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Sharing Saints, Shrines, and Stories: Practicing Pluralism in North India

Part II

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Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Religious Studies

by

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Anna Barry Bigelow

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## ABSTRACT

Sharing Saints, Shrines, and Stories: Practicing Pluralism in North India

by

Anna Barry Bigelow

Malerkotla is the only Muslim majority region remaining on the Indian side of Punjab. At the center of this town is the tomb of its founder, a Sufi saint popularly known as Haider Shaikh. At his tomb the simultaneous presence of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims challenges received notions concerning the definite and definable boundaries between religions, countering the prevalent images of inter-religious communal conflict. In addition to housing this popular shrine, Malerkotla is distinguished as a place that resisted the bloodshed and destruction that devastated Punjab during the Partition of India in 1947. Since that time this Muslim majority town in a Sikh majority state in a Hindu majority nation has successfully managed its multi-religious community. Residents and visitors alike perceive the tomb and the town as spaces of communal peace and harmony, made possible by several interlocking factors – the power of the saint upon whose body the city rests, the history of the region, and the will of the community. Through narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices the perception of Malerkotla as a place of peace is actualized into a dominant ethic of harmony.

This ethic is actively manifested and perpetuated in the shared shrines and civic space of Malerkotla, generating a network of everyday practices. This ethical code both reflects past

success in managing internal and external challenges to the harmonious status quo and organizes the community's ongoing struggles to live up to the ideal. Drawing on archival and ethnographic data gathered during sixteen months in Malerkotla, I argue that while it is impossible at the point to say that shared sacred sites or shared sacred histories are *the* crucial link in the chain that sustains the peace, the sheer mundanity of peaceful exchange in Malerkotla is perceived by residents and outside observers to be the result of just such past and present sharing. This perception is not merely a passively transmitted form of received knowledge, but it is actively maintained through the narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices that guide and structure social, political, religious, and economic exchanges between Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in Malerkotla.

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## Introduction

Although the sturdy stone wall enclosing the grave of the Sufi saint Shaikh Sadruddīn Sadr-ī Jahan (d. 1515) is said to have been built in a single night, the greatest miracle observable at the tomb is much more mundane. People of all religious faiths visit this Muslim saint's tomb, or *dargah*.<sup>1</sup> Here in Malerkotla, the only Muslim majority region remaining on the Indian side of Punjab, the simultaneous presence of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims at this tomb challenges received notions concerning the definite and definable boundaries between religions, countering the prevalent images of inter-religious communal conflict.<sup>2</sup> This peaceful state of affairs, far from arising overnight like the shrine's wall, has persisted for almost five hundred years. At least since Haider Shaikh, as the saint is popularly known, first settled here in 1454, this region has encompassed a diverse population, including Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians and Jains. Members of all these communities attend the *dargah* for a variety of purposes – to offer a prayer, make or fulfill a vow, obtain a blessing from the saint, ward off evil, seek relief from mental and physical suffering, or any number of other personal motivations. In addition to housing this popular shrine, Malerkotla is distinguished as a place that resisted the bloodshed and destruction that devastated Punjab during the Partition of India in 1947. Since that time this Muslim majority town in a Sikh majority state in a Hindu majority nation has successfully managed its multi-religious community. For these reasons, residents and visitors alike perceive the tomb and

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<sup>1</sup> *Dargāh* is from the "Persian, literally 'place of a door' usually 'royal court, palace' in Persia, but in India with the additional specialized sense 'tomb or shrine of a *pīr*.'" Encyclopedia of Islam (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), Volume II:141b.

<sup>2</sup> There is one other town in the Northwest of the state, Qadian, where there is a significant population of Muslims. Qadian is the spiritual center of the Ahmadiyya movement that recognizes Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908) as a prophet of God, a claim that is vigorously disputed. For example, Ahmadis are not recognized as Muslims in Pakistan, though they self-identify as such. For more on the Ahmadiyya, see: Spencer Lavan, *The Ahmadiyah Movement*, (Delhi: Manohar, 1974) and Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and Its Medieval Background*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). For a critical analysis of the movement see Abulhasan 'Ali Nadwi, *Qadianism: A Critical Study*, translated by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, (Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1967) a translation of *al-Qadiyani wa al-Qadiyaniyah*, (1962). For a view from within the faith, see Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, *Ahmadiyyat, or the True Islam* (Qadian, Punjab: Talif-o-Isha"at, 1924) or [www.alislam.org](http://www.alislam.org).

the town as spaces of communal peace and harmony, made possible by several interlocking factors – the power of the saint upon whose body the city rests, the history of the region, and the will of the community. Through narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices the perception of Malerkotla as a place of peace is actualized into a dominant ethic of harmony.

This ethic is actively manifested and perpetuated in the shared shrines and civic space of Malerkotla, generating a network of everyday practices that provides a system of checks and balances. This ethical code both reflects past success in managing internal and external challenges to the harmonious status quo and organizes the community's ongoing struggles to live up to the ideal. I argue that while it is impossible at the point to say that shared sacred sites or shared sacred histories are *the* crucial link in the chain that sustains the peace, the sheer mundanity of peaceful exchange in Malerkotla is perceived by residents and outside observers to be the result of just such past and present sharing. This perception is not merely a passively transmitted form of received knowledge, but it is actively maintained through the narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices that guide and structure social, political, religious, and economic exchanges between Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in Malerkotla. Here I identify and examine these everyday practices, illuminating the complexity and creativity involved in the practice of pluralism.

It is important to understand Malerkotla because multi-confessional sacred sites are not always peacefully shared in India or anywhere else in the world. As much as I wish that the simple fact of sharing sacred space were the single key ingredient in creating and maintaining peaceful communities, it cannot be seen as such. Shared sites are disputed and destroyed all the time. Places where shared shrines proliferate experience violence between religions just as places without them do. However, these sites, their lore, and management can provide a crucial

index of the degree of civil societal integration, thereby providing an important window into multi-religious communities. The dynamics of exchange on the local level have not been well explored. Some of the best work on inter-religious exchange in India has focused on the literary productions of shared religious traditions.<sup>3</sup> This work has done much to complicate stereotypes of Muslims and Hindus in particular as being wholly distinct in thought, word, and deed. Yet much remains to be done to understand the religious culture that produces these literatures. Furthermore, studies of inter-religious conflict over sacred sites such as Ayodhya and Jerusalem have tended to focus on the macro-level political economy, leaving the local as well as the cultural and religious dimensions unexplored. In this project I will establish a counterpoint to work, much of it excellent, which has illuminated the impact of civil society, politics, and economic opportunity on inter-religious relations.<sup>4</sup> Building on these studies, I show how shared shrines play a powerful role in sustaining peaceful multi-religious civil societies by serving as symbolic centers through which a community's idealized ethics and identity may be enacted and grounded in a particular place.

My primary argument is that the sharing of sacred space and sacred histories is a powerful resource for the maintenance of peace in plural societies. The production of shared places, shared memorial observations, and shared regulatory systems is an ongoing process.

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<sup>3</sup> For a smattering of these studies, see: Simon Digby, "Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography," unpublished paper, School for Oriental and African Studies, 1970 and "Medieval Sufi Tales of Jogis & Tales from the Afghan Sultanates in India," in *Wonder Tales of South Asia*, (New Delhi; Manohar, 2000), Richard M. Eaton, "Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam," *History of Religions* (Volume 14, no. 2, 1974), and Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving the Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory," *History of Religions* (Volume 40, no. 3, 2001). See also many of the articles in David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, (Gainesville; University Press of Florida, 2000). For a wonderful and readily available primary text that exemplifies the fluidity of religious identity in literary genres see, Manjhan, *Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi Romance*, translated by Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman, (New York; Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> One recent study of a Hindu-Muslim community in Bihar does seek to explore the discursive use of a site in constructing community identity. See Peter Gottschalk, *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2001). A less scholarly but more widely ranging book by Yoginder Sikand explores shared sites all over India. *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India*, (New Delhi; Penguin India, 2003).

Through this process shrines and stories become the physical and discursive spaces conducive to positive inter-religious interaction. In order to demonstrate this dynamic of place and history making, I document the constellations of beliefs and practices that facilitate the simultaneous presence of multiple understandings of the meaning and usages of shared shrines and sacred histories. This will reveal the systems that make it possible for diverse interest groups, with divergent stories, practices, and managerial ways of operating to be simultaneously present and invested in both the shrine and in the community.

### **The *dargah* of Haider Shaikh**

The *dargah* of Haider Shaikh is a site of enormous religious, economic, and political significance to the entire town of Malerkotla. As the tomb of the founder, a source of substantial income to the whole town, and a site with a multi-religious constituency the *dargah* functions as the symbolic center of Malerkotla. As a signifying site in the production and perpetuation of Malerkotla's identity as a zone of peace, its ritual, narrative and regulatory operations are also important sources of strength in the construction and maintenance of an ethic of harmony in the community as a whole. It is important to understand the strategies that make this sharing possible because these collective systems are elements that allow a variety of perspectives to coexist without coming into open conflict. For a shared shrine to function there must be mutually sustaining and reinforcing arenas of authority, operating in a manner akin to a division of power that generates a system of checks and balances. The three significant arenas of authority examined here – narrative, ritual, and regulatory – are spheres of inter-religious exchange in which authority is validated by the multi-religious constituent communities. The measure of each community's validation is observable in the prevalence and currency of narrative accounts of the saint, shrine and town, ritual practices, and regulatory participation

within each community. Because the entirety of Malerkotla's diverse population is invested in sustaining these traditions, the centrality of peaceful inter-religious exchange to Malerkotla's symbolic identity becomes apparent.

This study is a challenging project for I am attempting to describe a non-event, a state of peaceful exchange at a shrine that is sacred to Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in a town populated by all three groups. Whereas much social scientific and popular literature depicts such situations as powder kegs waiting to ignite the primordial tensions between religious groups historically and elementally at odds with one another, the reality of life in India belies this treatment. In fact, shared sacred sites hide in plain sight throughout the subcontinent. Contrary to their high profile cousins at Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Mathura and against the will of conservative elements in each religion, shared shrines enjoy vibrant and enthusiastic patronage and devotion from all sectors of society. Still it is undeniable that shared sacred sites have been and continue to be the flashpoints for antagonism and violence. The death toll related to the movement to establish a temple at Ayodhya on the site of a now destroyed mosque is above five thousand human lives to date.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Ayodhya Syndrome**

Since 1992, the scholarship on shared sacred sites in India has been dominated by a proliferation of studies on religious violence and politicized communal conflict.<sup>6</sup> On December

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<sup>5</sup> The riots in the mid 1980's and early 1990's that accompanied L.K. Advani's pilgrimage procession exceed a thousand, approximately three thousand were killed subsequent to the demolition of the Masjid in 1992, and as recently as 2002 two thousand were killed in Gujarat in riots related to the Ramjanmabhumi movement. Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram and Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Recent work by a number of scholars has begun to complicate this picture. Although studies of sacred sites have often remarked on the relationships between the principal religious community and the broader socio-religious context of the shrine, rarely do such studies highlight the nature and terms of engagement by the various groups. British colonial accounts emphasized the common religious beliefs and practices of the "folk" element at such sites, often to the exclusion of religious or political elite groups who are simply assumed to be above such messy thinking and practice. Although provocative as an indicator that "Indian" religion may be better understood locally than

6 of that year, in a chilling example of the power of stories to determine the course of history, people for whom a story of the past was more real than the stones of the present tore down brick by brick a sixteenth century mosque known as the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. According to inscriptions on the edifice, the first Mughal Emperor Babur's commander Mir Baqi had the mosque built to commemorate his overlord's presence there in 1528.<sup>7</sup> The conflict began its final phase in 1949 when a vision of the infant Lord Rama inside the mosque was widely reported.<sup>8</sup> The building was closed until a judge in 1986 ordered the gates opened and worship

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categorically, they reify the divisions between elite and popular traditions and in spite of their view that the masses are not concerned with communitarian identities, that does not seem to stop them from classifying and categorizing the very same people in ever more elaborate censuses and ethnographies. In Punjab, Harjot Oberoi's book draws heavily on the British accounts to establish what he calls (following Max Weber) an "enchanted universe" where there was a relative lack of identification with supralocal religious groups. According to Oberoi, this all changed with the British census requiring such identifications, and the rise of the Singh Sabha, the Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj, and the Muslim Anjuman organizations. After the late nineteenth century, the necessity to formalize affiliation in order to claim social and political power left little room for the idealized world of the Punjabi in which such labels did not apply. Although overly dependent upon the British records, Oberoi's thesis is not wholly without merit and draws much needed attention to the ways in which colonialism did not simply create passive, neatly enumerable categories of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, but was a factor in setting off a fierce struggle and debate within and between these traditions. In other parts of India, work such as that of Juan E. Campo on the Sabrimala pilgrimage in Kerala, Daniel Gold on Sufi shrines in Gwalior, Jamal Elias on Shaikh Hamdani in Kashmir, Yoginder Sikand on shared traditions throughout the country, and Kelly Pemberton on women's roles at shrines in Rajasthan and Bihar are important contributions to the field of Sufi shrines in India. See also P. M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Din Chishti of Ajmer* (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1989); Dominique-Sila Khan, *Conversions and Shifting Identities: Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan*, (New Delhi; Manohar, 1997); Christian Troll, editor, *Muslim Shrines in India*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1989); Kerrin Von Schwerin, "Saint Worship in Indian Islam: The Legend of the Martyr Salar Masud Ghazi," in *Ritual and Religion among Muslims of the subcontinent*, Imtiaz Ahmad, editor, (Lahore; Vanguard, 1985); Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, eds., *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, (London: Routledge, 1998); Paul Younger, "Velankalli Calling," in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Alan Morinis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers, 1992); and Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*, (Durham; Duke University, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Srivastava calls Babur's presence at Ayodhya into question, and asserts that Babur had given no orders that some pre-existing temple be demolished for the construction of a mosque. He and the findings of the Mandal Commission agree that though evidence of a temple exist, it was not a site that prior to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century was identified as the birthplace of Ram. Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Inquiry* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1991), D. Mandal, *Ayodhya: Archaeology after Demolition, Tracts for the Times* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993). Peter van der Veer's excellent study of the rise of Ayodhya as a pilgrimage town and the dynamics between the various Hindu sects situated there provides a fascinating insight into the politics of pilgrimage. Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Center* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> This vision is generally attributed to a Muslim constable, thereby establishing its veracity – after all, why would a Muslim see a Hindu god in a mosque unless it had truly happened? However, Srivastava and others dispute this account and point out that in the less widely known version of the local Muslims, a Hindu mendicant broke into the mosque and placed a idol which was later identified as the vision of the Muslim guard. (Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque*, p. 15)

of the deity's image allowed. Several pan-Indian campaigns to raise momentum and money for the building of a temple on the site were undertaken, led by the present Deputy Prime Minister of India, Lal Krishna Advani. In 1989, Advani led a *yatra* or pilgrimage procession throughout India gathering support for the building of a Ram temple on the site of the Babri Masjid.<sup>9</sup> In the wake of this march, disturbances broke out across India, even in places hitherto untouched by communal violence. On December 6, 1992 the mosque was destroyed precipitating riots in which at least 3,000 people were killed and thousands more were injured. In order to recover the mythic birthplace of Rama, almost five hundred years of Muslim history was erased.

Nearly ten years later the dispute over the site still regularly makes the front pages of India's newspapers, it remains a divisive and controversial issue, demonstrating the pervasive impact of Ayodhya on the social and political life of India. For example, building a temple to Ram at the site was, until 2001, one of the party platforms of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).<sup>10</sup> This party metamorphosed from the Janata Party, which briefly held power in India from 1977 to 1979. Although the party suffered electoral losses immediately after the mosque demolition, it rose to power in the late 1990's becoming the ruling party in the federal government with the support of numerous regional and ethnic parties. Its leaders, particularly Advani and two others who also subsequently become cabinet ministers, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati, were the prime instigators of the movement to destroy the mosque. In October of 2001 a group of Hindus, including a member of Parliament and representatives of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the organization principally responsible for the movement to 'liberate'

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<sup>9</sup> For an interesting discussion of the symbolism employed by Lal Krishna Advani and the BJP on this *yātrā*, see Richard H. Davis, "The Iconography of Rama's Chariot," in *Contesting the Nation*, David Ludden, editor, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> This position was removed from the BJP plank due to its increasing unpopularity. However, the move seems to have backfired as the VHP and RSS have excoriated their political wing saying that they betrayed their constituency and defrauded those who supported them. Furthermore, the VHP and RSS were able to distance themselves somewhat from the BJP and take a more radical approach.

the Ramjanmabhumi from the Muslim occupation of the Babri Masjid, violated the court order keeping the site off limits and conducted a *påja* worship for six hours. This made headlines across India.<sup>11</sup> But more was to come. In consultation with astrologers and coincident with elections in several key states, the VHP declared March 15, 2002 as the date for the commencement of construction, further inflaming tensions.<sup>12</sup> Just prior to that deadline, on February 28, 2002, a group of Hindu pilgrims returning to Gujarat from the volunteer work camps at Ayodhya were killed when the train car in which they traveled was set on fire by Muslims in a slum outside Godhra station. Subsequent violence throughout the state of Gujarat claimed the lives of at least 1,000 and displaced over 100,000. Overwhelmingly the victims were Muslim.

The speed with which these tensions are inflamed and the continued lack of resolution to the question of Ayodhya indicate a deep rooted, perhaps insurmountable, divide between religious communities fostered and fueled by political and institutional interest groups.<sup>13</sup> The inability of competing interest groups to achieve a peaceful means of regulating the disparate visions of Hindus and Muslims and their claim to this contested site has resulted in the deaths of thousands in the last decade, and contributed to a blind spot in the scholarship on shared sacred space. Little serious attention, either in the media or in the scholarly literature has been paid to the fact that as parts of India erupt sporadically into inter-religious violence, there are places that resist the bloodshed.<sup>14</sup> Certainly it is absolutely essential that the events at Ayodhya and in

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<sup>11</sup> *Indian Express, Asian Age, Times of India*, October 18 and 19, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Although prevented from actually beginning construction due to a court injunction, the VHP forced the government to participate in a *shilanyas*, the ritual of placing a foundation stone, in this case a pillar carved for placement at the temple site. This is a clear acknowledgement on the part of the government of the temple's right to exist and the center's support for its eventual construction.

<sup>13</sup> There have been court cases filed on the matter since at least 1948 with no resolution in sight.

<sup>14</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, a political scientist, has just published a study on ethnic conflict in India, comparing places where the conflict becomes violent to places where it does not. He concludes that places with substantial inter-

Gujarat be investigated in the hope that such research will lead to justice for the victims of the violence, reconciliation for the communities involved, and resolution to the lingering questions of community identity. The Gujarat riots were horrifying in their scale and impact, especially upon the Muslim community. Although the flashpoint was an attack by Muslims upon Hindus, there is considerable and increasing evidence that the ensuing riots and assaults on Muslim neighborhoods, businesses and religious sites were pre-planned.<sup>15</sup> Gujarat's Chief Minister, Narendra Modi claimed that the violence was a response in kind to the assault on the train by Muslims. This assertion was echoed by Prime Minister Vajpayee's declaration that one must ask first who began the fire before one explores the subsequent carnage.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, reports abound that the police were instructed not to act and were in some cases acting to protect the largely Hindu rioters. Such evidence of state complicity at the highest levels speaks to a deeply troubled and divided nation.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that even as Gujarat was engulfed for months in this horror, the violence did not spread. There were a few scattered incidents in other locations, but

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communal ties in the form of associations and organizations, rather than merely quotidian social ties, tend to be less 'riot-prone.' This position and others will be discussed later. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> There are widespread reports of *jathās* or gangs of young men in the telltale saffron colored bandanas and armbands of the Hindu right methodically moving through commercial areas with computer generated lists of businesses owned and operated by Muslims and destroying them. Carrying cell phones, water bottles, and *trishāl* (the three pronged spear of Siva), these groups were in communication with each other and went systematically from one area to another.

<sup>16</sup> Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi in a campaign speech. Vajpayee's remarks at a meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Goa one week after the train burning are overwhelmingly geared towards focusing the blame on the rise of Muslim extremism the world over. He says "Wherever there are such Muslims, they do not wish to live together, do not want to mix and mingle with others and instead of spreading their message peacefully, they want to spread their beliefs by terror, by fear, by threatening. The world has woken to this danger." For Vajpayee, the real question is who started the fire: "What happened in Gujarat? If the conspiracy to burn alive the innocent, helpless and blameless travellers on the Sabarmati Express had not been hatched, the Gujarat tragedy could have been averted. But this did not happen. People were burnt alive. Who were those people? The government is enquiring into it. The intelligence agencies are gathering all the information. But we must not forget how the Gujarat tragedy began. The later incidents are condemnable, but who started the fire? How did the fire spread?" He asserts in this speech that 99.9% of riots are begun by Muslims, which is wholly false. Not only do Muslims not start most communal riots in India, but also they are overwhelmingly the victims, suffering more deaths, injuries, loss of property than the majority community.

these were quickly and easily controlled.<sup>17</sup> In Punjab, there was almost no impact. However, because there are very few Muslims in the state, all eyes turned towards Malerkotla, where a significant Muslim population could be observed. Police were deployed in large numbers in the town and the Sub-Divisional Magistrate Gurloleen Singh took out a flag march (a kind of community solidarity demonstration) and called a meeting of the local Peace Committee.<sup>18</sup> Local Hindus and Sikhs chose not to observe the *bandh*, or general strike, called by the VHP after the train burning. During this period of tension, as with so many others, the external shock of the Gujarat carnage did not result in further trauma in Malerkotla or in most other regions of India. What is going right here that goes so horribly wrong elsewhere?

Indeed it is due to the reality of violent contestation that I undertook this study. But, rather than adding yet another voice to the cacophony of explanations of inter-religious division, it seems equally urgent to understand how highly integrated communities function without violence becoming their primary method of managing stresses from inside or outside the area. By exploring the inter-religious dynamics within the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh and within the community of Malerkotla we may begin to understand how it is possible to ensure that nothing continue to happen at such places. It is my contention that a great deal of work goes into making nothing happen.

### **Shared Sacred Sites**

Malerkotla, like the rest of India, is home to countless saint's shrines, places where Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu residents alike seek comfort, assistance, contemplation, and

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Wilkinson observes that state will and electoral proximity are two of the key factors in the occurrence and severity of ethnic violence. He is also the author of a forthcoming study that explores the reasons why other states in India did not experience violent outbreaks in the aftermath of the Godhra events.

<sup>18</sup> The role of these ad-hoc committees will be discussed further in Chapter Seven. The situation in Malerkotla was reported as calm in the *Tribune* on March 16, 2002.

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020316/punjab1.htm#15>

conviviality.<sup>19</sup> The tomb of Haider Shaikh, is unquestionably the largest and most prominent tomb shrine, or *dargah*, in the region. Festivals for the saint draw over a hundred thousand people to the hewn stone structure on the top of a low hill, surrounded by houses and narrow lanes. Due in part to the post-Partition demographics of Punjab, most of the visitors to the tomb are Sikhs and Hindus. But the caretakers are Muslim descendents of the saint, and local Muslims also attend the shrine. This multi-confessional appeal is not new. Nineteenth-century British accounts also report an equal or greater number of non-Muslims at the shrine.

The critical importance of *not* overlooking these *dargahs* and other shared shrines was vividly demonstrated in the Gujarat violence in spring 2002. Among the many horrifying aspects of that crisis, one of the most disturbing was the concomitant targeting of *dargahs*. These places were destroyed by Hindu nationalists for two reasons – first, they are emblems of the longtime Muslim presence and dominance in the region. Second, and perhaps more significant for the long run, *dargahs* are commonly sites where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, or whomever come together, jointly worshiping and collectively benefiting from the blessings of the saintly dead and the conviviality of the living humans with whom they pray.<sup>20</sup> According to reports by several commissions of inquiry investigating the violence, approximately two hundred and fifty *dargahs* were damaged or destroyed by unnamed, un-

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<sup>19</sup> I attempted on several occasions count these shrines, at one point numbering fifty-three. However, this is by no means reliable as behind many walls, in the middle of fields, and in other less readily accessed areas there are burial sites of Muslim saints, Hindu yogis, and Sikh martyrs, all of which may receive ongoing attention and propitiation from people on a semi-regular or daily basis. Furthermore, residents have their own accountings, reflecting the places that are significant to them.

<sup>20</sup> The destruction of *dargāhs* is not new in communal conflicts. Bayly notes an incident in 1789 in Calcutta in which a Muharram-Durga Puja clash combined with struggles over shifts in the local power structures between Hindus and Muslims resulted in violence during which a local *bania* (merchant) gathered "fifty or sixty armed peons and demolished all the Mahometan Durgahs they could find in the neighbourhood of Boitacannah." Bayly, C. A., "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860," (*Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2, 1985), p. 199.

charged rioters.<sup>21</sup> In some cases idols were placed in the shrines. Especially popular was the image of *Hulla·iya Hanuman*, riotous Hanuman, the ascetic monkey god and strong arm of the archetypal god-king Rama, the disputes over whose birthplace at Ayodhya was discussed above. In one case, the *dargah* of a seventeenth-century Urdu poet known as Wali Gujarati was razed and paved over in a matter of days, erasing from the sacred landscape the shrine and its potential to draw communities together.<sup>22</sup> These events demonstrate the highly complicated nature of such shrines in India, their symbolic value as sites of communal exchange, and the importance of understanding their role in the promotion and perpetuation of a civil multi-religious society in an environment where the politics of religious division are a common currency.

Rather than focusing solely on the macro level exchanges between ideologues, entrepreneurs, and politicians at sacred centers, it is important to also consider the role of everyday interactions and use of the shared civic and sacred space. As Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht have argued, disputes over sacred space are also necessarily struggles over the choreography of daily life.<sup>23</sup> An examination of effective interactive choreography at shared sites, therefore, will illuminate modes, systems, and strategies of exchange that substantively contribute to the production and perpetuation of peace. The ritual, narrative, and regulatory

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<sup>21</sup> The number was two hundred and sixty-seven according to Human Rights Watch, "'We Have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat," *Human Rights Watch* 14, no. 3(C) (2002). See also, "Crimes Against Humanity," report by Communalism Combat, [www.sabrang.com](http://www.sabrang.com). The report "Gujarat Carnage 2002: A Report to the Nation by an Independent Fact-finding Team," *Outlook India*, (April 11, 2002) details at least 240 *dargāhs* destroyed, twenty in Ahmedabad alone. Blue ribbon panels have issued reports from the People's Union for Civil Liberties, the People's Union for Democratic Rights, and the Indian National Human Rights Commission.

<sup>22</sup> "The famous Urdu Poet Wali Gujarati's *dargāh* was also razed to the ground at Shahibaug in Ahmedabad. While a *hanuman* [a Hindu god] shrine was built over its debris initially, all that was removed overnight and the plot was [paved] and merged with the adjoining road. No authority claimed any knowledge about the entire episode. It is worth noting here that the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, which is responsible for the maintenance of all these structures, and for the building of roads, is run by the Congress [party] with a near two-thirds majority." Human Rights Watch Human, "'We Have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat," *Human Rights Watch* 14, no. 3(C) (2002).

<sup>23</sup> Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, "The Bodies of Nations: A Comparative Study of Religious Violence in Jerusalem and Ayodhya," *History of Religions* 38, no. 2 (1998).

arenas of exchange between actors are situated and grounded in shared sacred sites. The quality of these interactions are key contributing factors in generating conflict or cooperation at such places, and inevitably impact the communities in which each shrine is situated.

First we must understand sacred places, broadly construed, and shared sacred places in particular. The history of religions tends to approach the sacred drawing on the theories of either Emile Durkheim or Mircea Eliade, identifying sacred places as either socially constructed or divinely determined. However, these perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive: each view is capable of encompassing elements of the other. One way in which the overly determined debate between constructivism and essentialism is circumvented has been in the introduction of more fluid notions of the relations between temporal and spiritual power. Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht challenge the tendency to interpret sacred space as the imprint of heaven on earth, a semiotic, spatialized cipher for a divine reality. Simultaneously they critique the social scientific reversal of this formulation in which earth imprints heaven, projecting the terrestrial social order into the celestial. Both views erase the politics of the center, and it is this very politics, they argue, that both centers sacrality and sacralizes centers. The sharing of a sacred center by multiple religious traditions necessitates politics. These are “signifying sites” at which and through which various identities are projected and received between and within religious and social groups. As such, they are “intertextual” and subject to potentially “conflictual readings.”<sup>24</sup> The daily use of the site and the choreography of its use are the observable imprints of interweaving, overlapping discourses of bodies, practices and imaginations. Thus, it is no longer a matter of reading the imprints of earth on heaven or vice versa. In order to comprehend the various significations of the narratives and behaviors that transmit the meaning of place into a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 112.

message, a hermeneutic capable of rendering this mutual imprimature is required. This hermeneutic engages the ritual and narrative transactional idioms and repertoires of multivocalic constituent communities and evaluates the modes in which the administrative regimes at multi-confessional sites enable or frustrate the simultaneity of plural and potentially contradictory beliefs and practices.

Thus, in addition to the transactions between the mundane and the divine occurring at sacred sites, these places also mediate transactions between multiple actors and divine agencies through a diverse repertoire of rituals, narratives and authoritative schemes. In some cases this multiplicity and simultaneity occurs uneventfully. Other situations require highly elaborate systems – such as the time-share arrangement at the Church of the Nativity – or even regulatory personnel – such as the police or the military. However, as phenomenologist of space Edward Casey asserts, one of the unique qualities of place is the ability to incorporate without conflict the most diverse elements that constitute its being. He writes: “There is a peculiar power to place and its ability to contain multiple meanings, diverse intentions, contradictory interactions. Surpassing the capacity of humans to sustain such a *gathering*, place permits a simultaneity and a filtering of experience, history, imagination, action.” Drawing largely on Heidegger’s phenomenology of space, Casey states that, “places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts.” Further, the power of place “consists in gathering these lives and things, each with its own space and time, into one arena of common engagement.”<sup>25</sup> In this way we see that the containment of multiple meanings, interests and intentions is not merely a function of sacred places, it is the very nature of place. The multiplicity itself, the suspended tensions of contradictory beliefs and practices, and the gathering power of spatial and narrative

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<sup>25</sup> Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith Basso, (Santa Fe, NM; School of American Research Press, 1996) p. 26.

symbols constitute, in part, the significance of shared sacred sites. In other words, by physically and discursively connecting people and their practices at a single site, by gathering and then maintaining that gathering, place is animated, enlivened and made meaningful.

Casey's notion of the gathering power of a place is extended in his work on memorialization which demonstrates the ways in which cultural memory and identity are constituted by and constitutive of the places in which community life takes place. This evokes Lefebvre's paradigm of the monumental as a "total space." Monuments (and he often cites the Taj Mahal as an example) are capable of erasing any violence or death at their foundation and replacing it with a "tranquil power." Through a process of displacement and condensation, monumental space

becomes the metaphorical and quasi-metaphysical underpinning of a society, this by virtue of a play of substitutions in which the religious and political realms symbolically (and ceremonially) exchange attributes – the attributes of power; in this way the authority of the sacred and the sacred aspect of authority are transferred back and forth, mutually reinforcing one another in the process.<sup>26</sup>

The monumental space of the shrines under discussion may be seen, in Lefebvre's terms, as the total expression and experience of the societies in which they are located. Furthermore, as Casey writes, commemorative rites connect bodily memory with place memory, enabling us "to honor the past by carrying it intact into new and lasting forms of alliance and participation."<sup>27</sup> Thus the meaning of a shared shrine is inscribed in the community through the public performance of community and individual identities at the site.

However, the frustration of this type of phenomenology is that in spite of its seductive language and sentiment, it lacks specificity. The socio-political context must also be considered. In a recent article entitled "Antagonistic Tolerance," Robert Hayden disavows the possibility of

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<sup>26</sup> Lefebvre, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 257.

non-contentious sharing of sacred space. He views sites scholars portray as uncontested as in fact exemplary of a "negative definition of tolerance as passive noninterference."<sup>28</sup> He claims that a radical imbalance of power is necessary for peace to be maintained. This, of course, merely suppresses hostility and competition rather than eliminating it. Moreover, Hayden characterizes studies of synthesis and exchange at shared sacred sites as essentially anachronistic, requiring the analyst to freeze time and erase the historic context of a place.<sup>29</sup> Thus for Hayden, depictions of 'un-contested' or peaceful shrines require either a false erasure of time from the theoretical analysis or a socially enforced political stasis. Synthesis of traditions, he writes, is a "temporal manifestation of relations between social groups, which continue to differentiate themselves from each other." His points have a degree of merit. Certainly dehistoricization is antithetical to any decent study and it is naïve to claim that shared sites are devoid of competition or the possibility of antagonism. After all, as Georg Simmel famously argued, competition is an indirect form of conflict.<sup>30</sup> However, sociologist John Hall also reminds us that, "Much competition between religious groups is peaceful, and it unfolds within a larger frame of mutual respect and sometime cooperation."<sup>31</sup> Given the situation on the ground at countless shared sites in South Asia, Hayden overstates the case by asserting that the competitive sharing of sacred space is inherently antagonistic. As we shall see, the situation on the ground at many multi-confessional sites in Punjab and throughout India challenges such divisions between Islam and South Asia's other religions. Not only does harmonious inter-religious exchange occur, but the exchange itself is *constitutive* of both the form and efficacy of

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans," *Current Anthropology* (Volume 43, no. 2, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 207.

<sup>30</sup> Georg Simmel, *Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1955 (1908)).

<sup>31</sup> John R. Hall, "Religion and Violence: Social Processes in Comparative Perspective," in *Handbook for the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Michele Dillon, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2002).

ritual and narrative engagements taking place at shared shrines. Thus, inter-religious encounter is part of the appeal *and* part of the power of these places.

This encounter continues in Indian Punjab given that, even in the absence of a significant Muslim population, Islamic shrines activate the religious landscape. At these sites Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim devotees engage together in a variety of encounters that demonstrate how shared sacred places in many instances express and facilitate the convergence of complex and contradictory beliefs and actions, rather than provide points for disputation and the articulation of oppositional identities. It is perhaps especially important to understand this ambient reality of peaceful multi-confessional sites in Punjab as this state was the most savagely and violently devastated by the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Although Partition entailed a radical shift of population, the sacred sites of the region remained where they were. Thus it has been an ongoing issue in India and Pakistan to negotiate for the continued care and maintenance of the sites that no longer have constituent populations to maintain them. In the case of East Punjab's *dargahs*, however, there has been almost no lapse in upkeep as they were and are held to be powerful and effective sites by Sikhs and Hindus. Therefore the tombs continue to be patronized and managed by non-Muslims. Thus although there are few Muslims in Punjab, the shrines in many ways subvert the division imposed by Partition, by continuing to provide points of encounter between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims.<sup>32</sup> In this way, the *dargahs* function as counter-sites, termed heterotopias by Foucault, that simultaneously represent, contest, and invert every

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<sup>32</sup> In an introduction, Ian Talbot warns that pre-Partition Punjabi culture should not be idealized as free of religious communalism. He remarks that "It was only in the celebrations of the Sufi shrines that 'distance' was broken down between communities who were otherwise near neighbours, but living in separate worlds." Although I disagree with his pessimistic view of the level of integration in community life, his singling out of *dargāhs* as idealized places of exchange is significant. Ian Talbot, "Introduction," in Anders Bjørn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide: Manifestation of Violence in Punjab, 1937-1947*, (New Delhi; India Research Press 2002), p. x.

site within a culture.<sup>33</sup> This is a type of space whose formation and usage can be interpreted as spatial representation of social relations, both real and imagined, enduring and momentary, but always connected through various processes to every other space within a cultural milieu, and always marked off as ‘other space’ accessible only through a transformative procedure such as purification or initiation. Shared shrines in India are heterotopic in that they contain and invert dominant conceptions and regimes of power, creating idealized and critical reflections of a South Asian society in which the lines drawn between religions can be lethal. That the Gujarat violence of 2002 also targeted *dargahs*, places where inter-religious bonds may be most readily formed, necessitates understanding how such sites function within communities on a daily basis. More often than not, *dargahs* defy the common assumption that shared shrines are ticking time bombs, merely awaiting the appropriate moment and conjunction of political, economic, and social forces to explode into yet another Ayodhya, yet another Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> According to that perspective, shrines that are multiply identified, managed, patronized, or worshipped are inherently and terminally conflicted.

In his work on conflict over shared sacred space, Ron Hassner asserts that the centrality and exclusivity of sacred sites results in an "indivisibility conundrum."<sup>35</sup> A site is indivisible to the extent that its identity is constituted both essentially and socially as coherent, non-fungible, and bounded. Depending upon factors of division or inclusion operative in a given instance, a sacred site may become contested. The conditions for non-conflictual sharing are more restrictive, Hassner argues, but not impossible and depend in no small part upon the role of

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<sup>33</sup> In Michel Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces" he proposes *heterotopias* as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted." Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* Spring (1986).

<sup>34</sup> This view is typical of conflict studies scholars such as Sissela Bok who view the activation of conflicts as the strategic action of rationally motivated actors taking advantage of perceived opportunities to advance their interests.

<sup>35</sup> Ron E. Hassner, "Understanding and Resolving Disputes over Sacred Space." *Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation Working Paper*, no. 62 (2002).

religious leaders and constituent communities as well as political authorities in facilitating the process. He gives an account of current policy approaches to intractable conflicts over sacred sites which tend to consider only the political powers at work in their approach. Generally, from a policy perspective, a sacred site is understood as essentially devoid of symbolic or esoteric meaning and is fundamentally a piece of property. Religious contestations are at root manifestations of disputation in the political economy. Another common approach treats these conflicts as axiomatic and indicative of deep-rooted, even primordial, divisions between religious worldviews and their civilizational contexts. Neither position holds much possibility for conflict resolution. In his essay, Hassner puts forward as a third perspective a critical phenomenology that refuses to either dismiss the symbolic dimension or reify it. It is this perspective which I hope to elaborate here.

### **Defining and Defying Religious Identity**

The prevalence of conflict models of inter-religious interaction, in India and elsewhere, sees points of communal exchange as inherently disputed and essentially irreconcilable. Shared sites are understood, at least implicitly, to be zones of conflict, either potential or actuated. This leads to confusion when we try to account for the fact that countless people in India and elsewhere visit the holy places of other religions on a regular, even daily basis. Indeed there are some sites that are so much a part of the shared life of a community that it is impossible to determine to which religion the shrine, the ritual specialists, or the congregation might belong. The stories told feature people of multiple religious orientations, not necessarily pejoratively or as a demonstration of one faith's superiority over the other. Rituals appropriate to multiple religious traditions may be performed in a single space, as are rituals that cannot be easily categorized. Spatially and iconographically the places themselves deliberately thwart

categorization. The fact that practitioners of these traditions may refuse to identify themselves with a recognized institutional religion, i.e. 'Hinduism' or 'Islam,' should indicate how mistaken questions about religious identity may be. These labels are often so limiting that they do not accurately represent either the self-perception of the devotees or adequately account for the fullness of the traditions associated with these shrines.

In fact, many devotees at shared sacred sites refuse to accept or adopt sectarian religious labels at all. Those that do claim a label usually assert the belief that religious identity is a matter of background or preference not superiority or exclusivity. This reluctance to claim a single identity for self or space reveals several things. First, it challenges the pervasive religious politics in India, particularly the dominant position of the Hindu right, which demands unitary religious identities. This demand was expressed by one of the primary ideologues of the doctrine of Hindutva, or Hindu-ness, V.D. Savarkar (d. 1966), "Spread between river Indus to the Ocean is this land of India; whosoever deems it as fatherland and holy land is a Hindu. It may be that at some future time the word Hindu may come to indicate a citizen of Hindusthan and nothing else!" Whereas for non-Hindu Indians this bespeaks a desire for cultural annihilation or assimilation, as interpreted by a modern day admirer of Savarkar, this statement is proof of the love of Hinduism for these faiths. He asks, "Does this not show that Savarkar visualised that a time would come when Muslims would be included in the fold of the Hindus? If this is so, how can Hindutva be anti-Muslim?"<sup>36</sup> The present Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee has echoed and updated the perspective that Hindutva is equivalent to Indianness. In his New Year's address in 2003, Vajpayee asserted that Hindutva "presents a broad, all-encompassing view of human life," and should not be confused with religious extremism. On the contrary, "This Indianness or

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<sup>36</sup> J. Joglekar, "Veer Savarkar Vindicated," at <http://www.hvk.org/Publications/veer.html>.

*Bhartiyata* (which is not different from *Hindutva*) is what we should all celebrate and further strengthen."<sup>37</sup> Yet this *Bhartiyata-Hindutva* agenda does not embrace the possibility of shared sacred space. Rather the main groups, often labeled the *Hindutva* brigade or the *Sangh Parivar*, have actively sought not to share but to liberate. Liberation, in *Hindutva* jargon, means the elimination of Muslim shrines identified as having previously been Hindu. By refusing to accept religious labels of any sort, devotees at shared shrines thwart the *Hindutva* ideologues who seek to subsume all religions into one Hindu identity. The refusal to deal in the common currency of sectarianism is as an everyday act of resistance against majority-minority politics that rewards clarity of affiliation and seeks to homogenize the nation.

Second, the rejection of labels by devotees at *dargahs* reveals their understanding of the agendas implicit in such queries from an obvious outsider and demonstrates an instinctive refusal to further fuel an already well-fed fire. Indians are painfully aware of the ways in which religion is used by politicians, journalists, and scholars to define every dispute and conflict. Most Indians live in a much more complicated world in which such identities are not satisfactory explanations for animosity or violence. Many devotees whom I questioned at Haider Shaikh's tomb and other such places made concerted efforts to circumvent what they imagined were my assumptions about their religious affiliations by either assuming a non-denominational identity or by asserting the normalcy of so many religions being co-present at the shrine. Indeed, many Hindus and Sikhs cite the shrine's lack of concern for caste and class as a significant part of the shrine's appeal. They frequently explain that they love this ostensibly Muslim saint for the very reason that "*voh hamare sanjhe pīr hain*," he is our shared holy man, who did not believe in sectarian religious identity.

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<sup>37</sup> Atal Bihari Vajpayee, quoted in V. Venkatesan, "A Secular Veneer," *Frontline*, (Volume 20, Issue 3, January 18-30, 2003).

Third, this refusal reveals a genuine concern to maintain the shared sense of community at the shrine which is predicated on the simultaneous and harmonious presence of multiple religious groups. At the sites I studied in India this quality of openness was one of the most commonly given reasons for the appeal of the shrine. The bulk of social science research on inter-religious relations focuses on the quantifiable criteria of exchange such as group membership, economic indicators and voting records. But it is important to study not just the public and social behaviors of people in a multi-religious area, but also their religious behaviors. Examining the shared narrative and ritual life of a place gives a more realistic understanding of the true depth of integration in a community. Unconfined by numeric representations, the *meaning* of these relationships to people and the places they *inhabit* become much more vivid and accurate.

However, the rejection of sectarian religious identity within the confines or environs of a shared sanctuary does not therefore mean that religious identity has no meaning. Religious identities *do* matter to people and understanding how, when, and why is essential to our understanding of the broader phenomenon of inter-religious relations in India.<sup>38</sup> This is particularly important in relation to minority religious communities, such as Malerkotla, which are caught between national and local level identity politics. The former requires minority populations to project a defensive image that emphasizes their non-threatening, harmonious identity while the latter demands that inter-religious friction be suppressed and denied to

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<sup>38</sup> For several much more nuanced approaches to this question, see David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, (Gainesville; University Press of Florida, 2000). On the subject of the construction of religious identities in India, see Paul R. Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia," in *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, edited by John Hutchison and Anthony D. Smith, (London; Routledge, 2000), Mushirul Hasan, ed. *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, (Delhi; Manohar, 1998) and "Minority Identity and Its Discontents: Ayodhya and Its Aftermath," in *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism*, edited by Harbans Mukhia, Praful Bidwai, and Achin Vanaik, (Delhi; Manohar, 1996), Francis Robinson, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2000).

maintain the dominant ethic of harmony. To manage the tension between these two forces, the populations in the town and at the shrine engage in a process that Foucault termed subjection.<sup>39</sup> Subjection defines the process through which hegemonic ideologies, such as the logic of Hindu nationalism, are internalized and become self-regulating. In Malerkotla, the ethic of harmony is internalized and becomes integral to people's sense of self and place and is thus enacted through narratives, rituals, spatial practices, and regulatory processes. The residents take up the work of self-disciplining to conform to this most conducive community identity.

The awareness of their vulnerability that pervades the Muslim community throughout India calls into question whether sharing of a sacred site primarily identifiable as Muslim such as the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh is voluntary or the result of the coercive force of the dominant population. Ultimately there is little that Muslims could do to exclude the majority population from such sites even if they chose to do so. Hindu nationalist groups have been very active in claiming sites that they identify as originally Hindu. In addition to the famous case of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya which was destroyed in 1992 by Hindus who believed it was built on the birthplace of the god Rama, over 30,000 other Muslim shrines are claimed to have been built on Hindu sites.<sup>40</sup> Leaders of organizations such as the VHP go on regular tours to visit these places and agitate for their "liberation." In such a context, the managers of Haider Shaikh's and other *dargahs* may well believe that allowing and promoting Hindu participation is not only in their economic interests but also guarantees their survival. Rather than truly embracing a multi-confessional constituency, they may be "learning to love the inevitable." However, as indicated above, the sharing of the site may not be a matter of force alone. Such openness is consistent

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<sup>39</sup> See especially Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (New York; Vintage, 1977).

<sup>40</sup> Sita Ram Goel, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them, Volumes I and II*. (New Delhi; Voice of India, 1998).

with the situation at many other Sufi tomb shrines throughout South Asia, in Muslim majority and minority regions. Most significantly, many devotees at shared sites assert the lack of sectarianism as one of their reasons for attending the shrine. The narrative, ritual, and regulatory systems enacted at the shrine and in the town serve as checks and balances, able to sustain the ethic of harmony under internal and external stresses.

Demonstrating an authentic identity in response to these numerous stresses requires considerable personal and collective creativity. The logic of the nation-state exerts a powerful force on multiply identifying individuals through the institutional forms and structures that require and recognize only certain identity formations such as Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh. Simultaneously, however, people are engaged in the creative process of identity construction, making room for multiple identity positions. The dialectic between the brittle, friable identities manifested on demand for institutional and descriptive purposes and the more fluid, protean selves operating simultaneously is a crucial part of the ongoing identity formation process. The demand to produce recognizable identity markers contributes as folklorist Henry Glassie explains, to the loss of "existential authenticity" as a predetermined identity marker is not "the product of direct creative activity." To compensate for this loss of creativity people "construct dainty, friable selves, selves so fragile that everyone takes everything personally, and sensitivity replaces virtue in interactions."<sup>41</sup> These fragile and brittle identities are the identities of confrontation and expedience. They become the battlegrounds of debates about their place in the collectivity of communities at all levels (personal, familial, local, regional, national). However, such ascriptive identities mask the fluidity with which most people shift, whether deliberately

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<sup>41</sup> Henry Glassie, "On Identity," *Journal of American Folklore* (Volume 107, 1994), p. 240.

and consciously or instinctively and defensively, between possible selves, according to context, interest, opportunity, and constraint.<sup>42</sup>

So we return to Durkheim, who understood that collective representations of a community's identity, in his case the totem, depend upon regular ceremonies of renewal by the collectivity. To retain the meaning and power of a symbol requires that we "plunge them again into the very source of religious life: assembled groups."<sup>43</sup> Although I resist Durkheim's radical relocation of the sacred into the collectivity, the case of Malerkotla and its acts of self-representation through narrative and ritual performances of its idealized past *are* activated and maintained as meaningful by repeated reenactment and constant reference to symbolic actors and events. Furthermore, Durkheim forcefully argues that "concepts are collective representations," and as such the ethic of harmony that pervades Malerkotla provides a conceptual framework that contains multiple specific understandings.<sup>44</sup> The generality of the notion of an ethic of harmony, usually termed *bhaichar* or brotherhood by residents, contains the enormous variety of particular perspectives held by the multi-religious community. Thus the collective representation of Malerkotla as a zone of peace, imbued with an ethic of harmony does not indicate a uniformity of opinion, but rather a consistency of the framework for self-definition on which the community tacitly agrees.

### **Grounds for Competition**

Community memories inscribe the life of the Shaikh into the sacred landscape and of Malerkotla. The endowment of the land, the miracles of the saint, and the accounts of his

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<sup>42</sup> The notion of fluid identity is applied in India in the work of E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1984). See also Peter Gottschalk's extensive use of fluidity as a metaphor for multiple identity in *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*, pp. 103-107.

<sup>43</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields, (New York; Free Press, 1995), p. 350.

<sup>44</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, p. 437.

offspring are all very much parts of the town's identity, from the earliest recorded sources to the narrative accounts of today. Many features of Malerkotla's environment are associated with the lore of the saint. One constellation of stories, histories and observations involving the wall surrounding the tomb provide an interesting insight into the way in which variant and potential conflicting versions of the tomb's structural history are defused. This wall is a prominent feature at the tomb and associated with the miraculous posthumous affirmation of the Shaikh's status as a saint. In fact, the first story I ever heard about the *dargah* was that *jinn* had built the wall enclosing the grave in a single night after the saint's death. I later heard that angels guard the two entrances to the *dargah*, one at gate.<sup>45</sup> Both stories relate the incursion of divine agency into the mundane realm in order to protect the sanctity of the space. However, myriad human caretakers and devotees help with the mundane work of maintaining the holiness of the tomb. This bears witness to a human effort to maintain the integrity of the shrine by upholding those traditions that make it an open and accessible place for its multiple constituents.

Nearly everyone in Malerkotla knows that *jinn* built the wall, including the devotees who swarm the shrine during the mela who often know little else of the lore of the saint or the shrine. The only variation on this tale given by devotees was to change the identity of the miraculous builders. These may be variously identified as *devaton* (gods) or the god Visvakarma alone was sometimes credited, not surprising, as he is the patron deity for carpenters and builders. An addition to the tale heard from an elderly woman of the *khalīfah* family introduces a domestic element. This woman, who spends much of her day sitting at the *dargah*, says that the building of the wall took place as a local woman was grinding flour in the night. When the woman stopped grinding, the wall also ceased. She explains:

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<sup>45</sup> These angels are known to certain members of the community. One of them came about eighty years ago from Baghdad to serve Haider Shaikh, the other is of unknown origin but has been at the *dargāh* for many years as well.

When he [Haider Shaikh] died [*chola chorh diya*], in one night this wall was made. God knows who made it, the *jinn*. A woman used to grind flour with a manual grindstone [*chakki*], she used to wake up by four a.m. When she started grinding, the walls were made. When she stopped grinding, the walls stopped. No mud, no cement is used in these walls. It was made in one night. Nobody was seen building it. This stone came from somewhere during the night, it is not known from where, and the wall was formed.

By incorporating one of the archetypal images of Punjabi life, a woman grinding flour, into this narrative, the miraculous becomes mundane, the awesome seems approachable, and the transcendent is immanent.<sup>46</sup>

The wall, whatever its origin, is composed of large square-cut grey stones which are not found in any other extant structure in Malerkotla today. There are rounded towers at each corner of the site and a number of arched niches on the interior and exterior, some with decorative motifs or inscriptions reading, 'Allah.' The pavilion over the saint's tomb is relatively recent and some maintenance in terms of concrete and marble flooring has also taken place making it difficult to know the form of the original site. By some accounts, at the time of Haider Shaikh's arrival there were the ruins of a fortification at Bhumsi, and this led the saint to settle here when he sought a place to meditate on the bank of a tributary of the Sutlej. According to Iftikhar Ali Khan's history of the state, the construction of the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh is credited to the first true Nawab of Malerkotla, Bayzid (d. 1657). The neighborhood known as Bhumsi is reported by several residents and some written sources as the location of a Hindu kingdom that predated the Muslim occupation of the area. Indeed, the ironworker, who recounted the tale of Haider Shaikh and the horse cited above, asserts that skeletons 25 feet long have been dug up from a place called Puj ki Haveli. Others say that the Hindu raja of this place was called Malher Singh, and hence from his name the region is called Maler. This king was believed to be descended from

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<sup>46</sup> This image is so archetypal that it is one of three or four nostalgic renditions of Punjabi village life that can be seen for sale as posters all over the state and on the walls of countless homes and offices.

Raja Bhim Sen, one of the five Pandava brothers who are the protagonists of the great Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Yet these references are largely points of pride rather than contention, integrating Hindu history into the Muslim dominated landscape.

Yet such histories also provide potential grounds for competition. As recently witnessed in the court-ordered excavation at the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi site, claims to prior Hindu occupancy have resulted in cataclysmic battles between Hindus and Muslims with shock waves felt throughout India. Thus it is important to understand how in other cases where there is a potential point of disputation that such conflicts do not occur. In Malerkotla this potential lies in the case of the miraculous wall surrounding the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh. Having entered the two outer and one inner gate, the visitor approaches the shrine from the back, and faces the miraculous wall that encloses the tomb itself. This wall is indeed remarkable in its construction and materials. A conservation architect who saw the wall was immediately struck by it, remarking that it resembled architecture of the Khilji period (1290-1320). Furthermore, she noted that the arched niches in the walls were on three sides linteled, but those in the *qibla* wall, facing Mecca, were 'true arches' with keystones bearing the weight – an innovation brought to India by the Muslims. The corner pillars on the *qibla* wall side also show some signs that perhaps the structure had been reoriented as the stones of the wall are cut flush with the pillars, not bricked into each another as on the other sides of the wall. All this is to say that there is some architectural evidence to suggest that this structure substantially pre-dates Haider Shaikh, and that was potentially not Muslim, or at least not for devotional purposes, in its original design. It is impossible to make such a determination, but it is significant that despite an active local oral tradition that there had been a Hindu kingdom here previously and that this was the site of Raja Malher Singh's fort, no one challenges the miraculous origin story of this unusual wall.

Architectural and archeological arguments over the identity of sacred space are major industries in India today. From the Babri Masjid-Sri Ramjanmabhumi in Ayodhya to the supposed birthplace of Krishna beneath an Aurangzeb-built mosque, to images of the elephant god Ganesha in the wall of the Qutb Minar in Mehrauli, the movement to 'liberate' temples from their Muslim oppressors is pervasive and comprehensive. The VHP and similar groups have gone to great lengths to document sites they believe were formerly temples. In his notorious book *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them?* Sita Ram Goel indexes a few hundred of his claimed 'thousands and thousands' of temples which have been martyred in every state in India.<sup>47</sup> But even his painstaking accretion of a few of the “mute witnesses” that “carry unimpeachable evidence of the violence that was done to them, deliberately and by human hands,” fails to come across the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh, although several less popular *dargahs* in Punjab are located and listed.<sup>48</sup> It is significant that in spite of the availability of narratives as well as physical evidence of a counter-history at the *dargah* and the very public discourse of contestation over sacred sites, no such issue has ever been raised nor any challenge mounted to the story of the miraculous wall. However, as documented in several studies of Ayodhya and the demolition of

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<sup>47</sup> Sita Ram Goel, "Let the Mute Witnesses Speak," in *Hindu Temples --What Happened to Them (Vol. I)*, ed. Sita Ram Goel (Voice of India Publication), <http://www.bharatvani.org/books/htemples1/ch10.htm>

<sup>48</sup> In Punjab he lists only two sites in District Sangrur, both in Sunam. The Qadîmî Masjid (1414) and Ganj-i-Shahîdân are both identified as former temple sites. The other Punjab sites listed are:

*Bhatinda* District: Mazâr of Bâbâ Hâjî Rattan (1593). Converted temple.

*Gurdaspur* District. *Batala*, Jâmi' Masjid. Temple site.

*Jalandhar* District. *Sultanpur*, Bâdshâhi Sarai. Built on the site of a Buddhist Vjhâra.

*Ludhiana* District. (1) Dargâh and Masjid of Alî Sarmast (1570). Temple site. (2) Qâzî-kî-Masjid (1517). Temple site.

*Patiala* District. 1. *Bahadurgarh*, Masjid in the Fort (1666). Temple site. 2. *Bawal*, Masjid (1560). Temple site. 3. *Samana* (i) Sayyidoñ-kî-Masjid (1495). Temple site. (ii) Jâmi' Masjid (1614-15). Temple site. (iii) Masjid near Imâmbâra (1637). Temple site. (iv) Pîrzâda-kî-Masjid (1647). Temple site.

*Ropar* District. Jâmi' Masjid. Temple site.

the Babri Masjid, when such targeting does occur, the Muslim custodians of the sites have few options available to counter the challenges.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Muslim Minority: Local, Regional, and National**

In India, the ascriptive identities which come to the fore under stress are often religious. Although frequently masking or involving issues beyond those of faith and practice, such as economic, social, and personal conflicts, public contestations are often interpreted and thereby experienced through the frame of religious identity. Thus in India, the politics of religious identity are intense. Under the British, a system was instituted which distributed authority, autonomy and benefits such as the franchise to vote, employment, and university admissions on the basis of religion. This system essentially guaranteed that the population would have to aggregate and agitate for increased rights on the same basis upon which those rights were distributed – that is religion.<sup>50</sup> This fissiparous logic was intensified by the tendency of the British to regard many instances of unrest, agitation, or violence as essentially religious and endemic rather than multi-causal and therefore evidence of resistance and opposition to the injustices of colonial rule.<sup>51</sup> The struggle for independence, though initially engendering solidarity between India's many ethnic and religious groups ultimately forced these diverse groups apart. In particular, the division between the Hindu majority seeking a strong central government and Muslims desirous of a federated system in which Muslim majority regions would have relative autonomy, combined with British mismanagement of the negotiations for

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<sup>49</sup> The delicate position of the Muslim community in Ayodhya is discussed in van der Veer's *Gods on Earth*, and, most poignantly, in Nandy, et al. *Creating a Nationality*. In the latter work, several local Muslim resist discussions about the demolition out of fear of reprisal and a sense of their own vulnerability as a minority.

<sup>50</sup> See Amrita Basu, ed., *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1998), Bidwai, et al *Religion, Religiosity, and Communalism*, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1993), Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1990), and van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*.

<sup>51</sup> See especially Pandey, op cit.

independent India, resulting in 1947's Partition of India and Pakistan. The transfer of population of close to fifteen million people also resulted in anywhere from 200,000 to a million deaths. India, formerly twenty-five percent Muslim was reduced to about ten percent Muslim in a matter of months. The remaining Muslim population, still a sizeable minority, has struggled ever since to establish its right to exist and to be Muslim.

For these reasons, Muslim Indians are in a precarious position. For them, efforts to mobilize their community or appeal for their rights as citizens are often assailed by the Hindu nationalists, who dominate politics at the national level. Reserved positions for Muslims and other under-represented groups are seen as coddling and pandering to the Muslim vote. Muslims in India are suspected of extra-territorial loyalty, accused of being a fifth column within India, and reminded frequently that their continued survival depends wholly on the good will of the majority. This was forcefully articulated as recently as March 17, 2003 when K.S. Sudarshan, the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (one of the principle Hindu extremist organizations with an estimated enrollment of over a million) issued what has come to be known as the Bangalore Resolution. This statement declared, in part, "Let the Muslims understand that their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority."<sup>52</sup> Such stark reminders of their vulnerability contribute to the highly complicated process of identity formation for Indian Muslims. In order to be considered fully Indian by the Hindu majority, there is the sense that Islam must be given up, or at least subordinated to other identities that are not perceived to conflict with the dominant Indian identity. Hindu, on the other hand, is synonymous with Indian and requires no accommodation or adjustment. In order for Muslims to be successful in public life must curtail their Muslim-ness. An extreme example of this is the current President of India,

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<sup>52</sup> Source: "RSS Stands by Resolution," *The Hindu*, March 23, 2003. The context of the Resolution was actually a meeting in Bangalore, the sixth such meeting in a series of dialogues with Christian groups.

Abdul Kalam, who, although a Muslim, calls himself a *brahmacarī*, a technical term for a Hindu man at the stage of life in which he undergoes a period of celibate spiritual training.

Encouraging this type of self-discipline on the part of India's Muslims is clearly a goal of the RSS and its affiliate organizations, which include the ruling political party BJP, who believe that all Indians should accept the label of Hindu as referring to a cultural rather than a religious identity. Styled in this fashion, no true Indian should object to being called Hindu.

Muslims know, even without constant reminders by national leaders, such as Sudarshan and Vajpayee, that their continued survival depends upon the goodwill of the majority Hindu population. They are painfully confronted with proof of their vulnerability by events such as the pogroms in Gujarat in the spring of 2002 when Muslims were killed and displaced in enormous numbers.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, in the summer of 2003 several of the few cases brought against the perpetrators of the violence were initially dismissed due to witness intimidation and a lack of institutional will to prosecute the criminals.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, an agency of the State Department, has gone so far as to assert that "Despite India's democratic traditions, religious minorities in India have periodically been subject to severe violence, including mass killings," and further notes that "those responsible for the violence are rarely ever held to account." The report implicates the Hindu nationalist BJP

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<sup>53</sup> News media estimates around 2,000 people killed in violence that followed the burning of a train car containing Hindus returning from the flashpoint city of Ayodhya just outside a station in a Muslim neighborhood. Reports of the cause of the attacks vary, but in the aftermath there were systematic attacks on Muslims, their neighborhoods, and their businesses. After over two months of disturbances, over 100,000 people were displaced, again mostly Muslim. The state government in power during the violence called for early elections which they won handily, and as yet no major case against the perpetrators has been brought successfully.

<sup>54</sup> In perhaps the most famous case, a female witness was one of thirty-seven of seventy-three witnesses to recant, turning 'hostile' on the stand in a trial taking place over a year after the events of spring 2002. Zahira Sheikh was an eyewitness to the death of her father and thirteen others who were burned alive inside the family's bakery business during the violence. It was widely reported that she was threatened until she recanted by the time she reached the stand. Speaking out afterwards, she told of systematic harassment that led her and her relatives and other witnesses to believe that the government itself would destroy their lives if she continued to press charges.

<http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/oct/09best1.htm>

government, which rules the central government and in the state of Gujarat since 1998, observing, "an increase in such violence has coincided with the rise in political influence of groups associated with the Sangh Parivar." The empowerment of the Parivar has resulted in a growing "climate of immunity for the perpetrators of attacks on minorities." In this climate of fear amid clear evidence that pogroms against Muslims will not only go unpunished but provide substantial electoral gains, the nature of daily interactions between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others throughout India becomes a matter of urgent concern.

In his insightful article, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?," Gyanendra Pandey explores how Muslim Indians are not only constantly reminded of their vulnerability, but also are required to actively manifest their identities as loyal and legitimate citizens. This coercion is part and parcel of the nation-building process that requires constituting a core mainstream, inevitably generating minorities who do not fit the core. Whereas Hindus are identified as "natural" citizens, Muslims are regarded as aliens, having a home in Pakistan. A popular Hindu extremist slogan declares, "*Babur ūi santan, jao, Pakistan ya qabarstan,*" (Babur's descendents – Go! To Pakistan or the graveyard).<sup>55</sup> The process of healing the wounds of national division in 1947 involved the forging of new coherent historical narratives. In India, this emerged as an episodic Indian history in which a glorified Hindu period was traumatically ended by Muslim invasion that was eventually superseded by British rule, culminating ideally in a cyclic return to Hindu dominance with Independence in 1947. In the aftermath of Partition, leaders of the nationalist movement such as Vallabhai Patel (then Deputy Prime Minister) declared to the Muslim population,

you must change your attitude, adapt yourself to the changed conditions... Don't pretend to say, 'Oh, our affection is great for you.' We have seen your affection. Let us forget the affection. Let us face the realities. Ask yourself whether you

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<sup>55</sup> Babur was the first Mughal ruler of North India, ruling from 1526-1530.

really want to stand here and cooperate with us or you want to play disruptive tactics.<sup>56</sup>

The process of dividing India along religious lines resulted in each community believing that only their own partisans would be genuine custodians of their welfare. According to Pandey, one of the most effective ways in which the notion of Indian-ness was formulated after the Partition was through the making of a narrative of the nation's history. In order to generate community cohesion, the narrative constructed was inherently exclusionary and led to alienation and suspicion between the two communities. For its part, the Muslim community in India lacks the coherence and solidarity that the more organized elements in the Hindu community possess. Fragmented and divided, few explicitly Muslim political parties exist, few leaders have national level prominence or appeal, and the government regularly bans Muslim organizations as suspected extremists.<sup>57</sup> A brief glance at some of the major publications geared towards this population reveals an anger tempered by anxiety that is reflected in the confused and often contradictory positions taken by various Muslim leaders.<sup>58</sup> For example the May 31, 2003 edition of *The Milli Gazette*, a bi-monthly journal, contains the following headlines: "Blaming Muslims for Others' Mischief," "Muslims in India: Live Together to Survive," and "Hindus

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<sup>56</sup> Vallabhai Patel, cited in Gyanendra Pandey, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999), p. 620.

<sup>57</sup> There are no major nation-wide Muslim political parties and the only Muslim party with a significant constituency is the Muslim League in Kerala. National Muslim organizations include the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), the Jamaat-i Islami e-Hind (JIH), the Jamaat-i Ulama e-Hind (JUH). Eight Muslim groups are among the twenty-three banned by the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) passed in 2001. (Four are Sikh groups and the remainder relate to regional independence struggles in Assam, Manipur, Tamil Nadu, Sri Lanka, etc.)

<sup>58</sup> In another example, in order to defend the tenuous autonomy of the Muslim population in terms of their ability to self-adjudicate in matters of personal law the acceptability of early marriage for girls has recently been championed by certain elements. Although this does not appear to be a popular move among Muslim Indians, such efforts are difficult to counter from within the faith as any challenge to the fragile authority of prominent Muslim associations such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) who put forward this stipulation, may be regarded as treasonous and undermining the uncertain solidarity of the Muslim community at large.

Return to Their Homes with Muslim Help."<sup>59</sup> These statements from a moderate source indicate the range of issues Muslim Indians feel most deeply. The first headline expresses resentment of the constant scapegoating of Muslims for all manner of crimes and social ills. The second demonstrates a fear of isolation and the need for solidarity to ensure their continued existence. The last headline is an indication of the potential for cooperation and support across religious boundaries. It gives evidence that mutual friendship and support exists, validating and encouraging those who do reach out beyond their own community. These headlines also illustrate the cycle of minority consciousness. The actors in all of these stories are reduced to their religious identities. They are not neighbors, the unemployed, outcastes, or Maharashtrian – merely Muslim or Hindu. This choice of language indicates the degree to which the Muslim community represented by this journal both consolidates the Muslim community, generating solidarity and cohesiveness, and simultaneously circumscribes Muslims, setting them apart and reinforcing the sense of separateness between religions. Only the last headline indicates the possibility of crossing boundaries, but it does not suggest that the boundary does not exist.

### **Civil Society and Communal Conflict**

Recently, a great deal of scholarship on inter-religious and ethnic relations in India has focused on the role of civil society in promoting or undermining peaceful relations between communities in a given locale. Paul Brass and Stanley Tambiah have studied the networks of "riot specialists" (as Brass has termed them) or "institutionalized riot systems" in instigating,

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<sup>59</sup> *The Milli Gazette* is the mouthpiece of the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat, an organization spearheaded by Syed Shihabuddin, a former Member of Parliament and prominent Muslim rights activist. See [www.milligazette.com](http://www.milligazette.com). Other English language sources on Indian Muslim issues include *The Islamic Voice* ([www.islamicvoice.com](http://www.islamicvoice.com)) and the Indian Muslim Action Network ([www.imannet.org](http://www.imannet.org)). This last group is a branch of the Indian Muslim Council based in the USA.

organizing, and perpetuating violent conflicts within a region.<sup>60</sup> Ashutosh Varshney likewise focuses on civil society and the associational and everyday links between ethnic and religious groups as the location where stable societies are built and maintained.<sup>61</sup> He identifies, following Brass, an "institutionalized peace system" in areas which have long records of interethnic peace, the processes of which work at the level of civil society. Within civil society, Varshney identifies two levels, the associational and the everyday and he unequivocally asserts that formal associational interethnic links substantially exceed the importance of *everyday* interethnic links as the crucial element in sustaining peace in a region. According to Varshney, "Though valuable in itself," the warmth generated by daily interactions "does not necessarily constitute the bedrock for strong civic organizations."<sup>62</sup> Although I disagree with Varshney's minimization of the role of the everyday, his expansion of Brass' theory of the institutionalized peace system is a valuable one. As Varshney puts it, "Ethnic peace should, for all practical purposes, be conceptualized as an institutionalized channeling and resolution of ethnic conflicts. It should be visualized as an absence of *violence*, not as an absence of *conflict*."<sup>63</sup> His point that conflict is always present in society in some form is well taken. It is the societies that manage that conflict that succeed in sustaining stable communities and are characterized by a strong civil society. The question remains, which comes first: the stable civil society or the absence of violence within the community. In my view, this approach results in circular argumentation, seeking causation rather than accurate documentation and obscuring the cumulative impact on particular communities of successes and failures in handling internal and external stresses.

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<sup>60</sup> See Brass, *Theft of an Idol* and Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*, (New Delhi; Vistaar Publications, 1996).

<sup>61</sup> Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* and "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond," *World Politics*, (Volume 53, April 2001), 362-98.

<sup>62</sup> Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.

All these theorists have indeed identified a critical element in the creation and sustenance of positive community life in multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multicultural societies. Yet the focus on civil society and formal associational level leaves out the everyday and the impact of the common place, the quotidian, the mundane. Looking for ways in which individuals and groups resist violence in their midst, many theorists fix on the fragments seemingly unrelated, sporadic acts of kindness: a Hindu family shelters a Muslim neighbor during a riot, endangering their own safety,<sup>64</sup> a Muslim man who prevents the rape of a Hindu girl caught by a mob, or a Muslim trader who pays for the repair of a temple damaged during the violence. Most analysts of ethnic conflict *acknowledge* the existence of such acts, but they are rarely placed at the center of the study. Even Nandy in *Creating a Nationality* asserts that he is seeking out such moments of resistance, yet his account is one that emphasizes the debilitating impact on communities of the Ramjanmabhumi movement. In his study moments of mutual protection and support appear fragile and fleeting. Thus rather than understanding how a community stays together, we see how the unrelenting force of the Sangh Parivar undermines even the most integrated and interwoven community. However, Nandy also reminds us that communities do not come apart easily, neighbors do not kill, rape, and loot each other without enormous provocation and systematic erosion of their integrity. But what is the daily work of community maintenance that goes into healthy civic life?

### **The Communal "Problem": Theories of Ethnic Conflict and the Practice of Peace in Malerkotla**

Given the interest in self-preservation among minority groups, the civic harmony in Malerkotla could be explained in part by its unusual demography. As many residents observe,

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<sup>64</sup> Nandy, *Creating a Nationality* and Sudhir Kakar, *Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, Conflict*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1996).

every religious group here is a minority in some way. Although Hindus are a substantial national majority in India of eighty percent, they only constitute around twenty percent of the population in Malerkotla. Sikhs are a sixty-six percent majority in Punjab, but locally are just under ten percent. Muslims are seventy percent majority locally, but are less than two percent in the state and about thirteen percent nation-wide. Perhaps due to this condition of mutual vulnerability, therefore, all the communities in Malerkotla seek to build coalitions with one another. While this is an accurate observation and one of the factors in maintaining the peace, it is by no means a sufficient explanation. Demographics alone do not account for the situation in Malerkotla. Certain factors must be in place to allow a principle of mutual protection to have force and appeal.

Another common explanation for the non-event of communal violence in India is rooted in the political economy. A high degree of competition in the political and economic spheres is generally assumed to contribute to civic strife. In Malerkotla, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, there is considerable competition in the economic sphere and increasing competition in electoral politics as the cachet of former rulers diminishes and the lineage dies out, the last Nawab having had no children. Yet there is no political capital gained by religiously divisive programs. Economic competition seems to work out through the market, as Malerkotla has become the main industrial hub for its district. Government incentive programs and entrepreneurship have raised the stakes considerably. Yet Malerkotla's social fabric remains intact.

A past history of inter-religious conflict or violence is frequently cited as an exacerbating factor in communal relations. In areas that experience endemic hostility or repeated acts of violence, new contestations are more likely to take root. However, Malerkotla's history is as

replete with periods of conflict as with times of cooperation between the local Muslim majority and the Hindu and Sikh internal and external populations. Since Partition the conflicts of the past have been left behind and are rarely discussed by locals from any community. The critical issue, therefore, is not the existence or non-existence of such a past history, but what happens to that history, and how is it that the histories conducive to coalition building and civic harmony come to dominate the public and private spheres. In Malerkotla an active process by locals and visitors maintains an ideal degree of openness and multivocality even as dissenting and divisive elements are actively suppressed.

It is common in riot-prone areas for there to be a surfeit of rumors accusing members of other religious groups of all kinds of malfeasance, particularly in terms of sexual or sacred violence.<sup>65</sup> When reports of kidnappings and rape, desecrations of shrines or tombs circulate unchecked and are actively transmitted by interest groups, a critical mass of ambient frustration is crystallized and focused upon a particular community. This system of transvaluation and focalization provides a point upon which anger over the rumor's substance and dissatisfaction over any number of issues become dangerously conjoined, creating a fertile ground for the incitement of violence.<sup>66</sup> In Malerkotla in recent years a number of rumors have circulated which might well have led to conflict between Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. However, these rumors have been effectively managed by local leaders and community members, minimizing the deleterious impact on inter-religious relations.

Another frequently cited cause for social instability in a community is the presence of activist and reformist religious movements with charismatic leadership. These groups tend to

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<sup>65</sup> Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, Gyanendra. Pandey, "The Long Life of Rumor," *Alternatives* (Volume 27, no. 2, 2002), and Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*.

<sup>66</sup> The notion of transvaluation and focalization is put forward by Stanley Tambiah in his study of ethnic violence, *Leveling Crowds*.

focus their activities on cleaning up their own communities and bringing about a renaissance of faith, practice, and social behavior. Organizations like the Tablīghī Jamaʿat, Jamaʿat-i Islāmī, Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, Sanatan Dharm, and others have all been identified as groups whose purificatory activities often also involve an increased differentiation of one religion from another.<sup>67</sup> In particular many of these organizations target those beliefs and practices that are viewed as dangerously syncretic or non-orthodox. Given that there is a tradition of saint worship in the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu religions, and a plethora of sites where these traditions overlap, it is not surprising that reformist groups often seek to eliminate such places and practices. In Malerkotla, however, in spite of the local activity of all of these organizations and others, saint veneration has not diminished nor have inter-religious relations generally been undermined. On the contrary, local leaders from those groups tend to reach out to each other.

One of the most common local explanations for the ambient peace in Malerkotla is one that is wholly neglected in the social science literature. Residents and visitors almost universally attribute Malerkotla's present idealized harmony and the safety of the area during Partition to one of several divine interventions. Some assert that since a Sufi saint founded the settlement, Haider Shaikh's ongoing interest in and impact on his territory is observable in the harmonious relations there. Others claim that Malerkotla is blessed because one of the past rulers of the town, Sher Muhammad Khan, had spoken out against the execution of the two young sons of the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh. Still others believe that God, given various names and worshiped in various ways, is responsible for the preservation of the town, for what reason God alone knows. The prevalence of such explanations bears witness to both the profound religiosity of the community and to the inadequacy of any common social, political, or economic theories to

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<sup>67</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

account adequately for Malerkotla's idealized identity. Although establishing the veracity of a blessing is wholly beyond the scope of this study or my ability to demonstrate, the impact of the conviction is observable and measurable in the narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices in the shrine and town.

Although *dargahs* are the final resting places for Muslim saints, they have lasting significance for people of all faiths. Such shrines are everywhere in India. Everyone knows about them, everyone sees them, many people believe in their power. Yet despite this ubiquity, the impact of these sites of exchange on India's religiously plural communities is relatively unexplored. This seems strange in a society that is assiduously dedicated to the interrogation of inter-religious relationships. This lacuna in the research on communal exchange is perhaps not surprising given that religious differences are more conducive to study. By separating and dividing religious traditions along social, philosophical, ritual, practical, or any other lines of inquiry, clear points of comparison emerge. These comparisons then enable further scrutiny in order to discern their origins, manifestations, and implications. Studying convergence is much more difficult. Arenas of exchange are, after all, the places where the lines blur. These zones are characterized by slippage from one distinct faith to another, from one tradition's belief system into another's complex of rituals. Here the rules are bent and broken – they do not apply. The clarity of concepts collapses in proximity to similarity. But this is the nature of society. Rules are merely ideal referents; philosophies are idealized worlds. On streets and in homes people constantly redraw these lines and reimagine these worlds.

Malerkotla is an ideal site to study these dynamics since Punjab is a state that has experienced a great deal of religious violence – perhaps more than any other region in India. Though not riot-prone in the sense that Gujarat or the city of Bombay are, the division of

Partition and the period of terrorism in the 1980's and 1990's took an unfathomable toll on Punjab leaving scars of fear and suspicion – and very few Muslims. It is significant that in the midst of these troubles Malerkotla was peaceful. It is important to study such locations because if we fail to grasp the complex of behaviors that promote the simultaneous presence of multiple, often conflicting, understandings of a site, partially understood histories will continue to dictate the possibilities of future realities. By focusing on explosive or exploded places, we see only the violent or overtly contentious aspects of conflict over shared places and miss the more subtle micropolitics of managing exchange that prevails in most locations.

### **Making Place, Making Peace**

In plural communities, engaging in joint business ventures, forming societies, and organizing on a neighborhood or community level requires strong links on the everyday level. Although it is impossible to determine whether, in Varshney's terms, formal associational or everyday connections are necessary preconditions for the existence of the other, I argue that the everyday is both less quantifiable and more essential to sustaining harmony. Thus we have before us a network of causes and explanations for the quality of communal relations in Malerkotla. Demographics, political economy, historical disputes, rumor-mongering, reformism, and divine intervention, none of these alone are sufficient. Rather than seek a single set of reasons or devise a flow chart of causes and effects, in this project I hope to adequately represent the way in which the web functions and is maintained by a network of practices.

This combination of reasons for sharing sacred and civic spaces creates an interesting conundrum. No single factor can or should be isolated as the key element of a stable society without which the delicate balance of exchange would collapse. Indeed, the combination of social and political institutional will, integrated civil societal institutions, everyday interaction

and integration, religious tradition, and powerful motivating ideals are all activated by the existence and maintenance of a dominant symbolic identity and ideology at Haider Shaikh's tomb and in Malerkotla. This identity and ideology is one of peace, communal harmony, and inter-religious exchange.

It is important to note that situations of peaceful exchange are not exclusive to Punjab or to India. Similar research at shared sites in Palestine done by Glenn Bowman bears out this sensibility. Bowman describes these shrines as *semantically multivocal*. Semantic multivocality allows multiple users to maintain relations with a site that is central to their local and/or religious identity without over-determining the site and rendering it fixed and unavailable to contradictory uses and interpretations. In Bowman's study in Palestine, as in my study in Punjab, the openness of a shrine is deliberately maintained through actions and interactions among the constituents that are keyed to allow for a lack of uniformity of belief and practice. Indeed, the communities in which such places are situated often value shared sites precisely for their quality of openness. As Bowman puts it, "while the miraculous power seen to be resident there served as a general pretext for the gathering of local persons of Muslim and various Christian persuasions, the specific reasons people gave for attending ranged from the need for cures through the demands of religion, to the pleasures of conviviality."<sup>68</sup> Thus a common primary motivator for allegiance to the shrine, its miraculous power, facilitates and perhaps even draws from another powerful factor in the site's appeal: its multi-religious constituency. Furthermore, Bowman found that part of the appeal of the shrines shared by Muslims and Christians was the opportunity to demonstrate symbolic, non-confrontational solidarity against the Israeli government.<sup>69</sup> At least within the confines of the shrines, normally disempowered minorities exercise a degree of

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<sup>68</sup> Glenn Bowman, "Response to Robert Hayden" cited in Hayden, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> Glenn Bowman, "Nationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories," *Man* (Volume 28, 1993).

autonomy. United in their resistance to Israeli authority, the symbolic value of public exchange at the shrines demonstrates an unforeseen impact of the usually divisive religious politics in Israel-Palestine to intensify the bonds between the disempowered. Although the degree of disenfranchisement experienced by Muslims and Christians in the occupied territories far surpasses the conditions of Muslims in Hindu majority India, the techniques of resistance to domination bear strong family resemblances.

For both disempowered populations, open opposition is a risky option. In Israel and Palestine such opposition has taken virulent and violent forms, contributing to a cycle of retributive attacks from both sides. Those Muslims, Christians, and Jews who choose not to engage in violence to voice their anger at Israeli policies make use of other modes of self-expression. In this context, shrine worship functions as a 'weapon of the weak,'<sup>70</sup> an oppositional, but easily concealed, act of resistance to the dominant politics of religious antagonism. For Muslim minority population in India, such strategies are essential so as to avoid even closer scrutiny and suspicion of their activities. For the underprivileged or lower caste Hindus who do not have access to authority within the brahmanical Hindu temple structure, the *dargahs* of *pīrs* are comparatively quite welcoming.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, most Hindu and Sikh devotees remark on Haider Shaikh's lack of regard for caste and creed as one of their primary reasons for attending his tomb. This clearly indicates that these marginalized populations engage the *dargah* consciously as a place where they are free from the oppression of brahmanical Hindu

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<sup>70</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>71</sup> In a large segment of Hinduism only the highest caste, or section of society, the *brahmins*, are traditionally allowed to fill the role of temple priests. Classical brahmanical Hinduism excludes untouchables and women from temples and enforces caste consciousness. The Sikh tradition distinguishes itself from Hinduism, in part, with its lack of regard for caste pollution. However, caste, ethnicity, and class prejudice are by no means absent from either of the supposedly egalitarian Sikh and Muslim traditions in India.

society. Thus Haider Shaikh's *dargah* becomes a site of symbolic resistance to the religious divisions that overshadow Muslims, Sikhs, and low or out caste Hindus.

### **Structure of the Study**

This dissertation follows a fairly straightforward structure. Having identified the narrative, ritual, and regulatory aspects of inter-religious exchange as a key interactive zone contributing to a peaceful community, each section of this work will explore one of these elements. In order to lay the groundwork for this analysis, Chapter One examines how the multi-religious community of Malerkotla has lived together historically. Drawing on available histories and local knowledge I will detail Malerkotla's complicated history of inter-religious relations – much of it violent. Part One explores the narrative element of exchange: Chapter Two documents oral and written narratives related to Haider Shaikh and his shrine, while Chapter Three explores the narratives relating to the town more broadly. From these two explorations it emerges that the active generation of a harmonious identity increases, culminating in the present day oral accounts as the community strives to present a picture that maximizes the dominant ethic of harmony. It is my contention that this process accelerates post-Partition due to the combined impact of Malerkotla's successful management of that crisis and their suddenly high-profile role as the only Muslim constituency in Indian Punjab. This process is further documented in Part Two which addresses the ritual levels of exchange in the *dargah* as well as in the streets and homes of Malerkotla. Chapter Four on the tomb cult explores the ritual practices past and present engaged in by Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus. Not only do these rituals occur in full view of each other, but they may require inter-religious interaction for their efficacy – as, for example, most devotees seek contact with the Muslim descendants of the saint, called *khalifahs*. The delicate balance of these practices is carefully maintained in order to permit the often

contradictory beliefs, behaviors, and theologies to coexist and even interpenetrate. Chapter Five details the ritual life of the town in two senses. One is the formalized and repetitive modes of interaction that are central to the ethic of harmony and traditions of the town at large. In the second sense, the ritual life of Malerkotla is illuminated through an exploration of ritual conflicts past and present and how they have been managed. Part Three turns to the regulatory regimes that structure and organize these two arenas of exchange. Chapter Six focuses on the two forms of authority at the *dargah* – the *khalifahs* and the *chelas*, Hindu and Sikh devotees who experience possession by the saint's spirit. Chapter Seven unpacks the history, especially post-1947 and the dissolution of the princely state of Malerkotla, of authority in the civil and political spheres. It excavates electoral and minority religious politics in Malerkotla and Punjab, demonstrating the careful balance of power that is maintained in order to sustain the tenuous position of this Muslim majority community in a Sikh majority state in a Hindu majority nation. I conclude by reconstructing this entire process of harmonization as it is enacted on all three levels of exchange. I argue that this process intensifies in post-Partition Punjab as the memories of violence that occurred around – but not in – Malerkotla remain vivid, as does the consciousness of Muslim vulnerability in a country where Hindu attacks on Muslims go unprosecuted.

Thus this study of the ritual, narrative, and regulatory practices at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh and the town of Malerkotla will demonstrate how shared shrines and shared civic space promote and even generate a dynamic of inter-religious engagement deliberately designed to promote cooperation and discourage discord. In particular, these shared spaces illuminate the ways in which the highly fraught relations between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are carried out on a daily basis through these symbolic zones of exchange. At these sites non-Muslims and

Muslims alike engage Islamic space ritually and discursively, deriving spiritual and political benefit from the inter-religious experience. As we shall see, stories and personal testimonies activate the multi-confessional shrine and town as symbolic identity markers, ritual conflicts are circumvented through dialogue and mutual validation. And finally, regulatory competition at the managerial, proprietary, and political levels is negotiated and managed in both arenas of shrine and town in order to maintain the dominant ethos of harmony. Contrary to the view that shared shrines and multi-religious communities are inherently conflicted, at these places although distinctions between religions are often made, discrepancies are rarely seen as antagonistic or threatening. On the contrary, the multivocality of the shared ritual, narrative and administrative life of the shrines and the town is not only part of the appeal but is also a source of their effective power. Thus, these shared sacred places serve as powerful resources for community building and the promotion of harmonious civil society. As interactive nodes between individuals, religions, genders, classes, age groups, etc., the bodily and discursive practices and experiences at the site are opportunities for the public performance of a community and individual identity characterized by openness and inclusiveness rather than exclusivity and hostility.

### **Methodological Statement**

This is a curious sort of religious and historical ethnography. As my goal was to gain as deep and broad a sense of how this shared sacred site and the shared social space of the town related to one another both now and in the past, my methods for gathering information were quite varied. I did extensive research at both the Punjab State Archives in Patiala and the India Office Collections (OIOC) in London. These two sources provided a great deal of information about the town, particularly from the British perspective. The Patiala archive was, unfortunately, limited in its scope. The bulk of the material there was financial documents relating to the state,

particularly from the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup> I also explored written histories of Punjab from the early eighteenth century to the present, including two English histories of the ruling clan written by members of the ruling elite.

In addition to these written sources and others, my principal methods were the classic anthropological techniques of extended interviews and participant observation. However, I chose not to enter Malerkotla with a survey under my arm and a list of "types" of people to talk to. Although such methods lend themselves to certain types of scientific analysis and the drawing of tables and diagrams, I feel that this also distorts the data sought and the information given. Although no method of observation from inside or outside is free of influence or change, I tried to see how the shrine and the town would present themselves to me. Following, in a sense, the model of Walter Benjamin's *flaneur* who traversed nineteenth century Paris by allowing the city to unfold itself, letting his footsteps be guided by the built and natural environment, I sought to perceive Malerkotla's physical and discursive landscape as they *are*, not how they are expected or desired to be. Thus I wandered, from street to street and house to house. I sat at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh at all hours of the day and night on festival and ordinary days. I visited as many of the other tomb shrines in the area that I could identify and spoke with devotees and caretakers. I went to Sikh gurdwaras, Hindu temples, Jain centers, and the local Christian church. I sat in shops and visited farms. I spoke in the local mixture of Hindi-Urdu-Punjabi to women and men, old and young, rich and poor, and to members of every religious group I encountered. As much as possible, or reasonable, I tried to go with the flow,

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<sup>72</sup> In spite of my best efforts I was never able to obtain any more state documents. Some reports claim that a fire consumed much of the ancient material about Malerkotla. Other say that one of the last Nawab's wives, who is still alive, has refused to turn over any of the documents in her possession for the historical record. According to another resident, all these papers were sold for their weight due to the dire financial straits of the remaining royal family. I inquired from Begum Mujawwar Niza about the papers and was not encouraged to pursue the search. She did, however, show me some photographs from her wedding to the Nawab in 1947 and several other state functions. She also taught me an excellent card game and delighted in beating me at it. The whereabouts of any additional state documents being difficult to discover, I chose to focus on the living history of Malerkotla.

expecting that that flow would reveal to me Malerkotla's natural geography on the physical, spiritual, political, and social levels. However, I did modify this organic method by pursuing leads obtained from the historical records and by seeking out those places and people that seemed to run counter to the dominant ideology and identity of peaceful interaction. I cannot say whether I would have learned what I learned had I pursued a more systematic method, but I am sure I used a method that I believe is appropriate to the type of study I wanted to do, that is to understand how a "successful" plural community goes about the daily work of actually living together.

I tape recorded over one hundred and twenty hours of audiocassette and about twenty hours of digital video. With the invaluable assistance of Dr. Neelam Sherwani, then a PhD candidate in Botany at Punjabi University, these interviews were translated into English. As a local to Malerkotla, Dr. Sherwani's understanding of idiom and the unique mixture of languages spoken was crucial. However, any errors in this dissertation are mine alone.

In representing myself in this dissertation I attempt to document my presence and then allow the reader to evaluate my possible impact on people and conversations by including my own questions in the many direct quotations from those whom I interviewed and with whom interacted. However, I am not an advocate of the type of anthropology that ends up being more about the academic than about the context of the study. I try to walk a middle path and the reader may judge if I am successful.

## Chapter One:

### Malerkotla Past and Present

#### Overview

Sitting in the Jama# Masjid one fall afternoon in 2000, I asked an 85-year-old Muslim man and former teashop proprietor to describe the community atmosphere in Malerkotla. He responded, "Everyone comes and goes in unity. There is no difference between people. They come and go, sit, eat and drink together in unity – Hindu, Sikh and Muslim people." Most people in Malerkotla shared his perception. For over a year and a half I asked whether the town's reputation as a peaceful place was true and I was almost universally assured that this reputation is not merely a media or politically driven idealization of the town. Malerkotla residents seem genuinely to believe, and genuinely wish to project the image, that their hometown enjoys an unusual amount of community harmony and inter-religious friendship. This contrasts with people in other places where such questions about inter-religious relations drew lists of mutual grievances. In Malerkotla the term most frequently employed to characterize the communal atmosphere is *bhaichar*, meaning brotherhood or brotherly affection. This general perception reaffirms the public reputation of this large industrial town (pop. 106,802) as a near utopia of inter-religious harmony. When Malerkotla appears in the news, it is often with headlines such as "Malerkotla: An Island of Peace," (*India Today*, July 15, 1998), or "Malerkotla Muslims Feel Safer in India," (*Indian Express*, August 13, 1997), or "Where Brotherhood is Handed Down as Tradition" (*The Times of India*, March 2, 2002). Malerkotla's reputation as a peaceful place and its symbolic importance as the only Muslim majority region in Indian Punjab combine to give the area a somewhat exalted status.

Perhaps most remarkable, the story of peace is true, at least in terms of the recent history of the area. During Partition the town did not experience the bloodshed and violence that devastated the rest of the state. Furthermore, Malerkotla has transcended tensions and overcome the strains of what Sudhir Kakar terms "precipitating incidents" in subsequent times of inter-religious tension, such as in the aftermath of Ayodhya and Godhra.<sup>73</sup> Precipitating incidents are events, rumored or actual, major or minor, that provide the impetus and pretense for violence and social conflict. Yet the peace in Malerkotla is not simply an extension of the status quo since 1947. Throughout the history of Malerkotla as a kingdom (1454 to 1947) there have been numerous instances of inter-religious conflict ranging from wars to riots. Furthermore, nowadays although there is a substantial majority of Muslims in the town (about seventy percent) they by no means have a monopoly on either economic or political power. Two of the most commonly identified exacerbating conditions that make communities "riot-prone" or open to inter-religious conflict are a history of inter-religious conflict and competition in the economic and political arenas. Yet peace prevails in Malerkotla since 1947 and subsequent tensions have been easily and quickly dissipated. In this section, I will provide a synopsis of Malerkotla's history, situating the territory within the broader context of Punjabi and Indian history. Through this historical excursus, the peace in Malerkotla during and after the Partition of the subcontinent will appear less as an anomaly and more as the product of active efforts on the part of local authorities and residents to make the unique history of the town a symbolically significant resource for community building and engaged pluralism in the present.

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<sup>73</sup> Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*.

