Revisiting the "Evolution of the Sikh Community"

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The Sikh tradition is barely five hundred years old. As the youngest world religion it has had to address the various doctrinal, philosophical, and cultural dilemmas and divergent approaches in a more 'compact' time frame and within a context of persistent political turmoil. Its evolution in response to changing historical context has been the focus of sustained scholarly attention for over a century. In his 'preliminary venture' to address this perennial issue in *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (1975) W.H. McLeod raised some questions coupled with tentative answers. The negative reception of this work in Sikh scholarly circles gave rise to intense polemical debate. The present essay carefully looks at the major hypotheses offered in the work and provides alternate readings of those issues. It further makes the case for putting McLeod's scholarship in its own historical context and adopting new approaches of understanding the Sikh past.

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I

W.H. McLeod single-handedly introduced, nourished and advanced the field of Sikh studies in the western academy for more than four decades of his life. On a number of occasions he represented the Sikhs and Sikhism to both academic and popular audiences in the English-speaking world. This special issue of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* on his first death anniversary provides us with an opportunity to revisit his scholarly contributions. My special thanks go to its editor, Professor Gurinder Singh Mann, for the invitation to offer some of my thoughts in this regard. This essay is, therefore, a reexamination of McLeod's major hypotheses presented in the first and third chapters of his book, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (ESC) published in 1975. This short monograph of five essays drew a great many polemic responses from Sikh scholars, generating more heat than light on the academic issues raised in the book. There is an urgent need to contextualize McLeod's scholarship through critical scrutiny and to find new ways of imagining the Sikh past.

In the present essay I will first provide the broader intellectual context in which McLeod originally constructed his hypotheses, including some scholarly critiques of his arguments. Second, I will critique his location of Guru Nanak's teachings within the Sant tradition of North India. Third, I will carefully examine the arguments of the impact of Jat cultural patterns on the evolution of the Sikh Panth. Fourth, I will closely look at McLeod's take on the creation of the institution of the Khalsa. Fifth, I will scrutinize the cohesive role of certain Sikh institutions. Finally, I will offer some reflections on the new ways of looking at the Sikh past based on some recent approaches developing in the field of historiography. In dealing with early Sikh history, an analytical approach must be based on contextual depth, focusing on both ideology and environment.

Throughout his analysis McLeod maintained a double focus along the line of history and across the arc of traditional Sikh understanding. As a modern historian, he frequently addressed the issues of history verses tradition, the nature of authority in the Sikh Panth (community), and the ever-evolving nature of Sikh identity. For him, Sikh history offered "an unusually coherent example of how a cultural group develops in direct response to the pressure of historical circumstances" (ESC, p. 2). He referred to the works of three historians, Harbans Singh, Khushwant Singh and Gokul Chand Narang, who understood the development of Sikh community as marked by 'three major stages'. Accordingly, the first stage began with the work of Guru Nanak who founded Sikhism and the Sikh Panth. The second stage was marked by a radical reshaping of the Sikh Panth in the early seventeenth century after Guru Arjan's martyrdom in 1606. His son and successor Guru Hargobind signaled the formal process when he donned two swords ceremonially, symbolizing the spiritual (*piri*) as well as temporal (*miri*) investiture. Under his direct leadership, the Sikh Panth took up arms to protect itself from Mughal hostilities. The religious teachings of Guru Nanak were retained intact but "those who practiced them would now be prepared to defend by military means their right to do so" (ESC, p. 4). The third and final stage began when Guru Gobind Singh fused the military aspect with the religious by creating the Order of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi of 1699 in response to the growing hostility of the hill rajas and the Mughal authorities as well as the weakness of his followers.

According to McLeod, the significance of these three stages cannot be disputed, but this interpretation of evolution can be 'considerably modified'. He described the purpose of his analysis as follows:

> The purpose of this essay is to seek a more radical concept of development, one which will express a much more intricate synthesis of a much wider range of historical and sociological phenomenon. Our basic

> disagreement with the traditional interpretation concerns its simplicity. It starts too late and ends too soon. It omits vital elements within the limited area which it claims to cover. It over-simplifies the events to which it does attribute importance and lays upon them a weight of emphasis which in all three cases is considerably in excess of their true significance. (ESC, pp. 4-5)

McLeod thus intended to closely look at a much wide range of historical and sociological phenomenon to offer his 'radical concept of development' of the Sikh Panth. He proposed the hypothesis that explained the progressive development of the Panth not in terms of purposeful intention of the Gurus but in terms of the influence of the social, economic and historical environment. This specifically included such major features as the militant cultural traditions of the dominant group of the Jats ('rural peasantry') within the Panth, the economic context within which it evolved, and the influence of contemporary events such as those produced by local political rivalry and foreign invasion.[1] This interpretation, however, came under vigorous attack within the Sikh scholarly circles. In his later works McLeod reassessed his earlier stance in the light of criticisms and acknowledged the "intention of the Gurus as an important factor" in the gradual growth of the Sikh Panth, along with environmental factors that were overemphasized in his earlier analysis.[2]

<p style="text-align:center">II</p>

W.H. McLeod took great pride in being 'a western historian' who was trained at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London during the mid-sixties. In his personal narrative he claimed: "The work of a western historian must involve a considerable amount of time spent on the slow, patient, and (for many) monotonous search for evidence. This does not mean searching in places which reveal only evidence which will suit a pre-formed view of the subject. It does not involve the suppression of inconvenient evidence either. Most assuredly, it does not. From the evidence which emerges, the historian must seek to frame a pattern for the course of events of any particular period, one which takes into full account the testimony of all the evidence which has been uncovered."[3] It is not surprising that McLeod came to be known as a 'rational empiricist' or 'positivist historian' who rigorously followed a skeptic approach in his analysis.

One of the great contributions of Enlightenment criticism was the analysis of society and its individuals through sociological study. In

particular, the analysis of social forces at work, the understanding of society and the relationship between wealth and power attained a new level of sophistication as a result of the pioneering work of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim on the ways in which texts and ideas relate to their social contexts.[4] Most frequently the word 'ideology' is used as a way of describing a system of ideas. It may also be used as a system of abuse in political discourse, when a position is dubbed 'ideological' because it is attached to narrow, doctrinaire positions. In the Marxist tradition, however, ideology functions in the interests of the wielders of power (often termed 'hegemonic groups'), who have an interest in maintaining things as they are and the interpretation of the world as it is, thereby enabling the economic interests of those with most wealth and influence to continue to wield that influence. Thus the study of ideology is to see how ideas and systems of thinking and belief function in a society in such a manner that the way people think and the ruling groups appear to be 'natural' and 'just'. Although these interests are not always compatible with the interests of the rest of the community, as the powerful groups are merely sectional in their interests, the way in which the language and system of ideas function is to make it appear that they are in fact in the interests of all. Not surprisingly, the critique of ideology involves the exposure not only of overt ways in which sectional interests are supported, but especially of the covert ways in which dominant interests are served. In addition, it exposes the contradictions in society and the habit which the dominant groups have of neutralizing their potential for resistance and change by co-opting some of the ideas into the dominant ideology.[5]

Most instructively, social, political and ideological criticism slowly infiltrated the world of biblical studies, dominated as it has been by the history of ideas and in particular the history of the development of the religious themes of particular communities.[6] McLeod was certainly aware of these contemporary intellectual trends and he applied sociological analysis to understand the progressive development of the Sikh Panth in terms of the influence of the social, economic and historical environment. For instance, he turned to examine the impact of the cultural traditions of the dominant group of the Jats in the process of militarization of the Sikh Panth during Guru Hargobind's period in response to Mughal hostility. We will return to this point later on in the section assigned to this discussion.

In his critique of McLeod's work J.S. Grewal skillfully provides the broader context in which religious ideas and social environment play crucial roles in the process of causation in Sikh history. He addresses the question: How do changes in history take place? The early European writers responded to the issue of 'change' in the Sikh Panth in terms of external environment in the form of repression and persecution by the Mughal state. In his *History of the Sikhs* (1849), however, Joseph D.

