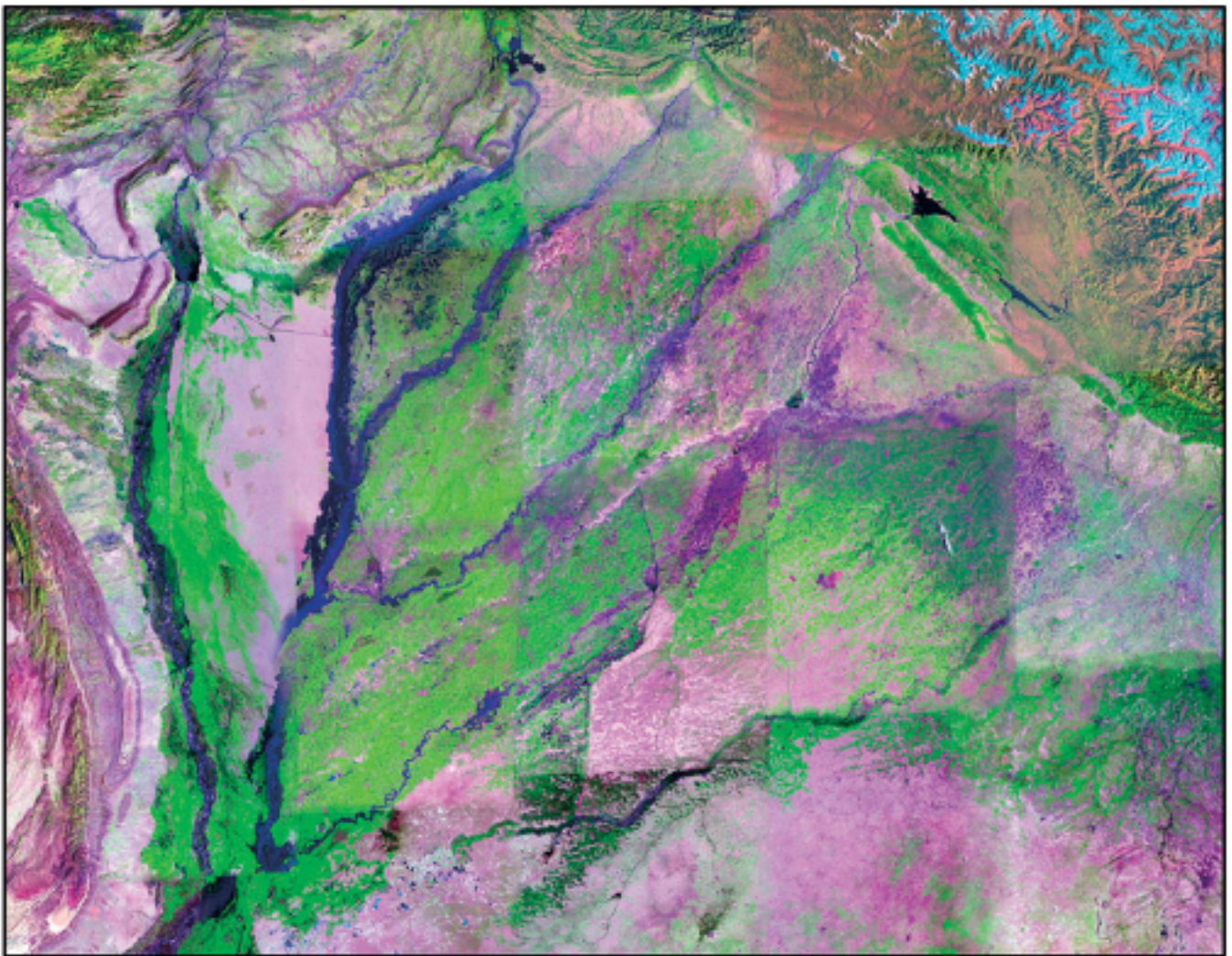


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## **JOURNAL OF PUNJAB STUDIES**

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## ***Editorial Note***

This issue of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* reflects the research being done in the universities and institutes at Chandigarh, Amritsar, Patiala, Shimla, Delhi and Baroda. Altogether, it covers a wide span of time, from the protohistoric period to the first decade of the present century, and studying the entire north-western region as well as its sub-regions in the plains and the hills, reflecting the distinctiveness of their historical experience in the larger context of Indian history.

In the first essay, Chetan Singh discusses how a hegemonic system was created in the Western Himalaya by integrating the local cults of villages and chiefdoms with the 'great tradition' of Brahmanical Hinduism, presided over by the *raja*. J.S. Grewal makes sense of the disparate facts and places in Ganesh Das's *Char Bagh* to reconstruct a coherent picture of socio-cultural configuration in the pre-colonial Punjab. Karamjit Malhotra throws light on the processes by which new gender norms were being formulated for the Sikh social order and community life in the eighteenth century. A comparative analysis of the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain* by Mini Sandhu shows that the change in the relative position and role of women designed by the male reformers was significantly different from the aspirations of the women themselves as the objects of reform. Prem Chowdhry discusses how the reigning ideology of excluding women from inheriting property was constructed by the colonial state and how it is pitted against the implementation of post-Independence legislation in the south-east Punjab. While underlining the iconoclastic radicalism of Wazir Singh, a dalit poet, Raj Kumar Hans sees his life and work as a continuation of the medieval Sant movement into the nineteenth century Punjab. Anshu Malhotra's analysis of Giani Ditt Singh's life and work brings out the constraints of a dalit intellectual in dealing with the debilitating institution of caste within the framework of the Lahore Singh Sabha. Sheena Pall's discussion of the Sanatanist assertion that Sikhs are Hindu and of its comprehensive rejoinder by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha underscores the persistent refusal of the Punjabi Hindus to recognize Sikh identity. Sasha Tandon brings out the bearing of the colonial situation *per se* on the outbreak and handling of epidemics in the Punjab region. Sukhdev Singh Sohal discusses the underlying causes of the deepening food crisis and escalating inflation in the 1940s and attributes it mainly to the priorities and policies of the British. Delineating the urban patterns in the Punjab region from the mature Indus phase to the end of the twentieth century, Reeta Grewal finds the changes in urban landscape under the British significant enough to be considered revolutionary, brought about by the Western technology subserving the demands of the colonial situation.

As an exercise in 'second order history', the last essay dwells on the growing richness of historical writings on the Sikhs and the emergence of controversies over nearly all the important aspects of Sikh Studies today. This essay focuses

on J.S. Grewal's position on the issues under debate but its bearing is evident on some other contributions as well. Incidentally, nearly half of the essays in this volume relate to Sikh history which, by now, has acquired autonomy of its own, partly because of its scope, complexity and sophistication, and partly because interest in the Sikh past began much earlier than in Punjab history.

Even when all the contributions are located in the discipline of history, there are significant differences of approach. Reliance on theory is explicit in some and implicit in others, though a few rely more on empirical evidence. Some analyse contemporary literature for historical reconstruction; some take note of ideological underpinnings and some tend to minimise these. This diversity of approach is as much due to the standpoints of the authors as to the bearing of different allied disciplines: geography, archaeology, social anthropology, sociology, literature, philosophy, political science, economics and religious studies. Differences in approach and interpretation can be taken as a sign of the vitality of the field of Sikh and Punjab Studies.

While breaking fresh ground in different facets of the region's history these essays throw up several new questions. Views expressed by the authors are entirely their own. The Editor is thankful to them for their contributions.

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## **Constructing the State in the Western Himalaya**

**Chetan Singh**

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During the medieval period different states in the Himachal region passed through a broadly similar political process by which small ruling elite consolidated its position through a clever use of religion. The local cults of villages and chiefdoms in small river valleys were integrated with the 'great tradition' of Brahmanical Hinduism in a manner that created a complex hierarchy of deities at the village, intermediate and State levels. Their systematic incorporation in the socio-political system corresponded with the temporal hierarchies of authority in the State, and enabled the *raja* to exercise domination on behalf of the supreme deity who was invariably Visnu or his incarnation, brought into the hills by the Brahmins. Notwithstanding the local variations arising out of geographical and cultural differences and historical reasons, Sanskritization of State polity discussed in this paper resulted in a hegemonic system that outlasted even the monarchies that had initially created it.

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### **Introduction**

The expansive military campaigns that periodically steered historic empire-building activities in the north Indian plains through different historic periods must have been anxious times even for the rulers of the somewhat inaccessible principalities of the western Himalayan region of Himachal. As they watched these imperial endeavours with concern from the fringes, it probably became evident to them that military power alone could not ensure the longevity of states. Conquests had to be consolidated by establishing the legitimizing hegemony of a small ruling elite. This, it soon became apparent, was frequently achieved through the clever use of religion. The complex relationship between the diversity of local cults and Brahmanic religion was part of a process of political domination. The Himachal hills rulers realized quite early the usefulness of non-military, hegemonic control.

The 'great tradition' of Brahmanic Hinduism was previously seen as a superimposition upon local, non-Brahmanical belief systems. But this doctrinal supremacy of Brahmanism was neither complete nor unquestioned. While many essential elements of Brahmanical beliefs certainly permeated folk religious practices, the latter, too, transformed Brahmanic religion in different regions by compelling it to adapt and change.<sup>1</sup> So influential, indeed, seems to have been the varied local traditions that one can hardly talk of a homogenised Hinduism. Despite the overarching influence of Brahmanism, there appears to have been no reduction in the astonishing number of folk cults that flourished across South Asia. But this does not indicate that there existed explicit

distinctions between folk and Brahmanic traditions. The gods and rituals of the two 'traditions' usually addressed different, yet overlapping and complementary, concerns. Mandelbaum has termed these as 'transcendental' and 'pragmatic'.<sup>2</sup> He explains:

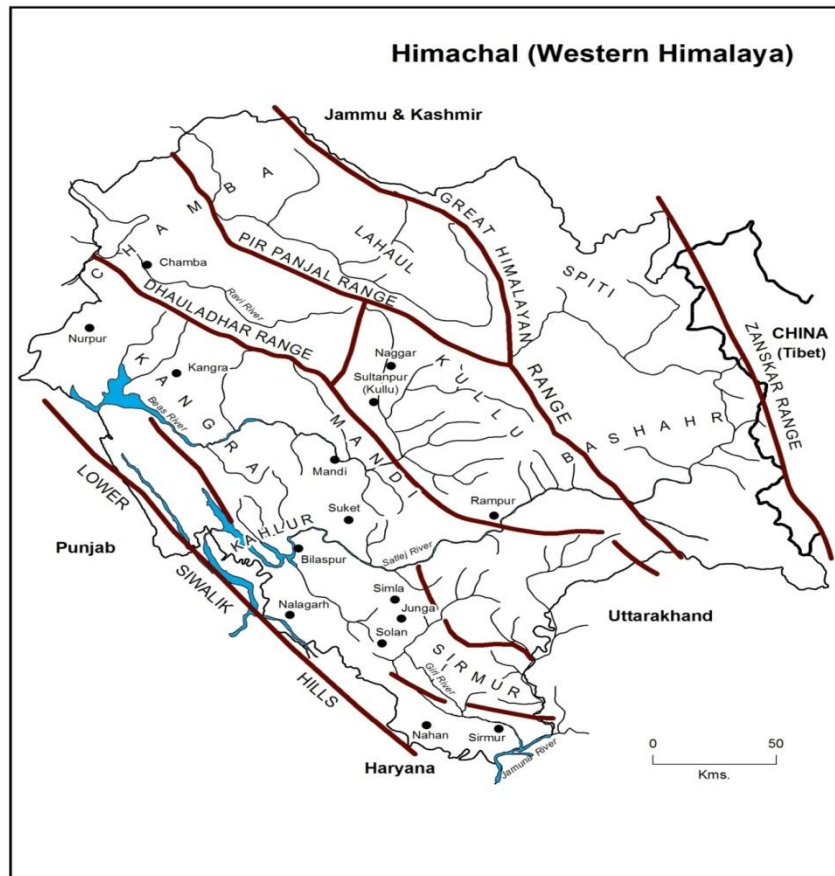
In India, the gods charged with the cosmic verities are not expected to attend to a baby's colic or a lost cow. Yet both baby and cow must be cared for, since they are part of the grand design. In India, answer is through specialization of function and hierarchical arrangement among supernaturals, as among men.<sup>3</sup>

More specifically, such hierarchies amongst gods and their wide range of functional specialisations (within the instrumental and spiritual aspects of life associated with the 'little' and 'great' traditions, respectively) formed the general structure of socio-political organization in Himachal. The State, too, was part of this terrestrial reflection of the cosmic order. In the overlap between governmental authority, social organization and religious sanction the rulers of the Himachal principalities played a central role. Upon them rested the responsibility of creating and maintaining an ordered world. But there were variations in the manner in which monarchical authority was locally constructed. There existed points of difference between the larger States and the tiny chiefdoms of the region.

### **Geography and Political Expansion**

The large States of Himachal were Chamba, Kulu, Mandi, Kangra, Bashahr, Kahlur and Sirmur. Perhaps the oldest and least mountainous of these was Kangra. It remained a dominant power in the area for most of the medieval period, till its annexation by Jahangir in the early seventeenth century. Throughout the seventeenth century Kangra was subject to direct Mughal rule. Because of its liminal position between the Punjab plains and the mountains, Kangra did not fully represent the typical Himalayan State. Chamba was another ancient State, but clearly more representative of western Himalayan polity than Kangra. Originally, the rulers of Chamba seem to have controlled only Brahmaur in the upper Ravi valley. Under Meruvarman (AD 680) and later under Sahilvarman (AD 920), Chamba established control over adjoining chiefdoms lower down in the valley.<sup>4</sup> It was here, on the right bank of the Ravi, that the capital town – Chamba – was finally established.





Most of the other large States, however, expanded during the medieval period through a long-drawn process of territorial conquest. The chronology of political expansion suggests that they originated as chiefdoms that first brought the main river valley under their control. Thereafter, the smaller tributary valleys were incorporated. As the expanding State reached out to these secluded valleys, the tiny political entities (*thakurais*) located here were either extinguished, or incorporated as feudatories of the newly emerging monarchical States.<sup>5</sup> There are references in the Chamba inscriptions of as early as AD 1160 and AD 1170 to some *ranas* having already acknowledged the suzerainty of Raja Lalita Varman. It is possible that these *ranas* also served as functionaries of the State. Under Balbhadra (AD 1589-1641), a large number of land grants and gifts were made to Brahmans. This certainly indicates that the formal 'Brahmanization' of the State political system had already taken place.

State formation in Kulu has a long history. But its expansion in medieval times took place under Raja Sidh Sen (AD 1500). His first victory was over a local *thakur* and this enabled him to capture territory that lay above the village of Jagatsukh, on both banks of the river Beas. Local tradition asserts that, thereafter he was elected as Raja of Waziri Parol. Subsequently, a rapid and significant expansion of the State occurred in the reign of Raja Bahadur Singh (AD 1532). During this period, the control of the Kulu ruler extended to Waziri Rupi, Shainshar Kothi, Makarsa in Hurla Khad (which actually functioned as Bahadur Singh's capital) and also Chaini Kothi. During the reign of Raja Jagat Singh (AD 1637-1672) the area lying on the right bank of the Beas – that was then the small kingdom of Lag – was annexed to Kulu. Kulu State, therefore, controlled extensive territory lying on both banks of the Beas. It was at this time that the Sanskritization of State polity apparently took place. Lord Raghunath became the state deity and was established as the ruler of the State while the Raja was declared his first servant. The capital, too, was transferred to Sultanpur from Naggar about 1660.

The State of Mandi expanded in a strikingly similar fashion. It grew out from the village of Manglaur (in Kulu) where the estranged brother of the Raja of Suket had earlier established himself as the *thakur*. Local tradition asserts that it was Kalian Sen (AD 1300) who first acquired the land at Batahuli across the river from Mandi. It was here that 'Old Mandi' was first established. Between 1332-1470, under Hira Sen and his successors, the endeavour of suppressing the numerous *ranas* and *thakurs* continued. The area that finally came to constitute the principality of Mandi was largely annexed by Ajbar Sen (AD 1500), and Mandi town was established in AD 1527. However, till as late as the reign of Narain Sen (AD 1575) several *ranas* remained in control of their separate territories, and it was only through the efforts of Raja Suraj Sen (AD 1637) that most of these *ranas* were finally defeated. During his reign – in a manner very similar to Kulu and at almost the same time – Lord Madho Rai was deemed as the formal ruler of the State of Mandi in 1648.

The expansion of each of these States mentioned above brought within their political ambit geographically distinct areas and people with different and long established socio-religious traditions. As mentioned earlier, people and territories could be militarily subjugated by the State. Establishing permanent dominance over vanquished people, however, presented an immensely more complex problem.

## **Religion**

### **The Mainstream**

All large States of Himachal invariably controlled an extensive part of an important river valley. The State capital was usually situated on the bank of the main river.<sup>6</sup> It was here that the *raja* resided and held court, and from where he exerted political control over the State. The centres of formal religious authority, too, were located in the main valley. Indeed, most of the important

temples dedicated to Brahmanical deities were initially built in the main river valleys.<sup>7</sup> A temple dedicated to Lakshana Devi had been built in the seventh century AD in the Ravi valley at Brahmaur, the ancient capital of Chamba.<sup>8</sup> By the tenth century AD the temples of Mani Mahesh and Narasimha too, had come into existence. At Chhatrarhi (also in Brahmaur area) a Shakti Devi temple was constructed in the seventh century AD. With the shifting of the capital to Chamba town, a large and impressive complex of temples dedicated to Visnu and Siva was raised at the new capital roughly between AD 920-1000.<sup>9</sup> Three of the temples in this complex were dedicated to Visnu, and three others to Siva. Even in Kulu State, several important Siva temples were constructed quite early at Jagatsukh, Bajaura, Naggar and Dashed, which are all places located in the main Beas valley. In the Satlej valley were built the Sun temple at Nirath, and the Dattatreya (Visnu) temple at Datnagar. Even the ancient village of Nirmand – with the temples of Parsuram, Ambika Devi and Dakhani Mahadeva – is situated in the Satlej valley. Political authority and religious orthodoxy were almost always located in the central valley along which the larger monarchies expanded and exercised complete control. Virtually all the extant copper plates of the Chamba rulers recording the grant of land to different individuals and institutions pertain to villages located in the Ravi valley.<sup>10</sup> The largest number of beneficiaries must have been either from the politically central areas of the State or Brahman immigrants in the service of the raja. This uneven distribution of copper plates certainly indicates the complete administrative control of the Chamba rulers over the Ravi valley, but it does not mean that their influence did not extend to the tributary valleys.<sup>11</sup>

We also need to factor in the possibility that religious processes that asserted the dominance of Brahmanic deities could also follow on the heels of larger sub-continental political developments. Brahmanism was not merely consequential to the emergence of large local States. Some land grants and temples at Nirmand and Nirath can be attributed to regional feudatories (*samantas*) who owed allegiance not to any hill ruler, but to an imperial power outside the region. In such cases, the areas falling under the sway of Brahmanism were situated at the fringes of an imperial authority located in the north Indian plains.

As a result of the Brahmanization of the main river valleys, there was a difference between a section of the ruling elite that resided in the capital and the influential groups and clans that inhabited the more distant territories but owed allegiance to the *raja* and the State. This was not simply the differential in access to political power. A social distinction was probably sought to be made. The elite in power claimed a higher caste status and adopted Sanskritized socio-religious practices. Its closer association with Vaisnavism seems to have distinguished the elite from the peasantry.<sup>12</sup> This was true of Chamba, but even more so of States such as Mandi, Kulu and Bashahr. Visnu, in one or another incarnation, was the presiding deity of many of these States and enjoyed a position superior to that of any other deity.<sup>13</sup> So close indeed, was the association of the ruling elite with Vaisnavism, and so clear its demarcation from popular religion, that the worship of Visnu does not appear

to have spread beyond a few politically important centres. Though this cult was probably introduced in Chamba as early as the tenth century AD, it remained virtually confined to the town of Chamba.<sup>14</sup> The same seems to have been the case in Mandi.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to one or the other incarnation of Visnu being declared as the supreme deity of most of the large States, each of the ruling families owed personal loyalty to a tutelary goddess (*kulaj*). The family goddess of the Chamba ruling house was Champavati<sup>16</sup> and that of the Mandi *raj*as was Sri Vidya.<sup>17</sup> Tripura Sundari of Naggar (and perhaps even to a greater extent Hidimba) occupied this position in the case of the Kulu rulers. The rulers of Bashahr state that bordered Tibet, and which had a substantial Buddhist population, had Bhima Kali as their family goddess..

From amongst the deities of the Hindu pantheon, Siva was by far the most extensively worshipped in the hills. Siva worship apparently prevailed in the region prior to the coming of Vaisnavism. Temples dedicated to Siva are found spread over a much wider area than those of any other deity.<sup>18</sup> It appears that local heterodox beliefs and practices, so typical of Himalayan Hinduism, were quite receptive to the growing popularity of Siva. Numerous village gods and local cults in Himachal became, by association, 'instrumental' extensions of a higher and more distant 'spiritual' Siva.<sup>19</sup> Through these linkages with smaller cults, Saivism established deep roots and became entwined with a network of diverse indigenous beliefs that collectively constitutes what is sometimes called the 'small tradition'.<sup>20</sup> In their occasional interaction with the Brahmanical order, these cults claimed a position within the Saivite tradition. At the village level, however, non-Brahmanical religious practices were central to the belief system of the community. They enabled the common peasant to approach the local deity to expeditiously address his immediate, rather mundane, concerns.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Hidden Valleys**

In the distant and almost hidden valleys of Himachal then, a pragmatic religion had been cobbled together. It centred on the village *deota* (god) and was rooted in the daily life and social organisation of the peasantry. Yet, it reflected a world-view that recognised the pre-eminence of the great gods of the Hindu tradition and the political system they legitimised.<sup>22</sup> A functional hierarchy of gods (*deotas*) is the most striking feature of Hinduism as it was, and still is, practised in Himachal. In this:

The key-stone is undoubtedly the *kul ka devta* or family god, and it is, therefore, unfortunate that the normal translation of *devta* as godling has obscured the prominent part he plays in the religious system of the hills. *Devta*, it is true, means literally a small god; but it is used not in the contemptuous sense conveyed by the expression godling, but to distinguish the minor deities from the *Devs* or mighty divinities who are too far removed from the daily worship of the people, whose

religion centres round the ancestral god. The jurisdiction of the latter is both personal and territorial. He exercises sway over the hamlet, group of villages or valley recognised from time immemorial as his domain....<sup>23</sup>

The mountain peasantry perceived and ordered the spiritual universe in the only way it knew – as an image that mirrored the temporal social order. Just as village headmen (*seanas*) were subservient to their *ranas* and *thakurs*, who in turn owed allegiance to the *raja*; so it was that village *deotas* were subordinate to a more powerful territorial god.<sup>24</sup> Territorial gods in turn, offered obeisance to the supreme deity of the State. In some instances an influential *deota* even had lesser *deotas* acting as his ministers, officials and door-keepers (*wazir*, *kotwal*, *dwarpala*, etc.). The latter, too, had shrines of their own and their importance is not to be underestimated. In the early decades of the last century (and this is also true today) it was observed that:

The *wazir* is sometimes a being of great importance, his shrine containing more votive offering than that of his master; but this is as it should be, for, as they say, the *wazir's* business is to deal with the ordinary affairs of the ordinary people and so relieve the god of the petty importunities of his subjects. If the underlings are sometimes arbitrary and tyrannical, they only follow the examples of their human counterparts.<sup>25</sup>

### **Hegemony**

Not surprisingly, an astonishing multiplicity of folk cults flourished and held sway in different parts of each State.<sup>26</sup> There also existed visible differences between the beliefs and practices of the ruling elite on the one hand, and the common people on the other. The political predicament before the State, therefore, was how to incorporate two apparently diverse world-views into one recognizable and acceptable cosmic order. This would then be an order that the monarch would claim to obey, uphold and implement in the material world. An effective solution to this problem emerged gradually in the form of a hegemonic, but flexible, socio-political system that drew heavily upon religion and religious symbolism.

This hegemonic system became possible because for the hill peasant the worlds occupied by the *deotas* and mortals were not insular. The devotees of a *deota* were regarded as his subjects (*raiyat*), and temporal relations between the subjects of different *deotas* were closely interwoven with the relationship of their respective *deotas* with each other.<sup>27</sup> Village *deotas* were invariably subordinate to a more powerful territorial deity even if there were occasional disagreements between them. As a result, their followers too, were drawn into a corresponding position of subservience. This was not where the matter rested. At the top of the pyramid of political and religious authority were situated the *raja* and the reigning deity of the State.

The annual Dushehra festival at Sultanpur, in Kulu, is the clearest exposition of how this sovereignty of the *raja* and the State deity over their realm was symbolically established and renewed. Thakur Raghunathji, the supreme deity of the State, mounted his chariot and was escorted by the *raja* to an open ground where all the *deotas* of the realm were assembled in their traditionally allotted places in a manner quite similar to courtiers. Obeisance was paid and allegiances were extracted. The traditional relationship between Lord Raghunath, the *raja* of Kulu, the *deotas* and the common subjects was reconfirmed at this annual enactment. It has been aptly described in the district gazetteer of 1917:

Once a year there is a great parade of all the *deotas* of Kulu in honour of the god Raghunath at Sultanpur, the ancient capital. In olden days they were brought in by the express command of the *Raja*, who seems to have been lord paramount of the gods as well as of the men of his kingdom, and this subservience of church to state still continues in the neighbouring independent state of Mandi. Doubtless it is based on the fact that the temples of the *deotas* possess endowments of land revenue which were held at the king's pleasure. The revenue of about one-seventh of the cultivated area of Kulu is alienated in this way, but now that it is held during the pleasure of the British Government the *deotas* are not so careful to pay their annual homage to Raghunath as formerly...<sup>28</sup>

An intricate network of hierarchically ordered deities stretched out to the remotest corners of the Himachal monarchies. Through it, the *rajās* exercised an influence of a kind, and in a manner, that even the most efficient administrative methods could hardly have matched. Former subjects of the isolated *thakurais* – once politically independent – were now politically bound to their monarchs, and their village *deotas* (or their territorial god) subordinated to the presiding deity of the State. This linking of Brahmanical Hinduism to the extremely influential cults of the 'little tradition' ideologically reinforced the dominance of the upper castes and the political authority of the monarchical State. This entwining of the *raja's* political pre-eminence with a 'spiritual hierarchy' between superior and inferior gods was probably based upon an older tradition: one that preceded the formation of a clearly monarchical State. In fact, there were some parts of Himachal where this older tradition appears to have persisted.

### **Chiefdoms and Intermediate Societies**

#### **Legitimacy and Legend**

It would be useful to look more closely at some of the smaller political entities. They apparently retained the characteristics of the old *thakurais* (chiefdoms)

that had in many parts of Himachal been subsumed by the larger, expanding monarchies. To stretch the argument further, the organization of these small *thakurais* probably represented a polity that preceded the larger States.<sup>29</sup> The difference between the two was not simply the extent of territory they controlled. The smaller states – or *thakurais* as they were termed – continued to draw legitimacy from local politico-religious traditions. These were folk traditions – as folk traditions often are – particularly rich in myths and legends.

An essential constituent of a society's historical consciousness is the constant need to establish an unbroken link with antiquity. In most pre-modern societies, myth, legend and folklore contributed significantly to the construction of this continuity. A collective 'memory' of the past despite being rooted in myths (and legend), commonly came to be accepted by society as its history.<sup>30</sup> Despite the differences that may exist between myths and legends an important factor common to both is that they are believed by the society in which they are prevalent to be an honest recounting of the past.<sup>31</sup>

The linkages between folklore, legend and myth can conceivably result in the emergence of a 'history' and a set of beliefs with which a community closely identifies and upon which it bases its socio-political system.<sup>32</sup> Communities acquire ethnic identities to distinguish themselves from other groups, but they also simultaneously create distinct norms and practices to facilitate their own internal integration. Defined geographical territory and a common language and forms of expression do contribute importantly to the initial emergence of ethnicity, even though the historical circumstances in which ethnicities have been nurtured are curiously diverse. In all societies, however, 'the imagining of the past was an ongoing creative process'.<sup>33</sup> The episodic reconstruction and reassertion of a common past by a community enabled it to pronounce itself as an entity rooted in antiquity. Like the sacred myths through which a society's links with antiquity were traced, its norms and values, too, were closely associated with folk tradition. The political order in the *thakurais* – especially the position of the chief – was strengthened by the legitimacy provided to it by popular cults.

The medieval *thakurais* of Himachal that had managed to survive as autonomous political entities till the early nineteenth century were administratively clubbed together by the British Government as the Simla Hill States. While Bashahr (a large State included among the Simla Hill States) was the exception that controlled territory on both sides of the river Satlej, the petty chiefdoms occupied only the watersheds of small tributaries of either the Satlej or the Giri rivers. Physiographically, therefore, these *thakurais* were either in the nature of a few mountain ridges and their flanks, or an almost bowl-like tract drained by small rivulets. They were difficult to access from the main river valleys, often occupied secluded niches that made them militarily and economically unattractive prizes for conquest by the larger States. This explains, albeit partly, their continued survival as *thakurais*. The example of one of the bigger chiefdoms – Keonthal – can be used to explain how the interweaving of religion, politics and geography created intermediate socio-political entities such as chiefdoms.

### Keonthal Thakurai

With the arrival of the British in the region during the first decade of the nineteenth century, the boundaries of some of the hill States underwent a change. Keonthal came to consist of eighteen *parganas* spread over six detached tracts.<sup>34</sup> This territorial fragmentation was the result of the *rana* surrendering some territory to the British, as payment due for military assistance provided to him for expelling the Nepalese invaders from Keonthal. In 1823, however, the detached *pargana* of Punar was given to Keonthal by the British government in lieu of additional land that the latter had taken over from the chiefdom. Sometime later, the British obtained some more land from Keonthal for the expansion of the newly established hill-station town of Shimla. As compensation, the *pargana* of Rawin was given to Keonthal in 1830.<sup>35</sup> The *pargana* of Rawin had originally been a separate *thakura*<sup>36</sup> with a long historical tradition of its own and its late incorporation into Keonthal prevented it from becoming part of the hegemonic system that had historically evolved in Keonthal.

The original territory of Keonthal consisted of two geographical tracts. The southern tract (*Halka Janubi*) in which the State capital of Junga was situated, consisted of ten *parganas*. Further north was the *Halka Shumali* or the northern tract. The villages of the core southern tract of the Keonthal coalesced around the religious cult of Junga. It was through this cult that the Keonthal rulers exercised a hegemonic influence over their chiefdom. Folk tradition traces the mythical origins of *deota* Junga to a disgruntled prince of Kutlehr. The prince left his home and came to Koti (where a branch of the Kutlehr family had earlier established a separate State) which shares its southern boundary with Keonthal. Subsequently, he disappeared mysteriously while crossing a forested ridge that separated the territories of Koti and Keonthal, only to reappear as a spirit. This marked the manifestation of *deota* Junga, who then proceeded to displace Jipur, the family deity (who was more in the nature of a *jathera* or ancestor) of the Keonthal *ranas*. By this usurpation Junga became the State deity: the suzerain of all other *deotas* in Keonthal.<sup>37</sup>

### Village Gods and Communities

There were twenty-two important village *deotas* – also called *tikas* (translated locally as ‘sons’ but could also mean princes)<sup>38</sup> – in Keonthal who stood immediately below *deota* Junga. These *deotas*, or *tikas*, of Junga were situated in different territories of Keonthal over which they wielded immense influence through clans of followers. However, even today no celebration or religious function can begin in the shrine of any subordinate *deota* without the permission of *deota* Junga. This consent is granted only after the customary dues from the *tikas* have been deposited in Junga’s treasury.

There existed a close connection between a dominant peasant clan and its *deota*. This association acquired a territorial dimension from the fact that a single clan of Kanet peasants was often concentrated in contiguous villages or



in a specific area.<sup>39</sup> Even the religious rituals and practices in many of the village temples were conducted, not by Brahmans, but by a Kanet peasant acting as a priest.<sup>40</sup> Territory, clan allegiance and religious affiliation, therefore, often overlapped. Festivals at the *deota*'s shrine were occasions on which large, yet well-knit, congregations from adjoining villages assembled. The Kanet peasantry exerted considerable influence over the manner in which the *thakurai* was governed. In order to maintain a political balance between different clans, Kanet clan-leaders occupied, by turns, the important administrative positions of the chiefdom.<sup>41</sup> This periodic re-distribution of public offices probably prevented any single clan from becoming too powerful. But a subtler, more powerful, force bound the Kanet peasantry to the *rana*. This was the spiritual authority of the chief deity Junga over the gods of the different peasant clans.

Ethnographic information recorded in the late nineteenth century about most of the twenty-two *tikas* of Junga, further illustrates the interconnections mentioned above.<sup>42</sup>

#### **Tikas of Deota Junga**

	<b>Junga Cults</b>	<b>Location of Temples</b>	<b>Followers</b>
1	Kalaur	Village Charej, <i>pargana Ratesh</i>	
2	Manuni	Hill of Manun (Manun is Mahadev)	Brahmans of Parali and Koti <i>dhar</i>
3	Kaneti	Village Dagon, by replacing Jipur	Bhaler clan of Kanets
4	Kulthi	Village Kawalath	Chibhar clan of Kanets
5	Dhanun	Village Neog	Brahmans
6	Dum	Village Katian, <i>Phagu tehsil</i>	Subordinate to <i>deota</i> Junga but independent elsewhere
7	Raita	<i>Pargana Parali</i>	Doli Brahmans
8	Chanana	Village Rawal	Image of Junga established by the people
9	Gaun		
10	Biju		
11	Deo Chand		<i>Jathera</i> (ancestor) of the Khanoga clan of Kanets
12	Shaneti		Dispute between two groups of Kanets (Painoi & Shainti).

			The latter established Shaneti
13	Mahanpha	Jatil <i>pargana</i>	Chibhar Kanets
14	Tiru		<i>Jathera</i> (ancestor) of the Jatik sept of Brahmans
15	Khateshwar	Village Koti	Brahmans of Bhakar
16	Chadei		Nawan clan of Kanets
17	Shanei and Jau	Village Koti	
18	Dhuru	Jai <i>pargana</i>	

### Territorial Allegiance

All *deotas* with shrines within the territory of Keonthal were subordinate to Junga.<sup>10</sup> This is of particular significance because some of the larger and more popular folk cults had followers and temples spread across two or more *thakurais*. For example, shrines dedicated to Dum *deota* existed not only in Keonthal and the neighbouring *thakurai* of Kumharsain, but also in the chiefdom of Kotkhai and the State of Bashahr. This could logically have created complications in the hierarchical structure of *deotas* in a State. The problem was, however, overcome by the stratagem of asserting the supremacy of the respective State deity over the different manifestations of Dum *deota* enshrined within their territories. Thus, Dum *deota* in Katin village (no. 6 in the table above) of Phagu *tehsil* in Keonthal was subservient to *deota* Junga, while the Dum *deotas* with temples situated in Kumharsain, were under the suzerainty of their own State deity – Kot Ishwar Mahadev. Similarly, Biju *deota* (no. 10 in the table) seems originally to have been an alien deity subordinate to *deota* Bijat of Jubbal State. After he was brought over by some of his followers who migrated to Keonthal, Biju began to owe allegiance to Junga.<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion

The emergence of monarchical states along the riverine areas of Himachal was accompanied by the Brahmanization of their ruling elite. Territorial expansion was gradually achieved through numerous small, albeit hard-fought battles. But long-term political consolidation was immensely more complex. Large areas and populations in these mountain monarchies tenaciously retained socio-religious traditions and political identities that were diverse and clearly different from the Brahmanized areas. The limited economic resources of the hill states did not allow them to maintain large standing armies to enforce the allegiance of clans and communities located in distant territories. It was here that religion was particularly useful as an instrument of social control. Political incorporation of newly conquered territories was reinforced by ideological

domination. Temporal hierarchies of authority in the State were replicated in the relationship between the deities of the kingdom. Territorial and village gods were hierarchically arranged down to the lowest levels. Their peasant followers, too, were politically and ideologically bound to the *raja* and the State deity. This convergence of politics and religion created a hegemonic system that ultimately outlasted even the monarchies that had initially created them.

### Notes

1. M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs in South India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965 [1952]), p. 167; Gerald D. Berreman, 'Brahmins and Shamans in Pahari Religion', in Edward B. Harper, ed. *Religion in South Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), p. 55; J. Gonda, *Visnuism and Sivaism: A Comparison* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1976 [1970]), p. 88; McKim Marriot. 'Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization', in McKim Marriot, ed. *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 197. In this context Marriot makes an interesting argument when he says that, 'for understanding why Sanskritic rites are often added onto non-Sanskritic rites without replacing them, the concept of primary or indigenous process of civilization again offers useful guidance. By definition, an indigenous civilization is one whose great tradition originates by "universalization" or a carrying forward of materials which are already present in the little tradition which it encompasses. Such an indigenous great tradition has authority in so far as it contributes a more articulate and refined statement or systematization of what is already there'.

2. David G. Mandelbaum, 'Introduction: Process and Structure in South Asian Religion', in Edward B. Harper, ed. *Religion in South Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), p. 11. See also Morton Klass, *Ordered Universes: Approaches to the Anthropology of Religion* (Boulder & Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), p. 57.

3. Mandelbaum, 'Process and Structure', p. 11; N.K. Singh and Joshi Rajendra, eds., *Religion, Ritual and Royalty* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1999), p. 12. For a comparable situation, see Michael Herzfield, 'Pride and Perjury: Time and the Oath in the Mountain Villages of Crete', *MAN* (n.s.), vol. 25, no. 2, June 1990, p. 320. In the context of the mountain villages of Crete, Herzfield sees the 'dialectic' between doctrinal and local concepts of Orthodoxy' as part of a 'more general dialectic between structure and strategy'.

4. For detail, see J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, 2 vols. (Shimla: Department of Languages and Culture, Himachal Pradesh, 1982 [1933]). The process of expansion of the States of Chamba,

Kulu and Mandi has been dealt with in the relevant volumes. The Chamba rulers consolidated their position much before the others. It is argued here that in 'Chamba State alone, with an area of 3,216 square miles, there must have been more than 100 petty Chiefs in ancient times'. Ibid., vol. I, p. 13. Sahilavarman 'brought under his sway all the petty Ranas who still held the lower portion of the Ravi Valley'. Ibid., vol. I, pp. 279, 283.

5. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 378-86 for this process of expansion in Mandi. In Kulu, the struggle that its rulers Sidh Singh (AD 1500) and Bahadur Singh (AD 1532) had to engage in against the *ranas* and *thakurs* remains deeply embedded in folk memory. For a discussion of the details see vol. II, pp. 442-56. For the subjugation of the *thakurs* in Suket State by Bir Sen the founder, see vol. I, pp. 343-45.

6. Chamba town is situated on the Ravi river. Mandi and Sultanpur, the capital towns of the States of Mandi and Kulu respectively are on the banks of the Beas. Bilaspur the capital of Kahlur, and Rampur the winter capital of Bashahr are located next to the Satlej.

7. L.S. Thakur, *Architectural Heritage of Himachal Pradesh* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996), p. 44. The earliest examples of *nagara* temples, it has been argued, came up along trade routes passing through Himachal and linking Garhwal with Kashmir. These locations, interestingly, are also along the major rivers or important tributaries: Nirmand on the Satlej, Jagatsukh and Bajaura on the Beas, and Hatkoti on the Pabbar, a tributary of the Yamuna.

8. Lakshana Devi is a form of Mahishasurmardini, who in turn is a form of Goddess Shakti.

9. For detail, Thakur, *Architectural Heritage*, passim.

10. J.Ph. Vogel, *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Part I (Calcutta, 1911), p. 40. Vogel writes: 'In Lahaul not a single specimen has come to light; in Pangi only one is known to exist.... In the Churah division comparatively few copper plates are found belonging to the Muhammadan period. In the Ravi valley proper, on the contrary, such documents are exceedingly numerous. The pre-Muhammadan plates all belong to this region'.

11. Thakur, *Architectural Heritage*, pp. 130-31. Chamunda Devi temple was a large proprietor holding land in villages beyond the Ravi valley even though some of the original grants are not available. See also Norbert Peabody, 'Kota Mahajagat or the great universe of Kota: Sovereignty and Territory in eighteenth century Rajasthan', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.), vol. 25, no. 1, 1991, pp. 45. Peabody refers to the use of the *mandala* schematic by Tambiah (ed.), *Culture, thought and social action: An anthropological perspective* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 252-86,

which when applied to the polity, creates a 'conception of territory as variable space, control over which diminished as royal power radiated from the centre'.

12. Marriot, 'Little Communities', p. 209. Marriot in his study of Kishangarhi (Haryana) observed that, 'Sanskritic deities of the great tradition play a larger part in the bloc of high castes in Kishangarhi than they do in the devotions of the lower castes'. Even so, the importance of non-Sanskritic beliefs is evident from the facts that only '45 per cent of the deities worshipped even by Brahmans are Sanskritic'. See also Edwin T. Atkinson, *Religion in the Himalayas* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications [Originally published as *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, Chapters VIII, IX and X] 1976), vol. II, p. 141. Atkinson recorded that 'Amongst the peasantry of the highlands the cult of Visnu is little known'. For some detail, see *Chamba State Gazetteer*, 1904, pp. 179, 191. The Rajputs in Chamba town are said to have worshipped Visnu. The *Gazetteer* notes that 'Visnu, though commonly worshipped in Chamba city, has but few shrines in the State'.

13. *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 110. Madho Rao, an incarnation of Visnu was the 'national God of the State' in Mandi. See also *Kangra District Gazetteer (Kulu)*, 1917, p. 63. In Kulu, Lord Raghunath occupied this position. The importance accorded to Visnu in Chamba is apparent from the large temple complex dedicated to Vishnu in the heart of Chamba town.

14. *Chamba State Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 179.

15. *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 110. Vaishnavism is mentioned as 'being clearly an innovation to which only conventional adherence is given'.

16. *Chamba State Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 191. The prevailing tradition suggests that the goddess was of local origin. She is said to have been the daughter of the *raja* who established the town of Chamba and named the town after her.

17. *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 110. The *Gazetteer* notes that, 'Sri Vidya known also as Rajeshwari is depicted as having four arms and holding the top of a man's skull (*pakha* or *pasha*), an elephant goad (*ankush*), and bow (*dhanush*) and an arrow (*ban*) she wears red garments and has a half moon on her forehead. She is supposed to be the giver of wealth and happiness'.

18. *Chamba State Gazetteer*, 1904, pp. 181, 191. Interestingly, the clan god of the Gaddis of Brahmaur (where the kingdom of Chamba originated) is Siva, not Raghunath as in the case of the Rajputs. See also *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 110.

19. *Sirmur State Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 42. The *Gazetteer*, however, observes that 'the direct worship of Shiva is not very popular in the hills...'. Two of the most influential Siva cults in Sirmur and the Shimla Hill States area are those of Mahasu and Shrigul.

20. Gonda, *Visnuism and Sivaism*, p. 95. About Hindu thinkers having little difficulty in 'absorbing anything extraneous into their own system' Gonda

argues that this was often done by 'reinterpreting its mythology, symbolism and metaphysics and accepting its god as a servant or manifestation of their Highest Being'. See also Marriot, 'Little Communities', p. 215. Beals' study of *jatras* in Yadgiri *tahsil* of Karnataka argues that 'The myth and ritual of these *jatras* involve a weaving together of local, regional and pan-Indian traditions...The worshipped deity is regarded as local in origin even though identified with less parochial Hindu and Muslim deities'. Alan R. Beals, 'Conflict and Interlocal Festivals in a South Indian Region' in Edward B. Harper, ed. *Religion in South Asia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), p. 105.

21. This is based on: Klass, *Ordered Universes*, p. 109; Mandelbaum, 'Process and Structure', p. 8; Berreman, 'Brahmins and Shamans', p. 67; Atkinson, *Religion in the Himalayas*, p. 40. Klass argues that such gods deal primarily with Mandelbaum's 'pragmatic' dimension (immediate human problems) of religion than his 'transcendent' (universe-maintaining) religious dimension. But he also emphasises that the importance of these gods lies not so much in their position in a theological order but in 'their role or roles in the particular community's religious universe'. Many of the local practices were conducted not by priests but by *shamans*, who Mandelbaum observes 'deal with the exigencies of daily life, with the immediate and worldly welfare of their clients'. Berreman makes the very interesting argument that 'Shamans and other non-Brahmanical practitioners are not with the great tradition of Hinduism, but they are all-India in spread and hence are part of the pan-Indian Hindu vernacular, or little, tradition'. About the Himalayan peasantry, as he saw it in the early years of the last century, Atkinson wrote: 'Siva and Visnu and their female forms are the principal objects of worship, but with them either as their emanations or as separate divine entities, the representatives of the polydaemonistic cults of the older tribes are objects of worship both in temples and in domestic ceremonies'.

22. B.R. Sharma, 'The Institution of the Village Gods in the Western Himalayas', in N.K. Rustomji and Charles Ramble, ed. *Himalayan Environment and Culture* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1990), p. 136. In the Shimla area, a village god was usually worshipped by a cluster of ten or twelve villages called *ghori*.

23. *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 119. See also Colin Rosser, 'A "Hermit" Village in Kulu', in M.N. Srinivas, ed. *India's Villages* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969 [1955]), pp. 80, 81, 88. Rosser's study of the isolated village of Malana in Kulu, where *deota* Jamlu reigned, is quite representative of other village gods, though the hold of Jamlu over his domain is somewhat stronger than most other *deotas*. The village council controls temple affairs in Malana. All land is owned by Jamlu and the Malana peasants consider themselves as tenants of the god. Rosser argues, 'Jamlu can be regarded as the deification of the village, and as the apotheosis of the village'.

24. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*, Midway Reprint (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1960]) p. 59. These territorial gods might be in some respect, what Robert Redfield calls, 'deities that are intermediate between great and little traditions, being local forms of the one and universalized forms of the other'.

25. *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 120. See also *Kangra District Gazetteer (Kulu)* 1917, p. 61. The *Kangra District Gazetteer* observes that, 'if the people are questioned as to their private worship, they will say that they render dues to the Thakurs and other big foreign gods but for every day wants and troubles they go to their nature deities'.

26. See *Sirmur State Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 38; *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, p. 110. This variation could be marked both in terms of territory and caste. In parts of Himachal there is an interesting overlap even of territory and caste. For example, in Sirmur, the Giri river was taken as the territorial demarcation between orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism and what was then regarded by observers as the 'primitive' type. In Mandi, the gazetteer notes a threefold division of (i) orthodox practices of superior Brahmans, Khatri and some higher Rajput clans, (ii) religion of agricultural groups in areas adjoining the Kangra foothills, and (iii) 'the religion of the hills'.

27. *Kangra District Gazetteer (Kulu and Saraj)*, 1897, p. 41; *Kangra District Gazetteer (Kulu)* 1917, p. 59. Folk tradition is replete with stories based on the familial relationship between village deities and their quarrels and friendships. The very human nature of their grudges is reflected in the hostility that has always existed in Kulu valley, between *deota* Kalinag and *deota* Narayan, because the former eloped with the latter's sister! The *Kangra District Gazetteer* of 1917 puts it aptly: 'The social system is kept up by the rules of caste, by the numerous visits paid by *deotas* to each other accompanied by their people, and by gatherings on occasions of joy and grief.'

28. *Kangra District Gazetteer (Kulu)* 1917, pp. 65-66.

29. Hutchison and Vogel have described in detail the position of the *ranas* and *thakurs* 'who exercised authority, either as independent rulers or under the suzerainty of a paramount power' in the hills. *Punjab Hill States*, vol. I, pp. 12-40. The State of Chamba originated in the small territory of Brahmaur which was in the upper Ravi Valley, vol. I, p. 278. Similarly Bahu Sen the founder of Mandi, after quarrelling with his brother the *raja* of Suket, became the *rana* of Manglaor and thereafter his successors expanded the territory into a large kingdom, vol. I, p. 375. As for the origins of Kulu, Behangamani the founder is believed to have been 'successful in gaining a footing in Upper Bias Valley by overcoming some of the local petty Chiefs. This as we know was the way most of the other Hill States were founded...', vol. I, p. 431.

30. G.W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory and Acculturation: Between Myth and History in Modern Melanesian Adjustments and Ancient Gnosticism', in

*Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1989, p. 648. Trompf wonders 'whether the early practice of history ... was originally only possible because of myth'.

31. William Bascom, 'The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives', in Alan Dundes, ed. *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1984), p. 9. Bascom writes that myths are sacred accounts and deal with a remote past in which the main characters are animals, deities and culture heroes. Legends, on the other hand, are secular in nature and narrate stories of humans living in a world that is not very dissimilar from what it is today.

32. G.S. Kirk, 'On Defining Myths', in Dundes, ed. *Sacred Narratives*, p. 58. Kirk has provided an interesting argument about the forms and functions of myths.

33. Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1995, pp. 713, 721. Talbot, however, points out that in pre-modern Europe, ethnicity also developed amongst a widely spread out aristocracy by cutting across territorial boundaries.

34. H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* [Based on the *Census Report for the Punjab, 1883* by Denzil Ibbetson and the *Census Report for the Punjab, 1892* by Edward Maclagan], (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department), 3 volumes, vol. I, p. 444. See also *Keonthal Settlement Report* (Simla District) 1914, Punjab Hill States Agency Records, *Basta* 1, no.15, H.P. State Archives, Shimla, p. 1.

35. *Keonthal Settlement Report*, p. 1.

36. *Simla Hill States Gazetteer (SHSG)* 1910: Jubbal Tributaries.

37. Rose, *Glossary*, vol. I, p. 443. Jipur is now no longer remembered. It is also possible that Rose confused Jipur with Sipur. Sipur *deota*, however, was connected with the Koti *thakurai* rather than Keonthal. Interestingly, his temple is quite near the place where the Kutlehr prince is believed to have disappeared.

38. The term *tika* came to be understood during Mughal times as a mark applied on the forehead (*tika*) that signified the succession of a chieftain to the *gaddi*. Chieftains within the Mughal empire had to obtain the consent of the Mughal emperor before applying the *tika*. Subsequently, the heir-apparent of a hill State came to be addressed as the *tika*.

39. Chetan Singh, *Natural Premises. Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya, 1800-1950* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 210-11.

40. Cf. Klass, *Ordered Universe*, p. 83.



41. *Keonthal Settlement Report*, 1901, para 29. The report mentions six classes of Kanets and notes that, 'The head of these tribes used to be the *wazir* in the State by turn'.

42. Rose, *Glossary*, vol. I, pp. 445-50.

43. If, hypothetically, Keonthal had been incorporated by conquest into a larger State (as happened to many *thakurais* in earlier times), then *deota* Junga would probably have been subservient to a deity of Brahmanical Hinduism.

44. Rose, *Glossary*, vol. I, p. 449; *Simla District Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 39; Nadia Lovell, *Locality and Belonging* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 54-55. In the area of Punar, which was added much later by the British to Keonthal State, the *deotas* naturally had no history of being subordinate to Junga. Within Punar, nevertheless, the territories of different *deotas* had been historically delineated. Nihagu *deota* of Jaili village presided over Agla Punar while Pichhla Punar was under Baneshar *deota* of Chohag village. The establishing of a shrine to their deity in a new place may be one of the means by which the followers also laid out a territorial claim. This clearly reiterates the connection between clan, deity and territory.



## **The *Char Bagh-i Panjab*: Socio-Cultural Configuration**

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The descriptive part of the mid-nineteenth century *Char Bagh-i Panjab* of Ganesh Das in Persian is analysed for evidence on the social and cultural history of the Punjab during the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. The disparate facts and places in specific space and time by the author are sought to be classified and put together coherently in terms of urbanization; religious beliefs, practices, and institutions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs; popular religion; traditional learning, both religious and secular; literature in Persian, Punjabi, Braj and 'Hindi' in Perso-Arabic, Gurmukhi and Devanagri scripts; and gender relations, with special regard to conjugal and personal love. The socio-cultural configuration that emerges on the whole from this analysis is given at the end, with the reflection of the author's personality as a member of the precolonial Punjabi society. Important in itself, this configuration provides the background for an appreciation of socio-cultural change in the colonial Punjab.

### **Introducton**

The *Char Bagh-i Panjab* of Ganesh Das Badhera is by far the most important single source of information for the social and cultural history of the Punjab before its annexation to British India in 1849.\* Though a general history from the earliest times to the fall of the kingdom of Lahore in 1849, about three-fourths of the work is devoted to the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, both in its narrative part which is almost entirely political, and its descriptive part which is almost entirely non-political. It is the descriptive part, however, which makes the *Char Bagh* exceptionally remarkable. Its close examination reveals a social and cultural configuration that is both interesting and significant.<sup>1</sup>

Ganesh Das was well qualified to write a description of the Punjab. He was a *qanungo* and a *zamindar* of Gujrat. His father, Shiv Dayal, had served as a *nazim* in the time of Sardar Sahib Singh Bhangi, the Chief of Gujrat. His grandfather, Mehta Bhavani Das Badhera, was an eminent person of Gujrat under Gujjar Singh Bhangi. His ancestors had settled in the Punjab three centuries earlier, and the Badhera Khatri were found in many towns and villages of the Punjab, as administrators, professional persons, traders and *zamindars*, providing a wide social network. His experience of administration and social connections were useful for collecting information for a comprehensive description of the Punjab. Ganesh Das knew Persian very well. A close reading of his work reveals his familiarity with a number of historical works in Persian.

Following the example of Abul Fazl's *Ain-i Akbari* and Sujjan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat ut-Tawarikh*, Ganesh Das, in the descriptive part of the *Char Bagh*, confines himself to the province of Lahore which had come to be equated with the Punjab in the time of Akbar. He talks of the courses of the six rivers and their confluences, which created the five *doabs* (interfluves) of the Punjab, metaphorically called the land of five rivers. Ganesh Das takes up each Doab to mention its administrative and revenue units and, wherever possible, the names of *nazims*, *faujdar*s, *qazis*, *muftis*, *sardars*, *hakims*, *kardars*, *chaudharis*, *qanungos* and *muqaddams*, associated with specific places in the Mughal and Sikh times. Within each Doab, Ganesh Das takes notice of cities, towns and villages known for one or another kind of their significant aspect, whether political, social, economic or cultural. Related to a given space, with an eye on the time, this information has a concrete quality. Collectively comprehensive, the information is provided in rather disparate bits and pieces. These bits and pieces have to be classified and put together for a meaningful configuration in socio-cultural terms.

Before we do that we may notice the general character of this information. It comes from both written and oral sources but remains selective, and not exhaustive. It is also uneven. Ganesh Das knew more about his own Doab, the Chaj, than about the Rachna or the Bari Doab. He knew much more about each of these three than about the Sindh Sagar or the Bist Jalandhar Doab. Within each Doab he made another kind of distinction: the urban and the rural. Ganesh Das knew far more about cities and towns than about villages. The information provided by Ganesh Das relates largely to the three middle Doabs and within these three, very largely to their cities and towns.

Like the range of his knowledge, the range of Ganesh Das's interests is also relevant. He talks of the ideal polity rather than ideal social order. It consisted of four components in proper balance. One of these four components, compared with fire, was the kings, their courtiers, and the army. The second, comparable with water, consisted of the educated class. The third, comparable with air, were the traders. The fourth component, comparable with earth (*khak*), consisted of *zamindars*.<sup>2</sup> All these four components figure in the *Char Bagh*. In its descriptive part, however, the local administrators, traders, *sahukars*, *sarrafs*, and *zamindars*, and men of letters and learning figure most prominently. In addition to these, the craftsmen are mentioned in connection with manufactures of various kinds, mostly in towns and cities. Ganesh Das was aware of the presence of the service performing groups and the outcastes in the social order, but they did not fall within the range of his interests. It is easy to see that the social order of his times was well differentiated in terms of religious communities, castes and classes.

Ganesh Das was not consciously interested in urbanization either. But he provides enough information on urban centres that makes his work important for a historian of urbanization. Similarly, he was not interested in gender relations *per se* but he provides significant evidence on gender and love in his own way. There is no doubt that Ganesh Das was interested in matters religious, cutting across the religious communities and sects or institutional

and popular religion. Similarly he was interested in learning, both religious and secular, and literature in Persian, Bhakha (Braj), and Punjabi, and what he calls 'Hindi'. Thus, with all the limitations of his information, Ganesh Das has enough to tell us among other things about urbanization, religious institutions, beliefs and practices, traditional learning and literature, and gender and love.

### Urban Centers

Ganesh Das makes a clear distinction between a rural and an urban habitation. About Sambrial in the Rachna Doab he says: 'it is a large village, like a town'.<sup>3</sup> About Lakhnawal in the Doaba Chaubihat (Chaj) he says: 'it is a large village like a small town'.<sup>4</sup> Here, Ganesh Das makes a distinction between a town and a small town. He talks also of large town (*qasbah-i kalan*). He makes a distinction between a town and a city (*shahr*) and talks of small city (*shahr-i khurd*), average city (*shahr-i mutawassit*), and large city (*shahr-i kalan*). The term *baldah* is reserved for a metropolis, like Lahore or Amritsar. What distinguishes a village from a town is clear: the former is predominantly agricultural, and the latter has a visible component of trade and manufacture. On this criterion, it is easily understandable why, with the same number of people, one habitation may be rural and the other urban. Population would certainly be the criterion for distinction between a town and a city. But the answer provided by Ganesh Das is not categorical. He appears to think that a city had a larger range of social, economic, intellectual, and cultural activities than a town.

The general pattern of urbanization that emerges from the information provided by Ganesh Das is only a partial approximation to the reality. The Bist-Jalandhar Doab had only 4 urban centres, and all of them were towns. In the Bari Doab there were 2 metropolises, 4 cities and 5 towns. In the Rachna Doab there were 5 cities and 15 towns. The Chaubihat (Chaj) Doab had 10 cities and 10 towns. The Sindh Sagar Doab had 11 cities and 12 towns. In all, there were 32 cities and 46 towns. The actual number of urban centers could be more than 78, not only because Ganesh Das did not have full information but also because he does not mention the status of some centres of administration.

Ganesh Das was aware of the dynamic character of urbanization. Wangli in the Sindh Sagar Doab was a large city (*shahr-i kalan*) at one time but now it was in ruins. Close to its ruins, the town of Kallar had come up. Sadhri in the Chaj Doab was earlier a town but now a village. Khuhi Sialan in the Rachna Doab was a large town earlier but a village now. The towns of Buchcha and Jalalpur Bhattian in the same Doab were lying in ruins now. Ibrahimabad Sodhara, founded by Ali Mardan Khan in the time of Shah Jahan, was now in ruins. The ancient city of Jalandhar, which at one time was a *baldah-i kalan*, was now a town.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that urban centres could disappear altogether, become smaller, or rural.

However, this was only one side. The other side was expansion of old urban centers and appearance of new ones. Haripur in the Sindh Sagar Doab was a city founded by Hari Singh Nalwa in the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Rawalpindi in the same Doab was a town that became a city due to the efforts of Sardar Milkha Singh. Gujrat in the Chaj Doab, which was founded by Akbar, had become an important urban center in Mughal times, and declined due to the political turmoil in the eighteenth century, was revived by Sardar Gujjar Singh Bhangi as his capital. Similarly, Sialkot in the Rachna Doab suffered decline and revival in the eighteenth century. Gujranwala was a small village but became large as the capital of Sardar Charhat Singh, the grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Qila Suba Singh became a town and Qila Sobha Singh a city in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Rasul Nagar grew from a town into a city. In the Bari Doab, Chak Ramdas or Chak Guru, a town founded by Guru Arjan in the reign of Akbar, became a *balдах* in Sikh times. No other large city of the province was comparable with it. Dera Baba Nanak became a large city. Dina Nagar as a town was founded by Adina Beg Khan in the second half of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The evidence provided by Ganesh Das on de-urbanization and re-urbanization is not exhaustive, or comprehensive, but it is enough to suggest that a phase of de-urbanization was followed by a phase of re-urbanization in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century.

It is important to note that more than half of the descriptive part is covered by what Ganesh Das has to say about 5 cities: Gujrat, Sialkot, Wazirabad, Lahore and Amritsar. These cities were located in the three middle Doabs. The history of Sialkot, Lahore and Gujrat went back into the hoary past but all the three emerged as important urban centers in the Mughal times. Wazirabad was founded in the reign of Shah Jahan. Amritsar, though founded in the reign of Akbar, developed into a large city in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ganesh Das happened to know more about his own city, Gujrat. Sialkot was associated with his ancestors, and Wazirabad had some important Badhera Khatri. In general too, Ganesh Das was more familiar with the Chaj and Rachna Doabs in which these three cities were located. Amritsar and Lahore in the Bari Doab were by far the most important cities in the time of Ganesh Das and he could easily collect information on both.

For the kind of activities in which Ganesh Das was interested, we may turn to Gujrat. He refers to its history, its administrators and rulers, its eminent men, *panchas*, *chaudharis* and *qanungos*, its *sahukars*, and its craftsmen who were superbly skilled in all kinds of crafts and manufactures, like the swords of steel. He appreciates the charitable works of eminent individuals who built tanks, bridges, stepwells, temples, and mosques. Ganesh Das refers to the calligraphists, the experts in composition, and those who were proficient in music, poetry and historical writing. There were some well known poets and satirists in the city, including a woman poet. There were experts in, Persian and Arabic lexicography, in account-keeping, in Indian and Greek medicine, mathematics, and astrology. There were Brahmans learned in the Shastras and the *'ulama* learned in Islamic law and theology. Ganesh Das takes notice of the presence of Vaishnavas, Shaivas, and Shaktas, their temples, *bairagis*, *sanyasis*, and the left-handers.<sup>7</sup>

### Religious Institutions, Beliefs and Practices

Sometimes the line between the religious and the secular could be thin, as in voluntary suicide. Talking of the inhabitants of Jalalpur, Ganesh Das refers to the old families of Sethi, Suri, Uppal, Bhalla and Mehta Khatri. Among them was Lala Sehaj Ram Uppal, father of Ganesh Das's mother. In 1783, he went to the Ganges at Hardwar and gave up his life, voluntarily and deliberately. We may be sure that Ganesh Das regarded his suicide as a religiously meritorious act.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, all charitable works had a religious dimension. That was why all works for public welfare, related not only to worship but also to food, water and comfort, were important and meritorious for the contemporaries of Ganesh Das as much as for him. Lala Devi Das Rang of Gujrat constructed a *baoli* on the road to Wazirabad in 1820 in order to perpetuate his name. Lala Bhag Mal Basambhu constructed a *baoli* on the road to Peshawar in 1828. These were obviously meant primarily for travelers. Jawala Das Basambhu dug a pool for the people to bathe. Kanhiya Mal Panwal dug a pool and planted a cluster of trees; the water and the shade were used by both men and the cattle. A temple dedicated to Mahadev was constructed in the town by Lala Amrik Rai Chhibber in 1840. He left behind also a stepwell (*baoli*) and a garden (*baghchah*).<sup>9</sup>

Baba Kamal Nain, a Brahman of Haranpur, was known for maintaining an open kitchen (*sadavart*). The Sodhis of Haranpur also provided food to travellers, Chaudhari Diwan Singh, proprietor of the village Baghanwala, used to look after the travelers and to provide food for them. Shaikh Saudagar Sachchar, who was in the service of Maharaja Gulab Singh, dug a pool and laid a garden in the environs of Sialkot. Lala Hari Ram Puri of the village Kharat was well known for serving the *faqirs* and the travelers who came to the village or stayed there. A *sahukar* of Lahore, named Ganga Shah Mehra, was known for building a *dharamsal*, digging a tank and a well, and laying a garden on the road to Amritsar. The whole complex served as a *sarai*. The individuals who left something for posterity by way of public welfare generally were religious personages, traders, holders of landed estates, or administrators.<sup>10</sup>

Ganesh Das took greater notice of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as representatives of the established systems of religion. He takes notice of two well known Vaishnava establishments in the upper Bari Doab: the place of Bhagwan Narain at Pindori and the Vaishnava establishment at Dhianpur. The latter was associated with Baba Lal, who was known to Prince Dara Shukoh. A dialogue between them was recorded by Chandar Bhan Brahman. The *faqirs* of Baba Lal had a Lal Dwara in the city of Wazirabad. The Jaikishnia *sadhs*, who worshipped Krishan Avtar, also had their Thakurdwaras in Wazirabad. Raja Gulab Singh built an idol temple for Thakurs at Pind Dadan Khan in 1830 and, founded a village named Gulabgarh for its upkeep, donating its revenues to the temple. At the 'place' of Baba Lahra Bairagi in the town of Narowal, fairs were held at the time of Baisakhi and Janamashtami. In the village Thapar,

near Gujranwala, was the place of Baba Murar Das Bairagi who had attained to divine knowledge; many people were followers of his successors. The place of the *bairagi sadh* Baba Ram Thamman was at about 12 *kos* from Lahore. A number of *smadhs* were important for the Vaishnavas, like the *smadh* of Baba Pohlo Ram Bairagi, who had come to the town of Bahlolpur from Gujrat in 1800; the *smadh* of Billu Sahib Bairagi Wadala Sandhuan in the *pargana* of Pursarur (many people were the followers of his descendant Ram Das); and the *smadh* of Bawa Lal Daryai in the '*ilaqa* of Ram Nagar. He had worked miracles in the time of Aurangzeb and had two eminent disciples: Sant Das and Sain Das. Most people in the area were their followers. In Sheikhpura was the *smadh* of Baba Balram Das Bairagi.<sup>11</sup>

Ganesh Das gives special importance to Baba Sain Das and his descendants, all respectable persons. Sain Das had received enlightenment through a miracle performed by Mukand Das Bairagi who was a disciple of Parmanand (linked with Ramanand through a chain of successors). His *smadh* in the village Baddoki Gosain in the *pargana* of Eminabad was a place of worship. On the Puranmashi of Vaisakh a fair was held there for three days. Baba Sain Das had five sons. One of them was named Ramanand who was believed to have performed a miracle at the age of twelve, and vanished in a tank. A large fair was held at this tank on 14 *sudi* of Vaisakh. He was succeeded by Gosain Nar Hardas. He had four sons and a large number of grandsons. Fourth in succession from him, Baba Karam Chand was believed to have taken his chariot (*rath*) over the river Chenab in the rainy season. He was succeeded by his younger brother Hari Ram who had a large number of descendants through several generations till the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Among the other Vaishnava places was Panj Tirathi, a place of worship in the Rawalpindi area. A *bairagi sadh* chose it for meditation, and gave the name Ramkund and Sitakund to two of the bathing places. In the fort of Gujrat was a place for the worship of Murlī Manohar, established during the period of Sikh rule. A gnostic named Prem Das was associated with a place in Gobindpur on the bank of the Chenab: it was known as the Chautara of Ram-Lachhman. Mayya Das, a well known *bhagat* of Krishna, lived in Zafarwal. Ganesh Das leaves the impression on the whole, that the worship of Rama and Krishna was more popular than the traditional worship of Vishnu. It was a measure of the influence of Vaishnava Bhakti in the Punjab.<sup>13</sup>

Ganesh Das refers to a number of Shaiva temples. Raja Gulab Singh demolished the old Shivdwara in Gujrat to build a new one in its place in 1839. In Dinga too, he built a temple of Mahadev as a place of worship for the Hindus. A Shivdwara in the town of Bhera was repaired by Lala Moti Ram Kapur who was in the service of the Raja of Jammu. In Sialkot, a Shivala was built by Diwan Harbhaj Rai Puri, and a temple of Mahadev was built by Raja Tej Singh in 1848 for worship by the people. The temple of Sri Mahadev in Wazirabad was repaired by Lala Ratan Chand Duggal in 1839, and entrusted to Gosain Shambhu Nath and Mathra Das for the performance of worship in this temple. A Shivala of Mahadev adorned the town of Kirana. The place of Mahadev in the village of Nand (Dhand) Kasel (near Amritsar) was a place of



worship. Thus, old and new Shiva temples were spread almost all over the Punjab.<sup>14</sup>

The Shaiva ascetics, generally called *sanyasis*, are mentioned by Ganesh Das at several places. In Gujrat, Buddh Gir was well known as a *sanyasi*. He was believed to possess supernatural powers. In the town of Pursarur, Baba Khushal Puri was an adept in *sanyas* at one time, and now there was Gulab Gir, a *sanyasi* who was known to have realized God. The place of a *sanyasi* on the bank of a stream in the village Punnanke near Sialkot was the site of annual fair at the time of Vaisakhi. Baba Lal Bharati was a famous *sanyasi* in the village Kharat. Ram Kishan, a Joshi Brahman, became a disciple of Swami Chetan Gir, attained to divine knowledge, and became famous as Gosain Raghunath Gir. He visited Wazirabad and gave the blessing of a child to Haria Duggal. Lala Ratan Chand Duggal, mentioned earlier, was a respectable descendent of Haria.<sup>15</sup>

More important than the *sanyasis* of the Punjab were the Gorakhnathi *jogis*. On a small hillock at 3 *kos* from Rohtas was the Tilla Jogian, associated with Bal Nath, where a large fair was held at the time of Shivratri. The *jogis* and other people flocked to the place, and food was served freely to all. Both Hindus and Muslims believed in the sanctity of the place. At Makhad was the place of Brindi Nath. The nearby Sarankot was also sacred for the *jogis*. In the city of Bhera, the *gaddi* of Pir Dhiraj Nath was a place of reverence. Sacred especially to Augars, was the place of Sukal Nath in the town of Kirana; he was perfect in divine knowledge and many people believed in him. Ganesh Das himself believed that whosoever prayed at his place had his wishes fulfilled. In the upper Bari Doab, Achal was associated with Sham Kartik, the son of Mahadev. It was an old place of the *jogis*.<sup>16</sup>

Ganesh Das takes notice of a number of temples dedicated to goddesses. There were two new Devidwaras in the fort of Gujrat. Two old Devidwaras were in Sodhara: one of these was associated with Sitala Devi, and the other with Kalka Devi. These two places were looked after by two Sants for worship. In one of the villages of Jalalpur Bhattian was a place of Kalka Devi. Between the Lahauri Gate and the Shah Alami Gate in Lahore was the place of Sitala Devi where a weekly fair was held. There was also the place of Kalka Devi in Lahore. At Niazbeg, 5 *kos* from Lahore, was the place of Bhaddar Kali. A large fair was held there in the month of Jeth. There was a place of Kalka Devi in Amritsar. At Garhdiwal in the Bist Jalandhar Doab there was a place of a *devi* who is not named. The left-hander Shaktas would normally conceal their practices. Significantly, however, Ganesh Das notices their presence in Gujrat, the town he knew best. Mohiya Nand and Sada Nand were perfect in the knowledge of the Shakta scriptures. 'But their practices are better not mentioned: drinking of alcohol, eating of meat, and indulging in sexual intercourse are obligatory in their system'. These Shaktas belonged to the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup>

Ganesh Das refers to *sadhs* and *faqirs* in general, not in association with one or another established system. In Jhelum, on the bank of the river were the places of worship of Hindu *faqirs*. Among them was Bhagat Kesar who lived

in seclusion. In Gujrat, there was Bhagat Parmal; several eminent individuals of the town had renounced the world and gone towards Kashi. Pandit Mansa Ram Razdan had come from Kashmir in the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and settled in the village Kotla in the Chaj Doab; he died there in 1826 but his *dhuni* or *atishkadah* was still there and revenues of the village Kaleke were assigned for its upkeep. In Sialkot, Partap Mal Chaddha was a perfect gnostic (*'arif*). He regarded all religions as manifestation of God and saw Him in every human being. Once a Muslim taunted that according to the belief current among Muslims only two infidels would go to heaven: Naushirwan, who was known for his justice, and Hatim, who was famous for his generosity. According to the belief of the Hindus, retorted Partap Mal, not a single Musalman would go to heaven.<sup>18</sup>

In Sambrial in the Chaj Doab there was a *sadh* named Ram Lila who sat in a *dharamsal* for twenty years without eating any food. His *smadh* was still there and the two persons who served him also attained to piety: Dayal Singh Granthi and Sehaj Ram Khatri. In Sodhara there was a *faqir* named Gokul Das. Whatever he uttered came to pass. In Jalalpur Bhattian, Mathra Das was a *sadh* known as the *faqir* of Ramdas. He was an emancipated person, not caring about any external observance but adorned by inner purity. He was well known for his bold sayings. He never looked towards anyone for subsistence and did tailoring to earn a living. He used to wear spotlessly white clothes and his followers in Jalalpur still lived like him. Ganesh Das mentions Durgiana as a sacred pool in Amritsar. A pool at Rahan, known as Suraj Kund, was a place of worship and many Hindus cremated the dead there.<sup>19</sup>

Among Muslims, Ganesh Das takes notice of both the *'ulama* and the Sufis. Several descendants of the common ancestor of the Badhera Khatri had accepted Islam. He refers to them casually and appreciates their achievement in various fields as Muslims. However, he was opposed to forcible conversion. That is why he appreciates Kanwal Nain Badhera for accepting death rather than Islam under pressure from the sons of Maulavi Abdul Hakim in the reign of Shah Jahan. In the reign of Aurangzeb the *'ulama* of Sialkot forced many Hindus to accept Islam. Their ascendancy in the reign of Muhammad Shah was reflected in the execution of Haqiqat Rai Puri who died for his faith.<sup>20</sup>

It is evident from his account of Haqiqat Rai that Ganesh Das did not like the aggressive attitude of the religious fanatics among the Muslims. Haqiqat Rai's father, a Puri Khatri of Sialkot, sent him to the local *maktab* for education. In due course he learnt enough to enter into discussion with Muslim boys. The son of a *mulla* did not like his intellectual superiority, and on behalf of his son the *mulla* incited other Muslims by alleging that Haqiqat Rai was disrespectful towards the prophet Muhammad. The Hindus of the city apologized on his behalf but the Muslims did not relent. They insisted that Haqiqat Rai should accept Islam, or he be put to death. Haqiqat Rai's father bribed the administrators and the corrupt *maulavis* in order to persuade them that the case may be taken to Zakariya Khan, the governor of Lahore (1726-45), who was known for his liberal views. A large crowd of Muslims accompanied Haqiqat Rai to Lahore to ensure that he did not escape

punishment so that they were not exposed for bringing a false charge against him. In Lahore, the *'ulama*, the *qazi* and the *mufti*, among others, supported the Muslims of Sialkot. Zakariya Khan listened to both the sides and came to the conclusion that the charge brought against the boy was false. He advised the men of religion in private not to be unjust. But they insisted that Zakariya Khan should not interfere in a religious matter. He advised Haqiqat Rai to save his life by accepting Islam, and offered a *mansab* of 3,000 with a suitable *jagir*, but the boy refused to sell his faith. The *mufti* pronounced capital punishment. The father asked for a day's delay in its implementation in the hope that he would persuade his son to accept Islam.<sup>21</sup>

Haqiqat Rai, however, insisted that he could not accept a faith which justified oppression, like the imposition of *jizya*, the notion of *dar al-harb*, enslavement of women and children, and discrimination on the basis of difference in faith. They who regarded these forms of oppression as the means of pleasing God were actually God's enemies, and enemies of even the genuine Muslim devotees of God, like Mansur and Shams Tabrizi. Haqiqat Rai's notion of true *dharma* underscores the importance of ritual observances, inner purity and *ahimsa*. He goes on to mention some other ideals of Hindu piety: to observe the rules of purity and pollution in eating and associating with other people, to practise monogamy and to look upon other women as daughters and sisters, to remain steadfast in faith, and not to reconvert a person who has been converted to another faith.

On the day following, the Muslims of the city came to the court of Zakariya Khan to witness Haqiqat Rai's initiation into Islam. But he refused to accept Islam. Zakariya Khan handed him over to the leaders of religion. With the earth upto his waist, they began to stone him to death. A soldier took pity and cut off his head. The severed head continued to utter 'Ram, Ram'. Even the Muslims now expressed regret. Haqiqat Rai's body was cremated in accordance with Brahmanical rites. A *smadh* was constructed over the spot of cremation as a place of worship. On the fifth day of every month Hindus gathered there and remembered God. In Sialkot, Haqiqat Rai's father constructed his *marhi* in the courtyard. It became a place of pilgrimage, and it was still there; people brought flowers, and lighted lamps over there.

Certainly aware of the importance of Muslim orthodoxy, Ganesh Das takes greater notice of Sufi Islam, largely because of the tangible legacies left in the form of the *mazars* of Sufi *pirs* and their popularity. Such sacred spaces were spread all over the Punjab. The influence of the Sufis comes out clearly from what he has to say. The oldest *mazar* in the Punjab was associated with Shaikh Ali al-Hujwiri, now called Data Ganj Bakhsh. Ganesh Das refers to it as his *khanqah*. Many Hindu Gujjars of the area had become Muslims under his influence. Since he was the head of the *fuqara* in the Punjab, the chronogram of his death was *sardar*. A large number of people visited his *mazar* on every Friday.<sup>22</sup>

Another place of pilgrimage in Lahore was the mausoleum of Shah Abu al-Ma'ali who was actually the *nazim* of Lahore in 1555-56, but he was known for his piety. Ganesh Das mentions several other Sufis of Lahore: Shah

Bilaval, Mian Muhammad Darvesh, Hazrat Mian Mir, and his disciple, Mullan Shah, who enabled Dara Shukoh to attain to divine knowledge. Another disciple of Hazrat Mian Mir was a *faqir* named Kanwanwale who performed no *namaz* and observed no *rozah*. Yet another disciple was an enunch named Sandal who prayed for rain on request from the people and his prayer was granted. Another *faqir* was 'Surat Bari' who saw God in every human being. Shaikh Hasan Farid was a man of miracles who performed no *namaz* and did not even recite the *kalima*. At the time of his death, Mulla Abdul Hakim insisted that he should recite the *kalima* and he said, 'there is no God but myself', and died. The *khanqah* of Saiyid Miththa was also famous in Lahore. A fair in honour of Shah Madar was held near the Taksali Gate.<sup>23</sup>

Next to Data Ganj Bakhsh in antiquity was Shaikh Farid Shakarganj of Pakpattan, also called Ajodhan. His father Jalaluddin was a descendant of Sulaiman Farrukh Shah Kabuli. It was said that Farid had struggled hard through austerities of all kinds in order to attain to God. For some time he tied a wooden loaf to his belly and remained occupied in remembrance of God. He became a perfect gnostic. He died in 1269. His mausoleum was a place of pilgrimage. In the region of Pakpattan, there were two other places of pilgrimage: Hujra Shah Muqim and Shergarh.<sup>24</sup>

In Gujrat, the most important Sufi was Shah Daulah. In his early life he was a slave. He attained to divine knowledge, and died in the reign of Aurangzeb, in 1675. He was succeeded by Bahawal Shah who had five sons from two wives. In the time of Ganesh Das the descendants of Shah Daulah were Mian Hasan Shah, Fazal Shah and Jiwan Shah. A Sufi named Shah Jahangir was a contemporary of Shah Daulah. Mian Lal was known for miracles in the reign of Shah Jahan. He ate no meat and lived like a *bairagi*. Pandhi Shah was a famous *faqir* of the eighteenth century. A mausoleum was built over his grave in 1807. Another mystic, Husain Shah, died in 1837. Faqir Karam Shah was a contemporary of Ganesh Das. In the rest of the Chaj Doab Ganesh Das notices the *khanqah* of Pir Muhammad Sachiar in the village of Naushehra as a place of pilgrimage. He was a disciple of Hazrat Haji Ganj Bakhsh Auliya. The *khanqah* of Hazrat Hafiz Hayat was near Kot Mir Husain. His disciples still cultivated land and provided food to travelers twice a day. A large fair was held at this place on 19 Muharram. Pir Azam Shah was a famous mystic of Bhera.<sup>25</sup>

Ganesh Das mentions three places of some importance in the Sindh Sagar Doab. Close to Hasan Abdal was the *khanqah* of Saiyid Qandhari, Shah Wali Allah, where a lamp remained burning all the night unaffected by rain and wind. This was a miracle. In Jani Sang was the *khanqah* of Jani Darvesh. Haqqani in Wangli was a *darvesh* known for miracles; his *khanqah* was a place of pilgrimage.<sup>26</sup>

Ganesh Das uses the term *khanqah* for a place associated with the tomb of a mystic or a martyr, and not in the sense of a monastic establishment. He talks of the *khanqahs* of Imam Ali al-Haqq, Shah-i Badshahan, Mir Bhel Shahid, Shah Monga Wali, Saiyid Surkh, Hazrat Hamzah Ghaus, and Saiyidan Nadir-i Mast, the guide (*murshid*) of Shah Daulah, and others in Sialkot. These places

are also referred to as the *mazars* of *walis*. A large village, Chhati Shaikh, belonged to Shaikh Saundha, son of Shah Muhammad Raza, who was a descendant of Hazrat Farid Shakarganj. In Sodhara, *faqir* Mastan Shah was known for miracles in the time of Sardar Sahib Singh Bhangi. Saiyid Ahmad Shaikh al-Hind, regarded as the *abdal* of the time, had come from Baghdad in the reign of Bahadur Shah and died in a village near Wazirabad which came to be known as Kotla Shaikh al-Hind. Most of the Muslims of the area were his followers. In Wazirabad itself, in the reign of Ahmad Shah, Baqi Shah Auliya was a mystic of miracles who had only to look at a person to make him intoxicated with the wine of love. His *mazar* was close to the Lahauri Gate. The *khanqah* of his disciple, Daim Shah, was also there. Another of his eminent disciples was Hafiz Hayat who is mentioned in connection with Gujrat. The *khanqah* of Saiyid Mansur, who was famous for his austerities, was in Eminabad. In Jalalpur Bhattian, the *khanqah* of Bahauddin was a place of pilgrimage. In the old city of Chandiot the *khanqah* of Shah Burhan was a place of pilgrimage. In the town of Shahdarah on the river Ravi, opposite Lahore, was the place of Shah Husain Durr who was known for miracles. Like his contemporaries, Ganesh Das believed that the Sufis who attained to union with God could perform miracles. Prayers at their *mazars* were still answered. That was why they were centers of pilgrimage. The *mazars* were generally looked after by the descendants or the followers of the saint, but not always. In Dayaliwal, a village at 3 *kos* from Batala, the *mazar* of Shamsuddin Daryai was kept up by the Hindu descendants of Dayali Ram, presumably the original proprietor of the village.<sup>27</sup>

As regards the Sikhs of the Punjab, Ganesh Das makes it clear at the outset that the term Khalsa referred to the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh. The Khalsa regarded themselves as distinct from both Hindus and Muslims, as the third *firqa*. Thoroughly familiar with the Khalsa *rahit*, Ganesh Das talks mostly of the Khalsa Sikhs. The greatest place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs was Amritsar. It owed its name to the tank built by Guru Ram Das. A large number of people came to this place every morning and evening. An exceptionally large number of people visited the place at the times of Vaisakhi and Diwali. Apart from the Harmandar, there were the Akal Bunga, Dukhbhanjani, Dehra Baba Atal, the 'smadhs' of martyrs, and the pools known as Santokhsar, Kaulsar, Bibeksar and Ramsar as places of worship in Amritsar.<sup>28</sup>

A number of other places were associated with the Sikh Gurus. Dera Baba Nanak on the bank of the Ravi was 'the sleeping place' of Guru Nanak. People from far off places visited his place (*asthan*) by way of pilgrimage and made offerings. A *langar* remained open all the time for food. The *asthan* of Baba Nanak was under the control of the descendants of Guru Nanak. Eleventh in descent from him were Faqir Bakhsh, Sant Bakhsh, Har Bakhsh and Kartar Bakhsh, the sons of Bhup Chand. Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, son of Kala Dhari, who had established himself at Una as a man of great spiritual status, belonged to another line of descent. His *smadh* was a place of pilgrimage. Ganesh Das ends his statement by saying that all the Bedi *sahibzadas* were worthy of respect.<sup>2</sup>

Among the other places associated with Guru Nanak was Rori Baba Nanak to the west of Eminabad, a place of worship since old times. In Sialkot, there was Ber Baba Nanak as a place of worship. It was believed that Guru Nanak had visited Sialkot in the summer of 1527-28. He sat under a tree that had no leaves and no shade. Suddenly green leaves appeared on all its branches to provide shade for Guru Nanak. It became an object of worship. Its custodians (*mujawars*) now were Akalis who kept a *langar* open for the visitors. Another place of worship in Sialkot was Baoli Baba Nanak. Close to the house of a disciple where Baba Nanak was staying was a brackish stepwell (*baoli*). The disciple rose to bring sweet water from another well but Baba Nanak told him to go to the nearby *baoli*. The moment Guru Nanak tasted the water it became sweet. Yet another place associated with Guru Nanak was Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal. Ganesh Das relates the legend in which Baba Nanak stops the large stone hurled at him by Saiyid Qandhari from the top of the hillock. The imprint of Guru Nanak's palm was still there on the stone. Since that time the place had been venerated and the praise of Baba Nanak was on the lips of all and sundry. The followers of Guru Nanak built a *dharamsal* for worship, close to the tank for bathing.<sup>30</sup>

Several places were associated with the successors of Guru Nanak. Close to the place of Mian Mir in Lahore was the place of Guru Ram Das. Like the tank of *amritsar* in Ramdaspur, there was a tank in Tarn Taran, with a structure built by Guru Arjan as a place of worship. A *dharamsal* in Wazirabad was associated with Guru Hargobind. Kiratpur was associated with Guru Hargobind and Guru Har Rai. In Ghalotian, a village opposite Daska, was a place of worship associated with Guru Har Rai. Makhawal was associated with Guru Gobind Singh. All these places were centers of Sikh pilgrimage.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from Gurdwaras associated with the Gurus, there were some other places which were seen by Ganesh Das as important. In his home town there were two famous *dharamsals*. One was that of Bhai Qandhara Singh who was known for piety and generosity. Guru Hargobind was believed to have stayed there. The other was the *dharamsal* of Bhai Kesar Singh who was known for his dedication to his faith.<sup>32</sup>

Ganesh Das is clear that the Udasi *faqirs* traced their origin to Sri Chand, son of Guru Nanak, who had become a renunciate and his followers too remained renunciates. The Tahli of Baba Sri Chand in Dera Baba Nanak was an important place of Udasi *faqirs*. Food was available there for travelers all the time. Ramdas was also a respectable place of Udasi *sadhhs*. The *smadh* of the *pious* gnostic Ram Kaur was there. In Gurdaspur was a place of the Udasi *faqirs*, with Baba Badri Das as its *mahant*. The tank and garden of Baba Sant Das Udasi were in Batala. Near Garhdiwal in the village Bahadurpur in the Bist Jalandhar Doab was a *dera* of Udasi *faqirs*. Bhai Makhan Singh, well known for his piety and faith in Wazirabad, was one of the Udasi *faqirs*; he was also well versed in the Shastras and Indian medicine. Outside the city was the place of Baba Sant Rein Udasi. In the town of Kot Nainan in the Rachna Doab was the *smadh* of Ram Kaur as a place of pilgrimage. Ganesh Das

mentions Akhara Advait Brahm in Amritsar without saying that it was an Udasi establishment.<sup>33</sup>

Ganesh Das does not use the simple term Udasi in all cases. In Jalalpur, Baba Saila and Bakht Mal Suri were Nanak Shahi Udasi *darveshes* known better as Ramdas. Many Hindus were their disciples. In the town of Muraliwala the *bhagat-dwara* was a beautiful place of Nanak Shahi *sadhs*. In Shahdarah there were two *dharamsals* of the Nanak Shahi Udasi *faqirs* where travelers could stay.<sup>34</sup>

If the Udasis appear to have come closer to the Sikhs in the time of Sikh rule, the Niranjaniyas appear to have remained aloof. Ganesh Das simply states that Aqil Rai Niranjania of Jandiala near Amritsar, with the *smadh* of his predecessor and a tank, was famous as a *guru*.<sup>35</sup>

Ganesh Das gives some interesting information on what may be regarded as popular religion. At 2 *kos* from the town of Wazirabad was the place of Sakhi Savar at Dharaunkal. It was believed that Sultan Sarvar was the son of Sultan Zain al-Abidin whose *mazar* was at 4 *kos* from the city of Multan. Sultan Sarvar controlled his senses through austerities and many people benefited from his generosity. He stayed in Dharaunkal for some time and many people became his disciples. People from Jammu, Sialkot, Pursarur, Darp and Salhar came to this place for pilgrimage. Most of the Bharais beat the drum for him and people entrusted offerings to them in the name of Sakhi Sarvar. He had gone towards Baluchistan, and his tomb was at 40 *kos* from Multan. It was called 'Nikah' and it was a place of pilgrimage. The *zamindars* of the village Lohan in the *pargana* of Pursarur believed in Sakhi Sarvar. They had raised a domed structure to Sakhi Sarvar as *Lakhdata* for worship. A Hindu named Hukma was a famous follower of Sakhi Sarvar there. All the Bharais and the followers of Sakhi Sarvar were obedient to Hukma. In Lahore, opposite the Lahauri Gate, people gave charities and offerings to the drum-beating Bharais in the name of Sakhi Sarvar.<sup>36</sup>

A few places of popular pilgrimage were associated with martyrs. A *mazar* in Sialkot commemorated an event that was supposed to have occurred in the late tenth century: the martyrdom of Imam Ali al-Haqq and his companions who had died fighting against Raja Salbahan, the second. Muslims from all directions used to come to this *mazar* in the month of Muharram by way of pilgrimage. One of the companions of Imam Ali al-Haqq was Saiyid Sabzwar who had attained to martyrdom. His tomb was at a place called Pir Sabz. Among the popular places of pilgrimage was the tomb of Shah Husain in Lahore. Ganesh Das refers to a large fair held at the *mazar* of Madho Lal Husain at the time of Basant Panchmi in the month of Phagun. It was believed that Madho was a handsome Hindu boy who was loved by the *faqir* named Lal Husain. Madho died but due to the prayer of Lal Husain he came to life again. He served Lal Husain for a long time and himself became a knower of secrets.<sup>37</sup> In this legend, Lal Husain and Madho are seen as a single entity.

Ganesh Das says that there were innumerable gnostics, both among Hindus and Muslims. Many of them remained unknown, but some of them left a legacy behind. One such Indian *bhagat* was Chhajju. Miracles were

associated with him and his Chaubara in Lahore was a place of pilgrimage. Every week, men and women attended the fair. At 3 *kos* from Lahore, there was the place of Bhairo at Achhara where a fair was held on the new moon. Associated with Shiva, Bhairo remains essentially a figure of popular religion.<sup>38</sup>

### Traditional Learning and Literature

We may turn to what Ganesh Das has to say of religious and secular learning in his own town. Talking of his ancestors he refers to Gurdit, who was good in mathematics, and Bami Ram, who was good in the art of composition (*insha*). Har Narain was good in history. Ganesh Das refers to the achievement of some of his ancestors who had accepted Islam, like Iqbal and Abdul Bari who were good in calligraphy, and Nusratmand who was good in music and poetry. Then there were others. Adept in satire were Diwan Thakur Das Vohra, Lala Jaswant Rai and Karori Mal Ghai. Later in time there was Lala Devi Sahai, a Brahman, who was the master of composition, lexicography in Arabic and Persian, and the principles of keeping revenue accounts (*siyaq*). Among the learned Brahmans were Misar Bahar Mal, Misar Bhogi Ram, Nawahu Ram and Misar Bidya Dhar. A famous astronomer of the town was Dilbagh Rai. Saiyid Miran Fazil had a complete mastery over *fiqh* and *shari'at*. In the time of Sardar Sahib Singh, Muhamamd Salih was one of the great '*ulama*' of Gujrat. Many Muslims benefited from his teaching. Mian Muhammad Tufail and his son Muhammad Ashraf were superior to others in composing poetry and prose. Their tradition was kept up by Muhammad Ali and his son Muhammad Salim as contemporaries of Ganesh Das. Saiyid Muhammad Ali composed good poetry in Persian under the pen name '*marg*'. Muhammad Qasim was unrivalled in medicine despite his blindness.<sup>39</sup>

In Sialkot, Abdul Hakim was the most learned in jurisprudence in the reign of Shah Jahan. His legacy was kept up by Maulavi Abdullah and Qazi Badruddin till the time of Ahmad Shah. Shaikh Ahmad Hakim and Saiyid Game Shah were exceptionally good in medicine and mathematics. Lala Inder Bhan Sialkoti, who wrote under the pen name of '*warastah*', was the author of *Mushtihat-i Shu'ra* and *Isha-i Sialkoti*. In the period of Sikh rule, Lala Moti Ram, a Nanda Khatri who wrote as '*parwanah*', was ahead of everyone else in composing poetry and prose. He left behind a number of works, like the *Diwan-i Parwanah*, *Masnavi-i Haqiqat Rai*, *Munashat-i Chamanstan* and *Ruq'at-i Moti Ram*. Lala Narain Das, a Brahman, was also good in the art of composition. He died in 1813. Ram Kishan, a Brahman was highly skilled in the knowledge of Shastras.<sup>40</sup>

In Lahore, Faqir Azizuddin Ansari, son of Ghulam Muhiyuddin Ansari, was unique in medicine. Khalifa Ghulam Rasul was unique in Arabic learning, especially *fiqh*. Well known in science, mathematics and astronomy were Lala Labhu Ram and Dalpat Rai Sehgal. Both of them had been taught by Lala Sehaj Ram who was a distinguished astronomer of the time of Ahmad Shah. Distinguished in medicine were Hakim Inayat Shah, Hakim Nur Muhammad,



Hakim Khari Shah, Mian Qadir Bakhsh Attar, and Lala Hakim Rai who was the physician of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Nur Muhammad was a good astrologer and Mian Baqir a good surgeon.<sup>41</sup>

Traditional learning in the past or the present was not confined to large urban centers. In the fort of Rohtas was an astronomer named Jita Rikh who was famed for his knowledge of mathematics as well. In Jalalpur, Ghulam Qadir Nazmi was good in Persian and Hindi poetry, calligraphy, the art of composition, and letter writing. In the town of Kunjah, Sukh Jiwan Mahajan was wonderful in the art of composition. A poet named 'Ghanimat' wrote the *Nairang-i 'Ishq*, a *masnavi* on the love of Aziz and Shahid, in the reign of Aurangzeb. Sodhara was famous for its calligraphists in the Mughal times. In the town of Wazirabad, Lala Gopal Sahai Badhera was unrivalled in Indian medicine and chess, and Munshi Naudah Rai had mastered the art of composition. Ram Gujrati, a Vaid Brahman, was thoroughly familiar with Indian astronomy. Misar Amir Chand was now distinguished above all in mathematics, (Greek) astronomy and Indian Siddhant. Mian Fazl was foremost among the calligraphists. Most of the *munshis* of Wazirabad were his students. Hakim Gul Ahmad was experienced in medicine. Raizada Akku Mal in Eminabad was excellent in medicine and unrivalled in treating patients. Raizada Ram Dayal had mastery in composing poetry and prose. Ram Das was highly competent in account keeping (*siyaq*) and composition (*insha*). Diwan Kirpa Ram, son of Diwan Jawala Sahai, was good in several fields despite his age: poetry and prose, the art of composition, poetics, medicine and science. In Daska Nidhan Singh, eminent in *siyaq* and *insha* were Bhawani Sahai and Gujrati Mal Chopra. In the town of Gujranwala Mian Faiz Muhammad, who used '*malahat*' as his pen name, wrote two works: *Mirat al-Hijab* and *Sharah-i Makubat-i 'Allami Abul Fazl*. Ram Kiran, a Maharaj Brahman, was perfect in astronomy. In Sheikhpura, Lala Ditt Mal and Amir Chand alias Lakhwarah were excellent calligraphists. Ganesh Das refers to the author of the *Khulasat ut-Tawarikh* as Sujan Singh Dhir (not as Sujan Rai Bhandari), and he mentions Ahmad Shah without referring to his *Tawarikh-i Hind*.<sup>42</sup>

Learning was not confined to the towns either. In the village of Kiranwala, Saiyid Nur Shah was learned in jurisprudence and his interpretation of the law was accepted in legal matters. In the village Deepoki lived Misar Gulab Rai and Ishar Das who had written a commentary on the *Lilavati*. In the village Chaundah Bajwa in the '*ilaqa*' of Pursarur was Ganga Ram, a Hindi poet. In the large village of Sambrial, Mian Ahmad was well versed in Arabic and Persian learning, and Mian Sadiq was a good calligraphist. In the village Kharat, learning was cultivated for generations by Mian Abdul Karim, Muhammad Azam and Shah Muhammad Khartali. The last two left as their legacy the works entitled *Munashat-i Azam*, *Diwan-i Azam* and *Swad-i Baharain*. In the village of Gakhkhar Cheema, Saiyid Muhammad Ali Shah Hakim was well versed in Persian and Arabic learning. In the village Kalaske, Darvesh Hakim was famous for his knowledge of medicine. Sardar Lehna Singh of the village Majitha was good in mathematics and science.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from the poets of Persian, Ganesh Das mentions a number of poets who composed in 'Hindi' like Dost Muhammad, Ganga Ram, Dilshad and Gopal Singh. Bhai Buddh Singh of Amritsar composed poetry in *bhakha*. The distinction made by Ganesh Das between 'Hindi' and *bhakha* is not clear. He also refers to the poets who wrote in Punjabi. In the village Ghalotian near Daska was Dayal Singh who wrote a *Siharfi* in Punjabi. Waris Shah, who belonged to Ram Nagar, composed a *Siharfi* which was popular among people. He also wrote the *qissa* of Heer and Ranjha. Others, like Muqbal, had written on this theme before Waris, and many others wrote after him. The Punjabi poet Mian Ahmad Yar, the author of the *qissa* of Kamrup, who used to live in Islamgarh, had migrated to the village Murala to the west of Gujrat. Ganesh Das refers to Qadir Bakhsh as a 'Hindi' poet who wrote on the tale of Puran Bhagat.<sup>44</sup> However, the most popular *qissa* on Puran Bhagat was written in Punjabi by the poet generally known as Qadir Yar.