## **The Past was a Sovereign Country**

Founded in 1454, Malerkotla was a princely state until 1948 when, in the aftermath of India's Independence from Britain, these autonomous units were dissolved. From 1454 to the present Malerkotla's borders and population has fluctuated widely, from 8,000 square miles in the late seventeenth century to only three square miles in the early eighteenth. At the time of its dissolution, Malerkotla was 167 miles square with a population of 85,000. The rulers of the kingdom were Pathan Afghans distantly related to the Afghan clan of the Lodhis, the last dynasty of the Delhi Sultanate prior to the advent of Mughal power in 1526. The first Lodhi Sultan Bahlol is said to have granted the territory to the progenitor of the Malerkotla ruling family, the Sufi saint Shaikh Sadruddin Sadar-ī Jahan, popularly known as Haider Shaikh. The original settlement was known as Maler. This neighborhood still exists and surrounds the tomb of the founding Shaikh. Kotla came into being in 1659 when a descendent of Haider Shaikh received permission from the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) to build a fortified city. After this period the *jagīr* or land grant originally endowed by Bahlol Lodhi was confirmed as a hereditary state and the ruler was given the title of Nawab. As the Mughal Empire declined after the death of Aurangzeb, Malerkotla increasingly sought independence from Delhi and frequently allied with tribes of Afghan invaders, in particular Ahmad Shah Abdali (d. 1773) whose Rohilla forces dominated the region of Punjab in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>74</sup> In the late eighteenth century Malerkotla alternated between alliances and battles with the larger Sikh states surrounding the small kingdom such as Patiala, Nabha, and Jind. As Sikh power in the Punjab consolidated under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century, Malerkotla and these neighboring Sikh States acceded to the British in 1809 in order to preserve their territorial integrity and a

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<sup>74</sup> Abdali also defeated the Marathas in the second Battle of Panipat in 1761. The Marathas were a central and western Indian based dynasty who, like Abdali and the Rohilla Afghans, took advantage of the power vacuum at Delhi.

degree of autonomy. In 1947 three simultaneous events – the end of British power, Indian independence, and the Partition of the subcontinent – left Malerkotla as the only significant Muslim principality in East Punjab on the Indian side of the new border.<sup>75</sup> With the dissolution of princely states in 1948, Malerkotla joined the administrative unit known as Patiala and the East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). PEPSU was dissolved in 1954 and the territory of Malerkotla was absorbed into the Punjab State, District Sangrur. Now the area known as Malerkotla is reduced to the town alone. Surrounding villages still look to Malerkotla as the largest local center of industry and commerce, but there are no longer direct governmental links. The town remains the only Muslim majority region in Indian Punjab.

### **The Coming of Haider Shaikh**

Both oral and written histories of Malerkotla usually begin with the arrival of the Sufi saint, Shaikh Sadruddin Sadar-ī Jahan. The Shaikh is described in one history of the dynasty as a Sherwani Afghan from Khurasan, "a very pious man of much celebrity in his time."<sup>76</sup> Haider Shaikh, as he is popularly known, was sent to the region from Multan by his spiritual preceptor.<sup>77</sup> He settled on the bank of a small river to engage in religious devotions, *#ibadat*. According to numerous sources, in 1451 Bahlol Lodhi encountered the saint on his way to conquer Delhi at which point he established the Lodhi Dynasty (which lasted until 1526).<sup>78</sup> Bahlol Lodhi asked the saint for a blessing that he would be victorious in the war. After conquering Delhi, the Sultan

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<sup>75</sup> The caveat to this is the town of Qadian, the home base of the Ahmadiyya, mentioned in the Introduction, p. 1, fn 2. The group is not active in Malerkotla.

<sup>76</sup> Iftikhar Ali Khan, *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin Sadar-i-Jahan of Malerkotla (1449 A.D. To 1948 A.D.)*, edited by R.K. Ghai, (Patiala; Punjabi University Press, 2000 [1948]), p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Multan, now in Pakistan, was a great center for Sufism, particularly the Suhrawardī *silsila* (lineage). Although its heyday was in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries during the time of the renowned Sufis Baha-ud Din Zakariyya (d.1262) and his grandson Shaikh Ruknud-Din Abu'l Fath (d. 1335), it would still have been the most important western Indian center of the Suhrawardī in the mid-fifteenth century when Haider Shaikh arrived.

<sup>78</sup> The date for Bahlol Lodhi's conquest of Delhi is typically given as 1451 when the Sayyid dynasty, which ruled briefly in the first half of the fifteenth century, fell. Romila Thapar, *A History of India, Volume I*, (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 280.

returned and in 1454 married his daughter Taj Murassa Begum to Shaikh Sadruddin, and gave her a number of villages in the region as a marriage portion.<sup>79</sup> The saint and his Afghan wife had two children – a daughter, Bibi Mangi, and a son, Hassan. In 1458, Haider Shaikh also married the daughter of Rai Bahram Bhatti, the Rajput ruler of Kapurthala, a nearby principality, and had two more sons, #Isa and Māsa.<sup>80</sup> The saint died on 14 Ramadan, 922 hijri/1515 C.E.<sup>81</sup> The eldest son Hassan was denied the inheritance of the *jagīr* (land grant), having fallen out of favor with his father.<sup>82</sup> Thus, after Haider Shaikh’s death, #Isa inherited the *jagīr*, Māsa became a dervish and did not marry, and the descendants of the disowned Hassan became the caretakers, or *khalīfahs*, of the saint’s tomb.

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<sup>79</sup> The 1904 *Gazetteer* lists the original grant as twelve large and 56 small villages. The 12 large villages are Maler, Hadiaya, Barnala, Phul, Mahraj, Langowal, Sanghera, Pail, Ghamkaur, Amrgarh, Balian and Amlah. Later under Sher Muhammad Khan, this was increased with grants of *parganas* by Aurangzeb to thirteen: Bahlolpur, Khizrabad, Khamano, Isru, Pail, Dhamot, Amlah, Bahadson, Kapurgarh, Nauganwa, Sherpur, Balian and Maler. Although these roughly correspond to the original villages settlement, the intervening century and a half had clearly resulted in a vastly larger estate through continued patronage from the Mughal dynasty. *Maler Kotla State Gazetteer*, (Lahore; The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904). This arrangement seems typical of the types of land grants given in the pre-Mughal period. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, “Wajh-i-ma'ash Grants under the Afghan Kings (1451-1555),” *Medieval India: A Miscellany*, (London; Asia Publishing House, 1972).

<sup>80</sup> The parentage of these children is given in accordance with Iftikhar Ali Khan's history (page 6) and his grand-uncle, Inayat Ali Khan's *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*, page 7. The 1904 *Gazetteer* claims that the three sons were born to Taj Murassa Begum and that Bibi Mangi was the only child of the Kapurthala Rajput union, page 2. Rose's *Glossary* asserts that following the saint's death his lineage was divided between the offspring of these two women, the rulers and Nawabs coming from the Rajput woman and the *khalīfahs* of the shrine from the Sultan's daughter, Taj Murassa Begum. However, the *Gazetteer* states that both lines are descended from the Lodhi princess and that only the ill-fated daughter, Bibi Mangi was born to the Kapurthala Rajput woman. In *Chiefs and Families of Note in Punjab* by Colonel Massey (Lahore; Civil and Military Press, 1940), only 'Isa is mentioned but he is said to be the Lodhi Princess' son. All sources assert that it is 'Isa's lineage that rules the state though Hassan was the elder, regardless of his maternal parentage. There is some ongoing disputation about this heritage between the caretakers of the shrine and the lineage of the Nawabs, both of whom prefer to claim pure Pathan Afghan heritage.

<sup>81</sup> The death date of the Shaikh is typically given as 1515, but the *hijri* date actually converts to 11 October, 1516. Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History* gives Haider Shaikh's ruling dates as 1449 – 1508. The *Gazetteer of Native States* (1908) gives 1466 as the date of foundation of Maler. Denzil Ibbetson, E.D. MacLagan, and H.A. Rose, in *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, (Lahore; Government Printing House, 1919 (1883)) lists 1454. In all cases, the source for these dates is not given.

<sup>82</sup> Officially the land was only a *jagīr*, not an independent kingdom. In return for the right to derive income from the property, the authority was expected to return a portion of his receipts to the overlord at Delhi and to depute a certain number of troops upon demand. Furthermore, upon the death of a *jagīrdār*, the rights over the land would have to be conferred by the central powers onto his descendents. If the ruler was uncertain of the landlord's loyalty or in need of land to give as a reward to some other retainer, the property could change hands.

Although #Isa inherited the bulk of the state, a portion went to Hassan and his heirs, setting a precedent of dividing the *jagīr* among the male heirs that would result in constant disputes persisting to this day.<sup>83</sup> Under Akbar, Maler (as it was still known at that time) was a part of the Delhi *Sāba*,<sup>84</sup> subsidiary to the Sarkar of Sirhind.<sup>85</sup> Six generations after Haider Shaikh, Bayzid Khan became the first true ruler of the territory, after he was awarded the title of Nawab by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. Under Bayzid the estate was enlarged, and he received permission to build a fortified city in 1657, which came to be called Kotla, meaning fortress.<sup>86</sup> Bayzid supported Aurangzeb in his campaign against his elder brother Dara Shikoh for the throne at Delhi. Having thus gained great favor with the court, he was allowed to build the walled city and to strike coins. According to a history written by Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of the kingdom, Bayzid was responsible for the building of the tomb shrine for his progenitor Haider Shaikh.

### **Sher Mohammad Khan and the *haa da naara* :**

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<sup>83</sup> 'Isa's share went to his son Muhammad Shah who first lost it as a punishment for his involvement in a murder plot. However, he subsequently increased it through some skillful maneuverings during the unsettled period of the Mughal Emperor Humayun's exile at the hands of Sher Shah. This also served the purpose of cutting off the *khalīfah* cousins from any claim to the property, as it was now his by purchase, rather than through hereditary claim. The Hassan branch became wholly dependent on the shrine for their livelihood after this.

<sup>84</sup> A *sābā* is a territorial administrative unit used by the Mughals. Under Akbar there were twelve. Within each *sābā* were numerous smaller units known as *sarkar* (territory of a governor).

<sup>85</sup> At that time Maler encompassed 103,444 *bighas* of land and possessed an army of 100 cavalry and 500 infantry. Abu l-Fazl Allami, *Ain-i Akbārī*, translated by Colonel H.S. Jarrett, (New Delhi; Crown Publication, 1988), Volume II, p. 301.

<sup>86</sup> Throughout Iftikhar Ali Khan's history, he repeatedly expresses bitterness about the degree of control exerted over the territory by the Mughal authorities. "...the Emperors of Delhi were at that time sole owners of landed property in India. Therefore whosoever possessed a State like Malerkotla was to all intents and purposes a tenant and not the virtual owner of the land over which he ruled. An unfavorable report by the Governor of that province or the whim and fancy of the king was all that was required to deprive the ruler of his State," (pages, 15-16). This type of central authoritarianism on the part of the Mughals is amply documented in the work of modern historians such as Muzaffar Alam, Percival Spear, and K.A. Nizami, as well as the contemporary chroniclers like Badauni, Abu Fazl, Ferishta, and others. See Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh & Punjab, 1707-1748*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1986), Percival Spear, *The History of India*, (New York; Penguin, 1965), Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "The Suhrawardi Silsilah and Its Influence on Medieval Indian Politics," *The Medieval Indian Quarterly* (Volume 2, October 1950), and Siddiqi, "Wajh'-i-Ma"ash Grants under the Afghan Kings (1451-1555)."

The most famous ruler in Malerkotla's history is Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, who ruled from 1672 until his death in 1712. This was a particularly critical period in the history of Punjab as the growing popularity and authority of the Sikh Gurus brought them into increasing conflict with the Mughals. Following the torture and subsequent death of the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, at the order of the Emperor Jahangir, hostilities between the Sikhs and the Mughals grew. Periodic battles increased from the time of the sixth Guru, Hargobind (d. 1644) until the effective demise of Mughal authority in 1757.<sup>87</sup> During these wars Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan and the Malerkotla forces played prominent roles. His bravery and ability as a general are remarked upon in both local histories and British accounts of the battles against the Sikhs.<sup>88</sup> He was an able general and served in the Mughal campaign against the Marathas, after which service he received an additional *jagīr* of seventy villages. According to an 1882 history of the ruling clan written by Inayat Ali Khan, the brother of Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan (r. 1871-1908), the borders of the kingdom at that time extended nearly 8,000 square miles to Ludhiana and Ropar. Sher Mohammad Khan also served in the fight against the Rohillas led by Ali Mohammad. The wars with the Sikhs heated up as Mughal power waned in the region, and Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan fought against three great Sikh leaders: Guru Tegh Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Bahadur.

Interestingly, in spite of his support for Aurangzeb and the Mughal regime in their battles against the Sikhs, most available sources, including numerous Sikh histories from the nineteenth

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<sup>87</sup> In 1757 the British East India Company defeated the Nawab of Calcutta, Siraj-ad-Daula, in the Battle of Plassey. This marked the shift from a trading outfit that merely meddled in governmental affairs to an administrative body. From 1757 onwards, British power expanded throughout the subcontinent and was consolidated after an 1857 rebellion of army troops was crushed, the East India Company was dissolved, the British Empire declared India to be a colony, and the last Mughal emperor was dethroned.

<sup>88</sup> There is a local legend that Sher Muhammad Khan was a great hunter and he twice arranged hunts for Aurangzeb. On one of these occasions a tiger suddenly charged the emperor, but the Nawab killed it with a single blow of his sword. This is given as an explanation of the additional *jagīr* grant. There is still a village named Sherpur after this Nawab in Patiala District.

century onwards emphasize only one event in Malerkotla's history: the *haa da naara* or Cry for Justice.<sup>89</sup> The *haa da naara* was given by Sher Muhammad Khan after a particularly vicious battle with Guru Gobind Singh. While the Guru was besieged at Anandpur, his mother, Mata Gujri, and his two younger sons, Zorawar and Fateh Singh, escaped. However, they were betrayed and captured at Sirhind (approximately fifty kilometers northeast of Malerkotla) where their fate hung in the balance. Refusing to convert to Islam, the *sahibzadas* (children of the Guru) were condemned to be bricked alive into a wall. Of all the assembled allies of Wazir Khan, the Mughal governor of Sirhind, Sher Muhammad Khan was the only one who spoke up in the children's defense. He declared that their quarrel was with the father not the sons, and that their lives should be preserved. He went so far as to declare the death sentence un-Islamic, violating the acceptable rules of combat. Although the appeal was unsuccessful and the Guru's sons were killed, this is by far the single most famous moment in Malerkotla's history. In Iftikhar Ali Khan's history, the narrative is drawn out at great length and includes quotations from a letter supposedly written by the Nawab to the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) on the children's behalf. The Nawab's sense of justice and tolerance are emphasized, and thereafter this incident becomes a leitmotif of sorts in his history, as it is periodically referenced as evidence of the liberalism and tolerance of the Nawabs towards the Sikhs, and the special place that the town in the Sikh heartland has as the beneficiaries of Guru Gobind Singh's blessing.<sup>90</sup> However there is a dark cloud over this moment in history. Many sources report that

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<sup>89</sup> The number of references in various sources to these events are simply too many to mention. Some of the older Sikh chronicles that give accounts include Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, (1926) Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Panth Prakash*, (New Delhi; Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, 1998 [1841]), Sainapat, *Sri Gur Sobha*, edited by Ganda Singh, (Patiala; Punjabi University, 1967), Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Prakash*, (Amritsar; Bhai Catar Singh Jiwana Singh, 1923), *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, (Amritsar; Khalsa Naishanala Ijamsi, 1923 [1892]). Every modern description of these events includes Sher Muhammad Khan's *haa da naara*. NB: I will render *haa da naara* with double 'a's to indicate the long vowel as that is the convention in Malerkotla.

<sup>90</sup> These events and their implications for the history, historiography and present peaceful reality of Malerkotla will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan took captive a woman attached to the house of Gobind Singh.<sup>91</sup> This woman, Anup Kaur, refused to accept Islam or the overtures of the Nawab, and killed herself. Her body was reportedly buried near the tomb of a Sufi saint, Shah Fazl. This would later become an issue for the Sikhs.

### **Banda Bahadur**

Guru Gobind Singh died from a stab wound in Nanded, Maharashtra. Not long before his death he met, and converted to Sikhism, a Hindu Bairagi yogi, Madho Das.<sup>92</sup> Adopting the name Gurbaksh Singh the former yogi became more widely known as Banda Bahadur (The Brave Servant), he gave up the path of renunciation and took up arms for the Guru. Following Guru Gobind Singh's death, Banda and a large army of Sikhs conquered vast areas of Punjab, but it appears that he did not approach Malerkotla. Whereas other Muslim principalities such as Sirhind – the scene of the martyrdom of the Guru's sons – were razed to the ground, Malerkotla was spared. Although any number of reasons could explain this, Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of Malerkotla, declares in his history of the kingdom (as do many residents) that Banda did not attack the otherwise rather vulnerable state out of respect for Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan's defense of the two *sahibzadas*.

Despite such moments of tranquility, wars between the multitude of Sikh principalities and outside Muslim invaders persisted. Malerkotla fought on the side of the Mughals until their power dissipated, at which point the rulers supported Ahmad Shah Abdali and the Rohilla Afghans who repeatedly invaded from the northwest in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Punjab in the eighteenth century was characterized by nearly perpetual battles between various

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

<sup>92</sup> Bairagis are a sect of Vaishnava yogis, renunciant Hindus devoted to Vishnu.

princely states and tribal leaders. These rulers fought frequently, forming alliances and attacking each other by turns, depending on to whom they owed money, whether they judged victory likely, or at the behest of a more powerful leader such as the Mughal ruler at Delhi, Muslim chieftains such as Ahmad Shah Abdali or Adina Beg, Hindu forces like the Marathas, or Sikh leaders such as Banda Bahadur or Maharaja Ranjit Singh.<sup>93</sup>

Nawab Jamal Khan (r. 1717-1755) fought more or less constantly against the various Rajas of Patiala, a large Sikh state to the east of Malerkotla. For example, in 1766 Amar Singh of Patiala captured the villages of Payal and Isru from Jamal Khan and then in 1768 seized Tibba from Jamal Khan's brother and successor Ataullah Khan. But by 1771, Malerkotla assisted Amar Singh against a usurper who had taken over during Patiala's campaign against the Marathas.<sup>94</sup> During the mid-eighteenth century, as the Afghan chieftain Ahmad Shah Abdali repeatedly overran North India, battling for control of the Punjab, Mughal power waned. Malerkotla's rulers supported Ahmad Shah in these expeditions. Most memorably, in February of 1762 in a battle not far from Malerkotla, Ahmad Shah and his allies slaughtered 30,000 Sikhs. This event has gone down in Sikh history as "the Great Holocaust," or *Wadda Ghalughara*. Jamal Khan died in battle and after him Malerkotla fell on hard times as his brothers, rather than his minor son, succeeded him. Several Nawabs were in power in Malerkotla in rather rapid succession, and excepting Jamal Khan, the military acumen and political competence of these

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<sup>93</sup> Under Shivaji Bhonsle (1627-1680) the Marathas established a sizeable kingdom in the region of Western India now identified as Maharashtra. Shivaji fought constantly with Aurangzeb and eventually was awarded the right to call himself Raja (King). He was crowned Chhatrapati (Lord of the Universe). After Shivaji, the Marathas continued to be a force in North and West India until Ahmad Shah Abdali and his army of Afghans defeated them at the second Battle of Panipat in 1761. Shivaji still holds a very high position among Hindu nationalists who regard him as a successful resistor to Muslim rule. Indeed in early 2004 there was an outcry over a book by James Laine, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*, (New York; Oxford University Press, 2003) which offended the sentiments of enough Hindus to result in an attack on one of the archives where Laine had done research. During the attack numerous irreplaceable Sanskrit and Tibetan manuscripts were destroyed.

<sup>94</sup> Lepel Griffin, *Rajas of the Punjab*, (Delhi; Low Price Publications, 2000 [1870]), pp. 34-35, 39.

rulers appears to have been minimal.<sup>95</sup> At one point, under Bahadur Khan (r. 1763-1766) the principality was reduced to the boundary walls of Kotla, a mere three miles in circumference. Fluctuating relations with the Sikh chiefs in the neighboring states of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind also characterized this period. There were, however, bright spots. In 1769 Nawab Umar Khan signed a treaty with Raja Amar Singh of Patiala guaranteeing mutual protection and respect. These rulers would occasionally come to the aid of the much smaller and more vulnerable Malerkotla against extra-local Sikh invaders such as the 1795 attack of Sahib Singh Bedi.

### **Sahib Singh Bedi**

Sahib Singh Bedi ostensibly attacked Malerkotla over the perennial issue of cow killing. Sikhs and Hindus both abstain from killing cows, holding the cow to be sacred as a source of life and sustenance. Muslim consumption and ritual sacrifice of cows has often been a stated provocation for inter-religious conflict, a precipitating incident. However, in this case, as in most others, there were other motivations. Bedi was a direct descendant of Guru Nanak. Since the time of the first Guru his family commanded great respect and authority within the Sikh religion and the socio-political power networks of Sikhs throughout Punjab. Bedi and his family had many loyal supporters who believed that the first Guru's power descended through his lineage.<sup>96</sup> Following the death of Guru Gobind Singh and his disciple Banda Bahadur, political and religious authority among the Sikhs became diffuse. The *missal* period saw the rise of *missals*, clan and family based power centers, which functioned within a kind of confederacy inasmuch as Sikh interests were a unifying and overriding concern, particularly regarding the

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<sup>95</sup> Nawab Bhikam Khan (ruled, 1755-1763), Nawab Bahadur Khan, (ruled, 1763-1766), Nawab Umar Khan, (ruled 1766-1780), Nawab Asadullah Khan, (ruled 1780-1784), Nawab Ataullah Khan, (ruled 1784-1810). See also Appendix A, "Genealogy of Malerkotla Nawabs and Rulers."

<sup>96</sup> This family remains a powerful charismatic presence in the Sikh community. The current scion, Sarabjot Singh Bedi lives at Una in Himachal Pradesh where his home and the tombs of several of his progenitors are pilgrimage destinations.

challenges by Mughal authorities, Afghan invaders, and the increasing presence of the British East India Company.<sup>97</sup> However, these *missals* enjoyed relative autonomy and were not above fighting with each other if the opportunity presented itself. Other Sikh leaders, such as Sahib Singh Bedi, who wielded both spiritual authority and considerable charisma, were periodically able to amass armies of their own. The group attacked a number of other locations prior to their arrival at Malerkotla, including Sikh regions. At Malerkotla Sahib Singh Bedi's forces were stopped at Amargarh, outside the capital city, and were repelled with assistance from Patiala.

Malerkotla joined the British in fighting the Marathas in the early part of the nineteenth century. During this period Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh ruler, was in the process of expanding his control over most of the Punjab, from present day Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to the northwestern regions of present day Pakistan and in the south to the Malwa region in which Malerkotla is located. Arriving at the town in 1808, the Maharaja demanded such an enormous amount in tribute that the state was forced to borrow heavily from its wealthier neighbors – Nabha, Jind, and Patiala. The Nawab at the time, Ataullah Khan, offered an elephant, but Singh demanded 1,000,000 rupees.<sup>98</sup> Summoning all his resources, he drummed

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<sup>97</sup> The *missal* period runs roughly from the 1715 death of Banda Bahadur until the rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1780. Indu Banga, "Formation of the Sikh State: 1765-1845," *Five Punjabi Centuries*, Indu Banga, ed., (New Delhi; Manohar, 1997), pp. 84-88.

<sup>98</sup> Gursharan Singh, *History of Pepsu: Patiala and East Punjab States Union, 1948-1956*, (Delhi; Konark Publishers, 1991), p. 9. A slightly different account is given in Mian Bashir Ahmed Farooqi, *British Relations with the Cis-Sutlej States (1809-1823)*, (Patiala Languages Department, 1971 [1942]). In this study, after Maharaja Ranjit Singh had taken Faridkot, he "then forced the Muslim Chief of Malerkotla to undertake to pay a lakh of rupees for which the Rajas of Patiala and Jind agreed to stand surety. [fn Metcalfe to Government, October 25, 1808, Bk. 5, Lt. 26, Copy] Metcalfe accompanied the Raja of Lahore up to Malerkotla but refused to 'follow the army in campaign' any further and strongly remonstrated against Ranjit's encroachments towards the east of the Sutlej." (p.. 6) As Colonel David Ochterlony, then Agent to the Governor General (later Resident at Delhi) pursued the negotiations with the Cis-Sutlej chiefs for their accession to British protection, he arrived at Malerkotla. Having reached agreements with the Rajas of Patiala and Nabha, "He then proceeded to Malerkotla, where the 'much respected and venerabl' Pathan Chief, Ataullah Khan, was the ruler from whom the Raja of Lahore had demanded a large sum of money. The Colonel reinstated the Chief in power who, 'but a few months since anticipated another visit from the Raja of Lahore which would doubtlessly have terminated in his absolute expulsion and ruin.' [fn Ochterlony to Edmonstone, February 9, 1809, Bk. 10, Lt. 6, Original]" Thus having propped up the Malerkotla State, and achieved satisfactory

up 566,391 rupees. Unable to pay, Maharaja Ranjit Singh attacked on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and the Nawab threw himself at the mercy of his wealthier Sikh neighbors. He then appealed to the British under Lord Metcalfe.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, in 1809 the British and the Maharaja signed a treaty ceding the Cis-Sutlej region in which Malerkotla is located under British suzerainty. Since the Battle of Plassey in 1757 the British East India Company had shifted from being primarily a trading company forging alliances with local rulers to pursuing its own military and sovereign interests. This signaled the demise of effective central Mughal power at Delhi. After 1803 the Mughals were subordinate to the British, although nominally the dynasty did not end until 1857. In that year the British crushed a rebellion of Indian army regiments, following which the East India Company's supervisory status gave way to direct rule and India officially became a colony of the British Empire. From 1809 onwards Malerkotla supported the British and assisted in a number of key campaigns against Kabul, in the Gurkha wars, and also during the 1857 Rebellion.<sup>100</sup> Family disputes over the right to succession continued, and were now arbitrated by the British government.<sup>101</sup> Relations with the British appear typical of British dealings with other kingdoms. The Malerkotla rulers were given nominal respect, listed in attendance at various courts, or *darbars*, of the Viceroys, ranked ninth among the Punjab states, and given an eleven-gun salute.<sup>102</sup> Exhaustive lists of exchanged gifts and other formalities are detailed in the

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control of all the kingdoms of the Cis-Sutlej region, the British were firmly ensconced in the region and well positioned to mount their eventual assault on Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

<sup>99</sup> Suraj Narain Rau, "Cis-Sutluj Sikh States, 1800-1849," (PhD Dissertation, History; Panjab University, no date), pp. 107-108.

<sup>100</sup> For more on the Mughal period in India see Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire*, (Aligarh; Centre of Advanced Studies, 1982) and John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>101</sup> See Rita Brara, *Marriage and Kinship*, Dissertation, (Sociology, Delhi University, 1989), pp. 63-69.

<sup>102</sup> The 1881 Imperial Gazetteer lists nine guns, "Malerkotla," in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, W.W. Hunter, ed., (London; Trübner & Co, 1881), p. 267. However, according to the 1886 and 1904 Gazetteer it was an eleven-gun

Nawab's history. The male royal family members were generally educated in England or in British-run schools in India. A resident British official assisted in state government from 1809 onwards, exercising varying degrees of control, depending upon the age and competence of the native Ruler, and of course upon British interests. According to the British records the royal family was deeply in debt and so was constantly on the verge of ruin.<sup>103</sup> Apart from brokering loans for the Nawab, the British also used this weakness to justify greater exercise of control in state affairs. In a letter to the Political Agent at Ambala, Sir George Russell Clerk, dated May 16, 1831, a British officer named Captain Murray observed,

I believe it to be impossible to extract any generally beneficial measure from the collected members of this turbulent and distracted family because their conflicting interests, ceaseless intrigues and mutual jealousy are too opposed to system and inimical to order, to be regulated on just and fundamental principles.<sup>104</sup>

In an 1836 letter Clerk himself reiterated this pessimistic impression describing a visit to the state to settle a question of succession and inheritance. This case concerned the fact that due to the minority of Wazir Khan his four uncles succeeded to the throne prior to his own ascension. Following the controversy a precedent in British India was set concerning the rights of primogeniture.<sup>105</sup> In the process of the investigation, Clerk observed the fractious quality of family relations.

What Captain Murray anticipated, my own experience has confirmed. It is vain to effect unanimity among the members of this family on this point. Some of the most influential are interested in subjecting inheritance to the Shurreh (sic), claiming its laws as applicable to all of their religious persuasion. Others discard the Shurreh, deny that its rules have hitherto been the guidance of the family...which is the fact...and prefer to adhere to their ancient usages.

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

<sup>103</sup> L/P&S/13/877, *Indian States, General Questions. Debts: Maler Kotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/1418, *Debt of Malerkotla to Calcutta Firms*. London: OIOC; R/1/1/2023, *Irregularities of Nawab Re: Payment of Debt*, (London: OIOC, 1930); and R/1/1/4156, *Malerkotla Finance*, (London: OIOC, 1944).

<sup>104</sup> Cited in Indra Krishen, "An Historical Interpretation of the Correspondence (1831-1843) of Sir George Russell Clerk, Political Agent Ambala and Ludhiana," (PhD Dissertation, History; Panjab University, 1952), p. 64.

<sup>105</sup> R/1/1/3832, *Malerkotla Affairs: Appointment of Successor, Administrative Scheme*, (London: OIOC, 1942).

Unfortunately their family customs in respect to inheritance have not hitherto been uniform.<sup>106</sup>

Interneicine disputes continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inayat Ali Khan himself devotes approximately one third of his 1882 manuscript to his claims to the estate of his brother Ibrahim Ali Khan who, as the adopted son of Nawab Sikandar Ali Khan, inherited the lands and properties of the throne. The accession of Ahmad Ali Khan (Ibrahim's son) was not disputed nor was the leadership of Ahmad's son Iftikhar. Family disputations over property continue to this day.

### **The Namdhari Massacre**

In 1872, one of the most tragic events in Malerkotla's history occurred. At the time Malerkotla was governed by a British agent, Mr. Heath, under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner at Ludhiana, J.C. Cowan. The Nawab, Ibrahim Ali Khan, was a minor when he succeeded his uncle and adopted father, Sikander Ali Khan, in 1871.<sup>107</sup> In January of 1872 Malerkotla was attacked by a group of Namdhari Sikhs, a sect widely and onomatopoeically known as the Kukas due to the ecstatic cries they utter during prayer. The Namdharis believe in the continuation of the living personal Guru after the death of Gobind Singh, and so they were and are seen as beyond the pale of mainstream Sikh tradition. However, Namdharis are also often depicted positively as the first freedom fighters, as they called for a boycott of British goods in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, established their own postal system, refused service in the army, and waged active struggles against cow slaughter, among other issues. According to Namdhari sources, the attack on Malerkotla was due to their opposition to the British presence there, to the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Ibrahim's brother was Inayat Ali Khan, the author of the *Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans* mentioned above. Inayat charged that when his brother was adopted by their uncle (who he claimed hermaphrodite and a homosexual and so had no children of his own) that Ibrahim's property should have devolved entirely to him as he was now the heir to the *gaddi* and all the state territories and assets.

killing of cows by the British and the Muslims, and to the worship of saints.<sup>108</sup> Namdhari literature today does not emphasize the Muslim role in subsequent events, but targets British imperialism and intransigent discriminatory policies as the provocation for their attack. Mainstream Sikh historians claim that the group wanted guns and that Malerkotla at the time was weak and an easy target. According to the 1904 British *Gazetteer*, "the fanatic Kukas attacked Kotla, killing some townspeople and plundering houses."<sup>109</sup> The Nawab's history, on the other hand, tells the story altogether differently. Here the leader of the movement, Bhai Ram Singh is described as a "sensible man" who was opposed to the attack on the grounds that Malerkotla had been blessed by the Guru. The attack is said to have occurred without Bhai Ram Singh's wishes and was undertaken by a rogue follower. Iftikhar Ali Khan supplies yet another motive in his history. The attack is depicted as a revenge for the rumored possibility that a Namdhari woman had been raped while in custody at Malerkotla. Whatever the cause, the assault on the state was limited, resulting in few deaths and the theft of some guns. In spite of the relatively minor damage, the punishment visited upon the Kukas by the British was grim indeed. After hunting down and capturing the perpetrators at Patiala, they were brought back to Malerkotla and executed without trial. Sixty-nine Namdharis, including some women and children, were placed in front of cannons and blown away over the course of three bloody days. The history of Iftikhar Ali Khan recounts that the British official who commanded this action was subsequently declared insane and removed. This incident has since played an extremely powerful role in Namdhari and Malerkotla history.

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<sup>108</sup> For example, [www.namdhari.org](http://www.namdhari.org) claims that the goal of the attack on Malerkotla was to put the British on notice about the growing resistance to their rule. The page presents the perspective of the Namdharis on the events by claiming one of the Namdhari leaders had addressed his party of attackers thus after the assault and before their arrest. Hira Singh is made to say to his compatriots, "We had achieved our target. We had conveyed our feelings to the British Government that now the Indians had woken up. They would neither tolerate foreign rule nor hurt to their religious sentiments and self respect."

<sup>109</sup> *Gazetteer*, 1904, p. 7.

## The Praja Mandal Movement and the Kothala Firing Incident

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

During India's movement for freedom from the British in the first half of the twentieth century, a parallel movement known as Praja Mandal emerged in the princely states to oppose these indigenous monarchical regimes.<sup>110</sup> In Malerkotla this movement was not very strong, but it was present in some parts of the state. According to a historian of the Praja Mandal movement in Punjab, Ramesh Walia,

In Malerkotla the Praja Mandal was very weak. The Muslims were predominantly on the side of the Nawab and the peasantry sided with the Akalis and the Communists. This State was an exception to the mass slaughter and

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<sup>110</sup> Ramesh Walia, *Praja Mandal Movement in East Punjab States*, (Patiala; Punjabi University Press, 1972).

emigration of the Muslim population in the wake of the country's partition. In the towns of Malerkotla and Ahmedgarh where Hindus were in substantial numbers some activity of the Praja Mandal was witnessed and the State promised to introduce constitutional reforms.<sup>111</sup>

However, Walia's view contrasts somewhat with that of Rita Brara, a sociologist at Delhi University whose dissertation focuses on marriage and kinship and its impact on land tenure in Malerkotla. She writes,

The Malerkotla chapter of the *Punjab Riyasati Praja Mandal* had focused attention upon the unfair eviction of cultivators from their lands. The leaders had spearheaded the demand for relief from the exorbitant revenue dues and taxes and sought parity with the cultivators of the neighbouring tracts. As far as the State was concerned, the activities of the Praja Mandal were illegal and the activists were dealt with severely right until 1946.<sup>112</sup>

In spite of their illicit nature, several groups did repeatedly meet within the kingdom's borders, largely drawing from the Sikh population who sought greater autonomy as agriculturalists, particularly in terms of land rights, lower taxes, and the right to fix their own prices.<sup>113</sup> They published pamphlets, held rallies, and formed networks with other Praja Mandals in the states of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind. Several newspapers were occasionally banned for publishing anti-Nawab articles, such as the *Riyasati Dunya*, edited by Talib Hussain a land rights activist, and the *Muslim Outlook*.<sup>114</sup> According to Walia, the peasants in Malerkotla were always agitating for their land rights over and against the elite Muslim landlords, the *khawanin*. In 1927 they set up a Zamindara Association and presented a case to the Viceroy at Simla, all leading up to the July 18 incidents at Kothala.<sup>115</sup> On this day a demonstration was brutally suppressed, with fourteen

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>112</sup> Rita Brara, "Marriage and Kinship."

<sup>113</sup> Giani Kehar Singh, *Praja Malerkotla di Dard-Kahani*, (Desh Dardi Press, no date), p. 67.

<sup>114</sup> IOC, L/P&S/13/1345, Malerkotla Affairs.

<sup>115</sup> Another report lists the secretary of the Panjab Riyasti Parja Mandal as S. Ranjit Singh of Malerkotla. According to this account, the main complaint against the Nawab was that he was obsessed with grandeur and had

people reportedly shot and killed. There were mass arrests. In the subsequent investigation, the Malerkotla ruler, Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan, attributed the action to overzealous police work and disciplined the Superintendent. No further action was taken.<sup>116</sup> However, annual gatherings at the site in memory of the dead persisted. It is frequently noted in the state records whether or not any demonstration occurred on the anniversary of the incident, clearly indicating that it was an ongoing point of concern for the rulers.

### **Religious Trouble**

Already it is clear that far from being the "Island of Peace" it was dubbed by the magazine *India Today*, Malerkotla has frequently been involved in conflicts and wars with Sikh and Hindu groups and kingdoms, as well as frequent intrafamilial strife. Although many of these confrontations concern politics and territory, several events clearly carry a religious dimension as well. It is significant that several of these conflicts, such as those styled by Sikh historians as the *Wadda* and *Chhota Ghalugharas* (Great and Small Holocausts), take on a level of religious meaning through the process of Sikh history making. The Sikh community's interest in sanctifying past victories and defeats has been part of a larger agenda of generating solidarity and consistency among the Sikh population.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, in Malerkotla the erasure of religious

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legalized *satta* gambling. In Malerkotla the movement was multi-religious and unified wide sectors of society. Both Sikhs and Muslims were among the first office bearers. Giani Kehar Singh, Sewa Singh, and Talib Hussain were the main Malerkotla activists. B. S. Nijjar, *Punjab under the British Rule (1849-1947)*, (New Delhi; K B Publications, 1974), pp. 32-47. Brara, "Marriage and Kindship," p. 149; Ramesh Walia. *Praja Mandal Movement*, pp. 49-50; S. K. Sharma, "Political Beliefs and Attitudes of a Religious Minority: An Exploratory Study of the Muslim Elite in Malerkotla," in *Political Dynamics of Punjab*, S. C. Wallace, ed., (Amritsar; Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981).

<sup>116</sup> For more see L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Kothala*, (London; OIOC, 1927) and R/1/1/1685, *Malerkotla Affairs: Zamindari Association*, (London; OIOC, 1927).

<sup>117</sup> Harjot Oberoi gives an excellent account of Sikh identity formation through the production and dissemination of history, the formulation of Sikh rituals, and the eradication of traditional Punjabi religiosity such as the worship of *pīrs* (Muslim saints). See *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

and ethnic conflict from the public imagination and the written record represents a process whereby the values of a peaceful plural community are grounded in an idealized past.<sup>118</sup>

Malerkotla's history is hardly free from explicitly (though not solely) religious conflicts. In 1935, for example, there was a case in which a Hindu group began a *katha* – the recitation of a sacred text – in a building that overlooked a mosque. As the recitation involved singing and the playing of instruments, it was objectionable to the Muslims during times of prayer. The dispute escalated and eventually resulted in a riot in which a Hindu was killed. Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan arrested several Muslim youths and two of them were put to death. Many local Muslims felt these executions were hasty and unwarranted and the matter did not disappear as the Hindus continued their recitation. Eventually a British officer came to settle the dispute, ruling in favor of silencing the *katha* during prayer times.<sup>119</sup> Several years later the issue was reactivated as one of many complaints lodged by elements of the Muslim population who declared that the rulers were biased against Muslims. A group of dissenters eventually left Malerkotla en masse, seeking to present their case before the Punjab Administrator at Lahore.<sup>120</sup> This case will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The 1930's were an intense period throughout India. Identity politics were the order of the day as the combined effects of nineteenth century reformist movements, British enumerative

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<sup>118</sup> The British records, on the other hand, tell a different story. Reports on religious disturbances in Malerkotla are common: L/P&J/170, *Puran Mal Murder*, (London: OIOC); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Hindu Muslim Dispute*, (London: OIOC 1936); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Hijra*, (London: OIOC, 1939); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Kothala*, (London: OIOC, 1927); L/P&S/13/1345, *Punjab States: Maler Kotla Affairs*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/2687, *Hindu Muslim, Arti-Namaz*, (London: OIOC, 1935); R/1/1/2860, *Muslim Agitation in Malerkotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/2936, *Muslim Agitation at Malerkotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/1/3006, *Congress Activities in Malerkotla*, (London: OIOC); R/1/2860, *Report on Muslim Agitation in Malerkotla State and Proposals for Future Administration of the State*, (London: OIOC).

<sup>119</sup> L/P&J/170, *Puran Mal Murder*, (London: OIOC), L/P&S/13/1345, *Malerkotla*, (London: OIOC); L/R/5, *Vernacular Press Reports – Hindu-Muslim Dispute*, (London: OIOC, 1936), R/1/1/2687, *Hindu Muslim, Arti-Namaz*, (London: OIOC, 1935).

<sup>120</sup> L/R/5. *Vernacular Press Reports – Hijra*, (London: OIOC, 1939); Parsuram Jain, *Haqiqat*, (Malerkotla, 1940), "Miscellaneous Papers Relating to Communal Problems in Malerkotla," 206, (Maler Kotla: Office of the Revenue and Finance Minister, 1935-1946).

authoritarianism, and the factions within the Independence Movement, particularly the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, took root. Especially since the nineteenth century with the consolidation of British authority both Christian missionaries and British policies distributed social and political opportunities based upon religious and ethnic identities. Simultaneously, and partially as a response to these efforts, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim organizations developed that defined and disseminated revivalist orthodoxies. Some of these groups worked closely with political parties, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress. As a princely state, political parties were not allowed in Malerkotla and so the kingdom was free from some these struggles. Although the alliance with the British gave rise to considerable criticism and internal agitation, these controversies eventually dissipated. Nonetheless, by the time of Partition, there was adequate local solidarity to sustain the community through that difficult period.

### **Partition**

The Partition of India in 1947 resulted in the transfer of approximately fifteen million people between the two new nation-states. The exact numbers of refugees will never be known as in the chaos some people were lost, others took on new identities, and many were killed. The numbers of the dead will likewise never be known but estimates range from two hundred thousand to a million or more. The regions of Punjab and Bengal were most adversely affected by this trauma as the new national borders ran through these two states. Punjab experienced particularly extreme violence, due in no small part to the region's having been the British army's favorite recruiting grounds. Soldiers decommissioned after World War II were capable of organizing and effecting veritable military campaigns against members of other religious communities. Entire trainloads of refugees heading in both directions were systematically

slaughtered. Throughout this trauma Malerkotla became known as a safe zone for Muslims traveling towards Pakistan. Migrants journeying by road or train made Malerkotla their intermediate destination, knowing that they could rest here securely. The elderly Nawab played little role in maintaining order, but his son Iftikhar Ali Khan was extremely active in maintaining the security of the borders and the morale of the population.

According to all the people and records I consulted, Malerkotla was a peaceful place during Partition.<sup>121</sup> Local resources were strained to the limit and the refugee situation was indeed dire, but the violence that shattered Patiala, Nabha, and Jind (three neighboring Sikh kingdoms) never occurred within Malerkotla's borders. Many Malerkotla residents attribute the peace at Partition to the brave leadership of the Nawab and the vigilance of the kingdom's army. Others claim that due to the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs spared Malerkotla. Still others believe that Haider Shaikh and the many other saints buried in Malerkotla were collectively responsible for preserving the kingdom from the violence that raged around. All of these explanations are significant to Malerkotla residents and visitors.

### **The Last Nawab**

Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan (d. 1982) was the last Nawab of Malerkotla state. He inherited the throne in 1947 after his father Ahmad Ali Khan died. He was educated by European governesses and tutors, and took the Cambridge Examination. He traveled broadly and met two British kings – George V and Edward VIII. He became Chief Minister of Malerkotla in 1946. The Nawab, by his own account as well as in the memories of many residents, was instrumental in maintaining peace during the Partition disturbances. He is said to have personally patrolled

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<sup>121</sup> "Disturbance in the East Punjab and Influx of Refugees," Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla File no. 1-C/47-A, 1947; "Refugee and Evacuee Information, Malerkotla File, 1947. File no. 2(19) PR/47; L/P&S/13/1345. *Malerkotla*, (London; Oriental and India Office Collection).

throughout the city, both publicly and anonymously in order to assess and address the condition of the inhabitants. After Independence, Malerkotla joined PEPSU (Patiala and East Panjab States Union) a body designed to govern the former princely states of Indian Punjab. The Nawab served in the administration of that union. Following the dissolution of PEPSU in 1954, Iftikhar Ali Khan was twice elected as member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Malerkotla. He married five times but had no surviving children. Under his leadership a number of local educational institutions and hospitals were founded, industry expanded, agricultural reform was introduced, and roads improved. Even after the Nawab's death in 1982, his family has continued to hold authority in the town, being very influential in municipal as well as state politics. Two of his wives, Yusuf Zaman and Sajida Begum, served as local MLAs as well. Sajida Begum is a local Congress party leader and activist and also serves on the board that oversees the management of the famous Dargah of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer. Until recently, the Nawabi and *khalifah* families had a near monopoly on local power, but new developments indicate that other elements in the town's diverse population are finding their political voice.

### **Local Diversity**

Malerkotla today is made up of a wide range of religious and ethnic groups. According to the Census of India (1991), India as a whole is comprised of 82% Hindus, 12.5% Muslim, and only 2% Sikh, whereas Punjab consists of 34.5% Hindus, 1% Muslims, 63% Sikhs. This demographic is entirely reversed in Malerkotla. In 1981 (the last year in which such a breakdown is available), the town's population was 67% Muslim, 20% Hindu, 11% Sikh. Interestingly, in 1881, Punjab was 51% Muslim, 41% Hindu and 7.6% Sikh, whereas Malerkotla at that time was actually a Sikh majority region, with an urban population of 35% Muslim, 23%

Hindu and 41% Sikh. In 1904, the urban population of Malerkotla was relatively evenly divided between the three major religions. By 1941, Malerkotla was 70% Muslim, 21% Hindu, 6% Jain, and 2.6% Sikh. At the time of Partition, Punjab's population was nearly evenly distributed among these three religions. In 1951, the first (and notoriously problematic) Census taken after Partition, the numbers are quite different. In Punjab as a whole, Hindus were 42%, Sikhs 56%, and Muslims 0.8%. However, in the city of Malerkotla itself in 1951 the population remained more or less steady with 66% Muslim, 22% Hindu, 6% Jain and 5% Sikh. The relative stability of the urban population continues to this day, with only a slight increase in Sikh representation. In the remainder of Punjab, as shown in the 1991 Census data, the Hindu population has decreased whereas the Sikh and Muslim populations have grown, reflecting emigration of Hindus, immigration of Sikhs, and the alterations in Punjab's borders to create Haryana and Himachal Pradesh in primarily Hindu eastern regions.<sup>122</sup> According to the 2001 Census of India, Malerkotla is made up of 106,802 citizens. Local estimates, corroborated by 1981 data, claim that approximately 70% of these are Muslim, and the remaining thirty percent is more or less evenly divided between the Hindu and Sikh communities.

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<sup>122</sup> Census of India, 2001 provisional results give 106,802 citizens of whom 56,872 are male and 49,930 are female, 59,101 are literate (34,583 male literates vs. 24,518 females). No statistics on religious affiliation are available yet. Sources for the remainder of the material are drawn from the Census of India, 1991; Sir Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes (reprint of The Races, Castes and Tribes of the People)* (Lahore; Superintendent, Government Printing, Punjab, 1916 (1883)), pp. 104-106 and Gopal Krishan, "Demographic Change," in *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence: Administration, Politics and Social Change, 1947-1997*, J. S. Grewal and Indu Banga, eds., (Chandigarh; Institute of Punjab Studies, 1998), pp. 156-176; Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1972).

Table 1: Malerkotla Population (NB: pre-independence figures reflect population throughout the kingdom which measured 167 square miles at the time, whereas present data reflects only the concentrated urban area of the town itself)

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

<b>Year</b>	<b>Malerkotla</b>	<b>Punjab</b>	<b>India</b>
<b>1881</b>	35% Muslim 23% Hindu 41% Sikh	51% Muslim 41% Hindu 7.6% Sikh	19.97% Muslim 78.09% Hindu
<b>1941</b>	70.27% Muslim (20,605) 20.8% Hindu (6,098) 5.81% Jain (1,705) 2.64% Sikh (823) .48% Christian (90)	53% Muslim 31% Hindu 15% Sikh	24.28% Muslim 69.46% Hindu
<b>1951</b>	66% Muslim (21,502) 22.1% Hindu (7,200) 5.84% Jain (1,780) 5.09% Sikh (1,902) .97% Christian (191)	62% Hindu 35% Sikh 0.8% Muslim	9.9% Muslim 85% Hindu
<b>1961</b>	61.47% Muslim (24,307) 23.75% Hindu (9,390) 5.02% Jain (2,080) 8.78% Sikh (3,473) .98% Christian (293)	64% Hindu 33% Sikh 0.8% Muslim	83.5% Hindu 10.7% Muslim 1.8% Sikh
<b>1971</b>	64.96% Muslim (31,740) 24.81% Hindu (12,124) 2.58% Jain (1,263) 7.53 % Sikh (3,683) .0001% Christian (48)	38% Hindu 60% Sikh 1% Muslim	82.7% Hindu 11.2% Muslim 1.9% Sikh
<b>1981</b>	67.3% Muslim 20.2% Hindu 10.7% Sikh.	36% Hindu 62% Sikh 1% Muslim	82.6% Hindu 11.4% Muslim 2% Sikh
<b>1991</b>	No Data Available	34.5% Hindus 1.18% Muslims 62.95% Sikhs.	82.41% Hindu 11.67% Muslim 1.99% Sikh

Local educational resources are growing to serve the expanding Malerkotla community. The Municipal Committee lists thirty-two local schools below the college level in Malerkotla, but there are many, many more unregistered with the municipality. Malerkotla, like India in general, has witnessed an efflorescence of ‘model schools,’ privately run schools that target particular communities. These are often opened as business ventures with little investment in the education of the children beyond getting them through the qualifying exams that form the backbone of the Indian educational system. There are government schools at all levels, but the best grammar and secondary schools are run privately and in association with religious networks. The Zorawar and Fateh Singh School is named for the two sons of Guru Gobind Singh whose execution was protested by the Malerkotla Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan. This school abuts the Singh Sabha Gurdwara. The Jain Girls School is one of the best girls' high schools in town. There is a Sita Grammar School that is run by a nationwide group affiliated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a Hindu nationalist organization.<sup>123</sup> During my stay in Malerkotla there were local rumors concerning the difficulty of Muslims gaining employment there, but Muslim children did attend the school. Through the efforts of the Jama#at-i Islamī, Islamiyya High Schools for boys and girls have been founded in town. There are also numerous *madrasas*, Islamic schools which focus on Arabic, Qur"anic studies, and religious practice along with the standard curriculum. Several such schools have been founded for girls as well as boys. Any educational institution is important in Malerkotla, as the literacy rate in 1991 was 42% as compared to Punjab’s rate of 57%. Although this is surprising given historic Muslim dominance. This is, unfortunately, typical of Muslim majority communities that tend on a national level to have lower literacy rates. It represents an enormous improvement, however,

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<sup>123</sup> It is well worth noting that the current head of the Sītā Grammar School is a Muslim.

from pre-Independence times when it is widely reported that the rulers did not allow their low caste subjects, Muslim or others, to read or go to school. In 1904 the literacy rate was highest among Jains at 18.5%. 4.5% of Hindus, 4% of Sikhs, and just 2% of Muslims could read and write. Only 7% of men and 0.2% of women were literate.<sup>124</sup> By 1971 these numbers were vastly improved but still not very impressive with a literate population of just 27%.<sup>125</sup>

Civic associations proliferate in Malerkotla, as elsewhere in India, ranging from international organizations such as the Rotary Club, to local literary societies (Sahit Sangam), to a group of cactus lovers (Greenwood Cactus and Succulent Society). There is an organization representing every imaginable interest group. It is difficult to know how many such associations are present and how many are actually active as many are not incorporated and therefore are not listed with the municipality. Some groups last only a few meetings and others endure with very few members and a limited mandate. Significantly, the office holders in many of these organizations represent multiple religious groups. For example, the local Bar Association, Bar Clerk Association, chemists Association, Journalists' Coordination Committee, Manufacturers and Suppliers Association, Malerkotla Printers Association, Rotract (sic) Club, Leo Club, Malerkotla Welfare Association, Malerkotla Heritage Society, Ex-Serviceman League Committee, Punjab Pensioners Association, and Malerkotla Improvement Trust all have Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs on their executive boards.<sup>126</sup> A few groups tend to be managed by a single community, but have a plural membership such as the Rotary Club which has tended to have Hindu and Jain leadership. In fact, the Rotary Club also organized an #Id Milan, a gathering to felicitate the Muslim community on the occasion of the two major festivals known as #Id which

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<sup>124</sup> *Maler Kotla State Gazetteer*, (Lahore; The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904).

<sup>125</sup> Sharma, "Political Beliefs and Attitudes of a Religious Minority," page 38. In 1971 33.7% of Punjab was literate. Women's literacy rates were just 12.1% for Punjab and 8.7% for Malerkotla.

<sup>126</sup> Source, *The Tribune*, multiple dates within the last five years (1998-2003).

mark the Islamic calendar.<sup>127</sup> Thus single religious leadership alone does not indicate single religious membership. Nor does the non-religious agenda of the Rotary Club preclude its sponsorship of religious activities such as the celebratory gathering for #Id. Indeed, such events are commonly organized by many groups in Malerkotla as a means of reaching out to the Muslim majority population. There are also associations specifically targeted to the interests of religiously based communities such as the Muslim Welfare Action Committee or the Aggarwal Sabha (Hindu and Jain). In general, such groups tend to participate in corporate public life in overt ways, even if their membership and mandate concerns a single religious community. For example, the Guru Nanak Samaj Sudhar and Sports Club and the various Youth Clubs may all compete together in public contests. For large festivals, such as the Shi#i procession for their major observance Muharram, groups from some local temples and gurdwaras will place stands to offer water and other refreshments to the marching crowd. It is also important to highlight that members of multiple religious traditions oversee several of the largest occupational and professional groups, such as the Bar Association and the Manufacturers and Suppliers Association. Such integration fosters open communication, reduces competition and tension, and helps create a sound basis for inter-religious interaction.<sup>128</sup>

The combination of inter-religious and intra-religious organizations is an important aspect of Malerkotla's plural society. The existence of public spaces for both types of engagement fosters security within different religious communities and maximizes the

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<sup>127</sup> 'Id al-Fitr marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and 'Id al-Adha, known in India as Baqr 'Id, is the festival of sacrifice, marking Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail in accordance with God's command. 'Id Milans are a major part of civic life in Malerkotla and are sponsored and attended by multiple religious, social, and political groups.

<sup>128</sup> Most recently Ashutosh Varshney has highlighted the importance of formal and semiformal civic associations in fostering positive inter-religious relations. This subject will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Six: Regulating Peace. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

opportunities for open exchange and the forging of shared interests between religious communities. Without both inter-religious and intra-religious organizations, sacred sites, educational institutions, and public events, the fabric of the community would become unevenly balanced allowing certain groups to dominate to the exclusion of others. In the following several sections I will give brief descriptions of the most significant of these organizations, sites, and events with particular attention to the Muslim majority community.

## **RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

### **Sunni Muslims**

Given the estimate that Malerkotla is 70% Muslim, roughly 74,200 of the 106,802 residents are Muslim. Of these, approximately 2500 are Shi'as<sup>129</sup> making Sunnis the overwhelming majority. The greatest division within the Sunni community is between those who follow either the Deobandi or the Barelvi schools of thought.<sup>130</sup> Although often not officially affiliated with either group, Sunnis will describe themselves as sympathetic to one or the other perspective. The main implication of this is observable in terms of the relative austerity of their belief and practice. Those who claim Deobandi affiliation or inclination tend to oppose visits to saint's tombs, elaborate weddings or funerals, and public audition of music, and to advocate Islamic education, veiling for women, and active reconversion of those Indian Muslims who changed their identities during or after the upheaval of Partition. Barelvi adherents may be active in missionary groups, support attendance at saint's shrines, enjoy music and dance, and may be less strict in terms of women's social mores. Neither of these labels necessarily indicates

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<sup>129</sup> This is a rough estimate. From interviews with Shi'i leaders in Malerkotla, they report at least 500 Shi'i families. However, the local census does not inquire about this division making the numbers hard to determine precisely.

<sup>130</sup> For more on Deoband, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1982) and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2002).

any sort of formal affiliation, although they may. Instead, the distinction is used in common parlance as a means of distinguishing Muslims and organizations as more or less liberal in their approach to Islam and multi-religious society.

A number of Muslim organizations are active in Malerkotla.<sup>131</sup> Many are general, defying sectarian interests such as Sunni, Shī#ī, Deobandi, or Bareilvi. For example there is a Muslim Welfare Action Committee, a Muslim Social Reforms Panchayat, and a Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Memorial Society.<sup>132</sup> Muslims, being a numeric majority, are major participants in groups like the Sahit Sangam (Literary Society), Heritage Society, various Youth and Sport Clubs, the Tagore Fine Art Club, and the Malerkotla Adventure Club. There are few extremist organizations in Malerkotla. For example, one of several groups banned by the Indian government, the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI),<sup>133</sup> is not active in Malerkotla. In 2001 *The Tribune* reported that the "lone unit of the banned radical Muslim outfit in Punjab has been lying dormant." The article also claims that in all of Punjab the group consisted of only twenty to twenty-five activists.<sup>134</sup> The activities of SIMI and other organizations identified as terrorist or radical are closely watched in Malerkotla as this is the only Muslim region. Thus any such group that *is* active in Punjab of necessity keeps a low profile in town to the point that they have little observable impact on daily life.

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<sup>131</sup> Sharma, "Political Beliefs and Attitudes of a Religious Minority," p. 42; Anila Sultana, "Muslim Institutions and Organisations in Malerkotla and Their Impact on the Muslim Community," *Punjab History Conference XXVIII* (1996) and "Muslims of Malerkotla."

<sup>132</sup> Abdul Kalam Azad was a leader of India's freedom movement and a member of the Indian National Congress. He actively opposed Partition and Pakistan and strove to create a space for Muslim Indians. He is famously quoted saying, "I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality...Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism. If Hinduism has been the religion of the people here for several thousands of years, Islam has also been their religion for a thousand years. Just as a Hindu can say with pride that he is an Indian and follows Hinduism, so also can we say with equal pride that we are Indians and follow Islam." Cited in Stephen Hay, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. II., (New York; Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>133</sup> SIMI is often associated with Deoband and the banning of the group has been very controversial in India as similar youth organizations among the Hindus have not been targeted in the same way.

<sup>134</sup> Singh, Prabhjot, "SIMI's Punjab Unit Lying Dormant," *The Tribune*, (Chandigarh, November 29, 2001). *The Tribune* is the newspaper of record in Punjab having published continuously since the nineteenth century. There is a Punjabi and a Hindi version of the paper as well, though the English edition is the most widely read.

There are several specifically religious Muslim groups, such as the Dar ul-Ifta that oversees the legal life of the Muslim community. In 1908 Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan established the office of Dar ul-Ifta", and appointed a Mufti for the State.<sup>135</sup> Since independence the Punjab State Government manages the office, appointing the Mufti, paying his salary, and maintaining several of the local Muslim properties and institutions including three local mosques and the #Id Gah, where the Muslim community gathers for prayers on the two #Ids. This office has gained a higher profile in post 1947 India, as the Mufti of Malerkotla is effectively the legal authority for the Muslim community of the whole of Punjab. In Malerkotla, he officiates at marriage, divorce, and death ceremonies, gives legal advice and decisions, declares the two #Ids, manages the government mosques, and provides personal consultation in religious and personal matters. Nine men have served in this capacity. The current Mufti, Fazlur Rehman Hilal Usmani obtained his mufti degree from Dar-al-#Ulum, Deoband in Uttar Pradesh, whence he hails. He came to Malerkotla in 1973 as Mufti and his children have married and settled there as well. Although trained at Deoband, Mufti Fazlur Rehman clearly does not affiliate with the more radical wing, he is a progressive man, all his daughters have sought higher degrees and he appears on a regional television station to discuss religious issues for a largely non-Muslim audience. He runs a center, the Dar us-Salam Islamic Center, which operates a school and engages in a number of educational and outreach projects. He has published over sixty books, including a translation and commentary on the Qur"an, a biography of the Prophet, and, most recently, a volume on Muslim personal law issues relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance, in both Urdu and

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<sup>135</sup> A *mufti* is a scholar of Islamic law capable of issuing legal opinions or *fatwas*.

English. He has also written a book entitled *Memaar-e Insaniyat* (The Architect of Humanity) addressing the importance of cultivating a society that fosters mutual tolerance and respect.<sup>136</sup>

The most active organization among Muslims in Malerkotla, and throughout South Asia in general, may well be the Tablīghī Jamaʿat.<sup>137</sup> This grassroots movement began its missionary work in 1926 near Delhi under the leadership of a Sufi and scholar, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944). Ilyas was associated with Deoband, but the program of the Tablīghī Jamaʿat is much more basic than the higher Islamic educational goals of the Deobandi movement and institutions. Drawing on a conservative Sufi heritage pioneered by such leaders as Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and other Naqshbandis, the Tablīghī Jamaʿat is primarily intended to revitalize Islam among Muslims. Tablīghīs heed six ‘simple’ principles: *iman* (belief), *salat* (prayer), *#ilm* and *dhikr* (knowledge and remembrance of Allah), *ikram-i muslimīn* (respect for fellow Muslims), *ikhlas-i niyyat* (sincerity or purity of intention), and *tafrīgh-i-waqt* (spending time working for Islam). These principles are executed by groups or *jamaʿats* of ten volunteers who go on missionary programs for (ideally) three days in every month. In Punjab, this takes on a unique tenor as the group is often targeting populations of Muslims who, in order to survive during Partition disavowed Islam or fell away from it afterwards.

The Tablīghī Jamaʿat has had a profound effect on Malerkotla. Many local residents are active members and the town provides a natural center for visiting *jamaʿats* who come to Punjab to engage in the work of reviving Islam in the state. Weekly meetings, called *ijtimaʿ*, are held

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<sup>136</sup> Usmani, Mufti Fazl-ur-Rehman Hilal, *Memaar-e-Insaniyat*, (Malerkotla; Jamia' Dar-us-Salam, 1991) and *The Islamic Law: Marriage, Divorce, Inheritance*, (Malerkotla; Darus Salam Islamic Centre, 2000). Also see, Vikrant Jindal, "A Codifier of Islamic Laws." *Tribune*, (December 5, 2000).

<sup>137</sup> See Mumtaz Ahmad, "Islamic Fundamentalism: The Jamā'at-i Islāmī and Tablīghī Jamā'at of South Asia," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, edited by Martin Marty and Scott Appleby, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991), Barbara Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablīghī Jamā'at," *Journal of Asian Studies* (Volume 52, no. 3, 1993), "New Medinas: The Tablīghī Jamā'at in America and Europe," in *Making Muslim Space*, edited by Barbara Metcalf, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1996).

by a number of leaders, including several women. These *ijtima*# follow a fairly set program in which members of the assembly perform *na#ts* or praise hymns to the Prophet, receive instruction in some basic practice or belief, such as the proper method for the prayer ablutions, ask questions about leading a religious life, testify to changes or miracles wrought by submission to Allah, perform prayers and prostration (*du#a* and *sajda*), and hear a formal exhortation by the leader. Since the time of Partition, Tabligh and other conservative groups have been increasingly active locally. Their impact is noticeable according to local residents and scholars. Fewer weddings are celebrated in ornate fashion, music is performed publicly less, more women wear some type of veil in public, and other such social changes.<sup>138</sup> A local college professor, Malerkotla native, and author of several studies on Malerkotla, Anila Sultana asserts "in due course, partially for reasons of compulsion and partially due to conviction created in people's mind by the preachings of the Jama#at, the playing of music on marriages etc. has been discontinued since the early eighties."<sup>139</sup> Sultana also claims that the local *qawwali* singers and *mirasans* (a hereditary group of dancing and singing entertainers) have been effectively shut down in Malerkotla. However, Malerkotla *qawwal* groups are often featured at events throughout Punjab and do perform occasionally at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh. Furthermore, in my own experience at Muslim weddings in Malerkotla, *mirasans* performed at ladies singing nights leading up to the wedding and at the henna ceremony the night before the marriage itself.<sup>140</sup> Nonetheless, *qawwals* at Haider Shaikh or elsewhere in town are rare events and the *mirasans* principally perform for the Pathan elite of the town, their hereditary patrons.

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<sup>138</sup> Sultana, Anila, "Muslim Institutions and Organisations in Malerkotla and Their Impact on the Muslim Community," *Punjab History Conference XXVIII* (1996).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p. 266.

<sup>140</sup> It is worth pointing out that the *mirāsans* tend to complain about a reduction in their employment and about their low income, and several Pathan families said they hired them less frequently and would more often use recorded film music for wedding parties.

Such reforms are also advocated by the Jama'at ahl-e Hadith. This group is present in Malerkotla, though extremely small. The Ahl-e Hadith regard only the Qur'an and the Hadith as authoritative sources in the determination of Islamic law. They strongly oppose any practices such as *dargah* attendance that bears resemblance to the practices of non-Muslims. There is a mosque and a *madrassa* (Islamic school) run by the Ahl-e Hadith in the center of the Moti Bazaar in the center of the Maler neighborhood. There is also an association founded for the uplift of the largest lower caste Muslim community in Malerkotla, the Khambhoj.<sup>141</sup> This group, the Anjuman Islahi Khambohan runs schools, educational programs, gives financial aid and also seeks to engender the types of social reforms indicated above.

Another influential Sunni group in Malerkotla is the Jama'at-i Islāmī. Although its membership of about 1500 individuals is small, its local impact is considerable. The Jama'at-i Islāmī was founded in about 1938 by Abul #ala Maudādi (1903-1979) to organize the Indian Muslim community and provide a stronger foundation of Islam in the country. Maudādi's writings are extremely popular in South Asia and throughout the Muslim world, and the influence of his thought can hardly be exaggerated. The Jama'at-i Islāmī's ideology is extremely conservative and is often described as fundamentalist and linked with terrorist groups.<sup>142</sup> One of

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<sup>141</sup> The Kambhoj are an agricultural caste of indigenous Indians converted to Islam. Their social status prior to the redistribution of land rights after independence was quite low. Since that time, the Kambhoj in Malerkotla are among the largest and most powerful groups in town. For British assessments of the nature of the Kambhoj see, D. Ibbetson, E.D. MacLagan, and H.A. Rose., *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, (Lahore: Government Printing House, 1919 (1883)). For a local perspective on Kambhoj status, see Anila Sultana, "The Agrarian Structure and the Muslims of Malerkotla," *Punjab History Conference XXV* (1992), Anila Sultana, "Hierarchical Change in the Muslim Society of Malerkotla in the Post-Independence Period," *Punjab History Conference XXVII* (1995), Mohammad Khalid Zubairy, *Malerkotla: Itihas Ke Darpan Me* (Malerkotla: Tarkash Publications, 2000).

<sup>142</sup> Although the US State Department's annual Patterns of Global Terrorism (2002) does not include Jamā'at-i Islāmī among its listed groups, it does identify Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) as the "militant wing" of Jamā'at-i Islāmī. Indian politicians have often sought to link Jamā'at-i Islāmī with HM and other Islamic organizations they view as anti-state. The Students Islamic Movement in India (SIMI) has been so linked and have been banned by the Indian Government under the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (2001). Typically journalists and authors will lump Jamaat-i Islami in with a range of radical Islamic groups. See, for example, B. Raman, "Jama'at-e-Islami, Hizbul Mujahideen, and Al-Qaeda." South Asia Analysis Group, (<http://www.saag.org/papers7/paper699.html>, 2003).

the chief objectives of the Jama'at-i Islamī is the establishment of *sharī'a* as the law of the land. However, historically the Jama'at-i Islamī did not support nationalism of any kind, religious or otherwise. In fact, Maudūdī himself opposed the partition of India, although he moved to Pakistan after 1947 and became deeply concerned with Islamizing the constitution and the country. In Pakistan the Jama'at-i Islamī became deeply involved in politics and is now a significant political party. In India, the Jama'at-i Islamī-e Hind has asserted an anti-political position and focuses on social service and missionary work. One of the principle activities of the Jama'at-i Islamī in Punjab is the reestablishment of mosques lost in the mayhem of Partition and the rehabilitation of Muslims who in the last fifty years either adopted Sikh and Hindu customs, or simply became less devout in their observations in order to get along in the new order. The Jama'at-i Islamī builds mosques, sends teachers, opens *madrasas* and provides literature about Islam to the communities. The leader in Malerkotla, Maulana Abdul Rauf, makes enormous efforts to do this in cooperation with local authorities. For the establishment of a new mosque for example, he seeks donations, labor, materials, and other supports from the entire community. At the ceremonies inaugurating these projects he invites Sikhs and Hindus, as well as Muslims, and uses the opportunity to foster greater understanding of Islam in relation to other traditions. Through such strategies the Maulana and the Jama'at-i Islamī unite their interests in uplifting Islam and fostering community solidarity and a type of secularism conducive to these efforts.

Abdul Rauf's attitude towards inter-religious exchange is consistent with the findings of Yoginder Sikand in a recent study of the Jama'at-i Islamī's strategies of inter-religious dialogue, in which he emphasizes the pragmatism of the position taken by Jama'at-i Islamī ideologues. As an organization of and for a minority population, the Jama'at-i Islamī is committed to work

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Also referenced, U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2002* (<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2002/>).

for the advancement of the Muslim faith. Their mission to demonstrate the superiority of Islam very deliberately does not involve coercion of any sort. Rather, the Jama#at-i Islāmī's *da#wat* (proselytizing) efforts must follow "ethical, constructive, peaceful, democratic and constitutional means" and avoid "all such activities as are opposed to truth and honesty or are likely to provoke communal hatred, class conflict or social disorder."<sup>143</sup> Thus the focus of Jama#at-i Islāmī activities is upon social service projects likely to foster trust and exchange. Indeed, the Jama#at-i Islāmī's ideologues take to task those Muslims who declare that Islam is only for Muslims, rather than belonging to the world. As *the* global, true faith, Islam must include all people and places in its efforts to restore justice, equality, human rights, ethics etc. to conformity with Allah's will. It is important to recall that the Jama#at-i Islāmī in India resolutely opposed the establishment of Pakistan, in particular objecting to the notion of a bounded *ummah* defined by national borders. The religion of Islam could not be applicable in only certain places and times, and the challenges of minority life must be accepted as the will of Allah and met head on. Pakistan, by this logic, is the coward's solution.

Nonetheless, life in India poses many challenges to Muslims. In order to survive in the Hindu dominated Indian political and social milieu, Muslims must manifestly conform to the laws of the constitution of India and give the majority population no cause for suspicion or alarm. Jama#at-i Islāmī member Muhammad Yusuf Islahi addresses this necessity by saying that Muslims should "desist from all such thoughts and actions that might cause the majority to seek revenge or which would create distance and hatred or lead to separatism."<sup>144</sup> The Jama#at-i Islāmī advocates loyalty and love for India, but this must be tempered and never border on *watan*

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<sup>143</sup> *Jamā'at-i Islāmī Hind: Policy and Programme (April 1999-March 2003)*, (Delhi; Publicity Bureau, Jamā'at-i Islāmī Hind, 1999), quoted in Yoginder, Sikand, "An Islamist Approach to Inter-Faith Dialogue: The Jamā'at-i Islāmī of India." *Qalandar* (2003), p.15.

<sup>144</sup> Muhammad Yusuf Islahi, *Izzat ki zindagi aur Musلمانan-i Hind*, (Delhi; Maktaba-i Zikra, 1999), p. 13, quoted in Sikand, p. 9.

*parasti*, meaning worship of the nation. *Qaum parasti*, worship of one's community, is also criticized and equated with communalism or religious chauvinism. Furthermore, such sentiments potentially lead to *shirk* (polytheism). A true Muslim will worship only Allah and reject the temptation to set up any worldly comparisons to Him. Although religious pride short of worship of the faith itself rather than God is advocated by the Jama'at-i Islami, the superiority of Islam does not preclude inter-religious dialogue or the pursuit of knowledge about other religious systems. Knowledge of Hinduism is a preparation for more effective outreach, and for that purpose Hinduism should be studied and understood, not dismissed as irredeemable polytheism. Initiatives to open up public forums for inter-religious dialogue have been taken, although at this point Sikand is doubtful of their impact. At a national level such efforts are limited in their scope and impact, but in local settings such as Malerkotla the Jama'at-i Islami's policy and program of openness has been a reality, not merely a recommended course of action.

Though small, the Jama'at-i Islami in Malerkotla has had great success in several areas in terms of outreach to other religious communities. In December 2000 at the celebration of the end of Ramadan, the Jama'at-i Islami, like many other organizations sponsored an #Id Milan, a celebratory gathering in which various invited guests speak and perform in honor of the festival. Community leaders and political parties all hosted these events, including the Congress Party, the Waqf Board, and the local Member of Parliament (MP), Simranjit Singh Mann. Rather than join this parade, the Jama'at-i Islami organized an #Id Milan in neighboring Nabha to which representatives of all religious communities were invited and gave speeches. Maulana Abdul Rauf dismissed the other gatherings sponsored by political parties as mere show, attempting to garner votes or gain local prestige. The Nabha gathering, by contrast, was deliberately held outside of Malerkotla, as a means of incorporating non-Muslims into the audience and to use the

opportunity to inform a community less familiar with Islam of the joy and privilege of having completed the fast for the glorious month of Ramadan. As mentioned above, the Jama'at-i Islamī have sought to involve local non-Muslims in their efforts to find and support the isolated Muslims of rural Punjab who remained during Partition. Furthermore, in Malerkotla during times of stress, the Jama'at-i Islamī leaders have been active participants in Peace Committees and other bridge building efforts. Indeed, Abdul Rauf professed respect and admiration for the local Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader.<sup>145</sup> As both the Jama'at-i Islamī and the RSS are widely regarded as Muslim and Hindu radical organizations respectively, it is significant that in Malerkotla they are not oppositional groups and even work together in some endeavors.

This cooperative effort is exemplified by an incident sometime in the mid-1980's in which a cow was killed and the blame was placed on several Muslim youths, leading to heightened tensions and a crowd gathering. Several people were arrested, but to relieve the pressure Abdul Rauf, the Deputy Commissioner, the Superintendent of Police, and a number of other Hindu and Muslim community leaders gathered. Abdul Rauf initiated the conciliation process by spontaneously asking the group's forgiveness for anything he may have done to cause offense. His lead was followed and in the process those actually accused also begged forgiveness, allowing the situation to defuse. Abdul Rauf claimed to have "family relations" with local RSS leaders, visits Hindu homes for Diwali and such occasions, and refrains from

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<sup>145</sup> The RSS, founded in 1925 by K.M. Hedgewar is the 'father' of the Sangh Parivar (family of the Sangh), a group of Hindu organizations that seek to revive and reestablish Hinduism in India through a variety of strategies and networks. The RSS organizes on an extremely local basis, gathering people for weekly exercises and meetings. The group professes a non-political stance. That role is taken up by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – currently ruling at the center. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is the explicitly religious wing of the family, made up of religious leaders and activists. It is the most militant of those directly linked with the RSS, but its youth group, the Bajrang Dal (BD) is one of the most virulent radical Hindu organizations in operation. There is a small RSS chapter in the Malerkotla area, limited BJP appeal, and no discernible activity from any other Hindu extremists.

passing judgment on even the most capricious elements of the Hindu community.<sup>146</sup> He extolled the importance of Muslims in Punjab, saying that though they are few in number, like salt, you need just a little and without it there is no flavor. Abdul Rauf also declares, echoing the policy of the Jama'at-i Islamī as represented by Sikand above, that loyalty to one's own faith does not necessitate hostility towards any other religion. He says, "Love with one's religion is not a bad thing, but you should not hate the other religion. As all parents love their children, likewise the religion is also loveable. But you should not have hatred for other religions." The Jama'at-i Islamī has a book center next to one of the main gates of Malerkotla which distributes literature and recently the group sponsored the production of a Punjabi translation of the Qur'an.<sup>147</sup> Maulana Abdul Rauf is also the imam of a small mosque which is one of the only mosques in which there is a space available for women to attend and hear the Friday *khutba* (sermon).

The major sites of significance in Malerkotla for the Sunni community include the Jama' Masjid, the #Id Gah, and the Dargah of Haider Shaikh. Numerous other mosques exist to serve the neighborhoods in which they are located. In addition to Abdul Rauf's mosque, another local religious leader, Hafiz Ghulam Rasul, has helped to organize a place for women to recite the #Id prayers together. Otherwise, women pray in their homes. Each mosque in town has its own governing board which undertakes charitable and social service work funded by the community's *zakat* (prescribed charitable offerings). Many of these groups fundraise for causes such as in the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake in 2000 or for the victims of violence in the Gujarat riots of 2002. The Jama' Masjid is the center for the activities of the Tablīghī Jama'at, and missionary

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<sup>146</sup> This is consistent with the controversial doctrine of *rja'* in Islam in which judgment on the salvation or damnation of others is regarded as the sole provenance of Allah and is not to be infringed upon. Though usually understood only in terms of sinning Muslims, Rauf's attitude signals a general openness to the possibility of change and redemption on the part of all humans.

<sup>147</sup> The Punjabi translation is of the Yusuf Ali edition which is the most widely disseminated Qur'an in the world. *The Qur'ān*, translated by Yusuf Ali, (Elmhurst, New York; Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc).

groups from all over India that come to Punjab often stay there. Although not all local Sunnis believe in the efficacy of *ziyarat* (pilgrimage to saints' tombs), most local residents do express respect for Haider Shaikh and take a certain pride in his fame and the popularity of his cult. There are many, many other *dargahs* in town, though none rival the prominence of Haider Shaikh.<sup>148</sup> In particular there are the *dargahs* of Baba Bodle Sahib, Lakhdatta Pir, Ghani Shah Chishti, and Naugaha Pir. Many residents claim that the safety and peace of Malerkotla is due to the large number of sainted dead in and around the settlement. The ubiquity of tomb shrines gives this theory some foundation. Muslims as well as non-Muslims attend all of these shrines, and at least one is managed by a Sikh.

### **Shī#as in Malerkotla**

Shī#a tend not to visit any of the local *dargahs*. Although Shī#as pay reverence to *sayyids* who are descended from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali, they tend to visit only their own sacred sites and graves of Shī#ī imams.<sup>149</sup> The differences between Shī#ī and Sunni belief and practice has been a common source of intra-religious strife in South Asia.<sup>150</sup> But as with the Hindu-Muslim divisions that are in many cases more axiomatic than actual, Sunni- Shī#a relations are often congenial. In certain areas they may

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<sup>148</sup> Indeed there are so many *dargāhs* I was unable to count all of them. I counted six tomb shrines with substantial buildings around them and twenty-seven smaller ones, but there are innumerable graves that receive some devotional attention but are nearly invisible or concealed within someone's property. Several residents call Malerkotla a city of *buzurgs* (pious elders).

<sup>149</sup> See for example, Anne H. Betteridge, "Women and Shrines in Shiraz," in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, edited by Donna Lee and Evelyn A. Early Bowen, (Bloomington; Indian University Press, 1993), Juan R. Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War*, (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), Ignaz Goldziher, "On the Veneration of the Dead in Paganism and Islam," in *Muslim Studies*, edited by S.M Stern, (London; George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1967), Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, (Albany; State University of New York Press, 1981), David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala : Muslim Devotional Life in India*, (Basingstoke; Palgrave, 2001) and *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, (New York; St. Martin's Press, 1993).

<sup>150</sup> Riots in association with the 'Ashura observances have occurred and continue to occur throughout South Asia. In Pakistan in particular, disputes arise which may likely be only partially religiously based, but derive more from the tensions between migrant populations from Partition and natives. See the chapter "Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan," in Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*.

find spaces for common ground. In Malerkotla though small (approximately 2,500 people) the Shī#a are well established. This is due in no small part to frequent patronage by the Nawabs and their kin. According to local Shi'i leaders the local Shī#a belong to the Isna #Ashari (Twelver) sect.<sup>151</sup> There are two groups among the Shī#a in Malerkotla, the Sayyids who trace their descent from the Prophet Muhammad, and the Shaikhs who descend from Indian converts. The two main Shī#ī associations serve each of these populations, the Anjuman Hussaini is associated with the Sayyids and the Anjuman Haideri is constituted by the Shaikh community.<sup>152</sup> Interestingly, most residents report that relations between Sayyids and Shaikhs are often more tense than those between the Shī#ī and Sunni populations. There is one Shī#ī Jama# Masjid and five *imambaras*, the shrines of the Shī#a that house *taziyas* (replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb) and are usually attached to mosques. The Nawab's family constructed the Shī#ī Jama# Masjid and two other *imambaras*. The mother of the second to last Nawab built one as the fulfillment of a vow she had made to Imam Hussain when praying for a son. It is known as either the *Sarkari* (government) or *Riyasati* (royal) *Imambara*. There is also the Imambara Ihsaniyya, constructed by a relative of the Nawab, Ihsan Ali Khan. This is located directly opposite the Diwan Khana (the public palace of the Nawabs). In the late nineteenth century a local community of Shī#a, the Khojgan *biraderi* (brotherhood or clan), built an *imambara* with their own resources, independent from the government. The Khojgan are Shaikh and are a very tight knit and active

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<sup>151</sup> Most of the *imāmbārās*, the centers of Shī#ī ritual life that house replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb, contain pictures of the Ayatollah Khomeini who led the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Khomeini was a leader in the Ithna" #Ashari sect which believes in twelve Imams subsequent to the Prophet Muhammad all of whom possess esoteric wisdom and understanding of the true nature of Islam and are able to communicate this knowledge to the community. Since 874 there has been no manifest Imam as due to persecution the Imam went into occultation and is now available through mediators who are able to transmit his wisdom to the faithful. The Imam Mahdi will appear as a preface to the Day of Judgment, a belief shared by Sunni Muslims.

<sup>152</sup> There are several excellent studies of the Shī#a in South Asia, see especially Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq* and *Sacred Space and Holy War*. See also the work of David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*, "Shi'ism in South Asia." *The Muslim World* LXXXVII, no. 3-4 (1997): 235-57; and *The Shiites*.

group. A small *imambara* has recently been put up directly across from Imambara Khojgan and is run by the Anjuman-e Hussaini.

In Malerkotla, though the Shī#a are few in number, during the first ten days of the month of Muharram they are suddenly ubiquitous. As Malerkotla is the only place in Indian Punjab housing an active *imambara*, Shī#a from all over the state come here to celebrate Muharram. This memorial observation marks the martyrdom of Hussain, the Prophet Mohammad's grandson, along with seventy-two of his companions in 680 CE on the field of Karbala by the Caliph Yazīd. For the Shī#ī community all over the world this event signifies the ultimate sacrifice and victory (even in death) of Hussain for the preservation of true Islam against the oppressive, depraved, and evil Yazīd. The magnitude of the sacrifice of Hussain exceeds all human capacity to acknowledge, but the rites of Muharram are an effort to do so. The rituals associated with this event continue throughout the year, but they come to a climax in Muharram. For the first ten days the entire Shī#ī population holds regular *majalis* (sg. *majlis*) or gatherings in private homes and in the *imambaras*. During a *majlis* the group will together recite dirges called *noha* and *marsiya* concerning the various members of Hussain's band of followers and Hussain himself, dwelling on their pitiable state as they lay besieged by Yazīd's forces and denied access to water even for the women and children.<sup>153</sup> After a period of recitation, one among the group, or the Imam if present, will recount a *hadis*, a story about Imam Hussain or one of the heroes of Karbala. This telling should be imbued with such pathos that it brings the assembly to tears.

The shedding of tears in memory of the martyrs of Karbala is seen as a sign of one's deep sense of indebtedness to Hussain and his household and sorrow for their loss. This debt and

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<sup>153</sup> These dirges, called *noha* and *marsiya* are chanted rhythmically but, like all Muslim recitations are never referred to as music or singing. For an excellent study of Shī#ī women's *majālis* and *marsiya* traditions, see Amy Bard, "Desolate Victory: Shī#ī Women and the Mar'siyah Texts of Lucknow." (Columbia University, 2002).

anguish is further acknowledged in the custom of *matam*, or self-flagellation, which Shī#ī men and women engage in as the emotion of the recited *nohas* and *marsiyas* reaches a crescendo. Most often *matam* consists solely of *hath ka matam*, breast beating with the hand of varying degrees of severity. Indeed to have a visible mark or even to draw blood from the blows is regarded as a badge of honor. For most women and men this is the extent of *matam*. Some men and boys also engage in *matam* involving knives or swords, striking themselves to the rhythmic chanting of "Ya Ali, Ya Hussain." The wounds from these sessions of *matam* are usually treated only with rose water and, if necessary, a bandage. *Zinjīl ka matam* (flagellation with knives) and *talwar ka matam* (flagellation with swords) usually takes place only on the tenth day of Muharram (known as *#ashura*, or the tenth, in the Arab world but simply as Muharram in India). This day is marked by a procession through the town made up of mourners from all the Shī#ī and some other communities. Some Shī#ī women process apart from the man, though they do not engage in public *matam* or recitations of *nohas*. Various groups carried the *taziyas* (replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb) and *#alams* (banners) that have been carefully crafted over the preceding year for this occasion. Some *taziyas* and *#alams* are passed down from generation to generation in a family or confessional community. Others are made to be disposable as the entire procession concludes with the interment of several *taziyas* in a special ground, known as Karbala, dedicated for their burial. In Malerkotla the participants recited dirges and engaged in increasingly vigorous *matam* all along the procession route until arriving at an open ground near one of the *imambaras* at which the *zinjīl ka matam* and *talwar ka matam* took place. After this the procession proceeded towards Karbala, stopping for an exhortation from an Imam about the significance of the day and the importance of publicly demonstrating the magnitude of Hussain's sacrifice on behalf of all Muslims. By the end of the procession, many of the participants are

hoarse or even voiceless from their recitations and bruised or bloody from the *matam*. Yet every single person with whom I spoke at the completion and on the day after – including those who had performed *talwar ka matam* – reported that they desired only that they could do more to acknowledge their gratitude to the Imam and the devastation of his loss.

Although the primary participants in the procession are Shī#a, groups of Hindus participate as well, especially young children for whom carrying a *taziyya* is regarded as an especial blessing.<sup>154</sup> Hindus also often take vows before the *taziyas* that are permanently installed in the various *imambaras* in town.<sup>155</sup> The caretakers of three of the *imambaras* informed me that this was quite common and that Imam Hussain was regarded by Hindus and Muslims alike as extremely effective in granting children to supplicants. At the completion of the procession in Malerkotla in 2001, a Hindu woman left an offering of *khīr* (sweet milk rice) at the ground of Karbala in acknowledgement some prayer that had been fulfilled through the blessing of Imam Hussain. Along the procession route there were several places where some sustenance was distributed. Although many Shī#a fast on this day and for the preceding two days, others partake of proffered tea and fruit sweetened water and sometimes also food, particularly *halwa* (a sweet porridge filled with nuts and raisins). Sikhs, Hindus and Sunnis all perform the service of providing beverages and food to the processors, acknowledging the devotion necessary to sustain the long day of walking from one end of town to the other while chanting dirges and performing *matam*. Sunnis in Malerkotla also participate in other ways. At several *majalis* I encountered Sunni men and women who professed an appreciation for either

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<sup>154</sup> This custom is widely reported throughout India. See David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala : Muslim Devotional Life in India*, (Basingstoke; Palgrave, 2001), "Shi'ism in South Asia," *The Muslim World* (LXXXVII, no. 3-4 (1997), *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, (New York; St. Martin's Press, 1993)

<sup>155</sup> In addition, H.A. Rose notes that Hindu women make vows for children and dedicate their sons to Islam until a certain age as water bearers in the *taziya* procession of Muharram, after which they return to the Hindu fold. Rose, H.A. *Rites and Ceremonies of Hindus and Muslims*, (New Delhi; Amar Prakashan, 1983 [1908]), p. 16.

the depth of devotion of the Shīʿa or for Imam Hussain himself, or a respect and affection for a neighbor or friend that impelled them to participate. At one house I met a young Sunni man who was good friends with a Shīʿī man whose family was hosting the *majlis*. He said that while his friendship with the Shīʿī was acceptable to his family, his mother told him not to eat in their house (a request that he ignored). This indicates both the extent and the limits of Shi'i-Sunni relations. Whereas personal connections may override social sanction, the prejudices of each community are still widely felt.

The perennial nature of the conflict was explained to me by a retired schoolteacher (a Sunni). He says:

- Teacher: The Shīʿī-Sunni quarrel was always there, whenever they had their horse procession, a quarrel was there. Efforts would be made and then the matter would cool down.
- AB: But the Shīʿī-Sunni quarrels occur now in places, and sometimes are very serious.
- Teacher: No, it was never serious, it just became inevitable, and communal riots might occur. So, the people, peace-loving people, easily pacify them, and there is communal harmony.

Indeed at the 2001 Muharram observations I witnessed no obvious tension between these communities in spite of the fact that three major local festivals coincided over the course of ten days. First, was the Hindu celebration of *navaratri*, or the nine nights of the goddess. During this time several local Hindu groups sponsored *kathas* (recitations of poems and stories about the goddess) and *bhajan* (devotional song) singing sessions. These gatherings were often in public and often at night, as were many of the Shīʿī *majalis*. Although state records indicate that riots have in the past occurred over a similar incident, the coincidence did not lead to any difficulties. The eighth day of *navaratri* is Ramnaumi, for which a local temple had sponsored a reading of the *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulsīdas (a medieval Hindi version of the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*) and a

parade through town.<sup>156</sup> In spite of several snafus, totally unrelated to the simultaneity of Muharram, these events occurred without conflicting with one another or creating tension in the town.<sup>157</sup> Also, several days prior to the tenth day there was a large gathering for Haider Shaikh as is typical of the first Thursday of the lunar month which always draws substantial numbers of devotees, five to ten thousand. Easter and the birthday celebration for Guru Hargobind also fell during this period, but did not involve any significant gatherings. For several days, however, the usually crowded streets of Malerkotla were quite overwhelmed with processions and people. This never led to any conflict, and the only contestations concerned the timing of the parades and the order of procession.

Perhaps one of the most important reasons why Sunni-Shīʿī relations have not escalated to a deleterious level was the positive relationship with the ruling family. In an example of state patronage at a *majlis* at the Riyasati Imambara I encountered the Begum of Malerkotla, one of the two surviving wives of the last Nawab. She believed quite strongly in the efficacy of attendance at these gatherings. She attends the *majlis* annually and she and her husband (in better times) were major patrons of the Riyasati Imambara. The Begum informed me that the mother of Nawab Sikandar Ali Khan (d. 1881) built this Imambara because her son was born after she had prayed to Imam Hussain for a child. In the building there is a picture of Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan (the father of the last Nawab, Iftikhar) and of Ayatollah Khomeini. The

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<sup>156</sup> The Ramnaumi celebrations were broken up not due to any communal trouble but because the *homa* (fire ritual) that marked the completion of the reading resulted in a truly terrifying bee swarm due to the smoke rising into an old tree at the temple. The resulting chaos ended after an hour with several people hospitalized and over fifty given shots to reduce their reactions to the multiple stings they had received. Later the organizers blamed the events on having begun the *homa* prior to the absolute completion of the recitation in order to keep the procession on schedule. This disrespect was remedied and the festival proceeded.

<sup>157</sup> Conflicts over simultaneous processions at Muharram and Hindu festival times are common causes for Hindu-Muslim and Sunni-Shīʿī violence.

Begum clearly appreciated the emotional dirges, though she did not herself engage in *matam* and (like most Sunnis) says that it is wrong to harm the body in this way.

From this it is apparent that the Shī#ī community in Malerkotla has enjoyed a fair amount of state patronage and reportedly little persecution, though their population remains small. The State records mention conflicts, particularly concerning the taking out of *taziyas* (replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb) and *#alam* (flags) during the observations of Muharram. However, these appear more often than not to be conflicts between Shī#ī groups or members of the Nawab's family who sought pre-eminence in the order of procession or refused to allow the marchers to proceed over their territory. At several points in the mid-nineteenth century a controversy arose over the celebrations of Muharram involving the sons and grandson of Nawab Bahadur Khan.

The Nawab's son, Dalel Khan "had a taste for Shyaism [sic]" and thus

brought out a horse imitative of Ali's charger, Duldul (Zuljenah), for procession which excited the religious feelings of the Sunnis so much that they crossed the path of it, and a *melee* ensued in which Dalel Khan lost his two upper front teeth, and the reader of the dirges of Hassan and Hussein was severely cudged. Henceforth Dalel Khan never dared publicly to profess the all-revered Shaya rite.<sup>158</sup>

Dalel's son, Ghulam Mohammad Khan, however, showed no such reservations and he resolved upon "performing openly in the town of Kotla those ceremonies which would have hurt the feelings of the Sunnis; rendering imminent an affray between the two sects. For the sake of public peace he was debarred from his intention by Mr. Barnes, the Commissioner of Ambala."<sup>159</sup> Although it appeared necessary to appeal to the British authorities outside the state on this account, the prohibition was followed up by an order from the Nawab Sikandar Ali Khan to confine and regulate the procession. This order specifies the routes to be taken by the various groups bringing out *taziyas* and *#alams*, the timing of these processions, and the amount of

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<sup>158</sup> Inayat Ali Khan, *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*, (Lahore; Civil And Military Gazette Press, 1882), p. 21-22.

<sup>159</sup> Khan, 1882, p. 23-24.

accompanying ceremony that may occur in terms of the recitation of *noha* (poems for the martyrs) along the way. A great deal of regard in the edict is paid to respecting the rights of performance within one's own territory as Malerkotla in those days was made up of dozens of minor *jagīrs* or land grants, to the various branches of the ruling clan. Furthermore, precedent in the observations is a major factor and Ghulam Mohammad is explicitly directed "to abstain from any innovations which would wound the feelings of the Nawab and his subjects."<sup>160</sup> The prohibition on innovations in the observance of Muharram brought this particular controversy to a close and allowed for the struggle for precedence between Ghulam Mohammad and other members of the royal family to step back from their aggressive postures without a complete loss of honor.<sup>161</sup>

The trouble arose again in 1935 in the middle of tensions between Hindus and Muslims that had begun earlier in the year. The *Fortnightly Report* from the Political Agent of the Panjab States, reported that a Sunni-Shī#ī dispute occurred over a Duldul (Hussain's martyred horse) procession during Muharram procession to be taken out by Khan Ihsan Ali Khan, a Shī#ī member of the royal house of the Khans. Although permission for the procession and its route had been duly received from Nawab the previous year, things went awry. The procession was supposed to take place in a neighborhood known as Sherwani Kot. But the Khan who possessed

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<sup>160</sup> Khan, 1882, p. 27.

