru and his family broke through the siege at Anandpur, his mother and his two younger sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, were separated from the Guru. They were betrayed, captured, and taken to Sirhind (approximately fifty kilometers northeast of Malerkotla) where their fate hung in the balance. Refusing to convert to Islam, the *sahibzadas* (children of the Guru) were condemned to be bricked alive into a wall. Of all the assembled allies of Wazir Khan, the Mughal governor of Sirhind, Sher Muhammad Khan was the only one who spoke up in the children's defense. He declared that their quarrel was with the father not the sons, and that their lives should be preserved. He went so far as to declare the death sentence un-Islamic, violating the acceptable rules of combat. Although the appeal was unsuccessful and the Guru's sons were killed, this is by far the single most famous moment in Malerkotla's history. In Iftikhar Ali Khan's history, the narrative is drawn out at great length and includes quotations from a letter supposedly written by the Nawab to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) on the children's behalf. The Nawab's sense of justice and tolerance are emphasized, and thereafter this incident becomes a leitmotif of sorts in his history, as it is periodically referenced as evidence of the liberalism and tolerance of the Nawabs towards the Sikhs, and the special place that the town in the Sikh heartland has as the beneficiaries of Guru Gobind Singh's blessing. However there is a dark cloud over this moment in history. A biography of Banda Singh Bahadur, a devout follower of Guru Gobind Singh, reports that Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan took captive a

woman attached to the house of Guru Gobind Singh.¹⁵ This woman, Anup Kaur, refused to accept Islam or the overtures of the Nawab, and killed herself. Her body was reportedly buried near the tomb of a Sufi saint, Shah Fazl.

Banda Bahadur

Guru Gobind Singh died from a stab wound in Nanded in the Deccan region of central India. Not long before his death he met a Hindu Bairagi, Madho Das who attached himself to the Guru.¹⁶ Adopting the name Gurbaksh Singh the former Bairagi became more widely known as Banda Singh Bahadur when he gave up the path of renunciation and took up arms for the Guru. Following Guru Gobind Singh's death, Banda and a large army of Sikhs briefly (1710-12) conquered sizeable areas of Punjab, but it appears that he did not approach Malerkotla. Whereas other Muslim principalities such as Sirhind – the scene of the martyrdom of the Guru's sons – were razed to the ground, Malerkotla was spared. Although any number of reasons could explain this, Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of Malerkotla, declares in his history of the kingdom (as do many residents) that Banda did not attack the otherwise rather vulnerable state out of respect for Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan's defense of the two *sahibzadas*. In terms of the popular understanding today, alternate explanations for Banda Singh Bahadur's avoidance of Malerkotla are not necessary and are not sought.

Despite such moments of tranquility, wars between the multitude of Sikh principalities and outside Muslim invaders persisted. Malerkotla fought on the side of the Mughals until their power dissipated, at which point the rulers supported Ahmad Shah Abdali and the Rohilla Afghans who repeatedly invaded from the northwest in the middle of the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth century the various Punjab chiefs fought frequently. They formed alliances and attacked each other by turns, depending on to whom they owed money or whether they judged victory likely. Sometimes they fought at the behest of more powerful leaders such as the Mughal ruler at Delhi, Muslim chieftains such as Ahmad Shah Abdali or Adina Beg, Hindu forces like the Marathas, or Sikh leaders such as Banda Bahadur or Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Malerkotla's Nawab Jamal Khan (r. 1717-1755) fought more or less constantly against the various Rajas of Patiala, a large Sikh state to the east of Malerkotla. Initially he fought against Ahmad Shah Abdali, but then joined forces with him. The next ruler Bhikam Khan (1755-1763) fought along side Abdali against the combined forces of the Sikhs in February of 1762 in a battle not far from Malerkotla, Ahmad Shah and his allies killed many thousands of Sikhs.¹⁷ This event has gone down in Sikh history as "the Great Holocaust," or *Wadda Ghalughara*. After this nadir of relations between Malerkotla and the neighboring Sikh states tensions persisted for some time with Amar Singh of Patiala capturing several villages in 1766 and 768 from Bhikam Khan's brother Nawab Umar Khan. Several Nawabs were in power in Malerkotla in rather rapid succession, and excepting Jamal Khan, the military acumen and political competence of these rulers appears to have

been minimal.¹⁸ At one point, under Bahadur Khan (r. 1763-1766) the principality was reduced to the boundary walls of Kotla, a mere three miles in circumference. Fluctuating relations with the Sikh chiefs in the neighboring states of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind also characterized this period. There were, however, bright spots. In 1769 Nawab 'Umar Khan signed a treaty with Raja Amar Singh of Patiala guaranteeing mutual protection and respect. By 1771, Nawab 'Umar Khan assisted Amar Singh against a usurper who had taken over during Patiala's campaign against the Marathas.¹⁹ From this point forward, the neighboring Sikh rulers would occasionally come to the aid of the much smaller and more vulnerable Malerkotla against extra-local Sikh invaders such as the 1795 attack of Sahib Singh Bedi.²⁰

Sahib Singh Bedi

Sahib Singh Bedi ostensibly attacked Malerkotla over the perennial issue of cow killing. Sikhs and Hindus both abstain from killing cows, holding the cow to be sacred as a source of life and sustenance. Muslim consumption and ritual sacrifice of cows has often been a stated provocation for inter-religious conflict, a precipitating incident. However, in this case, as in most others, there were other motivations for the attack. Sahib Singh Bedi was a direct descendant of Guru Nanak and since the time of the first Guru his family commanded great respect and authority within the Sikh religion and the socio-political power networks of Sikhs throughout Punjab. Bedi and his family had a loyal personal following who believed that the first Guru's power descended through his blood lineage.²¹ Following the death of Guru Gobind Singh and his disciple Banda Singh Bahadur, political and religious authority among the Sikhs became diffuse. The *missals* period saw the rise of *missals*, clan and family based power centers, which functioned within a kind of confederacy to the extent that Sikh interests could provide a unifying force, particularly regarding the challenges by Mughal authorities, Afghan invaders, and the increasing influence of the British East India Company.²² However, these *missals* enjoyed relative autonomy and were not above fighting with each other if the opportunity presented itself. During this period Sahib Singh Bedi was among those who wielded both spiritual authority and considerable charisma and was able to amass an armed force. At Malerkotla Sahib Singh Bedi's forces were ultimately repelled with assistance from Patiala.²³

Malerkotla joined the British in fighting the Marathas in the early part of the nineteenth century. During this period Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh ruler, was in the process of expanding his control over most of the Punjab, from present day Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to the northwestern regions of present day Pakistan and in the south to the Malwa region in which Malerkotla is located. Arriving at the town in 1808, the Maharaja demanded such an enormous amount in tribute that the state was forced to borrow heavily from its wealthier neighbors – Nabha, Jind, and Patiala. The Nawab at the time, Ataullah Khan, offered an elephant, but Singh demanded 1,000,000 rupees.²⁴ Summoning all his resources, he

drummed up only 566,391 rupees. Maharaja Ranjit Singh attacked on October 22nd and the Nawab threw himself at the mercy of his wealthier Sikh neighbors.²⁵

Finally, in 1809 the British and the Maharaja signed a treaty which placed the Cis-Sutlej region in which Malerkotla is located under British protection. From 1809 onwards Malerkotla supported the British and assisted in a number of key campaigns – against Kabul, in the Gurkha wars, and also during the 1857 Rebellion.²⁶ Family disputes over the right to succession which had plagued the kingdom for years continued, but were now arbitrated by the British government.²⁷ Relations with the British appear typical of British dealings with other kingdoms. The Malerkotla rulers were listed in attendance at various courts, or *darbars*, of the Viceroys, ranked ninth among the Punjab states, and given an eleven-gun salute.²⁸ Exhaustive lists of exchanged gifts and other formalities are detailed in the Nawab's history and are mentioned in the various *Gazetteers* and other colonial accounts. From 1809 onwards a resident British official exercised varying degrees of control over local governance. British records depict the royal family as deeply in debt and constantly on the verge of ruin.²⁹ The British also complained of tendentious family relations. As one Captain Murray observed in a letter to the Political Agent at Ambala, Sir George Russell Clerk, dated May 16, 1831,

I believe it to be impossible to extract any generally beneficial measure from the collected members of this turbulent and distracted family because their conflicting interests, ceaseless intrigues and mutual jealousy are too opposed to system and inimical to order, to be regulated on just and fundamental principles.³⁰

In an 1836 letter Clerk himself reiterated this pessimistic impression describing a visit to the state to settle a question of succession and inheritance.³¹ In the process of the investigation, Clerk observed the fractious quality of family relations.

What Captain Murray anticipated, my own experience has confirmed. It is vain to effect unanimity among the members of this family on this point. Some of the most influential are interested in subjecting inheritance to the Shurreh (sic), claiming its laws as applicable to all of their religious persuasion. Others discard the Shurreh, deny that its rules have hitherto been the guidance of the family...which is the fact...and prefer to adhere to their ancient usages. Unfortunately their family customs in respect to inheritance have not hitherto been uniform.³²

Such internecine disputes took place throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inayat Ali Khan devotes approximately one third of his 1882 manuscript to his claims to the estate of his brother Ibrahim Ali Khan who, as the adopted son of Nawab Sikandar Ali Khan, inherited the lands and properties of the throne. Although the accession of Ahmad Ali Khan (Ibrahim's son) was not disputed nor

was the leadership of Ahmad's son Iftikhar, family disputes over property continue to this day.