Cunningham introduced the factor of ideology with great emphasis on the relevance of the teachings of Guru Nanak in the development of the Sikh Panth. He also extended the scope of social environment by adding 'ethnicity' to the political factor generally invoked by his predecessors. A Punjabi Arya Samajist, Gokul Chand Narang, wrote the work *The Transformation of Sikhism* (1912), carrying the implication that Sikh ideology did not remain the same. A Bengali historian, Indu Bhushan Banerjee, wrote a two-volume work on *Evolution of the Khalsa* (1936), taking into account the ideas of Guru Nanak and his successors but emphasizing the crucial role of social environment, including ethnicity. In their *A Short History of the Sikhs* (1950) Teja Singh and Ganda Singh employed the term 'transfiguration' deliberately to hammer the point that developments in Sikh history were inspired by one and the same ideology expounded by Guru Nanak and his successors. Providing this contextual background to the controversy over *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Grewal makes the following observation: "W.H. McLeod, in theory, does not deny the role of ideas but, in practice, he concentrates on the social environment in his exposition of institutionalization, militarization, the Khalsa *rahit* and the doctrines of Guruship."[7]

McLeod did not write in a scholarly vacuum. Undoubtedly, he was the product of his own times. He was instrumental in carrying forward an 'objective' scholarship in his works, questioning and challenging traditional beliefs. His method remained a firm search for historical sources and causality. His undying faith in historicism and search for causality made him a 'skeptic historian'. Note the following statement: "Traditions abound but so too do compulsive reasons for skepticism. What we do know, however, indicates that the traditions relating to the period of Guru Gobind Singh must be wiped clean and must not be re-inscribed until we have ascertained just what did take place during the eighteenth century" (ESC, p. 16). This was the approach that historians of biblical scholarship followed in their quest for historical Jesus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They would respond to the basic question of 'what really happened'. Some Sikh historians in the academic community (like Ganda Singh) were appreciative of McLeod's work, while others (like Fauja Singh) were critical of its limitations. Among other Sikh critics Daljeet Singh was the most severe. His criticism of *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (1975) and of McLeod himself was 'brusque and pungent'.[8]

But the first frankly polemical work directed against McLeod appeared in the form of an edited volume, *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition* (1986), in which the editor, Justice Gurdev Singh, attributed 'extra-academic motives' to McLeod on the assumption that 'Christian missionaries were out to undermine non-Christian traditions'.[9] Grewal painstakingly points out that Justice Gurdev Singh's charge that McLeod presented Sikhism as 'only a rehash of an effete Hindu creed' is not

justified, since "it ignores McLeod's positive exposition of Guru Nanak's teachings which in 1968 was perhaps the most thorough exposition of the theme in English."[10] And, Gurdev Singh's work also ignored McLeod's appreciation of Sikhism as 'a religion of refined and noble quality'. It is instructive to note that the appearance of this work after post-1984 events is quite significant. Not surprisingly, the picture on the dust jacket of Grewal's *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, showing the destruction of the Akal Takhat in 1984 by the Indian army, rightly links the 'extension of the controversy' with the agony through which the Sikh community passed in the last two decades of twentieth century. This was the time when the number of Sikh critics of McLeod's scholarship increased with the inclusion of 'retired judges, civil servants, army officers, former ministers, and Vice Chancellors', who had access to the President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC).[11] McLeod was seen as serving the interests of those forces which were inimical to the Sikh tradition and hostile to Sikh aspirations. Ironically, these Sikh critics successfully diverted the Sikh outrage against the Indian state towards a western scholar and his associates.

   Grewal aptly points out that polemics may not be the best modes of protest but polemics do represent a form of protest. He has provided a balanced perspective on the debate between 'critical scholars' of the Sikh tradition and their 'Sikh critics' regarding controversial issues in the study of Sikhism. His book may be criticized on only one point. Academic techniques are certainly different from those of theologians and traditional scholars. The two different pedagogical ways of studying religion are aptly described in the images of pulpit and podium. The *pulpit* represents the *confessional* approach followed by religious preachers who instruct and nurture the understanding and religious participation of their communities. The *podium*, on the other hand, represents the *academic* approach to understanding various religious traditions as cross-cultural phenomena of human life by following historical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, textual, philosophical, ethical, and comparative methods.[12] Grewal seems to overlook the distinction between the 'pulpit' and the 'podium' approaches when he gives legitimacy to those Sikh critics who do not follow established scholarly norms. For instance, resorting to a level of insult and insinuation intended not to refute an opponent's arguments so much as to destroy his personal reputation is not usually a part of contemporary academic discourse. Nevertheless, the intended purpose of Grewal's book has a noble objective: "This controversy could turn out to be fruitful if the critical scholars realize the implications of their work for the Sikh community and if their critics 'from within the faith' realize the significance of 'methodological atheism' which characterize all rational-empirical research in the modern world."[13] Most instructively, the scope

of what we write is not only limited to a group of other scholars in the field but to the world audience at large.

<div align="center">III</div>

W.H. McLeod located Guru Nanak's teachings of 'interior devotion' squarely within the Sant tradition of North India, a tradition that stressed such features as the formless quality of God (*nirguna*) and a doctrine of deliverance that attached no significance to caste or to external modes of worship. However, he maintained that Guru Nanak reinterpreted the Sant inheritance in the light of his own experience and passed it on "in a form which was in some measure amplified, and in considerable measure clarified and integrated."[14] He asserted that Guru Nanak's concepts of the divine Word (*shabad*), Name (*nam*), Preceptor (*Guru*), and the divine Order (*hukam*) carry us beyond anything that the works of earlier Sants offer in any explicit form.[15] Further, McLeod observed: "Plainly there is much that is profoundly original in the hymns which we find recorded under his [Guru Nanak's] distinctive symbol in the Adi Granth. There is in them an integrated and coherent system which no other Sant has produced; there is clarity which no other Sant has matched."[16] In his overall analysis, however, McLeod placed more emphasis on similarities than on differences between Guru Nanak's thought and the Sant tradition. We will return to this point in the following analysis since differences are of crucial importance for shaping emerging Sikh identity and the evolution of the Sikh Panth.

It is true that like the protagonists of the Sant tradition Guru Nanak viewed the apprehension of the divine Name (*nam*) in terms of interior devotion. However, his emphasis on the extension of the knowledge gained in the process must be acknowledged. This extension of an interiorly gained understanding of the divine Name is predicated upon social responsibility and as such should be seen as movement away from the subjective speculation of the Sants. For Guru Nanak, the definition of the ideal person (*gurmukh*, "one oriented towards the Guru") is as follows: "*Gurmukh* practices the threefold discipline of the divine Name, charity and purity" (*nam dan ishnan*).[17] Indeed, these three features, *nam* (relation with the Divine), *dan* (relation with the society) and *ishnan* (relation with the self) provide a balanced approach for the development of the individual and the society. They correspond to the cognitive, the communal and the personal aspects of the evolving Sikh identity.

Let us closely look at the following example from *Var Majh* that McLeod cited in his analysis:

> Make mercy your mosque and devotion your prayer
> mat, righteousness your Qur'an; Meekness your
> circumcising, goodness your fasting, for thus the true

> Muslim expresses his faith. Make good works your
> Ka'bah, take truth as your *pir* [Sufi master],
> compassion your creed and your prayer. Let service to
> God be the beads which you tell and God will exalt you
> to glory.[18] (M1, *Var Majh*, 1 [7], AG, pp. 140-41).

In addition to insistence upon the 'interior' in the text, there is a decided emphasis upon the 'social' context in which 'righteousness', 'good works' and 'compassion' can make sense. In Guru Nanak's hymns one finds a recurrent theme on social responsibility that is quite central to his ideology as are his prescriptions of interior devotion. In his analysis, McLeod aptly delineates early Sikhism from the formalism and ritualism of the orthodoxies of the day and completely rejects "the mistaken notion that Guru Nanak offers a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim ideals."[19] Elsewhere, he is quite explicit in saying that "the emphasis for Nanak must be laid firmly and exclusively upon inner devotion as opposed to external observance."[20] Nevertheless, this emphasis on the devotional aspects as defining the general spiritual tendencies of Guru Nanak's *bani* runs the risk of descending into 'essentialist' thought patterns, in which Indian religion is summarily conglomerated into the single concept of 'mystical experience' based upon spiritual pursuit. What distinguishes Guru Nank's ideology is his repeated invocation of moral responsibility as the representation of a spiritual understanding extended into actual world. From this perspective, the citation given above is an instructive example, demonstrating not only Guru Nanak's rejection of the empty formalism of contemporary Islam, but also the way in which he sought to substitute positive ethical concepts in the place of petrified dogma.