<sup>161</sup> It is worth noting that the disputes between Nawabi families were exacerbated by a rather peculiar arrangement of succession which began during the eighteenth century and continued into the late nineteenth century, eventually resulting in a British investigation into the rights of inheritance in princely states. First, Jamal Khan inherited by abdication from his brother Ghulam Hussein who showed little skill as a ruler. Subsequent generations of descendants from Ghulam Hussein's lineage have occasionally laid claim to the throne. Second, after the death of Jamal Khan in 1755, the eldest of his five sons Bhikam Khan inherited the throne. Bhikam died in 1763 while his son Wazir Khan was a minor. Thus the second of Jamal Khan's sons, Bahadur inherited. At Bahadur's death in 1766, Wazir was still a minor, thus the third son of Jamal Khan, Umar, became Nawab. Umar ruled until 1780 at which time although Wazir Khan was eligible, the precedent of the brothers becoming rulers was established. Thus the remaining two, Asadullah and Ataullah, both ruled until at last in 1810 Wazir Khan's claim was acknowledged. The descendants of each of these brothers often retained certain lands as *jagīrs* and the competition between them and the ruler has occasionally been bitter. The files in the Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC) of the British Library are replete with comments on the deplorable infighting in Malerkotla.

the *jagīr* of that property, Muhammad Ali Khan may have been an Ahmadi, that is a follower of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d.1908) who claimed ongoing revelations from Allah. As his house was en route, Ihsan deemed it unacceptable to pass the home of the kinsman he regarded as a heretic. The route was altered with the permission of the Nawab, but Ihsan Ali Khan not happy with the settlement. Some in the Sunni community objected to the new route that brought the Shi'i procession more directly through their neighborhood. The Nawab asked Ihsan Ali Khan not to take out his procession, to at least postpone it until a settlement could be reached. Angered, Ihsan did not take out either a Duldul, or a *taziyya*. In the estimation of the British author of the *Fortnightly Report* of June 15, 1935, the dispute was not so much a Sunni-Shi'i problem, but was really about the Nawab's tense relations with his extended family. These objectors asserted that the Nawab was trying to stir up Sunnis in order to make Ihsan either look bad or appear to be a troublemaker. They said that the old route was fine, just a small change to avoid the Ahmadi's house. The Nawab said the settlement would have been fine except that Ihsan involved a Muslim political activist, Maulvi Birjis Ahmad from Ferozepore, in the matter, thus raising the stakes to an anti-royalist issue. The report's author concludes that there were "Probably faults and obstinacy on both sides." The matter faded away and it is only remarked upon in subsequent reports that nothing regarding the Sunni-Shi'i dispute persisted.<sup>162</sup>

Nowadays there is considerable cooperation and coordination between the Sayyids and Shaikhs concerning the conduct of Muharram, although competition and frustrations persist. In 2001 the two communities constantly negotiated and renegotiated with one another over the order of events, the route and timing of parades and *majalis*. Each group had sponsored a *maulvi* (religious teacher) from Uttar Pradesh (UP) to come and lead them through the ten days of nearly

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<sup>162</sup> IOC, L/P&S/1345, Malerkotla file.

constant religious devotions. The local *imam*, originally from UP himself, traveled to another Shī#ī community, and I was informed that this is quite typical. Members of both Shī#ī groups attend the public addresses of the visiting Imams. During the major procession, the Imam sponsored by the Khojgan *biraderi* and the Anjuman Haideri gave a sermon at one point and everyone sat in the street to hear his discourse. Both visiting imams were extremely dynamic speakers, bringing their audiences to tears and inciting cries of approbation from the assemblies. For the more routine *majalis*, Sayyids and Shaikhs do not intermix to the same degree. Nonetheless, the Shī#ī community has been active in promoting inter-religious dialogue. In 1999, a group from the Khojgan community sponsored a Unity Program featuring leaders from all the religious communities speaking about the principles of their traditions. Although the event has not been repeated, it indicates a concern among the minority Shī#ī to foster positive relations with other communities.

### **Sikh**

The Sikh population in Malerkotla is overwhelmingly Jat. This is the general caste of agriculturalists and pastoralists who dominate the whole of Indian Punjab. There are a few higher caste Sikhs as well: Bedis, Sodhis, and others. The largest population increase in Malerkotla in the last fifty years was due to the influx of refugee Sikhs from the Sindh and Punjab regions of present-day Pakistan. The percentage of Sikhs in the town is considerably less than that in Punjab in general (only ten or eleven percent). However, as a majority in the state (sixty-three percent), their local impact is considerable. Much of the land cultivated in the outlying villages that were formerly part of the kingdom are owned and farmed by Sikhs. There are six gurdwaras in Malerkotla. The gurdwara, the central space of Sikh worship, houses the Guru Granth Sahib (the compiled poetic hymns of the Sikh Gurus and other saints) at its center

as the focus of worship. Often gurdwaras contain relics of the Gurus or famous Sikhs in history, but in Malerkotla this type of historic gurdwara does not exist. The oldest gurdwara in town, the Singh Sabha Gurdwara, was built through the patronage of Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan in the 1920's. Another, more recently built, memorializes the Haa da Naara of Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan. A third is inside of one of the old *havelis* (mansions) of the royal family and is principally patronized by a small population of refugees from Sindh who were resettled in these buildings as a few remaining members of the Nawab's family left for Pakistan. The largest Gurdwara is newly built but also on the site of a former palace. Prior to Partition the urban population of Sikhs was relatively small, and this is reflected in the relative youth of most of the gurdwaras in town.<sup>163</sup> Among the Sikh organizations locally there is a Sikh Welfare Society that draws members from all the gurdwaras in the community. They engage in a variety of social programs, such as taking up a collection for the relief of a number of Sikhs who were killed in the summer of 2001 in the Kashmir Valley. Together the gurdwaras put together parades for the birthday celebrations of the gurus. Guru Nanak's *janam purb* (birthday celebration) is observed with particular fanfare involving a *nagar kīrtan* parade in which in which the Guru Granth Sahib is taken throughout the town on a cart as a *granthi* reading from it. This symbolically circumscribes the town and simultaneously incorporates the area under the protective power of the both the *guru granth* and the *guru panth*. The parade ideally pauses at each gurdwara and

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<sup>163</sup> In terms of other Sikh sects, there is a Nirankari Center near the Government College and a large Namdhari Martyrs Memorial on the Khanna road. Both groups practice an austere and simple form of Sikhism, focusing on the holy text and esteeming a living guru. The Nirankaris, as their name indicates, believe in a formless God and eschew all customs and practices that resonate with Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. The Namdharis focus on the Adi Granth rather than the Guru Granth Sahib, and believe in a living Satguru who is an incarnation of true God consciousness. They are actively marginalized by the Sikh orthodoxy. Orthodox Sikhs regard the notion of a living Guru as heretical. The governing bodies of the Sikh faith, in particular the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (which oversees historic gurdwaras and performs many other regulatory functions), have excluded them from participation. In Malerkotla these groups have little impact on the political life of the town. However, the Namdhari memorial is a major local landmark and is always included among residents' lists of *dekhne wale cheez* (things worth seeing).

make a complete circle of the town. It is accompanied by bands, distribution of food as *langar* (food dedicated to the Guru and therefore blessed), and displays of Sikh martial arts known as *ghatka*. Guru Gobind Singh's birthday is also celebrated, but with less fanfare, and though there have been *nagar kīrtan* processions in the past for this day, in 2001 there was not. Many holidays are observed less elaborately in Malerkotla itself, as many Sikh residents tend to travel to the places where the festivals are most elaborately commemorated, such as Diwali at Amritsar or Hola Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib.<sup>164</sup> If unable to travel a great distance for these holy days, residents often travel to Patiala or Ludhiana or another city where there are larger Sikh populations, historic gurdwaras, and, therefore, bigger festivals.

The biggest Sikh festival in Malerkotla marks the martyrdom of the Namdharis in 1872. The brutal and summary execution by the British of sixty-nine Namdharis, who had attacked Malerkotla, ostensibly for cow-killing, is one of the most famous events in Malerkotla's history. It is also a key event for the Namdharis and the martyrdom festival or *shahīdī mela* is attended by thousands of people. Although only one Namdhari family lives in Malerkotla full-time, a large event is held on January 17, 18, and 19, the anniversary of the firings. This is an enormous observation with all night *kīrtan*, constant *langar*, and is attended by tens of thousands. Interestingly, a smaller festival to commemorate these events occurs on the seventeenth of every month. The events take place on the grounds of the *kuka walla kalar*, a monument recently erected by the Namdharis in the form of a gigantic sword, perforated with a hole for every martyr

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<sup>164</sup> Diwali, typically the Hindu festival of lights in honor of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, is observed by the Sikh community for another reason. On this day it is believed that the sixth Guru, Hargobind, was released from prison by the Mughal ruler. It is celebrated at Amritsar with great fanfare as the entire Golden Temple is lit with lamps and candles and an enormous fireworks display is held. The next day is the first of the lunar month, a day upon which it is auspicious to bath during the earliest part of the day. Thus many thousands of people throng the Golden Temple in order to see the Diwali spectacle and bathe. Hola Mohalla was instituted by Guru Gobind Singh to be a martial festival beginning the day after Holi, a Hindu spring festival of colors when people douse one another with colored water and powder. Large crowds gather at Anandpur, the scene of the birth of the Khalsa (the pure followers of the Guru) and observe martial arts displays and other amazing feats.

with smaller ones representing the children.<sup>165</sup> These events draw Namdharis from the surrounding area, particularly from their center at Bhaini Sahib, approximately an hour distant, and even from Delhi. This fair is also an obligatory stop on the campaign trail of all political parties in Punjab. In 2001, the Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal addressed the gathering. This was interesting given the well-known support of the Namdharis for the opposition Congress party, which they regard as the party of the freedom struggle they had begun in the mid nineteenth century. Namdharis tend to view Badal's Shiromani Akali Dal Party with suspicion, as it is associated with the type of Sikh identity politics that tend to exclude non-normative Sikh groups such as their own. In particular reformist Sikhs object to the Namdharis' belief in a living guru. However, during an earlier visit to the annual Namdhari gathering in 1999, Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal referred to the living Guru of the Namdharis as "Satguru" during his speech, causing an enormous fracas among his party loyalists and the orthodox.<sup>166</sup> At the 2001 *mela*, no such mention was made, but Badal's speech was clearly far less compelling to the gathering than the telephone call from the Satguru Jagjit Singh that was piped in over the loudspeakers.

Sikh sectarian politics and the repressive Indian governmental response led to a long period of terrorism in Punjab during the 1980's and early 1990's. The violence and tension impacted Sangrur District (where Malerkotla is located) significantly, but Malerkotla itself was largely left unscathed.<sup>167</sup> Although curfew was imposed frequently here as in the rest of the

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<sup>165</sup> It is called the *kuka walla kalar* because it is the monument for the "Kukas" as the Namdharis are more popularly known. This name is applied to them due to the cries they utter when in ecstatic trance from listening to *kīrtan* (the singing of devotional hymns).

<sup>166</sup> Badal also declared Satguru Ram Singh's birthday, January 29 a permanent holiday in Punjab. *The Tribune*, January 18, 2001. This move was also regarded as deeply troubling by elements of the Sikh orthodoxy.

<sup>167</sup> According to the Punjab Backgrounder prepared by the South Asia Terrorism Portal, seventy percent of the violence during the terrorism was confined to three districts – Gurdaspur, Amritsar, and Ferozepur – but Sangrur experienced 227 killings in 43 separate incidents. Source: [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org)

region, there were no local casualties. Again many residents attribute this to the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh and the ongoing affection of the Sikhs for the town. Certainly the relatively low population of Sikhs would be another disincentive to violence. Sikhs in Malerkotla and the outlying villages engaged in acts of goodwill towards the Muslim population even during this difficult period. Many Muslim residents reported that when curfew was imposed during Ramadan and it was difficult to obtain food from the countryside, Sikhs would set up places to distribute water and food for the breaking of the fast. Sikh residents claim that the separatist elements were very weak in Malerkotla.

### **Hindu**

The Hindu population in 1981 (the last census available) was just over twenty percent. The vast number of temples, many quite old, indicates the long and important history of the Hindu and Jain communities in the town. Indeed, some local Jains and Hindus claim that their families were sent to the area by Bahlol Lodhi in order to develop the new settlement commercially and make the region a livable place for the sophisticated daughter of a Sultan. The Hindu residents in Malerkotla itself are mostly of Bania trade castes such as Aggarwal, Goyal, and Jindal. The substantial Jain community is also largely from this merchant class. Banias dominated in the bazaars, which is still true today, as these communities own most of the buildings along the Moti and Sadar Bazaar.

There are several local organizations to further Hindu interests. It is clear from state records that the Hindu Mahasabha was active in Malerkotla in the past, though it does not seem to be prominent now. The Hindu Mahasabha was formed in the early twentieth century with the purported goal of reviving Hinduism, in particular to combat the invidious effects of Christianity and Islam upon the integrity of the Hindu territory of India. Along with groups such as the Arya

Samaj (which does not appear to have been particularly vibrant in Malerkotla), the Hindu Mahasabha had a profound effect on religious revivalism in Punjab. After the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a former member of the RSS, the organization was banned throughout India. In Malerkotla the last Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan issued a declaration rendering the RSS an "unlawful body."<sup>168</sup> The various organizations of the Sangh Parivar (RSS, VHP, BJP) are not very active in Malerkotla. The BJP has never been particularly successful in town although a party unit does exist. Once in 1992 they floated a candidate for the Punjab Legislative Assembly, but since the alliance was formed with the SAD in 1998 the BJP has tended to take a back seat. The RSS helps to organize certain large-scale events such as pilgrimages to Hindu holy sites like Amarnath (a mountain shrine sacred to Shiva). Most of these activities are based at the recently built Hanuman Mandir. There is an active Sanatan Dharam Sabha in Malerkotla. Sanatan Dharam, meaning the eternal religion, is a term adopted by nearly every Hindu organization. It usually refers to a revivalist form of Hinduism that seeks to get back to the Veda and the "essentials" of the faith, cleanse Hinduism of caste restrictions, and encourage personal piety.<sup>169</sup> Various other committees form to manage the celebration of major festivals or to represent particular sections of society. There are, for example, caste based organizations such as the Aggarwal Sabha and the Brahmin Sabha. These groups and other

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<sup>168</sup> Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla File No. 1-C/1948.

<sup>169</sup> However, Sanatan Dharm also includes groups who are more extreme in their views. For example, the American Paatshala (congregation) identifying as Sanatan Dharm places the following quotation from Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (former President of India) on the front page of their website by way of introduction to the group's purpose and philosophy: "The Mohammedan invasions put an end to the great age of Hindu philosophy. The assaults of the Moslems, and later of the Christians, upon the native faith drove it, for self-defense into a timid unity that made treason of all debate, and stifled creative heresy in a stagnant uniformity of thought. By the twelfth century the system of the Vedanta, which in Shankara tried to be a religion for philosophers, was reinterpreted by such saints as Ramanuja (ca. 1050) into an orthodox worship of Vishnu, Rama and Krishna. Forbidden to think new thoughts, philosophy became not only scholastic but barren; it accepted its dogmas from the priesthood, and proved them laboriously by distinctions without difference, and logic without reason." Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (In Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, New York: MJF Books, 1963, 552.)  
<http://www.sanatandharmatemple.org/Paathshala/paathshalatimes2003.htm>

organizations with a broader appeal engage in advocacy for their constituency and charitable and social welfare activities.

There are a large number of temples in Malerkotla. The three most often cited by residents as significant are the Hanuman Mandir, the Kali Mandir and the Dera of Baba Atma Ram. The largest temple (boasting also the largest idol) is the Hanuman Mandir. This is a new temple, in the heart of the commercial district. In the courtyard of the temple is a gigantic image of Hanuman that looms over the entire city and is visible from a great distance.<sup>170</sup> This temple also houses a large meeting hall where weddings, awards programs, religious lectures and performances, and other events take place. On Tuesdays, the day dedicated to Hanuman, large numbers of devotees come to make offerings and receive blessings. The Kali Mandir is a very active temple with a new structure but an old *murti* or idol of the goddess. On Saturdays, the day of the goddess, and during the *navaratri*, the nine nights of the goddess, this temple is extremely busy.

The oldest Hindu site in town is the Dera of Baba Atma Ram, a Bairagi sadhu from the Neem Margi *sampraday* (group). A strong local tradition asserts that Atma Ram and a Muslim saint, Shah Fazl, placed the foundation stone of Kotla in the mid-seventeenth century at the behest of the Nawab. This gesture is seen as providing a literal foundation for Malerkotla's pluralism and open society. At the Dera, Tuesdays are especially observed here as the temple boasts a *murti* of Hanuman carved from an unusually large piece of *moong* stone. The largest non-Muslim religious festival in Malerkotla is Dussehra, the tenth day after the *navaratri* that is holy to Lord Rama.<sup>171</sup> For the nights leading up to Dussehra, plays of the Ram story, called *Ramlila*, are put on at venues throughout town. On the day itself the entire town, Hindus, Sikhs,

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<sup>170</sup> This is typical of a recent rash of Hanuman temple building described by Philip Lutgendorf in his article "My Hanuman Is Bigger Than Yours." *History of Religions* 33, Fall (1994).

<sup>171</sup> In North and Northwest India Dussehra is associated with Ram, but in Eastern India it is a day of the Goddess.

and Muslims, all turn out at the Dera where a gigantic papier-mâché effigy of Ravana, the villain of the *Ramayana*, is burnt. This event is very significant as it, perhaps more than any other brings, together the entire community. Muslim groups sponsor booths at the Dera distributing free cold water to those in attendance. In 2001 the person staffing one booth said that while he did not himself believe in Rama and the events being celebrated, he enjoyed the spectacle and the opportunity to serve the community. Although the appeal of Dussehra for Muslims, and likely for most participants, is less religious than spectacular, the parade and celebration are enjoyed by everyone in town.

Muslims, however, do attend the Dera on non-festival days as well. This is the case at many shrines in South Asia that are particularly known for healing certain disorders. At the Dera one morning the *påjari* (priest) and his son were both in attendance, as was the celibate *mahant*, or head of the sadhu (renunciant) lineage associated with the shrine. It was a Tuesday morning and many people were coming through to pay their devotions to the unique Hanuman *murti* at the Dera. After the steady flow had reduced to a trickle, a man and his son came in and sat before the younger *påjari*. Presenting the *påjari* with a bottle of water, the Brahmin priest began to murmur Sanskrit *mantras*, invocational formulas capable of focusing and channeling divine energy. After a few minutes, the *påjari* inserted a leafy twig from a neem tree into the bottle and, still uttering *mantras sotto voce*, he sprinkled the boy with the blessed water. After this the *påjari* gave the man and his son some advice about how to proceed, consuming small amounts of the water several times a day. The two bowed to the *påjari* and left. After they had gone, the *påjari*, knowing the nature of my research turned to me and smilingly informed me that the two visitors had been Muslim. As I had not discerned this from their appearance, I was initially surprised, but the *påjari* said that this was in no way unusual. I asked him how he felt about their

coming to him, given that they likely did not have any faith in Hanuman or any of the other deities at the shrine. The *pajari* responded simply that people are people and when they are in trouble, they seek help. If he can help them, that is sufficient. The universality of human concerns such as healing, in this case for a type of skin disorder, is also a common reason for Sikh and Hindu presence at Muslim shrines as well. The healing process is also not dissimilar as praying and Qur"anic recitation over water and its subsequent consumption is a traditional practice for Muslims.

There are only fifty or so Christian families in Malerkotla itself. It is a small, but closeknit group. There is one church associated with the Protestant Church of North India. They do not always have a pastor in residence, but at least once a month a priest comes from Ludhiana to lead services. The local Christians reported excellent relations with the Muslim majority and other religions in Malerkotla. Indeed some Muslims observed the Christmas and Easter celebrations at the church and participated in the feast and festival atmosphere. In the outlying countryside Christianity has a firmer hold and is increasing in popularity, especially among scheduled caste and backward classes.

## **Conclusion**

Malerkotla is a community of minorities, a place where total hegemony is impossible. This outline of the ebb and flow of history depicts a town full of contradictions and cooperations between diverse groups of people, all of whom feel uniquely bound to this place. The most commonly shared perception of Malerkotla both within and without the town is its peaceful inter-religious relationships. The fact that the town stands out so vividly due to this quality speaks volumes about the nature of inter-religious relations in Punjab and India at large. Indeed the expectation is that different religions will inevitably clash with one another, particularly in

areas where there is a diverse population, a past history of conflict, no clear monopoly on power, and a great deal of competition in the economic, social, and spiritual arenas. All of these exacerbating factors are present in Malerkotla, yet since 1947 the fabric of the community has remained strong. In this chapter I have presented some of the historical events that have shaped the town's identity. Significantly, many of these events are traumatic: the attacks by the Namdharis and Sahib Singh Bedi, the participation of the rulers in bloody campaigns against the Sikhs, and riots between Hindus and Muslims in the 1930's. These are not happy events. Yet there are counterbalancing resources to draw upon. The foundation of the town by a holy man, the *haa da naara* of Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, and the peace at Partition all provide the basis for positive inter-religious relations. Inasmuch as Malerkotla has tended towards the harmonious, especially since Partition, in spite of an increasingly polarized religious dynamic in India is a powerful testimony to the active efforts of community members of all faiths in remembering and memorializing the histories of peace and blurring and muting the histories of conflict. In the next several chapters I will detail the processes through which these histories are narrated, ritualized, spatialized, and regulated.

**Part One:**  
**Narrating Peace**

## Introduction

### History and Narrative

Creating coherent accounts of the past is a means of cultural production. These histories not only represent the events of the past, but make those events meaningful for the present. Although this understanding of what history is and does is now axiomatic in the humanities, it was once revolutionary. The explorations of the *mechanisms* of history, the reasons why certain histories are told, why some come to dominate, and how these histories are integrated into collective and individual realities remains a fascinating subject as the dynamic changes between and within cultures and communities. In this section I will explore the written and oral narrative processes that make sense of Malerkotla's past in such a way as to establish the dominant ethic of harmony and imbue it with the authority of history. Historical narratives have a great deal of power. Scholars such as Hayden White have emphasized the importance of the narrative process in authenticating historical accounts. In White's view, the reality of an event is unavailable to history if the narrative process is denied. In this way, factual and mythic events are only rendered meaningful within a particular context through their narration. Thus "the very distinction between real and imaginary events that is basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction presupposes a notion of reality in which 'the true' is identified with 'the real' only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity."<sup>172</sup> That is to say that the telling of events must necessarily take narrative form (which White sees as a universal form) in order to be recognizable as reality. Thus through the study of this reality principle at work in

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<sup>172</sup> Hayden White, "Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 6.

historical narratives, both written and oral, we glimpse the ways in which individuals and communities construct the past at various points in time.

The question of historical truth and its relation to the telling of history is not merely theoretical in the case of the narratives about Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla. The politics of everyday life and the legitimacy of both the shrine and town's identities as zones of peace are at stake. In Malerkotla there is an enormous premium on actively representing the town as harmonious. As the only Muslim majority region in Indian Punjab, the profile of the town is high and the necessity of projecting a positive and non-threatening image is tantamount to survival. Thus the narratives of Malerkotla's history are important records of the past and present strategies employed to promote the symbolic significance of the town. Caught between the dominance of national level Hindu hegemony and the complications of sustaining a community of minorities, Malerkotla residents and visitors tell stories about the saint and the town that help them to co-exist in the present. These stories focus especially on three aspects of Malerkotla's past. First they invoke Haider Shaikh himself, describing his advent and activities in the region. Second, the most widely known narrative about Malerkotla concerns the *haa da naara*, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan's 1704 protest against the executions of Guru Gobind Singh's two young sons and the Guru's subsequent blessing. Third, these stories and others are linked to the success of the community in surviving and transcending the trauma of Partition that took such a horrific toll on the rest of Punjab.

Through this combination of narratives, told by differing religious groups, the perilous ground between systemic constraint and personal creativity is articulated, bringing the community's ethic of harmony to the fore. As identity shaping narratives, these accounts integrate the ideology of peace into the community's past and present. They also provide

important motivating ideals, models of positive inter-religious relations from the past that may be replicated in the present. In this section I will explore how residents and non-residents communicate these three identity-marking narratives. First I will address several of the theoretical issues at stake in narrating identity. Then I will demonstrate the ways in which the stories people choose to tell, to whom they tell them, and how they are told reveal how people experience and engage their world. These narratives told by differing religious communities may vary and contradict, but they also cohere sufficiently to support and strengthen the ethic of harmony that is absolutely central to Malerkotla's identity.

## Identity and Narrative

Identity, writes folklorist Henry Glassie, is "a straightforward empirical problem disguised as a heavy philosophical issue."<sup>173</sup> The empirical problem is to understand the "relations between individual creativity and collective order," through a study of the ways in which people *are*, that is how we express our sense of self, in what form, when and to whom, and, of course, why. Although I think Glassie is a bit hasty in dismissing the philosophical issues at stake in understanding what identity is and how it works, my concern here *is* with the empirical aspects of identity – that is the observable ways in which identity is manifested and transmitted. In Malerkotla and at Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, there is a multivocalic convergence of narrative accounts of these places which articulate why they are sites of significance. Speaking in and through these spaces, residents and visitors are able to shift between multiple identity positions. The openness and malleability of the structure of these stories allows for the simultaneous presence of varying and even contradictory accounts of the sites and their importance.

Narratives facilitate transitions in the tricky terrain between multiple identities. Historian Caroline Walker Bynum describes identity as "shape carrying story." Thus our shapes – the forms we are given and those we assume – provide the structural basis for the stories of our selves, which combine to become our identities. Bynum writes, "if identity *is* shape carrying story – we need not decide between mind and body, inner and outer, biology and society, agency and essence. Rather we are living beings, shapes with stories, always changing but also always carrying traces of what we were before."<sup>174</sup> The notion of metamorphosis emerges in her analysis as the very nature of being human, providing a useful way of thinking of identity as

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<sup>173</sup> Henry Glassie, "On Identity," *Journal of American Folklore* 107 (1994), p. 241.

<sup>174</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Shape and Story: Metamorphosis in the Western Tradition*, (Jefferson Lecture, National Endowment for the Humanities, 1999), p. 10.

malleable rather than fixed or fragmented.<sup>175</sup> This approach allows for continuity and constraint as well as creativity and innovation. At places such as Haider Shaikh's *dargah* and in Malerkotla this protean quality becomes an important aspect of the ways in which individuals and groups situate themselves both verbally and physically in relation to the shrine and each other. Drawing from psychological and sociological resources, people craft themselves depending upon the context, available materials, and internal and external constraints.<sup>176</sup>

The concept of identity remains theoretically and practically inchoate, which is perhaps necessary to sustain the blurred boundaries conducive to overlapping, inter-penetration, and cohabitation. Hard, clearly drawn identities allow only proximity, not exchange. Unitary identities become apparent, fixed, and readily actionable when challenged, threatened, or questioned. Indeed, Henry Glassie points out that "identity is a concept of stress," in the sense that "identity is a latent dimension of creative life that is made manifest by stress, in particular during the struggles of minorities within nations or the struggles of nations against imperialist invasion, whether military or economic."<sup>177</sup> For the residents of Malerkotla and the devotees at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh, both struggles are ongoing. As a city of minorities, locals constantly experience the stresses of fitting in and standing out. Choosing or prioritizing the identities most conducive to comfortable minority life or globalizing economic opportunity may involve giving up or bracketing integral elements of the self. It is in response to this stress that particular identities become manifest.

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<sup>175</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, (New York; Zone Books, 2001).

<sup>176</sup> The literature on identity and self-making is enormous. Some of the key works are: Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge; Polity Press, 1991), and *Runaway World: How Globalization Is Reshaping Our Lives*, (New York; Routledge, 2000), and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>177</sup> Henry Glassie, "On Identity," pp. 239-240.

The context of Malerkotla provides ample materials and constraints for the identity constructing activities of its inhabitants. Here a rich history and architectural heritage is engaged by a multi-religious population for whom these resources are not equally available. Muslims from the Pathan ruling class and the *khalīfah* and Nawab families have little difficulty situating themselves within the past or present of Malerkotla's conceptual and physical landscape. For lower caste Muslims and non-Muslims, the narrative process is less immediately available but these connections are certainly made.<sup>178</sup> Each local religious community integrates their heritage into the historiography of Malerkotla. For example, according to some members of the local Jain population they settled here on the invitation of the Sultan of Delhi, Bahlol Lodhi, who wanted there to be a more cosmopolitan environment to accommodate his daughter, Taj Murassa Begum. Therefore he requested that several groups of Jain and Hindu merchants from the Aggarwal caste move from the area around Ludhiana to Malerkotla in order to create such an urban center.<sup>179</sup> Sikh families, on the other hand, forge their connection by evoking Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan and the blessing of the Guru as the main impetus for their settlement and

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<sup>178</sup> It is a common misconception that conversion to Islam resulted in the elimination of caste and social discrimination. In spite of oft-referenced ideals of egalitarianism, there are ethnic and caste based prejudices that remain very much in force among Muslims in South Asia. The *ashraf* or elite Muslims are almost always identified ethnically as Arab or Afghan in origin. Due to the tendency towards endogamy, especially cross-cousin marriage, these ethnic groups retain a fair degree of integrity. In Malerkotla this manifests most especially among the ruling elites who continue to identify as Pathan Afghans, though their progenitor, Haider Shaikh arrived over five hundred years ago. The lower castes, especially the agriculturalist Kambhojs, are viewed by the Pathans as recent converts from low-caste Hindus and view their own status as unduly oppressed, especially prior to Independence. For the role of caste and caste-consciousness among Muslims, see Imtiaz Ahmad, editor, *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India*, (New Delhi; Manohar, 1973) and Charles Lindholm, "Caste in Islam and the Problem of Deviant Systems: A Critique of Recent Theory," in *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power*, edited by T.N. Madan, (New Delhi; Manohar, 1995). On marriage patterns among the elite of Malerkotla see Rita Brara, "Marriage and Kinship," (PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, Delhi University, 1989).

<sup>179</sup> The formation and development of this settlement is consistent with the pattern of Islamicization through urbanization and the establishment of regional power bases through the patronage of Sufi centers as detailed by Richard Eaton in his several works: "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, Richard C. Martin, editor, (New York; One World Press, 1987), 106-23; "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2000), 94-132; *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1993); "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Barbara Metcalf, editor, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1984).

continued security in this Muslim state. Most of the Pathan Muslims are related to Haider Shaikh through either the Nawabi or *khalīfah* lineages. Some local Muslims trace their lineage to the early followers of Haider Shaikh. These groups establish their link to the area through this heritage. Some others claim that they were the original inhabitants of the region and converted to Islam after the coming of the Shaikh. These multiple accounts help to expand Malerkotla's past, opening it up to include groups besides the ruling clan. In this way Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims all make their place here, creating genealogies of involvement with the infrastructure and ideology of the town. Each has a unique sense of belonging and a means of communicating their role in society. Yet each group's dominant narrative highlights inter-religious connections and contributes to the construction and maintenance of Malerkotla's idealized identity.

In India, the politicization of religious identity has become the central focus of most studies of inter-religious conflict. There is no question that in the enormous, multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural Indian context, religion is one of the most readily available and deeply resonant dimensions of society that affords a ready means of networking and mobilizing a constituency. However, as Gyan Pandey, Partha Chatterjee, and others have pointed out, in both pre and post-colonial times, almost any form of competition or conflict has tended to be labeled as religious. During the colonial period this served a purpose to justify continued colonial control over the native population who otherwise would devolve into perpetual violence over the perennial and primordial disputes between Hindus and Muslims. After the British departed, not only has India's institutional structure continued to replicate the forms inherited from the British, but the constitution of the new nation-state required the generation of a national identity. In Gyan Pandey's terms, constituting that nation also constituted its minority populations, perpetuating a dynamic of opposition between inside and out, those who belong and those who

do not. For India's Muslims, this process has been especially problematic. As I pointed out in the introduction, organizing and creating a collective identity that is both Indian *and* Muslim has remained an elusive challenge due to state intervention and the absence of any truly pan-Indian Muslim organizations. In Malerkotla, the Muslim population must walk a fine line between their role as local majorities and their consciousness of their vulnerability as a minority regionally and nationally. This tension is discernible in the narratives about Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla from before and after Partition when Malerkotla went from being one state among many Muslim majority regions in Punjab to being the only one.

### **Writing and Telling**

In coming to understand the narrative life of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* and Malerkotla it is important to explore both oral and written narratives. Although all oral narratives I collected are, by definition, post-Partition, they also reveal aspects of pre-Partition Malerkotla and modern perspectives on the past that are extremely valuable. While written narratives tend to represent elite traditions, oral narratives are not exclusively the province of the masses. Both types of narrative function to make the truth of the events they describe "real" in the sense that they are adequate representations of the meaning of the truths they recount. In her study *Creating Histories: Oral Narratives and the Politics of History Making*, Wendy Singer identifies three critical building blocks in the process of producing narratives: "descriptions of events, the power relations that influenced those descriptions, and the means of communication that recorded and preserved them."<sup>180</sup> This process is equally true of oral and written narratives. The difference, as argued by Jack Goody, is the degree of openness and malleability of the "text," which

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<sup>180</sup> Wendy Singer, *Creating Histories: Oral Narratives and the Politics of History-Making*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 9.

increases with the level of orality in the telling. Singer describes the distinction between the written and oral thus:

Histories that are recounted in oral form have unique characteristics, especially their mutability. The same history tellers, telling the 'same' histories, may construct them differently with each telling. Oral narrators take into consideration each new audience, each new contemporary situation, and any new information. As a result, oral histories demonstrate in everyday terms a profound and self-conscious relativity...<sup>181</sup>

Thus while both oral and written histories are contextually bound, this is an ongoing process for any oral "narrative representation of reality." For the written history, the processes of interpreting and consuming a narrative continue, but the production is static. Through an examination of the variables in the performance context of an oral history, the truths being transmitted become more evident, as do the constraints and power relations within which the teller and the telling are situated. In the oral and written accounts of Malerkotla and Haider Shaikh, this distinction becomes most readily apparent, as we shall see, in relation to the historical construction of the community's origins.

It is important to note that although some traditional historians regard oral narratives with suspicion,<sup>182</sup> the authority of the oral is very much recognized by people in Malerkotla where the 1991 literacy rate was only forty-two percent. In fact, in primarily oral cultures where the literacy rate is low and highly exclusive, oral narratives are seen as equally or even more authoritative than written. A great premium is placed on the spoken, the remembered, and the inherited. Written texts are seen as fixed, potentially skewed and perspectival, and are not subject to either the test of time or the court of public opinion. Narratives passed from

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 303.

<sup>182</sup> For example, Richard Eaton writes about the Sufi biographical tradition in the following way, "The point is that while all *tazkiras* consist of oral traditions that at some time were written down and that require, therefore, the same caution with which one approaches any oral tradition, it is not true that all *tazkiras* served a saint-cult and were distorted on that count." Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 20. Implicit in Eaton's use of the terms "caution" and "distorted" is a notion of historical truth that transcends both written and oral narratives.

generation to generation do undergo such trials. Thus whereas such stories certainly change and adapt over time, they also maintain their connection to the community that generated them and, as Hayden White describes, their ability to represent adequately reality as experienced by that community. A Malerkotla resident from the *khalīfah* family affirms the positive role of orality in preserving the traditions of the saint. After recounting a narrative about Haider Shaikh that is not found in any of the written accounts I am aware of, he stated, "At that time writers were very few, nothing was written, only things were heard from generation to generation, but they are real."<sup>183</sup> Though able to read and write perfectly well himself, the *khalīfah* placed great authority on the stories heard from elders such as his father and grandfather, both respected Sufis. The traditions of Haider Shaikh are found in both written and oral sources, but neither should be understood as more or less "true." Rather, each form of narrative is appropriate for a different purpose and for different interlocutors. The point for this study is not to establish the veracity of the accounts but to understand their functions and meanings to the community who perpetuates them.

### **Winning History**

As the adage goes, the winners write the histories. The history of peace that is won in Malerkotla is both told and written. In both forms of narrative you find examples of ways in which Malerkotla's dominant ethic of harmony is incorporated into the traditions of differing religious groups. Some of the variations between religious perspectives and between oral and written accounts reveal differences in perspective that complicate Malerkotla's winning history of peace. The way in which these stories are told are records not just of a particular event, but of its significance in the formation of individual and collective identities. In certain instances, an

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<sup>183</sup> Interview, August 2, 2001.

event becomes symbolically important for a person and a community. Alessandro Portelli describes this process in his insightful article "The Death of Luigi Trastulli." In this piece Portelli outlines the mechanisms of memory and how "the memory of this brief episode has exerted a shaping influence on the town's identity and culture."<sup>184</sup> This "shaping influence" is an important process to observe as it reveals the ways in which particular events take on such a heightened degree of symbolic importance for personal or collective identities that they become identity markers. An identity marker provides a reference point, a semantically and symbolically rich instrument for conveying meaning. In certain contexts the mere mention of a particular event may be laden with significance that far exceeds the moment of a story's telling.

In this way, written and oral narratives about Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla combine to generate the symbolic and historic significance of each. The identity of the narrator and the symbolic significance of the events narrated are constructed through the strategic selection and deployment of available interlocutors, modes of expression, and performance contexts. The historical veracity of the events so narrated is secondary to their adequacy as representations of reality. The notion of oral and written narratives as wholly discrete communicative forms must be complicated in order to perceive the ways in which the oral and the written are embedded in one another and understand the ways in which they overtly and covertly reference one another. Finally, memory plays a key role in defining the symbolic, psychological, and functional meaning of an event. By studying the form and content of these memories and the way they are narrated in the present, it is possible to interpret the ways in which an event becomes meaningful to an individual or a community, how that meaning is made manifest, and how it is perpetuated and disseminated – that is, how history is won. Each telling reveals the perspective of the teller,

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<sup>184</sup> Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, (Albany; State University of New York, 2001), p. 1.

and reflects the way in which that teller has constructed their own and their community's identity through the telling. Thus emerges the shaping influence of the saint and certain events in the town's history on the identity of Malerkotla.

## Chapter Two:

### Narratives of Haider Shaikh and the *dargah*

Narratives about Haider Shaikh and his tomb shrine do four things: they found and establish the territory of Malerkotla and the devotional community affiliated with the saint, they describe the protective power of the Shaikh and the *dargah*, they integrate the population of the town and the constituency of the shrine, and they express the exemplary ethics modeled by Haider Shaikh and those who affiliate with him. These four functions, foundation, protection, integration, and exemplification, combine to give voice to the projected image of the town and the tradition associated with Haider Shaikh. As residents and devotees give voice to these aspects of Haider Shaikh and the tomb cult, the saint and the *dargah* become shaping symbols, structuring and legitimizing the ethic of harmony that is at the root of Malerkotla identity.

These four functions also change not only between narrators and contexts, but through time. The two most significant variables are the religious identity of the narrator and whether the account pre- or post-dates the Partition of India. Muslims tend to emphasize in their accounts, both pre- and post-1947, the power of the Shaikh and his role as the founder of the state of Malerkotla and the de facto origin of Islam in the region. Hindus tend to cut Haider Shaikh off from sovereign authority and to highlight the saint's spiritual prowess and his lack of regard for sectarian and caste discrimination. Sikhs also appreciate the Shaikh as a symbol of ecumenical spirituality, but there is also a marked tendency to link the saint to the *haa da naara* protest on behalf of Guru Gobind Singh's sons by the saint's descendent Sher Muhammad Khan. All of these efforts to symbolically manage Haider Shaikh's legacy are also attempts to control his image as a collective representation of the community ethic of harmony. These narratives

coexist and even interpenetrate, but do not undermine the multivocality of the written and oral lore of the Shaikh and the *dargah*.

In terms of temporal changes in the accounts of Haider Shaikh, the most obvious and significant shift occurred post-1947, signaling a new emphasis on those qualities of Malerkotla and its founding father that could be most conducive to promoting the type of identity that will ensure the survival of a flourishing community. Thus whereas pre-1947 narratives focus on the foundational and protective qualities of the Shaikh, the post-1947 stories tend to highlight the integrative and exemplary aspects of his character and lore. The first section of this chapter demonstrates the centrality of Haider Shaikh in the imaginations and experiences of Malerkotla residents and devotees by exploring the stories and histories that people tell in Malerkotla today. The second section investigates the pre- and post-Partition accounts of the Shaikh, bringing to light how this cataclysmic event shaped the stories and histories about the saint. A further aspect of these narratives is that all four functions are represented in the narratives irrespective of religious orientation of the narrator.

The pervasive impact of Haider Shaikh on Malerkotla became evident to me early in my stay in Malerkotla when I went to the Jama# Masjid (the Friday or congregational mosque) in order to talk to people there about the town's reputation as a zone of peace. I had heard that this mosque was the local center for the activities of the Tablīghī Jama#at, and therefore likely to oppose the practice of tomb visitation to shrines such as that of Haider Shaikh.<sup>185</sup> Having already spent much time at the *dargah* itself where Malerkotla's peace and harmony are most

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<sup>185</sup> In fact on a later visit with a Hindu colleague to find out about the history of the mosque structure, our queries about the mosque, which is quite beautiful with Qur"ānic verses painted in calligraphy all over the façade, were met with simple responses that the place was merely a place for prayer. Consistent with the radical reformist perspective, the history and aesthetics of the site are irrelevant, only its function as a place of prayer are important. It is worth recalling that a similar attitude prevailed among Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, who attempted in 1926 to destroy the tomb of the Prophet in order to prevent it from becoming an object of worship in its own right.

often attributed to the Shaikh's blessing, I was interested in learning if in this part of town, away from the tomb, there were varying perspectives on or explanations for the nature and quality of Malerkotla's community. In addition to being a more conservative mosque, the neighborhood around the Jama# Masjid is the only area where there are shops selling Islamic books and other paraphernalia such as prayer rugs (*jan namaz*), caps, prayer beads (*tasbīÈ*), Qur"an stands, books on religious matters, cassettes of Qur"an recitation and interpretation, and so on. The store directly across from the steps of the mosque is operated by a man who was sitting with a young man in the all-white *kurta pajama* (tunic and pants), beard, and close white woven cap that are telltale markers of Tabligh activists and conservative Muslims. Upon hearing of my interest in Malerkotla and its history, the shopkeeper first affirmed the pervasiveness of the spirit of *bhaichar*, or brotherly harmony, in the town and then launched spontaneously into the widely known tale of Haider Shaikh's encounter with the Sultan Bahlol Lodhi:

The army was resting near the #Id Gah. There was a big storm in the night. And this Babaji [Haider Shaikh] he was staying near the Purana Qila (the old fort). On that particular night the *badshah* [ruler] was surveying his army. He saw that in spite of such a big storm, a lamp was burning in Babaji's house. When he went there and saw, he found Babaji there. Babaji was very *khubsurat* (beautiful). [The *badshah* said,] I want to marry my daughter with you. Babaji said, "I am a *faqīr*, I can't do that." But after a long dialogue he said yes. Bahlol Lodhi was the *badshah* at that time.<sup>186</sup>

I was initially surprised that this tale of the Shaikh was offered by a man with every marker of the more conservative forms of Islam upon him and around him as most of these groups oppose the practice of *ziyarat* (pilgrimage to saint's tombs). I later realized that although his immediate reference to Haider Shaikh was somewhat unusual among members of these organizations, his respect for the saint was not. Even among the most vehemently anti-*ziyarat* polemicists, respect

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<sup>186</sup> Personal Interview, November 8, 2000.

rather than reverence for the Shaikh is common.<sup>187</sup> The bookstore owner, in addition to demonstrating the pervasiveness of the Shaikh's influence in the town, gave a masterful and swift rendition of the foundation of the settlement. The rapidity and fluidity of his narrative style indicated that it was a well-known tale, often heard and often repeated. In his account he stressed the piety of the saint who not only remained miraculously undisturbed by the storm, but also attempted to put off a powerful, worldly ruler's desire to marry his daughter to him. The motivation for his refusal was his desire to remain in the *faqīrī* life of poverty and asceticism, occupied solely with his devotions. In other tellings of the tale, from other sources both written and oral, this encounter is nearly always included, but the emphasis differs. Before examining perspectival variations and interpreting their significance, let us explore the core body of lore about Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan, commonly known as Haider Shaikh.

### **The Shaikh and the Sultan**

It was a dark and stormy night. At least that is how nearly every oral account of Haider Shaikh's life in the area now known as Malerkotla begins. This is the tale of the saint's first encounter with the Afghan warlord Bahlol Lodhi, soon to be Sultan at Delhi. Lodhi's uncle, Islam Khan, was in control of Sirhind at that time and Bahlol stopped there on his way to Delhi to challenge the weakening grip of the briefly ruling Sayyid dynasty (1414-1451). Haider Shaikh, a Sherwani Afghan, had come from Kabul via Multan where he studied and became adept in the spiritual path under the guidance of a *murshid*, or spiritual guide, of the Suhrawardī

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<sup>187</sup> It is a common misconception that all Muslims affiliated with Deoband, Jamā'at-i Islāmī, or Tablīghī Jamā'at are universally and passionately opposed to Sufism and *ziyārat*. The roots of Deoband are in Sufi traditions, as two of the founding scholars of the Deoband School Ahmad Rashid Gangohi (d. 1905) and Muhammad Qasim Nanatawi (d. 1879) were both disciples of Hajji Imdadullah (d. 1899), a Chishti *murshid*. These Sufis are associated with a more sober Sufism, *bishar* (with the *sharia'*) as opposed to the *beshar* (outside *sharia'*) Sufis who may flout the laws of Islam as a manifestation of their transcendence of worldly mores. It is true that bowing, making offerings, or going beyond praying for the soul of the deceased and pondering one's own inevitable death is seen as *shirk*, or polytheism and is prohibited. See Barbara Metcalf, "The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies* [12, no. 1 (1978)], p. 116, and her larger work, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1982).

Sufi lineage. This murshid is variously identified as Baha ul-Din Zakariyya (d. 1262) or his grandson Shaikh Rukn ud-Din Abu'l Fath (d. 1335).<sup>188</sup> At the behest of his *murshid*, Haider Shaikh settled on the banks of the Bhumsi, a tributary of the Sutlej River, which used to run through Malerkotla. It was there that Bahlol Lodhi encountered him. By some accounts Lodhi came simply because the area was en route. Others claim that he had heard of the Shaikh's piety and therefore sought him out. At any rate, Bahlol Lodhi reached the place on the bank of a river where the Sufi renunciant or *faqīr* had set up a hut in which to perform his devotions. In the night, a great storm arose, creating havoc throughout the army's camp, but Haider Shaikh's shelter was undisturbed. Impressed by the pious power of the saint who remained peacefully reading the Qur'an during the chaos, Lodhi asked for a blessing so that he would conquer Delhi. After his victory, the Sultan pressed a gift upon the *faqīr*, a beautiful horse fit for an emperor. But Haider Shaikh felt no need for a horse, so it was slaughtered to feed the *faqīrs* and other people who had come to live in his holy presence. Hearing of this, the Sultan was insulted and demanded the horse be returned. The saint miraculously produced multiple horses. The Sultan was humbled, he repented, and vowed to marry his daughter Taj Murassa Begum to Haider Shaikh.<sup>189</sup> Again the saint protested, but in the end they were wed. The Sultan gave a large land

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<sup>188</sup> Shaikh Baha-ul Din Zakariyya and Shaikh Ruknu'd-Din Abu'l Fath were grandfather and grandson and among the most famous saints of the Suhrawardī lineage in the subcontinent. However, their dates are clearly inconsistent with Haider Shaikh's who died in 1515. Still, it is certainly not uncommon to link later Sufis to the most renowned, popular, and powerful saints in their lineages. For those who attend the shrine who are aware of the variety of Sufi lineages, Haider Shaikh is universally identified as Suhrawardi. In another source, the *murshid* is identified as Baha-ul Haq [Sufi Muhammad Ismail, *Bagh Anbiya Punjab* (Malerkotla: Janab Doctor Muhammad Nizamuddin Sahib, 1995).] but this is likely a variant of the commonly given reference to Bahauddin Zakariyya. Coming from Afghanistan, the stop in Multan is not surprising, making the link quite possible. However, the *khanqah* at Multan was in decline after the death of Shaikh Ruknu'd-Din, and was no longer such an important center for Sufi learning. Of course, this does not preclude Shaikh Sadruddin Sadr-i-Jahan's going there.

<sup>189</sup> Although there are no contemporary records of this marriage, it is reported that on at least one other occasion Lodhi married one of his daughters to a saint. According to Punjab historian Fauja Singh, "During the period of his reign, Bahlol got a large stone-tomb constructed commemorating the death of his son-in-law, Mir-i-Miran, a great saint of the place. The saint had received a *jagir* in dowry in the neighborhood of Sirhind and at this place a tank, *bibisar*, was constructed by the princess or by her brother, Sikander Lodhi." Fauja Singh, ed., *Sirhind through the Ages* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1984).

grant, called a *jagīr*, as a wedding portion and the *faqīr* became a *jagīrdar* (the holder of a *jagīr*). The date most often given for these events is 1454.

The Shaikh and the Sultan's daughter had two children, Hassan and Bibi Mangi. As Haider Shaikh had risen in the world from a humble *faqīr* to a major *jagīrdar* with close ties to the Sultan, the ruler of the nearby kingdom of Kapurthala, Rai Bahram Bhatti, sought an alliance and offered his daughter in marriage. Two sons were born from Haider Shaikh's marriage to the Kapurthala princess, #Isa and Māsa. Eventually the Shaikh's daughter, Bibi Mango, was married. However, she was widowed very young, then mistreated by her in-laws. Hassan refused his father's directive to retrieve her and so #Isa and Māsa rescued their half-sister. On the return trip, Bibi Mango was overwhelmed by shame at her widowed and disgraced state and implored the earth to open and receive her, which it did.<sup>190</sup> The angry Shaikh disowned Hassan, the elder son for having refused to help his sister, which perhaps contributed to her sense of humiliation. Haider Shaikh blessed his other two sons, declaring, "*jao, degh, tegh, fateh*" meaning, "Go, may wealth, strength, and victory (be yours)."<sup>191</sup> Māsa became, like his father, a *faqīr*, but lived as a renunciant and had no children. #Isa (d. 1538) and his descendents became subsequent *jagīrdars*. As *jagīrdars* the family was always dependent upon the good will of the ruler at Delhi, which from 1526 until 1757 was the Mughal lineage. Not until 1657, under the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb did the region become a quasi-independent principality, when Bayzid Khan was granted the title of Nawab.

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<sup>190</sup> Her *dargāh* is on the outskirts of Malerkotla by the 'Id Gah. There is the stump of the tree said to have sprung from a piece of her palanquin. Some, but not many, devotees of Haider Shaikh come to pay their respects here as well. There is a new superstructure to the shrine, indicating ongoing patronage and it is well known locally.

<sup>191</sup> This is a common slogan among Sikhs as well. The attribution of this phrase to Haider Shaikh places it a hundred and fifty years before its usage by Guru Gobind Singh (d. 1708). The attribution to Haider Shaikh by elements of the Muslim community in Malerkotla may reflect a desire to appropriate and incorporate the popular slogan into a context to which they can also lay claim.

## Knowing the Shaikh

The practice of tomb shrine pilgrimage, known as *ziyarat*, is under attack on several fronts. Muslim reformers object to the practice as polytheistic and reminiscent of Hinduism.<sup>192</sup> Sikh reformers, on the other hand, object to the practice as derivative from Islam and suggestive of spiritual authority outside that of the Guru Granth (the holy text) and the Guru Panth (the body of believers).<sup>193</sup> And Hindu reformers have actively targeted *dargahs* in other regions because they are both Muslim sites and sites of inter-religious encounter.<sup>194</sup> Thus the accounts of Haider Shaikh, his tomb, and the community of the saint who attend his shrine and transmit his lore are important expressions of the struggle to maintain the relevance, significance, and existence of the site. Establishing the veracity of the events described by the various interlocutors of the saint is secondary to understanding the meaning of Haider Shaikh to his devotees and the residents of the settlement he founded. Among residents and visitors to Malerkotla the level of knowledge about the saint ranges widely from those who know multiple stories, recount his miracles, perform his rituals, and attend his shrine to those who do none of these things. In Malerkotla, nearly every resident whom I interviewed knew most of the basic outline of the history and hagiography of Haider Shaikh given above. However, the devotees from outside the town who attend the festivals for the saint knew few of these stories. The particular types of stories known, the number known and the variety of stories told are all indicators of the orientation of the teller towards the saint and the aspects of Haider Shaikh's tradition deemed relevant to community and

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<sup>192</sup> The controversial nature of *ziyarat* will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Six.

<sup>193</sup> The tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, according to majoritarian Sikh tradition declared that after his death the living guruship would end and the Guru (meaning God) would be enshrined in the Guru Granth and the Guru Panth.

<sup>194</sup> As discussed in the introduction, most recently in the violence in Gujarat in spring 2002, investigative panels list at least 240 *dargāhs* destroyed by Hindu mobs. See, for example, *Dateline Gujarat: Inside Hindutva's Laboratory*, Communalism Combat, 2002 [cited. Available from <http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2002/marapril/dateline.htm>].

personal life. Thus for some locals, the Shaikh is more important as the town's founder than as a holy man. The prestige of the marital link to the Sultan Bahlol Lodhi and the ancient heritage of the kingdom are points of pride for the Muslim community especially. Residents who do attend the shrine tend to possess a body of additional lore concerning the shrine's past and present role in community life, the site's miraculous construction, and numerous personal accounts of healing or fulfilled desires. Devotees from outside Malerkotla often do not know historic accounts of the Shaikh. Indeed many do not know his full name, Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan.<sup>195</sup> Whether or not they know any of the lore of the saint and the town, devotees from outside tend to be more concerned with communicating the living presence and power of the saint rather than extolling his past deeds. Given the multiple possible orientations towards the saint, it is not surprising that different features and variant narratives come to the fore with different tellers and in various contexts. These nuances, emphases, deviations, and contradictions, reveal how the stories become key identity markers for the interlocutors, shaping the personal and public meaning of the Shaikh.

The community of the saint is comprised of his descendents, the ritual specialists who mediate his spirit and power, and his devotees. This variegated community organizes their accounts of Haider Shaikh in order to construct his symbolic meaning according to their needs and interests. One way in which narrators do this is through committing what some would call an historical "error," displacing Haider Shaikh in time in order to generate a hereditary or sentimental link. This is consistent with the oral narratives collected by Alessandro Portelli in relation to the misplacement of a symbolic event in community memories in order to link the

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<sup>195</sup> Shaikh Sadruddin Sadr-i Jahan is written above the entrance to the tomb, but it is written in Urdu script, making it difficult for the mostly Punjabi and Hindi speaking clientele to read.

event with the ideological concerns of the present.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, temporal displacement of the saint is a common technique in Malerkotla employed to connect him in some way to the narrator's own history. Thus many local Hindus place Haider Shaikh as a contemporary of Baba Atma Ram, the Hindu saint whose shrine lies about a kilometer from Haider Shaikh's tomb. Although by most estimates Baba Atma Ram was active in the early eighteenth century, in these oral accounts there is a deep friendship between the two. This temporal shift reduces the dominant shadow cast by Haider Shaikh over the town, placing the Hindu saint as a contemporary and equal with his own repertoire of miracle stories and entourage of devotees. The shift also opens up space for Hindus in the devotional cult of Haider Shaikh as a holy man who was non-sectarian in his own lifetime as evidenced by his friendship with Baba Atma Ram and sets a precedent for his devotees to likewise supercede religious boundaries in the present. Haider Shaikh's acceptability as a companion to a Hindu saint provides a resource for Hindus today who wish to engage in inter-religious dialogue. This is important because many Hindus are under increasing pressure from groups like the VHP and RSS to focus their attention on their own community. Hindutva activists employ various tactics to foster heightened religious consciousness. In some cases, VHP, Bajrang Dal, RSS and other activists have sought to wrest control of a shrine and its identity from its Muslim proprietors.<sup>197</sup> For example, there are frequent calls to boycott Muslim businesses and products, an action that would make life extremely difficult in Muslim majority Malerkotla.<sup>198</sup> Participation in Sufi cults in the view of

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<sup>196</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*.

<sup>197</sup> This is most recently exemplified by VHP leader Praveen Togadia's tour of India in which he visited numerous shrines, holding rallies at which he declared that the place would be the "next Ayodhya." Although the focus of these groups is strongest upon three major sites – the Ram birthplace at Ayodhya, the Krishna birthplace at Mathura, and a mosque in Banaras – the thousands of other sites identified as formerly Hindu are often more available and locally vulnerable. One shrine that is most actively contested in this fashion is the jointly identified Dargāh Baba Budhan Shah – Sri Swami Dattatreya Peetha in Chikmagalur, Karnataka. For more on this place see, Yoginder Sikand, *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India*, (New Delhi; Penguin India, 2003).

<sup>198</sup> I have not seen or heard of any such pamphlets or efforts being promoted in post-Partition Malerkotla.

Hindu extremist organizations is a mixed proposition. On the one hand it demonstrates the openness and tolerance of Hinduism. On the other hand, it acknowledges Islam as a valid religion with indigenous traditions and brings revenue to the caretakers of the tomb – often Muslims. Thus the support of Sufi shrines is often viewed as akin to the type of appeasement that the Muslims already enjoy as a minority group in terms of reservations for jobs and places in universities, etc. and financial assistance to underdeveloped communities.<sup>199</sup> Thus Hindus who continue to participate in the cults of Sufi saints do so in the knowledge that their behavior would be objectionable to right-wing Hindu organizations. As such their presence may in many cases be a type of resistance to divisive Hindu politics. For these Hindus, displacing Haider Shaikh in time and condensing his cult with that of Baba Atma Ram strategically resignifies Haider Shaikh's symbolic meaning: he remains a key symbol of inter-religious harmony, but on terms which generate a powerful precedent for non-Muslims.

For the Muslims most closely connected to Haider Shaikh – that is his descendents – a different set of interests emerges from the narratives they transmit. The *khalīfahs* are the principal communicators of Haider Shaikh's history.<sup>200</sup> Many *khalīfahs* live near his shrine and some take an active role in its daily upkeep. Many *khalīfahs* are active transmitters of the lore of the saint. They not only tell the commonly known tale of Haider Shaikh's encounter with Bahlol Lodhi, but also of subsequent miracles and the importance of the saint and the *dargah* in their

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<sup>199</sup> In 1980 a body known as the Mandal Commission sponsored by the central government issued a report in which it was recommended that twenty-seven percent of all government positions and university admissions be reserved for backward and scheduled caste people. In 1990 the Prime Minister of India V.P. Singh announced that he would implement these reforms. The outcry led to his eventual resignation. In certain areas of India Brahman youths immolated themselves in protest. The VHP and BJP took this up as a particular cause. The prevailing anti-reservation attitude in the ascendant Hindu right movement helped to build the militancy in the movement to "liberate" Ayodhya as well. In general, Hindutva literature depicts Muslims as coddled by the government. In particular they object to the continued application of Muslim personal law while Hindus and Sikhs are subject to federal law in personal as well as civil and criminal matters.

<sup>200</sup> *Khalīfah* is an Arabic term for successor. It also contains the notion of being the custodian of the tradition of the one succeeded. Thus the first four leaders of the Muslim community were called the Rightly Guided Caliphs *al-khulafā' al-rāshidān*. Humanity's custodianship of the created world is also referred to as *khilāfat*, or viceregency.

own lives. There are several elder *khalīfahs* in particular who know many stories about Haider Shaikh. In addition to the descendents of the saint, who might be expected to know a great deal about his life and the lore of their ancestor, many residents of Malerkotla tell tales of the saint. Furthermore, among the devotees and pilgrims from outside who come to the shrine, certain tales are quite common. Over the course of a year and a half I solicited accounts of the saint from *khalīfahs*, residents, and devotees both inside the *dargah* and at other venues. Unsurprisingly, the repertoires of stories about Haider Shaikh's life tended to be largest among the *khalīfahs* and smallest among the devotees. However, the entire community of the saint possesses stories about Haider Shaikh's significance in their own lives, and communicated this meaning through stories of blessings received, miracles experienced, and lifestyles changed. Just a few stories of the saint are told with great frequency.

### **The Repertoire of Stories**

The reappearance of certain events in the narratives about Haider Shaikh indicate that these are particularly important signifying moments that reveal certain aspects of the saint's character and identity. By extension and through the act of performing these narratives, these aspects of the saint's character and identity are connected with the character and identity of the town that he founded and with the interlocutor recounting the tale. Thus the historical accounts of Haider Shaikh's life and miracles are stories of the past that are put to use in the present as a way of interpreting and understanding the present. This is a strategy of identity formation and perpetuation that is by no means limited to Malerkotla and the lore of Haider Shaikh. In his study of Mexicano use of "speech of the elders of bygone days," Charles Briggs describes how introducing an account of bygone days – such as the stories of the saint – into the discourse of the present shifts the context of a speech event from a temporally distinct moment. Extending

the moment in time simultaneously extends the meaning, opening up a new range of interpretive possibilities for the narrator and the audience. When speaking of the past, "the present can stand alone no more, bearing a false self-sufficiency and limiting the imagination to seeing what is present to the senses."<sup>201</sup> The present *needs* the past, to give it depth and meaning. The narrators who do the memory work of bringing the past into the present "use their historical force to confront the present with a value-laden interpretation of itself."<sup>202</sup> The mobilization of memories preserved by a community carries the identity of the community forward, allowing old values and truths to metamorphose into shapes that are appropriate in a new context. What Briggs terms "historical discourse" serves several purposes, to validate a cultural action, transmit particular genres associated with the past, and as a source of collective identity. The past "stands as a communicative resource, providing a setting and an expressive pattern for discussions that transform both past and present."<sup>203</sup> The collective memory work involved in passing on accounts of the past is an inherently interpretive process, requiring the communicator and the audience to engage the communicated events and determine their personal and social meanings. Briggs adds that the process of transformation is "intrinsically interpretive: both performers and audience members must deduce the basic principles that generated action in the past and then apply these to the present and future."<sup>204</sup>

This interpretive process, inherent to narratives of historical memories, is also consistent with the appropriate modes of transmission of knowledge in the Islamic tradition. Muslims constantly evoke the model of Muhammad and his companions as an *uswa hasana*, a beautiful model, towards which all later societies should turn in order to know what it is to act morally and

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<sup>201</sup> Briggs, Charles, *Competence in Performance: The Creativity of Tradition in Mexican Verbal Art*, (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p. 1.

<sup>202</sup> Op cit.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>204</sup> Op cit.

faithfully.<sup>205</sup> As one of the bases of prescriptive law, the *sunnah* of the Prophet illustrates, extends, and connects the Muslim community of the present with the exemplary community of the past. Narrative histories and hagiographies about Haider Shaikh and other Muslim leaders and mystics both follow this prescriptive pattern and provide justification for the devotional cults that arise around their tombs.

In this way, the didactic aspect of the stories told about Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla is wholly consistent with the genres of prescriptive literature in Islam that model appropriate behavior in the present on the perfect model of the prophet and his companions. In relating events of moral exemplars from the past, a narrator grounds his or her recommendations for ideal action in the present, effectively extending its significance and opening up a new field of meaning. The narrative technique of evoking the past to interpret the present is therefore quite consistent with the use of didactic exemplars in the transmission of Islamic principles. Thus, oft-repeated tales, their tellers, and the contexts in which the tales are told reveal a great deal about how the popular narratives about Haider Shaikh shapes the identity and culture of the *dargah* and the town. Variations, anomalies, and unique features of the narratives indicate how narratives of Haider Shaikh serve as vehicles for the representation of multiple personal and group identities.

Foremost among the principle interlocutors of Haider Shaikh are, unsurprisingly, his descendents. Not only were elder *khalīfahs* more willing and able to transmit narratives, but also the especially knowledgeable individuals were identified by others, validating his or her status as a competent communicator.<sup>206</sup> Not all *khalīfahs* referenced the same few elders as possessors of

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<sup>205</sup> Qur'an 33:21 says, "Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allāh a beautiful pattern (of conduct) [*uswa hasana*] for any one whose hope is in Allāh and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allāh."

<sup>206</sup> To varying degrees the *khalīfahs*, residents, and devotees who narrate stories of the saint may all be labeled *competent communicators* of the saint's tradition. In Dell Hymes' theory of narrative performance, there are varying degrees of "competence" among the possessors of a particular body of knowledge. Hymes defines a performance as a "cultural behavior for which a person assumes responsibility to an audience." Thus, competent

particular knowledge about the saint, but several people stood out. The range of narratives these elders possessed in their active repertoires far exceeded that of the average resident of Malerkotla and further demonstrated their authority as transmitters. These narrators also demonstrated their expertise and virtuosity by the fluidity with which they folded past and present into one another in these tales. This competence was especially manifest among those *khalīfahs* who were able not only to recount the story of Haider Shaikh's coming to Malerkotla, but also made connections between the events of the Shaikh's life and subsequent events in the area's history and the present day.

Local residents other than the *khalīfahs* also transmit Haider Shaikh's tradition, but their repertoires tended to be smaller, more focused on bare historical details, and highlight particularly famous miracles of the saint and his shrine. Non- *khalīfah* performers emphasized elements of Haider Shaikh's lore that established a personal connection between their own group and the saint, emphasized his popularity and fame, or made a particular point. Among the non-resident interlocutors, the principle competent communicators were the leaders of devotional assemblies who travel from locations across Punjab and North India to attend the shrine for the annual festivals for Haider Shaikh. These individuals are called *chelas*, a Sanskritic term for disciples. They are capable of communicating with the spirit of Haider Shaikh, and thus embody a highly privileged relationship with the saint as his most immediate interlocutors. Rather than looking to the saint's past to demonstrate his ongoing relevance and power, the *chelas* bring the saint into the present, making him available to a gathering of devotees in need of spiritual and material assistance, obviating the need for an extensive received body of lore about Haider

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communicators have the inclination, ability, and authority to represent a communicative behavior in a particular context. Other qualities of the competent communication are that it be interpretable, reportable, and repeatable. See Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance," in *"in Vain I Tried to Tell You": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*, edited by Dell Hymes, (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

Shaikh's worldly life and deeds. The non-resident devotional community of the saint includes not only the groups of devotees who attend the shrine in the company of a *chela* but also those that come independently. These individuals were rarely well versed in the lore of the saint, but most are adept in the appropriate ritual modes of interaction with the saint and the shrine. They attend the shrine for many reasons: long-standing family custom, personal affinity, group solidarity, etc. For these devotees, the particular motivation for attendance most often reported was the efficacy of their prayers. Another significant and almost universally cited collateral benefit was the egalitarianism, lack of sectarian divisions, and general conviviality at the shrine.<sup>207</sup>

For Haider Shaikh's many devotees who were not active transmitters of his historical lore, the opportunity to be present at his shrine afforded them an occasion to express their own interpretations of the saint's traditions and modes of integrating the saint into their lives. This was achieved not through the telling of tales about the saint, but through accounts of the self. For example, for these competent communicators, the principle mode through which the saint is experienced and expressed through highly personal testimonials, whereas the narratives of the *khalīfahs* and Malerkotla residents tend to emphasize the public life of the saint and the shrine.

These personal and historical tales are not fixed in form. Their shape and meaning is determined by the context of their telling, to whom they are told, when, and why. Far from being saved up for wandering anthropologists, these stories are exchanged at the shrine and in the town among people for whom the saint provides shape to the story of their own identity. That these stories develop and are used in interpersonal encounters is important as Briggs asserts that

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<sup>207</sup> At several of the festivals for Haider Shaikh I conducted brief surveys with numerous devotees. By sending out several neighborhood children, as well as myself and an assistant with forms and a list of questions, I was able to obtain several hundred responses at three festival events. Although not particularly scientific given the vagaries of the interviewers and respondents, these cursory responses overwhelmingly validated and repeated the responses I received in more extended interviews.

interpretation of a narrative event is dialogical and that both performers and audiences engage in the interpretation of a story. Alessandro Portelli points out that shifts in the temporal or material structure of a narrative is an interpretive act. Changing the place or time of an event determines the meaning of the event described by defining the parameters of its occurrence and its relations to previous and subsequent events. An example of this interpretive process is the extremely common practice among non-resident devotees of displacing Haider Shaikh from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and attributing to him the *haa da naara*, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan's protest against the execution of Guru Gobind Singh's sons. Although historically in "error," as Portelli argues, this act of displacement and condensation of Haider Shaikh with Sher Muhammad Khan reveals a great deal about the interests of those who make this assertion.

Although *khandan* and Malerkotla residents most frequently recounted the story about Haider Shaikh's meeting with Bahlol Lodhi, non-resident pilgrims most frequently cited this mistaken attribution of the *haa da naara* to the saint. This "error" revealed one of the reasons why the Muslim town of Malerkotla and the Muslim saint Haider Shaikh have such significance among non-resident Punjabis, the vast majority of whom are non-Muslim. For example, one devotee, a Sikh from Hathoi explained that the power of Haider Shaikh derived from Guru Gobind Singh's blessing. The blessing given after the Guru heard of the effort to defend his sons endowed Haider Shaikh with the power to grant the wishes of all those who come to pray with sincerity at his tomb. This claim introduces several possible interpretations and narrative intentions for the story of the Shaikh and the *haa da naara*. First, the power of the Muslim saint is described as being derivative from the Sikh Guru, thus establishing a spiritual hierarchy of efficacy. This view provides a theological cover for non-Muslims to attend a Muslim shrine. This is a sensitive point, however. While it does justify non-Muslim presence, such a claim of

derivative power also co-opts the saint for non-Islamic traditions, thereby doing nothing to validate in his own right or through Islam. Second, the Shaikh is credited by extension with the type of ecumenicism and sense of justice that is ascribed to Sher Muhammad Khan because of the protest. This elision is consistent with the prevailing view that Haider Shaikh does not discriminate between his devotees on the basis of religion. The Hathoi devotee and others also explained that they felt Haider Shaikh's multi-religious appeal was due to the fact that not only does the saint fulfill the desires of everyone, but also he does not believe in *jat-path*, or sectarianism. On the contrary, for many devotees, Haider Shaikh is *hamare sanjhe pīr*, "our common *pīr*." For the Sikh from Hathoi and many, many others who expressed similar views, the *haa da naara* is the local paradigm for the human capacity for justice and fairness and to supercede sectarian affiliation. Third, by identifying Haider Shaikh with Sher Muhammad Khan, the saint is linked to an event in which the defenseless are defended and the tyrannical are confronted. In spite of the fact that the *haa da naara* failed – the *sahibzadas* were executed – the symbolic gesture alone carries enormous power for the constituents of Haider Shaikh's tradition, many of whom are from oppressed and disempowered communities themselves. These qualities of justice and courage are emphasized in most of the stories told about the saint, but it is in this conflation of the Shaikh and the Nawab that the most powerful symbolic action in Malerkotla's history is made to resonate with Malerkotla's most integrative institution – the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh.

It is important to highlight the diversity of the community connected to Haider Shaikh. Although the *khalīfahs* are all Muslim, at no other level of association with the saint is there such a singularity of religious affiliation. The residents of Malerkotla who engaged the shrine come

from all faiths, and the pilgrims from outside the town were rarely, if ever, Muslim.<sup>208</sup>

Significantly, this diversity among the saint's community is often cited by visitors as one of the attractions of the shrine and Haider Shaikh's cult. Far from being a negative aspect or even a value-neutral feature, the openness of the tradition and the possibility of encountering devotees and custodians of different religious faiths was clearly one of the most appealing aspects of the pilgrimage. Thus the Muslim *khalīfahs*, the Muslims, Sikh and Hindu residents, and the Sikh and Hindu pilgrims recount their narratives of Haider Shaikh in an environment conducive to multiple interlocutors, a variety of narrative traditions, and inter-religious exchange.

### **Connecting with the Shaikh**

Given the diversity of the devotional community connected to Haider Shaikh, it is not surprising that some narrators omit certain events, or focus substantially on others, or include variant elements in order to communicate a particular interpretation of the significance of the saint for them personally or for the society generally. It is to be expected that the stories known and transmitted will reveal the interests of the tellers. What these interests are and how they overlap and relate to the tales told by others reveals a fascinating narrative web that enlivens the saint's tradition and demonstrates the creativity of his constituency. Of this variety, a few features are relatively universal. For example the entire non-resident folklore community connected to Haider Shaikh consistently portrays him as a saint for *all* people. As mentioned above, many of the devotees who attend the festivals refer to him as *hamare sanjhe pīr*, our common saint. Local and extra-local followers refer to themselves as the *pīrpanth*, the community of the saint, which groups them together around Haider Shaikh, but also connects

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<sup>208</sup> Other than itinerant *faqīrs*, I never encountered a Muslim pilgrim at Haider Shaikh's *dargāh* from outside Malerkotla.

them with the worshippers of Muslim *pīrs* throughout Punjab and beyond. Another common theme that emerges in the tellings are personal and group linkages made to the saint not just by his descendents, the Pathan *khalīfahs* who ruled Malerkotla and continue to manage the *dargah*, but also by non-Pathan Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. As discussed above, there is a further distinction between resident and non-resident devotees, the former tending to include historic tales and both groups recount personal testimonials that authenticate the power of the Shaikh. For example, a Sikh man now living in Singapore brought his entire family to the *dargah* one Thursday. He said he comes to Haider Shaikh's tomb whenever he comes back to visit his family in Punjab. His family had been coming to Haider Shaikh for many generations. In fact, his father and six uncles were all born after his grandparents had prayed at the tomb. His wife, who grew up in Singapore, has now taken up the worship of Haider Shaikh and every Thursday they light lamps and sing songs for Haider Shaikh in their home. Their son and daughter were born through Haider Shaikh's intercession, thereby continuing the tradition of faith as generation after generation finds a place for Haider Shaikh in their lives.

The community of descendents and devotees emphasize different aspects of Haider Shaikh's lore in their tellings of his life and times. The *khalīfahs* tend to highlight the royal connection, reaffirming Haider Shaikh's power and preeminence. They do this by iterating the connection to the Lodhi Sultan and by recounting Haider Shaikh's miracles. Hindus also tend to remark on Haider Shaikh's connection to the Lodhis, but they tend to disconnect him from the coercive power of the state. Sikhs fixate on a single incident of inter-religious cooperation between the Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan and their tenth Guru, Gobind Singh. In this way each element of the broader community symbolically manages the saint, dissociating him from the aspects of his history and lore that contradict idealized images of the Shaikh and themselves.

## **Khalifah Tales**

The descendents of the saint do not need to establish a personal connection. Their connection is clear; the concern is to manage the significance of that connection. For the descendents, both from the lineage of *khalīfahs* and the Nawabs, the emphasis of the stories told tended to be on the encounter with the Sultan, the ruler's amazement at the saint's holiness, his subsequent gifts, and the eventual marriage with Taj Murassa Begum. These accounts are standard among all the groups who narrate Haider Shaikh's traditions. For example, the eldest son of the current chief caretaker of the *dargah* known as the *gaddī nishīn*, gave the following rendition of the basic tale when I enquired about what pilgrims tended to ask of the *khalīfahs* when they arrived at the tomb. He responded:

People ask about his history. He came from Kabul. He was a Sufi saint, a big *buzurg* [pious man]. He came from Kabul to Punjab, Malerkotla. Once at night Babaji [i.e. Haider Shaikh] was inside his hut. From that side [gestures North] Bahlol Lodhi Badshah was going for war, he also put his tents there. Suddenly a storm came and his tents were destroyed but in Babaji's hut, the lamp was still burning. The rest of the people were really surprised that in spite of such a storm the lamp is still burning. They were impressed by him. The king asked Babaji to pray for him so that he should be victorious in the war. Babaji prayed for him and he won the battle. The Badshah out of happiness gave Babaji a horse, but Babaji was a Sufi, what was he to do with the horse? Babaji then gave the horse to somebody else. Somebody complained to the Badshah that Babaji has not accepted his gift. When the Badshah asked, Babaji with his miraculous power lined up a thousand horses just like that one in front of Babaji. Then the Sultan married his daughter to Babaji.

This account is quite similar to the basic outline of the Shaikh's story given above. The encounter with Lodhi in the storm is the key event, followed by his marriage to the Sultan's daughter. Added into this version is the fairly commonly known story of the saint's refusal of the gift of a horse. This episode serves to demonstrate Haider Shaikh's lack of worldly interest and also his miraculous powers as he first rejects the horse and then conjures a thousand more.

Several other members of the *khalīfah* family possess large repertoires of stories related to their progenitor, and from them I heard accounts that were not commonly told by others in the community. These tales tended to emphasize the Shaikh's miraculous powers, and the superiority of spiritual power over worldly authority. Two stories I heard from a *khalīfah* who worked as a *numbardar* (revenue collector), I never heard elsewhere. This middle-aged male *khalīfah* was particularly interested in the lore of the Shaikh and in Sufi practice. His father and grandfather were well-known local Sufis. He did not sit at the tomb or collect money from it. He himself kept horses, and joked that this perhaps reveals an affinity with his royal Afghan forefathers and the gift of Bahlol Lodhi to the Shaikh. He had a reputation for knowing a great deal about Haider Shaikh and many local people referred me to him to learn more about the saint.

### **The Shaikh as a Warrior**

One of the *numbardar*'s stories was an account of Haider Shaikh's motivation in coming to the region. In his rendition, the Shaikh was not just a religious renunciant, but also a military man, a general in the army in Afghanistan who had become increasingly absorbed in his religious practices, and was neglecting his military duties. Completely lost in *zikr* – repetition of the names of Allah – Haider Shaikh ignored the marching orders sent to him by the ruler. However, his negligence of his worldly duties results in the revelation of his high spiritual attainment when the battle is miraculously won, in spite of his failure to lead the troops to war.

Here is the *numbardar*'s tale:

Baba Hazrat Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan (*rehmat allāh*<sup>209</sup>) is his full name. He was a general in the army before, but he was a fakir also. Once the king asked

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<sup>209</sup> *Rehmat allāh*, (may God have mercy) and other such formulas such as *salla allāh* (may God give blessings) invoke blessings upon the souls of the saintly dead in Islamic parlance. The invocation denotes the acknowledgment of an exalted status above that of an ordinary pious person. Mention of the Prophet Muhammad is frequently followed by the phrase *salla allāh 'alayhi wa salam* (May the Blessings and Peace of God be upon him). The phrase is sometimes

him to go somewhere because at that place a revolt was going on. But when the command came to him he took it and threw it on one side – because he was doing *zikr* at that time, in the Lord's name. So his followers who were *jinn*, they picked it up.<sup>210</sup> Those *jinn* who obeyed his command picked it up. And therefore they understood that they were given this command and they went to that place and they conquered it. And they got the booty from the people there and the king asked, "My army didn't go there how were they conquered?" And he inquired [of Haider Shaikh], "If my general was here and my army was also here, who went to conquer that place?" He answered, "Your command came but I was praying and threw it to one side and my followers thought the command was for them so they went there and conquered." So the king ordered that he should not be given any work, he should only rest. But he left [the king's service]. Because his secret was laid open in front of everyone, which is not good. So his *pīr* ordered him to go to Malerkotla and spread Islam there and pray to God. On all sides there was water here, except the place where the *dargah* is now, that was dry, so he sat there.<sup>211</sup>

The *numbardar*'s tale has multiple levels and taps into several themes commonly associated with the advent of Sufism in South Asia. First, Haider Shaikh is depicted as a saint capable of anything, a true *sadr-e jahan*, or master of the world.<sup>212</sup> He wins battles without moving and commands *jinn* without attachment to these powers. The saint also manifests almost complete detachment from his worldly duties. Commands from his overlord and ruler do not disturb his devotions, instead he tosses aside the orders and remains lost in prayer. But significantly, this great Shaikh who ignores temporal authority and has armies of *jinn* at his command, humbly obeys his *pīr*, and goes to work as a simple man of faith, spreading Islam and praying in a place

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abbreviated and indicated by the letter s (saud) in parentheses. The infusion of these invocations into one's language is a means of signifying one's piety and manifesting a distinctly Muslim identity.

<sup>210</sup> *Jinn* are one of the three orders of sentient beings created by God, along with angels and humans. *Jinn* are not necessarily demonic creatures, but are often ascribed with the power to possess or attack humans. They do have superhuman strength and powers. It is said in the Sahih Muslim that every human has a *jinn* and an angel as partners. The angels are incapable of free reasoning and embody the will of God. *Jinn* are capable of mischief and evil and are often a temptation against the will of God. To command the *jinn*, as Haider Shaikh does in this example, is evidence of a high degree of spiritual power. Several people in Malerkotla reported to me that they were capable of perceiving the *jinn* and controlling them. One man said that as an experiment he had recited the *Surat al-Jinn* (Qur'an 72) a number of times, which is said to give one power over the *jinn*. At the end of his recitation a *jinn* appeared and asked what was his command. The man responded, "Go, you are free." The man further said that no one should be enslaved and he was wrong to have attempted to bring anything, even a *jinn* under his power.

<sup>211</sup> Personal Interview, January 28, 2001.

<sup>212</sup> It should be pointed out that *sadrudin sadri jahan* is more often an honorific title than a name. Furthermore *sadri jahan* was occasionally the title of an official rank among the *ulema*. As no contemporary accounts or biographical chronicles of the Suhrawardi lineage make mention of Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan, it is impossible to know what his name might have truly been or signified in terms of his level of education or community standing.

previously uninhabited and apparently uninhabitable, being completely covered in water. This demonstrates his capacity to wield power in both the temporal and spiritual worlds.

Second, the *numbardar*'s narrative also evokes a common trope in the hagiographies of Sufi saints in which the holy man goes to a wild and uncultivated land and establishes himself. In the *numbardar*'s story, Haider Shaikh arrives at a place that was isolated and surrounded by water. In other oral accounts, the area was described as a jungle. In either case, the region is understood to have been uninhabited and uncivilized prior to the saint's arrival. Through the saint's spiritual discipline, charisma, and *barakat*, the region is simultaneously civilized and Islamicized as people are drawn to the saint's teachings and settle around him. In his work *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, Richard Eaton describes the "association of Muslim holy men (*pīr*), or charismatic persons popularly identified as such, with forest clearing and land reclamation." These holy men come to symbolize the very process of Islamicization in a region. Eaton continues by asserting that such figures "have endured precisely because, in the collective folk memory, their careers captured and telescoped a complex historical socioreligious process whereby a land originally forested and non-Muslim became arable and predominantly Muslim."<sup>213</sup> Although in Malerkotla the arability of the land is not a feature of the narratives about Haider Shaikh, there is a consistent emphasis in the narratives that the area was wild and unsettled. The saint's coming thus represents the first significant human settlement of the region, and credits him with making the place habitable. Furthermore, Haider Shaikh was able to civilize the area enough to make it an acceptable dwelling place for the daughter of a Sultan. This could not have been a small feat and therefore further aggrandizes his powerful reputation. This harmonizes quite well with the process Eaton describes in which the career of a saint is

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<sup>213</sup> Eaton, Richard M., *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1993), pp. 207-8.

"made a metaphor for historical changes experienced by people." The story of Haider Shaikh, like that of Shaikh Jalal al-Din Tabrizi recounted in Eaton's work, "seeks to make sense of the gradual cultural shift," as the area transitioned into Islam and into the structure of centralized Muslim power.

Another common theme in narratives concerning the advent of Sufism that is present in the *numbardar's* tale is that of the warrior Sufi. According to the *numbardar*, Haider Shaikh had been a general in an unnamed ruler's army. Clearly unsuited to life on a battlefield, he neglects his duty for his spiritual discipline. Nonetheless, Haider Shaikh is depicted as having been a great warrior as he rose to the rank of a general, as well as a great Sufi, capable of performing miracles. Furthermore, he becomes a great ruler, thus establishing him as a master of every realm of human authority. The *ghazi*, or warrior Sufi, is a common feature in stories of the spread of Islam in India. In *Sufis of Bijapur*, Richard Eaton describes the material assistance of the *ghazis* in the spread and stabilization of Islam in India. Contrary to the images of Sufis as quietistic and wholly spiritual, these individuals worked on the frontiers of the Islamic conquest, waging the dual *jihad* of the soul and the sword. Eaton claims that this type of Sufi was a short-lived phenomenon that disappeared as Muslim rule stabilized. Nonetheless, the devotional cults connected to several *ghazis* remain strong, including Sufi Sarmast and Pīr Khandayat. Eaton cites Clifford Geertz's characterization of the warrior saint to describe how this figure so powerfully draws together the dual processes of religious and temporal civilization. Geertz describes the fusion in the warrior saint of "strong-man politics and holy man piety" as an "axial figure," combining in a single person both forces.<sup>214</sup> This fusion seems equally relevant in India as in the North African context about which Geertz was writing. In India, there are many shrines

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<sup>214</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, (Delhi; Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996 [1978]), p. 38.

to *ghazis*, in particular those who are martyred in battle, that have become objects of veneration and the centerpoint of a devotional cult. Further, these cults are often multi-confessional. For example, in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh at the shrine of Ghazi Salar Mas'ud, the site has been absorbed into the religious lives of both Hindus and Muslims. This saint is believed to be the nephew of the infamous eleventh-century warlord, Mahmud of Ghazni. Although Mahmud of Ghazni has pariah status among many Hindus because of his destruction of a famous Shiva temple at Somnath in present day Gujarat, his supposed nephew is not tarred with the same brush. According to some, the Ghazi was so disturbed by the ruthless destruction of the temple that he gave up the military life. Having abandoned violence as a means of spreading the faith of Islam, the Ghazi was killed in battle and his burial site became a point of pilgrimage for Hindus and Muslims.<sup>215</sup> In the case of Haider Shaikh, his identity as a warrior and his connection to Bahlol Lodhi link him to the ongoing battles for control of Punjab during the period. Arriving a few years before the Lodhi conquest of Delhi, the Shaikh might easily have been part of the rising tide of Pathan Afghan power in the region. The possibility that he was a warrior who would therefore be even more directly associated with the Muslim conquest of South Asia has clearly not diminished the appeal of Haider Shaikh's cult for non-Muslims. Through the association, the saint demonstrates his prowess in both the military and spiritual arenas of authority, possibly expanding his appeal, and allowing devotees and descendents to emphasize the aspects of his identity as they choose. Haider Shaikh was also credited by many with the

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<sup>215</sup> According to Kerrin von Schwerin, the Ghazi was killed in battle with the Hindu Bhars and happened to be buried at a site that had previously been sacred to the sun god. Thus people merely continued to worship the same point of power that they had always worshiped, with the addition of a growing Muslim population attending the grave. Tahir Mahmood describes the joint worship of the Ghazi as celebrating the saint's abandonment of the path of violence and temple destruction espoused by his uncle, Mahmud of Ghazni. See Tahir Mahmood, "The Dargāh of Sayyid Salar Mas'Ud Ghazi in Bahraich: Legend, Tradition and Reality," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), Kerrin Von Schwerin, "Saint Worship in Indian Islam: The Legend of the Martyr Salar Masud Ghazi," in *Ritual and Religion among Muslims of the Subcontinent*, ed. Imtiaz Ahmad (Lahore: Vanguard, 1985).

conversion of the local population who gathered around him and helped to establish a firm settlement. Although this places Haider Shaikh right on the cusp of the wave of spiritual and temporal power that was rolling into Punjab in the fifteenth century. Islam had been present in the Punjab since the eleventh century, but significant conversion seems to have begun in earnest in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>216</sup> Haider Shaikh's hagiographical tradition actually incorporates most of the popular explanations for the spread of Islam. These include the conversion by sword, conversion for social uplift, and conversion due to the charisma of a particular saint. Although, as Eaton has convincingly shown, these standard explanations are insufficient, but they have remained very much alive in the active lore of Haider Shaikh and other popular Sufi saints. Thus residents and visitors alike will attribute the success of Haider Shaikh's cult, and by extension the success of Islam, to the saint's charisma and the egalitarian values he embodied.

Relatively few sources also claim that Haider Shaikh was a warrior. Interestingly, the history written by the last Nawab does not assert that the saint came with an army or had ever served in the army. The Nawab, and most others, depict the saint as being deeply pious from a very early age, and he is rarely described as doing any other sort of work. In his history, Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan writes, "from his very childhood, he was inclined to be religious minded, and on reaching his manhood he roamed throughout Afghanistan in quest of a spiritual leader and it is indeed for the same reason that he is said to have come to India."<sup>217</sup> Such accounts support the popular although overstated theory of Islamic conversion through peaceful persuasion of Sufis, rather than through force. According to this perception, Islam spread in South Asia through the proselytizing efforts and personal charisma of Sufi saints. Many eminent scholars of South

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<sup>216</sup> Richard Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam In India," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, edited by Richard C. Martin, (New York; One World Press, 1987), pp. 113-116.

<sup>217</sup> Khan *History*, pp. 2-3.

Asian Sufism, including Richard Eaton, Simon Digby, Annemarie Schimmel, Carl Ernst, Bruce Lawrence, and Irfan Habib effectively dispel the notion that Sufis in the medieval periods of Muslim expansion were actively seeking to effect conversions among the Hindu population or that they were successful when they tried.<sup>218</sup> However, to this day in many areas of Punjab and Bengal, clans and groups *do* in fact attribute their conversion to the power and appeal of famous Sufi saints such as Baba Farid Shakarganj. Furthermore, for Muslims in Malerkotla today, emphasizing the peaceful spread of Islam through the inclusive and egalitarian traditions of the saints is an important way to counter the prevalent image of Islam as a religion of violence. Such narratives are among the strategies Muslims in India employ in order to preemptively demonstrate their loyalty to the overwhelmingly Hindu nation and to guarantee their safety. This emphasis on the peaceful aspects of Islam, even if exaggerated, are also a means of accomplishing community healing in the aftermath of Partition and other episodes of inter-religious violence.<sup>219</sup>

### **Faqīr's Tale**

#### ***The Shaikh as an Apostle of Peace***

Haider Shaikh is often depicted as just such a peaceful apostle of the faith, as in this account given by a visiting *faqīr* from Uttar Pradesh. This *faqīr* travels continuously from one *dargah* to another, and the tomb shrine in Malerkotla is one of his semi-regular haunts. Coming from outside the town and even the state, he is one of the rare extra-local competent communicators with a large repertoire of tales about Haider Shaikh whom I encountered.

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<sup>218</sup> For example, Lawrence notes that the famous Delhi based Chishti master Nizamuddin Auliya mentions how infrequently Hindus attended to his instruction. Digby argues that Hindus tend to appear in Sufi *tazkīra* (biographical) literature as foils for demonstrating the spiritual superiority of a Shaikh.

<sup>219</sup> This impulse to either beatify or demonize a religion following a traumatic event was evident in the USA after the destruction of the World Trade Towers by terrorists who were Muslim. Suddenly ubiquitous, Islam was either a religion of terror or a religion of peace, with no middle ground. For a considerable period it was extremely difficult to find a more nuanced and more accurate portrayal of the vast and varied faith.

Although he did not cite the sources of his knowledge of the lore of the Shaikh, he stays during his visits with a family connected to the shrine. The family showed him great respect and affection during their interactions. In his narratives, the *faqīr* depicted Haider Shaikh as a warrior, but in this case, he used the military career of the saint as a classic conversion story in which the past, ungodly life is forsaken and a life dedicated to Allah is taken up. The military life is then made a foil for the life of God, and this dedication results in sufficient charismatic power that results in conversions to Islam.

At that time he was a major in the military, and he came to see that the world's law was *jutha* (untrue) and that the Lord's law was true. To adopt the rules of God, he did whatever Allah, ^shvar, Prabhu, Bhagwan, Paramatma, he did whatever pleased Allah Most High, and when God was happy then he was God's and God was his. And from then on he resigned from the army and came to Malerkotla, which was a princely state, and this was a region where a lot of other saints were preaching. And when he stopped in this region, after seeing his personality, the people were drawn to pray through him to Allah.

The *faqīr's* tale emphasized, perhaps unsurprisingly, Haider Shaikh's abandonment of his worldly and military life to take up the pursuit of God's will. As the Shaikh grew in knowledge and devotion to the one true God, who has many names, he came to prefer the company of other saints to material or military rewards. Furthermore, the force of his personality drew people to him and through him to Islam. In this way a wandering *faqīr* from Uttar Pradesh, who had also given up his daily life, work, family, etc. in order to seek God, forged a connection with Haider Shaikh, an Afghan whose royal lineage and saintly tradition are deeply rooted at the tomb and in Malerkotla. The *faqīr* also reinforced the popular, though ahistorical, theory of Islamization through the peaceful persuasion of charismatic Sufis. Finally, he used the story of the saint's taking up a renunciant lifestyle as a vehicle to generalize the identity of God. This is an overt acknowledgment of the multi-religious appeal of Haider Shaikh. Although the performance context of this tale was in the home of the *khalīfah* family with whom the *faqīr* resides during his

visits to the *dargah* and no non-Muslims besides myself (being white it is generally assumed that I am Christian) were present. Still, the *faqīr* deliberately expanded the appellations of God in order to include all religious faiths within his purview. This linguistic incorporation and identification of the many names of God also validates the multi-confessional community of Haider Shaikh as devotees of the devotee of an all-encompassing, all inclusive God. These multiple communities may know God by different names, but all are able to reach him through Haider Shaikh. Thus the *faqīr* affirmed the unity of God and the variety of his names, and simultaneously asserted the preeminence of Haider Shaikh and his magnetic power.