### Gender and Love

Ganesh Das takes notice of women in various situations. A housewife named Bhola Dai was traveling with other Badhawan Khatri women from Wazirabad to Sodhara. She complained about mud on the banks of a stream on the way. Another woman taunted that she should get a bridge built over the stream. Bhola Dai stopped there, and left the place only after a bridge had been built. It was still known as the Bridge of Bhola Dai. The way in which Ganesh Das relates the story gives the impression that Bhola Dai was the wife of a rich Khatri who really cared for her wishes. Ganesh Das is more eloquent about a woman poet of Gujrat noticed earlier. Her name was Sahib Devi and her pen name was 'Arori'. It is not clear if she was an Arora woman, and whether or not she was married. She composed poetry in 'Hindi language' and produced flawless extempore verses. No man could compete with her in the perfection of *radif* and *qafiah*. A goldsmith woman, named Mai Durgo, was known for her spiritual perfection as an eminent disciple of Baqi Shah Auliya of Wazirabad. Two women of Lahore, Rajo Devi and Dharmo Devi, were well known for their piety, and their place had become a place of worship. Then there was Jeoni who was completely dedicated to her husband Raj Kaur Kohli. He died young and she burnt herself on his funeral pyre. Her *smadh* on the bank of the stream called Palkhu, between Wazirabad and Gujrat, was a place of worship for the people of India. A temple of Mahadev was also constructed near the *smadh*.<sup>45</sup>

Ganesh Das goes into much greater detail in narrating the story of a *sati* in his home town. A pious Brahman of Gujrat, named Sobha Ram, had a beautiful daughter called Radhi. A handsome boy named Bhagwan Das came from Bhimbar to Gujrat to see his sister who was married to the Brahman Ram Kaur. One day Bhagwan Das saw Radhi playing with other girls and was attracted towards her. They enjoyed each other's presence on the pretext of playing children's games. Separation was painful to them. Radhi's parents betrothed her to Bhagwan Das, and they were married. They lived happily for

some time in Bhimbar and came to Gujrat. Ram Kaur's son fell ill. Bhagwan Das prayed to God that he may serve as a substitute for his cousin. Ram Kaur's son regained health and Bhagwan Das fell ill. Despite all kinds of medication and charities, he did not recover. He was very sad to depart but Radhi told him that he would not be alone. Reassured, he died in peace. Radhi declared her determination to burn herself on his funeral pyre. Her parents tried to dissuade her but she told them that a woman without a husband was regarded in their religion as a body without its head; the place of a corpse was in the dust and not in the home.<sup>46</sup>

Many eminent persons of the town offered her all kinds of support for a comfortable living but she was not dissuaded. Pandit Radhe Kishan, son of Misar Bidya Dhar, who was well versed in the Shastras, came with some scriptural writing to advise her. She maintained that the soul was immortal and, therefore, she was not killing herself. The human body consisted of four elements: dust, water, air and fire. On destruction, it mingled with these elements but the soul was everlasting. She added that she had discovered God in her husband and she would be absorbed in God after her physical annihilation. She does not forget to mention that a woman without her husband was never safe from slander even if she locked herself in the home or remained in veil. Pandit Radhe Kishan was now convinced that she was justified in burning herself with her deceased husband. He also explained that *sati* was the one who recognized God and regarded her husband as God, looked upon his service as worship, obeyed his order as mandatory like a *farman*, cast her eyes on none else, and preserved her honour at all cost. If her husband dies before her, she burns herself with him. Such a woman attained to a status that was not accessible to the devotees of God. Ganesh Das says that four kinds of persons received high status in the next world: a gnostic, a brave warrior who dies fighting, a person who protects the cow, and the woman who accepts fire for the sake of her husband. Out of these four, the status of the *sati* was the highest.

Radhi dressed herself as a bride, with the colored turban of her husband over her head, and moved towards the cremation ground in the midst of a huge crowd. Garlands of flowers and golden ornaments were offered to her, and people bowed to her. She distributed with her own hands the precious articles among the poor. The procession reached the tank of Bhag Mal where a pyre of sandal wood had been made ready. She was overjoyed to see the prospect of burning herself with her husband. After the cremation, a domed structure was raised on the spot. People went there to pray to 'Radhi Bhagwan' for relief from their afflictions. This event had taken place in 1845, and Ganesh Das could have been an eye-witness. In any case, his great admiration for the practice of *sati* comes out clearly from this narrative. There were thousands of other people who shared his sentiment.

Ganesh Das takes notice of the women who became *satis* after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It may be noted that the common practices of the time, political considerations, and personal feelings informed Maharaja Ranjit Singh's attitude in matters of matrimony and sexuality. Ganesh Das mentions

casually that Kharak Singh was born to Bibi Sahiba Datar Kaur. Maharaja Sher Singh and Tara Singh were born to Mahtab Kaur. Kashmira Singh and Pashaura Singh were born to Daya Kaur, and Multana Singh to Ratan Kaur. The last two ladies were the widows of Sahib Singh, the ruler of Gujrat. Ranjit Singh had brought them under 'the shade of his sheet' in 1814. The reference here is to the practice called *karewa* or *chadar-andazi* for marrying a widow. The fifth wife of Ranjit Singh was Bibi Jind Kaur, the mother of Maharaja Dalip Singh. Apart from these ladies, Ranjit Singh admitted several other women into his palace, including the daughters of Raja Sansar Chand and other eminent Sardars. Each one was given a *jagir* and daily allowance. In the later part of his reign, he admitted Gul Bahar Begam, a courtesan, into the palace. Similarly there were a number of slave girls of known fidelity in his *haram*. They served the Sarkar and received rewards and gifts. According to Ganesh Das, eleven of the women who had shared Ranjit Singh's bed with him voluntarily burnt themselves on his funeral pyre. Among them were Har Devi, and also a Katoch princess. A strange thing happened: a pigeon also burnt itself in the fire. A *smadh* was built on the place of cremation. Ganesh Das does not conceal his appreciation in his account for the royal *satis*, but it is nothing compared to his admiration for Radhi in a situation of mutual love and fidelity.<sup>47</sup>

Before we take up the stories of love, we may notice that Ganesh Das treats the popular lore about Puran and Raja Rasalu, the sons of Raja Salbahan, as based on history. Born to Rani Achhran, the senior queen of Raja Salbahan, Puran was accused by Lunan, Salbahan's second wife who was the daughter of Raja Deep Raj Singh of Chamba, of incestuous advances. His hands and feet were cut off and he was thrown into a well, still known as the well of Puran. Women desirous of a child bathed in the water of this well. Salbahan's younger son, Rasalu, who was born to Lunan, succeeded Salbahan. Leaving a deputy in Sialkot, he founded a city in the hills of Akhnur. There, a demon was infatuated by his wife. She told Rasalu, and he drew his sword to kill the demon. The demon vanished with a loud cry, and all those who heard the cry became still like the statues of stone. Raja Rasalu fell in love with Koklan, the daughter of Raja Sarkap of 'Sandar' Bar. He built palaces for his beloved in the *shikargah*, which were still known as Dhaular-i Rasalu or Dhalular-i Koklan. Raja Hodi of Peshawar also fell in love with Koklan and she responded to him warmly. Rasalu came to know of it and killed Hodi on his way to the palace. He roasted Hodi's flesh and gave it to Koklan to eat. It tasted much different, and she asked Rasalu what kind of a *kabab* it was. He said: 'this is the flesh of your friend'. Stung by this taunt, she jumped from the roof and died. Rasalu never married again. Ganesh Das goes on to praise the fidelity of the wife of Rasalu's Khatri Diwan who preserved her honour despite all the contrivances of Raja Rasalu to seduce her.<sup>48</sup>

We may also notice that Ganesh Das looks upon the bandit hero Dulla Bhatti, many stories of whose bravery were narrated by the people, as a historical figure. Indeed, Pindi Bhattian had become noteworthy for Ganesh Das because Dulla Bhatti had lived there as an outlaw in the reign of Akbar.<sup>49</sup>

Like Puran, Raja Rasalu, and Dulla Bhatti, the lovers like Sohni and Mahival, Heer and Ranjha, and Mirza and Sahiba, were historical figures for Ganesh Das. The historicity of all the detail given by him is difficult to ascertain, but the stories told by Ganesh Das are a part of social reality for him and reveal his attitude towards love and gender.

Izzat Bakhsh, the son of a Mughal trader of Samarqand, was so struck by the beauty of Sohni, the daughter of Tulla, a potter in the city of Gujrat, that he fell senseless on the ground. He was taken away to his camp by his men, but he could not sleep for the night. Early in the morning he came to Tulla's shop and requested him to teach his craft to him. When Sohni wanted to know why he wished to learn the lowly craft of a potter despite being a merchant, he said that he was caught like a fish (*mahi-var*) in the net of her looks and had thrown his status into the dust at her door, to be a slave of her father. She understood his meaning and became inclined towards him. 'There is a secret between the lovers which even the angels cannot fathom'. But Tulla saw no point in his request for apprenticeship, and Izzat Bakhsh got the excuse to visit his place every day. His love for Sohni became increasingly intense, and a request was made for Sohni's hand for him. Tulla did not agree. He could never accept a person from outside his brotherhood. He betrothed Sohni to his nephew in the town of Raliala.<sup>50</sup>

Izzat Bakhsh gave his possessions in charity and wandered madly in his love for Sohni. The children laughed at him and called him Mahival (from *mahi-var*). One day he saw Sohni and fell at her feet. Sohni expressed her love for him, but also her helplessness. After a few days, the marriage party from Raliala came to Gujrat. Mahival begged a woman in the neighbourhood to arrange a meeting with Sohni. The woman took pity on him and brought them together. They expressed their mutual love and swore to have become husband and wife. Sohni went back to her father's house. The *qazi* and the *mufti* did not listen to her plea and married her to Tulla's nephew. In Raliala, she did not eat anything. When she did, it was only what was offered to her by a *diwana* who was actually Mahival. The people of Raliala took him to be a *jinn* in the guise of a *diwana*, and forced him to leave the town. They took him across the river in a boat and told all the boatmen not to allow him to recross the river. Mahival saw no use in approaching the local administrator (*hakim*), and put up a cabin on the bank of the river. Sohni thought that her lover should not die of hunger. She began to take food for him every night, swimming across the river on a pitcher. Sohni and Mahival enjoyed their love for a considerable time.

Sohni had persuaded her husband to believe that she was possessed by *jinn* who would not tolerate anyone's presence with her at night. Eventually, however, her husband's sister discovered what Sohni was doing. She replaced the baked pitcher with an unbaked one. She wanted Sohni to be drowned to death in order to save his brother's honor. The night happened to be stormy. It was mad to launch into the river on such a night, but love overpowered reason. The unbaked pitcher began to dissolve in water before she realized what was happening. She cursed the betrayer. More than her life she cared for the sight of Mahival. She began to swim, calling out for him. He jumped into the river

and took her in his arms. She looked at his face and breathed her last. With Sohni in his arms, Mahival sank to the bottom of the river. No one saw their corpses. Ganesh Das quotes a number of verses in his narrative, some of them indicating a certain degree of appreciation for the lovers. But love inevitably brings trouble. That was why the philosophers called it madness, or a fatal disease. The wise avoid it altogether.

Ganesh Das does not say so but his narrative is in a sense realistic enough to explain the tragic end. Mahival is not only a foreigner but also a person with a different social position than that of the potter Tulla. That is the reason why Tulla does not agree to Sohni's marriage to Mahival. Despite their mutual but personal binding in wedlock, the *qazi* and the *mufti* force her to marry Tulla's nephew. Sohni's husband's sister is so much concerned with his honor that she virtually ensures Sohni's death. Personal love has no place in the given social order. Like many of his contemporaries, however, Ganesh Das has a sneaking sympathy for personal love, and believes in the spiritual power of the lovers. The whole clan of her husband died of plague due to her curse. Nothing was left of the town of Raliala; it came under the river due to Sohni's curse.

Ganesh Das is more appreciative of the idea of love in his account of Heer and Ranjha. Dhido, a Ranjha Jatt, was the youngest of the seven sons of Mauju. He got the poorest piece of land as his share on his father's death. After a hard work one day he was sleeping under a tree. He saw in his dream a beautiful girl and fell in love with her. On waking up he was grief stricken not to find her. He was told that a dream was like a line drawn on water but he was not consoled. He left his home in search of his beloved. Since he was sincere in his search he was met on the first stage of his journey by the Five Pirs who gave their blessings and told him to go to Jhang Sial. When he reached the river Chenab, it was in flood. He persuaded the boatman Luddan to ferry him across. In the boat was Heer's bed. Dhido Ranjha gave his golden ring to Luddan and he allowed him to sleep in the bed. Heer came with her companions, beat Luddan, and rudely awakened Ranjha. On seeing him, however, she instantly fell in love with him.<sup>51</sup>

Dhido told Heer that he was a Ranjha Jatt from Takht Hazara, in search of work. He knew how to look after the cattle. Heer said that her father, Chuchak Sial, possessed a large number of cows and buffaloes and needed a loyal servant. Heer took him to her father and he was told to look after the cattle. His flute could intoxicate both animals and human beings. He began to graze the cattle in the meadows where Heer would bring food for him. They enjoyed each other's love. One day, Heer's uncle, Kaido, saw them, and informed Chuchak who threatened to kill Heer. Her mother suggested that it was high time to marry her off. Chuchak thought of Saida Khera of Rangpur as a suitable match. Heer was married to him and taken to Rangpur.

Ranjha thought of becoming a *faqir* and joined the *jogis*. But he could never forget Heer. One day he decided to go to Rangpur. There he went from door to door, begging for food. He saw Heer lying in bed due to long illness. He called aloud that he had the cure for all kinds of illness. But Heer did not recognize him; she was actually annoyed with his tall talk and turned him out

of the house. Jogi Ranjha established his place (*takia*) outside the town and people flocked to him, seeking relief from their afflictions. Saida Khera's sister, Sehti, went to him for help. On the plea of curing Heer from a snake bite, Jogi Ranjha was closeted with her in a alone room. During the night he broke the rear wall of the room, and they eloped.

They were pursued, captured near Adilpur, and taken to its *nazim* who had been appointed by Adli, the ruler of Delhi. In view of the fact that Heer had not given her consent to her *nikah* with Saida and their marriage was never consummated, their *nikah* was deemed to be null and void. Heer and Ranjha were set free. Ranjha wanted to take her to Takht Hazara but Heer wanted to go to her parents so that they were properly married. The old man whom they consulted agreed with Heer and suggested that she should stay in his house for some time so that her father was informed and persuaded to accept the course proposed. They accepted his advice and Ranjha went to Takht Hazara. On the same night, however, Heer was bitten by a snake and she died. People took her corpse towards Jhang Sial. Her father refused to see Heer's face. Consequently, she was buried on the way between Maghiana and Jhang. Four walls were raised on the spot, which were still there. When the news of her death was conveyed to Ranjha he too died instantaneously. Ganesh Das comments: 'Happy are they who die in the path of love'.

Ganesh Das tries to make the best sense of the received story of Heer and Ranjha. Dhido dreaming of Heer and receiving the blessings of the Five Pirs provide a mystical dimension for the story. The effect of Ranjha's flute on the cattle is also indicative of his rare talent. Heer's parents cannot think of marrying her to Ranjha because of the social constraints against personal love. But the *nazim* upholds her right to marriage by consent. Interpreted literally, the law of the state dissolves social constraints. But Heer's father is not prepared to see her face because of the dishonor she has brought to the family and, by extension, to the whole clan. It is clear that he would never have agreed to Heer's marriage to Ranjha. But Ranjha cannot live without her. He dies on hearing of Heer's death. Such is the nature of their love as madness. At one place Ganesh Das compares Ranjha with Yusuf; at another, he compares Luddan with Nuh. These passing allusions to the prophets reinforce the mystical dimension, and sanctify love.

The story of Mirza and Sahiba, as told by Ganesh Das, has no mystical dimension but he is clearly appreciative of their tragic love. Mirza was born in Faridabad on the right bank of the river Ravi. His maternal uncle took him as a boy to the town of Khiva Sial for religious education. The teacher of the *maktab* in the mosque recited the Surah-i Yusuf for Mirza's protection against the lure of the Zulekha-like world. It so happened that the beautiful daughter of Khan Khiva, the Sial, who was called Sahiba, was also sent by her father to the same mosque. Mirza and Sahiba were attracted to each other at first sight. The teacher failed to dissuade them from the game of love (*'ishqbazi*). In despair, he told Sahiba's mother and she stopped Sahiba from going to the *maktab*. She was in misery, confined to the home.<sup>52</sup>

Mirza was taken back to Faridabad. But he could not forget Sahiba. He rode his mare every morning and evening, thinking of the home of his beloved. An old man from the side of Jhang and Khiva Sial came to Faridabad and talked sweetly of the youth and beauty of the peerless Sahiba. Fired afresh by love, Mirza rewarded the old man, rode the mare, and reached the home of his aunt in Khiva Sial. She sympathized with him and went to Sahiba's home. There she found Sahiba in bed due to illness. In the course of conversation she dropped Mirza's name and found Sahiba responding to it with interest. She told Sahiba that Mirza had come to the town. On a sign from her, she talked to Sahiba's mother who agreed to allow Sahiba to go to her home for a change. Mirza and Sahiba met and kissed and embraced each other. They were seen together by a kinsman of Sahiba. He scolded Mirza's aunt and took Sahiba with him to be entrusted to her mother. Mirza rode his mare and flew like wind to Faridabad.

Sahiba complained to her parents that she was being unjustly maligned. They thought that the time had come for her marriage. Her mother mentioned Mirza as a suitable match in view of his equal social standing. But her husband announced furiously that he would never give Sahiba in marriage to Mirza. Their personal love was against the social norms. Tahir Khan, a *sardar* of considerable means, was seen by Khan Khiva as a suitable match for his daughter. Tahir Khan accepted the proposal and a day was fixed for marriage. Sahiba sent a message to Mirza, asking him to come like the cloud of mercy. Mirza reached Khiva Sial and joined the marriage party. Sahiba went to the top of the house, recognized Mirza in the party, came down from the roof, and in a moment Mirza took away the bride on his mare.

Sahiba's parents were naturally upset over what had happened. Sahiba's brothers, Khan Sher (Shamir) and Khan Amir, pursued Mirza and Sahiba with a large number of retainers. When both Mirza and Sahiba felt tired, they thought of taking some rest under a tree. Mirza fell asleep and Sahiba removed his bow and quiver and hung them carefully on the tree. When she saw the horsemen of her brothers approaching, she awakened Mirza. They rode the mare in haste, forgetting the bow and the arrows. Sahiba fell down from the mare and she was killed. Mirza took out his sword and fell upon them as a lion falls on the sheep. He killed many of them but they were too many. He died fighting. 'Happy is he who dies in the path of love'. The cruel pursuers returned to Khiva Sial. The Muslims of the neighborhood buried Mirza there as a martyr. His tomb on the road to Faridabad was now a place of pilgrimage.

The stark reality of the story brings their tragic love into high relief. The primary cause of the death of Mirza and Sahiba was the notion of personal and social honor cherished by Sahiba's father, and her brothers. There is no mystique in the tale. Yet Mirza is seen as a martyr. The idea of personal love is celebrated without questioning the social situation in which there is no room for personal love.



### **In Retrospect**

Intentionally or unintentionally, Ganesh Das provides evidence on the state of urbanization in the Punjab during the Mughal and Sikh times, making a clear distinction between a rural habitation and an urban centre and indicating the grades of urbanization as a dynamic process. He also provides a good deal of information on urban life.

For the religious life of the people in both the urban and rural habitations, Ganesh Das includes the three major communities of the region: the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. Among the Hindus he assumes the existence of sectarian differences and talks of the Vaishnavas, the Shaivas, and the Shaktas. They have their respective religious scriptures referred to as Shastras, and they have their own temples with various modes of worship. Both among the Vaishnavas and the Shaivas there were ascetics known as *bairagis* and *sanyasis*. Ascetical practices and austerities were regarded in high esteem. The cult of Rama and Krishna was more popular among the Vaishnavas than the worship of Vishnu. In the past, the left handers among the Shaktas were known to exist but not anymore.

Among the Muslims of the Punjab, Ganesh Das does not notice any sectarian divisions and the main lines of difference are between the orthodox tradition upheld by the '*ulama* and the Sufi tradition popularized by the *mashaikh* and *pirs*. While the '*ulama* tended to be fanatical and overbearing sometimes in the past, the Sufis tended to be catholic and tolerant, or even appreciative of the non-Muslims. The great institution of the orthodox was the mosque and that of the Sufis, the *mazar*.

For the Sikhs, Ganesh Das dwells largely on the Khalsa, or the Singhs of Guru Gobind Singh, who had a distinct identity of their own, with a written code of life. A large number of places associated with the Sikh Gurus had become centers of Sikh pilgrimage. The most important was the Golden Temple at Amritsar which was associated with Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, and Guru Hargobind. The Udasis are clearly distinct from the Khalsa, with their belief in Sri Chand and their practice of celibacy. However, Ganesh Das talks of Nanak Shahi *sadhs* or *faqirs* who presumably were celibate like the Udasis in general but who gave importance to the teachings of Guru Nanak. They had their own religious places. The only other sectarian group mentioned by Ganesh Das was the Niranjanias of Jandiala Guru, who are known to have been hostile to the Khalsa.

Then there were forms of popular worship: the shrine of Sultan Sakhi Sarvar who was a Muslim gnostic; the Chaubara of Chhaju Bhagat who did not belong to any known denomination; and the place of Madho Lal Husain at which the difference between a Hindu and a Muslim is dissolved in spiritual unity.

The bits and pieces of information given by Ganesh Das put together amount to considerable evidence in support of the tradition of learning cultivated for several centuries nearly all over the Punjab. The languages of learning and literature were Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, 'Hindi', Braj and

Punjabi. The scripts used were Perso-Arabic, Devanagri and Gurmukhi. The foremost sciences mentioned are astronomy and medicine. The former could not flourish or survive without mathematics, and it was closely allied with astrology too. Possibly, the tradition of Greek astronomy had survived even among those who were experts in Indian astronomy. The physicians practised both Greek and Indian medicine and they were far more numerous than surgeons. Arabic learning covered Tafsir, Hadis, Jurisprudence and Shari‘at. In Persian, the two most important branches of literature were poetry and history. Lexicography and calligraphy related to both Arabic and Persian. The art of composition included grammar, poetics, formal letters, and legal documents. Account keeping and the maintenance of revenue records required specialization. The knowledge of Shastras was kept up by learned Brahmans. Poetry was composed in several languages and in various forms, including satire. In Punjabi poetry, *qissa* and *siharfi* were the two major forms. Ganesh Das was familiar with the names and works of the greatest of the Punjabi poets of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. He does not fail to mention the cultivation of music, both courtly and popular.

Ganesh Das talks of women in several situations, both secular and religious: the familial context, the realm of literature, the field of religious devotion, and personal love. The ideal woman of Ganesh Das is the wife who becomes a *sati* on the death of her husband as the apex of conjugal love and fidelity. She becomes an object of worship. Even the royal *satis* are appreciated in a situation of polygamy in which the idea of dedication to the royal husband is emphasized. A woman who distinguishes herself in literature is admired, and admitted to be superior to the contemporary men. A woman who carves out an autonomous life for herself in the field of religion is appreciated and respected. However, in the social order, with its rigid sexual norms and well entrenched customs, there is no room for personal love between a woman and a man. The only end of a staunch and persistent commitment to personal love is death. Significantly, however, Ganesh Das has sympathy for the lovers and appreciation for their sacrifice in love. As martyrs they become the secular counterpart of the martyrs who die for faith.

Finally, we may note that the *Char Bagh* tells us something about Ganesh Das himself. He was proud of being a Khatri. He looked upon himself as an orthodox Hindu who subscribed to the *varnashrama* ideal, and admired the fidelity of Hindu women, symbolized above everything else in the act of becoming a *sati*. Ganesh Das thought of himself as a Punjabi, and an Indian (Hindi). He does not betray any religious or sectarian prejudice. The range of his empathy was very wide. His tone is seldom hostile. He rarely denounces any set of people as a group. Even in the case of individuals, he disapproves of their actions. Zakariya Khan is praised for his liberal attitudes, and the fanatical *‘ulama* are deprecated for their narrow religious and sectarian concerns and partialities. Ganesh Das prized his faith, and he respected the religious beliefs and practices of others. He was rather indifferent to voluntary conversion from one faith to another, but he was strongly opposed to forced conversion. He appreciated the learning of the *‘ulama* but not their bigotry. He

appreciated the learning of some left-handed Shaktas but not their religious ritual which appeared to infringe the moral code. He had a great respect for religion and religious piety, but he was equally interested in the temporal affairs of men. As a well educated person, Ganesh Das extolled the excellence of others in sciences and traditional learning, their skill in *inshapardazi*, account keeping and calligraphy, their achievement in literature and historiography, and their performance in dance and music. What he shared with a large number of people was his catholicity of outlook. Perhaps what he shared the most with the largest number of people of the Punjab was a positive acceptance of cultural coexistence.

[The reader may refer to the Glossary at the end for the meaning of non English terms figuring in the text]

### Notes

1. Ganesh Das, *Char Bagh-i Punjab*, ed, Kirpal Singh (Amritsar: Khalsa College, 1965). Kirpal Singh has collated the available manuscripts for the text, given an index of important persons and places, and a chronology of events. In the Introduction he has given an outline of the work, its title and the date of its compilation, some information about the author, his family and his other works, and he has given a literary review. He has also discussed the historical significance of this work. For an English translation of the descriptive portion, see J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, trs. & eds., *Early Nineteenth Century Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1975). For a brief analysis, see J.S. Grewal, 'Ganesh Das's *Char-Bagh-i-Punjab*', *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967). For his evidence on Sikh polity, see J.S. Grewal 'Ganesh Das on the Secular aspirations of the Khalsa', *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007), pp. 154-61.
2. Ganesh Das's *Char-Bagh-i-Punjab*, p. 345.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 171, 249, 262-64, 303.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.160-61, 174-76, 225, 261-62, 293-97.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-81.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

10. Ibid., pp. 167, 169, 225, 227, 247, 301, 305.
11. Ibid., pp. 168, 179, 218, 252, 254, 258-64, 273, 293, 296.
12. Ibid., pp. 161-62, 180, 219, 264.
13. Ibid., pp. 165, 180, 205, 210-11, 226, 252, 301.
14. Ibid., pp. 179, 220, 245, 247-48, 250-51.
15. Ibid., pp. 164, 165, 166, 210-11, 299.
16. Ibid., pp. 178, 180, 249, 263, 282-83, 293, 294, 304.
17. Ibid., pp. 164, 178, 179, 209, 245.
18. Ibid., pp. 246, 249, 264, 295, 304.
19. Ibid., pp. 232-44.
20. Ibid., pp. 231-32.
21. Ibid., p. 279.
22. Ibid., pp. 280-81, 282.
23. Ibid., p. 302.
24. Ibid., pp. 169, 177-78, 179, 206, 210.
25. Ibid., pp. 159, 161, 162.
26. Ibid., pp. 219, 227, 245-46, 248-49, 250, 253, 255, 263, 264, 274.
27. Ibid., pp. 105, 127, 299.
28. Ibid., pp. 293-94, 295, 297-98.
29. Ibid., pp. 159, 227, 255.
30. Ibid., pp. 180-81, 252, 256-57, 282, 300, 302.
31. Ibid., p. 180.
32. Ibid., pp. 152, 153, 218-19, 294, 296, 298-99, 305.

33. Ibid., pp. 207, 262, 274.
34. Ibid., pp. 220-21, 248, 283.
35. Ibid., p. 300.
36. Ibid., pp. 19, 224, 227, 279-80.
37. Ibid., pp. 281-82, 293.
38. Ibid., pp. 175-81.
39. Ibid., pp. 227-28.
40. Ibid., p. 278-79.
41. Ibid., pp. 164, 207, 209, 220, 247, 252-55, 261, 273, 299.
42. Ibid., pp. 208, 219, 246, 249, 256, 258, 301.
43. Ibid., pp. 206, 210, 220, 245, 256-57, 262.
44. Ibid., pp. 14-16.
45. Ibid., pp. 179, 252, 253-54, 282-83.
46. Ibid., pp. 188-200.
47. Ibid., pp. 323-24, 328.
48. Ibid., p. 264.
49. Loc. cit.
50. Ibid., pp. 181-88, 208.
51. Ibid., pp. 211-17.
52. Ibid., pp. 265-72.

### **Glossary**

*abdal*: an agent of God.  
*ahimsa*: non-violence.  
*atsh kadah*: fire-temple.  
*bairagi*: a renunciate.

*bhagat*: a devotee.  
*bhagat-dwara*: a place where devotees of God congregate.  
*Char bagh*: a royal garden, a park.  
*Chaudhari*: head of a group of villages.  
*dar al-harb*: an enemy's country.  
*darvesh*: a humble and pious Muslim devotee of God.  
*dera*: an establishment.  
*devi*: a goddess.  
*dharamsal*: a resting place, a place of worship.  
*dharma*: faith, duty.  
*dhuni*: fire kept burning.  
*diwana*: mad, mad in love.  
*faqir*: a religious mendicant.  
*farman*: a mandate, a royal order.  
*faujdar*: a commandant, an administrator of a *sarkar*.  
*fiqh*: jurisprudence.  
*firqa*: a body, a sect.  
*gaddi*: seat.  
*hakim*: a governor, an administrator.  
*'ilaqa*: an area under the jurisdiction of one.  
*inshapardazi*: art of composing letters.  
*jagir*: a grant of revenue-free land.  
*jinn*: a demon.  
*jizya*: tax on non-Muslims.  
*jogi*: a renunciate, generally a Shaiva.  
*kabab*: a piece of roasted meat.  
*kardar*: an administrator.  
*karewa (chadar-andazi)*: remarriage of a widow by a simple ceremony.  
*khanqah*: a Sufi monastery.  
*kos*: a measure of distance, about two miles.  
*langar*: a free kitchen.  
*mahant*: head of a religious establishment.  
*maktab*: a school.  
*'malahat'*: 'agreeable', 'elegant'.  
*'marg'*: 'death'.  
*marhi*: a small structure over a spot of cremation.  
*masnavi*: a poetic narrative composed in distichs of a pair of rhymes.  
*maulavi*: a learned man, a teacher.  
*mashaikh*: plural of *shaikh*, a guide; the head of a Sufi monastery.  
*mazar*: a mausoleum.  
*mufti*: an expounder of Islamic law.  
*mulla*: the keeper of a mosque and its school.  
*munshi*: one who knows the art of composition, a professional writer.  
*muqaddam*: a village headman.  
*namaz*: prayer by Muslims.  
*nazim*: governor of a province.

- nikah*: marriage of a Muslim.  
*pancha*: a member of the *panchayat*, an eminent person.  
*pargana*: an administrative unit.  
 'parwanah': 'a moth'.  
*pir*: a spiritual guide in a Sufi order.  
*qafiah*: a measure in poetry.  
*qanungo*: a revenue official.  
*qazi*: a Muslim judge.  
*qissa*: a poetic narrative.  
*radif*: a word following the rhyme.  
*rahit*: way of life.  
*rozah*: fast.  
*sadh*: a religious person.  
*sahibzada*: a young gentleman; son of a person of sanctity.  
*sahukar*: a merchant, a moneylender.  
*sanyasi*: a Shaiva renunciate.  
*sarai*: a resting place.  
*sardar*: a chief.  
*sarrafi*: a jeweller; a money changer.  
*sati*: a woman who burns herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.  
*shari'at*: Islamic law.  
*shikargah*: a place reserved for hunting.  
*siharfi*: a poem based on 30 letters.  
*smadh*: a structure raised on a spot of cremation.  
*sudi*: the bright half of the lunar month.  
*takia*: a place of repose, the place of a *faqir*.  
 'ulama': plural of 'ālim, a learned person.  
*varnashrama*: the ideal social order of four classes and four stages of life in the Brahmanical system.  
*wali*: a friend of God, a saint.  
 'warastah': 'humble', 'saved'.  
*zamindar*: a land-holder, an intermediary.





## Issues of Gender among the Sikhs: Eighteenth-Century Literature

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While analysing the whole range of contemporary evidence in Gurmukhi, Persian, and English on the issues of gender among the Sikhs, this paper determines the relevance of different categories of sources for reconstructing the relative position of the Sikh women in the family, the household, the community life, and politics during the eighteenth century. While differing in content, approach and points of emphasis, the Sikh sources as a whole provide the insider's view of the processes by which the new gender norms were being formulated and roles constructed, along with the gradual crystallization of the distinctly Sikh rites and rituals. In the community life visualized in these sources, faith and custom appear to be intertwined with the outlines of a new social order. Tension between the norm and practice too appears to be built into the rapidly changing socio-political situation in the eighteenth century.

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The eighteenth century opened in the backdrop of the institution of the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, which is regarded as a turning point in Sikh history in socio-religious as much as political terms. The political struggle of the Khalsa during the eighteenth century, the establishment of their rule, and their polity before the ascendancy of Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), have received a good deal of attention from historians. Recently, the bearing of this situation on the social and religious life of the Sikhs during the eighteenth century has been studied.<sup>1</sup> There have been some studies also of aspects of gender relations or the relative position of men and women in this changing socio-political context.<sup>2</sup> However, the conflicting claims of the Sikh ideals and customs, and the selective use of the sources have resulted in the conflicting interpretations of the issues of gender among the eighteenth-century Sikhs, which necessitate a fresh look at the subject. While taking note of the available sources in Persian and English, this paper analyses the normative and empirical evidence in the Gurmukhi sources, which understandably constitute the most important category of contemporary evidence for this period.

Significantly, a form of Sikh literature known as the *rahitnama* (manual on the Sikh way of life) emerged soon after the institution of the Khalsa, showing concern for the relative position of women. *Rahitnamas* continued to be compiled in the middle decades and around the end of the eighteenth century, providing, among other things, the norms recommended for gender relations. Some other forms of Sikh literature of the period like the *var* (generally, heroic poetry), the *gurbilas* (poetical work in praise of the Guru/s), the *sakhis* (episodes in the life of a Guru) and the *ustat* (poetical composition

in praise) provide bits and pieces of empirical evidence on the subject. However, in view of the occasional divergence and even contradictions in the normative and empirical evidence, there has been a serious questioning of the veracity and relevance of some of these Gurmukhi works as sources for studying social history of the eighteenth-century Sikhs. The *rahitnamas* in particular have been dismissed as ‘merely prescriptive texts’, or as works by unknown authors, or as belonging to the later period. The paper proceeds on the premise that in a moral system passing through significant socio-political change, the prescriptive texts enunciating the norms about the social relations envisaged for the emergent and growing community, also yield insights into the ground realities, to be supplemented and complemented by direct, indirect and unintended empirical evidence in other sources.

It may be interesting to note that on the issues of gender in particular the Gurmukhi sources have been interpreted from almost opposite standpoints. The differences in approach, especially between the Sikh scholars and academic historians, and then among the latter, become more marked as they shift their focus from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Therefore, as a progressive and accumulative endeavour, historical reconstruction proceeds by taking note of the existing scholarly understanding of the subject.

### **Conflicting Interpretations**

Teja Singh and Kapur Singh can be taken as the representative Sikh scholars to have reflected on the position of women in Sikhism. Citing the evidence of the *Asa di Var*, Teja Singh asserts that Guru Nanak restored to women the fullest rights in the society; in every way they were equal to men in the sight of God. Religious congregations were thrown open to women, and no social custom was to hinder them from doing so. Guru Amar Das forbade *sati*. Examples were known of the Sikh women in the later period that not only fought in battles but also ruled over states. They assisted men in spheres of social and political activity. Teja Singh comes to the conclusion that all invidious distinctions between men and women were abolished.<sup>3</sup> Kapur Singh reinforces the idea of women’s equality with men in the Sikh social order even more forcefully. In his view, the Hindu evaluation of woman was based on the Law of Karma (Retribution). Although she was treated with great tenderness and reverence in Hindu texts, yet her social position throughout the ages had been inferior and subordinate to man. ‘As a girl, she was under the tutelage of her parents, as an adult, of her husband and as a widow, of her sons’. Sikhism repudiated the nexus between *karma* and the social status of woman, declaring her to be ‘the very essence of social coherence’. This ‘ideological position’ is said to have been a source of vitality and strength for the democratic traditions and polity of the Sikhs.<sup>4</sup>

One may turn to the professional scholars for a more nuanced understanding of the issues of gender. In his *Guru Nanak in History*, J.S. Grewal underlines that Guru Nanak was prepared to defend woman against those who insisted on relegating her to an inferior position merely on the basis

of her sex. For liberation, 'she was certainly placed at par with man, just as the Shudra was placed at par with a Brahman'. However, a large number of metaphors relating to women in the compositions of Guru Nanak come from the conjugal relationship. The image of the ideal wife that emerges from these metaphors shows that the woman's place is in the home.<sup>5</sup> In a later analysis of nearly all of Guru Nanak's verses with a bearing on gender, Grewal underlines that the female voice used by Guru Nanak in these verses appears to bring the woman within the orbit of emancipatory venture. However, the ideal wife is squarely placed in the patriarchal structure. Guru Nanak appears to create a larger space for women than what is found in Kabir or in much of the literature springing from devotional theism. Total equality of woman with man in the spiritual realm was a radical idea in Indian history, especially because it embraced all women. Guru Nanak's symbolic attack on discrimination against women due to physiological differences carried the idea of equality a long step forward. Grewal emphasizes that even though much of the space Guru Nanak creates for women is within the patriarchal framework, he does not explicitly support inequality of any kind.<sup>6</sup>

Joining the debate, W.H. McLeod points out that the often quoted *shalok* of Guru Nanak in the *Asa di Var* would seem to maintain complete equality of women with men, not just for the Sikhs but for everyone. The other Gurus supported the stand taken by Guru Nanak, and opposed such practices as dowry, seclusion and female infanticide. 'The views of the Sikh Gurus were vastly ahead of those of their contemporary society'. However, McLeod emphasizes that there were some other facts of Sikh history which did not indicate equality between Sikh men and women. Even the contemporary Sikh institutions are male dominated. The point is elaborated by McLeod in some detail. This situation raises for him the issue of the gap between the ideal of equality in *Gurbani* and the empirical realities of the Sikh Panth in its history of five hundred years. The position of the Sikh Panth in this respect is said to be no different from that of the other societies because no society in the world even today is free from gender inequalities.<sup>7</sup> Though valid, in itself, this generalization ignores the relative position of the Sikh Panth in this respect in medieval India during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, let alone the eighteenth century which bridged the early and modern periods of Sikh history.

Recently, there has been scholarly focus on aspects of gender in the writings of Guru Gobind Singh and then through the eighteenth-century, notably by Nikki Guninder Kaur Singh, Doris R. Jakobsh, and J.S. Grewal.

According to Nikki Singh, Guru Gobind Singh's treatment (not invocation) of Durga is suggestive of woman's power in society. Durga 'as a figure of myth' could provide inspiration for revitalizing the society. She is independent and powerful. By affirming the female power Guru Gobind Singh is said to have projected a positive attitude towards women. All women are exalted through the mythical Durga. The recalling of Durga as Bhagauti imparts feminine identity to the sword which, in Nikki Singh's view, is a metaphor leading towards a recognition of the female principle. The prayer at

the end of the *Chandi Charitra*, which is believed to be a composition of Guru Gobind Singh, is to stand for the right cause and to die fighting till the end. Moreover, the Sikh prayer (*ardas*) till today starts with the opening verse of the *Chandi di Var*.<sup>8</sup>

Jakobsh, on the other hand, does not talk about any relevance of Durga mythology for gender relations. She chooses to concentrate on the evidence of the *Pakhyan Charitra* in the *Dasam Granth* in support of her hypothesis that a novel construct of gender difference was developing in Sikhism: a masculine ethos was transformed into 'hyper-masculine' ethos. The occasion for the collection of these 404 tales is provided by a wily woman and the majority of tales relate to sexual intrigue and violence in which women are generally the seducers. In fact, an explicit statement is made that there is no end to their intrigues. Jakobsh accepts the view put forth by a few scholars (most notably, W.H. McLeod) that the *Dasam Granth* was held at par with the *Adi Granth* during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is then taken to mean that the *Pakhyan Charitra* was respectable among Sikh men, and its tales integral to the construction of the relative position of women which was the reverse of the male construct initiated by Guru Gobind Singh through the Khalsa order. Thus, to Jakobsh, the women represented an anti-thesis of the warrior-saint.<sup>9</sup>

Proceeding further on her hypothesis, Jakobsh quotes selectively from the *rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh to show that women were not included in the regular discipline outlined for the Khalsa; anyone who administered baptism of the double edged sword to a woman was a defaulter and liable to penance; and that the woman was forbidden to read the *Granth Sahib* in a general assembly of Sikhs. Notions of impurity too came to be associated with women, and men who took orders from their women were regarded as sinful, licentious and stupid. A Gursikh should not trust a woman. Consequently, a polarization of sexes is supposed to have been brought about by the institution of the Khalsa, and woman became the opposite of the manliness of the warrior-saint. In short, the male was exalted and the female was depressed.<sup>10</sup> However, this *rahitnama* was neither the earliest nor the representative prescriptive text.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as discussed in this paper, the *rahitnama* literature of the eighteenth century does not support the 'theology of difference' postulated by Jakobsh.

J.S. Grewal looks at the eighteenth-century sources, especially the *rahitnamas*, in an altogether different light. The *B-40 Janamsakhi* composed in 1733 makes it absolutely clear that the path enunciated by Guru Nanak was open to women as well as men. Chaupa Singh's *rahitnama* contains injunctions for the Keshdhari Singhs, the Sahajdhari Sikhs, and the Sikhnis. They all belonged to the Sikh or Khalsa community. The baptism of the double edged sword was essential only for the category called Keshdhari, but other injunctions of the *rahitnama* were common for all the three categories. The essential message of this *rahitnama* for both men and women was not to waste the opportunity provided by human birth for liberation. Above all, as Grewal points out, the author of the *Prem Sumarag* postulates almost a total equality

between Sikh men and Sikh women, both of whom are to be administered baptism of the double edged sword. On the issues of *sati*, the treatment of widows, and polygamy, this *rahitnama* moves far away from the position generally upheld in the medieval Indian society.<sup>12</sup> What makes it even more important is that by now historians of Sikh literature are inclined to place this work in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>13</sup>

Evidently, there is a marked divergence in the scholarly understanding about the issues of gender among the eighteenth-century Sikhs. A nuanced rather than literal reading of the available literature of the period might yield a more rounded picture of the Sikh social order, particularly the everyday life of the householders who subscribed to the Khalsa ideology.

### **Evidence of the *Prem Sumarag***

The *Prem Sumarag* has ten chapters all of which contain references to gender relations, some incidental but mostly deliberate. In the first chapter, it is stated at one place that a person who follows the prescribed *rahit* would attain liberation, whether a man or a woman. Mutual fidelity on the part of married men and women is underlined. At the end of the second chapter it is stated that they who follow the *rahit* prescribed in the first two chapters would taste its fruit in this life, whether men or women. These two chapters relate to religious beliefs and practices, ethical life and baptism of the double edged sword (*khande ki pahul*). In other words, the religious and ethical values are common for men and women. It is important, therefore, to note that a woman could exercise the option of joining the path of *sikkhi* as enjoined in the institution of the Khalsa by the tenth Guru. The author goes on to lay down the procedure by which a married woman was to be initiated through baptism of the double-edged sword. Whereas a Sikh was to be initiated by five Singhs, a Sikhni was to be initiated by one Gurmukh (devout) Sikh. She should acquire Gurmukhi learning and love *shabad-bani* (compositions of the Gurus in the *Granth Sahib*), and read it. The Sikhnis should associate with one another to reflect on the *shabad*. Every Sikhni should serve her husband and obey him so that she may receive the gift of true Sikh faith. A widow could be initiated through baptism of the double edged sword with a slight variation in the procedure.<sup>1</sup>

In a few chapters of the *Prem Sumarag*, the references to gender relations are rather incidental. For example, in chapter five, which relates to the preparation and partaking of food, the Khalsa Sikh who eats the consecrated food alone is compared to a woman who eats from the hand of her husband or eats the food tasted by him. In chapter six, which relates to bodily care and hygiene, it is stipulated that a woman should bathe three days after menstruation and have sexual intercourse with her husband, and not during the days of menstruation. In the last chapter there is an injunction to treat the married and unmarried woman alike. The remaining five chapters relate to the ceremonies of birth, marriage and death, rulership and justice. In all these chapters there are multiple or elaborate references to women.<sup>15</sup>

About the ceremony of birth, it is stated first of all that the woman who has conceived should be administered *khande ki pahul* and she should keep the unsheathed *khande* and the bow and arrow and the sword in her sight. At the time of delivery she should pray to the Akal Purkh that she has taken refuge in him. It is explicitly stated that the procedure detailed for the birth of a son is to be followed on the birth of a girl, with appropriate variations. Among other things, the baby girl is to be given *khande ki pahul* and the epithet 'Devi' added to her name; *karha prasad* is to be distributed and *ardas* performed in the same manner as for the boy.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth chapter, on marriage (*sanjog*), starts with the recommendation that the girl should be married at a suitable age, the young age being more appropriate for the Kaliyuga. However, in the ninth section of the chapter it is stated that the girl and the boy should be married at the age of seventeen when both of them are grown up (*javaan*). The parents of the girl should give their daughter in marriage to a Khalsa Sikh who may be poor but earnest in his occupation. In the procedural detail reference is made to betrothal and other customary ceremonies and exchange of gifts, requiring the parents on both sides not to spend more than one-fourth of the cash in their possession. Five days before the marriage the girl should start eating the food specified for her. On the day of marriage she should be given *karha prasad* to eat at mid-day. An important feature of the detail is the wearing of arms by the bridegroom when he rides the mare; and the marriage party should sing or hear *shabad-bani* and the *Anand* composed by the third Guru Amar Das. Then there is detail about the actual rite of marriage.<sup>1</sup>

It is underlined that the customs of both the families may be followed, and an *ardas* should be performed, seeking peace for the couple and mutual love between them. The bride should serve the groom as her lord and should always be faithful to him; the groom in turn should regard her as the other half of his body (*ardh-sariri*) and be kind to her; he should share with her whatever he earns; they should remain faithful to each other; the wife should look towards her husband for everything and towards no one else. Not to take anything from the bride's parents has a merit equal to millions of Gurburabs (celebrations associated with the Gurus). In the *ardas* to be performed on the first night of the union (*suhaag raat*), the items gifted by the bride's parents are mentioned and the groom is advised to accept them with pleasure. The whole description suggests that the primary purpose of marriage is procreation (and not sensual pleasure). The parents on both sides should regard themselves as equal and none should try to demonstrate superiority in any way. The union takes place in the bride's home and the marriage party departs on the day following. When the parents of the bride visit the place of her in-laws, they should eat and drink without any hesitation as it is done between two Khalsa families.<sup>18</sup> This carries the implication that the relationship of faith is primary and the social tie is secondary.

The term used for widow remarriage is *par-sanjog*. Expressing the traditional view that a woman has far greater sexual urge than a man, it is argued that if a man could not live without a woman, how could a woman be

expected to live without a man? This is the main argument for widow remarriage. However, a number of qualifications are mentioned. The first preference of a widow should be to try to lead a life of contentment and self-control without getting married. If she has a son or a daughter, she should not get remarried. She could marry if she has no children or her children have not survived. The first circle of men whom she could marry was the collaterals of her deceased husband. If that were not possible for any reason she could marry a man who belongs to a good family and is a good person irrespective of his caste (*jati* or *baran*).<sup>19</sup> With appropriate variations, the basic procedure of widow re-marriage is the same or very much similar to that followed in the case of the first marriage. The same ceremony was to be performed in case of re-marriage to a man outside the circle of collaterals. The woman was to be administered baptism of the double edged sword in this case, as in the other.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from widow re-marriage, the marriage of a slave girl is also visualized. She too was to be given baptism of the double edged sword and, with appropriate variations; the procedure of marriage was similar to the procedure described earlier. This applied to an un-married slave girl as well as to the widow. The daughter of a Muslim could also be married to a Khalsa Sikh in a similar manner. It is interesting to note that she is to be given pork to eat for fifty-one days before she is married. Baptism of the double edged sword in her case too is obligatory. A Muslim widow could also be re-married to a Khalsa Sikh in this manner. Significantly, the treatment of the children born from remarriage was to be exactly the same as that of the children born from an earlier marriage. An infringement of this injunction made a person liable to excommunication.<sup>21</sup>

On the death of a Khalsa, no traditional mourning was to be observed. Instead, the compositions in the *Granth Sahib* called the *Alahanian* were to be recited. The women should also read and sing *bani* instead of beating their breasts. The ceremony to be performed on the death of males is given in detail. It is then stated that similar ceremony should be performed at the death of females. The ceremony to be performed on the death of a girl was to be almost the same as for the boy. Only slight variations are mentioned for the ceremonies to be performed on the death of the married and un-married women, and the widows. The death of a childless widow should be followed by *kirtan* instead of lamentation.<sup>22</sup>

Women figure in the chapter on *raj* in several situations. The ruler of the ideal Sikh state should ensure that education was imparted to Sikh girls as to Sikh boys. He should patronize not only artists and the performers of *kirtan* but also the *patars* (dancing girls) who are as attractive as the dancers at the court of Indra. They were to sing *kirtan* and also to perform dance. Interestingly, they were also to tempt *jogis*, *sanyasis*, *bairagis*, Udasis, Jain monks and *pirs*, and whoever donned a religious garb. Those who were tempted were to be obliged by the ruler to adopt the life of a householder.<sup>23</sup>

There are some suggestions regarding the woman's life outside the home. The Sikh ruler should organize a general festival on every full moon day (*Puran-mashi*) in which all men and women, and all boys and girls, were to

dress well to join the celebration. Both men and women should sing the praises of Sri Akal Purkh. A restriction is also suggested for women. With the exception of prostitutes, they should not be allowed to go out of the home unveiled. If a man indulged in illicit sexual intercourse with a woman, both of them were to be seated on a donkey, with their faces blackened; and they were to be ordered to get married. Their social status was to be determined by the caste that was lower. It is not clear that this case refers to the Sikhs alone. The quarters of the prostitutes should be clearly demarcated and separated from the rest of the people. It is interesting to note that, though any relationship with a prostitute is undesirable, it is more acceptable than adultery.

Furthermore, the ruler of the Sikh state should provide assistance to all kinds of needy persons, including the parent or parents who do not have sufficient means to marry off their daughters. It should be obligatory for every young man and young woman to get married. The 'Maharaja' should have only one wife. However, if she did not bear any children he could marry another woman. Normally, he should have no intercourse with a slave girl. But when the wife is not present and sexual urge gets hold of him he may have intercourse with a slave girl. It is bad, but it is better than turning to another woman. All women employed in the palace of the Maharaja and in the female quarters should be married women. The mount for women should preferably be the elephant, which is the royal mount, a camel, a horse, a mule, or a palanquin. Here, the author is thinking of the woman belonging to the royal and affluent households.<sup>24</sup>

The chapter on justice is more interesting from the view point of women's right in family earnings and property. Whatever a man earns, he should divide it for different purposes. He should first of all take out the share of the Guru. He should offer one rupee to his mother and father, and one rupee to his wife. He should save one rupee. If he has incurred any debt, he should use half his earnings to repay it. If a man dies without children, the debt incurred by him should be paid first out of his property and the rest only should be taken over by the ruler (as escheat). However, if the deceased person had a daughter who has given birth to a son, the property of the deceased, after the payment of the debt, should go to his daughter's son. If he has only a daughter and she has no son, then the property should go to her. If he gives any movable or immovable property to his daughter during his lifetime and the daughter dies, this property should go to her husband. But if the father had given no property to his daughter in his life-time and she dies, her husband has no claim over the property of the deceased. However, if the daughter who has died leaves a daughter behind, the property should go to her. In short, the daughter's son and daughter (*dohtra* and the *dohtri*) are equally entitled in certain circumstances to inherit the property of their grandfather. If the deceased had no son or grandson and no daughter who has a son or a daughter, the property should go to his real brother or to his son or to his daughter or to his grandson and granddaughter or to his *dohtra* and *dohtri*, in that order. So long as any of these inheritors was alive, the ruler should not escheat the property of the deceased.



About the shares in property of the deceased, it is stated that *dohtras* and *dohtris* should have an equal share. Similarly, among brothers and sisters the property should be divided 'equally'. The wife's share in the property is one-fourth; in the case of two wives, this share is to be equally divided among them. The detail given for other shares clearly mentions the equal share of daughters. An absolute right in property is recognized. If a man is annoyed with a son till the time of his death to the extent of disinheriting him, then no share in property should be given to this son after the father's death. However, if during his life time, the father forgives the son, he becomes entitled to an equal share. It is explicitly stated that if a daughter or a sister is the only legal claimant to the property, it should go to her, that is to the daughter first and if she is not there then to the deceased's sister. If a man has two wives, he should treat them equally well in all respects. If a person has no sons but only daughters and their mother is alive, then his property should go to the wife. When the property is to go to the daughters, the one who is unmarried should get the equivalent of expenditure on marriage in addition to her equal share in the rest of the property. If one of the daughters is a widow, she should get the double share. No distinction was to be made between a real mother and a step mother, a real brother and a step brother, or a real sister and a step sister. If a woman leaves her husband for any reason and gives birth to a son or a daughter she has no claim over him or her; they belong to the husband. Finally, there are strict injunctions against extra-marital relations of any kind in the chapter on justice.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Other *Rahitnamas***

Of the remaining *rahitnamas* placed in the eighteenth century, the one associated with Chaupa Singh is the most detailed, followed distantly by the texts attributed to Bhai Nandlal, Bhai Desa Singh and Bhai Daya Singh.

The prescriptive (*rahit*) part of the *rahitnama* of Chaupa Singh, a Chhibber Brahman, was compiled most probably in the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh; the two narratives and the admonitory (*tankha*) part were added later, possibly in the 1740s.<sup>26</sup> In addition to some statements which carry implications for the position of women in the Sikh social order, the specific injunctions for women relate to their initiation, religious life and domestic duties.

It is categorically stated in the *tankha* part of the *rahitnama* that a Sikh of the Guru who administers baptism of the double edged sword (*khande ki pahul*) to a Sikhni is a defaulter (*tankhaiya*) and liable to penance. A Sikh of the Guru should not give his daughter in marriage to a person who cuts his hair (*mona*). However, the daughter of a *mona* could be married to a Sikh boy after she has been administered *charan-pahul*. As the phrase suggests, it is baptism of the foot. Since there was no personal Guru, the *manji* (lactern) of the *Granth Sahib* served as the substitute. As in the case of baptism of the double edged sword, so in this case balls of sugar (*patashas*) were added to the water in which the foot of the *manji* was washed. While the baptismal water (*pahul*)

was being prepared, five *paunis* of Guru Nanak's *Japuji* and the five *paunis* of the *Anand* were to be recited.<sup>27</sup>

The prescriptive part of this *rahitnama* extols married life as the ideal for a woman. She is appreciated all the more if she comes from a good family. As she is expected to be loyal to her husband, he also should not covet another woman. As a matter of detail it is recommended that, like the Sikh of the Guru, the Sikhni should wash her hands before serving food or kneading dough. She should not allow her nails to grow long and she should not talk (while preparing food). She should have proper respect for food (*prasad*).<sup>28</sup>

The authority of Mata Gujri, the mother of the tenth Guru, is recognized by the Masands (deputies of the Guru) and the Sikhs: together, they request her that the *raj-tilak* of the *sahibzada* (Guru Gobind Singh) should be performed. The *rahitnama* categorically states that a Gursikh should never kill his infant daughter. The manual also instructs the Sikhs not to curse a respectable woman. The *rahitnama* also says that whether a Sikh of the Guru or a Sikhni, it was commendable for them to remain steadfast and detached even in *raj*. Regarding it the *raj* of Vaheguru, they should retain purity amidst *maya*. They should remain humble.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that over a dozen instructions meant for a Sikhni of the Guru are given at one place in the admonitory (*tankha*) part of the *rahitnama*. Most of the injunctions are negative, that is what women should not do. However, the positive injunctions included are equally important, or probably more. There are some mixed injunctions too. A Gursikhni should go to the *dharamsal* twice a day; sitting in a *sangat* she should keep her head covered to pay homage (to *Granth Sahib*) and concentrate on the *shabad bani* of the Guru. She should take something in kind as an offering, like a ball of cotton thread, a sheet or a small piece of cloth according to her means. She should also save a part of the raw food in the name of the Guru and take it to the *dharamsal* or give it to a needy Sikh. She should offer better food to a needy Sikh than to a member of her own family. She should regard her husband as *karta* (literally, doer) and look upon other men as a father, a brother or a son. At the same time, she should give instructions to her husband in the Sikh faith because men in the Kaliyuga listen to women more than to fellow men; the instructions given by the Sikhni would be very effective.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, a Gursikhni is visualized as the corner stone of the correct religious and social practice. She should read and understand the *Granth Sahib* without paying heed to worldly concerns. Before reading Gurbani she should bathe or at least wash her face, hands and feet. She should not go to a grave or a *marhi*. She should take refuge with the Guru. She should not believe in anything except the Guru, her husband, and the *sat-sangat*. She should remain faithful to her husband and observe *dharam*, adopting all the good qualities of a person mentioned in the *Granth Sahib*. She should discard the singing of popular songs, verses making fun of others, and vulgar songs; she should sing only the hymns called *Suhaag* and *Ghorian*, both composed by the fourth Guru. She should never associate with a man other than her husband and she should not sit alone to talk with a woman of ill-repute. She should not curse a

man, nor quarrel with him. She should not take her bath naked nor should she stand naked in water or before the sun. She should regard the water and the sun like her father. She should keep herself physically clean and, if dirty, she should not cook or serve food. While kneading dough or cooking food in the kitchen she should not talk because her spittle would fall into the food. If she cleanses her nose or scratches her body she should wash her hands immediately. A small boy or a girl should not be allowed to enter the kitchen while cooking is being done. The fundamental instruction is common for both men and women: they should strive not to miss the opportunity of human birth for liberation. In the rest of the *rahitnama* there are a number of injunctions with regard to the attitude of the Sikhs towards women in general or towards Sikh women but there are only a few injunctions for a Sikh woman.<sup>31</sup>

The remaining three *rahitnamas* do not say much on gender relations. A recent study has placed the *Nasihatanama* (also called the *Tankhahnama*) attributed to Bhai Nandlal, to the first decade of the eighteenth century, before the death of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>32</sup> Essentially spelling out the Sikh way of life in religious, ethical, social and political terms, this *rahitnama* emphasizes that a Sikh should 'observe strict fidelity to his wife'; he should neither visit a prostitute nor develop sexual relations with another woman.<sup>33</sup> The *Sakhi Rahit* placed in the early eighteenth century<sup>34</sup> exhorts that a Sikh should consider a woman older than his age as a mother and a woman of his age as a sister. A Sikh should never look with lust on another man's daughter and sister. Elsewhere, however, the author says that a Sikh should never trust a woman nor should he allow her to probe into his thoughts.<sup>35</sup> In the *rahitnama* of Bhai Prahlad Singh, the *kurimar* is noted as one of the reprobate groups and a Sikh is instructed not to have any relation with the Sikh who kills his daughter.<sup>36</sup> The *rahitnama* of Bhai Desa Singh placed in the late eighteenth century, also exhorts a Sikh to have no relation with the Sikh who kills his daughter. A Sikh is instructed to keep himself away from prostitutes and not to have any sexual relations with a woman other than his own wife. A woman without clothes is compared with a man without *kes*. A woman without restraint is compared to a Brahman who does not know the *Vedas*. When *deg* (sacred food) is distributed no distinction is to be made between men and women. A Sikh is instructed to give his daughter only to a *pahulia* (baptized Sikh).<sup>37</sup> In the *rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh, written probably in the last quarter of the century, a Sikh is instructed to have no relation with a *kurimar*. The marriage of a Sikh with the daughter of a Sikh is like mingling *amrit* (nectar) with *amrit*. To give the daughter of a Sikh in marriage to a non-Sikh is like entrusting a goat to a butcher. A Sikh is instructed to never look with lust nor fasten his affections on a prostitute or another man's wife.<sup>38</sup>

### The Gurbilas Literature

In the literature narrating the lives of the Gurus produced during the eighteenth century, concern for gender relations is not pronounced, yet the literary works

in this genre have a significance of their own, because the glimpses afforded by them into the issues of gender are incidental in nature.

In Sainapat's *Sri Gur Sobha*, composed probably during the first decade of the eighteenth century, there is a reference to mythical times in which Goddess Chandi was sent by the Supreme Being (Akal Purkh) to destroy the demons. In connection with the injunction against tonsure (*bhaddan*), the mother is made as much responsible as the father. The lure of beautiful women for the lustful man figures as providing the reason for compiling the *Charitro Pakhyan* (later incorporated in the *Dasam Granth*).<sup>39</sup>

In his *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* composed in 1751, Koer Singh invokes Ad Purkh Kartar at the opening of his work but at the end of the same verse he invokes Ad Shakti Mata too who made the Panth powerful. Koer Singh devotes nearly a score of pages to the worship of the Goddess by Guru Gobind Singh before the institution of the Khalsa. Later, when the Guru announced that he was going to depart from this world, it was reported to him that his wife, Mata Sahib Devi, would not be able to live without him (and that she would like to burn herself on his funeral pyre). Guru Gobind Singh makes it absolutely clear that this was forbidden.<sup>40</sup>

In the *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian ka* composed in 1769, Kesar Singh, a Chhibber Brahman, gives great importance to the worship of Mata Kali and the boons she gives for the institution of the Khalsa, and even for some features of the Khalsa *rahit* and Khalsa rule. The day on which Guru Gobind Singh declared that only the *Adi Granth* was the Guru and his own compositions were not to be included in the *Granth*, he also performed *Chandi Path*. In another episode, preference for male child is explicit and the Guru has no hesitation in giving the boon of male children to all the seven wives of a ruler.<sup>41</sup>

Chhibber takes particular notice of Mata Gujri, Mata Sundari, Mata Jito and Mata Sahib Devi, the first as the mother of Guru Gobind Singh, and the other three as his wives. When Mata Sundari misses her martyr son Ajit Singh and is not prepared to leave Nander for Delhi, Guru Gobind Singh entrusts a young Sikh named Ajit Singh to Mata Sundari as her son. Mata Sundari left Nander with her adopted son. At Delhi, the *sangat* was entrusted to Ajit Singh as the *sahibzada*. When he began to disobey Mata Sundari, he was persuaded by 'uncle' Kirpal to return to obedience.<sup>42</sup> Later, Chhibber gives a separate chapter to Mata Sahib Devi who is said to have succeeded Mata Sundari as the leader of the *sangat* after her death. The Sikhs used to come to her presence from all sides, especially at the time of Baisakhi and Diwali. Thinking of their insecurity in Delhi, Mata Sahib Devi thought of stopping the gatherings of Sikhs on these festivals. Eminent Sikhs, including 'Bebe Gulabo', discussed the whole matter with Mata Sahib Devi, and they all adopted the resolution (*gurmata*) that the general gatherings of Sikhs on these two occasions should be organized at Amritsar. In 1727, 'uncle' Kirpal, with seven other Sikhs nominated by Mata Sahib Devi, went to Amritsar, and made appropriate arrangements for the bi-annual gatherings and the revival of traditions associated with the Harmandar Sahib. Kesar Singh gives the detail of these

arrangements. He goes on to add that after the death of Mata Sahib Devi, 'Bebe Gulabo' looked after the establishment (*dera*) in Delhi for sometime till her death.<sup>43</sup>

In his chapter on Banda Singh, Chhibber takes notice of a Sikh *Sardar* who was made *faujdar* with thirty-four villages under Banda Singh's jurisdiction. The Sikh *sardar* did a shameful deed. He killed one man and forced his wife to marry him. She kept the head of her husband concealed, and started living in the *faujdar's* house. With her husband's head covered with a piece of cloth, she hurried to the presence of Banda Singh and placed her husband's head before him, and told him how her husband had been killed and she was forced to remarry. 'I have taken refuge with you for justice', she said, 'I shall hold you responsible in the divine court'. Banda Singh sent his men to bring the *faujdar* and to confront that woman. They were interrogated and the interrogation made it clear that the Sikh was a liar. Banda Singh ordered that he should be blown with cannon. Some *sardars* took him away for execution. But they allowed him to escape and a wooden effigy was blown by the cannon in her presence. That woman came to Banda Singh again that she had not received justice; the *faujdar* was kept alive in hiding. Then Banda Singh exercised his powers of imagination. The *faujdar* was called and blown by the cannon.<sup>44</sup>

In *Sakhi* 17 of his *Mahima Prakash* composed in 1776, Sarup Das Bhalla refers to the assistance of Chandi Mata after the performance of fire sacrifice (*hom-jagg*). He also refers to a costly bangle (*chura*) sent by a devout follower of Guru Gobind Singh for Mata ji (Mata Gujri) through a Masand who however gave it to his own wife. This misappropriation was exposed later and the Masand was reprimanded. According to Sarup Das Bhalla, it was Mata Gujri who persuaded Guru Gobind Singh to evacuate Anandpur, giving him the assurance that the hill Rajas would honour their oath and would not attack the Sikhs. There is a reference also to the memorials (*dehuras*) of the mother and wives of the tenth Guru erected at different places by the Khalsa.<sup>45</sup>

Bhalla takes particular notice of a (devout) Sikh woman who served Guru Gobind Singh well. On his way from Damdama toward the South, the Tenth Guru went to the house of this woman who said that the Sahibzadas were killed by the enemies but the Guru had not taken any revenge, adding further that, 'We people are simple Jats but if anyone kills one of our men we are never at peace until we have taken revenge, even in the second or third generation (if there was no earlier chance). But you have done nothing to your enemies. We being your devoted Sikhs cannot be easy in mind'. Guru Gobind Singh replied, 'If I shake the sleeve of my garment (*asteen*) many Sahibzadas would be produced'. Then he asked the old lady to draw a line on the ground. She did as she was told. The Guru asked her to undo what she had done. She did as she was told. The Guru asked her, 'did you feel any pain?' She said, 'How could I feel any pain about the lines drawn on the ground?' 'In the same way', said the Guru, 'I feel no pain on account of the *sahibzadas*. How can I accept your suggestion? A *banda* of mine would go and take revenge'.<sup>46</sup> This *sakhi* represents the direct relation of a woman disciple with the Guru.

In three consecutive chapters of his *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* written in 1797, Sukha Singh dwells on the worship of Goddess Kalka, her appearance, and the boons she gives to Guru Gobind Singh. He refers to women becoming Sikhnis of the Guru and he brackets men and women as the Guru's followers; he refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur's mother as 'Jagg Mata Nanaki'. Like Koer Singh, Sukha Singh refers to the preference being given to the male child in the society and Guru Gobind Singh giving the boon of a son to a Rani.<sup>47</sup>

It might be in order to include in this section a prose work called the *Mahima Prakash Vartak*. Although purportedly written in 1824, it is based entirely on the two eighteenth century works: *Parchian* by Seva Das and *Mahima Prakash* by Sarup Das Bhalla. In a recent analysis of this work, J.S. Grewal notices three categories of women: non-Sikh women, Sikh women, and the women of the families of the Gurus. Analysing each *sakhi* related to the women of these categories, Grewal notes that a large space appears to have been created for women in the Sikh social order. Sikh women are presented as respectable autonomous individuals who could attain to liberation. However, more space is created for them within the framework of the patriarchal family which remains the key institution of the Sikh social order. Significantly, no conflict is postulated between the demands of the faith and the demands of the family. Equilibrium is thus sought to be created between the principle of equality and the inegalitarian social reality.<sup>48</sup>

### The Other Sikh Sources

The empirical evidence about the Sikh women, particularly those associated with the tenth Guru, though meager, does leave the impression that in certain situations they exercised initiative and also wielded considerable influence. In a short poem by a poet named Mangal addressed to Mata Jito, she is seen as the overseer of the community, with the normal routine to ensure every family's welfare. The poem begins with a prayer that her glory may be like that of the sun and the moon, that her sons Jujhar and Zorawar may live long, and that her husband Guru Gobind Singh, 'the ruler of the three worlds', may have eternal life. Mata Jito herself is called Jagat Mata who grants wishes of all who come to her. The poet requests for financial support to enable him to perform the marriage of his daughter in Pasrur (near Sialkot). He hopes to return to Anandpur in order to serve Mata Jito without any anxiety on his mind. Apparently, his prayer was granted. This poem is recorded on the opening folio of the *Anandpur Bir* (recension) which, in Gurinder Singh Mann's view, was compiled in the 1690s at the court of Guru Gobind Singh. The place of Mata Jito's cremation at Anandpur was marked with a Gurdwara.<sup>49</sup>

The *Amarnama*, composed at Nander in October 1708 as a *var* in Persian verse, contains an episode narrated by Guru Gobind Singh in which the wife receives great consideration from her husband in all decisions on matters important to the family.<sup>50</sup>

In a compilation of episodes related to the Gurus, known as the *Parchian* of Sewa Das, written at Nander soon after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, there is an episode (*sakhi*) that underlines that service of the poor and the needy was undertaken by Mata ji who was persuaded that the ideal of service (*sewa*) was meant as much for women as for men.<sup>51</sup>

In this context, it is not surprising that after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, and as evident from the *hukamnamas* (orders) of Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi, they assumed leadership of the Sikh community on their own. The published *hukamnamas* of Mata Sundari, nine in all, are addressed to the *sangats* of Patna and Ghazipur, and to the family (*kabila*) of Bhai Rama (son of Phul), from 1717 to 1730. The published nine *hukamnamas* of Mata Sahib Devi, from 1726 to 1734, are addressed to the *sangats* of Patna, Benares, Pattan Shaikh Farid and Naushehra Pannuan; to Alam Singh Jama'atdar; and to the family of Bhai Rama of Phul. In both sets of *hukamnamas* the Sikhs are called 'sons' (*putt, farzand*) and are asked to send the stipulated amount of money through a bill of exchange (*hundi*) handed over to the authorized messenger. This amount is meant for the open kitchen (*langar*) in Delhi which was maintained in two separate establishments by Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi.<sup>52</sup>

The authority of Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi is acceptable to the Sikhs because of their status as the wives of Guru Gobind Singh and due to their personalities. A few of the *hukamnamas* are interesting in this connection. The *hukamnama* of Mata Sundari, dated 13 September 1726, and addressed to some leading Sikhs simply acknowledges the receipt of Rs. 21 sent by them with an authorized messenger as was customary. However, the *hukamnama* of Mata Sahib Devi of probably the same year and addressed largely to the same set of people, states that they had never sent anything for her, and that they should make no distinction between her and Mata Sundari, both of whom belonged to the same house. All the persons addressed in these *hukamnamas* were important individuals, especially Ala Singh, the founder of Patiala state, who had established his control over Barnala and a number of villages by the 1720s.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, they are addressed like other Sikhs as 'the sons' of Mata Sundari or Mata Sahib Devi who appear to exercise their authority essentially on moral grounds.

This does not mean that they were not interested in the mundane affairs of the Sikhs. The *hukamnama* of Mata Sundari, dated 18 October 1723 and addressed to five respectable Sikhs by name, asks them to do impartial justice to two contending parties (on behalf of the entire Khalsa of Vaheguru), and that their decision must be based on moral justice (*dharam-nian*). Significantly, instead of going to a *panchayat* or a court, the disputants went to Mata Sundari to seek justice, and she appointed arbitrators on behalf of the Khalsa!<sup>54</sup> In a *hukamnama* of Mata Sahib Devi, dated 30 December 1734, there is the order (*hukam*) to construct a well in Pattan Shaikh Farid for the use of the Sikhs. Expenditure on the construction of the well through Bhai Binta was to be debited to Mata Sahib Devi.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, there is hardly any doubt that both Mata Sundari and Mata Sahib Devi were maintaining regular establishments in Delhi with the help of Sikhs employed for various purposes, including secretarial work. The institution of *langar* was maintained as a part of each establishment. The evidence of the *hukamnamas* indicates that in secular matters too the wives of the Guru took initiatives, and that their authority was recognized by the Sikh *sangats* within and outside the Punjab. Incidentally, the *hukamnamas* also show that Mata Sahib Devi had begun to exercise authority during the life-time of Mata Sundari.

### Non-Sikh Sources

As it may be expected *a priori*, the Persian and early European sources of the eighteenth century showed little interest in the position of women among the Sikhs.

The silence of the Persian writers is far from surprising. They were interested primarily, almost exclusively, in the political activity of the Sikhs. Consequently, they would take notice of men and women directly involved in politics. Nevertheless, Rai Chaturman Saksena in his *Chahar Gulshan* mentions that in the reign of Farrukh Siyar, Mata Sundari established a separate spiritual seat and some Sikhs deserted her adopted son Ajit Singh in order to join her camp. When she died, people turned to Mata Sahib Devi as her successor. She too died a year later.<sup>56</sup> The resourcefulness of an ordinary Sikh woman is reflected in an incident recounted by Khafi Khan. Her son had been made captive along with Banda Singh Bahadur and his companions who were being executed in Delhi in 1716. She managed to find the means and a patron to enable her to make a representation to the emperor and the *wazir*, contending that her son had actually been captured by the Sikhs, and since he did not join them voluntarily he was innocent of any crime against the state. The emperor sent a mace-bearer with the order to secure the release of her son who, however, refused to be freed.<sup>57</sup>

Among the Europeans, the first to take notice of the Sikh women or the attitude of Sikh men towards Sikh women was the Irish adventurer, George Thomas, who was active in the south-eastern Punjab around Hansi (present Haryana). He observed that the women attended to their domestic concerns with diligence, and that they were held in little esteem among the Sikhs. They were ill-treated by their husbands and prohibited from accompanying them in their wars. However, there were 'not infrequent' instances in which Sikh women had taken up arms to defend their habitations from desultory attacks and conducted themselves throughout the contest with a highly praiseworthy spirit of intrepidity. This statement refers broadly to the last two decades of the eighteenth century when the Sikh rule had been established over much of the area between the Indus and the Yamuna.<sup>58</sup>

At the turn of the century, two British officers left some impressions about the relative position of the ordinary as well as upper class Sikh women. In 1808, Captain Matthews, an officer of the Bengal Army, travelled through the



Sikh territories and observed that both Sikhs and Singhs married one wife. In the event of her death, they could marry again. But if the husband died, the widow did not re-marry, except in the case of Jats who allowed widows to marry a second or a third husband. Sikh widows rarely became *satis* in the Punjab, though the practice was common in Jammu.<sup>59</sup> Writing his *Sketch of the Sikhs* about the same time, though published in 1812, John Malcolm contrasts the conduct of the contemporary Sikhs towards their women from that of their ancestors, apparently in the eighteenth century, who lived under severe restrictions; the fear of excommunication obliged them to cover their 'sins' with the veil of decency. In his day, however, there was hardly any infamy of which they were not accused with justification. They conducted themselves 'in the most open and shameful manner' in their sexual relations with women. In this context, Malcolm refers to the Sikhs as a 'debauched and dissolute race', whose women apparently were at the receiving end.<sup>60</sup>

This is too sweeping a generalization to be taken literally. Malcolm probably had in mind the examples of a few members of the Sikh ruling class in relation to their conduct with prostitutes and professional dancing girls who were generally Muslim. It may be added that the early European writers, including Malcolm, based their observations on limited evidence, and quite often relying on hearsay. Gender relations formed an unimportant aspect of any social order in their time. They remained distant and cursory observers of issues of gender among the Sikhs.<sup>61</sup>

The British, however, became interested in the ground realities immediately before and after the annexation of the State of Ranjit Singh in 1849. Their summary settlements and land surveys unearthed several landed estates held by the Sikh women and numerous charitable grants (*dharmarth*) made by them roughly during the last quarter of the eighteenth century when a large number of autonomous principalities and pockets had been created by the Sikhs. The women exercised authority or held estates and landed property generally as the wives, widows and regents of the emergent rulers and *pattidars* (co-sharers in a joint conquest).<sup>62</sup> It may be added that the early British records refer to the (*dharmarth*) grants, made among others, by Rani Sada Kaur, the widow of Gurbakhsh Singh Kanhaiya, for a *pakka* temple in 1798,<sup>63</sup> a year before she helped Ranjit Singh in the occupation of Lahore. On 26 February 1798, Sada Kaur confirmed the old Mughal grant of revenue free land in Kahnuwan held by the *mahants* of Pindori.<sup>64</sup> In 1800, she confirmed the old grants of four revenue-free villages held by the *mahants* of Pindori. In 1803, she gave a fifth village in grant to the *mahants* of Pindori. In 1808, again, Sada Kaur confirmed two more grants of revenue-free land upon the *mahants*.<sup>65</sup> That she was not an exception is evident from other sources. Ram Sukh Rao, for example, refers to the politico-administrative activities of Ram Kaur and Ratan Kaur, widows of Baghel Singh Karorasinghia.<sup>66</sup> The British records also contain several instances of the Sikh women inheriting landed property, or receiving land and well in dowry.<sup>67</sup> In his well known *Rajas of the Punjab*, Lepel Griffin refers to several intrepid, capable and resourceful Sikh women associated with the administration and politics of different ruling

families, like Rani Rajinder Kaur, Rani Sahib Kaur and Rani Aus Kaur of Patiala, Rani Daya Kaur of Ambala, Mai Deso of Nabha, and Mai Bhagbari of Kaithal.<sup>68</sup>

### **In Retrospect**

This analysis of the eighteenth century sources – the *rahitnamas*, *gurbilases*, *hukamnamas*, *sakhis*, and *vars* as well as the works of Persian and European writers – along with the early British records, yields a fairly rounded picture of the relative position of the Sikh women in the family, the household, the community life, and politics. These sources differ in content, approach and points of emphasis which apparently was as much due to the existential situation of the writer, his background, attitudes and concerns, as the period of writing.

The most comprehensive statement about the relative position of the ordinary Sikh women is found in the *Prem Sumarag* which more than balances out the negative injunctions of the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* inspired by the writer's Bramanical prejudice. Both ideologically and historically, the *Prem Sumarag* is closer to the spirit of the institution of the Khalsa. Monogamy and mutual fidelity were the corner stone of the social life of the Sikhs. The religious life was as much open to women as to men, though for initiation a few differences of detail are mentioned. For the ceremonies at birth, marriage and death also the differences between the men and women were of degree and not of kind. *Sati* was clearly disapproved of and widow re-marriage was allowed in certain situations. Within the general social and patriarchal framework, thus, a large degree of equality is visualized. The most radical feature was the right of women to hold property in certain situations. The *rahitnama* associated with Chaupa Singh is silent about rituals, widow re-marriage, and matters of property, but in all other respects it visualizes a large space for women. Thus, when seen in totality, its conservative stance gets mitigated. The remaining *rahitnamas* say very little about women and nothing new.

The other Sikh literature also does not yield much about gender relations, though several writers refer to the episode of the Goddess, prohibition of *sati* and preference for the male child. Men and women are bracketed for religious life, and women of the Guru's household play a considerable role in Sikh affairs, and memorials are built to them. Their role in public affairs is emphasized by the empirical evidence in the *gurbilas* literature and the *hukamnamas*. Significantly, all women noticed in public life did not belong to the Guru's house. In the second half of the eighteenth century, more women are mentioned as taking part in politics and administration, holding property and giving charitable grants. Despite their relative indifference to the Sikh women, even the non-Sikh sources of the later period point to their initiative and active role both within and outside the family.

In short, the sources taken up in this paper view the Sikh social order from the perspectives of the insiders and the outsiders. The Sikh sources as a whole

provide the insider's view of the processes by which the new gender norms were being formulated and roles constructed, along with the gradual crystallization of the distinctly Sikh rites and rituals which, incidentally, became the basis of the Singh Sabha program of reform a century later. In the community life visualized in these sources, faith and custom appear to be intertwined with the outlines of a new social order. Tension between the norm and practice too appears to be built into the rapidly changing socio-political situation in the eighteenth century.

### Notes

1. See Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Social and Cultural Life of the Sikhs in the Punjab during the Eighteenth Century', Ph.D. thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2010.
2. J.S. Grewal, 'Precolonial Sikh Social Order: The Issues of Caste and Gender' in *Essays in Memory of Professor R.S. Sharma* ed. D.N. Jha (New Delhi: Manohar, forthcoming). For a discussion of gender relations in the larger context of medieval India, see Indu Banga, 'Gender Relations in Medieval India', *The State and Society in Medieval India*, vol. VII, Part 1, in *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, ed. J.S. Grewal (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 443-74.
3. Teja Singh, 'Woman in Sikhism', *Essays in Sikhism* (New Delhi: Siddharth Publications, 1990 [1944]), pp. 44-49.
4. Kapur Singh, *Parasaraprasna: An Enquiry into the Genesis and Unique Character of the Order of the Khalsa with an Exposition of the Sikh Tenets*, ed. Piar Singh and Madanjit Kaur (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1989), p. 252.
5. J.S. Grewal, *Guru Nanak in History* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1998 [1969]), pp. 192-94.
6. Idem., *Guru Nanak and Patriarchy* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1993), pp. 1-21, 23-47.
7. W.H. McLeod, 'Gender and the Sikh Panth', *Essays in Sikh History, Tradition, and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 191-96.
8. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 118-26. It must, however, be pointed out that the *Chandi di Var* gives no indication that Guru Gobind Singh believed in Durga or Chandi. Like Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, Durga is God's creation for Guru Gobind Singh. Like Rama and

Krishan, God created Durga and caused the demons to be destroyed. For detail see J.S. Grewal, *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 161-76.

9. Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 126-49.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-49.

11. In a recent article, Purnima Dhavan also relies on the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* and its prohibitions against women in support of the idea of 'hyper-masculine men' characterizing the 'Khalsa culture'. The women's roles in society are said to have become 'increasingly circumscribed'. Moreover, Dhavan sees the *rahitnama* genre 'as reflecting diverse views within the Khalsa community, rather than describing an actual historical reality'. Empirically, her focus remains on the practices related to the women from the emergent Sikh ruling families of the last quarter of the eighteenth century who 'could use their social status and kinship ties to claim a limited authority in society as "honourary men"'. See Purnima Dhavan, 'Tracing Gender in the Texts and Practices of the Early Khalsa', in *Sikhism and Women: History, Texts, and Experience*, ed. Doris R. Jakobsh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 76.

12. J.S. Grewal, 'Sikhism and Gender', in *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 206-25.

13. There has been intense scholarly debate regarding the date of this work which ranges from the first decade of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. In the present state of our knowledge the *Prem Sumarag* may be considered as an early-eighteenth century work. S.S. Kohli states that a manuscript of 1718 AD is in existence. *Punjabi Sahit da Itihas* (Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop, 1955), p. 216. Basing entirely on internal evidence Bhai Randhir Singh gives an elaborate argument in support of this view. See *Prem Sumarag Granth arthat Khalsai Jivan-Jach* (Punjabi), ed. Randhir Singh (Jalandhar: New Book Company, 1965 [2nd edn.]), Introduction; Dr Mohan Singh too places this work in the early-eighteenth century. See *An Introduction to Punjabi Literature* (Amritsar: n.p. 1951), pp. 111-42. This view is endorsed by J.S. Grewal in 'The Prem Sumarag: A Theory of Sikh Social Order', *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1965), pp. 100-11.

In a recent, and a more detailed analysis of this work, Grewal reiterates that the *Prem Sumarag* is an early eighteenth century work. He supports the date with a rigorous analysis of the text which makes his argument convincing. Grewal, *History, Literature and Identity*, pp. 208-11.

Cf. Surjit Hans, 'Prem Sumarag: A Modern Forgery', in *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1982), pp. 180-88;

W.H. McLeod, 'Reflections on *Prem Sumarag*', in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 14, no.1 (2007), p. 124.

14. For the text see, *Prem Sumarag Granth*, pp. 8, 20-21.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 74-75, 147.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-26.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-38. For a discussion of the Sikh rites of passage, see Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Contemporary Evidence on Sikh Rites and Rituals in the Eighteenth Century', in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2009, pp. 179-97.

18. *Prem Sumarag*, pp. 38-42.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 46-48.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-56.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-91.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 103,105-6.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 105-6, 108-10, 119, 121, 122-23.

25. *Ibid.*, pp.125-31, 133-34, 137-39, 142.

26. *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama* (tr. and ed.), W.H. McLeod (Dunedin/New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 1987). The date of this *rahitnama* also is important for our purpose. McLeod places this work between 1745 and 1764. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28. Recently, G.S. Mann has placed its *rahit* part (dealing with desirable conduct) in the early eighteenth century. See, 'Sources on the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times', in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall 2008), pp. 249-50. On the basis of his analysis of the text Grewal places the *rahit* part *before* the death of Guru Gobind Singh. See, J.S. Grewal, 'The Singh Way of Life: The Rahitnamas', in *History, Literature, and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), pp. 206-26.

27. For a discussion of the evolution of Sikh rites and rituals, see Malhotra, 'Contemporary Evidence on Sikh Rites and Rituals in the Eighteenth Century', p. 182.

28. *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, pp. 59, 66-67, 69, 77, 82, 102, 104, 127.

29. Ibid., pp. 59, 81, 103, 108, 114, 123.
30. Ibid., pp. 115-16.
31. Ibid., pp. 114-16.
32. Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'The Earliest Manual on the Sikh way of Life', in *Five Centuries of Sikh Tradition: Ideology, Society, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), pp. 65-66.
33. Ibid., p. 69.
34. Grewal has argued that the *Sakhi Rahit* was originally written in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. See Grewal, 'The Singh Way of Life: the *Rahitnamas*', in *History, Literature and Identity*, p. 207.
35. *Sakhi Rahit Patshahi 10* appended to *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, p. 137. See also, *Sakhi Rahit in Rahitname* (Punjabi), ed. Piara Singh Padam (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 1995 [6th impression]), p. 63.
36. *Bhai Prahlad Singh Rahitnama*, in *ibid.*, pp. 65-66.
37. *Bhai Desa Singh Rahitnama*, in *ibid.*, pp. 133-34.
38. *Bhai Daya Singh Rahitnama*, in *ibid.*, pp. 69, 70, 72, 73, 74.
39. Sainapat, *Shri Guru Sobha* (Punjabi), ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1967), pp. 12, 32, 44.
40. Koer Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (Punjabi), ed. Shamsheer Singh Ashok (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1968), pp. 18, 103-23, 133, 153, 272, 286-87. Also see Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'The Goddess in the Eighteenth Century Sikh Literature', *The Panjab Past and Present*, vol. IXL, part II (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2010), pp. 6-14.
41. Kesar Singh Chhibber, *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* (Punjabi), ed. Rattan Singh Jaggi (*Parkh*, vol. II) (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1972), pp. 99, 102-15, 126, 136, 191, 235.
42. Ibid., pp. 99, 113, 125, 157-58, 178-79.
43. Ibid., pp. 182-86.
44. Karamjit K. Malhotra, 'Banda Singh in Chhibber's *Bansavalinama*: Image, Idea and Reality' in *Panjab Journal of Sikh Studies*, vol. II (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 2012), pp. 119-20.

45. Sarup Das Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash* (Punjabi), 2 vols., ed. Gobind Singh Lamba and Khazan Singh (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1971), vol. II, pp. 801, 820-40, 876, 882.
46. 'Sakhian Patshahi 10', in *ibid.*, *sakhi* 23, pp. 881-82.
47. Sukha Singh, *Gurbilas Patshahi 10* (Punjabi) ed. Gursharan Kaur Jaggi (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1989), pp. 6, 8-9, 34, 37, 42, 126-57, 208-9.
48. J.S. Grewal, 'Gender Relations in the *Mahima Prakash (Vartak)*', Forty-Fourth Session, *Proceedings Punjab History Conference* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2013), pp. 124-34.
49. Mann, 'Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times', pp. 246, 257-58.
50. Nathmal, *Amarnama* (Persian), tr. and ed. Ganda Singh (Amritsar: Sikh History Society, 1953), pp. 28, 36.
51. *Parchian Sewa Das* (Punjabi), tr. and ed. Kharak Singh and Gurtej Singh (Chandigarh: Institute of Sikh Studies, 1995), *Sakhi* 33, p. 148.
52. For Mata Sundari see document nos. 68-73, 79, 80; and for Mata Sahib Devi document nos. 74, 75, 77, 78, 81-85, in *Hukamname: Guru Sahiban, Mata Sahiban, Banda Singh ate Khalsa Ji De* (Punjabi), ed. Ganda Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), pp. 196-211, 214-231.
53. Document nos. 76 and 74, in *Hukamname*, pp. 209, 292-93. For a biography of Ala Singh see, Kirpal Singh; *Baba Ala Singh: Founder of Patiala Kingdom* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2005 [2nd edn]).
54. Document no. 73, in *Hukamname*, pp. 206-7.
55. Document no. 85, in *Hukamname*, pp. 230-31.
56. Rai Chaturman Saksena, *Chahar Gulshan*, in *Sikh History from Persian Sources: Translations of Major Texts*, ed. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), pp. 166-67.
57. The executioner was ready to strike when the order was handed over to him, but the son refused to be released. 'My mother lies', he declared, 'I am, heart and soul, a life-sacrificing believer and devotee of my Guide (*murshid*). Send me soon to join my companions already killed'. Khafi Khan, *Muntakhabu'l Lubab*, in *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, pp. 158-59.

58. 'Memoirs of an Irish Maharaja, 1803', in "Siques, Tigers, or Thieves": *Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs (1606-1809)*, ed. Amandeep Singh Madra and Parmjit Singh (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 202.

59. [Captain Matthews], 'A Tour to Lahore in 1808', reprinted in *The Panjab Past and Present*, ed. Ganda Singh, vol.I, part 1-2 (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1967), pp. 112-13.

60. John Malcolm, *Sketch of the Sikhs* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services 1986 [1812]), pp. 139-40.

61. For a critical analysis, see J.S. Grewal, 'John Malcolm: A Sketch of the Sikhs', in *Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011): Western Enterprise and Indian Response* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), pp. 40-59.

62. For example, Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs: Late Eighteenth-Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), pp. 131n58, 135n68.

63. For example, National Archives of India, New Delhi (NAI), *Foreign Political Proceedings*, 13 February 1857, No. 294.

64. This document bears a date later than that of Gurbakhsh Singh's death. The seal was apparently used by his widow, Sada Kaur, who administered her husband's territories after his death in his name.

65. B.N. Goswamy and J.S. Grewal (ed. and tr.), *The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori: A Historical Interpretation of 52 Persian Documents* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), pp. 247-71 (document nos. XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV).

66. Ram Sukh Rao, *Sri Bhag Singh Chadaruday* (Gurmukhi), MS/573, Punjab State Archives, Patiala, ff. 166-67, 169.

67. NAI, *Foreign Political Proceedings*, 21-28, February 1851, No. 218 A. See also Banga, *Agrarian System*, p. 136n71.

68. Lepel H. Griffin, *Rajas of the Punjab* (Patiala: Punjab Languages Department, 1970 [1871]), pp. 49n64, 61, 70-71 and passim.



## **Comparative Analysis of the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain* from a Gender Perspective**

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The modernizing reform movements in colonial Punjab, most notably, the Arya Samaj among the Hindus and the Singh Sabhas among the Sikhs, were the first to take up the challenge of 'reforming' their women and inculcating the new roles expected of them through education. The educational initiatives of the two movements culminated in the establishment of two influential institutions for girls' education in north India - Kanya Maha Vidyalaya at Jalandhar and Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalaya at Ferozepur. This paper analyses their periodicals, respectively the *Panchal Pandita* (1898-1911) and the *Punjabi Bhain* (1907-1912), from the perspective of their male and female contributors, their dominant concerns and the underlying assumptions and values regarding the relative position and role of women in society. Recording the self expression of the reforming males as well as the women who were the objects of reform, these journals afford insights not only into the contemporary social realities and changing social attitudes, but also suggest that the nature of change desired by the male and female writers was different in significant respects.

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This paper takes up the case study of the two early twentieth century periodicals issued by the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, Jalandhar and the Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, Ferozepur, respectively the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain*.<sup>1</sup> These journals offer valuable insights not only into the contemporary social realities, and the concerns of the reformers associated with the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha movements, but also into the changing social attitudes. This paper attempts to deconstruct the writings in the *Panchal Pandita* (1898-1911) and the *Punjabi Bhain* (1907-1912) from the perspective of their male and female contributors, looking for their dominant concerns and the underlying assumptions and values. Other questions that this essay seeks to answer are: Was there a shift in emphases with time? What were the similarities and contrasts in the concerns revealed in the two periodicals? What bearing did these have on the women's condition and their relative position in society?

The first decade of the twentieth century is the time period of the study which coincided with significant changes taking place in the Punjabi society. People were becoming aware also of the inspiring developments outside the region and the country. This paper, therefore, begins with reference to the context, which is followed by its three main sections: the *Panchal Pandita* is

taken up in the first section; the *Punjabi Bhain* in the second; and a comparative analysis of the two journals is attempted in the third. To the extent possible, an effort has been made to keep the writings of the men and women contributors distinct.

### The Context

The British annexation of the Punjab in 1849 was a watershed in its history, resulting in major political, administrative, economic and social transformation of the region. The inception of colonialism in the region coincided with a renewed vigour in the activities of the Christian missionaries who went about their evangelical program with great enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> The close cooperation between the missionaries and the administrators helped the missions undertake a wide range of activities which had a deep impact on the society. The colonial administrators' disapproval of several of its socio-religious practices, especially the pathetic condition of women, was reinforced by the Christian missionaries who used educational and philanthropic institutions for spreading Christianity. This resulted in the rise of modernizing reform movements among the Punjabis; most notably, the Arya Samaj among the Hindus; the Singh Sabhas among the Sikhs; and the Anjumans and, to a limited extent, Ahmadiyahs among the Punjabi Muslims.<sup>3</sup> This situation of cultural contact also saw other movements like the Brahmo Samaj, the Dev Samaj, and the Sanatan Dharm emerging in colonial Punjab and contributing towards the reform efforts.<sup>4</sup> The periodicals under discussion were published by the two leading educational institutions under the aegis of two major reformist movements of the region - the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha.

Although founded at Bombay on 10 April 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the Arya Samaj soon acquired the character of a regional movement. The Lahore Arya Samaj was established in 1877 and by the time of his death in 1883, thirty five Samajes had come up in towns and cities of the region, spreading his version of purified or Vedic Hinduism, and reinforcing his message and ideology through their activities. In 1886, the DAV Trust and Managing Society was founded and the first DAV school was established in Lahore. The Arya Samaj got split in 1893 into the militant 'Gurukul' wing and the 'College' party of the moderates who held control of the DAV Society. Both the wings of the Samaj focused on educational activities; simpler ceremonies for marriage, birth and death; remarriage of 'virgin' widows; orphan and famine relief; reconversion and purification of the low castes; and spread of Vedic education and knowledge. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, an Arya system of Anglo-Vedic education was in place from primary to college level, geared largely to the needs of the urban middle class Hindus. However, higher education for women was favoured only by the 'Gurukul' party.<sup>5</sup>

The Singh Sabha as the most important acculturative movement among the Sikhs also emerged around this time. The Singh Sabha of Amritsar was founded in 1873, the one at Lahore was founded in 1879, and more *sabhas*

followed. In due course, the Khalsa Diwans, followed by the Chief Khalsa Diwan, came up to coordinate their activities. Their declared objective was to restore Sikhism to its pristine purity, to promote Punjabi language, to publish books on Sikh religion and history and to promote modern education among the Sikhs. Majority of the Sabhas were attracted to the radical ideology of social and religious change propagated by the leaders of the Lahore Sabha, which also received the patronage of the Maharaja of Nabha and Sir Attar Singh of Bhadaur. The Singh Sabhas supported a large number of schools for boys and girls to impart Anglo-Sikh system of education which was regarded as an important means for introducing the desired change. In 1908, the annual Sikh Educational Conference was started to take stock of the development of education and literacy among the Sikhs.<sup>6</sup>

The Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha among the Hindus and Sikhs respectively were the first to take up the challenge of 'reforming' their women for communitarian uplift and to meet the criticism of the colonial masters. The Punjabi women, in fact, were the site on which social reform was hinged, and the status of women was seen as an important indicator for respectability and upward social mobility. Education was seen as an important means by which the agenda of reform was to be initiated and the new roles expected of women to be promoted. Apart from founding schools and colleges for boys and girls, the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha set up their own printing presses to produce educational text books as well as literature that would project their ideology in the competitive social scenario. Books, newspapers, magazines and tracts were published in increasing numbers. The educational initiatives of the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha movements culminated in the successful establishment of two influential institutions for girls' education in north India - Kanya Maha Vidyalaya at Jalandhar and Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalaya at Ferozepur. Both these institutions came to be regarded as pioneers in higher education for women in the Punjab, and the literature published by them took their message into many homes and helped to mould many young minds and lives. Recently, some of these writings have been used in studies of gender relations in the Punjab.<sup>7</sup> A detailed and comparative analysis of the two periodicals, however, is probably being attempted for the first time.

### ***The Panchal Pandita***

The Kanya Maha Vidyalaya (KMV) was established at Jalandhar on 14 June 1896 by the efforts of Lala Devraj who belonged to the 'Gurukul' wing of the Arya Samaj. He was a key figure in the establishment of the Jalandhar Arya Samaj. As the Samaj grew he distanced himself from it and immersed in activities related with women's issues and the KMV. He faced hostility both from within and without, but kept the KMV above controversy, provincialism and communalism. Devraj died in 1935 at the age of 75 years. He treated the women's education as his mission and produced literature that catered to the 'needs of educated ladies and young girls'. The *Panchal Pandita* was launched in November 1897 by his efforts, and under his guidance it reached out to the

educated women of north India. Till April 1901, the magazine consisted of 16 pages in Hindi and 4 pages in English. From April 1901 onwards it was issued in Hindi language only. Savitri Devi, a widowed student who later became the Principal of the KMV in 1913, became its sub-editor from January 1903 onwards. According to Satyadev Vidyalankar, the biographer of Lala Devraj, this was the first magazine published in Hindi in the Punjab, which aimed at ameliorating the position of women, and Savitri Devi was the first woman editor of this region.<sup>8</sup>

The *Panchal Pandita* carried articles written by both men and women, albeit with different emphases and nuances. Each issue of the journal began with a prayer and contained moral notes, wise sayings, editor's message, and news from different parts of India and abroad, in addition to stories, poems, character sketches, articles and essays. It invited articles from its female readers and often advertised essay competitions on thought provoking topics which got a good response. The male contributors were generally men associated with the management of the KMV, its teachers as well as members of the local Arya Samaj. The maximum contributions were made by Lala Devraj himself, followed by Savitri Devi.