Guru Nanak adopted a typically classic approach towards Hindu tradition and Islam of his day, an approach through which he condemned the conventional forms of religion such as ritual and pilgrimage, temple and mosque, Brahmin and Mullah, Vedas and Qur'an. By defining the 'true Hindu' and the 'true Muslim' as opposed to the false believer who continue to follow the conventional forms, he was in fact offering his own path of inner religiosity based upon ethical values to the followers of both religions. The universality of his teachings involved drawing upon a wide range of available linguistic resources. Guru Nanak rightly understood that his audiences would comprehend his message more clearly if put into the language of their own religious heritage. Thus, he was able to reach out to his Muslim audience by using the concepts of Islam; he encountered the Yogis through the use of Nath terminology. For instance, he addressed the 'twice-born' castes of the Hindu tradition as follows:

> Make compassion the cotton, contentment the thread,
> continence the knot and truth the twist. This is the

> sacred thread of the soul. If you possess this, O
> Brahmin, then place it on me. It does not break or
> become soiled with filth. This can neither be burnt nor
> lost. Blessed are the mortals, O Nanak, who wear such
> a thread round their neck.
>
> <div align="right">(M1, Var Asa, 1 [15], AG, p. 471)</div>

In a similar vein, Guru Nanak addressed the Yogis in their own terms and symbols as follows:

> Make contentment your earrings, modesty your
> begging bowl and wallet, and meditation on the Lord
> your ashes. Let the fear of death be your patched
> garment, be chaste like a virgin. Make faith in God
> your staff. Your great yogic sect (*ai panthi*) should be
> universal brotherhood, and self-control the conquest of
> the world.
>
> (M1, *Japu 28*, AG, p. 6)

The message of the divine truth revealed in these passages reflected Guru Nanak's self-understanding. As W. Owen Cole remarks, "Guru Nanak accepted the religious language of Islam and Hinduism when it suited him, but the truth which he wished to express was his own."[21] A close look on Guru Nanak's works reveals that his main emphasis was always on the cultivation of ethical virtues and the universality of human condition. He traveled widely to both Hindu and Muslim places of pilgrimage in India and abroad, with his life-long companion, Mardana, a Muslim bard. During these journeys he came into contact with the leaders of different religious persuasions and tested the veracity of his own ideas in religious dialogues. His inspired utterances (*bani*) reflect a unique quality of universality that has been instrumental in the ongoing process of crystallization of the Sikh tradition.

Indeed, the very survival of Guru Nanak's spiritual message largely depended on the superior nature of his compositions, both aesthetically and philosophically. It is difficult to imagine that a less profound doctrine could have withstood the test of time. Guru Nanak himself was not content to leave the ethical principles that he expounded in his life as merely theoretical constructs, but instead sought to institutionalize them at Kartarpur. His decision to found a new village in 1520s on the right bank of the river Ravi where he could establish a new religious community of his followers had far-reaching significance. It will be naïve to view the congregation (*sangat*) at Kartarpur as an incidental gathering of like-minded disciples around a typical Master (Guru) in Indian setting. Rather, one need to view his efforts to establish a community upon

ethical ideals he had been propagating as the natural extension of a mission to reorganize society according to a unique set of ideological and cosmological postulations that were in accord with the divine command (*hukam*). It is no wonder that Guru Nanak named his village as Kartarpur or "Creator's abode" to highlight the point that its residents were committed to restructure their lives according to a new rational model of normative behavior based upon divine authority.

At Kartarpur Guru Nanak gave practical expression to the ideals that matured during the period of his travels, and "combined a life of disciplined devotion with worldly activities, set in the context of normal family life and regular *satsang* ["company of the holy"]."[22] It was neither a monastic order involved in ascetic life, nor any Sufi *khanqah* ("hospice") established on revenue-free land (*madad-i-ma'ash*) granted by the rulers. In fact, Guru Nanak's accomplishment in founding a new town with the help of his own followers speaks much of his organizational skills. It clearly sets him apart from other contemporary poet-saints who may have dreamed of their "city of joy" (*begampura*, "abode without anxiety") but could not create it on earth.[23] Unlike Guru Nanak who belonged to the Khatri caste, Kabir, Namdev and Ravidas were all from the lower castes. Thus they did not have the requisite confidence or the means to build a city of their own.

In sum, Guru Nanak's egalitarian ideas about women set him far apart from the medieval poet-saints of North India, particularly Kabir, who described woman as 'a black cobra', 'the pit of hell', and 'the refuse of the world' (*Kabir Granthavali*: 30.2, 30.16, and 30.20). Thus he had major disagreements with the Sants on the issues of asceticism, misogyny, and sense of mission and the idea of an organized religious community. According to Grewal, McLeod's insistence that Guru Nanak can be squarely placed in the Sant tradition or that he can be called a Sant confuses the issue. It emphasizes the importance of similarities in ideas at the cost of differences in the system of Guru Nanak and Kabir, becoming "a case of a part being confused with the whole."[24] The authenticity and power of Guru Nanak's spiritual message ultimately derived not from his relationship with the received forms of tradition but rather from his direct access – through realization – to Divine Reality itself. Such direct access was the ultimate source of his message and provided him with a purchase from which he could fully understand, interpret, and adjudicate the various elements of tradition. Throughout his writings he conceived of his work as divinely commissioned, and he demanded the obedience of his audience as an ethical duty.

IV

W.H. McLeod cautiously offered the hypothesis that the founding of the villages of Tarn Taran, Sri Hargobindpur and Kartarpur in the rural areas

saw large number of converts from local Jat peasantry. He thus proposed a sudden shift in the social constituency of the Panth when rural component came to the fore during the period of Guru Arjan. He reinforced his argument with reference to Jat influence in the Sikh Panth during the time of Guru Hargobind on the basis of the mid-seventeenth century Persian work, *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*. He suggested that the entry of the Jats was presumably facilitated by the fact that Khatris commonly served as teachers of the Jats. Two other motivating factors were that the Sikh Gurus rejected the theory of caste in principle and that they raised Jats to positions of authority within the Panth. Mughal hostility towards the Panth, McLeod argued, should not be attributed solely to Jahangir's orthodoxy or to the promptings of his Naqshbandi courtiers but rather to Jat influx in the Panth: "The increasing influence of the Jats within the Sikh Panth suggests that Jahangir and his subordinates may well have had good reason for their fears, and that these fears would not have related exclusively, nor even primarily, to the *religious* influence of the Guru" (ESC, p. 12).

In his analysis McLeod focused on the martial traditions as an integral part of Jat cultural patterns: "With their strong rural base, their martial traditions, their normally impressive physique, and their considerable energy the Jats have for many centuries constituted the elite of the Punjab villages. They are also noted for their straightforward manner, for a tremendous generosity, for an insistence upon the right to take vengeance, and for their sturdy attachment to the land." (ESC, p. 11). He stressed the influence of Jat cultural patterns as a definitive factor in understanding the militant developments of the Panth following Guru Arjan's execution in 1606: "The growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems which prompted a militant response" (ESC, pp. 12-13). In his analysis, however, McLeod did not elaborate on the factor of 'economic problems' in the process of the militarization of the Panth.