### **The Miraculous Shaikh**

In other accounts it is not the inclusiveness of the saint's traditions and the unity in diversity of God, but the supremacy of Haider Shaikh that comes to the fore. In a story told by the *numbardar khalīfah* mentioned above, Haider Shaikh is shown to be superior in terms of his spiritually derived power to perform *karamat* (miracles) versus the mere magic of Hindu yogis. This narrative depicts an encounter between Haider Shaikh and a yogi who tries to draw the Sufi into a competition of their extraordinary skills. First, the yogi fails in his effort to summon Haider Shaikh to him and must travel to the Shaikh to obtain an audience. Upon arriving, he finds that his magical abilities are no match for the Sufi.

Yes, it is commonly known. Once there was a competition between Babaji [Haider Shaikh] with a yogi. He [the yogi] said, "Bring Babaji to me." He sent two men to bring Babaji there but they did not return. Then he sent more, they also did not return. When the fourth time men were sent he asked them not to sit there but to bring the others back. But they were not able to stand [i.e. they were incapacitated], so the yogi himself came there. He said, "I am flying. If you have some power, pull me back." And he flew with his magic. Babaji put off his slippers, they went up and banged on the yogi's head and he came down. Then he [the yogi] felt sorry and said, "Do not send me away from here. Please keep me

here.” And Babaji said, “You can stand outside this gate.” Then he used to stand here and later his children would stand.<sup>220</sup>

The defeat of one religious adept by another is a common trope in tales of saintly encounters. In his work on anecdotes of spiritual competitions between Sufis and yogis, Simon Digby concludes that these hagiographical themes are strategies employed by the faithful to assert simultaneously the autonomy and similarity of two contesting faiths, with the ultimate end of establishing the preeminence of a particular type of Sufi Islam through the universal acknowledgement of the perfection of a Shaikh.<sup>221</sup> Whether the Shaikh outdoes the magic of a yogi, causes the yogi to submit to Islam, or otherwise demonstrates his spiritual supremacy, the Shaikh emerges victorious and the preeminence of Islam is confirmed. The yogi's appearance in the hagiography of a Sufi Shaikh in some cases may reflect a historical event, but the event is rendered into a narrative and recounted in such a way that even as the connection is made between Sufi Islam and yogic Hinduism, the superiority of the former is clearly established.

In this case, the *numbardar's* tale demonstrates Haider Shaikh's superiority to the *jadu* [magic, usually black magic] of the magician. It also demonstrates Haider Shaikh's magnetic power over the yogi's retainers who were unable to return from their assigned task. The mode of defeat is particularly humiliating as the negative association of shoes is widely perceived in South Asia. In particular, the depiction of the shoe as the instrument of conquest exposes Hindu prejudices surrounding pollution that are often stereotyped in Islamic polemics. However, above all this story is a discursive defeat of Hinduism by Islam. The faith and practice of the Sufi saint allow him to effortlessly defuse and expose the yogi's tricks. Although I never heard this story or any like it from non-Muslim interlocutors, it is not unreasonable to assume that these

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<sup>220</sup> Interview, August 2, 2001.

<sup>221</sup> Simon Digby, "Encounters with Jogis in Indian Sufi Hagiography," unpublished paper presented at the School for Oriental and African Studies, January 1970.

potentially inflammatory, clearly partisan stories are known outside Muslims circles, though they do not appear to be an incitement to the Hindus.

### **Hindus and the Shaikh**

Hindus not only figure in the stories told about Haider Shaikh, but Hindus also *tell* stories about Haider Shaikh. The content of these narratives often establishes a direct link between the saint and the non-Muslim community in Malerkotla. The performer may use a story of the saint to make a social commentary on the quality of Muslim authority. For example, an elderly Hindu *mistri* (carpenter) recounted one of the most detailed renditions of the tale of Haider Shaikh's meeting with Bahlol Lodhi I ever heard.<sup>222</sup> This *mistri* was also the president of the committee that manages the Vishvakarma Mandir in the Bhumsi neighborhood, very close to Haider Shaikh's *dargah*.<sup>223</sup> In Malerkotla, as in most areas in India, these *jatis*, or caste groups are among the lower echelons of society. This *mistri* took obvious pride in his professional skills, but no longer worked, dedicating himself mostly to the temple. I encountered him during an interview with a local Jain historian. The *mistri* was among the small group (about five) of Hindus and Jains present. He was the oldest member of the gathering, thus deserving of respect, but was also the lowest caste, the remainder being Aggarwal Hindus and Jains. The conversation was a joint effort to recount the history of their *gotras* (clans) in the region.<sup>224</sup> The subject of Haider Shaikh came up early on in our conversation, although the men did not know that I was specifically interested in Haider Shaikh or in Muslim saints, only that I was interested in Malerkotla's history. Up to this point, those assembled had showed an impatient deference as the elderly *mistri* had frequently interrupted the published Jain historian to interject his own

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<sup>222</sup> Personal interview, March 10, 2001.

<sup>223</sup> Vishvakarma is the deity worshipped particularly by carpenters, ironworkers, builders and others who do skilled, manual labor.

<sup>224</sup> In this region the relations between Hindus and Jains are very close, and some people jointly themselves as both

opinions. The initial discussion focused on the first Jain presence in the area, and then turned to an event in which the last Nawab of Malerkotla came to meet a famous Jain *muni*, or ascetic. This meeting clearly stood out for the Jains as a significant moment when the Muslim authority of the town took the time to acknowledge the importance of the Jain community and their religious leader. At this point, in a kind of *non sequitur*, the *mistri* broke into the historian's account and launched into an extended narrative of the arrival of the most famous local resident, Haider Shaikh. He began the story of the saint's encounter with Sultan Bahlol Lodhi in a standard fashion:

When Bahlol Lodhi's army came there, they were on the march, and at once a storm came and all the tents blew up. The King saw that all the tents had blown up except one a long distance away and in it a light was burning. He stopped and went to him and said, give me a blessing that I should conquer Delhi. As the saint's work is to give blessings, he gave it, but the King put him in a fix as he gave him a horse. Baba said, "I am a saint, I do not need a horse." But he [i.e. Lodhi] said, "I have come to a saint, so I should give something," and he forcibly gave the horse.

Before giving the extended narrative which continued at some length, it is worth pointing out several features in the *mistri's* telling of the tale. First, Haider Shaikh is portrayed as not particularly interested in whether or not Lodhi should conquer Delhi. He blessed him as a matter of course, because "the saint's work is to give blessings." Second, the *mistri* emphasized the resistance of the *faqīr* to such an ostentatious and useless gift as a horse. This shows that the narrator chose to emphasize Haider Shaikh's poverty and nonattachment to worldly things above any other qualities of a saint, such as bestowing boons or fulfilling wishes. Finally, as the *mistri* placed the blame for this gift firmly upon the king who refused to take no for an answer, he clearly asserts a rather negative opinion of the Sultan. Rather than establishing a personal link with a powerful lineage, the meeting of Haider Shaikh and Bahlol Lodhi provided the *mistri* with an opportunity to demonstrate the profligacy and obstinacy of the Afghan ruler and the more

genuine authority of those who renounce the world. He continued this theme with a protracted parable explaining that it is in fact the king's nature to be so obstinate,

We [i.e. people] have three kinds of stubbornness or rigidity. One is the king's stubbornness or rigidity, one is the woman's stubbornness, and the third is the child's stubbornness and in front of these even God has to bow. No one can speak in front of the king's stubbornness. We have a lot of examples of the stubbornness of women. Ram Chandra went into exile because of his [step]mother's stubbornness.<sup>225</sup> The example of a child's rigidity occurs [in a tale] from Babur<sup>226</sup> and Birbal who were sitting and Babur said, 'I have seen the king's and the woman's stubbornness. The king's example is me, the woman's in the *Ramayana*, but what is the stubbornness of a child?' Birbal said, 'I will show you just now.' He brought a child from somewhere and soon the child started crying. The king asked what do you want? The child said a small pot. He was given it. He became quiet, but again started crying. The king again asked what do you want? He said an elephant. He was given it, then again he started crying and said I want to put this elephant into the pot, which was impossible so the king has to bow. So the king [i.e. Lodhi] because of that nature, tied the horse there and went.

This digression into the parable of the king illustrates the *mistri's* opinion of rulers in general. Clearly unimpressed by royalty, the *mistri* depicted Lodhi's behavior as inappropriate in foisting a horse on a *faqīr*. He expressed his displeasure through a protracted tale in which Babur's stubbornness received its comeuppance. However, in the case of Bahlol Lodhi, the stubborn king is rewarded, at least initially. The *mistri* continued:

He won in Delhi. In the meantime Haider Shaikh gave the horse to one of his disciples, somebody complained to the king that he [Haider Shaikh] did not accept your offer and gave it to somebody. So the king came and asked, 'Where is the horse?' So he said, 'I told you before that I do not need it, so I gave it to somebody.' So Haider Shaikh made [i.e. miraculously] a horse and gave it to the king, but the king said, 'I want my horse.' So Haider Shaikh said, 'You are arrogant, but I will give you your horse. You just close your eyes.' Bahlol Lodhi blinked his eyes and saw there were thousands of horses more beautiful than his

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<sup>225</sup> In the *Ramayana*, one of Ram's stepmothers [i.e., one of his father's other wives] insisted on her husband granting her a boon that her son be placed on the throne instead of Ram, the eldest son and rightful heir.

<sup>226</sup> Actually, Birbal was the minister to the emperor Akbar, not Babur. He was a very wise Hindu advisor, and the stories of his discussions with the ruler are among the best-loved and most popular fables and morality tale cycles in India.

horse standing there and his horse was standing behind them all, and was eating the shit of all the other horses. He saw the miracle and cooled down. He apologized and said "I will marry my daughter to you." His daughter was thirty-five years old. She gave birth to two children. [Lodhi] gave them fifty-five villages in dowry. Faith in [Haider Shaikh] was endless. When he expired he had two sons. His younger son took the offering. This is the Nawab family. They are first Pathans and later Mughals. In Malerkotla there was never a Mughal rule, there was not even the rule of Aurangzeb. Malerkotla's Nawab was called *jagirdar*, he was not called Nawab earlier. Aurangzeb gave Sher Shah [Sher Mohammad Khan] this status for the first time 300 years back.<sup>227</sup>

In one sense, the Hindu *mistri's* account of Haider Shaikh's meeting with Sultan Bahlol Lodhi followed the standard structure for this tale: the Sultan's army caught in a storm, the undisturbed saint, the request for a blessing, victory in battle, miracle of the horse, marriage to the ruler's daughter. However, the *mistri* also inserted a number of narrative elements that vary from the dominant structure. By embedding his perspectival variations in the standard framing tale of the meeting of the Sultan and the Shaikh, the *mistri* demonstrates his proficiency in the lore of the saint and establishes his right to render the tale meaningful in his own idiom. Highlighting these variations clarifies his particular perspective on Haider Shaikh, the Muslim ruler Bahlol Lodhi, and the moral significance of the foundational narrative of Malerkotla. Rather than emphasizing the link between the royal and spiritual lineages as is done by the *khalīfahs* and many Muslim residents, this Hindu narrator highlights the superiority of spiritual over temporal authority. He uses the story of Haider Shaikh's arrival to critique autocratic and imperious rulers who insist on having their own way.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> The first Nawab to actually be given that title was Bayzid Khan, not Sher Mohammad Khan.

<sup>228</sup> It would be presumptuous to conclude from this narrative alone that this represented the *mistri's* sentiments about the Muslim leadership in Malerkotla during and after the time of the Nawabs. Nonetheless, his criticism of those who fail to properly respect a holy man was vividly apparent.

The *mistri's* tale of Haider Shaikh and the Sultan exemplified what Dell Hymes calls a "breakthrough into performance."<sup>229</sup> This is a moment in which a competent communicator makes a qualitative shift from everyday modes of expression to one in which he or she signals his or her assumption of responsibility for the transmission of a cultural behavior, such as the identity shaping narrative of Haider Shaikh's arrival in Malerkotla and his encounter with Bahlol Lodhi. Although himself not a Muslim, the *mistri* did not express or experience any restriction on his ability or his right to transmit the lore of the Muslim saint and the Muslim ruler. Thus the criteria for judging the authority of his narrative does not derive from his religious identity. Rather, by demonstrating his mastery of the core elements of the tale and of other narrative traditions such as the *Mahabharata* and the tales of Birbal, the *mistri* establishes his expertise. In this case, the *mistri* also indicated his authoritative speech mode through several shifts. First, he changed the focus of his address from the group in general to me in particular, as the recording and preserving agent. In addition he shifted his language from a conversational and fragmentary style to a declamatory mode employing lengthy and extended sentences that allowed for the growth and development of a narrative arc and discouraged interruption. He also used a richer and more symbolically dense narrative style employing both didactic fables and local hagiographical tales to illustrate his point. His mastery of multiple genres and his integration of these genres also reinforced his authority to transmit the history of Haider Shaikh. His authority was acknowledged by the response of the audience, none of whom spoke or interrupted for the

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<sup>229</sup> Dell Hymes defines a performance as a "cultural behavior for which a person takes responsibility before an audience." In a performance, "known cultural material" is realized. In the *mistri's* tale, the depth of the performance is significant as he draws from a well of tales in the Birbal cycle which serve as didactic fables with clear moral messages. Another significant feature of a performance is its emergent quality, signifying the way in which the signifying act comes forward into the communicative event, revealing the structures of the cultural context in which it is embedded. Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1977). Dell Hymes, "Breakthrough into Performance," in *"in Vain I Tried to Tell You": Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*, ed. Dell Hymes (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

duration of his narrative. Such deference was rarely on display in the conversation either before or after.

The *mistri's* performance of the tale of Haider Shaikh demonstrated his expertise as a storyteller and revealed his interpretation of the events described and established his belief in the importance of telling the tale. Commencing his account in the middle of a discussion about the origins and contributions of Jain society in Malerkotla, the *mistri* represented the figure of Haider Shaikh in such a way as to demonstrate the general superiority of religious renunciants over worldly authorities, and the particular superiority of the hometown saint Haider Shaikh over the Delhi Sultan Bahlol Lodhi. Interestingly, some local Jains believed that they first arrived in Malerkotla at the behest of Haider Shaikh in order to urbanize the undeveloped region for the needs of his royal bride and his growing community of followers. The *mistri's* tale established the moral and temporal independence of Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla from the Lodhis and the subsequent Muslim rulers. This distance from central Muslim authority created a new sphere of authority under the lineage of the saint in which Jains and Hindus were acknowledged and supported as valued members of the community.

In his performance of Haider Shaikh's tale, the *mistri* made several very interesting narrative shifts, each signaling the introduction of a new element of meaning. The first switch introduced his story into the conversation on Jain origins in Malerkotla. He began by recounting the time when the last Nawab had come to pay respects to a visiting Jain *muni* (mendicant) and told him about Haider Shaikh.<sup>230</sup> Setting up his story with this anecdote, established the hierarchy of power that is consistent throughout his narrative as the spiritual leaders consistently

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<sup>230</sup> Jain *munis* travel from one Jain community to another, often on foot, with their noses and mouths covered, sweeping the ground in order to avoid inadvertently harming any living thing. When this important *muni* came to Malerkotla, the Nawab paid his respects as a matter of course. The Jain community in Malerkotla, as elsewhere in India, is quite wealthy and wields power far beyond their small numbers.

took precedence (being visited rather than visiting) over worldly ones. Next, he switched from the tale of Bahlol Lodhi's insistence on giving Haider Shaikh the horse to the story of Birbal and the various types of stubbornness encountered in humans. This exemplary tale emphasized the overbearing nature of rulers, and, in this case perhaps not coincidentally, Muslim rulers. The narrative then switched again to Haider Shaikh's shaming of the Sultan. The saint casually made horses appear, thereby demonstrating that if he had need or desire of a horse, he did not require any sultan to give it to him but was perfectly capable of producing it himself through his miraculous powers. Even this is not enough of an admonishment to the ruler whom the *mistri*, through Haider Shaikh, represents as 'arrogant.' The horse given by Lodhi was not only unnecessary and unwelcome, but was so inferior to the saint's miraculous horses that it consumed their excrement. This is an interesting strategy that, in the broader context of the conversation, clearly undermined imperial Muslim authority. The *mistri* had previously recounted the widely told tale of Malerkotla's pre-Muslim origins. In this view, Malerkotla was the province of a Hindu king descended from one of the central protagonists of the epic *Mahabharata*. After the extended narrative of Haider Shaikh and Bahlol Lodhi, the ironworker and the others present engaged in an extended discussion of Muslim oppression. Combined with the preceding account of the Nawab's visit to the Jain *muni*, the context of the *mistri*'s performance of Haider Shaikh's tale was one in which the myths of origins of the settlement and the community are linked to the present state of the social, political, and religious environment. The overwhelming and repeated emphasis on the superiority of saints over the Muslim rulers allowed minority Hindu and Jain populations to find space for themselves in the foundation narrative of the region. By signifying his approbation of the saint's behavior over that of Bahlol Lodhi, the *mistri* indicated a shared value structure prioritizing spiritual poverty over material wealth. By invoking more recent

events in which the Nawab placed himself in the subservient position to a Jain mendicant by visiting *him* rather than requiring the *muni* to attend his court, the narrator set forth his own view of the right order of things. Thus the narrative tradition of Haider Shaikh provided a structure through which a wide range of opinions, ethical values, and personal agendas were expressed with authority and enormous creativity.

### **The Shaikh as Protector and Integrator**

The above discussion established some of the narrative techniques through which Haider Shaikh's descendents and devotees, and the residents of Malerkotla express their connection to the saint. These techniques are important, as they are one of the major ways in which Haider Shaikh has become a meaningful symbol of community identity. Because people from all walks of life can locate themselves within his tradition are able to communicate their values and concerns through the structuring pattern of his life story, they generate a community of those for whom Haider Shaikh is a meaningful symbol. This role as a shared point of reference contributes to Haider Shaikh's exalted status among Malerkotla's various saints and holy people, both living and dead. By far more people are familiar with Haider Shaikh's historiography than any other holy person in Malerkotla's environs or history. That these narrative traditions are non-exclusive to Sikhs, Hindus, or Muslims, rich and poor, men and women, also validates the practice of pluralism and the existence of multi-confessional cults and communities. Haider Shaikh's significance to all the communities connected with him (*khalīfahs*, Malerkotla residents, and pilgrims) is most especially intensified by the frequent attribution of Malerkotla's peace during and since Partition to the saint's blessings. Haider Shaikh's protective power is one of the two most commonly given reasons for Malerkotla's stable multi-religious community, the other being the blessing of the Guru. This explanation is so pervasive among *khalīfahs*, residents, and

pilgrims that the popularity of Haider Shaikh clearly draws significantly from the widespread conviction that his *barakat* (spiritual power) preserved the town during the chaos of 1947 and in later periods of tension. This is reinforced by older residents and *khalīfahs* who reported that the popularity of Haider Shaikh has grown substantially since pre-Partition days. The belief that the saint has preserved the town through troubled times in the past is eagerly and frequently offered as an explanation for Malerkotla's harmonious community in the present. For example, the *numbardar khalīfah* cited above claims that the many *buzurgs* [pious elders, often synonymous with saints] are the reason for local peace. I inquired why Malerkotla had not experienced violence during Partition. The *numbardar* replied,

*Numbardar*: It is only due to the blessings of the *buzurgs*. Here people have never fought for caste and religion. All people have lived in unity in time of joys and sorrow, marriages and death.

ABB: Why?

*Numbardar*: The love between people is so strong that they never thought that they were Hindu, Muslims or Sikhs. At the shrines of the *buzurgs* people exchange love (*aapas me muhabbat bante*) with each other

ABB: But why is this only possible here and other places it is not?

*Numbardar*: The main thing is the blessing of the *buzurgs*. On all four sides there are *buzurgs* and *buzurgs* here. All around the boundary of Malerkotla there are *buzurgs*. It is only through their blessing that all Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs are one.<sup>231</sup>

Although the *numbardar's* explanation incorporated all of the saintly dead into the explanation, generally the Shaikh was acknowledged to be the chief of all the saints. For example, the *mutawalli* (caretaker) of a smaller *dargah* explained the relationship between Haider Shaikh and the other local saints in the following way, saying, "Baba Haider Shaikh is the emperor of all of them, he is a big *buzurg*." At the tombs of the pious dead one of the material blessings is that at their shrines "people exchange love." Because of this daily opportunity for positive, peaceful interaction, Malerkotla is able to remain free of significant conflict. Importantly, residents such

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<sup>231</sup> Interview, January 28, 2001.

as the *numbardar* recognized the value of such encounters and attributed the peace in town to the large number of saints' tombs and the way in which these places facilitate positive inter-religious exchanges. A local Hindu leader from the scheduled caste community likewise claimed that the peace in Malerkotla was due to the strong faith of the people in these saints. He stated, "This place is safe because people believe deep in their hearts in these saints and through the strength of their belief they have remained peaceful." But he also claimed that he himself primarily attended Haider Shaikh's *dargah* for social purposes, in order to show that he is not prejudiced in any way against the Muslim community. For him, shrine attendance is less about personal faith in Haider Shaikh and more about a perceived value in the chance to encounter one's neighbors and publicly manifest an open and non-sectarian attitude. Thus, surrounded by *buzurgs*, Malerkotla is surrounded by venues of opportunity for inter-religious connections to be forged. The blessing of the saints is perceivable in the relationships these interactions promote between residents and pilgrims of all religious faiths. As with the *haa da naara* and the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh, it is not necessary to form a judgment about the mystical power of Haider Shaikh or the spiritual efficacy of pilgrimage. For many in the community of the Shaikh the power of the shrine is fairly mundane and is predicated upon the practical dynamics of shrine worship, which almost inevitably entails inter-religious engagement.

For some interlocutors, this type of *bhaichar*, brotherly spirit, was possible only in Malerkotla. A member of the *khalifah* family who does not sit at the tomb but does pursue the Sufi path and is himself a *murshid* (spiritual guide) with *murīds* (disciples) of all religious faith expressed Malerkotla's special status in the following way:

*Murshid:* Yes, it is special, all the other places here or there they have some kind of problem or trouble, but there is nothing in Malerkotla. This is because of these *pīrs* who are in such a big number in Malerkotla. The other places don't have this. This is the problem.

ABB: So it is only because of the blessing of Haider Shaikh or of all the other *pīrs* (saints) as well?  
*Murshid*: Because of all the *pīrs*. Baba Haider Shaikh is the head [*sadr*] of all. Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan – the head of religion [*dīn*] and head of the world [*jahan*] also.<sup>232</sup>

The *murshid's* view of Malerkotla's peace closely echoed the *numbardar's*. For both it was the vast number of *buzurgs* that allowed the town to avoid the type of divisions and violence that other areas experienced. The *murshid* added in relation to Partition, "No murders were done here. No Hindu killed any Muslim, neither were Sikhs killed. No one felt it necessary. These all are his [Haider Shaikh's] blessings." For this descendent of the saint, Haider Shaikh is the chief of the *buzurgs*, a first among equals, but it requires the combined efforts of all the local saints to maintain the peace.

The view that Haider Shaikh alone preserved the town was given by a Hindu pilgrim from outside Malerkotla. This Hindu gentleman is also a *chela* – one who is possessed by the spirit of the saint and communicates Haider Shaikh's counsel and wishes to his devotees. I asked the *chela* if he had heard the story that Malerkotla was a zone of peace where no one was killed in Partition. He replied,

*Chela*: Yes. No Sikh was killed and no Muslim was killed. In its boundary no one was killed.

ABB: Why?

*Chela*: Because of the power of Babaji [i.e. Haider Shaikh] and I can't explain that.

ABB: No other reason?

*Chela*: No, if there had been some other reason than this would have been the case in other places as well. Other places men and women were murdered.<sup>233</sup>

For the *chela*, not only was Malerkotla's reputation as a peaceful place true, but it was the uniqueness of this status that proves the power of Haider Shaikh. Recalling that hundreds of

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<sup>232</sup> Interview March 8, 2001.

<sup>233</sup> Interview, May 31, 2001.

thousands of people died during the transfer of population, including in the area from which this *chela* had come, Malerkotla does stand out as one of very few places in Punjab that was able to prevent the violence from entering its borders. In the *chela's* view, this was further evidence of Haider Shaikh's greatness, as the most unique and important feature of Malerkotla is Haider Shaikh.

Another local Muslim who is related to the Nawabi family (and so also to the saint) extended Haider Shaikh's protective power from the time of Partition to other times of conflict and even natural disaster. He stated:

Before there was the Partition in the country in 1947, Muslims used to live here. There were a lot of majority Muslim areas and Punjab was one of them. In Punjab, from Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Sirhind, Amritsar, Faridkot, Bathinda a lot of migration took place. Because of that migration a lot of fighting broke out between these two communities. Here in India Muslims and there in Pakistan Sikhs were slaughtered, but not a single person was killed in Malerkotla. Thus people say that this is a sacred place because a lot of saints are here. Ten years back when terrorism was at its heights, the Sikh people who wanted a separate Punjab, everywhere people were killed, but not in Malerkotla. And there was no clash between the communities. They were living just like brothers. People say that Hazrat Shaikh was a pious person who for years prayed to God and due to his blessings there is no war in Malerkotla. Even during the First World War and Second World War there was no person lost from Malerkotla, never an earthquake has come in Malerkotla and no flood has come in Malerkotla.<sup>234</sup>

Although this Muslim gentleman distanced himself from this account somewhat with the formula "people say," rather than claiming that belief for himself, still the account places the responsibility for Malerkotla's peace upon Haider Shaikh and the many other saints in the region.

An important feature in many of these narratives is the way in which it is not merely the presence and the spiritual power of the narrative traditions connected to Haider Shaikh and the other *buzurgs* that sustain Malerkotla's peaceful plural culture, but the interactions occurring at the shrines. These opportunities to "exchange love" at shared sacred sites are critical resources

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<sup>234</sup> Interview, October 5, 2000.

in forging a positive relationship with people from multiple religious systems. At the shrines, not only are people coming together for their own personal reasons and agendas, but also almost inevitably encounter practitioners of other religious traditions. This is especially true of the *dargahs* in Malerkotla where the likelihood of meeting Muslims is exponentially greater than at any other place in Indian Punjab. Such interactions allow people to observe the commitment and devotion of members of other faiths, to note similarities and differences, and to engage in dialogue, if so desired. At the very least, it is possible to form a positive impression of other religious believers, and on occasion long lasting friendships may be born.

Such relationships are possible at shared shrines because the shrine itself provides a common ground, shared vocabulary of belief and practice that facilitates exchange. In his study of sites shared by Muslims and Christians in Palestine, Glenn Bowman describes such shrines as *semantically multivocal*. Semantic multivocality allows multiple users to maintain relations with a site that is central to their local and/or religious identity without over-determining the site and rendering it fixed and unavailable to contradictory uses and interpretations. In Bowman's study in Palestine, as in my study in Punjab, the openness of a shrine is deliberately maintained through actions and interactions among the constituents that are keyed to allow for a lack of uniformity of belief and practice. Indeed, the communities in which such places are situated often value shared sites precisely for their quality of openness. As Bowman puts it, "while the miraculous power seen to be resident there served as a general pretext for the gathering of local persons of Muslim and various Christian persuasions, the specific reasons people gave for attending ranged from the need for cures through the demands of religion, to the pleasures of

conviviality.”<sup>235</sup> Thus a common primary motivator for allegiance to the shrine – its miraculous power – facilitates and perhaps even draws from another powerful factor in the site’s appeal: its multi-religious constituency.

At the *dargah* people of all faiths exchange stories about Haider Shaikh and testimonials of personal experiences of Haider Shaikh's power and benevolence. These conversations are crucial to establish the possibility of deeper relationships. By sharing personal experience, giving and receiving advice and imparting knowledge about Haider Shaikh build a sense of trust between devotees. Not only do they witness one another participating in similar rituals but through testimonial exchanges the commonality of the problems brought to the shrine is recognized as is the shared human frailty of the supplicants. That this is a mutually humanizing experience for devotees from all religious backgrounds is apparent in the circles of people, small and large, who gather around the tomb and in the streets of Malerkotla during the saint's festivals. Whereas during the possession rituals, to be discussed later, devotees have the opportunity to formally and publicly declare their afflictions such as the lack of a child, employment, sobriety, sanity, and so on, these informal exchanges are also an important element of the shrine cult. Wandering through the streets between crowds of people sitting and standing I heard many, many discussions testifying to the power of Haider Shaikh. In those conversations that I initiated or became involved in this topic was often introduced and would usually result in numerous participants and passersby offering their own experiences, their sympathy for the situations of others, and their advice.

In a typical example of such an exchange of personal testimonials, I was visiting with a Muslim resident of Malerkotla who is a *murshid*, or spiritual guide, whose intimate connections

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<sup>235</sup> Glenn Bowman, “Response to Robert Hayden” cited in Robert Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans". See also Glenn Bowman, "Nationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting Identities in the Israeli-Occupied Territories," *Man* 28 (1993)."

to Haider Shaikh have brought him numerous disciples who look to him to mediate the saint's power in such a way as to ameliorate their situations. This *murshid* recommended that those of his followers who were in some difficulty come to him and pray with him, then bring him to the tomb, return to their homes and pray further. This method, he claimed, had always proved successful. During our discussion several disciples arrived, one Muslim and two Sikhs and provided their own testimonials to the power of the Shaikh and the *murshid*. One Sikh explained that his sister had become possessed by a malign spirit and that after praying to the Shaikh and consulting the *murshid* she had been cured. Furthermore, they had brought the Baba to their fields to bless them and since had experienced improved harvests. The other Sikh contributed his account which the *murshid* completed for him, saying

Once, his wife was at death's door. They took her to Patiala for treatment, but she did not improve. So they came to me. I did some things, asked them to take the name of Babaji [i.e. Haider Shaikh] and she became well, so they started coming to me. I said first go to Babaji [i.e. Haider Shaikh], then come to me. Since then he is coming for the last ten years.

These types of personal testimonials are told throughout Malerkotla in proximity and relation to Haider Shaikh. Generally, such accounts resulted in numerous signs of approbation from the group and another member of the assembly would often pick up the stream and introduce his own experience in all its variations and nuances. As in the example above, these supportive networks of exchange include people of all religious faiths, ages, genders, etc. Perhaps most important is the seemingly inexhaustible appetite of the pilgrims for such stories. I often had to extricate myself from conversations that seemed likely to continue long after I departed. The fascination for testimonials among believers is extraordinary and is an important element in building community.

The narratives about Haider Shaikh illuminate several ways in which the saint functions within the tomb cult and among the residents of Malerkotla. These functions illustrate the four major roles of Haider Shaikh as founder, protector, integrator, and exemplar for the territory of Malerkotla and its ethos. First, the basic tale of the saint's arrival in Malerkotla is widely known, but differently understood and told, allowing multiple interlocutors to make the tale meaningful to themselves and their communities. Sufficient continuity between certain core narrative elements maintains the coherence of the wider community of the saint and the tradition, but do not preclude variation and innovation. Second, the form and content of these multiple narratives depends upon the expressive intentions of the performer and the particular performance contexts. Hindus, Muslims, residents, and pilgrims all key their performances to suit their own agendas and to communicate with a particular audience. Third, the central importance of the saint is not dependent upon the religious identity or a direct relationship with the saint. Rather, Hindus and non-resident Muslims also recount the story of the saint, thereby establishing discursive and ideological links where hereditary connections may be absent. This also validates them as competent communicators of Haider Shaikh's lore. Fourth, the efficacy of Haider Shaikh's tradition as a binding force in the community does not depend solely upon belief in Haider Shaikh's salvific or benefactory grace. Instead, many interlocutors claim that their interest in the shrine derives from their interest in the community and the opportunity to meet and engage with adherents of other religious faiths and to publicly manifest their lack of sectarian prejudice, their common experiences, and shared concerns.

### **The Partition and the Shaikh**

Written accounts of Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla reveal something that does not emerge in the mostly oral accounts cited above – all of which obviously antedate Partition in 1947.

There is a marked difference between the pre- and post-Partition narratives. The textual sources on Haider Shaikh's life and times from before Partition focused on two things: his link with Bahlol Lodhi and the multi-religious appeal of his tomb shrine.<sup>236</sup> The oral and written narratives from after the Partition shift to focus on the protective power of the saint and the positive impact of his tomb, cult, and the establishment of Islam in the region. They overwhelmingly emphasize the multi-religious appeal of the Shaikh and the positive inter-religious relations in Malerkotla. From newspaper articles to a history written by the last Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan, to scholarly dissertations, to chapbooks, the multi-religious appeal of the Shaikh surges to the forefront. This change reflects a need to come to terms with Malerkotla's escape from the devastation that surrounded it in 1947 and to establish strong basis for their continued existence by depicting positive inter-religious relations, fostering the goodwill of the majority, and generating Muslim pride and solidarity. It also reveals the subtle ways in which the history and hagiography of Haider Shaikh is crafted to incorporate the unfolding of current events into the constellation of narratives associated with him. In this section I will review the ways in which Haider Shaikh is depicted in textual sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and contrast the themes and aspects of his lore emphasized then to the more recent accounts in which the integrative and protective qualities of the saint come to dominate.

One of the oldest available textual accounts of Haider Shaikh is in an 1882 chronicle of the ruling clan, *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*, by Inayat Ali Khan, the brother of Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan. Inayat remarks upon the saint's piety but is primarily concerned with

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<sup>236</sup> Griffin, Lepel, *Rajas of the Punjab*, (Delhi; Low Price Publications, 2000 [1870]), Ibbetson, D., E.D. MacLagan, and H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, (Lahore; Government Printing House, 1919 (1883)), *Maler Kotla State Gazetteer*, (Lahore; The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1904), "Malerkotla," in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, edited by W.W. Hunter, (London; Trübner & Co, 1881), "Malerkotla," in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, (London; Trübner & Co, 1886), "Malerkotla," in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, (London; Trübner & Co, 1908), "Malerkotla State," in *Yadgar Tajposh*

the saint's failure to divide his property properly at the time of his death. In his view, this sets an unfortunate precedent resulting in generations of internecine disputes in which Inayat was deeply involved.<sup>237</sup> Another late nineteenth century text mentioning the Shaikh is the 1883 encyclopedic ethnography of Punjabi culture, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab* written by British civil servant, Sir Denzil Ibbetson. Every *Gazetteer* – the historical, economic, and cultural almanacs kept by the British in India - from 1881, 1883, 1891, and 1904 mentions Malerkotla State. Most refer to the Shaikh as the progenitor of the ruling lineage.

A historical chronicle in Urdu, *Hayat-e Lodhi*, by Israr Afghani was published in 1907 and contains a section on the Malerkotla Afghans in which little is said about Haider Shaikh's piety and nothing about his ongoing cult. The history *Hayat Lodhi*, was written by a Muslim, Israr Afghani, ca. 1904 does highlight the encounter with Lodhi but discusses at greater length Haider Shaikh's family heritage. The section on Malerkotla begins with recounting the route taken by Haider Shaikh to get to the area where he settled. Then Bahlol Lodhi is encountered and the marriage with his daughter takes place. Afghani writes:

Lamih Qatal's great grandson [Haider Shaikh] was Ahmad Zinda Pir's son. He arrived in Hindustan on a voyage from Daraban and then arrived there at that settlement called Maler that was on the bank of a branch of the Sutlej. And on the bank a village Bhumsi was settled (this village was here from when Raja Bhim Sen was living here). He made his dwelling place in the open and remained absorbed in remembering Allah. One day in about 1450 Hamid Khan Wazir had summoned Bahlol Lodhi to come to Delhi from Sirhind, and his encampment was near the dwelling place of the saint. Having heard about the piety of the saint, he came before him to pray for victory and when he went to leave he made the vow that if he became the Badshah of Delhi he would marry his daughter to him. Arriving in Delhi his desire was fulfilled. The Sultan in his satisfaction married his daughter to the saint; by way of a wedding gift he gave her fifty-six small and

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<sup>237</sup> Khan, Inayat Ali. *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*, (Lahore; Civil And Military Gazette Press, 1882). Khan devotes the last third of this work to his dispute with his brother and the British for land rights to his brother, the Nawab's, share of the land they inherited from their father. As Ibrahim Ali Khan was adopted by his uncle Nawab Sikander Ali Khan (d. 1871), Inayat argues that he forfeits his inheritance from his father as he obtained all the land and revenue from the throne upon his ascension.

twelve large villages. After the wedding he [i.e. Haider Shaikh] went to one of the villages and settled it and named it Maler.<sup>238</sup>

This is a fairly unembellished account of the meeting between Haider Shaikh and Bahlol Lodhi that we encountered before. In this version no storms come up, no horses are given, and no miracles are performed at all (unless you count Lodhi's victory at Delhi). Instead the focus is on the genealogy of the saint, which establishes him as a Pathan Afghan and thus suitable for marriage with Lodhi's daughter. Afghani makes explicit reference to the commonly held view that this region was once connected to Bhim Sen, a hero of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. This reference also establishes the powerful and important pedigree of the territory. From the wording, Afghani is merely chronicling the epic history of the region, listing it among a variety of local features. He does not seem to be using the moment either to establish Muslim domination over the greatest of Hindus or to demonstrate the ecumenical history of the region. He simply remarks upon the connection as a point of distinction worthy of mention.

Interestingly, following this Afghani goes into great speculative detail about the name of Maler and its possible origins. He debunks several theories, which must have been extant at the time, in particular, the assertion that Maler comes from a previous ruler's name, identified as Malher Singh. Afghani states that this is "an invention of people's minds," as "Malher Singh was imaginary, if he had been real then would Shaikh Sahib have settled here and named it Malher?" This logic is hard to dispute, as it would be unusual for a conqueror to name his new territory after his predecessor. Following this note on the naming of the settlement, Afghani returns to the history of the saint.

After the daughter of Bahlol Lodhi married him it is said that his second *nikah* [marriage] was with the daughter of Rai Bahram, the ruler of Kapurthala. From the Shahzadi [daughter of the king] Hassan and from Bahram's daughter 'Isa and

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<sup>238</sup> Afghani, Israr. *Hayat Lodhi*. Saweem, Pakistan: Tarikh Jamiat, 1907.

Musa were born. Shaikh Sadruddin died at the age of sixty-one in 1515/941 h. and it is because of him that Maler is a pilgrimage place for the common people and the elite. After the death of Shaikh Sadruddin his son Hassan took up the *faqīri* life like his saintly father. He chose to do the service of the mazar. 'Isa and Musa administered the kingdom.<sup>239</sup>

The overall emphasis in Afghani's account is the details of the family's heritage, marriages, and lineage. As a chronicle of the entire Lodhi clan this is not surprising. However, the references to Haider Shaikh's saintly qualities and the identification of Maler as a place of pilgrimage are significant as the only proof offered of his saintliness is the victory of Bahlol Lodhi after their meeting.

A similar emphasis on family heritage is central to the narrative of Haider Shaikh that appears in *The Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans* (hereafter the *Description*) written by Inayat Ali Khan, the younger brother of Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan in 1882. Khan gives a great deal of information about the Nawabi lineage, and the connection with Bahlol Lodhi. However, in Inayat Ali Khan's estimation Lodhi is not a great ruler, pious Muslim, or particularly praiseworthy character. Rather, Khan takes special note of Lodhi's superstitious faith in saints. He writes,

About the year 1450 when Bahlol Lodi, at the suggestion of Vazier Hamid Khan, was on his way down to Delhi to assume the direction of the Government of India, a country too extended to remain long under one head, he happened to halt near the hut of the Seikh (sic), whose devoted piety so much impressed him that he asked for an interview, which was granted to him by the Saint. Accordingly, Bahlol visited the Seikh, and implored him to invoke the aid of the Supreme Being for his success; and of this, in reply, he was assured by the Saint, whose words were taken as those of God, under the prevailing belief of his possessing miraculous power. Though to all appearance this agreeable assurance seems to have been framed on the past triumphs of Afghan invaders over the weak Princes of India whenever the former took up arms against them, yet, at any rate, Bahlol departed quite rejoiced, and positive of winning the prize of the Empire—after the wont of Afghans, who rely more upon the prayer of a Saint than upon their own energy and action; and at the same time avowed in his heart that should he

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<sup>239</sup> Afghani, p. ???

succeed in his enterprise he would marry one of his daughters to the Seikh. Bahlol did not forget his vow. No sooner had he declared himself the King of Delhi, than he duly fulfilled it, and gave twelve large and fifty-six small villages by way of dowry into the bargain.<sup>240</sup>

Here, although Haider Shaikh is depicted as a pious saint and worthy of respect, Bahlol Lodhi's faith in him is dismissed as typical of Afghans who fail to show initiative (though clearly Lodhi *did* take some initiative in attacking Delhi) and depend on miracles and saintly intervention instead. It seems clear that Khan gives little credence to the notion that saintly persons have miraculous powers. His concern in this narrative is to establish the land grant of the Sultan to his ancestor, no matter how misguided that *jagir* might have been.

Khan also takes particular note of the "cupidity" of other regional chieftains such as Rai Bahram of Kapurthala, who ingratiated themselves to Haider Shaikh after his marriage with the princess:

The marriage of a King's daughter to a Saint whose name had scarcely been known but in the neighbourhood of his own hut, was a matter which naturally could not remain hidden; it spread far and wide, and a man, in the person of a Bhatti Rajput of Kapurthala, calling himself Bahram, appeared on the scene to offer his daughter in marriage to the Seikh, who readily accepted the liberal gift and thus added to the former matrimonial present received by him. There can be little doubt that Bahram's cupidity was aroused and excited by the Seikh's newly acquired wealth, and that he had no other object in view than that of procuring the means to reap the benefit of the Seikh's *jageer* while the latter was engaged day and night in religious meditations.

Although there is no evidence that Bahram took advantage of Haider Shaikh's religious preoccupation to gain from his wealth, the tone of Khan's narrative indicates enormous suspicion and a rather patronizing attitude towards the Shaikh. The reason for this becomes clear as Khan's greatest concern in the writing of the book becomes apparent, and he essentially takes the saint to task for failing to clarify the rules of inheritance at the time of his death. Khan writes:

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<sup>240</sup> Khan, Inayat Ali, *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*, (Lahore; Civil And Military Gazette Press, 1882).

The Seikh died at the mature age of seventy-one, leaving three sons—Hassan, Isa, and Musa, the former of whom was born of the first marriage and the two latter of the second. The death of Sadr-ud-deen gave rise to a series of dissensions amongst his sons regarding the succession to the patrimony, as may easily be understood from the character of the age, when the people were indifferent to a testamentary disposition of property, either by nature or through being over-occupied in religious matters or forays, an occupation of generally followed in and characteristic of the state of India under the Mahommedan rule even when it was at its highest pitch.

Inheritance rights would remain an issue in Malerkotla, plaguing the ruling family throughout its history and taking up the latter third of the *Description*. In establishing the ontogeny of irregular inheritance practices in his clan, Inayat builds his case that his brother's personal property should be made over to him after Ibrahim was named successor to the throne.

Overwhelmingly, the pre-Partition accounts of Israr Afghani and Inayat Ali Khan focus on the Shaikh's function as the founder of the state's dynasty who is therefore primarily responsible for the validity and continuity of the lineage. The primacy of these elements serves to bolster the authority of the Nawab's lineage and the integrity of the territory of the kingdom. Neither author is particularly concerned with Haider Shaikh's spiritual prowess or the reception of his charismatic power by the local community. Inayat Ali Khan negatively compares Haider Shaikh to his *murshid*, or spiritual preceptor. The comparison seems intended to highlight the fact that Haider Shaikh did not gather a following of initiates who could, after his death, carry on his spiritual teachings and provide a reliably supportive constituency to their royal benefactors.

Khan writes,

The Seikh bore a different character to his spiritual guide in one respect, that is, he did not exert himself during his lifetime in making a band of disciples; which system is a first-rate machine to establish the reputation of *sufees*. Moreover, these disciples, who eternally mutter their litanies and tell their beads, are under particular circumstances bound to pray for the stability of their co-religionist patron.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Khan (1882), p. 6-7.

This rather curious account minimizes Haider Shaikh's reputation as a great spiritual master. Instead Inayat Ali Khan focuses on the failure of the saint to establish a Sufi center to provide social stability and support that might have strengthened generations of Malerkotla's rulers. How this would have materially benefited the clearly self-interested Inayat Ali Khan is unclear. In the absence of an active Sufi *khanqah*, it is clear from British writings contemporary to Khan that there was a significant multi-religious tomb cult in the late nineteenth century. These records indicate that the shrine was enormously popular. Sir Denzil Ibbetson remarks in his *Glossary of Punjab Castes* of 1883 (just one year after Khan's book was published) that Haider Shaikh's "fair, held on the first Thursday of every lunar month, is largely attended by Hindus and Muhammadans from the State as well as from distant places."<sup>242</sup> It seems likely that Khan's comment is more specifically referring to the lack of an ongoing *khanqah* or Sufi retreat where the practice of Sufism would be taught and transmitted to future generations. On this point, he would be correct, there is no active Sufi center at Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, though there are many Sufis in Malerkotla who identify closely with Haider Shaikh such as the *numbardar* and *murshid* cited above. Thus the pre-Partition materials on Haider Shaikh emphasize his role as a lineage founder and his establishment of the settlement of Malerkotla. Only the British seem to note or care about the multi-confessional nature of the shrine.

By contrast, the accounts written after Partition call attention to a different set of issues. In this section I will examine three narratives written after 1947 that highlight these issues. The first is a chapbook about Haider Shaikh, the second is a history of the ruling lineage written by the last Nawab, and the third is a hagiographical dictionary or *tazkira* written by a local Sufi

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<sup>242</sup> D. Ibbetson, E.D. MacLagan, and H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, (Lahore; Government Printing House, 1919 (1883)), p. 644.

teacher. In these accounts three aspects of Haider Shaikh's persona are emphasized. The first aspect is the enormous piety and power of the saint. The second is the multi-religious appeal of the saint. The third stresses the unique Muslim community of Malerkotla and its chosenness by God. As with the pre-Partition texts, all three of the post-Partition accounts I will examine are authored by Muslims, and as such they represent the range of dominant views of Haider Shaikh and his role in Malerkotla's history. Nonetheless, each writer is situated differently in relation to the saint, revealing various perspectives and agendas in recounting his tale. The first is by the current *gaddī nishīn* of the *dargah*, Anwar Ahmad Khan. The second is the *History* by the last Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan that was written about fifty years previously but recently edited and published in 2000. The third was written by a local *maulvi*, Sufi Mohammad Ismail. It is significant that in terms of extended histories of Malerkotla and Haider Shaikh, the only published writings available are by Muslim residents of Malerkotla.<sup>243</sup> Although Malerkotla features in Sikh and British histories, the exclusive histories are all locally produced. This may well reflect Malerkotla's situation as the only Muslim principality in East Punjab and as a small territory totally dwarfed by its neighbors, Patiala, Nabha and Jind. Nonetheless, these three accounts give three very different views of Haider Shaikh and, in combination with oral narratives from residents and devotees, provide a well-rounded picture of the range of perspectives in the saint and his shrine.

Anwar Ali Khan is the current *gaddī nishīn* or head of the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh. At some shrines this role also entails a spiritual component, and the *gaddī nishīn* is a *murshid* or spiritual guide to a number of *murīds* (disciples). Here the role is largely symbolic and managerial. Khan no longer spends time at the *dargah* himself and in December of 2000 did not

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<sup>243</sup> One of the master's theses about Malerkotla in the Punjabi University library is by a Sikh woman, Satinder Kaur, "History of Malerkotla State." MA, Punjabi University, 1977.

attend the *'urs* of the Shaikh. Some time ago he wrote a small chapbook (undated) that was printed, but not widely distributed locally.<sup>244</sup> It is available in Hindi and Punjabi, but was likely originally written in Urdu.<sup>245</sup>

The chapbook includes the two most commonly known stories about Haider Shaikh— the story of the storm and the gift of the horse, both of which establish Haider Shaikh’s privileged relationship with Bahlol Lodhi.<sup>246</sup> Yet the focus of the chapbook is much more on demonstrating Haider Shaikh's pious character and his miraculous powers and providing a guide to the proper etiquette for his followers. These followers are understood by Anwar Ali Khan to be Sikh and Hindu as well as Muslim, and the real index of their right to participate in the tomb cult is the purity of their hearts in approaching the Shaikh. Thus this chapbook incorporates all four functions of the saint's symbolic persona as the founder, protector, integrator, and exemplar for his communities of faith and territory. The etiquette that is laid out in the text is defined through descriptions of Haider Shaikh’s temperament. Anwar Ali Khan portrays the Shaikh as easily angered. The very first paragraph of the text ends with the observation that the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs of the region come in *lakhs* [i.e. in the hundreds of thousands, *lakh* = 100,000] to Haider Shaikh’s *mela* (festival) because “it is their belief that if Baba Haider Shaikh

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<sup>244</sup> I never received a clear response as to the date of publication, but it was likely printed some time in the early 1980's.

<sup>245</sup> This is especially apparent in Khan’s vocabulary choices. For example, the common terms in Punjab for desires and wishes presented at a shrine are *mang* (from the Hindi, Punjabi *mangna* – to beg, demand, request) or *iccha* (Hindi - desire) or sometimes *kam* (Hindi, Punjabi – work). In this text the Arabic term *murad* (desire) is also employed. However, there is evidence of an effort to be intelligible to a wide audience in spite of greater facility in Urdu.<sup>245</sup> For example, 'to offer' is alternately signified by the terms *cadhana* (Hindi) and *pesh karna* (Persian derived Urdu).

<sup>246</sup> Another story included here is commonly told and widely known in town. In this tale, once while performing *wuzu* [ablutions before prayer], the Shaikh’s shoe fell into the river. Although his disciples were alarmed, Haider Shaikh simply told the river to return the shoe, and the river shifted its course towards Ludhiana. Still today there is no river flowing through the town, but residents explain that the *dargāh* is located in a high place because in the time of the Shaikh there had been water there. Indeed British accounts also reference an ancient waterway that is still apparent because it is a flood zone in the monsoon. In this tale, Haider Shaikh’s presence in the area has left an indelible impression on the natural environment of Malerkotla. There are also a few minor tales in the chapbook that I never heard performed orally.

became angry [*naraz ho gaye*], then they will fall into trouble.”<sup>247</sup> Again in the following paragraph the crowds of devotional groups, called *chaunki*, are described as coming to *dargah* to pay respects and then taking leave, they return [*salam karke unke agya lekar vapas ate hain*]. They must observe the proper procedure, or else they will suffer serious consequences. “The belief is that unless they observe every prescribed rule, then Babaji will become angry at them [*un par naraz ho jayenge to unki murad bhar na hon ayenge*] so their desire will not be fulfilled.”<sup>248</sup> This emphasis on Haider Shaikh as a *jalali* (terrifying and awe-inspiring) *pīr* is not found in any other texts, but it is a common belief among the visitors to the *dargah* and the *khalīfahs*.<sup>249</sup> Such displays of wrath, he asserts, are at root shamanistic, and are evidence of central Asian Indo-Buddhist culture with a thin veneer of Islamic learning overlaid.<sup>250</sup> One of the main *khalīfahs* (the son of the chapbook's author) also claims that Haider Shaikh's disposition tends to be angry with devotees who fail to observe the proper etiquette at his tomb. He said, "If somebody does not keep his dress properly, then Babaji gets annoyed. Otherwise he is a gentle [*naram*] natured *buzurg*. But if somebody makes a mistake, then he shows his power, he gets annoyed." The chapbook stresses these two themes, the connection with Bahlol Lodhi and the saint's miraculous powers. The first supports the saint's role as the founder while the second demonstrates Haider Shaikh's protective power for his devotees – if they behave properly. This

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<sup>247</sup> Khalīfah Anwar Ahmad Khan, *Hazrat Sadr Udin Sadare Jahan (Rehmat) Urf Baba Hazrat Sheikh Ji Malerkotla Di Puri Jivani* (Malerkotla: Jivan Glass House, n.d.).

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> This notion of *jalāli pīr* is contrasted with the *taÖ·a pīr*, or cool *pīr* who is not easily angered and less flamboyant in personality and habits. This is also evocative of a pattern Simon Digby claims derives from Central Asian shamanistic practices which carried over as Sufis and holy men migrated into South Asia. What transfers from the Central Asian context, according to Digby, is “an uncompromising arrogance despite professions of humility in the advancement of personal claims to spiritual eminence, and examples of the display of *jalal*, ‘splendour’ but in practice the ‘wrath’ which led to the discomfiture, misery and often death of those who presumed to oppose the Shaikh.” See Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India," *Purusartha* 9 (1986).

<sup>250</sup> This pattern is also described by Richard Eaton in *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204-1760*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1993), pp. 71-72. "Migrating Turks also grouped themselves into Islamic mystical fraternities typically organized around Sufi leaders who combined the characteristics of the 'heroic figure of old Turkic Saga,' the *alp*, and the pre-Islamic Turkish shaman- that is, a charismatic holy man believed to possess magical powers and to have intimate contact with the unseen world."

proper behavior is delineated through two narrative elements. The first is a description of the kind of disrespect that might incur such anger. The second is a list of proper behavior that is given as a sort of appendix. Through the body of the text it is made abundantly clear that these rules and the traditions of Haider Shaikh are not exclusive to Muslims the short index of rules, however include several recommendations specific to Muslims regarding prayer, but others can easily apply more generally.

Khan only briefly discusses the Shaikh's childhood, primarily to establish the saint's pious character. Several tropes typical of many hagiographies are repeated here. For example, before his birth his mother is said to have had a dream in which a wondrously strange light burned throughout the house and then flew away to another place. A wise man (*mahanpurush* – a highly Sanskritic term) interpreted the dream that a child would be born in whose name lamps would be lit in other countries. This of course came true.

Anwar Ahmad Khan gives several reasons for Haider Shaikh's coming to India. First, he asserts that the saint's fame had proliferated and so he was called by the residents who longed for his spiritual guidance. Another possibility Khan puts forward evokes the theory that Islam spread in South Asia primarily through state support of Sufis. Khan writes, "In those days with the foreign Muslim rulers came a great number of pious people of the new religion. They continued to come and they spread the religion of Islam."<sup>251</sup> As with the *numbardar* and the Muslim Baba's stories of Haider Shaikh given above, Sufi saints are the agents of the spread of Islam.<sup>252</sup> The warrior Sufis traveled and sometimes fought along with conquering armies. As these spiritually inclined Muslims settled in areas they were also the most readily available

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<sup>251</sup> Khan, *Hazrat Sadr Udin Sadare Jahan (Rehmat) urf Baba Hazrat Shekh Ji Malerkotla Di Puri Jivani*.

<sup>252</sup> This is the paradigm of Sufi penetration outlined by Richard Eaton in which he presents a progression of warrior Sufis into the frontier areas of Muslim authority to be followed by Sufi reformers, literati, and landed elites. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur* 1996 [1978], p. 36.

representatives of the central powers and received land grants and certain responsibilities for law, order, and governance as the local leaders were defeated or deposed. The local population was then drawn into the temporal and spiritual orbit of the Sufi leader and center as the new locus of power in a region. However, in the *gaddī nishān*'s account, there is noticeably little reference to conversions occurring due to Haider Shaikh's presence. Haider Shaikh is said to have come for *tablīgh karne* – to spread the faith – also known as *dawa*" or proselytizing. The fame of his piety quickly spread, drawing people like Bahlol Lodhi to him. However, there were no high profile or mass conversions reported such as are common in stories about other Sufis.<sup>253</sup>

The section of the chapbook headed "His teachings and advice," is fairly general, and does not reveal a particular sectarian affiliation or any very complex Sufi principles. No precedents for the practices enjoined are given, such as a Hadith of the Prophet, or a verse from the Qur'an. In most guides to Muslim living, such injunctions derive their authority and legitimacy from a laundry list of canonical references, without which the behavior or practice would be open to criticism as *bidaʿ* (harmful innovation)<sup>254</sup>. Subjects such as silent or audible repetitive prayers or *zikr*, the permissibility of the musical audition called *samaʿ*, and other commonly addressed issues are not mentioned. There are several rules directed towards women, advocating their education and instruction in religious matters and enjoining their obedience to their husbands. These directives are mostly geared towards a Muslim audience as they refer to the importance of constant remembrance of Allah, the importance of the five pillars, and a reminder of the Prophet's injunction to seek knowledge.

#### Hazrat Shaikh's teachings and advice

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<sup>253</sup> Simon Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India," *Purusartha* (Volume 9, 1986).

<sup>254</sup> See for example the Abu al-Najib Suhrawardī, *A Sufi Rule for Novices: Kitāb Adāb al-Murīdīn*, translated and edited by Menahem Milson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) or 'Umar ibn Muhammad Suhrawardī, *The 'Awarif ul-Ma'arif*, translated by H. Wilberforce Clark, (Lahore; Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1973).

1. Remaining in the company of the people of God (*ahl-e allah*) is an excellent practice for improving the mind.
2. With every breath remember God (*bhagvan*). No one knows when the breath will stop and only with constant repentance will you be able to remember God.
3. At two times give total attention to yourself, while speaking and while eating.
4. Let such prayers come constantly from your tongue such that you will not commit sins and thus your prayer will be accepted (*qabâl*).
5. For every Muslim it is a duty that they must seek knowledge: knowledge, faith, *namaz* (prayer, Arabic = *salat*), *rauza* (fasting), *hajj*, service of [one's] mother, father and neighbors, the knowledge of buying and selling, *haram* and *halal* [the forbidden and the permissible]. Without knowledge of these, humanity becomes corrupt.
6. Advise your women that along with these duties there are five good qualities of character:
  1. Remain pious and chaste
  2. Be frugal
  3. Look to your husband with respect
  4. Obtaining your husband's permission will preserve you from discord.
  5. Proclaim the Lord's goodness with joy.
7. Hazratji recommends that pious women be loving and affectionate like a mother and patient and subservient like a maidservant.
8. You inquired what path should be followed in order to be accepted by the people. It is recommended that you're your generosity and justice you will be popular with the people and will arrive near to the Lord.
9. Do not make friends with ignorant people. They will lead to your downfall.
10. It was asked of Hazrat, who is an improving influence? He replied that there is only Hazrat Mohammad Mustafa (*salla allah #alayhi wa salam*) and who else could there be?
11. In very single, tiny thing of this world the Lord's enormous generosity and the influence of his presence is found. Those who do not understand this are blind and deaf.
12. He recommended that the dervishes and God-fearing people be given more attention even than one's own brother and that supporting the *#ulama*" is the duty of every Muslim. I direct you to support the people of knowledge.

However, other than this brief section at the end of the text, the pamphlet is noticeably devoid of Islamic phrasing and references. The saint's Muslim identity *is* a pervading theme, but the text lacks even the standard invocations of mercy upon the saint. Such blessings are only once called down even upon the Prophet. That Haider Shaikh came to the region at the behest of his

unnamed *pīr-o-murshid* to spread Islam is mentioned only in passing. These directives advocate obedience and observance of the strictures of Islam, but the overwhelming emphasis is on the necessity of keeping and *supporting* (presumably financially) the company of the people of God. The text in general stresses the connection with Bahlol Lodhi and the saint's miraculous powers. The overall impact of the work is a non-sectarian affirmation of the sanctity and greatness of Haider Shaikh, the importance of appeasing the saint, and respecting and supporting those who dedicate their life to God.

The second extensive account of Haider Shaikh comes in the last Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan's history of his own lineage, which is appropriately titled in its recent publication *History of the Ruling Family of Shaikh Sadruddin Sadar-i-Jahan of Malerkotla (1449 A.D. to 1948 A.D.)*. In this text a great deal more attention is given to the clans and heritage of Haider Shaikh, including a lengthy discussion of the Sherwani and Lodhi clans, tracing them back to a twelfth-century Afghani chief, Shaikh Hussain Ghori. The encounter with Bahlol Lodhi and Haider Shaikh's subsequent marriage to the Sultan's daughter are recounted in great detail. The incident with Bibi Mango's doomed marriage is also described at length as part of a larger explanation as to why the descendants of Bahlol Lodhi's daughter are not rulers of the state. "Some historians criticise him [Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan] for not recognizing the claim of his eldest son to the *gaddī* of the State. They probably lose sight of the fact that he had lost the goodwill of his father and incurred his displeasure by refusing to go to the help of his sister at Tohana."<sup>255</sup> This emphasis on the Shaikh's ethics and principled manner of his rule sets a strong precedent for his descendants and is repeatedly referenced throughout the text.<sup>256</sup> But Iftikhar Ali Khan also

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<sup>255</sup> Iftikhar Ali Khan, *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin Sadar-i-Jahan of Malerkotla*, page 8.

<sup>256</sup> As noted above in relation to Inayat Ali Khan's history of the lineage, the issue of succession does become a complicated issue for the ruling family at several points. Early on a practice of sharing the inheritance and dividing up properties among the heirs of a deceased ruler led to the decentralization of authority and a reduction in

makes extensive comments on the piety of the saint and upon the continuing power of his tomb. He especially highlights what for him would be a central issue – the possibility of being both a worldly and spiritual leader.

Similar to the oral accounts given above, Iftikhar Ali Khan regards the Shaikh's decision to accept the daughter of a Sultan in marriage as requiring justification. After all, he was a *walī Allah* or friend of God, a renunciant holy man who had come to India to spread Islam and perform his own religious devotions. Marrying a princess would require a substantial change of lifestyle. Accepting the *jaḡīr* entailed responsibilities as a landlord, judicial, and military leader.<sup>257</sup> Often, examples of a saint shunning temporal authority are held up as evidence of moral superiority, especially by the Chishtīs.<sup>258</sup> Indeed the attitude of Sufi orders towards worldly power is one of the key points of difference between them. In this vein, some oral accounts assert that Haider Shaikh did not give up his *faḡīrī* life of asceticism and austerity. Instead, Taj Murassa Begum, Lodhi's daughter, joined him in his spartan habits.

The Nawab's history, rather than denying that Haider Shaikh took up the lifestyle of a ruler, avers the possibility of being both a worldly and spiritual leader. After the marriage, the

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revenues, problems in raising armies and funds, and internecine quarrelling. At one point Nawab Ghulam Hussain abdicated in favor of his brother Jamal Khan. Five sons of Jamal Khan held the *gaddī* serially due to lack of an heir or the young age of the heir. Another childless Nawab, Sikandar Ali Khan, adopted two nephews and this led to another property dispute. Eventually in 1810 after Malerkotla had become a British protectorate, the British government was petitioned to resolve the matter, and judged in favor of primogeniture in succession and set certain guidelines for the distribution of properties.

<sup>257</sup> On the nature of land settlements and the rulers and authorities in India, see: Rita Brara, "Marriage and Kinship" (PhD, Delhi University, 1989), Robert Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, "Rise of the Afghan Nobility under the Lodi Sultans (1451-1526)," *Medieval Indian Quarterly* IV (1961), Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, "Wajh'-i-Ma`ash Grants under the Afghan Kings (1451-1555)," in *Medieval India: A Miscellany* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1972).

<sup>258</sup> This is exemplified by the famous story in which the great Chishti Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya was said to have several times refused to call upon the seven rulers at Delhi who tried to contact him and draw him into their affairs. Indeed, he is reported to have said that his *khanqah* having two doors, if the ruler comes in one, he would leave through the other. The Suhrawardiyya lineage, on the other hand, was much more inclined towards the worldly and did not repudiate those in authority. From the origins of the lineage in Baghdad to its arrival in India, the Suhrawardiyya often brought censure on them for maintaining palaces and lifestyles that rivaled or exceeded the rulers. Digby, "The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India."

“hut life was renounced and in consonance with his dignity and position proper buildings were erected.”<sup>259</sup> But this adoption of a kingly standard of living ultimately in no way compromises

his saintliness:

The career of this remarkable man serves to remind us of the old adage ‘that it is possible to be engaged in worldly pursuits and yet remain Godly.’ It was his piety that gave him a distinguished position even after his death. He was buried in Malerkotla and his grave promptly became a shrine to the glory of the sophisticate. But although the Eastern mind is by nature inclined to be impressed by supernatural manifestations and raises many happenings to the pedestal of miracles, yet the faith of the people to regard Sadar-i-Jahan’s tomb as holding curative properties was in a way justified. That certain cures have been effected is not a wild story. Even in the light of new experience of spiritual thinkers a certain section admits that spirits have decidedly an influence on the human mind.<sup>260</sup>

Here Haider Shaikh is no hut-dwelling *faqīr*, but a ‘sophisticate’ whose source of spiritual power was his piety, not his austerity. The Nawab goes on to describe the tomb as a center for healing. He asserts that claims of miracles are not merely the inventions of the impressionable ‘Eastern mind’ but are documentable and potentially scientifically verifiable. Iftikhar Ali Khan strikes an interesting balance between emphasizing the regal nature of Haider Shaikh and his saintly power, his integrative force and his enormous piety.

The author of the third text, Sufi Mohammad Ismail, takes a somewhat different approach. It is a modern *tazkīra* (biographical index) of Punjab’s saints called *Bagh al-anbiya* “*punjab* (The Garden of the Saints of Punjab). The author is a local maulvi in Malerkotla whose primary devotion is to Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, which is reflected in the considerable space devoted in the text to Sirhindi.<sup>261</sup> This book, in the standard format of *tazkīra* literature, gives

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<sup>259</sup> Khan, 2000, p. 6

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>261</sup> Sufi Ismail has written several books on Islamic and Sufi subjects, focusing on death, preparation for death and the life to come, and collections of prayers. Ismail is a sober man, and rather intimidating. I met with him, but he was terse and unforthcoming and the interview quickly ended. Sufi Muhammad Ismail, *Bagh Anbiya Punjab*, (Malerkotla; Janab Doctor Muhammad Nizamuddin Sahib, 1995); *Kabr Ki Pahali Rat*, (Malerkotla; Kutub Khana

brief biographical details on thirty-two saints of Punjab and Haryana, including West Punjab, now in Pakistan.<sup>262</sup> This text bears resemblance to standard South Asian *tazkīra* texts, such as the *Akhbar al-akhyar* (Tales of the Great Ones) of Shaikh #Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi (d. 1642) and the *Siyar al-#Arifīn* of Shaikh Jamali (d. 1536), in terms of structure, language and thematic choices. The entry on Haider Shaikh opens with the saint's parentage and his taking of *bay#a* (Sufi initiation) from Shaikh Baha'ul Haq Zakariyya at Multan. As previously mentioned, the dates make this meeting impossible, as Haider Shaikh died in 1515 and Baha-ud Din Zakariyya in 1262. Still, it is not uncommon to draw links to a more famous *pīr* for the purpose of increasing the prestige of another. The discussion, though brief, of the Shaikh's time in Multan contrasts sharply with the account of Anwar Ahmad Khan (the *gaddī nishīn*) who did not name Haider Shaikh's *murshid*, nor describe his training in his chapbook. Another remarkable difference between the accounts is that, unlike the *gaddī nishīn*, Sufi Ismail does not emphasize miracles or Haider Shaikh's encounter with Bahlol Lodhi. The meeting with the Sultan is given as evidence of the ruler's piety and interest in seeking out and supporting men of religion. His description of Bahlol Lodhi contrasts sharply with that of Inayat Ali Khan who berates him for his superstitiousness. Sufi Ismail, on the other hand, highlights Lodhi's piety: "Sultan Bahlol Shah Lodhi had a very pious heart, he greatly respected the #*auliya*" *allah* (friends of God) the saints (*buzurganedin*), the noble men of learning (*#ulama*"), and pious people and he was constantly desirous [*arzomand*] of their prayers."<sup>263</sup> This account of Bahlol Lodhi leads to a brief rundown of the Lodhi dynasty and their ultimate defeat by the first Mughal Emperor Babur.

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Ibrahimiya, 1996); *Kabr Kya Kahti Hai*, (Malerkotla; Maktaba Rahimiyan, 1971); and *Na'atun Ka Bagh*, (Malerkotla; Kutub Khana Ibrahimiya, 1965).

<sup>262</sup> On Sufi *tazkīra* see Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Marcia Hermanson, "Religious Literature and the Inscription of Identity: The Sufi Tazkīra Tradition in Muslim South Asia." *The Muslim World* 87, no. 3-4 (1997).

<sup>263</sup> Ismail, 1995, p.167.

The mention of Babur opens the way for Sufi Ismail to mention Mir Baqi's building the mosque in Ayodhya in his master's name.<sup>264</sup> In his discussion of the Shaikh, Sufi Ismail focuses on his mission to spread Islam, and his success in doing so in the region. He writes, "at that time Maler was a Hindu Rajput settlement. Settling in this place, he spread the religion of Islam and called people in the way of the path of righteousness."<sup>265</sup>

Haider Shaikh's character as a perfected saint (*walī kamil*) is repeatedly mentioned and it is this incredible piety and closeness to Allah that brings him to the attention of Bahlol Lodhi. The account of Haider Shaikh's prayer for Bahlol Lodhi's victory in battle is keyed in a markedly different way from that of the *gaddī nishīn*. "And he implored [*darkhwast*] a prayer for his victory in battle. He [Hazrat Shaikh] gave the request that he be victorious, issued a prayer that was accepted by Allah most High was granted and the Badshah was successful [*kamiyan*]. From this the Badshah believed from his heart."<sup>266</sup> Rather than depicting the Sultan's victory as coming from Haider Shaikh himself, the entire event is interpreted as the particular will of Allah. Haider Shaikh's prayer was merely acceptable to Allah, and it was Allah alone who fulfilled the goal. It is not that Sufi Ismail is disavowing the possibility of miracles. On the contrary, Haider Shaikh, among other saints, is described as a miracle worker – *kashf o karamat* – and victory giving holy man – *buland paye buzurg*. But the supremacy and omnipotence of Allah is constantly reaffirmed. This contrasts notably with the *gaddī nishīn*'s own account of Haider Shaikh in which Allah is mentioned rarely and no *ayat* of the Qur'an, not a single Hadith or even the simplest *du'a* (prayer) is given as means of relating Haider Shaikh's tradition to orthodox Islam. For the *gaddī nishīn*, Haider Shaikh is a saint of action, *jalali*

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<sup>264</sup> Ismail goes no further with this commentary, but the mention of it, so completely out of context cannot be accidental. It is certainly consistent with his overall emphasis on the spread of Islam.

<sup>265</sup> Ismail, p. 166.

<sup>266</sup> Ismail, p. 167

(awesome) and full of *karamat* (miracles). The Shaikh's relationship with the Sultan is personal and intimate, and his blood descendents likewise possess all the power and charisma of this royal connection. Sufi Ismail, like the pre-Partition authors, makes no mention of the multi-religious appeal of the tomb cult.

For Sufi Ismail, the saint's real importance is as a foundational figure who brought Islam to the region. While going into some detail regarding Haider Shaikh and the history of the Lodhis, the bulk of the section on Haider Shaikh focuses on the subsequent rulers up until the present day and their role in spreading and supporting Islam in the area. Although Haider Shaikh is an important saint and is credited with establishing Islam in Malerkotla, the narrative really takes off at the time of Partition. Sufi Ismail goes into great detail about Malerkotla's unique status as an island of peace and an island of Islam during the chaos of 1947. This account will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, but it is relevant to the present discussion that Sufi Ismail primarily attributes the special status of Malerkotla to God's will rather than to Haider Shaikh or any other cause.

All three authors are Muslim, but Islam itself is central only in Sufi Ismail's *Bagh Anbiya' Punjab*. The Hindi-Punjabi chapbook and the English *History* are written for much wider audiences, whereas the Urdu *tazkira* would appeal almost exclusively to a Muslim readership. Their different audiences, agendas, and identities require each author to establish their authority in different ways. The *gaddī nishān* evokes Haider Shaikh's miracles and lineage to produce a popular hagiography meant to be accessible to non-Muslims and Muslims alike. The Nawab cites historical works such as the *Ain-i Akbari* and Lepel Griffin's *Chiefs of Punjab*, crafting a narrative modeled on standard European history writing, but incorporating elements of hagiographical writing as he reports the saint's miraculous powers both past and present. Sufi

Ismail operates within the world of Islamic hagiographical writings. Drawing on Qur'anic formulae and passages, frequently invoking God and calling for his blessings, Sufi Ismail's text is written for a Muslim audience, even a specifically Malerkotla Muslim audience. Both Iftikhar Ali Khan and Sufi Ismail dwell very specifically the nature of Malerkotla society and its special role in Punjab history. For Iftikhar Ali Khan Malerkotla is a pluralistic utopia. For Sufi Ismail, Malerkotla is divinely ordained to preserve and spread Islam.

### **Conclusion**

These narratives about Haider Shaikh and others about Malerkotla more generally demonstrate the role the saint plays in giving shape to Malerkotla's primary symbolic identity as a zone of peace takes shape in the public imagination. In this chapter we have seen how oral and written narratives about Haider Shaikh create space for all the local religious communities to identify with him and his tradition. These narratives establish the four functions of Haider Shaikh's persona as a founder, protector, integrator, and exemplar. This generates a powerful resource in the forging of a local identity grounded in an ecumenical ethos. The narratives from the *khalifah* family emphasize the aspects of Haider Shaikh's history that maximize his stature in relation to Bahlol Lodhi, as a worker of miracles, and as a former military man. These stories are keyed to emphasize the superiority of spiritual over worldly power, but do not undermine the significance of Haider Shaikh's being both a powerful chieftain and a holy man. By contrast the *mistri's* tale gives a slightly different twist to the same dynamic. Although he also expresses the supremacy of spiritual authority, he goes much further to undermine the power of the worldly ruler in his account, depicting him as arrogant and stubborn. The *mistri* also embedded his narrative about Haider Shaikh's coming to the region into a broader context that encompassed relations between the local Muslim rulers and the non-Muslim population. This narrative

strategy maximized the links between the past and the present, exalting the saint for his spiritual prowess, praising the Nawab for his ecumenical attitude in visiting the Jain *muni*, and challenging the character of the Sultan and by extension the institution of Muslim rule.

Another important feature in these narratives that comes to the fore is the shift in emphasis in the written accounts before and after Partition. Prior to 1947 only the British account of Haider Shaikh makes mention of his ongoing inter-religious appeal. Both Inayat Ali Khan and Israr Afghani focus on the ruling lineage. The post-Partition narratives of the *gaddī nishān* and the last Nawab both highlight this quality, although for slightly different reasons. The *gaddī nishān* obviously has some stake in maximizing the ecumenical nature of the shrine. The Nawab, on the other hand, is attempting to extend the present success of Malerkotla in managing inter-religious strife into the past. By contrast, Sufi Ismail's 1993 *Bagh Anbiya' Punjab* credits the saint primarily with bringing Islam to the region, making no mention of other religious groups.

This range of narratives about Haider Shaikh demonstrates the malleability of his tradition. The saint's character gives shape to the stories of the communities connected to the shrine, generating a multivocalic space in which differing religions locate themselves in relation to the saint. Haider Shaikh is a key symbol serving to establish the town and tomb cult, protect them, integrate their constituent populations, and model proper piety which often includes inter-religious tolerance. Through strategic uses of the framing narratives about the saint – the meeting with Bahlol Lodhi, his miracles, his warrior past, etc. – residents and devotees craft stories that create connections to the saint, express their interests and concerns about the tensions between worldly and spiritual life, and establish a precedent for non-sectarian ethic of harmony. Situated in a context of highly politicized religious identities, all of these groups engage the

tradition of the saint, including those who do not themselves advocate pilgrimage. Each finds a way to relate to Haider Shaikh and to give their particular shape to his story and form to their own identities.

## Chapter Three

### Narratives of Malerkotla: the *haa da naara* and Partition

The dominant identity of Malerkotla as a zone of peace is sustained by the active transmission of historical narratives within and between religious groups in the town and throughout the region. As with the oral and written accounts of Haider Shaikh's role in founding and sustaining the community of Malerkotla, stories about Malerkotla's past continue to be told in the town and throughout Punjab. The narratives that are told again and again reinforce the ethic of harmony that pervades the town, functioning to integrate the diverse population of the town and give shape to the local identity of inter-religious harmony.

In particular, two narrative clusters are repeated frequently that recall and reinforce Malerkotla's peaceful civic life – the *haa da naara* and the Partition. As discussed in Chapter One, the *haa da naara* is cry of protest given in 1704 by the Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan in defense of Guru Gobind Singh's sons who were about to be executed while in captivity. Partition in 1947 was the division of India and Pakistan and their concomitant independence from Britain. The transfer of population in Punjab in particular involved millions of people and was accompanied by traumatic violence. The violence did not however directly impact Malerkotla. It would be difficult to say which of these two events is more integral to Malerkotla's self-imagining or is more crucial to the perpetuation of social harmony. Both accounts are almost universally known in Malerkotla and throughout Punjab. Indeed the two clusters overlap as many people claimed that the peace at Partition was possible only because of the *haa da naara*'s power as a motivating ideal and its role in procuring the divine force of the Guru's blessing for the town. Certainly the *haa da naara*'s chronological precedence allows it to appear as a key element in averting all subsequent challenges to the integrity and stability of the kingdom. Yet

as we saw in the previous chapter, the shift in emphasis discernible in written narratives about Malerkotla after the Partition indicates that the precedence given to the *haa da naara* in many oral narratives may be a post-Partition reevaluation of that event. After all, Malerkotla was by no means an island of peace for the two hundred and forty-three years between the 1704 *haa da naara* and the 1947 Partition. On the contrary, as outlined in Chapter One, Malerkotla experienced and participated in any number of campaigns against and with Sikh and Hindu forces. Thus the manner in which these events are described today and have been described in the past provide important insights into the role such powerful historical moments and their subsequent articulations play in maintaining local peace.

### **The *haa da naara*: The Cry for Justice**

The importance of the *haa da naara* cannot be overestimated. No public assembly in Malerkotla goes by without mention being made of Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan's heroic defense of the sons of Guru Gobind Singh. As seen in the previous chapter, many of Haider Shaikh's devotees falsely attribute the *haa da naara* to the saint, thereby collapsing all of the idealistic power of this righteous act into one central figure in the town. Every Malerkotla resident and most Punjabis know the story of the Guru's sons, and most know the small role Sher Muhammad Khan played in the events leading up to their martyrdom. Written accounts of the *haa da naara* are also numerous, ranging from nineteenth century Sikh histories such as Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Panth Prakash* (1841) and Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* (1892), to Bachan Singh's 1908 chapbook *The Victory of Faith*, to the renditions given in countless biographies of Guru Gobind Singh, martyrologies on the web and even in children's books.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Some of these sources include: Ratan Singh Bhangu, *Panth Prakash*, (New Delhi; Bhai Vir Singh Sahit Sadan, 1998 [1841]); J.S. Grewal and S.S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh: A Biographical Study*, (Chandigarh; Panjab University Publication Bureau, 1967); Sainapat, *Sri Gur Sobha*, edited by Ganda Singh, (Patiala; Punjabi University, 1967);

These events have captured the imagination of many Sikh writers and Malerkotla residents in particular. After reviewing the essential elements of the narrative, I will give several written and oral versions from a variety of sources and discuss their key differences and their significance in building Malerkotla's identity.

### **The *haa da naara* in Sikh Sources**

Guru Gobind Singh founded the *khalsa*, the army of the pure, in 1699 at Anandpur, the city founded in 1644 by his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur. Driven from other Sikh centers at Kartarpur, Goindwal, and Amritsar, the Sikhs had settled into the hills of present day Himachal Pradesh and regained strength.<sup>268</sup> According to Sikh tradition, on the day of the spring festival of Baisakhi the Guru summoned his followers and asked them to commit fully to the path established by Guru Nanak, adhering to a special code of dress and behavior. This was the moment in which the famous five *k*'s of the Sikh faith were inaugurated – the five outward signs that indicate adherence to the Sikh faith.<sup>269</sup> These are *kesh*, uncut hair, *kirpan*, a knife, *kachera*, short undergarments, *kanga*, a comb, and *kaŪa*, a steel bracelet. Furthermore, the *amrit pahul*, or nectar ceremony, was established, often called "Sikh baptism" as it is a ritual of commitment

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Bachan Singh, *Fatehgarh Sahib Di Darshan*, (no date); Ganda Singh, "The Boy Martyrs of Sirhind," *The Sikh Review*, (December (1957); Giani Gian Singh, *Panth Prakash*, (Amritsar; Bhai Catar Singh Jiwana Singh, 1923) and *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, (Amritsar; Khalsa Naishanala Ijamsi, 1923 [1892]); Guru Gobind Singh, *Zafarnama*, translated by Darshan Singh, (New Delhi; ABC Publishing House, 2000); Puran Singh, *The Victory of Faith or the Story of the Martyrdom*, (Amritsar; The Khalsa Agency, 1908); Ranbir Singh, *Glimpses of the Divine Masters*, (New Delhi; International Traders Corporation, 1965); Sahib Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh*, (Jullundur; Raj Publications, 1967).

<sup>268</sup> On the invitation of two rival rulers in Garwhal and Sirmur, Guru Gobind Singh set up a base at Paonta in 1685. The increasing population and power drew the attention of the Mughal *subedars*, or military governors, on the plains and raised the attention of the Hindu kings in the mountains. He spent three years here in relative peace, regrouping his armies, recruiting from the Afghans no longer at war, and the *mahants* (heads) of temples in the region whose considerable landholdings often made them military leaders as well. However, the rival interests of these parties and their fear of his growing power resulted in several battles in 1688 and the Guru's return to Anandpur, which he had had to abandon three years previously. J. S. Grewal and S. S. Bal, *Guru Gobind Singh: A Biographical Study*. Chandigarh: Punjab University Publication Bureau, 1967.

<sup>269</sup> As each sign begins with the Punjabi letter *kaka*, they have come to be known as the five *k*'s.

to the Sikh faith performed by drinking blessed water and promising to adhere to the code of conduct set forth by the Gurus.<sup>270</sup>

The inauguration of these ceremonies contributed to the consolidation of the Sikh community, already perceived as a potential threat by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. In order to curtail this growing threat, Aurangzeb instructed his commander at Sirhind, Wazir Khan, to "admonish" the Guru.<sup>271</sup> As the imperial forces were heavily committed to expansionist campaigns in the southern region of the Deccan, it was imperative that the north remain a stable, revenue enhancing region. The growing power of the Sikh Khalsa also disturbed the neighboring kingdoms and thus in December of 1704 a coalition of Mughal forces and regional chiefs attacked Anandpur and laid siege to the Guru's fortress. As food and water became scarce, Gobind Singh and his army agreed to evacuate the town and shift elsewhere, but they were attacked by Wazir Khan and the Mughals upon their departure. Gobind Singh and a small band including his two elder sons managed to fight their way clear but his two younger sons and his mother were captured. Their servant, the Hindu Ganga Brahmin, helped them escape from the Anandpur battle and then turned them over to the Mughal authorities. They were brought to Sirhind where they were imprisoned in the Thanda Burj (the Cold Tower).<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Subsequently this code of conduct, known as *rehat*, has been codified by one of the central Sikh oversight groups, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee. This group was organized to manage the historical gurdwaras

<sup>271</sup> Grewal and Bal, p. 127.

<sup>272</sup> Gobind Singh and his retinue went on to Chamkaur, where the two elder sons were killed in battle. The Guru himself escaped in the night from the chieftain's house and was forced to keep on the move, dogged at every step by Wazir Khan and his forces until in 1706 he traveled to the Deccan to meet Aurangzeb and discuss the situation. While en route the Emperor died, obviating that mission. Gobind Singh then traveled to Delhi to meet with the heir apparent, Bahadur Shah, who kept him attached to the court as he traveled south to pursue the missions in the Deccan begun by Aurangzeb. The Guru stopped at a place called Nander, a hundred and fifty miles from Hyderabad, and settled down. It was there that he met the *bairagi sadhu* Banda who would become one of his fiercest loyalists, and there that he received a wound that would eventually kill him on October 18, 1708.

The two youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Fateh and Zorawar Singh were only seven and nine years old at the time of their capture.<sup>273</sup> Their grandmother Mata Gujri had already lost her husband, Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was executed by Shah Jahan for defending the freedom of religion of Hindus. In spite of their tenuous condition and fragile ages, according to Sikh martyrologies the three faced their imminent doom with enormous courage. The two *sahibzadas* (sons of the Guru) were brought to the court every day for three days and pressured to accept Islam. Sikh accounts depict a full court of witnesses, Wazir Khan, his Hindu advisor Sucha Nand, and several other regional Muslim rulers including the Nawab of Malerkotla, Sher Muhammad Khan. As the young boys were tested, they continued to profess their faith in the teachings of their father and to refuse Islam, though it meant their lives. Some of the accounts portray their bravery as moving Wazir Khan, shaking his determination to execute them. Others emphasize the role of Sucha Nand in shoring up the assembly's resolve. According to nearly every version of these events, at some point in the proceedings, Sher Muhammad Khan rose in the court and protested their execution. His plea went unheeded and Zorawar and Fateh Singh were killed by being bricked up alive in a wall. Upon hearing of the death of his sons, the Guru is reported to have inquired if anyone had been present to appeal for their lives. When told of Sher Muhammad Khan's defense of the boys, Gobind Singh is said to have blessed him and his descendants, declaring that his roots shall remain forever green, i.e. his lineage will never fail.<sup>274</sup> It is commonly believed that the Guru sent a sword to Sher Muhammad Khan in acknowledgement of his gratitude and the blessing.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Some accounts, such as one given below, claim six and eight years old, but the majority assert they were seven and nine.

<sup>274</sup> Ironically, since Partition the lineage has failed, in a sense, as the last Nawab had no children and most of his immediate family have either died or gone to Pakistan.

<sup>275</sup> The Begum Mujawwar Nisa", one of Nawab Ifikhar Ali Khan's wives, has in her possession this sword.

Several elements of this basic narrative must be stressed. First, Sher Muhammad Khan was by no means an ally of the Sikhs. He was present and active in the attack against the Guru.<sup>276</sup> Not only that, but his brother Khizr Khan and nephew Nahir Khan were killed in action during this campaign.<sup>277</sup> The Nawab, therefore, is in no way depicted as a pacifist or a collaborator with the Guru. His loyalty to the Mughal Empire is clear and is demonstrated by his participation in many campaigns, including this battle in which he sustained great personal losses. Second, in this story, there are both Hindu and Muslim villains. Mata Gujri, Zorawar, and Fateh Singh are betrayed by their Hindu servant and guide Gangu Brahmin. Later in the court of Wazir Khan, his Hindu advisor, Sucha Nand, is described in most accounts as having been the strongest advocate for executing the boys. Wazir Khan is generally given the harshest treatment among the Muslims for his merciless slaying of the *sahibzadas*. Third, several versions of these events claim that the "honor" of killing the boys was first offered to Sher Muhammad Khan because he had suffered such personal losses in the battle. This offer heightens the tension of the moment and adds to the sense of righteous forbearance when Sher Muhammad Khan refuses to kill the children. Finally, one of the most important aspects of this event is that the Nawab was unable to save Zorawar and Fateh Singh. This is a story of failure. Yet in that failure there are roots for a future success as the mere effort, the brave risk taken by the Nawab becomes a meaningful resource and a motivating ideal in maintaining the integrity of the multi-religious community in Malerkotla. No matter how the details are described, this

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<sup>276</sup> His bravery and ability as a general are remarked upon in both the Nawab's history and the *Gazetteer* accounts of the battles against the Sikhs. The *Gazetteer* also notes that he was instrumental in the defeat of Guru Tegh Bahadur at Chamkaur, where the Guru was captured and sent to Delhi and eventually executed. Interestingly, these sources, as well as one of the standard encyclopedias of Sikh history, Bhai Khan Singh Nabha's *Gurusabad ratanakar mahan kosh*, all report Sher Muhammad Khan's defense of Guru Gobind Singh's sons.

<sup>277</sup> Satinder Kaur asserts that it is believed by many that it is Sher Muhammad Khan's brother Khizr Khan who is referenced as Khwaja Mahdud in Guru Gobind Singh's famous epistle to Aurangzeb the *Zafarnama*. In this text he mentions one Khwaja Mahdud who stood behind a wall and jumped into the fray along with the army and is killed. The Guru mourns, "alas had I seen his face, I would have, in spite of myself blessed him." Cited in Kaur (1977), p. 48.

moment, this call for justice is known throughout Malerkotla and the Punjab as the *haa da naara*, which literally means the cry of protest.

There is a remarkable consistency in the written and oral narratives of these events. Although certain details may vary, overall the scene is set to emphasize the futile bravery of Sher Muhammad Khan and especially the innocence and courage of Zorawar and Fateh Singh. The earliest Sikh accounts of these events, Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Panth Prakash* (1841) and Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Gârâ Khalsa* (1892), focus on the Guru's response to the news of his sons' deaths. The efflorescence of historical texts in the nineteenth century reflects the dynamics of Punjab politics during this period. Following the death of the great Sikh leader Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, the kingdom he had managed to preserve from the British advance rapidly declined, finally ending in 1849 with the British taking command of the entire region. In this context the Sikh religion was likely less than twenty percent of the population.<sup>278</sup> In the late nineteenth century Sikh reform movements such as the Singh Sabha had a profound impact on Sikh identity politics. The Singh Sabha, founded in 1872 in Amritsar, sought to purify and revitalize Sikhism, counter the encroachments of Christian missionizing, and become a representative institution for the Sikh community. They published tract literature, formed many branches in local communities, and established gurdwaras to disseminate their version of Sikh orthodoxy. The success of the Singh Sabha, measured by its impact on forming the debate over who is a Sikh, was and is considerable. During this same period numerous organizations arose in all three of the major religious traditions seeking to define the faiths in a rapidly changing socio-political context. Muslim Anjumans or organizations, were formed throughout Punjab in the late

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<sup>278</sup> The first British census was in 1851, but the British failed to recognize the Sikhs as a separate religion until 1881. Still that census only recognized those Sikhs who kept their hair and did not smoke. Many, many Sikhs then and now cut their hair and otherwise do not conform to what has come to be the normative Sikh code of conduct. Some such as the Nirankaris, Udasis, Namdharis, and others acknowledge a different lineage of Gurus. Yet these individuals and groups very much consider themselves to be Sikh.

nineteenth century with varying purposes, but generally in order to purify the faith and solidify Islam socially and politically. Their goals included "imparting and popularization of religious and modern education, reform and welfare of the community, acquainting the Government with the problems and desires of the community, and taking up other matters in the interests of the community."<sup>279</sup> Such groups also formed in Malerkotla at least as early as 1894 with the establishment of the Anjuman Musleh-ul-Akhwan.<sup>280</sup> The Hindu "revival" was also extremely influential. The work of Swami Dayanand, the founder of the Arya Samaj, was particularly well received in Punjab. The Arya Samaj, the Punjabi Hindu Sabha, and the Hindu Mahasabha were all active in the region during this period.<sup>281</sup> Although their methods and motivations were diverse, all of these Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu groups shared several goals, to curtail the inroads of Christian missionaries, to educate and uplift their communities, and to activate on behalf of their community. In so doing, these communities had to be defined, a process that led to a hardening of boundaries between religions and a rise in communal politics. In short, this period was one in which identity formation was very much a concern for the all three major religions.

During this critical period Giani Gian Singh was one of the most productive scholars of Sikh historical works and his writings were an important part of the identity formation process.

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<sup>279</sup> Ikram Ali Malik, "Muslim Anjumans and Communitarian Consciousness," in *Five Punjabi Centuries*, edited by J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, (New Delhi; Manohar, 1999), p. 113. On the Anjumans and other Muslim organizations in Punjab, see Edward D. Churchill, Jr., "Muslim Societies of the Punjab, 1860-1890," *The Punjab Past and Present* (Volume VIII, no. 1, 1974); David Gilmartin, "Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab," *Modern Asian Studies* (13, no. 3, 1979); Iftikhar H. Malik, "Identity Formation and Muslim Party Politics in Punjab, 1897-1936: A Retrospective Analysis," *Modern Asian Studies* (29, no. 2, 1995) and "Muslim Nationalism and Ethno-Regional Postulations: Sir Fazl-i-Husain and Party Politics in the Punjab," in *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context*, edited by Pritam Singh and Shinder Singh Thandi, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>280</sup> Malik, "Muslim Anjumans," p. 122. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are many Muslim associations in Malerkotla, most of those still extant post-date independence.

<sup>281</sup> N. Gerald Barrier, "The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870-1908," *Journal of Asian Studies* (Volume 27, no. 3, 1968); Dietrich Reetz, "In Search of the Collective Self: How Ethnic Group Concepts Were Cast through Conflict in Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* (Volume 31, no. 2 1997); K.L. Tuteja, "The Punjab Hindu Sabha and Communal Politics, 1906-1923," in *Five Punjabi Centuries*, edited by J.S. Grewal and Indu Banga, (New Delhi; Manohar, 1997).

His comprehensive history of the Sikh faith and religion, *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* (Histories of the Gurus and the Khalsa) spanned the lifetimes of the Gurus and all subsequent Sikh history, thereby defining the parameters of what he viewed as the normative tradition. In his account of Guru Gobind Singh, he describes the martyrdom of the *sahibzadas*, his two sons. He focuses his narrative on the reaction of the Guru who was sitting with his Sikhs after the battle that had cost the lives of his two elder sons when an emissary from Sirhind approached.