### The Male Contributors

Referring to the status of women, Lala Devraj laments in a song that women of India are being treated like animals (*pashusam*), and seeks God's intervention to bring them out of their fallen state (*patit avastha*). Such prayers abound in the *Panchal Pandita*. At one place, Devraj writes: 'O God! ameliorate the condition of our fallen race!' (*dubi hui jati*). He recalls India's glorious past when women were respected as teachers, scholars and preachers, and is upset that they are being referred to as Shudras in the contemporary society and are degraded and treated like foot-wear (*paon ki jutti*).<sup>9</sup> In his view, the reason for the fallen state of women is ignorance and lack of education. He agrees with a contributor that three evils – 'lack of education, unjustified shyness, and inappropriate subordination' – are responsible for transforming the status of the Indian women 'from a human being to that of an animal'.<sup>10</sup>

Devraj blames women for lack of self respect (*nij-samman*) and for allowing themselves to be ridiculed and humiliated in society. He feels that their biggest fault is that they think they have no capability or ability to achieve success in life.<sup>11</sup> Badri Das, a lawyer by profession and the joint editor of the *Panchal Pandita* for its English section till April 1901, echoes a similar sentiment earlier on by writing that, 'the tendency of self depreciation in women weakens their attempts to enlighten themselves. It is highly necessary that these imaginary disparaging ideas be totally banished from the minds of men as well as women'.<sup>12</sup> Devraj reacts to a remark by a 'learned man' (*vidwan*) that men were crying hoarse over lack of rights and equality of treatment under the British but they themselves deny equal rights to their women.<sup>13</sup> In Devraj's view, it is not only men but women themselves who are responsible for this situation. Women are lazy and do not wish to come out of

their fallen state, or work for their rights, or support the cause taken up by those who wish to ameliorate their condition.<sup>14</sup>

Women are accused of upholding many undesirable customs and rituals like performance of *shradh* (a ritual for propitiating the ancestors by offering food and water to Brahmans), *syapa* (collective ritual mourning), child marriage, and singing of obscene songs on marriages and festivals which are disapproved of by respectable people.<sup>15</sup> He chides women for bathing shamelessly at village ponds and lakes. He quotes Mai Bhagwati, the founder of the first school for girls in Haryana in Hoshiarpur district, that, 'the foreigners consider the Indian men as weaklings and foolish and laugh at the absurd conditions of our foolish women folk'.<sup>16</sup>

The practice of *parda* (veil) is regarded as a major source of the women's weakness. Devraj thinks that they have got so used to the veil that they resist giving it up: 'Those who have got used to living in darkness feel upset with the rays of the sunshine. They do not even wish for sunrise'. Badri Das agrees that these 'denizens of abject darkness' cannot appreciate the boons of liberty.<sup>17</sup> Devraj goes on to compare such women with an injured animal which attacks the person who bandages its wound. He concludes his piece on a note of resignation: 'The women's body, mind and souls have become weak...they do not have the strength to think and cannot discriminate between the right and wrong'.<sup>18</sup> Highlighting the disadvantages of *parda*, Devraj relates the story of a friend who had listed his wife also as an item of his luggage while traveling by train. On being questioned, he retorted: 'Are our women not like material objects? Because of their foolishness we have to worry about them too like a bag of clothes'. Ironically, points out Devraj, women keep *parda* from their relatives, but not while dealing with the low caste men like barbers and washer men and while roaming around in fairs and markets. Devraj makes a strong case against *parda*, and maintains that 'modesty lies in the eyes'.<sup>19</sup> Vishva Nath Sharma, a teacher at the KMV, regards perpetuation of the evil custom of *parda* as a major hurdle in the way of women's uplift for which they themselves are responsible.<sup>20</sup>

Lala Devraj nevertheless prescribes a dress code for covering the women's body in five layers so that all parts of the body, except hands, feet and face are covered. He also cautions women against wearing *saris* of a very fine material, probably because it clings to the body. A woman's dress and security appear to be related.<sup>21</sup> Rather, remaining busy in their house work alone could keep them secure. Elsewhere, Devraj advises the girls not to look for outside protection; the *chowkidar* can only protect the building, whereas 'pure mind, righteous conduct, and your religion alone can be your protector'.<sup>22</sup>

Women themselves are blamed for being the perpetrators of women's subjugation. Girl children are not allowed to play with toys. A school going girl is supposed to be seen only with her books in her spare time and if she does not go to school she has to carry her younger siblings the whole day long. Daughters and daughters-in-law are advised by the elderly women of the house to sit with their heads bent down to look coy and docile. Devraj feels sorry that

the women themselves are harming the health and posture of these young girls.<sup>23</sup>

Devraj focuses on the pitfalls of keeping women illiterate and ignorant. Many stories of the women who were duped and sexually exploited while traveling are cited to emphasize the need for education.<sup>24</sup> He quotes a learned person who says that fewer men die in wars than the number of children who die every year due to the ignorance and foolishness of their mothers.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the male writers are of the view that no real progress is possible without educating women. As early as March 1898, Lala Badri Das writes that, 'however hard may men unassisted by their compeers try to improve themselves, their efforts must meet with failure if they do not raise their better halves'.<sup>26</sup> An illiterate wife can make life hell for her husband. Pandit Devi Dyal writes, 'a foolish wife and a clever husband will spend their days and nights fighting with each other' (*patni murakh pati chatur; kate din raat jhagrey mein*).<sup>27</sup>

The education of women is seen as the panacea for the pathetic condition of society and Devraj underlines this in many articles. This sentiment is well expressed in a poem reproduced by Devraj:

Women! Who too long have lain, bound by tyrant custom's chain;  
Forward now and boldly gain knowledge and be free.<sup>28</sup>

Devraj highlights the obstacles in the way of women's education, namely lack of general support; shortage of finances, books, infrastructure, and good teachers; unwillingness of parents; and the ignorance and indifference of the women themselves.<sup>29</sup> He is highly impressed by the progress of women's education in the Bombay region, and attributes it to the absence of *parda*, generosity of the people there, longer exposure of women to modern education, and because the people in that region respect their women more, for their women are worthy of respect.<sup>30</sup>

Devraj talks about the role and duties of an educated woman. She is the pivot of a happy home and the key to the country's progress. He expects educated women to be the torch bearers and lead their fallen sisters out of the darkness of ignorance. It is a debt that they have to repay, and a responsibility that they have to discharge. An educated woman who fails in her duty to spread literacy is like a 'fool and an evil soul' who has a cure for the others' suffering but is keeping it to herself.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the aim of education is viewed as making good wives, good mothers and good *pracharikas* (preachers). Working outside the home is generally not advisable, though a few years ago Devraj did write that in dire financial circumstances earning a living was better than asking the children to beg.<sup>32</sup>

By and large, promotion of the *pativrata* ideology, extolling a chaste and loyal wife, was the focus of the reformers. Queen Victoria who *died* on 22 January 1901 is hailed as an ideal wife, an ideal mother and a virtuous widow.<sup>33</sup> Vishva Nath Sharma in his article 'Pativrata Dharm' writes that 'there is no religious duty better than service to the husband'.<sup>34</sup> The expected role of a wife and an indirect reference to the dancing girls (*tawaiifs*) comes out when

Devraj makes a strong recommendation for including music in women's education. Not only would it soothe the tired nerves of the husband but also prevent him from going astray or committing a sin: 'If the (sacred) Ganga is flowing in your own home, then why go outside?' (*jab ghar mein hi Ganga behti hai, toh bahar kyon jayen*).<sup>35</sup>

The presence of a very large number of widows in the Punjab also caught the attention of the contributors.<sup>36</sup> The Bhagwati Widow Relief Fund was floated by the Managing Committee of the KMV to sponsor their education. However, no widow could avail this scholarship unless her good health and character was certified by two male members of the Arya Samaj.<sup>37</sup> In February 1911, Devraj writes about a widow who wanted to go back home as she could not bear hardships in the institution run for the widows by the KMV. He reprimands her that she is getting all the facilities like going out in fresh air, food, studies and medical care and is still behaving like an ungrateful person, who on being pricked by a thorn forgets all the bounties and comforts that the garden has bestowed upon her.<sup>38</sup> Significantly, male writers in the *Panchal Pandita* do not advocate widow remarriage as fervently as education for widows. The widow is advised to pray to God to help her lead a life of chastity and serve humanity.<sup>39</sup> Referring to the resolutions passed by the Khukrainis (a group of eight subcastes of the Khatris) in the Jhelum district, supporting widow remarriage, Devraj feels that a better alternative would have been to focus on their education.<sup>40</sup> Education for the widow is seen as an important tool that can keep her occupied as well as serve the community. Widows were seen as the only category of women who could meet the shortage of teachers and preachers.<sup>41</sup>

The obsession with the male child is also reflected in the medical tips and songs written for children in the *Panchal Pandita*. Phoolchand, *Koshadhyaksha* (treasurer) from Malwa – in Central India, gives medical tips for the growing children, repeatedly using the word 'balak' (male child) throughout his article.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, even lullabys (*loris*) written for infants do not use gender neutral words. They address the child as 'lal' (a boy), 'mera pyara' (a dear boy), or 'ved padhega tu' (you [he] will read the Vedas).<sup>43</sup> It is as if the girl child was not fortunate enough to be soothed by such endearments, or unconsciously, a different kind of life was visualized for her.

### Women's Writings

The tone of the women's writings is forthright and positive, reflecting the determination and the will power to improve their lives. The contributors included some teachers, a number of the present and former students of the KMV, and the women who were the regular readers of the magazine.

The contributors find education, motherland and the progress of the country interrelated. Saraswati, a student, maintains that the country is going towards its doom because very little care is given to women's education. Since a child's initial learning is from its mother, an illiterate mother cannot make a strong nation.<sup>44</sup> Giving the example of the Boers (who fought two wars

recently against the British) who could not be vanquished due to their bravery, Durgavati writes that 'the traits of a race are those that are inherited from its mothers'.<sup>45</sup> Savitri Devi offers a prayer to God to 'help our fallen race (*patit jati*) to rise; bring us back to life by giving us the milk of knowledge'. She stresses the importance of education for women and states that the learned men have rightly said that a country's destiny is in the hands of its women.<sup>46</sup> Rambai, a student of Daulat Ram Arya Kanya Pathshala, Bannu laments that the female half of the Aryan race (*jati*) is weak and withered. An educated mother is like a philosopher's stone (*paras pathar*) which can transform iron into gold. Rambai concludes by saying, that the daughters' education is the only means for social progress, and advises her sisters to tear the cloak of darkness and work for their own uplift.<sup>47</sup>

The educated girls were becoming sensitive about the general preference for sons in society. Lal Devi, a student writing on 'Striyon par Samajik Anyayay' (social injustice against women), is perturbed that people take no interest in educating their daughters though they do not mind even incurring debt for their son's education. She is saddened that the birth of a girl child is not welcome and condolence letters are actually sent to the homes where girls are born.<sup>48</sup> Rambai agrees that the birth of a boy calls for celebrations and the mother gets respectful attention, but the birth of a girl results in eerie silence and the mother is cursed for this misfortune. The boy is fondly called 'makhan' (butter) and 'chand' (moon) but the girl is cursed as a shaven head (*sir munni*) or burnt head (*sir sarhi*), both of which are symptomatic of misfortune to the family.<sup>49</sup>

An essay competition floated in the *Panchal Pandita* in 1901 on the theme, 'Whether you would like to be reborn as a man or a woman', elicited interesting responses from the women readers, reflecting growing feelings of despair as well as confidence. Gurdevi wants to be reborn as a man so that she might fulfill her dreams and desires. Daulat Bai wishes to be born as a man because of her present inability to satisfy her aspirations due to the drudgery of domestic work and responsibilities. On the contrary, Savitri Devi wishes to be reborn as a woman as they are mentally and emotionally stronger than men. Gulab Devi also wishes to be reborn as a woman because women have more grit and determination and are more patient and calm when faced with difficult situations. Her statement, that 'I want to be reborn as a woman, so that the birth of men does not cease' (*mein stri ban na chahti hun ki purush utpati band na ho jave*), probably is as much a taunt to the male psyche as an expression of a growing sense of women's self-worth.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, an increasingly confident note becomes evident in some writings. Gulab Devi writes, 'Women are no less hard-working than men, neither are they less energetic, industrious, knowledgeable and strong. ...If they would have got education like the men, God knows what they could have achieved'.<sup>51</sup> Savitri Devi does not agree with those who feel that women do not have brains for inventions which supposedly are the domain of men only. She strongly deprecates such assumptions and maintains that, 'the intellect given by God to men is similar to that given to women'. She writes that God has given the same



faculties to men and women and believes that, 'women can also achieve great feats, but men are not allowing them to do so'.<sup>52</sup> In an inspiring article entitled, 'Hamara Jivan Hamare Hath Mein Hai', Savitri Devi emphasizes that women can achieve all that they wish to do.<sup>53</sup> We hear of three women, Bibi Bhagyadevi, Bibi Aati and Bibi Laldevi, working as honorary teachers in Mai Bhagwati Putri Pathshala in 1901!<sup>54</sup>

While reporting on the celebrations of Bhagwati Putri Pathshala in Hariana in the Punjab, Durga Devi reacts to the remark by a speaker in a conference in Jammu, that the men could not bring about reform because of women's resistance to it: 'our beards are tied to our women's plaits' (*hamari dhadian auraton ki chhotiaon se bandhi huin hain*). Durga Devi strongly disapproves of such logic and writes that instead of waiting for the initiatives of men, the women themselves are now getting ready to work for the cause of women's uplift.<sup>55</sup> For creating more such women, their appearances as well as attitudes and conduct needed to be reformed. Savitri Devi is against inscribing tattoos and advises women not to wear heavy ear rings as they disfigure the ear lobes, disturb sleep and impair hearing. She asks women to shun *parda* and maintains that it is not a part of our heritage. She states that a woman's *parda* is her own good conduct (*nij sundar achar*). She asks women not to gossip or believe in ghosts and spirits and advises them to shun singing of obscene songs and useless rituals like *syapa* (ritual mourning).<sup>56</sup> Durgadevi draws the attention of the readers to the customs prevalent in Amritsar and the other cities in which it is the norm to mourn for the dead for four to five years, wear white clothes, beat their chests on festivals and refrain from cooking sweet delicacies. The writer wonders what purpose does this masochistic approach serve. Elsewhere, Mai Bhagwati criticizes the custom of mourning in which women beat their bare chests in front of the men folk who ridicule them. It goes on for many days and another death perpetuates the cycle and this is how women finish their life spans.<sup>57</sup> In a later contribution, Sumna, a student of the KMV, ponders why women go through a tough ritual like *syapa*. She feels that perhaps it is an escape from their dull routine and an excuse to go out. She suggests that women should instead organize solemn religious gatherings where they meet to have a change.<sup>58</sup>

Elsewhere, Savitri Devi condemns child marriage as a major impediment in social progress. Vidyavati and Gulab Devi advocate no marriage before the age of 16 for girls and 25 for boys, and elaborate on the ills of child marriage. Writing from Pathankot, Vidyavati warns against early marriage and advises women to get education which would not only add grace and dignity to them, such women with mature body and mind could happily beget ten sons after marriage!<sup>59</sup> Apparently, such ideas had begun to have effect. A few years later, a young student of the KMV in a letter complains about her family having fixed her wedding without consulting her to which she objects strongly as she wants to study further and thinks that the decision for marriage should be left to the girl and the boy alone. She questions the assumption that a life without marriage and household is meaningless (*grihasthi key bina kya manushyta ka jivan nirarthak hai?*)<sup>60</sup>

Logically, for a worthwhile life, the new woman did not necessarily have to get married. In an earlier article entitled 'Indriyadaman', Savitri Devi prescribes disciplined conduct and a rightful way of life for both women and men for a meaningful existence. A prescriptive code for desirable conduct is not for women alone. She advises balance between the material and spiritual domains and keeping the mind and senses busy in fruitful work.<sup>61</sup> In her article 'Avivahitava', Savitri Devi makes a strong case for the women remaining single by choice. She begs to differ from those who ridicule such an idea, for unmarried people have a lot more to offer to society than those whose domestic chores and responsibilities come in the way.<sup>62</sup>

The problem of widowhood also is approached somewhat differently by the women contributors. In 'Vaidhavya Dharma', Savitri Devi advises widows to conquer their desires, and instead of running after *sadhus* (renunciates) concentrate on getting education and serving humanity. She disagrees with those men who feel that widow remarriage is the only solution to the widow's problem and without it the widows cannot come out of their sorrowful existence or are not capable of leading a chaste life. She feels that such men are doing a great disservice to women by ridiculing them for the so-called fickle-mindedness and dishonourable conduct. God has blessed women with moral courage to preserve their chastity, and they are not weak. Women are endowed with skills to overcome the trials of their poverty stricken lives, and engage in noble acts to lead virtuous lives, and if men stop exploiting women, then all will be well (*purush unhey dushit karna chhod dain, toh bhala aur bhala hi ho!*). Moreover, she comments that it is a fallacy that domestic bliss is the only bliss and a woman's only aim is to produce children. She appeals to men to educate widows so that they are financially secure and can lead a noble life of service.<sup>63</sup>

A new awareness and determination becomes evident with time. Taking a cue from American women who were active in the 'Temperance Movement', of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Savitri Devi writes on 'Bratdharni Kanyayain'. She informs the readers about a town in America where the wise women formed an association in which they pledged to boycott marriage with men who are addicted to intoxicating drinks. Savitri Devi prays to God to give our country such knowledgeable and determined women who can take a similar stand and fight against the injustices being meted out to them.<sup>64</sup> With a growing awareness about the women's power, and the possibility of taking initiatives to control their destiny, Hemant Kumari Chaudhari, lady superintendent, Victoria Kanya Pathshala, Patiala state, announces setting up of a 'Vrat Palan Sabha', where all members will take a vow to educate their girls and not to marry them before 14 years of age, or to an old or already married man, or to an addict or a bad charactered person.<sup>65</sup>

Some women writers also respond to situations and practices beyond the domestic horizons. Daulatabai, in her very informative article on the plague, which raged severely during the first decade of the twentieth century, advises the readers to cooperate with the government and to get them inoculated. She gives medical advice on how to avoid getting this infection.<sup>66</sup> Responding to

the Swadeshi movement, Lal Devi recommends promotion of indigenous goods in her article titled, 'Swadeshi Vastu'.<sup>67</sup> Savitri Devi recommends that women should learn political science and time management. She also warns women against self medication and advises them to travel, because sheer exposure to the beauties of nature brings knowledge and happiness.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Punjabi Bhain**

The Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalaya (SKM) was established at Ferozepur in 1892 by the efforts of Bhai Takht Singh (1860-1937) who was associated with the radical leaders of the Lahore Singh Sabha.<sup>69</sup> He was a protégée of Bhai Gurmukh Singh and was inspired by Bhai Ditt Singh to work for women's uplift. However, later on, he cut off his links with the Singh Sabha, and single handedly, but with unflinching support from his wife, Bibi Harnam Kaur, dedicated himself to the cause of women's education. His selfless and untiring work earned him the title of *zinda shaheed* (living martyr). The *Punjabi Bhain* was a monthly periodical published by the SKM from 1907 onwards. Although the Ferozepur Singh Sabha owned and published it, as the manager of the SKM, Bhai Takht Singh took its overall responsibility. In its initial years, its editor was a former schoolmaster named Vir Singh, employed in the Mahavidyala since 1908, and later on from 1919, Bhai Takht Singh himself edited it.<sup>70</sup> This was claimed to be the only women's magazine in Punjabi, committed to women's uplift and education, and with articles written by both men and women on propagation of Sikh way of life, which included the family and household duties of women.

### **The Male Contributors**

The male contributors were generally men associated with the management of the SKM, including its patrons, office-bearers of the Sikh Educational Conference, teachers, members of the local Singh Sabha and some readers. However, there are many articles which do not carry the names of the contributors and an attempt has been made to place them in accordance with their tone and subject matter. Most of these anonymous contributions seem to flow from the editor's pen that appears to be writing also in feminine voice. This literary device was probably used by the male writers not only to camouflage their identity and to reach out to women more effectively, but to also give the male contributors the flexibility to hit out at the women and then counsel them as their well wishers. Paradoxically, it could also save the male writers from being ostracized for advocating women's rights.

The main thrust of these articles is on bringing about reform in the Sikh community by imparting education to its women. The writers were aware of the pathetic condition of their women-folk and were convinced that education alone was the key to ameliorate their position. Bhai Takht Singh confesses that it was the inferior (*heen*) and wretched (*ati deen*) condition of the helpless women that motivated him to set up the SKM and provide the girls with an

educational facility, if not better, then at least at par with that available for men's education.<sup>71</sup> Many appeals are made by the male writers through the columns of the *Punjabi Bhain* to promote the cause of women's education. A contributor writes that women need education more than men, and women go through greater hardships to acquire education. If men had to go through similar circumstances they would probably never get educated. He reiterates that educated women can actually help uplift their religion and country more than the educated men.<sup>72</sup> As a little rain results only in slush and a complete shower shows positive result, so is the case with women's education. Hence, complete education is advocated for women.<sup>73</sup> The editor emphasizes that one is never too old to learn, and informs that many 'bebejis' (older women) around 30- 35 years old are enrolled as students in their institution. 'If you love your dumb (*bejuban*), poor (*garib*), humble daughter (*nimmani dhi*) then do not indulge her but give her education, so that she gets respect in her marital home'.<sup>74</sup>

To reinforce its agenda of promoting women's education, the *Punjabi Bhain* published extracts from the public statements of the leading Sikhs of the day. It quotes from the vote of thanks proposed by Sardar Jogendra Singh, the President of the second Sikh Educational Conference, who later became a minister, that the secret of a community's development is the whole hearted support it gets from its men and women. He is happy to note that women participated in this second meeting in unexpectedly large numbers. He thanks the women and appeals to them to remember their duty (*farz*).<sup>75</sup> A plea is made to the Sikh Education Committee that just like boys, worthy girls should also get the privilege of grants and funds to pursue studies abroad after completing their education here.<sup>76</sup> The Presidential Address of Tikka Sahib, Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, to the All India Social Conference at Lahore in 1909, is quoted extensively in the pages of the *Punjabi Bhain*. He expresses sadness that the women are kept in the darkness of ignorance and faith whereas their education needs top priority if the nation has to progress.<sup>77</sup> A similar message is conveyed by Kanwar Daljit Singh of Kapurthala, who presided over the third Sikh Educational Conference. He regards the women's education as an important indicator of the academic status of a community and maintains that no community (*qaum*) can be called educated till its women are literate. Kanwar Daljit Singh blames the men who for their selfish reasons have relegated women's education to learning a few domestic skills, along with reading, writing, a little music, and needle work as the culmination of the women's education. He goes on to say that women are not merely the plaything of the men or nature's embellishment (*istriyan nirian purushan de khidaune aur kudrat di sawawat hi nahin han*). Hence, he calls for a focus on women's education and addresses it as a delicate (*nazuk*) issue just like the women themselves.<sup>78</sup>

The *Punjabi Bhain* carries lengthy articles reassuring its conservative readers that education would enable the women to be better wives, better mothers and better promoters of Sikhism. All doubts about unsexing girls or turning them into 'mehsahibs' (white women) are set at rest by explaining the

curriculum that girls would follow which would be different from that for boys. Another contributor states that there is no need for the women to memorise the subjects taught to boys as the women's needs and responsibilities are different from those of the men. He feels that girls must be taught all domestic chores as they have to go to the 'other' house.<sup>79</sup> Incidentally, this is testified by Krishnaji, the editor of the *Prakash*, a newspaper published by the Arya Samaj, who visited the SKM at Ferozepur and actually noticed that the girls were not being trained to be like madams but as splendid homemakers (*larkiyon ko memsahib nahin balki umda grihasthan bananey ka yatan kiya jata hai*).<sup>80</sup> Assuming that no work was like a disease, Bhai Takht Singh employed no servants in the boarding house and made it compulsory for the boarders to manage everything so that they remained active and busy. The aim was to combine education with simplicity.<sup>81</sup> Master Hardayal Singh, B.A. of the SKM advocates that kind of education which can instill into women the virtues of the ancient Sikh women along with the virtues of the western women sans their weaknesses. He recommends education that includes religious instruction, character development, music, painting and care of the children and the household. This would train the women to be efficient housewives; look after the education of their children; give advice to their husband (*sir taj*) and other relatives; and promote religious and spiritual growth.<sup>82</sup>

Sometimes, the physical disability of women was cited as the reason for a different curriculum for them. For example, the *Punjabi Bhain* cites Babu Uttam Singh who appeals to the organizers of the second Sikh Educational Conference to ensure that girls in village schools are not taught for more than six hours as it is detrimental to their health.<sup>83</sup> Another writer agrees that women cannot work as hard as men because nature has made them the 'weaker' sex. He writes that lengthy study hours are detrimental to women's health and beauty, and great distress is caused to the men who marry such sickly girls. Moreover, he feels that the Indian environment is responsible for the early maturity of girls and so marriages have to be solemnized earlier than in other countries. Therefore, given the limited time span, he advocates the teaching of essential skills only.<sup>84</sup>

Many male writers appeal to women not to put obstacles in the way of women's education. It is even recommended that scholarships should be given to girls to promote their education so that their illiterate mothers may send them to school out of greed for money.<sup>85</sup> Many 'foolish sisters' scoff at the one who goes to school and taunt at her for aspiring to be a '*patwaran, vakilni* or *tehsildarni*', the terms relevant for their small world in those days. The writer laments that she is harassed so much that out of exasperation she leaves her studies. He reprimands such women who themselves do not take initiative and mock at those who make the effort.<sup>86</sup> Women are depicted as being impediments to their own progress. They are accused of treating their educators as their enemies and their schools as prisons. When a husband tries to initiate his wife into studies, she retorts that he should educate his mother and sister instead.<sup>87</sup> The editor rebukes the women who are 'sick' but are

foolish enough to refuse to take treatment from their concerned brothers who are likened to the *vaid*s (doctors) who are ready to help them.<sup>88</sup>

Most of these articles focusing on women's education begin by recording their pathetic condition and comparing them with European, American, Chinese and Japanese women who are to be admired and emulated for their usefulness to their society. They are truly the 'better-halves' and enjoy respect and rights because they deserve them. An article applauds European women who bring up their children with so much care that what they accomplish at ten years of age is comparable to what our children achieve at the age of fifteen to twenty years. The editor states that a Russian falls sick once, the Australian for eight days and the Britisher for eleven days in a year, but a Hindustani is generally sick, mostly due to the fault of his (ignorant) mother.<sup>89</sup>

Male writers are critical of the unsatisfactory conduct of the ignorant women. Ridicule and derogatory comments for women abound in many articles. The illiterate women are referred to as animal (*januri*) or witch (*churail*). The editor states that it is because of ignorance that the women are not respected. They are denigrated and treated as 'pair di jutti' (foot wear) and they get what they deserve (*jeha muh tehi chapper*). These women make their homes hell by fighting with their husbands and mothers-in-law and bring disgrace to the woman kind. They are always manipulating to bring their husbands under their control and eliminate the influence of their mothers and sisters-in-law.<sup>90</sup> The husband is treated shabbily but the mendicants (*sadhus*) are served sweets and dry fruits. Moreover, such women dress up to visit the religious men (*sants*) but give a fright to their husbands by greeting them with shabby clothes and gloomy faces.<sup>91</sup> When their husbands prevent them from performing useless rituals, they are ticked off: 'go and have your meals from those who have taught you such lessons'.<sup>92</sup> Illiterate women who are coming under the snare of *sadhus*, believing in superstitions and charms, practising ritual mourning (*syapa*), singing obscene songs on marriages and festivals and obsessed with jewellery are repeatedly mentioned to drive home the point that education alone is the key to reform. A poem by Inder Singh of the Khalsa High School, Gujranwala, which was titled, 'Piyarian Bhaina nu Updesh' (Advice to dear sisters), reflects the ideal mould which the male reformers desired for women:

Rise early; do not loiter around in people's houses;  
 Recite your prayers; go to school with your books;  
 Do not wear ornaments on your nose or hands;  
 Guard the five Ks of your faith;  
 Do not sing obscene songs;  
 Wear simple clothes ...<sup>93</sup>

Stories highlighting the ill effects of the women's ignorance frequently appear in the *Punjabi Bhain*. The train is used as a metaphor for the dangers that women succumb to because of their ignorance. For example, a newly married woman was in veil (*ghund*), and not having seen her husband's face got down at the wrong station with a cheat who took advantage of her ignorance. The

editor is critical of the training given to this young woman by her mother. He expresses regret that women observe *ghund* even from the elders in the home.<sup>94</sup> Master Hardayal Singh, B.A. of the SKM calls *parda* a kind of imprisonment (*qaid*). It is responsible for the sickly condition of women and of their weak offsprings. He maintains that it is a sheer fallacy that *parda* was designed to protect women's honour. Even if the walls of the house are made of stone and *parda* of steel (*faulad*), it cannot stop deceit (*be-imani*) of the heart. What is needed is inner strength of the women which can save them from the lusty eyes of the undesirable men.<sup>95</sup>

The *Punjabi Bhain* disapproves of the wearing of jewellery not only because of the crimes it results in but also for its harmful effects like the piercing of the body and harassment of the husbands. Interestingly, however, it defends the women who write about the reasons for their love of jewellery. Denial of equal rights in property and the resultant insecurity is cited as the reason for the women to yearn for the security that gold offers to them. In reaction, in some articles men lambaste women that if they want rights, they had better take on responsibilities.<sup>96</sup>

Issues concerning marriage practices are also taken up by the writers. An article condemning early marriage gives the example of how the press in London criticized a priest who had solemnized the marriage of an 'underage' eighteen year old boy. The writer is upset that in our country the parents do not even feel guilty at marrying children at the age of five or so. He is specifically critical of the 'intellectual' Bengalis who have thousands of child widows. He advises parents not to marry their children till they can stand on their own feet and manage their household, and also appeals to the *granthis* to shun such marriages.<sup>97</sup> Another contributor advocates simple marriage ceremonies and spreads awareness against dowry, and praises Gurdit Singh, the *wazir* of the Patiala State, who married his son in a simple ceremony. No dowry was taken, and no Brahmanical rituals and wasteful expenditure were evident.<sup>98</sup> The readers are also advised to do away with the greedy Mirasis and Brahmans who arrange mismatched marriages. Parents are advised to fix matches themselves.<sup>99</sup>

The male writers try to inculcate the concept of *patibrata* or a devoted wife. An ideal wife touches her husband's feet when he comes home, greets him happily and serves him and his parents and children with devotion. This image of women appealed to so many harassed husbands that they are reported to be keen to send their wives to the SKM as if it were an 'asylum' or a reformatory.<sup>100</sup> Women are advised to be cheerful and nurture blissful marriages. The *Punjabi Bhain* in an article 'Sugharh Sahelian' (dextrous companions) advises women to read books like *Lakshmi ya Chhotti Nuh*; *Phulan di Tokri*; and *Istri Jivan Sudhar* to instill virtues of the *patibrata*.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, much stress is laid on compatibility in marriage. Many guidelines for a happy marriage are given, advising the couple, among other things, to give time to each other, not to find faults with each other and not to complain about each other to a third person.<sup>102</sup> Examples of companionate marriages are given. The editor informs about the sad demise of Bibi Dharam

Kaur, wife of Sardar Man Singh who was a student at Ferozepur. Her husband wished to educate her so that she could jointly work with him as the sub-editor of the Khalsa magazine. Lord Curzon's example is cited who on being felicitated as the brain that administers India pointed to his wife as deserving the real credit. It is stressed that men and women are like the two wheels of a cart and unless they progress at the same pace no development can take place. Hence, an appeal is made to treat women as equals.<sup>103</sup>

The *Punjabi Bhain* carries many articles on the pathetic condition of widows, especially child widows. The male reformers are rebuked for simply preaching and doing nothing to actually alleviate the misery of widows. An article pleads that all chains round the neck of the cow-like daughters should be broken (*gau te galan ton rassian la key assisan levo*) and all customs in the way of remarriage of child widows should be rejected (*bal vidhwa dey vivah dian rok walian reetan nuh raddi di tokri tey supurad karo*). A writer says that Hindus may make excuses in the name of their scriptures, and asks why are the Sikhs not making attempts to solve this problem?<sup>104</sup> Most articles actually condemn the concept of widow homes and promote the cause of widow remarriage as the better alternative. The evils that may befall widows in such homes are outlined in an article. It fears that the widows would continue to be exploited and some may even fall into disgrace. A widow home is compared to a life imprisonment and widow remarriage is presented as the best solution to wipe the tears of the suffering widows.<sup>105</sup> Budh Singh, Sub Overseer, district Gujrat, suggests two solutions for the widow's problem: widow remarriage, and education for the widows in ordinary schools for girls and not in separate widow homes where their wounds would never heal.<sup>106</sup> Reports of men marrying widows or advertisements seeking matrimonial alliances with child widows without any caste bar are published in the *Punjabi Bhain*.<sup>107</sup>

However, some writings tend to reinforce the deep rooted prejudices against women in society. Fearing that education would result in a loss of social control over women, some contributors expressed alarm at their becoming accomplished with degrees. One writer warns the readers not to buy the *Punjabi Bhain*. If uneducated women were harassing husbands what would the educated do? 'Every day we will have to keep our turbans at their feet to appease them' (*sanu te pairan te pag rakhke roj manana paiyaga*).<sup>108</sup> The periodical also served as a forum for exchanging advice for taming the shrews. A story of how the husband of a newly married girl instills fearful obedience from the start is narrated with approval.<sup>109</sup> In 'Bhaino Hosh Karni', the editor laments that since the British had started prosecuting the editors, many women have started pressurising their husbands to quit their jobs in the emerging field of Punjabi journalism. He expresses surprise that men are ready to obey women whom they ordinarily call 'foolish' (*murakh*) and 'lacking in wisdom' (*kanni diye mat valian*), and concludes with the question that if they never took advice from their women before, then why this new trend?<sup>110</sup>

The *Punjabi Bhain* has articles that promote the cause of the girl child. One writer criticizes a contributor for saying that it is no good to have even one daughter (*beti bhali na ikk*), and maintains that both sons and daughters



are God's creation (*dhian putt sab har ke kiye*). The prejudice against the daughter is comparable to a gardener who sits under the shade of a tree, enjoys its fruits and blessings and then cuts at its very roots.<sup>111</sup> The writer then congratulates some enlightened families who celebrated the birth of their daughters and distributed alms as thanksgiving and hopes that this spirit catches on.<sup>112</sup>

A poem titled 'Anand Jhok', written by Sohan Singh 'Rahi', recounts the contemporary social prejudices against women, and makes a plea for women's equality and uplift along desirable lines. This poem was read by Sadhu Singh on his daughter's marriage and his son Sarban Singh distributed 500 copies of the poem among the people present (*sangat*). It says:

Praise be to the pious father, do not kill or sell your daughters;  
Do not marry them twice or thrice;  
Sons and daughters are alike, they have been created by the One;  
Do you not feel ashamed to treat your daughters as liabilities?  
Sons are the masters, daughters are belittled;  
Daughters are called cows, girls are called birds;  
Woman's wisdom is said to be behind her ankles;  
Woman has been treated very shabbily in our country;  
Manu has destroyed her right in his famous writings;  
If the mother is a Shuder, how come the son is a Brahman  
The Gurus have given the message of equality;  
If a boy is like gold, the girl is not glass either.

The poem goes on to praise those parents who did not kill their girl child and embraced her with joy; who gave her education and made her partake of *amrit*; who did not marry off their girls to the aged grooms or sell them or exchange them; and who defied the age old customs that exploited their daughters.<sup>113</sup>

The magazine takes pride in the commitment and achievements of its students and the alumni. It reveals details about its students reciting *bani* (scripture) and giving speeches before dignitaries, and its alumni serving as teachers and making their ever increasing presence felt in the Sikh Educational Conferences. Satisfaction is expressed at the many letters and the intelligent responses that are pouring in from female writers. The editor remarks that men are knowledgeable, but women showing their creativity in writing is an indicator of hope amidst despair.<sup>114</sup> Great happiness is expressed at the four Sikh women having been appointed as the '*Nambardarnis*' as they were found to be more capable than men by the Maharaja of Nabha. He has also formed a women's *panchayat* in Jaito town in his state to report on the internal situation and to propose suitable matrimonial alliances.<sup>115</sup> In a later issue, the *Punjabi Bhain* makes an observation about women being as intelligent and capable as men and condemns those who think otherwise as selfish, stubborn and false.<sup>116</sup> It is happy to note that its alumunus, Shrimati Devi Bhagwati has launched *Bharat Nari*, a Hindi paper.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, great pride is taken in reporting the

organization and performance of an *akhand path* (continuous reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib*) in Sargodha by women alone.<sup>118</sup>

In 'Udaarchit Striyan', women's generosity is hailed and the editor rebuts the general belief that men are more generous than women. But, sadly, women do not have much cash in their control and though they are said to be the better-halves, they have claim only on two meals in a day (*stri jeenu ardhangani aakhde han keval do veley roti khan di bhaival hondi hai*).<sup>119</sup> The paper lauds Bibi Basant Kaur for giving scholarship to the needy students; Bibi Dhan Kaur and other students for selling their jewellery for the cause of their *alma mater*; and Bibi Shamsher Kaur even on her death bed reminding her husband to continue sending aid to her beloved institution.<sup>120</sup>

The *Punjabi Bhain* even dwells on issues of wider relevance like Sikh identity, census operations, and important political matters concerning the Sikh community. In its initial issues, a strong case is made in defence of Punjabi as the mother tongue and the need to promote it, with an appeal to the government to issue pamphlets in Punjabi language for the benefit of its Punjabi knowing subjects, especially the women.<sup>121</sup> The dangers of educating girls in mission schools are mentioned and readers are asked to keep education of their women in their own hands and strengthen their own institutions.<sup>122</sup> The Anand Marriage Bill is lauded and scathing criticism is voiced against the Hindus who are opposing it.<sup>123</sup> The *Punjabi Bhain* carries articles in which it is hoped that women could partake of *amrit* as desired by Sant Atar Singh on his visit to the institution on 24 May 1909.<sup>124</sup> In an article, 'Hun jaag Bhaina' the women are advised to wake up and become true '*singhnis*' and observe all the tenets of their faith.<sup>125</sup>

### Women's Writings

Though the known contributions by women writers to the *Punjabi Bhain* are fewer, yet they are significant and help us get an insight into the mindset of its teachers, the present and former students, and the regular readers of the magazine.

Many contributions reflect the women's low self esteem and their desire to improve their condition. In an article 'Vidya di Mahima', Balwinder Kaur, a student of the SKM laments at the present situation of women and writes, 'people have kept us beneath their shoes (*loki rakhya jutti de heth sanu*); they scoff at our lack of wisdom (*gichi pichhe tey sadi mat akhi*); what could be worse than this!' (*is nalon ki hor durkar bhaino*). Women's anguish is reflected in the lament that, 'if this state persists then we will sink' (*jeh eh hal reha, teh asi dubian*).<sup>126</sup> Earlier writing from Faridkot, Raj Kaur appeals to her brothers to restore to women their lost prestige and status. In 'Bhain di Viran Agge Pukar', she recalls the ancient times when women were educated and respected, and feels saddened at their plight in the present. She highlights the vices that have crept into the society due to lack of education. Women have started believing in *sants* and *pirs* and are keeping fasts and performing *syapa*. She blames her brothers for this pitiable condition and implores them to open

schools and promote education among women to ameliorate their degraded condition. She writes that, without education we have become helpless and our condition is pathetic (*vidya heen asi hoyian lachar vey; vidya to bina sada bura hal vey*); we are treated like foot-wear (*pair di jutti*) and repeatedly cursed.<sup>127</sup>

Women's writings highlight the importance of education and women are urged to gain knowledge. A remarkable insight is gained into the personality of Bibi Harnam Kaur, the wife of Bhai Takht Singh, through a letter she had written in 1906 to her student, Bibi Uttam Kaur. This letter was published later on in the *Punjabi Bhain* in which Harnam Kaur is upset to know that Uttam Kaur's parents are not allowing her to study further, and writes, 'if you were my daughter, I would not have hesitated to send you even to America for studies'. This coming from a woman in 1906 is rather surprising.<sup>128</sup> After some years, the *Punjabi Bhain* carried the speech given at the Sikh Educational Conference by Bibi Agya Kaur, the second wife of Bhai Takht Singh. She says that education prevents sorrow and does not forsake us in difficult times. Neither can a thief steal it, nor can fire burn it, nor can water drown it, nor do family disputes divide it. She writes that when one educates a son it benefits only one individual, but educating a daughter is a benefit to the entire community. She concludes by recalling the ancient times when women were respected and exhorts the Sikh community to wake up as the other communities have already taken a lead in this direction.<sup>129</sup>

Women often wrote on the importance of compatible marriages and were critical of the contemporary marriage practices. An article by Shrimati Vidyotma criticizes the prevalent marriage customs and compares them with ancient times when mismatched marriages were not solemnised by force. She writes: 'Those times were not as cruel as the present times; when due to greed and false ego, one puts chains around the cow-like daughters, and forcibly marries them off. No thought is given to compatibility or honourable conduct. One just closes one's eyes and completes the formalities'. She laments that compatible matches are few and mismatches are many (*jorian thoriyan teh narar batherey*) and, as a result, Punjabi homes are becoming dens of tension and frustration, resulting in domestic violence.<sup>130</sup> An earlier article reflects the fear of violence a mother has for her newly married daughter. She remembers her experience on how her body was assaulted with sticks, and worries that the same fate may not befall her daughter (*sotian nal hadh bhanayay san, kitey meri dhi nal vi uven na hundi hovey*).<sup>131</sup>

Equal treatment for women is advocated in an article that regrets that man has made every effort to deny woman her rights and has seldom given her an opportunity to grow. It reprimands the brothers, and even if they dislike it, questions their recitation of *Gurbani* which says that God is one and all are his children (*ek pita, ekas ke ham barak*).<sup>132</sup> Another contributor is perturbed at the degraded condition of the Sikh women and lays the blame squarely on the men folk of the community. She cautions men that if they give such a low status to their mothers, sisters and daughters (*chuhrey chamar di padvi*) then they should quit aspiring for greatness.<sup>133</sup> Raj Kaur agrees that God has given equal

rights to women and when men are questioned about this injustice they have no answer (*ik jahe hak rakhe sade kartar ne hak je mangiay tan nahi jawab hai*). She reminds men that they were born of a woman and yet they do not respect women.<sup>134</sup> A similar message comes out from an article published earlier on in the *Punjabi Bhain*, authored by Sarojini Devi. It says: 'Restore women their rights... women and not you [men] are the nation builders...'. The *Punjabi Bhain* also reported the address of Sarla Debi Chaudhrani who inspired women to work for their own uplift.<sup>135</sup> Shrimati Vidyotma in an article, 'Asi Kisse Galon Ghat Nahin' asserts that women have always had an inherent potential and will always keep giving a proof of what they can accomplish.<sup>136</sup>

While demanding restoration of their rights in the land, many writings by women justify their love for jewellery. An article on why women wear jewellery reports the oft heard retort of women: 'what else do we have' (*sadey hath paley hor ki hai*). The *Punjabi Bhain* accuses the men who deny them their rightful share in connivance with the government. If men are ready to give women their rights then why would the government hesitate? The writer wonders when such laws were enacted, and concludes: 'You took legal control of the land and we of the jewellery!' (*tusi kanuni malki sambhi; asi sambhe gehne*).<sup>137</sup>

Examples of women's generosity abound in the women's writings published in the *Punjabi Bhain*. However, a widow, Santi, writing from Abbotabad advises her sisters to convert their useless jewellery into money deposits and utilize the interest for the uplift of the community. She recommends giving financial assistance to the SKM, and the widow home and orphanage at Amritsar.<sup>138</sup> Bibi Harsaran Kaur advises women to sell their jewellery and invest the money in the Punjab and Sind Bank (founded in 1908) and use the interest to help out their husbands in fulfilling his financial commitments and responsibilities. If all sisters follow this example then 'we will soon acquire our rights' (*apne hak asi chheti lai lavan gai*). This advice was given to the writer by her friend Jeet Kaur who analysed that it is the lack of education and the resultant insecurity that makes the women obsessed with jewellery. She gives the example of western women who enjoy equal rights and do not need to wear jewellery to look attractive.<sup>139</sup> Mahinder Kaur, a student of the third middle, at the SKM cautions women about the dangers they expose themselves and their children to when adorned with ornaments. In their place, she advocates love for education and scriptures which alone can bring bliss.<sup>140</sup> Sham Kaur, a seventh class student at this institution, writes to her father to sell the jewellery he has kept for her marriage or stop sending her pocket money, and instead send financial help to fulfil the condition of Bhai Takht Singh's exile of collecting Rs. 50,000 for their beloved institution.<sup>141</sup>

Women's writings in the *Punjabi Bhain* are appreciative of British rule. On the occasion of the visit of the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, Sir Louis Dane, and his wife to their institution in January 1911, Bibi Harbans Kaur, a teacher of the third middle gave an impressive speech in English. She talks of Sikh loyalty to the Union Jack and thanks the British for emancipating

‘Indian women who only a decade or two ago were perhaps little better than slaves’. She goes on to say that the principles of Sikh religion are against ‘Sati, female infanticide and selling daughters. When we see that these are punishable by the British we thank God for the goodness He has done us by practically preaching the sacred doctrines of our Gurus through our kind rulers’. The British are lauded also for enforcing the Sikh code of conduct in the army and for promoting western education. Then an appeal for Punjabi to be adopted for teaching is made: ‘Training must necessarily be done through our mother tongue – Punjabi’. The address reproduced by the *Punjabi Bhain*, purportedly on behalf of the students, ends with ‘Your most obedient servants; the girl students of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya’.<sup>142</sup>

### **In Comparative Perspective**

An analysis of the contributions made to the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain* presents an interesting picture. First of all, more articles were written by men in these periodicals solely devoted to the women’s interests. Secondly, the subject matter covered by the male writers was more women centric than that covered by the women contributors themselves. Thirdly, and significantly, the position of women was differently perceived by the male and female contributors. The range of writings in these periodicals also varied: men and women writing on similar themes, with broadly the same message; men and women covering similar themes with differing emphases; and women alone writing on certain themes.

In both the periodicals men wrote on subjects having a bearing on the status of women in the past and their present condition. They outlined the expected duties, responsibilities and role of the women in the household and in the upbringing of their children. Articles on women’s education, its need, its aim, its curriculum, along with the adverse consequences of illiteracy and ignorance also featured predominantly among the male writings. The desirable conduct of women, their dress, food, and health were the other themes taken up by the men. A thematic shift with time is also discernible in their writings. Need for teaching English to girls, encouraging them to travel abroad, attending sessions of the Indian National Congress, or the Sikh Educational Conferences are some of the new concerns voiced. With time, and spread of education among women and their increasing contribution towards society and public life, the male contributors gradually began to write more approvingly about women’s achievements and were less critical of their supposedly inherent shortcomings.

Deviating somewhat from the thrust of male writings, and in addition to the importance of education for girls, the women wrote more on hygiene, health, exercise, time management, travel, horticulture, political-craft, and *swadeshi*, besides issues of morality. Articles on the problems of discrimination against women, child marriage, control of senses (*indriyandaman*), single status (*avivahitava*), veil (*parda*), and the plight of widows were contributed largely by the women writers. They also wrote on

aspects like the women's potential, and their duties and responsibilities. Many of them asserted that women were no less than men, rather better in many ways. With the passage of time men began to be blamed for the pitiable condition of their women and women became assertive, demanding restoration of their rights and status.

A closer look at the two periodicals reveals interesting similarities and contrasts. The conservative mindset of the men steeped in patriarchal ideology, but carrying the burden of ameliorating the women's condition was apparent in both the periodicals. Their contributors were painfully aware of the pathetic condition of women and both the periodicals carried lengthy articles on the need, aim and nature of education to be imparted to women. The awe of the other races, especially the Anglo-Saxons, and the running down of their own women was a strand that ran through both the periodicals. Both dwelt on women's resistance to reform, and recorded the difficulties being encountered by the reformers.

Though the two periodicals converged on many issues and their concerns regarding women's education and uplift seemed almost similar, some differences can nevertheless be noticed. The *Panchal Pandita* had more articles devoted to the undesirable customs and rituals practised by women and the need for reform, along with the strict codes to which women were expected to conform. It had articles written on dress (*pehrawa*), advising women to dress up modestly. Unlike the *Panchal Pandita* the *Punjabi Bhain* did not focus on women's conduct but disapproved in passing of the use of foul language and the evils of *syapa*. There was no prescriptive code for the girls' dress. Only in one instance, Sardar Naurang Singh, Assistant Surgeon, Ferozepur praised the simple dressing style of the girls and appreciated that their dress was not provocative (*bharak vali*).<sup>143</sup> A marked difference is also visible in the solutions offered for the widow's problem. The image of a self suffering and pitiable widow was constructed in the *Panchal Pandita* wherein she was advised to have control over her senses and devote herself solely to religious and social service. Her needs, desires and emotions had no place in the new social role expected of her. Widow remarriage was not looked upon favourably. The *Punjabi Bhain*, on the other hand, had many articles actually promoting the cause of widow remarriage as a better alternative and condemning the concept of widow homes, much extolled in the pages of the *Panchal Pandita*.

Generally, the articles of the *Punjabi Bhain* were more assertive regarding the idea of equality and women's rights as well as their relative position in society. The writings in the *Panchal Pandita* on the whole were more restrained and even resisted radical change, albeit conveyed in a subdued language. Moreover, the somewhat hesitant female voices steeped in patriarchal ideology noticeable in the early issues of the *Panchal Pandita* were absent in the early issues of the *Punjabi Bhain* which, of course, started a few years later. The maturity of thought processes and confidence seen in the post-1905 publications of the *Panchal Pandita* were evident in the early issues of the *Punjabi Bhain*. With time, and as reflected in the two journals, there was a

growing awareness created by education. It is equally likely that the generally surcharged political climate in the province,<sup>144</sup> and the publication of a politically articulate paper like the *Panjabee*<sup>145</sup> around this time might also have had a bearing on the changed tone of the two periodicals.

In the ultimate analysis, there was a difference in the tone, language and the ideological underpinnings of the two periodicals. The two periodicals functioned broadly under the aegis of the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha – essentially following different socio-cultural codes prescribed by different moral systems. The somewhat radical stance visible in the *Punjabi Bhain* regarding the women's property right and the problem of the widows can be attributed as much to the principle of equality upheld by Sikhism as to the majority of the Sikhs being governed by the Customary Law of the landed classes which recognized the remarriage of widows, even if to keep the property within the family. The personality and ideology of the founders of the two papers also appear to have influenced the content and thrust of the articles produced under their guidance. It is noteworthy that Bhai Takht Singh was considered a radical even in the Singh Sabha context.<sup>146</sup>

On the whole, the picture that emerges from the early writings in the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain* revealed male domination and male leadership, with a hesitant beginning on the part of the women to voice their concerns, and gradually, to even articulate differences of opinion from the male writers. Male contributors as a whole revealed a patronizing attitude wherein their superior knowledge and intellect was called upon to improve the mental makeup of the women. This was expected to equip them to take better care of their children and homes and thereby contribute towards the progress of the country. The men were by and large critical of the weaknesses of the women and their degraded position in the present. They dwelt on the glory of the women in the ancient period and the need to bring such ideal women back to life again. Education was the pivot of this programme for all. The nature and aim of education which women needed, however, could only be decided by the enlightened males. They wished to create the 'new' women who would prove to be good wives and mothers as well as the embodiments of simplicity, humility and congeniality. As the reformers went about their business, they revealed a condescending attitude and a bit of impatience and irritation with the 'subjects/objects' to be so painstakingly moulded. However, sympathy for the women's oppression and exploitation in the home, or a concern to improve the quality of her life and social standing was somehow missing from the writings of the male contributors.

Even when the women wrote on similar themes under the tutelage of the reformers, the thrust and perspective of the women's contributions differed. They increasingly tended to analyse the reasons for their degraded status and derided the men for not doing enough. Women's writings revealed their faith in their capabilities as human beings who deserved a life of dignity. Though not rebellious in their attitude, they reveal a yearning for a better life. Women writers give an insight into women's psyche, defend their position, and articulate their aspirations. Articles on travel, time management, women's

education, and scientific and medical news from all over the world indicated the widening horizons of women and that they dreamed to go beyond the limits set by the male reformers. A sense of self worth was increasingly evident in the women's writings. They did not ridicule women; rather, they tried to explain their weaknesses as arising from their unfavorable circumstances. They were sympathetic to the misery of their suffering sisters and through persuasion and good counsel tried to dispel their superstitions and make them see the light of reason. Women's writings exuded confidence and a steady improvement in their self esteem. One can only attribute this attitudinal change to the spread of education. Generally, they expressed gratitude for the endeavors of the reformers though occasionally, some were also critical of their attitudes. There, however, was no infringement into the male space, as the women wanted only their share of fulfillment under the sun.

Even when the male writings conveyed a sincere desire to improve the condition of women, it was not because they were human and deserved equality, but because they were the caretakers and custodians of their homes and their children. The reformers believed by and large that the women did not enjoy the same rights. At places, they maintained that nature made women different and weaker. Therefore, they needed the protective shield and guidance of the men who could enable them to live decently and not be a source of embarrassment to society. Even a lack of genuine respect for women or for their contribution is occasionally evident.

In short, the nature of change desired by the male and female writers appears to be different. The male reformers wanted reform in women's condition and that too in a limited and controlled manner, without affecting their relative position. They wanted women to be competent and accomplished and yet docile and homely. It was like giving them wings but not to let them fly out. On the contrary, women's writings increasingly revealed a desire to fly out into the world and have a life of dignity and respect, as equal human beings.

Thus, many contemporary social attitudes and prejudices are reflected as well as questioned in the pages of the *Panchal Pandita* and the *Punjabi Bhain*. Many hidden tensions between the old and new norms, roles and images of women surface in these periodicals. They are an important record not only of the self expression of the reforming males as well as of the women as the objects of reform, as of somewhat hesitant social and attitudinal change in the Punjabi society during the first decade of the twentieth century.

### Notes

1. I gratefully acknowledge the help extended to me by the Principal and Staff of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar where I consulted the *Panchal Pandita*. I am thankful to the Staff of the Bhai Kahan Singh Library, Punjabi University, Patiala and its Department of Punjab Historical Studies, where I consulted the issues of the *Punjabi Bhain*.



2. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2011[1990]), pp. 128-32.
3. J.S. Grewal, 'Christian Presence and Cultural Reorientation: The Case of the Colonial Punjab', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 51st Session* (Calcutta, 1990), pp. 535-42. For a detailed study see John C.B. Webster, *A Social History of Christianity: North-west India Since 1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).
4. Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio Religious Reform Movements in British India* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-103. See also Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharma: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1976).
6. Jones, *Socio Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 109-15.
7. These writings have been extensively used recently in two significant works on gender history of the Punjab: Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).
8. Satyadev Vidyalkar, *Lala Devraj* (Jalandhar: Swan Printing Press, 1937), p. 16.
9. *Panchal Pandita* (henceforth *PP*), August 1901, 4:10, p. 8; February 1902, 5:4, p. 3; October 1902, 5:12, p. 4; August 1903, 6:10, p. 7.
10. *PP*, July 1902, 5:9, p. 4.
11. *PP*, December 1900, 4:2, p. 9; February 1904, 7:4, p. 5.
12. *PP*, February 1898, 1:4, pp. 20-21.
13. *PP*, August 1902, 5:10, pp. 4-5.
14. *PP*, February 1904, 7:4, p. 6.
15. *PP*, May 1901, 4:7, p. 6.
16. *PP*, June 1902, 5:8, pp. 10-11.
17. *PP*, January 1901, 4:3, p. 21; August 1901, 4:10, pp. 8-9.

18. *PP*, August 1901, 4:10, pp. 8-9.
19. *PP*, November 1901, 5:1, p. 7.
20. *PP*, July 1908, 11:1, p. 13.
21. *PP*, April 1901, 4:6, pp. 6-10.
22. *PP*, August 1901, 4:10, pp. 3-4; June 1903, 6:8, p. 22.
23. *PP*, January 1901, 5:3, pp. 7-8; July 1901, 4:9, p. 11.
24. *PP*, June 1901, 4:8, pp. 4-5.
25. *PP*, February 1903, 6:4, p. 14.
26. *PP*, March 1898, 1:5, p. 21.
27. *PP*, March 1904, 7:5, p. 8.
28. *PP*, February 1898, 1:4, p. 20. This poem was written by Warner Snoad, *President of the 'International Women's Union' in 1895*, at the request of the Manager of KMV.
29. *PP*, November 1901, 5:11, pp. 3-4.
30. *PP*, February 1904, 7:4, pp. 12-14.
31. *PP*, August 1904, 7:10, p. 6.
32. *PP*, April 1901, 4:6, p. 13.
33. *PP*, April 1901, 4:6, pp. 20-21.
34. *PP*, December 1901, 5:2, pp. 16-17.
35. *PP*, May 1902, 5:7, p. 5.
36. Even though the number of widows in the Punjab was lower than other parts of India, the number of widows in the province in 1881, was reported to be 15, 03,300 which was 14.8 per cent of its female population. It came down to 13,86,000 in 1901, but rose again to 15,51,000 in 1911. See Reeta Grewal, 'Widows in North-Western India under Colonial Rule', in *Social Transformation in North-Western India during the Twentieth Century*, ed. Chetan Singh (New Delhi: Manohar, 2010), p. 361.

37. *PP*, November 1900, 4:1, pp. 20-21.
38. *PP*, February 1911, 14:4, p. 9.
39. *PP*, April 1901, 4:6, pp. 3-4.
40. *PP*, June 1911, 14:8, pp. 17-18.
41. Reeta Grewal, 'Widows in North-Western India under Colonial Rule', pp. 374-75.
42. *PP*, January 1901, 4:3, pp. 8-9.
43. *PP*, April 1901, 4:6, p. 4.
44. *PP*, May 1901, 4:7, p. 5.
45. *PP*, October 1901, 4:12, p. 4.
46. *PP*, July 1903, 6:9, p. 3.
47. *PP*, August 1911, 14:10, pp. 19-22.
48. *PP*, December 1901, 5:2, pp. 4-6.
49. *PP*, August 1911, 14:10, pp. 19-22.
50. *PP*, June 1901, 4:8, pp. 18-21.
51. *PP*, June 1901, 4:8, p. 15.
52. *PP*, February 1902, 5:4, p. 7; March 1902, 5:5, p. 6.
53. *PP*, January 1904; 7:3; p. 9.
54. *PP*, May 1901, 4:7, p. 14.
55. *PP*, July 1902, 5:9, p. 18.
56. *PP*, May 1901, 4:7, p. 4.
57. *PP*, June 1902, 5:8, p. 11; July 1902, 5:9, pp. 20-23.
58. *PP*, July 1903, 6:9, pp. 9-10.

59. *PP*, March 1903, 6:5, pp. 10-4; September 1903, 6:11, p. 19. Census records provide ample evidence of the prevalence of child marriage in the Punjab. In 1891, 4 per cent of the married children in the province were in the age group of 5-9 which remained between 2 to 3 per cent till 1921. The largest proportion of married children was in the age group of 10-14/15. From 27 per cent in 1891, it declined to 14 per cent by 1901 but increased to 17 per cent in 1911. From 1921 onwards, however only 15 per cent of the children in this age group were reported to be married. On the whole, there was a decline in the incidence of child-marriage over time. See Vijay Lakshmi, 'Children and the State: A Study of the Colonial Punjab', Ph.D. thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2008, p. 99.

60. *PP*, November 1910, 14:1, p. 5.

61. *PP*, October 1901, 4:12, pp. 13-21.

62. *PP*, March 1902, 5:5, pp. 12-13.

63. *PP*, December 1901, 5:2, pp. 6-8.

64. *PP*, December 1901, 5:2, pp. 8-9. Emerging in the USA during the late nineteenth century, the Temperance movement criticized excessive alcohol use, promoted complete abstinence and put pressure on the government to enact anti-alcohol legislation.

65. *PP*, February 1908, 11:3, pp. 20-22. The proportion of girls being married in childhood was two times more than that of boys. The married female infants in the Punjab in the age group of 0-5 numbered 2,077 in 1911, 2,677 in 1921, and 9,730 in 1931. From 1881 to 1931, the percentage of married children below the age of 15 ranged between 6 and 8 and over 70 per cent were females. See Grewal, 'Widows in North-Western India', pp. 362-63.

66. *PP*, September 1902, 5:11, pp. 8-13. For the use of the press and the educated classes to remove the misunderstandings of the ignorant people about the plague, see Sasha, 'Epidemics in the Colonial Punjab', in *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics and Culture*, ed. Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), p. 238.

67. *PP*, January 1906, 9:3, pp. 11-13. The Swadeshi movement started with the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon in 1905 and continued up to 1908. Strategies of the Swadeshi movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic products and production processes. For some detail, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 106-29.

68. *PP*, December 1900, 4:2, p. 11.

69. Jones, *Socio Religious Reform Movements*, p. 112.
70. N. Gerald Barrier, *The Sikhs And Their Literature* (Delhi: Manohar, 1970), p. 84.
71. *Punjabi Bhain*, (henceforth *PB*), April 1912, p. 8.
72. *PB*, February 1908, pp. 15-17.
73. *PB*, September 1908, p. 16.
74. *PB*, January-February 1909, p. 4.
75. *PB*, May-June, 1909, p. 25.
76. *PB*, May-June, 1909, pp. 17-18.
77. *PB*, March 1910, p. 13. Tikka Ripudaman Singh was the only son and heir of Maharaja Hira Singh of Nabha. He succeeded his father as the Maharaja of Nabha on 24 January 1912, but was deposed by the British on 9 July 1923 for his association with the Akalis and general sympathy for the anti-British individuals and organizations. He had presided over the All India Social Conference held in 1909 in Lahore. See Barbara Ramusack, 'Ripudaman Singh', in *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, ed. Harbans Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2001[1996]), vol. iii, pp. 502-3.
78. *PB*, April 1910, pp. 13-14.
79. *PB*, January-February 1910, p. 15.
80. *PB*, June-July 1910, pp. 3-6.
81. *PB*, November 1910, pp. 11-16.
82. *PB*, March 1912, pp. 13-15.
83. *PB*, May-June, 1909, p. 23.
84. *PB*, April, May, June 1911, pp. 6-7.
85. *PB*, August 1907, p. 17.
86. *PB*, March 1908, p. 10.
87. *PB*, June 1908, pp. 22-24; January-February 1910, pp. 25-30.

88. *PB*, May 1910, p. 3.
89. *PB*, July 1909, p. 35, for example.
90. *PB*, June 1908, p. 17.
91. *PB*, November-December 1909, p. 14.
92. *PB*, January-February 1910, pp. 25-30.
93. *PB*, July 1909, pp. 32-33.
94. *PB*, November 1910, pp. 9-10.
95. *PB*, March 1912, pp. 13-15.
96. *PB*, September 1910, pp. 11-12.
97. *PB*, March 1912, pp. 22-23.
98. *PB*, March 1910, pp. 24-25.
99. *PB*, September 1910, pp. 11-12.
100. *PB*, October 1908, pp. 3-4. Also see Sardul Singh Caveeshar, 'The Sikh, Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur', in *The Singh Sabha and other Social Religious Movements in the Punjab 1850-1925*, ed. Ganda Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1984), p. 117.
101. *PB*, February 1911, pp. 11-15; April, May, June 1911, p. 66.
102. *PB*, November-December 1908, p. 20.
103. *PB*, December 1907, p. 2; January-February 1909, p. 41.
104. *PB*, July 1909, pp. 16-22; August 1910, p. 36.
105. *PB*, July 1909, pp. 16-22.
106. *PB*, August 1909, pp. 24-25.
107. *PB*, April 1910, p. 32; August 1910, p. 37.
108. *PB*, September 1908, p. 18.
109. *PB*, September-October 1909, pp. 26-27.

110. *PB*, May 1910, pp. 19-21. The reference here is to the prosecution of a large number of newspapers and their editors under the Newspaper Act of 1908 by which the Press was almost completely suppressed. For detail see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988), p. 111.

111. *PB*, February 1908, pp. 7-10.

112. *PB*, November-December 1908, p. 30; May-June, 1909, p. 75.

113. *PB*, September 1910, pp. 14-16.

114. *PB*, July 1909, p. 27; September-October 1909, p. 29.

115. *PB*, May-June, 1909, p. 72. The reference here is to Raja Hira Singh (1871-1911), the ruler of Nabha State, who was made Maharaja just before his death in December 1911. He was one of the ablest of the Nabha rulers – wise, liberal and pious. He was succeeded by his son Ripudaman Singh. See S.S Bhatia, 'Hira Singh', in *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, ed. Harbans Singh (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2001 [1996]) vol ii, p. 276.

116. *PB*, January-February 1910, pp. 8-9.

117. *PB*, December 1910, p. 21.

118. *PB*, March 1911, p. 23.

119. *PB*, May 1910, pp. 10-12.

120. *PB*, September 1908, p. 23; June-July 1910, pp. 19-20.

121. *PB*, December 1907, p. 10.

122. *PB*, November-December 1908, p. 42.

123. *PB*, January-February 1909, pp. 5-6. The Anand Marriage Bill was proposed by Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha and introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council in October 1908. It was meant to give legal recognition to the Sikh ceremony of marriage. After much opposition the bill was eventually passed in October 1909. See J.S Grewal *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 151.

124. *PB*, July 1909, pp. 6-9. Sant Atar Singh (1865-1927) after a brief stint as a soldier had adopted the life of a roving missionary, visiting newly established schools and colleges. He valued education and visualized a future for Sikhs

through western educated leaders and intellectuals. See, Darshan Singh Tatla, 'Mission Abroad: Sant Teja Singh in the Western World', in *Five Centuries of Sikh Tradition: Ideology, Society, Politics and Culture*, ed. Reeta Grewal and Sheena Pall (New Delhi:Manohar, 2005), p. 175. For the life of Sant Atar Singh see Teja Singh, *Jivan Katha : Gurmukh Piyare Sant Atar Singh Ji Maharaj* (Barhu Sahib: Kalgidhar Trust, 2008 [1989]).

125. *PB*, July 1909, pp. 14-16.

126. *PB*, April 1908, p. 21; June 1910, p. 15.

127. *PB*, September-October 1909, pp. 40-42.

128. *PB*, August 1908, p. 21.

129. *PB*, April 1912, p. 23.

130. *PB*, August 1910, p. 7.

131. *PB*, November-December 1909, p. 10.

132. *PB*, April 1909, pp. 14-18.

133. *PB*, August 1909, p. 6.

134. *PB*, September-October 1909, pp. 40-42.

135. *PB*, November-December 1908, p. 27; January-February 1910, pp. 17-18. Sarala Debi, the gifted niece of Rabindra Nath Tagore, was brought up in Bengal and moved to Punjab after her marriage with Rambhuj Dutta Chaudhury in 1905. She spent about eighteen years in the Punjab, and participated in major anti-colonial programmes. For more details see Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 13-14.

136. *PB*, August 1910, pp. 5-6.

137. *PB*, September-October 1909, pp. 11-17.

138. *PB*, September-October 1909, p. 48.

139. *PB*, June-July 1910, pp. 31-35.

140. *PB*, December 1910, pp. 25-26.

141. *PB*, February 1911, p. 22. Bhai Takht Singh left for East Asian countries and China in February 1911 with a pledge not to return till he had raised Rs.



50,000 needed for the construction of the building and hostels of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya. He returned in March 1912 having collected the said amount. See *PB*, March 1912, pp. 18-21.

142. *PB*, January 1911, p. 5.

143. *PB*, June-July 1910, p. 45.

144. For detail, see J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, 'Background of Resistance to British Domination', in *The Ghadar Movement: Background, Ideology, Action and Legacies*, ed. J.S. Grewal, Harish K. Puri and Indu Banga (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2013), pp. 88-110.

145. The paper *Panjabee* was started in Lahore by the DAV Aryas led by Lala Lajpat Rai and Hans Raj (with its motto of 'self help at any cost') in October 1904 as a radical challenge to the relatively moderate *The Tribune* which was controlled by the Brahmo Samajis. The Punjab intelligentsia was infuriated by the prosecution of the *Panjabee* for writing about racist outrages. The trial of its editor led to demonstrations against the British in Lahore in 1907. For some details see Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 127-28.

146. For some detail about Bhai Takht Singh, see Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.



## **Emerging Patterns: Property Rights of Women in Colonial and Post-Colonial South-East Punjab**

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The colonial government selectively sanctified in law the male oriented customary practices which denied all rights to females and safeguarded the land and property in the patrilineal line of descent. After independence a complete reversal was effected through law in 1956, based on the principle of equality between males and females. It could hardly have the desired effect as the reigning ideology culturally and morally excluded females from inheriting property. This paper evaluates the question of female inheritance not only in the colonial past but also locates it in the rapidly changed and still changing socio-political economy, which has had an effect on the customary cultural patterns hitherto held sacrosanct in the rural areas. These changes have been magnetic enough for women to claim their inheritance and share in the property, but not without public censure, social protests and family denials.

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The laws governing property have seen massive turnabouts in India both in the colonial and post-colonial periods, highlighting the dichotomy between law and custom, law and social acceptance, and law and its enforcement. This paper while focusing on the property rights of women of south-east Punjab argues that the highly motivated colonial government selectively sanctified in law the male oriented customary practices, which denied all rights to females and safeguarded the land and property in the patrilineal line of descent. A complete reversal was effected through law, after independence in 1956, based on equality between males and females. However, the near century of British rule which had kept women excluded from inheriting property left lasting effects, many of which are visible even to this day. Apart from the sharp resistance of men whose interests were drastically affected, women too appear to resist the implementation of the enabling law, as the reigning ideology culturally and morally excluded them from inheriting property. It was only with the passage of considerable time that a certain reversal of opinion became visible. This paper evaluates the question of female inheritance afresh in today's political economy. Contrary to what is popularly belied and even academically upheld,<sup>1</sup> it shows how the customary norms governing inheritance and property have been quietly undergoing a change. The rapidly changed and still changing socio-political economy has had an effect on the cultural patterns hitherto held sacrosanct in the rural areas. Together, these have been magnetic enough for women to claim their inheritance and share in the property. These changes have occurred not only among women but also

crucially among men of various categories who stand in different relationship to women in their diverse capacities – underscoring an interesting contradiction in patriarchy itself, showing deepening of division among males when it comes to property. Significantly, cultural patterns are set to change though not without public censure and protest.

### Colonial Legacy

The British government, for a variety of reasons concerning Punjab's economic, political and military importance, too well known to bear recounting here, had adopted the 'preservation of village community', as a settled policy for this province.<sup>2</sup> The general argument offered in this connection by the British officials was that the mass of the agricultural population in this province did not follow either the Hindu or the Muslim law. Therefore, a general code of custom was prepared by the settlement officer out of the *wajib-ul-urz* (village administration papers) and *rivaj-i-am* (record of customs and rights) compiled at each settlement in consultation with the village headmen of each principal landowning caste in the district; these being acknowledged as 'men of most influential families in the village'. These recordings excluded women who never appeared before the authorities.<sup>3</sup> The officials also admitted the difficulty of recording customs in the midst of a large number of uneducated men in 'full assemblage together', where according to them the majority view tended to 'control, direct and dominate'.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, this majority was for depriving the women of their say.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the administrators noted down differences between what, according to them, could be termed as 'ideal customs', which the leading caste men wanted to portray, and the 'actual observance of these customs'.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the dominant landowning class customs in regard to civil matters like succession, alienation, marriage, tenure of land and adoption, which gravely affected the rights of women came to be settled primarily by the Punjab Customary Law, which became the first rule of decisions.<sup>7</sup>

The colonial government's decision to make custom rather than the personal law of Hindus and Muslims, as was done elsewhere in India, the first rule of decision in all civil matters was to severely compromise the inheritance rights of women in Punjab. What was made legally binding was what had been claimed as custom by the leading men of the landowning castes. As the land of the village was seen to be belonging to the male descendants of ancestors who originally settled and worked on it, the male agnatic descendants alone, as members of the localized clan, had reversionary rights in the estate. Land was ordinarily not to be alienated outside this group. This made the daughter and the sister the pivotal sites of conflicting interests and not the widow who had only a limited right to land, which at her death reverted to her husband's male collaterals. This meant basically that daughters and sisters who were potential introducers of fresh blood and new descent lines through their husbands had to be kept legally outside the purview of inheritance rights. This was necessary for land to be maintained within the immediate kinship group, not only to

maintain the extensive 'tribal' structure of society upon which the British had built their system of authority in Punjab,<sup>8</sup> but also to prevent the uneconomic fragmentation of holdings. Punjab custom was, therefore, accepted by the compilers of customary rights and the later jurists, in which 'as a rule daughters and their sons, as well as sisters, and their sons [were] excluded by near male collaterals'.<sup>9</sup> Accepted as the general custom, the onus of proving a case to the contrary then lay on anyone challenging it. Regarding rights of women as daughters and sisters and growing encroachments on them, a very revealing statement was made by the Settlement Officer of Hissar district in 1913, which is worth quoting in full:

I would note here that in the *wajib-ul-urz* of the various villages of the tract drawn up at the 1840 settlement the only points dealt with are the rights of government and the landowners. Practically nothing is said as to the succession, alienation or women's rights. And all the available evidence shows that those rights were very much wider than they are now. Nor is the reason for this far to seek. The country was in a very unsettled condition then, and devastated by periodical famines. There was much demand from cultivators, and, as life and property were by no means so secure then as they are now, the people were generally only too glad to get outsiders into their villages. A careful examination of the history of most of the Jat and Rajput villages of the tract, but more especially of the latter, shows that a considerable number of the present landowners are descendants of daughters and sisters. There were then very little restrictions, if any, in the powers of a sonless proprietor to give his land to the sons of his sisters or daughters, so long as they came and settled in the village.

In the *wajib-ul-urz* drawn upon the 1863 settlement we find a change; in them the subjects of inheritance and alienation are dealt with, and also the right of pre-emptors. Even so, though some limitation of those rights were (*sic*) then declared as existing, they were by no means so restricted as they are now stated to be.

At the recent settlement of 1910, we find customary law on these points much developed. Women's rights generally, as regards land at any rate, have become much more restricted, and the same applies to rights of alienation and inheritance generally, particularly of ancestral land. The reason for this development is obvious. The tract has become more prosperous (owing mainly to the extension of canal irrigation). The price of land has risen; and the people are keenly averse to strangers coming into their village and acquiring their ancestral land.

As a result of this history of the tract, it follows that, in my opinion, as to the restrictions the people maintain now exist on women's rights in land on the power of alienation generally and especially to a daughter, a sister or their descendants, they have to some extent stated what they wish for the future more than their existing customs.

The reason why the people have exaggerated like this is obvious. The sons-in-law are always in a minority and it is they who want to alienate their land to daughters or sisters. It was therefore to the interest of the majority of

those who gave the replies in, to maintain that greater restrictions exist on rights to alienate, whether generally or to daughters or sisters in particular, than is perhaps, really the case. As to the self acquired property, especially the powers of a proprietor to alienate are not in reality, so far as I can judge, so limited as the people have stated.<sup>10</sup>

Reports from other parts of Punjab show similar practice in existence in which daughters or sisters and their relatives were invited to cultivate land due to the land being plentiful and there being few hands to cultivate it.<sup>11</sup> The increase in land value and presence of a large population dependent on land made the male collaterals increasingly stake their claims, resulting in great restriction of female rights and even their exclusion. The British administrators considered this practice of keeping land within its own 'tribal' group as healthy and encouraged it. Such a custom in their opinion 'could not but operate for the good of the mass of the peasantry'.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, traditions were being reshaped and even altered.

The changing nature of rural landowning male opinion especially for daughter's rights was also commented upon by the judiciary from time to time whenever the *riwaj-i-am* was under consideration as the basis of delivering judgments on the property rights of women. For example, Chief Justice Clark of the Punjab High Court concurring with Justice Reid in 1906 observed:

As the land is rising in value under British rule the landholders are becoming more and more anxious to exclude female succession. They are ready to state the rule against the daughters as strongly as possible, but if the custom is so well established, it is strange that they are unable to state a single instance in point on an occasion like the compilation of the *riwaj-i-am*, when detailed inquiries are being made and when the leading men are supposed to give their answers with deliberation and care.<sup>13</sup>

Although instructions regarding references to recorded customs as made in the *riwaj-i-am* including civil cases had been made, yet even as early as 1892 these instructions were not 'always being adopted by the civil courts'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the civil courts were inclined to give cognizance to the changing dominant local opinion which tended to compromise greatly, if not to restrict outright, females' rights in land and inheritance. This also explains considerable legislative confusion prevailing despite similarity of cases. Conflicting judgments were being awarded even in the same caste group. For example, in 1890, in the case of Lado, a Jat woman of Jaurasi Kasba in Panipat district, who had taken over the land cultivation and management after the death of her father and in the absence of near collaterals, was challenged in court by very remote collaterals removed to the seventeenth degree. The revenue officials decided in favour of the daughter 'not because she was entitled to the land' but because 'she was in actual possession' of it.<sup>15</sup> Another case of Gujars of village Chaprian in Panipat district in the same year can be cited when the revenue officials similarly effected a mutation of land in favour of Bir Dei, the daughter of the deceased landowner against the claims of far removed collaterals.<sup>16</sup>

In such instances the customary saying invoked by the judiciary was: *qabza ho riwayat na ho waris hai* (actual possession, despite lack of custom, means entitlement). On the whole, however, the daughter's exclusion both from the ancestral and self-acquired property was recognized by the judges.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding such a custom, the discriminating reality was held valid for the lower castes as well. For example, among the Nais (Barber caste), the few cases that came up were decided according to the recorded customs of the agricultural castes and the judges ruled that daughters could not inherit their father's property.<sup>18</sup> The Muslims also claimed to be governed by the 'tribal law' of Punjab which excluded female succession in property matters. This was contrary to the Muslim personal law which allowed a portion of property to the females, equating to only half of the share of that of a son from the property of their father.<sup>19</sup> The daughters nevertheless frequently moved courts under the Muslim Law to claim their share and courts as frequently dismissed their claims.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Post-Colonial Realities: The Immediate Aftermath**

The near century of British rule legally established the custom of keeping women excluded from inheritance as part of Punjabi rural life. This was reversed in the early years of independence through the passing of the Hindu Succession Act, brought into force on 17 June 1956.<sup>21</sup> So far the most gender equitable law in India, it amended and codified the law relating to intestate succession among Hindus and brought about fundamental and radical changes in the law of succession, thus breaking violently with the past. Section 44 of this Act gave overriding effect to its provisions. It abrogated all the rules of the law of succession hitherto applicable to Hindus, whether by virtue of any text or the Hindu law or any custom, or usage having the force of law as had been in operation in the undivided Punjab, (including Pakistan Punjab) under the British. A progressive Act, its section 14 applied to women and enabled for the first time daughters (obliterating any distinction between married and unmarried daughters), sisters, widows and mothers to inherit land with full proprietary rights to its disposal.<sup>22</sup> In effect this legal creation of women's inheritance rights sought to reverse time-old traditions and customs prevailing in the rural areas of the undivided British Punjab which had restricted inheritance strictly to the male line.

The Act aroused tremendous anxieties in rural society. In the event of its proper implementation, the patrilineal and patriarchal hold stood to weaken and even be demolished in time. Consequently, one of the major effects of this Act has been to tighten the noose of control over females, unmarried or married, because giving them inheritance rights made the need to control them even more crucial.

Since women had stood so long in a relationship of total exclusion to property, now even though they were legally enabled in 1956, it was very difficult for them to accept it. Apart from the sharp resistance of the men, whose interests were drastically affected, women too appeared to have resisted

its implementation. Long standing cultural and ideological internalization would not allow women to accept this innovation, howsoever favourable to them and they refused to be a party to it.

The landowners of Punjab were apprehensive of the implementation of this Act. A couple of cases in the immediate aftermath of this Act, gave substance to the fears of the male populace, and succeeded in raising resentment and grave insecurity among them. In these stray cases the sisters successfully claimed their inheritance after contesting the claims of the collaterals. Significantly, in all these cases the sisters did not challenge the brothers, there being none, but staked claims to land in opposition to distant collaterals.<sup>23</sup> To illustrate, I cite one of the earliest cases from Punjab decided in the wake of the 1956 Act in which the sister successfully claimed her inheritance.<sup>24</sup> The case decided in 1960 concerned the inheritance right to certain plots of land in a village in Sultanwind *tahsil* in district Amritsar. Sahib Singh, the last male owner of the lands under dispute had died in December 1918. His widow Nihal Kaur had succeeded to the lands, but on her remarriage soon thereafter she was divested of them and they passed on to Sahib Singh's mother Kishen Kaur who died in November 1942. On her death a dispute arose between Sahib Singh's sister Jeo and Sahib Singh's agnatic relation Ujjagar Singh. Jeo filed a suit asking for ownership.

Despite the law and some court cases, there was nothing to indicate that a sizeable number of females had indeed been able to exercise their rights. Even when a few of them exercised their rights, they were greeted with great hostility and were forced to back out. I recall a case from south-east Punjab in the early 1960s, where a married woman, an only daughter of a widow, came with her husband and settled in village Chhara of district Jhajjar where she had inherited land from her mother. Her husband's landholding in village Jatwar in Ambala district, being much smaller, was given out on *batai* (share cropping). With great difficulty, this arrangement lasted only for two years. The male collaterals did not allow them to settle down. They were openly taunted; and quarrels were picked with them on the slightest pretext. Socially, they were unwelcome everywhere; animals were let loose in the fields, crops were destroyed; water channels were cut and water diverted elsewhere; special irrigation arrangements made from the neighbouring tube wells for two hours would dry up only after half an hour. Out of sheer helplessness the woman had to sell off the land at a much lower market price to the tormentors, that is her late father's male collaterals and move back with her husband to his village.

It appears that after the passing of the 1956 Act, the fear of landowning males, who remained apprehensive of the potential female claims, was greater than the actual claims. As a result, the landowners of Punjab showed unanimity regarding the urgency of abolishing this Act. On the one hand, they tried to have it abolished through the legislative procedures and, on the other, they accelerated their attempts through the caste panchayats to control its fall-out. Slowly, as tension mounted in the rural society, voices to abolish or amend the 1956 Act gained momentum.



In 1966, the state of Haryana was formed out of the truncated post-partitioned Punjab, primarily including its south-east region or the Ambala division of colonial Punjab. Within months of Haryana being created, its legislative assembly passed a resolution in 1967 (and the Punjab Assembly in 1977), requesting the central government to amend the said Act. The centre did not oblige. In 1979, the Haryana Assembly tried to force the issue by unanimously passing a Bill which amended the Act of 1956 and sent it for the President's approval. This was not granted. Ten years later in August 1989, Devi Lal (Member of Parliament from Haryana) as the Deputy Prime Minister proposed an amendment in the Succession Act, once again in an attempt to deprive the married women of their share in the parents' property.<sup>25</sup> The spate of democratic and gender protests which followed this move could not be ignored. Devi Lal was forced to drop the proposal in view of, as he acknowledged himself, 'adverse comments' in the media and elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> All these moves stand defeated as of now, but not the spirit that had moved them. This continues unabated cutting across differences of gender, class, caste and even political parties. More recently, this Act was further amended in 2005, in favour of female inheritors to rid of some of the major lacunae that existed in the original Act.<sup>27</sup>

Immediately after the passing of the 1956 Act and in anticipation of its enforcement, the rural patriarchal forces devised several ways to stem the progressive fall-out of this legal enablement. Many advocates testify to the stream of male members with the potential female inheritors in tow to get them to write off their land claims in favour of their brothers.<sup>28</sup> In the court one of the routine questions asked before '*likhat-padhat*' (formalization of rights) takes place is '*tum khush ho ker bhaiyon ko de rahi ho*' (are you giving [the land] to your brothers of your own sweet will?). Several gift and sale deeds were registered in favour of male members at this time. In some cases the land is automatically registered in the girl's name but remains in *de-facto* possession of the brother. However, more recently, I discovered that she cannot always sign away her inheritance as her brothers would have her do, as rural consensus puts the marriage age well below the age of attaining majority. In cases where she does sign away her right, after marriage she is invariably taunted for having been 'so very generous to have gifted away the land'. However, a way out of this has been found, which is not infrequently adopted. This is to seek the prior sanction of the husband-to-be and his family about her not claiming the due inheritance. In many cases this is forthcoming, perhaps because they too have daughters and are afraid of establishing a precedent and facing the social taunts regarding the obvious double standards. But in these cases, where the assent is not forthcoming, the *de-facto* control of the father and brother retains the upper hand. Violence and compulsion have been very effective in making the females sign away their rights.

An important way out has been to pose the inheritance right of a daughter and a sister to be against that of the brother and the patriarchal insistence upon dowry as an alternative settlement of a girl's claims/right to property. Rural male opinion is almost unanimous in contending that the girls receive their

share of patrimony at the time of marriage in the form of dowry and the fact that they are customarily only entitled to maintenance and to be 'suitably betrothed and married'. A large measure of legitimacy has been provided to this custom by women themselves, primarily because rural women have accepted dowry as a substitute for property for which their legal claim has been established. When directly questioned about their inheritance rights, many women displayed visible annoyance and also questioned: 'haven't our brothers got us married?' In the opinion of married women, they have already taken a share of their parental property in the form of cash and kind at the time of marriage, 'so where is the question of more share?'

It was not only the daughter or sister but also the widow whose traditional rights of inheritance tended to threaten the patriarchal system. As I have discussed at length elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> a way out of this was available in the form of widow remarriage, called the custom of *karewa* or levirate, in which the widow was remarried to her *devar* (younger brother-in-law), failing him the *jeth* (older brother-in-law), and failing him even a collateral cousin. Enforcement of this custom in the post-colonial period (in which her economic benefits have increased enormously due to recent increases in pension, and other compensations etc), is directly related to the widows having come into possession of the right of absolute inheritance (from that of limited inheritance in the colonial period), and the patriarchal desire to retain it in the family. A remarriage brings an otherwise independent woman with property, once again under male dominance, without endangering the established kinship patterns. The widow who wanted sexual and economic freedom, as well as freedom from institutionalized marital violence, resisted it vehemently then, and continues to do it even now, with differing results.

Indeed, the legal possibility of and claims of inheritance rights by women has strengthened the male propensity to inflict violence upon them. The one difference is in its infliction in the womb itself to eliminate the root cause of property going to a female, thus obviate the possibility of any future claim of property by her. The readily available and extensively used new technology for determining the sex of the fetus leading to female foeticide has wreaked havoc in society. The census figures of Haryana show a rapidly declining percentage of female sex ratio. For example, the census of 2001 shows only 819 females to 1000 males in the category of 0 to 6 years of age.<sup>30</sup> Such low female figures have effectively negated the progressive fall out of the inheritance enablement law on female population.

### **Contemporary Situation: The Changed Political Economy**

The male apprehensions and fears have not proved groundless. With passage of time it came to be noticed that all the cultural constraints, popular prejudices, peremptory steps and even violence had not entirely prevented the daughters from staking claims to their property or the sons-in-law (*jamaais*) from making claims on behalf of their wives. Gradually, as the knowledge about the legal enablement gained ground, changes started to surface and there

was a steady growth in the number of such cases. In fact, by 1979, good 23 years after the passing of the Hindu Succession Act, the members of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha testified to an alarming 'trend' showing the sons-in-law shifting to their wives' villages to claim land as also the 'greed' among people who after the 1956 Act wanted their sons to marry 'only those girls who had no brothers'. Clearly women as daughters were demanding their share of property either by themselves or being prompted by their husbands and/or their conjugal families. The legislators also acknowledged violence, even murder of *ghar jamais* (resident sons-in-law). However, statistics regarding the number of cases which may actually have been effectuated were neither provided nor are available.

More recent evidence shows that things are indeed changing. Why and how, is the main question. Is there significant revision in the viewpoint of men and women regarding female inheritance of property, visible now than earlier? There are no straight forward answers and it still remains an ambiguous terrain. But changes are noticeable. I had the occasion to ascertain this very recently during my extended field work in mid 2011. From the field work it became clear that although there continues to be open hostility to women inheriting property, things are changing and customs have had to be revised, as will be clear presently.

In all-men group discussions, men frankly admitted that they, whether as father, brother, husband or son, would not want women to have property. They openly acknowledged that it would give women tremendous leverage and '*yeh hamare sir per hee nachengi*' (literally, they will dance on our heads). Also, there continues to be a marked unanimity about the inappropriateness of the females getting property from two sources: the parents and the in-laws. These shares are, according to them, 'over and above the dowry that we give them'. Significantly, men do not have so much of a problem with dowry, as that gives them the much sought after status; it is a woman's claim to property that remains under attack. The men want her share in the parental property to be abolished which, according to them, must go to the male lineal heirs. 'Why should women get two shares? Isn't it enough that we get them married?' they ask. The apprehensions of men about their patriarchal power and authority being compromised are quite apparent. But as changes are now surfacing noticeably, they have no option but to either accept it or physically eliminate the women concerned. Confirming this, women stated: 'land or its possession is the cause of our deaths', and cited several cases from different villages where women were allegedly killed for property.

Similarly, many women in all-women group discussions felt that 'a daughter should have the right to property only in her *susral* (conjugal home) not in her *maika* (natal home)'. Others also maintained: 'Only if a daughter is not married she has the right to her parental property'. Condemning those women who are now demanding their share, another woman maintained: *Kuch bhi ho bhaiyan ki zaroorat to pade he kare. Un ke bina ke sare hai. Eese peese ka kei karnna jo adami ne kho de* (Whatever may be, one needs one's brothers. One cannot do without them. What good is this money which cuts off

your relationship with your natal males?). Sumitra Devi of village Meham opined very insightfully: '*Yahan to lugai adami ki sampati maani jaave hai vo keese sampati mein adhikar maange?* (Here [in Haryana], a woman is considered the property of a man. Where does the question of her claiming her share in the property arise?).

A contrary opinion does exist, as we shall see presently, but is not being openly voiced; they prefer to maintain silence for fear of being shouted down or even ostracized. The time has come to reevaluate the question of female inheritance afresh, especially in view of the increasing visibility of such cases. These cases have to be located in the changed political economy of today, as the customary norms governing questions of inheritance and property of women have been quietly undergoing change. I wish to emphasize just three aspects in the changed political economy of this region that have a direct bearing on this question.

The single most important change, which has had the most profound effect, is the enormous increase in land prices in Haryana which has brought about some rethinking among women regarding claiming their share. The increase in the prices of agricultural lands for urban purposes in the areas surrounding Delhi, as well as major towns of Haryana itself has been unparalleled. Not only have the number of towns grown in this state from 58 in 1961 to 106 in 2001, there has also been a steady growth of urban population of Haryana. Statistically, the growth of population in the towns has been from 1,772,959 in 1971, to 61,114,139 in 2001, a growth of 334.86 per cent.<sup>31</sup> In the previous decade alone for which the figures are available, that is 1991 to 2001, the urban area of Haryana has increased from 966.73 kms to 1287.93 kms, a growth of 33.23 per cent.<sup>32</sup> Even more importantly, out of 19 districts of Haryana, 7 districts fall in the National Capital Region (NCR), surrounding Delhi, containing 41.21 per cent of the total population of Haryana, according to the 2001 Census.<sup>33</sup> This NCR region of the state contains 40 towns and 2,496 villages out of a total of 106 towns and 6,955 villages in Haryana. In other words, 37.74 per cent of the towns and 35.89 per cent of the villages of Haryana are included in the NCR. It covers about 30.46 per cent of the total area of this state. These areas have seen massive escalation in land prices. Land around the major NCR towns in Haryana, like Panipat, Sonapat, Rohtak, Bahadurgarh, Rewari, Gurgaon, and Faridabad, measured in square yards rather than in acres has enormous price tags due to demands of urban residential, commercial and industrial expansion. In Rohtak district, for example, known as the 'C.M. City', as it is the current Chief Minister Hooda's constituency, the price of residential plots has gone beyond Rs. 65,000 per sq. yard.<sup>34</sup> The price of one acre of cultivable land in a village like Dujjana in district Jhajjar, is estimated to approximate close to a crore of rupees in 2012; it rose from 35,000 rupees in 1988, and the cost of this land was less than a thousand rupees in 1966—the year of the creation of this state. Similarly, in Karnal district, the centre of the green revolution, the price of one acre in 2012 stands well over a crore of rupees. It is estimated to have risen from anything between 2,000 to 4,000 rupees per acre available before the green revolution,

to 50,000 to one lakh and above as a result of the green revolution. This hunger for land and income is reinforced by the rising social expenditure, along with the growing demands of a new generation with a taste of urban life and consumerism.

The rapidly changed and still changing socio-political economy has had effect on the customary cultural patterns hitherto held sacrosanct in the rural areas. Together, these have been magnetic enough for women to claim their inheritance and share in the property, and also for some men to activate the inheritance law on behalf of their wives, so much so that even the children have reclaimed (as it is legally reclaimable) the once-orally-declined-share by their mother. As a woman in village Mandotthi, astutely commented '*Pahle ladkiyan mangti zaroor thi per leti na thi, eeb ladkiyan apna haq mangti bhi hain aur le bhi rahi hain*' (Earlier the girls were asking for their share, but not claiming it; now, the girls are asking for their share and even claiming it).<sup>35</sup> This is a change noticeably coming to the surface and in the long term stands to readjust social equations between males and females. Most men in village Chhara of district Jhajjar stated that in case of the death of the patriarch, the *patwari* automatically registers the ancestral land in the name of the survivors be it a girl or a boy. The girls now a days, however, are 'extremely reluctant' to transfer this land to their brothers as in the past and in fact in so many cases have refused to oblige; the exact words used are: '*latkaye rakhti hain*' (they keep on dithering). This is commonly heard not only in Chhara village but also in all the surrounding villages. Such actions, according to the local populace, are 'driving a wedge between the brothers and sisters, and vitiating their relationship'. It is ironical that for a sister to keep 'good relations' with her brother she must relinquish her share of property or the famed brother-sister love is all but extinguished.

### **Staking claims**

Interestingly, women may still write off or feel compelled to write off, their land rights but they are now demanding a share in the sale of the land which has brought huge economic returns in the NCR region. In village Baniara of Rohtak district, for example, which falls under the 'acquisition of land' plans of the Haryana government there has been enormous rise in the price of land. These highly attractive commercial prices have reportedly elicited a response from females resulting in about 10 to 15 married women in this single village to stake their claim for their share in the money which their brothers/fathers have received from the sale of the land. Many women are known to have already received this money. However, there is a shroud of silence regarding this exchange as there continues to be social censure of all such demands. The concerned parties are weary of admitting that they have had to accommodate the demands of the females of their family. There is consequent denial by those concerned, but many people in the know have confirmed it. In this respect, I shall take up just one case in which the female claimant has made such a demand, which highlights the pulls and pressures experienced by

females in order to either strengthen their agency or to create it. Out of many cases that reportedly exist, she alone was willing to be interviewed.

Rekha from village Ratthdhanna of Sonapat district is married to Rajbir, a police man. Her father originally had nine acres of land, out of which six acres were sold off for one lakh per acre much before her marriage. However, with the passage of time, urbanization of Sonapat and its industrial development and commercialization of the surrounding territory which fell in the coveted urban category, the price of land skyrocketed. As the land of Rekha's father fell in this commercialized area, he sold off his three acres at one crore rupees per acre. Prompted by her in-laws, Rekha asked for her share in the sale of this land. In return, all that she was given was some pieces of jewelry. She realized the 'unfairness' of it all. Consequently, she asked her father for her 'rightful share'. 'Why should my father discriminate between me and my two brothers?' she inquired. Till date she has not received her share.

During the interview, Rekha agitatedly complained that both her brothers were unemployed. Yet, they were still 'enjoying themselves' on this money, while she was constantly being nagged and taunted by her husband and father-in-law about her share which her father had so far refused to hand over to her. Clearly there was emotional and psychological pressure on Rekha which had intensified in the wake of the sale of the land by her father. When asked, whether society was now accepting the daughters' share in their father's property, Rajbir, underlining the changing norms, maintained very insightfully: Society doesn't say anything. All households are now-a-days facing such demands from their daughters who are claiming their share and in fact even getting it. Only money matters. This is especially so when relationship between the in-laws sours for some reason, as in our case. I hope the eventuality of moving the court doesn't arise. So far neither have we moved the court to claim Rekha's share nor have they given her share to us. Let us see what happens in the future.

It may be added here that claiming money or supporting the wife to claim money is far easier for the husband, as instead of land, money can be taken '*shaan se*' (with joy or pride), as one man put it. The money transaction also makes the real recipient, the husband, escape the slur of being a *ghar jamai* – a position, still considered 'demeaning', which will be dealt with presently. Even those women who ask for their share of land, which many from financially weak conjugal homes do, they generally sell it off for the same reasons, as is evident in the cases given below.

### **Demanding a Share: Sister vs. Brother**

Despite the dominant opinion being mouthed by both men and women that women have no right to their ancestral property, cases are steadily growing where women are claiming their share even after several years of not claiming it and despite there being a male heir. I shall just cite two cases out of the many that I came across.