Jagjit Singh took strong exception to McLeod's propositions that "the arming of the Panth would not have been the result of any decision of Guru Hargobind" and that "the death of Guru Arjan may have persuaded Guru Hargobind of the need for tighter organization" (ESC, p. 12). Addressing the question of leadership and initiative, Jagjit Singh provided a rebuttal to McLeod's arguments by asserting that "the initiative and determination for carrying on the armed struggle against the established state was invariably that of the Guru and not that of his followers."[25] Grewal makes the following observation on the debate between these two authors:

> It is interesting to note that whereas McLeod attaches importance to their [Jats'] presence in the Sikh Panth before the martyrdom of Guru Arjan, Jagjit Singh looks

upon the measures of Guru Hargobind as a factor
responsible for their increased number in the Panth.
This apparently small difference regarding what came
first acquires great significance because of the decided
preference of McLeod for ethnicity and of Jagjit Singh
for ideology as the primary operative factor.[26]

Grewal thus offers a restrained judgment on the arguments of these two
scholars. Accordingly, employing the method of social analysis McLeod
gave primacy to the environmental factors in the progressive
development of the Panth while Jagjit Singh maintained that Sikh
ideology served as the cohesive force in the evolution of the Sikh
community. Nevertheless, Grewal later on identifies the major flaws in
their works by stressing that "the evidence advanced by McLeod in
support of his hypothesis is too weak to sustain it" and that "Jagjit Singh
does not account for Jat preponderance in the Sikh Panth: he simply
ignores it."[27] There is a need to explain why two-thirds of Sikh
population has always been Jats.

My own take on McLeod's arguments is somewhat different. I do not
accept his hypothesis of sudden shift in the social constituency of Sikh
Panth with the influx of Jats during the period of Guru Arjan. There is a
need to avoid the dangers of retrospective interpretation by subscribing to
an essentialist approach that might circumscribe the 'character' of a
rather large group of diverse people within the Panth. The process of the
entry of rural people within the Panth had already begun during the
period of Guru Nanak at Kartarpur and continued under his successors.
The settlement at the 'village' of Kartarpur certainly represented the rural
'headquarters' for the nascent Sikh community. It was founded in the
midst of a wide expanse of cultivated land that Guru Nanak had managed
to purchase for himself. It is highly instructive to understand his
affiliation with the rural population as the result of a familial connection
to matters of land ownership. His father, Kalian Chand (Kalu) Bedi, and
his father-in-law, Mula Chona, were both revenue officials (*patvaris*) of
comparable socio-economic background. In Punjabi culture, a *patvari*
holds a position of authority in the social hierarchy of the village because
of his education in Persian and the basics of accountancy. The fact that
Kalu owned land would have further enhanced family's status. Similarly,
Mula worked in Pakho ke Randhawe, a village in the fertile area of upper
Bari Doab. The proximity of Kartarpur to the village of Guru Nanak's
father-in-law suggests that Mula was helpful if not entirely instrumental
in locating and then acquiring the land for the new village.[28] The
noteworthy point here is that the establishment at Kartarpur might be
seen as a bridge between the urban culture of Khatris and the rural
culture of peasantry. Leadership role was in Khatri hands, while the
increasing number of followers came from rural background.

In fact, the fifth Guru inherited diverse cross-sections of the Punjabi society when he assumed the office of the Guru. The projects of the excavation of large pools and a large well with six Persian wheels (*chheharta*) in the Majha area during his reign were basically intended for the welfare of the Jats. His philanthropic work during famine was for the amelioration of their poor economic conditions. The Mughal authorities, including Emperor Akbar, were highly impressed by it. At the time of his meeting with Guru Arjan at Goindval on 4 November 1598 Akbar remitted the annual revenue of the peasants of the district, who had been hit by the failure of the monsoon. This was indeed a major relief to the farmers. As a result of these activities Guru Arjan's popularity skyrocketed among the rural peasantry of the Punjab.

Elsewhere I have suggested that in order to appreciate McLeod's arguments there is a need to look at the cross-cultural anthropology of the peasantry in world history in general.[29] A brief survey of the history of the Punjab from the time of Timur's invasion in the late fourteenth century through the establishment of Mughal rule in 1526 reads like a textbook example of an environment of brutality, exploitation and disenfranchisement that was responsible for breeding a sharp sense of alienation in the rural population. In particular, the Jat community of the Punjab suffered the brunt of tumultuous historical circumstances. For many reasons, including their pastoral background and socio-cultural patterns, the Jats were reduced to the bottom of the caste hierarchy.[30] Therefore, they had no scope of improving their lot in the Hindu tradition. The peasant dream of radical egalitarianism was fulfilled among the Jats when they joined the Sikh movement. Guru Arjan provided them much hope to improve their economic situation. Nevertheless, as a result of the inequitable policies of Mughal regime, "the conditions of the peasant generally approximated the lowest possible level of subsistence."[31] It is no wonder that an average peasant family in the Punjab would make a bare subsistence living from year to year.

In his *Ain-i-Akbari* (II, p. 316) Abu'l Fazal testifies the importance of well-irrigation in Punjab during the reign of Emperor Akbar: "This province is populous, its climate healthy and its agricultural fertility rarely equaled. The irrigation is chiefly from wells."[32] In fact, the Persian-wheels were widely used in the regions of Lahore, Dipalpur and Sirhind, because these were the areas with sufficient and easily procurable ground-water supplies. Here, the town of Ramdaspur (Amritsar) was located in the Majha part of the Bari Doab. The familiarity of the Jats with the Persian-wheel was taken for granted in several passages of the Adi Granth.[33] Undoubtedly, the use of the Persian-wheel encouraged the extension and development of cultivation in the central Punjab. However, the self-sufficient class of the peasants was deprived of the fruits of their labor by a self-serving regime that extracted from them a large amount of revenue for providing the

technology of the Persian-wheel. Not surprisingly, the Jats were quite resentful towards the inequity of Mughal policy. It is in this context that Guru Arjan's excavation of a well with six Persian-wheels (*chheharta*) makes sense, providing a much needed relief to the farmers of Majha area who did not have to look towards the Mughal authorities for their irrigation needs. Similarly, the four hundred years old pool at Thatte Khera at Guru Ki Vadali, near Tarn Taran, provides us with the hard evidence of how Guru Arjan was deeply concerned with the needs of the rural peasantry.[34]

During the famine conditions of the late 1590s the Jats were further reduced into destitution. In the conditions of economic distress, therefore, the poor Jats turned towards the charismatic message of Guru Arjan who resolved the 'tensions of meaning' in their lives. But they were predisposed against the oppressive state structures that took two-thirds of their production in revenues. As part of their cultural traditions the Punjabi Jats have always been known for their defiance of authority. The Mughal officials were fully aware of a massive influx of Jats into the Sikh movement. During Akbar's reign they were successfully dealing with covert Jat resistance by providing revenue free grants to Guru Arjan in the Majha (Ramdaspur and Tarn Taran) and Doaba (Kartarpur) areas so that they could indirectly maintain their control over them. They were using Guru Arjan's philanthropic work of excavation of large pools and wells to their advantage. As a result of Guru Arjan's alleged blessings to Prince Khusrau, however, the situation of Mughal-Sikh relations changed dramatically. Because of their 'fears' about the increasing Jat influence within the Sikh Panth, the Mughal authorities purposefully kept Guru Arjan's execution a private affair. Even Jahangir had left Lahore after passing the orders of capital punishment. In actual practice it was Shaykh Farid Bukhari (Murtaza Khan) who carried out Jahangir's orders. It should, however, be kept in mind that no one dies a natural death in state custody. The Guru was tortured according to the Mongol law (*yasa siyasat*) while he was in Mughal custody for about a week (May 24-30, 1606).[35] Not surprisingly, after reading my arguments McLeod changed his earlier stance on Guru Arjan's martyrdom and accepted that the Guru "was cruelly executed while being held by the Mughal authorities in Lahore."[36]

V

The meta-narrative on the issue of why a tradition built on Guru Nanak's *interior* discipline of 'meditation on the divine Name' (*nam-simaran*) should have become a militant community and proclaimed its identity by means of prominently displayed *exterior* symbols comes from the Singh Sabha scholars. It stresses the point that militarizing of the Panth by the sixth Guru, Hargobind, and the subsequent creation of the Khalsa by the

tenth Guru were strictly in accord with Guru Nanak's own intention. In fact, the classic statement of this claim may be seen in the stirring words of Joseph D. Cunningham's *A History of the Sikhs*, first published in 1849: "It was reserved for *Nanak* to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those broad foundations which enable his successor *Gobind* to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes."[37] That is, Guru Nanak's egalitarian teachings provided the basis for the institution of the Khalsa to fight for equality, justice and human rights. In the recent past, Jagjit Singh developed this interpretation into a detailed theory of revolution: "The founding of the Sikh *Panth* outside the caste society in order to use it as the basis for combating the hierarchical set-up of the caste order, and the creation of the Khalsa for capturing the state in the interests of the poor and the suppressed, were only a projection, on the military and political plane, of the egalitarian approach of the Sikh religious thesis."[38] McLeod acknowledged that the most notable response to his tentative enquiry was offered by Jagjit Singh in his *Perspectives on Sikh Studies* (1985).