The next day a messenger came and gave everyone the news, and it became known that first Mata [Gujri] was brought with the *sahibzadas* to the village Kheri to Ganga Ram Brahman's kitchen. Then all their wealth was taken, and Mata said how can it be stolen, no one has come? Then having been rebuked, [Ganga Ram] called a Ranghera from Morinda and he caught Mataji and the *sahibzadas* together and brought them to Sirhind. Bazid Khan [that is Wazir Khan] the administrator tempted them and threatened them greatly to leave their religion, but they did not believe anything. They did not give up their religion. They gave their bodies. Hearing the cruel death sentence of the *sahibzadas*, then Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan of Malerkotla said, "It is a great sin to kill these very young and sinless children. Furthermore the killing of these innocents will not enhance your reputation. Honor would come from killing the lion Gobind Singh. If you are able to kill him then God does not consider this wrong." Hearing this all the people became silent but Nand Khatri Diwan [the minister Sucha Nand] spoke, "It is not good to save the children of a serpent." Hearing this the stonehearted Bazid Khan had the innocent children, as innocent as rosebuds, bricked up in a wall. Then the wall was opened, and they were killed but it is a great thing that these children never forsook their religion, they offered up their bodies. Hearing of their murder, Mata Gujri fainted and fell from the tower in which she was imprisoned and gave up her breath.<sup>282</sup>

Tears filled the eyes of everyone as they heard this tale and the wailing and crying went on for such a long time that the Guruji's neck drooped and he began digging at the seedling plants of a reed. Having heard the entire account, the Guru pledged, "Having given this call for justice, their roots will be preserved. In no other place will the roots of Muslim men be continued. Those Turks' lineages will be uprooted." Having said this, he pulled up the sprigs of grass and threw them away and with them the roots of Sirhind were uprooted and the order was given that that city should not dwell in peace. "From such a great sin, my Sikhs will plunder and loot and devastate the place and every Sikh will take its bricks and throw into the Sutlej."

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<sup>282</sup> Singh, Giani Gian. *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 778.

In Giani Gian Singh's history of the formation of the Sikh faith, the key elements are the innocence and courage of the *sahibzadas*, "innocent as rosebuds." The youth and purity of the two children contrasts with the strength of their convictions as they face Wazir Khan and determine to give up their bodies rather than their faith. Indeed, even Sher Muhammad Khan's protest highlights their young age and lack of sin. He describes them as very young, *shir khor*, meaning breastfed, implying that they are barely weaned. He also refers to them as *beguna*, without sin, and *masâm*, an Arabic derived term for innocence. Yet Sher Muhammad Khan's defense is not exaggerated. He does not advocate giving up the conflict or retreating from what he perceives as an unjust fight. Rather, he argues that glory and honor derive only from killing their father on the field of battle. That would be a fair and just fight, worthy of a true soldier. Sher Muhammad Khan is made to observe that it would be very sinful (*vadha bhari gunah*) to kill the *sahibzadas*, and that God would endorse the killing of their father in a fair fight. Giani Gian Singh does not depict him as grounding his objection in Islam itself. His objections are based on a general ethos of justice.

In *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, the account of the Guru's blessing of the Nawab's lineage is immediately followed by a morality tale of a Hindu follower of the Guru's who begged for a similar blessing. As the Hindu devotee had previously betrayed the Guru, upon solicitation Gobind Singh gave him a test. He gave him several personal objects (likely a weapon or a vessel) and told him that so long as his family cared properly for these items and worshiped them daily then they would be blessed. No such condition was placed on the prayer for Sher Muhammad Khan. Indeed, the Nawab would not have been present to receive the good wishes of the Guru. Although local tradition claims that the Guru sent a sword to the Nawab to

authenticate the blessing, no mention of this is made here.<sup>283</sup> Nor is the Nawab's protest associated with the phrase "*haa da naara*" which comes to be its formulaic referent in modern times. Thus the overall impact of this incident in Giani Gian Singh's history is to emphasize the bravery and youth of the *sahibzadas* and glorify the Guru's fairness as he blesses his enemy for an act of mercy shown to his children.

Later in the growth of Sikh identity politics the reform movements of late nineteenth century have had their impact and the independence movement has begun in earnest. In this period great quantities of tract literature aimed at shoring up these identities was produced.<sup>284</sup> A 1908 English chapbook by one Puran Singh, *Victory of Faith*, is portrays the martyrdom in a remarkably more partisan fashion than the earlier histories, focusing on the martyrdom of the two sons of Guru Gobind Singh, this text almost glosses over the Nawab's protest. Although the elements of the narrative are the same in Puran Singh's rendition, the players are somewhat different. Rather than Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan protesting that it would only be fair to kill Gobind Singh himself in battle, this objection is placed in the mouths of "two Pathan youths." The youths are unnamed and the only thing known about them other than their ethnicity is that their father had been killed in battle. They declare

May it please Your Honour, our father was killed by their father in a *pitched battle*, and we are not so heartless cowards as to take the innocent lives of these two infants in revenge-seeking. We would rather wait till we meet our worthy foe under similar circumstances and draw our swords on the head of Guru Gobind Singh himself. These are mere babies, and we cannot comply with Your Honour's order.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> The Guru is also believed to have given a pitcher to the ruler of Raikot in 1704. This blessing is reported to have saved the town from the violence of Partition just as the Guru's blessing preserved Malerkotla. See Ian Copland, "The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh Princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947," *Modern Asian Studies* (Volume 36, no. 3, 2002), p. 694, fn 98.

<sup>284</sup> See Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

<sup>285</sup> Puran Singh, *The Victory of Faith or the Story of the Martyrdom*, (Amritsar; The Khalsa Agency, 1908), p. 28-9.

These two fatherless youths, with every reason to desire vengeance exert the same self-control that Sher Muhammad Khan exhibits in Giani Gian Singh's text. Puran Singh even goes so far as to have them refer to Guru Gobind Singh as a "worthy foe," a somewhat unlikely description for someone who has killed their father. Nonetheless, no religious objection is raised by the Pathan youths, according to Puran Singh. Nor does Sher Muhammad Khan protest on such grounds. Immediately after the youths refuse to kill the *sahibzadas*, Puran Singh describes the Nawab as demanding that they be freed: "At this juncture the Nawab of Malerkotla boldly proposed to the Nawab of Sirhind for the release of the innocent boys." This is the totality of Sher Muhammad Khan's appearance in this chapbook. His proposal for the *sahibzadas* ' total release (which I never found in any other account) was unsuccessful, though it did move the Nawab of Sirhind,

and his face blushed with the shame of cowardice which he had shown and he felt half inclined to set them free when Suchanand, a Khatri minister, put in a remark that the young one of a snake grows to be a dangerous snake and hence it was not politic to show any mercy towards the sons of a dangerous rebel.<sup>286</sup>

This remark was enough to strengthen Wazir Khan's resolve, and the execution scene proceeds from there. By 1908 the Singh Sabha's reformist agenda dominated the Sikh institution building process. The Chief Khalsa Diwan, founded in 1902, formalized in many ways the goals of the Singh Sabha in a central body based at Amritsar to oversee and implement a cohesive identity for the Sikh community. Puran Singh's chapbook would have appeared in a moment immediately following the British government's first attempt to partition India, internally, along communal lines with the failed partition of Bengal in 1905. Followed by the formation of the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress' call for *swaraj* or self-rule, this was an important period in which India's religious communities were striving for self-determination and for

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

independence from the British. Puran Singh's focus on the Guru and his son's and his near omission of the Nawab are unsurprising in such a context.

Partition, of course changed everything. After 1947 Sikhs in East Punjab were now a majority of the population for the first time ever (fifty-five percent according to the 1951 census). Muslims became nearly non-existent. Yet the account of the *sahibzadas'* martyrdom remains very much the same. In a 1957 version of the incident written by Ganda Singh, an eminent historian of Punjab, Sher Muhammad Khan returns to a more central place, but his objections are still not presented in explicitly Islamic terms. As in Giani Gian Singh's rendition, a more generalized ethos of justice is invoked. In Ganda Singh's account, Sher Muhammad Khan was offered the 'privilege' of executing the *sahibzadas* out of revenge for the deaths of his brother Khizr Khan and nephew Nabhi Khan who were killed in the siege of Anandpur. But according to Ganda Singh the Malerkotla Nawab did not advocate avenging these deaths by killing the Guru's sons; rather he gave an impassioned protest. He declared that the boys were innocent and that the Mughal forces were at war with their father, not them. Ganda Singh describes the event thus:

But the brave Afghan refused to kill the innocent children, one of whom was six years old, and the other eight. 'Both I and my followers are soldiers and whoever opposes us in open war, we either kill him or are killed ourselves, but what you propose,' said Sher Muhammad Khan, 'is the business of an executioner.' Saying this he left the Darbar [court] and went away.<sup>287</sup>

This version emphasizes the Nawab's particular objections to the method of killing the *sahibzadas*, which he dismisses as unsoldierly. The Nawab does not remain to plead his case, however, but leaves the scene rather rapidly and abandons the *sahibzadas* to their fate. This emphasizes even further the bravery of the two young boys who are now wholly friendless as

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<sup>287</sup> Ganda Singh, "The Boy Martyrs of Sirhind," *The Sikh Review*, (December 1957), p. 40.

they face their fate. Ganda Singh sticks fairly closely to Giani Gian Singh's frame story, and does not elaborate upon the Nawab's role in the events. Written ten years after Partition, this short essay could not have been much concerned with the totally unnecessary task of differentiating Sikhs from the relatively non-existent Muslims nor with coalition building with the Muslim population. The *Sikh Review* and its readership were merely being reminded (as they were nearly annually) of the great sacrifice the two boys made for their faith. This is significant as accounts by other Sikh authors and by members of the Nawabi family do portray Sher Muhammad Khan's protest as based in his Islamic faith.

The *haa da naara* is imbued with religious motivation in an undated, but recent, chapbook by one Bachan Singh about Fatehgarh Sahib (the name given to Sirhind after these events, meaning the place of victory) entitled *Divine Vision of Fatehgarh Sahib (Fatehgarh Sahib di Darshan)*. In general the scene is similar to that portrayed by Ganda Singh, but is much more fully elaborated and quotes verses from Santokh Singh's *Sri Gurpratap Suraj Granth* (1843), a compendium of Sikh history and hagiography. Bachan Singh goes into great detail in depicting the scene, and when Sher Muhammad Khan arises to protest, the drama is at a fever pitch. Offered the opportunity to kill the boys himself out of vengeance for the deaths of his brother and nephew, Sher Muhammad Khan refuses.

But Sher Mohammad Khan was a tender-hearted man. He said, "My brother and nephew were killed in battle. I can take my revenge from Guru Gobind Singh on the battlefield. If there is any disagreement between us, then it is with Guru Gobind Singh, not with them. They are very young [breast-feeding] children, what sin could be theirs? Above and beyond this, it is against the *sharī#* (law) of Islam. Therefore I cannot do this."

Saying this, Sher Mohammad Khan gave a call for justice (*haa da naara mariya*) and rising from the *darbar* he left. Bhai Santokh Singh gives the following opinion about the above mentioned:

Although you are the enemy of the Guru's people  
on behalf of these innocents you rebelled  
Saying, do not kill these unweaned children

The cruel order you neither justified nor fulfilled.<sup>288</sup>

Bachan Singh portrays Sher Muhammad Khan in a very different light than earlier Sikh texts. No longer merely a consummate soldier, willing to face the Guru on the battlefield but not to kill children, he is tender-hearted. Furthermore, he adds the objection that to execute the *sahibzadas* would violate the laws of *sharī#a*, or Islamic law. The verse cited from Santokh Singh reinforces the power of Sher Muhammad Khan's objection. He is called the "enemy of the Guru's people," intensifying the power of his "rebellion" against his own community on behalf of the innocents. This makes the important move of separating the Muslims who conspire to kill the children from the Muslim who refuses to do so.

This differentiation between "good" Muslims and "bad" Muslims is an important one, bespeaking a sensitivity to the peculiar tensions of minority religious politics and the complicated nature of Muslim-Sikh relations vis-à-vis the Hindu majority. Hindu extremists have long viewed Sikhism as part of Hinduism. Indeed the BJP party now ruling at the center of national politics has often referred to Sikhs as Hindus, and the VHP lists Sikhism as one of the religions it considers within the Hindu fold. Sikhs, for their part, have mostly attempted to distinguish themselves from the Hindu traditions. Perhaps the most famous instance of this was the publication of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's tract *Ham Hindu Nahīn* (We Are Not Hindu) in 1898.<sup>289</sup> The Sikhs have also frequently pressed for greater autonomy politically from the central government. There have been significant agitations in the 1910's for an independent Sikh state, a call that was revived during Partition, and again in the 1980's. The first movement was

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<sup>288</sup> Bachan Singh, *Fatchgarh Sahib di darshan*, (unknown publisher and date), p. 23.

<sup>289</sup> Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha (1861- 1936) was one of the major ideologues of the Singh Sabha movement. He is also the author of the *Mahan Kosh*, Great Dictionary, an encyclopedic dictionary of Punjab. In the *Mahan Kosh* entry for Malerkotla, Nabha references the Guru's blessing: "It is from here that the ruler Sher Mohammad Khan having heard of the order to kill the small Sahibzadas at the fort in Sirhind raised a protest and told the Suba that to behead the children would be a sin, for this reason the Sikhs regard this kingdom with reverence (*sanman*). In the Gurpratap surya it is also written that the tenth guru declared, "Let this Malerian's roots be green." Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Gurushabad Ratnakara Mahan Kosh*, (Chandigarh; Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, 1999).

brutally suppressed by the British and the last was brutally suppressed by the Indian government under Indira Gandhi.<sup>290</sup> Faced with the need to constantly distinguish themselves from Hinduism, yet aware of the possible repercussions of doing so, Sikhs like Muslims must walk a fine line in order to be regarded as "good" Indian citizens.

Nowadays numerous Sikh websites include the *haa da naara* in their description of the *sahibzadas* martyrdom, testifying to the ongoing popularity of these events. The continuity of the content is remarkable, testifying to the currency of the older Sikh sources for modern audiences. A *Sikh Review* article posted in December of 2000 describes the *haa da naara* thus:

Amid this grilling, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan of Malerkotla, who happened to be there, earnestly implored that the children were too young and innocent to be punished and pleaded that Islam did not sanction such conduct.<sup>291</sup>

This is a fairly typical modern rendition of the *haa da naara*. In it the Nawab is shown as objecting on the same grounds as in previous accounts, with perhaps a greater emphasis on his opposing the execution on religious grounds. A few other sites dramatize the scene further, such as this version on the Sikhworld site, which is repeated verbatim on several others:

Nawab Wazir Khan called Sher Mohammad Khan, the Nawab of Malerkotla, and conveyed the Qazi's orders to him, "Your brother lost his life at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh. Here is an opportunity for you to wreak your vengeance. The Qazi has sentenced these two sons of Guru Gobind Singh to death and has further ordered that they be bricked alive. We are handing them over to you for doing the needful" On hearing this Sher Mohammad Khan was dumb founded. After some pause he said to the Nawab in a faltering voice, "This is cruelty! my brother was killed on the battlefield. These innocent boys are not responsible for his death. If we have to take revenge it shall be from the father. God save us from this sinful act." Saying this he got up and remarked in a mournful tone, "O God, how cruel!"<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Operation Blue Star authorized by Gandhi in 1984 was designed to rout out Sikh militants who had taken over the Golden Temple at Amritsar. However, the heavy handed firebombing and artillery barrage resulted in a massacre of hundreds, the wounding of many, many more, and the destruction of many priceless artifacts of the Sikh faith.

<sup>291</sup> Dr. Manmohan Singh, "Nikian Jindan-Vada Saka: Story of Child Martyrs," December 2000, <http://www.sikhreview.org/december2000/moral.htm>, (April 19, 2002).

<sup>292</sup> "Sikh Sacrifice: Supreme Sacrifice of Young Souls," <http://www.sikhworld.co.uk/page5.html>, (June 19, 2002)

Again, Sher Muhammad Khan's motivation is the avoidance of sin and the protection of the innocent, just as in the versions of Giani Gian Singh and Ganda Singh.

In only one account did I ever see the event portrayed in a substantially different light. On an internet discussion site devoted to Sikh issues, the case of the *sahibzadas* execution was presented by one participant as evidence of "how animal-like the Mohammedans are, have been and in every likelihood will be in the future." In this version by one Sukha Singh in April of 2000, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan does protest. Sukha Singh writes that

the Nawab of Malerkotla, Sher Muhammad, stood up and argued that Islam forbids slaughter of innocent children. That these kids have done no wrong and they should not be punished for wrongs done by their father. There was a furore [sic] in the court. The Qazis, however, argued and expostulated with Sher Muhammad about the true meaning of Islam and said that Sher Muhammad did not know true Islam and so on. That the kids should die. And finally, the Nawab agreed with the Qazis.<sup>293</sup>

This account is clearly part of a polemical and inflammatory posting. Nonetheless, that this event is singled out by the author (who in other postings addresses Women in Islam, Gay Sex in Muslim Paradise, and other provocative topics) as the crucial moment to prove the truth of Islam to a Sikh audience demonstrates how central this moment is in Sikh-Muslim relations. Clearly driven by a desire to undermine any positive opinions of the Muslim faith, the author directly attacks the central feature of the narrative, Sher Muhammad Khan's courage to oppose the execution of the children. In Sukha Singh's account, the Nawab caves under pressure from the Qazis (judges) and comes to agree with their death sentence. This also implies an agreement with their interpretation of "the true meaning of Islam." Having forged such a consensus about the meaning of Islam among the Muslim characters in this narrative, Sukha Singh is able to represent that consensus as true Islam. Interestingly, Sucha Nand, the Hindu minister who

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<sup>293</sup> Sukha Singh, "In the Name of Islam," April 17, 2000, <http://www.gillit.com/disc2/000004b5.htm>, (May 2003).

strengthens Wazir Khan's resolve in most renditions, disappears altogether in this version and his role is taken up by the Qazis. Thus in an effort to damage Islam in the minds of Sikhs, Sukha Singh attacks the moment of symbolic unity that demonstrates the possibility of rising above religious divisions. It is because of the power of the *haa da naara* as a unifying narrative that this reactionary author attempts to destroy the basis for this example of cooperation and common humanity.

These accounts of the *haa da naara* from Sikh sources demonstrate the ubiquity and power of this event. Although certain shifts in emphasis are evident, there is a remarkable consistency in the structure and substance of the narratives from the nineteenth century to the present. In all of the accounts Sher Muhammad Khan's plea goes unheeded. The execution takes place. Zorawar and Fateh Singh were not only killed, they were executed in a tortuous fashion, bricked up alive in a wall. Their grandmother, Mata Gujri, also died and is regarded as a martyr to the faith as well.<sup>294</sup>

The most notable change to the story occurs in some of the accounts written after Partition. But there is also a palpable shift in those written after Operation Bluestar in 1984 when the Indian Government forces stormed the Golden Temple to rout out a group of radical Sikhs, killing hundreds and desecrating the sacred site. The subsequent decade of terrorism and separatist violence exacerbated religious tensions in Punjab and heightened the already powerful sense of sectarian vulnerability of the minority religions in India. The rhetoric of these later accounts of the *haa da naara* is more explicit in portraying Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan as a "good Muslim" who sets aside loyalty to his master the Mughal Emperor and any sense of

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<sup>294</sup> Some accounts assert that she died from exposure in the Thanda Burj. The *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* asserts that she martyred herself by jumping from the tower or by passing out from the shock and falling to her death. "Hearing of their murder, Mata Gujri fainted and fell from the tower in which she was imprisoned and gave up her breath." Giani Gian Singh, *op cit*, p. 778.

religious solidarity in order to defend the *sahibzadas*. This understanding of the meaning of the *haa da naara* and the Guru's blessing comes to dominate not only modern Sikh versions, but also most popular oral narratives that I heard and the Muslim oral and written accounts as well. With the exception of Sukha Singh's vitriolic web log, this moment is emblematic of the possibility of a society in which religious affiliation does not determine loyalty and enmity. This is significant also as Malerkotla is now the only Muslim region remaining in Indian Punjab as part of the Sikh drive to purge the region of Muslims, according to Ian Copland, was to "clear a territorial space for the Sikh homeland – a space bereft of Muslims that the Sikhs could dominate by virtue of their military dominance and control over the agrarian economy."<sup>295</sup> The remaining Muslim region must be reconciled and incorporated into the new Sikh dominated polity. These narratives of the *haa da naara* give evidence of past points of cooperation. Furthermore, and increasingly as Hindu nationalist politics have been ascendant, Sikhs and Muslims are both minority religious populations coping with similar challenges of being minority religious populations. Thus this event is an important example of the kind of coalition building and preemptive self-identification as people of conscience first and religion after that they must assume in order to guarantee their safety as citizens. Lauding past examples of inter-religious cooperation provides both a motivating ideal for people from all communities and also a security strategy for minority religions. Thus the fact of Malerkotla's survival of the Partition crisis combined with the wholly new demographic and political dynamic in the Punjab allows this narrative representation of Malerkotla's ethic of harmony to take on real force in generating the kind of ideal society it represents. Thus the power of the Guru's blessing to preserve Malerkotla

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<sup>295</sup> Copland, "The Master and the Maharajas," p. 696.

from harm in all subsequent periods of tension with Sikh armies, rulers, and movements becomes quite real and ever more prominent in histories of the region.

### **The *haa da naara* in Muslim Sources**

Muslim narratives of the *haa da naara* tend to emphasize the sound religious basis of Sher Muhammad Khan's objection to the execution. Although structurally quite similar to the Sikh accounts, this element of the protest is highlighted to accentuate the Nawab's righteousness. In his *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadraddin*, Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of Malerkotla, asserts that after the failure of his *haa da naara* Sher Muhammad Khan returned to his kingdom and did not participate in any further campaigns against the Guru.<sup>296</sup> Iftikhar Ali Khan gives three reasons for Sher Muhammad Khan's refusal to rejoin the battle. First, Sher Muhammad Khan "was so much touched by the calamities and hardships that Guru Gobind Singh had to face that he had not the heart to add to his troubles and considered it a crime to participate in any struggle against him."<sup>297</sup> This description of Sher Muhammad Khan's motivations reinforces the representation of Sher Muhammad Khan, and by extension his descendents, as a compassionate and tender-hearted man. Second, lest this impression lead to his being thought weak or unmilitary, Iftikhar Ali Khan also points out that he chose for military and strategic reasons not to subject his troops to the hardships of the particular battle. Third, "on

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<sup>296</sup> This assertion must be balanced against a contemporary account of Sher Muhammad Khan's presence and valor in battle against Banda Bahadur. Muhammad Qasim authored the *Ibrātnāma* in about 1723, an account of the campaigns of Banda Bahadur. He specifically references Malerkotla and Sher Muhammad Khan's active defence of Wazir Khan in a battle against the Sikhs. Although Iftikhar Ali Khan is claiming only that Sher Muhammad Khan did not attack Guru Gobind Singh, still the fact of Sher Muhammad Khan's ongoing loyalty to the Mughal powers is undeniable. Qasim writes, "A great battle occurred twelve *kurohs* from Sahrind. The young men of the army of Islam, showing exemplary bravery, tasted martyrdom, after obtaining repute in the field of valour. Especially was heroism displayed in this battle by Sher Muhammad and Khwaja 'Ali, Afghans of Kotla Maler, who in this *sarkar* (i.e. district) were masters of a host and commanded trust. After much fighting, they stood firm like the Pole Star within that very circle and surrendered their lives to the Creator. You may say, they attained goodness and good name in that field of valour." It is also worth noting that Qasim makes no mention of the *haa da naara*. J.S. Grewal and Irfan Habib, eds. *Sikh History from Persian Sources*. New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), p. 116.

<sup>297</sup> Khan, *History*, p. 37.

hearing that the Guru was pleased with him at the protest he had launched with the Chakladar [i.e. Wazir Khan] to spare the lives of his sons, he did not think it advisable to turn his blessings into curses." Although undated, the *History* was likely written shortly after independence, as the last chapter is Iftikhar Ali Khan's ascension speech in 1948.<sup>298</sup> For Iftikhar Ali Khan, writing in the immediate aftermath of the trauma and bloodshed of Partition that nearly eradicated every Muslim from the surrounding region, there is little doubt that he would be greatly concerned to emphasize the possibility of inter-religious cooperation and loyalty. Many of his subjects were Sikh and the kingdom of Malerkotla was surrounded by two much larger Sikh states, Patiala and Nabha. Maintaining positive relations with his own population as well as his neighbors was evidently important to him from the way in which he depicts the *haa da naara* and its impact on Malerkotla history.

Although Iftikhar Ali Khan does devote a considerable amount of text to the valor of Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan in battle against the Sikhs, even more space is given over to descriptions of the Nawab's bravery in standing up in court to oppose the murder of Guru Gobind Singh's sons. When the two boys were brought before the court and invited to embrace Islam (and in so doing save their lives) they are depicted as tenaciously holding their ground and their faith. "Many temptations were placed before them and they were persuaded in every possible way to become Muslims, but they refused to do so. They were offered the entire *jagīr* of Anandpur, besides the high rank of an official which would eventually be bestowed upon them, but they spurned all temptations."<sup>299</sup> Wazir Khan eventually decides that the boys must die, as they are potential future rulers and powerful symbols for the Sikh community. Not only

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<sup>298</sup> There is no mention of his service as a representative to PEPSU (the Patiala and East Punjab States Union) immediately after the dissolution of the princely states in November of 1948, or as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) after the demise of PEPSU in 1954. Iftikhar Ali Khan died in 1982.

<sup>299</sup> Khan, *History*, p. 34-5.

must they be executed, but it is determined that they should be walled up alive. At this point, Iftikhar Ali Khan writes that Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan objected most strenuously to this act,

He was bold enough to say that it was against all principles of equity and justice that the two children should be made to suffer for no fault of their own and should pay for the deeds of their father. Such tyranny was against the dictates of Shariat and Islam.<sup>300</sup>

Here the Islamic grounds for the objection come to the forefront. Not only is the killing of the *sahibzadas* unjust, but it is also against *shari'ah*, Islamic law. Although Iftikhar Ali Khan is not specific about the codes of Islamic law that would contravene the execution, he does clearly state that there is a religious basis for acting against one's fellow Muslims.<sup>301</sup>

Although the Nawab's brother and nephew were killed fighting the Guru, Sher Muhammad Khan is not interested in revenge. He repeatedly insists that, although he would gladly meet the Guru on an open battlefield, the killing of captives has no honor, and "True Chivalry does not lie in tormenting helpless prisoners but lies in treating them with compassion."<sup>302</sup> According to Iftikhar Ali Khan, the Nawab even offers himself as guardian for the boys, "so as to keep a check on their actions and movements and not to allow them to entertain any kind of ideas of sedition or disloyalty in their minds."<sup>303</sup> In Iftikhar Ali Khan's rendition, Sher Muhammad Khan's appeal is much more fully fleshed out, as might be expected in an account by his descendent. Here Sher Muhammad Khan appears just, compassionate, and brave for standing up to his commander and, through him, to the Mughal Emperor. When Wazir

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>301</sup> There is ample evidence from the Qur'an and the Hadith that the killing of noncombatants, especially women and children is expressly forbidden in the waging of war (usually called *harb* or *qatl*, rather than *jihād*). For example, Qur'an 5:32 states, "Whosoever kills an innocent human being, it shall be as if he has killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind."

<sup>302</sup> Khan, *History*, p. 34.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

Khan decides to disregard the plea, no particular motivation for his refusal is given. Sucha Nand is not mentioned at all in the account, nor is any other scapegoat.

Perhaps most remarkable is an additional detail which appears in Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History*. Here we have the first mention of a letter purportedly written by the Nawab to Aurangzeb on behalf of the boys, in which Sher Muhammad Khan appeals to the Emperor's sense of justice and his faith in Islam for mercy. The claim that the Nawab actually wrote a letter to Aurangzeb describing his objections is dubious at best. A verifiable copy of this letter is no longer extant. Translations do exist and it is a moving statement, but most scholars of Punjab history are skeptical of its authenticity.<sup>304</sup> At a meeting of the Punjab Historical Society, an archivist from the National Archives in Delhi presented a copy of the supposed letter. The copy had been presented to Jawaharlal Nehru by Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan in the 1950's. However, "on the basis of a critical appraisal of the document... the Conference expressed its strong doubts about the authenticity of the petition."<sup>305</sup> In spite of its doubtful veracity, the letter has come to be quite important locally. For example, a gurdwara known as the Haa Da Naara Gurdwara was built twenty years ago, on property formerly belonging to the Nawab. It has a Punjabi and English translation of the letter posted in its courtyard. Also, several historians of Punjab have published translations of the letter in *The Sikh Review*. In January of 1967 a reprint of the Persian original and a translation appeared without attribution. Then in December of 1968 M.L. Peace published a poetic rendition of the letter under the title "Historic Epistle." A 2000 history of Malerkotla, *Malerkotla: Itihas ke Darpan mein* (Malerkotla: In the Mirror of History) by Khalid Zubairy includes a Hindi translation of the letter. Interestingly, earlier accounts, including the Sikh histories of the period, make no mention of a letter, merely of the act of

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<sup>304</sup> The complete text of the letter as reproduced in the Nawab's history is attached as an appendix.

<sup>305</sup> *Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference*, Volume XVIII, p. 201.

protest. It is difficult to determine when the first reference to a letter came into currency.<sup>306</sup>

Certainly it is a stretch to imagine that in such a situation that a letter posted to Aurangzeb who was campaigning in the Deccan, many hundreds of miles away, would have had any efficacy or purpose.

Iftikhar Ali Khan presents the entirety of the letter in his *History*. Whatever its authenticity it does contain the most fully articulated religious justification for sparing the *sahibzadas* found in any of the accounts of the *haa da naara*.<sup>307</sup> He writes:

It would, in no way be consistent with the principles of sovereignty and supreme power to wreak the vengeance of the misdeeds of a whole nation on two innocent children who, on account of their tender age are quite innocent and unable to take a stand against the all powerful Viceroy [of Sirhind]. This sort of action obviously appears to be absolutely against the dictates of Islam and the laws propounded by the founder of Islam (May God's blessings be showered on him) and your Majesty's humble servant is afraid that the enactment of such an atrocious act would perpetually remain an ugly blot on the face of your Majesty's renowned justice and righteousness."<sup>308</sup>

The Nawab realizes his proposals and his protests will likely go unheeded (though possibly not unpunished) as he then asserts, "the fear of God and the urge of faith does not allow the undue suppression of truths." He goes on to declare that if his plea "is deprived of the honor of acceptance, still your Majesty's humble and devoted servant shall have the consolation of having performed the sacred duty of expressing what was right and just and not having allowed his pen to deviate in the expression of truth."<sup>309</sup> The prominence of the incident in the *History* is significant as an indication that the Nawabs saw their relationship to the Sikh population of

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<sup>306</sup> Some locals speculate that it was about the time of the Kothala firings when the Praja Mandal movement against the princely states was active. As the preponderance of these freedom fighters were Sikhs, it is plausible that the Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan might have sought to shore up his support among this group by reviving this historical moment of Sikh-Muslim cooperation. However, no evidence exists to confirm or deny this speculation.

<sup>307</sup> The phrase *haa da naara* simply means a cry for justice or a call of protest. It does not specifically indicate either an oral or a written objection. The verb it is usually paired with *marna*, means to strike. As a compound, *haa da naara mariya*, "He gave a cry for justice," is emphatic and indicates a force and conviction which the English translation does not fully indicate.

<sup>308</sup> Khan, *History*, p. 36.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

Malerkotla and the Punjab, not as perpetually contentious, but as potentially cooperative. By emphasizing Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan's commitment to justice, and basing this commitment in his strong faith in Islam, the author places the past into the service of the present. Writing the *History* in a Muslim region of a Sikh majority state, Iftikhar Ali Khan reminds his readers of all faiths that Islam does not condone injustice or indiscriminate slaughter. On the contrary, as evidenced in the case of the Nawab and the Guru's sons, true Islam is based on principles of justice and righteousness that supersede battle lines and religious boundaries. Iftikhar Ali Khan also describes the moment when the Guru hears of the tragic fate of his sons, reportedly asking if anyone was there to speak for his children. On "hearing that Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan had strongly protested and tried his best to save his sons from their awful fate, the hands of the Guru were raised in prayer for the Nawab's prosperity saying that 'His roots will ever remain green.' And that from now onwards the Mughal Empire would decline."<sup>310</sup> It is this blessing that becomes one of the most powerful elements of Malerkotla's identity in subsequent years. Iftikhar Ali Khan is the first to link in print the blessing of the Guru to Malerkotla's peace. He asserts that in subsequent battles and confrontations with Sikh armies and movements Malerkotla was spared the full force of Sikh violence. This is attributed to Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan's vigorous defense of the Guru's sons.

By contrast, Inayat Ali Khan, also a descendent of Sher Muhammad Khan had given a brief account of the *haa da naara*, in his 1882 book *Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*. Far more space is devoted to the numbers of villages acquired and the battles waged by Sher Muhammad Khan. Nonetheless, he does portray the scene as a moment when his ancestor spoke courageously against an injustice. Having been captured, the *sahibzadas*

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid, p. 35. This may well be an unattributed translation from of Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha's *Mahankosh* entry for Malerkotla.

fell into the hands of the conquerors and were tortured to death, being buried alive under the walls of Sirhind by the order of the Subah. At the time of this horrible execution Sher Mahommed was present: he being disgusted at such a shameful and cowardly manner of taking revenge upon the innocent, remonstrated against it. The imperial officers did not pay heed to the remonstrance; they were resolutely determined to set a severe example, and to carry this into effect had decided upon the above mode of punishment. However, Sher Mahommed's efforts to do away with the that cruel punishment were not altogether without result, seeing that they won the affection of Guru Govind Singh who, on hearing the sad news of his sons' death, enquired if there was any one who advocated mercy to the children, and being told that Sher Mahommed had used every endeavour to obtain their release, was so influenced by his feelings that he offered up his fervent prayers for Sher Mahommed despite the past troubles and defeat he had received at the Khan's hands.<sup>311</sup>

Inayat Ali Khan's account goes into no detail whatsoever about the scene of the *sahibzadas* questioning and ultimate execution. Sher Muhammad Khan is not depicted as having any religiously based objections, the punishment is merely described as "cruel" and "cowardly." Written long before Partition in a Muslim ruled kingdom, Inayat Ali Khan does not seem to be interested at all in emphasizing this event as an example of inter-religious solidarity or as a model for present or future behavior. In his view the significant aspects of the event are that Sher Muhammad Khan spoke against the killing, and that subsequently Guru Gobind Singh blessed him for his mercy. Interestingly, no mention is made of a letter written to Aurangzeb or any other "endeavour" to save Zorawar and Fateh Singh from their fates.

In Sufi Ismail's *Bagh al-Anbiya" Punjab*, the *haa da naara* is remarked in a brief footnote. Sufi Ismail's description seems to serve several purposes. First, he details the foundation of a nearby town, Sherpur, in the name of the ruler. Second, he portrays the mercy and justice of the Nawab thereby explaining the affection of the Sikhs for Sher Muhammad Khan. Third, he remarks upon the subsequent neglect of his grave. He writes:

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<sup>311</sup> Khan, (1882), p.p. 13-14.

The town of Sherpur was founded in the name of Nawab Sher Ali Khan Sahib [sic] who in Sirhind in the court of Wazir Sube Khan had sympathy upon the children of Guru Gobind Singh and called for their release. Because of this the Sikh people believe strongly in him and remember him. His grave is in the Malerkotla Dhaba Gate graveyard but now no one goes there at all. Now all the care of the graves has been given to the Islamiyya School Branch.<sup>312</sup>

Sufi Ismail demonstrates little interest in these events other than in the mark they have left on the built environment of the region. He takes note of the fact that Sikhs remember the martyrdom of the *sahibzadas* and the *haa da naara* of Sher Muhammad Khan, but he also remarks upon their neglect of the Nawab's grave. However, even this mention of Sher Muhammad Khan is a sidebar. As the book is an Urdu *tazkīra* (biography) of Muslim saints, it is unlikely this was a concern for him. It is worth remembering that the primary significance of Malerkotla in the book is its role as God's chosen custodian of Islam in Indian Punjab after the Partition.

Iftikhar Ali Khan also emphasizes the Islamic aspects of Sher Muhammad Khan's defense, but he attributes great salvific power to the *haa da naara* or the Guru's blessing. For example, Banda Bahadur, the Sikh general who waged campaigns across Punjab after Guru Gobind Singh's death apparently never attacked Malerkotla. Although Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, had materially assisted the ruler of Sirhind in the campaign against Guru Gobind Singh, Malerkotla was unscathed. On the other hand, Sirhind, where the execution of the Guru's sons took place, was leveled. According to Iftikhar Ali Khan, Banda Bahadur did not include Malerkotla in his campaign of retributive violence against the enemies of the Guru because of the Guru's blessing. In his *History*, he explains the apparent mystery of Bahadur's avoidance of Malerkotla:

After the destruction of Sirhind the power of the Sikhs grew enormously and they were practically the paramount power in the Panjab. The small Muslim States of

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<sup>312</sup> Sufi Muhammad Ismail, *Bagh Anbiyā" Punjāb*, (Malerkotla; Janab Doctor Muhammad Nizamuddin Sahib, 1995), p. 173.

the Panjab were scenes of horror and bloodshed and Sikh atrocities were beyond description. On several occasions during these disturbances the Sikhs tried to persuade their leader to attack Malerkotla but he always pacified them by saying that as Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan was dear to Guru Gobind Singh he would never think of attacking the ruler of Malerkotla. During the course of these upheavals, the Sikh army had to pass through the State several times but no damage was done to anything belonging to its territory.<sup>313</sup>

Although Iftikhar Ali Khan clearly attributes Banda's avoidance of Malerkotla to the Guru's blessing, other authors give a different reason. Several accounts report that upon reaching the town, Banda was approached by a Hindu ascetic, Baba Atma Ram, a Bairagi sadhu, and enjoined not to attack. Prior to his conversion to Sikhism at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda had been a Hindu ascetic, possibly of the same lineage.<sup>314</sup> Thus entreated by his *gurubhai*, or spiritual brother, he could not refuse. From all reports Banda Bahadur was a deeply spiritual man and may well have been influenced by such a plea.

According to a recent biography, Bahadur came to Malerkotla with the object of punishing the kingdom for its role in the attack on the Guru at Anandpur and for the seizing of Anup Kaur.<sup>315</sup> Anup Kaur was a woman of the Guru's household who was believed to have been captured and kept by Sher Muhammad Khan. She refused to accept Islam and took her own life rather than submit to any other fate. Her body was buried rather than burned and this incident has been used as a precipitating excuse for attack by a number of assailants, including Banda Bahadur and Sahib Singh Bedi.<sup>316</sup> Varinder Singh Bhatia, a historian and professor at Punjabi University, Patiala, claims that Banda Bahadur sought Anup Kaur's remains but spared Malerkotla because of the Guru's blessing. In a brief article seeking to counter the common view

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<sup>313</sup> Khan, *History*, p. 39.

<sup>314</sup> Khan, *History*, and Satinder Kaur, "History of Malerkotla State" (MA, Punjabi University, 1977).

<sup>315</sup> Sohan Singh, *Life and Exploits of Banda Singh Bahadur*, (Patiala; Punjabi University Press, 2000).

<sup>316</sup> See also, Satinder Kaur thesis, pp. 56-67. Kaur further asserts that a "Shahukar sadhu, Atma Ram Bairagi gave Banda Bahadur rs. 4,000 not to destroy Malerkotla. She also reports that a fair is held at the site of this confrontation at Nimani Kadsi, a village one mile from Malerkotla. I was unable to confirm or deny this. Kaur also identifies the main reason for Banda's not damaging Malerkotla, in spite of passing through the Muslim principality many times, is the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh.

that Banda Bahadur was anti-Muslim, Bhatia writes of this event as evidence of Banda's selective campaigning only against those who participated in anti-Sikh campaigning. In order to refute the claim that Banda desecrated the graves of Muslims, Bhatia points out that the monumental tombs at Sirhind remain intact and that only in Malerkotla was a grave specifically dug up.

As regards the digging of graves we may say that only at Malerkotla the grave of Bibi Anoop Kaur, was dug out and her remains were cremated according to Sikh rites, because she had been forcibly carried away by Sher Muhammad Khan from Sirsa rivulet in December 1704 and buried in a grave after she had committed suicide to save her honour. The town of Malerkotla was also spared for Sher Muhammad Khan who had appealed for mercy for the sons of Guru Govind Singh at the time of their execution at Sirhind.<sup>317</sup>

Bhatia, writing in 1996, thus reiterates the widely held belief that Sher Muhammad Khan had captured a woman from the house of the Guru, and that she subsequently killed herself to avoid being raped. Given the prominence of rumors of sexual violence in past and present incidents of inter-religious conflict, the existence of this strong tradition regarding Sher Muhammad Khan is quite significant.<sup>318</sup> Often the rumor or reality of such incidents can be a precipitating cause for the outbreak of violence in a highly charged communal atmosphere. Clearly in the aftermath of the Guru's death as Banda Bahadur waged numerous successful and bloody campaigns across Punjab, particularly targeting the past allies of the Mughals, the atmosphere was indeed charged. Yet it is a widespread belief that the power of the Guru's blessing prevented Banda from attacking Malerkotla. The strength of this belief is also supported by the historian Ganda Singh, who claims, "the Sikhs have always remembered this protest of the Nawab with gratitude, and throughout their troubled relations with the Muslim powers they have always spared the house of

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<sup>317</sup> Varinder Singh Bhatia, "Banda Singh's Attitude Towards the Muslims," *Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference*, (Volume XXVIII, 1996), p. 74.

<sup>318</sup> See Sudhir Kakar, *Colors of Violence*; Brass, *Theft of an Idol*; Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds*; Gyanendra Pandey, "The Long Life of Rumor," *Alternatives* (Volume 27, no. 2, 2002), all of which address the role of rumors of sexual violence in fueling inter-religious conflicts.

Malerkotla from their attacks."<sup>319</sup> The Guru's blessing of Sher Muhammad Khan is believed by many Punjab historians, Malerkotla residents, and visitors to outweigh the Nawab's participation with the Mughals in the campaigns against the Guru *and* the capture and death of Anup Kaur demonstrates the centrality of this narrative in forming Malerkotla's identity.<sup>320</sup>

Although some historians, such as J.S. Grewal, assert that Malerkotla was spared because Banda's campaign simply did not take him through the kingdom, popular wisdom generally attributes Malerkotla's safety at this and other moments to the Guru's blessing. For example, this is the assessment of Ramesh Walia, a historian of the Praja Mandal movement, which sought the end of princely rule in India. He writes:

The Phulkian rulers [i.e., Patiala and Jind] never tried to capture this small Muslim State because of an interesting fact of Sikh history. Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan who came to power in 1672 had remonstrated with the Sirhind Faujdar against the cold-blooded murder of the innocent younger children of Guru Gobind Singh who were butchered to death in December 1704. So even this Muslim State had a link with Sikh history and claimed blessings of the Gurus.<sup>321</sup>

Walia, like so many other Sikh historians, sees the blessing of the Guru as a sufficient explanation for Malerkotla's relative security. Although he is absolutely incorrect in his view that the neighboring Sikh states never tried to capture Malerkotla, Walia's

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<sup>319</sup> Ganda Singh and Teja Singh, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, p. 73, fn. 2.

<sup>320</sup> Sohan Singh, a biographer of Banda Bahadur, claimed that although he came seeking to recover the body of Anup Kaur, Banda encountered a former patron, rather than a *gurubhai*, who entreated him not to attack. Singh describes the events in the following way:

But fortunately for the man and the place, there was a *sahukar* [wealthy man] at whose house Banda, in his days of asceticism had sojourned – a kindness which he gratefully remembered. That *sahukar* implored him to spare the town as well as the life of the Nawab, and to accept from him a present of rs. 5000 besides homage as over-lord. Thus it was that Malerkotla escaped pillage which, but for the intercession of a friend of Banda's, was quite inevitable."

Banda then demanded Anup Kaur's bones and had them properly cremated. Even with such provocation, it is said he did not attack. Although this is an interesting story, it is unsubstantiated, and some historians simply assert that Banda's route from Nabha on the campaign following Sirhind did not lead through Malerkotla. For whatever reason, Banda Bahadur did spare Malerkotla the wrath he visited upon Sirhind. Sohan Singh, *Life and Exploits of Banda Singh Bahadur*, (Patiala; Punjabi University Press, 2000), p. 66-67.

<sup>321</sup> Walia, *Praja Mandal Movement*, p. 30.

perspective on the power of the simple blessing is an important cultural fact. Even in his scholarly study it is not out of place to attribute salvific power to the *haa da naara* and the Guru's blessing.

Establishing the origin of this explanation for Banda's restraint is difficult, but it is possible to determine where these accounts appear. Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History* explains Banda's restraint as respect for the Guru's blessing. This version emphasizes the honor of the great ruler, Sher Mohammad Khan, and the noble and just role he played at the court of Sirhind. Interestingly, the Nawab does not emphasize the strength of the State or the Malerkotla army as any additional deterrent. Indeed Iftikhar Ali Khan describes Malerkotla during both attacks as vulnerable and isolated. Furthermore, Sher Mohammad Khan is not depicted as traitorous to his Muslim overlords. Rather he is a just and liberal ruler whose wisdom commands the respect of people of all religious faiths, even those who would usually be enemies. Sikh accounts also assert that Malerkotla was unharmed primarily due to the Nawab's protest. This accentuates the extreme forbearance of the Sikh armies, that even with a righteous cause and great provocation, they are not an undisciplined, bloodthirsty gang, but the Guru's *khalsa* (the Pure). Thus these stories utilize multiple explanatory schemes, ranging from the divine power of the Guru's blessing, to the practical appeasement of the Nawabs, to the intervention of a Hindu holy man. This variety of accounts involves the full range of Malerkotla's diverse population as contributors and participants in this event that concerned the security of the kingdom. Indeed there are several other points in Malerkotla's history when the involvement of all religious communities in the preservation of the kingdom is required. These moments are highlighted in historical texts, especially the *History* of the last Nawab as a testimony to the patriotism and peace of all the resident communities.

## **The *haa da naara* in popular culture**

Oral accounts of the *haa da naara* are remarkably similar in terms of the intended significance, to the written ones discussed above. Punjabis of all religions tell this story, usually citing it as evidence of a shared history of communal cooperation, a precedent for current shared practices, and a justification for continued exchange. This moment in which a Muslim ruler with every political and personal reason to execute the young sons of the Sikh Guru instead chose to exceed sectarian loyalties in the name of justice is a singularly compelling event that continues to activate the imagination of Punjabis today. Although these events, if indeed they took place as recounted, occurred three hundred years ago, they are far from being relegated to a dimly recalled and hoary past. Quite the contrary, the range and variety of occasions upon which the story of the *haa da naara* was and is told testify to its ongoing relevance to Punjabi, not just Malerkotla, identities. For many of the people with whom I discussed these events, it was a gripping tale of a moment that exemplifies an idealized view of Punjab's inter-religious harmony and exchange. This pluralistic ideal is pervasive in Punjab, as is the story of the *haa da naara*, and both are integral to Punjabi identity.

The widespread force and appeal of the *haa da naara* as a compelling narrative and a signifying event became vividly apparent to me quite far away from Malerkotla or Fatehgarh Sahib. I was at a festival for Baba Farid in Faridkot, some 250 kilometers away from Malerkotla. My purpose there was to see how Sufi saints are celebrated by non-Muslims in a totally non-Muslim environment as there are almost no Muslims in Faridkot since Partition. I was inquiring from the mostly Sikh pilgrims at the shrines to Baba Farid about their perceptions of the Muslim saint and their relationship to his tradition as non-Muslims. A small group

gathered around me on the grass at a gurdwara dedicated to Baba Farid.<sup>322</sup> I had asked several people what stories they knew about the saint. Although many knew poetic compositions attributed to him that are included in the Guru Granth Sahib, few knew accounts of his life. Those that did knew about his coming to the area and of several miracles he performed there. At one point I remarked that there were few Muslims in the area. An elderly man sitting across from me responded, "There are Muslims in Malerkotla." Then, a woman next to me, who had earlier recounted a number of tales about Baba Farid, chimed in saying:

Also in Malerkotla, which is a Muslim city, one Muslim rose up against the Muslims and said do not put the sons of Guru Gobind Singh into the walls. If you want to fight, fight directly with Guru Gobind Singh. Why are you killing these innocent children? So he gave the *haa da naara*. A gurdwara is built there in Malerkotla. And Guru Gobind Singh blessed the city, saying that the rule of Muslims will always remain. That is why [Muslims are there]. Only one man gave the *haa da naara*, and they [i.e. the *sahibzadas*] were later killed. That gurdwara is named *haa da naara*. So he was the man who stood against his own religion and said right is right and wrong is wrong. Otherwise people say that they might be right if some Hindu has done something and we were also Hindu, or a Sikh might have said right to what a Sikh has done. So the Guru gave his blessing because that man was against his own religion. Guru Gobind Singh not only uplifted the honor of the Sikhs, but also of the Hindus. At the age of nine years he gave his father for the help and security of the Hindus.<sup>323</sup> He said you cannot forcibly ask anybody to change his religion.

The Sikh woman's narrative applauded the righteousness of those who stand up for justice, even if the cause is not their own, as in the case of Guru Gobind Singh, or even against their own religion, as in the case of the Muslim of Malerkotla. Though she did not give the name of the Muslim who stood up for the sons of the Guru, she knew the event as the *haa da naara*, the cry for justice. She told this tale in connection with an ongoing discussion about how religions relate to one another. I had not mentioned Malerkotla and my research there. In order to make a point

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<sup>322</sup> This gurdwara, Godri Sahib Gurdwara, is where Baba Farid is believed to have performed a *chilla*, or forty-day retreat.

<sup>323</sup> According to Sikh tradition, Guru Gobind Singh's father, Guru Teg Bahadur, was killed defending the rights of Hindus to worship freely.

about the possibility of humanity superceding religious boundaries, this Sikh devotee of Baba Farid spontaneously narrated an event in Malerkotla's past that is emblematic of such a gesture. Furthermore, her narration indicates that this is a moment of symbolic importance throughout the Sikh community and beyond. Her perspective and depth of feeling about the event and its significance were by no means unique. By the end of my research it was apparent to me that the *haa da naara* is perhaps the single most famous and powerful episode in Malerkotla's history, providing an important narrative element in the construction of Malerkotla's peaceful present.

In Malerkotla the *haa da naara* is an important part of local lore. Almost no public gathering goes by without mention being made of the events. The impact of the gesture by Sher Muhammad Khan made three hundred years ago is still expressed by many residents. For example, the president of the Sikh Students Federation in Malerkotla claimed that the electoral successes of the Pathan Muslims were due to Sikh support. He said that the Sikhs vote for the Pathan Nawabs because they are descendents of the ruler who gave the *haa da naara*. Because of this abiding respect and gratitude, the Sikhs vote in a bloc, whereas Hindus are divided between BJP and Congress. Because both Muslims and Sikhs vote for the Pathans, they win in the elections. This same view was given by the *granthi* (reciter of the Guru Granth Sahib) at the Haa da Naara Gurdwara. He claimed that because of the *haa da naara*, "A Muslim MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) or MP (Member of Parliament) can get elected here because of this. In our area in District Sangrur from here the MLA is always Muslim." I asked why this was so, and the *granthi* responded that it was "Because Sikh people vote for them."

Not only do people use the *haa da naara* to explain Sikh electoral support for Muslim candidates, but also to account for the enormous power and appeal of Haider Shaikh. As I described in the previous section, many devotees at Haider Shaikh's *dargah* conflate Sher

Muhammad Khan and Haider Shaikh, believing that it was the Shaikh not the Nawab who defended the two sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Yet this "error" does not reveal a false history.

Rather, as Alessandro Portelli observes, citing Hans Magnus Enzenberger, history

'is an invention which reality supplies with raw materials. It is not, however, an arbitrary invention, and the interest it arouses is rooted in the interests of the teller.' This is why 'wrong' tales...are so very valuable. They allow us to recognize the interests of the tellers, and the dreams and desires beneath them."<sup>324</sup>

Clearly, any telling of history reveals interest, and the nature of that interest becomes (more) apparent by studying how the memories of an event are organized. The meaning of the telling changes with alterations in the temporal location or sequence of events, revealing the interest of the interlocutor. One of the key narrative strategies employed in making these shifts is what Portelli terms displacement and condensation. Instead of merely hunting for the "truth" of an incorrectly reported event, "the causes of this collective error must be sought, rather than in the event itself, in the meaning which it derived from the actors' state of mind at the time; from its relation to subsequent historical developments; and from the activity of memory and imagination."<sup>325</sup> Thus the meaning of a historical narrative is most clearly discernible in the ways people use it, not solely in the reality of the events themselves.

In the case of Haider Shaikh's conflation with his descendent Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan, this temporal and figural displacement and condensation of meaning into the figure of the Shaikh increases his importance for the Sikh population in particular. In part this is due to the exemplary model of the *haa da naara* as an incident in which religious divisions were secondary to human rights. One Hindu man said, "This *pir* of Malerkotla raised his voice against the walling up of the children. He rose above religious differences to the realm of humanity." The

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<sup>324</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, p. 2.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

identification of a realm beyond religious divisions as a "realm of humanity" is an important addition to our understanding of the significance of the *haa da naara* for locals and visitors to Malerkotla. Clearly one of the great appeals of the town and the shrine for those who are present there is its identity as a model for such non-sectarian behavior. This sentiment was clearly expressed by a Sikh devotee who pulled me aside at one of the festivals for Haider Shaikh in May 2001 and said, "There is no Hindu, no Sikh, there is only the commonality of the *pīrs* (*pīran da sanjha*). This *pīr* gave the *haa da naara* when Guru Gobind Singh's son's were bricked up alive."<sup>326</sup>

Numerous devotees reported that Haider Shaikh is capable of fulfilling the desires of the faithful *because* of Guru Gobind Singh's blessing. Because Haider Shaikh is believed to have protested the *sahibzadas* execution he was endowed with the power to perform miracles. A Sikh man gave a detailed but temporally and historically incorrect account of Haider Shaikh that expressed this belief in the source of the Shaikh's power.

Baba Shaikh Sadruddin is from a Pathan family, Afghans who came to worship at Sirhind in the name of God. Two of his sons married, he had one other son and one daughter. When Aurangzeb was acting like a despot, then he was the only one to say do not do this. The saint said why are you doing this? When Guru Gobind Singh came and asked who had protested his children's killing, then they said that Baba Haider Shaikh did and he was blessed forever after. Because of this blessing, Haider Shaikh has power. He can clear the mixed up mind and encourage concentration, he can heal diseases, give children, help studies, improve business. You can offer anything, but you must come with a clean heart, doing no wrong, harming no others, following God.<sup>327</sup>

This expression of Haider Shaikh's personality and power in many ways encapsulates the reasons for his enormous appeal among non-Muslims. Whether he is placed in the fifteenth century or the eighteenth, Haider Shaikh represents a spirit of ecumenicism. As the first Sikh devotee

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<sup>326</sup> May 31, 2001.

<sup>327</sup> Personal interview, May 31, 2001.

remarked, he rose above religion to humanity. For many of the devotees, confusing Haider Shaikh with Sher Muhammad Khan and attributing the *haa da naara* to the Shaikh intensifies these qualities. Given that the elision is so common among the visitors to the tomb it is clear that the non-sectarian spirit of the saint is one of the major reasons that tens of thousands of people attend his festivals five times a year.

However, the *haa da naara* is not always credited to Haider Shaikh. Most residents and many devotees do know the story of Sher Muhammad Khan and Guru Gobind Singh. Some believe that the *haa da naara* and the Guru's blessing have alone been sufficient to preserve Malerkotla from all harm, particularly at the hands of Sikhs. As one Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba from Ludhiana posted in a website, "Malerkotla is a most respected house in Punjab. They have earned this gratitude by the action of their ancestors." Lamba also posted a translation of the purported letter of the Nawab to the discussion group and followed it up with this praise and description of the events. He depicts Sher Muhammad Khan as having "lodged vehement protests against this inhuman act and said it is against the glorious tenets of Koran and Islam and the history will never forgive them for this heinous crime." The result of this powerful declamation and the subsequent blessing of the Guru is that "It is a historic fact that during the 1947 riots when the whole of Punjab was in flames it was the State of Malerkotla which did not witness a single incident of violence. It was an island of peace. This is the testimony to the fact that the power of religion or morality is much more strong and real than any other power."<sup>328</sup> Thus in the perception of Lamba and many others, it is religion which led Sher Muhammad Khan to protest. Rather than being a source of social divisiveness, deeply felt faith – whether

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<sup>328</sup> Gurcharanjit S. Lamba, "Re: History-'Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan's Plea,'" December 4, 1999, <http://www.sikhnet.com/sikhnet/discussion.nsf/0/FD37B42B9B26DA288725683D0064806B>, (April 19, 2003).

Sikh or Muslim – lead one to act in a just and humane manner. This web posting is just one of countless examples of the pervasive impact of the *haa da naara* on Punjabi society.

Still, the peculiar power of the *haa da naara* is hard to explain. After all, Sher Muhammad Khan failed. The events surrounding the escape, betrayal, imprisonment, and execution of Zorawar and Fateh Singh are among the most poignant in Sikh history. Perhaps the appeal is due to the clarity of the moral judgment against Wazir Khan, the *faujdar* of Sirhind, and those who supported him and encouraged him in his decision to kill the children.<sup>329</sup> The event epitomizes the nadir of relations between the Mughals and the Sikhs, giving clear proof to the Sikhs of Mughal intolerance, injustice and cruelty. This, along with the continued persecution of the Guru, promotes a united front among the Sikhs who rallied around this outrage and cried out for retributive action. Indeed, as discussed above, Sirhind was one of Banda Bahadur's first stops on his campaign through the Punjab after Guru Gobind Singh's death. Sirhind was basically razed to the ground, though numerous monumental tombs remain standing in the area, all of which are emblems of Muslim authority, either religious or worldly. For many years it was a popular custom among Sikh pilgrims to take one of the tiny ancient bricks from the remaining walls and ruins away with them – thereby obtaining a relic and helping to further demolish the Mughal edifice.<sup>330</sup>

As we have seen, Sikh histories dwell at some length on the tragic martyrdom of the Guru's sons and the subsequent death of his mother, Mata Gujri. In these accounts the pathos of the tale merges into the warrior ideal of the Sikhs. Zorawar and Fateh Singh's refusal to accept

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<sup>329</sup> Grewal and Bal refer to Wazir Khan of Sirhind as a *faujdar*, that is an army commander, as opposed to a *subedar*, the governor of a province, or *subah*.

<sup>330</sup> This practice of removing the bricks was noted by W.L. McGregor in his *History of the Sikhs* (1846), cf. Grewal and Bal, p. 234, n.25. It also appears as a direct order from the Guru as depicted in the *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* of Giani Gian Singh (1841). Singh writes, "The order was given that that city [i.e. Sirhind] should not dwell in peace. 'From such a great sin, my Sikhs will plunder and loot and devastate the place and every Sikh will take its bricks and throw them into the Sutlej.'" Giani Gian Singh, *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa*, p. 778.

Wazir Khan's offer of their lives if they would only convert to Islam is often drawn out at some length. The drama of the moment increases and the brave tenacity of the *sahibzadas* grows as the boys are repeatedly interrogated and then sent back to the Cold Tower to contemplate their fates. Yet they do not break in their faith. Their grandmother, who loves them more than her own life, urges them to remain strong and secure in their knowledge that the Sikh faith will sustain them, that their father the Guru is proud of them, and that there truly is no alternative but to stand up to oppressors. She, more than anyone, was aware of the sacrifices the Sikhs had made in the cause of justice. Her own husband, Guru Tegh Bahadur, had been executed by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan for defending the rights of Hindus to worship freely. And so the boys and their grandmother nightly prayed and reinforced their commitment to the way of the Gurus.

In every account of this event there is one moment of hope, a point where in the eleventh hour the seemingly inexorable march towards the children's death is suspended. But Sher Muhammad Khan fails. His appeal to justice, common sense, and to Islam all fail. Wazir Khan – in some accounts – appears momentarily moved, but his Hindu minister Sucha Nand rallies him around and restores him to the path towards the murder. So the Nawab of Malerkotla fails. He cannot turn the tide. The boys are killed and their execution is of the most brutal and painful nature – they are bricked up alive and then beheaded.<sup>331</sup>

Why is this story of the Nawab's failure to save these children such a powerful narrative, known by most every Sikh in the world and many others? Had the protest been successful and the boys freed or given over to the Nawab, would the story be as prevalent or as meaningful? I would argue not. It *is* the failure of the effort to save the boys, the very futility of the attempt

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<sup>331</sup> By some accounts they are suffocated and then removed from the wall and beheaded, in other accounts they are stabbed through the wall and killed.

that gives the moment such a compelling pathos. The Nawab tried to do what by most moral standards past or present was the right thing. Seven and nine year old children did not present threats to the vast Mughal Empire. However, as martyrs the *sahibzadas* become rallying points to mobilize and consolidate the Sikh community in their name. Thus their death makes them far more symbolically powerful than they were in life. And so the Nawab's effort on their behalf likewise rises in its impact and the extent of its fame. So although he failed, he, like the martyred *sahibzadas* succeeded on a much broader plane. He rose above sectarian divisions, he refused to submit to the pressure of his overlords and Mughal master. It was a simple act, a mere gesture of conscience, but the *haa da naara* remains as one of the most powerful symbols of the possibility that humanity may on occasion rise above sectarian chauvinism, religious prejudice, and the fear of reprisal. Part of the power of this narrative does in fact rely on its failure. Had he hoped to succeed, then his motives might have appeared less pure. Perhaps he hoped to eventually convert the boys, or to gain prestige as their custodian, or use them as bargaining chips with their father. Having failed, his motives remain untainted by such possibilities. The Nawab could have expected to gain nothing by his protest. Yet he seems to have gained an immeasurable boon for future generations in Malerkotla.

The argument that the Nawab's failure is part of the drama and the appeal of the story is also strengthened by the fact that assistance was given to the Guru by Muslims at other times, and they were likewise blessed, but with remarkably different results. For example, after escaping from the very battle in which his two older sons were killed, Guru Gobind Singh arrived at a town called Macchiwara. There Mughal forces surrounded him and escape seemed impossible. However, Gobind Singh was saved by two Muslim brothers, Ghani and Nabhi Khan, who dressed him up in blue garments and, placing him on a palanquin, they carried him

out of the town between the ranks of the soldiers declaring he was Uch ka Pir – the Muslim holy man from a place called Uch (now in Pakistan). The Guru was free and he blessed the Khan brothers, much as he had blessed the Nawab of Malerkotla. This event is also prominently featured in Sikh art and histories but is not memorialized to the extent that the martyrdom of the *sahibzadas* is. It is not unusual to see galleries of paintings housed next to many historic gurdwaras displaying a series of images depicting grotesque torture scenes of the Sikh faithful by various Muslim forces. Sandwiched between them will be a picture of the Guru on the palanquin being carried out of Macchiwara by Ghani and Nabhi Khan. These galleries invariably also display an image of Zorawar and Fateh Singh being bricked up alive. Sometimes the image includes a remonstrating figure – Sher Muhammad Khan objecting to the execution. Yet in the collective memory of the Punjab, especially among the Sikh population, the protest of Sher Muhammad Khan features much more prominently than the rescue of the Guru. The trauma and drama of the boys' death increases exponentially the significance of the event. The *successful* rescue merits gratitude and a place in the gallery of important events in Gobind Singh's life. Not only does the event play a less prominent role in Sikh history, but also there was considerable violence in Macchiwara at Partition and most of the Muslim population left. The Guru's goodwill had little impact there and the bravery of Nabhi and Ghani Khan did not suffice to save the town's Muslims.

This indicates that the Malerkotla Nawab's protest receives greater attention because of the subsequent peace in Malerkotla at Partition. The Guru's blessing is without question the most common explanation among Sikhs, Hindus, and non-residents for Malerkotla's having been spared the violence that happened elsewhere. Although many people – Sikh, Hindu, Muslim – will also attribute peace to Haider Shaikh and the many saints in Malerkotla, even those who do

not believe in the salvific power of the Guru's blessing *do* acknowledge that what has been effective in protecting Malerkotla is the very strong belief of the Sikhs in the blessing. By this account, it is not necessary to pass judgment on the divine power of the Guru. The blessing works because the faithful, especially the Sikhs, respect its sentiment. The symbolic significance of Malerkotla as a place where religious divisions do not obtain is given even greater force when perceived as a directive from the Guru himself.

### **Peace at Partition**

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of Malerkotla's history is its emergence relatively unscathed from the horrific violence that ravaged the South Asian subcontinent during the Partition of 1947. During these terrifying times it is estimated that anywhere from 200,000 to one million people were killed, often in the most gruesome of ways. Entire trainloads of refugees traveling in both directions were slaughtered. Neighbors turned on neighbors. People killed their own daughters to spare them being raped, tortured, and then murdered. People killed themselves.

The Punjab was the state most radically divided on August 15, 1947. The 'Land of the Five Rivers' became two lands: Pakistan's territory encompasses three rivers and two are in modern India. For months before, during and after the fifteenth these rivers were red with blood. An elderly gentleman who served in the Malerkotla army during the time recalls "the main irrigation canal which crossed the Malerkotla state at Ahmedgarh, for days together was full of bloated dead bodies. But there was little we could do except watch them float by."<sup>332</sup> The displaced migrants numbered around fifteen million, seven million Muslims and eight million Hindus and Sikhs. This represents the largest population shift ever recorded in human history.

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<sup>332</sup> Khushi Mohammad quoted in Asit Jolly, "Myth of Maler Kotla," *The Asian Age* 1997.

The impact on the living on all sides of the borders in the east and west continues to be felt, memorialized, mourned, and remembered. Over fifty years later, there is no end to the introspective efforts to understand how a nation could divide against itself in such a gruesome and damaging way, leaving deep scars and abiding enmities.

Studies of Partition and its impact on Indian society proliferate, but in many ways this remains one of the most incomprehensible events in the history of the region.<sup>333</sup> In Punjab, the puzzlement is increased due to the fact that the state, in spite of a Muslim majority and a Muslim Chief Minister, did not support Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League's Pakistan proposal until 1946. The Unionist government led by Sikandar Hayat Khan was a coalition of large landlords from all religious groups. The Muslim League's Lahore Resolution in 1940 raised the call for Pakistan to a national level, and its impact on Punjab, one of the Muslim majority regions, was clear. Clearly, Punjabi Muslims did not support this resolution as the Muslim League won only nominal support in Punjab until 1946.<sup>334</sup> Following the Cripps Mission in 1942 it became apparent that distribution of power in any post-British regime would be communally divided and constructed, whether in terms of confederated states or, as ultimately came to pass, in separate nations. This attenuated the situation in an already conflicted region.

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<sup>333</sup> Many valuable studies of Partition are available. Some recent titles include Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries : Women in India's Partition*, (New Delhi; Kali for Women, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence : Voices from the Partition of India*, (Durham, NC; Duke University Press, 2000); Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Inventing Boundaries : Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2000); Suvir Kaul, ed., *The Partitions of Memory : The Afterlife of the Division of India*, (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 2002), Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>334</sup> In a compelling article about the role of Muslim religious leaders in the eventual support of the Muslim League, David Gilmartin argues that the Unionist Government, caught between the interests of the rural landlords and the urban elite had tended for years to cultivate the landlords' support. For this reason the *sajjida nishins* who controlled the tomb shrines of the Punjab as well as large tracts of land that had been granted to those tomb shrines, tended to support the Unionist Party. But with the aggressive campaigning of the Muslim League whose appeal superceded the question of rural and urban interests focused on the question of religious identity, these leaders began to see a real possibility for gaining authority as landlords *and* as religious leaders within the party's structure and within any future Pakistani state. See, David Gilmartin, "Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab," *Modern Asian Studies* (13, no. 3, 1979).

In addition to the narrow Muslim majority, the sizeable Sikh population was increasingly politicized. The notion of a Sikh state, imagined as Khalistan, was a theme in Sikh politics from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly after the massacre of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators by the British General Dyer at the Jallianwalla Bagh in Amritsar, Sikhs mobilized politically, creating the Central Sikh League and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). The SAD were the principle architects of the Khalistan movement, and gained increasing influence throughout the independence struggle. However, the Sikhs were a majority in only one district of the state, so even voting nearly as a bloc for the Akali party in 1946, they were defeated by the Muslim League at the state level. This put the final nail in the coffin of a unified, independent India.

In striking contrast to the rest of Punjab, the community's handling of the trauma of Partition is a point of pride in Malerkotla. Few people left and no one died. At Partition, the only people who migrated from Malerkotla to Pakistan in any significant number were members of the ruling family. Seeing the inevitability of the dissolution of the semi-independent princely states, some in this already much diminished family left and received settlements in Pakistan. However, the Nawab himself remained and in a poll conducted in the early 1990's most people cited their loyalty to the Nawab as their reason for staying in Malerkotla. Other common reasons given were loyalty to other local leaders, belief in the greater viability of the Indian state, the expectation of gaining land rights in independent India, faith in their personal and economic security in Malerkotla, and love for their homeland. Also frequently mentioned, both in the

earlier survey and in my own interview experience, was the abiding power of Guru Gobind Singh's blessing that would preserve Malerkotla from any attack by Sikhs.<sup>335</sup>

The *haa da naara* emerges on everyone's lips as the first explanation for Malerkotla's peace during times of crisis, especially Partition. It appears that Iftikhar Ali Khan himself gave great credence to the power of the *haa da naara* to preserve Malerkotla's safety. A Christian missionary who had discussed this matter with the Nawab wrote a letter to Punjab historian C.H. Loehlin in which he described the Nawab's view of the matter.

I too have been interested in the effect of Guru Gobind Singh's reactions to the concern expressed by the Nawab in his day. I talked with the present Nawab on two occasions about this very question. He told me some facts that verify the influence of Guru Gobind Singh's declarations during the Partition. I suggested that the presence of the Nawab's army lessened the attacks by Sikhs on Muslims. He stated that he can document evidence to show that the Sikhs actually responded to protect us Muslims by belief in what Gobind Singh had commanded. The Muslims *enroute* to Malerkotla via train were attacked, but when the Sikhs knew they were going to Malerkotla, they spared them and personally escorted them to Malerkotla. Many Muslims fleeing for their lives were being pursued by Sikhs, trying to kill them, but when they crossed the border of Malerkotla State, they stopped and granted them their lives. There is no question in the Nawab's mind but that the Muslims were spared in Malerkotla State directly because of Gobind Singh's declaration that the Muslims of that State were to be protected.<sup>336</sup>

The missionary's letter strongly reinforces the widespread belief in the protective power of the Guru's blessing. Interestingly, the missionary also raised the question of the role of the army, which is regarded by many who reject sentimental or superstitious reasoning as a more viable explanation for peace. Yet the Nawab denied that the army was the key factor and dismissed this as an adequate explanation. It is significant that at the time of the writing in 1963 and the time of the conversation between the Nawab and the missionary that Malerkotla would no longer have

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<sup>335</sup> Sultana, "Muslims of Malerkotla," p. 78.

<sup>336</sup> C. H. Loehlin, "Guru Gobind Singh and Islam," *Proceedings of the Punjab History Conference* (Volume 2, 1966), p. 95.

had a standing army. Thus the future safety of the town could no longer depend upon such a resource, but must look elsewhere for security.

Lacking a local army and undergoing increasing fragmentation of power with the rise of democracy and party politics the *haa da naara* remains one of the key resources of community solidarity. For example, a scheduled caste Hindu and local politician also asserted that the blessing of the Guru has preserved the town from violence in 1947 and during the period of Sikh terrorism in the 1980's and 1990's:

Guru Gobind Singh's two young *sahibzadas* were killed in Sirhind. Guru Gobind Singh was in Raikot at that time, and he asked what had happened to his children. His army said that the two sons were assassinated and that no one raised a voice against the atrocity that occurred. Then one person said that Nawab Sahib Sher Mohammad Khan of Malerkotla raised a voice in favor of the *sahibzadas*. Then Guru Gobind Singh expressed the view that there will be peace in Malerkotla forever. This is the main reason that there is peace in Malerkotla now and in the past. In 1947 because of this blessing [*ashīrvad*] there was no killing here. The Sikhs didn't come against here during the terrorism either.<sup>337</sup>

In this politician's view, the single most important factor in Malerkotla's preservation from the violence that raged all around the area at the time of Partition and again during the period of terrorism is the *haa da naara*. This individual was not a superstitious man. In fact he claimed that he only visited Haider Shaikh's *dargah* as a gesture to demonstrate his lack of religious prejudice. Nor is he a Sikh for whom the blessing of the Guru would likely be a divine mandate. His primary focus of worship is Ravidas (d. ca 1529), an untouchable poet saint whose compositions are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Essentially, although it is by no means unusual for Hindus to revere and worship the Sikh Gurus, the precedence given to the Guru's blessing in preserving Malerkotla by this Hindu resident is an indication of how central the *haa da naara* is to all the communities in the town.

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<sup>337</sup> Personal interview February 21, 2001.

However, there are other interpretations of the peace at Partition. In addition to the protective power of Haider Shaikh, the blessings of the Guru, and the presence of so many saints of all religious traditions, some local residents attribute the peace to the quality of the people in Malerkotla. For example, the imam of a local mosque who also runs a charitable *madrassa* that instructs children in Urdu, Arabic, math, and other basic subjects asserted that there is no way to be certain why Malerkotla remained peaceful while other places burned. But if a reason must be given, it is the compassion of the people. He said

Here there was peace [at Partition]. We cannot know why here there was peace and elsewhere there was not. People here are more compassionate (*rehman-wale*) than other places. You won't encounter such compassionate people in any other place. People eat together; give [each other] money. There are no beggars here. If someone doesn't have a place to stay who is traveling, here they will be taken into the house.

Although clearly a deeply religious man, the imam's reason for Malerkotla's peace was one of the least other worldly given during my research. Rather than attribute the unique security of the place to the Guru, to Haider Shaikh, or to God, the imam simply lauded the people of the town as more compassionate, more kind than in any other place. These are people of such generosity that in Malerkotla there is no hunger and no lack of hospitality. Importantly he, like many others, remarks that Malerkotla residents eat together.

This theme of commensality was frequently recounted to me as evidence of the positive state of social relations in Malerkotla. Countless times when I was invited for tea or for a meal at peoples' homes (which happened with heartwarming regularity) neighbors would come in to visit and meet the foreign guest. Quite often these neighbors were from a variety of religious backgrounds and they ate and drank together with impunity. Weddings I attended invariably made provision for vegetarians. Funeral prayers I witnessed were regularly attended by people of all faiths. Many people I interviewed said that they exchanged sweets and food with their

neighbors and friends of all religions on festival occasions and for life cycle rituals such as births, deaths, and weddings. The ability to eat together is a key index of the level of integration in Indian society. Due to the variety of dietary and purity restrictions in the three main religions in Malerkotla, it would not be surprising if few people exchanged food or ate with members of another faith. Hindu purity laws are such that certain higher caste individuals are understood to be actually barred from sharing food, not only with non-Hindus, but with Hindus of a lower status. In addition, some Hindus are vegetarians and will not eat out of vessels that have ever been used to contain meat. Sikhs have no explicit restrictions in these terms, but are required to eat meat that has been killed in a manner called *jhañka* where the head of the animal is completely severed in one blow. Neither Hindus nor Sikhs are supposed to eat beef. Muslims, on the other hand, eat beef but do not eat pork. They also should only consume *halal* meat that is killed by slicing the jugular vein and allowing the blood to drain from the body. Muslims are barred from drinking alcohol, but no such explicit restriction exists for Sikhs or many Hindus. In addition to these religious strictures on food, there are numerous cultural prejudices. Even in ostensibly egalitarian Muslim households, often servants are not allowed to use the same vessels and utensils. One Sunni youth I met said that his mother and others had told him never to eat in the house of his Shi'i friend, a directive he ignored.

This abundance of regulations and customs could certainly impede the likelihood of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus eating together. And it is true that some members of all these religions will avoid such occasions. However, the avoidance appears to be one in which offered foodstuffs are accepted and not consumed so as not to offend. Furthermore, people take care to provide food that will not be refused, such as sweets made in a local shop that is known to be

clean rather than homemade items that may cause the recipient pause. In addition, some Muslim residents report that Hindus and Sikhs who are not strict *will* take *halal* meat if it is offered.

Just as we don't take *jhaāka* meat, the rigid Sikhs do not take *halal* meat. But our Hindu and Sikh friends who come to our house, they take meat with us. That is always *halal*. They eat more than we do. But the rigid ones do not take it and we don't insist that they do. If somebody wants to eat he can, if not it is up to him. We don't insist they eat because if somebody insisted that we take *jhaāka* meat we would feel bad.<sup>338</sup>

Here this Muslim schoolteacher made the point that where there is rigidity, bad feelings may arise if the situation is forced. But it would be wrong to press someone to violate their sense of what is right within their own belief system. Symbolically, the act of eating together and even transgressing normative rules regarding diet and commensality, becomes an important index of Malerkotla's integrated society. Such seemingly small, daily exchanges are in fact integral to sustaining the level of communal harmony in Malerkotla that enables the community to rise above such crises as Partition and the terrorism.

The hospitality and commensality of Malerkotla was put to the test during the period of transition in 1947 when well over 200,000 refugees descended upon the town.<sup>339</sup> Strained to the limits by this dramatic increase in population, the State made repeated cries for help to the British, but were refused. Certainly the humanitarian crisis in the camps at Malerkotla was nothing compared to the bloodshed in Patiala, Nabha, Jind, and other districts of the Malwa region, and was doubtless lower on the list of the trouble spots in need of whatever support might have been available. Camps were set up all over the area, including in the Nawab's own residence. A retired Muslim schoolteacher depicts a town stretched to the breaking point by the needs of the refugees.

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<sup>338</sup> Personal interview, January 22, 2001.

<sup>339</sup> Punjab State Archives, File 1/1-C/47-a/1947, "Disturbances and Refugees." 1947.

People did not migrate from here, but people from other states came here, they were kept in camps and when the situation pacified, they were sent on. First they were staying in people's houses, so diseases spread, like diarrhea. Not much was left with people to feed them. Then they started giving them porridge. Then an order was given that the people should be put in camps. They were forcibly taken out of houses, the camps were first put on the Nabha road, then as water came there so the camps were shifted to Id-Gah road. Then from there they were shifted to Pakistan. Food was brought from outside Malerkotla.

The schoolteacher asserts that at first refugees were sheltered in their own homes, this resulted soon in the spread of disease and a food shortage as more and more people came. Although the people were moved to camps, still great efforts were made to help and sustain them as spaces were made and food was brought in until they could be moved to Pakistan. This seems to echo the imam's statement presented above in which he declared that any visitor to Malerkotla would be taken in to somebody's house.

During Partition, it seems that this maxim was in many ways true.

This time is remembered with pride by residents who claim, "Not a single shot was fired in the kingdom during the Partition year."<sup>340</sup> Locals reported that some Hindus and Sikhs did abandon their homes out of concern for the large influx of Muslim refugees in transit to Pakistan. Yet they declared their property was perfectly safe and the Nawab himself guaranteed their safe return to Malerkotla after the crisis. Khushi Mohammad, who served in the army in 1947, affirms this, "Not only did we have to guard the state from outside aggression, but we had been ordered to protect non-Muslim property from local attempts at arson or looting." The retired schoolteacher cited above in reference to the camps confirms this, saying that "from Malerkotla Hindus migrated or ran away, leaving their houses. The Nawab posted police at their houses, but nobody did any damage to their houses or belongings." Hindu residents as well report that there

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<sup>340</sup> Faujdar Khushi Mohammad, quoted in Jolly, "Myth of Maler Kotla."

was a zero tolerance policy for looting of Sikh and Hindu property, and that the Nawab made efforts to be visible among all these communities during the crisis.

Indeed Partition brought out a solidarity between Hindus and Muslims that had not existed to the same extent previously. As illustrated in Chapter Two, Malerkotla's history is replete with strains and difficulties between religions. Perhaps especially in the period immediately preceding Partition, tensions were at a high level in Malerkotla as they were throughout India. In the 1930's there were a series of minor riots between Hindus and Muslims over the perennial issue of timing prayers at an adjoining mosque and temple. Yet in the troubled times the community drew together. Contrary to the schoolteacher's assertion, by no means did all the Hindus leave Malerkotla. In one case the Hindu *mistri* cited in the previous section actually made weapons to sell in the neighborhood, including to Muslims.

Everyone ran away. My mother was ill and we needed money, so I made some weapons from a big piece of iron lying at home meant for cutting cotton. The head of [a local Hindu organization] called me and asked, "You are selling weapons to Muslims?" I said, "There is no difference. If a Muslim dies, then also we will die. If a Hindu dies then still we are sitting between the Muslims [i.e. surrounded by Muslims]."

The *mistri's* decision to make and sell weapons to Muslims was called into question by local Hindu leaders, yet he felt that at that point all of their fates were united in the face of the chaos around them. Interestingly, in his conversation with me in 2001 the *mistri* continued to express some strongly anti-Muslim views. Nonetheless, in the period of crisis in 1947, his community identity superseded his sectarian identity – a powerful testimony to the integrative impact of Partition on Malerkotla and the self-perception of the residents.

Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan's behavior during the chaos is universally praised. Although his aging father, Ahmad Ali Khan, was still nominally ruler, Iftikhar Ali Khan was functionally the head of state. He is said to have ridden out day and night, watching the borders, patrolling

the refugee camps, visiting the neighborhoods, and constantly reassuring people of their safety.

The *mistri* praised the Nawab's behavior as well, saying

At the time of the Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan [i.e. in 1947], my duty was in a tent. We stopped him, he asked my name, I [told him] and he said, "Whose son are you?" My teacher was the Nawab's carpenter, so I took his name. He said, "I hope you do not have any problems? Do you need some weapons?" I said no, there was no threat. He used to meet us daily.

The Nawab encouraged people to remain, insisting that India was their homeland. In his speech upon ascension to the throne, Iftikhar Ali Khan credits his father's long reign and secular policies with the preservation of peace in Malerkotla. Although residents remember Iftikhar Ali Khan's presence and behavior during the crisis as a significant reason for Malerkotla's calm, Iftikhar Ali Khan asserts that the roots of Malerkotla's secularism lay in his father's practices during his reign.

His late Highness during his long reign of 44 years never let the sentiments of religion influence his task as Ruler. He always considered religion as a private link between man and God and ruled the State as an Indian Prince. I am glad to say that this spirit of tolerance proved to be the inevitable, as behind it lay latent the whole hearted support and goodwill of the people as a token of their fullest cooperation with their beloved Ruler in maintaining peace and security within the state, when during the recent terrible disturbances the fire of arson pillage and murder fanned by communal hatred raged all round.<sup>341</sup>

This eloquent praise of his late father highlights how the exemplary model of Ahmad Ali Khan's belief that religion was a private matter promoted a similar sentiment among the populace. However, we know from oral sources and British records that there were several religious disputes in Malerkotla under Ahmad Ali Khan's rule. Speaking in 1948 in the wake of Partition, Iftikhar Ali Khan unsurprisingly presents an idealized version of the past in order to create the possibility for the real success of inter-religious relations in Malerkotla in 1947 to continue.

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<sup>341</sup> Khan, *History*, p. 145.

The safety of the Muslims in Malerkotla is also the main theme of Sufi Ismail's treatment of Partition in *Bagh al-Anbiya' Punjab*, although the reason given for their safety is quite different. For Sufi Ismail, Malerkotla was preserved by God in order to be a bastion of the Islamic faith. To dramatize the importance of this role, Sufi Ismail describes the chaos that plagued the rest of Punjab and the dire refugee situation in Malerkotla. He depicts in gruesome detail the kind of violence that occurred as women were raped and children were killed.

In 1947 when Pakistan was made, in that terrifying time refugees fled the murder and destruction that was going on in other kingdoms and cities. They fled to Malerkotla, when outside Malerkotla's borders the murder of Muslims was becoming a normal thing. They were being robbed, their women and young girls were disrespected and were stripped naked, played *holi* with their blood<sup>342</sup> and rolled their children's heads like balls and burned their houses. So the looted and ravaged refugees came in caravan loads filling Malerkotla. There was not a single unoccupied space.

After setting the grim scene, Sufi Ismail turns to Malerkotla and its salvation from the fate that so many other Punjabis endured. In his mind there is no question as to why Malerkotla of all places was preserved: the will of God.

In all of Punjab, only in Malerkotla did peace and security remain. The whole of Punjab today is empty of Muslims. All of Haryana and Himachal too, which were once part of Punjab. This is entirely thanks to Allah most high and His special desire that this portion of Muslims remain and save the rest. The Great Master, from His mercy, commanded the protection of us and our beloved city. From His doing, everything becomes easy. He is Victorious, He is the Lord, the Protector, the Helper. Verily Allah has power over everything. God is one and there is nothing like Him, He has power over all things. He is the king of kings. There is no doubt that He makes those whom He chooses rich and those whom He chooses poor. If the Merciful God had not desired or caused it, then today Malerkotla also would be empty of Muslims. It was His desire that they protect the rest because due to His sovereign power He desired some work to be done for His religion. Therefore here all of us Muslims need to work to expand the religion of Islam. And to our other brothers we must bring forward the message of God and his Prophet. In this we Muslims must uplift this world and the next. The other [reason for peace] is the *buzurg* Hazrat Sheikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan's power and miracles. He whose original throne this is. He because of whom in

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<sup>342</sup> *Holi* is a Hindu holiday in which colored powder, often red, is thrown in a carnivalesque street festival.

this whole place Islam has come and from this town of Maler the (kingdom) city of Malerkotla was made. God bestows His grace on whom He chooses.

Otherwise when on all sides fire burned, then and now, how were we saved in the middle of this? Yes, not unless God had saved us from this [would we be saved] and God preserves us from this still.<sup>343</sup>

Sufi Ismail argues that Malerkotla was saved due as God willed that there should remain a Muslim area in Punjab. Without God's protection, no forces could have withstood the onslaught that was ravaging the other areas in the region. But because Malerkotla was saved, and because Malerkotla is a Muslim area, the Muslims of that area must realize that they have been charged with a mission. Their mission is to work for the glorification and expansion of God. For what other reason were they preserved from the horrific fate that met the Muslims in so many other places in East Punjab? Sufi Ismail vehemently contends that Malerkotla's Muslims are the custodians of Islam in Punjab. Had God willed, they would have been killed or been refugees, thus their safety was part of God's design. In addition to God's direct judgment, Sufi Ismail attributes the preservation of Malerkotla to the *barakat*, or spiritual power, of Haider Shaikh, and his *karamat*, or miracles. Sufi Ismail also credits Haider Shaikh with the Islamicization of the region and the foundation of the settlement. Yet these things too are possible only because "God bestows His grace on whom He chooses." This is a Qur"anic formula, a phrase that appears in numerous places throughout both the Qur"an and Sufi Ismail's text. Such reiterated expressions function to evoke the Islamic tradition, placing the events of the recent past into a continuum with the events in the Qur"an. Sufi Ismail is seeking to remind his largely Muslim audience of the importance of studying the past to become aware of God's will. This is the principle activity of a good Muslim, to observe and learn and come to know as clearly as possible what God intends for us as humans. Because Malerkotla is the only place in East Punjab that did not suffer

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<sup>343</sup> Ismail, pp. 176-177.

violence during Partition and Malerkotla is the only place in East Punjab where there is a Muslim population, for Sufi Ismail, God's will is blazingly apparent. Malerkotla was saved in order that "some work be done for God's religion."

### **Conclusion**

All of these narratives are means of symbolically reversing the process of Partition, of reweaving what was torn apart. The anxiety and destabilization of 1947 has left scarred and fragmented people, unable to account for their neighbors and their own actions during the transition. Efforts made to reconcile and put to rest the lingering psychic trauma include active efforts to forget and to brush over, obsessive repetition of the horrors, fictionalized representations, committees of inquiry, and so on. In Malerkotla the repetition of stories about Haider Shaikh, the *haa da naara*, and Partition are symbolic refusals of the division of India, and the division of Punjabi culture. Through stories that highlight and foreground past moments of cooperation the community authorizes these moments as emblematic of Malerkotla's ethic of harmony. By retelling such exemplary stories of the past in the present, the identity of Malerkotla as a zone of peace is consolidated and confirmed and the present reality is extended into the past, further strengthening it. These multivocal narratives need not be uniform. Their coherence as a repertoire about the past and present reality of Malerkotla lies in their overall impact and the fact of their repetition which strengthens this unity in multiplicity. The reiteration of these stories is evidence that Malerkotla residents and visitors value the shared aspects of their culture and history.

There is no uniformity in these narratives about Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla. Perspectives, details, facts, characters, etc. all change. Yet there remains an overwhelming consistency of meaning. A network of narratives emerges that connect and bind together

multiple feelings and multiple faiths. Hindus and Sikhs tell stories that integrate them into the life of Haider Shaikh as a living entity whose spirit continues to activate the sacred space of his *dargah* and all the spaces into which his spirit is summoned. Muslims negotiate the tricky terrain of maintaining their pride and community integrity without becoming overly subject to scrutiny from the Sikh and Hindu majorities. Through the stories they tell, people in Malerkotla use Haider Shaikh and the history of Malerkotla to give shape to their shared cultural identity. Shifting and altering the past, people create a basis for a shared community in the present.

Though it is often said that actions speak louder than words, spoken words can have the power of actions. That is to say that once an idea is articulated, made publicly available, and reinforced through continual repetition, the idea becomes a motivating ideal: inspiring action, facilitating its realization, and perpetuating its imaginative force. The conception, articulation, and perpetuation of the ideal of communal harmony in Malerkotla rests in no small part on the raised voice of one of the rulers of the state, Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan (ruled 1672-1712). It also rests on the shared traditions associated with the saint who founded the settlement five hundred years ago. The perpetuation of peace also depends upon the experience of Partition and its active remembering by elders who experienced it and their descendents who continue to pass on their stories. Far from being cheap, talk is, in the words of writer and statesman, Shashi Tharoor, "the necessary precursor for action." In an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* in July of 2002, Tharoor wrote against those naysayers who denigrate the power of words as empty. On the contrary, talk is the precondition for imagining a new possible way of being. He wrote, "talk lays down markers, articulates aspirations, identifies common approaches, reveals gaps and helps

bridge them."<sup>344</sup> Most importantly, talk does not necessitate unanimity or perfect agreement at all. Instead, the crucial aspect of talk is that it opens up prospects for accord.

Even when talk does not lead to agreement – even when it degenerates into received wisdom, time-honored conventions, tired formulas and, perhaps worst of all, insider jargon – it still helps change perceptions and establish new levels of acceptability for both familiar and unfamiliar ideas. Repeated talk alters the substantive threshold in the talkers' minds: as you listen, positions you would never think of adopting become comprehensible to you; the process of reacting to what is said reveals you own assumptions to you.

Although I believe that Tharoor undervalues the utility of received wisdom and tired formulas, which in some circumstances can help to establish a common base of communication, he beautifully expresses the importance of simply having the conversation. Through continued exposure to people of a variety of views and faiths, such as through participation at the shrine or in any community forum, the alien and unfamiliar becomes imaginable. Fed with media reports and scholarly studies that presume constructed or primordial enmities between religions in India, we forget how to look at a peaceful community. We are weighted by the assumption that Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs cannot live together, that peace is only stasis or a kind of *détente*. But in Malerkotla we find that through talk, through narratives both written and oral, old formulas and the cliché of peace become resources for making it happen. Furthermore, although in some cases, such as that of Sufi Ismail, the peace is seen as being particularly for or because of one special community, most often, Malerkotla residents and visitors incorporate the narrative of Malerkotla's peace and its various causes into their own narratives and lives. This incorporation helps to sustain a high level of integration in which Sikhs and Muslims share stories and share meals. The narratives create a well-defined space in which people are able to situate themselves as long as they adhere to the frame story of Malerkotla's communal harmony.

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<sup>344</sup> Shashi Tharoor, "In Defense of Gabfests," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2002.

Residents walk a careful line between adhering to a particular view of why Malerkotla has managed to maintain its peace and allowing for a variety of other perspectives on that peace. This is exemplified by a statement from a Muslim schoolteacher in which he acknowledges the power and importance of the common explanations – the blessings of Haider Shaikh and the blessing of Guru Gobind Singh – and yet maintains his own opinion that the ultimate credit belongs with God. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that the existence and popularity of the other accounts are crucial to the establishment of brotherhood and the perpetuation of peace.