Anaro Devi, Chamar by caste, worked as an agricultural labour in village Dujjana of district Jhajjar. After the death of her husband three years ago, and finding it difficult to make two ends meet, Anaro decided to ask for her share of land in her father's property. The two acres of ancestral land was then in the exclusive control of her two brothers. Significantly, this demand was made nearly twenty years after she had been married and was greatly resented by her brothers. Feeling bitter, they threatened that 'they would not bother about her even if she were to die'. Her younger sister, who did not claim her share and considered Anaro's action totally wrong, stopped all communication with her. Her brothers had already cut off all relations with her. After claiming her share, Anaro sold off the land and bought two milch cattle. She now makes enough income through the sale of this milk, priced at 25 rupees per litre. From the income she is able to look after herself and her two sons—one of whom has been recently married off. Showing her mettle, she admits that for taking her share she had to put up with a lot of 'taunts' from kinsmen and the villagers.

The second case is that of Dhanpati, a Jat woman from village Shari Khawda, district Rohtak, who married Ram Prasad of village Dobh, at the age of 16, some forty years ago. Dhanpati and her three sisters had not laid any claims to their parental property. Her two brothers had consequently inherited two acres each from their father. Out of the two brothers, the younger one had been close to the four sisters and had observed all the rituals by presenting them with *kothali* (gifts on social and festive occasions). He was unmarried and died early. The older brother had always been very unpleasant to his sisters; he did not observe any of the rituals and in fact did not allow his sisters even to visit him. After the death of their younger brother the sisters staked their claim in their father's property. They together got one acre in 2001 which they sold off to someone in their natal village itself. The sale got them two lakh rupees which were distributed among the four of them that is fifty thousand each.

However, during the interview, Dhanpati felt the need to justify her action, as the dominant opinion remains critical of the daughters claiming their share, especially if there is a son/brother to inherit it. Rationalizing her initiative, she said: 'I claimed my share as my brother was misbehaving with me and my sisters and not fulfilling his brotherly obligations'. Only one of her sisters has any regrets. After this incident, the relationship between the brother and his four sisters totally broke down. It is a well known fact, as already mentioned, that if the sisters were to claim what is legally theirs, they have to completely write-off any relationship with the natal family.

Interestingly, when this move to claim their share was under consideration, Dhanpati's husband and those of her sisters' had encouraged them to take their share. More and more cases of the husband and/or the conjugal family, encouraging the wife or the daughter-in-law to stake her claim to inheritance are coming up. This is in spite of the likely public censure which the family may have to endure. Cultural patterns are set to change, though slowly and not without some protests.

The effect of having claimed one's share became visible very soon. Dhanpati maintained: 'Our (the sisters') condition improved after we claimed our property'. Out of the money Dhanpati received from the sale of the property, she bought a buffalo whose milk is providing sustenance to her entire family. For the rest of the money, her husband suggested that they should convert their *kachcha* (made of mud) house into a *pucca* (lined with masonry) one. She agreed, as because of lack of finances, it had not been possible for them to have a *pucca* house earlier. It may be noticed that, after claiming her share, not only has the quality of life changed for the better for Dhanpati, but she also came to assume a position where she is taking both individual and joint decisions.

The case does not end here. It is carried on in the sub-case of her daughter. Dhanpati had a son and a daughter. The daughter was married at the age of sixteen in 1998. The son died early in 2003 due to drug abuse. This left the daughter as the only inheritor of the property of Dhanpati and her husband, which includes land, house and cattle. After the death of her son, Dhanpati and her husband had declared that after their death, their two acres of land and other property would go to their only daughter. The price of land in this area, which is close to the urban colonies of Rohtak, is estimated to be about rupees one crore per acre. The fact that the daughter is going to inherit her parental property has changed the daughter's conjugal equations as well as the established cultural patterns. The daughter has begun to be sent frequently to be with her parents, whenever her presence is required due to her parent's ill health or any other work. This is a severe reversal of the age-old practice which does not allow the frequent visits of the wife to her natal home. Indeed, now even the son-in-law readily accompanies his wife and stays with his in-laws to help them out in peak agricultural seasons.

### ***Ghar jamai: Changing Perceptions***

One of the major reasons why a daughter/sister may be wary of claiming her share in the property of her father is the negative connotation associated with the word *ghar jamai* (the resident son-in-law). In Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, the cultural prejudice against *ghar jamai* among landowning caste groups is so strong that it has become the butt of many jokes and stories.<sup>36</sup> An oft quoted proverb runs:

*sohre ke ghar jamai kutta*  
*bahen ke ghar bhai kutta*

(A man living in his father-in-law's house is akin to a dog  
A brother living in his sister's house is akin to a dog)

In ordinary circumstances, a son-in-law is treated with honour and respect especially when he is on a visit to his wife's village. Great respect is shown to him not only by the wife's immediate kinsmen but also by her classificatory



kin, such as her lineage males and fellow villagers. In fact, in the whole of north India he is generally referred to as the *bateu* or a *mehman*, both words literally meaning a guest, and his honour lies in remaining one, that is a *jamai*, and not become a *ghar jamai*. Since the collaterals, it is said, would not like to see an outsider taking a share of the ancestral property, if he were to go and live in his wife's village, he is likely to be despised and incur considerable shame.

Given below is just one case from Rohtak district, out of quite a few that I came across, regarding women inheriting property and the turning of a *jamai* in to a *ghar jamai*. This case underlines the continuing and even accelerating change in Haryanavi rural society which is on its way to accept a significant breach in the time honoured tradition of patrilocality by relocating the husband in the natal village of his wife. Allowing and accepting the daughter (and her husband) to take over the ancestral property (an act which was always vehemently resisted by the natal family, the collaterals, the community, as well as the villagers) is a major breach in the cultural perceptions surrounding the concept of *ghar jamai*. This particular case shows the most respected *jamai* turning into a *ghar jamai*, but with hardly any negative connotations in real life. This is specially so in relation to the collaterals, whose customary rights had been totally curtailed under the 1956 Act. After initial resistance, as indicated in an earlier case, the collaterals appear to have accepted their ouster from direct acquisition of property as a matter of their right. Now this acquisition can only be through purchase. Undoubtedly, their reservations remain regarding the daughters taking over the property, but these have not proved to be of any great hindrance.

This is a case in which two brothers got married to two sisters, and translocated themselves from their own village to their wives' village, became *ghar jamais* and have been successfully cultivating the land of their father-in-law without incurring any social disapproval or strictures.

In village Ballam, 20 kms from Rohtak city, the ailing Gujjar family of Banwari, 82 years of age and Shayam Bai, 72 years old, were unable to cultivate their land holding of 11 acres. In 2000, they invited Sunil and Anil, their sons-in-law, to stay with them and cultivate the land on their behalf. The sons-in-law agreed as their own ancestral land was a mere 5 acres and also not-so-fertile which they held and cultivated jointly with their three brothers in village Ojha of Bhiwani district. In any case, their wives had no brother and the land would have eventually been inherited by them. Their own land, were it to be divided, would have meant uneconomic holding of just one acre each for the five brothers.

Interestingly, the village folks do not condemn these *ghar jamais*, suggesting a certain reversal of opinion that has been gradually taking place in the rural areas. The villagers, both men and women opined that the two brothers are the village *bateu* (guests) who always give them (the villagers) 'full respect' and are 'respected in return'. Once when the neighboring field accidentally caught fire from the actions of one of the *jamais*, the village *panchayat* refused to impose any penalty as they would have invariably done

in any other case, and were satisfied with the apology tendered by the *jamaïs*. Explaining this they said: ‘How can we impose fine on our own daughters? After all, our daughters are the owners of this land’.

Regarding the property going to her daughters, the mother, Shyam Bai, stated the following:

We have made a will leaving our 11 acres of land to be divided equally between our two daughters. No one has any objections, neither the collaterals, nor my husband’s brothers who had received their own share of 11 acres each some fifty years ago, nor any of the villagers.

There are several such cases in which the brother-less married sisters have inherited the property and shifted with their husbands to take over.

Another case worth mentioning is that of Kamala Devi, a Brahmin by caste, who shifted with her husband to her natal village Meham in Rohtak district, after her parents’ death to look after the six acres of land which they had owned. Kamla has two more sisters; consequently, her father had divided the property into three, leaving two acres each to his three daughters. Although the husbands of Kamla’s sisters did not shift, Kamla’s husband did. He has two other brothers and was encouraged by Kamla’s mother-in-law to shift to his wife’s natal home. Kamla stated that she divides the income ‘fairly and honestly’ into three shares – one for herself and the other two for her sisters. In all this her husband and his family as well as her sisters and their families have supported her fully.

This case evoked both criticism and acceptance. The criticism emanated not from the fact that her husband had become *ghar jamai* but from the fact that this change catapulted the female inheritor to a powerful economic position of a ‘*karta*’ (a doer or the head of the household), not socially accepted for married females in this region. The criticism has been twofold: One, she has been told to stop all ‘*mardon ke kaam*’ (men’s work)—which she had to undertake due to her husband’s acute illness, and two, to go back to her *sasural* which alone, according to the village critics, she is entitled to. Admitting the first charge, Kamala Devi significantly confirmed: ‘for the last 14 years (since 1997), I have been managing like a man’. Explaining this Kamala elaborated:

If I had not taken over the land it would have been misappropriated by my *chacha-tau* (uncles) and we would not have been able to do anything. Now I stand in place of a brother for both my sisters, fulfilling all the social and ritual obligations that a brother is expected to observe towards his sisters, like *bhat* and *kothali* etc. and even provide them with a place (natal home) they can visit, when they like.

In other words, property acquisition by a woman in certain cases has meant a *de-facto* female-headed household. In a complete role reversal the entire work: agricultural, household and animal husbandry, from management to marketing

– is being performed by her. This can only be termed as a major change, made possible because of the inheritance claimed by the woman.

### **Brother-less Sisters: Change in Cultural Patterns**

Such cases can be multiplied manifold. Another case is that of Nirmala and Tejaswani, two sisters hailing from an upper caste/class Brahmin family of village Sitali in Sonapat district. They married two brothers Ram and Ajit Niwas of village Dobh in district Rohtak and initially lived together in a joint family. Both these sisters do not have any brother. The parents of the girls have very fertile five acres of irrigated land situated between two canals, which remit an income of rupees 25,000 per acre per annum. Their father had openly declared that he will leave all his property to both his daughters. He had earlier shown his willingness to adopt the son of one of his daughters but this was not acceptable to the daughters' conjugal family. Not only did they fear for the life of the child so adopted but also made a condition that the child who gets adopted will have to forgo his own claims to his paternal property. This was not acceptable to any one of them.

The brothers together own six acres of land which they cultivate themselves with the help of a tractor; this land is not as fertile as the one owned by their father-in-law. Also, it is prone to floods. In 2010, for example, more than half of their land was under water and they were unable to make any profit out of cultivation. In such a situation the attraction of their father-in-law's land is very clearly evident. In the eventuality of their wives inheriting this land they plan to either give it out on rent for cultivation or even sell it. The money so generated would, according to them, go to their wives. However, they also laughingly added that 'in any case being their husbands we have equal rights to our wives' money or land – whatever the case may be'. It may be noted that the reverse sort of claim that is of their wives on their husbands' property is never acknowledged. I may add here that, although it is true that the husband comes to have enormous rights over his wife's property, but it still remains in the wife's name. That is crucial, because in all future negotiations and sale, her signature or consent is needed and necessary, which may or may not be forthcoming. There are some cases in which the wife refused to sign the sale deed of her inherited property.

In this case, although the husbands have not shifted to their in-law's village, and cannot be strictly called *ghar jamais*, they shoulder all responsibilities. At the time, when they were interviewed, Tejaswani, the wife of the younger brother had gone to her *maika* (natal home) to look after her old parents. In fact, both the sisters take turns to ensure that their old parents are never left alone. When one of the sisters is visiting her parents, the household work in her absence is shared by the mother-in-law, who is stated to be 'most cooperative'. The mother-in-law takes over cooking, cleaning, milking and looking after the milch cattle, without being resentful of her daughters-in-law's very frequent absence from the family, as is generally in most of the cases. Underlining the winds of change, Nirmala maintained:

Because we have our father's property behind us we have not only got respect in our family but ... because of our property, our family is respected in the community and in the village. The neighbours are also very cordial because they think that once we inherit the five acres of our father's property we are bound to sell it and they being our immediate neighbours may be given preference in purchasing it.

As mentioned earlier, this is quite contrary to the reigning cultural practice which does not encourage the visits of married women to their natal homes; it is sanctioned on rare and significant social and family occasions only. A woman has no right to take such a visit for granted and needs the permission of her husband and other family elders. Under the new situation, the socio-cultural norms stand willingly and permanently altered to suit the new requirements.

#### **Accommodating daughters along with sons**

There are also cases in which the fathers, despite having sons, take the lead in giving the share of property to their daughters; yet others are willing to look after their daughters in case the marriage collapses for some reason. Given below is one such case, indicating the changes regarding property rights surfacing not only among women but also among men.

Bimla, Jat by caste, from village Kharkadi, district Bhiwani, was just 16 years of age when she was married off. Unable to tolerate marital violence Bimla sought a legal divorce from her husband. However, by the time she took this step, she had had two children – a girl and a boy. In this demand she was fully supported by her father, an ex-army officer, who was in the know of her violent marital relationship. She succeeded in getting the divorce, the custody of her children, as well as maintenance for herself and her children.

Bimla had four siblings—two sisters and two brothers. The father had divided his property equally between his four children. After her divorce, Bimla's father also gifted a house to her to live in. Complications emerged when one of her brothers died at the age of 37 leaving behind a daughter. The younger brother as the only male heir started to put pressure upon the father to make over the entire property to him, including the house that had been gifted to Bimla. The father resisted this demand as long as he was alive. After his death the pressure and the demands increased. Bimla's brother demanded that their mother, who was living with Bimla, should shift with him and he should get 'the benefit of her pension' as well as the interest from the fixed deposit that the father had left in the name of the mother. Indeed, old age pension in Haryana has emerged as a potent reason for the frequent fights between siblings (mostly males) over the custody of their old parents.

The brother when interviewed was defiant and aggressive about these demands and felt that he was 'fully justified' in making them. The village *biradari* and other relatives were also of the opinion that it was 'the son's right

to get all the property'. The mother and two sisters however refused all his demands. The younger sister's conjugal family also put pressure upon their *bahu* not to be a party to this arrangement. They argued: 'old customs and tradition must be honoured and these decreed that property must go to the son/s and the parents should live with the son instead of the daughter/s'.

Bimla is now 57 years old and lives with four of her family members in Hissar. She has with her the mother, her deceased brother's daughter, as well as her own son and daughter.

### Conclusion

It is undeniable that regarding rights of inheritance of women, the dominant vocal opinion in this region, both of men and women, remains antagonistic and unsympathetic. This is reflected even in the unhelpful approach of many of the government and political functionaries who share the prevailing social biases with its strong male resistance to female inheritance of land. They do not take kindly to such claims and often obstruct the implementation of laws favouring women. In the absence of an effective and encouraging state support system, women are also reluctant to claim their inheritance or to even vocalise their rights. Despite a very high awareness of such rights, they either reiterate the male reasoning in asserting male entitlement or offer cultural, moral and emotional justification for not claiming their share.

However, the legacy of custom, cultural constraints and prejudices against women inheriting land and property, officially nurtured by the colonial government, as well as its residue apparent in the present day dominant local opinion, has not entirely prevented females, who are now legally enabled to inherit, from staking claims to their share of property in rural Haryana. The stray cases which had surfaced even under the colonial regime have steadily grown in the post-colonial situation. Slowly, the changes are coming noticeably to the surface. In fact, as a result of these changes, it cannot also be denied that the Haryanavi situation born out of the male anxiety to control females has turned into one of potential violence for them. In fact, the murder of women in such cases, where the inheritance rights may be claimed or are claimed, is openly acknowledged. The recent sprout in cases of 'honour killings' can also be directly related to this growing phenomenon.<sup>37</sup> The current drive for consolidation of traditional forces in the form of *khap panchayats* and the punitive measures adopted by them to tighten the noose of control over females, unmarried or married, as well as the renewed social efforts to do away with the laws that give validity to the property claims of women are crucially related to the accumulative impact such claims are having in this region.<sup>38</sup> These norms not only go against the laws of the land but are also create social anomalies in the greatly changed political economy of today's Haryana.

Clearly, the drive for change and opposition to this change, co-exist in the contemporary Haryanavi society. It takes time and an enormous and concerted effort to change social attitudes and cultural patterns. In order to accelerate

these changes, there is an urgent need to do away with difference between the legal recognition of a claim and its social recognition, and also between recognition and enforcement. [Even though the sample for this study comes largely from the present day Haryana, it is not unlikely that the situation is broadly similar in the post-1966 Punjab: *Editor*].

### Notes

[*Author's Acknowledgements*: This paper largely draws upon my field-based study carried out for UN Women on determining effects of women's property ownership and economic independence on reduction of violence against them in rural Haryana.

See [http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/economic\\_security.html](http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/economic_security.html).

For the UN study extensive field work was undertaken in mid 2011 in a large number of villages, selected randomly, in different districts of Haryana. For the field work I wish to thank my short-term research assistants: Yudhvir Zaildar and Rekha Lohan. The use of the field data, its analysis and conclusions, including all the errors which may have crept in, are strictly mine and in no way reflect on the work of my research assistants].

1. There is a great paucity of research in the area of female inheritance of land and property. Even the national and regional surveys regarding land ownership and its use do not give sex-wise information. The few articles that exist merely confirm the popularly projected and accepted view that women of this region are not activating their property rights or claiming their inheritance. See, for example, Raj Mohini Sethi, 'Gendered economy of Haryana', in *Gender Discrimination in Land Ownership*, ed. Prem Chowdhry (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009), pp. 41-58. I may add here that my own views regarding female inheritance have had to be substantially revised due to my recent field work in Haryana which has thrown up an altogether different picture of the reality.

2. C.L Tupper, *The Punjab Customary Law* (Calcutta: Superintendent, Govt. Printing, 1881) vol. II, pp. 17-19.

3. See case from Lahore, Musammat Subhani vs. Nawab, appeal no. 5 of 1939, in *All India Reporter* (Privy Council, 17 August 1940), pp. 21-33. The observation made in this case was repeated in several other cases.

4. G.C. Walker, *Customary Law of the Main Tribes in the Lahore District* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1894), vol. XIII, p. ii.

5. J.M. Douie, *Riwaj-i-Am of Tehsil Kaithal of Pargana Indri in the Karnal District* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1892) see preface.

6. Walker, *Customary Law Lahore*, pp. iii-iv.

7. Tupper, *Punjab Customary Law*, vol. II, pp. 86-88, 99-00.
8. For details, see David Gilmartin, 'Kinship, women and politics in twentieth century Punjab', in *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, ed. Gail Minault (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1981), pp. 153-73.
9. *Rohtak District Gazetteer, 1910* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1911), III-A, p. 88.
10. C.A.H. Townsend, *Customary Law of the Hissar District* (except the Sirsa Tehsil), (Lahore: Punjab Govt. Press, 1913), vol. XXV, pp. i-ii.
11. T. Gordon Walker, *The Customary Law of the Ludhiana District* (Calcutta: Central Press Co., 1885), vol. I, pp. 33-39; C.C. Garbett, *Riwaj-i-Am of the Panipat Tehsil and Karnal Pargana in the Karnal District* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1910), p. 18; Townsend, *Customary Law, Hissar*, p. 39.
12. Walker, *Customary Law Ludhiana*, 38-39; also J.M. Dunnett, *The Customary Law of the Ludhiana District* (Lahore: Punjab Govt Press 1911 [rev. edn.]), vol. V, pp. 107-8.
13. *The Punjab Record*, 1906, Maula Baksh vs. Mohammad Baksh, vol. 54, p. 208.
14. Douie, *Riwaj-i-Am Tehsil Kaithal*, see preface.
15. Garbett, *Riwaj-i-Am Panipat*, p. 24.
16. Loc. cit.
17. Townsend, *Customary Law of the Hissar*, pp. 36-39.
18. C.C. Garbett, *Riwaj-i-Am of Panipat Tehsil and Karnal Pargana*, see case of Musammat Bajudi vs. Maula Baksh, 1896, p. 23.
19. The Shariat which entitled the females to inherit land was not allowed to operate in colonial Punjab by the Muslim landowners. Instead, they took recourse to the 'tribal law' of Punjab to deprive the females from acquiring land rights. See W.M. Rattigan, *A Digest of the Civil Law for the Punjab Chiefly Based on the Customary Law as Present Ascertained 1880* (Allahabad: The University Book Agency, 1960 [2nd edn.]), pp. 7-23. Also see H.C. Beadon, *Customary Law of the Delhi District* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1911), vol. XXII, p. 34.
20. Townsend, *Customary Law Hissar*, pp. 36-39.

21. For details of the Act and its comparison with the earlier situation existing in British India, see 'The Hindu Succession Act, No. XXX of 1956', in Sunderlal T. Desai, *Mulla Principles of Hindu Law* (Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private Ltd. 1966 [13th edn.]).

22. This equal share of intestate succession however did not extend to the concept of joint family property where a son's share in the property is calculated to be five times that of the daughter's share. For details see Lucy Carroll, 'Daughter's right of inheritance', *Modern Asian Studies*, October 1991, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 791-809.

23. *Haryana Vidhan Sabha Debates*, 25 September 1979. See speech of Jagjit Singh Pohlu, a landowner of considerable stature from village Chattar.

24. *The Supreme Court Journal*, 1960, civil appellate jurisdiction, Ujjagar Singh, vs. Jeo, vol. XXIII, pp. 16-26. This case also refers to a host of other similar cases.

25. This qualified exclusion of married women only, in effect, meant exclusion of all women from inheritance. In 1981, for example, females who remained unmarried by the age of 35 in rural Haryana were 0.08 per cent only. See *Census of Haryana, 1981*, series 6, Social and Cultural Tables (Chandigarh, Director of Census Operations, 1987), part IV A, pp. 46-47.

26. *The Times of India*, daily news paper (New Delhi: 19 August 1989), p. 6.

27. Although the 1956 Act was a substantial move forward, it fell woefully short of introducing equal inheritance rights for women and significant inequalities remained. One of the major limitations, lay in the retention of *Mitakshara* coparcenary, which did not include females as coparceners in joint Hindu family property, where as a male became a coparcener at birth. The Hindu Succession Amendment Act passed on 29 August 2005, covered inequalities on several fronts, from *Mitakshara* joint family property to agricultural parental dwelling house and rights of certain widows etc. This amendment overrode any legislation made by the states. For detail Prem Chowdhry (ed.), *Gender Discrimination in Land Ownership* (New Delhi: Sage, Publications, 2009), Introduction.

28. Communication from Jasbir Singh Malik, advocate, village Gohana.

29. Prem Chowdhry, 'Contesting claims and counter claims: Questions of the inheritance and sexuality of widows in a colonial state', in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, January-December 1995, vol. 29, no. 1&2, pp. 65-82.

30. According to the 2001 Census, in parts of Haryana the female sex- ratio dips really low; for example, in Kurukshetra, it is 770, in Sonapat, 783 and in



Ambala, 784. The activists in Haryana observe that in some villages it is as low as 500-550. The government, according to them, is pressurizing the village authorities not to disclose this fact or recognize it officially.

31. *Census of India, Haryana, 2001*, series 7, Provisional Population Totals, Paper 3 (Director of Census Operations, Haryana, Controller of Publications, Delhi, n.d.), p. 26.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

34. Information given by the government assesses and property dealers of Rohtak.

35. There is an extreme case reported in the news papers regarding a young girl Sonia who killed eight members of her parental family in Hissar and then tried to commit suicide. Her suicide note read: 'I am fed up with my family for not giving me my due share of the property and I am going to eliminate them as well as myself'. *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, 26 August 2001.

36. The transformation of a *jamai* into *ghar jamai* and consequent fall in his status and prestige has been the theme of folk-lore published as far back as 1876. See, for example, India Office Records, London, *Vernacular Tracts*, No. 103, a story titled '*Manusukhi aur Sunder Singh Ka Vartant*' (Lahore, 1876).

37. For details see Prem Chowdhry, 'Caste Panchayats and the policing of marriage in Haryana: Enforcing kinship and territorial exogamy', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, January-August 2004, pp. 1-42.

38. In April 2010, in one of the rare cases of conviction in 'honour killing', that of Manoj and Babli, an Additional District Sessions Judge of Karnal held the *khap panchayat* (traditional clan council) responsible and pronounced death sentence for five men and life term for another one. This case galvanized a huge drive for consolidation of the traditional *panchayats* demanding legal status for themselves and amendment of earlier acts regulating marriage and succession.



## **Sant Poet Wazir Singh: A Window for Reimagining Nineteenth Century Punjab**

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The dominant historiographical tradition of Punjabi literature has generally neglected the powerful literary current called '*sant sahit*' besides '*sufi*' and '*gurmat*' literature. Most of these *sant*-poets were either part of the established orders or independent composers, at times leading to tensions between the custodians of established religions and followers of non-conformist spirituality. The paper focuses on an 'unknown' *dalit* poet, Wazir Singh, who remained unrecorded and unrecognized in the literary and historical culture of the Punjab, and places him in the context of the Sant movement. He becomes important not only for his iconoclastic ideas but also for the space and respect given to women in the otherwise exclusive male domain. One of his followers, Nurang Devi, is regarded as the first Punjabi woman poet. Sant Wazir Singh's life and work open up possibilities of re-imagining the Indian and regional pasts.

There is much which appears to be known, that is questionable, or even false. There is much that many believe to be unknown, or even unknowable, which is actually part of people's everyday experience.

Jonathan J. Dickau<sup>1</sup>

The diversity and plurality of religious practices in the nineteenth century Punjab has been discussed at some length by Harjot Oberoi.<sup>2</sup> Such diversity was best manifest in the intellectual expressions of poets, more so of such poets who either carried the hybrid religious practices during the nineteenth century in their bones or those who also experimented with new ideas which would go against the acceptable norms. Moreover, such poets were not necessarily individualistic, meditating in solitary confines of monasteries but were active public figures with their followings.

In the dominant tradition of history of Punjabi literature what is less known and acknowledged is the powerful literary current called '*sant sahit*' besides '*sufi*' and '*gurmat*' literature. Most of these compositions by *sadhus* and *sants* were either part of the established orders like Nath or Kanpata Yogis, Udasi, Nirmala, Gulabdasi, Sewapanthi, Suthrapanthi, Nirankari, Namdhari, Radhaswami, Kabirpanthi, Dadupanthi, and Raidaspanthi where chances of survival of such literature were quite high due to continuity of succession. On the other hand, in the case of several independent and

autonomous *sadhus* and *sants* like Saeen Hira Das and Sadhu Wazir Singh, the access to such literature would require conscious effort on the part of the interested researchers.<sup>3</sup> This *sant* tradition as part of the popular religion<sup>4</sup> has been fairly inclusive and the establishments of the *sants* (*deras*) were open to all the castes and communities. The fact that the study of the Vedas has been an integral part of much of this tradition has also been overlooked in the wake of hegemonic tendencies of the established religiosity. This becomes clear from the tension between their custodians and the followers of non-conformist spirituality of Sant Gulabdas and others during the nineteenth century. While this paper focuses on an 'unknown' spiritual poet, namely Sant Wazir Singh, who remained unrecorded and unrecognised in the literary and historical culture of the Punjab, it attempts to situate his ideas in his larger contemporary poetic and cultural context. The paper also tries to establish connection between him and his ideas with those of his contemporary junior and successful intellectual poet Gulab Das, who was much maligned in the established orders.

### **Sant Wazir Singh**

Wazir Singh remained unknown in the Punjabi literary and even in the *dera* cultures. He has been rescued from obscurity by Shamsheer Singh Ashok, a well-known researcher and scholar of Punjabi literature and history. He had procured a manuscript of long 12"X6<sup>5/4</sup>" size containing 72 works (folios 2- 248 carrying Braj poems in more than 3800 *chhands* and folios 1-105 with Punjabi poems in 922 *chhands*) by Wazir Singh that came to be part of the editor's personal collection.<sup>5</sup> The Punjabi University, Patiala decided to publish the edited volume of select Punjabi poems of Wazir Singh under its scheme of publishing the manuscripts of Punjabi classics by the Department of Studies of Punjabi Literature.<sup>6</sup>

Wazir Singh was born in village Daulatpur near Zira town of Ferozepur district in about 1790 and very early in his adulthood he had started moving in the company of *sadhus* from whom he learnt reading and writing Punjabi. He left his house for good in 1815-16 and after staying in Lahore for some time settled in Lahuke village in the same district where he died in 1859. His unorthodox views communicated in a mystical (*sufiana*) idiom soon attracted people in large numbers to his *dera*. He preached life unbridled by orthodox religiosity and social taboos which won him the devotion, among others, of five budding poets, including two young widows who became his ardent disciples, serving him till his death. This was a radical departure from the past tradition both of the established religions as well as heterodox practices of the Nath, Sufi and Sant orders at least as far as the Punjab was concerned. His radicalism appears to have earned him enough enemies who even attacked his premises as evident from his own writings.

It is intriguing that in Ashok's monograph Wazir Singh's caste identity is suppressed whereas he had already been identified as belonging to an

untouchable (Mazhabi) family in an earlier writing by Ashok himself. Given the volume of Wazir Singh's work and the range of topics covered by him from metaphysical to socio-political he came to be recognised as a great poet (*mahan kavi*) of his times.<sup>7</sup> After long contemplative sessions and close study of the ancient texts and discussions on *bhakti* and *sufi* thought he appears to have attained the spiritual height of a gnostic (*brahmgyani*).<sup>8</sup> Five of his identified poet disciples, including two young widows, came from the upper castes. One of them was Vir Singh Sehgal while another, Nurang Devi, turned out to be the first Punjabi woman poet groomed under his guidance as a *guru*.<sup>9</sup> While Ashok largely uses the prefix 'sadhu' for Wazir Singh in this monograph I prefer to use the prefix '*sant*' for him for two reasons. Firstly, the internal evidence in his poetry, which also includes some compositions by his followers, explicitly supports my assumption that Wazir Singh should be unequivocally characterized as a '*sant*'. Secondly, Ashok himself uses the expression '*sant* poet' for Wazir Singh at least five times in his introduction.<sup>10</sup>

In one sense, Wazir Singh is part of the Sant tradition of north India, yet he seems to be going beyond the set paths. He is radical and iconoclast like Kabir, but in addition, he brings in the question of gender equality. He is highly critical of establishments whether social or religious. He lashes out at Brahmanical structures of inequality manifested in *varna-ashram dharma* and *jat-pat*, and like Sant Ravidas, envisions '*Beghampura*', a liberated society. In the backdrop of the Sufis, the Sants and the Sikh movement fracturing and weakening Brahmanical ideology in the Punjab, space became available to the Punjabi *dalits*. They became a respectable part of the Sikh movement and also got an opportunity to express their creativity in writing. Lest Wazir Singh should be looked upon as an aberration or an isolated instance, a quick mention must be made of the three other powerful *dalit* poets of Punjab who appeared on the horizon of Indian literary world from the last quarter of the seventeenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth, that is prior to the rise of '*dalit consciousness*' in politics and literature.<sup>11</sup>

The *dalit* literary tradition in Punjab may be said to begin with Bhai Jaita alias Jeevan Singh (c.1655-1704), who was very close to the Gurus' household as he was the one who had carried the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur from Delhi to Anandpur, and composed a devotional epic '*Sri Gur Katha*' around Guru Gobind Singh's life which is placed in 1699-1700.<sup>12</sup> Sant Ditta Ram alias (and more famously) Giani Ditt Singh (1850-1901) emerged as a poet, polemicist, journalist, teacher, orator and ardent Sikh missionary who left behind more than 50 books to his credit. [See the next article in this issue: *Editor*] The last *dalit* intellectual poet in this line happens to be Sadhu Daya Singh Arif (1894-1946) who came to master Gurmukhi, Urdu, Persian, and Arabic and Sanskrit languages with the help of several non-formal teachers who were stunned by his sharp intellect. Not only did he read and understand the Vedas, Puranas, *Granth Sahib* and the Quran, besides a wide range of secular literature, he had also reached the spiritual heights of a gnostic, true to the title of '*Arif*' assumed by him. Chronologically, Wazir Singh, the subject of this paper, was the second of these *sant* poets who had prolifically

composed philosophical, spiritual and social poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century.

### **Philosophy of Wazir Singh**

The best way to discuss Wazir Singh's philosophy may be through his compositions which are fairly clear in their import and emphasis. Stressing the importance of unity and non-dualism, he says:

Forsaking all contestations and disputes I have realised myself.  
You are there in the day as you are at night, at evenings, all the times.  
Ruler and the ruled, you are the teacher and the taught, who can distinguish?  
Wazir Singh! the Supreme manifests in you in different forms all around.<sup>13</sup>

He seems to have a materialist approach to God:

Let me speak the truth and understand that He is not far from anyone.  
Learn this primeval thought from the *guru* to be free from any illusion.  
If you need to loot, you construct god and tell lies and commit sins.  
Wazir Singh says if there is really a god, then I should make you see and touch with your hands.<sup>14</sup>

He reasserts his position by asking his audience:

Tell me where does He live for whom all meditate and pray?  
Cannot be at peace when we cannot see but believe what others say.  
This is my question to everyone, let anyone come forward who knows.  
Anyone who answers to Wazir Singh is his fellow learner and real friend.<sup>15</sup>

He celebrates human body and equality among human beings:

Only human body can contemplate, soul and god neither eat nor reside.  
Only the body has 'five elements' which could be seen and described.  
No one is born or dies, neither comes and goes, all forget this truth.

O! Wazir Singh it is your entire embodiment, everyone is alike and equal.<sup>16</sup>

He is equally refreshing in his view of creation:

Tell me what time, day, date and season the universe was created?  
Pundits invented this notion and have been transmitting this hearsay.  
O' Pande! If you do not know, listen to the *sants* who talk with proofs.  
Wazir Singh this creation is independent, evolved on its own, no one has made it.<sup>17</sup>

He is wary of the old established religions:

I am contented after realising the self as I do not see the world is different.  
I have no illusion about Hindus and Turks, both consider better than the other.  
Hindus read their *granths* and *pothis* as Muslims read the Quran.  
We are beyond all O' Wazir Singh! as we only subscribe to science.<sup>18</sup>

At places, Wazir Singh gets aggressive as if he has been confronted by his orthodox opponents:

We never need the Quran as we also tear the *pothis* after seeing their emptiness.  
No desire for either Sikh or Muslim prayer as we burn the temples and mosques.  
We have given up Ganges, Gaya and Prayag as we also do not worship the tombs.  
As we have become impartial O' Wazir Singh! we watch the games both play.<sup>19</sup>

He pronounces his liberation thus:

There is no desire to go to heavens as hells do not scare me.  
I have no fear of god (*khuda*) as I have declined Muhammad and Ram.  
I 'have no respect for religion and faith as I tested the limits of both.  
O' Wazir Singh! I stand liberated after seeing Him in my mirror.<sup>20</sup>

He could do so because he claims *brahmgyan* at several places in his poetry. He says at one place:

Meditated for long and did not get tired till reached the truth.  
By covering the body with ashes, had all the pilgrimage.  
A close study exposed all the *granths* as empty, not leaving  
even the secrets of four Vedas.  
After realising the self I came to know that the universe exists  
in the form of personal self.<sup>21</sup>

He goes on in the same vein:

When the fire of Truth got ignited, the illusion of *karma* was  
burnt.  
The ecstasy of realising the self freed me from the question of  
life and death.  
Found Brahman in everything- in mountains, woods and flora  
that removed the illusion of duality.  
Wazir Singh attained the *brahmgyan* that liberated him from  
the prison of *baran-ashram*.<sup>22</sup>

Wazir Singh's poetry is suffused with the negation of *varnashramadharma* (in Punjabi *baran-ashram*) and untouchability (*jaat-paat*), the pillars of Brahmanical Hinduism, which he denounces vehemently. A few samples would show the depth of his conviction:

Dualism was the source of arrogance and miseries which the  
*guru* has removed.  
The *guru* has cut the chains of casteism, *baran-ashram* and  
three-shames.  
While distinguishing the Name, Form and Way the *guru* has  
emphasised the unity of soul.  
Understand O' Wazir Singh! the existence is in your image  
after duality is removed.<sup>23</sup>

Once I realised the self, I threw away the *baran-ashram*.  
Shameless I am after breaking the three-shames and  
demolishing the ego.  
Freed from caste-differences, I have also risen above Hindu-  
Turk differences.  
Going beyond all O' Wazir Singh, I find everyone within  
me.<sup>24</sup>

Once you meditate on breath you would get subsumed in  
Brahman.  
Concentrate and see that there is nothing outside Brahman.



Realise the truth about yourself once you see the unity in soul and Brahman.  
By relinquishing *baran-ashram* O' Wazir Singh! you would sing of your omniscience.<sup>25</sup>

*Ashiqs* have no doubts as they have gone beyond frames of all logics.  
They have left behind distinctions of castes and *baran-ashram*, of Turk-Hindus.  
After going through rituals, prayers and knowledge they have gone beyond.  
Realising all in the self O' Wazir Singh! they stand distinct from all.<sup>26</sup>

We have no shame either of lineage or people, nor do we recognise Vedas and the Quran.  
Neither have we bothered about Muslims or Hindus nor about *baran-ashram*.  
We have gone beyond this or that world; we also do not differentiate between *jeev* and *ish*.  
We relish the state of ecstasy O' Wazir Singh! beyond the two there is no profit and loss.<sup>27</sup>

Appreciate him as brave who has destroyed the illusion of pride.  
Who has crossed the boundaries of *baran-ashram* and annoyed others by abandoning three-shames.  
Who has gone beyond concerns of five-*koshas*, three-*gunas* and three stages.  
Being different from all O' Wazir Singh! you have passed the degree of self-realization.<sup>28</sup>

Do not get self-conceited, give up your ego and listen to the *guru's* counsel.  
Weigh the three-shames and *baran-ashram* in the scale of truth and decide.  
If you have strong desire to play the love-game, bring your head in your palm.  
Guru sayeth to you O' Wazir Singh! you are God unto you.<sup>29</sup>

Look! The enemy parents oppressively detain the child wanting to be free.  
He has been tied in the bonds of three-shames and trapped in *baran-ashram*.  
His body is trapped in the prison of caste identity.

O' Wazir Singh! the man gets forcefully married at young age to this social trap.<sup>30</sup>

Wazir Singh notices degeneration that was taking place in the Sikh religion during his time. His could perhaps be the first bold voice in this regard. He says:

The Guru left the Granth and Panth under the care of *sants* to be rated above all.  
 There are many sects now and the leaders stress their own codes of conduct.  
 Bringing back the trap of *baran-ashram*, they also bind people with three-shames.  
 By creating different *sikhis*, O' Wazir Singh, they have created cults around them.<sup>31</sup>

They highlight their own sects and do not give clue to the common thread.  
 They surround the unattached and trap the free into their narrow sects.  
*Gurus* are greedy and so are Sikhs, both reciprocating in their interests.  
 The Sikhs become angry with their *gurus* who in turn keep pleasing their clients.  
 Both accuse each other in public while people get surprises of this kind.  
 O' Wazir Singh! these *gurus* and Sikhs have become worldly to the disenchantment of *sants*.<sup>32</sup>

The lions that had eaten together with goats are devouring the goats and call themselves *singhs*.  
 As the lion awakens another lion, O' Wazir Singh, the Sikhs of Gurus should not forget their duty to awake others to fearlessness.<sup>33</sup>

Turning now to Nurang Devi, the disciple of Wazir Singh, and a poet in her own right, we find her strengthening Wazir Singh's observation on this count:

Akalis have made their own Sikhs without any real teaching.  
 If they are merciful, they would ritualise 'initiation' by a few words.  
 By preaching they recruit their followers by removing from their families.  
 On such occasions sons-daughters and wives cry as do the parents and kins.  
 All relatives get together and create ruckus.

Sayeth Nurang Devi! the Jat has been made a Sikh who knows nothing of true meaning.<sup>34</sup>

Keeping in mind such a bold denunciation of the established orders and their current practices, one may expect equally strong reactions from a range of vested interests. In fact, it is possible to get sufficient leads from Wazir Singh's compositions how his radical preaching invoked opposition from several quarters and even incurred hostilities. He refers to his own establishment:

The *sants* reside in the tower of Lahuke, they do not hurt anyone nor do they allow others to hurt them.  
 Years have passed staying here but they never asked anyone for a penny.  
 People wonder from where we eat and how we survive.  
 Some speculate we have something O' Wazir Singh, some think we manufacture.<sup>35</sup>

Many crave for audience while others burn in envy at the sight.  
 While many come full of love for us, others want to kill us.  
 Many worship in great devotion while some unnecessarily annoy.  
 O' Wazir Singh! while devotees bow their heads the opponents seek duels.<sup>36</sup>

He provides a graphic picture of one such skirmish in a composition:

If you are really interested in knowing let us enter into questions-answers.  
 If you do not want to listen why we should waste our time, better be silent.  
 From wherever the truth can be had we should touch the feet of the source, why fight?  
 Sayeth Wazir Singh! if interested we meet, else keep distance and not hurt.<sup>37</sup>

They created ruckus and misbehaved with *sants*.  
 These fools hurled abuses in hundreds on *guru* and women without discrimination.  
 They got back what they came intended and got thoroughly beaten.  
 Wazir Singh got a staff in his hands and gave them five to seven to get rid of.<sup>38</sup>

Wazir Singh's criticality does not stop at the established religious practices but extends to the caste-communities. He talks of the Khattris, Jatts, Julahas, and

the artisan communities as well as the shepherds. He is very critical of the dominance of the Khatri from amongst whom all the Sikh Gurus came:

Bedis<sup>39</sup> are supposed to know the Vedas but today's Bedis meaninglessly call them such.  
They are greedy and coax others' women while kill their own female infants.  
Wazir Singh! they claim to be *gurus* of the world but shamelessly commit sins.<sup>40</sup>

He also talks about the Sodhis<sup>41</sup> who manned religious establishments as their shops. Khatri generally were business people who would flourish on their tricks and intelligence.<sup>42</sup> He does not spare the Jogis either:

Today's Jogis do not know the methods of *jog* and without that method o' people do not recognise them.  
They shave their heads and pierce their ears for big earrings....<sup>43</sup>

In congregation they drink liquor and eat flesh.  
They have all kinds of intoxicants: they eat *bhang*, *post*, *charas*, and *afeem*, and smoke tobacco and *ganja*.  
They have tarnished the Jogi image howsoever bravely they might try to rescue.  
O' Wazir Singh! they have no idea of *jog*, only in attire do they appear to be *faqirs*.<sup>44</sup>

Wazir Singh also records his observations about different places he had visited and the ways of the people he had encountered. He had traveled to different parts of the Punjab, mountainous areas of Kashmir and present Himachal Pradesh as also the eastern part of the present day Uttar Pradesh. Given his ideological position, especially in the spatial context of the Punjab, his observation about the Ganga-Yamuna plains brings out the subtle differences between the societies in the two regions:

Eastern land is very ritualistic (*karam-kandi*), where I endure sufferings.  
One has to cook ones' food to satisfy the hunger.  
Those liberated who go from this side and settle there become ritualistic as everyone is.  
After seeing the eastern *des* O' Wazir Singh! we decided to come west.<sup>45</sup>

Given the range of his observations from material to spiritual, social to religious, political to philosophical, it is not difficult to see Wazir Singh, the *sant*-philosopher, also in the role of a preceptor, or a guide. Luckily, we have

the compositions of his disciples expressing their gratitude toward their *guru*. There is no dearth of internal evidence to suggest that he had reached those heights to be considered as a spiritual master and *guru*. Even though Wazir Singh stresses the importance of the preceptor for paving the way to enlightenment there is no clue to his personal *guru*. He himself definitely got recognised as the *guru* by his followers and the literal testimony is important in this respect.

The use of the terms *sant* and *guru* needs some clarification in the context of Indian religions, especially the *bhakti* traditions. Karine Schomer offers some clarification about the variety of usages in different traditions:

Derived from Sanskrit *sat* ('truth, reality'), its root meaning is 'one who knows the truth' or 'one who has experienced Ultimate Reality', i.e. a person who has achieved a state of spiritual enlightenment or mystical self-realization; by extension, it is also used to refer to all those who sincerely seek enlightenment. Thus conceptually as well as etymologically, it differs considerably from the false cognate 'saint' which is often used to translate it. Like 'saint', '*sant*' has taken on the more general ethical meaning of the 'good person' whose life is a spiritual and moral exemplar, and is therefore found attached to a wide variety of gurus, 'holy men' and other religious teachers. Historically, however, *sant* is the designation given to the poet-saints belonging to two distinct, though related devotional *bhakti* traditions.<sup>46</sup>

While distinguishing the north Indian devotees of a formless God from the non-sectarian Vaishnava poet-saints of Maharashtra, Schomer is clear that the north Indian *sants* defy classification within the usual categories of Hindu *bhakti*. Though in the 'Sikh' usage the word *sant* acquires a different and also an evolving meaning and the term *guru* carries the hierarchically higher status,<sup>47</sup> our poet of the paper was more in tune with Schomer's north Indian usage. Let us listen to Wazir Singh what he has to say on who is a *sant*:

The entire world lives in limits, only a *sant* is limitlessly shameless.  
He abandons parents, siblings and relatives and runs away from home.  
He breaks the trap of *baran-ashram* and shackles of three-shames.  
He boldly denies and defies caste-differences and untouchability.  
Who have joined the company of truth-seekers do not do anything else.  
O' Wazir Singh! by getting the human form, you are adoring everywhere.<sup>48</sup>

A *sant* is full of knowledge, beautiful worth audience,  
 surrounded by disciples.  
 Listening to his discourses, people start revering him as Sahib  
 in *bhakti*.  
 Priests get extremely jealous on his being adored and served  
 by people.  
 A *sant* is God (*parameshwar*) manifested in him O' Wazir  
 Singh.<sup>49</sup>

A *sant* is the one who is free of three-shames and Hindu-Turk  
 difference.  
 People get furious in vain listening to a *sant* that *baran-*  
*ashram* is outdated.  
 O' Wazir Singh! a *sant* is liberated, carefree and listens to his  
 heart only.<sup>50</sup>

Having reached that height of liberation for himself and his followers as the  
 realised goal Wazir Singh is in a position to call it 'Beghampura' as visualized  
 by Sant Ravidas. This may be a small space, a commune, a liberated zone but  
 it is of the realised and loved ones. Wazir Singh describes it thus:

Beghampura is our city in which we reside and speak truth.  
 We give damn to codes of conduct, we live as we desire.  
 Devotees throng and serve us; they come with offerings but  
 get fruits in return.  
 O' Wazir Singh! here the river of love flows where lovers  
 come and swim across.<sup>51</sup>

Even though in the Punjab context a *guru* stands higher to a *sant* in status  
 (Sikh Gurus for example), Wazir Singh is also accorded that status by his  
 disciples. The poetic compositions of Vir Singh Sehgal and Nurang Devi are  
 full of their adoration for him as their '*guru*'. Let us listen to Vir Singh first:

The *guru* has awakened *vairag* in me which has come in full  
 share to me.  
 Without my going through meditation the *guru* has awakened  
 me in a flash.  
 He has filled me abundantly and allowed my entry into his  
 good company.  
 Wazir Singh has accepted me as his servant O' Vir Singh! he  
 has opened my eyes.<sup>52</sup>

Throwing away the quilt of lineage-shame we accepted the  
*guru's* words and got rid of our sorrows.  
 We the ignorant humans came to the *guru* who filled us with  
 knowledge.

The *guru* accepted our devotion and removed the difference of the *jeev* and Brahman for us; we got transformed from cowards to the brave.  
Sayeth Vir Singh, the servant of Wazir Singh, he has removed our faults and made us popular.<sup>53</sup>

So much so that Vir Singh could not resist elevating Wazir Singh above the status of an incarnation (*avatar*) when he says:

Guru's charisma is such that I fail to describe.  
Four Vedas and ten *avtars* are no parallel to the *guru*.<sup>54</sup>

In her moving poetry Nurang Devi proclaims Wazir Singh as her *guru* with an elan:

I had taken this birth to better the life but got trapped in the family net.  
I have met the enlightened *guru* and has passed the test by leaving the blind.  
O God! Destroy those sinners who prevented me from the truth.  
Nurang Devi beseeches Guru Wazir Singh to keep me at your feet as servant.<sup>55</sup>

I have left the shelter of the amateur *guru* and found the true *guru*.  
Amateur *guru* had raw ideas but now I have met the perfect *guru*.  
As the perfect *guru* has shown I have burnt the heightened ego and pride.  
Nurang Devi has left crafty *guru* behind while meeting the excellent *guru*.<sup>56</sup>

### **Historical Context of Wazir Singh's Ideology**

The question arises where and how to place Wazir Singh in the existing traditions of Sikh religion, *bhakti* or *sant mat*. Clearly, he does not belong to the Sikh tradition even if his upbringing was in a Sikh family and was surrounded by Sikh ethos. Strong elements of the *sant* tradition are evident in him. 'The 'tradition of the Sants' (*sant prampara*)', as Charlotte Vaudeville says, 'is essentially non-sectarian, though a number of *Sant* poets have been considered the founders of sects which bear their name but have developed after them'.<sup>57</sup> Following Vaudeville, the *sant* poetry as a whole has strong anti-Brahmanical overtones as the *sants* appear to be heterodox and even 'heretics'. They reject the authority of 'books' whether Vedas or the Quran and also that of Brahmins and Mullas. To quote Vaudeville at some length:

*Sant mat* has been equated with ‘nirguna bhakti’, a term which would seem to define bhakti according to its objective: the non-qualified (*nirguna*) aspect of the Supreme Brahman, the One non-personal, all pervading, ineffable Reality which can only be spoken of in negative terms. This notion of the Absolute as *nirguna* coincides with the Upanishadic concept of the Brahman-Atman and the *advaita* (monistic) interpretation of the Vedantic tradition, which denies any real distinction between the soul and God and urges man to recognise within himself his true divine nature. The northern *Sants*, led by Kabir, mostly seem to adopt this stance, speaking of merging or re-absorption of the finite soul, the *jiva*, into the infinite ineffable reality – or state – which is the ultimate goal.<sup>58</sup>

Since we find in Wazir Singh all the elements stressed by the *sant* poets – the necessity of devotion to and practice of the divine Name (*nama*), devotion to the divine Guru (*satguru*) and the great importance of the company of the *sants* (*satsang*)<sup>59</sup> – it is not difficult to place him within the *sant* tradition. His recognition as the *guru* also falls within this tradition. Juergensmeyer puts it aptly: ‘As a manifestation of a higher form of spirituality than most devotees possess, the guru is both exemplar of behaviour and a revelation of the divine itself.’<sup>60</sup>

Wazir Singh’s poetry that has survived the vagaries of time suggests that probably some major churning was taking place in the realm of thought in the early nineteenth century Punjab. Piara Singh Padam discovered Sadhu Jagan Singh a contemporary of Wazir Singh, who stresses the exploration of the self in his poetry. In his *Siharfi Yog Gian*, Jagan Singh dismisses the differences of caste and regards different faiths, texts, rituals and worship as useless.<sup>61</sup> Quite interestingly, in his composition *Asi Kaun Han*, like Bulle Shah in the previous century, he raises the question of identity as had been done by others:

Neither we are Singh Sardar soldiers, nor do we become  
*darvesh*.  
Neither *pandit* nor *mulla kazi*, nor are we untouchables or  
*shaikhs*.  
...  
Neither we follow six-philosophies or four-sects, nor do we  
wear the *panthic* robes.  
We do not subscribe to *baran-ashram*, caste or lineage, nor do  
we identify with territories.<sup>62</sup>

Another such liberated poet of the first half of the nineteenth century happened to be Sant Surjan Das Azad from Ajnianwale in Gujranwala.<sup>63</sup> Readings of his poetry published by Dharampal Singal and Baldev Singh Baddan suggest that true to his name Azad was a liberated person, who did not practice any kind of



sectarianism, opposed all kinds of ritualism, had a carefree, independent mind, and would not hesitate to attack his opponents fiercely.<sup>64</sup> Azad proclaims:

Surjan Das Azad has become without caste,  
He has talked straight in a fearless poetry.  
Whatever came to my mind, I have uttered,  
Without bothering about poetic meters and genres.<sup>65</sup>

In his *Siharfi* also he is explicit about his liberated persona:

Once I realised myself, the sectarianism of Hindu-Muslim  
vanished.  
After breaking the trap of *baran-ashram*, there was no need to  
follow the religious business.  
We follow the path of the shameless, the fear of punishment of  
the Vedas or the Quran has gone.  
Surjan Das says it is the pleasure of the liberated in seeking  
joy from anywhere.<sup>66</sup>

Evidently, Wazir Singh was not voicing his radical ideas in isolation. In fact, his courageous defiance of the established orders and entrenched ideas emboldened a few other voices. His junior contemporary, Gulab Das (1809-1873) followed in his footsteps and even went somewhat beyond. Even if Wazir Singh did not launch a movement and it appears he had no such desire, Gulab Das succeeded in creating a stable following and a sect came to be known after his name.

The Gulabdasi sect emerged as an intellectually vibrant movement in the late nineteenth century Punjab. Gulab Das was born in a Jatt family of Ratola village near Tarn Taran in Amritsar district. He served as a trooper in Maharaja Sher Singh's army and after the Sikhs were defeated by the British, Gulab Das became a *sadhu*, studied the Vedas and soon started his own establishment (*dera*) at Chathhianwala between Lahore and Kasur. He was an accomplished poet and a gnostic. He became an atheist and advocated an epicurean life. Like Wazir Singh, he shunned caste and gender differences and the discrimination based on these; the untouchables and women thus became integral part of his creed. His *dera* became a hub of intellectual activity and soon there were numerous Gulabdasi *deras* across the Punjab.<sup>67</sup> An account by E. D. Maclagan in the Census of 1891 offers interesting details about this movement:

The Gulabdasis have thrown over asceticism and have proceeded to the other extreme. They originally held that all that was visible in the universe was God, and that there was no other. It is said that Gulab Das declared himself to be Brahm and many of his disciples believe themselves to be God; and, properly speaking, their faith is that man is of the same

substance as the deity, and will be absorbed in him, but for the most part they are looked on by their neighbours as denying the existence of God altogether. They do not believe in a personal future life, and dispense with the veneration of saints and with pilgrimages and religious ceremonies of all kinds. Pleasure alone is their aim; and renouncing all higher objects they seek only for the gratification of the senses, for costly dress and tobacco, wine and women, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. They are scrupulously neat in their attire and engage in all worldly pursuits, some of them being men of considerable wealth. They are said to have an especial abhorrence for lying, and there is certainly little or no hypocrisy in their tenets. In appearance they vary; some always wear white clothes; others preserve the Udasi dress; others are clothed like the Nirmalas; and others are distinguished by being always shaved. They are of course greatly distrusted and, to some extent, despised by their co-religionists, and their numbers are said to be on the decrease.<sup>68</sup>

What was more scandalising about the sect was the presence of a woman at the *sadhu's dera*: Peero Preman (c.1830-1872). She came from a Muslim family, had a turbulent life of unhappy marriage, forced prostitution and concubinage; she also emerged as a poet who ultimately became the co-saint of Gulab Das' establishment.<sup>69</sup> While giving details from the 1891 Census about the Gulabdasi sect, a Sanatan Sikh paper, *Shuddhi Patra*, of 1897 denounced the sect in its editorial, alleging that Peero was a harlot of Lahore but the Gulabdasis addressed her as '*mata*'. They used to go to Chathianwala during Holi celebrations and worshipped both Gulab Das and Peero while the close disciples waved sacred fly-brush over their heads as the followers do now at their joint-grave. This paper alleges that the Gulabdasis have been dancing, wining and dining ever since and they have two *kutha* (Muslim style) mutton shops at the *dera*.<sup>70</sup> In continuation of its attack on the Gulabdasis in its next issue, the *Shuddhi Patra* cited some verses from *Gulab Chaman*, a book of poetry by Gulab Das, and on the basis of those compositions summed up the philosophy of the sect. It was asserted that going against all religions the Gulabdasis subscribe to enjoying life with women, not even discarding the Muslim women; by following arbitrary system of knowledge they consider themselves as the Brahman; by discarding all Hindu thought they reject reincarnation; they dismiss *mahatmas* and pilgrimage; do not follow any religious conventions and rituals; and indulge in gratifying the sensual desires by eating meat of all kinds, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco and viewing women's photos.<sup>71</sup>

The intensity of attack against the Gulabdasis was probably a pointer to their popularity in Punjab in the mid-nineteenth century. Apparently, the movement was gaining strength, for the contemporary observers note that the Gulabdasi *deras* had been established throughout the Punjab. What most of the

critics debunking the sect appear to miss is that its ideas were fairly close to what can perhaps be regarded as the Punjabi ethos. Mahant Ganesha Singh, a Nirmala intellectual, admitted that listening to the liberating ideas of Gulab Das, thousands of people became unattached and free from the dogma of various kinds; eating meat and drinking liquor, they would move from village to village; finely dressed with fragrances, they would sing the *Mirza* and the *Heer*; the men and women had thus become shameless. There was uproar in the country and there also were complaints against them. Maharaja Narendra Singh of Patiala and other *rajās* started arresting the Gulabdasis and the British also followed suit that stemmed the Gulabdasi tide.<sup>72</sup> Because of its radical and heretical ideas the sect came to be opposed strongly by the new reformist orthodoxies such as the Singh Sabhas, Arya Samajes and the Ahmadyas. Eventually, the Gulabdasi sect came to be banned officially.

### Conclusion

The credit for discovering the *dalit* intellectual poet in Wazir Singh from the labyrinth of obscurity must be given to the researcher and editor of his poetry, namely Shamsheer Singh Ashok. However, since its publication in 1988, Wazir Singh's work has somehow escaped the notice of otherwise liberal Punjabi literary world. To the best of my knowledge this is the first modest effort to understand the poetry and the underlying philosophy of this iconoclastic writer.

Wazir Singh's life and work open up possibilities of re-engaging with the Punjab pasts. First of all, there is the possibility of imagining *dalits* achieving such creative and spiritual heights in the face of historical disabilities and also of stretching the limits of spatial and temporal boundaries of 'dalit literature'. It has implications thus for looking afresh at the heritage of the *sant* literature as a powerful precursor to, or may be part of 'dalit literature'. Secondly, quite often the great *sant* tradition is taken to be confined to the 'medieval' times whereas Wazir Singh's work shows its continuity into the early nineteenth century. He becomes important also for the space and respect given to women in the otherwise exclusive male domain. Allowing women to live in the *dera* of a *sant* is a radical departure for those times. The tradition Wazir Singh laid down was followed by Gulab Das who accorded equal respect and stature to Peero, the great woman Punjabi poet after Nurang Devi. For historians, Wazir Singh's work may open up the possibility of reimagining Indian and regional past during the last three hundred years and to locate an intellectual tradition independent of the dominant traditions.

### Notes

1. 'The Known, the Unknown, and the Unknowable: Are the Boundaries of Consciousness a Fractal?' <http://jond4u.jonathandickau.com/known.htm>.

2. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

3. Some earlier attempts to compile information about the *sant* tradition in Punjabi were Mahant Ganesha Singh's *Bharat Mat Darpan* (Amritsar, 1926) and Sufi Sadhu Singh's *Jag Jeevan* (Amritsar, 1954). The latest compilation in Punjabi by Dharampal Singal and Baldev Singh Baddan, *Punjabi de Sant Kavi* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2006) lists 67 Punjabi *sant* poets and offers samples of their poetry. The Hindi works incorporating Punjabi *sadhu* and *sant* writings are: Pandit Chandrakant Bali, *Punjab Prantiya Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (New Delhi, 1962); Acharaya Parshuram Chaturvedi, *Uttari Bharat ki Sant Prampara* (Prayag, 1964); and Manmohan Sehgal, *Sant Kavya ka Darshanik Vishleshan* (Chandigarh, 1965).

4. In the Punjab context see Oberoi's chapter 3, entitled 'An Enchanted Universe: Sikh Participation in Popular Religion' in his *Construction of Religious Boundaries*, pp. 139-203.

5. Shamsheer Singh Ashok (ed.), 'Mudhali Jaan-Pachhaan', *Siharfian Sadhu Wazir Singh Ji Kian* (Punjabi), (henceforth *Siharfian Wazir Singh*) (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1988), p. xxviii.

6. Rattan Singh Jaggi, 'Bhumika', in *ibid.*, p. vii.

7. See Shamsheer Singh Ashok, *Mazhbi Sikhian da Itihas* (Punjabi), (Amritsar: Bhai Chattar Singh Jeevan Singh, 2001 [1981]), p. 110.

8. *Brahamgyani* is the one who has realized and attained knowledge of the supreme cosmic power, the 'Brahman, the one non-personal, all-pervading, ineffable Reality'. See Charlotte Vaudeville, 'Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity', in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (hereafter *The Sants*), ed. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1987), p. 26.

9. Ashok (ed.), 'Mudhali Jaann Pachhann', *Siharfian Wazir Singh*, p. xiii.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xxviii.

11. See Laura R. Brueck, 'Dalit Chetna in Dalit Literary Criticism', *Seminar*, special issue on Dalit Perspectives, No. 558 (February 2006): <http://www.india-seminar.com/2006/558/558%20laura%20r.%20brueck>.

12. This important composition by Bhai Jaita came to light only in the second half of the 20th century. It was included in Naranjan Arifi's *Ranghrehitian da Itihas: Adi kal ton 1850 tak* (Punjabi), (Amritsar: Literature House, 1993), part

I, pp. 396-424. Then it was published by Gurmukh Singh in *Bhai Jaita Ji: Jiwan te Rachna* (Punjabi), (Amritsar: Literature House, 2003), pp. 49-82. Baldev Singh also gives this poem at the end of his Punjabi novel *Panjwan Sahibzada* (Ludhiana: Chetna Prakashan, 2005), pp. 465-501. Also see Giani Nishan Singh Gandiwind, *Shaeed Baba Jiwan Singh: Jeevan, Rachna te Viakhia* (Punjabi), (Amritsar: Bhai Chatar Singh Jeevan Singh, 2008), p. 174.

13. *Siharfi* Wazir Singh, *Siharfi* 18, *Chhand* 28, p. 80.

*Alif- apna aap pachhata, chhad sabh jhagde jhere, baad bakhede.*  
*Aape din aape hai raati, aape saanjh savele, hai har vele.*  
*Aape raja aape parja, aape hai gur chere, kaun nikher.*  
*Wazir Singh tuN ikkar maula, eh sarup haiN tere, disan chufere.*

14. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 19, *Chhand* 16, p. 83.

*Suad- juda hari nahiN kise then, tudh nuN sach sunaiye, beh samjhaiye.*  
*Eho matt jatharath aadoN, gur then eh matt paaiye, vehem bhulayiye.*  
*Jhooth paap je kehna hove, taN rabb kite banaiye, te lut khaiye.*  
*Wazir Singha je rabb sarbtar hoye, taN naineeN tujhe dikhaiye, hath farhiye.*

15. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 21, *Chhand* 13, p. 91.

*Je- jis vaste karn sadhna, so tum kaho bataayee, kithe rahaaee.*  
*Naikee vekhe jin tript na aave, kanni sune sunayee, shanti na aayee.*  
*Eh prashan hai sabh par kehya, koyee kaho janayee, jis nuN aayee.*  
*Wazir Singh jo uttar deve, so hamra gur bhai, saka sakhayee.*

16. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 21, *Chhand* 27, p. 93.

*Noon- nakh sikh dehi kiya bibek, keete jeev ishar na khaye, nahiN thiaye.*  
*Deh andhar bahar panjh tatt hoye, eh nainnee tujhe dikhaye, je samjhaye.*  
*Na koyee janme na koyee mar hai, na koyee aaye jaaye, sarabh bhulaye.*

*Wazir Singha hai sarup tumahra, ahe jete roop sabaye,  
samayN janaye.*

17. Ibid., *Siharfi* 21, *Chhand* 28, p. 93.

*Wao- waqt rut thitt kaun vaar see, jab eh rachan rachayee,  
kaho batayee.  
Pandit ukat jugat surtee siyoN, kahee eh sunee sunayee, te mil  
bhayee.  
Jekar paNde khabar na tainuN, santan aakh sunayee, deh  
janayee.  
Wazir Singha eh rachna sutantar, sute upje binsayee, na kise  
banayee.*

18. Ibid., *Siharfi* 12, *Chhand* 15, p. 43.

*Suad- sabr aaya vekh aap tari, nahiN japda hor jahan loko.  
Hindu Turk da vaad na riha koyee, ehnaN dharm te uhnaN  
iman loko.  
Hindu parhe graNthaN te pothiaN nuN, Musalman kateb  
Kuran loko.  
AseeN sarbh thoN pare Wazir Singha, nihcha dharia vich  
vigyan loko.*

19. Ibid., *Siharfi* 12, *Chhand* 22, p. 44.

*Qaf- kade Kuran di lor naahi, vekh pothiaN thothiaN paaDde  
haN.  
Rehras namaz di khahash naahi, dharmsaal maseet nuN  
saDde haN.  
Gang Gaya Prayag nuN tiyag keeta, gor maDhi niyaz na  
chhaDde haN.  
Hoye aap nirpakh Wazir Singha, pakhaN dohaN di khed nuN  
taDde haN.*

20. Ibid., *Siharfi* 12, *Chhand* 16, p. 44.

*Suad- dozkaN da riha na sog koyee, naata jannataN da diloN  
tod baithhe.  
Khud aap Khudaye da khauf naahi, Muhammad Ram koloN  
mukh moD baithhe.  
NahiN dharam imaan di kaan koyee, sharaa dohaN di nuN  
neer boD baithhe.  
Aap hoye beqaid Wazir Singha, an-al-haqq maeiN aiyena joD  
baithhe.*

21. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 12, *Chhand* 3, p. 42.

*Te- tak rahe jaan nakk aye, rahe thakk na hakk nitaria si.  
Dhooni lae vibhut charae rahe, teerath naeh ke haal gujaria  
si.  
Parh pothiaN vekhian thothiaN ni, chare bedan da bhed  
vicharia si.  
Mithe arifan aye Wazir Singha, sarup apna aap niharia si.*

22. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 12, *Chhand* 4, p. 42.

*Se- sach di agg jan mach payee, jal bal gayee granthi karam  
di si.  
Jaan apna aap nishang hoye, chhuti kalapna maran te janam  
di si.  
Van trin parbat parbrahm jata, kiti dur dwait jo bharam di si.  
Ahm brahamgyan Wazir Singha, rahi kaid na baran ashram di  
si.*

23. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 2, *Chhand* 9, p. 6.

*Dal- dukh dwait da hungta si, tan hungta nuN guraN pattia je.  
Jaat paat te baran-ashram taaeen, teen laaj janjir nuN katia  
je.  
Naam rup te bidh nikhed guraN, ik aatma hi sekh rattia je.  
So hai tera sarup Wazir Singha, samajh aap dwait nuN sattia  
je.*

The term *teen laaj* (three shames) has been explained by Wazir Singh in a later composition as *lok laaj* (social shame), *kul laaj* (shame of lineage), and *Bed laaj* (as shame literally of the Vedas and metaphorically of formal religion): *Ibid.*, *Siharfi* 21, *Chhand* 25, p. 92. In a note, however, Ashok explains the three shames as: 1. *lok laaj*, 2. *kul di laaj*, and 3. *Bhaichare di laaj* which is not satisfactory. *Ibid.*, p. 54, n. 2.

24. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi*, *Chhand* 15, p. 7.

*Suad- soojh payee jabee aatman di, tabhi baran ashram  
udayia meiN.  
Teen laaj ko todi nirlajj hoye, tann hungta burj nuN dhaiya  
meiN.  
Jaat paat thin aap achhut gaye, Hindu-Turk da pachh uthaiya  
meiN.  
Hoye sarb ke pare Wazir Singha, sarb aatma aap kahiya  
meiN.*

25. Ibid., *Siharfi* 3, *Chhand* 4, p. 9.
26. Ibid., *Siharfi* 4, *Chhand* 12, p. 14.
27. Ibid., *Siharfi* 5, *Chhand* 24, p. 20.
28. Ibid., *Siharfi* 6, *Chhand* 4, p. 21.
29. Ibid., *Siharfi* 6, *Chhand* 25, p. 24.
30. Ibid., *Siharfi* 14, *Chhand* 30, p. 54.
31. Ibid., *Siharfi* 16, *Chhand* 47, p. 66.
32. Ibid., *Siharfi* 16, *Chhand* 48, p. 66.
33. Ibid., *Siharfi* 21, *Chhand* 25, p. 93.
34. Ibid., *Siharfi* 17, *Chhand* 18, pp. 71-72.
35. Ibid., *Siharfi* 14, *Chhand* 10, p. 51.
36. Ibid., *Siharfi* 14, *Chhand* 13, p. 52.
37. Ibid., *Siharfi* 22, *Chhand* 1, p. 94.
38. Ibid., *Siharfi* 22, *Chhand* 2, p. 94.
39. Guru Nanak was from the family of Bedi Khatris.
40. *Siharfian Wazir Singh*, *Siharfi* 16, *Chhand* 4, p. 59.
41. From the fourth Guru onwards all the Sikh Gurus were Sodhi Khatris.
42. *Siharfian Wazir Singh*, *Siharfi* 16, *Chhands* 9, 10, 15 and 16, pp. 60-61.
43. Ibid., *Siharfi* 16, *Chhand* 11, p. 60.
44. Ibid., *Siharfi* 16, *Chhand* 12, p. 61.
45. Ibid., *Siharfi* 22, *Chhand* 23, p. 97.
46. 'Introduction: The *Sant* Tradition in Perspective', in *The Santis*, ed. Schomer and McLeod, pp. 2-3.



47. W. H. McLeod points out that in the works of the Gurus, the 'sikh' and 'sant' are interchangeable while the word 'gurmukh' is favoured over both. See his 'The Meaning of *Sant* in Sikh Usage', in *ibid.*, p. 255.

48. *Siharfiyan Wazir Singh, Siharfi 16, Chhand 54*, p. 67.

49. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 19, Chhand 20*, p. 83.

50. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 20, Chhand 6*, p. 86.

51. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 22, Chhand 30*, p. 98.

52. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 5, Chhand 1*, p. 17.

53. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 23, Chhand 24*, p. 105.

54. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 11*, p. 40: In Vir Singh's words,

*Mahima guru ki adhik hai, keti kahuN sunai.  
Bed char avtar das, e guru ke sam nahiN.*

55. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 7, Chhand 1*, p. 25.

56. *Ibid.*, *Siharfi 7, Chhand 4*, p. 25.

57. 'Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal path to Sanctity', in Schomer and McLeod (ed.), *The Sants*, p. 21.

58. *Ibid.* p. 26.

59. *Ibid.* p. 31.

60. Mark Juergensmeyer, 'The Radhasoami Revival of the *Sant* Tradition' in *ibid.*, p. 340.

61. Piara Singh Padam, *Kalam de Chamatkar* (Patiala: Author, 1981), pp. 272-77

62. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

63. Piara Singh Padam, *Punjabi Majhan te Aasawarian* (Patiala: Author, 1991), p. 37.

64. Dhrampal Singal and Baldev Singh Baddan, *Punjab de Sant Kavi* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2006), p. 471.

65. Ibid., p. 472.

66. Ibid., p. 475.

67. For details see Gian Inder Singh Sevak, *Gulabdasi Sampardaye: Rachna te Vichar*, Ph.D. thesis (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1984); Navratan Kapoor, *Sadhu Gulab Das: Jeevan te Rachna* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1993); Bikram Singh Ghuman, *Kishan Singh Arif: Jeevan te Rachna* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987), pp. 9-10.

68. H.A. Rose, comp., *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette, 1911), vol. II, p. 319.

69. For details about Peero Preman see, Santokh Singh Shaharyar, 'Punjabi di Pahili Shaira: Peero Preman', *Ajoke Shilalekh*, Jan 1997, pp. 5-8; Swarajbir, 'Antika' (Epilogue) in his *Shairee: A Play* (Ludhiana, Chetna Prakashan, 2004), pp. 185-97. For a scholarly treatment of Peero and her poetry see Anshu Malhotra, 'Telling her tale? Unravelling a life in conflict in Peero's *Ik Sau Sath Kafian (one hundred and sixty kafis)*', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2009, pp. 541-78.

70. *Shuddhi Patra: Khalsa Dharam Prakashak*, 2, 5 (1 September 1897), p. 3.

71. Ibid., 2, 6 (1 October 1897), pp. 1-3. The real purpose of the paper was to attack Giani Ditt Singh and Jawahar Singh of the Lahore Singh Sabha who had earlier been Gulabdasis.

72. Mahant Ganesha Singh, *Bharat Mat Darpan* (Amritsar, 1926).

## **Living and Defining Caste: The Life and Writing of *Giani Ditt Singh / Sant Ditta Ram***

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This essay explores the protean stances on the idea of caste among the Sikh reformers of the Lahore Singh Sabha in the late nineteenth century through reading the life and writing of Sant Ditta Ram, later *Giani Ditt Singh*. Though Ditt Singh was from a Ravidasi background, and his career reflected his desire to overcome the debilitations associated with it, he could not advocate an unequivocal stand on caste. Looking at his changing discourse on caste the essay discusses his different readings of the institution and the reasons for such vacillations. In the context of the contemporary debate on caste among Sikhs, and as *dalit* assertion takes place in the Indian Punjab, the ideas of a *dalit* Sikh will illuminate the period of history when caste and community identities were being reformulated.

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In this essay I will explore how the idea of caste came to be formulated by Sikh reformers of the Lahore Singh Sabha in the late nineteenth century Punjab by reading the life and select writings of a stalwart among them, *Giani Ditt Singh*, formerly Sant Ditta Ram of the Gulabdasi *dera*. Ditt Singh is a particularly apposite figure to study the protean stands of the Singh Sabha on caste as he was a 'Rahtia' or a 'Ravidasia,' polite terms that nevertheless carried the stigma of a Sikh 'untouchable' Chamar. An unambiguous stance on the meaning/s of caste (or its irrelevance) would surely have better served him and the Tat (pure) Khalsa community that the Sabha and Ditt Singh were invested in constituting. However, as the essay will demonstrate, his marked ambivalence on caste, sometimes repudiating it, and at others insisting on its centrality to social life, reflected deeper anxieties on the issue – whether in constituting community, denigrating popular culture, or in imagining the opportunities and energies its absence may release.

As the Punjabi reformers of different hues initiated and participated in the project of creating modern subjectivities unmarked by the taints of caste,<sup>1</sup> the question of caste came to be incessantly debated, among others, by the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha. For the Sikh reformers culling a Khalsa identity, freeing the Sikhs from what came to be perceived as the debilitating influences of the 'boa constrictor' of Hinduism became a project in itself.<sup>2</sup> Caste in its myriad manifestations came to be associated with Hinduism's deleterious effects, even as they imagined and discursively sought to produce a casteless Sikh past of the time of the Gurus. As the project of forging Sikhs into a

Khalsa identity gained momentum, and every custom and ritual came to be examined for its appropriateness towards this endeavor, practices came to be slotted as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. Yet variable stands on caste persisted, exemplified here in Ditt Singh, and doing away with the institution became more difficult than has been hitherto recognized. Harjot Oberoi, W.H. McLeod, and Tony Ballantyne have all suggested the successful efforts of the Singh Sabha in achieving the Tat Khalsa identity, which included the need to free Sikhism from the stranglehold of caste.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we need to pause and reexamine the certitudes of this historiography by looking at a figure germane to Sikh reformism.

Sociologists have debated for a long time the polysemic significations of the term caste – its association with occupation, ritual purity, bodily substance, social privilege and the like.<sup>4</sup> The term will be used in all these senses here. Historians have been particularly concerned with questions of the persistence of the institution from earlier times,<sup>5</sup> or its specific transmutations in the colonial period.<sup>6</sup> Thus the moral valence that the term ‘*dharma*’ may have – say when Ditt Singh as a Gulabdasi *faqir* in the earliest phase of his career rejected *varnashramadharmā* – may be different from what caste came to mean in a public sphere formed by Orientalist knowledge projects, colonial governmentality, and reformist reformulations. But how did these varied understandings impinge on quotidian life? How did individuals like Ditt Singh who straddled pre-colonial and colonial times, understand and express the changing connotations of the institution? The variability of his position on caste as of others like him caught in the vortex of destabilizing change, are a product of their times, implicated in and constitutive of their efforts at self-fashioning and disciplining society, in debates that swirled in the public sphere. Such vacillation persisted despite the trajectory of Ditt Singh’s life that indicates his personal quest and attraction for public forums which would downplay, if not obliterate the reach of caste. While it was difficult for the upper castes to forgo the privileges granted by that status – after all the universal modernity of the middle class in India was often shaped by upper caste men<sup>7</sup> – there was no given clarity in the positions espoused by the ‘*dalits*’ either. The peculiarly colonial idea of immutability of caste, the attractions of upward mobility and its deployment for community identities as undertaken by Ditt Singh, or alternative potentialities of the institution are delineated in this essay, discussed through the case of this remarkable individual.

In the wake of the resurgence of the debate on caste within Sikhism in the context of assertion of *dalit* identity in Punjab, Ditt Singh’s variable stand on the issue will illuminate the historical period when this legacy was redefined. This may lend a perspective on the persistence of the institution of caste within Sikhism, despite a salient desire to fight it. The indeterminacy and lack of fixity on caste and community identity, from the writings of one primarily associated with the development of identity politics, shows the complexity of the issue at hand. This essay will begin with a survey of the historiographical understanding of the historical role of caste within Sikhism. This will be

followed by a glimpse of Ditt Singh's life, stressing the significance of his Gulabdasi background, his move into the Arya Samaj, and finally his association with the Lahore Singh Sabha. The last section will take up some of his writings to examine his varying stands on caste and the contexts in which his arguments were constituted and expressed.

### **The Question of Caste in Sikhism**

W.H. McLeod as a historian constantly engaged with the question of caste in the course of his enormous contribution to Sikh Studies. This is visible in his important effort at analyzing Sikh sacred scripture and the anecdotal accounts of the first Guru's life (*janam-sakhis*) to study the life and teachings of Guru Nanak, placing him within the larger north Indian Sant movement.<sup>8</sup> McLeod underlines the theoretical rejection of vertical caste hierarchies in Nanak's teachings, drawing attention to his egalitarian vision of emancipation available to all castes without any disability attached to being born low caste. This was in consonance with other *sants*, men of God often low-born, who preached against the rules of *varnashramadharm*, the broad category of the *varna* divisions and stages of life, that placed the Brahman on top of the social heap, Shudra at the bottom, and the untouchable outside its ambit. These *sants* also ridiculed the idiom of purity and pollution in caste practice that rates as superior one who is least soiled with bodily waste and its management. At the same time, McLeod draws attention to the continued horizontal operation of caste, in the sense in which rules of caste endogamy were adhered to even in the lives of the Gurus, as they all married within their ascribed caste *gotras*. McLeod observes the persistence of this aspect of caste rules particularly among the Khatri of the Punjab, the social category to which all the Gurus belonged.<sup>9</sup>

Significant from the point of view of the fashioning of the Tat Khalsa, or the pure Khalsa identity, is McLeod's work on the prescriptive literature of the Sikhs. The *Rahitnamas* are the corpus of literature produced in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries that pronounce on the 'code of conduct' of the Khalsa.<sup>10</sup> The importance of *rahit* literature, for the purpose of understanding its deployment by the vociferous advocates of the Lahore Singh Sabha is twofold. Firstly, the *rahit*, its study and what was attributed to it became the basis for laying the rules for 'correct' Sikh/Khalsa conduct – appearance and personal grooming, costume, rituals and other social and behavioral indicators – that would mark the Sikhs as a separate community. As McLeod shows, the Sabha intellectuals deliberated on and sieved this literature, picking up elements that *they* attributed to the tenth Guru's period, in consonance with his vision as *they* saw it, while rejecting anything that smacked of being 'Hindu'. They tended to overlook the specific circumstances of the *rahit's* evolution over time. Secondly, the eighteenth century, the time of the composition of some of this literature, became the 'heroic' age of the Khalsa for the pamphleteers and public men of the Singh Sabha, adept at investing the writing of history – a community's existence and survival in its

difficult past – to mould community identity.<sup>11</sup> The struggle of the Sikhs against the Mughals and Afghans was seen to potentially possess emotive power that could be exploited to forge a separate identity. Bhai Vir Singh, the famous Sikh literary figure, successfully welds together history with new literary forms like the novel, to develop a sense of community. Often using the eighteenth century as a backdrop to create moral fables featuring Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as distinct types, Vir Singh uses the didactic novel to spell out the characteristics of the Khalsa Sikhs.<sup>12</sup>

Studying the six *Rahitnamas* of the eighteenth century, McLeod comments on the cultural background of the ‘Hindu’ world against which the *rahit* was formulated.<sup>13</sup> The attitude towards the institution of caste could vary in this prescriptive literature from its virtually complete acceptance in daily social conduct in say the Chhibber Brahmin Chaupa Singh’s *Rahitnama* to the more circumspect *Rahitnama* of Daya Singh that discountenances caste.<sup>14</sup> Recently, Purnima Dhavan has shown the simultaneous growth of *rahit* literature along with that of the *Gurbilas* in the eighteenth century. While the former attempted to draw boundaries around Khalsa social conduct, the latter used the devotional idiom and *Pauranic* myths to figuratively partake in the court of the tenth Guru and its warrior tradition. Thus diversity, Dhavan notes, was intrinsically a part of the Sikh world of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

From this bricolage world, where one could be a Sikh or/and a Khalsa, a kesdhari,<sup>16</sup> or a *sahajdhari*,<sup>17</sup> or indeed an Udasi, Nirmala, Akali, Nihang, Nirankari, Namdhari, Sarvariya, or even Hindu-Sikh – the Lahore Sabha, according to Harjot Oberoi, from the late nineteenth century embarked on the project of homogenizing the Sikhs and defining Sikhism. While Oberoi stresses distinction between the uniformity promoted by the Tat Khalsa (Lahore group), and the pluralist *sanatan* positions among other reformist groups (for example, Amritsar Singh Sabha), McLeod shows the contemporary historian’s tendency to overplay the differences between the two.<sup>18</sup> Ditt Singh, an early member of the Lahore group, I suggest, represented an equivocating figure, sometimes working for an exclusive Sikh identity and at others pushing for Hindus and Sikhs to jointly abjure ‘Muslim’ practices. He was keen to establish the Sikhs as a third community of the Punjab, distinct from the Hindus, yet found it difficult to theoretically and socially work out this separation, producing literature ambivalent on both caste and community identity.

This prevarication on caste among the reformers of the Singh Sabha (and of the Arya Samaj) in relation to reforms for/of women has been discussed in my earlier work. In *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities*, I demonstrate how preserving the privileges of high caste, brought into question by the public debate initiated by the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha on caste was to be mitigated by regulating women’s lives through redefining their roles in society, home, and marriage. In this paper, I turn to the voice of a low caste Sikh reformer to underscore the heterogeneous positions on the question of caste as it came to be discussed in the 1890s.

The apparent success of the Tat Khalsa advocates in homogenizing Sikh identity has been challenged by the unstable and complex relationship of the *dalit* Sikhs (the scavenger Chuhra /Mazhabi, and the leather-working Chamar – Ravidasi/Rahtia) to it. In a state where *dalits* constitute up to 28.3 per cent of the population, (the highest in a state in India),<sup>19</sup> their assertion has led to tensions in the present Punjab and in the diaspora. This erupted, for example, in the attack on two visiting Ravidasi leaders in Vienna, Austria, by a group of Sikhs in May 2009.<sup>20</sup> The tensions also spilled out on Punjab's streets in the summer of 2007 when the Dera Sacha Sauda's Guru Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh attempted an imitation of the tenth Guru's initiation ceremony for his own followers.<sup>21</sup> This un-spooling of caste-based identity politics, albeit a product of social churning in modern Punjab, has also to be understood in historical light. Though the Singh Sabha in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was dominated by the 'upper castes' of Khatri and Aroras, who were traders, merchants, shop-keepers and professionals, their legatees in homogenizing Sikh identity and controlling its religious and political organs of power were the Akalis, who represented the rural and landowning Jats. The assertion of identity on the part of the *dalit* Sikhs, those who earlier worked on the lands of the Jat *zamindars* and provided other menial services, has been at the heart of this conflict.

Historically, the low castes freewheeled between the different religious conglomerations of Punjab, themselves fairly fluid, on the one hand, and adhered to their own heroic and saintly figures like Lalbeg, Balashah or Balmiki.<sup>22</sup> The colonial state, with its Orientalist notions of religion that refused to recognize the piety displayed by the Balashahis or the Lalbegis as constitutive of religion, tended to club them with the dominant communities.<sup>23</sup> The attraction of conversion to Christianity under the aegis of the missionaries in the Punjab led to a reaction among indigenous reformers who initiated programs of low caste 'uplift'. This move received fillip once the reformers became conscious of displaying enhanced community numbers and imbibed the logic of majorities/minorities, leading to concerted efforts to 'purify' (*shuddhi*) and entice the low castes to join mainstream Hindu/Arya and Sikh ranks.

Caste mobility and change of occupation through conversion to Islam or Sikhism was already available in Punjabi society. Conversion to Sikhism could lead to change in status and nomenclature – Chuhra to Mazhabi (who then gave up scavenging) or Chamar to Ravidasi (who sometimes gave up working on leather and took up weaving)<sup>24</sup> – as will be demonstrated for Ditt Singh. Additionally, there were sects on the margins of society that admitted low castes and untouchables into their ranks, like the Udasis, and the Gulabdasis of the Punjab, and offered avenues of gaining respect through donning the garb of the *sadhu/faqir*, along with access to literacy and education.<sup>25</sup> Later, as shown by Juergensmeyer, the Ad-Dharm movement under its inspirational leader Mangoo Ram, offered yet another alternative to the low castes in the Punjab in the 1920s. Ditt Singh, a Rahtia, struggled to free himself personally of constraints that shadowed him because of his caste, and intellectually in

working out agendas that would reflect the egalitarian principles that the Gurus stood for.

### **In Public Life: Ditt Singh's Quest for Respectability**

We know little about Ditt Singh's personal life, though in recent years there has been a spurt of interest in him fuelled partly by an eagerness to reclaim him as a *dalit* hero.<sup>26</sup> His biographers repeatedly speak of his lowly birth giving an impression that the question ought to have bothered him, as it does them,<sup>27</sup> for how could someone from a Chamar background not have been affected by its debilitations? In the argument presented here I also index the part his caste played in determining his career, whether initially with the Gulabdasis, or later in the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabha. The issue of caste became shrill from the late nineteenth century onwards as the reformist Aryas and the Sabhaites attempted a theoretical reformulation of the institution. In the charged atmosphere of the time, when the proselytizing missionaries initiated conversions to Christianity of the Punjabi peoples (for instance, the stories of the genesis of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, and the Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar, are about the anxieties putative conversions produced),<sup>28</sup> the reformers in imitative ceremonies introduced the 'conversion' of low castes to twice-born status in the case of the Aryas, and to the Khalsa in that of the Sabhaites. The convergence of the issues of conversion and caste in these vitiated times created a resonance on the question of caste that played itself out in sharp polemics and mimetic actions among the varied players in public life. There can be little doubt that Ditt Singh the polemicist must have been painfully aware of his own origins at such a time.

The fact that there is no unanimity even on the date of birth of Ditt Singh is a reflection of the paucity of personal information on him. While different authors agree that he was born on 21 April, and the year of his birth is proffered variously as 1850, 1852, or 1853.<sup>29</sup> However, all his biographers are agreed on a few basic facts of his life. His father was 'Sant' Diwan Singh, a Ravidasi weaver, who was religious minded and well versed in the philosophies of Nyaya and Vedanta. He is also said to be an admirer (or member) of the Gulabdasi sect. It seems Diwan Singh's own religious inclinations influenced the choices he made for his son, whom he first taught himself, and then around the age of 8-9 years, sent him to village Tiur, in Ambala district, to be educated by Sant Gurbakhsh Singh, a Gulabdasi, who instructed him in Gurmukhi, prosody, Niti-Shastra, and Vedanta. Additionally, one Lala Dayanand of the same village taught Ditta Ram Urdu and Persian. At the age of 16-17 years, he moved into the main establishment of the Gulabdasis at Chathianwala, near Lahore, where Sant Desa Singh was his preceptor.<sup>30</sup>

Information on the religious life of his father, and his own precocious career is also available in Ditt Singh's controversial booklet *Sadhu Dayanand Nal Mera Sambad (My Conversations with Sadhu Dayanand)* on his putative discussions with Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj,



when the latter visited the Punjab in 1877 and established a Samaj there.<sup>31</sup> Ditt Singh writes:

I was born in the house of a *sant* who preac  
So from a young age I too began to settle disputations.<sup>32</sup>

The Gulabdasi background of Ditt Singh is significant for many reasons. It is important to note that his father was influenced by the teachings and the philosophical leanings of the Gulabdasis that veered towards the metaphysical monist musings of the Vedanta. As I have discussed in 'Panths and Piety', Gulab Das, the founder of the sect, had been educated by the Udasi and Nirmala teachers, and among the practices that he borrowed from the Udasis was to keep his establishment open to all castes, besides the attention to life of the mind and dissemination of knowledge that he owed to both the sects. Gulab Das also spent time with the *faqirs* of the Bulleh Shahi order, an irreverent and popular Sufi order that was established in the eighteenth century. The Gulabdasis were indubitably one of the most exciting sects of the middle years of the nineteenth century. Not only were they willing to impart knowledge to one willing to receive it, they were fond of debate, discussion and controversy, putting forth their point of view in unequivocal and provocative manner. They also spouted radical ideas, which included preaching against the *varnashramadharma*, and allowing religious initiation to women, the most famous case being that of the Muslim courtesan Peero.<sup>33</sup> Coming from a low caste and a profession of disrepute, Peero repeatedly underlined the unique characteristics of her sect that disregarded caste fastidiousness and was open to all religions.

The radical, intellectually stimulating and the uninhibited lifestyle of the Gulabdasis must have appealed to Diwan Singh.<sup>34</sup> As noted, Diwan Singh came from the upwardly mobile section of the Chamar community, the Ravidasis, who had taken to weaving, a clean profession, giving up the impurity associated with leather. According to Denzil Ibbetson, the colonialist administrator-ethnographer of the Punjab, in the eastern districts of the province, where Ditt Singh's birth and early upbringing occurred, most of the Julahas or weavers had origins among the Chamars. However, the 'Julaha does not work in impure leather, he eats no carrion, he touches no carcasses.... In a word, the Chamar is a menial, the Julaha an artisan'.<sup>35</sup> For a spiritually inclined person like Diwan Singh, the Gulabdasis opened up opportunities for further learning and better status for himself and his son, without necessarily having to undertake the onerous asceticism associated with an order like the Udasis. The fact that Gulab Das' followers came from different castes, including Jats, Khatri, Kumhars, Ravidasis,<sup>36</sup> must have added to their appeal, offering interaction unencumbered by the strictures of caste. For example, Jawahir Singh Kapoor, a Khatri '*guru bhai*' of Ditt Singh, whose career paralleled his own, became a life-long friend; he was the likely inspiration in Ditt Singh move from the Gulabdasi establishment to the Arya Samaj, and then the Singh Sabha.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the Gulabdasis offered a genuine environment of intellectual creativity in the early years of colonial rule, before communal diatribes vitiated public life towards the end of the century. Besides Gulab Das, who had been a prolific writer of more than twenty books which were philosophical in nature, almost all his disciples wrote, and their works are available in hand-written manuscripts or lithographed pamphlets.<sup>38</sup> Many wrote in a philosophical vein, for instance Bawa Des Raj (probably the same as Ditta Ram's teacher Desa Singh), Mayya Das, or Sham Das 'Asif', but others expressed themselves in different modes. Peero penned verses speaking of her mystical yearning, but also wrote a surprisingly autobiographical narrative, along with celebratory songs for *holi* festivities.<sup>39</sup> Others composed for a burgeoning market for printed pamphlets that exploited the Punjab's popular stories, the *qissas*, and other indigenous genres. The more successful of these was Kishan Singh 'Arif', who wrote more than fifty *qissas* on characters of Punjabi folklore like *Hir-Ranjha*, *Raja Rasalu*, *Puran Bhagat* and *Dulla Bhatti*.<sup>40</sup>

Ditta Ram started his writing career in a similar vein, his first work, as noted earlier was the *qissa* of *Shirin Farhad* (1872), and the second had *Abla Nind* (1876) verses on wiles and vices of women.<sup>41</sup> Ditta Ram captures the stimulating atmosphere of the Gulabdasi *dera* in his closing verses of *Shirin Farhad*, the moment in traditional writing when the author re-enters his narrative, having earlier closed the tale being related. Here he calls himself Ditta Ram 'faqir' (mendicant), who sat in the *baradari* (airy pavilion) of Satguru Das Gulab, while around him friends were engrossed in various activities. Though we do not have to read these lines literally, they do capture the ambience of the *dera* and its literati rather well:

Some sit to read lexicon or poetry, some sing the Ramayan friends.  
Some read chapters of *unani* medicine, some put energy in singing friends.  
Some read of the unity of God with interest, relating it with love to friends.  
Some start to speak of lovers, turning pages of *qissas* friends....<sup>42</sup>

A similar mention of Chathe Nagar (Chathianwala), the main establishment of the Gulabdasi sect, and the *baradari* and the *talab* (pond) is also made in the closing verses of Ditta Ram's *Abla Nind*.<sup>43</sup>



This is a picture of Ditta Ram available in the hand-written manuscript of his *Shirin Farhad*. According to Ashok, it depicts the author at the age of twenty-one. Note the style of clothes and the *baradari* the author is seated in. His name Dittaramji is etched just above his turban.

Source: Shamsheer Singh Ashok (ed.), *Shirin Farhad* (Ludhiana: Punjabi Sahit Academy, n.d).

What is apparent from the above is that Ditta Ram participated fully in the cultural atmosphere of the Gulabdasi establishment. He imbibed their monist philosophy, and was immersed in their world of learning and imparting knowledge: reveling in composing poetry, indulging in Punjabi popular literary practices, absorbing Bhakti and Sufi ethos, and engaging in religious discourses and disputations. Yet, even as he seemed firmly ensconced in this pluralist space, he opted out, becoming embroiled with the Arya Samaj and the new politics that came in its wake. Why did this happen?

The reasons for such a move are easy to discern. The death of the charismatic founder of the *dera* in 1873 may have left it bereft of a personality who could keep all disciples together. Many left soon after to create local centers of their own,<sup>44</sup> and others' literary careers took wing, though many remained loyal to the *dera* and to Gulab Das' memory. However, the more significant reason must be seen to be the effect of Swami Dayanand's visit to the Punjab. Kenneth Jones speaks of his fifteen-month stay in the province, from April 1877 to July 1878, as one of sensational lectures, debates and controversies. A number of Arya Samajes were established in various parts of the Punjab, and the younger generation was inspired by his teachings that emphasized the need to reform the society.<sup>45</sup> Among the new ideas promulgated by Dayanand was an insistence on the reconfiguration of caste. He envisaged a society where education, talent and the virtues of a person would determine caste, rather than birth.<sup>46</sup> Though this idea is unevenly present in his opus *Satyarth Prakash*, it had the potential for genuine transformation, despite the notion of hierarchy remaining entrenched.<sup>47</sup> Among the arguments proffered by Dayanand to make his case was that of the need to change caste if a person demonstrated commensurate abilities: 'Even if a lowborn man were to possess qualifications ... of a superior *Class*, he should be recognized as such; and if a man highborn though he be, were to act like a man of inferior *Class*, he should be relegated to it'.<sup>48</sup> Dayanand reinforced his logic by giving mythological examples of caste mobility: sage Javal of an

unknown caste became a Brahman; Matang, an outcaste, became a Brahman; and Vishwamitra, changed his Kshatriya status for that of a Brahman.

We can only guess at the effect such remarkable ideas had on an 'outcaste' like Ditt Singh, though this point cannot be overstretched. His friend and fellow Gulabdasi, Jawahir Singh Kapoor, a high caste, too was attracted to the Arya Samaj and the new associational politics it represented, serving it as a secretary for some years. Yet, it is important to underline the manner in which Ditt Singh absorbed and repeatedly deployed the logic of caste status spelt out in the *Satyarth Prakash*. It had obvious echoes for him, a learned 'outcaste', who embarked early in life on a career of writing and lecturing, but had to battle the prejudices of society. Even though he moved out of the Arya Samaj, he never gave up the potentially revolutionary aspect of Dayanand's argument. Moreover, soon thereafter, the Arya Samaj kick started a program of *shuddhi* using Dayanand's logic, at least intermittently, to justify its conversions of the low castes who had found succor in religious traditions other than Hinduism. Thus the argument worked out by Dayanand stayed in public life to an important extent. Ditt Singh's disquisition on caste from various perspectives is available in his *Nakli Sikh Prabodh (The Awakening of False Sikh/s)*, produced in his Singh Sabha days and published in 1893. At one point in the work he endorses caste as an institution as it had existed in the 'early' days. Having established that the four *varnas* were based on the occupations, he states:

The system benefited the Hindu *qaum* because every *qaum* or *varan* stood firm in their task. The reason for progress was also that if a Brahman did the work of a Chhatri, he was called a Chhatri, if he did the work of a Vaish he was called a Vaish, of a Shudar, he was called a Shudar, *and if the Shudar did the job of a Brahman, he became a Brahman*. So Krishnaji in Gita had called one's *karam* one's *varan*. Like Ved Vyas though born of the stomach of a fisherwoman was called a Pandit Brahman, Vashisht born of a prostitute was called a Brahman and Vishvamitra though born a Brahman, because he kept weapons was called a Chhatri royal sage.<sup>49</sup> (Emphasis added)

To give another example of the use of the same logic to register his frustration at the persistence of caste in society, Ditt Singh writes in the *Khalsa Akhbar* of 15 July 1898, a newspaper he edited over a number of years: '...an illiterate man who calls his caste Brahman, is addressed as Panditji, but if a man of another *varan*, however well-versed in Shastras is never seen as a Pandit, but people are bothered by the question that a Vaish or a Shudar does not have the right to hear the Veda ...'<sup>50</sup>

The strength of this argument that accounted for the years Ditt Singh spent in gathering and disseminating knowledge can be gauged for him if we also take a look at the nature of caste prejudice he faced and the public humiliations he had to swallow. We know for instance that when Bhai Takht Singh, the founder of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozepur, invited Singh to this

school set up in 1893 to educate Sikh girls, the local Singh Sabha refused to share their meal with him because of his caste. Takht Singh, who personally found Ditt Singh inspirational, had to take him to his house and serve him a meal there.<sup>51</sup> Similar bias was displayed by the priests of the Golden Temple who would not open the precincts of the temple to outcaste devotees till later in the afternoon, well after all others had left. The consecrated food, *karah prasad*, prepared by the lower castes was also not accepted at the temple. It seems people like Ditt Singh too were not exempt from such treatment.<sup>52</sup>

Thus while the Gulabdasis created an enclave where caste affiliations were rejected, they themselves were increasingly relegated into a marginal community by the end of the 1870s, devoted to philosophical questions and intellectual pursuits. The new public life began to engage the emerging elite on issues that now had a wider resonance in society. What the Arya Samaj offered to Ditt Singh was a bold restatement on caste that could be carried into public life, not just a flouting of established customs to be practiced within a small arena among people devoted to esoteric values. The new argument was debated with force and conviction in the new fora of the public sphere - the newspapers, journals, associations, public lectures.