The Namdhari Massacre

The most infamous event in Malerkotla's history occurred in 1872. At the time Malerkotla was essentially being governed by a British agent, one Mr. Heath, under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner at Ludhiana, J.C. Cowan. The Nawab, Ibrahim Ali Khan, was a minor when he succeeded his uncle and adopted father, Sikander Ali Khan, in 1871.³³ In January of 1872 Malerkotla was attacked by a group of Namdhari Sikhs, a sect widely and onomatopoeically known as the Kukas due to the ecstatic cries they utter during prayer. The Namdharis believe in the continuation of the living personal Guru after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, and so they were and are seen as beyond the pale of mainstream Sikh tradition. However, Namdharis are also often depicted positively as the first freedom fighters, as they called for a boycott of British goods in the late 19th century, established their own postal system, refused service in the army, and waged active struggles against cow slaughter, among other issues.

According to Namdhari sources, the attack on Malerkotla was due to their opposition to the British presence there, to the killing of cows by the British and the Muslims, and to the worship of saints.³⁴ Namdhari literature today does not emphasize the Muslim role in subsequent events, but targets British imperialism and intransigent discriminatory policies as the provocation for their attack. Mainstream Sikh historians claim that the group wanted guns and that Malerkotla at the time was weak and an easy target. The British, perhaps unsurprisingly, depict the Namdharis as extremists in need of subjugation. According to the 1904 British *Gazetteer*, "the fanatic Kukas attacked Kotla, killing some townspeople and plundering houses."³⁵ Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History* (written in the late 1940's), on the other hand, tells the story altogether differently. Here the leader of the movement, Baba Ram Singh is described as a "sensible man" who was opposed to the attack on the grounds that Malerkotla had been blessed by the Guru. The attack is said to have occurred without Baba Ram Singh's wishes and was undertaken by a rogue follower. Iftikhar Ali Khan supplies another motive in his history – a rumor still widely believed in Malerkotla that a Namdhari woman had been raped while in custody just before the assault. Whatever the cause, by all accounts the assault on the state was limited, resulting in few deaths and the theft of some guns. In spite of the relatively minor damage, the punishment visited upon the Kukas by the British was grim indeed. After hunting down and capturing the perpetrators at Patiala, they were brought back to Malerkotla and executed without trial. Sixty-nine Namdharis, including some women and children, were placed in front of cannons and blown away over the course of three bloody days.

In fact, the largest gathering of both orthodox Sikhs and Namdharis in Malerkotla is the martyrdom festival or *shahidi mela*. The annual event is held on January 17,

18, and 19, the anniversary of the firings. Thousands of people attend although only one Namdhari family lives in Malerkotla year-round. The *shahidi mela* is an enormous event with all night *kirtan*, constant *langar* (communally prepared and consumed food), and all the other trappings of large events, including a bustling street market and a series of speakers on subjects both religious and secular. A smaller festival to commemorate these events occurs on the seventeenth of every month. The events take place on the grounds of the *kukain walla kalar*, a monument recently erected by the Namdharis in the form of a gigantic sword, perforated with a hole for every martyr with smaller ones representing the children. These events draw Namdharis from the surrounding area, particularly from their center at Bhaini Sahib, approximately an hour distant, and even from Delhi. This fair is also an obligatory stop on the campaign trail of all political parties in Punjab. In 2001, the Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal addressed the gathering. This was interesting given the well-known support of the Namdharis for the opposition Congress party, which they regard as the party of the freedom struggle they had begun in the mid nineteenth century. Namdharis tend to view Badal's Shiromani Akali Dal Party with suspicion, as it is associated with the type of Sikh identity politics that tend to exclude non-normative Sikh groups such as their own. In particular, reformist Sikhs object to the Namdharis' belief in a living guru. However, during an earlier visit to the annual Namdhari gathering in 1999, Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal referred to the living Guru of the Namdharis as "Satguru" during his speech, causing an enormous fracas among his party loyalists and the orthodox.³⁶ At the 2001 *mela*, no such mention was made, but Badal's speech was unsurprisingly less compelling to the gathering than the telephone call from the Satguru Jagjit Singh that was piped in over the loudspeakers.

In spite of the traumatic event of the Kuka executions, Malerkotla's rulers remained loyal to their British protectors until the latter's departure from the subcontinent. From the Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC) records it appears that a British officer was often the effective authority of the state due to the incompetence of various rulers. These documents indicate that at numerous points the Nawab sought the help of British officials to decide a prickly matter, for financial or military support, and for validation of their local authority. The OIOC files on Malerkotla dwell upon the persistent debt of the ruling family and the need to establish a sound economy. British records also depict all episodes of civil unrest in Malerkotla as a result of mismanagement by the *khawanin* (the ruling Khan clan) and their near stranglehold on all land ownership rights throughout the kingdom. Unsurprisingly, the history written by Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan makes no mention of such incompetence or of civil unrest. By and large Khan gives the impression of strong leadership and sound policies with a minimum of intervention from the British. Indeed, events that counter this prevailing image are barely mentioned.

Religious Trouble

In Malerkotla the erasure of religious and ethnic conflict from the public imagination and the written record represents a process whereby the values of a peaceful plural community are grounded in an idealized past.³⁷ However, from the above it is already clear that far from being the “Island of Peace” as it was dubbed by the magazine *India Today*, Malerkotla and its Muslim rulers were frequently involved in conflicts and wars with Sikh and Hindu groups and kingdoms, and plagued by intrafamilial strife. Although many of these confrontations concern politics and territory, several events clearly carried a religious dimension as well.

In 1935, for example, there was a case in which a Hindu group began a *katha* – the recitation of a sacred text – in a building that overlooked a mosque. As the recitation involved singing and the playing of instruments, it was objectionable to the congregation during times of prayer. The dispute escalated and eventually resulted in a riot in which a Hindu was killed. Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan arrested several Muslim youths and two of them were put to death. Many local Muslims felt these executions were hasty and unwarranted and the matter did not disappear as the Hindus continued their recitation. Eventually a British officer came to settle the dispute, ruling in favor of silencing the *katha* during prayer times.³⁸ Several years later the issue was reactivated as one of many complaints lodged by elements of the Muslim population who declared that the Nawab and his cronies were biased against Muslims and favored the Hindus to whom they owed money. A group of dissenters eventually left Malerkotla en masse, seeking to present their case before the Punjab Administrator at Lahore.³⁹

These conflicts were similar to events elsewhere as the 1930’s were an intense period throughout India. Identity politics were the order of the day as the combined effects of nineteenth century reformist movements, British enumerative authoritarianism, and the communally based factions within the Independence Movement, particularly the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, took root. Especially since the consolidation of British authority in the nineteenth century, imperial policies distributed social and political opportunities based upon religious and ethnic identities. Simultaneously, and partially as a response to these efforts, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim organizations developed that defined and disseminated revivalist orthodoxies. Some of these groups worked closely with political parties, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress. As a princely state, political parties were not allowed in Malerkotla, but the kingdom was hardly free from the building communal tension. The conflict which began in 1935 with the *katha* persisted in various guises until 1941. Nonetheless, by the time of Partition, there was adequate local solidarity to sustain the community through that difficult period.

Partition

The Partition of India in 1947 resulted in the transfer of approximately fifteen million people between the two new nation-states. The exact numbers of refugees will never be known as in the chaos some people were lost, others took on new identities, and many were killed. The numbers of the dead will likewise never be known but estimates range from two hundred thousand to a million or more. The regions of Punjab and Bengal were most adversely affected by this trauma as the new national borders ran through these two states. Punjab experienced particularly extreme violence, due in part to the region's having been the British army's favorite recruiting grounds. Sikh and Muslim soldiers decommissioned after World War II were capable of organizing and effecting veritable military campaigns against members of other religious communities. Throughout this trauma Malerkotla became known as a safe zone for Muslims traveling towards Pakistan. Migrants journeying by road or train made Malerkotla their intermediate destination, knowing that they could rest here securely. The elderly Nawab played little role in maintaining order, but his son Iftikhar Ali Khan was extremely active in maintaining the security of the borders and the morale of the population.

According to all the people and records I consulted, Malerkotla was peaceful during Partition.⁴⁰ The refugee situation strained local resources to the limit, but the violence that shattered Patiala, Nabha, and Jind (three neighboring Sikh kingdoms) never occurred within Malerkotla's borders. Some residents attribute the peace at Partition to the brave leadership of the Nawab and the vigilance of the kingdom's army. Others claim that due to the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs spared Malerkotla. Still others believe that Haider Shaikh and the many other saints buried in Malerkotla were collectively responsible for preserving the kingdom. All of these explanations contribute to Malerkotla's collective identity as a place of *bhaichara* and a zone of peace.