See about Guru Gobind Singh it is said that his blessings are on this kingdom. And it is also said this is a land of *buzurgs*, on all sides are *buzurgs*. Both are the reasons [for the peace]. Sikh people say that because of the Guru's blessing, Malerkotla is safe. Muslims say it is because of these *pirs* that Malerkotla is safe. My views are these, whether it is the blessing of the Guru or the blessing of the *buzurgs*, God wanted to preserve this place. It *is* safe. The reason may be any of these. In people, these things are more prevalent. In the Sikhs it is more prevalent that to keep good relations with the Muslims they say this, that our Gurus had relations with these people. The Nawab of this place saved the children of our Guru and our Guru gave a blessing to this city and this city was saved. With this comes brotherhood, and we can say there is common unity.<sup>345</sup>

In Malerkotla the dominant ideology of *bhaichar* (brotherhood) has been internalized and become readily manifest in times of stress or upon query from an anthropologist. The community identity as an island of peace is a hegemonic narrative, leaving little space for radical departure. This dominance is the result of the Muslim majority's interest in self-preservation. As a suspect minority, Muslims must manifest publicly and constantly that they are loyal citizens and above suspicion. Hindus as a numerical minority must also perpetuate the dominant identity for their own continued comfort. Sikhs, caught in the middle as a local and national minority but a regional majority, also have interest in maintaining the identity of peace. Yet none of these expedient political realities explain why the society should be so deeply integrated, why Hindus

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<sup>345</sup> Personal interview, January 22, 2001.

and Sikhs attend a Muslim saint's shrine and transmit his lore, or why Malerkotla alone in Punjab should have transcended the challenge of Partition.

It emerges that the impact of Partition upon Malerkotla was precisely the opposite of its effect elsewhere. Here the ability of the community to rise above religious divisions and provide for their common defense makes Partition a moment of shared success which has an integrating influence on the local population. Sustained by several clusters of narratives that articulate the motivating ideal of *bhaichar*, or brotherhood, that characterizes the community, Malerkotla is able to in many ways realize its utopian vision of itself. Motivated by their role as religious minorities, all the local religious groups have an interest in maximizing the efficacy of this idealized identity. By maintaining an active repertoire of tales concerning the *haa da naara* and Partition, in addition to the complex of narratives associated with Haider Shaikh and the other local saints, Malerkotla residents and visitors create the conditions necessary for the type of coalition building, trust, and non-sectarian political economy that sustains the multi-religious community.

**Part Two:**  
**Ritualizing Peace**

## Introduction

In the previous section I examined ways in which the multi-perspectival narratives about Haider Shaykh and Malerkotla expand and contract to allow for multiple interlocutors to locate themselves within the dominant symbolic identity of the town as a zone of peace. This is reflected in the types of stories about the shrine and the town that dominate, such as the *haa da naara* and the peace at Partition, which emphasize a consistent message in which humanity and justice are not confined to religious identification. In this way these narrative traditions symbolically reverse the process of Partition, reuniting Hindus and Sikhs with Muslims by remembering, reiterating, and replicating the shared past.

The dominant identity of the *dargah* of Haider Shaykh and the town of Malerkotla as places of inter-religious harmony is constructed not only through narratives, but through ritual practices as well. The spaces of the shrine and the town are activated by ritual performances that reinforce this identity. These ritualizations reveal the complex interaction of individual interest with multiple theologies and ritual systems. Malerkotla is the meeting point of numerous vectors of power and subjection as it is both a subordinate Muslim-majority community in Hindu nationalist dominated India, and a dominant community of Muslims with a subordinate community of Sikhs and Hindus. As documented in the previous chapter, the tensions of these dual and dueling dominations given rise to a multivocal narrative tradition capable of articulating the prevailing local identity of peace. Likewise, the ritual repertoire of the shrine and the town is rich and complex, comprising a range of practices appropriate to the multi-religious community. In this section I will detail these rituals and demonstrate how they function within these multiple structuring frameworks and how devotees and residents ritually enact the inter-religious exchange necessary to the construction and maintenance of Malerkotla's peaceful community.

As with the universal form of the narrative which, following Hayden White, generates the requisite degree of reality to empower an event as an identity-shaping symbolic structure, ritual is an important act of meaning making. Ritual practice is dense with meaning, both conscious and unconscious. The significance of ritual ranges from the divine to the mundane, personal to the political, the psychic to the social. As, at least in part, intentional action, ritual marks out arenas of signification in which behaviors both prescribed and innovated combine to achieve interests that may be obligatory or voluntary, personal or social, public or private, or all of the above. According to Emile Durkheim, ritual is a means of renewing the beliefs of a community and generating the collective effervescence necessary for engendering solidarity.<sup>346</sup> As a *fait typique*, or total social fact, a ritual is also a representation and condensation of the social system that produced it, a kind of hypostasization through which that system is made manifest. Clifford Geertz perceived ritual as a symbolic fusion of the "world as lived and the world as imagined."<sup>347</sup> Structuralist anthropologists, most notably Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner see ritual as a means of mediating transitions, particularly in regard to life cycle observations. Deceptively simple is J.Z. Smith's articulation that "ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference," between the sacred and profane.<sup>348</sup> Ritual theorist Catherine Bell also advances this perspective, writing that ritual practice is "the way in which certain social actions strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions."<sup>349</sup> She, like Smith, also sees the making of this distinction as predicated upon a distinction between the sacred and profane. Bell also points out that whether a theorist regards ritual as a window through which the basic structures of a society can be viewed,

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<sup>346</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, translated by Karen E. Fields, (New York; Free Press, 1995), see especially Chapters Five and Six "The Origins of these Beliefs."

<sup>347</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973), especially Chapter Six, "Ritual and Social Change," and Chapter 15, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight."

<sup>348</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 109.

<sup>349</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York; Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 74.

or as a means of reconciling opposed social and cultural elements, or as a means of displaying reinscribing social norms, ritual is often defined in order to establish the theoretical premises of the scholar generating the definition. Bell's study attempts to move beyond such tautological definitions and seeks to define the parameters of what she calls *ritualization*, or ritual practice.

Although her analysis is prone to some of the same problems as those whom she critiques and expands upon, Bell's integration of ritual and practice theory provides an excellent starting point for my own discussion of the rituals in Malerkotla. Of particular interest is her insight into the strategic aspects of ritual practice and the potential for rituals to both construct and reconstruct the power configurations in a culture. In Malerkotla, as in Bell's view, ritual practice is a strategy "for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations."<sup>350</sup> Thus ritualization both reinforces social structure and creates the conditions possible for that structure to be changed. Through the process of ritualization, people come to master the techniques of control that are particular to a ritual context. Mastering ritual techniques is akin to mastering techniques of social control. Furthermore ritualization cultivates techniques of *self*-control, leading to a condition of subjection not unlike that described by Foucault in which an individual internalizes the coercive force of the power structure and both disciplines herself to conform to the system and finds ways to creatively thwart and alter the system.<sup>351</sup> Cognizant of the parameters of acceptable behavior, micro-strategies of resistance become available to a practitioner. The constant dialogue between domination and resistance is a crucial aspect of a ritual system.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>351</sup> See Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (New York; Vintage, 1977) and *Power/Knowledge*. New York; Pantheon, 1972).

Ritual practice is part of the strategic repertoire of action available to agentive actors operating within a cultural milieu. Bell correctly does not overstate the degree of agency available to actors, nor does she relegate them to an unrelenting static system of dominance and hegemony. Following Gramsci, she sees hegemony as dialogic, and following Foucault, dominance as perpetually resisted, indeed as predicated upon resistance. The dialogic and resisted nature of a hegemonic system opens it up to the possibility of change and the possibility of sustaining multiple modes of experience and interpretation. In Malerkotla, the dual power structures at the national and local level create a complex arena for ritualization and a dynamic in which actors must negotiate their own interests in relation to potentially conflicting power structures. One way in which the tension between the divine and the mundane, the national and the local, and the public and the personal is mediated is through ritual practice. At the shrine these practices concern Haider Shaykh and the other devotees, in the town ritual practices concern the community at large and its collective identity.

According to Bell, ritual practice entails four elements. "Practice is situational, strategic, embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing, and able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world."<sup>352</sup> While the first two elements are self-evident – ritual is context based and purposive – these last two points bear some discussion. The misrecognition of a practice is a key element in a ritual event. Misrecognition means that ritual efficacy, what a ritual does, is to varying degrees concealed from the practitioner, but also from the ritual system itself and the power relations that configure it. When theorists attempt to dissect the layers of strategy and activity into their constitutive elements, the meaning of the ritual is lost and reduced to a set of reversible structures, devoid of the mysterious power that

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<sup>352</sup> Bell, p. 81.

animates the ritual.<sup>353</sup> Theoretical reconstructions reduce ritual to a mode of replicating social structures, as a psychic break into a liminal space, and so on. Yet ritual practitioners, including those conscious of functionalist explanations of their behavior, do not cease to practice, or cease to have faith in the efficacy of the ritual to achieve a particular goal. Because of this misrecognition, a ritual maintains its apparent efficacy, ambiguity and mystery. This insight is useful as it allows the "reality" of ritual practices and their ability to shape divine and human realities to persist.

Michael Taussig also illustrates this point in his article, "Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism." For Taussig, the difference between the "real" and the "really made up" is a misleading one.<sup>354</sup> In a functioning ritual system, such as witch doctoring in his example, skepticism and doubt are integral parts of the system's perpetuation. The existence of fakery is widely acknowledged as is the fact that rituals fail all the time. Yet these open secrets do not undermine the practice of witch doctoring as a whole, nor does it account for the empirical reality of its efficacy. Ritual practice enables these misrecognitions. I would add that misrecognition also functions as part of the ritual performer's strategic engagements with the power structures they experience. The purposes and processes of ritual practices as a means of experiencing and altering those structures must often be deliberately concealed, not merely from the actors themselves in order to be effective, but also from the dominant culture, in order to effect change or maximize the space for authoritative action available to the ritual practitioner. This is indicated by Bell's fourth element of ritual practice which points out that rituals may both reproduce and reconfigure power structures, neither succumbing to absolute determinism nor capable of absolute free agency. Bell calls this concept redemptive hegemony, "a strategic and

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid, pp. 82-83.

<sup>354</sup> Taussig, Michael, "Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic," in *In near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century*, edited by Nicholas B. Dirks, (Minneapolis; University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

practical orientation for acting, a framework possible only insofar as it is embedded in the act itself. As such, of course, the redemptive hegemony of practice does not reflect reality more or less effectively; it creates it more or less effectively."<sup>355</sup>

The misrecognition of ritual practice and its capacity to bring about change indicates the possibility that rituals may function as acts of resistance. The persistent, everyday, banal transactions at shared sacred sites may be understood as a "weapon of the weak," part of the "hidden transcript" of non-dominant groups in a context in which highly divisive social and religious politics are the order of the day. In James Scott's formulation, these arts of resistance need not be formal or even effective.<sup>356</sup> Very often resistance to a hegemonic system is masked by acquiescence and is only intelligible in fragments of a hidden transcript.<sup>357</sup> This is another dimension of the misrecognition of ritual practice in which not only are many of the functions of ritual concealed from the consciousness of the practitioner who is enacting an internalized behavior, but also the meaning and interests of the ritual are concealed from the power structure and its regulators. Thus the performance of ritual takes on another strategic dimension, opening up the possibility that tacitly or overtly, participation in a particular ritual system may be an act of resistance to a hegemonic power structure. In the case of Haider Shaykh, this potential function of ritual is activated as practitioners are fully conscious of the challenges to their presence at the shrine by reformist elements in each major religious tradition and from without by the prevailing environment of religious factionalism in the country. Likewise, residents and visitors to Malerkotla are unavoidably aware of the town's unique demographics and its symbolic identity as a zone of peace, thereby imbuing their behavior within this space with additional

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>356</sup> Scott, James C., *Weapons of the Weak : Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>357</sup> Scott, James C., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance : Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1990).

layers of signification. Merely being present in Malerkotla or at Haider Shaykh's *dargah* does not necessarily mean that a given actor adheres to the prevailing ethic of harmony, or advocates inter-religious interaction, or supports Islam per se, but it is my contention that a person's presence and practice do have a material effect on the constitution of the symbolic identity of these places.

One of the shortcomings of Bell's study is that its focus on the theory of ritual and its role in social and cultural formation does not allow for many sustained examples of the application of that theory. Yet the critical insights into the nature of ritual practice as *misrecognized* and as capable of simultaneously sustaining and changing the power regime in its context are important to work out on the ground. At the *dargah* of Haider Shaykh and in Malerkotla, rituals are numerous, multivocal and multivalent. In this chapter, I will discuss the ritual practices at the shrine that occur on the devotional and social levels and ritual practices in the town occurring on social and political levels. These rituals are not merely, as Bell describes, "a way of acting that sets itself off from other ways of acting by virtue of the way in which it does what it does."<sup>358</sup> Many rituals at Haider Shaykh are not so readily distinctive or so observably effective. On the contrary, especially on ordinary days at the shrine, ritual practices often lack the coherence necessary for such a setting off. People frequently interrupt their procedures of interacting with the saint in order to consult with one another or the *khalifah* present, to discuss mundane concerns such as the payment of certain performers, to see to the comfort of children, or to make arrangements for the next meal. The residue of these overtly religious and apparently mundane exchanges interpenetrates. The distinctions are not absolute. Thus making an offering at Haider Shaykh's tomb is embedded in a broader context of inter-religious encounter and the quality of

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

the one experience inevitably impacts the other. Therefore, in addition to the hope that a particular ritual will bring a desired result, an often-misrecognized collateral effect of ritual practices is the establishment of inter-religious contact and relations. These relations may be seen as part of the redemptive hegemony of the ritual practices at the site, both constructing and reproducing an integrated religious culture. Although this effect is rarely described by devotees as one of the intended purposes of the ritual itself, devotees often do cite the opportunity for exchange with other devotees as one of the pleasures and purposes of the visitation more generally. For this reason I approach the ritual transactions at the shrine on both the devotional and social levels. Similarly, in Malerkotla, local events enacting the symbolic identity of the town are ritualized through the same logic that identifies ritual practice within a sacred space. Through their performance a social or political event becomes a symbolic enactment of the community ethos of harmony. In particular through commemorative practices that reiterate and reinstitute the exemplary behaviors of past generations, Malerkotla is ritually constituted as a zone of peace.

## Chapter Four:

### Ritual Performances at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh

To attend the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh is to walk backwards in time. Here it is possible to imagine that Partition never happened, that the Muslims were never driven from the East and Hindus and Sikhs never fled for their lives from the West. Reaching the *dargah* necessitates coming through a neighborhood that is almost wholly Muslim. Except on a Thursday evenings or a festival day, few non-Muslims are present in the streets leading up to the shrine. For Hindus and Sikhs coming from outside Malerkotla, this could be an unusual and possibly intimidating experience since for the last fifty-five years, there have been almost no Muslims in Punjab at all. Yet having reached the *dargah*, one finds (on a non-festival day) an atmosphere of calm and welcoming serenity. Moving through the space, pilgrims and caretakers, residents and visitors find themselves face to face with the saint and with each other. Maintaining the multi-confessional community of the saint requires that these interactions be conducted so that both the devotional and social purposes of the pilgrimage are supported. Given the variety of practices and practitioners at the *dargah*, this is an intense and interesting choreography.

Rituals at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh, such as offerings, prostrations, vows, obeisance to the saint's descendents called *khalīfahs* and his interlocutors known as *chelas*, lighting lamps, feeding the *faqirs* and beggars, cleaning the area, etc., have two levels of strategic intention and resulting effects. The first level of ritual practice is devotional. At this level, the intention is to properly engage the saint in order to gain the desired result. The desired results of the pilgrimage range from obtaining children, jobs, sanity, family harmony, success in an examination, fulfillment of a vow etc. to the simple invocation of blessings upon the soul of the dead saint. The rules of proper engagement at Haider Shaikh are largely generated organically. Although

manuals of proper etiquette for shrine visitation, known as *ziyarat*, do exist, they are largely known to only a small sector of highly literate Muslims.<sup>359</sup> The mass of devotees – Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu – learns the protocols for such pilgrimages through experience, observation, and inquiry. This process of participation and observation likely occur under the guidance of one of the two categories of ritual specialists at the tomb, the *khalīfahs* who are descended from the Shaikh or the *chelas* who are possessed by the spirit of the Shaikh.

The second level of ritual practice is social. Both practitioners and observers often misrecognize this level of the ritual. This social level of ritual practices occurs as multiple actors engage in a series of exchanges – verbal, physical, and visual – that require contact between individuals. At a multi-confessional site like Haider Shaikh's tomb, these exchanges are almost inevitably inter-religious.<sup>360</sup> For Hindus and Sikhs both the first and second levels of ritual practice are inter-religious. Although Muslim attendees are not crossing religious boundaries in terms of the identity of the shrine, they are inevitably going to contact or at least observe, the practices of Hindus and Sikhs who have come to the site to accomplish often quite similar goals. The unavoidability of this proximity constitutes the social level of ritual practice wherein the

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<sup>359</sup> For studies of these manuals *kitab adab al- ziyārat*, see: Averil Cameron, "On Defining the Holy Man," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, edited by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, (New York; Oxford University Press, 1999); Tewfik Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine*. Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1927); Carl W. Ernst, "An Indo-Persian Guide to Sufi Shrine Pilgrimage," in *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*, edited by Grace Martin Smith and Carl W. Ernst, (Istanbul; The Isis Press, 1993); Josef W. Meri, "The Etiquette of Devotion in the Islamic Cult of Saints," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, edited by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, (New York; Oxford University Press, 1999); Christopher, Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, (Leiden; Brill, 1999).

<sup>360</sup> There is one group who may be able to avoid most inter-religious encounters in their dealings with the tomb – the small clique of Muslims mostly *khalīfahs*, who attend the shrine very early in the morning after the dawn prayer. At this time there is less of a crowd at Haider Shaikh's tomb. However, this is also the time when morning worship begins at many temples and gurdwaras and the streets are by no means empty. On several occasions I witnessed people who had clearly just visited a temple (bearing a red *tikka* mark on their foreheads) come into the *dargāh* to pay their respects at the beginning of the day. Although several *khalīfahs* who habitually came to Haider Shaikh early, especially women, told me they did so to avoid the crowds, no one ever claimed they did so in order to avoid meeting Hindus and Sikhs.

conditions for exchange between and among devotees and ritual specialists becomes possible and even likely. In fact, for many this contact with a ritual specialist is part of the first level of devotional practice and is necessary to guarantee ritual efficacy. Some may choose to follow wholly personal practices and avoid contact with either *khalīfahs* or *chelas*. Yet even those who avoid physical or direct contact with such regulatory personnel are conscious of the presence of these personnel and devotees and most likely observe at least some of their behaviors.

At the devotional level, the ritual life at Haider Shaikh seeks to establish and maintain positive relations with the buried saint. Given the range of theological and historical perspectives on who exactly Haider Shaikh *is*, the means of interacting with and understanding the Shaikh are by no means homogenous. For all the communities who engage the shrine, the key to ritual efficacy is internal to the pilgrim, depending upon each individual's purity of heart. Although the nature of that purity is variously defined, the internal location of this critical element is conducive to the co-presence of competing and conflicting ideas about the saint and the shrine. As discussed in relation to the stories told about Haider Shaikh by his various interlocutors, the tradition of the shrine and the saint is multivocal. This multivocality is also expressed ritually. The entire tradition of Haider Shaikh and the *dargah* is activated, narratively and ritually, by the plurality of the constituent community. Thus given the freedom of most devotees in attendance to go elsewhere, it is clear from the mere presence of such numbers of people in the space of the tomb and the array of stories told by such a variety of narrators that Haider Shaikh's tradition is grounded in this multivocality. Multiplicity, therefore, is integral to the nature and efficacy of the shrine. The narrative and ritual variations do not destabilize the co-presence and simultaneity of the community. From the British sources we know that at least

by 1883 the shrine was extremely popular among non-Muslims.<sup>361</sup> This was neither unusual nor novel. Indeed, there is substantial evidence from the records of more prominent shrines of Hindu attendance and patronage from earlier periods.<sup>362</sup> It emerges that one of the greatest sources of continuity at the shrine is the diversity of adherents, narratives, and ritual practices. The question becomes how to account for this diversity of belief and practice on the devotional and social levels and how these differences are managed.

I should be clear that differences are never resolved. There is no fusion into a homogenous community. The multiplicity itself, the suspended tensions of contradictory beliefs and practices, and the gathering power of spatial and narrative symbols constitute, in part, the significance of shared sacred sites. The co-presence of multiple meanings seems to increase the perception of the shrines efficacy in fulfilling desires, and to add another compelling feature – the opportunity to behave as if and imagine that Partition never occurred.

Most of Haider Shaikh's devotees do not consider him to be dead in the sense of being no longer sentient. On the contrary, although his physical body is interred, Haider Shaikh's spirit remains very much alive. All three major religious traditions represented at the site account for this condition in different ways, but there is a shared belief in the ongoing presence of the saint and the importance and efficacy of pilgrimage to the *dargah*. In order to understand the nature of the encounter between Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus at such a space it is important to know how these traditions view the holy dead. There is no enforcement or concern with promoting a unitary belief system along with a ritual practice. As Catherine Bell points out, this is part of the nature of ritual – it does not demand unanimity of belief, merely a minimum recognition of its

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<sup>361</sup> Denzil Ibbetson, et al., *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab*.

<sup>362</sup> See, for example, Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu`in Al-Din Chishti of Ajmer* and Eaton, "Approaches to the Study of Conversion to Islam in India," and "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2000).

formal features. She writes, "ritualized activities specifically do *not* promote belief or conviction. On the contrary, ritualized practices afford a great diversity of interpretation in exchange for little more than consent to the form of the activities."<sup>363</sup> Yet at Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, even the form of worship varies greatly according to factors such as the practitioner's religious affiliation, gender, age, and wealth as well as according to their particular motivation in attending, the amount of time necessary and available for the act of worship, and their personal proclivities.<sup>364</sup> Given the variety of rituals and beliefs, it is important to comprehend not only how these belief systems differ but also how these religions perceive one another as they perform a variety of rituals at the tomb. First I will discuss the devotional level, assessing some of the central ideas about tomb shrines in each faith and then address the second question concerning the social level of mutual perceptions.

### **Muslim Pilgrims**

Pilgrimage to saints' tombs, *ziyarat*, in Islam is a controversial topic, in fact significantly more so than in the Hindu or Sikh traditions. Partisans on both sides have written and argued extensively about the permissibility of tomb visitations and the appropriate form of worship if attendance is indeed allowed. Reformist groups such as Tablighi Jama'at and Jamaat-i Islami, which have been discussed in Chapter Two, staunchly oppose such practices. Although they advocate respect and prayer for the souls of the departed pious people, any form of regular ritual observance is viewed as tantamount to assigning comparisons to God, or *shirk*. These groups and others who oppose *ziyarat* cite hadith, verses of the Qur'an and legal judgments by reputable *#ulama*" to support their argument. Muslim advocates of shrine visitation use the same sources to make their case for the permissibility of *ziyarat*. The positions adopted within this debate

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<sup>363</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 186.

<sup>364</sup> Variation in practice is generally tolerated. The only person I ever saw turned back from the shrine was someone who attempted to wear their shoes into its precincts.

range widely from conservative views endorsing a qualified acceptance of visitation, usually in order to recollect one's own inevitable death and the wisdom of preparing for it spiritually in advance, or for the purpose of invoking blessings upon the deceased. More liberal Muslims advocate *ziyarat* as beneficial for all worldly problems. The saint, in his capacity as a *wālī allah* or friend of God, is able to bring one's prayers closer to God than can a less spiritually realized human being.<sup>365</sup> The comparison is often drawn to the attempt to meet any powerful person such as the Prime Minister. In order to gain an audience one must go through his entourage of familiars. Likewise, God is most easily approached through the mediating presence of the *auliya*", those who are close to Him. This is often likened to the principle of *safarish*, a recommendation or influential connection without which very little in South Asia would get done. Having this inside track to God through the dead saint expedites all prayers, whatever they may be. Still many Muslims say that asking the saint for boons such as children or employment is inappropriate. Others flatly state that such desires are always granted if the supplicant asks with a pure heart.

Opponents of *ziyarat* in India draw from several sources. A strong anti-*ziyarat* tradition relies heavily on the fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) whose ideological heir in South Asia is Shah Waliullah (d. 1762) and, through him, organizations such as the Jamaat-i Islami and Tablīghī Jama'at. Ibn Taymiyya wrote several tracts denouncing the practice of *ziyarat*.<sup>366</sup> He felt that prayer to a saint to mediate or intercede with God was tantamount to unbelief, because it supposes that the saint is closer to one than God, who is "nearer to him than his jugular vein." (Qur'an 50:16) Therefore presuming God has not heard

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<sup>365</sup> A *wālī* (pl. *auliyā*"') whether living or dead is understood to be close to God, indeed that is the literal meaning of the word which indicates proximity and closeness. Living *pīrs*, as well as dead ones are unconstrained by the bodily and mental barriers that confine normal humans.

<sup>366</sup> See especially his "*ziyarat al-qubur*," in *Majmu'āt al-Risā'il w'al-masā'il*, (Cairo: Lajnat al-Tuath al-Arab).

our prayers is subjecting God to human limitations. Ibn Taymiyya dismisses the justifications for tomb visitation as *bidaʿ* or unlawful innovation by focusing on hadith that indicate Muhammad's disapproval of the practice. For example, he and others often cite the following hadith from the canonical collection *Sahīh Bukharī* which references the habit of Christians of building tomb shrines to their holy dead: "If any religious man dies amongst those people they would build a place of worship at his grave and make these pictures in it. They will be the worst creature in the sight of Allah on the Day of Resurrection."<sup>367</sup> Although Ibn Taymiyya unequivocally condemns the building and visitation of monumental tomb shrines, he gives qualified approval to attending graves. Such visitations could be undertaken provided its purpose was to remind one of one's own death, to pray to God on behalf of the dead, or to simply greet the dead in a gesture of respect.

In his study of *ziyarat* in medieval Cairo, Christopher Taylor points out that even in his own time Ibn Taymiyya's view was not shared by the majority of scholars, *ulama'*. Indeed, he died while imprisoned in Damascus for publishing a polemical tract against *ziyarat*.<sup>368</sup> Although his views on this subject may have been unpopular in his day, Ibn Taymiyya's influence on later influential reform movements such as the Wahhabis is undeniable. His thought was also admired by Shah Waliullah, the eighteenth century Delhi based reformist Sufi and scholar whose ideological descendents include, among others, the founders of the extraordinarily influential Dar ul-Ulum Deoband.<sup>369</sup> Shah Waliullah shared Ibn Taymiyya's reservations about the acceptability of grave visitation. Like Ibn Taymiyya he absolutely denounced the building of monumental

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<sup>367</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, 8:419.

<sup>368</sup> Taylor, p. 172.

<sup>369</sup> Several excellent studies of Deoband are available. Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1982), and "The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1978). Less specific to Deoband, but an important study of the supposedly recalcitrant *ulama'* is Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2002).

shrines and the practice of direct supplication to the saint for benefits or material gains. Yet, especially in the earlier period of his writings, Shah Waliullah affirmed the ongoing links between the saintly dead and the phenomenal world of living humans. He writes, “when the spirits of perfect people are separated from their bodies they become like billows rooted on the spot.” Not only are the spirits of the saints present, indeed *rooted*, at the place of their interment, but these spirits are available and accessible to those who seek with a pure heart to commune with them. Shah Waliullah asserts that the spirit is not bound within the corporeality of an individual. Rather connection and communication between souls is possible, particularly for the pure of heart. Shah Waliullah explains this phenomenon in the following way: “souls near to those spirits may earnestly endeavor to cling to them, and a light in a shape that corresponds with those spirits may arise within them. An allusion to this is made by the saying of the Prophet: 'no one will greet me without returning my spirit to me so that I may reply to his greeting.'”<sup>370</sup> Therefore, the believer at a *dargah* who sincerely and respectfully approaches the tomb and its inhabitant will meet the uplifting and beneficent spirit of the saint. This reciprocal exchange exalts the visitor to the tomb of the saintly dead, as his or her spirit rises in an effort to adequately encounter to the spirit of the saint. This experience is likened to the Prophet's example, in which the fullest expression of the simple act of greeting another person involves a reaching forth not only of hands, but also hearts.

Proponents of *ziyarat*, like its opponents, fall on a spectrum from the obviously partisan custodians of tomb shrines to many among the *#ulama* who, like Shah Waliullah, acknowledge the pious merit, or *qurba*, of such visitations. These advocates of *ziyarat* also cite hadith to validate their position, such as the following from another canonical collection, *Sahih Muslim*, in

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<sup>370</sup>J.M.S. Baljon, "Shah Waliullah and the Dargah," in *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, ed. Christian W. Troll (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

which the Prophet states, "I forbade you to visit graves, but you may now visit them."<sup>371</sup> They also reference strong traditions describing the Prophet's visit to his mother's tomb and a widely reported account that the Prophet appeared after his death in the dream of one of his close companions, Bilal, summoning him to his grave. One of the key elements of the argument made by these advocates is based on the notion that the dead are not insentient at all but should be treated with the same, if not greater, respect and courtesy that one proffers to the living. This ties in with Ibn Taymiyya's acknowledgment that visiting tombs for the purpose of greeting the dead is permissible. The renowned Sufi scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) makes the same point in Book Four of his classic work *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revivification of the Religious Sciences). In this text, which in many ways validated Sufism within Islam, al-Ghazali explains the eternity of the soul thus:

Death cannot destroy the soul, which is the place of Allah's *ma'rifat* (gnosis), because it is something spiritual. Death causes the change of the condition of soul, and relieves it from the prison of its bodily cage. It does not end as Allah says: "Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord; they rejoice in the bounty provided by Allah. And with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them (in their bliss), the (Martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve. They glory in the Grace and the bounty from Allah, and in the fact that Allah suffers not the reward of the Faithful to be lost (in the least)." One should not think that this position is acquired only by those that are martyred on the battlefield, because every breath of an *#arif* (one who has gained knowledge) is a martyr.<sup>372</sup>

Although al-Ghazali is primarily describing the souls of the righteous dead, his understanding of the nature of death is that it merely wreaks "a change of the condition of the soul, and relieves it from the prison of its bodily cage." Therefore, to visit the dead is to encounter the same being that once walked the earth in an altered form, but no less aware of the doings of the living.

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<sup>371</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, 4:2131.

<sup>372</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'ulum al-din*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Alamiya, 1992).

For the faithful who approach the tombs of the dead, greeting is an essential element of the encounter. Shah Waliullah set forth the appropriate ways to approach the tomb of the saintly dead. One should enter the tomb in a state of ritual purity, approach the tomb and recite the *fatiĤa*.<sup>373</sup> Subsequently, one must perform two *rakat* (cycles of prayer), squat down facing the dead with one's back in the direction of Mecca, recite the Surat al-Mulk, the *takbĪr* (Allahu Akbar, God is Supreme), profess the *shahada* (confession of faith), again recite the *fatiĤa* eleven times, approach the tomb calling out twenty-one times *ya rabb* (Oh Lord!) and repeat *ya ruh* (Oh Spirit!) into the ear of the dead. Finally, the visitor relaxes and waits to see if their presence and invoking of blessings upon the saint will be welcomed and meet with a response.<sup>374</sup> Some of these directives are highly detailed (such as the above) and extensively annotated, justifying each prayer and practice with evidence from Qur'an and Hadith. Certain *dargahs* possess rules and customs of behavior exclusive to that shrine and saint, often reflecting particular events or attributes ascribed to the saint. Thus at some *dargahs* in India, alcohol is offered or timepieces or padlocks, all reflecting the particular character of the saint and the type of blessing he or she is renowned for bestowing.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> The *fatiĤa* refers both to the opening verse of the Qur'an and also denotes prayers on behalf of the deceased.

<sup>374</sup> Baljon, pp. 189-190.

<sup>375</sup> For more on Sufi shrines in South Asia, see: P. M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu`in Al-Din Chishti of Ajmer*, (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard M. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India*, (Delhi; Munshiram Manoharlal, 1996 (1978)); Ernst, Carl W., *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, (Albany; State University of New York Press, 1992); Carl W. Ernst and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Miles Irving, "The Shrine of Baba Farid Shakarganj at Pakpattan," in *Notes on Punjab and Mughal India: Selections from Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, edited by Zulfiqar Ahmed, (Lahore; Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1988); Claudia Liebskind, *Piety on Its Knees: Three Sufi Traditions in South Asia in Modern Times*, (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1998); Desiderio Pinto, *Piri-Muridi Relationship: A Study of the Nizamuddin dargāh*, (Delhi; Manohar, 1995); John A. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Shrines and Saints*, (New York; Samuel A. Weiser, Inc., 1970 (1938)); Christian W. Troll, ed., *Muslim Shrines in India: Their Character, History and Significance*, (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1989); Peter van der Veer, "Playing or Praying: A Sufi Saint's Day in Surat," *The Journal of Asian Studies* (51, no. 3 1992); Kerrin Von Schwerin, "Saint Worship in Indian Islam: The Legend of the Martyr Salar Masud Ghazi," in *Ritual and Religion among Muslims of the Subcontinent*, edited by Imtiaz Ahmad, (Lahore; Vanguard, 1985); Pnina Werbner and Helene Basu, eds., *Embodying Charisma: Modernity, Locality and the Performance of Emotion in Sufi Cults*, (London; Routledge, 1998).

Almost two hundred and fifty years after Shah Waliullah laid out his version of the appropriate code of conduct during *ziyarat* (shrine pilgrimage), the residents of Malerkotla and visitors to the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh enact their understanding of the *adab*, or appropriate conduct, of devotion. Though most attendees observe far less complicated rites, some visitors do prescribe similarly precise behaviors. An elderly hafiz (one who has memorized the Qur'an) explained that it is essential to approach a graveyard of any kind, whether a shrine or a common burial ground, in a state of purity having performed *wuz'ā* (ritual cleansing) and with an attitude of humility and respect. Hafizji said, "wherever you go you should do *wuz'ā*. A man does no wrong when he has done *wuz'ā*, he is pure."<sup>376</sup> He also affirmed the critical importance of properly greeting the denizens of a place of burial. Upon entering the grounds, first one must declare "Salaam Alaykum (Peace Be Upon You)" so that those present will not be surprised or offended by one's sudden appearance in their midst. Hafizji advised,

Whenever you go to a graveyard you say Salaam Alaykum. It means may the mercy of God be upon you, O buried ones, upon the *muslimīn* [Muslims] and the *mu"minīn* [true believers, a degree above average Muslims]. You have gone to the grave before us and we will come after you. This is the prayer for going to *qabrstans* [graveyards]. ... You have gone before us, and we are coming after. Everybody has to go. That is our prayer. So first we *salaam* to the grave.

A respectful greeting and salutation prior to commencement of prayers is crucial because the souls of those buried remain present at the gravesite. After the greeting, the Hafiz instructed that one should recite the *fatiha*, the *dhurud sharīf* (a prayer litany invoking blessings on the followers of Ibrahim and Muhammad), and then any special prayer according to one's needs or knowledge.

Whereas Shah Waliullah indicated that the souls of buried saints are like rooted billows at the place of interment, Hafizji extended this by affirming the living presence of all those who die

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<sup>376</sup> Interview, August 2, 2001.

until the Day of Judgment. Until that time, all of God's sentient creations, that is humans and *jinn*, are understood to be alive in a way distinct from their previous corporeal existence, but nonetheless present and active in this plane of being. Hafizji explained it thus:

All of them are alive, no one is dead, they are all alive. Whosoever died is still alive from whatsoever community. Because the point is that he who dies is held accountable. God has placed this accountability on humans and *jinn*. On the *jinn* there is an accounting. On humans there is an accounting.

Hafizji's view that physical death is not the true death is a widespread one. Although Islamic thought holds a variety of positions regarding the status of the dead, this perception is quite common. The souls of the dead are aware of the world, but they have entered a liminal zone called *barzakh*. Here the soul is separate to a degree from the body. However, prior to the Day of Judgment it is fully within God's power to change the condition of the dead and alter their salvation status. Therefore, prayers on behalf of any of these deceased persons may have a positive impact on their ultimate salvation. The relative efficacy of this is also debated between those who quantify the exponential rewards reaped through such prayers and those who merely suggest their advisability and general merit. The finality of death does not come until the Day of Judgment, at which point those who are damned will wish instead for death.

The spirit of Haider Shaikh is therefore present at the *dargah*. Furthermore, his spirit continues to communicate with the living through the ritual specialists who channel the saint for his devotees. A member of the *khalifah* family who does not sit at the *dargah* explains this possibility in the following way:

People think Haider Shaikh died, [but] his soul is there alive. When some disciple of Babaji's plays [i.e. become possessed by the spirit of the saint] his *paun* [spirit] comes. So he is not dead. No he is not dead. This is in the Qur'an Sharif and Hadith. He who links himself to God, he does not die. He only hides himself from the world.

The *khalīfah's* perception that through linking oneself to God a person does not die is a clear reference to the passage in the Qur'an that is often cited as evidence of the ongoing relationship between the living and the righteous dead. Qur'an Sura 3:169 declares that those who die striving in the way of Allah are not dead, but live on. Although the apparent reference is to martyrs in battle, many Sufis, as we saw with al-Ghazali above, prefer the esoteric, or *batin*, interpretation that the *mujahidun* (holy warriors) in question are those who die while striving in the greater *jihad*, the struggle with their *nafs*, their own base nature and worldly desires.<sup>377</sup> The great Bihari Sufi saint Sharafuddin b. Yahya Maneri (d. 1381) explains this very passage in the following way:

Concerning the friends of God ...it has been said: 'Those who are killed along the Way to God – do not number them among the dead, for they live through their Lord!' A person should be ready to give his life at the head of the Way and walk along it stripped of his own life, so that this special situation might arise wherein 'they live through their Lord.' ...whoever sets out along this Way after having sacrificed his life, and continues to walk in love, has to pass by no other intermediary. This group consists of friends who seem to be annihilated but who really live, while the other group is comprised of strangers who are seemingly alive but actually dead.<sup>378</sup>

Thus, those individuals who are able to supercede worldly attachments through their quest for essential, spiritual knowledge or *maʿrifat* do not die but remain awake in the grave and their souls remain active in the world. Maneri specifically identifies this group as 'friends' or *auliya*'' who merely appear to be dead, but are in reality more alive than most who seem to live and are accessible to the living. The *dargah* provides a point of exchange, a focus for ritual activity that

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<sup>377</sup> In Islam, there are two degrees of what is usually termed the 'soul' in English. The *nafs* is the baser level of spirit which animates our material selves. *Nafs* is also possessed by other sentient beings such as animals and humans are believed to be constantly struggling against their *nafs* in order to curb instincts and impulses that lead us away from God. The higher degree of spirit, termed *ruh*, is a more subtle essence. The goal of much spiritual practice is to separate the *ruh* from the *nafs*, thereby freeing it to unite with God. Until the last day, the *ruh* remains 'alive' in the sense that it is still possible to pray on behalf of the departed and hope that they will receive the rewards of that prayer. For those, such as the saints, who were perfected in life, the *ruh* of the saint is able to perform intercessory prayers on behalf of the living. This last point is an issue of some dispute among Muslims.

<sup>378</sup> Sharafuddin Maneri, "Letter 86: Coming to Terms with Oneself," in Paul Jackson, *Sharafuddin Maneri: The Hundred Letters* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).

maintains the active connection between the physically dead but spiritually alive saint and the inhabitants of his *wilayat*, or spiritual territory.

The actual form of Muslim ritual at Haider Shaikh's tomb varies, depending upon the particular school of thought the Muslim belongs to with regard to *ziyarat*. For those of the Ibn Taymiyya/Shah Waliullah reformist mindset, should such a visitation occur at all it ought to be brief and simple. For travelers on the Sufi path the procedures may be quite elaborate and time consuming. Few visitors to these tombs know or follow the directives given in the elaborate manuals of etiquette described above. The essential elements for most Muslims are quite similar to the description given by the Hafiz in Malerkotla. One must enter in a state of ritual purity, having performed *wuz'ā*, the ablutions prior to prayer. Shoes are never worn and most people, men and women, will cover their heads. Entering the tomb area it is not necessary to circumambulate or bow, but many do. Eventually one comes to face the side of the tomb that faces Mecca.<sup>379</sup> Standing or sitting one recites the *fatiha*, the opening chapter of the Qur'an, which is an appropriate recitation for any occasion. Afterwards, any other part of the Qur'an, especially the thirty-sixth chapter *Ya Sin* or the Throne Verse (Qur'an 2:254), may be recited if desired.<sup>380</sup> This is followed by any formulaic or personal *du'a*, a supplicatory prayer. Many of these *du'as* are commonly and widely known, such as the *dhurud sharif*, a prayer that invokes blessings on the persons and people of Ibrahim and Muhammad. Improvised, extemporaneous personal supplications may then be made.

Upon completing the prayers, the Muslim passes her hands over her face and head, distributing whatever blessing might have been received and physically marking the completion

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<sup>379</sup> In Islam corpses are always buried facing Mecca, thus to address the deceased properly one must approach the head of the tomb on the western side.

<sup>380</sup> *Yā Sīn*, the thirty-sixth *sāra* of the Qur"ān is often recited as a memorial for the dead. See Juan E. Campo, "Burial," in Jane Macauliffe, editor, *Encyclopedia of the Qur"ān*, (Leiden; Brill, 2001), pp. 263-265.

of the formal prayers. After this the visitor departs, some retreating backwards so as not to disrespect the saint by turning away, and others simply walking out. This form of visitation is the most basic. Those Muslims who choose to make offerings of money, flowers, sweets, or cloth grave covering known as *chadars*, will typically do so immediately upon entering the tomb space. This is accomplished by approaching the base of the tomb, which in Haider Shaikh's case is straight ahead upon entering the inner space. At any given time, two to ten members of the *khalīfah* family will likely be present at the *dargah*.<sup>381</sup> The *khalīfahs* in attendance sit there, facing those who enter the inner tomb area, and receive whatever is offered. If flowers or cloth covers are given, the *khalīfah* present will place them on the tomb on behalf of the devotee if asked, but some devotees prefer to do so themselves. At Haider Shaikh's tomb this is acceptable, but at some other tombs this is only done by the shrine servants.<sup>382</sup> After completing their prayers and offerings the visitors will return to the foot of the tomb and receive back a portion of the offerings made, now blessed due to their proximity to the saint. This is known as *tabarruk*, a term for any substance which has come in contact with the *barakat* laden tomb and therefore retains some portion of that spiritual power. This *tabarruk* is then brought back by the pilgrim and distributed among family and friends. If a great deal of food is offered, only a small part will be left at the tomb, a small part retained by the pilgrim, and the remainder is distributed amongst all those in attendance, particularly *faqirs* and beggars. The numbers of these groups are small at Haider Shaikh's tomb, but at some *dargahs* like those in Ajmer Sharif or Nizamuddin in Delhi, vast numbers of poor and hungry people are fed by the visiting pilgrims.

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<sup>381</sup> There is a schedule, more or less formal, which determines which branch of the family is responsible for officiating at the site during which hours of the day. On Thursdays and for festivals when the attendance at the shrine is greater, typically representatives of all the *khalīfah* families are there.

<sup>382</sup> At the shrine of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, for example, *khudām* or shrine servants are the only ones who may directly contact the tomb of the saint.

At Haider Shaikh's *dargah* and the other *dargahs* in Malerkotla the full gamut of Muslim perspectives and practices on *ziyarat* are represented. Some believe that attendance, recitation of the *fatiha*, and saying some *dua*" is the maximum appropriate behavior. Still others will bring offerings of flowers, sweets, *chadars*, and will bow to the tomb, even pressing their hands, eyes, and heads to it or kissing it. One local scholar of Malerkotla's history asserts that due to the rising influence of Jama'at-i Islami and Tablighi Jama'at in town that fewer and fewer local Muslims attend saint's tombs.<sup>383</sup> My own observations and interviews confirm that fewer Muslims than Hindus and Sikhs are in attendance, but many Muslims in town report that this is not appreciably changed from earlier periods.<sup>384</sup> Almost all the Muslims who attend the shrine are local. Very few Muslims from outside the state come on pilgrimage here. According to the *khalifahs* and other locals, this has been even more pronounced in recent years as tensions with Pakistan have often resulted in travel restrictions between the two countries.<sup>385</sup> Therefore Muslims from this region of Punjab who may have attended the tomb prior to 1947 are unable to visit this shrine or any other in India. In any account, the majority of the devotees at Haider Shaikh are Sikh and Hindu.<sup>386</sup>

## Hindu and Sikh Pilgrims

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<sup>383</sup> Sultana, 1993, pp. 158-170, also Sultana, 1996.

<sup>384</sup> There are many other *dargāhs* in Malerkotla. Several of these are located in predominantly Muslim neighborhoods and are quite out of the public eye, therefore they have a larger Muslim constituency. Other sites such as the shrine to Lakhdata *pīr* is managed by a Sikh and attended by almost no Muslims whatsoever. Still others demonstrate a relatively equal mix of religions.

<sup>385</sup> During the period of my research the border with Pakistan was largely closed. A bus service that had briefly operated was closed and only just reinstated in July 2003. Furthermore, visas for Pakistani pilgrims to come to India are often difficult to obtain, no matter what the state of relations between the two countries.

<sup>386</sup> However, the smaller *dargāh*s in Malerkotla are visited mostly by locals of all religious groups and the numbers there appear to be more balanced, even favoring Muslims.

For Hindu and Sikh devotees at the shrine, there is far less need to justify their conviction that the spirit of the saint is accessible to them at this place.<sup>387</sup> Hindus and Sikhs perform nearly identical rituals and offerings at *dargahs* and these practices are quite similar to the formal actions of the Muslims. Hindu and Sikh concepts of the status of the holy dead are fairly similar, but the Hindu literature on the nature of death and transmigration is infinitely larger. Both Hindus and Sikhs adhere to the notion of *samsara*, the principle of cyclic time through which souls are reincarnated. In the Hindu perspective, the soul or *atman* continues to be reborn until such a time as the whole of cosmic time ends or until the soul achieves perfect knowledge, enlightenment known as *mokṣa*. At this point the cycle of *samsara* ceases and the individual soul, or *atman*, is united with a cosmic *ītman*.<sup>388</sup> Those who achieve *mokṣa* during their lifetimes are said to be *jīvanmukti* – or dead while alive, existing in a state of pure consciousness no longer fettered in any way by their gross, subtle, or cosmic body. Upon physical death, which occurs at the will of the one who has achieved *jīvanmukti*, the body may be buried rather than burned. Particularly in yogic traditions of Hinduism, physical death for those who have achieved perfect knowledge is merely another state of being.<sup>389</sup> The physical, or gross, body is so

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<sup>387</sup> Hindu death rituals and understandings of the nature of the soul are highly elaborated in countless sources. The Sikh tradition, on the other hand, has paid little attention to this matter. Beyond a general belief in reincarnation and a priority upon cremation of the dead, there seems to be little material indicating a concern with the status of the dead. There is, however, a highly active cult of the powerful dead, particularly of martyrs of the faith. See Stuart Blackburn, "Death and Deification: Folk Cults in Hinduism," *History of Religions* Volume, 24, no. 3 (1985); Louis Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2000); Victor Turner, "Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process," in *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions*, edited by Frank Reynolds, (University Park; Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977).

<sup>388</sup> This is the Vendantin perspective, only one of several schools of thought about the nature of human life and death and the status of the soul in the Hindu traditions. Other conceptions maintain there will always be a distinction between the soul of a human and the divine soul, and that the state of perfect enlightenment is a state of pure devotion to the divine principle – a relationship of reciprocity that requires that distinction to remain.

<sup>389</sup> Particularly interesting studies of death in Hindu traditions have been done by Jonathan Parry. See "Death and Digestion: The Symbolism of Food and Eating in North Indian Mortuary Rites," *Man* (Volume 20, 1985); *Death in Banaras*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1994); "The End of the Body," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, edited by Michel Feher, (New York; UrZone, Inc., 1989); "Ghost, Greed and Sin: The Occupational Identity of Benares Funeral Priests," *Man* (Volume, 15, 1980); "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic," in

completely controlled by the mind of the yogic adept, that death of the body merely signals a change of consciousness. Burying the body fulfills a form of yogic practice in which breath and bodily control are so complete that the practitioner is merely in a state of eternal meditation or *samadhi*, described by Jonathan Parry as a “perpetual cataleptic condition of suspended animation.”<sup>390</sup> Burial sites for Hindu saints are known as *samadhis* and are found throughout India. At these sites the incredible beneficent power of the saint remains available to devotees. These sites often become shrines. In Malerkotla, the Dera of Baba Atma Ram is one such place in which Baba Atma Ram and several of his disciples are interred in small buildings with small markers placed to indicate the place of burial and to provide a focal point for ritual activity.

There is a long history of devotion to saints in the Hindu traditions. In North India the roughly contemporary medieval poet-saints such as Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, Surdas, Nanak and others came to be known as the Sant tradition (signifying the guiding role of saints or sants), or the bhakti movement (highlighting the devotion or bhakti involved). This broad based group of poet saints did not work in any kind of coordinated fashion, either together or within a particular religious tradition. Rather they shared an ethos that opposed conventional religion, in particular the caste system and religious formalism. They also tended to dismiss the relevance of religious distinctions. These individuals did not constitute a formal group, merely a shared orientation towards the divine that tended to ignore or even deliberately attack sectarianism.<sup>391</sup> This is born out today at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh most frequently cite the Shaikh's lack of belief in

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*Death and the Regeneration of Life*, edited by M. Bloch and J. Parry, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>390</sup> Both Hindus and Muslims believe that the body of the saintly dead do not corrupt in the grave. This is due to the perfection of their relationship with Allah in the case of Islam and to the complete mastery of the phenomenal world on the part of the Hindu yogi. Parry, Jonathan, "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, edited by Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 96

<sup>391</sup> In the both the case of Kabir and Guru Nanak, religious communities independent from Hinduism and Islam arose, that of Nanak in particular becoming a wholly unique tradition.

religious sectarianism and caste discrimination (*jañ-pañh*) as one of their main explanations for their own attendance at the shrine and for the multi-confessional appeal of the saint. The poetic compositions of these saints, or *sants*, reveal that they had achieved a unique level of realization of the ultimate reality or communion with God.<sup>392</sup> After their physical deaths, these *sants* through their poetry and the rich bodies of lore concerning them continue to activate the religious lives of countless people throughout India regardless of religious affiliation. Much of this lore directly challenges religious separatism. For example, there is a widely known story that is associated with both Kabir and Guru Nanak, the first teacher of the Sikh tradition, about their deaths. Having appealed to both Hindu and Muslim communities, both *sants* had large followings affiliated to those religions. After they died, the Hindus and Muslims began to dispute over which group should dispose of the body. When they raised the cloth shroud, they discovered that the body had turned into a heap of flowers. Each community took half of the flowers, the Hindus burned theirs and the Muslims buried their share. Clearly both groups missed the point, but through the mercy of the saint conflict was averted.

For Hindus, the Muslim saint is understood to be alive while dead, still very much present and available to the devotees. This state of being in which the spirit is no longer bound by physical restrictions is understood by Hindus to be akin to the state of ultimate realization. Having thus transcended these limits, the saint is in effect, joined with God. Thus many devotees understood Haider Shaikh, *as* God, stating unequivocally, "*voh hamare bhagwan hai*," "He is our God." This is extended by a Hindu *chela* who is possessed by the spirit of the Shaikh

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<sup>392</sup> For example, the Banaras based poet Kabir composed the following:

The Hindu says Rama is the Beloved,  
The Turk says Rahim.  
Then they kill each other.  
No one knows the secret.

Hess, Linda, *The Bijak of Kabir*, (San Francisco; North Point Press, 1983), page 42.

whom I asked what the difference between believing in the power of a saint and believing in God was. He responded, "As I told you, he is our God. We believe in him like God. He is a form of God." Understood in this way, the saint may be prevailed upon to fulfill the needs and prayers of his devotees, if properly worshipped. In the Hindu understanding, it is Haider Shaikh himself who is capable of fulfilling the desires of his constituency. This is an important distinction from the Muslim perspective in which it is very clearly God and God alone who may grant any desire, not Haider Shaikh, who is a go-between or mediator who carries the prayer of the supplicant to God. Hindus, on the other hand, believe that as the saint has transcended the restrictions of human bodily and spiritual life, he is no longer subject to the laws and restrictions that pertain to normal humans. He has united with God. Thus he is capable of altering the physical and spiritual condition of anyone, if he so desires.

In the Hindu conception the spirits of enlightened beings have a material impact on the atmosphere in which they practiced their devotions.<sup>393</sup> Such a place is qualitatively superior to other areas, and provides a point of access to divine realms known as *tīrth*, or crossing place. Traveling to such places is an act of merit and rituals observed in these shrines are beneficial to one's own *karma* and to the general maintenance of *dharma*. In the universal sense, *dharma* signifies the right order of things. Thus by participating in rituals that affirm the benefit of prayer and worship at holy places, the general welfare of society is also served both socially, as people are performing their proper duties, and spiritually.<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Note Sax, mountain goddess

<sup>394</sup> A heightened consciousness of the importance of Hindu sacred space is discernible in the movement to "liberate" Hindu sacred sites from Muslim "occupation." Books such as Sita Ram Goel's *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them?* fuel the fire of groups such as the VHP, Bajrang Dal, and Shiv Sena. In particular three sites have been targeted as major shrines in need of liberation, along with vague estimates of 30,000 other such places. A survey and index of some of these sites is part of Goel's book.

The Sikh perspective on death and the dead is similar but far less elaborated than the Hindu. The Sikh faith was born from the sant tradition of poets who dedicated themselves to seeking God and for whom religious categories and divisions were largely irrelevant. Guru Nanak the first Sikh Guru was born into the type of multicultural milieu that was common at that period. His father was a *patwari* or accountant for the Mughal government at Talwandi, in present day Pakistan. Nanak was trained in Persian and Sanskrit and worked briefly as a bookkeeper. After experiencing a direct revelation of God, Nanak began to travel and preach of his new knowledge of the nature of the divine. His teachings stressed the oneness and eternity of God, the equality of humanity, and the absurdity of sectarianism. There is a strong tradition that his first declaration following his experience of God was, "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim." Although many sants gave up their worldly lives, this was not to be the path of the Sikhs. On the contrary, Guru Nanak opposed asceticism and withdrawal from the world, instead encouraging a congregational and community based householder lifestyle. At the time of his death he designated one of his closest disciples, rather than his son, to be the next Guru.<sup>395</sup> After the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, the lineage of human gurus for normative Sikhism came to an end and the Guru was understood to be transmogrified into the *Guru Granth-Guru Panth*. This formula represents the enshrining of the Guru in two forms: the Guru Granth Sahib being the collected hymns of the Gurus and other sants, and the Guru Panth in the form of the community of believers. The understanding is that these two collectivities embody the Guru who is, in an ultimate sense, God.

The Sikh tradition is often regarded as an amalgam of Hinduism and Islam, though this formulation undermines the uniqueness of the faith and the sense of identity and solidarity

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<sup>395</sup> This led to the first schism among the Sikhs as some clustered around Nanak's son. This was the first of what became a large fellowship of Sikh groups outside the normative tradition, often designated collectively Nanak panthis. However, the majority of the followers adhered to the lineage of Guruship traced through Angad.

among Sikhs. That said, there is a degree of ecumenicism integral to the tradition from its formative period. Evidence of this non-sectarian ethos in the Sikh faith is ample. One of Guru Nanak's closest companions who accompanied him on his travels was a Muslim musician Mardana. The foundation stone of the central Sikh shrine known as the Golden Temple was laid by a Muslim saint, Mian Mir. The Guru Granth Sahib contains poetic compositions attributed to numerous poet saints including several Muslims, most notably Baba Farid Shakarganj. However, from at least the time of the fifth Guru, the Sikh community came into increasing conflict with the Mughal rulers at Delhi.

Many Sikh life cycle rituals resemble Hindu rituals, from the wedding ceremony in which the Guru Granth Sahib is circumambulated rather than a sacred fire to the cremation of the dead. However, the treatment of the dead and the understanding of death in Sikh tradition is quite unique. Hindu death rituals involve elaborate mechanisms to expedite and ameliorate the deceased's transition to the next life. There are numerous ceremonies designed to propitiate the dead spirit, build for it a "body" in the afterlife, and to guarantee it a positive rebirth.<sup>396</sup> Furthermore, for the relatives of the deceased especially, contact with the dead or the dying process requires careful rituals of purification. Sikhs on the other hand, though they adhere to the notion of rebirth, have simple ceremonies, committing the dead to the pyre and disposal of the ashes can take place in any body of water.<sup>397</sup> The Sikh Rehat Maryada, or code of conduct, then advocates a simple ceremony in which the entire Guru Granth Sahib is recited, called Akhand Path.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Knipe, David, "Sapindikarana," in Frank Reynolds, ed. *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions*, (University Park; Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977).

<sup>397</sup> Many Sikhs do prefer to bring their dead to the gurdwara at Kiratpur at the foot of the Himalayas, but this is not regarded as prescriptive to the same degree that immersion in the Ganges is the optimal end of life for Hindus.

<sup>398</sup> On the rehat see W. H. Mcleod, *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-Nama*, (Dunedin, NZ; University of Otago Press, 1987).

Yet the Rehat Maryada, which began to be explicitly formulated in the early to mid-nineteenth century, also emphasizes the points of distinction between Hinduism and Islam.<sup>399</sup> In particular, attendance at non-Sikh shrines is strenuously opposed. The Rehat explicitly instructs, "Worship should be rendered only to the One Timeless Being and to no god or goddess." Furthermore, no grave is supposed to become a place of worship. These formal objections stand in some tension with the actual practice of many Sikhs. It would be enormously unusual to visit one of the several major goddess temples in Punjab and find no Sikhs there. In addition, Sikhs are present in enormous numbers not only at Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, but at other *dargahs* throughout the country. Finally, there is a strong reverence for Sikh martyrs. This is evident from the martyr's galleries that adjoin many gurdwaras featuring paintings gruesomely recreating scenes of torture of Sikh heroes such as Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Baba Deep Singh, and so on. There are also countless small white memorial monuments placed over the graves of Sikh martyrs – known as *shahīds* – who died unjustly. These monuments litter the landscape, as do Muslim graves. They too are plowed around in fields, placed within the courtyards of temples and houses and incorporated into the daily life of many people.<sup>400</sup> In spite of the explicit injunctions against such memorials and against the utility of pilgrimage to them, these places thrive and proliferate, indicating that the mass of Sikh faithful are not comfortable with the absolute cessation of relations between the living and the dead that is promulgated by official bodies such as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee that oversees historic gurdwaras.

There is a great deal of similarity in certain aspects of ritual practices at the shrine. One of the most common rituals involves taking vows, or making prayers and then returning to make

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<sup>399</sup> An excellent assessment of the process of formulating the Rehat and the process of creating unique rituals in order to foster a sense of religious identity can be found in Oberoi.

<sup>400</sup> In some cases these shrines also become more substantial places of worship as do the sites where revered Sikh leaders died or were killed, such as the Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in Delhi marking the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur's body was burned after his head was taken by a faithful disciple to Anandpur in Punjab.

an offering in gratitude. Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims all engage in this practice and their fulfillment (*sukha*) of the vow is typically the same. The main difference between vows and prayers is whether the desire, say the birth of a son, is simply prayed for and an offering made in hopes of the good intentions and proper etiquette finding favor with the saint, or if a kind of bargain is made by a declaration that if the desire is fulfilled, in return a certain amount of money, food, or charity will be given. Others take on obligations or practices until the desire is fulfilled such as abstention from meat or alcohol, or weekly prayers, or even fasts (though this is not undertaken by Muslims). Some devotees engage in more demanding fulfillment such as proceeding to the tomb from a great distance in serial prostrations, advancing only the length of one's body at each stage. Newly married Sikh and Hindu couples frequently come to the tomb at the first festival for Haider Shaikh or, if that is not possible, at the first opportunity after their marriage. The bride will wear her wedding *dupaããa* (scarf), which is then tied to a cloth worn by the groom. This is believed to guarantee offspring and marital happiness. Children born through Haider Shaikh's blessing are presented at the tomb and offerings are made. As it is believed that touching the child to the grave itself is auspicious, the scene at the chaotic and crowded *mela*, or festival, becomes quite hazardous as babies are dangled near the tomb from a distance.

In addition, some people, especially the *khalīfahs*, have particular rituals that must occur at the shrine. Unlike Sikh and Hindu couples, the *khalīfah* bride and groom must come to the shrine before the *nikaĤ* (Muslim marriage service). This is explained by a woman from the *khalīfah* family:

Begum: Yes, after [Hindu or Sikh] marriage both bridegroom and bride are brought here, to fulfill the wish. Now when we [i.e. the *khalīfahs*] have a marriage first we will go there and then perform the marriage.

AB: And for a child?

Begum: First the mother *salaams* (prostrates) and then the child.  
 AB: Do Hindu people also do this?  
 Begum: They also do it but to lesser extent. If somebody has made a vow then they come, if somebody has not he does not come, but we necessarily come.  
 AB: So what do you offer there?  
 Begum: Like some sweets, we take some candles, incense, etc. If we first had said that we will do *niyaz* [sweet rice], then we do the *degh* [a cauldron for making a large amount of *niyaz* to give to the dervishes and the needy].  
 AB: Do you recite some special prayer?  
 Begum: Yes, after reading Qur'an Sharif, I ask blessings on him [Haider Shaikh].

This example demonstrates that the slight differences in ritual and practice are known, but in no way mutually exclusive or problematic for the Begum or anyone else interviewed. However, some rituals are simply particular to Haider Shaikh's descendants. For example, British ethnographers reported that silver equal in weight to a child's first haircut is given here and an offering is made at the time of circumcision.<sup>401</sup> Some *khalifahs* assert that before they travel out of Malerkotla they come and take leave from their Dadaji as they would from all their respected elders. According to a senior member of the *khalifahs*, the Malerkotla army used to come to pay obeisance prior to going to battle:

This Malerkotla was managed by the Nawab and the army of the Nawab. Whenever the army of the Nawab was to go for war, the forces used to first visit Haider Shaikh. They used to salute and offer *salaam* to Haider Shaikh. When these two wars broke out, the First World War and World War II, first in 1914 and second in 1939-45, the Malerkotla forces were on the side of England and America who were called the Allies. The opponents were Germany-that is Axis. Whenever the forces used to go for war, they used to come first to Haider Shaikh, marching all around in lines of one, two, three, four. Millions of people respect Haider Shaikh and the forces used also to respect him. These forces used to take the blessings of Haider Shaikh and that custom is still practiced these days. Whenever people go somewhere or the students go for their exams they come for his blessing first. Whenever there is a marriage, the bridegroom before going to the bride's house, the groom goes for blessing from Haider Shaikh.

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<sup>401</sup> These practices and others are all recorded in Ibbetson's Ethnography. Ibbetson, et al., *A Glossary of the Punjab Castes*.

Many of these particular rituals are diminishing. There is no state army now and many local Muslims no longer come to the shrine before marriage.<sup>402</sup> However, Hindu and Sikh devotees continue in great numbers to observe the traditions that their own parents and grandparents had observed. As one male Hindu devotee explains, “my mother didn't have any children, she had four or five, but they died. Then a Babaji told her to come to Baba [Haider Shaikh] and she came and I was born. Our ancestors also believed in Babaji, but after that our belief became complete.” I met a number of devotees now settled abroad, in Singapore, the USA, Canada, etc. who came back with their babies or their newlywed children to show their gratitude for the continued blessings of Haider Shaikh. A Sikh gentleman from Singapore said his great-grandfather had prayed here for a son and received seven. His wife, who grew up in Singapore, is now also a believer and lights candles and sings songs for Haider Shaikh every Thursday in their home.

At Haider Shaikh's *dargah* there is ample textual evidence from the late nineteenth century British records of multiple users and usages. Ibbetson and Rose's *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab*, as well as several texts on the folklore of the Punjab all make reference to the large number of Hindus and others who come to the shrine to pray for children and for relief from possession. Ibbetson and Rose observe that “the attendance at the fair of Hazrat Shaikh is very large, people of all creeds and ages and of both sexes being attracted to it from a long distances.”<sup>403</sup> The *Malerkotla State Gazetteer* from 1904 remarks that every Thursday people gather at the shrine – in the thousands on the first Thursday of the lunar month – as well as at several large fairs during the month of Jeth (a Hindu month falling in May-June).

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<sup>402</sup> The disappearance of some traditional rituals and practices is noted by Anila Sultana, a college professor and Malerkotla native whose unpublished dissertation, “Muslims of Malerkotla,” addresses this very subject.

<sup>403</sup> D. Ibbetson, E.D. MacLagan, and H.A. Rose, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, (Lahore: Government Printing House, 1919 (1883)), p. 645.

The British gazetteers, the local histories, and the accounts of the ruling family all testify to the centrality of Haider Shaikh and his shrine in the formation and perpetuation of Malerkotla as a territory and its identity as a place of inter-religious peace.

Ultimately it is clear that although each of the three major traditions have internal discourses challenging the practice of visiting *dargahs*, these objections or restrictions are wholly ignored by vast numbers of people. This demonstrates that the considerable diversity of belief in terms of theological status of the dead, does not undermine the unity of belief about the function of the saintly dead. To reiterate Bell's point, no unanimity of belief is necessary. In the perception of all three of the major religious traditions represented at the *dargah*, the saintly dead are uniquely capable of addressing the concerns of humans. Having been human themselves at one stage, even though they achieved in life a super-human degree of awareness and closer than usual relationship to the divine, the saintly dead are capable of deep empathy, compassion, and mercy for their fellow humans.

## **RITUAL PRACTICE**

Although there are considerable theological differences there is little observable variation between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in terms of daily ritual practice at Haider Shaikh's *dargah*. Although Muslims are more likely to offer prayers and not to prostrate or give food or money, that is by no means always the case. Anybody can and does offer sweets, a green or blue cloth cover or *chadar* for the tomb, small clay horses, incense, oil lamps, money, goats, or objects for the maintenance of the shrine. Like the offerings, the ritual specialists are also multiple, as space is made at the place for various modes of interaction with Haider Shaikh – through his descendants, the *khalīfahs* and through visiting disciples, *or chelas*, whom he possesses.

### **A Day at the *dargah***

As in most Muslim communities, the day in Malerkotla begins for many residents after the *fajr* prayer at dawn. Though some people return to sleep after prayer and some do not stir at all (particularly on cold winter mornings) for early risers and *panch namazis* (those who habitually pray five times a day) they are moving through their homes and streets in the first grey light. Many Hindus and Sikhs are also out and about early, some due to the practical habits of working before the heat of the day and keeping the hours of the sun. Others attend temples and gurdwaras for morning prayer which occurs at this time as well. In mixed neighborhoods one may be overwhelmed by the combined sounds of the Muslim call to prayer, *azan*, Hindu devotional songs, *bhajans*, and the hymns of the Sikh gurus, *kīrtan*, all broadcast over loudspeakers.<sup>404</sup> In all three traditions this is a powerful moment when the lines between waking and sleeping, consciousness and unconsciousness, the divine and the human are in transition and indistinct.

From this hour on, there is no time when the *dargah* is deserted. A member of one of the five branches of the *khalīfah* family is always present.<sup>405</sup> In this family, women often take on this role – though at many *dargahs* this is unheard of, even forbidden. The entire area around the *dargah*, called *uperwalla mohalla* or the 'high neighborhood,' due to its situation on a hill, is inhabited almost exclusively by members of the caretaking families – *khalīfah* families, descendants of Haider Shaikh, and *mujawwar* families, descendants of those who served Haider Shaikh in his life. It is mostly these people who come in the early morning.

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<sup>404</sup> It is worth noting that prior to Partition in Malerkotla there was a significant controversy over the sounds broadcasting from a Hindu temple in proximity to a mosque during the times for prayer that led to riots and at least one death. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Since Partition no such disputes have occurred, but the problem is noted by many from the British colonial authorities to postcolonial theorists such as Partha Chatterjee.

<sup>405</sup> This arrangement will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

At these early hours, visitors are few and mostly, but not exclusively Muslim. Many come daily at this time to pray and most of those present are *khalīfahs*. These people have various habits of prayer, but there are some standards. Prior to entering the *dargah*, everyone removes his or her shoes. Only menstruating women are expected not to come in, but there is no sign or posting regarding this as is found in some Hindu temples. On entry most people proceed directly to the tomb. Some will bow and press their forehead or sometimes each eye to the marble surface. Some reach under the *chadar* (covering cloth) to contact the tomb itself or lift the cover up to their eyes and lips. Then some people will walk around the tomb, others simply sit.<sup>406</sup> Some Muslims do not bow, believing this to be *shirk* or placing something else on a comparable level with Allah.<sup>407</sup> Most Muslims who stay to offer prayers will do so, if space

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<sup>406</sup> An interesting anomaly at Haider Shaikh is that the tomb is always circumambulated counterclockwise. At no other *dargāh* in India that I attended does this occur. Furthermore, no one I asked had any explanation for this variation on common practice. All the major *dargāh*s I visited are circumambulated clockwise: Ajmer, Gulbarga, Nizamuddin, Panipat, etc. In India, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs walk around their holy places clockwise, indeed some view doing other wise as inauspicious and even dangerous. In Punjab only the Nihangs, a groups of somewhat antinomian Sikhs, habitually walk against the flow. This, I was informed, is because as the army of the Guru they must be forever prepared for battle and thus they wear multiple weapons on their person at all times, including a sword. Should the need arise, they must draw this sword away from the Guru Granth Sahib, both to protect it and to show it no disrespect. In the case of Haider Shaikh's *dargāh*, however, this is hardly applicable. Several possibilities exist. The first, and most probable, explanation is that the route to the left is somewhat impeded by a tree and two large *mazārs*, tombs. Although there are four additional *mazārs* on the right, they are less obtrusive. Another possible, and more appealing to a religious studies scholar, is that the Ka'aba in Mecca is circled to the right. This perhaps is a link, direct or indirect, with the *ṣawāf* of the hajj. Reasons for that direction are legion, but none particularly conclusive. Some say that keeping the left side closer to the Ka'aba, one's heart is closer to the holy place. Another possible explanation is that as left is associated with evil and right with good, perhaps moving to the left is inauspicious in a holy place. This was suggested to me by Valerie Hoffman who also reported that in Egypt, saint's tombs are commonly circled counter clockwise. However, one reason sometimes given in India for the clockwise rotation in temples is that the impure left side should never be presented towards the sanctuary. Finally, Professor Gordon Newby proposed that 'Semitic' circumambulation is always counterclockwise and he witnessed Jewish women at Rachel's Tomb circling in this fashion, binding threads around the tomb and subsequently around their own waists as a blessing for fertility. At Haider Shaikh's *dargāh*, appealing as the Hajj explanation might be, I am inclined to reject it. Although *ziyarat* to some saint's tombs is often said to be a substitute for the Hajj for those unable to afford the journey, in India this association is usually reserved for the tomb of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Indeed, numerous people at Ajmer and elsewhere informed me of the acceptability of this replacement 'hajj.' However, I never observed anyone at Ajmer circling to the right with any clear intention. No one at Haider Shaikh suggested to me that pilgrimage there could be a substitute Hajj. In the end, we may have to say, "God knows everything," and leave it at that.

<sup>407</sup> The Muslim term for saluting the tomb is *salām*, a generic term for greeting, as distinguished from the word for bowing which is *sajda* and is reserved solely for prostration during prayer. Sikhs call bowing *matta tekhana* which is

permits, on the left side of the tomb where they sit with their backs to the *qibla* (the direction of Mecca). As the dead in Islam are interred with their faces turned towards Mecca, sitting at this point means they are facing the saint, which is viewed as not only proper *adab* (etiquette) but also provides the most direct contact and point of communication. Hindus and Sikhs are likely to sit anywhere, but most seem to prefer the space at the foot of the tomb. Many people bring some offering, those that do not are also usually Muslim. These offerings include money, sweets, small clay horses, uncooked wheat or rice, and goats. Many people will place incense and/or small oil lamps in a small structure directly behind the main tomb as the enclosure is entered. Some devotees also place offerings on the other graves in the complex belonging to Haider Shaikh's wives, sons Hassan, #Isa, and Musa and three servants. There are additional tombs outside the inner enclosure wall but within the shrine compound belonging to members of the *khalīfah* or *mujawwar* families. The offerings made at these tombs belong to the descendants of the tomb's occupant.

On a typical morning at the *dargah* after *namaz* there are usually at least three or four people present at the *dargah*, at least one of whom is a member of the *khalīfah* family. Outside visitors come and go, but usually spend only a few minutes to perform a perfunctory obeisance, circle the tomb, receive some *tabarruk* or *prasad*, and depart.<sup>408</sup> The *khalīfahs* use their time at the shrine as much to be with their family members and exchange news as to commune with the saint or perform any devotions. Mundane topics as well as religious matters are discussed freely.

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Punjabi for touching the head. Hindus in Punjab will also say *matta tekhan*, or also *pranām* or *nāmaskār*, both of which indicate obeisance.

<sup>408</sup> *Tabarruk* from the Arabic and *prasad* from the Sanskrit both denote the materials given to devotees that has previously been offered at a shrine. In the Muslim perception, through proximity to the saint's *barakat* (from the same Arabic root, *b-r-k*) the substance, usually food or flowers, acquires a degree of that spiritual power and may confer it to the devotee. In Hindu and Sikh thought, *prasad* is the leftover of the Guru, deity, or holy person to whom it was offered. The essence of the offering having been consumed, the remainder is returned to the faithful, bearing some trace of that divine contact.

Devotees come and go and are given *tabarruk*, blessed by contact with a *khalīfah*, and occasionally obtained advice or some consultation. Some Muslims bring containers of water and recite certain *ayat* (verses) from the Qur'an, especially the *ayat al-kursī*, the Throne Verse, which is believed to be especially powerful for healing. As they recite, they periodically blow on the water. This water is usually for household use to manage problems with health, business, or personal matters such as family acrimony or depression. Muslims who attend saint's shrines believe that the healing power of the water, or occasionally rice or pulses, is increased by recitation in proximity to the *dargah*. Non-shrine going Muslims believe that the efficacy of such prayers depends more upon the piety of the one who recites than on the place in which it is recited.<sup>409</sup>

As in many religious places, some people come and stay for long periods in prayer, depending upon their particular spiritual practice or some personal difficulty. Some seek solace from the others present, some keep to themselves. Some come looking for advice and solutions, others do not. One morning at the *dargah* an elderly Muslim man arrived and sat uttering a prayer in the traditional posture with his open hands raised before his face. After signaling the completion of his recitation by passing his hands over his face and head, he turned to an elderly *khalīfah* woman sitting next to him on the left side of the tomb. They began to converse and it emerged that his wife, daughter and daughter-in-law had all died in rapid succession after consuming bad mustard oil. As the devastating tale unfolded, the two elderly people wept periodically and raised their hands towards the sky in gestures of silent, helpless supplication.

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<sup>409</sup> For example, following a meeting (*ijtima'*) of women Tablighī Jamā'atis, the leader of the weekly group, a young and earnest hafiza, was asked for such help by a concerned mother whose son was not doing well in school. She recited the *ayat al-kursī* over some rice which she instructed the woman to feed only to her son. The Hafiza asserted that it is the prayers of the living which can have some effect, not a misguided belief in the intercessory powers of the dead.

Soon the sister of the *khalīfah* woman arrived and also offered her condolences, prompting a retelling of the tragedy and further weeping.

As their conversation went on across the tomb, people occasionally came in to pray, some obviously Hindu or Sikh and some apparently Muslim. A middle-aged Hindu woman arrived, offered eleven rupees<sup>410</sup> and some sweets, pressed the tomb with her hands, bowed, and then circled the graves, tossing grains of wheat. Receiving some *prasad* from the *khalīfah* woman and bowing to her, she sat cross-legged to one side and prayed with her hands upraised in the Muslim style for about five minutes and then left. After the elderly man whose family had died had departed, two well-dressed Sikh men arrived. They bowed to the tomb then turned to the *khalīfah* woman and expressed interest in doing some kind of service, or *seva* for Babaji [i.e., Haider Shaikh]. A child was sent to retrieve one of the head male *khalīfahs* who arrived shortly. They sat under the tree and discussed the men's intentions. After a bit they all left, as did the Muslim man whose family had died.

The shrine was not empty of pilgrims for long. Soon two more Hindu women arrived. They appeared unsure of how to proceed and came cautiously up to the tomb where the two elderly *khalīfah* women were sitting. They gave a few rupees and some sweets and bowed to the tomb, walked around and lit two oil lamps in the area behind the grave. Returning to the foot of the tomb (the foot end where these transactions take place), they received some *tabarruk* then hesitantly asked the *khalīfahs* for help with their particular dilemma. The younger Hindu woman was the elder's daughter-in-law and she had not conceived after two years of marriage. One of the *khalīfah* woman told them to pray to Hazratji and they will surely get a son. The older woman replied that is all well and good, she believes, but her daughter-in-law does not. The

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<sup>410</sup> It is believed by many Hindus that offering even amounts of money is inauspicious.

daughter-in-law said that she doesn't so much *not* believe, she simply doesn't know if she does or not yet. She knew only that her mother-in-law has great faith in the saint. The *khalīfah* told her that so many women have had sons from praying here, she can be sure that she will also be blessed if she prays from the heart. The women asked if they should make some particular vow, or offering. They are told no, they should do whatever they feel in their hearts, and give according to their need and ability. The three women then start talking generally about the daughter-in-law's diet, health, and habits. The two older women continue to exchange advice while the younger mostly listens. These exchanges are commonplace, mundane, even dull. Except that they are not. They demonstrate the range of encounters of mutual support – spiritual, personal, and financial-that occur within the bounds of the *dargah*. Though some of these experiences are momentary, even fleeting, their impact on the lives of the participants as well as on the life of the community endures.

The multi-religious constituency is a point of great pride among the *khalīfahs* and other local Muslims around the shrine. Most of the major capital improvement projects undertaken at the tomb have been sponsored by non-Muslims, some from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) living in Canada and the USA. These structures and stories are integral to the experience of visiting this tomb. The reputation of Haider Shaikh and the *dargah* among devotees is not built upon the stories of the past but on the testimony of the present. The obvious popularity of the shrine is validating evidence of the place's power and the material boons obtained by visitation. The mere presence of pilgrims from diverse religious, caste, age, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds proves the non-sectarian sentiments of the Shaikh who clearly rewards those who attend with a pure heart no matter what their religious identity may be.

It is this question of the pure heart that lies at the center of the constitution of Haider Shaikh's devotional community. The pure heart of the visitor is determined by the combined influences of the religious structures of the pilgrim's faith and those of the Shaikh and his shrine. Thus there is some variation in defining this purity as for most Muslims it is important to clarify that they do not pray *to* the saint but *for* him and *through* him. Though offering reverence and respect, there can be no question that people's needs are fulfilled by God alone. This generates a moral code among some Muslims that is critical of those who come to the shrine to ask for material, physical, or spiritual assistance. Purity of heart means that one prays for mercy upon the deceased and upon one's self and others without attaching vows or conditions. These Muslims regard vows which stipulate some offering or devotional practice in return for a boon as a form of coercion and therefore totally inappropriate. For other Muslims purity does not preclude making known to the saint and through him to God the desires of one's heart, but may mean that coercive vows are offensive. By contrast, purity of heart for most Hindus and Sikhs requires absolute faith in the Shaikh's power to fulfill all desires, cure all ills, and reveal all truths. Doubt and skepticism must be abandoned, as they are the most likely causes for the failure of prayers made at the shrine. Likewise vows stipulating certain offerings or behaviors are not seen as coercion but as signs of good faith. This is also consistent with the sacrificial model of Hindu religious practice. The classical Hindu notion of sacrifice emphasizes a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between humans and the divine. Divine forces in this view require support and sustenance gained by the sacrificial rituals of humans. thus rituals must be performed correctly in order to be efficacious and for the divine to receive the sustaining essence of the substances offered – whether animal, vegetable, or mineral or the metaphysical results of human behaviors such as fasting, asceticism, prostrations, etc. Expecting that divine forces will

therefore bless humanity by fulfilling the needs and desires of the people who support them is not coercive, it is righteous. This exchange is therefore integral to the ethical system of divine-human relations in the Hindu cosmology.

Just as in the case of the theology of saint worship discussed above, Hindus and Muslims hold radically opposed views of what constitutes a pure heart. Not only do they understand the status of the dead saint and the reason for the efficacy of prayer at the tomb quite differently, but also the nature and quality of the exchange is predicated on contradictory notions about the purity of one's heart. That these complicated and conflicting ideas do not preclude co-presence at the shrine is part of the magic of place. Once again we are reminded that uniformity of belief is not required within a ritual system.

The essential aspect of this variation from the perspective of reducing conflict is that many pilgrims to Haider Shaikh are aware of these contradictions. This emerged slowly from numerous interviews with devotees. Many visitors initially responded to my query concerning the ritual and conceptual differences with stock phrases suggesting vaguely that all religions are the same, the paths are many but the goal is one, and the like. On further discussion, most people would point out several external distinctions such as styles of prayer. In particular, pilgrims remarked that many Muslims do not bow to the tomb but that all Hindus and Sikhs will touch their foreheads, *mattha āekna*. Several non-Muslim visitors expanded on this by confirming the distinction that Muslims pray *through* the saint to Allah whereas Hindus and Sikhs pray directly to the saint. In the confines of the shrine I never met a person who felt that this variation was a problem of any kind. Most merely shrugged, unconcerned by the implications of the logical inconsistency for the efficacy of prayer at the tomb. Instead, the major variable that determined the efficacy of shrine worship was not ritual precision, but the

purity of heart among the shrine visitors. The prevalent attitude was summed up by one devotee who said, "whatsoever religion a person is born into, they should hold fast to that one." This indicates that the formalities of faith and practice pertain less than the sincerity with which one dedicates oneself to that faith and practice. Clearly the multi-confessional space that has been worked out at Haider Shaikh is not based on naïve consensus or the reconciliation of many traditions into one. Rather it is a highly complex system that encourages those present to be fully Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh and to adhere strongly to their own faiths. Only in this way is it possible for each individual to achieve the purity of heart necessary for ritual efficacy.

The community gathered at the tomb is not most fundamentally bound by a shared belief in the efficacy of their prayers. After all, as previously discussed, the ideas about the nature of the saint, the reasons for the efficacy and the appropriate form of prayer can be quite different. Instead, the greatest sources of unity among visitors are the shared reasons for their presence. There is no distinction between religions in matters such as the desire for children, health, financial security, domestic tranquility, spiritual fulfillment, respect for ancestral custom, the pleasure of companionship, and so on. Attending the *dargah* with these concerns in mind in no way abrogates making similar supplications in temples, mosques, gurdwaras, other shrines, and homes. Nonetheless the tomb is particularly effective place to do so for several reasons. First, it is a common belief that the saint as a human being himself, will have greater sympathy and mercy for the pilgrim's plight. As Stuart Blackburn points out in his work on deifying the dead, themes of human struggle require human intervention and therefore need human gods.<sup>411</sup> This is intensified by the Hindu and Sikh view that life is cyclical, making the dead intimately connected

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<sup>411</sup> Blackburn, 1985.

with the process of rebirth as they are in the transitional world between these realms.<sup>412</sup> Muslim pilgrims regard saints as closer in proximity to God than themselves, and closer to themselves as they are also human. Second, as many afflictions are understood to be demonically caused, the aid of saints who have such forces in control is indispensable.<sup>413</sup> Certainly God is capable of this as well, but such trivial matters may also be worked out at a lower level. In addition, for many Sikhs and Hindus, such demonic afflictions are often understood to be caused by Muslim ghosts or *jinn*.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, they must also be managed by Muslims. Third, the testamentary evidence of efficacy for such a vast and wide ranging population of devotees should not be underestimated. This is exemplified by the most common response given by devotees to my queries about prayer fulfillment. Most would simply gesture towards the throngs around them, as if to say can so many people be wrong? Fourth is, I think among the most significant misrecognized reasons for shrine attendance. These places provide the opportunity for encounter and exchange across religious, ethnic, gender, age, and class lines. This carnivalesque quality of the *dargah* makes it a truly open space in which social distinctions and hierarchies exist primarily in relation to the saints' descendents. Otherwise no one has a privileged status in terms of access. Inside the tomb everyone is equally exposed before the Shaikh and equally dependent upon the purity of their hearts to bring answers for their prayers.

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<sup>412</sup> Victor Turner makes the point that the *communitas* of the living and the dead that is accessible in the liminal worlds of initiatory ritual and pilgrimage is connected with death and regeneration, fertility. The dead defy strict categories and are therefore dangerous, polluting and potentially contaminating. Yet they are also regenerative, fructifying and part of *communitas*. See, Turner, 1977. There is also a stereotype of Muslims as incredibly fertile, which is fed by anti-Muslim tract literature such as *The Muslim Population Explosion in India* and more recently through heavily publicized studies sponsored and approved by the BJP government asserting that the eighty percent majority Hindu population will become a minority in fifty years. This is patently false. Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar claims that this association of Muslims with fertility may also influence non-Muslims to attend Muslim shrines for such purposes. See Sudhir Kakar, *Shamans, Mystics, and Doctors: A Psychological Inquiry into India and Its Healing Traditions*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>413</sup> There is an entire body of literature in ayurvedic medicine that discusses the various forms of spirit possession that may cause certain ailments. See Dominic Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda*, (New Delhi; Penguin, 1998). Furthermore, the Hafizji discussed previously has in the past used his influence with certain deceased saints to relieve people of possession afflictions.

<sup>414</sup> This is discussed in Kakar, 1991.

## FESTIVALS – MELAS:

There are five large *melas* (festivals) for Haider Shaikh during the year. Four of these occur after the two harvest seasons in the Sikh calendar months of Jeth and Magh (May and December). For two sequential Thursdays devotees come in large numbers, on the first they tend to come from the west and are overwhelmingly Sikh, on the second they tend to draw more from the east and there is a larger number of Hindus represented.<sup>415</sup> The first Thursday of every lunar month also brings a larger than usual crowd. Other than a few itinerant dervishes, there is no increased Muslim presence at these events; in fact locals of all religions tend to avoid the chaos of the shrine during these times. The largest festival is held for a few days in June. During this time possibly one hundred thousand people came to pay respects, receive the blessing of the saint, and participate in the festival atmosphere of Malerkotla.

The *melas* are accompanied by the efflorescence of the local market. The streets are covered with canopies and tables bearing colorful merchandise vie with food stands and shop doorways, rickshaws and buffalos for space on the street. Nearly everything imaginable is for sale from cheap trinkets to gemstones, household goods to children's toys. Outside the street leading to the *dargah*, many household items are for sale, particularly the ironworks for which the Muslim craftsmen of Malerkotla are particularly famous. Closer to the tomb, tables are geared towards the mela itself, bearing pictures of various saints – especially Lakhdada Pir, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti and Baba Farid. Although most people, including the *khalīfahs*, declare that there are no images of Haider Shaikh, some unscrupulous salespeople attempt to sell the stylized images associated with other saints to customers claiming they are Haider Shaikh.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> I inquired but no one had an explanation for this pattern.

<sup>416</sup> The only place I ever saw a picture that was actually labeled as *Pir Maler Kotla* was at a *dargāh* in Faridkot where it was prominently displayed leaning against the foot of another *pīr's* tomb. The walls in this shrine were covered with images of deities and saints as well as the *chela* of the shrine and his followers. The chief caretaker was

Extremely popular in the bazaar are cassettes containing songs of devotion to this saint and others. Some are by famous singers of the Islamic devotional musical style known as *qawwali*, such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan or the Sabri Brothers. Others are locally produced and recorded, mostly by Sikhs. The lyrics of these recordings tend to emphasize the importance of attendance at the *dargah* so as not to anger Haider Shaikh or in order to have one's desires fulfilled. They sing the praises of Haider Shaikh in a general way, and are fairly formulaic. Most cassettes contain songs that refer generally to a *pir* or Baba and do not explicitly link with Haider Shaikh. The performers are mostly Sikhs. Also found in the bazaars are innumerable medallions and mass-produced amulets called *taw#īz*.

Some stalls sell things to take home from the *mela* and others sell things to take to the shrine. Cloth covers for the tomb, flowers, clay oil lamps, small clay horses, dried henna and small clay containers for it, various sweets, especially the sweet yellow rice known as *niyaz* or *zarda* which is typically offered at all saints tombs. The cloths, usually green or blue, flowers, sweets, and the oil lamps are typical offerings at most *dargah*. The small horses are not common, however, and though I asked numerous vendors, pilgrims, and caretakers, no one knew their significance.<sup>417</sup>

Hindu and Sikh groups from outside Malerkotla most often undertake charitable distribution of food and drink at the *melas* for Haider Shaikh. However, at local festivals for other events, groups from all religions will do this. For example, at the extremely popular Hindu festival of Dussehra, there were two stands giving water and tea to the crowd that were operated

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a Hindu *chela* who was sitting on an antelope skin wearing purple velvet and pink nail polish. He did not know any stories about Haider Shaikh. After asking me if I had brought him a *tohfā* (gift) and learning that I had not, the *chela* took out a bottle of perfume and began to spritz himself. I concluded that the interview was over.

<sup>417</sup> Some speculated that Haider Shaikh had come as a warrior on a horse. A few *khalīfahs* suggested that it represented Bahlol Lodhi's gift of a horse and Haider Shaikh's miracle in bringing it back from the dead and replicating it.

by Muslim organizations. For the Shi'i procession during Muharram, Hindus, Sikhs, and Sunni Muslims offer *halwa* (a sweet dish of wheat flour, dried fruits, and nuts) and *sabīl* (a beverage, usually sweetened water) to the Shi'i marchers. These acts are seen as meritorious and the sponsors claim they do so out of faith and also in keeping with Malerkotla's ethic of harmony. Thus, one might attribute the lack of such activities by residents at Haider Shaikh's *mela* to a disapproval of the practice of *ziyarat* by the overwhelmingly Muslim population, but it seems equally likely that a significant factor is that the pilgrims are not from Malerkotla. The support and charitable sustenance of festival goers of all faiths by Muslims at other events indicates that far from being indifferent or hostile to the pious purposes or personal travails of these chaotic public events, Malerkotla residents are simply more oriented towards the support of their own community, regardless of religious identity. It is also possible that Haider Shaikh's *melas* bring in so much revenue to many industries and businesses in town that it is largely a commercial rather than a spiritual event for most residents. Furthermore, those residents, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim, who *do* go to the *dargah*, say that they avoid it at festival times due to the undeniably oppressive crowds.

Conspicuously absent from the bazaar scene is any kind of Islamic paraphernalia, from books to prayer beads to skullcaps or even the perfumes and incense typical of Islamic shops – none of this makes its way to the bazaar around the *dargah*. Contrasting this situation with the scene at Nizamuddin's tomb in New Delhi or Muinuddin Chishti's at Ajmer, this absence is striking. At those major shrines there are countless videos, cassettes, books, pamphlets, clothing, and trinkets that appeal to both the saint's devotees and those interested in Islam in general and Sufism in particular. One might assume that, as most pilgrims at Haider Shaikh are not Muslim, such items are not of interest to the population. But there are no religious bookstores in the area

around Haider Shaikh at all. There are general stores, sweet shops, printing shops, electrical and household supply stores, and medical shops but not a single bookstore of any kind is nearby the tomb. As previously mentioned, most bookstores, where one also finds prayer rugs, Qur'an stands and the like, are in the neighborhood around the Jama' Masjid at some distance from the *dargah*. As the Jama' Masjid area is the local center of the reformist group Tablighi Jama'at, these vendors are Muslims who would be unlikely to visit the tomb as a matter of principle. In fact, most local Muslims of all groups, unless commercially involved, leave the *mela* alone. However, neither do they interfere by organizing co-incident events or rallies to draw people away or mobilize public opinion against this event or the popularity of Haider Shaikh's pilgrimage. Unlike some mass gatherings at which one sees opposing parties using the opportunity of the event to publicize their position, here no such activism occurs.

Both at festival and non-festival times there are ritual specialists within and without the *dargah's* space and institutional structure who facilitate the devotional practices of the devotees. In addition to *khalīfahs* and the descendents of Haider Shaikh's close disciples, the *mujawwars*, there are many devotees from outside Malerkotla, mostly Hindus and Sikhs, who claim a special relationship to the saint and the ability to channel his spirit.<sup>418</sup> Inside the *dargah*, *khalīfahs* accept offerings, give blessings and advice, and return *tabarruk/prasad*. The *mujawwar* sell goats and operate many of the stalls set up with other items to be offered at the shrine. The *chelas*, a Sanskritic term for disciples, enter into trance states during which they are either possessed by or able to communicate with Haider Shaikh. Thus the Shaikh himself is present at the *dargah* in two ways. Through his blood descendants his *barakat* is still present and is transmittable to the devotees through contact. Even if the only *khalīfah* present is a young child,

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<sup>418</sup> In fact in a year and a half I never witnessed or heard of a Muslim who was “played” by the spirit of the saint at this shrine. A common term for being possessed by the saint is *khelna*, or playing.

many of Haider Shaikh's devotees, primarily Hindus and Sikhs, will seek out physical contact in order to obtain this residual power. The other way in which Haider Shaikh continues to be present is through his spirit (the terms *paun*, Hindi for breath and *ruh*, Arabic for spirit are both used), which enters certain of his devotees. The spirit of Haider Shaikh becomes manifest and accessible through these *chelas*, dispensing advice, treatments, and blessings.