Ditt Singh's break with the Arya Samaj occurred only in 1888, over the vocal critiques of the Sikh Gurus by the Arya leaders.<sup>53</sup> By then, Ditt Singh had probably already joined or come to be associated with the Lahore Singh Sabha, set up in 1879 under the leadership of Gurmukh Singh. His new associates encouraged him to clear the Punjabi language '*Giani*' examination in 1886 and he subsequently joined the Oriental College, Lahore, as a Professor of Punjabi.<sup>54</sup> Ditt Singh's membership of both the organizations simultaneously was neither contradictory, nor controversial, as he went about creating a niche for himself in public life. So long as Sikhism was viewed as reformed Hinduism, it did not lead to problems - only when the Arya leaders began to condemn Sikhism as idolatrous, and began attacking the Sikh Gurus, that the situation became intolerable, and the break came.<sup>55</sup> This point might be worth reiterating because some of Ditt Singh's biographers, for instance Amar Singh, try to prove that he was never a member of the Arya Samaj.<sup>56</sup> Others have dated the pamphlet to 1877. This was after Ditt Singh's polemical *Sadhu Dayanand Nal Mera Sambad*, where he describes three disputations between the Swami and himself, in each of which apparently the Swami was worsted by Ditt Singh's better knowledge of the Vedas and the Indian philosophical traditions. In fact, this was the year that the Swami was in Lahore, thus effectively showing break of Ditt Singh with the Arya Samaj in the year of its establishment!<sup>57</sup> This pamphlet, in my opinion, ought to be dated after the break, for it would have been impossible for Ditt Singh to continue within the Samaj after the ridicule he poured on the Swami, considering the Swami's status within the Samaj.



This picture depicts Ditt Singh at the time of his appointment as a Professor in Punjabi at the Oriental College, Lahore. While the style of turban is similar to that portrayed in the earlier picture, he wears a formal western style graduating gown, and has a fuller flowing beard.

Source: Shamsheer Singh Ashok (ed.), *Shirin Farhad* (Ludhiana: Punjabi Sahit Academy, n.d).

The mid-1880s was a time of turmoil for Ditt Singh, a period that pushed him into clarifying his positions on a number of issues. On the Singh Sabha front, this was the time when the Lahore group threw a challenge to the Amritsar ‘conservatives,’ condemning their *sanatani* beliefs. The practice of worshipping living *gurus* came to be critiqued along with the question of maintaining caste rules. As Oberoi points out, the Amritsar group’s approval of an exegesis of the *Granth* that endorsed *sanatani* world view was also disapproved of.<sup>58</sup> The ex-communication of Gurmukh Singh from Sikhism under the seal of the Golden Temple followed, at the behest of the Amritsar group.<sup>59</sup> Ditt Singh even had to face a court case for his farce *Supan Natak* (*Dream Drama*) that he published in the *Khalsa Akhbar*, which lampooned the Amritsar group.<sup>60</sup> The issue of caste was covertly present in these proceedings. Gurmukh Singh, though a Chandhar Jat, was seen as the son of a *langari*, a cook, and Ditt Singh as an ‘outcaste’.<sup>61</sup> The attacks of the Aryas on Sikhs also began to be vociferous around this time.

Simultaneously, it seems the Gulabdasis took out a ‘notice’ against Ditt Singh, the man who attacked ‘gurudom’, for being a *guru* to villagers in Abhaipur, Ambala, where he apparently maintained a small hermitage. The notice ran as follows:

We’ve heard that Bhai Ditt Singh, when a *faqir* of the Gulabdasi persuasion for a long time, in Abhaipur of tehsil Kharar, zila Ambala, had built (is building?) a hut and a small garden, and calls himself a *guru* in the villages of the Lamba-Chhamba, and gets himself worshipped and accepts votive offerings of the people.<sup>62</sup>

Though none of his biographers mention when this particular *nindya patar* (defamation letter) of the Gulabdasis came out, the question it raises points to the controversy around the tradition of living *gurus*. Ditt Singh did not deny

the charge, explaining the charge of ‘his brothers’, as proving how respected he was from a young age in many towns and villages of Punjab! Here Ditt Singh seems to suggest that this occurred in his early career, at a time prior to his going to Chathianwala. He further maintains that his preaching in those days was against the worship of idols, graves, *pirs*, and superstitions, and generally in line with his ideology as a Sabhaite. However, Ditt Singh’s defense of his actions still does not answer when this charge was made against him, nor is his argument convincing. Though the Gulabdasis were advocates of Vedantic monism, the worship of graves and tombs did become an aspect of their cult: a tomb was built on the graves of Gulab Das and Peero at Chathianwala which became an important site of the sect’s piety.<sup>63</sup> Ditt Singh was somewhat restrained in his response to the Gulabdasi ‘brothers’, with whom he may have maintained cordial relations. At the same time, he used this occasion to ridicule the Arya Samajis, taking a dig at the Swami. Referring to his early experiments with different ascetic and spiritual practices, Ditt Singh observed that while he himself was already a respected preacher, Dayanand was still looking for an intellectual tradition to follow.<sup>64</sup>

The convergence of all these issues indicates overlapping affiliations that Ditt Singh concurrently maintained, even till the mid 1880s – Gulabdasi, Arya Samaji, and the Sabhaite. The turn of events from the second half of the 1880s, however, forced his hand, and he felt obliged to choose one of the groups and he chose the Khalsa identity being worked out by the Lahore group over others. However, the point that needs to be underscored is that it was possible till then, even for a man in the colonial public sphere to belong to and appropriate more than one tradition. Perhaps, this was easier for someone like Ditt Singh who received an orthodox education, and was introduced to western institutions somewhat later in life.<sup>65</sup> The rigid compartmentalization of religious communities and their essential beliefs was something he learnt later. And if he did manage to tutor himself in divisive communal politics, he never deployed that lesson in totality. Ditt Singh displayed changeable stances in works that ostensibly presented an unencumbered ideology of the Singh Sabha, as the next section will show. In some ways this early grooming in multiple intellectual and religious traditions stood Ditt Singh in good stead even as an advocate of the Singh Sabha reforms, for he used his vast knowledge to refute charges, make accusations, and take on the role of an untiring scribe and spokesman of the Lahore Sabha. By the time of his early death in September 1901, Ditt Singh came to be seen as a vigorous ideologue for the reformed Khalsa identity, and continues to be regarded as such. What such straitjacketing hides is his multi-layered personality. This section has followed his life trajectory, demonstrating the personal conflicts he faced as he negotiated caste prejudices. Yet there was no straightforward rejection of caste in Ditt Singh’s writing. What one finds instead is an endorsement of the institution at times, and its rejection at others, or its persistence in re-worked forms. The next section will look at some of Ditt Singh’s writings to highlight his complex position on caste and understand its implications.

### Caste in Ditt Singh's Writings

The eclectic career of Ditt Singh was reflected in the literature he produced. His writing spanned forays into popular Punjabi literary culture, polemical diatribes against 'other' religious communities, and caste practices. He wrote biographies of Sikh Gurus and martyrs, and condemned practices unbecoming of the Khalsa.<sup>66</sup> His contribution to Punjabi journalism was noteworthy as the editor of the *Khalsa Akhbar*, a position he occupied from virtually its inception in the mid-1880s till his death, with a gap of few years when it was discontinued. Ditt Singh was adept at writing verse, a legacy of his Gulabdasi days, though he used prose particularly in his journalistic writings. Ditt Singh mostly wrote in Punjabi in Gurmukhi script, but he was equally at home in Braj, Urdu and Persian.<sup>67</sup> The multiple innovations in the use of language in the Punjab of the nineteenth century will not detain us here,<sup>68</sup> however, Ditt Singh's choice of language and genres point to his comfort with the literary and pluralistic cultures of pre-colonial Punjab. His discerning use of language also reveal his engagement with the agendas of reform – questions of language, caste and the definition of religious communities – and the appropriate vehicle to carry these forward. It is for this reason that Ditt Singh is sometimes seen as a forerunner of Bhai Vir Singh, in his unflagging endeavor for reforms through the medium of writing, and in his use of history and language, in the defining of Khalsa identity.<sup>69</sup> In a sense, the trials, errors and successes of Ditt Singh initiated a more cogent Sikh reform that followed. Here I will show how caste appeared in various forms in his writings, and the different ways in which he understood the institution. The variable use of caste reflected both the deep-rooted nature of the institution in society, and the difficulties experienced in working out a theoretical argument against its prevalence among the Sikhs. Arguing for the irrelevance of caste from a Gulabdasi enclave where *varnashramadharma* could be disregarded, to taking the idea to a larger social arena was a task imbricated in contradictions and pitfalls, as Ditt Singh's shifting stands on the question reveals.

To explicate Singh's protean stances on caste, I will use two of his substantial pamphlets. These are the *Nakli Sikh Prabodh* mentioned earlier, and *Sultan Puara* (Trouble over Sultan).<sup>70</sup> Both were published in the 1890s, and were reprinted a number of times - *Nakli Sikh* at least three times in the life time of Ditt Singh,<sup>71</sup> and *Sultan Puara* remained popular even after his death, his son having it reprinted. *Nakli Sikh* was probably written first, as Ditt Singh later elaborated in separate pamphlets some of the themes lampooning popular cultural practices of Punjabi Sikhs (and Hindus) that he introduces here - *Sultan Puara*, *Gugga Gapaura*, and *Miran Manaut* (against the worship of Sakhi Sarvar, Gugga Pir and Miran Pir respectively). *Nakli Sikh* is more complex of the two, because of the number of issues he tackles in its pages. Ditt Singh wrote this pamphlet to establish the separate identity of Sikh religion and community, asserting that from the time of the early Gurus onwards, their conscious effort was to create a distinct religion in Punjab – *sab ton juda jhanda gadan da si* (to plant a separate banner).<sup>72</sup> Ditt Singh,



insidiously, conflates Sikh religion with its Khalsa variant from the time of Nanak, the first Guru, thereby pushing back in time the Sabha disapprobation of *sahajdhari* identity, though he later wrote of the tenth Guru's initiating the Khalsa in Anandpur. However, the referents in his language remain impregnated with multiple possibilities – note the use of the term *avatar* (incarnation) to describe Nanak in the quote below, alluding to the Pauranic mythological significations:

He accepted suffering on his body.  
Within the Khalsa Panth was Guru Nanak, the *avtar*.<sup>73</sup>

In this tract Ditt Singh tells Sikhs that they could learn from other religious communities, that is, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, of how distinct identities can flourish. Simultaneously, he attempts to create separate rituals for the Sikhs, critiquing the myriad 'Hindu' practices that the Sikhs apparently followed – birth and death rituals, wearing Hindu garments (*dhoti* instead of *kachhehra* or drawers), and keeping Hindu somatic symbols like the sacred thread (*janeyu*), and the topknot (*choti*), instead of unshorn hair and the turban. Ditt Singh also initiates weaning the Sikhs away from popular practices like visiting the tombs of Sufi *pirs*. In this conscious step at culling out a Sikh identity from a *mélange* of practices, Ditt Singh also discusses caste, both in a conscious and 'correct' manner, according to the new Sabhaite insistence on its irrelevance in Sikhism, but also in an unconscious and complex way that assumes caste to be endemic in society. Though there were other pamphlets that Singh wrote to pronounce on Sikh traditions – *Gurmat Arti Prabodh*, *Durga Prabodh*, *Darpok Singh Daler Singh* – none match in the plethora of issues he picks here, making this booklet something of a torchbearer in laying the blueprint for Sikh reform.

In *Sultan Puara* Ditt Singh has a more straightforward task – to demonstrate to Sikhs the foolhardiness of worshipping a 'Muslim' saint, Sakhi Sarvar. In the spirit of competitive one-upmanship between popular religion and Sikh practices, Ditt Singh trivializes the miracle-making powers attributed to Sarvar, and offers as consolation for giving up Sarvar the parallel myths and rituals of the Sikh religion. Though Ditt Singh speaks of the glory of the Khalsa religion, the pamphlet is clearly addressed to both Hindus and Sikhs, and seeks to remove them both from the reach of a Muslim *pir*.<sup>74</sup> The 'othering' of Muslims is rather crude, a far cry from the embarrassment with the excesses of anti-Muslim tirade of the eighteenth century *Rahitnamas* that McLeod has discerned in the writings of Kahn Singh Nabha later on.<sup>75</sup>

The pamphlet is also important for the sub-regional identities within the Punjab that Ditt Singh alludes to, identifying people with their local customs. This is significant for it uncovers a manner of apprehending people other than their religious or caste identities. In the process, Ditt Singh underlines the appeal of Sarvar across Punjab, but also unveils the ambition of the reformist agenda for a pan-regional adherence. Most of all, the pamphlet is of interest for addressing people of different castes to abjure the worship of Sarvar, in the

first instance by recuperating their caste identities, lost in the melee of Sarvar fairs, and the medley of beliefs and rituals that form the core piety towards the *pir*. In other words, in *Sultan Puara* Ditt Singh adopts a circuitous path via caste to the Khalsa ideal of 'castelessness'. The intermingling of castes in the cultic practices of the Sarvarias, and the belief that the *pir* disapproved of the custom of untouchability (*chhut*) were in fact raised to condemn Sarvar – 'the *pir* does not approve of untouchability, we go like brothers'.<sup>76</sup> This liminal state of castelessness during the pilgrimage of the saint, is shown to be repugnant precisely because it violates codes of caste behavior:

Becoming *pir* - brothers they all go to the court of Sarvar.  
Sinking caste in the well they have made the (Muslim) *bharai*<sup>77</sup>  
their *pir*.<sup>78</sup>

Caste was then to be recovered and reinstated as the ideal state, and it remains ambiguous here to what extent it could be discarded after adopting the Khalsa practices.

It might be useful at this juncture to see where Ditt Singh iterates the position that in Sikhism there was no caste. Two points need to be emphasized. Firstly, the statement against the practice of caste invariably occurs when he speaks of the Gurus and the importance they placed on this matter that is at a moment when he was consciously stating a theoretical position on Sikhism. Secondly, the idea of caste incorporated both the notion of *varna* (*baran*), the classical four castes of Brahmanical Hinduism, and the idea of untouchability (*chhut-chhat*) associated with everyday social behaviour. The notions of purity/pollution pertained to the complex of cooking (*chaunka*) and the rules of commensality. Speaking of the erasing of caste by the tenth Guru, Ditt Singh writes – *char baran ik baran sajaye amrit chakh sabh bhrat banaye* (four *varnas* were constituted as one, they were made brothers by tasting *amrit*). He further notes of the Khalsa thus created – *chhut-chhat ki rasam na karte, nahin kahu se ranchak darte* (they do not follow the rituals of untouchability, nor are they afraid of anyone).<sup>79</sup> Earlier, he had made a similar observation for the third Guru Amar Das who advised his followers to give up rigid principles of untouchability.<sup>80</sup>

Ditt Singh's most important and oft quoted statement, because of its lyrical style, was made in the *Nakli Sikh* where he addresses the different occupational castes of the Punjab and admonishes them for adhering to their traditional caste statuses despite taking *amrit*, or initiation into the Khalsa. Illuminating the significance of initiation, Ditt Singh elaborates on how this ceremony incorporates a person in the qualities of the tenth Guru: he should now say that he is born in Patna Sahib as the Guru was, lives in Anandpur, like the Guru did, that the tenth Guru is his father, the Guru's (third) wife, Sahib Kaur his mother, and that their caste is Singh or Khalsa. However, people in disregard of such injunctions, continue with their old names, ways and castes:

What manner of a Sikh are you brother? I am Arora, and he a Nai.

O'Sikh! what is your caste? I am from the clan of Nama, of  
Chhimba brotherhood.  
What (manner) of milk is yours? We Singhs are stout Jats.  
Whose house have you been born? I am a Mehra who supplies  
water.<sup>81</sup>

In this mien Ditt Singh speaks of various castes/occupational and endogamous groups – Aroras, Chhimbas, Jats, Mehras, Ahluwalias, Tarkhans, Brahmans, Khatri, Sahnis, Rangretas, Ravidasis, Suniaras, Rahtias, Lubanas, Bhallas, Trehans and Bedis – for example. It is noteworthy that he addresses higher castes of Brahmans, Khatri, Aroras, along with 'untouchables', Ravidasis and Rahtias, various artisan castes, and other service providers, along with the Khatri castes of the first three Gurus – Bedis, Trehans and Bhallas – the *Bawas* who sought to defend their caste and status privileges against the onslaughts of the Lahore Sabhaites. This was perhaps his most comprehensive statement that endorsed if not a casteless position, the advocacy of one caste for all the Khalsa, and hence equality of status. However, Ditt Singh was far from consistent in maintaining this position.

Having noted Ditt Singh's statements abrogating caste, it is important to review the many occasions when he evokes caste, and associates it with either duties that were required of a specific group, or appeared intrinsic to its somatic-social makeup. Speaking of Hindus, and the lessons the Sikhs could learn from them via the epic *Ramayana*, viz., that despite the personal quest of Ram to get Sita back from her abductor Ravan, an undertaking in which no benefit was to accrue to them, the Hindus still make it a point to remember their God. They periodically perform his story, or greet each other with a respectful 'Ram Ram,' unlike Sikhs who have forgotten all the good their Gurus had done. Ditt Singh also notes that Ravan was a good Brahman, not a base person, and that Ram had to fight him in order to fulfill the duties of a Kshatriya king (*Chhatri raja*).<sup>82</sup> Similarly in the *Mahabharata*, Krishna taught Arjun his *Chhatri dharam* by encouraging him to take up arms.<sup>83</sup> In relating these tales Singh assumes a moral righteousness associated with following appropriate caste prescriptions. The idea of taking the morally right path, a duty to which one is born, or one that circumstances place a person in, was a favorite of Singh, on which he sermonizes again in his pamphlet *Pratigya Palan* (Fulfilling Vows).<sup>84</sup> Since the notion explored was one of ensuring one's duties (*dharm*), he uses the rich mythology of the epics and the Puranas along with tales of the lives of the Gurus and other exemplary figures, including celebrated Sufi *shaikhs*. In this anecdotal and mythological performative mode, Ditt Singh puts to use his training as a Gulabdasi discourses. In fact, its pluralist cultural ethos constantly surfaced and exceeded the brief required for fashioning a Tat Khalsa identity.

If the idea that castes are bound to specific moral duties is seen above, what emerges in *Sultan Puara* are castes tied to their occupational duties, and to pride related to birth status. It is interesting to note that Ditt Singh speaks of broad *jatis*, in the sense of local occupational groups. He remonstrates through

the character of a reformed Sikh (*Guru ka Singh*), reminding the various castes who go for Sarvar's pilgrimage that their association with Muslims was making them break/defile their caste taboos. So a Brahman/*misar* is reminded of his priestly duties, the value of Hindu places of pilgrimage (*Ganga, Parag*), of Hindu gods (Ram, Laxman, Krishandev) and symbols (*janeyu*).<sup>85</sup> A Jat as a landlord is told of his high status in the village (*nambardar*) or a leader (*sardar*) and how unbecoming it is for him to keep company of Muslims and Chamars. Turning to a Chamar (*Chamiar*), Ditt Singh makes fun of his desire to mimic the Brahman and the Jat in joining the pilgrimage – *bhedan nun bhi lage zukam, jiste karda nahin aram* (do sheep too catch a cold and that is why you do not rest?)<sup>86</sup> Unlike the higher castes, the Chamar has to earn his livelihood (presumably through manual work), or else his wife and family would go hungry and curse him. At other places, Ditt Singh addresses a Khatri, reminding him of his high status, a Mehra (water-carrier) and a Tarkhan (carpenter), dissuading all from joining the pilgrimage. He is particularly harsh on Kirars (largely Arora moneylenders), whom he criticizes for dressing in 'Muslim' clothes, and even conducting their religious ceremonies at Nigaha at the shrine of Sarvar, forgetting about their temples and pilgrimage centers.

The attractions of visiting Sufi shrines were to be countered by placing people more firmly within 'their' specific religious and social practices. What is also surprising in Ditt Singh's advice to various castes is the manner in which he seeks to 'retrieve' and pin caste and community prejudice in relation to Chamars and Muslims. Here the notion of caste as organic in nature that marks and differentiates the somatic substances of different bodies is at play, the extension of which is the idea of untouchability (*chhua-chhut*). Significantly, the Muslim is made the target of this bodily repugnance along with the Chamar, both within and outside an overarching caste hierarchy.

This cluster of ideas again comes through when the reformer Ditt Singh attempts unraveling the myths associated with Sarvar, one of which relates to Sarvar protecting cattle (*dangar*) from a tiger's attack by a single swish of his sword. To show the ordinariness of this supposedly saintly miracle Ditt Singh relates an incident when a Chamar/Chamreta accomplished a similar feat. The followers of Sarvar are portrayed as horrified at this comparison between a highborn saint, a Sayyid, and a Chamreta! However, the reformer Singh stands their argument on its head by asking the Brahman if he was 'higher' than a Muslim in caste hierarchy, and then goes on to speak of the revulsion inherent in worshipping a Muslim saint:

The Musaman is called a *mlechh*, when does a Brahman eat at his house?

And if he does he should be called a murderer, and ostracized from *dharma* and *karma*.

The Chamar does not kill a cow, but takes the skin off a dead one.

So we call him low, and do not sit near him.

But these Musalman butchers kill a living cow.

So they are our enemies, we will never benefit by associating with them.<sup>87</sup>

How does one disaggregate a tangle of prejudices embedded in these lines? A striking reversal of cultural role assigned to Sarvar is transforming him from a Krishna-like cow-protector to a universal Muslim cow-slayer, and therefore the recipient of the odious title *mlechh*, rather than recognized as a venerable Saiyyad!<sup>88</sup> The saint, with his benefactions to animals and humans, his rich mythology of bringing the dead alive,<sup>89</sup> is reduced in Ditt Singh's literalist writing to not only an ordinary mortal, but one who represents the other Muslim, the target here of unabashed hate. In this pamphlet, Ditt Singh uses the epithet *miyan*<sup>90</sup> even more than *mlechh* to show contempt towards Muslims. While the epithet (*mlechh*) ostensibly places the Muslim outside the framework of the Brahmanical caste system, however, its use in this instance seems to fix him as the lowest in the graded hierarchy of the caste system with the same logic that puts the untouchable outside caste, *but only in relation to it*. Thus there is the simultaneous incorporation/expropriation of the Muslim in a framework of hierarchy, the same that includes/excludes the untouchable. Moreover, here clearly the rules of *chhua chhut* are followed by the Khalsa, the reforming Ditt Singh, who distinguishes himself from the Sarvar pilgrims precisely through maintaining this aspect of caste practice. If the Khalsa in other situations are expected to give up caste praxis, here its regimen must apply even more sharply to them when in contact with a Muslim – *main han Singh aap tu miyan, tere baithe neer na piyan* (I am a Singh and you a *miyan*, I can not drink water in your presence).<sup>91</sup> However, unlike the Chamar, who is also dissuaded from joining the Sarvar pilgrimage, and is therefore seen as part and parcel of the Hindu-Sikh 'community', the Muslim is clearly identified as the enemy (*vairi*). In *Nakli Sikh* too the same point is reiterated.<sup>92</sup> Or even when the various *pirs* of the Punjab popular among women, as for example Miran, are taken on by Ditt Singh, he says the same: 'what colours are abloom, a *miyan* in the house of Sikhs!<sup>93</sup>

However, it must be emphasized that in other contexts and on a different register, Ditt Singh could also consciously 'own' Muslims as belonging to the culture of 'Hindustan', or on many occasions the religious identity of a person did not come into play. In a changed context the Muslims appear intrinsically as a part of the Indian landscape, naturally a part of its culture. This underscores the effort that was required to disentangle and mark as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' a common heritage, even though the idea of religiously etched identities was not completely novel in the Punjab. Thus, at one juncture, in *Nakli Sikh* Ditt Singh sees the Christian doctrines and traditions as the 'other', which did not belong to a north Indian ethos. Speaking of the 'conditions of the Christians' (*Isaian da Haal*), Singh says that according to the Gospels (*anjil*) Jesus was extremely restless and unhappy before his impending execution. He speaks of Jesus being hanged rather than crucified, which perhaps points to Ditt Singh's limited interaction with the missionaries. However, he contrasts what he sees as the pitiable state of Jesus with that of

Mansur, who in popular Punjabi parlance went to the gallows smiling, and Shams Tabrez, who evidently did not utter a cry when his skin was torn off him and filled with hay by the king of Multan, or indeed the ninth Guru Tegh Bahadur, who bravely faced his beheading on the orders of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.<sup>94</sup> The appearance of the Sikh Guru on the same register of personal valor as the ‘martyr of love’ Mansur, and Shams Tabrez is noteworthy. Even more intriguing is the Punjabi ownership of Mansur-al-Hallaj, a ninth century mystic of Baghdad, albeit who is said to have traveled to north-west India in his peregrinations; and Shams Tabrez, said to be the preceptor of Jalaludin Rumi, the thirteenth century mystic from Turkey. Both these figures appear repeatedly in the folklore of the Punjab, in localized myths, and Ditt Singh in *Pratigya Palan* too made an exemplum of their lives, elaborating on the martyrdom associated with both.<sup>95</sup>

What also appears perplexing, considering his own caste background, is Ditt Singh’s derision of the Chamars. Not only does he advise the Brahmans and Jats from staying aloof from them, he also evokes norms of untouchability to underscore the pollution encountered in such contact. And these instances discussed by him of distancing from the low castes can be multiplied. A particularly interesting example is his ridiculing of the *bhanda*s and *mirasis*, actors of local farces (*swangs*), who entertained their patrons occasionally by dressing in different caste costumes. The *Mirasis* were otherwise also the genealogists, musicians and bards of the Punjab. Noting how they often turned out sartorially as rich *Khatri*s (*sahukars*), wearing turbans, *dhotis*, caste marks (*tilak*) and carrying pens and account books (*bahis*), but when the performance was over they reverted to their traditional base status – *mangte Mirasi* (beggar *Mirasis*), he underlined that the inherent nature of a person did not change, that is in reality a *Dum-Mirasi* stayed as such, and did not/could not become a high caste.<sup>96</sup> The point here was about the constancy of the inherited caste status, for Ditt Singh uses the common nomenclature – *Dum* and *Mirasis* – the Hindu and Muslim bards, terms often used in unison in the Punjab, which underplayed the significance of ‘religious’ identity, emphasizing one of caste.<sup>97</sup> In *Sultan Puara* again, when the reforming Sikh offers to all castes the possibility of becoming the *Khalsa* and so giving up their given caste status, Ditt Singh makes a special case for the *Chuhra*s and *Chamars*, that *even they* can become *Singhs*.<sup>98</sup>

How does one square this with either a theoretical position that Sikhs, particularly the *Khalsa*, disapproved of caste, or with Ditt Singh’s own *Ravidasi* upbringing? We can argue that caste prejudices were so deeply internalized, that despite the rationale against caste practices provided by the *Gulabdasis*, the *Arya Samajis*, or the *Singh Sabhaites*, and his own careful statements on the issue, Ditt Singh still spoke in caste terms, and imbibed and perpetuated oppressive and humiliating behavior towards the low castes. Alternatively, we can suggest that he homed on to the best way to create a cleavage between the *Hindus* and *Sikhs* on the one hand, and the *Muslims* on the other, by re-invoking and re-focusing caste prejudices by projecting them to the *Muslims*, though this strategy had deleterious repercussions on the low

castes as well. By recouping caste identities he could attempt to break practices like saint worship that were unacceptable to the Sabhaites. A third possibility is, however, suggested by Ditt Singh himself at various times in his pamphlets. This was the miraculous transmutation that occurred on becoming a Khalsa. The initiation into the Khalsa, which was now projected by the Sabhaites as the normative Sikh identity, ensured that everyone became of the caste status of the Guru, a Chhatri/Khatri/Kshatriya. Incidentally, this also shows that in the Punjab, the Khatri, otherwise a caste associated with shop keeping, trading, and the professions, were regularly conflated with the Kshatriya status as we will see. Thus, the Khalsa initiation became both the simplest route to upward mobility and its advocacy could be the surest way to make this identity attractive to all Sikhs. Ditt Singh on initiation had given up his earlier status, he could assert, and such a transformation was available to all. He subtly enunciates such an interpretation of the initiation ceremony, the taking of *amrit*, in both the tracts under discussion.

In *Sultan Puara* Ditt Singh invites all to take the *amrit*, give up previous caste and become a brave Chhatri:

The power of this *amrit* let me tell you of it.  
On tasting it all become brothers, giving up their old castes.  
You become a brave Singh, Chhatri son of the Guru.  
Breaking with (worshipping of) graves, cremation grounds,  
Gugga, Miran and *pirs*.

A similar sentiment is expressed in *Nakli Sikh*, where Ditt Singh explicates the meaning of taking on the Khalsa identity as becoming brave Chhatris.<sup>99</sup>

It can be argued that Ditt Singh was advocating a metaphorical transition to 'Chhatriness', the imbibing of the martial qualities of the Kshatriya, rather than any literal transformation of the caste of a person. In every instance where he speaks of becoming a Chhatri, he does so while delineating military values of valour and prowess at war. In *Sultan Puara* he even brings the contemporary participation of the Sikhs in the British Indian army that apparently fought bravely in China, Burma, Kabul, Qandahar, and Egypt, to draw attention to the power of *amrit* and appropriate these victories to the cause of Khalsa identity.<sup>100</sup> Of course, as maintained by Richard Fox, there was a significant congruence between the British attempts at recruiting Khalsa Sikhs in the army, their admiration of the warrior qualities of the Khalsa, and the Sabha endeavor to render Sikhs Khalsa and martial.<sup>101</sup>

Two further points may be made in relation to this martial transmutation. Firstly, a note must be made of the idiom of miracle in which the initiation into the Khalsa was invariably presented in the nineteenth century Sabha literature. One only has to read Bhai Vir Singh's *Sundri* to appreciate the projection of the miraculous power of the initiation *amrit*, instantaneously transforming individuals into paragons of valor. In a period when the miraculous was purportedly unraveling under the assault of the rational and the humdrum, as Ditt Singh himself undertook in relation to Sarvar's magical powers, the

miracle of the *amrit* remained an exception in Sikh literature. So while the Chuhras, Chamars or Mirasis must remain as such, those who turned Khalsa could hope for change. The message was not about a society without the framework of caste, as one of elevating one's position within it by becoming the Khalsa. This worked, unsurprisingly, in tandem with the Arya Samaj's notion of caste in proportion to talent. The reformers of the time dared not imagine a society without the institution of caste.

Secondly, Ditt Singh was not alone in understanding Khalsa initiation as ushering a change of status. In fact, he may have been endorsing a view that had a wider, and an older currency. His contemporary, Giani Gian Singh, a prolific scholar of Nirmala persuasion, wrote in his influential *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* about the meaning of initiation as 'From today you belong to the Sodhi lineage of the Khatri caste<sup>102</sup> of the Khalsa. Your name is Singh and your abode Anandpur....'<sup>103</sup> In other words, entering the ranks of the Khalsa was often depicted as bringing one in proximity to the tenth Guru, and an incorporation within his caste. Also, it was the Khatri, with their purported Kshatriya antecedents, who were ascribed the militaristic values imbibed by the Khalsa. Despite suffering humiliations for his caste in his personal life, it is possible that Ditt Singh held fast to the belief that his initiation into the Khalsa changed his status, and this may explain at least in some small measure his contempt for the low castes.

Yet another manner in which the issue of caste cropped up was on the question of the *biradari*, caste brotherhoods/lineages, which played an important role in life-cycle ceremonies, and defined at the local level the social status of families. The question was a tangled one, for if marriages were endogamous, that is took place within prescribed caste categories, then the issue of caste and *biradari* took precedence over that of Sikh identity. This problem also then linked up with the relationship between Sikh 'community' and the Hindu 'community'. Ditt Singh was cognizant of the problem, and made an effort to tackle it. For instance, the Singh Sabha reformers urged the Khalsa Sikhs to marry their daughters to the Khalsas, theoretically of any caste, but realized that this was not always possible and the caste norms were invariably followed. The response to this dilemma was the advice to make sons-in-law 'Singhs':

Get engaged to each other, and become the true brothers of the community.  
Do not give a daughter to one who is not a Singh, do not do this for any reason.  
On giving a daughter make a Singh, and increase the *panth* of the Guru.<sup>104</sup>

But the problem was more intractable, as it was impossible to disentangle the 'community' affiliation between friends, relatives and caste brotherhoods. In a fairly perceptive moment Ditt Singh hit the nub of the problem when he had the '*nakli*' Sikh proclaim:



Commensality and relations, are tangled with each-other.  
 There is no enmity between us, so why should we make a  
 separate *qaum*.  
 The Hindu religion is dear to us, it is our great support.<sup>105</sup>

In response to how Sikhs should define their relationship with Hindus, Ditt Singh once again gives contradictory prescriptions and ties himself up in knots. On the one hand, he tells his readers to look at the relationship between the Hindus and the Sikhs as that between Judaism and Christianity – the one having originated from the other (*apne aap nun Hindu qaum vichon hi banya hoya samajh*),<sup>106</sup> but conscious of differences and having established itself as separate.<sup>107</sup> Guru Gobind Singh must then be seen as the true *avatar*, and the *Guru Granth* as their separate book. In this spirit Ditt Singh seemingly concedes the popular assumption that the Sikh Granth was no more than an exegesis of the Vedas, put in a simple language because of the difficulty of understanding Sanskrit! Rather, he had no intention of turning the Sikhs away from either Hinduism or the Vedas – *Hindu dharam ar Ved nun samjho apni dhal* (view the Hindu religion and Vedas as your shield).<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, within the space of two pages, he changes track, and declares that the Hindu and Sikh faiths were mutually destructive – *ik duje de ghati*.<sup>109</sup> Relying on the significance of the five bodily symbols that increasingly for the Sabhaites defined the essence of the Khalsa, Ditt Singh gives the scenario of a Khalsa going to Gaya (in Bihar) to undertake ancestor related rituals (*pind bharan*) as likely to shed all his bodily symbols to fulfill these. Similarly a Hindu would have to give up his topknot, *dhoti* and the sacred thread on becoming a Khalsa. In other words, it was best to see the Sikhs as a third *panth*, or community, different from the Hindus and the Turks.<sup>110</sup>

### Conclusion

The last quarter of the nineteenth century in the Punjab was a time of transition. In hindsight we tend to assume the pace of change faster than it was, and progressing in a linear trajectory than probably was the case. There were people, institutions and cultures that were caught in the middle, at times uncomprehending the change, at others as midwives ushering in a new era. Ditt Singh combined in his person both an agency of change, and a welter of cultural practices he sought to later shed from his person and from the community whose separate identity he discursively tried to project. The constitution of public life, the meaning, performance and reception of religious discourses, the very stuff of religious controversies and debates, got transformed in these years. Having been at the forefront of controversies and debates as a Gulabdasi preacher – whether on the message of the Vedanta, the sagacity of *varnashramadharm* – or in popular eye because of participating as a young *qissakar* in the effervescent charm of the love of Shirin and Farhad,

‘Sant’ Ditta Ram or Ditta Ram ‘Faqir’, enjoyed a place in the public life of colonial Punjab, but one that carried the flavor of an older Punjab.

As he found his feet in the late 1880s as ‘*Giani*’ Ditt Singh, the controversies and debates around him changed, and he participated in the new environment. After almost a decade or more of staying within overlapping associations and identities, he threw his weight behind the Lahore Singh Sabha’s attempt at forging a sharper and a clearer Sikh/Khalsa identity. This required him and other pioneers of his ilk to undertake the labyrinthine and difficult task of fitting cultures to the merits of the identities being constructed. It would be wrong to assume that this self-fashioning emerged out of a vacuum. Yet it is also clear that enormous sifting and defining of cultures had to be undertaken in order to ‘plant the banner of Sikhism,’ to use Singh’s words, as a distinct community. This meant commenting on who the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were. This was not easy, and Ditt Singh sometimes grouped Hindus and Sikhs together, othering the Muslims, and at others, tried to spell out the differences between the Hindus and the Sikhs.

A rethinking on the question of caste was the order of the day and the Sabhaites and the Arya Samajis, both in their own ways, initiated this process. Ditt Singh’s Ravidasi background perhaps invested his contribution to this effort with an urgency and edge that other stalwarts’ writing on the matter may not have experienced. But to assume that it also gave him clarity on the issue would be wrong. The deep-rooted nature of the institution, a plethora of available interpretations, the attractions of upward mobility, and the strategy of using its divisive and derisive power to make cleavages between communities, could all be exploited at different points of time depending on the need of the occasion. Thus, in the corpus of Ditt Singh’s writing, we find ambiguity, vacillation and fickleness in maintaining a single, coherent line of reform. Perhaps his belonging to the time he did – with its changeability and instability – may explain partially Ditt Singh’s protean stances. Perhaps the rich and pluralistic cultural ambience he had imbibed early in his life gave him an intellectual and cultural breadth that was difficult to shed or narrow down to the extent the new identity making required. Nevertheless, he sowed the seeds of many a line of argument that would be later developed by his fellow reformers.

Ditt Singh’s niche in history will also be determined by what his followers attribute to him, and he is being resurrected today as a *dalit* hero who condemned the idea of caste. Those among the *dalits* who are specifically seeking-out his legacy, are more keen to portray the personal obstacles he may have surmounted to reach a position of public leadership and respectability. Careful calibrations of his shifting stands on caste would interest them a little less. However, given the continuing frisson on the question of caste and its relevance to identity politics in the Indian Punjab, we may wish to understand Ditt Singh’s equivocation on the issue. We might reflect on why despite many banishments and mutations, the issue of caste remains alive within Sikhism.

**Notes**

1. As modern middle class identities were shaped there came to be an embarrassment with the idea of caste. See Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 2. On delegitimizing of caste for middle class identity see Sanjay Joshi, 'Introduction', to his *The Middle Class in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xxxix-xl.
2. Tony Ballantyne, 'Resisting the "Boa Constrictor" of Hinduism: The Khalsa and the Raj,' *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, 6 (2), 1999, pp. 195-216.
3. Harjot Oberoi comments on the success of the Tat Khalsa in defining Sikh identity and separation from what he calls the *sanatan* paradigm. See his *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Religion* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994). Unless otherwise pointed out all subsequent references to Oberoi are from this work. W.H. McLeod has consistently noted the issue of caste in the making of Sikh identity, but has discussed caste as a persistent social problem, rather than one stemming from ambiguity of stand. See his *Who is a Sikh: The Problem of Sikh Identity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) pp. 62-81. Ballantyne emphasizes the continuing diversity of Sikhs and has brought the perspective of the Sikh diaspora. However, he does not note the ambiguity on the issue of caste, and in fact quotes Ditt Singh to iterate the Lahore Sabha's apparently unambiguous stance on caste. See his *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007), pp. 57-58.
4. For a succinct discussion of various perspectives see Ishita Banerjee-Dube (ed.), 'Introduction: Questions of Caste,' in *Caste in History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xv-lxiv.
5. Susan Bayly, 'Introduction,' to her *Caste, Society and Politics in India: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [1999]), pp. 1-24.
6. Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
7. Joshi, *The Middle Class*, pp. xxxvi-xliv.
8. W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1996) [1968]. Karine Schomer & W.H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1987).

9. W.H. McLeod, 'Caste in the Sikh Panth,' in his *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996 [1976]), pp. 83-104. More recently, his 'Sikhs and Caste,' in Tony Ballantyne, ed. *Textures of the Sikh Past: New Historical Perspectives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 104-31.
10. Among McLeod's contributions on the subject is his *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).
11. See Louis Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the Game of Love* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005 [2000]).
12. Bhai Vir Singh, *Sundri* (Punjabi), (New Delhi: Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, 1983 [1898]).
13. McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, p. 52.
14. *Ibid.*, p.130.
15. Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
16. One of the five ks – *kes* or unshorn hair, is mandatory for the Khalsa Sikhs, the others being in parlance of the Sabhaites, *kachh* (long drawers), *kara* (steel bangle), *kirpan* (small sword), and *kangha* (comb). The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh is said to have instituted the Khalsa, exhorting the Sikhs to turn Khalsa by taking the baptism of the double edged sword (*khande ki pahul*), and to maintain certain bodily and behavioral practices, or the *rahit*. However, according to McLeod (*The Sikhs of the Khalsa*), exactly what these practices were is not clear, the early *rahit* not even mentioning all five, or the same five ks. The Singh Sabha sought to create uniformity on such somatic symbolism.
17. The Sabhaites interpreted *sahajdhari* as those gradually turning Khalsa. However, the term could also refer to the Sikhs who believed in ineffable bliss (*sahaj*) as the highest spiritual goal.
18. McLeod, *The Sikhs of the Khalsa*, p. 164.
19. K.S. Singh (ed.), *People of India – Punjab – vol. XXXVII* (Delhi: Manohar, 2003), pp. xxvi; xliv.
20. 'It was Waiting to Happen', *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi: 28 May 2009).

21. Lionel Baixas, 'The Dera Sacha Sauda Controversy and Beyond', *Economic and Political Weekly*, (henceforth *EPW*), 6 October 2007, pp. 4059-74.
22. John C.B. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation: An Examination of Perspectives* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002) pp. 16-17.
23. Instructions to census officers in 1931 in the Punjab asked them to enumerate as Hindu all Chuhras who were not Muslims or Christians and did not return any other religion. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Social Vision of the Untouchables* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988) p. 73.
24. Denzil Ibbetson notes in his 1881 Census report, 'The scavenger on becoming a Musalman will refuse to remove night soil, and on becoming a Sikh will take to tanning or leather-working. The tanner and leather-worker on becoming a Musalman will give up tanning, and on taking the Sikh *pahul* will turn his hand to the loom, and so forth'. *Panjab Castes* (Patiala: Languages Department Punjab, 1970 [rpt.]) p. 268.
25. On the Gulabdasis and Udasis see Anshu Malhotra, 'Panths and Piety in the Nineteenth Century: The Gulabdasis of Punjab', in *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture and Practice*, ed., Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 189-220.
26. The preface of Pritam Singh's eight-volume collection of Ditt Singh's writings makes this interest in *dalit* literature clear. He speaks of Ditt Singh's rise from a downtrodden society (*dabbe-kuchle dalit samaj*), and introduces himself as the author of *Dalit Rattman di Mala (A Necklace of Dalit Gems)*. See *Panth Rattan Bhai Ditt Singh Giani – Rachnavali, Bhag I* (Punjabi), (Mohali: published by author, 2005), pp. 1-3. Gurditt Singh, a biographer of Ditt Singh, also mentions his humble origins, noting prejudice against him because of his 'poor caste' (*garib jati*). See *Giani Ditt Singh: Jiwan Ate Rachna* (Punjabi), (Chandigarh: Dharam Prachar Committee (SGPC), 1998), p. 4.
27. See, for instance, *Giani Amar Singh, Jiwan Charitter Singh Sabha Lehar de Ughe Sanchalak Giani Ditt Singh Ji* (Punjabi), (Amritsar: Gulab Singh Malak Firm, 1962).
28. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh*, p. 70; Madhu Kishwar, 'Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar,' *EPW*, April, 1986.
29. Shamsheer Singh Ashok in his preface to Ditta Ram's *Shirin Farhad*, proffers 1850 as the year of his birth based on oral information. Ashok also suggests that Ditta Ram was born in village Jhalian Kalan, rather than

Anandpur Kalaur, Patiala, that the rest agree on. See Sant Ditta Ram (*urf Giani Ditt Singh*), *Shirin Farhad* (Punjabi), (Ludhiana: Punjabi Sahit Academy, n.d.). The year 1852 is suggested by Amar Singh in *Jiwan Charitter*, and Narinder Singh Kapoor, *Giani Ditt Singh: Jiwan te Rachna* (Punjabi), (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1987). The year 1853 is noted by Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1996), vol. I, pp. 589-90; Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab* (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), p. 329.

30. If this information were correct, it would indicate that Ditta Ram arrived at Chathianwala in the lifetime of the founder of the sect Gulab Das (d. 1873). His first piece of writing, the *qissa* of *Shirin Farhad*, was dedicated to Gulab Das.

31. *Sadhu Dayanand Nal Mera Sambad* (Punjabi), in Gurditt Singh, *Giani Ditt Singh*, pp. 43-82. In this Ditt Singh sketchily mentions his early life. It is important to remember the polemical nature of this work, and his words should not be taken at face value, as some writers have done.

32. *Ibid.*, p.45.

33. On Peero see Anshu Malhotra, 'Telling Her Tale? Unravelling a Life in Conflict in Peero's *Ik Sau Sath Kafian (One Hundred and Sixty Kafis)*', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 46, no.2, 2009, pp. 541-78.

34. Ashok refers to the Gulabdasis as 'free thinking' (*azad khayaliye*), pointing to their disregard for social taboos. He notes the immense popularity of what he calls the 'Sufi type' Gulabdasis among the Punjabis and Sikhs, their ideas spreading like a 'dust storm'. See his preface to Ditta Ram, *Shirin Farhad*, p. 5.

35. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, p.302.

36. Gulab Das was a Jat, and he 'adopted' a successor to his *gaddi* (seat) from the Kumhar or Potter caste. Giani Gian Singh, *Sri Guru Panth Prakash* (Punjabi), (Patiala: Bhasha Vibhag, 1990 [1880]), pp. 1292-95.

37. For Jawahir Singh Kapoor see *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, pp. 372-73.

38. On Gulab Das' writings and philosophy see Gian Inder Sewak, *Gulabdasi Sampradaye: Rachna Ate Vichar* (Punjabi), Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1984) pp.169-71.

39. *Ibid.*, pp.200-1.

40. Ibid., pp. 236-38.
41. Ibid., pp. 229-30. Three of Ditta Ram's writings, *Shirin Farhad*, *Abla Nind* and *Mansambodhan* are attributed to his pre-Singh Sabha phase.
42. Pritam Singh, *Panth Ratan*, vol. I, p. 54. The original reads as:
- Koi kosh te kavi nun parhan baithe, koi baith Ramayan gan  
beli.  
Koi tib te bab nun dekhde je, koi gaune te jor paun beli.  
Parhan ik tauhid nun shauq beli, baithe ulfatan nal sunaun  
beli ...  
Koi ashqan di gal tor denda, khol qissyan de varqan beli.*
43. Ibid., p. 101. All translations from Punjabi of Ditt Singh's writings in this essay are mine. I visited Chathianwala, now in Pakistan, on 25 May 2008. An elderly person corroborated the architectural details of the *dera*. While the tomb where Gulab Das and Peero lie buried is now dilapidated, he told of the earlier existence of a beautiful pond (*sarovar*) with a bridge across it, which is now destroyed.
44. Sewak, *Gulabdasi Sampradaye*, p. 115. Sewak speaks of centers opening up in Ferozepur, Patiala, Ropar, Ambala, Jalandhar, Karnal, Amritsar, Kasur, Pothohar, Sialkot, Sindh and Balochistan.
45. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 36-37.
46. Ibid., p. 33.
47. Dayanand's vacillation between caste by birth and by talent is examined in Anshu Malhotra: 'The Body as a Metaphor for the Nation: Caste, Masculinity and Femininity in the *Satyarth Prakash* of Dayanand Sarasvati', in Avril A. Powell and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (eds.), *Rhetoric and Reality: Gender and the Colonial Experience in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 121-53.
48. Ibid., p.135. This quotation is from Chiranjiva Bharadwaja's translation of the *Satyarth Prakash* called *Light of Truth* (New Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, 2003 [rpt.]), p. 98.
49. Giani Ditt Singh, *Nakli Sikh Prabodh*, in Pritam Singh, *Panth Ratan Bhai Ditt Singh Giani, Rachnavali – Bhag 8* (Mohali, 2007), p. 146.
50. Quoted in Narinder S. Kapoor, *Giani Ditt Singh*, p. 114.

51. M.M. Amol, *Bhai Takht Singh da Jiwan te Panth Seva* (Punjabi manuscript), 1938, pp. 12-5. I thank Mahima Manchanda for bringing this work to my notice.
52. Amar Singh, *Jiwan Charitter*, pp. 74-75; Kapoor, *Giani Ditt Singh*, p. 17.
53. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 135-39.
54. See Harbans Singh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 589-90. The honorific 'Giani' before Ditt Singh's name may not signify his passing this examination. According to Ditt Singh he was called *Giani* because he started preaching at a young age. *Sadhu Dayanand Nal Mera Sambad*, p. 45.
55. Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 135-39.
56. Amar Singh, *Jiwan Charitter*, p. 54.
57. The 'defeat' of the Swami is underlined by Gurditt Singh, *Giani Ditt Singh*, p. 4. Ashok also dates the pamphlet to 1877, *Shirin Farhad*, p. 8.
58. See also, Amar Singh, *Jiwan Charitter*, pp. 61-69.
59. See the note on Gurmukh Singh in Harbans Singh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia*, vol. II, pp. 185-87.
60. See the note on Ditt Singh in Harbans Singh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia*, vol. I, pp. 589-90.
61. Amar Singh, *Jiwan Charitter*, p. 59.
62. Gurditt Singh, *Giani Ditt Singh*, p.46. According to Amar Singh, Ditt Singh in his Gulabdasi days practiced Udasi/Gulabdasi asceticism that required him to smear his body with ashes and meditate in graveyards and cremation grounds, practices that later became the target of his wrath. See *Jiwan Charitter*, p. 15.
63. Gian Singh, *Panth Prakash*, p. 1293.
64. On Dayanand's life and thought see J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati: His Life and Ideas* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978).
65. The point about interaction with western education and institutions of the Lahore reformers is made too blithely. McLeod, for example, writes about the Lahore Sabhaites that they 'essentially thought in western terms...' *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, p. 159.



66. Ditt Singh is credited with more than forty books/pamphlets.
67. Kapoor makes the point that Ditt Singh used Braj for philosophical issues and Punjabi for his exhortative works. *Giani Ditt Singh*, pp. 131-32. Ashok also comments on Ditt Singh's use of Bhasha (Braj) in works like *Supan Nataak*, *Abla Nind*, *Guru Nanak Prabodh* and *Mansambodhan*, and notes his comfort with Persian and Urdu in *qissas*. *Shirin Farhad*, p. 9.
68. On the politics of language in Punjab see Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
69. Kapoor, *Giani Ditt Singh*, p.145.
70. Bhai Ditt Singh *Giani*, *Sultan Puara* (6th edition, n.p., n.d.).
71. Pritam Singh, *Panth Ratan*, vol. 8, p. 98.
72. *Nakli Sikh*, p. 133.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
74. *Dharamsal te thakurdware pichhe kite sare, paun mundian de ja janeyu Sarvar de darbare* (dharamsalas and temples have been abandoned, boys are made to wear the sacred thread in the court of Sarvar). *Sultan Puara*, p. 2.
75. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh*, p.50; *idem*, *The Sikhs of the Khalsa*, pp. 169-70.
76. *Sultan Puara*, p. 6.
77. *Bharais* were the 'priests' of Sarvar, and took parties of pilgrims to the shrine at Nigaha near Dera Ghazi Khan in north-west Punjab. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, p. 229.
78. *Sultan Puara*, p. 3. In Ditt Singh's words:
- Pir bhai ban ke eh sare chale Sarvar de darbare.  
Zat pat nun khu dubaiya bharai nun cha pir banaiya.*
79. *Nakli Sikh*, pp. 164-65.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
81. *Ibid.*, pp.172-74. Ditt Singh puts it evocatively:
- Kaun Sikh hunde ho bhai? Main Arora ih hai Nai.*

*Teri Sikha ki hai jaat? Nama bansi Chhimba bhrat.  
Tera dudh kaun hai pyare? Asi Singh han Jat karare.  
Tera janam kina de ghar da? Main han Mehra pani bharda.*

82. Ibid., pp. 105-8.

83. Ibid., p. 109.

84. Bhai Ditt Singh *Giani, Pratigya Palan* (Punjabi), (Lahore: Khalsa Press, 1896).

85. *Sultan Puara*, pp. 10-11.

86. Ibid., p. 16.

87. Ibid., pp. 9-10. The original is as under:

*Musalman mlechh kahave, kad Bahman usde ghar khave.  
Jo khave soi hatyara, dharam karam te gaya nikara.  
Uh Chamiar gau nahin mare, mari hoi da cham utare.  
Tante neech asi us kehnde, jis de pas mul na behnde.  
Par eh Musalman hatiyare, gau jin vdi nun far mare.  
Jiste eh sade han vairi, inde nal mile nahin khairi.*

88. There were other myths that associated Sarvar with ‘Hindu’ deities Bhairon and Hanuman, also discussed in Ditt Singh’s pamphlet. On the cultural reach of Sarvar in colonial Punjab see Harjot Oberoi, ‘The Worship of Sakhi Sarvar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in the Punjab’, *Studies in History*, vol. 3, no.1, 1987, pp. 29-55.

89. The saint was said to have brought his dead mare, Bakki, alive – another myth Ditt Singh tried to demystify. The saint was also supplicated for boons of sons, and is said to have restored to life the dead son of Dani Jatti. Ditt Singh advertised in this pamphlet and in the *Khalsa Akhbar* that Dani’s progeny gave up the worship of Sarvar under the influence of Singh Sabha preaching. For a discussion of this episode see Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities*, p.176.

90. Though the term *mlechh* has received scholarly attention, the epithet *miyan* has not been considered. When this term becomes opprobrious is difficult to say. I have noticed its usage in the writing of the Gulabdasi Peero. Ditt Singh also uses terms ‘Turak’ and ‘Musalman’ for Muslims.

91. *Sultan Puara*, p. 46.

92. *Nakli Sikh*, pp. 167-69.

93. Ibid., p. 188.
94. Ibid., pp. 114-15.
95. *Pratigya Palan*, pp. 33-37.
96. *Nakli Sikh*, p. 171.
97. Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, p. 234.
98. *Sultan Puara*, p. 72.
99. *Nakli Sikh*, pp. 148, 158.
100. *Sultan Puara*, p. 71.
101. Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
102. All the Gurus from the fourth Guru onwards were Sodhi Khattris.
103. Gian Singh, quoted in McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, p. 45.
104. *Nakli Sikh*, p. 164.
105. Ibid., p. 212.
106. Ibid., p. 210.
107. Ibid., pp. 208-10.
108. Ibid., p. 208.
109. Ibid., p. 213.
110. Ibid., p. 221.



## **Issues of Sikh Identity: Sanatanist-Sikh Debate**

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In the wake of growing awareness about identities and relative numerical proportions towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Sanatanist Hindus started asserting that the Sikhs were Hindus. The protagonists of the Lahore Singh Sabha insisted in response that the Sikhs had a distinct religious identity of their own. In 1897, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha wrote his *Ham Hindu Nahin* in Hindi, to be followed by the Gurmukhi version, to question the Sanatanist contention and to explain how Sikhs were distinct from Hindus. By the time he brought out the fifth revised and enlarged edition of this work in Gurmukhi in 1920, the Sikh position seemed clearly articulated and established. However, this debate had been sharpened meanwhile by the legal contest over Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia's Will, removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple, and the Anand Marriage Act. The Sanatanists persisted in their assertion that the Sikhs were Hindu, refusing to enter into any serious dialogue and merely explaining away 'Sikh separatism'.

It has been pointed out recently that the 'Hindu' participant in the debate about Sikh identity in Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's *Hum Hindu Nahin* is a Sanatanist and not an Arya.<sup>1</sup> This raises the question: what did the Sanatanists who constituted an overwhelming majority among Punjabi Hindus think of Sikh identity? The question is important because, generally it has been assumed or asserted that the debate on whether the Sikhs were Hindus was conducted by the *tat-khalsa* and the Arya Samajists.<sup>2</sup> This paper focuses on the view of Sanatanist Hindus towards Sikh identity and their attitude towards issues involving Sikh identity.

### I

The earliest known leader of the Sanatan Dharm movement in the Punjab, Pandit Sharda Ram Phillauri (1837-1881), did not show much concern with Hindu-Sikh identity in his *Sikhan de Raj di Vithya* (The Story of Sikh Rule) published in 1865.<sup>3</sup> The Bharat Dharm Mahamandal did not show any interest in the issue of the identity of the Sikhs in its first report of 1889.<sup>4</sup> In 1897, however, in a large public meeting at Lahore the Sanatanist Hindus passed a resolution that the Sikhs were a part of the Hindu community.<sup>5</sup>

The question of Sikh identity became a legal issue when Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia died in September 1898 and his widow contested his Will, claiming that the Hindu law of inheritance under which he had given his

property in trust did not apply to a Sikh. The Chief Court of the Punjab ruled that Dyal Singh was, in fact, a Hindu. The Bharat Dharm Mahamandal took notice of this issue and passed a resolution in a meeting at Delhi, asserting that the ten Gurus of the Sikhs from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh were Hindus. Furthermore, Baba Khem Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak, and Bawa Sumer Singh (Bhalla), a descendant of Guru Amar Das, subscribed to the view that Sikhs were Hindu.<sup>6</sup>

The *Akhbar-i Am* blamed certain members of the Managing Committee of the Khalsa College at Amritsar for the unsatisfactory condition of that premier institution because their assertion that Sikhs were not Hindus had alienated the sympathies of seven-eighth of the Sikh population.<sup>7</sup> The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette* praised the Maharaja of Patiala for declaring that it was a mistake to suppose that the Hindus and Sikhs constituted separate 'nations' because the Khalsa always sacrificed their lives for the protection of the Hindu religion. The Sanatanists hoped that the Maharaja of Patiala would emulate his Gurus and his predecessors and support the cause of the Hindu religion in every possible way.<sup>8</sup> Lala Hari Chand, a Collector in the Kapurthala state, argued in the *Akhbar-i Am* that Sikhism was 'an offshoot of the Hindu religion'.<sup>9</sup> The *Akhbar-i Am* denounced the radical Sikh reformers for throwing away a *Shivling* installed in a temple situated in the circumambulatory passage (*parikrama*) of the Golden Temple. Similarly, a painting in another temple showing Guru Gobind Singh standing with folded hands before the Goddess was 'obliterated' with ink.<sup>10</sup>

The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette* quoted verses from the *Guru Granth Sahib* to show that Guru Nanak and his successors had accepted the authority of the Vedas and that the Sikhs believed in incarnation.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in the *Akhbar-i-Am*, a *pandit* quoted the *Guru Granth Sahib* to support the idea that Sikhs were Hindus. He also referred to the Census of 1891. Guru Gobind Singh transformed the Sikh community from a purely religious into a political association, and what was previously a quietist sect of the Hindus, now expanded to such an extent that strangers and even the people of the Punjab began to look upon the Sikhs as constituting a separate religion.<sup>12</sup> They had no right to be called a separate religious body as they did not possess a code of law or a scripture of their own.<sup>13</sup>

The removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple in May 1905 raised a controversy about Sikh identity. The manager (*sarbarah*) of the Golden Temple, Sardar Arur Singh, issued orders on 1 May 1905, prohibiting the Brahmans from sitting in the *parikrama* with the idols for worship and also forbade them from washing their clothes in the tank, besides spitting and rinsing their mouth in it. However, they could bathe, do *puja* and apply *tilak*.<sup>14</sup> While complying grudgingly with this order, the Sanatanists declared in a public notice (*ishtihar*) that Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus were Hindus. A meeting of the Hindus of Amritsar was held on 4 May 1905. It was resolved in the meeting that the manager of the Golden Temple had offended the feelings of Hindus by his unlawful interference with their right to conduct idol worship (*thakur puja*) around the sacred tank. The Golden Temple, which

was founded by Guru Ram Das, was especially held in veneration by all classes of Hindus of whom the 'Sanatan dharmis' formed the majority. They claimed that they had been performing their religious rites such as bathing, meditation, worshipping idols, singing hymns, and delivering sermons in accordance with the orthodox beliefs of their own religion 'from ancient times' at the Golden Temple.<sup>15</sup> They contended that the manager's arbitrary order (*Aurangzebi hukum*) wounded the feelings of all the Sahajdhari Sikhs who were more numerous than the Keshdhari Sikhs who were said to belong to the 'sect' of Guru Gobind Singh alone, and whose temples were situated only in Abchnagar (Nanded) and Patna. Guru Ram Das was Ram Das (i.e. not a Singh), and being a leader of the Hindus, was also a leader of the Keshdhari Sikhs.<sup>16</sup>

On 6 May 1905 the Brahmans returned with the idols to the Golden Temple. The matter was reported to the police by the manager and another order was issued by him on 7 May which was finally complied with.<sup>17</sup> But the Sanatanists continued to appeal to the government for over a year, and memorials were sent to the Lieutenant Governor. Seth Radha Krishan of Amritsar presented a petition, signed by 13,000 Hindus and Sikhs of Amritsar, asserting that only a small minority of the 'reformed' or 'heretical' Sikhs, who called themselves *tat-khalsa* ('neo-Sikhs'), held that the Sikh doctrines did not allow idols to be displayed in their temples. There was no reason to offend the majority of the 'Sanatanist Sikhs' even if it was admitted for the sake of argument that Sikhism in its purist form was opposed to idolatry.<sup>18</sup> The memorialists warned the authorities that 'the unprecedented step taken by the manager would create endless dissensions, disputes and sectarian animosity'.<sup>19</sup>

An important concern of the Singh reformers was the Anand Marriage Bill that was introduced by Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1908 to give legal recognition to the Sikh ceremony of marriage. Not only the Arya Samaj but also many conservative Sikhs were opposed to the Bill, including the *granthis* of the Golden Temple. The Anand marriage was regarded as an innovation of the Singh reformers by the opponents of the Bill. Hundreds of communications were sent to the government for and against the Bill.<sup>20</sup> H. Erle Richards, Member of the Governor General's Council pointed out in his letter to Sir Harvey Adamson, Home Member, that other than the Arya Samajists, the Hindus declined 'to recognize that the Sikhs are a distinct community from the Hindus'.<sup>21</sup> In October 1909 the Bill was passed.

The Sanatanist papers and periodicals took notice of the *tat-khalsa* who were probably irritated by the Sanatanist assertions about Sikh identity. The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette* alleged that the *tat-khalsa* insulted Hindu gods and goddesses in the lectures they delivered in Gurdwaras.<sup>22</sup> The *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak* in 1912 reported that in the religious debate held at the Sanatan Dharm Debating Club at Amritsar between the Hindus and the *tat-khalsa* in 1912, the latter conducted themselves in an 'unbecoming manner' and stooped low enough to 'abuse'. The *Parcharak* asserted that the Sikh Gurus had laid down their lives in defence of the Hindu community and religion when

Aurangzeb unsheathed his sword against Hindus. It was further asserted that the Hindus and the Sikhs belonged to the same stock because the Sikhs, their Gurus, and the parents of all the ten Gurus were Hindus.<sup>23</sup> The *Sanatan Dharm Patrika* accused a Sikh named Arjan Singh of wounding the religious sentiments of the Sanatanists in a Punjabi poem in which he refers to Krishna as his brother-in-law (*behnoi*).<sup>24</sup>

In the arguments put forth by the Sanatanists it is contended that the Sikh claim to distinct identity was something new as it was espoused by a small minority, that is the *tat-khalsa*. The Sikh Gurus were Hindus; they accepted the authority of the Vedas, and subscribed to the belief in incarnations; they had no law code or scripture of their own; and they had not rejected idol worship nor any of the Brahmanical rites of passage. The Sanatanists stood opposed to the *tat-khalsa* in all those situations in which the latter acted on the basis of a distinct faith and a distinct identity, like the removal of idols from the Golden Temple and the Anand Marriage Act. The Sanatanists blamed the *tat-khalsa* for alienating the Hindus and Sikhs by their innovations, and the *tat-khalsa* were irritated by the Sanatanists' insistence on 'Hindu' identity of the Sikhs.

## II

The Singh Sabha at Lahore had been founded in 1879. Its leaders played a crucial role in sharpening the consciousness of a distinct Sikh identity. The most important among them were Professor Gurmukh Singh (1849-1898), Bhai Ditt Singh (1853-1901) and Bhai Kahn Singh (1867-1938).<sup>25</sup>

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha wrote his *Ham Hindu Nahin* ('We are not Hindus') in response to the ongoing debate on the issue of Sikh identity in 1897. To address the Hindus, however, this book was first published in Devanagari script. A year later, its Gurmukhi version came out under the same title. Several revised editions were published subsequently. The fifth and the final edition was brought out in 1920.<sup>26</sup> It is in the form of a dialogue between a Hindu and a Sikh. All possible arguments in support of the proposition that Sikhs were Hindus come from the Hindu participant, while the arguments in support of the proposition that Sikhs have an identity distinct from Hindus come from the Sikh participant.

The most important argument put forth by the Hindu protagonist in *Ham Hindu Nahin* was that the authority and sanctity of the Vedas was acknowledged by the Sikh Gurus. They are also said to have referred to the Shastras, Smritis and Puranas with approval. There was a reference to the six schools of philosophy too. Thus, it is asserted that the Brahmanical scriptures were not rejected in the *Adi Granth*. Another line of argument was that since Guru Nanak belonged to the Bedi subcaste, his ancestors at one time must have been known for their knowledge of the Vedas and adherence to the Vedic *dharma*. Here, the *Bachittar Natak* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh was quoted: 'They who mastered the Veda came to be known as Bedi; they propagated actions based on *dharam*'.<sup>27</sup> It was contended further that writings in the *Dasam Granth* make it clear that Guru Gobind Singh believed in



incarnations (*avtars*). A verse carried the import that one could be freed from transmigration by worshipping Krishna. The *Chandi Charittar* composed by the tenth Guru in praise of the Goddess was also cited by the Hindu participant who pointed to the invocation of *Bhagauti* (a name of the Goddess) in the Sikh prayer (*ardas*).<sup>28</sup>

On the related point of idol worship, a cardinal feature of Brahmanical Hinduism, a reference is made to the *Granth Sahib* depicting Namdev attaining to God through the worship of an idol and Dhanna finding God in a piece of stone. The references to Dhanna and Namdev in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas which expound the *Granth Sahib* were taken to mean that the Sikhs had no objection to idol worship. The Sikhs regarded the *Granth Sahib* as the physical form of the Guru, offering *karah* by way of *bhog* (sanctified food). This, it was asserted, was an expression of idol worship.<sup>29</sup>

It was further maintained that certain other practices were shared by the Sikhs with Hindus. For example, Guru Nanak is believed to have observed his father's *shradh* a couple of days before his own death. The Sikh Gurus were known to visit the Brahmanical places of pilgrimage. In a composition of Guru Amar Das there are clear instructions regarding what was to be done after his death, including the *katha* of the *Garud Puran* by Keso Gopal. This verse refers also to *pind*, *pattal*, *kriya*, *diwa*, and *phull*, the essential features of the Brahmanical mortuary rite. This showed that these practices were observed by both Hindus and Sikhs. It was asserted that no injunction of the Gurus forbade the Sikhs to perform their rites in accordance with the *Shastras*, and there was no injunction to have separate Sikh rites (*gurmaryada*). As regards the compositions called the *Ghorian* and *Lavan*, recited by the Sikhs at the time of marriage, it was maintained that these were not meant to be taken literally for the actual practice (*vivhar*); it was asserted that they were supposed to be metaphors. Furthermore, even if it was conceded that Sikhs had their own rites, the symbols like the *kesh* and *kachh* were seen as temporary measures adopted in a situation of armed conflict, and were no longer necessary. Rather, had it been necessary to keep the hair uncut, the first nine Gurus too would have done that.<sup>30</sup>

The Sikh position that they did not subscribe to the *varnashrama* ideal was contested with reference to Guru Nanak's supposed regret about the obliteration of *varnamaryada* in his days. In his compositions, he castigates the Khatri for discarding his *dharam* and adopting the language of the *mlechch*: 'the whole world has become one caste, and there is no *dharam* left'. In the *Janamsakhi* of Bhai Bala, Lalo, a Tarkhan, and therefore a Shudra, presumed that Guru Nanak would not eat the food cooked by him, and suggested that the Guru might prepare his own food. The issue of the sacred thread had a bearing on the question of *varnamaryada*. A composition by Guru Nanak was cited to confirm that he himself used to wear the sacred thread. In the *Sukhmani* by Guru Arjan the Sikhs are said to have been instructed to revere the Pandit who understood the Vedas, Smritis and Puranas. The *Bachittar Natak* states that Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life to save the *tilak* (sacred mark on the forehead) and *janeo* (sacred thread) of the Hindus. Guru Gobind Singh wrote

the *Savvayye* in praise of Brahmans and instructed his followers to give charity (*dan*) to them.<sup>31</sup>

Continuing in this vein the Hindu raises three more points. The first relates to the basic principles of Hindu *dharma*, which he maintained were acceptable to the Sikhs. They regarded the Vedas as true, and believed in God, good and evil, heaven and hell. The Sikhs also believed in liberation (*mukti*) as release from transmigration, *varnashrama* as the ideal social order, cremation of the dead, and protection of the cow, and they upheld the ideas of purity and pollution. Moreover, even if Sikh *dharam*, Sikh principles and Sikh rites and ceremonies were taken to be different from those of the Hindus, the Sikhs were governed by the Hindu Law. Thirdly, and on an altogether a different plane, it is suggested that it is not really politic on the part of the Sikhs to 'separate' themselves from the Hindus as all such attempts would increase mutual hostility. In view of their small numbers, the Sikhs were bound to suffer great loss through separation from the Hindus. Thus, by aligning themselves with the Hindus, who had become important under the British, the Sikhs could enhance their own importance.<sup>32</sup>

Some more arguments were added in support of the Hindu position. The Sikhs were Hindus because they had emerged from amongst the Hindus; they ate food with Hindus; they entered into matrimony with Hindus; and they lived in 'Hindustan'.<sup>33</sup> The phrase, '*Hindu salahi salahan*' in the *Granth Sahib* showed that Hindu beliefs and practices were approved by the Gurus. The *Chhakke Chhands* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh are quoted to the effect that the Khalsa Panth was meant to spread Hindu *dharma*. Therefore, the Sikh *mat* was a Hindu *panth*, like the *bairagi* and *sanyasi panths*. Furthermore, the Sikhs who equated the Sikh Panth with *qaum* (community) did not realize that it was necessary to have large numbers to be a *qaum* whereas the Sikhs counted merely in *lakhs*. Saying that the innumerable *sakhis* proved that Sikhs were Hindu, it was asserted that Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the sake of Hindus because he was himself a Hindu.<sup>34</sup>

Bhai Kahn Singh, thus, provides a whole range of arguments used by the Hindu participant in the debate, mainly that the Sikhs upheld the sanctity of the Vedas, Puranas and the Dharmshastras; believed in incarnation; practised idol worship, *kriya*, *shradh*, pilgrimage, and fasts; and subscribed to the *varnashrama* ideal, and protection of the cow. Bhai Kahn Singh then refutes all the arguments of the Hindu protagonist on the basis of Sikh literature. The most important aspect of his book was the thesis that a distinctive Sikh identity was not a new thing. He invokes Sikh literature that was not only pre-colonial but also voluminous and wide-ranging, in support of this thesis.<sup>35</sup>

According to the Sikh protagonist in the debate, the Sikhs have their own scripture in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Other religious books of the Sikhs are judged as authentic to the extent they accord with the *Granth*. Justification for this exclusive status for the *Granth Sahib* is found in the compositions of the Gurus and in other Sikh literature. Guru Amar Das emphasized the superiority of the *bani* of the Gurus over the compositions which are looked upon as 'unripe' (*kachchi bani*). According to Guru Ram Das, *Gur-shabad* is above

everything else. The Sikhs of the Guru regard it as true: the Creator himself made the Guru utter it. What the Gurus say about other scriptures should be seen in conjunction with the indispensability of the true *bani* underlined by the Gurus. Twenty quotations from the *Adi Granth*, the *Bachittar Natak*, the *Ram Avtar*, the *Thirty Three Savvaye* and the works of Bhai Gurdas underline the inefficacy of the Vedas, Smritis and Shastras. Bhai Gurdas includes the Puranas, the Epics and the *Gita* in the list of religious books which should be rejected in comparison with Gurbani. The entire message of Gurbani is meant for all human beings. The Sikh conception of *karma*, *upasana* and *gian* is totally different from what these mean among the Hindus. The lines and phrases quoted by the Hindu participant are refuted by the Sikh participant either by providing the full context to explain the correct meaning or by quoting other passages for clarifying the meaning, or by doing both. The final conclusion drawn on the point of scriptures is that the only valid religious book for the Sikhs is the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and no other scripture.<sup>36</sup>

On the issue of the *varna* system, the Sikh participant quotes the passage from Manu and other authorities which exalt the position of the Brahman and his rights and privileges, and which underline the disabilities and deprivation of the Shudra. The message of the Gurus, on the other hand, is meant for the four *varnas* and even for the outcastes (*chandals*). The path is open to all because the whole of mankind is believed to have been created from the same light (*nur*). Guru Nanak castigated those Khatri who had abandoned their faith. Had he believed that Persian was a *mlechch bhasha* he would not have composed in Persian, and Guru Gobind Singh would not have written his *Zafarnama* in Persian. The idea of equality in the Sikh Panth is underlined at many places in the *Adi Granth* and in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. More than a score of quotations on this point are cited from these and other sources like the *Akal Ustat*, the *Gurpartap Suriya* and the *Rahitnamas* of Bhai Chaupa Singh and Bhai Daya Singh. The *Sakhi* of Lalo Tarkhan demonstrates that Guru Nanak ate food cooked by a Shudra. For this reason alone, the point about the sacred thread loses its significance. The line quoted from the *Adi Granth* by the Hindu participant, placed in its proper context, also shows that Guru Nanak discarded the distinctions of caste. In the *Bachittar Natak* quoted by the Hindu participant, *tilak* and *janeo* were clearly the sacred mark and sacred thread of the Brahman who had approached Guru Tegh Bahadur for help. An incident narrated in the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* indicates that the Sikhs attached no sanctity to the sacred thread even before the Khalsa was instituted. Furthermore, the Gurus wanted their Sikhs to give charity not to Brahmans but to Sikhs. The *Savvayye* of Guru Gobind Singh were not in praise of the Brahman but in favour of the Khalsa who were to receive all kinds of gifts. In the *Sukhmani*, Guru Arjan emphasizes the qualities which make any person a true Brahman (and not the Brahman of the *varnashrama*). The *pandit* of the Hindu social order is denounced by Guru Nanak and his successors. Appropriate quotations are given from the compositions of Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das on the point.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of incarnation stands discarded in Sikh *dharam*: God is never born; He never dies; He does not take any form. The so-called *avatars* are God's creatures, and they too search for emancipation. In support of this view, quotations are cited from the *Adi Granth*, the *Shabad Hazarey*, the *Thirty Three Savvayye* and the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal. If Krishan is mentioned in the *Krishan Avatar*, it must be remembered that this work was meant to be a free version of a received account, and the ideas it contained could not be taken as the views of Guru Gobind Singh. In *Maru Solhe*, Guru Arjan refers to beliefs prevalent among other people; his own view is expressed in the last line, indicating his preference for the True Name. The use of epithets for God derived from the names of *avatars* did not mean that God of the Sikh *dharam* becomes equated with them. Rather, a new meaning is given to those epithets.<sup>38</sup>

As God's creatures, gods and goddess stand bracketed with *avatars*. They were all part of *maya*. Like the other creatures of God, they too seek emancipation. Neither Brahma, nor Vishnu nor Mahesh can be equated with God. They all serve God who alone is to be worshipped. These ideas find support in the *Adi Granth*, the *Akal Ustat*, the *Thirty Three Savvayye*, the *Jap-Sahib*, the *Sabad Hazare*, the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh, and the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal. The use of the term Kalika in the *Chandi di Var* is for Akal Purakh and not for the Goddess. Durga in the same composition is mentioned as created by God. Since the *Chandi di Var* was a popular version of *Durga Saptashati*, every idea mentioned in the composition could not be ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh. In his *Bachittar Natak* Guru Gobind Singh explicitly asserts that none other than God is to be worshipped. To argue that ritualistic purification was hygienic was a futile rationalization because the ritual itself was based on superstition. Similarly, the practice of plastering the ground with cow-dung and drawing a circle (*chaunka karna*) which, among other things, was insisted upon by Manu, was denounced by the Gurus. Bhai Chaupa Singh in his *Rahitnama* forbids the use of cow-dung in the *langar*. The author of the *Gurpartap Suriya* asserts that the Sikh sacred food (*deg*) was meant for all the four *varnas*. The author of the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* also conveys the impression that there was no restriction on food among the Sikhs. The only criterion was that it should not be harmful for the body.<sup>39</sup>

Quotations from the *Adi Granth*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh, and the *Gurpartap Suriya* support the view that fasting on days like Janamastami, Ram Naomi and Ekadasi was rejected by the Gurus and their followers. Observing fasts was a sign of ignorance (*agian*). So was the notion of auspicious and inauspicious days and times. Verses from the *Adi Granth*, the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* show that the notions of *mahurat*, *tith*, *var*, and *sagan* were discarded by the Gurus and their followers. The idea of the efficacy of *mantras*, *tantras*, and *jantras* in enhancing the spiritual and physical prowess of individuals, giving them supernatural powers or longevity or sexual virility, stood discarded in Gurmat. The performance of *hom* and *yagya* was also

discarded. Quotations from the *Adi Granth*, the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal and the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* support these views.<sup>40</sup>

The rites of *kriya*, *shradh* and *tirath* are taken up together as related to death. The statement from the *Janamsakhi* that Guru Nanak observed *shradh* for his father only two days before his own death, is not based on authentic information, contends the Sikh protagonist. The *Sadd* of Guru Amar Das in *Rag Ramkali*, which is supposed to prescribe *kriya* after his own death, is not properly understood. It is written with reference to a hymn of Guru Nanak in which the word 'Keso' refers to God. Therefore, the Keso Gopal of *Sadd* is no other than God. Furthermore, at several places in his compositions, Guru Amar Das himself denounces the *pandit* and what he does. Mourning with loud lamentations are denounced by Guru Nanak himself. He prepared *karah parshad* after Mardana's death, according to a *Janamsakhi*. According to the *Gian Ratnavali*, *kriya* was replaced by *ardas*, *kirtan*, and *karah parshad*. The ceremony of *bhaddan* (tonsure) was not to be observed, according to the *Gursobha* and Bhai Chaupa Singh. The Gurus went to the places of Hindu pilgrimage not as pilgrims, but to preach their own message to the people assembled there.<sup>41</sup>

The *gurmaryada* regarding birth, initiation and marriage had nothing to do with Hindu *mat*. Guru Amar Das uttered the *Anand* at the birth of his grandson and instructed the Sikhs to recite this composition at the birth of a child. Guru Arjan did this, as referred to in one of his hymns, at the birth of his son Hargobind. Guru Ram Das composed *Chhants*, *Ghorian*, and *Lavan* for the occasion of marriage. A close scrutiny of these compositions makes one realize that they were meant to be used on the occasion of marriage. Bhai Daya Singh in his *Rahitnama* insists that Sikhs should not adopt any ceremony of marriage other than the *Anand*. For initiation Guru Nanak introduced the practice of *charan-pahul*, which was followed by all his successors before Guru Gobind Singh introduced *khande ka amrit*. He also instructed the Sikhs to observe *rahit* and adopt certain symbols like *kachh* and *kara*. Bhai Kahn Singh points out that the Sikh Gurus used to keep uncut hair (*kes*). There was no evidence to suggest that Khalsa symbols were meant to be a temporary measure for the time of war. There was no certainty that wars had ended for all times to come.<sup>42</sup>

Responding to the seven 'universal' principles mentioned by his Hindu counterpart, the Sikh participant denies that the Vedas are the basis of Sikh *dharam*. Belief in God, *punn* and *paap*, or reward and punishment, were not confined to Hindus and Sikhs. Similarly, belief in transmigration was not confined to Hindus or Sikhs in the history of mankind. The Sikhs did not subscribe to the ideal of *varnashrama*. Cremation was not the only practice among either Hindus or Sikhs. While *jal-parwah* (immersion) was known to both Hindus and Sikhs, there were Hindus who practised burial rather than cremation. Cow protection was rationally desirable, but the Sikhs did not have the same kind of attitude towards the cow as the Hindus. Finally, the Sikhs do not subscribe to the idea of pollution. Thus, the basic principles which the Hindu participant maintained were common to Hindus and Sikhs are denied by

the Sikh participant either because of their absence among the Sikhs or because of their presence among others too. He goes on to add, that like the Hindu gods, the principles to be found among Hindus, were innumerable. Consequently, the census report failed to clarify who was a Hindu. That there was no acceptable definition was not surprising, because the word 'Hindu' did not occur in the sacred books of the Hindus. They were the only people in the world to have accepted a name given to them by outsiders.<sup>43</sup>

On the question of Hindu law being applicable to the Sikhs, the Sikh participant maintains that the law operative in the country was no longer Hindu. It was mostly customary law that was operative among the Sikhs. There were no legal codes based entirely on religious books. So far as the Sikhs were concerned, the basic principles had been enunciated in Gurbani and the *Rahitnamas*. The Anand Marriage Act had also been passed. Thus, the possibility of preparing a Sikh code of law had been created. Sir Lepel Griffin is quoted to the effect that the Sikhs had 'abandoned the Hindu faith and with it the system of laws which is the basis of that faith and for fifty years the Sikh chiefs had followed laws of succession which were altogether different. To invoke the legal authority of Manu and the Shastras by Hindu converts to Sikhism would have been unreasonable as to invoke the *Shariat* by Muslim converts to the Sikh faith'.<sup>44</sup>

Whether or not they were Hindu, was it politic on the part of Sikhs to insist that they must be treated as a separate people? The answer is clear. No progress (*unnati*) was possible without independence (*sutantarta*). To be a branch (*shakh*) of another *qaum* is to remain in subordination (*ghulami*). The Sikhs loved their neighbours and looked upon their tribulation as their own, but they could not be treated as a part of another people in terms of religious and social principles. They had already suffered for becoming one (*ikk-mikk*) with the Hindus. The Sikhs lost in numbers; their wealth went into the hands of Brahmans through *dan* and *dakshina*. Vested interests among Hindus made every possible effort to dissuade Sikhs from retaining their religious symbols. Many Sikh families reverted to the Hindu fold and many others entered into matrimony with Hindus. While Sikhs were told that Sikhism did not lie in the *kes* or the *kachhi*, no one told the Hindus that their *dharma* did not lie in the *janeo* or the *bodi* (top-knot). If mutual hostility was increasing it was due to the hostile attitude of some Hindus towards the Sikh faith. Aggression came precisely from those Hindus whose vested interests were bound to be hit if Sikhs were treated as a separate *qaum*. They were keen to own the Sikhs in self-interest. They were joined by the self-styled *gurus* among the Sikhs who published books and articles to show that the Sikhs were Hindus.<sup>45</sup>

### III

Bhai Kahn Singh's arguments made no difference to the Sanatanists. At the meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha at Hardwar in 1921, Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma proposed a new and broad definition: a 'Hindu' belonged to a religion born in India; cherished its pilgrimage centres and culture; subscribed to the

principle of rebirth; accepted Sanskrit as the language of the sacred scripture; and venerated the cow. This definition was deliberately inclusive so that the Sanatan Dharmis, Aryas, Brahmos, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists were all covered. The Arya 'Vedutva' was replaced by the Sanatanist 'Hindutva' to broaden the base of Hindus. All non-Muslim and non-Christian 'Indians' were brought under the umbrella of evolving Hinduism.<sup>46</sup>

However, the Sanatanists had no appreciation for the Akalis who had been trying to reform the Gurdwara for some time now. The debate assumed political undertones. The *Sanatan Dharm Patrika* suggested that all the Gurdwaras 'in the possession of the Akalis should be boycotted and new temples of their own should be established'. The Hindus were urged also to seek legal help to obtain rights in temples and properties attached to the Gurdwaras, which were built with their hard earned money.<sup>47</sup> Pandit Gopi Nath, a former editor of the *Akhbar-i Am*, asserted that the 'action of the Akalis in reforming the Gurdwaras by force, in utter disregard of law and the religious rights of other sections, is neither proper nor lawful'. If the Akalis did not mend their ways the government would have to take notice of their 'revolutionary activities' and the whole Akali movement might be held to be 'seditious'. Furthermore, if the present state of affairs was allowed to continue the rights of no section of Punjabis would be safe in the hands of the Akalis.<sup>48</sup> At the Brahman Conference held at Lahore in 1923, it was pointed out that the Akalis were harassing Brahmans and other Hindus in the villages. At places where only a few Brahmans and Khatris lived, the Akalis asked them to embrace Sikhism. Indeed, the Akalis 'surpassed even (what was done in) the times of the Muhammadans'. They demolished certain Hindu temples.<sup>49</sup> Opposing the Gurdwara Act of 1925, the *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak* maintained that the erstwhile Udasi custodians of the Gurdwaras should have the Gurdwara Act repealed by instituting regular proceedings regarding those shrines which had been taken away under the Act. The Sanatanists also urged the Punjab Government to 'compensate' the Udasis for the 'wrongs' done to them under the Act.<sup>50</sup>

Pandit Mulraj Sharma, a Sanatanist ideologue, condemned the *tat-khalsa* for having sought to legalize the Anand marriage ceremony of the Sikhs. In his view, the Sanatanist marriage ceremony was the oldest and the most appropriate and the earlier generations of Sikhs had followed that ceremony. If the traditional Hindu ceremony was declared unlawful then the marriages of ancestors and their progeny too would become unlawful. Mulraj did not relish the obvious implication of the Anand marriage ceremony: it dispensed with the services of the Brahman priest. Mulraj maintained that the Sikh Panth had emerged from within the Sanatan Dharm as its branch, and he contended that no *samskars* (sacraments) and rituals were formulated by the Gurus.<sup>51</sup>

Sant Mangal Singh, a preacher of the Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha of the Punjab, reiterated in 1928 that the ten Gurus were Sanatan Dharmis and delivered the sermon of Sanatan Dharm in the Darbar Sahib. Banda Singh Bahadur was claimed to be a Hindu and the day of Shiromani Banda Vairagi's sacrifice was celebrated with great fervour. The report of the Pratinidhi Sabha

denounced the Akalis for stealing and breaking the image of Sri Satya Narayan at Loralai in the north-west and the image of Radhikaji at Garh Fateh Shah in Lyallpur. They had forcibly occupied a Panchayati *dharmshala* and converted it into a Gurdwara in *muhalla* Gawal Mandi in Rawalpindi. The Akalis had forcibly occupied a *dharmshala* in Daska and renamed it as the Gurdwara of Waryam Singh. The Akalis were condemned for disrupting the programme of *prachar* of the Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha at Talagang, Rawalpindi, Kohat and Peshawar.<sup>52</sup>

In a work entitled, *The Hindu Problem in the Punjab*, Professor Gulshan Rai argued that the Sikh movement was in itself a result of the great Vaishnava movement which had started in the Ganges valley in the fifteenth century. Guru Nanak and his nine successors established in the north-west a spiritual empire in the hearts of the Hindus. It could not be denied that the Sikh Gurus re-awakened the Hindus to 'the past glories of the Aryan race'. The result was that a new spirit was aroused and the followers of the Gurus eventually succeeded in weakening the empire of the Mughals and rescued the country from the grasp of Ahmad Shah Abdali. For Gulshan Rai, the Sikhs were a 'reforming body within the Hindu community'. Under Hinduism, each individual was free to worship a separate god of his own. He further added that in a family one member may be an orthodox Hindu, another may be a Sikh, and still another may be an Arya Samajist or a Brahma Samajist or a follower of the Radha Swami sect. Gulshan Rai assumed that the Sikhs formed a part of the Hindu community when the Punjab was annexed to the British empire in India in 1849, just as the Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj and Dev Samaj formed a part of the Hindu community in his own time. But, gradually, during the last fifty years, certain forces brought about a cleavage between the Hindus and the Sikhs. Referring to the Arya Samaj, Gulshan Rai remarked that a protestant section of the people among the Hindus began publicly to ridicule and abuse the Sikh Gurus and offend the Sikh community. These differences between the Hindus and the Sikhs were fully exploited by the Europeans who tried to interpret the sacred books of the Sikhs in such a manner as to induce them to believe that they were not a reforming body within Hinduism, but an altogether a separate community. As a result, the Sikh community, an overwhelming majority of whom were Jats, a military caste, had gone out of the Hindu fold. From the military point of view it had been a great blow to the Hindus says Gulshan Rai.<sup>53</sup>

In 1936, Pandit Sukhlal, a preacher (*updeshak*) of the Punjab Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha published his *Guru Sahibon ka Dharm*, written in Devanagiri script and dedicated to Goswami Ganesh Dutt, the General Secretary of the Pratinidhi Sabha. The professed purpose in writing this tract was to protect all those Sikhs from sin who believed that Sikhs were distinct from Hindus. This comprehensive statement of the Sanatanist assertion subsumes the arguments of the earlier writers on the subject. To capture its essence it has been given in entirety.

With 500 examples, Sukhlal sought to prove that the Gurus and the *Granth Sahib* approved of Hindu scriptures and incarnations, the practices of



idol worship and *shraddh*, marriage and death rites, pilgrimages and fasts, cow protection, the caste system, the sacred thread, the supremacy of the Brahmans and their right to receive charity. To prove his point, the writer provided a list of works of Sikh literature that he used: *Janamsakhi Bhai Bale Wali*, *Adi Granth*, *Dasam Granth*, *Bani of Bhai Gurdas*, *Bani of Bhai Mani Singh*, *Mukammal Sausakhi*, *Gurbilas Pathshahi Chhevin*, *Gurbilas Pathshahi Das*, *Surya Prakash*, *Panth Prakash* and *Khalsa Tawarikh*.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Pandit Sukhlal used his own arguments to underline that culturally and socially the Hindus and Sikhs stood bracketed against the Muslims. Without referring to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, he tries to provide a comprehensive support for 'Hindu' identity of the Sikhs.

According to Sukhlal, the Sikhs were Hindus because Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Arjan Dev referred to only two religions, Hinduism and Islam in the *Granth Sahib*. Therefore, the Sikh Gurus did not regard the Sikh faith as being distinct from the Hindu religion. Verses from the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Dasam Granth*, the *Sausakhi* and the *Bhagat Ratnavali* were quoted in support of the argument.<sup>55</sup> It was asserted that the Gurus accepted the authority of the Vedas and quoted the *Bachittar Natak*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and the *Panth Prakash* in support of this argument.<sup>56</sup> It is maintained that the Gurus listened to the recitation of the Puranas. The *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* is quoted to assert that Guru Hargobind listened to the *katha* of *Shrimat Bhagvat* from Pandit Nityanand of Batala at Amrtisar. Similarly, Guru Arjan Dev is said to have listened to the discourse on *Brahma Puran* by Pandit Gulab Rai. The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to the effect that Guru Amar Das recommended *katha* of the Purans by Pandit Keso Gopal. The *Khalsa Tawarikh* is quoted to the effect that Guru Amar Das listened to the discourses on the Upanishads.<sup>57</sup> Several verses from the *Granth Sahib* are quoted in support of the contention that the Gurus believed in rebirth by saying that one has to go through eighty four lakh births to get a human life.<sup>58</sup>

The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to the effect that Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev subscribed to the worship of Narsingh *avatar*. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh in his *Dasam Granth* sanctions the worship of Narsingh *avatar*. Quotations are given from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Dasam Granth* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas to contend that the Gurus had faith in fifty-two incarnations. It was due to the grace of Ram whose name is repeated 2432 times in the *Granth Sahib*, that Guru Arjan Dev was able to give life to a dead person. Evidence from the *Adi Granth*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and the *Dasam Granth* is given in support of the worship of Krishan. Referring to a conversation of Guru Hargobind with Kaula in the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, and of Guru Gobind Singh with Roop Kaur in the *Dasam Granth*, it is contended that the Gurus did not regard Lord Krishana to be adulterous and did not condemn him. The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to assert that Guru Arjan Dev praises Krishan and does not criticize Janamashtami.<sup>59</sup>

Evidence from the *Mukammal Sausakhi*, the *Panth Prakash* and the *Bhagat Ratnavali* is given to maintain that the worship of Ganesh was acceptable to the Gurus. The *Surya Prakash* is quoted to contend that Ganesh

was worshipped in the marriage ceremonies of Guru Nanak, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh rulers also had faith in the worship of Ganesh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the idol of Ganesh installed at the entrance of a *bunga* near the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Similarly, in accordance with his wishes the image of Ganesh was placed at the entrance of his memorial (*samadhi*) at Lahore. But this image was not visible as the Akalis had placed a signboard over it.<sup>60</sup> Sukhlal asserted that the Sikhs worshipped the Goddess. There is a reference to Parvati in *Japuji* in the *Granth Sahib*. Twenty verses from the *Dasam Granth* are quoted to maintain that Guru Gobind Singh worshipped the Goddess. Furthermore, the *Chandi Charittar* of Guru Gobind Singh, in praise of the Goddess, is cited as evidence. In the Sikh prayer (*ardas*), the Goddess (*Bhagauti*) is invoked in the first sentence.<sup>61</sup>

It was contended further that the Sikhs were idol worshippers. The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas are quoted in reference to Dhanna and Namdev to prove that there is no objection to idol worship by the Sikh Gurus. The *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth* sanction the worship of the Linga. The Sikhs also bow to Tahli Sahib, Kotha Sahib and Beri Sahib. It was also claimed that two images of Guru Nanak, one white and one black are kept at Gurdwara Har Sahai in the Ferozepur district. These images are displayed during the fairs of Baisakhi and Maghi. Above all, the Sikhs regard the *Granth Sahib* as the physical image of the Guru and worship it, which is after all only paper. They offer *karah* (offering) in a dish as *bhog* to the *Granth Sahib*.<sup>62</sup>

To assert that Guru Nanak had observed his father's *shradh* the *Surya Prakash* is quoted. Similarly, the *Chakra Charu Chandrika* is quoted to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh observed his father's *shradh* according to Hindu rites. Guru Amar Das in *Rag Ramkali* instructs that Pandit Keso Gopal should conduct the *katha* of Puran after his death. As mentioned earlier, in the same verse there are references to rites associated with death like *pind*, *pattal*, *kriya*, *diwa* and *phull*. In support of this contention, quotations are given also from the *Bhagat Ratnavali*, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, the *Sausakhi*, and 'Bhagat Bani'.<sup>63</sup>

Quotations from the *Granth Sahib* are given to maintain that the Gurus instructed that marriage should be performed by Hindu rites and by the *pandit*. The *Surya Prakash* is cited to say that Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh were married according to the 'Hindu' rites and ceremonies: engagement, *karadhi chadhna*, *batana lagana*, *kangana bandhna*, *grihashanti*, *barat chadhna*, *bakher*, *phere*, *kanyadan*, and dowry.<sup>64</sup>

Sukhlal maintained that the Gurus believed in pilgrimages. The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to the effect that going to pilgrimages attains the grace of God and it is the duty of the Guru and his followers to bathe at places of pilgrimage. The *Sausakhi* is quoted to maintain that a bath in the Ganges washes away sins and salvation is attained by drinking the water of the Ganges. Verses in support of pilgrimages are also given from the *Bachittar Natak* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. Among other sacred spots are Kurukshetra, Brindaban, Hardwar, the temple at Jwala Mukhi and the river Jamuna. It is emphasized that a

pilgrimage to the Ganges is far superior than the pilgrimage centres of the Sikhs like the tanks at Amritsar and Tarn Taran, the *baoli* at Goindwal and the wells at Gangsar and Chheherta.<sup>65</sup> The *Granth Sahib* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas are cited to contend that the Sikhs are instructed to observe fasts as well.<sup>66</sup>

In support of the idea that the Gurus stood for cow protection, quotations are given from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, *Chhakkey Chhand* of the *Dasam Granth*, the *Bhagat Ratnavali*, and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*. An incident is narrated from Baba Narain Singh Vakil's *Sikh Hindu Hain* to suggest that a Sikh could never be the cause of a cow's death. During the rule of Ranjit Singh, a complaint was made that a Sikh had killed a cow. The *kardar* refused to accept this complaint and said that the killer of a cow could never be the son of a Sikh. When the mother of the killer was questioned she confessed that the father of her son was a Chuhra (scavenger by caste).<sup>67</sup> A quotation from the *Granth Sahib* is cited to the effect that by eating meat and drinking alcohol the merit earned by pilgrimage, fast and *nam simran* will go waste.<sup>68</sup> Sukhlal maintained that the Sikhs revered ascetics and saints. Quotations are given from the *Granth Sahib* and the *Dasam Granth* to the effect that it was the duty of the Sikhs to serve and protect the ascetics and saints.<sup>69</sup>

Sukhlal asserted that the Sikh Gurus religiously followed the caste system and instructed others to follow it. Guru Nanak Dev in the *Adi Granth* criticizes the Khatri who had left his *dharma* and adopted a *mlechch* language (*bhasha*). The other works cited in support of this statement are the *Dasam Granth*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, the *Tawarikh Gurdwariyan* and the *Tirath Sangrah*. The last work says that the sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters of all the Gurus who were high caste Khatri, were married into Hindu Khatri families. The families were Kumrav, Rikhirav, Sudhi, Marwahe, Khosle, Dhuse, Chondh, Lamba, and Sekhdhi.<sup>70</sup> The *Granth Sahib* was invoked to assert that Guru Nanak wore a sacred thread which led to salvation. The *Bachittar Natak* is quoted to the effect that Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the protection of the *tilak* and the sacred thread, and his son also protected the sacred thread. Among the other works cited are the *Surya Prakash*, *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi*, *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin*, *Panth Prakash*, *Gurmat Nirnay Sagar* and *Sikh Hindu Hain*.<sup>71</sup>

On the issue of charity (*dan*) to Brahmans, Sukhlal quoted *Savviyey* from *Bhagat Ratnavali* to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh instructed his followers to give charity to Brahmans. Quotations in support were also cited from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Dasam Granth*, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* and the *Sausakhi*. The Akalis should be ashamed of themselves as according to their interpretation of the *Savviyey*, charity should be given to the Sikhs. Sukhlal argued that there was no reference to the Sikhs in the *Savviyey* and also that there were no Sikhs when the *Savviyey* were written. The *Tawarikh Gurdwariyan* interprets the *Savviyey* to the effect that it is a sin for the Khalsa to accept charity. Many quotations from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Vars* of Bhai

Gurdas, the *Sausakhi*, the *Panth Prakash* and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* are given to assert that the Sikhs were not permitted to accept charity and if they did they would go to hell (*narak*).<sup>72</sup>

Sukhlal contended that the Brahmans had done great service for the Sikhs for which they should be grateful. According to the *Janamsakhi Bhai Balewali*, Guru Nanak received his early education from a *pandit*. According to the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, Pandit Keso Gopal recited the Veda, Shastra and Purana for Guru Amar Das. The *Bachittar Natak* is cited to assert that it was with the help of Dayaram, a Brahman, that Guru Gobind Singh won the battle of Bhangani and gave him the title of Dronacharya.<sup>73</sup> The *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, the *Panth Prakash* and the *Zafarnama* are cited to refute the allegation that the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh were killed due to the Brahmans. In the *Zafarnama*, Guru Gobind Singh clearly blames Aurangzeb for murdering his four sons.<sup>74</sup>

Sukhlal used his own arguments to emphasize the similarities between the Hindus and the Sikhs vis-à-vis Muslims. While chanting their religious verses the Muslims went into a trance and their rosary had one hundred and one beads, whereas the Sikhs, like the Hindus, prayed sitting down with their hands folded and their rosary had one hundred and eight beads. In the mosques, prayers were not accompanied by music, but in the Gurdwara, as in a Hindu temple, prayers were offered to the tune of music. The *Qur'an* was not worshipped in a literal sense, whereas the *Granth Sahib*, like the Vedas and the Puranas, was offered *prasad* (offering), flowers and clothes. The Muslim law (*shari'at*) regarded the use of music as a sin. On the other hand, the Sikhs like the Hindus sang their religious hymns to the accompaniment of instrumental music. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, in fact, begins with *Shri Rag* based on *Rag Hanumant* of the Hindus. Unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus have faith in the theory of rebirth based on actions (*karma*). The festivals of Diwali and Holi had no meaning for the Muslims, whereas the Sikhs, like the Hindus, celebrated both the festivals with fervour at Harmandir Sahib and Anandpur.<sup>75</sup>

Continuing in this vein, Sukhlal says that unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus did not perform the ritual of circumcision. The Muslims shaved their heads and the Hindus maintained a tuft of hair on their heads. As the Sikhs maintained long hair, they were 'double Hindus'. From birth to death the Hindus and the Sikhs shared common rituals. The Hindus did not inter-dine with the Muslims, whereas, commensality between the Hindus and the Sikhs was permissible. Unlike the Muslims, who bathed in the nude, the Sikhs and the Hindus wore clothes while bathing. Even the attire of the Sikhs and Hindus was the same, as both wore underpants like Hanuman. The Muslims on the other hand wore only a cloth wrapped around their waist (*tamba*) or pajamas. The names of the Muslims were always different from those of the Hindus. The surname Singh used by the Sikhs was also used by the Rajputs since ancient times. Therefore, the Sikhs (Singhs) were Hindu.<sup>76</sup> The Muslims had different names for the days of the week and months in a year. The Sikhs and the Hindus had the same names for the days of the week and months. Unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus celebrated the first day of the month

(*sankranti*). Calculations by the Muslims were done from the right to the left whereas the Sikhs like the Hindus wrote figures from the left to the right. The Urdu alphabets were different from the Devanagri alphabets. The alphabets used by the Sikhs were similar to the Devanagri. Unlike the Muslims, it was not a sin for the Sikhs and the Hindus to accept interest on money advanced as loan.<sup>77</sup>

The changing political context of the last decade of colonial rule had a bearing on this debate. In the 1940s, the Sikhs and the Sanatanists were united in their opposition to the demand for Pakistan. However, the issue of identity was rekindled with the announcement of the Azad Punjab scheme for a province to be created through reorganization of territory to ensure a balanced communal proportion, with about 40 per cent Muslims, 40 per cent Hindus and 20 per cent Sikhs.<sup>78</sup> For Gulshan Rai, this scheme was based on 'rank communalism',<sup>79</sup> presumably because it talked of three religious communities. Lala Shiv Ram Sewak, leader of the Punjab Mahabir Dal, came up with a 'trenchant criticism' of the scheme at the Punjab and Frontier Akhand Hindustan Conference in Rawalpindi in 1943. He challenged the Akali leaders that even the Sikhs would not accept the scheme.<sup>80</sup> At the Akhand Hindustan Conference at Chakwal he contended that the Azad Punjab scheme was 'anti-national'. It appeared to support division. Shiv Ram denounced the Akalis also for cooperating with the Unionists through the Sikandar-Baldev Singh Pact.<sup>81</sup>

#### IV

The first thing that strikes us in retrospect is that there was no dialogue between the leaders of the Singh Sabha movement and the Sanatanists. Both sides stuck to their ground. Bhai Kahn Singh's view that the Sikh identity was not new because the Sikhs were conscious of their distinct identity before the advent of colonial rule, was not taken seriously even though he had adduced evidence from the pre-colonial Sikh literature starting with the *Granth Sahib*. Instead of meeting his arguments, the Sanatanists rejected his interpretation of Sikh scriptural literature and continued to interpret it in their own way in support of their position.