The Last Nawab

Iftikhar Ali Khan (d. 1982) was the last Nawab of Malerkotla state. He inherited the throne in 1947 after his father Ahmad Ali Khan died. He became Chief Minister of Malerkotla in 1946. The Nawab, by his own account as well as in the memories of many residents, was instrumental in maintaining peace during the Partition disturbances. He is said to have personally patrolled throughout the city, both publicly and anonymously in order to assess and address the condition of the inhabitants. After Independence, Malerkotla joined PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) a body designed to govern the former princely states of Indian Punjab. The Nawab served in the administration of that union. Following the dissolution of PEPSU in 1954, Iftikhar Ali Khan was twice elected as member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Malerkotla. He married five times but had no surviving children. Under his leadership a number of local educational institutions

and hospitals were founded, industry expanded, agricultural reform was introduced, and roads improved. After the Nawab's death in 1982, his family has continued to be influential in municipal as well as state politics. Two of his wives, Yusuf Zaman and Sajida Begum, served as local MLA's. At present only Sajida Begum survives and is a local Congress party leader. She also serves on the oversight board that manages the famous Dargah of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer. Until recently, the Nawabi and *khalifah* families had a near monopoly on local power, but new developments indicate that other elements in the town's diverse population are finding their political voice.⁴¹

Local Diversity

Malerkotla today is made up of a wide range of religious and ethnic groups.⁴² As detailed in the demographic table appended below, Muslims have long been a majority, especially since Partition. The member of the legislative assembly has always been Muslim, with one brief exception. However, the head of the local Municipal Committee has often been (and is as of this writing) a non-Muslim. But Malerkotla's Muslims are not monolithic in their political allegiances. Although Congress has generally succeeded here, in the post-1984 Operation Bluestar period, support shifted to the Akali Dal. Residents reported voting for people from all religious backgrounds. At the level of civil society, there are numerous inter-religious as well as intra-religious organizations. Civic associations proliferate in Malerkotla, ranging from international organizations such as the Rotary Club, to local literary societies (Sahit Sangam), to a group of cactus lovers (Greenwood Cactus and Succulent Society). Data shows that the leadership of many groups is inter-religious.⁴³ For example, several of the largest occupational and professional groups, such as the Bar Association and the Manufacturers and Suppliers Association have multi-religious leadership. Such integration fosters open communication, reduces competition and tension, and helps create a sound basis for inter-religious interaction.⁴⁴ Without both inter-religious and intra-religious organizations, sacred sites, educational institutions, and public events, the fabric of the community would become unevenly balanced allowing certain groups to dominate to the exclusion of others. Such an imbalance readily fuels tensions between social and religious sectors.

Given the estimate that Malerkotla is 70% Muslim, roughly 74,200 of the 106,802 residents are Muslim. Sunnis comprise the overwhelming majority and approximately 2,500 are Shi'a.⁴⁵ A number of Muslim organizations are active in Malerkotla.⁴⁶ Many are general, defying sectarian interests such as Sunni, Shi'a, Deobandi, or Barelvi. For example there is a Muslim Welfare Action Committee, a Muslim Social Reforms Panchayat, and a Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Memorial Society. Muslims, being a numeric majority, are major participants in groups like the Sahit Sangam (Literary Society), Heritage Society, various Youth and Sport Clubs, the Tagore Fine Art Club, and the Malerkotla Adventure Club.

There are several specifically religious Muslim groups, such as the Dar ul-Ifta that oversees the legal life of the Muslim community. In 1908 Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan established the office of Dar ul-Ifta", and appointed a Mufti for the State.⁴⁷ Since independence the Punjab State Government manages the office, appointing the Mufti, paying his salary, and maintaining several of the local Muslim properties and institutions including three local mosques and the 'Id Gah, where the Muslim community gathers for prayers on the two 'Ids. This office has gained a higher profile in post 1947 India, as the Mufti of Malerkotla is effectively the legal authority for the Muslim community of the whole of Punjab. In Malerkotla, he officiates at marriage, divorce, and death ceremonies, gives legal advice and decisions, declares the two 'Ids, manages the government mosques, and provides personal consultation in religious and personal matters. Nine men have served in this capacity. The current Mufti, Fazlur Rehman Hilal Usmani obtained his mufti degree from Dar-al-'Ulum, Deoband in Uttar Pradesh. He came to Malerkotla in 1973 as Mufti. Mufti Fazlur Rehman runs a center, the Dar us-Salam Islamic Center, which operates a school and engages in a number of educational and outreach projects. He has published over sixty books, including a translation and commentary on the Qur'an, a biography of the Prophet, and, most recently, a volume on Muslim personal law issues relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance, in both Urdu and English. He has also written a book entitled *Memaar-e Insaaniat* (The Architect of Humanity) addressing the importance of cultivating a society that fosters mutual tolerance and respect.⁴⁸

The most active organization among Muslims in Malerkotla, and throughout South Asia in general, may well be the Tablighi Jama'at.⁴⁹ This grassroots movement began its missionary work in 1926 in order to revitalize Islam among Muslims.⁵⁰ In Punjab, this takes on a unique tenor as the group is often targeting populations of Muslims who, in order to survive during Partition disavowed Islam or fell away from it afterwards. The Tablighi Jama'at has had a profound effect on Malerkotla. Many local residents are active members and the town provides a natural center for visiting *jama'ats* to Punjab. In 2000-01 weekly meetings, called *ijtima'*, were held by a number of leaders, including several women.⁵¹ A local college professor, Malerkotla native, and author of several studies on Malerkotla, Anila Sultana observed the impact of the Jama'at, writing that "in due course, partially for reasons of compulsion and partially due to conviction created in people's mind by the preachings of the Jama'at, the playing of music on marriages etc. has been discontinued since the early eighties."⁵² Sultana also claims that the local *qawwal* singers and women singers and dancers known as *mirasans* have been effectively shut down in Malerkotla. However, during my own research I observed that Malerkotla-based *qawwal* groups are often featured at events throughout Punjab and do perform occasionally at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh. Furthermore, in my own experience at Muslim weddings in Malerkotla, *mirasans* and their *mirasi* male musicians performed at ladies singing nights leading up to the wedding and at the henna ceremony the night before the marriage itself.⁵³ Nonetheless, *qawwals* at

Haider Shaikh or elsewhere in town were rare events and the *mirasans* principally performed for the Pathan elite of the town, their hereditary patrons.

Another influential Sunni group in Malerkotla has been the Jama'at-i Islami.⁵⁴ Although its membership was small in 2001 (maybe 50 families actively involved), its local impact is considerable. One of the principle activities of the Jama'at-i Islami in Punjab was the reestablishment of mosques lost in the mayhem of Partition and the rehabilitation of Muslims who in the last fifty years either adopted Sikh and Hindu customs, or simply became less devout in their observations in order to get along in the new order. The Jama'at-i Islami built mosques, sent teachers, opened *madradas* and provided literature about Islam to the communities.

The Jama'at-i Islami leader in Malerkotla during my research was Maulana Abdul Rauf who passed away in 2003. Maulana Rauf made enormous efforts to work in cooperation with local authorities. For the establishment of a new mosque in a village with few Muslims, he sought donations, labor, materials, and other supports from the entire community. At the ceremonies inaugurating these projects he invited Sikhs and Hindus, as well as Muslims, and used the opportunity to foster greater understanding of Islam in relation to other traditions.⁵⁵ In Malerkotla during times of stress, Maulana Rauf and other Jama'at-i Islami leaders were active participants in Peace Committees and other bridge building efforts. Indeed, Maulana Rauf professed respect and admiration for the local Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader.⁵⁶ As both the Jama'at-i Islami and the RSS were widely regarded as Muslim and Hindu radical organizations respectively, it is significant that in Malerkotla they were not oppositional groups and even worked together in some endeavors.

This cooperative effort was exemplified by an incident sometime in the mid-1980's in which a cow was killed and the blame was placed on several Muslim youths, leading to heightened tensions and a crowd gathering. Several people were arrested, but to relieve the pressure Maulana Rauf, the Deputy Commissioner, the Superintendent of Police, and a number of other Hindu and Muslim community leaders gathered. Maulana Rauf initiated the conciliation process by spontaneously asking the group's forgiveness for anything he may have done to cause offense. His lead was followed and in the process those actually accused also begged forgiveness, allowing the situation to defuse. Maulana Rauf claimed to have "family relations" with local RSS leaders, visits Hindu homes for Diwali and such occasions, and refrains from passing judgment on even the most capricious elements of the Hindu community.⁵⁷ He extolled the importance of Muslims in Punjab, saying that though they are few in number, like salt, you need just a little and without it there is no flavor. Maulana Rauf also declared that loyalty to one's own faith does not necessitate hostility towards any other religion. He said, "Love with one's religion is not a bad thing, but you should not hate the other religion. As all parents love their children, likewise the religion is also loveable. But you should not have hatred for other religions." Maulana Abdul Rauf was also the imam of a small

mosque which was one of the only mosques in which there is a space available for women to attend and hear the Friday *khutba* (sermon).