Inside and outside the shrine, the *chelas* who connect to Haider Shaikh spirit set up satellite ritual spaces. These *chelas* are overwhelmingly Sikh and Hindu. The Sikh and Hindu *chelas* come to the shrine for festivals and, in lesser numbers, on Thursday nights along with groups of followers, ranging from a few to a few hundred. Although these *chelas* pay respects at the *dargah* and receive blessings from the *khalifahs*, the main focus of these *chelas* and their entourages are these satellite ritual spaces, called *chaunkis*. Some groups have banners made and set up camps and food distribution centers throughout Malerkotla. The followers of the *chelas* call their leader Baba, Pir Baba, Guru, or sometimes President. At a given moment during the *mela* there may be hundreds of people inside and outside the tomb who are 'playing.' At one point within the tomb enclosure itself I counted seven people in states of active possession and several others exhibiting all the paraphernalia of the *chela*. These include wearing the garb of a renunciant, often green or blue the colors typically associated with Sufi saints, but almost equally often a *chela* will wear the pinkish saffron of a Hindu *sadhu*. Many *chelas* arrive in processions accompanied by a drummer and a retinue of disciples. They often carry with them iron rods or chains which may be used to flay themselves during the period of possession. Some *chelas* approach the tomb in a state of possession, others go into trance upon arrival, and some come, bow, circle and leave with no demonstration of any altered state. Occasionally pilgrims who do not appear to be *chelas*, lacking accompanists or any marking clothing, go into states of

possession at the tomb. These events are taken in stride and those in proximity will acknowledge the presence of the saint with raised hands and bowed heads, listening for any messages that might be intelligible. Usually the possession passes and the person possessed bows to the tomb and is struck firmly on the back, releasing the spirit from the human.

However, most of the really involved work of the *chelas* occurs outside the tomb enclosure in the structured settings known as *chaunki*, *darbar*, or *diwan* (all these terms signify a formal period of audience). These take place in the shelters by the tomb, in the streets under tents, in rooms rented out by locals, wherever there is space. The format of the *chaunki* is fairly standard. The main *chela* or a senior disciple would set up a small altar, usually on the floor or ground. The altar consists of several small lamps, some sweets (usually *laddu*, made of sugar and gram flour), and maybe a few rupees. After a brief prayer in praise of Haider Shaikh, then musicians play a devotional song. There is always a drummer (usually playing the large two sided drum called a *dhol*, or the smaller *dholak*). Sometimes also an *ektar* or *dotar* (one- or two-stringed bowed instrument) player is involved and those gathered may also play small cymbals or other drums. After this first song, one of the congregation will come forward and bow to the altar. Depending on the size of the group this may be the principle *chela* or possibly one of his or her senior disciples who also experience possession by Haider Shaikh. If Haider Shaikh is so inclined, the invocation is successful, and the individual is a fit vehicle, then the *chaunki* begins. The spirit of the saint is present (*parvesh*).

The presence of Haider Shaikh is signaled in a number of ways, most typically by head rolling of varying degrees of intensity. This ranges from slight nodding to a violent whirling of the entire torso. Most *chelas* have long hair, both men and women, making this an especially dramatic event. This practice is also noted in Ibbetson's 1883 ethnography, "At first the woman

sits silent with her head lowered and then begins to roll her head with hair disheveled.”<sup>419</sup> After some period of head rotation the *chela* stops and so does the music. The *chela* speaks, first calling down praise on Haider Shaikh, inspiring responses from the gathering of *jay Babaji* – victory to Haider Shaikh – from the gathering. The music resumes and the head rolling begins again as well, usually for a shorter period. The *chela* stops, the music stops, and the question and answer period (*puch-batan*) commences. The *chela* usually asks what the concerns of the assembly are. He or she inquires who has come with “child work,” *bacche ka kam* or job related issues or health problems.<sup>420</sup> Some members will rise and one will be selected. The music resumes and the *chela's* head rolls. Then the music stops and the *chela* addresses the querant both telling about their situation and asking about them. The supplicant's situation is clarified sometimes with alternating rounds of music accompanied trance and questioning until all are satisfied that the problem has been discovered and an appropriate remedy prescribed. The source of the problem may be from any one of multiple causes, black magic and curses, failure to properly propitiate the Shaikh or some deity, bad personal habits, or negative relations. Remedies tend to involve prayer to Haider Shaikh, attendance at least once a year at the *dargah*, offerings of a certain kind (such as goats or a particular kind or amount of a grain or pulse), giving an amount of money, forsaking meat and alcohol, etc. Once one person's problem has come to a close, the *chela* reenters the trance briefly, and then inquires for the next person to present their problem. This goes on until the spirit leaves. Sometimes these sessions just end. Other times Haider Shaikh's departure becomes apparent if the *chela* makes repeated assertions that the supplicant says are incorrect. Some *puch-batan* sessions or *diwan* last hours, others just

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<sup>419</sup> Ibbetson, 1883, page 644-645.

<sup>420</sup> The use of the term *kam* or work to describe the desires of the devotee is further evidence of the transactional understanding of the relationship between human and divine in the Hindu view. The devotee has come expecting to be assigned some task or work in order to have his or her needs met. Likewise, if properly performed with a pure heart, Haider Shaikh is obliged to fulfill his end of the contract.

a few minutes. At the end the musicians are paid, and they are often offered small amounts throughout.

Occasionally, Haider Shaikh does not come when invited or comes with such force that the *chela* does not have the capacity to endure or manage the spirit. This is usually understood to indicate that the *chela* is not ready or an impure vehicle for the saint. During possession, some but not all *chelas* will at some point in the proceedings strike themselves with iron chains or rods. One *chela* described this flagellation as *phul* or flowers and all claim to feel no pain. Some *chelas* are conscious of what is going on and others remember nothing. Generally the *chelas* are believed to be capable of reading the minds of the assembled, predict the future, and give directions that, if followed precisely, will secure some desired goal. The *chelas* themselves describe their experience of embodying the spirit of the saint in a number of ways. A Sikh *chela* from Bhatinda said the Haider Shaikh is always available because he himself is absolutely pure of heart and a total devotee. He said he had been a follower of Bhindranwale, the charismatic leader of the violent movement to establish a Sikh state that terrorized Punjab in the 1980's and 1990's. Then Haider Shaikh came into him and he gave up the life of violence, alcohol, and meat and dedicated his life to serving the saint. He explained that it is possible for Haider Shaikh to be simultaneously present in a number of people simultaneously because his spirit is like the wind, it is everywhere and nowhere. Although his manner of possession was quite violent, he claimed to experience no pain or discomfort or even consciousness during the possession.

The Sikh *chela's* style contrasted sharply with that of a Hindu *chela* from Dhabiwali, a town east of Malerkotla. This gentleman had been channeling the saint for over twenty years. The physical signals of this *chela's* possession were quite minimal: a slight nodding of the head and tapping of his finger in time with the drumbeat. The Dhabiwali *chela* did not experience a

loss of his own consciousness as the Sikh *chela* did. For him, "there are two types of feelings. One is a voice from inside like a telephone. And this is a supernatural power, even I don't know what this is. And the other type something happens in front of me." The Hindu *chela's* mode is much more interactive. He communicates conversationally or experiences a vision. In addition to helping his disciples to overcome their problems, the *chela* has experienced prophetic visions from Haider Shaikh. In fact he claimed to have foreseen the period of terrorism through the power of the Shaikh:

I will tell you an old story. There was a *divan* [gathering] organized at Gidarvan. I was sitting in a car and I saw a great fire in front of me. I asked Babaji, what is this? He said, such a time will come when the whole of Punjab will burn due to terrorism. Then the other *sevadars* [those who perform service] sitting by me said what happened and I told them and said the pir said this, you can believe me or not. After six months the whole of Punjab was engulfed by terrorism.

These *chelas* and their followers have very fluid notions of religious identity. This is apparent not only in their presence at the tomb of a Muslim saint, but also in the language they use to describe their affiliation. Although their names and certain aspects of their appearance may reflect a Hindu or Sikh ethnic and cultural identification, most *chelas* and their entourages actively resist being labeled. They mix up traditions and languages, stories and practices and argue that this is the true nature of religion. For example, the Dhabiwali *chela* explains how he got his *guru* (a Hindu title) who initiated him into the tradition of the Shaikh:

*chela*: We met at a *diwan* (gathering). I expressed my desire [for initiation] and he said okay I will be your *guru*.

AB: What type of instruction did you get from him?

*chela*: A way to remember the *pīr* as we remember God. This is our *#ibadat* (devotional practices).

AB: Do you have some *japa* (repetitive formula) or *mantra*?

*chela*: Yes it is *japa* or in *pīr's* language it is *kalam*. In Hinduism it is called mantra.

AB: How do you teach your disciples?

*chela*: There is not a training. We say, just serve the *pīr*, do the *japa* and cleave your heart to his heart.

This dialogue demonstrates beautifully how the various streams from different religions become synthesized. Having met at a *diwan* (a Persian derived term), the *chela* acquires a guru. The guru teaches him *#ibadat*, an Arabic term for devotional practices and habits. In my response I mistakenly assumed I should use Hindu terms for recitation practices, but the *chela* gently corrected me, explaining that in “*pīr*'s language,” it is *kalam* – an Arabic term for religious language. This is an excellent example of how particular words, practices, and beliefs are employed that are appropriate to this particular religious context. Similarly, Hindu and Sikh devotees often employ Muslim style of prayer at a *dargah*, holding their hands before their faces, so the Hindu *chela* asserted that the proper language for worshiping Haider Shaikh should be Islamic in derivation even if the speaker is not Muslim.

Another *chela*, from Sirsa, refused altogether to take on a singular religious identity. He claimed to be Hindu and Muslim and also not to distinguish between castes and classes. He validated this practice saying that all are equal in the eyes of Haider Shaikh whom he described as his “guru.”

AB: You are Hindu, but the Baba is Muslim

Sirsa *chela*: I am also Muslim

AB: Please explain.

Sirsa *chela*: I am explaining, he is also Muslim, I am also Muslim. If he is Hindu  
I am also Hindu

AB: Then there is no difference?

Sirsa *chela*: I do not have any problem.

AB: So there is no difference between Hindu and Muslim religions?

Sirsa *chela*: They all are Hindu who are bowing their heads.

AB: Do they follow different rituals?

Sirsa *chela*: No.

AB: Everyone comes, but do they hold different views?

Sirsa *chela*: No.

Follower: It is like, whichever religion our hearts follow, we follow that. We see which religion has good things and we adopt the good things of that religion. We are not concerned with whether the religion is Hindu or Muslim, we are concerned with humanity only. In

whichever religion we see good points, we follow that. We find power in this *pir* so we come.

The Sirsa *chela* then continued, saying "I also take food from Muslim houses, from Hindu houses I take. I do not think whether he is a Muslim, Hindu, sweeper or *chamar* [leatherworker]. In my guru's eyes all are equal, so I feel this way also." The Sirsa *chela*, his follower, and many others dodged questions that would require them to reduce their religious beliefs, practices, and identities to a single label. The follower did this by explaining that religion is a matter of the heart and humanity. The Sirsa *chela* reinforced his lack of distinction in relation to the Shaikh by asserting that he himself takes food from anyone, as discussed in Chapter Three, commensality is one of the major indicators of inter-religious relations. Thus when this *chela* says he eats anywhere, he is indicating a deep conviction that caste, ethnic, and religious distinctions do not have any ultimate meaning. This lack of caste or religious division is the reason most commonly given by Hindus to explain Haider Shaikh's plural appeal.

At the festivals for Haider Shaikh, by far the most frequent explanation for the saint's plural appeal given by Hindus and Sikhs was the lack of religious distinctions. Haider Shaikh was identified as our common *pīr* or as the *pīr* of all and it was claimed that he did not believe in *jañ-pañh*, caste and sect. For the overwhelmingly Sikh and Hindu pilgrims, the Muslim saint's tradition freed them from the obligations and restrictions of a dominant faith bent on defining their adherents and distinguish from others. At least for the duration of their voyage to Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, the pilgrims participate in the type of truly pluralistic society that simply does not exist elsewhere in Punjab. Thus they enjoy the opportunity to not only remedy their personal needs but also to heal temporarily the 1947 evisceration of the region.

## #URS

Unlike the *melas*, the *#urs* is not very crowded and is attended by many more Muslims than Hindus or Sikhs, though members of all communities are present. An *#urs* marks a saint's death day upon which he was joined with God. Haider Shaikh's *#urs* falls on the fourteenth of Ramadan.<sup>421</sup> It is celebrated with considerable formality and sobriety compared to the festivals in June, spring and fall. The kind of crowd and spectacle that prevails at the *melas* is seen as inappropriate during the holy month of Ramadan. During this month Muslims are supposed to rededicate themselves to Allah. Any superogatory prayer, practice, charity, or good deed reaps additional *sawab* (spiritual benefit), which may be dedicated to others, including the saintly dead such as Haider Shaikh. Far more people than usual perform the five daily prayers, and an atmosphere of mixed piety and celebration prevails for the duration. Therefore, the *#urs* in Ramadan is a fairly solemn and substantially more Islamic event than the *melas*. Although Hindus and Sikhs can and do attend and participate as observers during the ceremonies and they make offerings at the *dargah*, the number of Muslims present compared to the *melas* is significant. Most are the *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars*, but local Muslims also attend as do a number of itinerant dervishes. At the *#urs* in December of 2000, reportedly for the first time one of the officiants, a *khadim* or shrine custodian, from Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's tomb at Ajmer was the chief guest in attendance. It is common for there to be an exchange of *khalīfahs* at the time of an *#urs*, especially within a *silsila* and it is not uncommon for Sufis affiliated or

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<sup>421</sup> It is worth noting that the death anniversaries of saints are often not celebrated at all and another date might be observed in association with the saint. Generally ceremonies of any sort are avoided, marriages are not performed and other occasions such as births receive minimal attention. The Thursday night observations at the tomb during Ramadan are minimal and even the first Thursday of the lunar month is lowkey, though some Hindus and Sikhs come. In 2000 when I witnessed the *'urs* there was no conjunction of one of the major harvest festivals as Ramadan fell in December. No one mentioned past difficulties in relation to such a convergence.

primarily affiliated with other lineages to attend the *#urs* of a saint from another *silsila*.<sup>422</sup> Thus the presence of the *khadim* from Ajmer Sharif (as the Chishti *dargah* is known) at the *dargah* of the Suhrawardi Haider Shaikh is not peculiar. More remarkable was the fact that no Suhrawardi Shaikhs were present. Although there was no representative from the great Naqshbandi *dargah* of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, which is little more than an hour away,<sup>423</sup> there were Naqshbandi *faqīrs* present. Nonetheless, the *khalīfahs* at Haider Shaikh seemed well pleased with the presence of the young representative from Ajmer, and deferred to him to lead the ceremonies. He had brought a tomb covering cloth or *chadar* from Ajmer Sharif and was dressed in white silk robes and an elaborately embroidered hat. He carried himself with great poise and led the proceedings with authority and dignity, although he was only twenty-two years old.

The ceremonies began before the *maghrib* prayer at dusk, which also signal the time to open the fast during Ramadan. The *khalīfahs*, *faqīrs*, and a few invited guests (several Sikhs and a Hindu who are major patrons of the *dargah*) gathered just outside the inner gate on a platform. With the *khadim* from Ajmer at the center, a circle was formed around the *chadar* he had brought and two more which were embroidered by women of the *khalīfahs*. Several of the most senior *khalīfahs* and *mujawwar* (though not the *sajjida nishīn* himself) sat next to the *khadim*. They too were very well dressed, wearing white garments, and even Chishti style headwear. As they sat around the *chadars* to be offered, the proceedings were initiated by the *mar-e takbīr*, the giving of the call 'Allahu \$kbar,' God is Great. Then the Ajmeri *khadim* commenced the *fatiha*, the

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<sup>422</sup> For the *'urs* of a major figure in a lineage such as Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti or his disciple Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya, a large number of representatives from Chishti shrines all over the world will arrive to reaffirm their spiritual allegiance and reverence for the founding Shaikhs. These events can be somewhat fraught with tension as the Shaikhs of these centers must both demonstrate and be given the appropriate amount of respect and honor according to their status within the *silsila* and the acknowledged level of their spiritual attainment. It is sometimes visibly awkward when a Shaikh arrives at an *'urs* to ensure that he is placed properly in relation to the tomb and the head of the host *dargāh*. Not showing or being shown the proper deference, giving inadequate offerings, or failing to observe the etiquette of the hierarchy may result in all kinds of difficulties, even fractures within the communities. For example, see Liebskind (1998).

<sup>423</sup> I was unable to determine if any invitations to such figures had been made.

opening *sāra* of the Qur'an. The *dhurud sharīf* is always recited, as it is at every prayer time. This short prayer calls down blessings on Ibrahim and the Prophet Mohammad and upon the people of Ibrahim and Mohammad. After this, the *khadim* prayed for all the saints in a lineage from the Prophet and especially for Haider Shaikh are recited. He implored blessings for all those present, especially the *khalīfahs*, the descendants of the Shaikh, and for all the Sufi *pīrs* and spiritual guides, *murshids*. Then the prayer affirmed Allah's knowledge of all things and power to grant all things and begged that God, who knows what is in the heart, would bestow mercy and goodness on everyone at this auspicious occasion.

After the *khadim* completed these salutations, invocations, and supplications, several of the *faqīrs* present commenced reciting parts of the Qur'an. As one dervish reached the end of his recitation, another began. After some time this gave way to the chanting of *na"ats*, poems in praise of the Prophet. These compositions may be descriptions of the Prophet's beauty or wisdom, expressions of joy upon seeing the hills of Medina or completing the Hajj, or declarations of the desire to devote oneself wholly to worshiping the greatness of Allah. On this occasion, the main themes of the *na"ats* recited were the Day of Judgment and the desire of the supplicants to be counted among the *auliya" Allah*, those close to God, on that day:

*Ya illahi hashar mein khair auliya ke sath ho  
Rahin ke 'alam jagah mein mustafa ke sath ho*

Oh Allah, let me be among your friends on the Day of Judgment  
At the place where the world is given mercy, let me be with Mustafa (the Prophet)

As these *na#at* proceeded, the *khadim* of Ajmer and the *khalīfahs* rose and proceeded to the tomb, bearing aloft and overhead the *chadar* to be offered. At the tomb another brief prayer was given and numerous *chadars* were placed on the tomb. There is then a procession of devotees,

many Hindu and Sikh, who come to make offerings and pay obeisance to the *khalīfahs* and the saint.

After the *maghrib* prayer and the *iftar* meal, there was another ceremony at the *dargah* called *roshni* which involves lighting small lamps and electric lights around the tomb. A short series of prayers was made and rosewater is sprinkled over the tomb of the saint and those of his family and servants within the complex. After this a steady but not overwhelming stream of devotees continued into the night. Noticeably absent were any *chelas* and no possession rituals took place either at the shrine or within its environs at this time. Reportedly, there are never possession events at the *#urs*.

The next day, between eleven a.m. and twelve p.m., for a single hour, the few relics of Haider Shaikh are publicly displayed. These include his vest, belt and a pair of shoes. Again the gathering was moderate in size as a small but steady stream of visitors, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim, came to view the items.

The *iftar*, or meal ending the daily fast in Ramadan, on the night of the *#urs* was an elaborate affair, with all the *khalīfah* families coming together. The Ajmeri *khadim* was given pride of place and there was obvious pleasure on the part of the family to receive this honored guest. Although young, he was very well spoken and considerate of his hosts, showing great politesse and receiving the honor and respect shown him with grace. In his prayers, invocations and conversation, the *khadim* drew little distinction between the Chishti and Suhrawardi *silsilas*. He stressed the Chishti love for music and *sama#*, audition, “the Chishti *silsila* permits *qawwali*, the essence of the Chishti is that unless they hear *qawwal* they remain hungry. *Qawwali* is a spiritual gift.” Other than this difference, the *khadim* asserted (incorrectly) that the other *silsilas*, Suhrawardi, Naqshbandi, and Qadiri, are all offshoots of the Chishtiyya. He further drew the

Malerkotla *dargah* into the purview of Ajmer by saying that just as *ziyarat* to Ajmer substitutes for the Hajj for those unable to travel to Mecca, so pilgrimage to Malerkotla may substitute for going to Ajmer:

Whoever comes here, he feels he has gone to Ajmer Sharif, those who can't go there, come here. They believe that if they can't go there, it doesn't matter, but my *sarkar* [i.e. ruler, it is unclear if he means Allah or Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti] has called me here to Malerkotla. It is as if I was present there. Whatever is prayed here it is accepted in Ajmer. Then it is accepted in Medina. If it is accepted in Medina, then it is accepted in the Kaaba, the center of prayer and the ocean of beneficence. It is accepted in the house of God.

This discursive chain links Haider Shaikh, a small and somewhat marginal *dargah* of a different primary spiritual lineage to the Ajmeri shrine of India's most popular lineage, and through that to the axis of the Muslim world: Mecca. The invitation and presence of the *khadim* from Ajmer substantially boosted the status of the Malerkotla shrine and its caretakers, authenticated the tomb within the purview of Sufi Islam, and potentially forged a link with that powerful and popular *dargah*.

The *khadim* also noted the popularity of both this shrine and Ajmer Sharif among non-Muslims. Like the *khalīfahs* and the pilgrims at Haider Shaikh he felt that there is little difference between the devotion of the various religions. Rather, all who come with faith and love are viewed as one and their desires are fulfilled. Furthermore, although some might view this as an opportunity to spread Islam, this should in no way be forced upon non-Muslim visitors:

The Hindus are much more devoted there [Ajmer] than the Muslims. The Hindus and *sardars* [i.e. Sikhs] are more faithful here, to them the Sufi [Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti] said that to all communities show love and honor whatever religion they are. If you can help them then do it but do not give anyone trouble. This is the obligation of every Muslim.

This sentiment echoes one of the most commonly cited passage in relation to pluralism from the Qur'an 2:250: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error:

whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.” For the faithful Muslim, it is obligatory to help others towards Islam if possible, but that help should never become an onerous pressure or difficulty. The openness and availability of shrines like Ajmer Sharif and the *dargah* in Malerkotla to non-Muslims has resulted in a curious puzzle in which the spiritual benefits of the site are being reaped by many Hindus and Sikhs. The *khadim* explains it thus:

As you see by coming here, that though he [Haider Shaikh] is a Muslim that more Hindus offer gifts than Muslims. You can see that the largest group making offerings is Hindu, Muslims are fewer. Those who ask for support more are Hindus. These days the non-Muslims are obtaining benefit from *sarkar darbar* [the court of the ruler, i.e. the *dargah*]. The Hindus take the benefits from the *darbar*.

Not only are Hindus gaining these benefits through their offerings and devotions, but Muslims are becoming dangerously egotistical and self-reliant. In the *khadim*'s view, the emphasis on individual practice encouraged by reformist groups such as Tablīghī Jama#at is arrogant and prideful to the point that it threatens to alienate not only the *pīr*, but Allah himself:

Muslims think they can do it themselves: say *namaz* [the five times daily prayer], read Qur'an, go on retreat. Without a doubt *namaz* is necessary for Muslims, therefore those who say *namaz* declare that from saying *namaz* your *namaz* will be accepted [by God]. But first if you are shown the way, the *buzurganedin* [the saints], their *namaz* has already been accepted by God. If you follow them, then *khuda* [God] will also accept your *namaz*. If we turn our face from these *pīrs*, then God will turn his face from us and he will not accept our *namaz*. *Namaz* is no doubt necessary, but we must take hold of these *pīrs* also. If we don't take them, our religion is nothing. As long as you are with the *buzurgan*, you will be saved at *qiyamat* [the Day of Judgment], and in this world and in the hereafter you will be happy.

The *khadim* from Ajmer invoked a number of established Islamic principles in his defense of saint veneration, in particular the imitation of worthy exemplars. Although often the principle of imitation, or *taqlīd*, is referenced by Sufis to denounce the blind obedience to the law seen as prevalent among religious scholars or *ulama* who criticize Sufism. Here it is used to show that

following in the way of the pious saints who have already found favor with God is a sure way to find favor oneself. The belief that one does not need such models is attacked as evidence of the sin of pride. For the Sufi, humble piety (*taqwa*), repentance (*tauba*), and above all constantly seeking Allah's forgiveness (*istighfar*) for one's human failings are among the most essential states of being. By rejecting the help of those who have shown the way, an arrogant Muslim turns away from the *pīrs* and likewise from the path of God. The *khadim's* discourse on Sufism and the importance of saints was a major element in making the *#urs* a markedly Islamic event unlike the *melas*.

The *#urs* of Haider Shaikh is a qualitatively different ritual than the daily practices and occasional festivals. It is highly Islamic in its content and format. It involves all the local *khalīfahs*, invited guests from other Sufi shrines, and dervishes and *faqīrs* from all over the region. Although the principle Hindu and Sikh patrons of the shrine are present they clearly take a backseat and are observers. They do not know or recite the prayers and Qur"anic verses. However, the formality of the ceremony is impressive and conveys to these non-Muslim patrons the power and mystery of another system of belief. A middle aged male Sikh devotee from a nearby village declared that he came every year, though he understood little of the proceedings. It is significant that the *#urs* is kept distinctly separate from the other *melas*, though in some years it may fall simultaneously due to the lunar calendar of the Muslim year. The celebratory atmosphere is subdued out of respect for Ramadan. Perhaps also a large and chaotic *mela* at this time of year would be viewed less tolerantly among conservative elements of the Muslim community. It is clear however, that the appeal of this ceremony to the local Muslim population is much greater than the other festivals for Haider Shaikh. Through strategic performances such as this, and the innovation of inviting a representative from the great *dargah* at Ajmer, the

*khalīfahs* at Haider Shaikh's tomb reestablish their orthodox credentials, and gain authority and dignity in the eyes of the Muslim majority of Malerkotla.

## **Conclusion**

Although events like the *#urs* represent a time when the Islamic character of the saint and the shrine come to the fore, the Muslim caretakers of the shrines more often must mediate the devotions of Hindus and Sikhs. Furthermore, they do so in full consciousness of their conflicting ideas about the nature of the saint. The guardians of the shrines are well aware that in the minds of non-Muslims prayers made to the saint are *fulfilled by the saint himself*, and not by Allah through the saint's intercession. Yet they find ways to validate these practices. The *chelas* who channel the Shaikh know that the *khalīfahs* and the Muslims in attendance understand the nature of the holy dead wholly differently. Yet they operate within their own ritual idiom without changing or challenging oppositional perspectives. By marking out the space of the saint through ritual practice, pilgrims transact between these two systems of spiritual authority, validating both and creating a space that affirms the prevailing ethic of harmony.

Furthermore, as a site that serves to invert the daily experience of most Punjabis in terms of the Muslim population in their home communities, Haider Shaikh's *dargah* is a powerful place that invokes the days before Partition. In the two generations since 1947 in many places in Punjab the long heritage of Muslim culture is only perceptible in the form of converted buildings and in the ongoing traditions of the *dargahs*. The relative ubiquity of the latter indicates that *pīr* worshippers have an enormous selection in terms of the tombs they might choose to visit. Therefore it is significant that non-resident pilgrims in such vast numbers choose to continue or to establish a connection with the tomb of Haider Shaikh in a place where Islam still flourishes.

Indeed, it seems that the numbers of pilgrims have only increased over the years. As one member of the *khalifah* family who does not attend the shrine himself described,

There is a lot of difference between the *melas* of those days and the *melas* of today. There used be a lot of gathering in those days, but these days there is even more of a crowd. More of the public are coming these days. These days the offerings are greater. And [for example] those offerings that are in the form of *chadars*, these cloths are of silk. In those days these were not given. At that time, handspun cotton was used and the rupee was also not there. At that time coins were used, ten *paisa*, twenty *paisa* used to be offered. These days people have more money so they give more. They are more prosperous, that is why they offer more.

Thus the appeal and wealth of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* has grown since Partition. It is clear from the statements from devotees and *khalifahs* that this increased popularity is due in part to its emblematic status as an "authentic" Muslim shrine with a living lineage of *khalifahs*. But the appeal is also because of the incredible reality of life in Malerkotla which continues as mixed and fluid as it was in the days when Punjab was whole. For many, this is a precious, unique, and even sacred experience.

In many ways the blending of religions, ethnicities, ages, genders, and classes is part of the nature of the tomb shrine. Writing of such sites in medieval Cairo, Christopher Taylor describes a scene of what he calls "vital social mixing." He writes,

It was here that a lot of vital social mixing took place; here the living mixed with the dead, the rich mixed with the poor, the powerful with the powerless, men with women, the formally educated with the illiterate, believers with nonbelievers, authorities with outlaws, and the mundane mixed with the sacred.<sup>424</sup>

What was true of Al-Qarafa, the Cairo cemetery, in the fourteenth century is true of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* today as the same range of pilgrims make their way to the tomb. Some, as we saw in the example of the scheduled caste Hindu leader, come for social purposes, publicly

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<sup>424</sup> Taylor, p. 224.

demonstrating a non-sectarian ethos through the performance of a ritual pilgrimage to a Muslim shrine. Others come for devotional reasons, to fulfill their vows and their personal needs. These ritual engagements often blur the lines between typically Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim practice, thereby manifesting a faith in the efficacy of prayer that is based more on the purity of intention than on the purity of tradition.

Furthermore, Taylor asserts that the vital social mixing that took place at al-Qarafa was a *liminoid phenomenon*, "an essential instrument of normative *communitas*, or social antistructure, which played its own important role in integrating the communal life of this great metropolis."<sup>425</sup> Although Malerkotla can hardly be described as a metropolis, having a population of just over one hundred thousand, the ritual exchanges at the *dargah* do indeed integrate the population on both devotional and social levels. On the devotional level, in spite of the enormous variation in belief and practice, the common interests and concerns of the pilgrims facilitate the co-presence of conflicting views and rituals. If from a theological perspective the crucial element in ensuring the efficacy of rituals at the shrine is the purity of heart of the devotee, then the meaning of the practice is largely self-determined and tends at most shared shrines to minimize overt conflicts that would necessitate exclusion, definition, and segregation. The social implication of this theological perspective is the establishment of a functioning shared religious environment, proving that such intimate exchange is not only possible but desirable. This is reinforced at the tomb by the activities of *khalifahs* and residents as they facilitate the devotions and presence of non-residents and non-Muslims. Thus the formal and informal encounters at sites such as Haider Shaikh's *dargah* activate the motivating ideals of community and cooperation as people grapple

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<sup>425</sup> Op cit.

with the mundane reality and necessity of forging relationships with each other, with the divine, and with the dead in a shifting and uncertain world.

## Chapter Five:

### Ritual Conflicts and Resolutions in Malerkotla

It is clear that Malerkotla's integration persists beyond the miraculous walls of the tomb. Indeed, much as the *dargah* is a focus for shared religious activity, interactions in the neighborhoods and streets of the town promote and provide a structure that reinforces the ethos of harmony that is also rooted in the saint's tradition. Just as the shrine's unifying power is activated and observable in the ritual practices that animate it, so the engaged pluralism of Malerkotla's civic space is activated and observable in the community's memorialization of its shared social memory as a zone of peace and its management of public displays of religiosity that could potentially trigger conflict. In this chapter I will elucidate two modes of ritual practice in the town. The first involves ritual production, the public performance of Malerkotla's identity as a zone of peace. The first mode of ritual production reveals the ways in which religious, regional or national occasions such as #Id or Independence Day are made locally meaningful through the incorporation of symbolic events from the past. The second entails the management of Malerkotla's ritual life and public religiosity. I will examine cases in which the ritual use of Malerkotla's public space was contested, both before and after Partition, and how those conflicts were managed. The second mode of ritual management shows how the ritually invoked identity of peace is challenged and reconciled through successfully negotiated conflict over ritual space and practice.

#### Ritual Production and Memorialization

Both before and after Partition memorializing practices at the state and civic levels have ritualized Malerkotla's history and social memory, rooting it in particular places and practices. These commemorative activities generate a community of memory and a ritualized pattern of

harmony, regularly reestablishing and revitalizing the resources of the past to serve the interests of the present. At the *dargah* these interests were overtly devotional and personal, with an unrecognized but nonetheless effective social and political impact that promoted religious co-existence. Ritual commemoration of the community identity outside the *dargah* reveals overtly social and political interests with a covert devotional and personal effect.

Commemorations of the past such as the two Muslim #Id festivals, the martyrdom observations of the Kuka Sikhs, Independence Day, and so on serve several functions. Ritual memorials are of two general types: celebration and mourning. Celebratory memorials evoke positive histories, aggregating and concentrating the values represented by those events that a community seeks to retain, reinvigorate, and perpetuate. Mourning memorials remember and reconcile past traumas, thereby maintaining memories that remind those in the present of past sacrifices, heroisms, and tribulations. Over time certain memorializations come into being and others may fall away, revealing the shifting needs and central themes of a community's process of self-identification. In the case of traumatic events, effective memorialization may contribute to the community's healing. The failure to account for past trauma to deny, repress, or reject the events may have pathological results. Sociologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich term this the inability to mourn and its legacy is a population pathologically fixated on the trauma.<sup>426</sup> In India, and perhaps especially in Punjab, commemorating Partition has been difficult. There are no public observations, no days of remembrance as there are for other disastrous events.<sup>427</sup>

On the contrary, the horrors of Partition are wholly subsumed by the nationalistic pride invoked

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<sup>426</sup> This concept was first put forward in the context of coping with the violence committed and experienced by Germans in WWII by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in their book *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, (New York; Grove Press, 1975).

<sup>427</sup> The events of Operation Bluestar are often marked by events in gurdwaras throughout the region. A closer parallel would be the Jewish observance of Yom Hashoa, the day of mourning for the victims of the Nazi program of extermination. This memorialization of the trauma of mass death is often a key element in community healing. Conversely, the failure to find a collective means of reconciling such trauma, particularly when accompanied by denial of the events themselves as often happens in South Asia, can result in a pathological "inability to mourn."

through state-sponsored Independence Day festivals being the order of the day. As Gyan Pandey has pointed out, the violence and trauma of Partition is erased and sublimated in the making of the Indian nation-state. Partition's devastation is aestheticized by the state and becomes Independence, clean, free, and noble. Although "Partition *was* violence, a cataclysm, a world (or worlds) torn apart," it is treated as an unfortunate but necessary byproduct of the concomitant realization of Independence, which is cast as the culmination of the historical metanarrative of India.<sup>428</sup> But Partition's violence must be accounted for, it cannot be "disappeared" as so many of its victims were. According to Pandey, the legacy of the violence is very much present, even if often displaced from within a community, in the boundaries of belonging that define the community on a local, regional and national level.<sup>429</sup>

In Malerkotla, this process is present but it is also inverted as there must be a laying to account of the *non*-event of violence in the town. The obvious pride in the town's emergence relatively unscathed from the horrors is tempered by residents' awareness of the terrifying violence and death that surrounded them, and the vulnerability and exposure as the sole Muslim community afterwards. Therefore pride, guilt, fear, and hope intermingle in the emotions swirling around Partition's local legacy. Just as the communities analyzed by Pandey tend to downplay and displace the violence, so in Malerkotla the feelings of pride and purpose are foregrounded in the memories of 1947 and extended to the present day as evidence of the Muslim town's rightful place in post-Independence India. In Pandey's cases the violence is reconciled by being displaced. It always happens "out there," never within the community. The displacement marks the borders between groups and places, creating a safe space of denial. In Malerkotla, repeated ritualistic invocations of community pride in the way Partition did *not*

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<sup>428</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>429</sup> See Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, especially Chapter 8: Constructing Community.

happen relieves their sense of vulnerability through public demonstrations of their pacific past. The evocation of Partition memories in Malerkotla justifies, validates, and assimilates the Muslim principality into the Indian polity through an idealized representation of the community as a model of successful inter-religious integration past and present.

As discussed in Part One concerning the narrative invocations of the legacy of harmony that dominates Malerkotla's collective memory, the community's self-perception and projected identity is as a zone of peace. Not only does this identity take discursive form, but it also emerges in strategic practices that conjure up and enact the ethos of harmony. Through these practices, in particular the formulaic invocation of the symbolic events of the Nawab's *haa da naara* protest and the peace at Partition, these useful elements of the past are made available to the present. As phenomenologist Edward Casey asserts, "commemoration can be considered the laying to account of perishings, the consolidating and continuing of endings. It is the creating of memorializations in the media of ritual, text, and psyche; it enables us to honor the past by carrying it intact into new and lasting forms of alliance and participation."<sup>430</sup> Both before and after Partition, Malerkotla's leaders and citizens have created ways to memorialize the past emphasizing the cooperative and minimizing the conflictual. The histories of the state that are actively recounted in oral and written form tend to focus on the shared past of the community. In particular they emphasize those events which maximize the ability of all residents to identify with the events, such as the coming of the territory's founder Haider Shaikh and the Nawab's protest over the execution of the Guru's sons. These events dominate the imaginative landscape of the community and unsurprisingly emerge as central motifs in most public affairs, particularly

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<sup>430</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 257.

major religious festivals and other ceremonies involving large public gatherings such as #Id and Independence Day.

Linking locally significant events to regional, national, and religious events, forges a connection between Malerkotla's history as a place of peace and inter-religious harmony and Malerkotla's identity as an integral part of a plural Punjab and India. Repetition of integral acts such as the *haa da naara*, Haider Shaikh's arrival, or the peace at Partition help to renew and regenerate their power to give shape to Malerkotla's identity. In addition to myriad and frequent references to these symbolic events in everyday and formal discursive interactions, the importance of these moments takes ritual form at the *dargah* and in the town. Haider Shaikh's festivals and *#urs* ritually memorialize the power of the saint. Although there are no *separate* ceremonies for the *haa da naara* or the peace at Partition, almost no public gathering in Malerkotla goes by without reference to one or both events. This effectively turns nearly every assembly into a form of memorial observance of these two moments in history, each of which exemplifies Malerkotla's idealized moral fibre. According to Casey, such commemorations involve "remembering through specific commemorative vehicles such as rituals or texts," a process which "solemnizes by communalizing in a ceremony" a collectively significant event.<sup>431</sup> In this way, certain elements of the past are made to resonate with and validate present interests and purposes. At the civic level, these interests involve the establishment and perpetuation of a stable community. As ritual practices, public commemorations of the past that incorporate invocations of these symbolic events also have the misrecognized effect of sacralizing the community and its ethos of harmony, giving public and present form to the shared past.

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

The significance of these commemorative acts is apparent inasmuch as such references are ubiquitous and integral to the efficacy of all public ceremonies. In over a year of attending Malerkotla happenings of all sorts, either passing mention or a full account was made of either the quality of the community's moral fiber in resisting violence during Partition or the Nawab's protest (or both) at every single ceremony. These events ranged from religious festivals and parades, political rallies, regional, state, or national holidays, to seminars and conferences, poetry readings and festschrifts, to local charity events. The range of ceremonies and the inevitability of such invocations indicates the central importance of these identity shaping symbols in the life of Malerkotla.

Significantly, the public ceremonies at which these events are commemorated have been and continue to be sponsored by the state, the municipality, by religious organizations, political parties, and civic groups. The use of the *haa da naara* and the peace at Partition as recurring symbolic motifs by local, regional and national power elites further demonstrates how these moments function as key identity markers of the Malerkotla community. The strategic deployment and linkage of the events of 1947 and the *haa da naara* promotes and manufactures Malerkotla's idealized identity. The invocations associate those events and the ideals they represent with the power elites who articulate these values at social, political, and religious events. Such a process is also documented in a Japanese case in a recent article "Social Memory as Ritual Practice" concerning post-World War II Japan. In this study, John Nelson points out that everyday sociocultural practices promoted by power elites shape the meaning of social memory, giving the practices ritual significance.

Some of the most critical ways that shape the meaning of individual memories are those institutional, organizational, and political entities and processes imbued with (and often afforded an excess of) religious legitimacy. Although religious orientations may, of course, be explicitly doctrinal, more recent studies have

shown how they may also be diffuse networks of power relations that act on and often bypass individual consciousness and are promoted through everyday sociocultural practices.<sup>432</sup>

These everyday sociocultural practices take on the force of ritual as they are promoted by local and extralocal power elites. In the case of Japan, the government's support of museums in which to enshrine and fix the ambivalent histories of Japan's war history was a means of coping with the realities of human loss and the ideological defeat that accompanied the military devastation. By incorporating the war dead into the realm of the spirits who guide the nation and creating a space in which memory, history, and the spirit world could be united, the government - in need of stability - and the population - in need of healing - combined to create a moral community of memory. Having been thus established,

At an abstract level, the spirits of the founding fathers and mothers of the nation are ever present as guides and coercive examples for present-day correct policy and behavior. ... The way that they are referenced through social memory and commemorative rituals interacts not only with traditional religious values but also, as we shall see, with the nation's highest political leaders and their networks of alliance and power.<sup>433</sup>

In Malerkotla, we have seen how the founding father Haider Shaikh is enshrined and made present as a guide and coercive example. Similarly, Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan and the *haa da naara* are constantly invoked as positive models. Furthermore, the peace at Partition is attributed to a constellation of causes ranging from Haider Shaikh's blessing, to the effective policies of Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan, to the brave performance of the army, to the sound character of the community at large. This diffuse network of participatory actors extends the credit and the power of the calm in 1947 to a wide circle of founding fathers and mothers. By investing every public gathering with the collective remembrance of these moments of inter-

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<sup>432</sup> Nelson, John. "Social Memory as Ritual Practice." *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 2 (2003), p. 445.

<sup>433</sup> Op cit.

religious cooperation, and the individuals who perpetrated them, Malerkotla's community identity as a zone of peace is actively produced and reinforced.

Prior to Partition, governmental memorialization of the founding spirits of the state and establishment as exemplary guides was undertaken by the Nawabs. At every coronation, before every royal wedding, prior to going to battle, at #Id al-Fitr, Baqr #Id, and at the #urs the Nawab would visit the *dargah*. In his description of the shrine of his ancestor, the last Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan describes the site's role in important state events, his patronage of the shrine, and the overwhelming popularity and importance of the *dargah* to the general population. Although he acknowledges, and even defends, the healing powers of the Shaikh's *dargah*, there is no litany of miracles in Nawab's account. He affirms the power and efficacy of the shrine, the veracity of miracles, and the obvious and overwhelming faith of the people, but the significance of the shrine to the rulers as a locus of state ceremony and as multi-confessional site is emphasized:

Utmost reverence is paid to the shrine of their ancestor by the Rulers of the State. On the occasion of accession to the throne or on the celebration of the two #Ids, offerings of horses, robes and money are made at the tomb on behalf of the State. Many a time the grave is resorted to in cases of personal differences when an oath as to truth or falsity of a case is to be taken. As to the extent to which the general public irrespective of their religion, impose a faith in the supernatural powers of the shrine, it is sufficient here to say that in month of *no-chandi* a large fair is held and the streets of Malerkotla are thronged with thousands of men, women and children who assemble and celebrate the day. Offerings of such varied nature as corn, cereal, sweets, rice, cloth and goats are generally made and not infrequently wishes are held in minds when offerings are made at the grave.<sup>434</sup>

This passage encompasses a wide range of the shrine's usage by the rulers, the citizenry, and the devotees. Clearly state visits to the shrine marked the most significant religious events such as #Id al-Fitr and Baqr #Id, and the most significant secular events such as accession to the

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<sup>434</sup> Khan (2000), p. 9.

throne.<sup>435</sup> The authority and importance of Haider Shaikh was also reinforced by its role as an arbiter or honest broker in the resolution of disputes.<sup>436</sup> The state, through its sponsorship of the shrine, drew authority from regular acknowledgments of the intimate link between the saint and the rulers and cultivating, by extension, the continued loyalty of the saint's devotees, who, significantly, were Hindu and Sikh as well as Muslim.<sup>437</sup>

These ceremonies are also described by elder members of the *khalifah* family who are descendents of the sheikh. Furthermore, older Malerkotla residents reported that prior to departing for duty in World Wars I and II, the state army as a body processed through the *dargah* to receive Haider Shaikh's blessings before going to war. According to at least one resident, because of this blessing, "Even during the First World War and Second World War there was no personal loss in Malerkotla."

After the dissolution of the princely state, the shrine continued to have a prominent role for local and regional leaders. Not only have the elected representatives from Malerkotla, many of whom share the saint's bloodline, made high profile visits to the tomb, but so also do politicians from around the state, including the present Chief Minister Captain Amrinder Singh, the past Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, and the past Governor, Lieutenant General J.F.R. Jacob. Such visits both acknowledge and attempt to garner the power of the shrine as a place of universal appeal.

Outside of the shrine, politicians and leaders past and present make use of the other two common elements of Malerkotla's ecumenical identity – the *haa da naara* protest over the

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<sup>435</sup> These are the two major festivals of Islam: 'Id al-Adha or Baqr 'Id marking Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail, and 'Id al-Fitr marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

<sup>436</sup> This is a function commonly associated with *dargāhs* throughout South Asia, but is not a primary nowadays at Haider Shaikh's tomb.

<sup>437</sup> Remember that Inayat Ali Khan in his book *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans* had lamented the absence of Sufi followers to provide a reliable support base for Haider Shaikh and his household. As it emerges, the clientele of the shrine are loyal to the Saint's descendents.

execution of Guru Gobind Singh's sons and the peace of Partition, often linking the two. The centrality of the *haa da naara* in Malerkotla's identity formation became evident during the celebrations for the two #Ids. Both #Ids are important times in Malerkotla. The Chief Minister of Punjab almost always comes for the #Id prayers, after which he makes a speech promising the community all sorts of things. At both #Id prayers in December 2000 and March 2001, the Chief Minister at the time, Prakash Singh Badal, promised funds to expand Malerkotla's overflowing *#idgah*, the special #Id prayer grounds. He also professed support for an Urdu academy. During these festivals, Malerkotla becomes the most important place in Punjab and all the power elites who have an interest in cultivating this Muslim majority constituency must come to town. #Id, therefore, is an opportunity for Malerkotla residents to publicly demonstrate their sense of their own importance in Punjab and beyond. These are identity-shaping events.

At the end of Ramadan in December 2000, the pace of life in Malerkotla picked up sharply. The winter days had been warm enough that people did not move around much and there had been a perceptible slowing of daily life during the holy month. In the evenings as soon as the fast was broken and prayers were said the bazaars filled with people shopping, eating, and going to communal *iftar* meals.<sup>438</sup> On #Id al-Fitr, the date marking the end of the fast, and for several days afterwards, the social and political life of Malerkotla was busy from dawn to dark with #Id Milans. #Id Milans are formal gatherings, sponsored by various organizations, for the purpose of acknowledging the end of this important religious obligation. Many civic groups and political parties organized #Id Milans and there was clearly a priority on bringing the most distinguished person available to attend as chief guest. Local dignitaries did not suffice, nor did

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<sup>438</sup> Also in Malerkotla many non-religious groups such as the Rotary Club sponsor *iftārs* as a gesture of support to the Muslim community. Similarly, President Bush ingratiated himself to the Muslim world by holding *iftārs* during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003.

they need to. As the only Muslim constituency in Punjab prominent politicians from all over the region are more than willing to preside. In 2000 the Punjab State Waqf Board sponsored an #Id Milan in Malerkotla at which the chief guest was Surjit Singh Barnala, then Governor of the newly created neighboring state of Uttaranchal Pradesh. The Shiromani Akali Dal-Mann hosted an event at which the party's leader and the Member of Parliament from Malerkotla's district Sardar Simranjit Singh Mann was the main attraction. The Jama#at-i Islamī organized an #Id Milan in the neighboring town of Nabha, where there are few Muslims, using the opportunity to reach out to and educate non-Muslims. Sajida Begum, who is the last Nawab's youngest wife, a former MLA, and a local Congress Party leader, hosted an #Id Milan at the Diwan Khana palace presided over by Captain Amrinder Singh, then campaigning for the position of Chief Minister to which he was subsequently elected. All of these events began with a Qur'an recitation and the performance of *na#ats*, liturgies in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Poets recited their own works that often, but not always, focused on Islamic themes. Religious leaders exhorted the gathering to greater piety. Prominent community members spoke on all manner of topics. One subject was *always* the *haa da naara*.

Because of the heightened significance and profile of the 'Id Milan context, I was struck by the constant repetition of this key moment in Malerkotla's history. Nearly every speaker – Muslim and non-Muslim – mentioned the bravery of Nawab Sher Muhammad Khan when he stood up for justice and true Islam against the pressure of his Mughal superiors. The innocence of the children, the rapacity of the Sirhind chief Wazir Khan, the tenacity of Sher Muhammad Khan – all of these themes reverberate for several days through the streets of Malerkotla over crackling public address systems. The *haa da naara* is literally ubiquitous, impossible to escape, told by one speaker even when the previous speaker had described the same event. There is little

variation or detail given in most speeches and the emphasis is consistently upon the Nawab's bravery in confronting his co-religionists and calling them to task for a just cause. If the Nawab in such difficult conditions could put justice over blind loyalty to his confessional community, then what should stop people today from doing the same? The relentless repetition of the tale forces the audiences to recognize the *haa da naara* as a powerful precedent for present day inter-religious relations. The symbolic event is linked to a call for people to rise above religious sectarianism and join together to forge a united India (under the SAD, the Congress Party, on behalf of Malerkotla, etc.). For example, in 2000 the leader of Punjab's Congress party, Captain Amrinder Singh, spoke on these themes at an 'Id Milan. As he was in the middle of campaigning for the 2001 elections, Singh was obviously concerned to garner the support of this key constituency.<sup>439</sup> Furthermore, Singh was the erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala, one of the largest and most powerful of Punjab's princely states and neighboring state to Malerkotla. Throughout his speech he referenced the kinship between the two kingdoms, accentuating their similarities as royal houses and their past cooperation. Significantly, he opened his address with a reference to the *haa da naara*.

First of all, on this special occasion I congratulate you. My family has an old relationship with this city. Nawab Sher Khan Sahib gave the '*haa da naara*' for our innocent *sahibzadas*. This is history. If the Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs maintain their unity, India can become a marvelous country. If we do something with our whole hearts, we can do anything. Punjab is like a family.

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<sup>439</sup> The Muslim community is generally seen, in Punjab and in India at large, as a fairly reliable Congress Party bloc. However, in the last elections, the Muslim MLA was elected from the Shiromani Akali Dal (a Sikh nationalist party) which was ascendant on the state level. In addition, Sikhs are ambivalent about the Congress Party as it is strongly associated with oppressive central government regimes. Congress PM Indira Gandhi was responsible for the infamous Operation Bluestar in 1984 that firebombed the Golden Temple and killed and wounded hundreds of Sikh militants who had holed up there as well as bystanders. The subsequent period of militancy in Punjab was brutally repressed by Congress leaders at the center. Thus, the Congress Party's fortunes in Punjab were closely linked to the national government's will to impose Congress rule in the state. Unsurprisingly, since the first elections after the end of the period of terrorism in the early 1990's the Shiromani Akali Dal had been ascendant. Meanwhile, Congress has typically enjoyed considerable support among India's Muslim population, having successfully projected itself as a secular party. This cause has been materially assisted by the rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP as the chief opposition and eventual ruling party.

Captain Amrinder Singh, a Sikh on the campaign trail in a Muslim town at a Muslim celebration, clearly felt that he could most effectively draw in the largely Muslim assembly by reminding them that the bonds between Sikhs and the Muslims of this town go back for generations. He extended the past solidarity to the present, and then asserted that it is in religious unity that India's future lies.

I asked many locals what they thought about the ubiquity of the *haa da naara* at all public affairs. Most people responded that it was only natural that Sikh and Hindu politicians would try to find common ground with the Muslim population through such references and vice versa. Some saw it as evidence of Sikh faith and obedience to the will of their Guru. Others extended the political and social invocations of the *haa da naara* to include the peace at Partition, citing it as the reason why Sikhs did not attack the principality. Overwhelmingly people felt that the references were a given, a natural and inevitable feature of every public assembly. The very naturalness and unquestioning acceptance of the invocation indicated that the *haa da naara* is as integral to the community's self-perception as it is to the perception of outsiders such as Captain Amrinder Singh. This was evident from the following typical exchange. I approached one of the *granthis* who officiates at the Haa da Naara Gurdwara in Malerkotla, asking,

**AB:** In every political or religious program here in Malerkotla, at every function, people talk about the *haa da naara* and Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan. Why is this story so important?

**Granthi:** This is important because when the children [of Guru Gobind Singh] were being walled, their knees and feet were cut so the bricks could be set straight. The Nawab said, why are you being so cruel? Why such brutality? These children are like our children. You should fight with those who are fighting you, not with these children. And he left the gathering. That is the story of the *haa da naara*. This all comes in the Dasam Granth of Guruji. It is written in the *sakhi* [i.e. the stories of his life] and it comes in the Guru's writings. That is why it is so well known.

A Muslim MLA or MP can get elected here because of this. In our area in District Sangrur from here the MLA is always Muslim.

AB: Like [Nusrat Ikram Khan, the current MLA and Sports Minister from the SAD]?

*Granthi*: Yes, always a Muslim from this community.

AB: Why?

*Granthi*: Because Sikh people vote for them.

Although his account adds a previously unheard level of gruesome detail and mistakenly identifies the source of the story as the Dasam Granth of Guru Gobind Singh, his understanding of the power of the *haa da naara* is quite typical of Malerkotla residents. This particular *granthi* was quite elderly and from a village that had been within Malerkotla state territory in 1947. He recollected those times and asserted that Malerkotla was preserved from Sikh violence because the place was beloved by Sikhs out of respect for the Nawab's protest and the Guru's blessing. In this telling it becomes clear how intimately bound up with one another all of these events are and how elemental to Malerkotla's collective identity the repetitious invocation of the *haa da naara* is for the residents.

The ubiquity of the *haa da naara* during Malerkotla public events contrasts sharply with its absence at the Shahīdi Jor Mela, the festival marking the martyrdom (*shahīdi*) of the two sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Zorawar and Fateh Singh. This event goes on for three days in Sirhind, the site of their execution. The entire district in which Sirhind lies is called Fatehgarh Sahib, the Place of Victory after the moral and spiritual victory of the *sahibzadas* over their captors. The Shahīdi Jor Mela, even more than the #Id events in Malerkotla, is the place where Punjab's political agenda is set. Every political party puts up an enormous tent in which endless speeches are made and honored guests of national prominence, such as the most famous Indian actor and

erstwhile politician Amitabh Bachhan, give stump speeches.<sup>440</sup> Yet here in Sirhind, just meters away from the gurdwara that displays a piece of the very wall in which the Guru's sons were executed, here the *haa da naara* all but disappears. I only once heard mention of the Nawab's protest – by a Muslim from Malerkotla who was a supporter of the Sangrur MP Simranjit Singh Mann. This renegade MP whose major platform position concerns minority religious rights is very interested in Malerkotla and supportive of Muslim issues. It is not surprising that reference to the *haa da naara* would be made in his tent. The absence of any other mentions during the memorial event can be attributed to the lack of any Muslim population, obviating the need to generate common ground. In Malerkotla, communal harmony is a necessity for group survival. There is no chance of one group pushing out or wholly dominating another. Not only does the mutual minority status of all the religious communities preclude this, but also the weight of ritually reenacted collective memories provides a structure of reinforcement for the community identity of peace. Having survived and surmounted the horrors of Partition, the key symbolic events of Malerkotla's history have become repositories for a collective desire to embody and practice the idealized identity. As with so many other major religious events, politics and religion blend at the Shahīdi Jor Mela in Sirhind and at the #Id Milans in Malerkotla. This interweaving of party platform and moral ethos is a subtle exchange, balancing deeply held conviction with politically expedient slogans.

Such public events provide critical opportunities for residents of multiple religious orientations to engage in symbolic interactions. This opportunity is not unlike that afforded by the *dargahs*. These encounters are intensified as public demonstrations of mutual support, such as the way in which Hindus, Sikhs, and Sunni Muslims support the Shi'i Muharram procession

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<sup>440</sup> Bachhan was elected to Parliament in 1984 for the Allahabad District in Uttar Pradesh. He resigned before completing the five year term.

by offering drinks and food to the participants. This is typical of the support offered in acknowledgment of other religious events. According to a Muslim resident, "When #Id comes in the hot summer, Hindu and Sikh brothers make stalls for cold water for their Muslim brothers. Similarly on their occasions, our society [Muslims] do this service." This was born out at several major festivals at which I observed such provisions. For example, one of the most widely attended events in Malerkotla is the celebration for Dussehra, when a giant effigy of the demon king Ravana is burned, having been defeated by the Hindu god-king Rama. At the burning, nearly the entire population of Malerkotla gathers at the Hindu Dera Baba Atma Ram, the shrine to a Hindu ascetic. Although in some ways more carnival than spiritual, nonetheless the event is regarded as a shared experience and one of the most important events in the Hindu religious calendar. At the Dera in 2001 two booths were set up by Muslim associations to provide cool, clean water to the assembly.

This mutual support and participation is echoed on a smaller scale at ritual acknowledgements of life passages. As previously mentioned, Malerkotla's integration is manifest at wedding parties and funerals as people of all religious faiths are present and provision is invariably made for dietary differences. As a Muslim schoolteacher explains, the fact that the religions do not share all of the same daily religious practices (though many may jointly participate in Sufi shrine worship) is not the measure of inter-religious relations. There is no need for Hindus or Sikhs to pray in a mosque or for Muslims to pray in a temple. The depth of connection is manifest in the respect for difference and in the participation in one another's significant life transitions.

I am 45 years old, and I have never seen a Hindu or Sikh offering *namaz*. But if there is some gathering, suppose somebody died, and on the third day people gathered, but the space nearby the house is not enough, so arrangements were made in some mosque, so Hindu, Sikh friends come there and if there is some

gathering in the Gurdwara or Mandir we go there. But neither they nor we say to each other to follow or perform each other's ways of worship. Their religion is for them, ours is for us, and if we will compel them, then there will be a fight.<sup>441</sup>

This common sense approach to living with religious diversity is the norm in Malerkotla, but the approach is *made* normal through practice and perpetuation. Through public participation in events of ritual significance to the town, to one of its religious communities, or to a particular family or individual, the inter-religious fiber of Malerkotla remains interwoven and becomes more difficult to fray. Tension in other parts of the state or the country are met with active efforts to prevent such divisions from taking root locally. Local problems are either projected outside by being blamed on external, political influences – a common strategy as Pandey points out – or addressed directly through meetings, committees, and reparations. As we will see in the next section, this repertoire of peace strategies is necessary in Malerkotla as inter-religious relations here have not always been positive.

### **Ritual Conflict**

It would be possible to accept uncritically the common perception that Malerkotla is a place where nothing bad has ever happened between Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. One could see the storefront names in the bazaars alternate – Narendra Singh Cloth, Jindal Glass, Hussain Sweets, Jain Books – and believe that such integration is the whole story. One could observe the variety of turbans, caps, beards, and veils in a tea, sweet, or snack shop and assume that people of all religions patronize each other's businesses regardless of sect or ethnic group. Membership in political parties, local businesses, and civic groups is usually quite integrated. The status quo in the town appears to be pretty healthy in terms of all observable indices. Likewise, media reports about Malerkotla reveal a remarkably homogeneous catalogue of stories about

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<sup>441</sup> This last line also resonates with two Qur"ān verses: Sāra 113 which closes "to them their religion and to you yours," and the 254<sup>th</sup> line of the second Sāra which enjoins, "Let there be no compulsion in religion."

Malerkotla as a peaceful town. It was after I published a newspaper article on the deplorable state of many of Malerkotla's heritage sites that I was confronted with the more complicated history of the town.<sup>442</sup> A retired schoolteacher, a Muslim man from the weaver caste, spent several hours with me going into great detail about past events of religious tension. From this discussion emerged several new points to research, mostly dealing with pre-Partition events.

In Malerkotla, and throughout the subcontinent, the 1920's and 1930's were full of unrest. As discussed earlier, because Malerkotla was a princely state with an independent standing army, little agitation against the British was tolerated. Under British protection since 1809, Malerkotla was not only loyal to the crown, but also was deeply in their debt. Malerkotla battalions fought with the British in the mid-nineteenth century Afghan wars, World War I, and World War II. As discussed in Chapter One, although the Praja Mandal movement against the princely states was weak in Malerkotla, the struggle to bring about representative democracy had a substantial impact there as well. The feeble efforts to organize against the royal house were quickly subdued and demonstrations, such as that at Kothala in July of 1927, were violently dispersed. Yet the polarizing religious politics that were deepening in India were also felt in Malerkotla. In the kingdom where political activism was largely impossible, religious issues could be a focus for Malerkotla's population. During this period in Malerkotla there were at least two murders, two riots, two investigations by British and local officials into religious disputes, and three incidents when large groups left the state en masse to protest the Nawab's policies on religious issues. The Nawab during this time was Ahmad Ali Khan, by all accounts a modernizing ruler who had built schools, a college, hospitals and brought the railroad to Malerkotla. Yet British records also describe him as a weak-willed man, prone to overspending and constantly in debt.

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<sup>442</sup> Anna Bigelow, "Malerkotla: A Heritage Going to Seed," *The Tribune*, (Chandigarh, December 12, 2000). The unfortunate title is not mine. The article is also available online: <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20001202/windows/main1.htm>

Furthermore, it is clear from both the Punjab State Archives and the British that Ahmad Ali Khan had an unfortunate tendency to flee for Simla – the British summer capital in the Himalayan foothills – at the first sign of trouble. For example, in a *Fortnightly Report* chronicling the goings on throughout the region dated September 30, 1935 the Nawab's behavior is strongly criticized.

The behavior of His Highness the Nawab of Malerkotla during the recent troubles in his state cannot be passed over without mention. He changed orders when pressed by relatives, showed abject fear of his subjects and after releasing the arrested disturbers of the peace fled on the excuse of ill health to Simla when a Muhammadan demonstration was made at the palace at Malerkotla.<sup>443</sup>

Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan's cowardice in the face of protests and tension in his kingdom cannot but have exacerbated the situation. The disputes in question were over the timing of namaz and various Hindu rituals at two different mosques, the release of Hindus believed to have killed a Muslim girl, the prosecution of Muslim youths for killing a Hindu man, and the dismissal of the local Mufti. The Nawab and his government were accused by turns of favoring one community or the other – the Muslims as his co-religionists or the Hindus as he was afraid of them and deeply in their financial debt. His management of these disputes leaves much to be desired, but it is to the credit of the community that these inflammatory events did not cause greater trouble and that they were eventually satisfactorily and apparently permanently resolved. The range and seriousness of the conflicts that spanned a period from 1923 to 1940 indicate that Malerkotla was hardly the trouble-free zone that its more recent press would lead one to believe. In this section I will examine in depth the most protracted of these conflicts and its resolution and then indicate how the lessons learned in this dispute combined with the

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<sup>443</sup> IOC, L/P&S/13/1345 Malerkotla affairs.

post-1947 situation of Malerkotla have all but eliminated virulent religious disputes from Malerkotla's civic life.

On May 7, 1935 one Peshawri Mal was sponsoring a *katha*, the recitation of a Hindu scripture, on behalf of a sick woman of his household.<sup>444</sup> The space chosen was a rooftop, owned by a kinsman, overlooking a mosque. The mosque, called the Lohar's (ironworker's) mosque belongs to the Ahl-e Hadith sect. Of all Islamic sects, the Ahl-e Hadith are the least likely to tolerate the sound of music or singing – whatever its source – during their prayers.<sup>445</sup> On this particular night a group of Muslims objected that the *katha* was clearly audible during the #Isha prayers, the last of the five obligatory prayers of the day. Negotiations ensued to arrange the times for the recitation or to reduce its volume during *namaz*, but the next night a large group of Muslims had gathered and claimed the sound was still invading their prayer space and a violent clash ensued. Both communities claimed that past precedent validated their position. The Muslims declared that no such *katha* had ever taken place there and there was no reason why it should have to be so loud during their prayers. The Hindus retorted that indeed *kathas* had occurred within earshot of that mosque and others and that their performance in no way prevented Muslims from praying. Some months later, in mid-July, a nearly identical problem cropped up between another temple and a mosque elsewhere in Malerkotla. The temple, owned by the family of the above-mentioned Peshawri Mal, performed its evening worship, called *arati*, in such a way and at such a time as to be clearly audible to the Muslims at

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<sup>444</sup> A *katha* is the public performance of a holy Hindu text. The term literally means story or telling, but in a religious context it applies specifically to sacred texts. One of the most common *kathas* is the recitation of the *Ramayana*, the epic story of the god-king Rama's activities restoring righteous rule on earth. A *katha* would typically be chanted, but there may also be some instrumentation and the occasional interjection of songs, often based on the poetry of the text.

<sup>445</sup> Termed the "piety people" by historian of Islam Marshall Hodgson, the Ahl-e Hadith reject the binding authority of the four canonical schools of Sunni law as they do not give reliable credence to the principles of *qiyās*, analogical reasoning, or *ijmā'*, consensus of the community. Rather they are textual literalists who strive to base every decision and all lifestyle practices solely on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

prayer in an adjacent mosque.<sup>446</sup> Both groups claimed that their worship services had traditionally been performed either first or, at most, simultaneously. The Hindus said they always performed *arati* just at sundown, and if this was the time of *maghrib namaz*, then that was the way it had always been and the Muslims were only making it a problem now. The Muslims declared that the *arati* had always begun sometime after their prayers, and that beginning earlier was a deliberately provocative innovation. Again negotiations failed and a large group of Muslims gathered to protest. Reports vary, but it seems that a number of people were injured, likely less than a dozen. The *arati* was shut down and discussions began between the aggrieved parties. On July 22 the *pujari* (priest) of the temple and the *imam* (prayer leader) of the mosque were summoned to the Nawab's court to settle the matter. The next day in a sworn statement before the District Magistrate, the *pujari* and the *imam* both declared that the *arati* always began after the three audible *rakats*, or prostration sequences, and continued as the Muslim congregation would typically perform two more silent *rakats*. Interestingly neither community accepted the pronouncement of their leaders.<sup>447</sup> The Nawab ruled that this past practice should be restored. Subsequently the entire Hindu community of Malerkotla went on a sort of spiritual strike, refusing to hold *arati* at all. Restrictions on the performance of *kathas* resulted in a similar boycott of those ritual practices.

Although the Nawab declared an end to the matter and fixed that the *arati* should begin after *maghrib*, he also solicited an independent investigation from the British government in order to forestall accusations of bias towards his own community. Having made this request, the

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<sup>446</sup> *Arati* is the evening worship of the deities during which the *pujāri*, or priest, of the temple will perform the worship of the deities to the accompaniment of hymns to the deities, ringing bells, and sometimes other instrumentation.

<sup>447</sup> Donaldson observes the contradictions in evidence given by the Imam and the Pujari saying, "It is rather distressing that it should be possible for the whole peace of the town to be disturbed by a dispute between two little hedge-priests of this type and their congregations." Ibid, file page 93 (report page 29).

Nawab left Malerkotla for Simla. In his absence, from September 9 to 17, J.C. Donaldson of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) conducted an inquiry into two matters of the *katha* and *arati* conflicts with *namaz*. The guiding focus of his inquiry was that prior to these disputes relations between Hindus and Muslims in Malerkotla had been largely pacific. His main interest was therefore to discover the past practice that had been in force and to endeavor to return the two communities to those principles of behavior. After questioning over forty witnesses and expressing satisfaction with the cooperation and competence of the police, legal counsel, and other administrators who assisted the inquiry, Donaldson affirmed the Nawab's decision. He stated that there was ample time for the performance of both *arati* and *namaz* within the prescribed periods of time. Although he saw no prohibition on *namaz* at the neighboring mosque being performed after the *arati*, Donaldson did assert that it would be strange, as well as unlikely to have been 'past practice,' for this lone mosque to pray some twenty minutes later than all the others in town.

Donaldson concluded that *arati* at the Chaudrian Mandir used to and should again take place late in the twilight after *namaz* in the Masjid Bafindagan. In his assessment of the situation he also remarked that the matters under dispute are actually of minor religious significance. He further recommended that if consultation does not result in an agreement, the state should intervene and regulate fair practice. "It is deplorable that the former admirable good relations of the communities in this peaceful, well administered, and, to all appearances, prosperous State, where religious toleration and respect for the feelings of others were observed both by the authorities and public, should have been disturbed in this way."<sup>448</sup> Donaldson's estimation of good governance was generous to say the least. By the late 1930's the British had brokered

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid, page 101 (report page 37).

several substantial loans to Malerkotla from Bahawalpur State. Several files in the India Office Collection (IOC) pertain only to the state's debt. Furthermore, whatever the past practice of religious tolerance had been, the immediate future turned out to belie his confidence. The situation in fact deteriorated.

In October of 1935 the restrictions on *katha* were lifted, with the result that the Lohar's mosque was virtually surrounded by houses holding such gatherings, a clear provocation. The reaction by the Muslims was equally out of proportion as large groups took to the streets in clashes that and resulted in the death of one Puran Mal, a prominent Hindu and kinsman of Peshawri Mal who had been at the center of the earlier disputes.<sup>449</sup> Four Muslim youths were detained and eventually two were executed. Not long after this shocking turn of events another body was discovered. It seems that a wall collapsed in the rains and the body of a young Muslim girl said to be clutching a copy of the Qur'an was unearthed. The Hindu owners of the property where the wall came down were detained, but eventually released. This fueled accusations of bias from some in the Muslim community, particularly the Mufti of the state, Shafiq Ahmad. In 1936, in protest over the perceived leniency to the Hindus accused of murdering the girl, a substantial number of Muslims left Malerkotla in a protest march for Lahore. These *muhajirān*, meaning people on a *hijra* or migration, remained out of the state for over a month.<sup>450</sup> Meanwhile, the Nawab left for Simla, leaving his new Chief Minister, Jamil Ahmad, to deal with the situation.<sup>451</sup> Subsequently a state of relative disquiet must have persisted in Malerkotla, now

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<sup>449</sup> IOC, L/P&J/170, *Puran Mal Murder*.

<sup>450</sup> IOC, R/1/2860, Report on Muslim Agitation in Malerkotla State and Proposals for Future Administration of the State and IOC, R/1/2936, Muslim Agitation at Malerkotla.

<sup>451</sup> Ultimately they returned, Mufti Shafiq Ahmad was dismissed and a new Mufti appointed. I heard a fascinating story about this *hijra* from a resident, whose father had been a supporter of the Mufti's, in which as the people left on the road towards Ludhiana a great storm arose. The Mufti and the *muhājirān* stopped and recited the *lātiha* and *durūd sharīf* and the rain fell on either side of the road, allowing the party to pass comfortably.

known as the town where nothing bad ever happens, since *arati* appears not to have taken place for *five more years*.

The Malerkotla Chief Minister's records pick up where J.C. Donaldson's report leaves off. Numerous letters to the Nawab from one Mohan Lal Sharma, the Secretary of the Malerkotla branch of the Hindu Sabha fill the file. Several of these were clearly forwarded on to Major B. Woods-Ballard, the Secretary to the Resident for the Punjab States. The emphasis in the letter is that any and all restrictions on the timing of *arati* must be lifted immediately. In Sharma's words,

It will not be unreasonable and out of time to submit to Your Highness that Our Grievance at this moment is purely a religious one. The petitioners have nothing to do with the politics of the State. The petitioners do not aspire for jobs nor for any other political favour to their community. The petitioner's community can tolerate and suffer for any wrong done to them but it is almost entirely impossible for them to have any legal restriction on their religious rights which they have been already enjoying from the times immemorial.

Your Petitioners therefore humbly pray that the ban imposed on the performance of their Arti which has given rise to the protest continued over a period of five years, may be removed.<sup>452</sup>

Sharma's careful phrasing allows him to lodge the very complaints he claims not to be suing for – jobs or political power. Yet he also urgently requests the lifting of the enforced mandate that the Nawab had made in 1935 and that was confirmed by Donaldson that the *arati* should be postponed until the completion of the *maghrib namaz*. After five years of tension, a murder, a trial, two executions, an exodus, and accusations of bias from all parties, the Chief Minister was ready to deal with the situation.

After several rounds of suggested agreements, a proposal was floated that used as a model a previous compromise reached by the Hindus and "Mohammedans" of Agra in 1934 over

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<sup>452</sup> Letter from Mohan Lal Sharma, Secretary Hindu Sabha, Malerkotla to H.H. the Nawab, Malerkotla, dated June 8, 1940, Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla Chief Minister File 10 of 1936.

a similar issue.<sup>453</sup> That agreement simply stated that the Hindus and Muslims would revert to past practice of tolerance and goodwill in the performance of their customary worship. The accord also stipulated that the restrictions on worship in the temple in question be lifted.<sup>454</sup> This model, along with the exhaustion in town over the prolonged tensions, apparently provided sufficient impetus that reconciliation could take place. A successful agreement was finally reached between the Hindus and Muslims of Malerkotla on September 20, 1940.

We the Hindus and Muslims of Malerkotla are not satisfied with the orders of the Darbar [i.e. the Nawab's court] dated the 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1935, regarding the dispute about the coincidence of the times of Katha in Moti Bazar, Arti in Chaudhrian Temple and Namaz in Weavers' Mosque. With a view to restore our unity and cordial relations, we by mutual consideration have come to the understanding that the Hindus will not by their conduct in performing their Katha and Arti give any occasion which may be likely to create interference in the Namaz, and the Muslims in view of the above assurance, will not interfere in the performance of Arti and Katha.<sup>455</sup>

The thirty-one signatories to this agreement represent a range of religious and ethnic communities, and the process leading up to the resolution appears to have wrought the necessary change in local sentiment. Although immediately following the agreement some disquiet resulted in the detention of three individuals, soon the situation stabilized. In a letter dated February 9, 1941 to Major Woods-Ballard, Chief Minister Jamil Ahmad reports a significantly improved atmosphere. He gives account of action taken against the trouble makers, but says that

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<sup>453</sup> The text of the Agra agreement reads:

We the Hindus and Moslems of Agra have composed our differences and will perform our customary worship and prayers according to our established and recognized usages in our temples and mosques with our mutual goodwill and without interference from either side.

We further desire that the restriction of sec. 144 Cr. P.C. be withdrawn from the temple of L. Kokomal.

Reprinted in Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla Chief Minister's file 10, page 55-6.

<sup>454</sup> Section 144 of the Criminal Procedures Code allowed for the unilateral imposition of curfews and restrictions to preserve public safety. The same section of code was applied to the temple in the *ārati-namāz* dispute and to the performance of *kathās*. *Maghrib namaz* was also prohibited in the Masjid Bafindagan. Text of the Agra agreement is on page 55 of the Punjab State Archives, Malerkotla Chief Minister File 10, 1936.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid, pp. 63-66.

later on when it was found that the relations between the two communities had greatly improved and religious controversy which was a standing menace to the peace and tranquility of this place was gradually disappearing, a general pardon was granted to all persons accused of offences of political or communal nature including the above persons, with a view to encouraging the above spirit of accord and harmony. Since then nothing untoward has happened and both the communities are duly performing their religious worship without causing offence to each other.<sup>456</sup>

In this report, written a few months after the agreement was reached, the situation remains quiescent. The general pardon had the desired effect of bringing about reconciliation rather than releasing frustrated and angry elements into the community.

Perhaps most importantly, the positive resolution of the dispute seems to have had a lasting impact. In 1942 there were some disturbances over the selling of meat during a Jain festival. The Jains being devout vegetarians, it had been requested that the butchers, mostly Muslims, close shop for the day. They refused. Discussions took place over the next year, however, and in the *Fortnightly Report* of September 15, 1943, the author of the report declared that he was satisfied that

there has been no injury to Muslim religious sensibilities in the closing of the butchers' shops on the occasion of Jain processions in connection with the Samatsari festivals, these processions this year had to go out on two days, the third and fourth September. The butchers' shops were closed on both days and the butchers declined to accept compensation from the Jains for closing their shops. They sold meat from their houses as usual, however, and the festival passed off quite peacefully in spite of all apprehension to the contrary.<sup>457</sup>

Thus closes this dark chapter in Malerkotla's inter-religious history, and just in the nick of time.

Only six years later the Partition of Punjab brought such devastation to those relations that only a strong foundation could have withstood the challenge.

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>457</sup> IOC, L/P&S/13/1345 Malerkotla affairs.

Significantly, the final resolution to the *arati/katha-namaz* disputes in Malerkotla seem to have come not so much from the Nawab's mandate or the British officer's adjudication. Rather, the initiative to reach a final resolution seems to have been taken by leaders of the communities involved. The authorities attempted heavy-handed tactics on several occasions by deploying police and then summarily executing the Muslim youths for the death of Puran Mal. They tried leniency by relaxing restrictions on the performance of *kathas* and releasing the accused in a forensically unpursuable case. They attempted third party negotiations bringing in a British officer. In short, they ran the gamut of traditional approaches to resolving conflicts. But it is clear from Jamil Ahmad's reports that the role of community members was the crucial ingredient in bringing about an agreement that could effectively end the tension. Although the role of elites and institutional will to effect a compromise are also factors, the text of the resolution testifies to community resentment of these heavy handed tactics and places the onus of maintaining order in their holy places upon the people of Malerkotla. Interestingly, there is little active community memory of these events, which seem to have been overshadowed by time and dwarfed by the events relating to Partition. Those that did discuss it often misidentified the mosques and temple involved (which of course might be very revealing if explored further) or attributing the ultimate resolution to the Nawab.

One point of agreement between the people of Malerkotla and Donaldson's assessment is that prior to the summer of 1935 inter-religious relations in Malerkotla were quite positive. He begins his report saying that

There was however neither evidence nor assertion that prior to these events the Hindus of Malerkotla State had been subject to any adverse discrimination, or had had any legitimate grounds of complaint that their religious liberties had been interfered with by the authorities. In fact, with the exception of a comparatively

minor incident ... it is an admitted fact that there has been no Hindu-Muslim trouble in this State within living memory, until the present year.<sup>458</sup>

Donaldson also remarks favorably upon the skill with which residents and officials managed the ritual confluence of Muharram and Dusehra in 1918, an event that resulted in violence in numerous other regions of India. He dismissed one of the main complaints in the 1935 disruption in Malerkotla that the ruling Muslims were prejudiced against the Hindus in resolving the matter. In fact, Donaldson praises not only the officials who managed the tense disputes, but most significantly he credits the entire populace of Malerkotla with keeping the situation from spiraling out of control. He writes,

The evidence before me has not shown that the State authorities or any official displayed any communal bias in the official acts by which they dealt with those disorders. Some difficult situations appear to have been handled with a tact and discretion which was creditable to the officers concerned. The fact that much more serious trouble was averted is a credit not only to them but to the population in general.<sup>459</sup>

After praising most of the participants, Donaldson goes on to seek out what the past practice had been that had so successfully managed similar problems up to 1935. It emerges that previously the means of coping with all potential coincidences or conflicts between worship services and public processions "seems to have been to arrange them with mutual forbearance and good will."<sup>460</sup>

Donaldson also remarks on a matter of paramount concern to the British, the possibility that the religious agitations were merely a cover for anti-colonial or anti-governmental movements. He warns

The leaders of all communities in this State should beware of allowing themselves to be used as pawns in any struggle for power which may be proceeding between the communities in British India. They would be very wise

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<sup>458</sup> IOC, L/P&S/1345, Malerkotla file, file page 68 (report page 4).

<sup>459</sup> Ibid, file p. 69-70 (report pp. 5-6).

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, file p. 73 (report p. 9).

not to sacrifice their own happiness and prosperity in order to please people who selfishly desire to make use of them as part of their strategy in that struggle and care nothing for the welfare of the residents of Malerkotla<sup>461</sup>

This warning speaks of the broader political context of 1930's India. In 1929 the Indian National Congress (INC) led by Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru called for full independence from Britain. 1930 saw the first major expression of a desire for a separate Muslim state in an address by the poet and philosopher Allama Iqbal. In 1932 Gandhi initiated a civil disobedience campaigns designed to fill the jails with non-violent resisters to the British regime. These campaigns often led to heightened tensions as authorities, both the British and the princely states, sought to suppress the freedom fighters. Although the movement was minimal in Malerkotla, it would have been impossible for such a small principality to remain wholly isolated from these activities.<sup>462</sup> That the situation in Malerkotla from 1935-40 declined is consistent with the deteriorating relations between the INC and the various Muslim interests, most especially the Muslim League (ML). Newspaper clippings about the events, especially from the partisan Hindu paper *The National Call* printed inflammatory reports of deaths and oppression by the Nawab. There is also evidence of an increasing interest from national groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha in the late 1930's and early 1940's. The Hindu Mahasabha was closely affiliated and allied with the INC, one of the many reasons why the ML alliance with the INC eroded some years earlier. Visits from Mahasabha, Congress, and Muslim League activists riddle the state records from this period, demonstrating that even in the kingdom of Malerkotla, the politics of the day were very much present. The late 1930's brought ambient issues into sharp relief and created the potential to link these local problems with national level politics, something the Nawab clearly wished to avoid.

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid, file p. 101, (report p. 37).

<sup>462</sup> IOC, R/1/1/3006, *Congress Activities in Malerkotla*.

As a good civil servant Donaldson laments the fact that past successful arrangements were never fixed as state policy, nor were they documented. Certainly the developments in 1935 indicate that having had such policies and strategies ready to implement might have helped to nip tensions in the bud after the first incidents in May with the *katha* and *namaz* dispute. No doubt most political scientists and many conflict resolution experts would also mourn the absence of definite procedures in place in the kingdom. Yet Donaldson shows a significant degree of sensitivity to the situation, acknowledging a sound reason for *not* documenting and legalizing past resolutions of such issues. He writes,

It cannot always be assumed that everybody will act in all circumstances exactly according to the correct routine. The excuses given by the officials for not having prepared a record [of past disputes and their resolutions] are by no means unlikely ones. At the first sign of a communal disturbance officers are usually anxious to minimize its importance in order to prevent the excitement spreading and not to put ideas into people's heads. When a settlement had been reached they might well have thought it best to let sleeping dogs lie and leave the parties alone.<sup>463</sup>

Although regrettable in light of the potential utility of such agreements to help resolve later conflicts, there is a strong argument to be made for *not* creating fixed policies whose formation would inevitably raise the stakes involved in a present dispute to the status of a legal precedent upon which future legislation would be based. The Nawab's government had opted in the past to retain flexibility in such matters and to seek to minimize their impact by keeping them from becoming points for more binding disputation. It is sound conflict resolution practice to proactively obviate future contestations rather than reactively legislating in response to very particular and therefore very personal issues. Although most modern western legal systems operate on the basis of precedent setting cases, many traditional modes of governance and legal systems are far more contextually based, with preceding cases functioning as potentially

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid, file p. 86 (report p. 22).

analogous guidelines rather than as prescriptions for all subsequent situations bearing a passing resemblance.

Whether the Nawab's government was following this traditional tendency or was more deliberately attempting to brush past problems under the carpet is hard to know. Although many locals do attribute Malerkotla's inter-religious harmony in part to the Nawab's sound management of the state, the written legacy is actually much more complicated. Not only did Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan leave town when unrest among his people became apparent, but he also on several occasions exacerbated tensions. First, in the middle of the *arati/katha-namaz* conflict, in June 1935 the Nawab also meddled in the processions for Muharram, compromising the ability of his Shi'i kinsman, Ihsan Ali Khan, to take out his processions as previously arranged. There is the suggestion in the British record that he sought to thwart this rival branch of the family by inciting the Sunnis against Ihsan. Second, the Kothala firing incident in 1927, though not religiously motivated, primarily pitted the Muslim ruling and landlord families against Sikh and Hindu land tenants. Third, the state was in considerable financial debt, mostly to Hindu moneylenders, which fuelled the *hijra* of 1936 and accusations of apostasy and pro-Hindu policies. Fourth, this *arati/katha-namaz* dispute dragged on from 1935 to 1941. Although it must be acknowledged that civic unrest was pervasive throughout India in this period, this is a long time for a dispute to remain unresolved. Given the length of the dispute, it is all the more surprising that inter-religious relations did not worsen and that relatively speaking Malerkotla was not badly afflicted, even during the particularly horrific riots in Punjab in 1946.

### **Triggering Events**

In an interesting though brief document, the "Commissioned Report on Communal Disturbances," published by the British Government in about 1928, several of the most common problems leading to Hindu-Muslim conflict are identified. The list of proximate causes of disorder are remarkably similar to those proposed by scholars such as Paul Brass, Stanley Tambiah, and Sudhir Kakar today. The "Report" cites conflict over cow slaughter, festival coincidence, rival processions, and the playing of music near mosques as inevitably inflammatory acts. However, the anonymous author also notes that riots may occur with far less provocation, "if explosive material has been stored up, a spark will ignite it; if communal feelings are strained, the smallest pretext will suffice to start a conflagration which each side accuses the other of having provoked."<sup>464</sup> One of these is ritual conflict concerning the timing of worship between two proximate religious spaces. The coincidence of Muslim prayer with Hindu worship, which tends to involve singing and music, easily become triggering incidents for conflict. During these moments of heightened religious significance, latent religious identities become central. If the competition for dominance of the spiritual sound and landscape is effectively tied to perceived imbalances of control over other shared arenas of civic life, such as the political, economic, social, or religious spheres, then the possibility that violence could occur is substantially increased.

A similar dynamic is documented in Allen Feldman's book *Formations of Violence* which documents the conflicts in Northern Ireland. Feldman demonstrates how public processions performed by Catholic Republicans and Protestant Loyalists allow each group to symbolically dominate the landscape of Belfast for the period of the march. In these times the public space of Belfast becomes effectively Catholic or Protestant, anti or pro-British. Each event serves to

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<sup>464</sup> L/P&J/7/132, *Commissioned Report on Communal Disturbances*: IOR, 1928?

make physically manifest the proprietary claim over the territory made by each group and justified by radically opposed understandings of Northern Ireland's identity. Parades in Belfast by each group entail movement from the center of each community to the boundary zones between Loyalist and Republican areas and then back. The route

transforms the adjacent community into an involuntary audience and an object of defilement through the aggressive display of political symbols and music. In periods of peaceful coexistence the Orange Order (Protestant) parades were occasions of great entertainment for Catholics, who often tactfully attended these events from the sidelines. But during periods of ethnic tension, marching at the interface was a predictable and intentional trigger of violence based on the formation of a schismed audience.<sup>465</sup>

Feldman describes how the involuntary audition and witness of another community's public display of an exclusionary identity may be either the object of curiosity and observation or a triggering event for violence. The difference between peaceful observation and hostile reaction is conditioned by the current state of tension between the representative communities. Locating the turning point is a difficult alchemy, often apparent only in hindsight. Although it is clear that such public displays may be provocative, especially during times of tension, it is not well understood how potentially *integrative* processions, festivals, and ceremonies may also be.

A careful reading of the report authored by Donaldson on the Malerkotla riots reveals numerous references to positively managed disputations over the arrangements for public displays of religious sentiment. In one case he notes how even in 1918 when Muharram and Dussehra coincided and clashes occurred in many places in India that Malerkotla effectively managed the potentially calamitous confluence of rituals. In his report, Donaldson notes the degradation in community relations that precipitated the clashes of 1935. He observes,

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<sup>465</sup> Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 29.

Such matters have in the past been adjusted (whatever form the actual adjustment may have taken) by mutual good sense and forbearance without the need of intervention by the authorities. Even in 1918 when Moharram and Dasehra coincided, and extensive and elaborate precautions had to be taken in British India, arrangements here were made by mutual agreement and the effect of the agreement was not embodied in any formal order, but merely contained in a direction issued to officials which had no legal effect upon either community. (pp. 68-69, report pages 4-5)

In spite of the agreement being informal, it was apparently effective as, in those days, no disturbance ensued. In my own experience in Malerkotla in 2001, another ritual confluence also went smoothly when Muharram, Navaratri, and one of Haider Shaikh's more substantial *melas* all converged for several days in early April. In spite of the crowds and the chaos, no violence occurred and the police reported that the only detentions made were of petty thieves. The question remains, what happened in Malerkotla between 1918 and 2001 in order for the seemingly minor triggering event of mutual audition to become inflammatory?

### **From Partition to the Present**

As Partition and Independence became inevitable, Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan's role in the daily operations of the state diminished. Although none of the records of the 1935 *arti/kathanamaz* problems or the 1936 *hijra* mention Ahmad's son, by the 1940's most state affairs were managed by Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of Malerkotla. In his own history of the state, Iftikhar Ali Khan does not mention any of the above-discussed controversies except a brief reference to the Kothala firing incident. Apparently reverting to the adage "least said, soonest mended," Iftikhar Ali Khan clearly was capable of shoring up any erosion in community trust in the period prior to Partition. As discussed in previous chapters, Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu residents almost universally praise him for his management of that chaotic time. The fact that he was repeatedly elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly could indicate more than merely the residue of some royal charisma.

Clearly his father's mismanagement of the conflicts of the 1930's did not taint the reputation of Iftikhar Ali Khan since Partition in Malerkotla is remembered today as a resounding success. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, residents praise the Nawab, the army, the saints, and the people for the peace during the trauma of 1947. Since 1947 there have been no open conflicts between religious communities. Electoral disputes, business competition, land rights issues and so on do occur, but they tend not to take on the additional patina of communalism. In the time that I lived in Malerkotla I learned about a number of potentially inflammatory issues that arose and were effectively and efficiently dispelled. Here I will briefly discuss those that pertain directly to the practices of conflict management in Malerkotla.

The pattern of practice in Malerkotla proceeds from the triggering event to the inevitable reaction among the residents. At this point there is a proven track record of speedy action on the part of a local Peace Committee, made up of leaders of various groups and communities as well as town officials ranging from the Municipal Committee to the District Magistrates. The willingness of these individuals to negotiate and to take decisive action is clearly the key to preventing escalation of conflicts. The decisive action may take the form of informal agreements, public demonstrations, or joint resolutions. It is always followed up with the concerted inter-personal contacts as community members keep tabs on aggressive individuals in their own neighborhoods and associations. People also take care to publicly demonstrate conciliatory and cooperative behavior, visiting one another's homes and actively discouraging inflammatory discussions. Such public exchanges may include casual, but deliberate, visits in the homes or businesses of members of another religious community. People may attend a religious or social celebration, or – importantly – a site sacred to another religion. On at least one occasion an *Ekta Sammelan*, or Unity Gathering was sponsored by members of the Shi'i

community that brought religious leaders from all religions together to discuss their central tenets and raise general awareness. These practices material improve the atmosphere of *bhaichar* brotherly love and reinforce the ethos of harmony that defines the town.

The most crucial moment immediately follows the initial reaction to some triggering event. Failure to take rapid and perceivable action in response to a provocative incident leaves the management of its significance up for grabs. If Malerkotla were the kind of place where individuals such as the incendiary VHP leader Praveen Togadia (who was recently arrested for distributing *trishuls*, the trident shaped weapon associated with the god Shiva to crowds in Rajasthan) had a substantial audience, then there have been several moments when the town could have become polarized. Instead, Malerkotla has responded relatively calmly to inflammatory events such as the Sikh nationalist terrorism of the 1980's and 1990's, the Ayodhya dispute and the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, a rumored cow-killing, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by Afghanistan's Taliban regime in 2000, the anti-Muslim reaction in other areas of Punjab to the Buddhas' demolition, and most recently the horrors of the Gujarat violence in the spring of 2002. All of these events could, and in other places did, result in inter-religious conflict and violence.

In Malerkotla, there is a ritualized peace system that sustains the community through such stresses. One of the most crucial threads in the warp and woof of Malerkotla's fabric is the internal policing of the communities that occurs. At times of stress, both internal and external, each religious group acts to check their co-religionists, thus obviating the need for the corrections to be made by members of other religious communities or by the authorities. This self-governance reduces the risk of developing the kinds of grudges or feuds that provide fuel to those who may seek to cultivate division. By nipping any troublemakers in the bud, their impact

on the larger community is mitigated and the level of trust is increased. For example, there was an incident in the mid 1980's in Malerkotla when a cow turned up dead. Cow slaughter has been illegal in Malerkotla since the late nineteenth century, and neither beef nor pork is readily available in town to this day. Nonetheless, the cow was dead and a rumor began that it had been maltreated and then killed by some Muslim youths. Soon a crowd gathered and tensions increased. The police and the Deputy Commissioner (the highest ranking civil servant) arrived. Along with leaders of all the local religious communities they made efforts to resolve the problem and disperse the assembly, but to no avail. The head of the local Jamaat-i Islami, Abdul Rauf, described the incident thus:

There was a (Hindu) boy, he created the mischief by spreading the rumor that some Muslims had slaughtered a cow. Muslims then were determined that before they would leave, he should apologize. But he would not apologize. The DC tried very hard but in vain. He said, "I will have to take the course of law." Something came in my mind, I suddenly stood up and said, "I swear by God that if I have made a mistake, forgive me, never ever will I do such a thing again, which can cause riots in a city." After I said this, two people from the RSS stood up and said also that "I swear to God, and say that if I have made some mistake forgive me for that." Like this, one, two, three, people turn by turn stood up and then that person's turn [i.e. the one who had spread the rumor] came and he also said I swear by God, if I have made some mistake, forgive me, I will never ever do such a thing which can spoil the peace of the city. Then everybody was happy; from all sides people said congratulations. The DC came out and said the matter is solved.

This account demonstrates an effectively functioning peace system. As Abdul Rauf observed in a quotation cited earlier, each community polices themselves, correcting their own members when things go wrong. In the example above, although Abdul Rauf places the responsibility for the incident on a Hindu rumor-monger and emphasizes his own role in defusing the tension, he also highlights the role of RSS leaders in immediately following his initiative. By sharing credit for mitigating the tension with members of a Hindu partisan organization Abdul Rauf

acknowledges that peacemaking is a collective project. The willingness of the RSS leaders to put themselves on the line by asking for public witnesses to their commitment to inter-religious peace created space for the Hindu who was guilty of spreading the rumor to ask for forgiveness. Another crucial element of the strategy's efficacy was the willingness of all sides to validate the resolution and acknowledge it as sufficient reparation to bring the conflict to a close. The activities of individuals, such as Abdul Rauf, working in concert with civil and political societal associations *and* with the state generates a positive form of governmentality in which conflicts are speedily and easily resolvable.