For McLeod, Guru Hargobind's decision to leave the plains and move to the Shivalik Hills – the low range which separates the plains of the Punjab from the Himalayas -- in response to Mughal hostility was the most significant moment in the evolution of the Sikh Panth. This move took place in the year 1634 when the Guru shifted the Sikh centre from Amritsar to the village of Kiratpur. From this time onwards Guru Hargobind and all four of his successors spent most of their time in the Shivalik Hills, first at Kiratpur and then at Anandpur. In particular, the tenth Guru was brought at Anandpur, and for the most of his period as Guru he was exclusively occupied in Shivalik affairs. McLeod argued that the Shivalik Hills have long been a stronghold of Devi or Shakti cult. The hills of the Punjab are culturally distinct from the plains, and the most significant difference being the Shakti aspects of the hills culture.

On the basis of the compositions of the Dasam Granth McLeod offered the following hypothesis: "This Shakti blended easily with the Jat cultural patterns which had been brought from the plains. The result was a new and powerful synthesis, one which prepared the Panth for a determinative role in the chaotic circumstances of the eighteenth century." (ESC, p. 14). In Guru Gobind Singh's view, Akal Purakh ('Timeless Being') was personified by steel and worshipped in the form of the Sword (*kharag*). For him, the characteristic name for the divinity was *sarab-loh*, the 'All-Steel', and it is not surprising that in the preparation for Khalsa rite the sweetened water is always stirred by a double-edged sword accompanied by the recitation of five liturgical prayers. McLeod further referred to the writings of the Dasam Granth

where constant references to the mighty exploits of the Mother Goddess are found.

In his critique of McLeod's arguments, Grewal asserts that "the Mother Goddess figures much less prominently in the *Dasam Granth* than the other *avtars*, notably Krishna and Rama," symbolizing "legitimacy of the use of physical force in the cause of righteousness."[39] In this respect, Grewal argues, "the *Dasam Granth* elaborates and reinforces the idea present in the compositions of Guru Nanak that God protects his saints and destroys the wicked."[40] In line with the teachings of Guru Nanak the tenth Guru proclaims: Akal Purakh is supremely just, exalting the devout followers and punishing the wicked. In the everlasting cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, Akal Purakh intervenes in human history to restore the balance in favor of those who wage war on behalf of the good. From time to time particular individuals are chosen to act as agents of God in the struggle against the evil forces. Defining his mission in his autobiographical *Bachitar Natak* ("Wondrous Drama") the Guru firmly believed that he was such an agent of God: "For this purpose I was born in this world. The divine Guru (*gurdev*) has sent me to uphold righteousness (*dharam*), to extend the true faith everywhere and to destroy the evil and sinful."[41]

Guru Gobind Singh identifies Akal Purakh with the Divine Sword in the celebrated canto of *Bachitar Natak*:

> Thee I invoke, All-conquering Sword,
>   Destroyer of evil, Ornament of the brave.
> Powerful your arm and radiant your glory,
>   Your splendor as dazzling as the brightness of
> the sun.
> Joy of the devout and Scourge of the wicked,
>   Vanquisher of sin, I seek your protection.
> Hail to the world's Creator and Sustainer,
>   My invincible Protector the Sword.
>
> (*Dasam Granth*, p. 39, McLeod's translation)

Similarly, the 'divinity' is addressed as 'all-steel' (*sarb loh*) or as the 'revered sword' (*sri bhagauti*), a mode of expression that reveals "a dark and turbulent presence which is only ever encountered through the convulsive events of battle and love, birth and death."[42] In his celebrated *Jap Sahib* ("Master Recitation") Guru Gobind Singh proclaims: "I bow to you, the one who wields weapons that soar and fly. I bow before you, Knower of all, Mother of all the earth" (verse 52).[43] Thus the divine Being is a great warrior who wields weapons of all kinds. But before he uses those weapons he has the perfect knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. And, during the battle he does not fight savagely with

anger but with the nurturing presence of the mother whose aim is to reform her children who have gone astray.

There are some important issues that need to be addressed from the perspective of ritual studies with respect to the original Khalsa *amrit* ceremony. Was it really an initiation ceremony? Or, was it the ceremony of enthronement to the exalted status of the Khalsa with its power and authority? A careful examination of an ancient Indic practice of 'enthronement ceremony' (*rajasuya*) reveals that some elements of the original *amrit* ceremony had parallel with it.[44] But most of the features had principal Sikh components such as the recitations of five liturgical prayers. Indeed, the 'Double-edged Sword' (*khanda*) became the central article in the Khalsa *amrit* ceremony. Three significant issues were linked with it. First, all who chose to join the Order of the Khalsa through the ceremony were understood to have been "reborn" in the house of the Guru and thus to have assumed a new identity. The male members were given the surname *Singh* ("lion") and female members were given the surname *Kaur* ("princess"[45]), with the intention of creating a parallel system of aristocratic titles in relation to the Rajput hill chiefs of the surrounding areas of Anandpur. From that day onwards, Guru Gobind Singh was their spiritual father and his wife, Sahib Kaur, their spiritual mother. Their birthplace was Kesgarh Sahib (the gurdwara that commemorates the founding of the Khalsa) and their home was Anandpur, Punjab. This new sense of belonging conferred on the Khalsa a new collective identity.

Second, the Guru symbolically transferred his spiritual authority to the Cherished Five when he himself received the nectar of the double-edged sword from their hands and thus became a part of the Khalsa Panth and subject to its collective will. In this way he not only paved the way for the termination of the 'office of a personal Guru' but also abolished the institution of *masands*, which was becoming increasingly disruptive. Several of the *masands* had refused to forward collections to the Guru, creating factionalism in the Sikh Panth. In addition, Guru Gobind Singh removed the threat posed by the competing seats of authority when he declared that the Khalsa should have no dealings with the followers of Prithi Chand (Minas), Dhir Mal (Guru Har Rai's elder brother, who established his seat at Kartarpur, Jalandhar) and Ram Rai (Guru Harkrishan's elder brother, who established his seat at Dehra Dun). Indeed, abandoning these five reprobate groups (*panj mel*) led to the "greater awareness of boundaries and a heightened consciousness of identity."[46]

Finally, Guru Gobind Singh delivered the nucleus of the Rahit ("Code of Conduct") at the inauguration of the Khalsa. By sanctifying the hair with amrit, he made it "the official seal of the Guru," and the cutting of "bodily hair" was thus strictly prohibited. The Guru further imposed a rigorous ban on smoking. In addition, he made the wearing of "five

weapons" (*panj hathiar*) such as sword, disc, arrow, noose and gun obligatory for the Khalsa Sikhs: "Appear before the Guru with five weapons on your person" (*hathiar panje bann ke darsan avana*).[47] This injunction must be understood in the militaristic context of the contemporary situation.