There is a small (approximately 2,500 people) but well-established population of Shi'a Muslims in Malerkotla. This is due in no small part to frequent patronage by the Nawabs and their kin. According to local Shi'i leaders the local Shi'a belong exclusively to the Isna 'Ashari (Twelver) sect.⁵⁸ There are two groups among the Shi'a in Malerkotla: the Sayyids, who trace their descent from the Prophet Muhammad, and the Shaikhs, who descend from Indian converts. The two main Shi'i associations serve each of these populations, the Anjuman Hussaini is associated with the Sayyids and the Anjuman Haideri is constituted by the Shaikh community.⁵⁹ Most residents reported that relations between Sayyids and Shaikhs are often more tense than those between the Shi'i and Sunni populations.⁶⁰

In Malerkotla, though the Shi'a were few in number, during the first ten days of the month of Muharram in 2001 they were suddenly ubiquitous. As Malerkotla is the only place in Indian Punjab housing an active *imambara*, Shi'a from all over the state come here to celebrate Muharram. This memorial observation marks the martyrdom of Hussain, the Prophet Mohammad's grandson, along with seventy-two of his companions in 680 CE on the field of Karbala by the Caliph Yazid. For the Shi'i community all over the world this event signifies the ultimate sacrifice and victory (even in death) of Hussain for the preservation of true Islam against the oppressive, depraved, and evil Yazid. The magnitude of the sacrifice of Hussain exceeds all human capacity to acknowledge, but the rites of Muharram are an effort to do so. The rituals associated with this event continue throughout the year, but they come to a climax in Muharram. For the first ten days the entire Shi'i population holds regular *majalis* (sg. *majlis*) or gatherings in private homes and in the *imambaras*. There are also a number of public processions, culminating on the tenth with a slow march through the center of town while chanting dirges for the martyrs and the performance of *ma'tam*, self-flagellation as a sign of mourning. Although the primary participants in the procession are Shi'a, groups of Hindus participate as well, especially young children for whom carrying a *taziyya* is regarded as an especial blessing.⁶¹ Hindus also often take vows before the *taziyas* that are permanently installed in the various *imambaras* in town.⁶² The caretakers of three of the *imambaras* informed me that this was quite common and that Imam Hussain was regarded by Hindus and Muslims alike as extremely effective in granting children to supplicants. At the completion of the procession in Malerkotla in 2001, a Hindu woman left an offering of *khir* (sweet milk rice) at the ground of Karbala in acknowledgement some prayer that had been fulfilled through the blessing of Imam Hussain. Along the procession route there were several places where some sustenance was distributed. Although many Shi'a fast on this day and for the preceding two days, others partake of proffered tea and fruit sweetened water and sometimes also food, particularly *halwa* (a sweet porridge filled with nuts and raisins). Sikhs, Hindus and Sunnis all perform the service of providing beverages and food to the processors, acknowledging the devotion necessary to sustain the

long day of walking from one end of town to the other while chanting dirges and performing *matam*. Sunnis in Malerkotla also participate in other ways. At several *majalis* I encountered Sunni men and women who professed an appreciation for either the depth of devotion of the Shi'a or for Imam Hussain himself, or a respect and affection for a neighbor or friend that impelled them to participate. At one house I met a young Sunni man who was good friends with a Shi'i man whose family was hosting the *majlis*. He said that while his friendship with the Shi'i was acceptable to his family, his mother told him not to eat in their house (a request that he ignored). This indicates both the extent and the limits of Shi'i-Sunni relations. Whereas personal connections may override social sanction, the prejudices of each community are still widely felt.

The perennial nature of the conflict was explained to me by a retired school teacher (a Sunni). He said:

Teacher: The Shi'i-Sunni quarrel was always there, whenever they had their horse procession, a quarrel was there. Efforts would be made and then the matter would cool down.

AB: But the Shi'i-Sunni quarrels occur now in places, and sometimes are very serious.

Teacher: No, it was never serious, it just became inevitable, and communal riots might occur. So, the people, peace-loving people, easily pacify them, and there is communal harmony.

Indeed at the 2001 Muharram observations I witnessed no obvious tension between these communities in spite of the fact that three major local festivals coincided over the course of ten days. First, was the Hindu celebration of *navaratri*, or the nine nights of the goddess. During this time several local Hindu groups sponsored *kathas* (recitations of poems and stories about the goddess) and *bhajan* (devotional song) singing sessions. These gatherings were often in public and often at night, as were many of the Shi'a *majalis*. Although state records indicate that riots have in the past occurred over a similar incident, the coincidence did not lead to any difficulties. The eighth day of *navaratri* is Ramnaumi, for which a local temple had sponsored a reading of the *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulsidas (a medieval Hindi version of the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*) and a parade through town.⁶³ In spite of several snafus, totally unrelated to the simultaneity of Muharram, these events occurred without conflicting with one another or creating apparent tension in the town.⁶⁴ Also, several days prior to the tenth day there was a large gathering for Haider Shaikh as is typical of the first Thursday of the lunar month which always draws several thousand devotees. For several days the usually crowded streets of Malerkotla were quite overwhelmed with processions and people. This density never led to any conflict, and the only contestations concerned the timing of the parades and the order of procession.

Non-Muslim in Malerkotla

In Malerkotla the minority population is Sikh and Hindu. This is an unfamiliar position for the Hindus who are overwhelmingly dominant in the national population. In 2000 and 2001 I encountered a heightened consciousness of the Muslim dominance in local politics and the local economy among Sikhs and Hindus. Although for some this was frustrating, others pragmatically accepted this as a trade-off for the higher profile they enjoyed due to this demographic anomaly. The percentage of Sikhs in the town is considerably less than that in Punjab in general (only ten or eleven percent). However, as a majority in the state (sixty-three percent), their local impact is considerable. Much of the land cultivated in the outlying villages that were formerly part of the kingdom are owned and farmed by Sikhs who are overwhelmingly Jat. This is the large group of agriculturalists and pastoralists who dominate the whole of Indian Punjab. There are a few other groups of Sikhs such as Bedis and Sodhis. A number of refugee Sikhs from the Sindh and Punjab regions of present-day Pakistan were relocated to Malerkotla. One of the six local gurdwaras is inside of one of the old royal mansions and is principally patronized by the Sindhi refugees who were resettled in these buildings as a few remaining members of the Nawab's family left for Pakistan. The largest Gurdwara is newly built but also on the site of a former palace. The oldest gurdwara in town, the Singh Sabha Gurdwara, was built through the patronage of Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan in the 1920's.⁶⁵ Another, more recently built, memorializes the *ha da narah* of Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan.

Sikh separatist politics and the repressive Indian governmental response led to a long period of terrorism in Punjab during the 1980's and early 1990's. The violence and tension impacted Sangrur District (where Malerkotla is located) significantly, but Malerkotla itself was largely left unscathed.⁶⁶ Although curfew was imposed frequently here as in the rest of the region, there were no local casualties. Although the relatively low population of Sikhs is an obvious factor, many residents attribute this to the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh and the ongoing affection of the Sikhs for the town. Locals reported that Sikhs in Malerkotla and the outlying villages engaged in acts of goodwill towards the Muslim population even during this difficult period. Many Muslim residents said that when curfew was imposed during Ramadan and it was difficult to obtain food from the countryside, Sikhs would set up places to distribute water and food for the breaking of the fast. Sikh residents claimed that the separatist elements were very weak in Malerkotla.

Although there are vastly more Sikhs in Punjab than Hindus, in Malerkotla there are more Hindus than Sikhs. Here the Hindu population in 1981 (the last census with this local breakdown) was just over twenty percent. There are many temples, some quite old, indicating the long history of the Hindu and Jain communities in the town. Indeed, some local Jains and Hindus claim that their families were sent to the area by Bahlol Lodhi in order to develop the new settlement commercially and make the

region livable for the sophisticated daughter of a Sultan. The Hindu residents in Malerkotla itself are mostly of Bania trade castes such as Aggarwal, Goyal, and Jindal. The substantial Jain community is also largely from this merchant class. Banias dominated in the bazaars, which is still true today, as these communities own most of the buildings along the Moti and Sadar Bazaar.

There are numerous Hindu organizations in Malerkotla. It is clear from state records that the Hindu Mahasabha was active in Malerkotla in the 20's and 30's, but is no longer active.⁶⁷ Hindu extremist groups have long been discouraged in Malerkotla. For example, the last Nawab declared the RSS an "unlawful body"⁶⁸ after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a former member of the RSS. The various organizations of the Sangh Parivar (RSS, VHP, BJP) are not very active in Malerkotla. However, the leaders of the local RSS are a small group who speak in pure Urdu (a language associated with South Asian Islam) of the need to lift up their community. The BJP has never been particularly successful in town although a party unit does exist. Once in 1992 they floated a candidate for the Punjab Legislative Assembly, but since the alliance was formed with the Akalis in 1998 the BJP has tended to take a back seat. The RSS helps to organize certain large-scale events such as pilgrimages to Hindu holy sites like Amarnath (a mountain shrine sacred to Shiva). Most of these activities are based at the recently built Hanuman Mandir.