The Sanatanists were keen to defend their position because the issue of Sikh identity was not merely an academic or theological question. It had practical implications – legal, cultural, social and political. This was why the Will of Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, the removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple, and the Anand Marriage Act became politically important in the early twentieth century. The growing political concern of the Sanatanists is reflected in their all-inclusive definition of the term 'Hindu'. Indeed, the decennial census played an important role in the situation. In the Census of 1881 the percentage of Hindus (covered under the 'General' category) in the total population of the Punjab was nearly 43; it got reduced to 41.7 in 1901, and further to 36.2 in 1911; by 1931, it had become 26. Meanwhile, the number of Sikhs had been increasing. In 1881, the number of Sikhs in the

region was 2,000,000, and it rose to 4,000,000 in 1931. Sikh percentage in the total population thus rose from less than 8 in 1881 to over 13 in 1931.<sup>82</sup>

The success of the Singh Sabha movement in winning converts and purging the Sikh way of life of Brahmanical accretions hardened the attitude of the Sanatanists towards the issue of Sikh identity. In fact, based on the idea of a distinct Sikh identity, the politics of the Akalis could never be appreciated by the Sanatanists. However, though generally opposed to their politics, the Sanatanists could share platform with the Akalis on issues of common interest, like opposition to the idea of Pakistan. This bivalent relationship would remain relevant for the Akali-Sanatanist relations after independence.

### Notes

1. J.S.Grewal, 'An Argument for Sikh Nationality: Nabha's *Hum Hindu Nahin*', in Grewal, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 280.
2. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 323-24. Harjot Oberoi states that among the opponents of the 'Tat Khalsa position', who favoured retention of idols in the precincts of the Golden Temple, the 'Arya Samaj protagonists occupied the front ranks'.
3. Shardha Ram Phillauri, *Sikhan de Raj di Vithya* (1865) (Punjabi), ed., Pritam Singh, (Jullundur: Hind Publishing Limited, 1956). For the biography and ideas of Pandit Shardha Ram Phillauri (1837-1881), see, Sheena Pall, 'Bhagyawati: The First Hindi Novel of the Punjab', in Reeta Grewal & Sheena Pall, eds., *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), pp. 340, 341.
4. *Report of the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal*, 1889 (Mathura: Lala Hari Prasad Press, 1889). The Bharat Dharm Mahamandal was the most important pan-Indian coordinating body of the Sanatanists.
5. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 395.
6. Harihar Swaroop Sharma, *Vyakhyan Wachaspati Pandit Din Dayal Sharma: Smarak Granth* (Hindi), (New Delhi: Dev Publishing House, 1985), p. 160.
7. *Akhbar-i Am*, 19 May 1899, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1899, vol. XII, p. 295.
8. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 15 January 1899, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1899, vol. XII, p. 97.

9. *Akhbar-i Am*, 26 February and 5 May 1900, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1900, vol. XIII, pp. 108, 231.

10. *Akhbar-i Am*, 10 April 1900, in *ibid.*, p. 200.

11. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 5 May 1900, in *ibid.*, p. 231. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 4 March 1901, *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1901, vol. XIV, p. 153.

12. E.D. Maclagan, compl., *Census of India: 1891, The Punjab and its Feudatories*, vol. XIX, part I, Calcutta: 1892, p. 164.

13. *Akhbar-i-Am*, 26 February 1900, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1900, vol. XIII, p. 108.

14. Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, *Home General, Confidential*, file no. 3/51, 1906, Reg: Idols in the Amritsar Golden Temple, pp. 229, 230. There is evidence to show that even in the past similar orders were issued. An order dated 29 January 1878 was passed by Sardar Mangal Singh, the then Manager, which stated that the 'worship of idols in the Darbar Sahib is opposed to custom and the ancient rule' and in the 'Darbar Sahib only Sri Guru Granth Sahib is worshipped'. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

15. PSA, Chandigarh, file no. 3/51, 1906, Reg: Idols in the Amritsar Golden Temple, pp. 21, 22. The Hindus of Amritsar were supported by the Hindus of Hoshiarpur who conducted a meeting in the premises of the Sanatan Dharm Sabha in Hoshiarpur to protest against the actions of Sardar Arur Singh. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

16. PSA, Chandigarh, file no. 3/51, 1906, Reg: Idols in the Amritsar Golden Temple, pp. 51-53.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-36.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

20. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, *The New Cambridge History of India* II.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 151.

21. I am grateful to Professor Indu Banga for drawing my attention to this particular file: National Archives of India, *Home Judicial*, progs no. 106-B, January 1910, Anand Marriage Act VIII of 1909, p. 2, para 4.

22. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 28 February 1906, *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1906, vol. XIX, p. 63.

23. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 24 June 1912, *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1912, vol. XXV, p. 544. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 1 May 1912, in *ibid.*, p. 384. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 16 January and 8 February 1917, *Selections from the Indian Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1917, vol. XXX, nos. 5 and 8, pp. 86, 141.

24. *Sanatan Dharm Patrika*, 20 Jan 1918, *Selections from the Indian Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1918, vol. XXXI, pp. 57, 126.

25. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 145. *Idem*, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, p. 295.

26. Bhai Kahn Singh, *Ham Hindu Nahin* (Punjabi) (Amritsar: Singh Sabha Shatabdi Committee, 1973 ) [reprint of the 5th edition of 1920]. In spite of Bhai Kahn Singh's *Ham Hindu Nahin*, the Sanatanists persisted in their assertions to the contrary, throughout the remainder of the colonial period. In 1899 itself, two tracts in Punjabi, entitled, *Sikh Hindu Hain*, by Bawa Narain Singh and Lala Thakar Das, countered the arguments of Bhai Kahn Singh. N. Gerald Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970), pp. 28, 39.

27. The original text of *Hum Hindu Nahin* has been seen and the following references are to this article. J. S. Grewal, 'Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity', in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), pp. 234-35.

28. Grewal, 'Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity', p. 235.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-36.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-34.



35. Ibid., pp. 233-34, 237-43. The *Adi Granth* which was compiled in 1604-5; the works of Bhai Gurdas, written mostly in the early decades of the seventeenth century; the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh and others in the *Dasam Granth* which were written mostly before the end of the seventeenth century; the works of Bhai Nand Lal as a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh; the *Gursobha* which was composed during the first decade of the eighteenth century ; the *Rahitnamas* which were composed largely in the eighteenth century; the *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* by Sukha Singh which was written towards the end of the century; and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* and the works of Bhai Santokh Singh which were composed in the early nineteenth century. At a few places, the evidence of *Janamsakhis*, which were compiled in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, is also invoked.

36. Grewal, 'Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity', p. 237.

37. Ibid., pp. 237-38.

38. Ibid., p. 238.

39. Ibid., p. 239.

40. Ibid., pp. 239-40.

41. Ibid., p. 240.

42. Ibid., pp. 240-41.

43. Ibid., p. 241.

44. Ibid., pp. 241-42.

45. Ibid., p. 242.

46. Sharma, *Vyakhyan Wachaspati Pandit Din Dayal Sharma: Smarak Granth* pp. 327-28. For the biography and ideas of Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma, see Sheena Pall, 'Din Dayalu Sharma: The Formative Phase of the Sanatana Dharma Movement in late Nineteenth Century North India', *Indian History Congress Proceedings*, 63rd Session (Kolkata: Kolkata University, 2003), pp. 1012-20.

47. *Sanatan Dharm Patrika*, 29 May 1921, *Punjab Press Abstracts*, 1921, vol. XXXIV, p. 273.

48. *Akhbar-i Am*, 29 November and 6 December 1922, *Punjab Press Abstracts*, 1922, vol. XXXV, pp. 610, 624.

49. *Bharat*, 20 June 1923, *Punjab Press Abstracts*, 1923, vol. XXXVI, p. 342.
50. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 16 January 1926, *Report on Newspapers and Periodicals in the Punjab*, 1926, pp. 44-45.
51. Pandit Mulraj Sharma Nagar, *Hindu Dharm Darpanam* (Hindi), (Lahore: Vidhya Prakash Press, 1922), vol. II, pp. 40, 207-8, 226-27.
52. *Annual Report of the Shri Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab* (Hindi), (Lahore: Goswami Ganesh Dutt, 1928), pp. 23, 26, 79-81.
53. Gulshan Rai, *The Hindu Problem in the Punjab* (Lahore: Sanatan Dharm Collage, 1934), pp. 16-17, 22, 26, 45.
54. Pandit Sukhlal, *Guru Sahibon ka Dharm* (Hindi), (Lahore: Basant Printing Press, 1936), p. iii. At the end of this work there is an advertisement that lists other works of Sukhlal in Hindi and Punjabi. The works in Hindi are: *Tat-Khalsa ki Pol*, *Sikho ki Bajbul Arz*, *Navin Singh Shiksha*, *Khalsa Kuriti Nivaran*, *Shri Gurughar mein Durga Pujan*, *Shri Gurughar mein Dan Vidhi* and *Anand Nirnay*. A few have been translated into Punjabi. The work in Punjabi is *Jehi Ruh tehe Farishte*. Many of the works were reprinted. For the biography and ideas of Goswami Ganesh Dutt, see Sheena Pall, 'Goswami Ganesh Dutt: The Sanatan Dharm Movement in the Colonial Punjab', *Journal of Regional History*, vol. XV, 2009 (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2009), pp. 69-81.
55. Pandit Sukhlal, *Guru Sahibon ka Dharm*, pp. 7-10.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-36.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-7.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-47.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-54.
63. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-76.

64. Ibid., pp. 39-45.
65. Ibid., pp. 53-57.
66. Ibid., pp. 155-56.
67. Ibid., pp. 48-52.
68. Ibid., p. 55.
69. Ibid., pp. 155-56.
70. Ibid., pp. 27-30.
71. Ibid., pp. 19-25.
72. Ibid., pp. 77-81, 82-86.
73. Ibid., pp. 94-98.
74. Ibid., pp. 87-94.
75. Ibid., pp. 12-17.
76. Ibid., pp. 11-12, 17-19.
77. Ibid., pp. 13-15, 17.
78. Indu Banga, 'The Crisis of Sikh Politics, (1940-1947)', in Joseph T.O'Connell et al, eds., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p. 242. It was essentially a reiteration of the demand for 'territorial rearrangement' of the province made by the Sikhs in 1931 at the Second Round Table Conference. Ibid., pp. 243 n72, n73.
79. *The Tribune*, 5 January 1943, pp. 4, 10.
80. N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, vol. 2, July-December, 1943, pp. 306-7. For the Punjab Mahabir Dal, see Sheena Pall, 'Emergence and Programme of the Punjab Mahabir Dal under Colonial Rule', *Punjab History Conference*, 44th Session, 2012 (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2012), pp. 341-48.
81. N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, vol. 2, July-December, 1943, pp. 302-3. According to Indu Banga, the Sikander-Baldev Singh Pact was an attempt at a limited cooperation between the Akalis and the Unionist and at mitigating what were seen as the adverse effects of 'Muslim domination'. It

covered nearly all those issues that had been agitating the minds of the Sikhs before the League's resolution in 1940, such as legislation on religious matters, the share of the Sikhs in services, teaching of Punjabi in Gurmukhi and facilities for *jhatka* meat. 'The Crisis of Sikh Politics (1940-47)', p. 241.

82. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p.137. Denzil Charles Ibbetson, compl., *Census of India: 1881, Punjab*, London: 1883, vol. II, Appendix A, Table III, Religion. Pandit Hari Kishan Kaul, compl., *Census of India: 1911, Punjab*, Report, Lahore: 1912, vol. XIV, part I, p. 97. Ahmad Hasan Khan, compl., *Census of India: 1931, Punjab*, Report, Lahore: 1933, vol. XVII, part I, p. 317. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Provincial Series, Punjab, 1908 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers rpt., 1991), vol. I, pp. 39, 53.

## Epidemics in Colonial Punjab

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The Punjab region was one of the worst affected from the epidemics of malaria, smallpox, cholera and the plague, which broke out recurrently from 1850 to 1947 and caused widespread mortality. The paper discusses the outbreak and pattern of epidemics as well as their handling by the colonial state which used unprecedented measures because of the military and economic importance of the region. However, its measures remained haphazard and tentative due to the lack of knowledge about the causes of the diseases till then. The outbreak of the plague during the closing years of the nineteenth century brought about an alarmist response from the British who tried to deal with it comprehensively, often using coercion. The effects of the epidemics and people's responses varied in rural and urban areas. While the urban middle classes generally collaborated with the government, people in villages and small towns resisted the government measures in different ways, thus shedding their generally docile attitude towards the administration.

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Epidemics of malaria, cholera, smallpox and the plague broke out intermittently and recurrently, with varied intensity in different areas of colonial Punjab. Initially, the colonial medical opinion ascribed the epidemics to the habits and customs of the natives and geographical variations, overlooking, thus, the actual causal agents and environmental factors, particularly those created by the colonial policies and measures. Consequently, the measures adopted to combat the epidemics remained haphazard and tentative. The people looked at the government with suspicion and showed reluctance to adopt them. The mortality from epidemics remained rather high in the north-western region till the 1920s.

### **Outbreak and Pattern of Epidemics**

From the 1850s to the 1920s, the Punjab (including North West Frontier Province) was one of the regions worst affected by epidemics. Its mortality rate was the highest for the plague, and the average annual deaths from malaria, smallpox, and cholera also remained comparatively high.

Fifteen major epidemics of malaria broke out in the region during 1850-1947, claiming 51,77,407 lives.<sup>1</sup> Both the official and non-official sources highlight the disastrous consequences of malaria. 'In 1891, several square miles of overripe rice fields could be seen as the villagers were too weak to reap them. In towns, no wages could be earned as the bread winners were prostrated'.<sup>2</sup> The *Khalsa Advocate* commented on the 1908 epidemic: 'Malaria is so depressing in its outset, so devitalising in its effect, so disorganising in its

result to the whole system, is (sic) better understood than it used to be, it is still unhappily exceedingly prevalent and is likely to continue until the conditions which produce it have been banished'.<sup>3</sup> The malaria epidemic caused maximum havoc in nearly twenty five centrally located districts of the province where it is reported to have claimed 22,03,576 lives. A higher rainfall made the central Punjab districts of Jalandhar, Amritsar, Lahore, Gujranwala and Shahpur, and the sub-montane areas of Rawalpindi and Peshawar, a perennial breeding ground for mosquitoes, leading to recurrent outbreaks of malaria. In the north-west dry area of Montgomery, Shahpur, Lyallpur, Jhang, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan, 8,78,763 people succumbed to the disease. There were relatively few casualties in the Himalayan region where only 1,55,493 deaths were reported.

Smallpox accounted for 8,50,591 deaths in the region from 1868 to 1947. Smallpox broke out with maximum intensity from 1875 to 1919 when nine major epidemics of smallpox affected in twenty-seven districts, claiming almost 2.5 lakh victims. One in every ten cases of smallpox turned out to be fatal, and of those who survived the attack, one-fourth were scarred.<sup>4</sup> The average annual smallpox deaths were considerably higher than the rest of the provinces of British India.<sup>5</sup> The worst affected districts were mainly in the north-west and south-east where vaccination was rather unpopular and people preferred recourse to variolation rather than vaccination. The close proximity of Karnal and Rohtak to the principal shrine of the goddess Sitala in Gurgaon resulted in the people preferring to visit the shrine to obtain relief rather than getting themselves vaccinated.<sup>6</sup>

Twelve major cholera epidemics broke out in the Punjab between 1866 and 1921, affecting all its areas and killing 2,49,050 people. On an average, 4,357 people died of cholera annually. The districts most affected by cholera were Gujranwala, Hazara, Rawalpindi, Ambala, Gurgaon, Lahore, Jalandhar, Peshawar, Amritsar and Shahpur. The recurrence of cholera in these areas was attributed to a large number of local and regional fairs which were marked by overcrowding, insanitary conditions, besides inadequate and contaminated water supply.<sup>7</sup>

From 1897 to 1918, the plague erupted with varied intensity in twenty-six districts, and had a mortality rate which was approximately four times the all India average. In mortality and dreadfulness, the plague surpassed all other epidemics in the Punjab. The first case of the plague occurred in Khatkar Kalan village in Banga circle on 17 October 1897. Until 1899, the plague remained confined to Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts. The ignorance regarding its cause and mode of spread did not help in arresting the disease which spread to Patiala state by 1900.<sup>8</sup> In 1901, the epidemic moved to the other thickly cultivated, densely populated and humid areas in the upper *doabs* (interfluves) of central Punjab and affected seven districts, extending as far as Ferozepur, Gurdaspur and Sialkot.<sup>9</sup> By 1901-2, it spread to the sparsely populated, arid areas in the south-west which were being canalised and colonised, and affected sixteen districts in all the five divisions of the province. The extensive irrigation from canals also resulted in increasing the humidity

level, which was conducive to the spread of the disease.<sup>10</sup> By the end of 1902-3, twenty-one districts had been affected.<sup>11</sup> By 1904-5, the plague had spread to twenty-six districts, including Dera Ghazi Khan across the Indus.<sup>12</sup>

It should be possible by now to discern a pattern in the outbreak of epidemics and also understand the factors that probably contributed towards this situation. The outbreak of malaria coincided with the periods of heavy rainfall, which caused flooding of vast areas, water-logging of the sub-soil and providing a breeding place for mosquitoes.<sup>13</sup> In 1878, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts were affected by floods. These two districts recorded a high incidence of malaria; 254 villages were affected in Jalandhar district and an area spread over 5,512 acres was affected in Hoshiarpur district.<sup>14</sup> In 1904, the sanitary commissioner noticed a greater prevalence of fevers in areas with heavy rainfall.<sup>15</sup> In 1908, there was a high prevalence of malaria in Fazilka and Amritsar where the area was flooded with 'people homeless and buildings grounded'.<sup>16</sup> The peak of mortality from epidemics occurred in particular months of the year. About forty per cent of the deaths from malaria occurred in the month of October. Of the total of fifteen major malaria epidemics, at least ten attained their height in October. After the monsoons, various low lying areas got flooded, the subsoil level was high and the conditions were conducive for the growth of mosquitoes. Sixteen epidemics of the plague reached their height in the months of March and April. About seventy-seven per cent of the total deaths from the plague were reported in these months when the humidity level and temperature were most conducive for the proliferation of rat fleas. The mean number of plague deaths per day in April was 1,648, followed by 1,218 in May and 923 in March.

A comparison between the figures for the rural and urban areas in the Punjab shows that the incidence of malaria, plague and cholera epidemics was greater in the countryside. For example, in 1882, the fever death rate in the rural areas was 18.50 per mille while in the urban areas it was 17.14 per mille.<sup>17</sup> The rural population was more exposed to wet and marshy conditions, which were conducive for the breeding of mosquitoes.<sup>18</sup> The lack of funds prevented drainage work and filling up of ponds and pools around the villages.<sup>19</sup> In general, there was shortage of medical aid and personnel as well.<sup>20</sup> By and large, people lacked information about the cause of the disease and the preventive measures to be adopted.<sup>21</sup>

From 1868 to 1890, the average mortality rate of cholera in the rural areas was 4.87 per mille whereas in the urban areas it was 1.06 per mille. The marked difference in the death rate from cholera in the rural areas was primarily due to the impurities of drinking water which was obtained from *kacha* tanks or shallow wells, and got polluted by organic impurities.<sup>22</sup> Also, the food sold in the villages was reported to be adulterated and unhygienic as the bylaws for the sale of milk, butter and other food articles, which were increasingly being adopted by the municipalities in the urban areas, were hardly operative in the rural areas.<sup>23</sup>

The plague too was largely a rural phenomenon. The plague death rate in rural Punjab was 6.30 per mille in excess of the urban deaths caused by the

plague.<sup>24</sup> The poorly ventilated, ill-built and crowded houses facilitated a faster spread of the disease in the rural areas of the Punjab. In the towns, foodgrains were not stored in the houses in larger quantities as in villages, which probably contributed towards a lesser presence of rats and, consequently, a lower incidence of the plague.<sup>25</sup>

The incidence of epidemics was generally greater among women as compared to men. The average mortality rate of the men per mille in the Punjab from 1901 to 1920 was 5.85 while that of the women was 7.55. Similarly, in case of fevers, the average annual death rate per mille for men was 21.75 while the corresponding figure for women was 23.95. There seems to have been a connection between the higher incidence of disease and mortality among women and the prevailing patriarchal structure. Compared to their male counterparts, women could benefit much less from the plague inoculation and smallpox vaccination. This was due to ignorance as well as the general disregard for women's health. The upper classes also brought in the question of 'honour' and 'custom'. A male physician's touch was considered 'polluting' due to which the women refused or were not permitted by the family members to get inoculated.<sup>26</sup> Also, the manner in which vaccination was carried out discouraged the women to get themselves vaccinated. Often, they were dragged out of their homes.<sup>27</sup> The vaccinators were not sensitive to the social susceptibilities of the women and were unmindful of their domestic privacy.<sup>28</sup> Family considerations, along with poverty, cost of medication, restrictions on the movement of women, and lack of time to travel long distances to reach medical institutions, were some inter-related factors which discouraged women from seeking medical aid. Consequently, there were lesser number of women, as compared to men, who received treatment in the government hospitals and dispensaries. From 1875 to 1885, of the total number of people going to dispensaries, the percentage of males varied between seventy and seventy-five, while the corresponding figures for women were twenty-five to thirty per cent.<sup>29</sup>

The prevalence of epidemics was attributed to social customs as well as to poverty, insanitary conditions and unhealthy living. The colonial administrators considered India as the abode of diseases. The plague was understood as 'a disease of filth, a disease of dirt and a disease of poverty'.<sup>30</sup> The British attributed the prevalence of diseases to the 'peculiar sanitary habits of the Indians'. The houses of the natives were considered 'insanitary' and 'ideal homes' for rats, mosquitoes and diseases. 'The katcha floors absorbed filth of every kind and in rainy season became squalid and wretched'.<sup>31</sup>

The British attributed the spread of epidemics to certain medical and social practices. The 'obnoxious' practice of variolation was believed to be behind the spread of smallpox.<sup>32</sup> Variolation was considered as infectious as the disease itself, because it induced the disease in its full intensity.<sup>33</sup> The epidemics at Kangra, Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Gujrat in 1873 were attributed in particular to the practice of variolation.<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, variolation was said to be behind the outbreak of smallpox in 1886 at Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Shahpur and Jhelum.<sup>35</sup> The social activities like condoling in groups, attending



religious gatherings and social customs like sitting next to a sick or a dying person were also considered responsible for the spread of the plague.<sup>36</sup>

In the course of attributing the outbreak of epidemics to the prevalent 'insanitary conditions', certain racial stereotypes became evident in the general attitude of the administrators towards the poor. The cholera outbreak at Amritsar was traced to the 'Kashmiri Mohammedans' who were considered 'filthy beyond the ordinary filth of the inhabitants of the Punjab in their persons and clothing, their houses reeked with concentrated effluvia of long accumulated faecal dejecta on the tops, while their floors and courtyards were mere cess pools of urine and various sweepings of their household'.<sup>37</sup> The 1875 fever outbreak at Rawalpindi was explained in terms of the 'races' of urban population of Peshawar, Kohat and Rawalpindi who lived in 'closely packed and ill-ventilated townships', and who were 'notoriously filthy in their habits'.<sup>38</sup> The district administrators also assumed that the people belonging to certain social and occupational categories acted as the carriers of the plague. For example, the *Nais* (barbers) and the *Chamars* (leatherworkers) were believed to have spread the disease by taking the clothes of the dead as perquisites and by carrying these to other places.<sup>39</sup> The *Doms* were believed to carry the infection from one place to another as they also acted as porters.<sup>40</sup>

The pilgrimages were considered as the chief mode of spreading cholera. As the pilgrim centres were crowded and had inadequate provisions for water and sanitation, often the pilgrims got infected from contaminated water and carried the infection with them on their way back. The water carried from the pilgrim centre as *prasada* (sanctified food) was also considered as a source of infection.<sup>41</sup> Thus, for more than half a century, the specific outbreaks of cholera continued to be ascribed to the increasing number of people going to the fairs and places of pilgrimage; the chief sources of infection being the Kumbh fair at Hardwar, followed by the fairs at Nurpur, Katas, Jwalamukhi and Naina Devi.

However, the British overlooked the administrative and environmental factors that contributed to the recurrence and spread of epidemics. Due to the frontier location of the Punjab, there was a frequent movement of troops through the province. In 1872, the troops of the Peshawar Mountain Battery returning from the Looshaie expedition got infected and were reported to have introduced cholera in Jhelum, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Mian Mir.<sup>42</sup> The movement of the troops specially in hot weather resulted in fatigue, lack of provisions, extreme sweating, consumption of water from contaminated sources, and insanitary conditions which led to the spread of the infection along the entire route.<sup>43</sup>

The British were reluctant to admit any connection between the outbreak of epidemics and the environmental changes brought about by canalisation and colonisation and the development of railways. An enquiry instituted by the Government of India in 1875 noticed that the death rate in the districts irrigated by the Western Jumna Canal was higher than that in the province as a whole.<sup>44</sup> It was seen that the artificial flooding produced by irrigation resulted in water-logging and stagnation of water, which resulted in the breeding of the

mosquitoes.<sup>45</sup> The malaria outbreaks in the Karnal district were traced to the irrigation of the rice fields by the Western Jumna Canal.<sup>46</sup> The increased incidence of malaria and high mortality, in fact, coincided with the process of canalisation from the areas irrigated by the Western Jumna Canal, Bari Doab Canal and the Chenab Canal.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, due to over irrigation and wrong alignment of canals, problem of water-logging was common, which increased the incidence of malaria.<sup>48</sup> The process of canalisation and colonisation also resulted in increasing the humidity levels which in turn caused conducive conditions for proliferation of rat fleas and the consequent increase in the incidence of the plague in these areas. As a result of canalization and colonization and the increased humidity levels this epidemic erupted in the districts of Gujranwala, Jhung and Lahore respectively during 1892-1905, 1902-6 and 1904-6.<sup>49</sup>

The construction of railways too resulted in the ecological disturbance. Railways in the Punjab received the special attention of the British because of its frontier location and its potential for agricultural production and exports.<sup>50</sup> Its rivers necessitated the construction of several large bridges and piers which was accompanied by digging of the earth. This resulted in water-logging over large areas which helped in the breeding of mosquitoes. Moreover, the construction of embankments for laying the railway tracks resulted in creating burrow pits over large areas. These got filled with water and vegetation during monsoons and became 'mosquito hatcheries'. Also, the natural drainage lines would get blocked by the embankments and created ponds and raised sub-soil water levels.<sup>51</sup> The Lieutenant Governor of the province admitted in 1878 that the water-logging resulting from the embankments on the Grand Trunk Road and the railway crossings was responsible for a higher incidence of malaria and mortality in the Jalandhar Doab.<sup>52</sup>

### **Colonial Response to Epidemics**

The British adopted rather comprehensive measures to deal with the epidemics. Their doing so enunciated the principle that providing relief measures during epidemics was the responsibility of the government. As may be expected, the resources were used selectively and according to the priorities of the colonial state. It appears that the British were concerned largely about preservation of their own political and material interests, including the safety of Europeans in the subcontinent. However, the measures became more focused and specific as the etiology of different epidemics became clear with the passage of time.

During the middle of the nineteenth century, when the causal factors of the diseases were not clear, measures adopted to combat the epidemics were directed against the natives rather than the actual bacilli. The British administrators acted on the assumption that the Indians lived in unhygienic and insanitary conditions and required constant surveillance. Consequently, emphasis was laid on isolation through cordoning and quarantine, as well as the disinfection of the dwellings and personal belongings of the sick. Those

afflicted with the diseases were segregated in tents or huts while their attendants were isolated separately. Their dwellings and household articles were disinfected and fumigated to prevent the spread of the disease.

The medical efforts to combat malaria were marked by debates over the causes and curative factors, which often resulted in haphazard preventive measures. Until 1880, the British attributed malaria to 'miasma' arising from the decomposing vegetable matter. In 1880, Laveran discovered the malaria parasite but his findings were met with considerable hostility and scepticism. In 1897 Ronald Ross solved the problem of the causation of malaria, clearly establishing the role of mosquitoes in its transmission.<sup>53</sup> Due to differences of opinion regarding the cause and mode of controlling malaria, different sets of measures were adopted to combat it. Some administrators favoured Ross's view and advocated mosquito eradication measures while the majority favoured administering of quinine prophylaxis.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, there was a general emphasis on the distribution of quinine to prevent and combat malaria. Initially, government officials and the government hospitals and dispensaries carried out the work of distribution of quinine.<sup>55</sup> From 1897 onwards, quinine was distributed all through the year to reduce the incidence of malaria.<sup>56</sup> The scheme of using postal agency to distribute quinine started in 1898 in Lahore division and was extended to all the divisions of the province in 1903.<sup>57</sup> At various places, local ventures supplemented the quinine distribution measures for a more effective coverage. The quinine distribution societies set up in Gurdaspur district in 1909, distributed the medicine free of cost to the poor.<sup>58</sup> In 1910, local bodies carried out the quinine distribution work. A scheme for the 'quinization' of school children was started in 1916.<sup>59</sup> A scheme for the spleen census of school children was prepared by the chief malaria medical officer in 1914 since malaria was most prevalent amongst the children. The scheme was to be applicable to all children studying in primary and secondary schools recognised by the education department of the government in towns and notified areas, and the villages where a government dispensary or a hospital existed.<sup>60</sup> However, due to the outbreak of the war, this scheme could not be carried out and it became operational only in 1918-19 when six medical inspectors were appointed in the province to carry out spleen census. In 1925, the scheme was extended to all schools and colleges but was confined only to boys studying in certain classes.<sup>61</sup>

Along with this, measures for the destruction of mosquitoes and mosquito-breeding places were undertaken. Investigations to control malaria were carried out in 1901 and 1908 which studied the relationship between the outbreak of malaria and the incidence of rainfall, canal irrigation and faulty drainage.<sup>62</sup> The findings laid emphasis on the destruction of the mosquito-breeding places following which collections of water were either drained or filled up, irrigation channels were cut, swamps were oiled and grass and undergrowth were cleared.<sup>63</sup> The mosquito control measures received greater attention in 1940, as there was shortage of quinine supplies due to the loss of

Java Island in the war.<sup>64</sup> In 1944, spraying of pyrethrum and DDT was resorted to for destroying mosquitoes.<sup>65</sup>

Several drainage schemes were introduced in the towns and cities which aimed to reduce the water-collections, thereby reducing the breeding of mosquitoes. However, such measures did not extend to the villages largely because it was believed that the measures like drainage of sub-soil were 'large scale, long term and expensive'. Consequently, from 1910 onwards, specific preventive measures which laid emphasis on mosquito extirpation and use of well-known contrivances for protection from mosquito bites were adopted.<sup>66</sup>

As in the case of malaria, there was considerable difference of opinion among the British medical officers regarding the causal agent of cholera. These differences of opinion had a bearing on the preventive measures to be adopted which remained tentative. In fact, the British in India took more than a decade to assimilate the Robert Koch's discovery in 1883 of comma shaped bacilli in water as an essential cause of cholera. Some administrators agreeing to Koch's view advocated improvements in the water supply, while others were inclined more towards making sanitary improvements.<sup>67</sup>

Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this scenario of ambivalence regarding the causal agent of cholera persisted and the British continued to lay emphasis on preventing the spread of cholera through cordons. A 'sufficient' number of men were deployed to set up a cordon around the infected area on the assumption that there was 'danger from the affected persons and their belongings'. The infected cases were segregated and restrictions were imposed on the movement of people. Disinfection followed cordons and segregation, though the disinfecting agent varied with place and time.

Nevertheless, some efforts were made in the rural areas towards improving the water supply. This was largely carried out by cleansing and disinfecting the wells but it is unlikely to have covered all the wells. The wells were disinfected with lime, alum or potassium permanganate from 1895.<sup>68</sup> Wells were also provided with platforms and parapets with finances drawn from the district funds.<sup>69</sup> In 1929, matters relating to water supply schemes in the rural areas were entrusted to the rural sanitary board, following which hand-pumps were installed in the villages.<sup>70</sup>

However, cleaning of the wells in the towns preceded the cleanliness measures in the villages. Bathing on the platforms of the wells was prohibited in the towns in 1875.<sup>71</sup> In 1879, the sanitary commissioner Punjab directed the municipalities to clean the wells and the tanks and to protect them from all polluting matter.<sup>72</sup> In 1908, people were asked to consume boiled water.<sup>73</sup> In 1921, the district boards provided vessels to draw water from the wells.<sup>74</sup> Chlorination of water was started in 1937.<sup>75</sup>

Water supply schemes which included construction of large reservoirs, laying of pipes and sinking of additional wells were undertaken initially in some urban centres, mainly the major cities and cantonments.<sup>76</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, such schemes were extended to other towns as well.<sup>77</sup> However, the 'financial stringency' due to the first world war resulted

in deferring the water supply projects for certain towns.<sup>78</sup> In view of the massive coverage area and finances involved for cleanliness and sanitation measures, the provincial government handed over sanitation matters ironically to the ill equipped and under resourced municipalities.

Vaccination against smallpox was one of the earliest forms of colonial medical intervention in India. However, vaccination was implemented selectively as this involved considerable infrastructure and heavy finances. An elaborate establishment, largely comprising of a superintendent-general, sanitary commissioner, deputy sanitary commissioner, district medical officers and Indian vaccinators was created for carrying out vaccinations. This establishment of vaccination scheme underwent modifications from time to time. During the 'vaccination season',<sup>79</sup> a few children were vaccinated and on the eighth day, from the children bearing the best lymph, the lymph was used for vaccination.<sup>80</sup> The people to be vaccinated were collected together at a central place and vaccinated from the lymph taken from children belonging to the same village.<sup>81</sup> In 1884, arm-to-arm vaccination was replaced by calf lymph vaccination.<sup>82</sup> The government sought to make vaccination compulsory for children in certain municipalities and cantonments. For this purpose, a bill was introduced in 1879, which also prohibited the practice of variolation.<sup>83</sup> In 1880, this bill was passed as the Vaccination Act. However, it was enforced mainly in the cities and in the summer capital Simla. Gradually, it was extended to some other urban areas of the province.<sup>84</sup> It was only in 1919 that all government servants were to be compulsorily vaccinated before entering service.<sup>85</sup> In 1929, compulsory vaccination was extended to rural areas, though it is not certain if it was ever intended to cover the entire population.<sup>86</sup>

The practise of vaccination was seen mostly as interference in the customs and personal lives of the people, because of which there was a possibility of unrest. The British therefore, undertook different measures to popularise vaccination. The deputy sanitary commissioner went to a number of villages in 1874 to explain the benefits of vaccination to the people.<sup>87</sup> From 1877, the officials and the subordinate staff were directed to work towards removing the reluctance of the people for getting themselves vaccinated.<sup>88</sup> From 1886, the sanitary commissioner himself gave lectures about the benefits of vaccination in the villages.<sup>89</sup> The native elites were induced to set examples by getting the members of their families vaccinated. Members of municipal committees of Multan, Ferozepur and Ambala motivated the villagers to come forward for vaccination.<sup>90</sup> The native rulers, for instance of Bashahr and Faridkot, set examples for popularising vaccination by getting their own children vaccinated.<sup>91</sup>

The plague policy, however, involved an unprecedented degree of medical and sanitary intervention because its outbreak was perceived as an emergency situation by the Administration. 'To all intents and purposes', the plague was 'an exotic, generating fear and scientific interest on a scale unmatched by malaria and other diseases indigenous to India'.<sup>92</sup> The British were initially reluctant to report the outbreak of the disease, for they feared the imposition of an international embargo on Indian shipping which would close an important

market and a source of raw material for Britain. Moreover, a period of heavy mortality also meant adverse effects on trade, reduced productivity and enhanced cost of administration.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, a comprehensive framework for the plague administration was created. It laid emphasis on early detection of the disease, evacuation of the infected dwellings, segregation of the sick and their relatives, and disinfection of the infected articles.

During the outbreak of the plague, the primary concern of the district administrators was to prevent any communication between the infected and uninfected areas. They were acting on the assumption that human contact was the main agency for the spread of the epidemic. Therefore, they got the infected villages partially or wholly evacuated, village sites disinfected, and the plague infested areas cordoned off. The villagers were then asked to evacuate their homes and to move into the camps within forty-eight hours. They were required to take their moveable property and supplies for about two months. Once the evacuation had taken place, no one was allowed to go back.<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, the evacuated houses in the villages were disinfected, ventilated and whitewashed.<sup>95</sup> The Chamars, coolies and water-carriers were ordered to thoroughly soak the walls, flooring and ceiling with the phenyl solution. A hole of about twenty-four square feet was made in the roofs to allow the sunlight. The next day, the house was white washed.

The plague measures extended even to the dead. The district administrators favoured corpse inspections.<sup>96</sup> The police disposed off the corpses of those who died in trains or in hospitals due to the plague or even of the suspected plague.<sup>97</sup> During the outbreak of 1911, at many places, including Jalandhar, corpse inspections were rigorously carried out much to the annoyance of the bereaved families.<sup>98</sup>

The movement of people from one place to another in both urban and rural areas was restricted during the course of the epidemic. Orders were issued prohibiting the granting of leave to government servants, sepoy and students to visit any infected area.<sup>99</sup> People were not allowed to visit the neighbouring villages to fulfil social obligations.<sup>100</sup> The district magistrates were given powers to prohibit the holding of caste gatherings and other social assemblies.<sup>101</sup> Special measures were taken to prevent the periodic and local fairs, which were a regular feature of people's life in both urban and rural areas. The assistant commissioner of Jalandhar district, Leslie Jones, prohibited the holding of fairs at villages Angle and Garcha.<sup>102</sup>

The movement of rail passengers was likewise monitored and they were subjected to medical examination at various inspection posts.<sup>103</sup> Passengers of the first, second and intermediate classes were given precedence over the passengers travelling by the third class. The latter were 'inspected' on the railway platform itself while former were 'examined' in their carriages.<sup>104</sup> The clothes, bedding and other belongings of the passengers were also checked, and 'filthy' articles, belonging mostly to third class passengers, were burnt. Those third class passengers who seemed likely to be carrying the plague were detained. Here, the authorities went by their 'dirty' appearance and their social

background. It was believed that lower classes were more likely to spread the disease as they travelled in gangs whose whereabouts could not be traced on arrival at their destination; nor could they be depended upon to give correct information. The detained men and women passengers were taken to a separate disinfecting tank and quarters where they were disrobed, and their own clothes were disinfected with the steam apparatus after which the passengers were allowed to proceed with their journey.<sup>105</sup> By contrast, the Europeans and Eurasians, even if they were sick, were allowed to continue with their journey in the rail carriage in which they were travelling. Their relatives and friends could also accompany them.<sup>106</sup>

Rather, special efforts were made to protect the European enclaves – cantonments, civil lines and the hill stations – from epidemics. Since they were meant for the British civil and military personnel, there already was physical distance from the areas inhabited by natives.<sup>107</sup> During the outbreak of epidemics the cantonments were cordoned off so as to prevent any communication with the infected areas.<sup>108</sup> The imposition of quarantine in the immediate vicinity of cantonments came to be generally regarded as ‘a means of protection’, which ‘certainly can do no harm’.<sup>109</sup> The Europeans acquired immunity from smallpox after getting themselves vaccinated and quinine gave them some protection against malaria. Due to concentration of the sanitary measures in and around the civil stations and cantonments, the European enclaves became relatively free of cholera as well. In the early years of the plague, however, the Europeans did not have any protection against this disease. The administration, therefore, sought to protect them by cordoning off their residential areas. Additional forces were deployed to ensure that the cordons were not broken and that the Europeans generally remained safe.

The hill station was another safe area for the Europeans. Its layout and administration ensured that epidemics were kept away. The preventive measures taken in Simla reveal the extent to which the colonial authorities worked to keep it safe from epidemics. Because Simla was the summer capital of the British Indian Empire from 1864 and the summer headquarters of the Punjab Administration, special measures were adopted there to keep it free from epidemics. ‘To improve the sanitary condition of Simla for establishing its agreeable character as the Summer Capital of the Government of India, and the resort of so many hundreds of Europeans’, seven lakh rupees were given as loan by the Punjab Government to the municipal committee to ‘improve water supply, conservancy and bazaar conditions’.<sup>110</sup> The Lieutenant Governor sanctioned money for improving sanitary conditions and for re-roofing slaughterhouses.<sup>111</sup> Simultaneously, improvements were made in the water supply of Simla. As early as 1875, pipes were provided in the houses.<sup>112</sup> The water supply scheme of Simla was strengthened subsequently by some special grants.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, special efforts were made to protect Simla from infection. Medical examination of the travellers coming from plains was carried out at Kalka by the hospital assistants assisted by the police. This was done to ‘guard not only Simla from importation of the disease but also to guard

European soldiers' at the cantonments of Kasauli, Dagshai and Subathu and European children and staff at the Lawrence School at Sanawar.<sup>114</sup>

### **Response of the People to Government Measures**

The diverse measures which were adopted by the British to handle epidemics affected different sections of the population in different ways. The epidemics not only entailed loss of life, but also affected the people materially and emotionally. Quite often their cultural and religious susceptibilities were hurt by forcible handling by the administrators. Physical dislocation and economic hardships, especially of the poorer sections, were integral to this situation.

Unsettling and hardship were built into the process of evacuation. During their evacuation to the camps, arrangements for accommodating the evacuees often caused discontent. People complained of inadequate number of huts in the camps; following which they were asked to live under the shades of trees, in the open, and in temples. During the cholera epidemic in 1872, the villagers were 'huddled in quarantine camps'; they were exposed to 'harsh conditions and inclement weather'.<sup>115</sup> The assistant commissioner on plague duty at Zafarwal conceded that there was a shortage of huts in the villages of Gundial and Ali Mardan.<sup>116</sup> Though the *zamindars* and the people with means could manage somehow, the rural poor, uprooted from their homes and hearths were left exposed to harsh conditions. They also complained of shortage of necessities of life in the camps as the authorities did not take up the responsibility of providing the necessary provisions.<sup>117</sup>

The villagers particularly complained of the coercive and callous attitude of the subordinate staff.<sup>118</sup> The vaccinators of the provincial establishment used the authority and influence of the local officials – *lambardars* and *zaildars*, for vaccinating the children who were often gathered forcibly and vaccinated without the consent of their parents. Women were dragged out of their homes and children snatched from their arms. The beards of the men were also pulled for not bringing the children out of their homes.<sup>119</sup>

The epidemics, followed by measures like cordoning, resulted in suspension of the means of livelihood of different sections of population. The worst affected were those whose subsistence depended on their daily earnings.<sup>120</sup> Measures like evacuation and cordoning prevented the pedlars and traders from selling their goods.<sup>121</sup> Trade declined in small places like Garhshankar.<sup>122</sup> Even the larger centres were affected. During the plague epidemic, the wholesale market in Delhi was closed, resulting in paralysing local as well as external trade.<sup>123</sup> Agricultural production also declined in the process. During the cholera epidemic in 1872, quarantine prevented the farmers from cultivating their fields.<sup>124</sup> The owners of those crops which required selling or processing immediately on ripening were the worst affected as they were unable to get through the cordon at every attempt in order to sell their produce.<sup>125</sup>

The responses of different sections of the people to the government measures varied, depending upon the extent to which they were involved and



affected, and the manner in which the representatives of the state dealt with them. Some sections of the society voluntarily carried out the requisite measures. In other cases, the reactions varied from sullen acceptance to active resistance.

'Leading men of influence' were required to assist the medical staff in the implementation of the plague eradication measures and convince the headmen and villagers of their area regarding the effectiveness of the measures. Several individuals co-operated with the authorities in their implementation.<sup>126</sup> Rai Bahadur Lala Kishen Das of Delhi placed four of his gardens at the disposal of the public for use during evacuation.<sup>127</sup> Some socio-religious associations too helped in the epidemic operations. The Arya Samaj in Jalandhar organized visits to the houses of the plague stricken and gave them financial help.<sup>128</sup> The relief committee of the Punjab Brahma Samaj supplied medicines and carried the work of disinfecting.<sup>129</sup> Public associations and committees were also formed to assist in the situation created by the plague. For instance, in Zafarwal, a public association comprising of both the Hindus and Muslims of the town was formed to allay the excitement of the people and to co-operate with the authorities to combat the plague.<sup>130</sup> In 1908, to assist in carrying out measures to prevent malaria, voluntary committees were formed in the towns and worked under a civil surgeon or a medical officer.<sup>131</sup>

The urban middle classes were generally restrained in expressing their resentment against the handling of epidemics. It was mostly voiced through the lodging of complaints with the authorities. For example, in Moga, a complaint was made against a native doctor in connection with the plague operations.<sup>132</sup> In Jalandhar, higher authorities were approached against the 'arbitrary' orders of the cantonment magistrate to disinfect the houses by burning dry grass in them.<sup>133</sup> Sometimes, the educated sections made use of the press to express their anger against the insensitive handling and sadist attitude of the British administrators. In an article on 'The Plague Administration in the Punjab', *The Tribune* condemned the callous attitude exhibited by the officials in dealing with the plague afflicted people and highlighted the need for appointing men of special tact to take charge of the plague operations.<sup>134</sup> The *Khalsa Advocate* maintained that efforts to contain the plague had failed 'to secure the cooperation of the people or to exert much influence on the course of the epidemic'.<sup>135</sup>

The circulation of rumours was a manifestation of people's disapproval of the preventive measures. Rumours chiefly revolved around the coercion associated with vaccinations and the plague. Regarding vaccination, it was said by some that the government was marking the children because it was looking for people fit enough to be slaves. Some believed that the British were taking out blood to prepare a blood mummy. It was also rumoured that the government was trying to find a child who had milk in his veins as such a child would be the expected Imam Mahdi whom the British were trying to kill.<sup>136</sup> Vaccinations were seen also as a means of spreading Christianity.<sup>137</sup> The set of rumours associated with plague measures was equally interesting. To arrest the plague, the government was believed to be resorting to poisoning the afflicted

persons.<sup>138</sup> The medical subordinates were administering pills of suspicious character and a certain hospital assistant was believed to have died after consuming his own pill.<sup>139</sup> The native officers like the assistant surgeons and *naib tahsildars* were suspected of spreading the disease by distributing poisoned sweets or by poisoning the village wells.<sup>140</sup> Credence was even given to the idea that the male members were being killed by the plague poison to secure their female relations for the enjoyment of the officials.<sup>141</sup>

The active resistance of the people was expressed in different ways. The general reaction to the government measures was to conceal the sick. The fear of separation from the family members added to the unpopularity of government measures. During the cholera epidemic in 1872, cholera cases were concealed because people were afraid of being quarantined.<sup>142</sup> Children were concealed in their homes till the tour of the vaccinator was over to prevent them from getting vaccinated.<sup>143</sup> In Lahore city, children afflicted with smallpox were concealed at the time when the vesicles were ripe and they were required to be brought for inspection.<sup>144</sup> The fear of segregation was the main reason behind the concealment of plague cases. In Sadhowal village, a constable discovered graves of people who had been secretly buried after succumbing to the plague.<sup>145</sup> The villagers buried the corpses even in their houses; in Sheikhpura, the body of a person who had died of the plague was found hidden in a stack of fodder.<sup>146</sup> In Garhshankar, the *lambardars* probably accepted gratification to allow the plague victims to be buried secretly.<sup>147</sup>

The rigour of the preventive measures resulted in giving of bribes to the lower government functionaries. In Palwal, members of the municipal committees bribed the vaccinators for not carrying out any vaccinations in their localities.<sup>148</sup> To avoid vaccinations of newborns in Ludhiana, the clerk registering births was bribed.<sup>149</sup>

Role of some vested interests, religious susceptibilities, and unfounded fears accounted for the resistance to the eradication measures. During the cholera epidemic in Amritsar, in 1875, a native practitioner of traditional medicine incited the Kashmiris not to get them inspected because his private practice 'got affected by the medicines administered by the administration'.<sup>150</sup> Some sections of society like Brahman priests, keepers of Sitala temple, Mullas and variolators felt that vaccinators deprived them of their livelihood. Attempts were made to prevent them from doing their job.<sup>151</sup> The villagers at Kathgarh refused to get themselves examined by the doctor till they were explained the importance of early detection of the infection. At Garhshankar, the *Sayyids* objected to the house-to-house inspection by the Muhammedan midwives (*dais*).<sup>152</sup> The inhabitants of Kalka were so opposed to desiccation and disinfecting that they did not let even the affected houses to be desiccated or disinfected.<sup>153</sup> Hindus and Jains were opposed to rat destruction on religious grounds. They either buried the baits laid for rats by the district administrators or released the rats caught in the traps.<sup>154</sup> During the malaria epidemic in 1910 in Gurdaspur district, instead of taking the quinine given by the quinine distribution society, the villagers gave the medicine to their cattle or threw it into the ponds and dung heaps.<sup>155</sup> The orthodox Hindus opposed vaccination

on grounds of caste and religion. A strong reluctance was reported apparently from the Muslims of the districts of Gurgaon, Lahore, Gujrat, Muzaffargarh and Dera Ismail Khan on the plea that the serum contained animal matter forbidden by their religion.<sup>156</sup> The people in Sialkot district refused to evacuate their houses due to fear of theft.<sup>157</sup> The residents of Paragpur who had refused to evacuate their homes in the plague-affected area, moved into the camp only after the arrest of a couple of men.<sup>158</sup>

The resistance of people in fact ranged from mild opposition and attacks on subordinate staff to more violent forms like riots. During the early period, their anger was directed against the vaccinators. In 1883, the vaccinators were actually assaulted four times and were prevented from carrying out their duty. In another incident, the head vaccinator of Delhi, Ghalib Ali, was attacked in the bazaar.<sup>159</sup> After outbreak of the plague, the anger of people was expressed through public demonstrations and threats to government functionaries and actual assaults on them. The residents of Garhshankar held a demonstration in the bazaar to protest against the house-to-house 'inspections' by the Muhammedan *dais* and the arrest of some men.<sup>160</sup> The residents of Sihawal and Darya Nangal violently threatened the naib tahsildar;<sup>161</sup> at Kathgarh, a person actually attacked the naib tahsildar, while the watchman (*chowkidar*) who was ordered to arrest the culprit, refused to do so. In Banga circle, the hospital assistants and compounders were accused of bribery, extortion and ill treatment; abuses were hurled at them, and some of them were manhandled.<sup>162</sup>

The growing discontent eventually resulted in clashes between people and the authorities. It was believed that highhandedness of the police and the tactlessness of the civil functionaries made the people defiant.<sup>163</sup> The functionaries at the lower rungs, who represented the state authority and came into contact with people, became the targets. They were beaten up, pelted with stones and sometimes killed. The people actually resorted to rioting at places like Bhangala in Nawanshahr *tahsil*, Shahzada in Sialkot district, Khanowal in Gurdaspur district, Garhshankar in Hoshiarpur district and in the town of Patiala where riots broke out, leading to attacks on officials, damage to government machinery, camps, hospitals and huts.

Thus, in the course of the epidemics, varying attitudes and responses, both from the government and the people, came to the forefront. In the initial years, the British laid emphasis on measures emphasising physical distance from the natives who responded with some restraint and a few incidents of resistance. However, outbreak of the plague brought about considerable change in the manner of handling the epidemics. Since the plague threatened the economic base of the British, it evoked an alarmist response from them. They handled the situation with determination, using coercion under-towed with apathy. People reacted sharply, and in voicing their discontent, at least for some time, Punjabis from different backgrounds came together, cutting across communal and caste barriers. To control the situation and reduce the escalating tension, the administration felt obliged to become more accommodating towards the natives. At the same time, responsibility for sanitation was passed on to the municipalities which were altogether unequipped to handle the epidemics.

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53. Simkie Sarkar, 'Malaria in Nineteenth Century Bombay', in Deepak Kumar ed. *Disease and Medicine in India: A Historical Overview*, ed. Deepak Kumar (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2001), pp. 134-39.
54. Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo Indian Preventive Medicine 1859-1914* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1994), pp. 158-65.
55. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, April 1891, Serial Number 30, pp. 15-17.
56. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1898, Serial Number 46, p. 177.

57. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1903, Serial Number 60, p. 53. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1908, Serial Number 72, p. 55. The distribution agencies were attached to the office of the inspector general of hospitals.

58. *Gazetteer of Gurdaspur District, 1914*, p. 197. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1910, p. 87. In 1910-11, the societies ceased to exist and the work of distribution was taken over by the vaccinators and dispensaries.

59. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1915, Serial Number 86, p. 46. Local bodies were asked to bear the cost of 'quinization' of the children.

60. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1914, Serial Number 84, pp. 70-72.

61. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, March 1926, Serial Number 106, pp. 1-3. The boys studying in classes I, V, VII, IX and XI were examined.

62. Major S. R. Christophers, *Malaria in the Punjab* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1911), pp. 5, 84.

63. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, October 1908, Serial Number 72, p. 80. Also, *Gazetteer of Gujranwala District, 1935*, p. 54. In the towns, voluntary committees were set up which carried out the work of the destruction of mosquitoes under a civil surgeon or a medical officer.

64. *Punjab Government Civil Secretariat Proceedings, B, Home: Public Health*, (cited hereafter as *Proceedings, Home: Public Health*), 1943, Number 140, pp. 3-4.

65. *Proceedings, B, Home: Public Health*, 1944, Number 102, pp. 2-3. Local bodies or municipal committees carried out the work of spraying in the towns. In the villages spraying was done twice a week.

66. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, January 1911, Serial Number 77, p. 88. Training was imparted to medical officers and subordinates on malaria prevention.

67. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1897, Serial Number 44, p. 609.

68. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1896, Serial Number 41, p. 120.



69. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1897, Serial Number 44, p. 609. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1905, Serial Number 65, p. 59.
70. *Proceedings, B, Home: Public Health*, 1929, Number 6, pp. 1-2. Also, *Proceedings, B, Home: Public Health*, 1944, Number 66, p. 3.
71. *Proceedings, Home*, June 1876, Serial Number 8, p. 335.
72. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, January 1879, Serial Number 11, p. 13. The wells were cleaned with Potassium Permanganate.
73. *Khalsa Advocate*, 13 March 1909.
74. *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, January 1921, Serial Number 42, p. 6.
75. *Proceedings, B, Home: Public Health*, 1938, Number 195, pp. 8-10.
76. *Proceedings, Municipal*, May 1878, p. 17. Also, *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, 1887, Serial Number 10, p. 32; *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, 1892, Serial Number 15, p. 258; *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, 1893, Serial Number 16, pp. 5-7.
77. *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, 1901, Serial Number 23, p. 262. Also, *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, 1907, Serial Number 28, p. 3; *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department*, 1912, Serial Number 33, p. 31.
78. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1917, Serial Number 90, pp. 77-79.
79. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1882, Serial Number 14, 95. The vaccination season extended from November 1 to March 31 in the plains and from April 1 to October 31 in the hills.
80. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1880, Serial Number 12, pp. 342-43.
81. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1882, Serial Number 14, p. 95.
82. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1903, Serial Number 60, p. 127. Initially, calf lymph was used, which was taken on the fifth day from the udder of the animal under one year who was free from any contagious disease.

83. Variolation was a practice in which the inoculators kept dry crusts from pustules mixed with a few grains of rice in a box. Smallpox was induced by inserting the mixture into a wound made near the base of the thumb. This was kept for six hours. Dietary restrictions were imposed. For six days cold water was poured over the patients' head. This was discontinued for three days when the eruptions began. Pustules were opened and pus drained off. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Punjab, Volume I*, (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1908), p. 146.

84. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, December 1879, Serial Number 11, p. 1; *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1884, Serial Number 18, p. 93. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1887, Serial Number 24, p. 89; *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1888, Serial Number 25, p. 89. In 1884, the Act was enforced in Lahore Municipality, and in 1887 at Simla and Amritsar.

85. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, February 1886, Serial Number 21, pp. 19-20. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1919, Serial Number 94, p. 70.

86. *Proceedings, A, Home: Public Health*, 1929, Number 4, p. 3.

87. *Proceedings, Home*, February 1874, Serial Number 6, pp. 88-89.

88. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1877, Serial Number 9, p. 681.

89. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, May 1886, Serial Number 21, p. 75.

90. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, October 1880, Serial Number 12, pp. 540-41.

91. *Proceedings, Home*, August 1876, Serial Number 8, pp. 552-53. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, October 1880, Serial Number 12, p. 541.

92. Harrison, *Public Health in British India*, p. 150.

93. Anil Kumar, *Medicine and the Raj: British Medical Policy in India, 1835-1911*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 194.

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95. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 119-121, pp. 1-2.

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97. *Proceedings, Medical and Sanitary*, August 1898, Number 172-B, p. 3.
98. *The Tribune*, 18 May 1911, p. 3.
99. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, March 1901, Number 58, p. 1.
100. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1898, Number 208.
101. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, May 1901, Number 134-35, p. 1.
102. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, April 1898, Number 276-B, p. 23.
103. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, May 1898, Number 69-71, p. 3. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1898, Number 91-104, pp. 3-5; *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1898, Number 282-85, p. 3.
104. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1898, Number 172-B, p. 1.
105. Inglis, *Plague in Jullundur and Hoshiarpur 1897-98*, pp. 46-47. The detained men and women passengers were escorted by the policemen and the *dais* respectively.
106. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1898, Number 172-B, p. 1.
107. Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 37.
108. *Proceedings, Home*, May 1875, Serial Number 7, p. 381.
109. *Proceedings, Home*, March 1874, Serial Number 6, p. 132.
110. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, March 1878, Serial Number 10, p. 349. Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1877, Serial Number 9, pp. 704-5.
111. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1877, Serial Number 8, pp. 705-11.
112. *Proceedings, Home*, October 1875, Serial Number 7, pp. 778-79.

113. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, March 1878, Serial Number 10, pp. 349-50. Also, *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department, 1893*, Serial Number 16, p. 9; *Proceedings, Boards and Committees Department, 1920*, Serial Number 41, p. 15; *Proceedings, B, Home: Public Health, 1936*, Number 129, pp. 4-5.

114. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, October 1875, Serial Number 7, p. 774.

115. Cunningham, *Cholera Epidemic of 1872*, p. 28.

116. *The Tribune*, 4 May 1901, p. 5. Also, *The Tribune*, 27 April 1901, p. 2; *The Tribune*, 4 May 1901, p. 3.

117. *The Tribune*, 27 April 1901, p. 2.

118. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, November 1878, Serial Number 10, p. 941; Also, *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, December 1879, Serial Number 11, p. 7.

119. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, February 1881, Serial Number 13, pp. 82-83.

120. *The Tribune*, 27 April 1901, p. 2.

121. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, April 1898, Number 279 B, pp. 1-2.

122. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 149, p. 15.

123. Narayani Gupta, *Delhi: Between Two Empires 1803-1931, Society, Government and Urban Growth*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 137.

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125. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, August 1898, Number 206, pp. 3-4.

126. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, December 1907, Number 6-9, pp. 1-2.

127. *The Tribune*, 17 April 1907, p. 3.

128. *The Tribune*, 20 February 1902, p. 5.

129. *The Tribune*, 19 April 1907, p. 5.
130. *The Tribune*, 27 April 1901, p. 2.
131. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, September 1915, Serial Number 86, p. 40.
132. *The Tribune*, 30 April 1901, pp. 3-4.
133. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1911, Number 16-18, pp. 1-3. Also, *The Tribune*, 19 May 1911.
134. *The Tribune*, 30 April 1901, pp. 3-4.
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136. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, February 1881, Serial Number 13, p. 84.
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138. *Proceedings, Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 122-26B, p. 1.
139. *The Tribune*, 14 May 1901, p. 3.
140. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1901, Number 99-100, pp. 2-3.
141. *The Tribune*, 14 May 1901, p. 3.
142. Cunningham, *Cholera Epidemic of 1872*, pp. 4-5.
143. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1880, Serial Number 12, pp. 342-43.
144. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1884, Serial Number 18, p. 92.
145. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 149, p. 3.
146. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, April 1898, Number 276 B, p. 20. Also, Inglis, *Plague in Jullundur and Hoshiarpur 1897-98*, p. 81. In Dhahan village, in Banga circle, an infected corpse was found locked up in a room.

147. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, April 1898, Number 280B, p. 5.
148. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, October 1880, Serial Number 12, p. 540.
149. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1880, Serial Number 12, pp. 342-43.
150. *Proceedings, Home*, June 1876, Serial Number 8, p. 337.
151. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, February 1881, Serial Number 13, pp. 81-82.
152. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 149, pp. 2-5.
153. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, May 1904, Number 42--43, p. 2.
154. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, October 1907, Serial Number 70, p. 75.
155. *Gazetteer of Gurdaspur District*, 1914, p. 197.
156. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1890, Serial Number 29, pp. 40-41.
157. *Gazetteer of Sialkot District*, 1920, p. 31.
158. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 148, p. 3.
159. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, July 1884, Serial Number 18, p. 87.
160. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, June 1898, Number 149, p. 5.
161. *Proceedings, Home: Medical and Sanitary*, May 1901, Number 111-23, pp. 3-4.
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## **Food Crisis, Inflation and Political Control in Punjab (1940-47)**

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Colonialization of the peasant economy turned Punjab into a major food supply zone within the British Empire. It also remained the most important recruiting ground for the British Indian army. The British imperial interests during World War II dictated the use of government machinery to draw the maximum of human and material resources from the Punjab. In the process, the province went through a number of interrelated socio-economic crises such as food shortages, rationing, hoarding, black marketing, profiteering, price rise, inflation, and speculation, which were compounded by massive demobilization after the war. This situation caused discontent among the disbanded soldiers and acute deprivation among the masses, especially the wage earners and the salaried classes, in both rural and urban areas. It also had far reaching effects on the political situation in the 1940s.

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In the wake of World War II, the agrarian economy of the Punjab witnessed unprecedented food crisis, rationing, price rise and inflation in the 1940s which caused large scale dispossession and deprivation among the producers and consumers, especially the middle and lower classes. The colonial state became more exacting for foodgrains which precipitated a food crisis both at the level of production and distribution. Excessive exports of foodgrains mandated rationing which led to price rises, hoarding, black marketing, speculation and inflation. It caused discontentment among the masses. Political control by the colonial state came under strain. This paper attempts to delineate the processes of economic crises at the level of production, distribution and fiscal management in the Punjab during the 1940s upto the British withdrawal from India.

### **Towards World War II and the War Economy**

With the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, World War II began in Europe. The mobilization of British forces was declared. An ultimatum was issued to Germany at 9:30 pm and the second and final one on September 3 at 9 am. Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, spoke on the radio at 11:15 am. Both Britain and France declared war on Germany on the same day. From his viceregal summer residence in Simla, Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, announced the war against Germany on Sunday, September 3, at 8.30 IST over the All India Radio. India was vital to the defence of British interests around the world. The ships would transport food, armaments and troops from the colonies and dominions on the periphery of the Indian Ocean

to the United Kingdom, as well as to war theatres around the Mediterranean Sea or in Southeast Asia. Linlithgow immediately got immersed in the war problems. He was industrious, clear-headed, patient and capable, having rock-like firmness.<sup>1</sup> In fact, his principal claim to fame was his organization of the Indian war effort. From the British viewpoint, he successfully handled both the challenges of supply and recruitment, and came to be called as 'a Great War Viceroy'.<sup>2</sup> A Defence of India Ordinance restricting civil liberties came into force the day war was declared. It established the power of the Central Government to promulgate such rules as appeared necessary for securing defence of British India or the efficient prosecution of the war or for maintaining essential supplies and services.

However, the elected members of the Central Legislative Assembly had not been consulted. Even though within the Indian National Congress, Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were sympathetic towards France and Britain, they felt outraged at the Viceroy dragging India into the war without consulting the representatives of the Indian people. The Congress Working Committee met at Wardha from 10 to 14 September 1939. Sharp differences cropped up. The Socialists like Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan and Subhas Chandra Bose argued that the war was an imperialist one and differed on extending any support to England. Jawaharlal Nehru made 'a sharp distinction between democracy and Fascism'. At the same time, he underlined that Britain and France were imperialist nations. Therefore, he argued that India should neither join the war nor take advantage of Britain's difficulties. On 22 October 1939, the Congress Working Committee met again at Wardha and resolved that any support to Great Britain would amount to an endorsement of imperialist policy. The Congress ministries in Madras, the Central Provinces, Bihar, the United Provinces, Bombay, Orissa and North West Frontier Province resigned from 27 October to 15 November 1939. Thus, the Congress rejected any responsibility for India's war contribution.<sup>3</sup> For India, World War II was 'a conflict between old and new imperialist powers'.<sup>4</sup>

It was evident that the war between the contending parties was a war for resources, war conducted with resources and war decided to a large extent, by the comparative superiority of resources.<sup>5</sup> Lord Zetland, the Secretary of State for India, informed the Viceroy that the whole strength of the empire might have to be developed and deployed. The first step was 'to increase the output of India's munitions factories to the maximum in order to meet their own needs as also all outside demands'.<sup>6</sup> Hence, India entered into the war not on its own will, but committed to it by its rulers. Ethically, the war was not of India's seeking. It was entirely due to European rivalries and imperialist competition. The new British Government had made the subservient Government of India join in their extra-frontier imperialist operations.<sup>7</sup> Winston Churchill categorically declared that it will be a long war and one full of sorrow and disappointment for the British empire. Sir Leopold S. Amery, the new Secretary of State for India, decided 'to utilize Indian supplies to the



utmost'. Even the American President F.D. Roosevelt prepared for a prolonged war.<sup>8</sup>

The Punjab bore the main burden of providing cannon fodder for the various theatres of the war. The Indian army numbered 1,94,373 on the eve of the war in September 1939.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the war, the bureaucracy operated seamlessly with the military establishment, squeezing every village for manpower. Sikander Hayat Khan, the Punjab Premier, also called 'the soldier Premier', confidently assured the Punjab Governor, Henry Craik, that the province could supply half a million recruits for the Indian army within weeks. Hence, the epithet 'the garrison state' which was mobilized in support of Britain's war efforts against the Axis Powers. Interestingly, by the end of September 1939, General Sir Robert Cassells, the Commander-in-Chief for India, had recruited about 34,000 men out of whom 18,000 or 19,000 were from the Punjab, and without the knowledge of its Governor.<sup>10</sup> In the Punjab, the initial responses towards recruitment were 'enthusiastic'. The Deputy Commissioner of the Attock district in the north-west, reported keen interest in the possibility of recruitment.<sup>11</sup> The vernacular press considered it 'a limited war' that would end soon.<sup>12</sup> In the beginning of May 1940, the green signal was given in London for expanding the Indian army in view of the possibility of hostilities with Russia and Afghanistan. By the middle of August 1941, recruitment attained a record figure of 50,000 per month. The Indian army doubled, from 166,377 in 1940 to 3,26,497 in 1941, and reached upto 6,51,655 in 1942.<sup>13</sup> Significantly, however, recruitment had been opened to 'non-martial castes' which included the Mazhbis, Ramdasi Sikhs, Christians and Ahmdiyas. Even physical standards were relaxed.<sup>14</sup> The Punjab continued to be the main supplier of soldiers throughout the war, accounting for about 36 per cent of all soldiers recruited from India.<sup>15</sup>

The profile of the army changed in the process. The number of Muslim recruits from the Punjab quadrupled: from 43,291 in 1940 to 165,497 in 1942. The share of the Sikhs also increased from 24,723 in 1940 to 72,059 in 1942, and that of the Jat Sikhs from 18,465 in 1940 to 42,087 in 1942. As a whole, the Indian army expanded fast: from 1,50,000 in 1939 to 10 lakhs in 1942, increasing by 50,000 men per month. Between November 1941 and September 1942, 50.7 per cent recruitment was from the pre-war catchment areas, and 49.3 per cent from amongst the new groups. On 1 January 1944, the total strength of the army in India and overseas was 23,62,156 which included only 1,75,323 of the British army.<sup>16</sup> Churchill felt gratified that with two and a half million Indians volunteering to serve in the forces, this was the biggest army ever raised without conscription.<sup>17</sup> The mobilization reached 20 lakh, of which about 50 per cent were Punjabis.<sup>18</sup> World War II was viewed in the Punjab as 'a total war', leading to unprecedented 'mobilization of manpower and economic resources'.<sup>19</sup>

Along with manpower mobilization, there was a massive resource mobilization testified to by the historians of different hues. The defence expenditure grew rapidly. The total defence expenditure was Rs.46 crore in 1939, which increased to Rs.593 crore in 1943, to Rs.773 crore in 1944, to

Rs.869 crore in 1945, and to Rs.769 crore in 1946, increasing thus by 19 times. The proportion of national income spent on defence increased by 7 times, increasing from 2.4 per cent in 1939 to 14.3 per cent in 1946, reaching the maximum of 16.4 per cent in 1943.<sup>20</sup> By 1945-46, the defence expenditure had risen to Rs.3,955 million per annum and over the period 1939-45, it amounted to over Rs.17,000 million or 75 per cent of the total expenditure on current account of the Centre. Taxes were substantially raised and tax revenue rose, but current revenues covered only 70 per cent of the Centre's outlays during the war.<sup>21</sup> The annual average of the total defence expenditure of India during the war was three times that of India's annual revenue at that time.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, practically the whole of the net expenditure on defence services and supplies in India was in the shape of rupee expenditure.<sup>23</sup>

While Indian revenues were to be used for the defence of the colony, in a major departure of policy, the British Imperial Government agreed to foot the bill for the use of Indian forces in the defence of the empire. However, as the treasury in London was short of cash, a mechanism was devised by which India would be reimbursed at the end of the war. So, part of the total expenditure on the war would be recoverable as sterling credits for India accumulated in the Bank of England.<sup>24</sup> Of the total government expenditure of Rs. 39.96 billion incurred in the course of the war, 37 per cent had been raised by taxation, 36 per cent by borrowing, and 27 per cent (Rs.10.78 billion) by increase in the money supply. The economy was structured in the service of the war.<sup>25</sup> In the War Cabinet meeting of 4 August 1943, the Secretary of State for India admitted that the Indian economy was being 'strained almost to breaking-point' by the demands of the war.<sup>26</sup> In short, the strain on the civil economy was considerable, because 'since 1939, India progressively took more and more from her civil economy to meet defence requirements'.<sup>27</sup>

### **Agrarian Production and Export of Foodgrains**

On the eve of the war, the state of agrarian production in India was critical. Food production had declined at an annual rate of 0.02 per cent during 1924-44.<sup>28</sup> However, with massive irrigation networks, the Punjab had emerged as 'a new agrarian frontier', which was said to be 'the most export-oriented in the whole of Asia'.<sup>29</sup> The Punjab had the largest irrigation system with 20 million acres under irrigation, with a canal network running over 3220 kilometers. The total irrigated area accounted for 52 per cent of the total cropped area in the Punjab. Improved varieties of wheat, cotton and sugar reached 50 per cent, 70 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively.<sup>30</sup> In view of this, the German military and economic experts had assumed self-sufficiency of India in food stocks. However, it proved to be 'illusory', as India had actually imported rice throughout the 1930s.<sup>31</sup> Taking 1893-86 as the base period, the decennial average of crop output for 1936-46 was 93 for food crops, 185 for commercial crops, and 110 for agricultural production as a whole. With the post-1921 demographic change, per capita output actually declined.<sup>32</sup> Though the Punjab achieved high rate of increase in the both food and cash crop production, the

cropping pattern underwent drastic changes. The proportion of area under wheat declined in conformity with the profit-maximization principle as it was one of the 'least profitable' crops. By comparison, cotton enjoyed a decided advantage, achieving the highest profit in terms of unit cost of production.<sup>33</sup>

On 26 August 1939, the Department of Supply was created to deal directly with the problems concerning supplies of all kinds required for the prosecution of the impending war. The War Supply Board was reconstituted in November 1939.<sup>34</sup> The rural population was rallied to intensify the area under cultivation through 'Grow More Food' campaign in the Punjab. In April 1943, the Kisan Women's Conference was held which passed a resolution supporting the 'Grow More Food' campaign.<sup>35</sup> The total cropped area increased from about 30 million acres in 1939-40 to nearly 35 million acres in 1942-43.<sup>36</sup> By then, the area under food crops in the Punjab reached 25.6 million acres which exceeded by nearly half a million acres over the year 1933-34. The area under four important crops – wheat, rice, maize and *bajra* – was the highest ever recorded in 1942-43.<sup>37</sup> With the average of three years ending in 1939, the area under grain crops in 1943-44 had increased by over 11 million acres, providing, thus, an additional yield of 4 million tons of foodgrains.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the agriculturists devoted better quality land as well as that under irrigation to the cultivation of commercial crops. In the canal colonies, the cultivation of American cotton became profitable which replaced sugarcane.<sup>39</sup> Linlithgow considered the procurement of the necessary wheat surplus from the Punjab as far more important than any political considerations, including any interests of the ministers, and even the continuance of provincial autonomy in the Punjab.<sup>40</sup>

On 21 July 1943, the Government of India once again asked Amery, the Secretary of State for India, for immediate imports, noting that 'famine conditions have begun to appear' in parts of southern India and in Bengal.<sup>41</sup> The Punjab Government promised wheat supplies to Bengal, but sought assurance that 'the Bengal authorities would cease to make a profit out of the sale of foodstuffs'.<sup>42</sup> In 1943, the 'Grow More Food' campaign was intensified. It was decided to increase the production of rice and millets. The provincial government expected 'to exceed the export targets'. The year 1943 had experienced 'an excellent harvest', and wheat reached the *mandis* in large quantities. The central purchasing agents, the military agents and the North-Western Railway authorities made considerable purchases from the *mandis* at rates varying from Rs.10-12-0 to Rs.11-1-0 per *maund*. The Director, Food Supplies, Punjab bought rice at Rs.17-14-0 per *maund*.<sup>43</sup> The wheat from the Punjab found its way not only to Bengal but to many war fronts.<sup>44</sup> The Punjab exported about 1,62,000 tons of foodgrains.<sup>45</sup> An analysis of the 'Grow More Food' campaign of 1942-43 suggested that the additional production of food grains was obtained by diversion of a substantial area from short-staple cotton to millets. This was largely in response to concessions and financial assistance offered by the central and provincial governments and the higher prices of food grains.<sup>46</sup>

However, procurement of wheat lagged behind. It only totalled 3,11,000 tons against the expected 5,00,000 tons during May-July 1943. In response to a directive from the centres to improve the procurement position, the Punjab Premier issued two appeals to the growers to bring their grain to the market.<sup>47</sup> In November 1943, it was argued in the Central Legislative Assembly that 'the Grow More Food' campaign had not made 'any improvement' in food-grain cultivation 'in any appreciable degree'. Due to shortage of cattle for cultivation, the price of bullock had increased seven times; the daily wages of a unit of plough rose by eight times. Hence, cultivation went beyond the means of an ordinary peasant, whereas 'the interests of the producers were paramount concern' in the Punjab, maintained Sir Jogindra Singh.<sup>48</sup> Even though the 'Grow More Vegetable' was launched to control the price of seeds, and food was characterized as 'a munitions of war', it was one of the first commodities to feel the impact of the crisis caused by the increasing purchases for the war.<sup>49</sup> Wheat purchases for export reached 1,84,860 tons (1,19,938 tons for defence and 64,872 tons for civil purposes) against the quota of 4,20,000 tons for raw wheat.<sup>50</sup> The Central Food Department made arrangements for providing storage for foodgrains. New constructions were contemplated in the Punjab. Accommodation for 60,000 tons had already been hired in the Punjab which was expected to increase upto 1.5 lakh tons. During the fortnight ending 1 December 1944, 21,410 tons of foodgrains were dispatched by the Punjab Government on civil accounts; of this, wheat constituted 13,109 tons, millets 1450 tons, and rice 6,851 tons.<sup>51</sup> As reported in *the Tribune* in the five year period ending 1942-43, the average area under wheat in the Punjab represented about 28.2 per cent of the total area under wheat in British India. In early January 1945, favourable rain proved very 'beneficial to standing crops'. It was also reported that by the beginning of July 1945, about 7,632 tons of foodgrains were dispatched from the Punjab to the deficit provinces in India. According to F.B. Wace, Secretary, Civil Supplies, Punjab, 80,000 tons of rice were purchased for export to the deficit provinces, and by early December 1945, about 13,724 tons of foodgrains had been dispatched to the deficit areas.<sup>52</sup> During 1945-46, about 4,15,886 tons of wheat, 96,813 tons of rice, and 18,055 tons of millets were exported from the Punjab.<sup>53</sup> From March 1945 to February 1946, the actual exports of foodgrains from the Punjab stood around 6,80,000 tons.<sup>54</sup> Food production remained critical in India, because as compared to 1900-1, it was less in 1947-48.<sup>55</sup>

### **Food Crisis, Rationing and Price Regulations**

As was to be expected *a priori*, stagnant food production and massive exports led to shortages of foodgrains in the Punjab. The south-eastern Punjab districts faced famine. In Hissar, there were cases of general debility. The Director of Public Health reported that the cases of absolute starvation were not difficult to find.<sup>56</sup> It was reported in the press that the prices of food and other necessities of life were soaring; the cost of living was mounting; and the black market was thriving.<sup>57</sup> In Amritsar city, one of the principal wheat markets of the province,

there had been violent fluctuations in the price of wheat. The Deputy Commissioner attributed it to wild speculation in 'futures'.<sup>58</sup> In fact, the prices rose rapidly in the 1940s and remained at very high levels throughout 1947.<sup>59</sup> This situation had necessitated regulation of prices. In the month of April 1941, the local merchants in the Punjab sharply reacted to the price regulations. They openly protested against the sales tax. They called for the provincial merchants' conference in Amritsar, which created a deadlock in different centers in the Punjab.<sup>60</sup> Despite concessions made by the provincial government to the shop keeping class,<sup>61</sup> the supply of food was running desperately low in India by the end of 1941. The shortfall for dominant staple rice had exceeded 2.8 million tons which could not be met by imports. The Government of India felt obliged to introduce Statutory Price Control in December 1941. In January 1942, the Punjab Government issued an order to all farmers to declare stocks of wheat of 20 *maunds* and more. Meanwhile, the Department of Food was created by the Government of India in December 1942.<sup>62</sup> In April 1943, the Department of Industries and Civil Supplies was established on the assumption that requirements of civil consumers were no less important than the 'user' demands in a war.<sup>63</sup>

The price index rose from 137 in 1941-42 to 236.5 in 1943-44. The price rise induced the peasants to dispose of their reserve stocks at what seemed to them heaven-sent prices. The overall shortage had been estimated at 5 per cent but this was aggravated by faults of distribution and control.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the price index was based on the officially specified prices which were less than the prices actually prevailing in the market.<sup>65</sup> Mahatma Gandhi cautioned on 19 January 1942 that scarcities would worsen as the war prolonged.<sup>66</sup> The Government of India convened two foodgrains conferences in 1941 and 1943.<sup>67</sup> The Price Control Policy recommended the following: (i) the underlying principle of the United States Price Control Order that fixed the price as the average of the price of a commodity for the years 1919-29, should be adopted in the Punjab; (ii) as in England, the government should subsidise price control in India too; (iii) Punjab peasants should not be forced to supply food grains at cheap rates to the deficit areas, as there the local government was earning huge profits in foodgrains trade; (iv) special importance should be given to the perpetually famine stricken region of south-east Punjab; (v) price control should be applied to the food commodities; and, (vi) if the government felt unable to enforce these principles, it should permit the agriculturists to raise the prices of their commodities by as many times as the prices of their needs had gone up.<sup>68</sup>

The District Magistrate of Lahore reportedly admitted that owing to the very heavy military demands on wheat supply there was likelihood of shortage of wheat in the Punjab. In March 1942, the Punjab Legislative Assembly criticised the export of wheat. The *Khalsa* commented that through its policies of food requisition, rationing, and price control, the Raj had compromised its cardinal principle of maintaining rural stability.<sup>69</sup> The Punjabi peasant retaliated by withdrawing supplies from the market. The Punjab itself appeared to be on the threshold of famine. Yet, in consultation with the Wheat

Commission of India, the Punjab Government, albeit reluctantly, agreed to allow export of wheat and wheat products to the maximum permissible limit of 9 lakh tons during 1942. Between May and October 1943, about 2,65,100 tons of foodstuffs were sent from the Punjab to Bengal. The shortage of foodgrains now began to be felt acutely in the Punjab.<sup>70</sup> As in the Punjab, the scarcity in Bengal too had been avoidable. It has been argued by the renowned economist Amartya Sen that 'the Bengal famine was not the reflection of a remarkable over-all shortage of foodgrains in Bengal'. It was essentially 'a rural phenomenon' and the worst affected were fishermen, transport workers, paddy huskers, agricultural labourers, craftsmen, and non-agricultural labourers. The least affected were peasant cultivators and share-croppers. Urban areas were substantially insulated from the rising food prices by the subsidised schemes.<sup>71</sup> It was reported in the press that the Punjab Government had decided to build up a reserve to the extent of 40,000 tons of wheat, to be stored at various centers to ward off artificially engineered shortage.<sup>72</sup> Apparently, the officials could not use coercion beyond a point to extract wheat from the farmers: maintaining army morale meant pleading with, rather than threatening, the families of Punjabi soldiers. Linlithgow admitted that he did not want to antagonize the Unionist Government or to upset the cultivators whose sons were in the army. He feared that soldiers might consider that their legitimate claims out of food profits were being taken away from them.<sup>73</sup>

To deal with the shortages, on 21 July 1943, the Government of India asked the Secretary of State Amery for immediate imports. Meanwhile, rationing was first introduced in July 1943 in 13 cities and areas in India.<sup>74</sup> The Central Government introduced forced requisitioning and price control. It regarded total urban rationing as a fundamental part of the all India food policy. However, the provincial governments suggested a partial rationing.<sup>75</sup> The long range policy of the Government of India for dealing with the food situation was based on the recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee which submitted its report in September 1943. Its main features were: (i) institution of statutory price control over major foodgrains; (ii) introduction of civilian rationing in all towns with a population of over 75,000; (iii) procurement of foodgrains direct from the growers by provincial governments; and (iv) adoption of a vigorous policy for increasing the area under food crops.<sup>76</sup> As the Bengal famine crisis deepened further, the forced food requisitioning was introduced in the Punjab in September 1943, and price control in November.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, the Punjab Government was blamed for perpetuating famine conditions in Bengal by imposing an embargo on the export of grains. The Governor made it clear that the whole of the Punjab, in common with the rest of India, was gravely disturbed by the plight of Bengal.<sup>78</sup> Viceroy Wavell toured the Punjab in the last week of November 1943 'to get the ministers to agree to statutory price control of food and rationing'. They did not like regulations. Moreover, the situation remained 'unsatisfactory' due to the failure of rains.<sup>79</sup> The Unionists felt obliged to advocate the introduction of price control over the goods required by the peasants.<sup>80</sup> The situation had worsened in 1944, with hail damaging the wheat ripening in the fields of the

Punjab. By November 1944, about 460 towns and municipal areas were brought under rationing, covering about 42 million people; by October 1946, 771 towns and rural areas with around 150 million people were covered by rationing.<sup>81</sup> Political insecurity and good prospects in black market created a situation as a result of which maize, wheat and grain virtually disappeared from the open market by December 1945.<sup>82</sup> H.A. Majid, Rationing Controller, Lahore, issued an order fixing the maximum wholesale and retail prices of wheat and wheat *atta* within the limits of the rationed area of Lahore.<sup>83</sup> By early 1947, nearly 900 towns with a total population of 152 million received rationed foodgrains in India.<sup>84</sup>

In February 1945, during the Fifth All India Food Conference, the Punjab representative argued that 'the Punjab Government was not convinced that rationing is necessary at all in urban areas of a surplus province'.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, the Premier Khizr Hayat Khan was unable 'to prevent the reintroduction of price control'.<sup>86</sup> To deal with wheat shortages, the Government of India enhanced wheat supplies at the rate of one lakh tons per month from July to December 1945. It was hoped that it would materially help to maintain the stability of food administration in India. The Director, Civil Supplies, Punjab welcomed the decision to import wheat. He argued that the hoarders will think thrice before hoarding their grains. Consequently, in the rationed area of Lahore, the wheat price was reduced by 12 *anna* a *maund* from 3 July 1945. Subsequently, the Punjab Government issued an order fixing the maximum price of gram in 30 markets of the Punjab.<sup>87</sup> On 18 August 1945, F.B. Wace, Secretary, Food Supplies, Punjab reportedly announced that 'as long as acute shortage of supplies existed, control would continue'. He expected rationing to continue for another two years. He further elaborated that 'while army demands decrease as a result of the cessation of hostilities, civilian demands would increase with return to home of soldiers'. In the All India Radio broadcast, R.H. Hutchings, Secretary, Department of Food, Government of India remarked that the war had forced rationing, which people had to accept without regard to class, wealth and privilege.<sup>88</sup>

Though expected to be withdrawn in certain areas by the beginning of 1946, food rationing pervaded the daily life of the people. Sugar and *atta* was refused for charitable purposes on the occasion of *Bhadri Amawas* celebration for which a *mela* was held outside the Masti Gate, Lahore at a shrine called the Darbar of Jhingar. *The Tribune* remarked that 'price controls are man-made in India which create such conditions that no self-respecting man can live'. The export of wheat, rice, paddy, *jowar*, barley, *bajra*, maize and pulses had been exempted to provinces except Delhi city without obtaining an export permit. As reported on September 18, the Punjab Regulation of Local Purchases Order (1945) had been promulgated all over the province. No military contractor and no person buying on behalf of, or with the object of selling to a military contractor, could purchase in any district any of the articles such as bovine cattle and buffaloes, fish and beef, sheep and goats, poultry and eggs, vegetables including onions, potatoes, fruits (fresh and dry), and *bhoosa* (chaff). In early November 1945, the Punjab Government prohibited the export

of *gur* (jaggery) by any means from the districts of Ambala, Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Gurdaspur, Sialkot, Gujranwala and Lyallpur except under permit. The Punjab simply followed the rationing policy of the Central Government, not contemplating introduction of rationing in case of other articles because it would be difficult to build stocks.<sup>89</sup> Rationing of rice was enforced in the cities of Lahore, Amritsar and Rawalpindi which had already been brought under rationing. Loud protests were raised against the compulsory inclusion of rice in the ration as the government allowed 66 per cent in the form of wheat and 34 per cent in the form of rice with effect from 14 April 1946.<sup>90</sup> The Punjab Government also resorted to propaganda 'to impress upon the public the necessity of avoiding wastage of foodstuffs at the stages of buying, cooking and serving'. A film of about 1200 feet in length had been prepared to educate the masses to prevent wastage connected with storage and infestation problems. The provincial home publicity organization had been mobilized to take up this publicity through available means like the press advertisements, radio, films and loudspeaker vans, besides the posters, handbills and pamphlets.<sup>91</sup>

The situation continued to be grim till the end of colonial rule. As reported by *the Tribune* food crisis in India was discussed as 'alarming' in the House of Commons. An All India Conference in New Delhi discussed short term and long term aspects of the food problem. The stress was laid on the existing 'Grow More Food Campaign'. International Emergency Food Council reportedly authorized India to purchase a total of 9,50,000 tons of grains in the first six months of 1947. Sardar Swaran Singh, Food Minister, Punjab, agreed to implement the five year plan for 'Grow More Food' drive. He, however, assured the growers that they 'would not suffer as a result of the fall in prices'.<sup>92</sup>

### **Black-marketing, Hoarding and Deprivation**

The war situation steadily resulted in black-marketing, hoarding and deprivation. Already, at the time of the outbreak of World War II, it was reported that the prices of food and other necessities of life were soaring, the cost of living mounting and the black market thriving.<sup>93</sup> Initially, there was delay in putting a check on profiteering. The provincial government, however, claimed that prompt steps were taken to pre-empt looting of shops and even of food riots.<sup>94</sup> With Statutory Price Control introduced in December 1941, the general response of the Punjab cultivators was to resort to hoarding.<sup>95</sup> The rumours are said to have played an important role in creating scarcity.<sup>96</sup> The substantial price differences among different provinces led to smuggling and hoarding; a case in point was the wide disparity of price of rice between the Punjab and the United Provinces across the border and large purchases of paddy and rice.<sup>97</sup> In August 1943, it was reported that as much as one million tons of an estimated harvest of 35 million tons had not come to the market.<sup>98</sup> Chhotu Ram, the Revenue Minister in the Unionist Government, openly called for cultivators to hoard wheat until they secured higher prices for their



produce.<sup>99</sup> The Viceroy condemned such 'ruthless political opportunism', and asked the Punjab Governor, who tried to defend Chhotu Ram, 'to admonish' him 'very severely'.<sup>100</sup>

In October 1943, an Ordinance was promulgated to prevent hoarding and profiteering. In July 1944, Consumer Goods (Control of Distribution) Order was issued. By November 1945, the distribution of 34 articles of common use was controlled. The order required dealers and producers to furnish information about their imports and production periodically to the Controller General of Civil Supplies.<sup>101</sup> The price control and rationing in the Punjab could be achieved with 'much difficulty'. Wavell admitted that, in 1944, he was facing a 'hard struggle to hold prices and to stave off shortage and actual famine'.<sup>102</sup> In March 1944, the Secretary of State wanted the Viceroy to announce the import of 4 lakh tons of wheat, but conceal the export of 1.5 lakh tons of rice. Wavell, however, called it 'dishonest and stupid'. He considered one million tons of foodgrains as the 'minimum' required to ward off the food crisis in India. He even thought of 'resigning to bring the situation home'.<sup>103</sup> In the north-western region, the farmers held out wheat for higher prices. They preferred to keep their savings in the form of grain because they had come to distrust the value and security of cash.<sup>104</sup> The Punjab ministers were individually and collectively advised to abstain from making unwarranted or provocative statements about the grain position.<sup>105</sup> Debating the food situation in India in the Central Legislative Assembly, Sardar Mangal Singh questioned the allegation that the Punjab peasants were 'withholding foodgrains from Bengal'. He reminded the authorities that, rather than curbing black marketing, the Punjab Government and the Military Department entered into the black market and purchased wheat at Rs.7 or 8 instead of Rs.5 as determined under the price regulations.<sup>106</sup> At the same time, it was reported in the Punjab Assembly that the landlords were indulging in black marketing and the condition of the tenants had become miserable.<sup>107</sup>

By now, it is clear that the real fantastic increase was not in production but in profits, particularly speculative gains through profiteering in food, share market operations, and black market in general.<sup>108</sup> Black marketing in commodities remained active in the Punjab in spite of stringency and wide scope of the government measures.<sup>109</sup> *The Tribune* reported that in Multan, an effigy of 'black market' was set on fire at a public meeting held under the auspices of the local workers' assembly. The wheat shortages caused 'great anxiety'. Addressing the Fifth All India Food Conference at New Delhi, Sir Jogindra Singh underlined that the food problem should 'continue to need our anxious care for many years to come'. The readers of *The Tribune* complained that price-control-created black-market had ousted the honest traders from business.<sup>110</sup> There was a scarcity of daily necessities which were selling in the black market. Fearing a further cut in the wheat ratio allowed under rationing, the average consumer began concealing stocks of foodgrains such as rice, gram and pulses.<sup>111</sup> In the month of November 1945, about 59 prosecutions were launched relating to food offences, and a fine of Rs.500 was imposed. In Hoshiarpur, the defaulters were convicted to three months' rigorous

imprisonment.<sup>112</sup> In the months of January and February 1946, the black market price of wheat obtained a record level, selling at Rs. 11-18 per *maund* as against the control price of less than Rs.10-16 per *maund*. The government banned inter and intra regional movement of the commodity. All the stocks in the under rationing towns were taken possession of by the government.<sup>113</sup> Under the Punjab Hoarding of Rice and Paddy Prevention Order (1945), Clause 4, the dealers who held stocks in excess of those permitted by Clause 3 were required to dispose these within 21 days.<sup>114</sup> Due to serious famine in some parts of India, a cut of five *chhataks* (1/16th of a seer) per adult a day was made in the basic ration with effect from February 1946. The special ration allowance for marriage and death were stopped.