McLeod proposed the hypothesis that all the 'Five Ks' [Beginning with the Punjabi letter 'K', these five Khalsa symbols are known by the collective term *panj kakke*, or 'Five Ks', that is, *kes* or 'uncut hair', *kangha* or 'wooden comb', *kara* or 'wrist-ring', *kirpan* or 'miniature sword' and *kachhaira* or 'a pair of breeches which must not reach below the knees'] came from the Jat cultural patterns in combination with the developments of eighteenth century (ESC, p. 51). Grewal however maintains that "on the point of 5Ks McLeod's hypothesis, essentially, does not hold good."[48] He agrees with McLeod that explicit references to 5Ks are rather late. But to assume that the 5Ks were introduced in the eighteenth century is wrong. Grewal further argues that it is necessary to make a distinction between the formulation and its substantive prototypes. Undoubtedly, "the formulation came later but the substantive symbols were there from the time of instituting the Khalsa."[49] Instructively, all these five items were there in the eighteenth-century literature in the scattered form. Elsewhere, I have argued that the formulation of the convention of the "Five Ks" became evident from the literature produced as a result of Singh Sabha's new definition of orthodoxy. Although these substantive symbols were already there in the early tradition, their formalization in the late nineteenth century enhanced their value.[50]

The social constituency of the Sikh Panth during the period of Guru Gobind Singh was quite diversified. In addition to the Jats among the rural people there were many artisan groups in the congregation such as Ramgariahs who built the fortified structures of ancient buildings at Anandpur, reflecting Guru Gobind Singh's warfare strategies. In a similar vein, the Vanjaras manufactured the weapons used by the Khalsa army. An ethnographic study of Vanjaras in Southern India highlights the fact that they were part and parcel of the Sikh Panth since the period of Guru Hargobind or even before. It is no coincidence that Makhan Shah Lubana and Lakhi Shah Vanjara were associated with the life of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the former for identifying and supporting the 'real Guru' in the face of the severe threat posed by pretenders and the latter for cremating his headless body at Delhi in 1675. Indeed, both have become an integral part of the cultural memory of the Sikh Panth for their roles at crucial moments of Sikh history. Similarly, Bhai Mani Singh's five sons – Ude Singh, Bachitter Singh and others – received the Khalsa initiation in 1699 and laid down their lives fighting for the Guru. All these eminent Vanjara Sikhs had a long association with the Sikh Panth. Thus the fusion of Khatri, Jat, Ramgariah, Rajput and Vanjara cultures created a

new and most powerful synthesis, one that prepared the Panth for a determined role in the chaotic circumstances of the eighteenth century. In response to McLeod's hypothesis, this modified understanding reflects the cultural diversity of the Sikh Panth.

<div align="center">VI</div>

In the process of institutionalization a radical ideology becomes the orthodoxy and a revolutionary movement becomes an establishment. Through the process of the 'routinization of charisma' and the systematic codification of the way to liberation, a new religious tradition is born.[51] Guru Nanak's creative ideas and strategies at Kartarpur triggered the process of institutionalization under his successors. Considering his specific ethical formulations as a viable model of a new social organization I have argued elsewhere that Guru Nanak's ideology contained a singular appeal that might be understood in terms of 'prophecy' in Max Weber's sense of the term. Thus, there is a need to understand Guru Nanak's message as a special form of human expression specifically relevant to the re-structuring of the society according to a distinctive 'creative strategy' that was able to resolve certain 'tensions' of meaning and collective identification that the existing systems of thought could not address. In this context, Guru Nanak's rejection of the prevailing orthodoxies of both Islam and Hindu tradition provided an alternative spiritual paradigm that became the basis of social reconfiguration according to divinely sanctioned normative principles. The very survival of his message over many generations and historical periods is a testimony to its unique qualities of continued relevance.[52]

Just as ideology represents a discourse of meaning in a society, so Guru Nanak's message became the principal motivating factor in the process of institutionalization. The sober integration of his thought facilitated and lent authority to the efforts of the subsequent Gurus to institutionalize it. The quest for normative self-definition was linked with the emergence of a new kind of doctrinal self-identification among Sikhs in the early phase of history. Based initially on religious ideology, however, the distinctive Sikh identity was reinforced with the introduction of distinctly Sikh liturgical practices, ceremonies, holy sites, and the compilation of an authoritative scripture. In particular, the Adi Granth advocated the doctrine of the unity of Akal Purakh, an uncompromising monotheism in which there was no place for incarnation or idol-worship. It provided a framework for the shaping of a text-centered community and hence it was a decisive factor for Sikh self-definition. As 'an organizer, systematizer, formalizer', to use Wilfred Cantwell Smith's terminology, Guru Arjan played an extremely important role in the process of crystallization.[53]

   McLeod himself acknowledged that in certain respects the information contained in *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* has been overtaken by later research, mentioning specifically that the material relating to the Adi Granth contained in chapter 4, 'The Sikh Scriptures', "has been greatly expanded by the recent work of Pashaura Singh and Gurinder Singh Mann."[54] Employing the method of textual analysis from his own training in biblical studies, McLeod entered into the so-called Kartarpur-Banno debate on the original text of the Adi Granth. He raised the issue of the incomplete nature of Guru Arjan's *Ramakali* hymn, which in its Banno version alluded to the puberty rites conducted at the initiation of his son Hargobind, involving the shaving of his head. This obviously went against the later Khalsa prohibition of hair-cutting. Following the assumption that there was a good reason for its deletion from the Kartarpur text, McLeod cautiously lent his support to the hypothesis that the Banno version was the original text and that the Kartarpur manuscript was its shortened version: "This hymn describes the puberty rites conducted by Guru Arjan at the initiation of his son Hargobind. The rites follow a standard Hindu pattern and in the third stanza there is a reference to the manner in which the boy's head was shaved …The conclusion which seemed to be emerging with increasing assurance was that the widely disseminated Banno version must represent the original text; and that the Kartarpur manuscript must be a shortened version of the same text" (ESC, p. 77).

   McLeod was not able to examine the Kartarpur manuscript himself. He speculated that the Khalsa ideals could have provided the motive for the deletion of the additional portion of the *Ramakali* hymn in the Kartarpur manuscript. I personally examined the Kartarpur manuscript on 14 May 1990 in detail. Therefore, I can confirm that while there is a blank space of more than two folios after the opening verse of the *Ramakali* hymn on folio 703/1, there is no evidence of any erasure or any other kind of deletion. If there were such a deletion, it would support the claim that the Banno text may actually represent an earlier recension than the Kartarpur text. This is simply not the case because upon close examination we now know that there is no actual deletion. Thus McLeod's hypothesis was a clear case of retrospective interpretation which could not be convincingly applied to explain the early seventeenth-century Sikh situation. In fact, the question of later deletion in this instance cannot be taken seriously since there are a number of seventeenth-century manuscripts of the Adi Granth that do not contain the extra material of the Banno version. Also, the assumption that the hymn is somehow related to the puberty rites of Guru Hargobind cannot be sustained.[55] After reading my arguments, McLeod wrote to me in a personal communication: "It provides what I have so long sought, namely a thorough competent textual analysis of certain portion of Sikh scriptures. In the course of so doing you have at last answered the

question which I was raising (all of sixteen years ago) of Guru Arjan's two lines in *Ramakali* raga. Prior to this no one had provided me with a satisfactory answer to my concerns. Now, however, that answer has been provided" (Personal letter, 1 May 1991).

The next issue relates to the social constituency of the Panth which was far from being homogenous. Diverse groups from both urban and rural backgrounds comprised the Panth. While the urban Sikhs had taken Sikhism beyond Punjab in the major cities of India and Afghanistan, the rural headquarters of the Gurus attracted the local population within the fold of Sikhism. A radical egalitarianism of the Gurus' teachings was the main attraction behind the extensive Jat allegiance to the Panth. Sikh community self-consciousness was further heightened by the in-group conflict created by dissenters and slanderers. The external conflict with the local Mughal authorities provided another challenge to the Sikh Panth. McLeod maintained that after the period of ten Sikh Gurus the need to meet the internal and external challenges was provided by cohesive ideals and institutions in the Sikh Panth.