The oldest Hindu site in town is the Dera of Baba Atma Ram, a Bairagi sadhu from the Neem Margi *sampraday* (group). A strong local tradition asserts that Atma Ram and a Muslim saint, Shah Fazl, placed the foundation stone of Kotla in the mid-seventeenth century at the behest of the Nawab. This gesture is seen as providing a literal foundation for Malerkotla's pluralism and open society. At the Dera, Tuesdays are especially observed here as the temple boasts a *murti* of Hanuman carved from an unusually large piece of *moong* (coral). The largest non-Muslim religious festival in Malerkotla is Dussehra, the tenth day after the *navaratri* that is holy to Lord Rama.⁶⁹ For the nights leading up to Dussehra, plays of the Ram story, called *Ramlila*, are put on at venues throughout town. On the day itself the entire town, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, all turn out at the Dera where a gigantic papier-mâché effigy of Ravana, the villain of the *Ramayana*, is burnt. This event is very significant as it, perhaps more than any other brings, together the entire community. Muslim groups sponsor booths at the Dera distributing free cold water to those in attendance. In 2001 the person staffing one booth said that while he did not himself believe in Rama and the events being celebrated, he enjoyed the spectacle and the opportunity to serve the community. Although the appeal of Dussehra for Muslims, and likely for most participants, is less religious than spectacular, the parade and celebration are enjoyed by everyone in town.

Muslims, however, do attend the Dera on non-festival days as well. This is the case at many shrines in South Asia that are particularly known for healing certain disorders. At the Dera one morning the *pujari* (priest) and his son were both in attendance, as was the celibate *mahant*, or head of the sadhu (renunciant) lineage

associated with the shrine. It was a Tuesday morning and many people were coming through to pay their devotions to the unique Hanuman *murti* at the Dera. After the steady flow had reduced to a trickle, a man and his son came in and sat before the younger *pujari*. Presenting the *pujari* with a bottle of water, the Brahmin priest began to murmur Sanskrit *mantras*, invocational formulas capable of focusing and channeling divine energy. After a few minutes, the *pujari* inserted a leafy twig from a neem tree into the bottle and, still uttering *mantras sotto voce*, he sprinkled the boy with the blessed water. After this the *pujari* gave the man and his son some advice about how to proceed, consuming small amounts of the water several times a day. The two bowed to the *pujari* and left. After they had gone, the *pujari*, knowing the nature of my research turned to me and smilingly informed me that the two visitors had been Muslim. As I had not discerned this from their appearance, I was initially surprised, but the *pujari* said that this was in no way unusual. I asked him how he felt about Muslims coming to the shrine. The *pujari* responded by saying that people are people and when they are in trouble, they seek help. If he can help them, that is sufficient. The universality of human concerns such as healing is a commonly given reason for Sikh and Hindu presence at Muslim shrines as well.

These integrative practices and institutions have born fruit. Since Partition, Malerkotla's multi-religious community has successfully managed several crises. In 1992, after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, a group of Muslims took to the streets and damaged a Hindu temple, the Viskvakarma Mandir, and the main Jain Sabha hall in the center of the bazaar. These two acts of violence clearly threatened the stability of the community and the events continue to be remembered by the community. However, in the retrospective accounts of the violence, the community itself emerges as the hero. Muslim leaders stepped in to subdue the attackers. Several Muslim benefactors paid for the damages and the Muslim MLA ensured that funds for complete restitution were obtained from the state. Hindus exercised enormous restraint in their response, briefly debating retaliation but opting instead to work through the local Peace Committee to ensure that the perpetrators were sent away and a clear message was sent that such acts were intolerable in Malerkotla.

In 2000, the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, triggering several incidents of anti-Muslim actions such as the throwing of pig meat into a mosque and burning of the Qur'an. In Malerkotla both the Buddhas' destruction and these anti-Muslim assaults were deplored. Some Muslims suggested a parade in protest, but the local leaders prevailed upon them to avoid such public displays which tend to inflame rather than reduce tensions. Instead, the entire community – Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu – held a general strike for a day. Thus a potentially divisive incident was transformed into an act of symbolic solidarity against a variety of injustices. Other such moments, too numerous to recount, indicate an overall propensity towards conciliation rather than animosity among Malerkotla's residents. Furthermore, these events demonstrate the amount of labor and effort that community leaders and members put into maintaining the level of peace and integration that Malerkotla has come to enjoy.

Conclusion

Malerkotla is a community of minorities, a place where total hegemony is impossible. This outline of the ebb and flow of history depicts a town full of contradictions and cooperations between diverse groups of people, all of whom feel uniquely bound to this place. Both within and without the town, Malerkotla is reputed for its peaceful inter-religious relationships. That this is so remarkable speaks volumes about the nature of inter-religious relations in Punjab and India at large. Indeed the expectation is that different religions will inevitably clash with one another, particularly in areas where there is a diverse population, a past history of conflict, no clear monopoly on power, and a great deal of competition in the economic, social, and spiritual arenas. All of these exacerbating factors are present in Malerkotla, yet since 1947 the fabric of the community has remained strong. In this essay I have presented some of the historical events that have shaped the town's identity. Significantly, many of these events are traumatic: the attacks by the Namdharis and Sahib Singh Bedi, the participation of the rulers in bloody campaigns against the Sikhs, and riots between Hindus and Muslims in the 1930's. These are not happy events. Yet there are counterbalancing resources to draw upon. The foundation of the town by a holy man, the *ha da narah* of Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, and the peace at Partition all provide the basis for positive inter-religious relations in the present day. Inasmuch as Malerkotla has tended towards the harmonious, especially since Partition, in spite of an increasingly polarized religious dynamic in India is a powerful testimony to the active efforts of community members of all faiths in remembering and memorializing the histories of peace and blurring and muting the histories of conflict.

Malerkotla Population (NB: Pre-independence figures reflect population of the 167 square mile kingdom. Present data reflects only the concentrated urban area of the town)

1876: 91,560
 1881: 71,051
 1901: 77,506
 1991: 88,600
 2001: 106,802

Year	Malerkotla	Punjab	India
1881	35% Muslim 23% Hindu 41% Sikh	51% Muslim 41% Hindu 7.6% Sikh	19.97% Muslim 78.09% Hindu
1941	70.27% Muslim (20,605) 20.8% Hindu (6,098) 5.81% Jain (1,705)	53% Muslim 31% Hindu 15% Sikh	24.28% Muslim 69.46% Hindu

	2.64% Sikh (823) .48% Christian (90)		
1951	66% Muslim (21,502) 22.1% Hindu (7,200) 5.84% Jain (1,780) 5.09% Sikh (1,902) .97% Christian (191)	62% Hindu 35% Sikh 0.8% Muslim	9.9% Muslim 85% Hindu
1961	61.47% Muslim (24,307) 23.75% Hindu (9,390) 5.02% Jain (2,080) 8.78% Sikh (3,473) .98% Christian (293)	64% Hindu 33% Sikh 0.8% Muslim	83.5% Hindu 10.7% Muslim 1.8% Sikh
1971	64.96% Muslim (31,740) 24.81% Hindu (12,124) 2.58% Jain (1,263) 7.53 % Sikh (3,683) .0001% Christian (48)	38% Hindu 60% Sikh 1% Muslim	82.7% Hindu 11.2% Muslim 1.9% Sikh
1981	67.3% Muslim 20.2% Hindu 10.7% Sikh.	36% Hindu 62% Sikh 1% Muslim	82.6% Hindu 11.4% Muslim 2% Sikh
1991	No Data Available	34.5% Hindu 1.18% Muslim 62.95% Sikh.	82.41% Hindu 11.67% Muslim 1.99% Sikh
2001	No Data Available	36.7% Hindu 1.6% Muslim 59.9% Sikh	80.5% Hindu 13.4% Muslim 1.9% Sikh

Notes

¹ The population of non-Punjabi Muslims is growing but no figures are yet available. Punjab's total Muslim population is 382,045 (2001 Census), with Malerkotla as the greatest single concentration. There is another town in the Northwest of Punjab, Qadian, where there is a significant population of native Muslims. The total population of Qadian is 22,575 (2001 Census), though the breakdown by religion is not currently available at www.censusindia.net. This is the spiritual center of the Ahmadiyya movement that recognizes Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908) as a prophet of God, a claim that is vigorously disputed. For example, Ahmadis are not

recognized as Muslims in Pakistan, though they self-identify as such. For more on the Ahmadiyya, see: Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiyah Movement*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1974) and Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). For a critical analysis of the movement see Abulhasan 'Ali Nadwi, *Qadianism: A Critical Study*, translated by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1967) a translation of *al-Qadiyani wa al-Qadiyaniyah*, (1962). For a view from within the faith, see Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, *Ahmadiyyat, or the True Islam* (Qadian, Punjab: Talif-o-Isha'at, 1924) or www.alislam.org.

² The term "precipitating incidents" was coined by Sudhir Kakar in his work *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1996). Similar notions are put forward by Stanley Tambiah in *Levelling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*, (New Delhi; Vistaar Publications, 1996) and Paul Brass in *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1997).

³ Iftikhar Ali Khan, *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin Sadar-i-Jahan of Malerkotla (1449 A.D. To 1948 A.D.)*, edited by R.K. Ghai, (Patiala; Punjabi University Press, 2000 [1948]), p. 2. Hereafter cited as *History*.

⁴ Multan, now in Pakistan, was an important center for the Suhrawardi *silsila* (lineage). Its heyday was in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries during the time of the Baha-ud Din Zakariyya (d.1262) and his grandson Shaikh Ruknud-Din Abu'l Fath (d. 1335).

⁵ The date for Bahlol Lodhi's conquest of Delhi is typically given as 1451. Romila Thapar, *A History of India, Volume I*, (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 280.