The increasing inability of the government to curb the malpractices associated with rationing and controls became progressively evident. It was pointed out in the Punjab Assembly that the situation was aggravated by corruption which was said to be in full swing in the province.<sup>115</sup> Contrary to the spirit of the government orders, the price of rationed wheat was very high in the towns compared with the villages, and the people protested against it.<sup>116</sup> It was mentioned in the Assembly that the poor men had to face problems at the hands of the ration depot holders.<sup>117</sup> The Premier, Khizr Hayat Khan, appealed to every Punjabi, the cultivator and the trader alike, 'to do everything they can to ensure that every grain which is surplus to their essential needs is made available for less fortunate fellows in other parts of India'.<sup>118</sup> The Muslim League leaders supported the government against the black marketeers.<sup>119</sup> In a press statement in *the Tribune*, Sardar Baldev Singh, minister from the Punjab in the Interim Government, insinuated that the private traders offered prices higher than statutory maximum rates for gram and wheat. However, no government would allow such malpractices when the people were faced with starvation. *The Tribune* reported that the mustard oil was being sold in black market at Rs.60-70 per *maund*. The shopkeepers had turned bold regardless of price control. In fact, control without enforcement was said to be useless. In the month of January 1947, Fazilka *tahsil* was in 'the grip of wheat famine'. However, P.N. Thapar, Secretary, Civil Supplies, Punjab considered it only a temporary shortage, and hence, a local problem. Similarly, wheat and *atta* became scarce in Jhang. The Deputy Commissioner exhorted the people to release the stocks of wheat if any such they had hoarded. The *muhalla* committees were formed, and the Governor paid a visit to the city. It was alleged that the big *zamindars* hoarded wheat amidst scarcity in the city of Jhang. Unlicensed dealers and the licensed dealers. As argued by Devi Dass Seth, Managing Director, Grain Syndicate Ltd., Lyallpur, the price controls had 'hopelessly failed' and allowed unscrupulous people to build up fabulous profits at the expense of the poor. *The Tribune* extensively reported that vital articles of food were disappearing from the market, but they could be obtained at black market prices.<sup>120</sup>

The provincial government admitted that wheat shortage had been causing considerable anxiety especially in the Rawalpindi division. The *zamindars*

blamed the merchants, and the townspeople alleged that the *zamindars* were hoarding wheat and selling it at black market prices.<sup>121</sup> With reports of scarcity conditions mounting, the province began to run out of grain. Even Lyallpur, the granary of the Punjab, faced acute shortage of wheat. With the introduction of Wheat Monopoly Procurement Scheme, wheat failed to reach the market. Fazilka and Kasur too reported to be facing acute shortage of wheat. The shortage of wheat persisted, and from 2 February 1947, every ration card holder in Ludhiana, Simla, Gujranwala, Sialkot and Rawalpindi was allowed to draw only one-third of the permissible quantity of wheat or wheat *atta* on his or her card. The remaining one-third of the ration would be in the form of rice only. Acute wheat and rice shortages were reported from the hill station of Dalhousie as well. With effect from February 16, 1947, consumers in the towns of Hoshiarpur, Hissar and Jhelum could draw two-third of the ration in wheat and one-third in rice. Likewise, the ration card holders in the towns of Batala, Gujrat and Campbellpur were permitted to draw only one-third of the ration in wheat or *atta* and the remaining two-third in rice. The wheat position was summed up as 'living from ship to mouth', as each shipload was consumed immediately on landing. In short, food situation caused general 'anxiety' in India in 1947.<sup>122</sup> However, despite the precarious food position in the province, the Punjab Government lent to the Centre 30,000 tons of wheat.<sup>123</sup> It has been suggested recently that the controls of the late 1940s were necessary to cope with the serious imperfections of the market networks of the Indian domestic economy.<sup>124</sup> It would probably be more realistic to say that food crisis was 'greatly aggravated by gross mismanagement and deliberate profiteering', leading to the interrelated problems of famine, inflation, scarcity, hoarding and black marketing.<sup>125</sup>

### **Inflation and Price Rise**

The war economy brought in 'galloping inflation'. The inflationary pressure emanated largely from the massive expansion in the public expenditure. Between 1939 and 1945 nearly Rs.3.5 billion were spent on defence purposes in India. The Government of India financed the war by making the mints work harder.<sup>126</sup> While the monthly circulation of money increased by less than Rs.5 crore during 1939-41, in April 1943, the rise was by Rs.37 crore, that is by more than seven times. The wholesale prices had climbed from 100 points in August 1939 to 293 points in April 1943, which was an increase of about three times.<sup>127</sup> Between 1939 and March 1946, the wholesale price index rose from 100 to 246; the money supply increased from Rs. 340 crore to Rs. 2120 crore; and sterling securities with the Reserve Bank of India increased from Rs.74 crore to Rs.1724 crore.<sup>128</sup> Money supply with the public increased by Rs.1776 crore between 1936-46, which was a rise of about seven times over the pre-war level.<sup>129</sup> From Rs.182 lakhs on 1 September 1939, the note circulation increased to Rs.1,137 lakh on 8 June 1945.<sup>130</sup> The total money supply (notes in circulation, bank deposits, cash holdings, and deposits with the RBI) rose from Rs.3.17 billion in August 1939 to Rs.21.9 billion in September 1945.<sup>131</sup> The

notes in circulation shot up from Rs. 2300 million in 1939 to Rs.12,100 million in 1945.<sup>132</sup> The note issue increased by practically 600 per cent during the war years.<sup>133</sup> The corresponding increase in money supply was from Rs.327 crore to Rs.2120 crore, and the price index rose by 2.5 times during the war.<sup>134</sup> The sterling debt too arose. The indiscriminate printing of paper money enabled the Government of India to acquire supplies for the war effort, both within the country and without.<sup>135</sup> On account of her sterling balances, India became the largest creditor of Britain. However, Britain's indebtedness replaced India's dwindling economic power.<sup>136</sup> After 1945, India ceased to be vital to Britain's pressing needs, being neither a source of essential supplies nor a net contributor to the Dollar Pool.<sup>137</sup> Given the Indian monetary system, sterling balances were treated as assets against which the Reserve Bank of India was 'entitled to print notes worth about two and a half times their total value' so that the recoverable war expenditure tended to have a stronger inflationary impact than expenditure on India's own account.<sup>138</sup> However, the sterling balances could not be used for purchasing goods abroad or for importing them for the use of the people. On the contrary, the sterling balances represented the deprivations of goods and services caused to the Indian consumers and producers in order to meet the requirements of the war.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the most powerful factor promoting inflation was the freezing of the sterling balances in London, which India had accumulated by her war contributions.<sup>140</sup> In theory, the cost of the war was to be met by taxation in India and reimbursement from Britain. In practice, however, the war could only be financed by inflationary currency issue.<sup>141</sup> In fact, between 1939-1946, the Government of India spent Rs.17.4 billion on behalf of, and recoverable, from Britain. The total amount of sterling balances due to India, lying with the Bank of England, came to Rs.21 billion until the end of June 1946. This entire sum was kept out of the reach of the Indian people during the war.<sup>142</sup> Thus people were forced to sacrifice consumption by diversion of goods and productive power to the war use.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, the war-time stagflation weakened the colonial economy which quickened the process of decolonization.<sup>144</sup>

It is evident that the war gave hardly any growth impulses to the Indian economy but subjected it to ever greater amount of inflation.<sup>145</sup> Prices of essential commodities, especially clothing and wheat, went up about 300 per cent by the end of 1941. Due to dislocations of war, imports dropped drastically. As government purchases of war-related material diverted some goods from Indian consumption, there developed serious shortages also of the other essential commodities like kerosene oil.<sup>146</sup> The central problem admittedly was severe inflation caused by the financing of military expenditure, which wiped out the profits resulting from the increase in the prices of wheat, maize, gram and *bajra*.<sup>147</sup> There were complaints of high prices in urban areas where the poor people on more or less fixed incomes were finding it increasingly difficult to subsist.<sup>148</sup> In its Report ending June 1943, the Reserve Bank of India for the 'first time clearly admitted 'the existence of serious inflation'.<sup>149</sup> The war time inflation robbed the landless, the small farmer, the factory worker, the salaried man, and the old pensioners,

with the brunt falling on the poorer elements in India. Capitalists and war contractors made enormous profits and the gap between the rich and the poor widened appreciably.<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, food prices in wartime Britain rose about 18 per cent whereas in India this increase was about 300 per cent for rationed foods alone!<sup>151</sup> As one case study of the upper Sind Sagar Doab shows, the defence expenditure galvanized the economies and flattened the societies on which it was concentrated.<sup>152</sup> The inflationary regime advantaged those whose income fluctuated over time, and proved to be of disadvantage to those whose incomes were fixed. In the former category were traders and investors in joint stock companies; the latter category consisted of wage earners, rent receivers, salaried people, interest receivers, pensioners, and the liberal professionals like teachers, professors, lawyers, doctors and journalists. The vast majority had felt obliged to take tea instead of milk and buttermilk (*lassi*), and use vegetable oils instead of pure ghee and butter. Many had to dispense with domestic servants and the *dhobi* (washerman). They had little to save.<sup>153</sup> The index numbers of prices received and prices paid by the farmers show that the average Punjab peasant stood to gain in the earlier two years of World War II on account of the rising prices. He was adversely affected by price controls, rationing and inflation during the subsequent years till the partition in 1947, after which the costs and returns showed a tendency to equalize.<sup>154</sup>

### **Demobilization, Discontentment and Political Mobilization**

In mid-1945, large number of demobilized soldiers began to return only to face massive unemployment. By the end of 1946, less than 20 per cent of the ex-servicemen registered with the employment exchanges had found work.<sup>155</sup> The Punjab Government offered the returning soldiers a meager bonus of Rs.4 per head and 50,000 acres of land for half a million soldiers from the province. The Unionists, in fact, had no rehabilitation scheme.<sup>156</sup> The post-war reconstruction schemes had done nothing for the military men even when a very large number of them were expected to be demobilized in the Punjab. The number of demobilized soldiers reached 4,86,000 by March 1946, and 5,29,000 by the end of September 1946.<sup>157</sup> On 1 July 1947, the Indian army was reduced to 507,422 men.<sup>158</sup> The Premier, Khizr Hayat Khan, announced that 78,000 acres of land were set aside for the ex-soldiers, but the government's failure to provide employment to them caused resentment.<sup>159</sup> In the elections of 1946, several Indian leaders highlighted the problems of the ex-army men.<sup>160</sup> The Muslim League recruited them in its organization and made major inroads in the recruiting areas of Rawalpindi and Jhelum.<sup>161</sup>

Discontent was mounting because of the general feeling that the actions taken to prevent inflation, hoarding and profiteering had not been adequate. The earlier expressions of discontent apparently had not worried the government excessively, when, for instance, the Ahrars, Socialists and 'left wingers' had held meetings in the bigger towns against the price rise.<sup>162</sup> As a result of food shortage and high prices, a widespread dissatisfaction of the

people and unrest were observed in August 1942 in the Punjab.<sup>163</sup> Now the administration began to fear that a prolonged scarcity of supplies in a particular area could well lead to looting and riots.<sup>164</sup> In April 1943, the Conference of Kisan Women expressed deep concern over the serious situation arising out of the scarcity of cloth and other necessities of life and the high rise in prices. It was emphasized that the privation and hardships in obtaining essential commodities had made the life of an average Kisan woman unendurable.<sup>165</sup> There were demonstrations in Amritsar and considerable restlessness was evident in other places in the Punjab.<sup>166</sup> The Axis Radio propaganda during the month of September 1943 was concentrated almost exclusively on exploiting India's food difficulties which were attributed to British rule.<sup>167</sup>

The Government of India decided to purchase grain from 'surplus' provinces such as the Punjab and to send it to 'short' provinces such as Bengal, but failed to procure enough. The problem was that cultivators of the Punjab had been enjoying a double windfall: their soliders sons were remitting pay checks and their wheat was more in demand than ever before. Instead of selling, farmers began hoarding for higher prices. They preferred to keep their savings in the form of grain because they had come to distrust the value and security of cash. There was widespread fear that the United Kingdom would revise the exchange rate between the rupee and the pound sterling, thereby slashing the wartime earnings of Indians as had happened after World War I.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, Punjab had been asking for parity of rice prices with the United Provinces and priority of movement for their own surplus grain.<sup>169</sup> In this context, as noticed earlier, Chhotu Ram had been censured by the Viceroy for the suggestion that the *zamindars* should keep their wheat at home or bring the minimum quantities to the *mandis*.<sup>170</sup> In fact, Linlithgow had feared 'an agrarian revolution' in the Punjab and 'reaction among the Punjab soldiers serving overseas, if they came to know that their houses were being invaded and their families insulted under the pretext of requisitioning, and their legitimate food profits being taken from them.'<sup>171</sup> In early November 1943, the Punjab Legislative Assembly adopted without division an unofficial resolution to the effect that any attempt to control the price of wheat would 'result in very keen resentment and discontentment among agricultural classes'.<sup>172</sup>

As the colonial state became more interventionist with a wide range of regulations, a British officer became 'a hated figure' in the villages. It signalled the end of the policy of putting the Punjabi *zamindar's* loyalty above all other political consideration. The British thus destroyed the political system they had so carefully nurtured.<sup>173</sup> Opposition to rationing manifested in various ways. A memorandum was sent to the Department of Food, signed by 6000 residents of Karnal against rationing.<sup>174</sup> The bureaucracy alleged that 'a curious agitation was engineered by hoarders and black-marketeers'. In this 'mischievous propaganda' every effort was made to organize *hartals* (ceasing work), and processions in which ignorant people were made to shout anti-rationing slogans.<sup>175</sup> Even the pro-government press could not ignore the feelings of the people of Karnal:

This is scarcely surprising in view of the fact that Karnal is situated in a surplus area; it is impossible to allay with words, real or imaginary fears of food shortages from which large exports of foodgrains are a daily and a public occurrence. Many too may have found rationing a curse instead of a blessing.<sup>176</sup>

Under pressure from the Centre, the Unionist Ministry resorted to force to requisition grain from the villages, and disturbances broke out in Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur and Ferozepur in the middle of the elections of 1946, which also revealed the polarization that the war years had fostered.<sup>177</sup> On 21 February 1946, news reached that in Kaiserganj *mandi* 400 bags of wheat were lying waiting to be exported from the city. Immediately, a procession of 3000 workers and women reached the spot. They demanded the distribution of the grain. The officials refused and instead called in the *lathi* police. The people were determined to secure the grain. Soon the Congress and Communist leaders reached the spot, met the Deputy Commissioner and made him distribute ten bags of grain there and then. Similarly, in Hoshiarpur, on 27 February 1946, 'a stirring procession of 1500 hungry people led by the Communist Party marched around the city and demonstrated in front of the grain depots, all of which had been "reserved" for government servants'. It was reported further that the procession marched to a hoarder's shop where 500 bags of wheat were surrounded by a crowd of women. With the police and the Additional District Magistrate looking on and not daring to stop them, the crowd peacefully sold a large portion of wheat at controlled rates.<sup>178</sup> An extraordinary Punjab Government Gazette issued in March 1946 brings out the growing helplessness of the government. It was ordered that no person shall manufacture for sale or sell cakes and pastry in which the flour of any cereal or other food grain is an ingredient!<sup>179</sup>

Rationing rapidly became a communal as well as rural vs. urban issue. The Muslims of Lahore and other large urban centres asserted that the predominantly Hindu and Sikh Civil Supply Officers openly decided against them in the distribution of the rationed commodities. In the Ambala division, villagers complained that they received smaller quotas than the urban population. Supplies of kerosene at any rate did not reach the villages. Moreover, the food crisis drove a wedge into the system of patronage that the British had built in the Punjab.<sup>180</sup> The strains of the war economy alienated important sections of the Raj's political supporters among the Muslims in the Punjab and thus sent them over to the Muslim League.<sup>181</sup> The year 1945-46 proved to be even more expensive in Punjab in terms of cost of living than the war years. The prices of all commodities of daily use 'appreciably advanced'.<sup>182</sup> As reported by *The Tribune*, a demonstration of 500 men and women was held in Kasur due to scarcity of wheat. It was officially admitted that food stocks in India were very low.<sup>183</sup> It may not be far wrong to say that the colonial state starved the Indian lower classes.<sup>184</sup> In one sense, the

agriculturists gained because of the prevalence of high prices of agricultural produce, but the money earned by the farmers could purchase little of the commodities and services which they required. Interestingly, as noticed by *The Tribune*, the small peasant proprietors and tenants who had no supplies to sell (and not much to buy), and who subsisted on the produce raised on the farm, perhaps were not too badly off in the face of the prevailing high prices.<sup>185</sup> It is said that what weakened the will and ability of the government to maintain an effective control regime was the political uncertainty and the battles over economic performance plaguing the Interim Government, which in itself was an uneasy exercise in power sharing between the Congress and the Muslim League.<sup>186</sup>

### Conclusion

The agrarian economy of the Punjab experienced unprecedented strain and stress in the 1940s. Fighting for a colonial power proved to be exceptionally exacting in terms both of human and material sources. Even when the foodgrain production had remained almost stagnant in the Punjab during the last decade of colonial rule, it had to meet the demands of the war and scarcities in other parts of India. Simultaneously, price rises engendered a shift towards non-food crops, adding to the shortage of foodgrains, especially in urban areas. Requisitioning of food mandated rationing which entailed controls and concomitant corruption. Appreciation of food prices also encouraged hoarding and black-marketing. Though high prices and war remittances enriched the big *zamindar*, trader and the moneylender, their possible benefits to the peasant and the tenant were neutralized by increase in the prices of industrial products. After the war was over, demobilization caused unemployment and disappointment over the treatment of the disbanded soldiers. War time inflation substantially eroded the purchasing power of the urban dwellers, salaried classes, wage-earners and the poor, thus causing widespread deprivation, discontentment and unrest. Above all, it weakened the political hold of the Unionist Party and facilitated the rise of the Muslim League. Cumulatively, the war situation and its aftermath in the Punjab exposed the essentially exploitative nature of colonial rule, undermined its authority, and hastened the process of British withdrawal from India.

### Notes

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## **Urban Patterns in the Punjab Region since Protohistoric Times**

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This paper discusses the emergence, decline and revival of towns and cities in the Punjab region over the millennia. There were changes from the protohistoric Indus urbanization to the second urbanization of the early historical period. Contrary to the notion of urban decay, several new centers emerged in the region in the pre-Turkish period. The impetus to urbanization given by the Delhi Sultanate has been characterized as 'urban revolution'. Under the Mughals, the Punjab became the third most urbanized region of the sub-continent, with a proliferation of small towns and revival of some old ones. After the decline of Mughal power there was an increase in the number of urban settlements under the emergent rulers of the late eighteenth century. The expanding state of Ranjit Singh added to the urbanscape. With the onset of colonial rule, there was a substantial increase in the number, size and functions of towns and cities, which came to dot all parts of the Punjab region. This qualitative change in the urban pattern can be termed revolutionary. While geography combined with economy had been the deciding factors in the pre-colonial times, from the colonial period onwards, polity combined with technology became crucial to the urban process.

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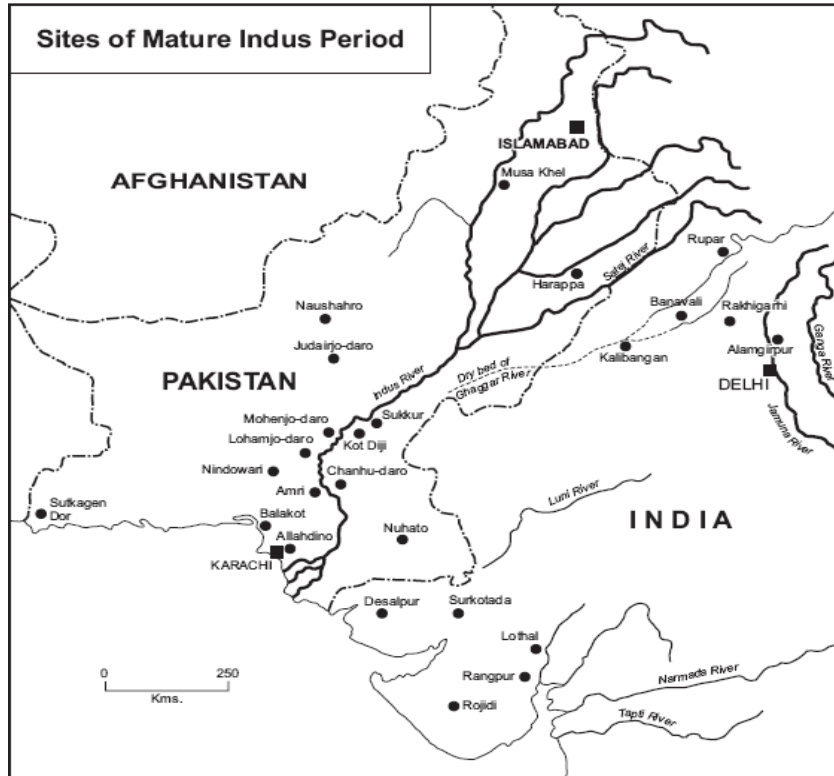
The Punjab region has been the site of towns and cities for nearly five thousand years. In fact, it is the area in which the first urbanization of the sub-continent emerged c.2350 BC, lasting for about 600 years upto c.1700 BC. For a thousand years then the region seemed to be devoid of urban centers, but around 600 BC, evidence of urban settlements re-surfaced. Since this second urbanization, it has been a continuous process. The urban network was restricted to the areas which were naturally endowed for the emergence and continuation of urban settlements. Yet, there have been constant variations in the urbanscape over time and space, which suggest that urbanization is a dynamic process. It is linked as much to the physical characteristics of the land and its economic potential as to the specific features of social and political organization and the technology available at a particular historical juncture. In short, the urban units and the region are mutually bound together in a symbiotic relationship. They are dependent on one another and the ensuing environment as a result of the historical processes, which results in a somewhat unique pattern.

The present paper attempts to survey the urban pattern in the Punjab region from the earliest times to the end of the twentieth century in terms of the changing number, size, and distribution of urban centers in different periods in the region's history. The causative factors having a bearing on the urbanscape have been identified for each period, although their relative

importance varied with time and space. Stretching from the Khaiber Pass in the north-west to the river Jamuna in the south-east, the Punjab region comprises the five interfluves constituted by the rivers Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and the Satlej as well as the Satlej-Jamuna divide through which the river Saraswati/Ghaggar flowed. This region covers the present day states of Punjab and Haryana on the Indian side and the provinces of Punjab and NWFP across the border in Pakistan. Though an urban center has been defined in various ways, for purposes of the present discussion it may be taken as a human settlement supporting a heterogeneous population pursuing a multitude of non-agricultural occupations catering to the urban and rural settlements around, and having a socio-political organization of its own. Depending upon the complexity of functions, the size of a center varied in the urban hierarchy, consisting broadly of the small, middling and large centers in a region, and constituting a network oriented towards its city or cities.<sup>1</sup>

### **Protohistoric Urbanization**

Urbanization had its beginning in the Indus civilization some 4500 years ago. The archaeological evidence points towards the existence of settlements which exhibit the use of metals like copper, bronze, gold and silver; stone and metal sculptures; wheel- turned pottery; cotton textiles; elaborate and varied seals; and beads and semi-precious stones. The manufacture and use of these articles presupposed the existence of long distance trade, providing the base for the emergence of towns and cities. The origin of urban settlements has been a matter of some debate. One view regards the Indus cities as the consequence of diffusion from Mesopotamia, while the other view supports their indigenous origin. By now, 'the growing evidence appears to be in favour of an indigenous origin of the Harappan cities with some diffusion of ideas from West Asia'.<sup>2</sup> The towns developed through a process of gradual expansion and refinement over time, passing through several stages or phases. The urban units of this period were located over a wide area which extended from the Kathiawar peninsula to the foothills of the Himalayas and the north-western region, and covered the present states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab (both in India and Pakistan), Sind (Pakistan), Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh. Spread over a vast area, this early urbanization represented a well developed urban system and society.



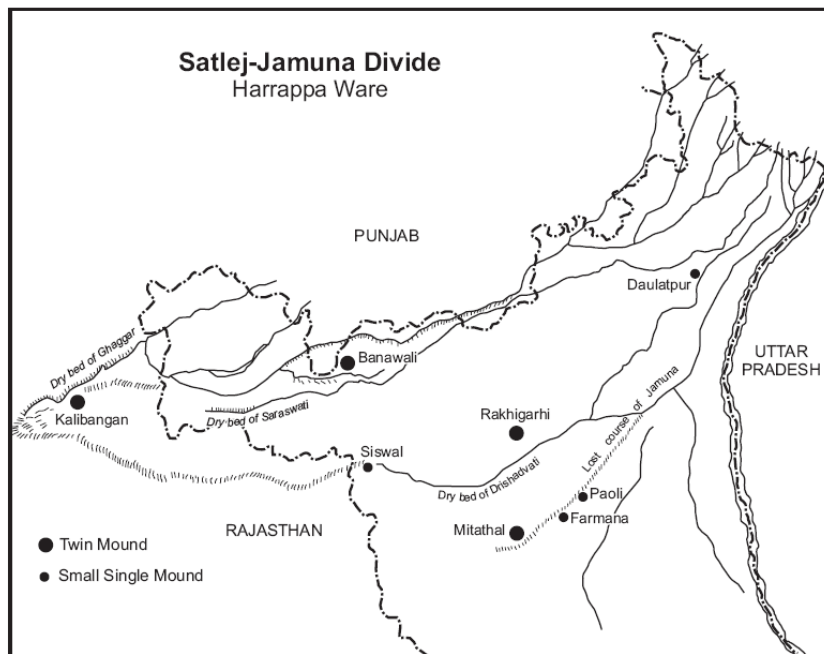
Based on: Bridgit and Raymond Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: CUP 1966) p.168.

Map 1

The Punjab region at this time had over thirty identified urban centers of varying sizes. However, their size and geographical distribution are not certain in the absence of detailed archaeological investigations. Broadly, the early Harappan sites are concentrated in the areas east of the river Ravi and in the Satlej-Jamuna divide, as the arid western parts were not conducive for agriculture and development of large human settlements. The early Harappan settlements formed a cluster in the present Sangrur-Bathinda area in the south-west parts of the Punjab, and in Jind-Hisar-Karnal-Gurgaon tract in the south-east corner of the region. In the Bathinda area were five large sites of over 100 hectares (ha: a unit of 2.47 acres) – Lakhmirwala, Dhalerwan, Gurni Kalan I, Hasanpur II and Baglian da Theh; four medium size settlements of 25 ha and six smaller places of about 16 ha each. The south-west area had the larger sites of Harappa, and close to it was Chak Purvane Syal, a small center. In the Satlej-Jamuna divide were located several sites: 17 in the Saraswati valley and 16 in the Ghaggar valley. It is quite probable that some of these had urban characteristics.

The premier urban center of the region was Lakhmirwala (225 ha); it was followed by Harappa and Dhalerwan, both being around 150 ha in size; Gurni

Kalan was 144 ha; and Hasanpur and Baglian da Theh constituting the second level were about 100 ha each. At the third level were centers of 16-25 ha, among them were Rakhigarhi (24 ha) and Banawali (16 ha), as well as ten sites in the Sangrur-Bathinda area. At the basal level were 'small towns' of 5-7 ha which cannot all be clearly identified. Mitathal was one of them; it was formed of two mounds at a distance of twenty metres from each other and 7 ha in size.



Based on: Suraj Bhan, 'Harappan Urbanism in the Satej-Jamuna Divide', in *Five Thousand Years of Urbanization: The Punjab Region*, ed. Reeta Grewal (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), p.56.

Map 2

Information on Harappa is readily forthcoming, and may be seen as an illustration of a large urban center. It had a circumference of 5.63 kilometers and covered an area of over 130 ha scattered over seven mounds. One of the mounds was a cemetery and probably outside the city. Another was a rough parallelogram in shape with fortifications of a mud and mud-brick wall, ramparts and bastions. On the mound close to the river was a great granary of two blocks divided by a wide aisle and grain pounding platforms. A group of houses in an enclosure with melting crucibles was located near the granary. Yet another mound shows streets, drains, mud-brick platforms and pottery kilns. Harappa was obviously a collection-distribution center for grain and other agricultural produce and a manufacturing center for copper items and pottery, performing, thus, urban functions of trade and manufacturing for the region.

Among the smaller towns may be mentioned Banawali, a walled urban center with a rectangular place and situated on the Saraswati. Banawali had no



separate citadel mound but the citadel was demarcated from the rest of the town by a wide wall having two entrances. The north-eastern corner had a ramp, two main streets of 5 and 9 feet width which joined the gates. The rest of the unit was a criss-cross of narrow lanes and houses but with no public drainage system. Evidence of seals, weights, beads in gold, lapis lazuli, cornelian and pottery are proof of its non-agricultural activity. There is also evidence of a large house with 'storage vaults', which is believed to be that of a prominent merchant. The trade and manufacturing aspects of this settlement would qualify it to be a town.

In the time of the Harappan civilization urban centers were relatively concentrated in the Punjab region. It has been suggested that these towns originated in the Cholistan-Mohenjodaro area and later expanded to the north and north-east. Most of the settlements were situated close to the river and many were also close to one another, as for example in the Bathinda area where urban settlements were 3-5 kms apart. In the peripheral areas, the spacing between urban units increased. These centers were also located in agriculturally well developed tract which supported their existence. In fact, four settlements were as large as Harappa, that is around 150 ha, with one as extensive as Mohenjodaro, the premier city of the Indus civilization. Large centers were more or less absent from the *doabs* of the Punjab, the average size being about 3 ha, which probably were village settlements. The small towns would have functioned as collection-distribution points, and the medium and large towns had a variety of manufacturing activities and a wide range of trade. Various raw materials were utilized in productive activities, namely alabaster, steatite, ivory, shell, coral, cornelian, agate, jasper, lapis lazuli, jade, chalcedony, silver, gold, lead, chert, sandstone, limestone, yellow Jaisalmer stone, flint, marble, haematite, quartzite, basalt, calcite, serpentine, feldspar, hornblende, slate, granite, and *sang-i abri*. Apparently, these centers formed part of a well laid out urban network, with trade links to the south-west, north-west and west.

With the decline of the Indus civilization c.1700 BC, the urban centers tended to disappear from the urbanscape of the region, though some continued to survive at a lower level of urbanization. In fact, several mature Harappan sites are believed to have continued in the area between the Ghaggar and the Jamuna, and along the Himalayan foothills. Over five hundred sites have been located here, many of them 2 ha or less in size. Banawali, Sanghol, Dadhani, Mohrana and Rohria are some of those sites where hearths, kilns, terracotta wheels, beads, copper items and semi precious stones have been excavated. The traces of a variety of crops found at these sites point towards their being permanent, well established settlements. It is also noted that such centers were more evenly distributed over the region by this time. The post-Harappan period, thus, brought about some internal variations in the urban pattern, even though the overall level of urbanization seems to have declined.

### **Urbanization in the Early Historical Period**

The Indus civilization is understood to have ‘merged into the mainstay of Indian cultural development’, and moved eastwards to the Ganga-Jamuna plains, also fanning out from its earlier concentration, though not in its urban form but as a rural economy in different regions. At this time, as evident from the decline of trade, the settlement clusters seem rather isolated from one another. Termed as the early historical period, this phase saw the emergence of new political forces and territorial units. Between *c.*700 BC and *c.*300 AD when conditions were suited for urban development, a second urbanization appears to have taken place in the Indian sub-continent. In this phase, too, a large number of urban centers can be identified in the Punjab region.<sup>4</sup>

Among the urban settlements of the early historical period in this region were a number of new towns – Charsadda, Purusapura (Peshawar), Sakala (Sialkot), Taxila or Takshasila, Talamba, Sugh (Srughna), Sunetra or Sunet, Agroha, Thaneshwar, Rangmahal, Karni ka Qila, Ghuram, Daulatpur, Ajaram and Chawinda. The urbanscape had extended to the north-western parts, though it became more intensive in the Satlej-Jamuna divide. This reflected an increased level of urbanization for the region. Though small in number, some of the previous towns also continued as well – Ropar, Sanghol, Bhagwanpur and Bara, among others. Around thirty towns are identified during this period. Most of these urban units were new ones with just about 12 per cent of the earlier centers surviving into the early historical period. Significantly, even when the total number of urban settlements had not appreciated much, the area which became urbanized had expanded. The renewal of urban process was marked by the emergence of new towns. It may be noted that new centers had even sprouted in the south-east, replacing the earlier units here, while the Sangrur-Bathinda tract which was previously a well urbanized one remained unrepresented on the urban map of the early historical period. Thus, compared to the first, the second urbanization in the Punjab region presented a different urbanscape.

The urbanization of this phase has been linked to the growing political and economic influence of the Achaemenid Empire which is said to have stimulated urban growth. Originating between 600 BC and 300 AD, these new settlements were fortified; these served also as trade centers, connecting Punjab to the neighbouring regions in the east and the west. The region was connected with Central Asia through the Arabian seaports. The sphere of trade had widened by this time and the new centers rose to meet the new requirements of trade. By the second century BC, the Indo-Greeks extended control over the region, giving ‘fresh impetus’ to urban growth in the Indo-Gangetic divide. The early historical period is seen as one of ‘maximum urbanization’ in which the urban process peaked during the time of the Kushanas.<sup>5</sup> These new units served as trade and manufacturing centers as well as religious and educational nodes.

To cite the example of Taxila as the best known of the urban centers of this period, it was located at the point of convergence of three great trade routes linking it to the north, east and west.<sup>6</sup> It had been founded in the Mauryan times in the fifth century BC. Next to it, a second site, Sirkap, was

founded in the second century BC, as a typically Greek planned center which had a circumference of 5.63 kilometers. During the time of the Kushanas the third site of Sirsukh was laid out as a traditional Central Asian city in a parallelogram with a perimeter of 4.83 kilometers. Taxila was expanding with time to meet a diverse range of urban needs. It had shops, palaces, houses of rich merchants and a mint. Coins from Greece, as well as those of the Saka, Parthian and Kushana dynasties have been excavated here, reflecting its extensive trade. This urban center manufactured pottery, copper-bronze mirrors, earthen utensils, combs in ivory and bone, copper cooking vessels, glass beads and tiles, jewelry in gold and silver, seals, clay pens and inkpots. Among the other items found here are grinding mills, crucibles, bellows pipes, portable furnaces, coin moulds, dies for coins and ornaments, and semi-precious stones. Taxila had *stupas* and monasteries abound. At this time, Taxila was a center of trade and manufacture as well as a religious-cum-educational place.

Several other urban places functioned as trade and production centers during this period. For instance, Sanghol served as a mint, and produced beads, coins, terracotta items, and sculptures. Sunet too had a mint, and manufactured beads, seals, and objects in terracotta and bone. Ghuram was a ceramics center, and had a mint and large storage bins. Ropar made coins, silver utensils and terracotta seals. Agroha made bricks, pottery, toys, games, shell and glass bangles, iron goods and coins in copper. It also had two temples. Daulatpur manufactured pottery items, beads, daggers, wheels, glass, iron implements and copper coins. In the early historical period, thus, the urban characteristics had expanded to cover a wider range of urban activities of economic, religious and educational nature. Literary sources record a rural-urban dichotomy as well as a 'definite urban consciousness in early historical India'.<sup>7</sup> In the post-Gupta period, however, many of these urban centers are believed to have declined once again.

The issue of urban decay in the post-Gupta phase has been a matter of debate. Almost all the excavations point towards a shrinkage in urban functions. This de-urbanization is attributed to the invasions of the Huns, 'feudal war', natural calamities, interruption of trade routes and minting of coins, break in the occupation levels, ruin of *stupas* and desertion of monasteries, and decline of merchant and artisan guilds, and even abandoning of sites.<sup>8</sup> This downward trend in urbanization probably began at different points of time in different towns, around the first century AD in Ghuram, second century AD in Sirkap, third century AD in Sunet, Sugh and Karni ka Qila, fourth century AD in Agroha and Sirsukh, and around fifth century AD in Ropar. It is suggested that there was a clear shrinkage of the urban sector.

The decline, however, was neither total nor permanent; nor did it imply a decline of economic activity. Several urban centers in the region survived the 'decay', as for instance, Taxila, Sanghol, Ropar and Agroha; though their urban activities were on a much smaller scale. In Agroha, the temples accounted for the continuation of the town. Many of these sites revived at a later date. Some new towns also appeared on the urban map.

The assumption that there was a significant socio-economic change leading to increased ruralization in the early historical period and a corresponding decline in trade and urban centers, is seriously challenged by the information on a new urban settlement, Prthudaka. Located in the Karnal district of the Satlej-Jamuna divide, Prthudaka (present Pehowa) has been described as 'an incipient urban center'.<sup>9</sup> An inscription of the ninth century refers to this place as an *adhithana* (a town or a city) and a center for horse trade. The significance of the settlement emerges from the fact that there existed a horse dealers' guild with traders from nine localities; some of them were from as far as the Lahore area and were Brahmans who built temples or shrines in Prthudaka; the representatives of the king and the elites also bought horses here. It was clearly a major and established market center for the trade in horses.

A new urban unit in the post-Gupta period would certainly not be an exception in the overall urban process. Several other central locations would have become the focal point for local commerce, followed by the reappearance of trade routes in their proximity. Gradually, a market would emerge and an outside merchant community, as well as artisan groups would settle down. The local rulers would also have contributed to the urban process by founding new towns or assigning land for new townships. The continuity of trade and urban centers was in all likelihood part of the early medieval scenario. 'Urban decay' can therefore be viewed as relocation and spread of towns and cities, beginning thereby a *third* phase of urban expansion. At any rate, in the pre-Turkish period, the Punjab region appears to have entered a new urban phase, marked both by decline of some towns and the emergence of the new ones. In some areas, significantly, a relocation of urban centers took place generally around the sites of the pre-existing towns.

### **Impetus to Urbanization: Eleventh-Seventeenth Centuries**

The Punjab region, understandably, was the first to experience the effect of Turko-Mughal rule, broadly corresponding to the medieval period of Indian history. This region became relatively more intensively urbanized during this period. Al-Beruni, who accompanied Mahmud Ghaznavi on his invasions, left a travel account of the early eleventh century, entitled *Kitab-al Hind*. Al-Beruni refers to many urban centers in the parts he visited. For example, Multan is said to be an old pilgrimage center; Lahore had one of the strongest forts; Alore, Mansurah and Debal were centers of learning; and Thanesar or Kurukshetra was a land of divine miracles. He also refers to Sialkot, Nandanah, Dunpur, Lamghan, Purshawar, Waihind, Jailam and Mandkakkar.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, several new towns had emerged by that time.

The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of Minhaj-us Siraj, written in the late thirteenth century, adds some other urban places identified as Uchh, Tabarhind, Kuhram, Sarsuti, Khushab, Makhiala, Fatehjang, Pind Dadan Khan, Shahpur, Rawalpindi, Bhakkar, Attock, Wazirabad, Sadhaura, Sarhind, Kasur, Qabulah, Hujra, Dipalpur and Chamba.<sup>11</sup> In his travel account (*Rehla*) of the early

fourteenth century, Ibn Batuta adds Abuhar, Hansi, Masudabad, Akroha (Agroha), and Ajodhan to the earlier list. Hansi is described as one of the finest towns, thickly populated and perfectly built with huge ramparts, Akroha, situated between Hansi and Sarsuti (Saraswati), is recorded as the original habitation of the Aggarwal Banias. Akroha is also mentioned as 'now a village', pointing to its earlier urban status. Bhakkar, founded by Kishlu Khan, is said to be a handsome city with canals, bazaars and many new buildings under a noble (*amir*). Uchh is noted as a religious place of Shaikh Qutubuddin Haider Al-Alavi who was known for his piety. During the early decades of the century, under Iltutmish, it had become a center of learning as well. Ajudhan was linked to Shaikh Farid-ud-din Ganj-i Shakar, and known as a holy place.<sup>12</sup>

The *Tarikh-i Firuzshahi* of Ziauddin Barani, another fourteenth century work, makes further additions to the list of towns in the region. Barani records the existence of Dipalpur, Gujrat, Samana, Panipat, Dhatrath, Safidon or Tughlaqpur, and Jwalamukhi. Firuz Shah himself founded the towns of Fatehabad, Firuzabad, Harnikhera, and Hissar Firuza.<sup>13</sup> The *Waqiat-i Mushtaqi*, a contemporary source of the fifteenth-sixteenth century, talks of many towns of the Punjab region, and adds Jhajjar, Kalanaur, Khamaon, Machhiwara and Nagarkot to the earlier list.<sup>14</sup> Several other urban units are mentioned by the modern historians of the Delhi Sultanate. The Sayyid Sultans founded the new towns of Khizrabad and Mubarakabad on the river Jamuna; Batala was established by a Bhatti Rajput; Kaithal, Ghurram, Bhatnir, Jalandhar, Eminabad, Khairabad, Bahlolpur, Jalali, and Sultanpur had also emerged by the fifteenth century.

Evidently, since the eleventh century, a new phase of urbanization had begun. Towns increased in number, size and economic activity, and exhibited heightened socio-cultural features and functions. Collectively, these centers reflected further expansion of the urbanscape towards the north-western parts as well as in the upper and lower Rachna and Bari Doabs. At the same time, there is reference to de-urbanization and existence of ruins in the Jhelum area, in the tract south of the Salt Range and even across the Indus in the Bannu area. Hansi is referred to as a ruined castle in the fourteenth century. The urban pattern appears to have undergone shifts and variations in the period, marking for fluctuations in the process of urbanization and the emergence almost of a new pattern. The substance of Mohammad Habib's hypothesis of an 'urban revolution' in north India in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in terms of an increase in the number and size of urban units, is borne out by the available evidence. Since the Turkish nobility preferred to live in urban centers, the artisans and service performing classes from the countryside were also allowed to move in, simultaneously adding to the urban population and giving an impetus to craft production and trade both of which were conducive for urban expansion.<sup>15</sup>

Towns in the Punjab region thus came to extend over a wider area, covering the north-western and eastern areas as well as the upper *doabs*. Yet, the process of urban development from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries was a gradual one, keeping pace with the expansion and consolidation of the

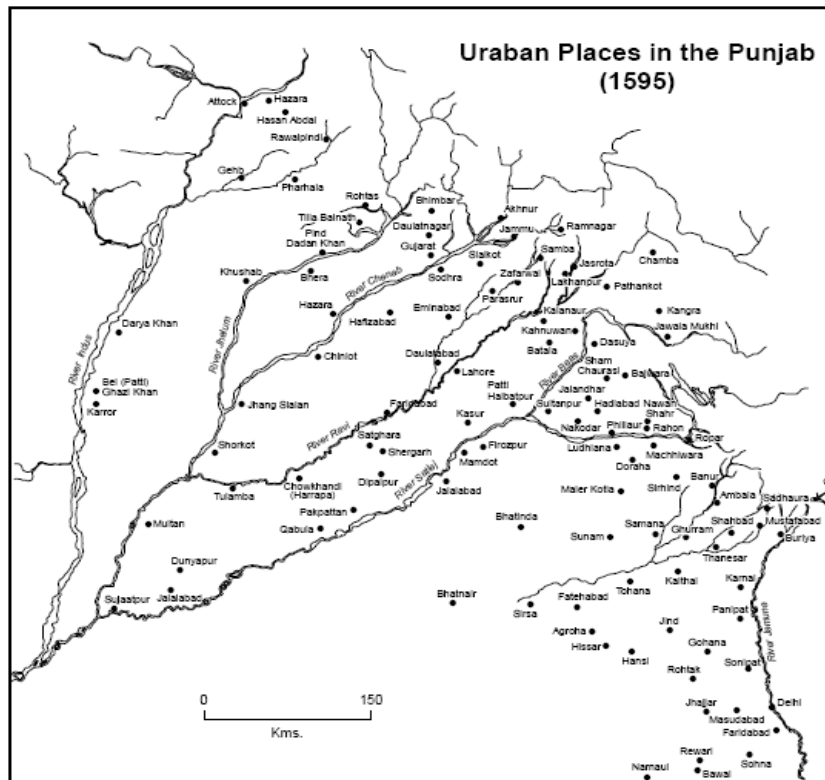
Sultanate of Delhi which used towns as politico-administrative and economic nodes of varying sizes. A large increase of urban centers during the pre-Mughal period pre-supposes that the ruling class played a significant role in the proliferation of towns and in the strengthening of their growing economic activity. It is estimated that about two-thirds of the previously existing centers continued to survive during this period, while one-third of them were new urban settlements. By this time, towns were also acquiring a new socio-cultural significance, which added to their growing functions and increasing relevance in the political and economic organization under Turko-Afghan rule. The 'inland centers, such as Multan, Lahore and Delhi, which were the favourite haunts of foreign merchants', are said to have become 'the most progressive centers of Hindustan in many respects'.<sup>16</sup>

The Mughal period is seen as 'a veritable golden age of urbanization'.<sup>17</sup> The *Babarnama* refers to the country as 'extensive and full of men and produce. Its towns, its cultivated land, its people are all different'. The towns of the Punjab region are seen, however, as 'wanting in charm'. Apparently, there was a constant flux in the urban pattern. Babur's observation applicable to north India, is worth quoting: In Hindustan, towns are depopulated and set up in a moment. If the people of a large town; one inhabited for years even, flee from it, they do so in such a way that not a sign or trace of them remains in a day and a half. On the other hand, if they fix their eyes on a place in which to settle, they need not dig water-courses at all as the population is unlimited and swarms in. They make tanks or dig a well; they need not build houses or set up walls. Khas grass abounds, wood is unlimited, huts are made, and straight away there is a town.<sup>18</sup>

Writing towards the end of the sixteenth century, Abul Fazl records in the *Ain-i-Akbari* that the Punjab region was the third most urbanized area of the Mughal empire. He identifies many of the previously existing towns and cities of the Punjab, with some new entrants like Sohna, Sirsa, Satghara, Hazara, Shamsabad and Zafarpur. The *Ain* also confirms the existence of Mankot, Narnaul and Phillour<sup>19</sup> – the places to which Badauni also makes a reference. Writing his *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* at the turn of the sixteenth century, Badauni also mentions several towns and cities of the region, adding Bhera, Bhimnagar, Narela, Sonipat, Ganaur, Karnal, Asamabad, Manikiala, Bhatia, and Ropar to the already identified urban centers of the medieval period. Of these, Bhatinda (present Bathinda) was an administrative center with a strong fort; Bhimnagar, Sonipat, Bhatia and Nagarkot also had forts; Thanesar and Pak Pattan or Ajodhan are mentioned as religious places.<sup>20</sup> The *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* of Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad adds Sunam and Ambala to the list of urban centers of the period.<sup>21</sup> The European travellers to the Punjab region during the seventeenth century comment on the places they visited. Finch, for instance, talks about Lahore being second only to Agra, the imperial capital. He adds Sitpur and Chima Gakhar to the urban centers of the time.<sup>22</sup> Travelling through north India during the reign of Aurangzeb, Tavernier also describes some of the well known towns and cities of the time. Lahore is noted as a large town, with houses higher than those in Agra and Delhi, but in a

ruined state.<sup>23</sup> Although contemporary sources do not provide much direct information on the urban centers of the Mughal period, the fact that several new towns appeared on the urbanscope is borne out even by their passing notices. It is equally significant that a considerable number of towns and cities had continued to survive through the medieval period.

Taking a deeper interest in the urban dimension, modern historians notice some more urban units of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Daryabad, Khairabad, Rohtas, Patti, Sheikhpura, Bajwara, Ludhiana, Rewari, Dhankot, Nilab, Miani, Dhonkal, Purmandal, Kheora, Balanath Jogi, Sodhra, Chiniot, Attock and Naushahra. Among the new towns identified are Bhera, Ibrahimpur, Kartarpur, Nurmahal, Phul, Daska, Phagwara, Malerkotla and Barnala. There is a reference also to the revival of towns, such as Jalalpur, Banur, Shahabad, Sri Hargobindpur and Shergarh. By the seventeenth century, Hasanabdal, Goindwal, Nakodar, Maham, Rahon, Wazirabad, Jahangirabad and Qabula functioned as urban units.



Based on: Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Muslim Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), Map 4A.

Map 3

Lahore can be cited as an illustration of steady urban growth in this period. Founded sometime between the first and seventh centuries AD, Lahore is mentioned as a mart for a variety of goods in the tenth century work, *Hudud-ul Alam*. By the eleventh century, it had been occupied by Mahmud Ghaznavi and made an administrative center. In a twelfth century anonymous Armenian record, Lahore is described as an economic and socio-cultural center. During the next two centuries, Lahore served as a strategic base to protect the Sultanate from the Mongol inroads. The Mughal period saw the rapid rise of the city, which served virtually as the imperial capital for nearly two decades in the later part of Akbar's reign. Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb, as well as their nobles, contributed to the buildings, markets, mansions (*havelis*) and quarters (*katras*) of the city which flourished as an administrative, economic and cultural center *par excellence*.<sup>24</sup>

The Mughal period was thus marked by a spurt in the level of urbanization, by the emergence of a number of small towns in the urban network as well as the growth of the existing towns. The Satlej-Jamuna divide falling in the Delhi province had a higher concentration of urban units under the Mughals, while towns also emerged along the major trade routes. The rural-urban interaction and inter-urban linkages were strengthened during this period. A major factor in the urban process of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries was the strengthening of economic base that nurtured urban growth. However, towns did not expand uniformly; their growth depended on different determinants like location, economic potential and administrative, military and cultural role in the new regime. As a whole, it would not be incorrect to say that the large measure of urbanization introduced by the Turkish Sultans was taken further by the Mughal emperors to reach a high watermark by the middle of the seventeenth century. The Mughal period is also marked by a revival of towns which again was linked to a heightened economic activity. Urban places continued to act as administrative headquarters, trade and manufacturing centers, as religious nodes as well as centers of learning and arts. Many of them simultaneously developed specialized production activities and participated in long distance trade. Significantly, the Sikh Gurus also promoted urbanization by founding towns like Kartarpur, Khadur, Goindwal, Ramdaspur, Sri Hargobindpur, Tarn Taran and Anandpur and by giving incentives to traders and artisans to settle in these. A rough estimate based on the identified towns suggests that around 30 per cent of the pre-Mughal towns continued to exist at some level during the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, and about half of the urban centers were new entrants to the urban scape of the region.

At the same time, deurbanization was integral to the urban process, and quite a few towns declined during the medieval period or even ceased to exist. A number of urban units which had existed at the beginning of the sixteenth century are not mentioned as towns in the later phase, as for example, Agroha, Bhairowal, Gharounda, Fazilabad, Bhatnir, Doraha, Samalkha and Tabarhind. In fact, several small towns that probably came into existence in the sixteenth century itself cannot be traced in the seventeenth century. The emergence of



small towns, it seems, was a short lived process, about a third of them could not survive over a long period of time and were soon replaced by other nascent small units in a continuous process of emergence, disappearance and re-emergence of urban centers in the region.

As an illustration of the urban process during the medieval period, one may look at Sarhind, an urban center since the first century AD. Sarhind or Sairind was located on a major trade route from Peshawar via Lahore to Delhi and was visited by Heun Tsang in the seventh century. In the eleventh century, the town was an administrative center of the Hindushahis. When a large part of the region was conquered by Mahmud Ghaznavi, Sarhind came to be located on the periphery of the Ghaznavid empire and functioned as a military post, though it is not clear whether or not it was part of it. With the arrival of Muhammad Ghori towards the end of the twelfth century and the occupation of the Punjab region by him, Sarhind again served as an administrative headquarters. Under the Tughlaq Sultans, the town acquired more importance since it was upgraded to serve as the headquarters of an intermediary administrative unit called the *shiq*, a position it retained upto the sixteenth century. In the Mughal empire, Sarhind rose further in importance on the urban scale as the headquarters of a *sarkar* and a vibrant social and cultural center. The Mughals added several new buildings to the town and laid out gardens. By the seventeenth century, Sarhind increased its volume of trade, as evident from the presence of prosperous merchants, including the Banias, and other traders. It also emerged as an important educational and religious center and was known for its 360 mosques. Even if the figure seems to be exaggerated, it points to the place being a center of Islam with a large Muslim population. At any rate, at this time, Sarhind was a multifunctional town of long standing, a commercial and religious place as well as an administrative headquarters. It was famed for its cloth and also its writers and intellectuals. Sarhind appears to have survived as an urban unit under successive regimes mainly because of its central location, expanding economic base and growing socio-cultural activities, and partly because its rulers and residents who could adapt to the changing configuration of power in Delhi.<sup>25</sup>

Another example of medieval urbanization is Hissar-Firoza. The town was founded by Firoz Tughlaq around 1360 AD on the main route from Multan to Delhi at a location from where a hunting expedition could be launched. A fort palace was constructed, members of the ruling elite were granted land for building their mansions, and canals from the Jamuna were constructed to meet the requirements of water for various purposes, including the laying of gardens and orchards. The town was assigned administrative status as a *shiq* and it soon developed economic activities through increased cultivation in its vicinity accompanied by increased trade. The Mughals continued to prop up the town by maintaining its canals on which the local economy was based and also by supporting the religious elite and intellectuals of this place. In short, Hissar survived into the eighteenth century as much because of the concern of the rulers as its location on the trade route.<sup>26</sup>

### **Urban Expansion: The Eighteenth-Early Nineteenth Centuries**

Generally conceived as a dark period, the eighteenth century has not received adequate attention from the urban perspective. It is evident from the political histories of the period that several wealthy towns in the region suffered plunder by the invading armies, particularly of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali. Towns also suffered as a result of the contest between the Sikhs and the Mughals, with the latter supported by the Marathas. It is not unlikely that the period started out as a phase of decline and even deurbanization for some centers. Significantly, however, the second half of the century saw revival and re-urbanization taking place on a fairly large scale.

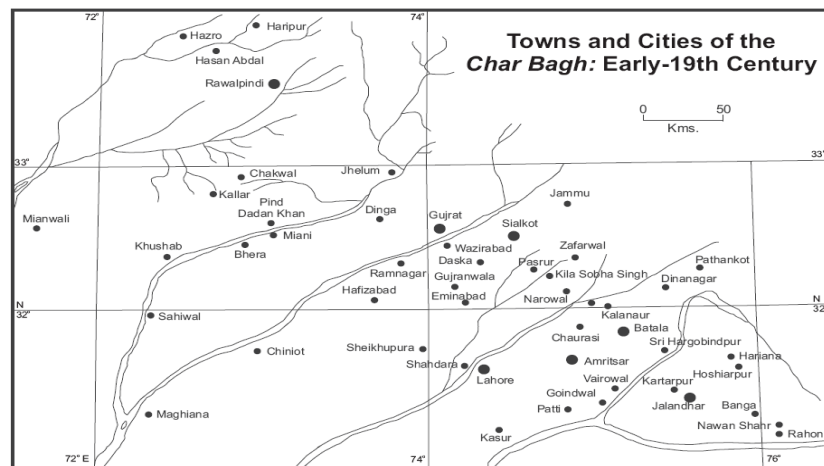
The eighteenth century had opened with the establishment of an independent political entity under Banda Singh Bahadur in 1710 which, though short-lived, heralded a triangular contest between the Mughals, Sikhs, and later, the Afghans. In 1752, the Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali replaced the Mughal power in the region. He also gave a crushing defeat to the Marathas at Panipat in 1761. By 1765, however, the Sikhs were able to oust the Afghans. This process culminated in the emergence of scores of new rulers in the region, many of whom were Sikh. By the late 1760s, over a hundred small and large autonomous principalities came into existence. The rise of new rulers entailed the rise of new centers of power as capital towns. To mention the dominant among them: Jassa Singh Ahluwalia set up his capital at Kapurthala; Gujar Singh Bhangi ruled from Gujrat; Charhat Singh Sukarchakia from Gujranwala; Jassa Singh Ramgarhia from Sri Hargobindpur; Jai Singh Kanhiya from Batala; Ala Singh from Patiala; Hamir Singh from Nabha; Gajpat Singh from Jind; Walidad Khan Sial from Jhang; and Ranjit Dev from Jammu.

The political process during the eighteenth century evidently gave impetus to urbanization, or brought about some shifts. For example, due to military activity, the northward shift of the major trade route from Peshawar led to the growth of Jammu as a commercial center. At the same time, because of its association with the martyrdom of the younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Sarhind suffered at the hands of the Sikhs. As a whole, however, contemporary writers of the time and travellers to the Punjab testify to the existence of many flourishing towns in the region. There are numerous instances of the efforts of the new chiefs to revive economic activity and consequently, urban centers. In an attempt to resuscitate Satghara, Qamar Singh Nakai rebuilt its wall after it had been attacked and later abandoned. Gujar Singh persuaded traders to settle down in the newly rebuilt Gujrat. Several urban centers, including Lahore, Sialkot, Bhera, and Jalalpur, underwent a similar process of revival. During the last quarter of the century, the new rulers also endeavoured to found towns such as Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Fatehabad, Narot Jaimal Singh, Daska, Rasulnagar, Alipur, Qila Suba Singh, Qila Sobha Singh, Shujabad and Muzaffarabad. An interesting example of urban growth was the creation of several small townships in the later part of the eighteenth century by the Sikh chiefs at Chak Ram Das, and their eventual unification into the city of

Amritsar by Ranjit Singh (1780-1839) in the early years of the nineteenth century. Apparently, the decline that took place in the first half of the eighteenth century was more than reversed towards its end.

It is reasonably well established, thus, that a political upheaval could not halt the process of urbanization in the region. The Punjab maintained its urbanscape even though it did not see significant expansion. The overall urban pattern was marked by continuity of towns, decline of some and emergence of the new ones. There probably was not much change in the number and distribution of urban centers, but the size of towns and appearance of new urban units reflected significant internal re-adjustments in the pattern. With the occupation of Lahore in 1799, Ranjit Singh began the process of piecemeal conquest or subjugation of the diverse centers of power and their incorporation into his expanding state. However, his expansionist activity across the Satlej was checked by the British who maintained the *status quo* in the Satlej-Jamuna divide, but allowed him to expand northwards. The stability and consolidation brought about by Ranjit Singh in the five *doabs* had a significant bearing on the urban scenario as noted by a contemporary, Ganesh Das Wadera.

In his *Char Bagh-i Panjab* completed in 1849, that is in the year of the annexation of the state of Ranjit Singh by the British, Ganesh Das not only identifies the urban units in the kingdom of Lahore but differentiates among them on the basis of size.<sup>27</sup> He is aware of the predominantly non-agricultural nature of the urban settlements and understands that it is the merchants, craftsmen and professionals who constituted the core of an urban place. The emergence of new towns, decline of some and growth of others is noted in all the five *doabs*, which amounts to a comment on the changing urban pattern in the region. Among the new towns in the Sindh Sagar Doab, Ganesh Das particularly mentions Hariapur founded by Hari Singh Nalwa, though several other places in this tract are also mentioned for the first time. Ganesh Das notices decline in case of Attock and Dangli, while places like Hazro, Rawalpindi and Khushab continued to exist. In the Chaj Doab, several small towns survived while Bhera, Sahiwal, Qadirabad and Gujrat had grown in size to dominate the area. Towns like Daulatnagar and Hazara had declined, while another, Ralyala, could no longer be traced. The Rachna Doab had small urban units in the submontane areas such as Jasrota, Mankot, Samba and Ramnagar. Narowal was on the bank of the Ravi, while Qila Sobha Singh, Qila Suba Singh, Zafarwal, Sialkot, Gujranwala and Daska were the other known towns. Some of the older places like Aurangabad, Ban, Sodhra, Sayyidpur, Bodhiana and Sirkap are said to be deserted in the early nineteenth century. However, the Bari Doab, about which Ganesh Das knows relatively less, seems to be largely unaffected by the process of deurbanization. Rather, several of its towns had increased in size, like Qasur, Kalanaur, Dipalpur, Pakpattan and Dera Baba Nanak which are referred to as large towns, while the cities of Lahore and Amritsar in the Bari Doab, distantly followed by Multan in the south-west, dominated the urbanscape of the entire region. In the Bist Jalandhar Doab are mentioned the towns like Jalandhar, Rahon, Talwan and Nawanshahar.<sup>28</sup>



Map 4

This picture of the early nineteenth century obtained from Ganesh Das is further elaborated by recent work on urbanization in medieval Punjab with numerous small towns added to the list based on the *Char Bagh*. In fact, proliferation of urban units at the small town level underlines the increased levels of urbanization in the region during the early nineteenth century. The extension of urban places was both in terms of number and size. Though many of these newer townships did not survive over a long period, these can probably be taken as evidence of a higher degree of urbanization in the region and the expansion of the urban network. In addition to the information on urban units in Ganesh Das, more than a hundred and thirty centers can be identified in the five *doabs*: 45 in the Bari Doab; 36 in the Rachna Doab; 27 in the Bist Jalandhar Doab; and 25 in the Sindh Sagar Doab.<sup>29</sup>

As a whole, the early nineteenth century probably had over 200 towns and cities of varying sizes. Of these four-fifths were small towns, 15 per cent were of medium size and just 2 per cent were large enough to be called cities. The three cities of the region were Lahore, Amritsar and Multan. About 60 per cent of the centers were located in the areas east of the Ravi which constituted only about a fourth of the north-western region. There was a concentration of towns in the upper Bari, upper Rachna and Bist Jalandhar Doabs while the lower *doabs*, which were relatively rain-starved and arid, had fewer and scattered urban centers, and the *bars* or uplands in the western parts of the region were almost devoid of towns. As a whole, the period of Ranjit Singh saw an increase in number, size and extent of the urban places in the region between the Indus and the Satlej. Small towns emerged in all corners of his kingdom, though they would prove to be as transient as they had been in the earlier time.<sup>30</sup>

Gujrat presents an example of the fluctuating urban development of this phase. Believed to be an ancient town founded by Raja Bachan Pal as

Udhmagari, Gujrat was already in a state of decline in the seventh century. It was revived in the ninth century but destroyed again by Mahmud Ghaznavi. During the reign of Akbar, a fort was built, the town was made a *pargana* headquarters and the Gujars from the surrounding tract were induced to settle in the town. Due to the efforts of Akbar in redeveloping this urban center, it came to be called Gujrat-Akbarabad. In 1738, Nadir Shah ravaged the town and it was subsequently taken over for some time by the Gakhars under Mukarrab Khan, only to be ousted by Gujar Singh Bhangi in 1765. Gujrat functioned as his headquarters and his son Sahib Singh repopulated the town. Gujrat was conquered briefly by Zaman Shah of Afghanistan in 1797 but was soon recovered by the Bhangis. In 1810, Ranjit Singh annexed Gujrat. The town continued as a *pargana* headquarters in the early nineteenth century, and was inhabited by Khattris and other traders, as well as artisans. By this time, Gujrat had emerged as an administrative, commercial and manufacturing center, producing swords, shawls, cloth, brass vessels, wooden items and boats. It was known for its calligraphers, poets, writers, musicians, physicians and intellectuals. Several administrators of the town contributed to its growth by laying gardens and constructing temples, *baolis* (step wells) and wells. The town was also associated with sacred spaces of the Sufis, like the tombs of Pandhe Shah and Hussain Shah.<sup>31</sup>

Gujrat survived the ravages of time essentially because of its location which secured it the protection of successive rulers and enabled it to develop into a large multi-functional town by the early nineteenth century. Once it had created an economic base to sustain itself, it developed socio-cultural features which strengthened its position as an urban center. This, apparently, was the experience of numerous other towns in the region. Compared to the earlier periods, the pace of urbanization in the early nineteenth century appears to have been much greater.

### **Urban Revolution in a Colonial Situation**

After the annexation of the state of Ranjit Singh in 1849, the British brought about its politico-administrative unification with the territories to the south of the Satlej which had been taken under their protection in 1809. After the Mutiny of 1857-58, the south-eastern tract called Haryana, which had been conquered along with Delhi in 1803, was added to the province of the Punjab. As the frontier province, it came to have a large number of purpose-built cantonment towns in the hills and plains. The great agricultural potential of the thirsty western plains was tapped by constructing vast irrigation networks and by colonizing this tract by shifting the hardworking agriculturists from the overpopulated eastern plains. Their surplus produce was carried to other parts of India as well as to the sea ports by an extensive rail network.

Before significant changes in the number, size and distribution of urban centers in the region became noticeable, there were 240 towns concentrated, as earlier, in the eastern plains, in 1881. The two cities of the region and most of the medium towns were located in the upper Bari and Bist Jalandhar Doabs.

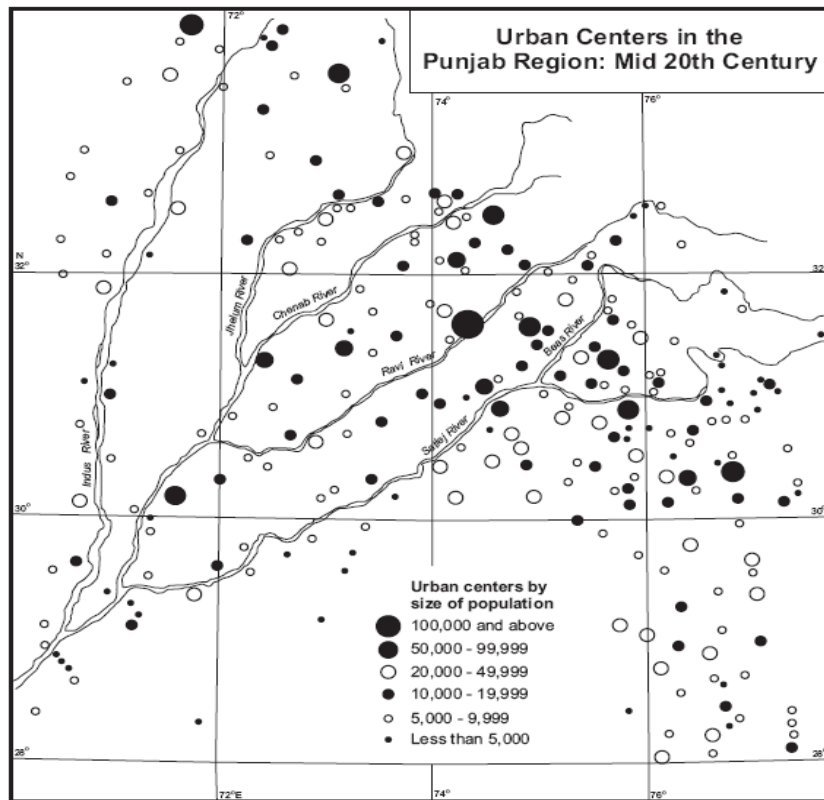
Some urban centers, mostly small towns, were scattered in the upper Rachna, Chaj, and Sindh Sagar Doabs along the confluence of the rivers in the south-western part of the region, and the Satlej-Jamuna divide. The lower *doabs* had a few urban settlements along the river valleys, though the uplands remained relatively devoid of these. Thus, for over three decades since annexation, there was no appreciable change in the urban pattern of the region. The urban centers in the western plains continued to be relatively scarce and widely spaced out. At this time, over 91 per cent of the urban centers were small towns, about 7 per cent were middling sized towns and only one per cent happened to be large enough to be called cities.<sup>32</sup>

By 1941, that is in the last decade of colonial rule, the urban picture was strikingly different. The number of towns had increased to 292, though this had not been a steady upward movement. The number declined to 220 in 1891, rose to 238 in 1901, declined again to 208 in 1911, and further to 205 in 1921, but rose abruptly to 249 in 1931. In the 1880s, there was one town for every 1540 square kms; in 1941, the average was one center for every 518 square kms. Cities now formed 3 per cent of the total urban units, and were spread in all parts of the region. The medium sized towns constituted 17 per cent and small towns 80 per cent of the urban structure, reversing the pre-colonial pattern. The cities and medium towns were thus growing at the cost of the small towns whose number declined significantly. This somewhat inverted the urban system as it had evolved till the middle of the nineteenth century, making it 'top' heavy, and lacking in a sizeable urban base of small towns to support the urban structure in the region.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of location, the regional urban landscape exhibited internal shifts in the period from 1881 to 1941. Towns were no longer confined to the river valleys and the eastern plains. New towns emerged in the western parts and in the hills. Areas with a higher degree of urbanization in 1881 declined while the less urbanized areas had a higher level of urban growth by the end of period. Consequently, towns in the less urbanized areas in 1881 showed the maximum growth rate. With a few exceptions, they were mostly situated in the western tract and southern parts of the Satlej-Jamuna divide. Several of them were newly founded *mandi* towns and administrative headquarters in the newly irrigated areas. The previously existing towns by contrast had an average growth rate. Rather, many old towns remained untouched by the cumulative impact of colonial rule. These surviving towns were some administrative centers, state capitals and market towns. As small units located at a distance from the main lines of communication, they barely participated in the expanding colonial economy. Many small towns even declined to the position of village settlements. In all, over 60 towns were declassified during this time, some being redesignated as 'urban' at a later date. On the whole, the process of declassification and reclassification affected only a small proportion of towns.

During 1881-1941, over 130 new towns emerged on the urban scene of the Punjab region. Some were founded afresh, some were revived as towns, while others were old settlements that had acquired urban characteristics and functions. In 1891, 27 towns were added to the urban list, 11 each were added

in the next two census years, 17 in 1921, 29 in 1931, and the largest addition of 49 was made in 1941. The new towns were cantonements, both in the hills and plains, educational centers for European children, and sites of new projects related to colonial 'necessities'. Two-thirds of the new towns in 1941 came up in the newly irrigated western plains and the Bahawalpur area while others were located along the railway linkages in the lower *doabs*.<sup>34</sup>



The colonial period, thus, saw a significant alteration in the urban pattern of the Punjab. Almost all categories of towns, except the smallest ones, followed an upward trend, with considerable increase in number and size of the urban centers. Cities came to be located in all parts of the region in contrast to their earlier central location. New towns rose in the hills, the Salt Range tract and the western plains, increasing the overall proportion of urban centers, though their proportion declined in the submontane and eastern plains which had been relatively well urbanized in the earlier period. The lower *doabs*, especially the *bars*, became urbanized for the first time. It was no coincidence that the fishing village of Karachi developed into the fourth largest port of British India,

catering very largely to the Punjab region for both exports and imports and linking it up directly with the metropolitan economy.<sup>3</sup>

On the whole, the degree of urbanization in the sub-regions of the Punjab varied considerably. The broad hierarchical pattern, however, continued, with a large proportion of small towns at the base and a small number of cities at the apex of the urban hierarchy. The category of cities, though, had become 'heavy'. The region as a whole does not seem to have experienced deurbanization, although internal shifts and variations are noted in the urban pattern. The pre-colonial towns showed a special adaptability and resilience in surviving through the colonial period due largely to their location, role in sub-regional trade and administrative status. New urban centers too emerged to meet the market needs of the newly developed agricultural areas in the region. As a whole, changes in the urbanscape were significant enough to be considered revolutionary, albeit brought about by the western technology subserving the demands of the colonial situation.

### **Post-Independence Trends**

Independence and partition into India and Pakistan directed the urban process into trajectories which, strictly speaking, are not comparable with the earlier period. Only a few broad trends covering the Indian Punjab and the State of Haryana (established in 1966) may be noted. A new state capital was established as Chandigarh. The influx of refugees led to expansion of existing centers and the setting up of four new towns mainly for rehabilitation. The influx of refugees, combined with the migrations from rural areas, brought about significant increase in the urban population, from 13 per cent in 1931 to 21 per cent by 1961, and to over 30 per cent by 1991. The post-1947 period saw the addition of 81 urban centers to the States of Punjab and Haryana. Many of these had been urban places in the earlier periods but had declined with time. The urban population as a whole registered an increase of 50-150 per cent, with only 5 centers registering over 500 per cent growth, 10 having 250-500 per cent growth, and 27 showing 150-250 per cent increase in population. By 1991, the cities came to have more than half the urban people, that is 52 per cent. Moving eastwards from the Amritsar and Ambala districts, urban units came to be more intensely located in the Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Faridabad and Yamunanagar areas which had been comparatively less urbanized before 1947. The least urban parts, however, remained the same – Hoshiarpur and Mahendragarh districts, respectively in Punjab and Haryana.<sup>36</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the early stages of urbanization in the Punjab region, location and natural advantages strengthening the economic potential of a place played an important role in the emergence and survival of towns and cities and the ensuing urban pattern. In the medieval period, polity had a more direct bearing on the urban pattern through integration of the existing urban units into a



relatively centralized administrative structure, and the development of new towns. The creation of a large number of administrative foci, and the concentration of the ruling class in urban centers as well as promotion of crafts and trade accelerated the urban process under Turko-Mughal rule. The Sikh Gurus also promoted urbanization by founding autonomous towns. The emergence of the new centers of power during the late eighteenth century their unification under Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century was equally conducive for urban growth. Colonial rule, however, was far more pervasive than all the previous regimes put together. The residential, administrative, military and economic needs of the British centered on cities and towns tied together by the railway system and the new means of communication. With the technology at their command, the British could construct towns on hill tops and excavate canals in the arid western plains of the Punjab, and construct the *mandi* towns to systematically siphon off the surplus agricultural produce to other parts of the sub-continent and Europe. In the process, the natural environment of the Punjab region was substantially altered, and polity got precedence among the factors influencing the urban pattern. The post-Independence period broadly reflects the continuation of the colonial urban pattern with an increase in the number and size of urban units and substantial growth of the cities, reinforcing, thus, the 'top heavy' urban structure and involuted urban pattern.

#### Notes

1. Reeta Grewal, *Colonialism and Urbanization in India: The Punjab Region* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009), p. 19.
2. Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 26.
3. The ensuing discussion is largely based on *ibid.*, pp. 82, 83, 86-87, 92-94, 109-10, 114-15, 130-31, 133-34 and *passim*. See also Suraj Bhan, 'Harppan Urbanism the Sutlej-Yamuna Divide', in *Five Thousand Years of Urbanization: The Punjab Region*, ed. Reeta Grewal (New Delhi: Manohar/Institute of Punjab Studies, 2005), pp. 55-61.
4. Chakrabarti, *The Archaeology of Ancient Indian Cities*, pp. 242, 244, 267-68 and *passim*.
5. For an overview of the second urbanism, see R.S. Sharma, 'Urbanism in Early Historic India', in *The City in Indian History*, ed. Indu Banga (New Delhi: Manohar/Urban History Association of India, 2005, rpt.), pp. 9-15.

6. For some detail, Kukum Roy, 'Taxila in the Mauryan Empire', in *Five Thousand Years of Urbanization*, pp. 63-78. See also R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300 – c.1000)*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987), pp. 11-13.
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8. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, p. 185.
9. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 133.
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11. Minhaj-ud-din, Abu Umari-i Usman, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia including Hindustan; from A.H.194 (810 A.D.) to A.H.658 (1260 A.D.) and the Irruption of the Infidel Mughals into Islam*, tr. Major H.G. Raverty (New Delhi: Oriental Books 1970, rpt.), pp. 533n, 537n, 538n, 611n, 613, 645n, 678n.
12. *Ibn Batuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, tr. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Kegan Paul, 1953, 3rd impression), p. 190. See also Agha Mahdi Husain, *The Rehla of Ibn Batuta* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1953). p. 24.
13. R.C. Jauhari, *Medieval India in Transition: Tarikh-i- Firozshahi* (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 2001), pp. 93, 96-97, 143, 182, 187, 189, 247-48, 287.
14. Shaikh Rizqullah Mashtaqi, *Waqiat-i Mushtaqi: A Source of Information on the Life and Conditions in Pre Mughal India*, tr. I.H. Siddiqi (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre/ICHR, 1993), pp. 22, 55, 56, 81, 85, 108, 126-27, 166, 209.
15. For a discussion, see Reeta Grewal, 'Urbanization in Medieval India', in *The State and Society in Medieval India*, ed. J.S. Grewal, History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), vol. VII, part 1, pp. 400-1.
16. K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969). See also Reeta Grewal 'Urbanization in Medieval India', pp. 398-99.

17. Gavin Hambly, 'Towns and Cities: Mughal India', in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. I: c.1200-c.1750, ed. Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1984), p. 436. Hambly qualifies that the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries were 'a veritable golden age of urbanization, at least for much of northern and central India'.
18. Zahir-ud din Babar, *Babarnama*, tr. A.S. Beveridge (New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1970, rpt.), pp. 480-81, 485-88.
19. Abul Fazal Allami, *Ain-i Akbari*, vol. II, tr. H.S. Jarret, revised by Jadunath Sardar (New Delhi: Taj Publishers, 1989), pp. 285-86, 299, 318-19.
20. Abdul Qadir Badaoni, *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, tr. George S.A. Ranking (Patna: Academia Asiatica, 1973), pp. 21n, 37n, 44n, 46, 48n, 66-67n, 137n, 185-86, 325-26, 366n, 383n.
21. Khwaja Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, vol. II, tr. Brajendra Nath, revised by Beni Prasad (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1992), pp. 14, 184, 215, 243, 396, 508, 546.
22. William Forster, *Early Travels in India* (New Delhi: Oriental Books, 1985, rpt.), pp. 123-24, 155-56, 169-70.
23. Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, tr. William Crooke (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001), pp. 76-79.
24. Information on Lahore collected from H.K. Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India 1556-1803* (Bombay: Asia, 1968), pp. 26-26, 75-79; S. Abdul Quddus, *Punjab: The Land of Beauty, Love and Mysticism* (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1992), pp. 347-52.
25. For an overview, see Fauja Singh, *Sirhind Through the Ages* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1972).
26. Based on Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition-Tarikh-i Firozshahi*, p. 6.
27. J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, trs. and eds., *Early Nineteenth Century Punjab: From Ganesh Das's Char Bagh-i Panjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1975), p. 30.
28. For a discussion, Reeta Grewal, *Colonialism and Urbanization*, pp. 30-36.

29. Rohilla Tabssum, *Urbanization in Medieval Punjab*, Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2010, p. 114.
30. Reeta Grewal, 'Polity, Economy and Urbanization in the Early 19th Century Punjab', *Journal of Regional History*, vol. IV, 1983, pp. 56-72.
31. Information on Gujrat collected from *Early Nineteenth Century Punjab: From Ganesh Das's Char Bagh-i Panjab*, pp. 28, 56-57.
32. Reeta Grewal, *Colonialism and Urbanization*, pp. 64-65.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 66-72.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
35. See Indu Banga, 'Karachi and its Hinterland under Colonial Rule', in *Ports and their Hinterlands in India*, ed. Indu Banga (New Delhi: Manohar, 1992), pp. 337-58.
36. This understanding of the post 1947 period is based on the work of Rupali Bhalla, *Urbanization in Post Independence India: A Comparative Study of Punjab and Haryana upto 1991*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 2000.

### **Appendix: Towns Identified in the Punjab Region**

#### **The Indus Civilization**

Agroha; Ajaram; Bagrian daTheh; Banawali; Bhagwanpura; Chak Purvane Syal; Dadehri; Dhalevan; Gurni Kalan; Harappa; Hasanpur; Kalibangan ; Katpalon ; Kotla Nihang Khan; Lakhmirwala; Mitathal; Mohenjodaro; Mohrana; Nagar; Rakhigarhi; Rangmahal; Ropar; Sanghol; Sugh; Sunet; Thaneshwar; Vainiwal.

#### **Early Historical Period**

Argan-Manga; Bara; Chanda Kheri; Chawinda Ghari; Deel Chappar; Fattehpur; Ghugatwind Hinduan; Ghurram; Kakrauni; Khabba; Kotli Mallian; Makhanwindi; Mattewal; Raja Karni ka Kila; Rajputan; Ropar; Saikhan Dheri; Sanghol; Saundha; Sirkap; Singh Bhawanipur; Sirsukh; Sugh; Taragarh; Vadall-Dogran.

#### **Seventh-Tenth Centuries**

Adampur; Ajodhan; Akkbar; Ambakapi or Ammakatis; Aminabad; Atak; Bhairowal; Bhakkar; Bhatnir; Bhatinda or Tabarhind; Bhera; Chamba; Chinapatti or Patti; Daulatnagar; Dipalpur; Doraha; Fazilabad; Ganaur; Gharaunda; Ghuram; Gujrat ; Hansi; Harappa; Hasan Abdal; Hazara; Hoshiarpur; Jahwal; Jhelum; Jalandhar; Jhang; Kalanaur; Kapurthala; Karnal; Khushab; Kohram; Kusawur or Kasur; Lohawur or Lahore; Machhiwara; Masudabad; Mong or Nikea; Multan; Nagarkot; Nakodar; Nandana; Narela; Panipat; Peshawar; Rahon; Rajgarh; Rawalpindi; Ropar; Sadhaura; Samana; Sarsuti or Sirsa; Sakala or Sialkot; Satghara; Shahdara; Sirhind; Shorkot; Taki or Asarur; Talamba; Taxila; Tohana; Narsingha or Ransi; Uchh; Wazirabad.

### **Eleventh-Fifteenth Centuries**

Ambala; Badi; Bahlolpur; Bajwara; Batala; Bhatinda; Bhatnir; Bhera; Bhakkar; Chamba; Dhatrath; Dipalpur; Fatehabad; Firozabad; Ferozepur; Hansi; Hanikhera; Hasan Abdal; Hazara; Hisar-Firoza; Jwalamukhi; Jind; Jhajjar; Kaithal; Kalanaur; Kaliaana; Kangra; Khizrabad; Khushab; Lahore; Ludhiana; Machhiwara; Malot; Malkahans; Multan; Nagarkot; Nakodar; Narnaul; Panipat; Peshawar; Pind Dadan Khan; Qabula; Qasur; Rawalpindi; Sadhaura; Samana; Sunam; Sarsuti or Sirsa; Satghara; Shahabad; Shahpur; Shamsabad; Sialkot; Sirhind; Sultanpur; Talamba; Tilla Balnath; Tughlaqpur or Safidon; Tughlaqpur Kasna; Tughlaqpur Malul Makar; Uchh.

### **Sixteenth-Seventeenth Centuries**

Ahroni; Ajodhan; Ambala; Aminabad; Attock; Badarpur; Bahlolpur; Bajwara; Balachaur; Ballabgarh; Balot; Bamnikhera; Banur; Basohli; Batala; Bel Ghazi Khan; Beri Dulbadan; Bhadra; Bhairowal; Bhatinda; Bhatnir; Bhera; Bhimber; Bhimnagar; Bhakkar; Bilaspur; Bilaura; Chamba; Chichawatni; Chima Chatha; Chima Gakhar; Chiniot; Dadial; Dadrala; Dadri Taha; Dahota; Daulatnagar; Dharmkot; Dera Ghazi Khan; Dera Ismail Khan; Dhameri; Dhamlok; Dhankot; Dhatrath; Dhaunkal; Dipalpur; Dipalpur Lakhi; Dodai; Faridkot; Fatehpur; Fatehgarh; Firozabad; Ferozepur; Ganaur; Garhdiwala; Gakhar; Gharaunda; Ghuram; Goindwal; Gujrat; Guler; Hajjipur; Hansi; Harappa; Hasan Abdal; Hazara; Helan; Hiantal; Hisar-Firoza; Hoshiarpur; Indral; Jahanabad; Jahangirabad; Jhelum; Jalalabad; Jalandhar; Jamia Gakhar; Jammu; Jasrota; Jaswan; Jwalamukhi; Jhang; Jhand Sialan; Jind; Jhajjar; Kahlora; Kaithal; Kajakot; Kalabagh; Kalanaur; Kalapind; Kangra; Karnal; Khanna; Khanda; Khari; Khairabad; Khatpur; Khizrabad; Khushab; Kiratpur; Kishtwar; Kotkehr; Kullu; Kumaon; Lahore; Lakhapur; Leiah; Ludhiana; Maham; Makhiala; Malot; Mangewal; Mankot; Mansurpur; Marikala; Margala; Masudabad; Masur; Mauj; Mihirabad; Mihirpur; Multan; Mustafabad; Nagarkot; Nahan; Najafgarh; Nakodar; Nandana; Nadaun; Narnaul; Nawanshahar; Nawan Bhera; Nilab; Nimrana; Nurmahal; Nuruddin; Pakka; Pharwala; Pathankot; Patti Haibatpur; Peshawar; Phagwara; Phillour; Phul; Pind Dadan Khan; Pinjour; Pir Kanu; Purmandal; Qabula; Qasur;



Bhera; Bhiwani; Bilaspur; Budhlada; Bund; Burewala; Buriya; Campbellopur; Chachran Sharif; Chachrauli; Chak Jhumra; Chakwal; Chaklala; Chamba; Chawinda ;Chichawatni; Chishtian; Chiniot; Chuharkana; Chunian; Dadri; Dagshai; Dajal; Dalha; Dalhousie; Darman; Daska; Dasuya; Dera Baba Nanak; Dera Bassi; Dera Ghazi Khan; Dera Ismail Khan; Dera Nawab Shah; Dhanaula; Dhariwal; Dharmkot; Dharmsala; Dhuri; Dinanagar; Dinga; Dujana; Duniyapur; Edwardesabad; Ellenabad; Eminabad; Faridabad; Faridkot; Farrukhnagar; Fatehabad; Fatehgarh; Fatehjang; Fazilka; Ferozepur; Firozpur Jhirka; Fort Abbas; Gakhar; Garhshankar; Garhi Ikhtiyar Khan; Gharounda; Gidderbaha; Gobindgarh; Gohana; Gojra; Gujranwala; Gujrat; Gurdaspur; Hadali; Hadiabad; Harunabad; Hasilpur; Hidayatpur; Hafizabad; Hansi; Hariana; Haripur; Haripur(Kangra); Hazro; Hissar; Hodal; Hoshiarpur; Isakhel; Ilaahabad; Jagadhri; Jagraon; Jaitu; Jajja Abbasian; Jalalabad; Jalalpur; Jalalpur Pirwala; Jampur; Jamke; Jand; Jandiala; Jalandhar; Jaranwala; Jatoi; Jhang-Maghiana; Jhajjar; Jhawarian; Jhelum; Jind; Jogindernagar; Jutogh; Jwalamukhi; Kahrora; Kaithal; Kalabagh; Kalanaur; Kaliana; Kallur Kot; Kalka; Kamalia; Kamonki; Kangra; Kapurthala; Karnal; Karor; Kartarpur; Kasauli; Kasumpti; Kasur; Khan Bela; Khanewal; Khengarh; Khanpur ; Khanqah Sharif; Khairpur; Khanna; Kharar; Kharkhauda; Khem Karan; Khudian; Khushab; Kohat; Kot Adu; Kot Chhuta; Kot Kapura; Kot Moman; Kot Sabzal; Kulachi; Kunja; Kunjpura; Ladwa; Lahore; Lakki; Lala Musa; Lalian; Leiah; Loharu; Longowal; Ludhiana; Lyallpur; Machhiwara; Maghiana; Mahatpur; Mailsi; Majitha; Makhad; Makhu; Malakwal; Malerkotla; Mandi; Mandi Bahauddin; Mandi Guru Har Sahae; Mandi Pattoki; Mandi Sadiq; Mansa; Meham; Mian Chhanu; Miani;(Bist); Miani (Chaj); Mianwali; Minchinabad; Mitha Tiwana; Mithankot; Mitranwali; Moga; Mohindergarh; Montgomery; Morinda; Mubarakpur; Mukerian; Muktsar; Multan; Murree; Muzaffargarh; Nabha; Nagar Bhojpur; Nahan; Najafgarh; Nai Dabwali; Nainakot; Nakodar; Nalagarh;Nankana Sahib; Narnaul; Narot; Narowal; Narwana; Naushahra; Nawanshahar; Nawanshahar(Peshawar); Nurmahal; Nurpur; Okara; Paharpur; Pak Pattan; Palwal; Panipat; Pasrur; Pataudi; Pathankot; Patiala; Patti; Payal; Phagwara; Phillour; Phul; Phulerwan; Pehowa; Peshawar; Pind Dadan Khan; Pindi Gheb; Pundri; Qaimpur; Qila Didar Singh; Qila Sobha Singh; Radaur; Rahim Yar Khan; Raja Sansi; Rajpura; Rahon; Rajanpur; Raikot; Ramdas; Rampur Bashahr; Ramnagar; Rania; Rattia; Rawalpindi; Rewari; Rohtak; Rojhan; Ropar; Rori; Sabathu; Sadhaura; Safidon; Sahiwal; Sanaur; Sangla; Samana; Sambrial; Sanawar; Sanjarpur; Sangrur; Sankhatra; Sargodha; Shahabad; Shahar Sultan; Shahpur; Shankargarh; Shamsheerpur; Sharakpur; Sheikhpura; Shorkot; Shujabad; Sialkot; Sillianwala; Simla; Sirhind; Sirsa; Sitpur; Sodhra; Sohna; Sonapat; Sot Samba; Sri Govindpur; Sujanpur; Sukhochak; Sultanpur; Sultanwind; Sunam; Tajgarh; Talagang; Talamba; Tandlianwala; Tank; Tarandah Din Panah; Taunsa; Tarn Taran; Thanesar; Toba Tek Singh; Tohana; Uchh Sharif ; Una; Urmal Tanda; Vairawal; Vehowa; Wazirabad; Zafarwal; Zira.





## **J.S. Grewal on Sikh History, Historiography and Recent Debates**

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With reference to the recent research of J.S. Grewal, the essay delineates the beginning of modern Sikh Studies in terms of Western enterprise before annexation; its development in terms mainly of Indian response in the early twentieth century; its maturity in terms of widened range in contemporary times; and complexity in terms of intense controversies emerging by the turn of the century. Virtually all the high points of the Sikh movement figure in these controversies some of which can be traced to Western writings under colonial rule. Grewal's considered views on each of these issues bring out his palpable differences with W.H. McLeod and Harjot Oberoi, among others. By emphasizing that there is no substitute for a rational and sympathetic interpretation of Sikh sources for a meaningful interpretation of the Sikh past, Grewal seeks to bridge the supposed divergence and growing gulf between the so-called 'critical' and 'traditional' historians. Refusal to enter into genuine debate or to take note of valid objections might result in loss of momentum and credibility for the field of Sikh Studies as a whole.

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The tremendous growth of the discipline of history over the past half a century coincides with J.S. Grewal's multi-faceted contribution to historical research. By the time he joined the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, for Ph.D. in the late fifties, a serious rethinking had started about the nature, scope and method of history in the West. Yet, in the contemporary academic context in Britain, his decision to work on the British historical writing on medieval India was regarded as somewhat unconventional. By now, however, it is well recognized that the vitality and consistency of the discipline of history requires periodic stock taking or reflection by its own practitioners. As a form of history of ideas 'second-order-history' illumines historical reconstruction and interpretation.

After the publication in 1970 of his doctoral thesis on British historians of medieval India, which came to be regarded as a seminal work,<sup>1</sup> Grewal kept up his interest in the history of historical writing while branching out into several other areas of Sikh and Punjab history. In fact, his first research paper on 'J.D. Cunningham and his British Predecessors on the Sikhs' had been published in 1964. By the time he wrote on the 'State of Sikh Studies' in 1973, his monographs on *Guru Gobind Singh* (conjoint, 1967) and *Guru Nanak in History* (1969) had been published, along with an insightful collection of essays entitled, *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (1972). The deepening of Grewal's interest in Sikh history thus went hand in hand with reflections on its treatment by historians. *Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Persian*

*Chroniclers* (1976) preceded a detailed treatment of the historians of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1980, to be followed by two monographic studies of Ranjit Singh and his times (1981, 1982). In 1990, came out Grewal's 'veritable tour de force', *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, incorporating the latest research, widening and deepening his interest in Sikh history, and extending it to contemporary times.<sup>2</sup> A monograph on *Guru Nanak in Western Scholarship* was published in 1992, partly in response to the ongoing debate about his status and the nature of his message, to be taken up later in this essay. Two more monographs dealing with controversial issues followed. The tercentenary of the Khalsa in 1999 inspired focus on the historical and historiographical studies of the Khalsa.

All along, Grewal kept on analysing the Sikh and Persian sources and revising and elaborating his earlier understanding of Sikh history and its central issues, best exemplified by his influential collection of essays whose fourth revised and enlarged edition came out in 2007.<sup>3</sup> Since then, and among others, Grewal has produced the inter-related studies on the *Guru Granth Sahib* (2009); *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity* (2009); *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition* (2011); *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies* (2011); and *Historical Writings on the Sikhs* (2012). His *Historical Studies in Punjabi Literature* (2011) can be regarded as an offshoot of interest in Sikh literature, beginning with an analysis of the *Prem Sumarag* in 1965. Evidently, empirical research, analysis of literature, and history of ideas enmeshed in these works have been mutually illuminating. This is true equally of Grewal's work specifically on regional and medieval Indian history.<sup>4</sup>

Taking note of his recent publications on Sikh history, the present essay begins with a discussion of Grewal's latest monograph dealing with historical, historiographical, methodological and interpretational issues of fundamental importance to the field of Sikh Studies.

### **Scope and Approach**

A substantial volume, the *Historical Writings on the Sikhs*, is divided into six parts, presented in terms of 'Western enterprise and Indian response', from the last quarter of the eighteenth to the beginning of the present century.<sup>5</sup> The first two parts take up works of the British, European and American writers who 'laid the foundations of modern Sikh studies in the broad framework of colonial, "orientalist", and evangelical concerns'. The next three parts include the works of the first three generations of the English educated Indian writers from diverse professional and regional backgrounds. They 'appropriated the Western legacy and tried to improve upon it' in the backdrop of socio-religious and political resurgence during the colonial period. The sixth and the last part of the book dealing with contemporary times exemplifies the widening scope and increasing complexity of historical studies on the Sikhs, which has also resulted in controversies among the Western and Indian scholars over several issues. Altogether, the works of over three scores of writers on the Sikh past

have been taken up in this book. With their diverse backgrounds, varied purposes, competing interpretations and differing emphases and nuances, they may be seen as cumulatively constituting, to use Grewal's words, 'our heritage as researchers in the area of Sikh studies' (Preface).

Broadly, three kinds of approaches seem to have been adopted in this book. The works of most of the writers in the first five parts have been analysed on the assumption that their historical thinking was embedded in their socio-political situations and world-views. Therefore, to determine their relative worth for illuminating the Sikh past, Grewal goes into the scope, thrust, sources, method and limitations in each case. The existential situation of a writer, his avowed purposes and underlying concerns and assumptions are considered relevant for understanding his prejudices, misconceptions and errors, which resulted in several stereotypes. Where possible, as in the case of Trumpp and Macauliffe on Sikhism and the Sikh scripture, a comparative analysis of their works is made to evaluate their relative worth. While analysing the writings of the Indian historians of the colonial period in the next three parts, their formulations are seen in relation to their ideological orientations to the changing socio-political context during the colonial period. In the post-colonial period, however, the widened scope of historical research necessitated a somewhat different approach. Grewal takes up fifteen monographic studies which in his view represent major new themes, sources and approaches and, together, mark a significant departure from the historical writing on the Sikhs before Independence. In the last chapter of the book, the controversies between the professional historians mostly located in the West and those writing as 'Sikh' scholars largely located in India have been approached in terms of the origin and escalation of controversies and the issues involved.

### **Western Enterprise**

Turning to the foundational texts in part one, the author traces the beginnings of interest in the Sikh past under the East India Company from 1784, and situates the analysis of each writing in the rapidly changing political context and purposes of the British until 1849, the year of annexation. On the maxim that knowledge was power, appraisals of the resources of the Sikhs as the potential political adversaries could have more meaning for the British if seen in relation to the Sikh past. Thus, an interest in Sikh history is evident in the writings of Charles Wilkins, Antoine-Louis Henri Polier, George Forster and James Browne which covered the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Their endeavour synchronized with the rise of the East India Company into political power in Bengal and that of the Sikhs in the Punjab. Establishment of British supremacy over Delhi in 1803, and over the cis-Satlej Sikh chiefs in 1809 resulted in John Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* which was published in book form in 1812. Henry Prinsep gave an assessment of Ranjit Singh's financial and military resources after the Governor General William Bentinck sought to contain Ranjit Singh's advance towards Sind in 1831. While Prinsep

considered the possibility of the Company annexing his territories after his death, the British writers of the 1840s - W.G. Osborne, W.L.M'Gregor, G.C. Smyth and H.H. Wilson - unequivocally supported an aggressive policy towards Ranjit Singh's state and successors.

The only discordant note in this expansionist stance was struck by J.D. Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs*. Its publication ironically coincided with annexation in 1849. Decried in the official circles for its criticism of the British authorities, Cunningham's work was eventually acclaimed as a 'classic'. It stands out, among other things, for his appreciation for Sikhism as a distinct faith, an innate sympathy for the Sikhs as a young nation, objective assessment of his British predecessors on the Sikhs, erudite interpretation of a vast range of Sikh sources and, above all, 'his sound judgement in selecting his facts with a strict regard to historical truth'.<sup>6</sup>

In part two of his book, Grewal discusses the British, European and American writers in the period under the crown. Interestingly, from 1865 to 1930 nearly a dozen British administrators and military officers wrote on the Sikh past mainly to justify annexation and British rule, trace the history of the loyal Sikh rulers and aristocracy, provide information about Sikh religion and customs to the recruiting and commanding officers of the army, and to harness the support of the Sikh people as collaborators. As may be expected *a priori*, the points of emphasis changed with the changing political context. However, these writers took no serious interest in the Sikh past, they had no appreciation for the Sikh tradition, and their general attitude towards the Sikhs remained unsympathetic. Moreover, with the exception of Lepel Griffin who collected information about the chiefs and families of note, all other writers depended on the published works, mostly by Malcolm and Trumpp, using these selectively to suit their purposes.