Before he passed away in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh terminated the line of personal Gurus and installed the Adi Granth as the eternal Guru for the Sikhs. Thereafter, the authority of the Guru was invested together in the scripture (Guru Granth) and the corporate community (Guru Panth). The twin doctrine of Guru-Granth and Guru-Panth successfully played a cohesive role within the Sikh tradition during the eighteenth century. The *gurmata* ('intention of the Guru') system provided an effective means of passing resolutions in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. In his analysis McLeod argued that the doctrine of Guru-Panth became current first and then the doctrine of Guru-Granth emerged in response to the needs of the Sikh community. This is questionable. Even a lay Sikh knows that the doctrine of Guru-Panth cannot function without the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. Grewal aptly remarks that "these two doctrines appear to be the two sides of the same coin of authority" and that "both had their immediate basis in the injunction of Guru Gobind Singh, and both crystallized in the eighteenth century."[56]

To consolidate his power Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) abolished political *gurmatas* in 1809 and downplayed the doctrine of Guru-Panth in order to reconcile the growing inequalities in the Panth. Grewal has observed that "every Sikh was equal in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, in the *sangat* [congregation], and the *langar* [community kitchen], but in the life outside social differences were legitimized."[57] Thus the process was set in motion by which the doctrine of Guru-Granth came to the fore in place of the doctrine of Guru-Panth. It gained further momentum during the Singh Sabha period. In this context, McLeod remarked that "the doctrine of the corporate Guru effectively lapsed and an undisputed primacy was assumed by the

scriptural Guru theory, a primacy which continues to this day" (ESC, p. 45).

As the chief of the Sikh pilgrimage centers Amritsar has played an important cohesive role in Sikh history (ESC, p. 53). The installation of the first authoritative text of the Adi Granth in the Darbar Sahib ('Court of the Divine Sovereign', present-day Golden Temple) in 1604 enhanced its centrality in Sikh life. It marked the beginning of a distinctive Sikh ceremony of conferring royal honor upon the scripture when it was installed ceremonially early in the morning at the central place of Sikh worship. As a result, the city of Ramdaspur emerged as a new "power center" in its own right. Here, Guru Arjan had established the divine rule of justice and humility (*halemi raj*) where people enjoyed comfortable living, fired with the spirit of fearlessness, dignity and self-respect. They strongly believed that they were under the protection of God, the Sovereign of sovereigns. In particular, the eight *chaunkis* ("sittings") of devotional singing at the "Divine Court" filled the hearts of the devotees with the mystery of the divine presence. These liturgical sessions played a dominant role in reinforcing the centrality of the Darbar Sahib in Sikh life. The contemporary Sikh bards sang eulogistic songs of the majesty of the Sikh court in regal metaphors. No one can deny the pointedly political overtones of the very phrase "the divine rule," referring to radically subversive, socially revolutionary and politically dangerous interpretations of Guru Arjan's lived experience.[58]

Although Amritsar lost its primacy when Guru Hargobind moved to the Shivalik Hills in 1634 and it fell into the hands of the followers of Prithi Chand (*Minas*, "scoundrels") for about seven decades, it regained its original status by becoming the 'rallying point' for the Sikhs in the eighteenth century. The appearance of the Golden Temple today owes a great deal to the generous patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Most importantly, the sacred sounds of devotional singing of the Guru's hymns (*Gurbani Kirtan*) resonate inside the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar every day. The beginning of twenty-first century ushered in a new era of televised broadcasting of those sacred sounds throughout the world with the help of Zee TV's Global platform, the *ETC Channel Punjabi* network.[59] Notably, the live broadcast of *Gurbani Kirtan* from the Golden Temple is viewed by millions of Sikh devotees on every continent of the planet from 4.30 am to 8.30am in the morning and from 4.30pm to 6.30pm in the evening. This service is unprecedented in the world of broadcasting as the Golden Temple is the only place of worship where a permanent Earth station is in place with a satellite dish, up-linking equipment and editing controls.[60] It is no wonder that the daily routine of *kirtan* at Golden Temple has become a significant factor in the evolution of Sikhism in a global context.

During the British rule the dominant Sikh response to modernity was conditioned by the need to enforce clear definitions of authority and

community in the face of the double challenge of colonialism and of neo-Hinduism.[61] The main impetus behind this response was to secure permanent control of Sikh institutions in the Punjab. The effect of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 was to make available to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC, "Chief Management Committee of Sikh Shrines") and thus to Akali Dal the enormous political and economic benefits that came from control of the gurdwaras. A government within a government was created as the price of a restored acceptance of the British among Sikhs.[62] In the course of time the SGPC became the "authoritative voice" of the Sikhs. As a democratic institution it has always represented the majority opinion. As such, it has laid the claim to represent the authority of the "Guru-Panth," although it has been frequently challenged by Sikhs living outside the Punjab. In order to maintain its control over the large Sikh community, it invokes the authority of the Akal Takhat in Amritsar, which is the seat of religious and temporal authority among the Sikhs. The Akal Takhat may issue edicts (*hukam-namas*) that provide guidance or clarification on any aspect of Sikh doctrine or practice. It may punish any person charged with a violation of religious discipline or with activity "prejudicial" to Sikh interests and unity, and it may place on record individuals who have performed outstanding service or made sacrifices for the sake of the Sikh cause.

Finally, McLeod asserted that in terms of formal religious observances and personal piety the gurdwaras around the world have always provided a strong bond of panthic unity. Although these institutions provide a focus for genuine personal devotion and for a continuing loyalty to traditional forms, they also serve as an arena for disruptive political strife at the same time (ESC, pp. 57-8). The gurdwaras have their own managing committees. Each congregation (*sangat*) is a democratic community. Because there are no priests or ordained ministers, lay people actively participate in the various functions of a gurdwara on a voluntary basis. Each gurdwara, however has an official *granthi*, or "reader" of the Sikh scriptures, who is responsible for conducting its routine rituals. As with other Sikh institutions, gurdwaras play a central role in community life by making it more religiously and culturally homogenous. They offer a wide variety of educational and cultural programs, such as the teaching and perpetuation of the Punjabi language and of Sikh music and songs among new generations. Some gurdwaras operate a Sikh version of a Sunday school, where children are given formal instruction in the tenets of Sikhism, while others support Sikh charitable and political causes. Although the institution of the gurdwara serves as a rallying point and an integrative force for the Sikh community, the management of its affairs sometimes becomes a bone of contention between different groups. That happens because the members of the gurdwara committee often use their position

to enhance their own image in the wider society. Thus factional politics in gurdwara affairs can have a divisive effect in the community, and are usually based on personalities, not issues. Paradoxically, this factionalism may result in greater long-term community solidarity, because it forcefully draws people's attention to get involved in community affairs. It also leads to the building of more than one gurdwara in one location, serving the needs of different factions. In the absence of an external threat, however, this factionalism seriously weakens the community's ability to work toward a unified goal.

<p style="text-align:center">VII</p>

In concluding the discussion of this essay, it may be stated that McLeod presented historical facts as telling of a single narrative, while recent scholarship maintains that historical facts do not lead to one story but interpretation of such facts to create various versions of the history and therefore 'critical histories'. He maintained that history and documentation could prove the single line of causality. His constant struggle with Sikh sources was to define a singular methodology as relevant to scholarly enquiry, which can be identified as historical teleology. Such an approach privileges the scholar's 'historically accurate' account over the memories of the followers of a religion and plays down the 'tradition' handed down from the past. In fact, tradition is the active enlivening of the present through links with the past. But central to the concept of tradition is memory, especially group memory passed down through the generations. In particular, the concept of group memory has found increasing currency among historians, and anthropologists, and in the mass media. This concept conveys the dynamic aspect of narration, which is never just a recollection but also the act of recollecting. The group memories frequently offer different narratives of the past.

   Calendars count years but narratives serve to describe the link between the past and the present. Motivated by shared interest in the past, groups derive roughly consensual group memories from individual memories. Groups shape and reshape these memories inter-subjectively through discourse and may communicate versions to successive generations.[63] As group interests change, so can the narratives that reflect them. In other words, group memories vary according to specific strategies of authorization, verification, and transmission that are deliberately adopted to express particular interests.[64] Obviously, written documents emerge from the 'struggle of memory against forgetting'. In addition, there are other issues related to the complexity of the idea of 'forgetting' and the power in silence. At times knowledge of the past becomes a dangerous thing and its proponent maintains a determined 'silence' for the sake of survival. This is how people conceal the past to

protect themselves from reprisals. One must acknowledge that history and memory are as much about repression and suppression as they are about creation and recollection.[65] In fact, the control of voices on historical knowledge has always been critical and remains critical in all sorts of settings. As David William Cohen remarks: "The processing of the past in societies and historical settings all over the world, and the struggles for control of voices and texts in innumerable settings which often animate the processing of the past, this we term the *production of history*."[66] It is no wonder that the powerful erase those out of power from public consciousness and forge the collective memory that they select.