⁶ The 1904 *Gazetteer* lists the original grant as twelve large and 56 small villages. The 12 large villages are Maler, Hadiaya, Barnala, Phul, Mahraj, Langowal, Sanghera, Pail, Ghamkaur, Amrgarh, Balian and Amloh. Later under Sher Muhammad Khan, this was increased with grants of *parganas* by Aurangzeb to thirteen: Bahlolpur, Khizrabad, Khamano, Isru, Pail, Dhamot, Amloh, Bahadson, Kapurgarh, Nauganwa, Sherpur, Balian and Maler. Although these roughly correspond to the original village settlement, the estate increased through continued patronage from the Mughal dynasty. *Maler Kotla State Gazetteer*, (Lahore; The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904). This arrangement seems typical of the types of land grants given in the pre-Mughal period. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, "Wajhi-ma'ash Grants under the Afghan Kings (1451-1555)," *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, (London; Asia Publishing House, 1972).

⁷ This parentage is that given by the last Nawab, Iftikhar Ali Khan, in his *History* (page 6) and by his grand-uncle, Inayat Ali Khan's *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans* (Lahore; Civil And Military Gazette Press, 1882), page 7. The 1904 *Gazetteer* claims that all three sons were born to Taj Murassa Begum and that Bibi

Mangi was the only child of the Kapurthala Rajput union, page 2. Rose's *Glossary* asserts that following the saint's death his lineage was divided between the offspring of these two women, the rulers and Nawabs coming from the Rajput woman and the *khalifahs* of the shrine from the Sultan's daughter, Taj Murassa Begum. In *Chiefs and Families of Note in Punjab* by Colonel Massey (Lahore; Civil and Military Press, 1940), only 'Isa is mentioned but he is said to be the Lodhi Princess' son. All sources assert that it is 'Isa's lineage that ruled the state though Hassan was the elder son. A dispute continues about this heritage between the caretakers of the shrine and the lineage of the Nawabs, both of whom prefer to claim pure Pathan Afghan heritage.

⁸ The death date of the Shaikh is typically given as 1515, but the *hijri* date actually converts to 11 October, 1516. Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History* gives Haider Shaikh's ruling dates as 1449 – 1508. The *Gazetteer of Native States* (1908) gives 1466 as the date of foundation of Maler. Denzil Ibbetson, E.D. MacLagan, and H.A. Rose, in *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, (Lahore; Government Printing House, 1919 (1883)) lists 1454. In all cases, the source for these dates is not given.

⁹ Initially the land was a *jagir*, not an independent kingdom. In return for the right to derive income from the property, the chief was expected to return a portion of his receipts to the overlord at Delhi and to depute a certain number of troops upon demand. Furthermore, upon the death of a *jagirdar*, the rights over the land would have to be conferred by the central powers onto his descendents. If the ruler was uncertain of the landlord's loyalty or in need of land to give as a reward to some other retainer, the property could change hands.

¹⁰ A *suba* is a territorial administrative unit used by the Mughals. Under Akbar there were twelve. Within each *suba* were numerous smaller units known as *sarkar* (territory of a governor).

¹¹ At that time Maler encompassed 103,444 *bighas* of land and possessed an army of 100 cavalry and 500 infantry. Abu I-Fazl Allami, *Ain-i Akbari*, translated by Colonel H.S. Jarrett, (New Delhi; Crown Publication, 1988), Volume II, p. 301.

¹² Throughout Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History*, he expresses resentment of Mughal authority, "...the Emperors of Delhi were at that time sole owners of landed property in India. Therefore whosoever possessed a State like Malerkotla was to all intents and purposes a tenant and not the virtual owner of the land over which he ruled. An unfavorable report by the Governor of that province or the whim and fancy of the king was all that was required to deprive the ruler of his State," (pages, 15-16). This type of central authoritarianism on the part of the Mughals is amply documented in the work of modern historians such as Muzaffar Alam, Percival Spear, and K.A. Nizami, as well as the contemporary chroniclers like Badauni, Abu Fazl, Ferishta, and others. See Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh & Punjab, 1707-1748*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1986), Percival Spear, *The History of India*, (New York; Penguin, 1965), Khaliq

Ahmad Nizami, "The Suhrawardi Silsilah and Its Influence on Medieval Indian Politics," *The Medieval Indian Quarterly* (Volume 2, October 1950), and Siddiqi, "Wajh'-i-Ma'ash Grants under the Afghan Kings (1451-1555)."

¹³ Most of Punjab was under Ahmad Shah Abdali's control from the 1740's until 1765, Mughal power having waned since the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. In 1757 the British East India Company defeated the Nawab of Calcutta, Siraj-ad-Daula, in the Battle of Plassey. This marked the shift from a trading outfit that merely meddled in governmental affairs to an administrative body. From 1757 onwards, British power expanded throughout the subcontinent and was consolidated after an 1857 rebellion of army troops was crushed, the East India Company was dissolved, the British Empire declared India to be a colony, and the last Mughal emperor was dethroned.

¹⁴ The number of references in various sources to these events are simply too many to mention. Some of the older Sikh chronicles that give accounts include Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, (1926) Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Panth Prakash*, (New Delhi; Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, 1998 [1841]), Sainapat, *Sri Gur Sobha*, edited by Ganda Singh, (Patiala; Punjabi University, 1967), Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Prakash*, (Amritsar; Bhai Catar Singh Jiwana Singh, 1923), *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, (Amritsar; Khalsa Naishanala Ijamsi, 1923 [1892]). Every modern description of these events includes Sher Muhammad Khan's *haa da naaraah*.

¹⁵ Satinder Kaur, "History of Malerkotla State" (MA Thesis, History; Punjabi University, 1977); Iftikhar Ali Khan, *History*; Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1999); Sohan Singh, *Life and Exploits of Banda Singh Bahadur*, (Patiala; Punjabi University Press, 2000); Anila Sultana, "Muslims of Malerkotla: A Study in Social and Cultural Change 1947-91," (PhD Dissertation, History; Punjabi University, 1993).

¹⁶ Bairagis are a sect of renunciant Hindus devoted to Vishnu.

¹⁷ Lepel Griffin, *Rajas of the Punjab*, (Delhi; Low Price Publications, 2000 [1870]), p. 25. Griffin actually identifies the Malerkotla chief during this period as Jamal Khan, but all the local sources (Inayat Ali Khan and Iftikhar Ali Khan) claim that Jamal Khan died in 1755 and was succeeded by his son, Bhikam Khan.

¹⁸ Nawab Bhikam Khan (ruled, 1755-1763), Nawab Bahadur Khan, (ruled, 1763-1766), Nawab Umar Khan, (ruled 1766-1780), Nawab Asadullah Khan, (ruled 1780-1784), Nawab Ataullah Khan, (ruled 1784-1810). See also Appendix A, "Genealogy of Malerkotla Nawabs and Rulers."

¹⁹ Griffin, pp. 34-35, 39.

²⁰ Griffin, pp. 77-80. Griffin rather uncharitably characterizes "Bedi Sahib Singh" as "a man, half fanatic and half imposter and as dangerous, greedy and unscrupulous as such characters usually are." Needless to say, this description reveals British interest in minimizing the claims of all charismatic authorities in the region.

²¹ Whether these Bedi loyalists are Sikhs or not is a matter of some debate. The family remains a powerful charismatic presence. The current scion, Sarabjot Singh Bedi lives at Una in Himachal Pradesh where his home and the tombs of several of his progenitors are pilgrimage destinations.

²² The *missal* period runs roughly from the 1716 death of Banda Bahadur until the rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1780. Indu Banga, "Formation of the Sikh State: 1765-1845," *Five Punjabi Centuries*, Indu Banga, ed., (New Delhi; Manohar, 1997), pp. 84-88.

²³ Griffin, p. 78.

²⁴ Gursharan Singh, *History of Pepsu: Patiala and East Punjab States Union, 1948-1956*, (Delhi; Konark Publishers, 1991), p. 9. A slightly different account is given in Mian Bashir Ahmed Farooqi, *British Relations with the Cis-Sutlej States (1809-1823)*, (Patiala Languages Department, 1971 [1942]). In this study, after Maharaja Ranjit Singh had taken Faridkot, he "then forced the Muslim Chief of Malerkotla to undertake to pay a lakh of rupees for which the Rajas of Patiala and Jind agreed to stand surety. [fn Metcalfe to Government, October 25, 1808, Bk. 5, Lt. 26, Copy] Metcalfe accompanied the Raja of Lahore up to Malerkotla but refused to 'follow the army in campaign' any further and strongly remonstrated against Ranjit's encroachments towards the east of the Sutlej." (p. 6) As Colonel David Ochterlony, then Agent to the Governor General (later Resident at Delhi) pursued the negotiations with the Cis-Sutlej chiefs for their accession to British protection, he arrived at Malerkotla. Having reached agreements with the Rajas of Patiala and Nabha, "He then proceeded to Malerkotla, where the 'much respected and venerabl' Pathan Chief, Ataullah Khan, was the ruler from whom the Raja of Lahore had demanded a large sum of money. The Colonel reinstated the Chief in power who, 'but a few months since anticipated another visit from the Raja of Lahore which would doubtlessly have terminated in his absolute expulsion and ruin.' [fn Ochterlony to Edmonstone, February 9, 1809, Bk. 10, Lt. 6, Original]" Thus having propped up the Malerkotla State, and achieved satisfactory control of all the kingdoms of the Cis-Sutlej region, the British were firmly ensconced in the region and well positioned to mount their eventual assault on Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

²⁵ Suraj Narain Rau, "Cis-Sutluj Sikh States, 1800-1849," (PhD Dissertation, History; Panjab University, no date), pp. 107-108.