On the assumption that there was a link between the celebrated martial spirit of the Sikhs and their faith, the bureaucracy encouraged the study of their religion and scripture, first by Ernest Trumpp, a German missionary, and then by Max Arthur Macauliffe, a British civil servant, who wrote in direct reaction to Trumpp. Grewal compares the two writers, also taking note of N.G. Barrier's recent defence of Trumpp's work, and comes to the conclusion that the latter's work was essentially unsympathetic and extremely misleading. In Grewal's assessment, Trumpp's understanding was faulty, his translation was literal and flawed, and his interpretation of Sikhism amounted to 'misrepresentation' on several crucial points.<sup>7</sup> He was highly sceptical about the use of *Janamsakhis* for the historical life of Guru Nanak who was said to be greatly indebted to Hindu philosophy for all his important doctrines, and especially to Kabir for his theistic ideas. Trumpp maintained that Sikhism remained a Hindu sect.

By contrast, Macauliffe's approach towards Sikhism was sympathetic and his attitude towards Sikh orthodoxy was considerate. He evaluated the different Sikh sources and looked upon Sikhism 'as the most original dispensation' with 'many "moral and political" merits'.<sup>8</sup> His translation of the Sikh scripture and some other sources was closer to the original. Yet, Macauliffe too could not transcend his immediate context. He uncritically

accepted some post-eventum prophecies because these suited the colonial state and the loyalist Sikh scholarship. At places, he accommodated the orthodox Sikh view against his own judgment about the reliability of a particular source. On the whole, 'Macauliffe was acceptable to the Sikhs primarily because his translation was closer to the original, and his interpretation of the Sikh tradition was faithful to the sources he used'.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, by widening the scope of the early Sikh tradition, he provided the basis for the later writings on Sikhism. His translation and interpretation suggested to Dorothy Field in 1914 that 'Sikhism was a world religion "rather than a reformed sect of Hindus"'.<sup>10</sup>

Turning to the works of John Clarke Archer and C.H. Loehlin, two American missionaries, Grewal notices interesting similarities and differences between them. Archer's comparative study of the Sikhs in relation to other religions, and Loehlin's work on *The Sikhs and their Scriptures* were first published in 1946. In 1971, Loehlin published his study of the *Granth of Guru Gobind Singh and the Khalsa Brotherhood*. Together, the two writers bridged Western scholarship of the colonial and post-colonial periods. At the end of his analyses of their works, Grewal observes that while the two agreed that Sikhism emerged as a world religion, they differed in their conception of the nature of the Sikh faith in the beginning. Loehlin believed that Sikhism was a synthesis of Bhakti Hinduism and Sufi Islam, and that Guru Nanak was indebted to both Vaishnava Bhakti and Kabir. While they agreed on the development of the Sikh Panth as evolutionary, Archer laid emphasis on the martial activity of Guru Hargobind, and Loehlin focused on the tenth Guru as completing the process of militarization. Despite their broad agreement over the invocation of the Goddess by Guru Gobind Singh, personal Guruship ending after his death, Guruship vested in the *Granth Sahib*, and the need to determine the authenticity of the *Kartarpur Pothis*, there are differences of emphasis and detail between Archer and Loehlin. Loehlin regards the *Dasam Granth* as one of the 'two books of scripture'. As a whole he does not clarify any issue.

Grewal draws attention to some other views peculiar to the two writers. Archer was the first Western scholar to postulate a difference between the Nanak of history and Nanak of faith, and to suggest that the Khalsa *rahit* (code of conduct) as well as the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth came to be established gradually during the eighteenth century. Loehlin emphasized the gap between the ideal of equality and the ground realities by pointing to the caste restrictions for matrimony, and denial of equality to the lower castes in social relations and worship. It is possible to see the bearing of the missionary orientation of the two writers on these formulations which, significantly, were picked up later by W.H. McLeod. There was a palpable influence of Trumpp on Loehlin as well as McLeod.

### Indian Response

The next three parts take up the historical writing on the Sikhs by Indians from the 1890s to the 1950s, ending with an analysis of Teja Singh and Ganda Singh's well-known work, *A Short History of the Sikhs*.

In 1891, Syad Muhammad Latif published a substantial volume on the *History of the Punjab* since the earliest time to the present. Over half of its 650 pages are given to the history of the Sikhs as the immediate predecessors of the British. He used a large number of non-English sources, mainly Persian, and his treatment was essentially unsympathetic, justifying annexation and praising British rule. As an Extra Judicial Assistant Commissioner in the Punjab, Latif hoped for reward from the government, which he got in 1892. He wrote as a loyal Muslim and his work reflected the emerging communal consciousness in North India. For Sikh history, at any rate, it leaves a dead trail.

The other three writers in part three of the book happened to be educated Sikhs who belonged to the emergent professional middle class and whose scholarship was inspired by their faith and sympathy for the Sikh tradition. Sewaram Singh Thapar, a lawyer and later a District and Sessions Judge, published a monograph on the life and teaching of Guru Nanak in 1904. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, a professor and a journalist, wrote on the life of Guru Gobind Singh in 1909, and on the Sikh martyrs in 1919. Khazan Singh, an Extra Assistant Commissioner, produced 'the first comprehensive work on the history and religion of the Sikhs' in 1914. Responding to the writings of the Western writers, all three of them sought to correct the existing misrepresentations. They laid emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Sikh faith and Sikh identity. They were concerned with the correct understanding about the Sikh movement, doctrines and institutions. For example, Sewaram Singh underlined that 'Guru Nanak enunciated the basic principles for the guidance of his disciples'; Bhagat Lakshman Singh emphasized that 'Guru Gobind Singh's achievement was made possible by the work of the predecessors' or that martyrdom was 'an integral part of the Sikh tradition'; and Khazan Singh suggested that 'the "touchstone" for assaying any work on Sikhism was available in the *Adi Granth* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas'.<sup>11</sup> In Grewal's assessment, the three writers had a good knowledge of the Sikh sources which they used critically and interpreted 'in human and rational terms'.<sup>12</sup> There were occasional errors of judgment or compromises in deference to tradition. As a whole, the three writers could be taken as the early representatives of modern 'Sikh' scholarship. Their concern for the Sikh past was related to their concern for the present and future of the Sikhs. Interestingly, writing in the backdrop of the Singh Sabha movement, 'they did not look upon Sikh identity as a basis of Sikh politics'.<sup>13</sup>

In part four, Grewal analyses the writings of the two well-known Bengali historians – Indubhusan Banerjee and Narendra Krishna Sinha – which were well-received as comprehensive scholarly studies and remained part of the university syllabi for four decades or so. First published in the 1930s, the

works of both the historians reflected the influence of the Freedom Struggle and its undercurrents during the twenties and the thirties.

In the course of his analysis of Banerjee's study of the *Evolution of the Khalsa* in two volumes, Grewal draws attention to its basic limitations arising partly from the author's conceptualization inspired by his environment, and partly from his inability to deconstruct Sikh sources. Assuming that Guru Nanak was a 'Vaishnava reformer', Banerjee failed to grasp 'the core of the message of the *Janamsakhis*' about 'the uniqueness of Guru Nanak's mission'.<sup>14</sup> For Banerjee, thus, there was 'nothing in the ideology of Guru Nanak' which could lead to 'transformation of Sikhism'. He tried to explain it 'in terms of "Muslim persecution", the ideological and institutional developments under the successors of Guru Nanak, and the innate traits of the Jats'.<sup>15</sup> These assumptions clouded Banerjee's judgment and he not only failed to appreciate the creative responses of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, but also overlooked the ideological continuities between the first and the last Guru. Moreover, Banerjee wrote as a Hindu nationalist.<sup>16</sup> In short, the ideas that informed Banerjee's research 'induced him to force on his evidence an interpretation that it was not strong enough to support'.<sup>17</sup>

Inspired by J.D. Cunningham's work, and dedicating his *Rise of the Sikh Power* to him, Sinha subscribed to his formulation of 'theocratic confederate feudalism' for the eighteenth century Sikh polity. Drawing a parallel between the rise of the Sikhs and that of the Marathas, Sinha underlined 'the collective endeavour of a united people' who were led successfully by 'comparatively obscure men'. He appreciated their role in checking 'the Durrani menace'. In Grewal's words, 'for Sinha, the rise of Sikh power was a nationalist enterprise, both Indian and Hindu'.<sup>18</sup> By comparison, in his study of *Ranjit Singh*, Sinha was much less appreciative of his 'military monarchy' and of Ranjit Singh himself both as a person and as a ruler. He was credited nonetheless with saving the Punjab, Kashmir and the north-west for India from the Afghans. Sinha wished, however, that instead of 'yielding' to the British, Ranjit Singh had gone to war against them, irrespective of the consequences. While borrowing his formulations from modern European history, Sinha allowed his judgments to be influenced also by the contemporary political environment in India. Like Banerjee, Sinha's works too suffered from the limitations of conceptualization and sources.

The fifth part of the book deals with 'the native historians of the Punjab', beginning with Gokul Chand Narang's doctoral study. First published in 1912, and revised and enlarged several times till the 1960s, his *Transformation of Sikhism* remained consistent in its basic premise that Sikhism was a Hindu sect and that Sikh movement was a Hindu movement from the first to the tenth Guru. Banda Bahadur, however, taught the Hindus how to conquer and rule, thereby making Sikhism 'less sectarian and more nationalistic' in its character. Grewal suggests that Narang 'looked upon the Sikhs as prototypes of the Arya Samajists'.<sup>19</sup> Ironically, while he highlighted the 'life-and-death struggle' and political achievement of the Khalsa in the post-Banda period, for the history of the Sikhs under colonial rule, Narang dwelt on the theme of loyalty. Until after

the attainment of independence, 'Narang looked upon himself as a "missionary of Hindu-Sikh unity"'.<sup>20</sup> He had no sympathy for the Sikh struggle for what he calls 'Khalistan' and the Akali agitation for a Punjabi-speaking state. Like Indubhusan Banerjee, Narang 'tried to appropriate the Sikh past for Hindu nationalism'. While Narang's 'assumptions and approach' marred his interpretation even in the first edition of his work,<sup>21</sup> 'the later editions can be seen as "a journalistic exercise" or as "a piece of political writing rather than a writing of history"'.<sup>22</sup>

The next historian taken up is Hari Ram Gupta who can be seen as chronologically bridging the pre and post-Independence historical writing on the Sikhs. His most important work on Sikh history was his doctoral thesis published in 1939 as *History of the Sikhs* from 1739 to 1768. Its sequel came out in two volumes in 1944 as the history respectively of the cis and trans-Satlej Sikhs from 1769 to 1799. The first and the third volumes give a connected and on the whole meaningful account of the political activity of the trans-Satlej Sikhs who fought against the Mughals and Afghans and developed institutions and practices that contributed towards the ultimate triumph of the Sikhs and occupation of territories. The second volume on the politics and warfare of the cis-Satlej Sikhs, however, 'does not contribute to our understanding of the political process'. In Gupta's treatment, the Sikh chiefs of this tract emerged as selfish plunderers who subordinated collective interest to their individual interests, and who had no hesitation in accepting political subordination as vassals. Gupta referred to them as the Phulkian *misl*, 'though there is no evidence for treating the Phulkian chiefs as a single unit'. Moreover, Gupta failed 'to see that all the important Sikh chiefs were acting independently of others'. If they were virtually autonomous in the cis-Satlej tract, in the trans-Satlej area 'they were acting as monarchs and Ranjit Singh was a born monarch'.<sup>23</sup>

Gupta evinced admiration for the trans-Satlej Sikhs who repulsed the Afghan invasions and established sovereign rule in the Punjab. By turning the tide of 'foreign' aggression after 800 years and by securing the frontier region of 'our country', they performed a 'national duty'. In this 'equation of Muslims with foreigner', Gupta revealed an overlapping of 'Indian nationalism' with 'Hindu nationalism',<sup>24</sup> though he was far removed from Narang's unabashed 'Hinduized perspective positing Hindu-Muslim divide as a central aspect of Indian society'.<sup>25</sup> Gupta's sympathetic treatment brought out the 'intrinsic worth' of the Khalsa and 'their tenacity of purpose and resourcefulness'.

Using a number of Persian, English, Gurmukhi and Marathi sources, Gupta 'may be seen as interpreting eighteenth century Sikh history largely through his facts'. He was meticulous about persons, places and events, but stretched his 'contemporary evidence' to 'anything that came from the eighteenth century and even the early decades of the nineteenth century'. As a whole, his work can be seen as constituting 'a clear and substantial advance over Sinha in terms of factual detail and authenticity and in terms of political development phase by phase'. However, continues Grewal, Gupta's *History* 'does not



contribute anything serious' to the study of Sikh polity, while economic, social and cultural aspects are 'barely mentioned'.<sup>26</sup>

G.L. Chopra was the first historian of Ranjit Singh to get a doctorate from London which he published in 1928 as the *Punjab as a Sovereign State*. With its critical use of unpublished Persian and English sources available in London, extensive annotation, three maps, and seven appendices (six of which illumine the text), Chopra's work can be considered 'scholarly'. He systematically studied the creation and structure of Ranjit Singh's state and attributed its ultimate decline to some 'subtle and fundamental causes' beyond his control. Chopra disagreed with his British predecessors over the character and religious beliefs of Ranjit Singh, his court and civil administration. It was underlined that there was neither any religious discrimination nor any 'drain of wealth' under Ranjit Singh. He involved all religious communities of the Punjab in his enterprise, but it was a mistake on his part to allow the Dogras to acquire vast territory and influence. As Grewal puts it, 'an undercurrent of Punjabi nationalism' was evident in Chopra who assumed the existence of three well-marked religious communities in the Punjab.<sup>27</sup>

A 'strong Punjabi sentiment' is evident also in Sita Ram Kohli's work on Ranjit Singh and his successors. As the Keeper of Records at Lahore, he had access to a diverse range of sources in Persian, English, Urdu and Punjabi and even some artifacts which he used for his various publications on the early nineteenth century Punjab. Kohli was not inclined to treat any of the existing sources and recent studies as 'authorities' though he appreciated J.D. Cunningham's sympathetic approach. Kohli's comprehensive study of Ranjit Singh in Urdu (1933) and Punjabi (1953) dwells on his early life, political history, diplomatic relations, military organization, revenue and civil administration, and his idea of sovereignty. Ranjit Singh did not give importance to the symbols of royalty like the crown and the throne, but he could lay emphasis on his sovereign status through other means. In Kohli's view, his greatest service to the country was the unification of the Punjab which entailed peace and prosperity for a large part of the country.

Kohli studied the eventful decade after Ranjit Singh in a separate volume entitled, *Sunset of the Sikh Empire*, which was published posthumously. While meticulously presenting the fast-changing political scenario at Lahore and the political considerations of the British, Kohli narrated the sequence of events leading to the outbreak of the Anglo-Sikh War and what Grewal calls the 'deliberate subversion of a protected state' subsequently.<sup>28</sup> Despite Khushwant Singh's substantial editing of the last three chapters, the *Sunset* remained Kohli's work 'with great empathy for the Khalsa'.<sup>29</sup> His approach was marked by intellectual integrity, logical presentation and lucidity of style. He was 'a pioneer in bringing new sources to light'; he was 'also a pioneer in giving special attention to the army of Ranjit Singh, and his revenue administration'.<sup>30</sup>

The last work analysed by Grewal is *A Short History of the Sikhs* by Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, which represents 'a kind of transition from the colonial to contemporary Sikh studies'.<sup>31</sup> By then, a string of 'Sikh scholars' had produced encyclopaedic, textual, philological, linguistic, scriptural,

philosophical, grammatical and biographical studies in Punjabi and English.<sup>32</sup> Historical approach is evident in the works particularly of Teja Singh, Karam Singh, 'the historian', and Ganda Singh. Through his several publications on Sikhism, Sikh ideals and institutions, Teja Singh laid emphasis on Sikhism as 'an original system'. Representing the Singh Sabha concern for Sikh history, Karam Singh collected unpublished evidence about the period of Sikh rule in Punjabi, Persian and English. His articles on problems of Sikh history and monographs on Banda Singh and Raja Ala Singh presented 'rational interpretation of empirical evidence' in Punjabi, with an open-minded approach to the sources. 'Interest in biography, original source materials, and issues or themes of contemporary interest' was evident also in Ganda Singh's writings. Reflecting all these concerns and approaches during the transitional phase, *A Short History* can be regarded as 'its most important publication', which 'served as a good introduction to Sikh history for six decades'.<sup>33</sup>

Laying emphasis on 'scientific approach', Teja Singh and Ganda Singh claimed their history to be a just and impartial account from a secular viewpoint. They covered the period of Sikh history in three unequal phases: From 1469 to 1708, the ten Gurus laid its 'religious foundations'; from 1708 to 1716, Banda Singh laid its 'political foundations'; and the period from 1716 to 1765 was marked by 'persecution leading to power'. The authors underlined that Sikhism was founded as a new faith from the very beginning, and that Sikh ideology and institutions became the bases of the Sikh social order. The Sikh ideology for which they used the term 'character' (sum of ideas, attitudes, ethics and values) enabled the Sikhs to respond to the trying situations constructively. This empathetic and insightful study evinced familiarity with the sources from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, with a cautious use of Persian and English accounts and greater reliance on the contemporary Sikh sources, including the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

However, as Grewal points out, the authors did not always 'make a distinction between strictly "contemporary" and "near contemporary" evidence'. Moreover, there is no credible evidence for the ideas that Guru Gobind Singh agreed to perform *hom* for the Goddess (even if to disillusion the people); that it was Banda Singh who first thought of sovereign rule; that he abolished the *zamindari* system; that the *rakhi* system was different from the occupation of territories by the Sikhs later on; or that the concept of *misldari* was relevant for the period of Sikh rule which, incidentally, was not covered in *A Short History*.<sup>34</sup> Recent research has drawn attention towards these lacunae in the political history of the Sikhs as presented by Teja Singh and Ganda Singh. By now, in fact, the scope of Sikh history has widened sufficiently to cover social, cultural, economic and institutional aspects.

### **In Retrospect**

The contours of modern historical writing on the Sikhs took shape over the past century and a half. What was a bare outline at the end of the eighteenth century got filled up gradually by the time J.D. Cunningham published his

sympathetic yet scholarly *History of the Sikhs* in 1849. In the first half of the colonial period historical writings on the Sikhs moved either in neutral gear or consciously away from Cunningham, adding to stereotypes and misconceptions. A convergence of traditional Sikh scholarship (inspired by the Singh Sabha resurgence) with the Western scholarship (inspired by colonial necessity) resulted in Max Arthur Macauliffe's multi-volume work published in 1909, weaving tradition with narrative. It was intelligible alike to the Western and Indian readers, and its influence can be discerned in the later writings of the American missionaries. By then, and as a corrective to the generally unsympathetic Western writings, the first generation of the English educated 'Sikh' scholars came to the fore, using Sikh sources, laying emphasis on the distinctiveness of Sikhism, and expressing concern about the position of the Sikhs in contemporary times. The growth of modern education and the march of Indian nationalism, albeit under-towed by communalism, inspired a cross-section of Punjabi and Bengali scholars to study Sikh history from various standpoints. The traditional Sikh scholars also came forth with a diverse range of studies in Punjabi as noted by Grewal. A convergence of some of their concerns with those of modern scholars is evident in Teja Singh and Ganda Singh's *A Short History*.

While classifying the writers according to their background and period, Grewal rightly looks upon them as the products of their particular situations. Through his deconstruction of each work, capturing its nuances and intricacies, pointing out its fine points and inaccuracies, and unravelling its author's purposes, concerns and predilections, Grewal determines the degree of its reliability and comparative worth for Sikh history. His analysis exposes the prejudices and hollowness of the writings of the British administrators and military officers, particularly in the post-annexation period. Their relevance lay more in affording insights into the thinking and priorities of the colonialists in their own time. By and large, the works of only those writers – whether Western or Indian – turned out to be more lasting for those who used the sources critically while respecting the Sikh tradition. With the exception of Syad Muhammad Latif, Indian scholars attempted that, albeit with varying degree of success. All along, they were asking new questions, unearthing new sources, refining the earlier interpretations, and gaining maturity, respectability and readership in the process. According to Grewal:

What is common to the Indian historians is their conviction that their understanding and their interpretation of the Sikh past was more meaningful than that of the Western writers. Adopting Western methodology, they created 'modern' historical writing.

Looking back, it is possible to see that the works of J.D. Cunningham and some Indian scholars turned out to be important milestones in the historiography of the Sikhs, identifying and illumining the different periods of Sikh history. Some of these studies blazed trails and some came to be regarded

as classics for their sound treatment, empathetic understanding and lucidity of style. Some works have remained relevant for posterity only as the mirrors of their own time, and for the views of the authors; they have entered history in the sense of their contents and interpretations having been rejected or subsumed by the later research. Together, however, the works analysed in the book constitute the ‘heritage from the colonial period’, to be ‘reinforced, expanded and enriched after India’s Independence’.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Widening Range**

Since the 1960s an increasing number of professional historians have been producing monographs and anthologies on a diverse range of themes:

Religious and secular figures of Sikh history, Sikh thought and ethics, the Sikh movement under the Gurus, Sikh politics and polity of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, the Sikh scripture and various forms of Sikh literature, Sikh institutions, Sikh social order with reference to caste and gender, the Sikh tradition of martyrdom, Sikh identity, and historical writing on the Sikhs.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, besides reinforcing the study of early Sikh tradition, its politicization and Sikh polity, three distinct areas of study have been added to the emerging field of Sikh Studies: the Sikh experience of the colonial period, Sikh politics in post-Independence times, and the Sikh diaspora. This growing interest is reflected also in the publication of a number of general histories of the Sikhs by both amateur and professional historians over this period. Given the constraints of space, Grewal introduces the widening range of systematic interest in the Sikh past through fifteen ‘representative’ monographs for the four major periods of Sikh history. His criteria for selection are academic importance and representation of ‘a period, an area, a form, or a theme’ in the framework of Indian history. Thus, an emerging new area such as the Sikh diaspora, or a few works on Sikh art, literature and coins have not been included. The publications connected with the controversies in Sikh Studies have also been excluded from discussion at this stage.

The early Sikh movement is represented by three complementary monographs: *Guru Gobind Singh* by J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal (1967), *Guru Nanak in History* by J.S. Grewal (1969), and *the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society* by Nihar Ranjan Ray (1970). While the first two focus on the writings of the Gurus to understand their status and creative responses in their specific contexts, the third work interprets the message of the Sikh Gurus, laying emphasis on its distinctiveness in religious and social terms. The period of Sikh rule is represented by two studies – one on Sikh polity by Bhagat Singh and the other on polity and agrarian structure, somewhat misleadingly called the *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, by Indu Banga. Interestingly, published in the same year, that is 1978, the two works treat the subject from diametrically

opposite standpoints, one tracing the polity to Guru Nanak, and the other studying continuity and change in the politico-administrative organization of the Sikhs with reference to the Mughal system and Sikh ideology. The historiography of the colonial period is represented by six works, three of which study the movements for socio-religious reform – *The Kuka Movement* by Fauja Singh (1965), *The Sikhs and Their Literature* by N.G. Barrier (1970), and *The Nirankari Sikhs* by John C.B. Webster (1981), each bringing out the characteristics of the particular movement, and Barrier's work also discussing the literature of the Singh Sabha movement. Social change among the Sikhs in terms especially of the caste and class is discussed in *The Transformation of the Sikh Society* by Ethne K. Marengo (1976). The altered equation between the Sikhs and the colonial state over the reform of the Gurdwaras and its wide ranging political significance is studied as *The Akali Movement* by Mohinder Singh (1978), while the sixth monograph by K.L. Tuteja focuses on *Sikh Politics* of the third and the fourth decade from the nationalist angle (1984). The contemporary period continues to be dominated by politics, albeit of different kinds, which is represented by two sets of writings. For the movement for the Punjabi-speaking state two studies are chosen: Baldev Raj Nayar's *Minority Politics* (1966) and Ajit Singh Sarhadi's *Punjabi Suba* (1970); interestingly, one is literally by an 'outsider' and the other is virtually by an 'insider'. The manner of creating the Punjabi-speaking state led to fresh problems resulting in an upsurge of militancy which has been studied by Harnik Deol as *Religion and Nationalism* (2000) and by Jugdep S. Chima as *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency* (2010). These two works by political scientists trace the background of Sikh ethno-nationalism, and the political, economic and technological factors contributing towards its escalation as well as its different stages till the early 1990s. Although Grewal has his reservations about the conceptualization and approach of some of the 'representative' studies discussed here, as a whole they are seen as representing a distinct advance over the historiography of the early twentieth century.

This advance was facilitated, among other things, by the publication of research tools like the general and classified bibliographies, catalogues of unpublished sources, calendars of archival records, and the texts and translations of the Gurmukhi and Persian sources. The Punjab Languages Department created in the 1950s, and the state universities founded at Patiala and Amritsar in the 1960s, especially helped in promoting research in Sikh and Punjab history through their publications and academic and research programs. Sikh history came to form a substantial segment of the postgraduate courses in Punjab history. Incidentally, this is how Grewal was introduced to the sources and problems of Sikh history at Chandigarh. The centenaries of important events associated with the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh past became the occasions for fresh research and publications. It may be relevant to mention that the above-mentioned studies of Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak by Grewal were produced in connection with their birth centenaries. The interest in Sikh history was generated also by the growing presence of the Sikh diaspora in the West and the setting up of Chairs of Sikh and Punjab Studies in some

universities. The outbreak of militancy too appears to have drawn attention towards the Sikhs and their history. Significantly, two-thirds of the 'representative' works are by the professional historians from India, mainly Punjab, and one-third is by the scholars located in the West (half of them being of Punjabi origin). All the general histories noticed in this study are by the Punjabis, including one by Grewal himself. Apparently, what began as the 'Indian response to Western enterprise' has by now been overtaken by the Indian initiative. In the ultimate analysis, however, the widening range of Sikh Studies was not unrelated to the widening scope of history as a discipline, which became noticeable since the 1960s also in the case of Indian and Punjab history.<sup>37</sup>

### **Recent Controversies and Debates in Sikh Studies**

As noted earlier, the last chapter of the book is given to an overview of what Grewal calls 'recent controversies' which originated with the publication of W.H. McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (1968), and got escalated with the publication of his *Evolution of the Sikh Community* (1975). The controversy involving professional historians and 'Sikh' scholars for and against McLeod's position became 'intense and bitter' with the deepening of political crisis in the Punjab in the 1980s and the growing interest in the Punjab and Sikh Studies in North America since the 1970s. Feeling concerned about the hardening of grooves and its adverse effect on the growing field of Sikh Studies, Grewal decided to examine the issues involved so that the possibility of a dialogue could be created. By the time he published his *Perspectives on Sikh Identity* (1997), question marks had been put on nearly all the high points in the history of the Sikh movement. Another monograph by him followed as the *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* (1998).

Over a score of scholars came to be involved in these controversies. McLeod and Harjot Oberoi reinforced each other's position on the early and later history of the Sikh movement. Pashaura Singh, Louis Fenech and Doris Jakobsh more or less supported McLeod's assumptions in their doctoral studies. If a number of Western scholars sympathized with their position, a much larger number of 'Sikh' scholars questioned their assumptions, formulations and methods, even imputing motives.<sup>38</sup> Reacting strongly to their invective, McLeod declared in his *Autobiography* (2004) that he was following the established methods of historical research and writing *only* for the 'educated Western readers', and that he had to offer 'no apology' for it.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, publication of some doctoral studies produced in North America added some more issues to these controversies. In the words of Grewal:

One side presents it in terms of Enlightenment *versus* religious faith, or 'critical historians' *versus* 'traditional historians'; the other side presents it in terms of deliberate misrepresentation of the Sikh tradition, lack of empathy and linguistic competence, and use of inappropriate methodology. There is

little mutual appreciation. Consequently, what we hear largely are two sets of assertions.

Obviously, 'the two world-views' stood 'in complete opposition to each other'. Grewal's concern has been with their 'bearing' on 'historical writing', which alone in his view is 'relevant for debate'.<sup>40</sup>

McLeod has been at the center of this controversy. While the Western scholars by and large tried to perpetuate, substantiate or defend his position, the 'Sikh' scholars and their sympathizers directed their critique primarily against him, and secondarily against Oberoi, followed at some distance by Pashaura Singh and others. Some of the reviewers of Grewal's earlier publications on the controversies had commented that he unfairly defended McLeod, or that there was no real debate, or that the author had not given his own views.<sup>41</sup> Grewal confronted each issue by evaluating the respective positions at length and then giving his own 'assessment' in no uncertain terms in his *Recent Debates* (2011). This work is as much a reflection of his usual objectivity, lucidity and thoroughness, as it is a trenchant affirmation of his own position *vis-à-vis* McLeod.

While emphasizing the need for a dialogue in his 'Introductory' statement, Grewal says in the *Recent Debates* that he had not realized that howsoever 'slight', there were differences between him and McLeod on nearly every important issue from the very beginning.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, he read and reread McLeod's entire work, absorbing the detail, noting the modifications in his successive publications, and capturing the nuances in his argument and unravelling the underlying assumptions. By then, Grewal himself had freshly analysed and interpreted a large number of Sikh and non-Sikh sources.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, his 'assessment' in *Recent Debates* clarifies the issues, amplifies the respective positions, and modifies his earlier understanding. Given the constraints of space, this essay briefly elucidates his particular position on each of the major issues under debate rather than the arguments for and against.<sup>44</sup>

Essentially, and in opposition to McLeod, Grewal maintains that Guru Nanak consciously offered 'a new dispensation', which was distinct from contemporary religious traditions in both 'ideology and praxis'. Placing him in the Sant tradition therefore is not only historically untenable, it tantamount to a denial of his express statements and acts for which there is ample credible evidence.<sup>45</sup>

Responding to McLeod's rejection of the *Janamsakhis* as projecting the 'myth' of Guru Nanak and therefore of no use to his biography, and suggesting 'a positive approach', Grewal maintains that let alone the 'probabilities', 'even in terms of certainties we know more about Guru Nanak than about any other religious figure of the medieval period'.<sup>46</sup> The evidence of the *Janamsakhi* combined with the compositions of Guru Nanak, and other information about the period could tell us more about his life. Furthermore, 'the "myth" of Guru Nanak is in fact an interpretation of his life and mission and, therefore, the core of a *Janamsakhi*'.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, 'the "myths" of Guru Nanak in different

*Janamsakhi* traditions are as many interpretations of his doctrines, ethics, attitudes and status'.<sup>48</sup>

McLeod's explanation of the development of the Sikh Panth in terms of evolution and gradual weaning away from 'Hindu' tradition does not take into account the replacement of Brahmanical institutions with new ones like the Gurdwara, the *Granth* and Guruship. Moreover, the distinctive Sikh 'rituals' can be traced to Guru Nanak himself.<sup>49</sup> McLeod's attribution of politicization and militarization to 'the pressure of external circumstances', like the Shakti cult of the hills blending with the Jat culture of the plains, ignores the pontificate of Guru Arjan and initiative of Guru Hargobind. Grewal underlines Guru Arjan's use of the concept of *helemi raj* 'for the entire dispensation of Guru Nanak and his successors'. Thus, rather than being a state within a state, Sikh Panth came to represent 'a parallel dispensation with no territorial limits'.<sup>50</sup>

Critiquing the position of McLeod and Oberoi over the distinctiveness of the early Sikh identity, particularly Guru Nanak being represented as a 'Hindu' in certain situations, Grewal maintains that 'the connotation of "Hindu" in the seventeenth century was not the same as in the twentieth'. The *Janamsakhi* evidence has therefore to be interpreted as Guru Nanak's 'denial' that he was a 'Muslim'. The *Janamsakhis* project the Panth of Guru Nanak 'as different also from the Panths of the Vaishnavas, Sanyasis and the Yogis (which are now regarded as Hindu)'.<sup>51</sup> McLeod and Oberoi refer to the Sikh sources 'without studying' their 'evidence' in detail.<sup>52</sup> A careful study of the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and the compositions of the Gurus in the *Guru Granth Sahib* brings out the 'Sikh self-image' which has not been taken note of by any other scholar. Grewal emphasizes that the successor Gurus and the people closely associated with them 'thought of the path of Guru Nanak as totally new'. Even an outside observer of the seventeenth century, the author of the *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, 'underscores the distinctive character of Sikh doctrines and practices in relation to the three great religious traditions of the seventeenth-century India: the Islamic, the ascetical and the Brahmanical'.<sup>53</sup>

Grewal finds serious flaws in McLeod's hypothesis about the Khalsa *rahit* and the doctrines of Guru Granth and Guru Panth. Grewal notices 'a profound continuity with the pre-Khalsa tradition' in the *rahit* about the religious life of the Khalsa as spelt out by the *Rahitnamas* of the eighteenth century. There is contemporary evidence also about 'the most important' positive changes introduced by Guru Gobind Singh in the wake of the institution of the Khalsa – the baptism of the double-edged sword, the unshorn hair, the epithet Singh, the bearing of arms, and the duty to fight for establishing Khalsa Raj. Even the most emphatic negative injunction against the use of tobacco figures in the contemporary sources. The basic items of the 5Ks, that is *kesh*, *kirpan* and *kachh*, find mention in the sources of the time of Guru Gobind Singh. The remaining two – *kangha* and *kara* – even in McLeod's view, can go with *kesh* and the arms. 'What is *new* is the formula of 5Ks [emphasis added] and *not* the substantive items'. Grewal finds McLeod's suggestion that these symbols came from the Jat culture as 'equally off the mark'. What is particularly



questionable here is the assertion of ‘sanctity attached to the *kesh*’ by the Jats for which again there is no evidence. Moreover, ‘the *kachh* can never be associated with them’; ‘the *kirpan* had no fascination for them and there is no evidence of its use by the Jats’.<sup>54</sup>

Grewal questions the validity of McLeod’s hypothesis that the doctrines of Guru Panth (Panth is the Guru) and Guru Granth (Granth is the Guru) arose gradually out of the need for cohesion during the eighteenth century, and not as a result of the Guru’s own explicit injunction. The evidence of Guru Gobind Singh’s court poet, Sainapat, whose *Sri Gur Sobha* is now placed in the first decade of the eighteenth century, expressly counters McLeod’s hypotheses on this point.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, ‘neither was the doctrine of Guru Granth preceded by the doctrine of Guru Panth nor was the doctrine of Guru Panth completely dropped in the early nineteenth century’.<sup>56</sup>

While underlining the distinctiveness of the Khalsa identity and its dominance during the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Grewal clarifies some ‘misconceptions’ held by McLeod and Oberoi. Grewal suggests that the term ‘Khalsa’ was in use for those Sikhs who were directly linked with the Guru before the institution of the Khalsa. During the eighteenth century, therefore, ‘the former Khalsa was looked upon as consisting of *keshdhari* Singhs and *sahajdhari* Sikhs’, and ‘both were regarded as members of the Panth’. It is emphasized that ‘neither the “Nanak-Panthis” nor the Udasis can be regarded as Sahajdharis who were closely aligned with the Singhs’. Furthermore, the Persian writers generally used the term ‘Nanak-Panthis’ ‘for all the followers of Guru Nanak and his successors’. Since the Persian writers were not interested in any differences within the Panth, this ‘blanket term’ served their purpose even during the eighteenth century for referring actually to the ‘Singhs’. Through a process of elimination thus, Grewal shows that ‘Oberoi’s Sahajdharis are virtually ‘Udasis’.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Oberoi builds his hypothesis of ‘Sanatan-Sikhism’ having replaced the Khalsa identity in the early nineteenth century, mainly on the basis of an Udasi text, combined with the selective use of the works of Koer Singh and Bhai Santokh Singh, and some Nirmala writings of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Taking note of the major works of Sikh literature, chronicles of the period, and the works of Malcolm and Cunningham, ‘seen in their totality’, Grewal concludes that:

By far the most important identity of the Sikhs was that of the Khalsa Singhs. Even the Sahajdhari movements of the early nineteenth century [the Nirankaris and the early Namdharis] were anti-Brahmanical and supportive of a distinct Sikh identity.<sup>58</sup>

Grewal finds consciousness of a distinctive Khalsa identity not only continuing into the colonial period and revitalized by the Singh Sabha movement, particularly the radical reformers called the Tat-Khalsa. One of its leading exponents, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, published his *Ham Hindu Nahin* in 1898,

dwelling on the ideological foundations of the Khalsa identity and equating the Sikh Panth with the Sikh *qaum* (nation), thereby projecting the Sikhs as a political community. In due course, it came to be regarded as a classic statement of Sikh identity. As the basis of Sikh politics of constitutional, agitational and militant variety in the twentieth century, identity became 'a sensitive issue' for the Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs. Therefore, even when it is easy to recognize the distinct socio-cultural identity of the Sikhs from the sixteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century as 'an academic issue', it no longer remains 'academic' towards the end of the twentieth century. Depending upon their values and assumptions, scholars tend to look upon the question of Sikh identity differently, most often to utter disregard of empirical evidence. Thus, Oberoi's hypothesis of Sanatan-Sikhism hammers 'rupture' from the past, overlooking the ideological and historical continuities, highlighting differences and deviations, and looking upon Nabha's writing as a polemical pamphlet. By comparison, McLeod may appear to be closer to the ground realities, but he too downplays the strength of the Khalsa tradition and its bearing on consciousness of identity and political outlook. In the final analysis, clarifies Grewal, what was new to the Singh Sabha phase was 'rational argument for a distinctive Sikh identity with its political implications, and not Sikh identity itself'.<sup>59</sup> In his view, a better understanding of the movement requires a serious study of the Singh Sabha interpretation of the earlier Sikh literature along with the literature produced by its leaders.

It may be relevant to point out that in his recent monograph on Sikh literature from Guru Nanak to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Grewal arrives at the conclusion that there was unambiguous evidence of a consciousness of distinctive Sikh identity and its acknowledgment by the non-Sikh observers from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century:

This study indicates that the consciousness of identity among the Sikhs was a product of their religious beliefs and institutions, their social order, and their political role. Present even in the literature of the earlier period, this consciousness crystallized in the eighteenth century as the *tisar panth* [the Third Panth]. It may only be added that the author of the seventeenth century *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, who was a Parsi, the author of the eighteenth century *Jangnama*, who was a Muslim, and the author of the nineteenth century *Char Bagh*, who was a Punjabi Hindu, looked upon the Sikhs in the pre-colonial period as distinct from both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>60</sup>

Grewal sees the Sikh conception of martyrdom as integral to Sikh tradition. In the works of Oberoi, McLeod and Fenech the concept of martyrdom is presented as a kind of 'invention'.<sup>61</sup> They look upon it as a product of the Tat-Khalsa view of Sikh history, turning the Sikh heroic figures of the eighteenth century into 'martyrs'. Finding this assertion based on an unwarranted use of a few Sikh sources of the pre-colonial period, Grewal examines the entire range

of Sikh literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the *Adi Granth* itself he notices several inter-related dimensions that have a bearing on the 'ideal of sacrificing one's life to uphold the tradition promulgated by Guru Nanak'.<sup>62</sup> Guru Arjan's compositions, as elaborated upon in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, point to a conscious decision to court martyrdom to reinforce this tradition. Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom upheld the ideal of freedom of conscience. After the institution of the Khalsa, 'the *pahul*, the *kesh* and martyrdom' not only went together but also served as 'the markers of Sikh identity', says Grewal.<sup>63</sup> He concludes, thus:

In Sikh literature of the pre-colonial centuries, on the whole, martyrdom remains an essential feature of the Sikh tradition. The Sikh who died fighting valiantly for the cause of the Panth was greatly admired, but the martyrs regarded as the most venerable were not warriors. The ultimate source of martyrdom was not the heroic tradition of the Punjab but Sikh ideology. As evident from the sources, the Sikh tradition of martyrdom developed historically in response to the changing environment.<sup>64</sup>

Addressing the issues of authenticity of the *Kartarpur Pothi*, the process of its compilation, and its relationship with the *Guru Granth Sahib*, Grewal examines the views of McLeod who gave a spurt to textual studies by expressing doubts about the authenticity of the *Kartarpur Pothi*. In the course of analysing the works of different textual scholars, Grewal finds the two recent studies by Gurinder Singh Mann as 'the most satisfactory on the whole'.<sup>65</sup> Mann is able to use larger evidence and analyse the *Kartarpur Pothi* minutely to settle the issue in favour of its authenticity. He also provides a historical view of the processes that led to the compilation of the *Damdami Bir* before the end of the seventeenth century, and how it became the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

As regards the status of the *Dasam Granth*, Grewal finds 'no empirical basis' for the view made current by McLeod and Oberoi that it 'had come to be regarded as the Guru before the advent of colonial rule'.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, neither was the *Dasam Granth* compiled by Guru Gobind Singh nor were his writings 'meant to be part of the Sikh canon'.<sup>67</sup> There is no clarity about the stage at which the genuine works of Guru Gobind Singh were incorporated into the corpus later called the *Dasam Granth*. Therefore, a serious study of its history, contents and influence is needed. Interestingly, Grewal convincingly places the much discussed Goddess squarely in the context of Sikh ideology:

There is hardly any doubt that Durga figures in the *Dasam Granth*, like Ram and Krishan, as God's creation and not as the Supreme Deity. Her role is similar to that of Ram and Krishan: to fight with great courage and prowess in support of

good against evil. Her parity with the male figures in this context is beyond any doubt.<sup>68</sup>

On the issues of equality and caste, Grewal expresses a nuanced difference from McLeod who recognizes the egalitarian ideal of the Gurus, but underlines the persistence of caste in the day-to-day life of the Sikhs, especially in commensality, connubium and notions of status. The starting point for his discussion is the Caste System. Grewal calls for 'a new paradigm' for a historical study of equality and caste in the Sikh social order. 'A distinction can be made between the pre-Khalsa Sikhs and the Khalsa Singhs', which requires 'a thorough analysis of the entire range of Sikh literature and other contemporary evidence'.<sup>69</sup> Working out of the underlying principles and ethos were different in the pre and post Khalsa period. Application of the principle of equality would be different again in the period of Sikh rule. It is important nonetheless to recognize that, 'Sikh ideology introduced equalities in the religious, social and political spheres of the Sikh Panth and that the Sikh Panth was more egalitarian than the traditional social order'. With the change in the structure of opportunity, there is clear evidence of upward mobility, and extension of commensality from the Brahman to the clean Shudras of the traditional order. At the same time, concedes Grewal, traditional institutions and practices related to marriage were taken for granted; differences of wealth were accepted as God given; and inequalities existed side by side with new equalities. It must, however, be emphasized that 'Sikh ideology does not support any notions of hierarchy based on birth or occupation'.<sup>70</sup> It allowed for reduction of inequalities and creation of new possibilities in different situations.

On the issue of equality and gender too Grewal's approach is different from that of McLeod who emphasizes empirical continuities to make the general point that the idea of equality did not make women equal to men in society, especially in public life. Holding the stick from the other end, Grewal looks for affirmation of the principle and creation of situations conducive for reduction of gender inequalities. He concedes that by creating spiritual space for women within the institution of family, and by using metaphors from conjugality, Guru Nanak sustained the inegalitarian patriarchal framework. At the same time, explicit appreciation of woman and the ideal of householder, combined with insistence on monogamy and mutual fidelity, probably mitigated the rigors of male domination. Express equality in the religious sphere enabled Sikh women to participate in congregational worship and community meal. The doctrine of Guru Granth enabled them to read, understand and even expound the scripture. As a corollary, and as evident from the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*, additional space was created for women outside the family and in the life of the local community.

Grewal cites several striking features of the *Rahitnama* called the *Prem Sumarag* which he places early in the eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup> There are common injunctions for both man and woman in the *rahit* and religious beliefs and practices; there are broadly similar rites of passage for them; the woman is

entitled to baptism and is an equal member of the Khalsa Panth; she can inherit property in certain situations; and she can remarry as a childless widow. While in this conception of 'an ideal Sikh social order', the woman is 'not exactly at par with the man', the degree of equality visualized between the Khalsa men and Khalsa women 'makes them almost equal'. In the final analysis, suggests Grewal, 'gender in Sikhism is conceptualised as a balance between the norm of equality and the demands of a patriarchal family'.<sup>72</sup> 'A thorough research' grappling with the tension between the two remains a desideratum.<sup>73</sup>

Responding to the methodological issues thrown up by this debate, Grewal finds himself in agreement with Mcleod and Oberoi over the 'working' principles of historical method. But he has reservations about their 'application' on several points, arising often from '*a priori* assumptions', together with 'selective' use of sources. He underlines, therefore, that 'methodology by itself does not ensure veracity or validity'.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, he agrees with them about the widened scope of history to legitimately include the study of religious movements. Grewal maintains that as a 'motivating force' religious ideology becomes relevant for the historian when 'it finds expression in words and actions, and words and actions are the subject matter of history'. History would become poorer if it neglected 'ideas, assumptions and sentiments or "mentalities"'.<sup>75</sup> Evidently, there is a broad similarity of concerns between historians and the 'Sikh' scholars.

At any rate, what Grewal seems to stand for is an open-minded approach to sources, not allowing theory, or ideology, or any other *a priori* assumption to cloud one's judgment. He prefers to analyse a source in totality before using it in any significant way. His general approach is characterized by rigorous application of historical method, combined with empathetic understanding and sympathetic ear for tradition not countered by reason. Understandably, the *Recent Debates* is dedicated 'to all those scholars who aspire to become liberal historians of the Sikh tradition'.

Concluding the discussion with reference to the essential similarity of the methodology used by the two groups, Grewal says:

A good deal of importance is given to methodology both by the academia and the intelligentsia involved in the controversies. No one has denied the importance of empirical evidence, or the need of verification of generalizations. Therefore, the distinction between the 'critical historians' and 'a traditional historian' is a difference of degree but not of kind.<sup>76</sup>

It is necessary to recognize that there is no substitute for historical method for studying a young religious movement with a large corpus of sources left by the founder himself, his accredited successors and their followers as well as the dissenters, detractors and other contemporary observers. This realization could perhaps bridge the supposed divergence between the 'insiders' and 'outsiders', or 'believers and 'non-believers, or 'critical' and 'traditional' historians, or, for

that matter, between 'Indian' and 'Western' academics. Grewal rightly emphasizes that, 'the historical method in itself is not culturally rooted'. It is 'Western simply because it was initially developed in the West'.<sup>77</sup> As J.D. Cunningham's 'classic' work shows one does not have to be a Sikh or an Indian, or even a professional scholar to produce an academically sound and widely acceptable study of Sikh history.

### In Conclusion

The magisterial stock taking by Grewal shows that neither theory nor environment, nor can too much of scepticism or good will illumine the Sikh past. For a worthwhile study there seems to be no substitute for a rational and sympathetic interpretation of the Sikh sources. Grewal's own work exemplifies the possibility of bridging the best in professional and 'Sikh' scholarship. As a whole, inputs from different social sciences and humanities have enriched the field of Sikh Studies and made it methodologically sophisticated and academically respectable so as to acquire autonomy of its own. It would be a pity if further growth of Sikh Studies as a branch of knowledge with historical discipline at its center is marred by the refusal to enter into genuine debate, or to take note of valid objections about content, interpretation and method. Indifference on the part of some and keenness to demolish on the part of others might result in loss of momentum and credibility gained over the past half a century.

### Notes

1. J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessments of British Historians* (Oxford: OUP, 1970).
2. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, The New Cambridge History of India series (Cambridge: CUP, 1990; Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1991; Delhi: Foundation Books, 1994; rev. edn. 1998; recent rep. 2011).
3. Between 2007 and 1972 when this collection was first published there was nearly cent per cent increase in its volume, though some essays have been taken out in the light of fresh thinking. See note 43 for full reference.
4. For a list of Grewal's work from 1964 to 2009, see Indu Banga and Karamjit K. Malhotra, *Making of the Historian J.S. Grewal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009), pp. 66-77.
5. J.S. Grewal, *Historical Writings on the Sikhs (1784-2011): Western Enterprise and Indian Response* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2012), (cited hereafter as *Historical Writings*).
6. *Ibid.*, p.113.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-5.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 221, 226, n.29.
11. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 276-77, 285-86.

12. Ibid., p. 268.
13. Ibid., p. 292.
14. Ibid., p. 323.
15. Ibid., p. 300.
16. For a discussion, Indu Banga, 'In the Service of Hindu Nationalism: Banerjee's *Evolution*', in *The Khalsa: Sikh and Non-Sikhs Perspectives*, ed. J.S. Grewal (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004), pp. 187-200.
17. Grewal, *Historical Writings*, p. 323.
18. Ibid., p. 332.
19. Ibid., p. 359.
20. Ibid., pp. 360, 362.
21. K.L. Tuteja, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 365.
22. Fauja Singh, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 363.
23. Ibid., p. 397.
24. Ibid., p. 396.
25. K.L. Tuteja, 'Interpreting Sikh History: A Study of Gokul Chand Narang's *Transformation of Sikhism*', in *Historical Diversities: Society, Politics and Culture*, ed. K.L. Tuteja and Sunita Pathania (New Delhi: Manohar, 2008), p. 425.
26. Grewal, *Historical Writings*, p. 398.
27. Ibid., p. 417.
28. Ibid., pp. 439-41.
29. Ibid., p.12.
30. Ibid., p.442. See also Fauja Singh, 'Sita Ram Kohli', *Historians and Historiography of the Punjab*, ed. Fauja Singh (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1978), pp. 336-37.
31. Grewal, *Historical Writings*, p. 444.
32. These scholars are: Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Bhai Jodh Singh, Sir Jogendra Singh, G.B. Singh, Giani Sher Singh, Narain Singh, Sahib Singh, Teja Singh, Karam Singh and Ganda Singh. Ibid., pp.445-46.
33. Ibid., pp. 445-46, 467.
34. Ibid., pp. 467-68. Elsewhere, Grewal points out that Teja Singh and Ganda Singh 'look upon Guru Gobind Singh as the creator of a nation and yet they are reluctant to ascribe any political purposes directly to him'. 'Study of Sikhism, Sikh History and Sikh Literature', in *Approaches to History: Essays in Indian Historiography*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Delhi: Primus Books/ Indian Council of Historical Research, 2011), p. 289.
35. Grewal, *Historical Writings*, p. 12.
36. Ibid., p. 473.
37. For a discussion, Indu Banga and J.S. Grewal, 'The Study of Regional History', in *Different Types of History, History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, vol. XIV, pt 4, ed. Bharati Ray (Delhi: Pearson Education/ Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2009). pp. 199-228.
38. The Western scholars articulating their support for McLeod include, among others, Mark Juergensmeyer, N.G. Barrier, John Stratton Hawley,

Milton Israel and J.T.O' Connell. The attack on McLeod was initiated by Daljeet Singh who was joined by other 'Sikh' scholars, including 'Justice' Gurdev Singh, Jasbir Singh Mann, Kharak Singh, Trilochan Singh, Balwant Singh Dhillon, G.S. Dhillon and Gurtej Singh.

39. Hew McLeod, *Discovering the Sikhs: Autobiography of a Historian* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), p.130.

40. *Historical Writings*, p. 498.

41. J.S. Grewal, *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies: An Assessment* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2011), (cited hereafter as *Recent Debates*), Preface.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

43. The following publications appearing in the past decade contain substantial discussion of sources by Grewal: *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: OUP,2011); *Guru Granth Sahib: Doctrine, Social Content, History, Structure and Status* (Amritsar: Singh Brothers, 2009); *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity* (New Delhi: OUP ,2009); *Sikh ideology, Polity and Social Order: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, 4<sup>th</sup> edn.); *The Khalsa: Sikh and Non-Sikh Perspectives*, ed. (New Delhi: Manohar, 2004); and *Sikh History From Persian Sources*, ed. with Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001).

44. For detail, the reader may refer to Grewal's *Recent Debates* and *Historical Writings*.

45. *Recent Debates*, pp. 67-71.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

47. *Historical Writings*, p. 499.

48. *Recent Debates*, p. 52.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 101,116.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

55. J.S. Grewal, 'Praising the Khalsa: Sainapat's *Gursobha*', in *The Khalsa: Sikh and Non-Sikh Perspectives*, pp.35-45. See also Gurinder Singh Mann, 'Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times', *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 15, nos. 1-2 (Spring-Fall, 2008), pp. 252-53.

56. *Recent Debates*, pp. 97-98.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-25.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

60. *History, Literature and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, p. 306.

61. *Historical Writings*, p. 503.

62. *Recent Debates*, pp. 197-98. These dimensions are: 'the hardness of the path, its demand for sacrifice, the conception of liberation, the idea of selfless service, active detachment born of social commitment, and the willingness to accept God's will and to act in accordance with it'.



63. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
66. *Historical Writings*, p. 504.
67. *Recent Debates*, p. 256.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
69. *Historical Writings*, p. 502.
70. *Recent Debates*, p.147. See also J.S. Grewal, 'Caste and the Sikh Social Order', in *The Sikhs*, pp.189-205.
71. After carefully considering McLeod's view that the *Prem Sumarag* is a later work presenting, 'the testimony of a Sanatan Sikh', Grewal comes to the opposite conclusion. See '*The Prem Sumarag: A Sant Khalsa Vision of the Sikh Panth*', in *The Sikhs*, pp.158-85. It may be added that Grewal has revised his earlier understanding about the dating of the *Prem Sumarag*. Cf. W.H. McLeod, *The Prem Sumarag: The Testimony of a Sanatan Sikh* (New Delhi: OUP, 2006).
72. *Recent Debates*, p. 158.
73. *Historical Writings*, p. 503. This view takes note of the existing works on gender in Sikhism, including that by Doris Jakobsh who has attempted 'to interpret the evidence in a socially meaningful way'. *Recent Debates*, p. 147-51. For a discussion, see J.S. Grewal, 'Sikhism and Gender', in *The Sikhs*, pp. 206-25.
74. *Recent Debates*, p. 296-97
75. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
76. *Historical Writings*, p. 505.
77. *Recent Debates*, p. 297.



## Book Reviews

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Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2010) xiii + 277 pp. ISBN 978 0 520 26269 0 (hb) \$40.

This is an important book which explores some of the many implications of language policy in colonial Punjab, asking in particular why it was that a vibrant Punjabi literary culture was able to survive and develop in spite of lack of any official patronage of the kind which secured the standardization and future regional hegemony of so many other South Asian languages. While it will be of particular interest to Punjab studies specialists, the book's findings should therefore prove a useful challenge to historians of language working in other regions of India. It should also be said that the clear presentation and attractively jargon-free style of this monograph should help it reach the wider public which it certainly deserves to inform.

After a wide-ranging introduction which explains both the general cultural context and the author's proposed lines of approach, the main body of the book is divided into five chapters. The first deals with British language policy following the annexation of 1849, seeking to understand why it was decided not to give official support to the language of the vast majority of the population, for such reasons as the previously uncultivated character of Punjabi, its close association with the Sikhs whose loyalty to the new regime was then thought to be so doubtful, and the convenience of being able to use the Urdu language skills of administrative and clerical personnel from the adjoining provinces to the east. Although from the later perspective which has come to see a pattern of clearly defined and securely established provincial languages as the South Asian norm, Mir is of course right to emphasize the anomalous character of language policy in the Punjab, it might also be argued that the Punjab pattern was truer to the earlier diglossic arrangements generally preferred in India, which saw unlocalized standard languages like Sanskrit or Persian being used for most formal purposes alongside the more restricted literary and cultural role accorded to largely unstandardized local vernaculars. The ability of this historic arrangement to function very well is of course fully exemplified by the hierarchical diglossia of Urdu and Punjabi in a single literary and cultural system in Pakistan Punjab today, over 160 years since the British annexation.

While it would be a counsel of perfection to suggest that the cultural history of the period could only hope to be properly written if equally full attention were given both to Punjabi and to Urdu, it is in practice difficult for scholars not to be drawn to cultural values associated with one or the other. So, while the book generally succeeds in maintaining a proper scholarly objectivity, there are places in which Mir shows a natural sympathy for the inclusiveness of colonial-period Punjabi literary culture as opposed to the communal divisiveness associated with official policies, including the patronage of Urdu.

Internal divisions within the Punjabi literary sphere, most obviously manifested in the distinction between the Persian and Gurmukhi scripts, are described in the second chapter dealing with Punjabi publishing in the later nineteenth century. But less importance is attached to these than to the cross-

communal participation in the creation and consumption of popular Punjabi poetry. Rightly taking the *qissa* as the core genre of this poetry, Mir draws particular attention to the classic theme of the genre, the Hir-Ranjha romance. The relationship between traditional oral performance and the printed texts of the period is well explored in the wide-ranging third chapter on the 'Punjabi literary formation', which draws illuminatingly on the all-too-rare first-hand descriptions by colonial observers of live performances of Punjabi poetry, particularly in association with Sufi shrines, whose well-known appeal across narrow religious boundaries does much to support the author's characterization of Punjabi literary culture.

The fourth chapter then focuses upon the Hir-Ranjha texts produced in such numbers during the colonial era, which are usefully listed in an ample appendix. Mir is able convincingly to show how the definitions of religious identity which were so obsessive a concern of the colonial state and which were to be so increasingly important in the formation of elite opinion, were of much less interest to the *qissa* writers than the *zat* ('caste', 'tribe') affiliations of the chief characters of the story. This is extended in the fifth chapter into an exploration of the association of the higher values expressed by the *qissa* poets with the institution of the saints and their shrines, in particular the Panj Pir who play so large a role in providing a higher sanction for the romance of Hir and Ranjha. While admitting the primacy of Muslim poets in the poetic handling of the story, Mir is also keen to show that non-Muslim writers are also able to participate in what she calls a 'shared ethos of piety shared by Punjabis of different religions'. As the book's brief conclusion records, however, it was of course only the Akali Dal, with its narrowly Sikh agenda, which was finally able to secure the official status of Punjabi in one small part of the former imperial province. But, as an aside tantalizingly suggests, history might have turned out quite differently if the Unionist leadership had had the imagination to draw effectively upon the values of the Hir-Ranjha story for the creation of a genuinely popular pan-Punjabi ideology.

This then is a book for all Punjab studies enthusiasts to enjoy and learn more both about what was and what might have been.

**Christopher Shackle,**  
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Ishtiaq Ahmed, *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed: Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy through Secret British Reports and First-Person Accounts*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012) xlviii + 592 pp. ISBN: 9780199064700 (hb) Rs. 2100..

The Punjab was at the epicentre of the violence which accompanied the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in August 1947. Nationalist histories have tended either to stress the achievement of independence over its human costs, or have

used partisan accounts with the aim of 'blame displacement' to reinforce notions of community 'sacrifice' and 'honour'. With the fiftieth anniversary of independence in 1997, the turn to the 'human dimension' of Partition, termed the New History, has transferred the focus from 'high politics' studies on the genesis of Partition to its human aftermath for ordinary people. *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* belongs to this growing body of scholarship which has given a regional and local perspective to the factors of Partition violence and its attendant mass dislocation. The book is organized into three broad 'stages'. It begins with a comprehensive overview of the concepts of identity, ethnic cleansing, genocide and forced migration that provide the theoretic framework of the argument. It then goes on to delve into the diverse and complex sets of community relations by concluding that, despite societal divisions and politicisation of religious identities, a social order had survived until the later stages of colonial rule. The large-scale violence and the mass migration which accompanied it was, by no means, inevitable at the end of British rule, but was contingent on political circumstances. Having established that, the author then leads us into the first stage of the book that provides the historical background to the events leading up to the decision for Partition, explaining national and regional high politics, as well as the start of unfolding violence in the Punjab. Here, of course, Ishtiaq Ahmed is returning to his early work, especially as it pertains to the politics of violence leading up to 1947. Ahmed argues the growing tension that had accompanied the previous year's provincial elections, 1945–6, and the collapse of negotiations that ensued, created insecurity and fears about political and social stability and that this was a precipitating point for ensuing violence in the urban centers of the Punjab. Second only to this was the resignation of the Unionist Government of Khizr Hayat Tiwana and the unsheathing of a *kirpan* by the Sikh leader Master Tara Singh outside the Punjab assembly in March 1947: 'no other moment has been described as more dramatic than Master Tara Singh's bravado outside the Punjab assembly' (p. 131).

The source material is clearly very important and certainly has the makings of something very interesting. Particularly poignant are the accounts of the March violence in the cities of Punjab. Standard accounts of Partition violence commonly concentrate on the disorders of mid-August, when the machinery of the colonial state was in the process of transition or being dismantled and the boundary demarcation was uncertain. Ahmed reveals violence in the Punjab's major towns and cities, in contrast, started as early as March when the first tide of violence and actual movement of people began as a result of the Rawalpindi district killing of Hindus and Sikhs. Violence followed shortly afterwards both in Lahore, Amritsar and their surrounding areas and was endemic until the British departure ushered in the final round of blood-letting and migration.

In stages two and three of the book, the evidence of interviewees discloses the truth that official documents hide. The oral histories that the author presents here focus on the diverse aspects of the Partition: the patterns and motives of violence; the sense of displacement; the memories of refugee convoys/camps, and the nostalgia for pre-1947 bonds between the 'Punjabis'— Muslims, Sikhs

and Hindus. Ahmed's accounts not only attempt to connect the experience of individuals with the history of nations and their 'high politics', but also provide the link between private and collective memory. The interviews also show that the first tide of violence expedited the anticipatory migration of wealthy and politically astute non-Muslims. For example, the accounts confirm the members of Premchand Khanna family left Multan for Jullundur as early as in April 1947 as did the family of Girdhari Lal Lapur who left Multan for Saharanpur (pp.161–2). Similarly, Harkishan Singh Mehta's family left Rawalpindi for New Delhi in June when the tensions increased with the actual announcement of the division of Punjab, alongside the Partition of the subcontinent (p.171). In addition, the interviews suggest the preparations for violence were made to pre-empt the Punjab boundary award, ranging from the stocking of ammunitions to the recruitment of militias in the ranks of the parties and bands. The decay of colonial administration was a precondition for violence in the major cities of the Punjab. There is mounting evidence of the involvement of members of political parties, police and paramilitary groups in violence. What were the motives behind attacks on unwanted minorities? 'The motivations for taking part in the attacks may have been ideological, religious and indeed the survival instinct must also have been a factor', Ahmed notes. 'However, the driving force that animated the attackers was the urge to loot and plunder and capture of females of the enemy group' (p. 542). While attacks on rival minorities 'bore all the characteristics of retributive genocide...', Ahmed concludes, 'at no point, did the pogroms and massacres degenerate into a war of communities' (pp. 542–3).

The real strength of this book is in the source material. The author is to be congratulated on the exhaustive oral histories gathered on both sides of the divided Punjab. It is certainly the last opportunity to capture voices and memories of the people, now very aged, who lived through the 1947 tragic events. Ahmed supplements the oral histories with previously published collections of archival documents, mainly the *Fortnightly Reports* (FRs) and newspaper clippings (especially the *Pakistan Times* and *Tribune*). Despite the richness of the source material, regrettably, it is more easily fixed; thick descriptions prevail over analysis. Narrative piles on narrative, with little or no critical reflection on the sources, and we are not told where the experiences detailed here fit in a wider historiography. The author trusts his hunch that respondents 'spoke with great honesty': 'I believe an experienced researcher cannot be easily deceived in an interview' (p. xlv). Furthermore, it is not clear, why Ahmed relied on previously published FRs, what he termed the *Secret British Reports*, but not the hitherto little-used First Information Reports (FIRs) and Intelligence Branch records (Secret Police Abstracts). In places, there is quite a lot of insider language: place names (e.g. Akalgarh, Ram Nagar, pp. 353–4) are put in without any gloss on where they are.

While the book is very dense and the details are wholly convincing, in some way, it is not as informative as it might have been. Ahmed's accounts of violence routinely attributed this to 'Muslims', 'Hindus' and 'Sikhs' without identifying the actual perpetrators and their chains of command. In a recent project, Steven Wilkinson (2010) has linked war-time military experiences with



the high levels of violence in Punjab. Veterans were active in Partition violence, but there were other dynamics and individuals behind the massacres. Crime reports and FIRs registered by the victims of violence often identify the local constituencies and categories for violence and looting, as well as typologies and occupational basis of perpetrators – for example in some localities the killers were local butchers (*qasaai*) and iron-workers (*lohars*). Did such instances have any interaction with wider episodes of violence? Did engagement in previous criminal activity or involvement with state sanctioned violence predispose individuals to become perpetrators? There are no final answers. In addition, it would have been helpful to have a more sustained analysis of links between local episodes of violence and the interaction between supra-local organisations and local perpetrators of violence.

‘Already from March 1947 nexuses comprising politicians, criminal gangs, famously known as *badmashes* and *goondas* and partisan officials in the administration collaborated to carry our crimes against humanity’, Ahmed notes (p. 542). He named the Indian politicians (namely Master Tara Singh, Sardar Patel, the maharaja of Patiala and crown prince of Kapurthala, Liaqat Ali Khan) who goaded and sanctioned episodes of the violence (p 539), but again we do not get a sense of the legitimacy of violence as a foundation for statehood, and how pre-existing local networks and communal organisations, such as Muslim and Sikh war-bands, facilitated mobilisation for violence. Moreover, we learn little about why particular social groups were more likely to engage in violence than others and where the regional variations in violence were, although other work suggests that the private and public content might be discerned beneath episodes of political violence involving, for example, the settling of old scores or localised economic motivations. Though Ahmed boasts that his work is ‘the first holistic and comprehensive case study of the partition of Punjab’ (p. xlv), he has not benefited from the other recent studies of Partition. References to Shail Mayaram (1996), Ayesha Jalal (1998), Swarna Aiyar (1995), Ian Talbot (2006), Yasmin Khan (2007), Ravinder Kaur (2007), Pippa Virdee (2007), as well as the more recent work of Talbot and Singh (2009), Anna Bigelow (2009) and Vazira Zamindar (2008) would have strengthened the contextual framing of the wider historical argument. It is for the reader to judge whether the book has proffered a grittier dimension of India’s Partition. The book, as a whole, is written in a lively, journalistic and accessible style, which gives the work appeal to non-specialists. At the same time, there is sufficient and detailed new information that can be seen as a primary source for those interested in India’s Partition.

**Ilyas Chattha**

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Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) 347 pp. ISBN 978-0-520-27087-9 (pb) \$27.95; £19.95.

Nayan Shah's book is a major achievement. Many years in the making, meticulously researched and closely argued, it makes very significant contributions to our knowledge of early Punjabi and other South Asian immigrants and to our thinking about them. An historian, Shah has mined and mastered almost unbelievably wide-ranging and numerous sources, as the bibliography testifies. Especially revealing are the primary and archival sources, most notably local court and library records from Oregon, California, New Mexico, Washington, and Vancouver, British Columbia. Shah uses these and other records to examine several hundred interracial marriages of South Asian men and Mexican American, white, Puerto Rican, and black women and more than a hundred cases of illicit sexual contact between South Asian men and men from a variety of other backgrounds.

Shah is a fine writer and has organized his material well. In the first section, Shah shows that the South Asian men migrating to the North American West in the early decades of the twentieth century (many of them Sikhs) engaged in multiple forms of sociality and domesticity. Section headings in chapter 3 include, for example, 'Bunkhouse Cohabitation and Troubled Masculinity' and 'Intimate Dependencies, Male Households, and Improper Domesticities.' Shah argues that social regulation and policing by the state increasingly shaped the strategies and options available to transient men and women, to migrant laborers, labor contractors, tenants, and landowners as they created and defended intimate dependencies. In his second section, Shah examines the legal reasoning behind evolving state regulation of sexual practices and social ties, showing how licensing, registration, and civil and criminal prosecution defined human relationships according to racial, ethnic, age, moral, and sexual categories. Detailed case histories involving sodomy and marriage and divorce establish his points. In his third and final section, Shah argues that nation-state promotion of intimate personhood, conjugal marriage, and domestic dependency organized exclusion from and inclusion into the US and Canada. Here he connects the later erasure of racial boundaries to immigration and citizenship to the promotion of heterosexual families and family reunification policies following World War II.

Shah utilizes (with full acknowledgement) some of the material on the Punjabi Mexican rural families in California from my own 1992 book, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans*, and he pursues some of those stories even further. There is also some overlap with Vivek Bald's 2013 book, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*. While I showed that the bi-ethnic families in the American West produced conflict as well as cooperation among family members, Bald argues that, for the Bengali Muslim peddlers and ex-seamen alike, women of color and urban communities of color were crucial to their lives in America. Bald sees women of color and their neighborhoods helping to integrate the South Asian men

through marriages, work, and settlement in America, while Shah argues that the range and variety of immigrants' social relationships and intimacies were increasingly subjected to "normative" expectations and state regulations by the mid-twentieth century. Shah, Bald and I all argue, in different ways, that the early South Asian immigrants were on the whole cosmopolitan, while the numerous middle- and upper-class immigrants taken to represent South Asians in North America today, those coming from the late 1960s on, often reflect more narrowly transnational identities, ones focused more on religious and kinship networks from the homeland.

In sum, Nayan Shah's book is a landmark achievement, probing and analyzing material and issues previously unexplored and unconnected. His ideas are original and often provocative, but his evidence and arguments are strong as he links intimate experiences, "stranger intimacies," to county, state, and national policies and laws in new and compelling ways.

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Jacobsen, Knut A. and Myrvold, Kristina, *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities and Representations*, (London, Ashgate, 2011), xiv+ 346pp. ISBN 9781409424345, (hb) £60.

Sikh migration overseas started well over a century ago and has led to the creation of a vibrant, dynamic and diverse diaspora which spans nearly a hundred countries around the world. This migration process coincided with the expansion of the British Empire and was energised in the post-colonial period, especially in the 1950s (UK) and 1960s (Canada and USA) when immigration controls became more relaxed. The UK, Canada and the USA emerge as the three dominant centers of Sikh settlement. Further, although the culture of overseas migration had become deeply embedded in Sikh pschye, the tightening of immigration controls, from the 1980s onwards, all around the world made legal immigration from Punjab more and more difficult. Moreover, new pressures created by the rapidly deteriorating political situation in Punjab and the new land and sea migration routes which opened up with the ending of the Cold War, made it imperative for young Sikhs to 'escape' Punjab, legally or illegally. From the mid to late 1980s, continental Europe, stretching from the eastern periphery of new, or soon-to-be, member states of the European Union to western and Nordic countries, saw a significant increase in Sikh presence largely as 'new migrants' but also adding to small communities who had settled earlier, mostly in Germany. This then is the backdrop to the context and content of the book under review. Unlike the larger UK Sikh community, which has been well studied since the 1960s, this is the *first* comprehensive account of the growing Sikh presence in continental Europe. On this criterion alone it is a landmark publication. It is a wonderful output from the conveners of the first conference on *Sikhs in Europe* held at the University of Lund in June 2010 with a promise

of a second volume to follow.

The book contains 13 chapters based on empirical case studies of migration and identity issues faced by Sikh communities in Europe. It is neatly organised into three parts, compartmentalised by geographical considerations. The first part contains studies on Sikhs settled in northern and eastern Europe, the second on those settled in southern and western Europe and finally the third on Sikhs settled in the UK and Ireland. Most chapters are highly illuminating in terms of size of community, settlement pattern, socio-economic and legal status and identifying major cultural and inter-generational issues facing the community. In Part 1, with five chapters, we read about the pioneering phase of community development in Norway and issues surrounding inter-generational transfer of Sikh tradition there (Knut Jacobsen); the precarious position of the Sikhs in Denmark, where internal tensions amongst the Sikhs have dogged further enhancement and greater visibility of the community (Helene Ilkjaer); the relative success of Swedish Sikhs in building community institutions and forging good relations with both local communities and state agencies (Kristina Myrvold); how the small community of Sikhs in Finland have achieved relative success in the restaurant trade despite problems of isolation and marginalisation (Laura Hirvi) and how Poland has emerged both as a staging post for new Sikh migrants who want to travel further west and south and how some have decided to make Poland their home despite severe cultural and economic difficulties.

In Part 2, with four chapters, we have a more critical examination of significantly larger and rapidly expanding Sikh and Punjab communities in southern Europe. In the opening chapter of this section Bertolani, Ferraris and Perocco provide a fairly comprehensive overview of the growth in size of settlement, institution-building, spatial distribution, socio-economic activities and challenges faced by local communities in terms of accommodating Sikhs in Italy. Since many of the new Sikh migrants to Europe came through irregular routes and channels, often having to destroy documents in the process, desperate attempts to regularise their stay in a European country has been a recurring issue. Christine Moliner's chapter on Sikhs in France interrogates this issue and identifies a number of problems faced by Sikhs to both regularise their stay, enabling them to seek employment in the formal sector and also move them away from the margins of French society. Given that 'secular' France outlawed wearing of religious symbols in public schools and other buildings, makes our understanding of the issues around Sikh marginality even more interesting. The next chapter by Kathryn Lum on *Ravidasia* Sikhs in Spain and written with the backdrop of the murder of a popular Ravidasia leader in Vienna by so-called 'higher caste' Sikhs, illuminates the debates and tensions within the Ravidasia community about their religious identity and their difficulties in maintaining a cordial relationship with mainstream Sikh tradition. This chapter is useful in demonstrating how social structures of Punjab, such as caste, become replicated in different diaspora locations. The last chapter in this Part has a focus on Greece and discusses how Sikhs settled there have fared in terms of economic and social integration, despite having a lengthy period of settlement.

In Part 3, three of the four chapters focus on the UK Sikh community,

bringing out the issues of diversity and differentiation and inter-generational transmission of Sikh beliefs and values. The opening chapter in this section by Eleanor Nesbitt provides a comprehensive overview of inherent diversities among British Sikhs, whether they be in terms of location, language, religion, caste, politics or inter-generational. Naturally such diversities have the potential to give rise to multiple identities and blurred boundaries which give in turn give rise to contestations and community tensions over representations. The second chapter by Jasjit Singh zooms in on young Sikhs and the phenomenon of growth in *sikhi* educational camps in the UK and evaluates youth experiences of participating in such camps. The third chapter by Opinderjit Kaur Takhar continues the theme of diversity explored by both Kathryn Lum and Eleanor Nesbitt. Takhar focuses on the three smaller Punjabi religious groups who have varying degrees of organic link with the mainstream Sikh tradition: Valmiki, Ravidasis and Namdharis and the distinct problems these groups face both in terms of representing and transmitting their tradition to younger generations and also in terms of 'marginality' by being minorities within minorities. The final chapter in this last Part by Glenn Jordan and Satwinder Singh has a rare discussion on the emergence of a Sikh community in Ireland, covering both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. We get a good sense of the period of settlement, profiles of early migrants and of their religious and cultural life.

As the first comprehensive academic work on Sikhs in Europe, there are inevitable challenges that the scholars, both new and established, must have faced in undertaking their case studies. These challenges are not helped by the fact that apart from the UK, it is very difficult to establish the exact size of the communities at each location, the extent to which problems of legality have been resolved and how each community has fared regarding establishing official links with the Indian government and host governments. The picture that emerges is that there is considerable diversity in terms of period and nature of settlement, degrees of institution building and preparedness for cultural transmission. For example countries such as Italy, Germany and Spain appear to be further ahead compared with France and Denmark where issues of marginality and vulnerability, hostile local laws and relative non-accommodation of non-European populations hinder their progress. The general challenges faced by first generation Sikhs across Europe are not very different from those faced by first generation Sikhs in the UK and potential is there for Sikhs in continental Europe to learn from the experiences of UK Sikhs. The emergence of the satellite channel, Sikh Channel, as a major vehicle for identifying and raising concerns, for sharing experiences and uniting them on community action, should help to alleviate some challenges. By bringing out this refreshing and timely publication on Sikh communities in Europe, which hitherto had been largely invisible, little known and understood despite their unsurpassed contribution during WW1 and WW2, the editors have done a great service to both the fields of Diaspora Studies and Sikh Studies.

**Shinder S. Thandi**  
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Kamala Nayar, *The Punjabis in British Columbia. Location, Labour, First Nations and Multiculturalism*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012) 384 pp. ISBN 9780773540705 (hb) 100 CAD.

As the title suggests, this is a volume with an ambitious agenda. It is also remarkably successful in achieving its agenda. Kamala Nayar, building on her earlier work, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver*, continues to provide analysis of her carefully constructed ethnographic research in giving information and insight into the historical and contemporary realities of the Punjabi, though largely Sikh, community of British Columbia. She tracks an important element of the migration process of Punjabis, often overlooked in migration studies, namely, the contrasting experiences of migrants within what she labels the 'cultural synergy' of remote towns in northwestern British Columbia with the 'ethnic insularity' of large urban spaces to which many are drawn due to the 'globalization-driven decline' of forestry and fishery industries in Canadian rural areas. Seeking to capture the oral traditions of those Punjabis who are still connected to these rural regions, Nayar provides an important link to largely hitherto unexplored aspects of Punjabi migrant history in Canada. Moreover, she also establishes links to issues of religious, cultural pluralism and citizenship, especially with regard to First Nations in British Columbia, thus shedding light on highly complex intercultural relations in the process of 'becoming' Canadian within the context of multiculturalism.

Chapter one situates the study of Punjabi migrants within theoretical questions of heterogeneity of immigrant communities and the negotiation of identities focusing on the migration experiences of early Punjabi migrants in the Skeena region of northwestern British Columbia. Nayar examines traditional approaches to the study of minority groups, namely, those focusing primarily on notions of ethnicity, race and class, arguing that these are empirically skewed, given that immigrant experiences, particularly for Punjabis, have been gender specific. Moreover, the bulk of studies undertaken by social anthropologists and historians have focused on groups within metropolitan sites, despite much of the immigrant experience having taken place within rural arenas. Nayar proposes that Punjabi immigration patterns must be situated within a broader perspective that highlights both agency and structure, namely, 1) characteristics of Punjabi ethnicity and how those elements facilitated the initial and later adaptation process 2) circumstances surrounding British Columbian labour, with a particular focus on forestry and the fishing industry and labour unions and 3) changing policies and practices of Canadian multiculturalism. Utilizing these variables, she examines the processes of social and cultural adaptation and transformation, while also taking into account geographic location, which form the analytical framework for her study. Methodologically, through qualitative analysis, Nayar's research includes 105 semi-structured interviews, a longitudinal analysis of labour and governmental archival data, as well as participant observation in a number of socio-religious and political centres and programs for the various groups she includes within the larger study of Punjabi immigrants, Punjabi-Hindus and Punjabi-Sikhs in the largely rural Skeena

region and the urban metropolis of the Lower Mainland, namely, the Vancouver area.

Chapters two and three investigate the movement of Punjabi immigrants, arriving initially in areas surrounding the Lower Mainland in the early twentieth century to leave for more remote areas such as the Skeena region in the 1960s as the forestry industry in the Lower Mainland reached its saturation point. In the Skeena region, the bulk of Punjabi immigrants were employed as manual or semi-manual labourers, but increasingly, from the 1970s onward, with policies of multiculturalism and changed immigration laws, educated Punjabis moved into industry, skilled labour and began their own businesses. Nayar then turns her attention to the economic and psychosocial impact of the decline of the forestry industry on Punjabi immigrants from the mid-1990s. Increasingly insecure employment led not only to emotional and economic distress, but also a disorientation of identity, given that Punjabis had been identified with the forestry industry for the past one hundred years. Building on central narratives, the study examines how immigrants adapted and navigated through the social system of Canada, despite limited educational opportunities and skills. According to Nayar, aspects of the Punjabi cultural ethos, including hard work, strong kinship ties and landownership, were important assets in becoming established in Canada.

Chapters four and five are ground-breaking in their investigation of the highly specific immigrant experience of Punjabi women from the 1960s in the Skeena region within the fishing industry, while also contextualizing and reinterpreting traditional Punjabi gender roles such as *izzat* (honour) as they adapted to their new surroundings. Shedding light on the experiences of women in rural Canada, she examines how many experienced tremendous social isolation yet also hard wrought agency as they were separated from their natal homes in Punjab through marriages. Moreover, most lacked any family connections in Canada due to the remoteness of the rural areas to which they were bound. Nayar by and large restricts her study to Punjabi women's agency while offering little insight into negative effects of the religio-cultural gender codes within Punjabi society. A more balanced approach would allow for a more wide-ranging analysis in this regard. These chapters situate women's experiences historically through individual narratives, examining the economic and emotional impact of the decline of the fisheries on women as well as exploring the strategies developed over time in adapting, negotiating and maintaining their economic and social autonomy. Chapter five also explores Punjabis' encounter with First Nations women and men. Punjabi women in the fisheries industry in particular were confronted with hostility as they were perceived as 'stealing' jobs from First Nations people, leading to substantial anti-immigrant hostility and workplace segregation.

Chapter six continues with an overview of occupational segregation practices within the resource industries of the Skeena region, examining the gender and ethnic lines that emerged. Nayar investigates the 'triadic intercultural dynamic' that developed among Anglo-Canadians, First Nations and more recent immigrant groups, including Chinese and Punjabi immigrants, and how,

with the rise of unions, platforms were put in place by which various groups could voice their grievances. Chapters seven and eight move beyond the more commonly studied focus of immigrant groups in relation to the Anglo-mainstream. Nayar instead highlights the multifaceted intercultural interactions of Punjabis and other communities, particularly First Nations. The creation of religious and cultural spaces allowed Punjabis to get established within larger public spheres, thus moving beyond most immigrants' primary initial aims of simply acquiring greater economic security. Perhaps most enlightening are the depictions of intercultural events where traditional Punjabi floats moved beyond only displaying elements of Punjabi culture, and also included coastal emblems, such as the orca, thereby continuing to strengthen relations with First Nations communities.

Chapters nine and ten look at what Nayar labels the 'second journey' of Punjabis relocating and reestablishing themselves in urban centres after their sojourn in remote regions. According to Nayar, this relocation involved a departure from an identity based on 'cultural synergy; to an ethnic insularity, tending to stay apart from broader Canadian society within metropolitan areas'. Here Nayar builds on her earlier work on ethnic identification, utilizing narratives that depict processes of 'being a part of' and 'being apart from' mainstream society, including a renegotiation of both their ethnic identity and their identity as Canadians, including an examination of inter-cultural generational differences.

Kamala Nayar's *The Punjabis in British Columbia. Location, Labour, First Nations and Multiculturalism* is an important contribution to migration, diaspora and Canada studies in that she challenges traditional tropes of inquiry of Punjabi migration patterns beyond the Canadian metropolis and Punjabi/immigrant relations with the Anglo-Canadian mainstream. She also offers a solid examination, through extensive historical and ethnographic research, much of it through the first-person narrative voice, into the psycho-social processes of agency, resiliency and adaptability, not only for the largely studied Punjabi-Canadian male populace, but also Punjabi women's work and narrative, a glaring dearth in most studies of the Punjabi-Canadian community.

### **Doris R. Jakobsh**

University of Waterloo

Tariq Rahman, *From Hindi to Urdu: A Social and Political History*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011) 476 pp. ISBN 9780199063130 (hb), PKR 1,095.

Urdu is the only national language of Pakistan. It is the official language of five states in India and is one of twenty-two scheduled languages according to the Indian Constitution. The Urdu language is also mutually intelligible to Hindi, at the spoken level. However, the relationship between Urdu and Hindi is not as simple in the history of South Asia as it would appear now (Shackle and Snell 1990). There have been a lot of political, ideological, and historical debates on



the relationship between the two languages. Rahman's well researched book *From Hindi to Urdu* offers such debates from a historical perspective by discussing the origin and development of the Urdu language. Although the name Urdu started to be used for the language in the eighteenth century (pp.18–54), Rahman has traced its roots centuries earlier, intertwined with the development of the Hindustani language, which later split into Hindi and Urdu. Rahman has supported his arguments in the book by using excerpts of classical texts like those of Amir Khusrau (pp.66–78) as well as personal interviews that he carried out with linguists, educationists, and historians over several years.

In the first three chapters, after the introduction, Rahman presents the historiography of Urdu, various names attributed to the language at the various stages of its development as well as the literary, cultural, and political connotations associated with it in the course of history. During the British Raj, the controversy over Urdu and Hindi contributed to the formulation of the two-nation theory, leading to the Pakistan Movement. The two languages came to be regarded as distinct from each other by their respective scholars and speakers. One of the main reasons for this distinction has been that Hindi has been relatively more influenced by Sanskrit whereas Urdu has been more influenced by Arabic and Persian. Rahman analyses various theories about the Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit roots of Urdu within the contexts of religion and politics in the history of the subcontinent. In the subsequent five chapters, Rahman presents the relationship of the British government with Urdu and Hindi as the languages of Muslims and Hindus, respectively. In the princely states, Muslim rulers patronised Urdu because of its close relationship with Islamic culture and its role as an identity marker for Muslims. Similarly, Muslim scholars wrote a lot of religious literature in this language. Consequently, Urdu now has a huge Islamic literature, probably richer than any other South Asian languages. This literature is not just limited to translations and commentaries of the Qur'an, but many other forms of religious poetry such as *hamd*, *naat*, and *marsiya* as well. Therefore, Urdu predominantly became an Islamic language. Its Perso-Arabic script, which distinguishes it from Hindi's Devanagiri script, became another reason for its popularity among Muslim readers. However, Rahman dispels the perception that Urdu has only been used in religious writings by Muslims. He provides various examples, particularly from the *ghazal* form of Urdu poetry, to argue that eroticism and romance have also been an essential part of the Urdu literature.

While Punjabi remains an important language for everyday communication for its speakers in various parts of Punjab, it has been especially important for Sikhs because of their religion. In Pakistani Punjab, although Punjabi and Saraiki are also part of the official curriculum at various educational levels, Urdu is the medium of education, or the language of explanation in English medium education. Rahman has highlighted that Urdu has been considered as a means to attaining better economic opportunities in Pakistan due to its official status and support from the ruling elites. Similarly, a vast majority of the younger generation prefer to speak Urdu rather than their native languages for this reason. Chapters ten and eleven explain the significance and role of Urdu in

contemporary employment and education in Pakistan. In universities, English is the medium of education and examination, and it enjoys prestige and offers better chances of employment and working overseas, which Rahman (1997) has also discussed elsewhere as a strategy by the ruling elites to make themselves distinct from the common people. In schools and colleges, with the exception of some elite institutions, as mentioned above, Urdu still remains a language of education. In the last three chapters, before his conclusion, Rahman discusses the role of Urdu in print and electronic media in Pakistan. The majority of the national daily newspapers are in Urdu, except a few in English which have a limited readership. Similarly, the use of Urdu in the radio, television and cinema, particularly Bollywood movies, has paved its way to being the language of the future. This significance of Urdu also prompts the use of the language in modern technology such as computers and mobile phones. This area is beyond the scope of this book, focusing as it does on history, but it can be an important aspect of studying the contemporary relationship of Urdu and Hindi, given the increasing use of Romanised script for both the languages in social media and mobile text messages, whilst also taking into account the historical perspectives discussed by Rahman.

Rahman has mentioned how various languages and dialects of Hindustani have shaped modern Urdu, and how, now that Urdu is more rigorously influencing and being influenced by many regional languages of Pakistan, the divide between Urdu and Hindi has become a point of exploration in the current scenario. On the one hand, Urdu has been among the major sources of ethnic conflicts in Pakistan, for example in the case of the separation of Bangladesh, and until recently in the conflict between Sindhi speakers and Urdu speakers in Karachi. On the other hand, Urdu plays an important role for a unified Pakistani identity. For example, Urdu as a medium of communication between Punjabis and other ethnic groups in Pakistan, in more or less the same way as Hindi and English are used in India, is giving new dimensions to Punjabi identity in relation to the broader national identity. Whilst linguists and social historians will find *From Hindi to Urdu* a marvellous treasure, particularly useful in the context of South Asia, it also has a lot to offer to political scientists and policy makers in exploring the role of language in educational policy, religious identity, and ethnic politics.

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Kyotaka Sato, *Memory and Narrative Series 3: Mrs Jasvir Kaur Chohan: Life Story of A Sikh Woman and her Identity*, (Tokyo: Meiji University, 2011) 185pp. ISSN 2185-6079 (pb).

Kyotaka Sato, *Memory and Narrative Series 4: Mr Sarup Singh, MBE and Mrs Gurmit Kaur: Life Stories of A Sikh Artist and his Wife*, (Tokyo: Meiji University, 2012) 179pp. ISSN 2185-6079 (pb).

Kyotaka Sato, *Memory and Narrative Series 5: Life Story of Mr Jaffer Kapasi, OBE: Muslim Businessman in Leicester, and the Ugandan Expulsion in 1972*, (Tokyo: Meiji University, 2012) 192pp. ISSN 2185-6079 (pb).

[The series is available from Tousui Shobou publishers, Tokyo].

The three books form part of the Memory and Narrative Series published by Professor Kyotaka Sato of Meiji University, Tokyo. The purpose of this series is 'to enable the UK's many and various ethnic minority communities and indigenous groups to record and preserve their memories, life experiences and traditions, and to ensure access to this rich inheritance for present and future generations' (p3). The series presents a written version of the oral histories narrated to Professor Sato by interviewees, sometimes during multiple interviews over a period of several years. The people interviewed for each book narrate not only the reasons for their immigration to the UK but also their experiences of various aspects of life in a foreign country. Each book begins with a Foreword which outlines a precis of the life of the narrator. The Introduction gives some historical background; this helps give the reader some context to help them understand significant events in the narrator(s)' lives. For example, there is a short history of Sikhs in the Punjab, of the Sikh diaspora and the UK and in Leicester, and the expulsion of Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972.

These histories put into context the importance of religion and culture to the narrators of books 3 and 4 which are both about people who are Sikh, and who either emigrated from the Punjab for economic reasons following a Government call for Asians to come to work in Britain, for marriage, or were children of first generation immigrants and had grown up in Britain. In book 5, Jaffer Kapasi's story tells of colonial influences which brought his family from the Gujerat to Uganda and subsequent expulsion due to Governmental policies seeking to empower native Ugandans and redistribute wealth which had been accrued by Asians. Thus, colonial influences continued to affect Indians in India and Africa.

It is interesting that regardless of the reasons why the narrators came to Britain, their experiences are largely similar, often facing hardships due to low incomes, exacerbated or eased depending on their educational achievements and sometimes because racism prevented them from being given the better jobs like managerial posts. Some sought refuge in their culture and by living in proximity to other Asians who understood their ways rather than rejected them. Religion and culture has played an important role in their lives, and the creation of places

of worship became an important element of living in Leicester, regardless of whether they were gurudwaras or mosques. But not everyone wished to retain their Indian identity. Jasvir Chohan tells of cultural conflicts while growing up in Britain, and how she and her husband wanted to be more Westernised in their dress and culture. They returned to what she regarded as Indian culture and Sikhism later in life.

Despite the hardships the narrators faced, all three books show remarkable strength and resilience, a will to survive which helped them and their families through difficult times when jobs were denied them, or when whole populations were expelled from their country of residence or birth because of the colour of their skin, with nothing but what they could carry. The immigrants not only survived but became valuable members of society, receiving honours from the Queen and accolades in their fields of work or in their art, giving back locally, nationally and even internationally through their art or work in the gurudwaras, mosques, museums and other organisations which were created to improve the lives of not just Asians but all communities in Leicester and beyond.

Professor Sato presents the oral histories of the people he interviewed. Reading these books not only provides an insight into the immigrant experience of Indians in Leicester, but also likely experiences in other areas of Britain. The books often break the stereotypes of Asians. The narrators speak of growing up in Britain, of cultural conflicts and wanting Westernised lifestyles and the freedoms like having boyfriends or mixed marriages, of divorce and remarriage, but also of children bringing narrators back to their cultural roots instead of away from them. They speak of leaving their homelands, and those very places subsequently feeling familiar but foreign because Britain has become home. Jaffer Kapasi gives an insight into another immigrant experience, outlining how he and his family coped with being forcibly removed from their adopted homeland of Africa and then having to resettle and rebuild their lives in Britain. All the narrators speak of India or Africa no longer feeling like 'home'.

The issue of what is 'home' becomes relevant when the narrators' and their families' notion of 'home' changes over time and through generations. Over time they recognise that utopian place to be Britain, despite the pull of the Punjab or Uganda, and regardless of their cultural and religious practices or reasons for migration.

Some narrators show that their experiences of life were not only influenced by the host communities but by other communities too. Jasvir Chohan and Gurmit Kaur both talk about how the arrival of East African Asians affected them, and how many Punjabis felt that East African Asians seemed more removed from their Indian roots, particularly the women who were regarded as 'different' because they wore Western clothes and cut their hair. For some, these differences were liberating. Mrs. Kaur talks of how the East African women going out to work had a liberating influence on the Punjabi women who had previously been homemakers. Working women helped the men financially through increased family incomes.

There is some repetition when Professor Sato summarises findings then goes into detail in latter sections, but the appendices and photographs reinforce

the narratives. All three books show the give and take attitudes of the narrators' and other communities; not all experiences of the host community are cited as negative. It would be interesting to see whether the other books in this series show similar experiences, conflicts and attitudes regardless of narrators' countries of origin and religions.

Professor Sato uses primary source material as oral histories of Asians in Leicester. But the books do not present just the histories of the narrators. Much information is provided about other historical contexts to help Asian and non-Asian readers understand the narrators and their experiences better, such as: the political background on the expulsion of Asians from Uganda; a history of the Sikhs within a colonial context in the Punjab and as diaspora; and the Sikh religion and its dress, symbols and language. The informative local, regional and national maps, facts and figures also help readers to put the narratives into context. Without this additional information the full impact of the narratives and the histories contained within would be lost. As a result, the books would aid future critical studies of the Asian diaspora in the UK and beyond, whether of Sikhs from the Punjab or Gujarati Asians coming to Britain via Uganda. Thus, the books are so much more than the simple oral histories they may appear to be.

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Sheba Saeed, *Beggars of Lahore: A Film by Sheba Saeed*. (Asetikbird:ZerkZari Productions, 2010) £74.99 (institutional price); £24.99 (individual price).

This documentary film provides a contemporary examination of the sociology of begging in Pakistan's cultural capital and its second largest city. Whilst the focus is Lahore, the issues raised by the film are of relevance not only to the region of Punjab but also to similar urban locations across Pakistan and the Indian sub-continent in general. A central theme of the documentary centres upon the relationship between the prohibition and condemnation of begging in Islam, on the one hand, and the obligation of giving charity to the needy via alms and *zakat* on the other. The opening scene aptly highlights this tension by relaying an exchange between a beggar and a member of the public; the beggar is reproached by a passer-by for transgressing *shari'ah* and his response is an attempt to neutralise the gravity of his begging by contrasting it with banditry, stealing and looting.

The film prompts the audience through a series of points and questions for reflection, interspersed with snippets from video-interviews with beggars, politicians, activists, members of the public and representatives from non-governmental organisations. What the film lacks in technical polish it gains in informational and contextual depth. The audience is introduced to graphic images of beggars accompanied by an emotive score, many are disfigured, disabled or blind but it is largely left to the viewer to discern any significant differences between the varieties of behaviour which is encompassed by the

umbrella deviant term 'begging'. The beggars include those hawking goods or leading prancing animals; transvestites offering prayers for money or drug addicts begging to feed their addictions.

The views of non-beggars, namely the politicians, scholars and activists, swing from the condemnatory to sympathetic, whilst the specific issue of syndicate or organised begging occupies much of the discourse. Similarly, the film depicts the plight of children including specific interviews with practitioners of child protection. Where state and governmental policies are indicted for their failure, the work of some initiatives, such as by the Child Protection Bureau, indicate some positive inroads being made. Elsewhere, however there is criticism of the true impact of some non-governmental organisations who house their seminars on begging in five star hotels. This important theme, the stark difference between have and have nots, as demonstrated by poorly distributed gross domestic production per capita in Pakistan, is only fleetingly alluded to in the film. Certainly greater visual illustration of the extent of wealth disparities in Lahore would have enriched the arguments being presented here. Nevertheless, the film is important for a number of reasons which may not be obvious to scholars unfamiliar with fieldwork in Pakistan. Researchers and journalists need to contend with the social and religious prohibitions upon the use of photography in Pakistan, particularly of females (Baljon, 1994; Hayat, 2007). There is also the challenge of dealing with the sensitivities of capturing acts deemed as criminal and affording a degree of anonymity to the respondents. This fact may account for the delay between the year of interviews (2005) and year of production (2010). Furthermore, Pakistan has witnessed extensive incidents of domestic terrorism and remains a high crime environment which brings particular personal risks for researchers, journalists and travellers to the country (HRCP, 2012). Also, given that there are assertions implicating that the police and other officials play central roles in organised begging, the execution of a documentary highlighting this corruption comes with the specific risks of confiscation and censorship by the very same corrupt state representatives.

Becker asserts that researchers of deviance consciously or subconsciously adopt positions in terms of whether they are for the subordinates, the incarcerated or deviant or whether their work reflects the perspectives of the incarcerator, the law enforcer, the state (Becker, 1967). It is clear that Saeed's documentary is with the subordinate, highlighting the plight of the destitute albeit against a broader reflection of the macro geo-political factors which exacerbate this pervasive social problem. The documentary also serves to demonstrate the plurality of the phenomenon and the myopia of viewing begging as a homogenous phenomenon. For whom then would this documentary prove useful viewing? It is clear the film is a visual prompt to introduce rather than fully explore the phenomenon of begging in Pakistan. It works to highlight the polarisation and conflation the phenomenon evokes amongst politicians, activists and members of the public. Saeed should be applauded for her execution of a film about a controversial topic in a challenging social environment and most importantly for enabling the articulate and often very

moving voices of many beggars to be documented and heard.

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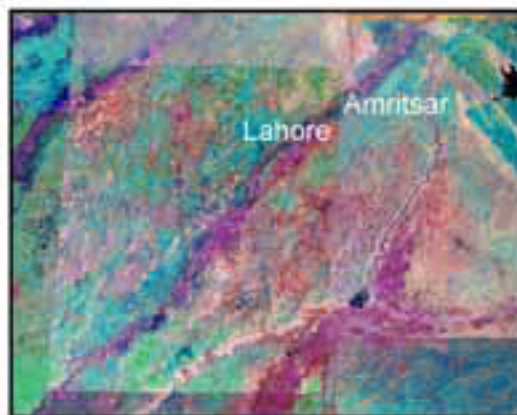
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Centered around the cities of Amritsar and Lahore, the region of Punjab spreads from Delhi in the Southeast to Peshawar in the Northwest, and connects the Indian subcontinent with Central Asia and the Middle East. Beginning with the Indus Valley Civilization, the region has played a pivotal role in the cultural, economic, and political development of India. The *Journal of Punjab Studies* is a forum for interdisciplinary and comparative scholarship on the region of Punjab and Punjabis living overseas.