In sum, Sikhism has had and continues to have a seemingly unending number of dominant, institutional, regional, national, and local expressions of faith in constant dynamic relationship with one another, continually influencing each other and defining and redefining what it has meant and continues to mean to be a Sikh in different places around the globe. There is a need to adopt an inclusive approach in historical analysis which allows the multiplicity of Sikh voices throughout the Sikh World today and throughout Sikhism's history to be heard without privileging any singular one. The best tribute to McLeod's 'objective scholarship' can be paid when we explore new ways of knowing the past and complement historical data with ethnographic study that can illuminate the lived experience of the Sikh community. In more recent studies 'religion' is not considered a purely interior impulse secreted away in the human soul and limited to private sphere, nor an institutional force separable from other non-religious or secular forces in the public domain. Rather, all the public-private, religion-politics, and church-state dichotomies have come under the powerful critique of postmodern and postcolonial studies. It has been suggested that such dichotomies, rather than describing reality as it is, justify a certain configuration of power. The idea that "religion has a tendency to cause violence – and is therefore to be removed from public power – is one type of this essentialist construction of religion."[67] Not surprisingly, Sikh doctrine of *miri-piri* -- symbolizing the 'temporal' as well the 'spiritual' investiture – explicitly affirms that religion and politics are bound together. In McLeod's words, religious issues must be defended in the political arena and political activity must be conducted in accordance with traditional religious norms.[68]

Notes

[1] W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), chs. 1 and 3.

[2]W.H. McLeod, *Sikhism* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 116.

[3] See W.H. McLeod's autobiographical narrative in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Sikhism and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9.

[4] Christopher Rowland, "Social, Political, and Ideological Criticism," in J.W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 656.

[5] Ibid., p. 657.

[6] Ibid., p. 656.

[7] J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1998), p. 168.

[8] Ibid., p. 126.

[9] Ibid., p. 300.

[10] Ibid, p. 300.

[11] Ibid., p. 227.

[12]For instance, see June O'Connor, "Pulpit and Podium," *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 2003): 63-4.

[13] Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations*, p. 16.

[14] W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 161.

[15] Ibid.

[16] W.H. McLeod, *The Sikhs: History, Religion, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 31.

[17] M1, *Ramakali Siddh Gost 36*, AG, p. 942.

[18] McLeod, *The Sikhs*, p. 28.

[19] Ibid., p. 29.

[20] W.H. McLeod, *Exploring Sikhism: Aspects of Sikh Identity, Culture, and Thought* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 29.

[21] W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), p. 96.

[22] McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, p. 230.

[23] Ravidas, *Gauri 2*, AG, p. 345.

[24] Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations*, pp. 300-301.

[25] Cited in ibid., p. 173.

[26] Ibid., p. 177.

[27] Ibid., p. 178.

[28] Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), p. 22.

[29] See my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory, and Biography in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 224-28.

[30] Nonica Datta, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 23.

[31] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd revised edition, 1999; originally published, 1963), p. 230.

[32] Cited in ibid., p. 123, n. 57.

[33] For instance, see M 1, *Basant Hindol 1*, AG, p. 1171: "Make (service with) the hands your wheel, and focused attention the chain and the buckets, and yoke the mind like the bullock, to work the well. Irrigate your body with the divine nectar, and this way the Gardener, your God, will own you." Also see ibid., p. 123, n. 59.

[34] The photographs of the original structure of the pool at Thatte Khera may be seen in Gurmeet Rai and Kavita Singh, "Brick by Sacred Brick: Asrchitectural Projects of Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind," in Kavita

Singh, ed., *New Insights into Sikh Art*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2003): 36-7.

[35] Ganda Singh, *Guru Arjan's Martyrdom*, p. 27.

[36] See his Foreword to my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, p. x. In her review of my book, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh observes: "I find it significant that Professor Hew McLeod (who doubted the martyrdom in his *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford, 1975, p. 3) now agrees with Pashaura Singh. In his forward to his book, McLeod acknowledges and honors the Guru "who was cruelly executed while being held by the Mughal authorities in Lahore." See *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture and Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (December 2007).

[37] J. D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1955 [1849]), p. 34.

[38] Jagjit Singh, *Perspectives on Sikh Studies* (New Delhi: Guru Nanak Foundation, 1985), p. vii.

[39] Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations*, p. 178.

[40] Ibid.

[41] *Shabadarath Dasam Granth Sahib*, Volume I (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1973), p. 74.

[42] Navdeep Mandair, "An Approximate Difference," *Sikh Formations*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (December 2009): p. 91.

[43] Translation is taken from W.H. McLeod, *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 69.

[44] See, for instance, the enthronement ceremony of Sri Ram Chandra at Ayodhya after 14 years of exile in the *Ramayana* film series. The principal priest asks for the holy water from different sacred rivers which Hanuman brings in time in a brass container. Then the priests pour handfuls of water over Sri Ram Chandra's head to sanctify his hair number of times with the recitation of Vedic mantras.

[45] Doris Jakobsh's article ("What's in a Name?" in *Sikhism and History*, ed. Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier, OUP 2004, pp. 176-93) presents the argument that "Kaur" as nomenclature for Sikh women was part of the Singh Sabha project in the twentieth century. However, we have evidence that "Kaur" was used by Sikh women in the pre-modern times (Guru Har Rai's daughter's name was Bibi Rup Kaur and then there were Sada Kaur, Raj Kaur, Mehtab Kaur, Rup Kaur and so on). The actual practice was already there, though the formulation of the convention may have come as the result of Singh Sabha reforms.

[46] J.S. Grewal, *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1997), p. 30.

[47] Ganda Singh, ed., *Hukam-name* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), pp. 179, 194.

[48] Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations*, p. 184.

[49] Ibid., p. 303.

[50] See my "Formulation of the Convention of the Five Ks: A Focus on the Evolution of the Khalsa Rahit," *International Journal of Punjab Studies,* Vol. 6, No. 2, (1 July 1999): 155-169.

[51] Roger O'Toole, *Religion: Classic Sociological Approaches* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1984), p. 168.

[52] See my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, p. 198.

[53] Ibid.

[54] See his introduction to an omnibus volume of his four classic works in W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. viii. For detailed analysis of the issues related to the Sikh scriptures, see Pashaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib: Canon, Meaning and Authority* (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2000) and Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[55] See my *The Guru Granth Sahib*, pp. 114-122.

[56] Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations*, p. 304.

[57] J.S. Grewal, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 118.

[58] See my *Life and Work of Guru Arjan*, p. 128.

[59] Vijay N. Shankar and Ranvir Bhatnagar, "ETC Channel Punjabi: Gurbani for the World," in *The Golden Temple: A Gift to Humanity – 400 Years of The Guru Granth Sahib* (Gurgaon, Haryana: Ranvir Bhatnagar Publications, 2004), pp. 172-73. Gurbani Kirtan started being shown live from the Golden Temple in 2001.

[60] Ibid., p. 172.

[61] Christopher Shackle, "Sikhism," in Linda Woodhead et al. eds., *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 83.

[62]Ian J. Kerr, "Sikhs and State," in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1999), p. 166.

[63] For details, see Peter Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity Narratives from Village India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 5-6.

[64] Ibid., p. 7.

[65] David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 7.

[66] Ibid., p. 4.

[67] R. Scott Appleby, "Fire and Sword: Does Religion Promote Violence?" in *Commonweal*, Volume CXXXVII, No. 7 (April 9, 2010): 13.

[68] McLeod, "The Role of Sikh Doctrine and Tradition in the Punjab Crisis," in *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and Society*, p. 99.