²⁶ For more on the Mughal period in India see Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, (Aligarh; Centre of Advanced Studies, 1982) and John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁷ See Rita Brara, *Marriage and Kinship*, Dissertation, (Sociology, Delhi University, 1989), pp. 63-69.

²⁸ The 1881 Imperial Gazetteer lists nine guns, "Malerkotla," in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, W.W. Hunter, ed., (London; Trübner & Co, 1881), p. 267. However, according to the 1886 and 1904 Gazetteer it was an eleven-gun salute, "Malerkotla,"

in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, (London; Trübner & Co, 1886), p.255; “Malerkotla,” in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, (London; Trübner & Co, 1908), p.400.

²⁹ L/P&S/13/877, *Indian States, General Questions. Debts: Maler Kotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/1418, *Debt of Malerkotla to Calcutta Firms*. London: OIOC); R/1/1/2023, *Irregularities of Nawab Re: Payment of Debt*, (London: OIOC, 1930); and R/1/1/4156, *Malerkotla Finance*, (London: OIOC, 1944).

³⁰ Cited in Indra Krishen, “An Historical Interpretation of the Correspondence (1831-1843) of Sir George Russell Clerk, Political Agent Ambala and Ludhiana,” (PhD Dissertation, History; Panjab University, 1952), p. 64.

³¹ This case concerned the fact that due to the minority of Wazir Khan his four uncles succeeded to the throne prior to his own ascension. Following the controversy, a precedent in British India was set concerning the rights of primogeniture. R/1/1/3832, *Malerkotla Affairs: Appointment of Successor, Administrative Scheme*, (London: OIOC, 1942).

³² *Ibid*, p. 65.

³³ Ibrahim’s brother was Inayat Ali Khan, the author of the *Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans* mentioned above. Inayat charged that when his brother was adopted by their uncle (who he claimed hermaphrodite and a homosexual and so had no children of his own) that Ibrahim’s property should have devolved entirely to him as he was now the heir to the *gaddi* and all the state territories and assets.

³⁴ For example, www.namdhari.org claims that the goal of the attack on Malerkotla was to put the British on notice about the growing resistance to their rule. The page presents the perspective of the Namdharis on the events through the voice of one of the Namdhari leaders who addressed his party of attackers after the assault and before their arrest. Hira Singh is made to say to his compatriots, “We had achieved our target. We had conveyed our feelings to the British Government that now the Indians had woken up. They would neither tolerate foreign rule nor hurt to their religious sentiments and self respect.”

³⁵ *Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 7.

³⁶ Badal also declared Satguru Ram Singh’s birthday, January 29 a permanent holiday in Punjab. *The Tribune*, January 18, 2001. This move was also regarded as deeply troubling by elements of the Sikh orthodoxy. He also created a Satguru Ram chair at Guru Nanak Dev University in 1999. “Namdhari Chair Announced,” *The Tribune*, November 23, 1999.

³⁷ The British records, on the other hand, tell a different story. Reports on religious disturbances in Malerkotla are common: L/P&J/170, *Puran Mal Murder*, (London: OIOC); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Hindu Muslim Dispute*, (London: OIOC1936); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Hijra*, (London; OIOC, 1939); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Kothala*, (London: OIOC, 1927); L/P&S/13/1345, *Punjab States: Maler Kotla Affairs*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/2687, *Hindu Muslim, Arti-Namaz*, (London: OIOC, 1935); R/1/1/2860, *Muslim Agitation in Malerkotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/2936, *Muslim Agitation at Malerkotla*,

(London: OIOC); R/1/1/3006, *Congress Activities in Malerkotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/2860. *Report on Muslim Agitation in Malerkotla State and Proposals for Future Administration of the State*, (London: OIOC).

³⁸ L/P&J/170, *Puran Mal Murder*, (London; OIOC), L/P&S/13/1345, *Malerkotla*, (London; OIOC); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Hindu-Muslim Dispute*, (London; OIOC, 1936), R/1/1/2687, *Hindu Muslim, Arti-Namaz*, (London; OIOC, 1935).

³⁹ L/R/5. *Vernacular Press Reports – Hijra*, (London; OIOC, 1939); Parsuram Jain, *Haqiqat*, (Malerkotla, 1940), “Miscellaneous Papers Relating to Communal Problems in Malerkotla,” 206, (Maler Kotla: Office of the Revenue and Finance Minister, 1935-1946).

⁴⁰ “Disturbance in the East Punjab and Influx of Refugees,” Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla File no. 1-C/47-A, 1947; “Refugee and Evacuee Information, Malerkotla File, 1947. File no. 2(19) PR/47; L/P&S/13/1345. *Malerkotla*, (London; Oriental and India Office Collection).

⁴¹ Nusrat Ikram Khan, the past MLA is connected to the shrine of Haider Shaikh and the Pathan elite, but not the Nawab’s lineage. Razia Sultana, the current MLA is unrelated to this clan as well. The Malerkotla Constituency, Punjab State Legislative Assembly Member (1977-2002)

List Of Winning Candidates			
Year	Winner Name	Party	Percentage Of Valid Votes
2002	Razia Sultana	INC	34.78
1997	Nusrat Ikram Khan	SAD	41.6
1992	Abdul Ghaffar	INC	43.03
1985	Nusrat Ali Khan	SAD	49.97
1980	Sajida Begum	INC(I)	50.31
1977	Anwar Ahmad Khan	SAD	52.03

Source: Election Commission of India,

<http://www.eci.gov.in/se2002/pollupd/ac/states/S19/win81.htm>

⁴² According to the Census of India (2001), India as a whole is comprised of 80.5% Hindus, 13.4% Muslim, and only 1.9% Sikh, whereas Punjab consists of 36.9% Hindus, 1.6% Muslims, 59.9% Sikhs. These demographics are reversed in Malerkotla. In 1981 (the last year in which such a breakdown is available), the town’s population was 67% Muslim, 20% Hindu, 11% Sikh. Interestingly, in 1881, Punjab was 51% Muslim, 41% Hindu and 7.6% Sikh, whereas Malerkotla at that time was actually a Sikh majority region, with an urban population of 35% Muslim, 23% Hindu and 41% Sikh. In 1904, the urban population of Malerkotla was relatively evenly divided between the three major religions. By 1941, Malerkotla was 70% Muslim, 21% Hindu, 6% Jain, and 2.6% Sikh. In 1951, the first (and

notoriously problematic) Census taken after Partition, the numbers are quite different. In Punjab as a whole, Hindus were 42%, Sikhs 56%, and Muslims 0.8%. However, in the city of Malerkotla itself in 1951 the population remained more or less steady with 66% Muslim, 22% Hindu, 6% Jain and 5% Sikh. The relative stability of the urban population continues to this day, with only a slight increase in Sikh representation. In the remainder of Punjab, as shown in the 1991 Census data, the Hindu population has decreased whereas the Sikh and Muslim populations have grown, reflecting emigration of Hindus, immigration of Sikhs, and the alterations in Punjab's borders to create Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in primarily Hindu eastern regions.⁴² According to the 2001 Census of India, Malerkotla is made up of 106,802 citizens. Local estimates are consistent with the 1981 data claiming that approximately 70% of the town is Muslim.

⁴³ There is an organization representing every imaginable interest group. It is difficult to know how many such associations are present and are actually active as some do not incorporate and therefore are not listed with the municipality. Some groups last only a few meetings and others endure with very few members and a limited mandate. The office holders in many of these organizations represent multiple religious groups. For example, the local Bar Association, Bar Clerk Association, chemists Association, Journalists' Coordination Committee, Manufacturers and Suppliers Association, Malerkotla Printers Association, Rotract (sic) Club, Leo Club, Malerkotla Welfare Association, Malerkotla Heritage Society, Ex-Serviceman League Committee, Punjab Pensioners Association, and Malerkotla Improvement Trust all have Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs among their executive officers. A few groups tend to be managed by a single community, but have a plural membership such as the Rotary Club which has tended to have Hindu and Jain leadership. In fact, the Rotary Club also organized an 'Id Milan, a gathering to felicitate the Muslim community on the occasion of the two major festivals known as 'Id which mark the Islamic calendar. Thus a monopoly on leadership in a group or society does not reflect homogenous membership. Nor does the non-religious agenda of the Rotary Club preclude its sponsorship of religious activities such as the celebratory gathering for 'Id. Indeed, such events are commonly organized by many groups in Malerkotla as a means of reaching out to the Muslim majority population.

⁴⁴ Most recently Ashutosh Varshney has highlighted the importance of formal and semiformal civic associations in fostering positive inter-religious relations. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2002).

⁴⁵ This is a rough estimate. From interviews with Shi'i leaders in Malerkotla, they report at least 500 Shi'i families. However, the local census does not inquire about this division making the numbers hard to determine precisely.

⁴⁶ Sharma, "Political Beliefs and Attitudes of a Religious Minority," p. 42; Anila Sultana, "Muslim Institutions and Organisations in Malerkotla and Their Impact on

the Muslim Community,” *Punjab History Conference XXVIII* (1996) and “Muslims of Malerkotla.”

⁴⁷ A *mufti* is a scholar of Islamic law capable of issuing legal opinions or *fatwas*.

⁴⁸ Mufti Fazl-ur-Rehman Hilal Usmani, *Memaar-e-Insaniyat*, (Malerkotla; Jamia’ Dar-us-Salam, 1991) and *The Islamic Law: Marriage, Divorce, Inheritance*, (Malerkotla; Darus Salam Islamic Centre, 2000). Also see, Vikrant Jindal, “A Codifier of Islamic Laws,” *Tribune*, (December 5, 2000).

⁴⁹ See Mumtaz Ahmad, “Islamic Fundamentalism: The Jama’at-i Islami and Tablighi Jama’at of South Asia,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, edited by Martin Marty and Scott Appleby, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991), Barbara Metcalf, “Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jama’at,” *Journal of Asian Studies* (Volume 52, no. 3, 1993), “New Medinas: The Tablighi Jama’at in America and Europe,” in *Making Muslim Space*, edited by Barbara Metcalf, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1996).

⁵⁰ Tablighis heed six ‘simple’ principles: *iman* (belief), *salat* (prayer), ‘*ilm* and *dhikr* (knowledge and remembrance of Allah), *ikram-i muslimin* (respect for fellow Muslims), *ikhlas-i niyyat* (sincerity or purity of intention), and *tafrigh-i-waqt* (spending time working for Islam). These principles are executed by groups or *jama’ats* of ten volunteers who go on missionary programs for (ideally) three days in every month.

⁵¹ These *ijtima’* follow a fairly set program in which members of the assembly perform *na’ats* or praise hymns to the Prophet, receive instruction in some basic practice or belief, such as the proper method for the prayer ablutions, ask questions about leading a religious life, testify to changes or miracles wrought by submission to Allah, perform prayers and prostration (*du’a* and *sajda*), and hear a formal exhortation by the leader.

⁵² Anila Sultana, “Muslim Institutions and Organisations in Malerkotla and Their Impact on the Muslim Community,” *Punjab History Conference XXVIII* (1996), p. 266.

⁵³ It is worth pointing out that the *mirasans* tend to complain about a reduction in their employment and about their low income, and several Pathan families said they hired them less frequently and would more often use recorded film music for wedding parties.

⁵⁴ The Jama’at-i Islami was founded in about 1938 by Abul ‘ala Maududi (1903-1979) to organize the Indian Muslim community and provide a stronger foundation of Islam in the country. Maududi’s writings are extremely popular in South Asia and throughout the Muslim world, and the influence of his thought can hardly be exaggerated. The Jama’at-i Islami’s ideology is conservative and is often described as fundamentalist and linked with terrorist groups. Although the US State Department’s annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (2002) does not include Jama’at-i Islami among its listed groups, it does identify Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) as the “militant wing” of the Jama’at-i Islami in Pakistan. Indian politicians have often

sought to link the Indian Jama'at-i Islami with HM and other Islamic organizations they view as anti-state. The Students Islamic Movement in India (SIMI) has been so linked and have been banned by the Indian Government under the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (2001). Typically journalists and authors will lump Jamaat-i Islami in with a range of radical Islamic groups. See, for example, B. Raman, "Jama'at-e-Islami, Hizbul Mujahideen, and Al-Qaeda." South Asia Analysis Group, (<http://www.saag.org/papers7/paper699.html>, 2003). Also referenced, U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2002* (<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2002/>).

⁵⁵ Maulana Rauf's attitude towards inter-religious exchange was consistent with the findings of Yoginder Sikand in a recent study of the Jama'at-i Islami's strategies of inter-religious dialogue, in which he emphasizes the pragmatism of the position taken by Jama'at-i Islami ideologues. Yoginder Sikand, "An Islamist Approach to Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Jama'at-i Islami of India." *Qalandar* (2003), p.15.

⁵⁶ The RSS, founded in 1925 by K.M. Hedgewar is the 'father' of the Sangh Parivar (family of the Sangh), a group of Hindu organizations that seek to revive and reestablish Hinduism in India through a variety of strategies and networks. The RSS organizes on an extremely local basis, gathering people for weekly exercises and meetings. The group professes a non-political stance. That role is taken up by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – currently ruling at the center. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the explicitly religious wing of the family, made up of religious leaders and activists. It is the most militant of those directly linked with the RSS, but its youth group, the Bajrang Dal (BD) is one of the most virulent radical Hindu organizations in operation. There is a small RSS chapter in the Malerkotla area, limited BJP appeal, and no discernible activity from any other Hindu extremists.

⁵⁷ This is consistent with the controversial doctrine of *rja'* in Islam in which judgment on the salvation or damnation of others is regarded as the sole provenance of Allah and is not to be infringed upon. Though usually understood only in terms of sinning Muslims, Rauf's attitude signals a general openness to the possibility of change and redemption on the part of all humans.

⁵⁸ Most of the *imambaras*, the centers of Shi'a ritual life that house replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb, contain pictures of the Ayatollah Khomeini who led the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Khomeini was a leader in the Ithna' Ashari sect which believes in twelve Imams subsequent to the Prophet Muhammad all of whom possess esoteric wisdom and understanding of the true nature of Islam and are able to communicate this knowledge to the community. Since 874 there has been no manifest Imam as due to persecution the Imam went into occultation and is now available through mediators who are able to transmit his wisdom to the faithful. The Imam Mahdi will appear as a preface to the Day of Judgment, a belief shared by Sunni Muslims.

⁵⁹ There are several excellent studies of the Shi'a in South Asia, see especially Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq*, (Berkeley; University of

California Press, 1988) and *Sacred Space and Holy War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). See also the work of David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in South Asia*, (Basingstoke; Palgrave, 2001) and "Shi'ism in South Asia," *The Muslim World* LXXXVII, no. 3-4 (1997): 235-57.

⁶⁰ [There is one Shi'a Jama' Masjid and five *imambaras*, the shrines of the Shi'i that house *taziyas* (replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb) and are usually attached to mosques. The Nawab's family constructed the Shi'i Jama' Masjid and two other *imambaras*. The mother of the second to last Nawab built one as the fulfillment of a vow she had made to Imam Hussain when praying for a son. It is known as either the *Sarkari* (government) or *Riyasati* (royal) *Imambara*. There is also the *Imambara Ihsaniyya*, constructed by a relative of the Nawab, Ihsan Ali Khan. This is located directly opposite the Diwan Khana (the public palace of the Nawabs). In the late nineteenth century a local community of Shi'a, the Khojgan *biraderi* (brotherhood or clan), built an *imambara* with their own resources, independent from the government. The Khojgan are Shaikh and are a very tight knit and active group. A small *imambara* has recently been put up directly across from *Imambara Khojgan* and is run by the Anjuman-e Hussaini.]

⁶¹ This custom is widely reported throughout India. See David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala : Muslim Devotional Life in India*, (Basingstoke; Palgrave, 2001), "Shi'ism in South Asia," *The Muslim World* (LXXXVII, no. 3-4 (1997), *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, (New York; St. Martin's Press, 1993)

⁶² In addition, H.A. Rose notes that Hindu women make vows for children and dedicate their sons to Islam until a certain age as water bearers in the *taziya* procession of Muharram, after which they return to the Hindu fold. Rose, H.A. *Rites and Ceremonies of Hindus and Muslims*, (New Delhi; Amar Prakashan, 1983 [1908]), p. 16.

⁶³ The Ramnaumi celebrations were broken up not due to any communal trouble but because the *homa* (fire ritual) that marked the completion of the reading resulted in a truly terrifying bee swarm due to the smoke rising into an old tree at the temple. The resulting chaos ended after an hour with several people hospitalized and over fifty given shots to reduce their reactions to the multiple stings they had received. Later the organizers blamed the events on having begun the *homa* prior to the absolute completion of the recitation in order to keep the procession on schedule. This disrespect was remedied and the festival proceeded.

⁶⁴ Conflicts over simultaneous processions at Muharram and Hindu festival times are common causes for Hindu-Muslim and Sunni-Shi'i violence.

⁶⁵ Prior to Partition the urban population of Sikhs was relatively small, and this is reflected in the relative youth of most of the gurdwaras in town.

⁶⁶ According to the Punjab Backgrounder prepared by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, seventy percent of the violence during the terrorism was confined to three districts – Gurdaspur, Amritsar, and Ferozepur – but Sangrur experienced 227 killings in 43 separate incidents. Source: www.satp.org

⁶⁷ The Hindu Mahasabha was formed in the early twentieth century with the purported goal of reviving Hinduism, in particular to combat the invidious effects of Christianity and Islam upon the integrity of the Hindu territory of India. Along with groups such as the Arya Samaj (which does not appear to have been particularly vibrant in Malerkotla), the Hindu Mahasabha had a profound effect on Hindu revivalism in Punjab.

⁶⁸ Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla File No. 1-C/1948.

⁶⁹ In North and Northwest India Dussehra is associated with Ram, but in Eastern India it is a day of the Goddess.