During times of inter-religious crisis in India or Punjab, the mutual support between religious communities becomes even more important, and they are remembered. For example, during the period of terrorism in Punjab when curfews and killings made life difficult on numerous levels, Malerkotla had the particular problem of coping with the fasting month of Ramadan. As agricultural distribution was curtailed and constrained and curfew often imposed at sundown when Muslims would break their fast and then go to the markets to get food and go from house to house to exchange felicitations, these years were difficult for Malerkotla in a different way than in other regions. Although locally there was little Sikh extremism, Sangrur District in general was hardly free of strife.<sup>466</sup> During this tense period Malerkotla's Muslims were supported by Sikhs who were more capable of moving about during the hot days without discomfort. From within and without the town Sikhs brought food to the streets of Malerkotla for fasting Muslims to prepare their meals.

In more recent years local solidarity has been manifested on several key occasions. After the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas there were several anti-Muslim attacks in Punjab and

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<sup>466</sup> Sangrur District was home to Sant Harchand Singh Longowal who was a leader of the Akali Dal (Sikh nationalist political party) during the tensest period. After signing a treaty with Rajiv Gandhi, Longowal was assassinated on August 20, 1985 in Sherpur, a village formerly in Malerkotla State named for Sher Muhammad Khan.

other areas of India. In response to this stress, Malerkotla residents and shopkeepers of all religions observed a one day *hartal* or closure of shops and offices. Again after the violence in Gujarat in spring 2002 killed two thousand Muslims and Hindus, Malerkotla's citizens banded together in opposition to the divisive violence. After the rumored killing of a cow in Malerkotla during the 1980's, there were meetings of religious and community leaders and reconciliation took place without violence.

Perhaps most significantly, in 1992 when the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya was torn down by Hindu extremists, Malerkotla was swept into the maelstrom of violence. According to local reports Muslim youths went out into the streets and marched to a Vishvakarma Temple in the Bhumsi neighborhood of Malerkotla. This temple is located in a largely Muslim neighborhood and has a mostly low-caste Hindu constituent population. Perhaps regarded as an easy target for these reasons, one of the walls of the temple was torn down. The police came quickly, community leaders gathered and the destruction was stopped. The youths most responsible were, reportedly, disciplined and eventually exiled.<sup>467</sup> A local Muslim industrialist immediately provided funds for the repair of the temple. Also in the aftermath, a local Jain center in the Moti Bazaar burned down. Conflicting reports exist about the causes of this. Jains and Hindus claim that Muslims burned the building, though no one is clearly identified. Muslims either hedge the question or believe that the building was burnt for the insurance money or because the Jains wanted to build a larger facility. The MLA from Malerkotla at the time, Abdul Ghafar, also participated in the reconciliation process, returning from the state capital to examine the damage

## **Conclusion:**

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<sup>467</sup> At least everyone whom I discussed the matter with said that those responsible had "left" town. The matter remains somewhat mysterious.

Rituals at the shrine of Haider Shaikh and in the town of Malerkotla both constitute and are constituted by the prevailing symbolic identities of both arenas as zones of peace. Importantly, these personally meaningful acts of piety are situated within a larger context. In Malerkotla there are at least two levels of power structures on the social level – the national and the local. On the national level the prevailing ideology of Hindutva requires every citizen to consider themselves in some sense Hindu. Non-Hindus who accept this demand such as the *brahmacharin* Muslim President Abdul Kalam are rewarded. Non-Hindus who refuse are labeled unpatriotic, suspected of extra-territorial loyalties, and their activities are monitored. The local power structure, determined by the national, demands constant evidence that Malerkotla's population is not threatening. Thus the ritual life of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* and the town of Malerkotla operates on several levels. First, the ritual enactment of ecumenicism is a strategy for survival as a minority community. Second, these ritual practices are a means of symbolically reversing the process of Partition. By choosing to attend the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh over any of the myriad other Sufi *pirs* that proliferate in Punjab and choosing to inhabit or visit Malerkotla, people from inside and outside of Malerkotla encounter the type of multi-confessional community that existed throughout Punjab prior to 1947. Finally, the public performance of peace both generates a foundation for that peace by facilitating inter-religious business links, devotional practices, and electoral politics, and enforces it by cultivating and regulating subject citizens who adhere to the dominant ideology of peace and practice in their own lives.

**Part Three:**  
**Regulating Peace**

In addition to the narrative and ritual exchanges at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh and in the town of Malerkotla that sustain the integrated atmosphere, there is an important regulatory dimension as well. The regulation of the shrine consists of the management of the time, space, economy, and community of the *dargah*. Likewise, the regulation of Malerkotla entails the management of the time, space, economy and community of the town. In both the shrine and the town there are two types of regulatory authorities: formal-hereditary and semiformal-elective. In both arenas there are validating processes that signify and authenticate the power of the regulatory authorities. These processes of validation are enacted by the constituent communities of the shrine and the town and serve to define the terms of acceptable or appropriate conduct within the two spheres. These regulatory authorities have their own strategies that establish, validate, and manifest their authority, and the constituent communities likewise have techniques that recognize, verify, and in some cases contest the governing procedures and purposes. In this chapter I examine how the *dargah* and the town have been and continue to be regulated by overlapping authorities and managerial systems in ways that allow for maximum participation by multiple interest groups with a minimum of tension.

The key to this process is the dialogue between regulatory authorities and the regulated communities. At the shrine the authorities consist primarily of two types of ritual and regulatory authorities: the formal-hereditary *khalīfahs* and the semiformal-elective *chelas*, the mostly non-Muslim devotees who are possessed by the spirit of Haider Shaikh. The constituent community is the devotees – Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim – who attend the shrine. In the town the regulatory authorities are also twofold. As an erstwhile princely state the residue of royal power remained with formal-hereditary leaders. Thus the former ruling clan and their kinspeople who descend from Haider Shaikh retain much local power. The other type of authority in the semiformal-

elective arena is more open to multiple religious and ethnic groups at the level of political and civil society. Both authorities are involved in shaping the local public sphere, as is the constituent community, which encompasses the entire town of Malerkotla. At both the shrine and town levels, the repertoires of engagement between multi-religious and multi-ethnic authorities and communities function to generate what Paul Brass has called an "institutionalized peace system."<sup>468</sup> In this system, the modes of interaction and validation between religions and between authorities and those they govern are structured to facilitate a stable society.

In order to understand the dialogic process of regulation in both the town and the shrine, the notion of *governmentality* is extremely helpful. As conceived by Michel Foucault, governmentality is the dual process by which the relations of individuals to the state are regulated both by the individuals within the state and by the state itself. Thomas Lemke explains the Foucauldian concept of government thus, "Foucault defines government as conduct, or, more precisely, as 'the conduct of conduct' and thus as a term which ranges from 'governing the self' to 'governing others.'"<sup>469</sup> This governance entails the power to structure and shape the "field of possible actions of subjects."<sup>470</sup> Thus for Foucault, government is the result of the combined effects of self-regulated individuals and the coercive structures of the state. The configuration of government is not monolithic and unchanging, but dynamic, complicated by the "strategic games" of actors who are never wholly determined by the state.

We must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties – strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others – and the states of domination, which are what we

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<sup>468</sup> Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (Seattle; University of Washington Press, 2003).

<sup>469</sup> Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," paper presented at the Rethinking Marxism Conference, (University of Massachusetts, Amherst 2000), p. 2.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

ordinarily call power. And, between the two, between the games of power and the states of domination, you have governmental technologies.<sup>471</sup>

The field in which governmental technologies and strategic games occur ranges from the personal, indeed the psychic, to the state, that is from the radical interior to the most broadly understood exterior. With this insight, we obtain the means to see a more subtle and nuanced play between the coercive state and the *coercive self*. By recognizing that governed selves constitute civil society, political society, and the realm of the everyday (individual, family, population, etc.) we obtain the means necessary to understand the role of the internally and externally guided individuals in forming a particular society. Recalling Pandey's important work on the careful self-positioning demanded of Indian Muslims, the techniques of government in Malerkotla reveal how Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus find ways to optimally structure their society and their interactions.

However, this governing power is not the sole property of the state nor do its operations occur only within the confines of the state or the self. Here I will present the modes of regulating conduct and the strategies for engaging or contesting the regulations within two governed spaces: the *dargah* of Haider Shaykh and the town of Malerkotla. Through the coercive powers of the regulatory authorities at the shrine and in the town in exchange with the coercive powers of the individuals who make up the constituent communities in both arenas, the continuities and contestations of positive inter-religious interactions and the identity of the region as a zone of peace is realized. These processes are dependent upon both inter-personal interactions and institutionalized structures of power.

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<sup>471</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as the Practice of Freedom," in *The Final Foucault*, edited by J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen, (Boston, MA; MIT Press, 1988), p. 19, quoted in Lemke, p. 5.

## Chapter Six: Regulating the Shrine

At the *mela* festivals for Haider Shaikh the *khalīfahs* surround the tomb of the saint. They monitor every rupee, every cloth grave shroud, each goat, piece of jewelry, and other object offered to the Shaikh. The *khalīfahs* direct, guide, and facilitate the devotees who take blessings, give gifts and money, and receive blessed offerings called *tabarruk* to take home. Often during *melas* large groups of devotees arrive in the entourage of a *chela*. *Chela* literally means disciple, but in this case the name signifies those who are possessed by or communicate with the spirit of the saint. Thus at these moments Haider Shaikh is present in the arena of the *dargah* in three ways: in his grave, through his blood descendents, and through the *chelas*. It is a moment in which it may be unclear which of the three might be the most authentic representation of the saint. The devotees engaging the tomb, the *khalīfahs*, and the *chelas* each have a means of physically signifying their judgment on this question. Contact with the tomb is generally understood to be mandatory. Contact with the *khalīfahs* or *chelas* is not. Nonetheless, most devotees seek out one or both sources of authority, transacting freely between all three nodes of spiritual power. On the other hand, interactions between *khalīfahs* and *chelas* are often minimal. Some *chelas* will seek contact with and personal blessings from the *khalīfahs*. Others move directly to the tomb, pressing their hands and sometimes their faces to the cenotaph or as close as possible to it depending on the crowds. *Chelas* frequently go into states of possession in proximity to the tomb. This may be signified through dramatic head rolling, occasionally by vocal outbursts, and in some cases by a total physical collapse. Within the inner space of the *dargah* drums are not allowed, though the rhythmic beat is clearly audible from the interior.

During these moments the *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars* (descendents of the Shaikh's followers) rarely interfere with the *chelas* and their assemblies. They may observe the possession event as long as its drama persists or their own tasks permit, but having witnessed countless such events, only the most extreme manifestations will hold a *khalīfah's* attention for long. For the duration of the possession the *chela* is managed by the group with whom he or she came. These people create a space in which the period of possession can *khalīfahs* its course without causing harm to either the *chela* or to the assembly. Occasionally a *khalīfah* will instruct the entourages to shift if their location is blocking traffic or access to the tomb. Outside the shrine itself, many *khalīfah* families house the *chelas* and their retinues during their pilgrimage and in some cases establish ongoing relationships with them. But in terms of their ritual authority, the two groups remain distinct.

Transacting between the *khalīfahs* and the *chelas* and acknowledging both authorities are the devotees for whom contact with one or both is an essential ingredient in the efficacy of their pilgrimage. Pilgrims often seek out the *khalīfahs*, press their hands, feet, or any other body part that is in reach, offer gestures and salutations of respect to them, and may seek counsel from them. After attending the shrine they may attend the *chaunkis* (possession events)<sup>472</sup> in which the *chela's* authority is central. Here the devotees may prostrate, touch the *chela's* feet, and seek counsel. Before leaving Malerkotla, both the visiting devotees and the *chelas* will return to the shrine to take leave. At each point, offerings may be made and from each authority blessings may be sought. In the *chaunkis*, the devotees asking for advice and healing are frequently advised by Haider Shaikh through the *chela* to make monetary and substantive offerings at the shrine. They also are instructed to return to the shrine in subsequent years to maintain their state

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<sup>472</sup> These events are also known as *diwān* or *darbār*, terms which designate a royal court.

of grace with the Shaikh. Indeed many devotees report that they have attended the shrine for as long as they remember and this is a continuation of their family's long past practice.

These two sets of authorities – the *khalīfahs* and the *chelas* – operate in different conceptual frames about the nature of the saint and the site and their relationship to them, but in a single physical space. In order to maintain this multiplicity, the regulation of the shrine must achieve an ideal combination of governance and openness of conduct. Both the formal-hereditary and semiformal-elective authorities are engaged in maximizing their authority, a process which requires making space for one another, and allowing the free transaction of the community of the saint between them. The community, likewise, must demonstrate their recognition of the formal-hereditary authorities and, if they choose to participate in their forums, the semiformal-elective as well. Appropriate conduct is determined by all three populations, and is as much an internal process for the constituent communities as an external one. The governing technologies of the shrine, to use Foucault's terminology, are the systems of interaction which define appropriate conduct at the tomb. Both sets of authorities provide instruction to the attendant devotees in the proper way of behaving and believing, some of which contrast with one another. The devotees, meanwhile, accept or reject these prescriptions, engaging in strategic games to find their ideal balance of internal and external governance. Each sphere of regulatory specialists has a particular mode of establishing, validating, and manifesting their authority.

Who has the authority to represent and control the *dargah* and manage its meaning for the constituent community? How is that authority manifested and acknowledged? How do multiple regulatory authorities negotiate, establish, and maintain their arenas of power? How do the groups connected with the shrine participate in its ongoing regulation? To answer these questions, first I address the two modalities of managerial authority at the shrine: the formal-

hereditary, and semiformal-elective. At a tomb shrine, formal-hereditary links are of two kinds, through a spiritual lineage and through blood connections. These are, to an extent, self-authenticating mechanisms inasmuch as both relations carry forward the historical and temporal authority of long-standing traditions and possess formal mechanisms of validation within a spiritual or familial lineage. Although certainly their continued relevance depends upon the ongoing support of the constituent community of the saint, their authority is primarily signified by their mere presence in proximity to the shrine. For those professing a spiritual connection with the saint, sometimes more evidence of affiliation is required such as the wearing of Sufi dress, the manifestation of healing or miraculous powers, or a visible demonstration of profound piety. At Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, the formal-hereditary authorities are the *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars* who are the descendents of the saint's followers. I deal primarily with the *khalīfahs* as the *mujawwars* do not generally perform any ritual functions.<sup>473</sup>

The semiformal-elective authorities associated with the ongoing maintenance of the shrine include all those who participate in the maintenance of an active tradition of devotion at the *dargah*: the *chelas*, patrons who financially support the shrine, and *sevadars* who do voluntary but organized labor on behalf of the shrine. Beyond mere attendance, these groups and individuals support the shrine through donations, ritual exchanges, and manifestation of the power of the saint and the site. Unlike the formal-hereditary authorities above, these semiformal-elective authorities require authentication both within the confines of the shrine and by the community of devotees. Semiformal-elective affiliation is by no means an unsystematic mode of authority. For the *chelas*, their power must be made manifest as they signify to their audience that they are in genuine contact with the spirit of the saint and capable of

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<sup>473</sup> As will be discussed below, the *mujawwars* by long arrangement have received a lesser portion of the offerings made at the shrine. In return they are responsible for some of the maintenance, but generally speaking are not involved in the daily activities at the shrine or in the same degree of exchanges with the *chelas* or devotees.

communicating his wisdom and counsel to the assembly.<sup>474</sup> Reputation, popularity, attendance at the *chaunki* possession sessions organized by a *chela* and his or her entourage are among the validating mechanisms of authority. For the patrons, their financial and structural support must be authorized by the *khalīfahs* as owners of the shrine. Structural contributions such as the building of a bathing tank or a resthouse in proximity to the *dargah* cannot occur without permission from the *khalīfahs*. For substantial material donations, consultation and approval is also necessary and the terms and expectations of the gift negotiated. Likewise, the *sevadars* who wish to contribute their time and labor to the shrine's upkeep must be acceptable to the *khalīfahs*. Some *chelas* and *sevadars* claim a spiritual link to the saint. This can provide grounds to contest the authority of the *khalīfahs* who by and large do not demonstrate deep spiritual knowledge or interest.

The interaction between the codified structures of authority embedded in a Sufi *silsila* or a family of *khalīfahs* and the community of devotees and their leaders who patronize the site is often neglected in studies of shrine life. Indeed, the mutual intelligibility and acknowledgement of one another's spheres of authority is a crucial element in sustaining positive relations at a shrine. At Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, this occurs through a number of strategic exchanges between the formal-hereditary and the semi-formal elective authorities. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the management of narrative, ritual, and spatial encounters is an organic process, rarely requiring any systematization. In some measure, the formal and semiformal regulatory authorities function independently of each other, but these spheres of authority also overlap. Significantly, these spheres of authority are not mutually exclusive, nor are the logics and mechanisms of their validation. To maintain the daily and festival viability of the shrine's

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<sup>474</sup> This has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three on the ritual aspects of the shrine.

organization, finances, maintenance, and devotional efficacy, the formal and informal authorities at the shrine must actively engage in processes of mutual validation. These validating mechanisms include the participation of the devotees, the donation of time, material, or monetary support, and the verbal and physical exchanges signifying authority. These practices delineate the formal and semiformal spheres of authority, highlighting how these personnel interact to support a multi-confessional space.

### ***Dargah Authority***

In Malerkotla, as in many other places, Islamic religious authority was established through the personal charisma and recognized spiritual prowess of an individual Sufi.<sup>475</sup> As we saw in previous chapters, both the discursive and the territorial integrity of Malerkotla expanded from the central point of the saint's tomb shrine. The various appropriate modes of relating to Haider Shaikh's *dargah* function as primary identity markers. This is reflected at every level of engagement with the shrine and the Shaikh, from his descendants (the *khalīfahs*), to the descendents of his followers (the *mujawwars*), to the disciples whom he possesses (the *chelas*), to the patrons who materially support the operation and structure of the shrine, to the large and unstructured population of his devotees who identify as the *pīr panth*, or community of the saint. Through their relations with the *dargah* and with each other, each individual and each group establishes the authenticity of their connections to the Shaikh and the shrine. The various narrative, ritual, and spatial practices of identification outlined in previous chapters all combine to validate the administrative structure of the shrine and to mark these actors as participants in the development, maintenance, and perpetuation of the *dargah's* regulation. This is important, as

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<sup>475</sup> This process of gathering worldly and spiritual power and disseminating it has been outlined in earlier chapters and draws on the work of Richard Eaton in particular. See his "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid," and *Sufis of Bijapur*. See also, Ernst and Lawrence (2002).

the *dargah* is the stage upon which these identifying narrative, ritual, and spatial performances take place. Here the organizational force of the state and the saint become manifest to the local population. Richard Eaton describes the medieval *dargah* in relation to the constituent communities as a "mini-theater state."<sup>476</sup> He writes, "the shrine provided the tribes with a tiny 'theater-state' of their own; that is, it displayed throughout the ceremonies and celebrations that marked its liturgical calendar the pageantry of both the court of God and the court of Delhi, albeit on a microcosmic scale."<sup>477</sup> The modern *dargah* functions as a theater-state of a somewhat different order where the organizational force of the saint and the organizational force of the multiple functionaries necessary to maintain his accessibility become manifest – a theater-bureaucracy, if you will.<sup>478</sup>

This theater-state also plays a role in determining the competence and authority of the performer, and in the potential of a performance event to identify and locate the authorities within the regulatory scheme of the *dargah*. Thus, within the space of the shrine, individuals are marked by varying levels of competence and invested with varying degrees of authority to regulate particular types of exchange, and modes of behavior. The proper functioning of this authenticating system is crucial on two levels. First, as sociologist Ron Hassner has suggested, the absence of a clear hierocratic authority at a shared sacred space is generally understood to be

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<sup>476</sup> Here Eaton is extending Clifford Geertz's notion of the Balinese temple as a theater-state. See Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*, (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>477</sup> Eaton (1984), p. 347.

<sup>478</sup> David Gilmartin explores the ways in which this authority was negotiated and validated through the courts during the colonial period. He argues that whereas prior to the advent of the British there was a close link between the temporal and spiritual authorities at the *dargāhs* in his study, once the worldly power was wholly subsumed by the colonial regime, only the spiritual dimension remained as a means of verifying authority at the shrine. Whereas before the British the symbiosis was more complete, now the political authority was based entirely upon the relations with local landowners and tribal leaders. These relations being complicated by marriage bonds and other allegiances, the only other negotiable source of authority lay in the role of the *dargāh* as an Islamic educational institution. Thus the ability of the *sajjida nishīn* to effectively disseminate Islamic values and provide spiritual guidance becomes the only real variable in the equation of power at the *dargāh*. David Gilmartin, "Shrines, Succession and Sources of Moral Authority," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, edited by Barbara Metcalf, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1984).

an exacerbating factor in terms of the tension between multiple interest groups.<sup>479</sup> Thus, without mutually intelligible modes of establishing their authority, the roles and purview of the various parties becomes negatively ambiguous, opening ground for contestation. Second, for many constituents, pilgrimage to the site is incomplete and ineffective if contact with certain authorities such as a *khalīfah* or *chela* does not occur. These are the individuals who are capable of accessing and activating the power of the saint, making the Shaikh's *barakat* available for public and personal use. Thus the absence of a single hierocratic authority at the shrine based on lineage, descent, authentic relations with the saint, or any other quality opens the regulation of the *dargah* to multiple potential contestations. Lacking a unitary narrative, ritual engagement, spatial choreography, or administrative monopoly, the terms of engagement at the *dargah* are constantly under negotiation. Significantly, this ongoing process of negotiation – though competitive, fragmentary, and emergent – is peaceful.<sup>480</sup> No significant court cases involving the tomb's management have ever been filed, few individuals have ever been barred from attending the shrine, and criticism concerning the regulation of the *dargah* is rarely antagonistic.

### **SILSILA: AUTHORITY THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL SUFISM**

The *dargah* of Haider Shaikh has always been under the exclusive control of the saint's blood descendents. There is no ongoing *khanqah* or center of formal Sufi training at Malerkotla and therefore no lineage of spiritual descendents to rival the *khalīfahs*' charisma. The authority to manage the shrine is based entirely on the ancestral connections between the saint and these *khalīfahs*. The routinized authority of Haider Shaikh is validated and maintained with the full

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<sup>479</sup> Ron E. Hassner, "Understanding and Resolving Disputes over Sacred Space," *Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation Working Paper*, (Number 62, 2002).

<sup>480</sup> This notion of the incomplete and emergent quality of history is a methodological and theoretical intervention put forward by many in the subaltern studies and postcolonial historiography schools of thought. Excellent examples of such works include: Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* and Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* (Volume, 37, Winter 1992) and *The Construction of Communalism*.

understanding that the *khalīfahs* share the saint's blood, but not necessarily his *maʿarifāt*, or spiritual knowledge.<sup>481</sup> Although affiliated with a prominent and widespread Sufi order – the Suhrawardī *silsila* – the significance of this link is largely symbolic and does not seem to bear much meaning for any of the *khalīfahs* who regularly sit at the shrine other than as a point of reference. The names of the most famous South Asian Suhrawardī saints, Baha ul-Haq Zakariyya (d. 1268) and Rukn-i-alam (d.1335) are invoked, often interchangeably, as Haider Shaikh's *murshid*.<sup>482</sup> As Haider Shaikh died in 1509, direct discipleship is impossible. However, such invocations do not in this case indicate ascription to a set of beliefs or practices belonging to the *silsila*. In order to understand which features of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* are unique and which reveal continuities with other such shrines, it is important to understand the variety of regulatory authorities existing at this and other *dargahs*.<sup>483</sup>

There are two common ways in which the managers of Sufi shrines are determined: either through blood or spiritual descent from the saint associated with the site. At many Sufi *dargahs* in South Asia both are the case, but at Haider Shaikh there is no ongoing Sufi center, or *khanqah*, nor is there an active connection with the Sufi lineage of the saint. By comparison, at Ajmer, Nizamuddin, or Gulbarga where great saints of the Chishtī *silsila* are entombed and where an active *khanqah* remains, the emphasis not surprisingly shifts. There the lineal affiliation is central and knowledge of the order, its spiritual instructions, and its ritual practices deepen. Also, as at Hindu places of pilgrimage like Haridwar or Rishikesh, devotees at Ajmer, for

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<sup>481</sup> It is important to point out that it is often the case at such shrines, even at places where there is a functioning *khānqāh*, that not all of the custodians are deeply knowledgeable about Sufi teachings.

<sup>482</sup> Both of these saints have biographical entries in several significant *tazkīras* of South Asian Sufis, but neither is detailed enough to indicate several generations of disciples to reach to Haider Shaikh's time. Nor do the teachings or hagiographical materials bear any observable similarity to features associated with Haider Shaikh. Mirza Muhammad Akhtar Dihlavi, "Tazkirahī Auliya Hindo Pakistan," (1972), Hamid ibn Fazl Allah Jamali, *Siyar Al-Arifin* (Lahore: Markazi Urdu Board, 1976), Muhammad ibn Mubarak Kirmani Amir Khurd, *Siyar Al-Auliya Fi Muhabbat Al Haq* (Lahore: Markazi Urdu Board, 1980).

<sup>483</sup> The continuities and contrasts on the ritual, narrative, and spatial levels have been discussed previously.

example, develop relations with particular families of servants at the *dargah* known as the *khudam* (ones who give service, sg. *khadim*).<sup>484</sup> In places such as Malerkotla, the highly local and personal connection between the Shaikh and the surrounding environment comes to the fore. At this shrine - outside the corridor of a temporal and spiritual institutional power - there are less formal and structured, but in many cases quite intimate, relations among the *khalīfahs* and the constituent population.<sup>485</sup>

It is not wholly unusual that a tomb shrine should function as much as a center of worldly authority as a spiritual refuge. Richard Eaton's study of Baba Farid's tomb in Pakpattan describes a similar process that concentrates authority in the descendents of the saint as Farid's *barakat* inheres not only in his blood relations but also his spiritual terrain, from his own tomb and also those of his spiritual *khalīfahs* whose burial points became additional nodes for the distribution of spiritual power. As the custodianship of the shrine was fixed in one family, the shrine and its endowments and gifts from local leaders and the central authorities at Delhi helped to entrench the power of Farid in the *dargah* itself. After Farid, his spiritual gifts were never as fully realized among his descendents.<sup>486</sup> His spiritual heir, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya took up residence at Delhi, not in Pakpattan, thereby extending the spiritual territory or *wilayat* of the

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<sup>484</sup> A detailed account of the relations between the *khudam* at Ajmer and their client families is given in Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Mu'in al-Din Chishtī of Ajmer*.

<sup>485</sup> For example, a visitor to the large *dargāh* at Ajmer is immediately greeted by a member of the *khudām*, one of the hereditary caretakers of the tomb. As at Hindu pilgrimage centers like Haridwar and Rishikesh, families establish hereditary links with the *khudām* at Ajmer and their devotions will be mediated by one group of these ritual specialists. Not only do they facilitate worship during visits to the shrine and give spiritual instruction and advice at those times, but between visits the *khudām* are expected to continue to offer prayers on behalf of their clients and to respond to any needs communicated to them by letter or telephone. This situation does not occur to the same degree at Haider Shaikh. There is only one family, relatively unified, and there is little competition for clientele. Although there are many devotees who attend the shrine and patronize as a matter of long past tradition in their families, the formality of association necessary to manage the enormous numbers of devotees at Ajmer is unnecessary.

<sup>486</sup> A few individuals stand out, such as his twelfth generation descendent Shaikh Ibrahim who is often known as Farid al-Thani, or the Second Farid. Indeed it is to Shaikh Ibrahim, also known as Shaikh Brahm, that many scholars attribute the true authorship of the verses of the Guru Granth Sahib which are signed with the name 'Farid.' The debates over the possibility that Farid wrote the 112 verses have been fierce, interesting, and continuous.

Chishtī *silsila* and obviating the possibility of contestation for authority at the *dargah* on these grounds. Thus a decrease in the mystical teachings and esoteric purposes available at a shrine often occurs as the *barakat* associated with a particular saint's spiritual prowess grows ever more temporally distant from the living personality of the saint, and remains accessible largely through the saint's descendents. Thus, in some cases the power of the saint is instantiated and formalized into a pilgrimage center operated by the descendants, saintly or not, of the *pīr*.<sup>487</sup> In other places where connections to a *silsila* are also present, the authority of the established tradition is gained.

On the other hand, at those shrines that lack any truly active *khanqah*, there is little diminution of the perceived efficacy of the shrine as reflected in the beliefs and practices of the denizens of the shrines. The *barakat* does not diminish. On the contrary, in many cases, tomb cults do not even develop until long after the death of the grave's occupant, and are therefore unmediated by hereditary or spiritual lineages. These tombs become known through the manifestation of miraculous power, experienced and authenticated by the local population. This is especially true of the minor tomb shrines at which the officiants – if any exist – are often self-appointed through their personal inclination or connection to the land or the site. Such spots are more often termed *mazars*, as they bear none of the built evidence and formality that the term *dargah* evokes as a word which in its Persian origins designated a royal court. These *mazars* are often no more than cenotaphs or even piles of earth, covered with dusty green sheets. In some cases the manifest blessings of the site increase and in response so does the clientele of the site. This increase in devotional constituency may result in buildings and the development of other facilities. In the case of Haider Shaikh, the formal Sufi connection is nominal, but frequently asserted by the *khalīfahs*. Nonetheless, Haider Shaikh is very much present. The blood relations

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<sup>487</sup> This process is described more fully in Eaton, "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid."

are active. Eruptions of the miraculous are real and ongoing manifestations of Haider Shaikh's *barakat*.

Among the *khalīfahs* at Haider Shaikh's shrine, knowledge of the various *silsilas* is rarely a point of interest or concern and is generally restricted to observable practices. However, studies of the Suhrawardī in India do indicate certain continuities with the orientation of the *khalīfahs* at Haider Shaikh's *dargah* towards temporal authority. For example, K.A. Nizami characterizes the Suhrawardī as nearly in opposition to the far more popular Chishtī in terms of their willingness to associate with worldly powers.<sup>488</sup> Indeed, from the very inception of the lineage with Abu al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 1168) and his nephew Shihab al-Din (d. 1234) in Baghdad, the order has sought to accommodate not only temporal authorities, but the worldly concerns and needs of those seeking to follow the path the Shaikhs laid out. For example, writing of the ideal relationship between a Sufi and the temporal power of the Sultan, Abu al-Najīb writes:

In association with the sultan: one must obey him except in disobedience to God or violation of traditional law. "O You who believe, obey God and the Prophet and those in authority among you" (Qur'an 4:59). One should pray for the ruler and avoid slandering him. It is meritorious to visit a just ruler; but one should stay away from an unjust ruler except in case of necessity or in order to reprove him. He who has to visit them should pray for them and exhort them and reprove them according to his capacity. Some eminent Sufis used to approach the rulers for the welfare of the people. Ibn #Ata" said: "It is more meritorious to be ostentatious [with regard to one's piety] in order to gain social esteem and thereby be able to assist another Muslim than to act in total sincerity for the sake of one's own salvation."<sup>489</sup>

Thus rather than advocating ascetic withdrawal, Shaikh Abu al-Najīb recommends that engagement with worldly leaders is less selfish and potentially more beneficial to society as a

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<sup>488</sup> Digby, Simon, "The Sufi Shaikh as a Source of Authority in Mediaeval India," *Purusartha*, (Volume 9, 1986) and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "The Suhrawardī Silsilah and Its Influence on Medieval Indian Politics" *The Medieval Indian Quarterly*, (Volume 2, October 1950).

<sup>489</sup> Suhrawardī, Abu al-Najīb, *A Sufi Rule for Novices: Kitab Adab Al-Muridin*, translated by Menahem Milson, (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1975).

whole. This stands in sharp contrast to the Chishtī attitude typified by the widely known declaration of the prominent Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya" (d. 1325) who when threatened with a visit from the ruling Sultan at Delhi declared that if the Sultan were to enter his *khanqah* through the front door, he himself would depart from the back. Although many Chishtī *dargahs* have become centers of worldly as well as spiritual authority, the ideal of remaining aloof remains a pervasive, if imperfectly realized, theme among Chishtīs even today.

At Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, the Suhrawardī mode of worldly involvement is very much in place. Not only are the *khalifahs* and Nawabs from the same blood lineage, but also, as we saw in Chapter Four, the shrine is central to a number of the rituals of state as the tomb was visited by soldiers en route to war, by each Nawab prior to his coronation, and continues to be a necessary stop on campaign trails today. In Chapter Two the centrality of the saint in oral and written histories of the region was demonstrated. It is significant that this centrality is by and large locally and socially constructed, even if extra-locally confirmed by the patronage and devotion of visitors, politicians, and devotees from throughout the state, nation and the world. Little authority is gained through deliberate associations with the prestige of the Suhrawardī lineage. Indeed if a link is made to any Sufi order at all, it is to the Chishtī as evidenced by the participation in Haider Shaikh's *#urs* observations of a *khadim* hereditary shrine servant from the central Chishtī *dargah* of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishtī at Ajmer. Thus it is clear that the sources of authority at the shrine derive either from descent from the Shaikh or through demonstrated voluntary association with the shrine and support for its traditions. Both categories of authorities maintain among the constituent population the active repertoire of miraculous accounts associated with Haider Shaikh.

The degree to which the *dargah* can be understood as Suhrawardī is clearly somewhat limited. As seen in Chapter Two, the spiritual precepts cited by the *sajjida nishin*, or preceptor of the *dargah*, in his chapbook about Haider Shaikh are extremely general, demonstrating no features that indicate a sectarian affiliation. In terms of specific knowledge at the site concerning the particularities of this *silsila* or any other, many Muslims in Malerkotla and most in the family of Haider Shaikh are aware of his lineal affiliation with the Suhrawardī *silsila*, but few in the family or outside of it know anything particular about the Suhrawardī or about Haider Shaikh's own beliefs and practices. There are, however, exceptions. The *numbardar khalīfah*, whose narratives of Haider Shaikh were given in Chapter Two, is more mystically inclined than most. He notes that at the *dargah* there are frequent musical events, both in terms of the drummers accompanying those who are possessed by the saint and occasional formal *qawwali* performances at the tomb. However, he observes that this is somewhat inconsistent with the Suhrawardī's extremely conditional and limited acceptance of musical audition and performance. The *numbardar* also notes observable distinctions between the lineages such as the Suhrawardī preference to engage in *zīkr*, or repetitive remembrance of Allah, out loud, whereas others, such as the Naqshbandī, perform this basic (and not necessarily Sufi) ritual silently. He also identified one of the characteristic Suhrawardī practices as a particular way of invoking Allah prior to performing *wuzū*", (bathing before prayers):

About the customs of the Suhrawardī *gharana* (lineage), though customs are countless, among those that are well known, the biggest thing is with *wuzu*. Sitting as we sit during *namaz*, they say, "*he tu, he tu, he tu, he tu,*" that "you and you and you are on all four sides." This daily round of recitation of theirs is the most well known, and this is known to everybody in the Suhrawardī *gharana*. Likewise in the Naqshbandī *silsila* "*Allahu Allahu,*" is said and in the Chishtī *gharana* "*la ilaha illallah*" is said and after three repetitions they say "*muhammad rasul allah.*" This is common among the Chishtī *gharana*. Similarly, it is

common among them [the Suhrawardī], to say "only you - *he tu* - are on all four sides."<sup>490</sup>

This brief explanation of some of the formal variations in practice between the Sufi orders in India is fairly common knowledge to anybody who is at all interested in Sufism. However, after interviews with numerous *khalīfahs* and other residents, it became clear that such formal Sufi customs are not prevalent at the shrine. Rather, Sufism in Malerkotla is centered not on a *silsila*, but on particular charismatic teachers and shrines.

For the *numbardar khalīfah*, as with most of those in Malerkotla who professed to be Sufis, external customs and formal affiliations appear to be secondary to personal connections.<sup>491</sup> Though institutional Sufism and renowned Sufi saints were referenced as a means of establishing authenticity or authority, most people described their beliefs and practices in terms of a particular beloved guide, often a family member. The *numbardar* described this situation:

Numbardar: There were many who were close to Baba Sahib [i.e. Haider Shaikh], who obeyed him in the beginning. Their children are many, but now nobody knows anything.

AB: Is there no interest?

N: If I have some interest, only then I will get anything from Tayaji (his teacher), otherwise, what will he give me? If I go to him and serve him I will learn from him. I will learn the Qur'an Sharif and get some benefit from him. As there have been such *buzurgs* (pious elders) like my Dada (paternal grandfather), there were also bigger *buzurgs* than him also. My father was like this [i.e. a Sufi], so I became interested in knowing and learning what he had done in his life. What he used to do, what he did. Through this [study] one becomes a total master, as his *nazarekaram* (blessed sight) is there.

This *numbardar's* father and grandfather were both Sufi masters, renowned for their spiritual knowledge and healing skills. However, according to the *numbardar*, such individuals were rare among the descendents of the Shaikh. Furthermore, only those who take it upon themselves to

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<sup>490</sup> Personal Interview, August 2, 2001.

<sup>491</sup> The centrality of the personal connection between a guide and a disciple is fundamental to all Sufis, whether fully engaged with a particular *tarīqa* or not. My point here is simply that here the institutional element is almost wholly absent.

pursue such knowledge will gain the rewards of their forefathers' teachings. Nonetheless, the *numbardar* reported that many people did in fact consult with his grandfather:

A lot of people used to come to him to ask about Sufi matters. *Faqīri log* (Sufi practitioners sworn to a life of poverty) from outside used to come also. All the gentry of the town used to come. Even politicians used to come. People used to come for *du#a*" (supplicatory prayer). ... Poor people and the people of the city used to come to him for *du#a*". Officers used to come. All these people used to come so that they might learn some good thing (*acchī bīt*).

Notably absent from the list of those in attendance are the other *khandan* (clan members).

Nonetheless, the teachings of his father and grandfather continued to be meaningful to the *numbardar* and after their deaths, he continued those practices.<sup>492</sup>

This contrasts somewhat with the situation at sites where the *silsila* itself is enshrined. For example, at the Dargah of Sayyid Muhammad al-Husayni Bandahnawaz Gisudiraz (1321-1422) in Gulbarga, Karnataka, the saint's descendents are still the keepers of his tomb and his tradition. Khwaja Gisudiraz was one of the leading disciples of the fifth great master of the Nizami Chishtī *silsila*, Shaikh Nasir-ud-Din Chiragh-i Dilhi. The current *sajjida nishān*, Sayyid Shah Mohammad Hussaini and his son Sayyid Shah Khusro Hussaini are both extremely active in the maintenance of the shrine and the spiritual legacy of their forefather. The *sajjida nishān* is an active *murshid*, or spiritual guide in the Chishtī *silsila*. Shah Khusro Hussaini has done considerable research on the life and teachings of Khwaja Gisudiraz and in addition he does

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<sup>492</sup> He also has formed a deep bond with an elderly Hafiz (one who has memorized the Qur'an) who is a denizen of the neighborhood. This 87-year-old gentleman is an honored and respected teacher among many communities. He and his disciples claim that the Hafiz is able to converse with the *auliyā*" whose spirits permeate the town and control the *jinn* and angels. He comes and goes freely from many homes in Malerkotla, declaring that everyone knows him. As a *hafiz*, he has memorized the entire Qur'an and is able to recall and recite it at will. He claims no lineage of teaching, but instead refers to *khudā*, God, as the source of all knowledge and understanding. The extremely personal and intimate relations between Hafizji and his disciples is a mode of transmission that is not dependent upon the availability of *khānqāh* or other centers of Sufi teachings. His students refer to him as *ustād* (teacher), *tayaji* (uncle), or *hafizji* (an honorific for one who has memorized the Qur'an). These students do not observe any of the formal *adab*, or manners, reserved for one's *murshid* such as bowing, touching his feet, pressing his hands, and so on. The Hafiz frequents many homes throughout Malerkotla, but does not visit much with the *sajjida nishān* or the other *khandan* who spend significant time at the *dargāh*.

scholarly research on Sufism, working towards a doctoral degree in Religious Studies from McGill University.<sup>493</sup> The shrine contains a library on Sufi matters and cells for visitors and dervishes to perform retreats. The proceeds from the *dargah* are used for a wide range of social programs, schools, clinics, etc. which Shah Muhammad Hussaini and his son believe most completely fulfills the mission of their saintly ancestor who is popularly known as *Banda Nawaz*, or the Helper of Humanity. Thus at this *dargah*, the authority of the caretakers is validated by their blood and the integrity with which they have sustained the spiritual teachings and humanitarian mission of Khwaja Gisudiraz. It is worth noting that this shrine also is overwhelmingly peaceful and is patronized by all religious communities.

### **KHAL^FAHS: AUTHORITY THROUGH BLOOD**

For most devotees, the absence of an active *khanqah* or esoteric Sufi instruction is not problematic. Most see the blessing obtainable through contact with the *khalīfahs* as transmittable wholly independently from the spiritual state and awareness of the descendents.<sup>494</sup> At Malerkotla many of the *khalīfahs* – both those who spend significant time and derive their primary income from the tomb's revenues and those who do not – are extremely pious and devout Muslims. There are many *panch namazis* (those who perform the five times ritual prayers on a daily basis) and many men and women who incorporate a visit to the tomb and some form of superogatory prayer into their daily ritual lives. Nonetheless, the level of counsel and guidance required from the *khalīfahs* by most devotees is not of a highly esoteric quality. At

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<sup>493</sup> Sayyid Shah Khusro Hussaini has written two works in English on Gisudiraz and has compiled an extensive bibliography on the saint's writings and writings about him. These can be found in two of his works, a booklet called *The Life and Teachings of Khwajah Bandahnawaz Gisudiraz*, (Gulbarga; Sayyid Muhammad Gisuderaz Research Academy, 2001 [1986]) and a book *Sayyid Muhammad Al-Husayni-i Gisudiraz: On Sufism*, (Delhi; Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1983).

<sup>494</sup> The term *khāndān* is the most frequently deployed by members of the Nawabi and *khalīfah* families to designate that they are from the 'Khan' Pathan Afghan lineage. All of these people use the surname Khan and many are quick to note the difference between "real" Khans and those Muslims of native Indian descent who adopt the name as a means of upward mobility.

Haider Shaikh's shrine the *khalīfahs*, who are the direct descendents of the Shaikh, are divided into several branches. Of these five families are intimately involved in the operation of the *dargah* and the remainder are involved in occupations outside the shrine. All the *khalīfahs* express pride in their descent from the Shaikh and their Pathan ethnicity. The *khalīfahs* claim that their lineage follows through Haider Shaikh's eldest son, Hassan, whose mother was Taj Murassa Begum, the daughter of Sultan Bahlol Lodhi. Nonetheless, there has been a significant degree of intermarriage between these two branches of the family, and many people are descended from both branches.<sup>495</sup> Relations among the *khalīfahs* are basically congenial, and Anwar Ahmad Khan, whose chapbook concerning Haider Shaikh appeared in Chapter Two, is generally acknowledged to be the primary *khalīfah*, or *gaddi nishīn*. Among the five principle *khalīfah* families there is some verbal dissent as to whether he or his brother should be the primary authority, but this has not resulted in active or open contestation.

In addition to the *khalīfahs* there is another group who have a significant role in the ongoing operation of the *dargah*. The *mujawwar* are the descendents of Haider Shaikh's *khudam* (those who worked in the service of the saint). Although generally regarded by the *khalīfahs* as lower in status, they also claim Pathan Afghan heritage, a common status marker among Muslim Indians.<sup>496</sup> There has also been intermarriage between *mujawwar*, *khalīfah*, and *nawabi* families. Typically, the *mujawwar* families do not sit at the shrine, except on Thursday and on festival days. They do not dispense spiritual or personal guidance at the *dargah*, though several have taken on this role from their homes. At busy times they are always present at the shrine as one of

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<sup>495</sup> This pattern of intermarriage is the subject of Rita Brara's dissertation, "Marriage and Kinship."

<sup>496</sup> For the role of linking to Arab lineages as a marker of status see, Charles Lindholm, "'Caste in Islam and the Problem of Deviant Systems: A Critique of Recent Theory,'" in *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power*, ed. T.N. Madan (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Role of Arabic and the Arab Middle East in the Definition of Muslim Identity in Twentieth Century India," *The Muslim World* 87, no. 3-4 (1997).

their major sources of income is the selling of goats to the devotees, which are then offered (not slaughtered) and returned to the *mujawwar* to be sold again. There is a legal agreement between *khalifahs* and *mujawwar* regarding the management of the shrine, which has never fallen under the purview of the state.<sup>497</sup> According to the last Nawab, Iftikhar Ali Khan, in a letter to the Home Minister of Patiala, "The management of the Shrine is carried on as a private right jointly

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<sup>497</sup> This is confirmed in a letter from the last Nawab, Iftikhar Ali Khan, to M.R. Bhide, Esq. the Regional Commissioner and Home Minister of the PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) dated January 11, 1950. The letter is as follows: "My dear Mr. Bhide, With reference to your enquiry the other day at Patiala I am sending you a detailed statement regarding management, etc. of the Shrine of Hazrat Shaikh Sadarud Din Sadar-i-Jehan situated at Malerkotla.

The Shaikh was the founder of the Malerkotla State and common ancestor of the Ruling Family, was well known for his sanctity and held in great reverence by persons of all castes and creed. Impressed by his piety and bravery Bahlol Lodhi, King of Delhi married his daughter Taj Murrassa Begum to him. The Shaikh died in 1508 and is buried in Maler. His Shrine is held in great reverence by people of all castes and creeds and specially Sikhs and Hindus come from distant places to pay homage and offerings and nazars, even up to the present day.

The management of the Shrine is carried on as a private right jointly by the Khalifas and the Mujawars ever since the demise of the Shaikh without any interference whatever by the State. The Khalifas are also direct descendants of the Shaikh.

There is no permanent dedicated income for the maintenance of the Shrine and the only income which is considered as personal income of the Khalifas and the Mujawars, is from offerings and nazars presented by persons on the occasion of Urs and specially on Thursdays falling in the month of Jeth, with Nirjala Ikadshi.

The income is distributed between Khalifas and Mujawars as follows:-

<u>Class of Income</u>	<u>Share of Khalifas</u>	<u>Share of Mujawars</u>
Cash	Rupees in coins or C. Notes, small coins presented by one person to the total value of one rupee or more provided that in any pice coins are included in the change they will go to Mujawars	Pice, and all small coins in case the nazar from one person is below the value of one rupee
Livestock	all species of animals above goat and sheep	goat and sheep and all other livestock like poultry
Cloth and Jewelry	All woolen and silken cloth All Kilaats of Cotton cloth and Ornaments which are presented with Khilaats. Three pieces of cotton cloth constitute a complete Khilaat	Any number of cotton cloth pieces falling short of a complete Khilaat and all ornaments presented separately

Any other lump sum or lands awarded by any one go to the Khalifas. The expenditure towards repairs of the Shrine and other incidental charges is borne by the Khalifas and Mujawars jointly by contribution at a ration of ¼ : ¾. A sum of rs 250/- is earmarked for the purpose and is annually deducted from the joint income according to the above ratio from the joint income. Any further sum if and when required is raised by joint subscription at the same ratio. The expenditure is controlled by the Senior Khalifa of the time. Khalifa Bahawal Khan is at present the Senior Khalifa.

With regards, yours sincerely, Iftikhar Ali Khan"  
Punjab State Archives, Dharam Arth, 464/103.

by the Khalifas and the Mujawars ever since the demise of the Shaikh without any interference whatever by the State." The agreement stipulates the terms for the division of the offerings that come to the shrine. All coins under one rupee and all cotton cloths, and goats, sheep or other small animals are the property of the *mujawwar*. Any money over one rupee goes to the *khalīfahs* as does silk cloth, gold or silver jewelry and articles, horses, camels or any large animals, and any moveable property such as fans or tube lights. The food offerings are primarily sweets and cooked food, most of which is returned to the devotees as *tabarruk/prasad* or given to the *faqīrs* and beggars who gather at busy times. On festival days when large amounts of cloth, money and goats come in, periodically several youths representing the various families will remove the excess to be divided later. The *khalīfah* and *mujawwar* families then meet (separately) and divvy the offerings according to their own proportional agreements. During the chaos of the *mela*, however, a great deal of money is 'lost' in the cracks and quick-fingered children from both families of ten or twelve years of age may bring home hundreds of rupees. However, there is no secret about this as the kids brag throughout the neighborhood and there appears to be little animosity over the money that doesn't make it to the general pool. Repairs to the shrine are undertaken jointly by the *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars*. However, large-scale capital improvements usually occur due to a particular patron's donation and are carried on in cooperation with the *khalīfahs*.

Long term relationships between the *khalīfahs* and the community of the saint exist in a number of ways. First, locals who attend the shrine on a daily or weekly basis are well known to the *khalīfahs* who sit at the shrine. Even those devotees who do not appear to interact significantly with the *khalīfahs* other than to make offerings and receive *tabarruk/prasad* (the returned blessed portion of the offering) are often familiar to the *khalīfahs*. Many locals attend

the shrine on non-festival occasions, and take the opportunity to visit with the *khalīfahs* at the tomb in addition to receiving Haider Shaikh's blessings. Relations with such community members are clearly long-standing and reciprocal, as people will come by to discuss all manner of subjects from the spiritual to the mundane. Another mode of encounter between the *khalīfahs*, *chelas*, and devotees (as well as a source of income for many of those who live in proximity to the *dargah*) is through renting space in their homes for pilgrims to stay. Groups ranging from two to two hundred come to Haider Shaikh's *mela* and set up camp everywhere in this congested area – in courtyards, on roofs, in factories and warehouses, in cars, and on the street – anywhere there is free space. Prices for quarters range from ten rupees to one hundred rupees per person. There are few hotels in Malerkotla and none close to the *dargah*. The lack of places to stay is a source of great concern to the pilgrims, and recently several benefactors have contributed to make a large new resthouse across from the *dargah*. However, given the tens of thousands who attend the shrine at festivals, this will still be inadequate to house the throngs. Thus many groups will continue to sleep wherever space permits. Some such pilgrims have long-standing agreements with the families in the area, and come year after year to the same home. Some of these relationships are quite warm and the local families will observe the *chaunkis* in their courtyards or living rooms with interest. Others are clearly merely financial arrangements. Some families, such as the one I lived with, choose not to take in *melewalas* (festival goers) on a regular basis.<sup>498</sup>

At the shrine itself, the most significant exchanges between *khalīfahs* and the community of the saint occur on non-festival days. As a member of the family is always present at the site, any visitor is able to encounter these authorities. *Chelas* are not present at all times and come

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<sup>498</sup> They do, at times, but it seems more a matter of charity, as when a physically challenged, middle-class Hindu stayed for whom sleeping on the ground would be extremely difficult.

primarily on *mela* days or sometimes on Thursday evenings. Thus for those devotees who are seeking out a *chaunkis* or a *chela*, their opportunities for such encounter are comparatively restricted. The *gaddi nishīn*, Anwar Ahmad Khan, does not sit at the tomb any longer. His sons Asrar and Bobby in particular have assumed this duty. Several other *khalīfahs* frequent the shrine including many women. Dozens of children of *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars* and other neighbors hang around the tomb, in the historically justified expectation that eventually something interesting will occur there. There is no formal training in the shrine's procedures. The *khalīfahs* tend to frequent the *dargah* from their childhood, learning the procedures and processes through the time-tested method of participant-observation. There is an understanding among the principle families that someone should always be at the shrine, and this is usually the case. Rarely was the tomb wholly unattended and as any visitor must pass the homes of the *khalīfahs* to arrive at the tomb, it is unlikely that anyone would be alone there for long. The *khalīfahs* who sit most often frequently provide ritual, spiritual, and personal council to the visitors. Although the chaos of the *melas* prohibits such exchanges, during normal days at the *dargah* devotees often consult with the attendant *khalīfahs*.

Through both their descent from the Shaikh and their (variably realized) empathetic skills, the *khalīfahs* prove their authority to mediate between the saint and the constituents. Though not guiding these seekers through the various levels of *ahwal* and *maqamat*<sup>499</sup>, the *khalīfahs* are responsible for their clientele's well-being. Giving thoughtful, engaged, and effective counsel is a critical element in authenticating their regulatory power. The devotees, for their part, assert their own needs, demand a remedy, and one suggests a need for further proof to

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<sup>499</sup> *Ahwāl* (sg. *hāl*) refer to spiritual states and *maqāmāt* (sg. *maqām*) designates the spiritual stations through which Sufi practitioners advance in their search for God.

overcome her lack of conviction. The proper guidelines, as vague as they are, are given and with the consultation comes the security of achieving the blessing desired.

The regulatory authority of the *khalīfahs* also derives from their direct blood link to Haider Shaikh. They refer to the saint as Dadaji – honored grandfather – or also as Hazrat Shaikhji. They are far more likely to use the saint's full name in reference to him than any other group. They avoid the moniker "Haider Shaikh" as they perceive this as a corruption of Hazrat and is seen as less respectful, possibly even suggestive of a non-Islamic influence.<sup>500</sup> The *khalīfahs* all refer to themselves as *aulad* or *khandan*. *Aulad*, the Arabic for children, again affirms the blood tie to the saint, though it is occasionally used in an expansive manner to indicate that we are all the saint's or God's children. *Khandan* is a Persianate term referring to the clan of Pathan Khans – an Afghani royal class. However, "Khan" is also a name adopted by many Indian Muslims, not just those of Afghani descent; this is a point of great significance for the *khalīfahs* and the Nawabi family. Indeed Haider Shaikh is said to be of the same Pathani Afghan tribe as the Lodhis, but from different clans: the Sherwanis versus the Lodhis. The marriage of Haider Shaikh with Bahlol Lodhi's daughter is seen as a marriage between equals. The second wife, and mother of the Nawabi lineage was Rajput, an indigenous Indian caste which – though high- is seen by most Muslims as inferior to the Arab, Persian, Turk, or Afghan lineages of the conquerors.<sup>501</sup> Though these conversions may have taken place hundreds of years previously, even in 'egalitarian' Islam, caste and class are very much realities.<sup>502</sup> In Malerkotla,

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<sup>500</sup> Certainly the honorific Haider is not uncommon in the Arab world. Meaning 'lion,' the name is associated with many illustrious Muslims. In India, a prominent ruler in Mysore in the south was known as 'Haider Ali.' Nonetheless, many local Muslims eschew the term Haider for the more formal Hazrat.

<sup>501</sup> For more on the marriage patterns of the ruling family of Malerkotla see Brara, "Marriage and Kinship."

<sup>502</sup> Between these lineages there are other distinctions, with Sayyids descended from the Prophet enjoying significant prestige over the Mughal Turks. This particular division is even more pronounced (unsurprisingly) among the Shi'i community which is sharply divided between Sayyids and Shaikhs, the latter being native Indian converts. For caste issues in Malerkotla, see Anila Sultana, "Hierarchical Change in the Muslim Society of Malerkotla in the Post-

the descendants of the saint are referred to as *khalīfahs*, *khandan*, Pathans, *dargahwale* or (somewhat derisively) *dargah baitne wale* – those that sit at the *dargah*. This last reference carries a pejorative connotation implying that they do little else for their daily bread or their community than sit and collect money.<sup>503</sup>

The greed of shrine caretakers is a commonly heard complaint at nearly every sacred site in India. These complaints are also heard at Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, but they do not seem to have resulted in any challenge to the *khalīfah*'s custodianship. The pilgrims who complain usually comment on the lack of provision for their visitation: few residential spaces, no regular kitchen, poor bathroom and washing facilities, limited space for the offering of oil lamps, etc. Locals who voice criticism of the *khalīfahs* tend to focus on these issues and on the new homes built by some of the *khalīfahs*, the relative isolation from the community of the *gaddi nishān* and his family, and the inconvenience of the huge crowds that attend the festivals. By and large, however, these complaints are few and far between. Most residents, even those who do not attend the shrine, appreciate the prominence and/or the revenue that Haider Shaikh brings to Malerkotla. Pilgrims recognize the limitations on expansion at the tomb due to its location in the middle of a dense and ancient residential area. Besides, for some the difficulties and challenges of the pilgrimage are part of the appeal as a test for their faith in the saint and an opportunity to demonstrate their deep devotion.

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Independence Period," *Punjab History Conference XXVII* (1995). On caste in Indian Islam more generally see Ahmed, "Caste and Stratification" and Lindholm, "Caste in Islam."

<sup>503</sup> Just as the authorities at the tomb are named according to their relationship with the shrine, likewise there are names for other people associated with the site. Some denote time of attendance (*melawalas*), others ethnicity (Pathan) or lineage (*khalīfah*, *khāndān*), some behavior (*kam karne wala* for those who come solely to have some need fulfilled), or belief (Barelvi, *pīrpanth*), or location (*dargāhwala*). Many of those present at the shrine at a given moment can lay claim to more than one of these labels and apply any number to those simultaneously in attendance. On most occasions this mutual labeling occurs without public or discernible acknowledgement. At other times, the labels are used to determine those able to perform certain rituals, requiring that necessary identity markers, physical, verbal, positional, be recognizable. The Barelvi designation implies a Muslim who advocates *ziyārat* and saint's shrines. The name is most often used as an oppositional term in relation to the Deobandis who by and large disapprove of these institutions.

## SEVADARS AND CHELAS: AUTHORITY THROUGH ASSOCIATION

In addition to the *khalīfahs*, various resident *sevadars*, or shrine servants, materially assist the daily supervision of the *dargah*. These are people who have attached themselves to the shrine as a matter of faith or livelihood or both. These *sevadars* clean the shrine area, especially on Friday mornings and after the *melas*. They wash the marble floors, removing any remaining residue from offerings – old clay lamps, sweet rice, wheat grains, and so on. Each tomb within the structure is rinsed and swept. Haider Shaikh’s tomb is relieved of any excess *chadars* (cloth covers) offered by the devotees, but is never left exposed.<sup>504</sup> Included among the population of *sevadars*, there a number of *faqīrs*, mendicants and devotees who make the *dargah* their home – some permanently, some periodically. These people, mostly men but some women, sleep in the shelters around the shrine or in the homes of the *khalīfah* and *mujawwar* families. They spend much of their time at the shrine itself, engaged in various activities ranging from devotions to conversations. Some are clearly less equipped than others to function in the world outside the shrine’s space. Whether due to physical or mental challenges, many *faqīrs* have taken a sort of refuge at the tomb, and found a peace and hospitality that is less possible on the streets of a busy industrial town like Malerkotla. In order to do this work, the *sevadars*’ presence must be acceptable to the *khalīfahs*. In the past, *faqīrs* who became unruly, abusive, or were known to be reprobate in any number of ways have been forced to leave the shrine and denied access. However, the eccentricity of the preponderance of the regular *sevadars* testifies to the fact that these rules are not overly strict.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> At most *dargāh* of any size, there are few moments when the tomb itself is wholly denuded of *chadar* and/or flowers. At monumental *dargāhs* such as those at Ajmer and Gulbarga, the rituals involved in cleaning the tomb are elaborately ritualized and often the exclusive privilege of the descendants or hereditary caretakers. This concealment and the extreme caution with moments of exposure is an interesting phenomenon.

<sup>505</sup> However, another local shrine to an apocryphal *pīr* is managed by a *faqīr* who used to attend the *dargāh* of Haider Shaikh. When accusations were made that he had improperly addressed or even assaulted a woman at the

Several of the *faqīrs* are ‘regulars’ who were rarely if ever absent from the tomb which I visited almost daily for over a year. The connections between these individuals and the *dargah* were fascinating mixtures of faith, friendship, and convenience. One regular is an elderly Muslim man related to the *mujawwar* families whose mental acuity comes and goes. He was well-educated and enjoyed reading and reciting the Qur'an and Urdu *na'ats* (devotional poems in praise of the Prophet). He was well known not only at the *dargah*, but throughout Malerkotla. He brought me one day to one of the other famous burial shrines in Malerkotla, the Dera of Baba Atma Ram, the Hindu saint mentioned in association with Banda Bahadur in the previous chapter. At the Dera, the Mahant greeted him warmly, as did several of the Hindu gentlemen who take part in the management of the Dera. His knowledge of Baba Atma Ram and his life and lore bespeaks a shared culture of saint cults that has little regard for religious boundaries and definitions.

Another resident identifies himself as a *bhagat* (a Sanskritic term for a devotee employed by Sikhs and Hindus) of Haider Shaikh and traces his family lineage to Sikh Maharajas. He, like the Muslim *sevadar* above, does not manifest the linear and pragmatic thinking necessary for functioning in the world outside the shrine. His mind wanders and wonders in intriguing and intricate pathways. Most of the time he is physically located in or around the tomb. He often sits in prayer in the Muslim fashion with his hands held open towards his face. He wears the green shirt of a dervish and a turban of the same color tied in the Sikh style over a *lungi* (wrapped cloth like a sarong) of any fabric. He speaks of his own royal lineage from a Sikh ruler who was blessed by God for always providing food and sustenance to anyone in need. He drifts

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*dargāh*, he was forced out. Now he claims that Haider Shaikh's spirit visits the shrine he supervises every Thursday night in order to avoid the crowds.

in and out of the tomb space, praying, observing the goings on, listening to various conversations.

There is also an eccentric and flamboyant resident *faqīr* at Haider Shaikh's tomb. It is hard to know whether he is crazy or affects insanity for various purposes – getting money, avoiding questions, instigating conversations, and his own or general amusement. He often runs small errands, and does chores and odd jobs at the *dargah*. He is almost invariably present at every religious festival in town, especially those involving *langar* – free distribution of food. He usually wears green, but for some large Hindu holidays he may be spotted sporting saffron (the color associated with that faith). He is a fascinating presence at Haider Shaikh's *melas* when the number of ritual specialists of all religions increases exponentially. He watches these outsiders in action – the beggars and the Babas, checking out their styles and sincerity. Once I witnessed him jumping into the scene during a possession to ask questions and to question the *chela*'s veracity. Another time he approached a heavily garlanded Sikh Baba with an enormous retinue and wept forlornly over his pathetic condition until the Baba gave him ten rupees and blessed him. Walking away he was quite chipper with the return on such quick work.

Itinerant *faqīrs* are semi-regular participants in the life of the *dargah*. Although not directly involved with the regulatory systems at the shrine, their presence is nonetheless crucial. As familiar figures at any Muslim shrine, they provide visible verification of the efficacy of a shrine. Although some *faqīrs* are generally understood to be "fakers," many are not and participate in ongoing pilgrimage circuits depending upon the festival calendar, the orders or customs of their *murshids*, and their own inclinations. Such *faqīrs* are invariably present at the *melas* and the *#urs* for Haider Shaikh. As noted above, these *faqīrs* play a central role at the *#urs*

in particular, reciting passages from the Qur'an and providing an opportunity for the *khalīfahs*, *mujawwars*, and other patrons to gain the *sawab* (merit) of supporting them.

These *sevadars* provide several crucial services that maintain the *dargah*. First, many of them do work on the shrine, helping to keep it clean and in good repair. The less spiritually oriented may run errands for the *khalīfahs*. Second, their presence is another validation of the efficacy and power of Haider Shaikh. Empty, unpopulated *dargahs* indicate a lack of vitality and possibly a lack of *barakat* (spiritual power). A healthy number of *faqīrs* and other *sevadars* in residence indicates a wealthy shrine, capable of supporting such individuals and a powerful shrine which gives spiritual benefits to those who dwell there in devotion. Third, as mentioned above, it is an act of merit in all religions to support religious renunciants. Providing this opportunity to the pilgrims as well as to the community is seen as a religious duty (*farz*) by Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus.

The other group of semiformal-elective authorities at the shrine is the *chelas* who are possessed by the spirit of the Shaikh. As described in Chapter Four, these individuals come with retinues of various sizes and set up satellite ritual centers during the course of the *melas*. They do not give or receive direct support from the *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars* and in certain ways their spheres of influence are wholly discrete. The *chelas* have their own modes of validating their claims to communicate with the saint and of manifesting their authentic connection. Some larger groups come to the *melas* with banners and signs identifying themselves as servants of the Shaikh, the name of their primary *chela* (usually denoted by the title "Baba"), their hometown, and the particular service they may be providing to the other pilgrims (i.e. tea, water, food, etc.). As noted in Chapter Four, many *chelas* carry iron implements – rods and chains – which designate them as vehicles for the saint. Some merely carry these symbolically, but others

employ them quite vigorously during the period of possession. Most *chelas* report that they do not experience pain or feeling of any sort. One *chela* informed me that the force would break my ribs were I to strike myself with the same strength. Another referred to the blows as *baba ke phul*, or the flowers of the Shaikh, indicating that the feeling is as light as petals.

The mode of representing a *chela's* authority is also often reflected in the structure of the communities. Some groups are completely autocratic, with a single *chela* as the leader who does not accept disciples who are also "played" by the saint. These domineering *chelas* assert great control over their disciples, and often manifest distinct markers of their status through their wardrobe or signage. One *chela* bore the obvious markers of his entourage's respect as he was nearly invisible beneath the layers of tinsel garlands they had bestowed upon him. On the other hand, some groups are rather democratic in their group structure. One particular assembly of fifty-sixty in attendance at the Haider Shaikh *mela* actually designated the primary *chela* as President and his main disciple who also undergoes possession was Vice President. Though clearly acknowledging the seniority of the President, the general demeanor of the group is more participatory, less obsequious, and somewhat less hierarchical. The more controlling *chelas* tend to have many obvious markers of their identity, and the more democratic tend to be much less distinguishable from ordinary people.

In addition to physical and material markers such as carrying of iron rods, wearing garlands, traveling with an entourage, etc, the *chelas* also authenticate their claims to represent the Shaikh and their ability to mediate the needs of the devotees through their accounts of how and when the Shaikh first took hold of them. The formal and substantial features of these narratives reveal a relatively consistent pattern. Most *chelas* describe having been in a difficult circumstance from which increased faith or supplication to Haider Shaikh saved them, after

which the lines of communication remained open. Some had been possessed by evil spirits. Others were lost in more human ways, drinking, acting violently, or impoverished and marginalized. One *chela* even declared that he had been a "terrorist," associated with the Sikh separatist movement which ravaged Punjab through the 1980's and early 1990's. Some *chelas* report that their forebears – mother, father, grandfather, etc – had also "played" with the Shaikh, demonstrating that hereditary authority is not simply reserved for the *khalifahs*. In a fairly typical narrative of his first experience of possession, a male Hindu *chela*, sixty-two years old, explained that his first possession occurred twenty-six years previously. His father had also been "played" by Haider Shaikh, but he had not instructed his son in this practice. Indeed, the ability to communicate directly with the Shaikh is not something one can learn, rather it is an experience that one can invite but not achieve through human effort. Somewhat parallel to the notion of divine grace, the saint visits whom he wills, invited or not. The Hindu *chela* reported his experience thus:

I was at my brother-in-law's wedding and the spirit of a woman had been coming into their house. My wife had had two mothers, one real and one stepmother. It was the spirit of the stepmother which was coming [in the house]. They said to me, we will show her to you, just say "Namaste," nothing else. Then they asked me to light *chiraghs* (oil lamps) but the spirit told me to blow them out. I slapped her and I held onto her and then she entered my body. She tortured me for two years when through the increasing power and blessing of Babaji she left me.

In this narrative, the *chela* explains that he was unwillingly possessed by the dissatisfied spirit of his wife's stepmother. He had been vulnerable to this possession, as he explained later in the interview, because he had been drinking alcohol at the wedding festivities. After two years of suffering he began to attend more closely to Haider Shaikh, whom he calls "Babaji." Through his superior spiritual strength and his mercy, the Shaikh liberated his devotee who thereafter was able to communicate with the Shaikh at will. I asked how often he experienced the presence of

Haider Shaikh within him and he replied, "I have never counted. He comes only when I call. Suppose someone comes here and asked something from me while I am talking to you I can ask him. His *parvesh* (spirit) is in me all the time." The Hindu *chela* also explained that although he could communicate directly with Haider Shaikh, still he sought guidance from a *guru* (spiritual master) to cultivate his ability appropriately.

The sheer number of *chelas* may contribute to potential conflicts over realms of authority. Within the context of the *mela*, each *chela* and their *chaunki* function as miniature spiritual territories. These are both spatially and temporally defined as a particular area may be the site for the possession of several *chelas* either sequentially or simultaneously. Their ability to gain and maintain an audience is crucial to validate the authenticity of their roles as interlocutors for the saint. A large number of devotees in attendance are unattached to a particular *chela* and move freely from one gathering to the next. These devotees, in search of authentic interlocutors for the Shaikh, in many ways become the mode of verifying and validating the authenticity of the *chelas*, *khalīfahs*, and the shrine itself. Although clearly there was competition between *chelas* and *chaunkis*, there did not appear to be active contestation. Indeed, when posed the question of how multiple, concurrent *chaunkis* were possible, i.e. how could the spirit of a single saint be simultaneously present in so many individuals, the typical response was that the spirit of Haider Shaikh is uncontainable. The Shaikh surmounts this metaphysical challenge because his soul is not subject to the types of limitations pertaining to the normal dead. One *chela* clarified this possibility by describing the Shaikh's spirit like the wind, it is everywhere and nowhere at once.

The *chelas* in attendance at Haider Shaikh's *dargah* thus establish their arenas of authority through their accounts of their possession, the personal practices they undertake within and without the *chaunki* context, and through their recognition by devotees of the saint who

become their disciples. The opportunity for conflict over their individual zones is mitigated by the clear boundaries between *chaunki* events, the established custom of unaffiliated devotees moving freely between these events, and the sheer numbers involved. In short, there are enough devotees to go around. Indeed I often encountered *mela* attendees wandering through the streets looking for *chaunkis* to attend. Hearing the signal sound of the drum beat, they would trace it to its source and observe the proceedings in order to determine its authenticity. News about a particularly dynamic *chaunki* would often seep out into the streets, drawing large crowds. Other *chaunkis* taking place in the streets or in public were open to constant evaluation on the part of the assembled witnesses and participants. It is a free market of *chelas*, *chaunkis*, and devotees and there is enough of each to go around. Thus, the authority of the *chelas* is established in large measure by the community of the saint, that is the devotees who must validate their authenticity and their status as competent communicators on behalf of the Shaikh and his devotees. The community of the saint signifies their recognition of the authenticity of the *khalīfahs* and *mujawwars* by ritually, verbally, monetarily, and physically engaging them. Without this crucial acknowledgement of their authority, neither the hereditary nor the elective regulatory authorities would have an audience.

## **REGULATION AND DEVOTIONAL EXCHANGE**

Although the *khalīfahs* and *chelas* work to some extent in separate spheres, there is ample potential for conflict over the distribution of resources and the boundaries of their arenas of authority. Indeed there is considerable overlap in terms of clientele, services provided and even the location of their practices. However, as noted above, rather than accentuate or manipulate these points of difference, the *khalīfahs* and *chelas* seek ways to acknowledge – tacitly and overtly – each other's authority. This validation and the struggle not just to find but to create

common ground is vividly illustrated by a conversation between a *khalīfah* (who does not sit at the tomb) and a Hindu *chela*. The group associated with the *chela* had come to Haider Shaikh's *melas* for many years and stayed on the grounds of the *khalīfah*'s factory. There is an easy camaraderie between the descendant of the saint and the Hindu devotees who hold their *chaunki* (which the *khalīfah* does not attend) on his property. During a conversation between myself, the *khalīfah*, and the *chela*, I broached the subject of apparent contradictions between Hindu and Muslim rituals and beliefs. In this context, the *khalīfah* broke into an extended narrative wherein he described an experience in which Haider Shaikh summoned him and his teacher to a conversation.<sup>506</sup> He began his narrative by situating the events in time shortly after his return from Hajj. He then described a mystical invitation from an unknown visitor to an audience with Haider Shaikh, whom he referenced by his entire name – Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan. During the interview with the saint many subjects were addressed and the *khalīfah* took the opportunity to pose the question of inter-religious differences and how they should be managed and understood. In particular, his question pertained to the issue most often criticized from within the Muslim community: the common belief that the saint himself is fulfilling the wishes of those who come to demand things from him. The *khalīfah* posed the problem thus:

So a conversation began. The matter is long but that which is relevant to what we are talking about is that I asked him, "Hazrat, people come here, they come for a wish. They come for a boy child, some say our business is not going well. But it is written in our book that whatever you ask, ask it from God only. But thousands of people come and ask from you. So what is the order for us, and what are the orders for them?" And so he [i.e. Haider Shaikh] responded, "This is the secret of God." He said, "Let them do their work and you do yours." He didn't say you are

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<sup>506</sup> The *khalīfah*'s narrative followed Dell Hymes' model for a "breakthrough into performance," as described in relation to the *mstri* in Chapter Two. Whereas the conversation had been general and alternating between various speakers, the *khalīfah* began his discourse by formally addressing me. He then opened by setting the stage and the occasion of the events in his story. He said, "Anna, once I was sitting in my house with Hafizji after I came back from the Hajj. An unknown person came and said, Baba Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan is calling you." The temporal shift from the present conversational to the past narrative signaled a qualitatively different mode of exposition. The *khalīfah* then proceeded with his tale, uninterrupted except by audience feedback.

right or they are right, he said these are the secrets of God. I asked, "What are those secrets?" And he said, "That only God knows." And he also said that "Whoever commits an error commits it for themselves. This is God's secret. What secret is there, He knows. He alone knows. Those whom He calls go there, and whom he does not call, will not go there. He will go there. You keep doing things your way and they will do theirs."

The Hindu *chela* listened intently to this account, giving constant feedback responses to show his agreement and deference to the *khalīfah*'s tale.<sup>507</sup> He then responded, reinforcing the special status of Haider Shaikh's *aulad*, descendants, and drew several distinctions, which are not points of conflict or disagreement, between the practices of Hindus and Muslims at the shrine. He says,

This is a routine thing. You people go there and prostrate. You can always meet him; he will meet you. You don't have to bow your head, because he is your elder. We do his *seva*. We ask for things, you don't ask for things. We ask for things. You [merely] come and bow he will meet you. If we come he won't meet us.

This personal encounter simultaneously establishes the *khalīfah*'s authority and authorizes the beliefs and practices of the Hindu devotee. It also emphasizes the importance of proper conduct in relation to Haider Shaikh, which is not universal but particular to the identity of the believer. By directly addressing the difference between Muslim, Hindu and Sikh practices and beliefs, the *khalīfah* receives a carefully worded reply reminding that Allah knows best why he created people to believe and act as the Hindus and Sikhs.

Thus having left judgment over these contradictory practices and conceptions up to God, the *khalīfah* established his own authority and simultaneously legitimates the beliefs and practices of the Hindu devotee. Furthermore, he asserted his credentials as an orthodox Muslim by prefacing his account saying that the interview occurred when he had just returned from Hajj.

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<sup>507</sup> This feedback is known as *backchanneling* and signifies an audience's reception of the performance. In this case the backchanneling signaled comprehension, interest, and approval of the account's content. The actual feedback took the form of syllabics such as "han," meaning yes, or muttered declarations, especially "*thik hai*," meaning all right.

Finally, he concluded his narrative with Haider Shaikh's declamation "Let them do their work and you do yours." This phrasing evokes the commonly known 109<sup>th</sup> *Surat al-Kafirun* of the Qur'an, which ends "to you be your religion, and to me, mine." Thus, by directly addressing the difference between Muslim, Hindu and Sikh ritual practices, the *khalifah* receives a carefully worded reply reminding the audience that Allah alone knows best why he created people to believe and act in a variety of ways. For his part, the Hindu *chela* acknowledged that the *khalifah* as a descendant of the saint was able to meet the saint personally, while he and those with him had to negotiate a different sort of relationship with Haider Shaikh. This includes different rules for behavior. For example, the *chela* notes that Hindu and Sikh devotees are often instructed by Haider Shaikh during *chaunkis* to abjure the consumption of meat. Yet the Muslim descendants do eat meat, which the *chela* regarded as a special dispensation. Furthermore, some Muslims will not prostrate before the tomb believing this practice to be akin to idolatry. Conscious of this, the *chela* references such divergent behavioral patterns, but relegates them to a category of ritual that does not require exclusive adherence to establish validity. This encounter reflects the multivocal quality of the *dargah* in which ritual variance is facilitated rather than contested or prohibited. This demonstrates also that given conditions of support from both groups of religious authorities, the potentially divisive factor of a diverse religious tradition is neutralized by the leaders and validated by the constituency.

## CONCLUSION

All of the processes of exchange outlined above – dialogue, ritual interactions, mutual perceptions, etc. – facilitate the peaceful governance of the shrine by the authorities and the community of the saint. Both the authorities and the communities in attendance regulate the appropriate conduct in the shrine through verbal directions, physical encounters, visual and

expressive cues and various other means. Thus a person attempting to wear shoes into the inner tomb space may be stopped by a *khalīfah*, a *mujawwar*, a *sevadār*, or another devotee.

Individual pilgrims may exercise various choices in their ritual and interpersonal engagements to either maximize or minimize the possibility of inter-religious exchange. The absence of a highly structured ritual process facilitates ritual variation. A pilgrim whose personal interest is to avoid both the *khalīfahs* and the *chelas* will choose a time to visit that will be most conducive to that project. The governmentality of the shrine is manifest through the explicit instructions and behavior of the *khalīfahs* and the *chelas* for whom proper conduct is not only their livelihood, but also the primary means of maintaining ritual efficacy. Simultaneously, the community of devotees will attempt to adhere to the unwritten code of conduct, and will also seek ways through strategic games to adjust that code for their own purposes and interests.<sup>508</sup>

The regulation of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* occurs on multiple levels through a range of practitioners. At each level the authority to regulate the shrine is manifested, validated, and maintained through a variety of practices. Some authenticating structures, as in the case of the authority derived from a spiritual or blood lineage, are comparatively tacit and embedded in the history of the shrine's institutional authority. Through the connection with Sultan Bahlol Lodhi, the subsequent lineage of rulers and after them through politicians, the linkages between temporal and spiritual authority are firmly established. Through the nominal maintenance of connections with a Sufi lineage and tradition and ongoing strategic reinforcement in public and private, the institutional authority is affirmed. Promoting and facilitating the inclusion and participation of non-Muslim patrons and ritual specialists guarantee the shrine's continued relevance in a largely non-Muslim social milieu.

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<sup>508</sup> This is both a conscious and unconscious process. Although enormous debates rage on about the degree of self-consciousness necessary for an act to be agentive and purposive, in this study I am more concerned with the impact of actions on a social system.

The validity of other authorities at the shrine and their practices, such as the claims of the *chelas* to speak to and for the Shaikh, are actively asserted and authenticated by an audience. The modes of expression and authorization employed vary somewhat, but rest on the sustained ability of the saint's interlocutor to manifest his experience of the saint in ways deemed relevant by his constituent assembly. The structures of authority within these assemblies vary significantly and do not appear to require or even desire homogeneity. Rather, a free market in which possession events and their stylistic variations coexist with other ways of accessing the saint's *barakat* is desirable to the devotees who consume their benefits.

The potential contestation over arenas of authority of the *khalīfahs* and *chelas* must be carefully managed. This management and mitigation is crucial as these dueling spaces could potentially provoke clashes between the Muslim owner/caretaker *khalīfahs* and the Sikh and Hindu itinerant *chelas*. However, this does not occur. A game theoretical model could easily project the *khalīfahs* banning or exiling the *chelas* from the *dargah's* environs in that they are the undisputed owners of the site. That they do not do this shows that rational actors are not wholly motivated by material concerns. This is significant as the lack of an absolute monopoly on hierocratic religious authority is one of the key factors that potentially produces conflict over sacred space by opening space for competition. However, in this instance the competition does not become antagonistic contestation. Rather, the two ritual systems exist side by side, with devotees transacting uninhibited between them. Furthermore, both parties tend to seek ways to validate each other, even though they may not participate in, support, or agree with one another's perspectives or ritual practices.

Such examples of inter-religious exchange illustrate the variety of strategies through which local actors actively establish an open and multicultural civil society. That the saint's

descendents should wish to maintain the availability and openness of Haider Shaikh's tradition to Hindus and Muslims is not surprising given a self-interest in the saint's popularity (though he derives no primary income from the site, many in his family do and the entire community benefits from the thousands of pilgrims attending festivals). The Hindus and Sikhs in attendance almost universally assert that the appeal of the saint is his lack of religious affiliation: *voh hamare sanjhe pīr hain*, he is our collective or common saint. These communities, having an interest in cooperative cohabitation, actively create spaces where pluralism and difference are simultaneously embraced and applauded. Public acts and subtle interactions combine at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh and throughout Malerkotla to create a resource in establishing and maintaining community harmony. To the extent to which many of these dynamics are not exclusive to Malerkotla, locally based, longstanding strategies are either identifiable or potentially replicable elsewhere to generate a culture of peace.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Regulating Malerkotla**

In the last chapter I showed how potential conflicts of authority at Malerkotla's central shrine were obviated through careful but often mundane strategies of mutual validation ranging from ignoring to engaging the "other," that is those from another religious community. After seeing how the various authorities establish their legitimacy and how that authority is acknowledged, validated, and perpetuated by constituent populations at the multi-confessional shrine, I now turn to the identical processes as they occur on the streets of this multi-religious town. Through an examination of the governing practices of the state, local politics, civil society, and everyday exchanges between religious communities, it emerges that strong ties between groups in all arenas generate and sustain Malerkotla's stable social, political, and spiritual relations. How is authority established and acknowledged within and between religious communities in Malerkotla? How do these authorities interact at the political, civil societal, and everyday levels to foster peaceful exchanges and a stable multi-religious society? In order to determine the degree to which the lives of Malerkotla residents interpenetrate outside the central shrine of the town, we must explore how the life of the town is regulated and how these authority structures are experienced and understood by the community. This will illustrate the critical role of everyday interactions in constructing a positive plural society.

In order to clarify the context, I begin by reviewing the diversity of Malerkotla's population. Then we will see how this diverse population has been governed as a kingdom and then a democratic polity. In connection with this I will explain how the wider milieu of Indian and Punjabi politics of religious division have impacted Malerkotla. Finally I will address the

much lauded role of civil society in promoting positive multicultural communities, the formal associations at the town, community, and religious levels will be presented. Throughout, I will delineate the ways in which neighborhood communities *live* with each other, demonstrating how the everyday exchanges between individuals are the essential, although transient and often unsystematic, interactions which enable political society and civil society to function productively. Contrary to theories that privilege one element over the other, it is my argument the entire complex of formal and informal regulatory systems is necessary to sustain harmonious civic life.<sup>509</sup>

The increase in communal conflict in India is often attributed to the processes of urbanization that are thought to inevitably break down the social structures that make communities stable. Many theorists argue that this process of modernization, urbanization, and migration are the constituent elements in creating the cultural conditions of ethnic conflict.<sup>510</sup> Furthermore, inasmuch as democratization has accompanied modernization in India and ethnic conflict has increased during this process, violence is viewed as an aspect of mass politics, one of

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<sup>509</sup> For example, some studies of communal conflict in India tend to focus on the role of British colonialism in shaping or creating the distinct, oppositional, and eventually actionable – religious identities. See Chatterjee *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1989), Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*. Other scholars assert that the Hindu-Muslim divide in particular is one that predates the British. This view is held by extremists within each community and by theorists tending towards a primordialist approach, in particular see Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*. Interestingly, theorists such as C. A. Bayly also assert that the conflicts between religions are nothing new, but from quite a different perspective which reduces the impact of religion and essentially sees the conflicts between religions (which certainly do predate the British) as masked power struggles in the political and economic arenas. See Bayly, "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860." *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985).

<sup>510</sup> Amrita Basu, ed, *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, (Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1998), Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence*. (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1997), Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2001), Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 2000), Kakar, *The Color of Violence*, Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram and Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*, (New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 1995), Pandey, (1990), Tambiah, (1996), Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1994), Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (New Haven; Yale University Press, 2002), Steven Wilkinson, "Consociation Theory and Ethnic Violence." *Asian Survey*, XL, no. 5 (2000).

the many techniques in the repertoire of political mobilization.<sup>511</sup> Thus, far from tempering divisive forces, representational democracy in postcolonial situations is conducive to ethnic conflict.

The harmful macro politics of the nation and the rationalizing, destabilizing forces of modern capitalism have not yet created the crises of identities and fragmentations of selves that undermine the essential unity of the village. For example, according to Ashis Nandy, communal violence results in part from "the emergence of a modern, massified, and paradoxically elitist version of religion that acts as a political ideology but also compensates for the deculturation, rootlessness, and loss of faith in the massified sections of the urban population."<sup>512</sup> Modernity and globalization are more immediately felt in urban environments and are identified as "identity-threats" by Sudhir Kakar. He describes the process thus,

feelings of loss and helplessness accompany dislocation and migration from rural areas to the shanty towns of urban megalopolises, the disappearance of craft skills which underlay traditional work identities, and the humiliation caused by the homogenizing and hegemonizing impact of the modern world which pronounces ancestral cultural ideals and values as outmoded and irrelevant.<sup>513</sup>

Although these processes *are* destabilizing, it is no longer possible (if indeed it ever was) to presume non-urban India to be immune from the impact of modernity and globalization.

Idealizing the village in this way both fixes an essentialized Indian society in a premodern political and social time and renders the village population eminently manageable for enumerative and anthropological purposes. Nor is it helpful to depict urban life as inherently uncentered and devoid of tradition. After all, urban centers have existed for millennia; do they

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<sup>511</sup> Both Stanley Tambiah and Paul Brass adhere to this theory. Tambiah describes a *repertoire* of leveling practices which seek to redress perceived and real inequalities in society. These include riots and the techniques involved in creating them or directing them once begun. Brass describes an *institutionalized riot system* that provides the structures, frameworks, mobilization, and manpower necessary to foment and perpetuate riots. Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol* and Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*.

<sup>512</sup> Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality* p. 23.

<sup>513</sup> Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, p. 187.

not also possess tradition? The radical disjuncture hypothesized between marginal localities and urban centers, between traditional, stable, and religiously based identities and modern, fragmented, and secular urban ones does not exist.

However, the idealized notion of the local community has served a purpose, not just for social scientists, but also for the state. Gyanendra Pandey points out that for the British colonial regime, the 'village community' and 'caste' vied for the position of the basic administrative unit of the government.<sup>514</sup> For the purposes of revenue collection and law and order (that is for the purposes of governability) the colonial government "set out to map those qualities of the subject population that were most germane to the business of administration."<sup>515</sup> By rationalizing the population, detailing its proclivities, social structures, and earning power, administrative units were created that in interacting with other identity markers among the population resulted in a 'communalized' society. For Pandey, "communalism" is "a form of colonialist knowledge" whose logic is intimately and inextricably associated with the need and will to govern and dominate the subcontinent. The British grouped Indians into principally two groups, 'Hindu' and 'Muslim,' posited them as terminally opposed to one another, and evaluated all social mobilization and unrest (including and perhaps especially anti-colonial activities) under the rubric of communal conflict. In this way the colonial administration not only claimed the neutral high ground of a third party arbitrating authority or an honest broker, but also obtained a meta-narrative to justify their own rule.<sup>516</sup> In this view, the Indians needed the British to stabilize the otherwise crippling forces of religious chauvinism and the primordial hatreds of these incommensurable faiths.

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<sup>514</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, p. 67.

<sup>515</sup> Pandey *The Construction of Communalism*, p. 68.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

Although much scholarship has made apparent the processes of colonial metanarrative-making, the legacy of the governable society has continued in several ways. Partha Chatterjee has been particularly helpful in elucidating the implications of colonial governing practices upon post-colonial approaches to development by the state in India. The post-colonial state has, in Chatterjee's view, mimetically co-opted the authority of the colonial state through replicating its institutional structure. This effort results in a process of rationalization similar to the one effected by the British. Chatterjee sees this process as antithetical to the retention of what he calls (following Sudipta Kaviraj) "fuzzy communities," in contradistinction to the "enumerable communities" conducive to the colonial regime. A "fuzzy" community "did not claim to represent or exhaust all the layers of selfhood of its members" nor did it "require its members to ask how many of them there were in the world."<sup>517</sup> For the colonial system to manage a vast and diverse population efficiently, it was essential to enumerate that population. To that end not only the Census of India, but also land revenue assessment reports, ethnographic glossaries, monographs on the social, religious, and political lives of various enumerated populations, etc. were generated in enormous profusion beginning from the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing until the end of British rule. Certainly Malerkotla did not escape the British census takers, ethnographers, or land assessors. But the community remains fuzzy to this day, as many residents profess and enact multiple identities that defy simple categorization.<sup>518</sup> It is my view that the communities that attend the shrine of Haider Shaikh and those that live in Malerkotla are precisely the sort of fuzzy communities presented by Chatterjee. It is true that solidarities have been generated on a regional and national level that make fuzziness more challenging, requiring

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<sup>517</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 223.

<sup>518</sup> This is consistent with the multiple identities of the residents of Arampur region in Uttar Pradesh documented by Peter Gottschalk in *Beyond Hindu and Muslim*. In his study, Gottschalk presents a nuanced description of the ways in which individuals in that region shift languages, registers, narrative styles, and meaning depending upon their contexts and interests.

concerted action on the part of the community to maintain the freedom of ambiguity. Furthermore, the governability of the population is undermined by fuzziness, by communities who thwart enumeration or shift categories and classifications. According to Chatterjee, the state, heavily invested in capitalist structures, "cannot recognize within its jurisdiction any form of community except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation."<sup>519</sup> The result of this enumerative imperative is state repression of community identities, restriction of the methods and opportunities of those communities to activate for their interests in a manner legible to the state, and the relegation of community to the pre-social or 'natural.' However, the fact that the fuzzy community does not register on the radar of the capitalist state also provides a space of freedom. The strategic games of communities to defy restrictive categories create space in which the course of governance (both by the state and other regulatory agencies) will always assure a dialogic process through which communities and governing powers engage one another.

Harjot Oberoi has demonstrated very well the impact of the enumerative policies of the British in the case of Punjab. In *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* he describes a dialogic process of identity formation in the Sikh tradition both within the tradition itself and between reform movements in Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious contexts, and the political possibilities the resulting identity formations enabled.<sup>520</sup> These processes were predicated upon the rationalizing episteme of the British colonial regime that "in order to govern an alien society," not only counted the minutiae of that society's personal habits, but then embarked upon a project to define the validity of the many identities grouped under a rubric such as "Sikh." By distributing goods, employing personnel, and permitting political participation on the basis of

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<sup>519</sup> Chatterjee *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 238.

<sup>520</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 424.

these determinations, the colonial regime produced a system that was conducive to the homogenizing and purificatory tendencies of the reform movements that took over the discourse of religious identity beginning in the late nineteenth century.<sup>521</sup>

The real casualties in these processes were the "fuzzy communities" described by Chatterjee. Yet he argues that these communities are only casualties in the analytic sense. Far from disappearing from the scene, they have simply evaded the enumerative tendencies of the social sciences and the modern nation-state. Thus he writes:

I do not believe that the imaginative possibilities afforded by the fuzziness of the community have disappeared from the domain of popular political discourse. On the contrary, I suspect that with the greater reach of the institutions and processes of the state into the interiors of social life, the state itself is being made sense of in the terms of that other discourse, far removed from the conceptual terms of liberal political theory. The notions of representation and the legitimation of authority, for instance, have taken on a set of meanings in the popular domain of contemporary Indian politics that would be impossible to describe, let alone justify, in the terms of a theory of interest aggregation or of the rationalization of authority."<sup>522</sup>

Thus, although ignored by the state and by social science, the fuzzy community has been able to continue beneath the radar and the value formations taking place within the fuzzy community continue to impact the policies of the state. As we have seen, ritual and narrative engagements in Malerkotla at the shrine of the founder and in the community not only persist, but thrive. These are the arenas wherein the fuzzy community is most visibly active, but the fuzzy community does not cease to exist in the realm of governance, it merely no longer registers. In this way the

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<sup>521</sup> The postcolonial developmentalist state (particularly in the Nehru and Gandhi years) took up the notion of discernible and divisible "populations" who were the target of development projects. In Chatterjee's view, these "populations have replaced the individual or family as the basic unit of society. He writes: "The conceptual move that seems to have been made very widely, even if somewhat imperceptibly, is from the idea of society as constituted by the elementary units of homogeneous families to that of a *population*, differentiated but classifiable, describable and enumerable."<sup>521</sup> The shift to population serves a particular purpose, making "available for governmental functions (economic policy, bureaucratic administration, law, and political mobilization) a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of 'policy.'" (p. 60) Population is not normative, but descriptive. Thus identity defined by affiliation with a particular population is how one becomes legible to the state and to civil society for the purposes of delivery of services, political mobilization, etc.

<sup>522</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 225-6.

arena outside the purview of liberal political theory and unrecognized by the ever-reaching arm of the state is both impacted by and impacts upon both epistemic arenas. If Chatterjee is correct (and I believe on this point that he is), the fuzzy community resists such unitary purposes and works in a much more contingent, strategic, and less systematic fashion to create the maximum freedom of movement and expression possible. As we shall see, such space has been made in Malerkotla at all levels of society.

### **Diversity**

According to popular wisdom, Malerkotla is famous for three ‘M’s’: *methi* (fenugreek), *makki* (flies), and Muslims. In fact, the *methi* (fenugreek) is so famous that it earns mention in a British Gazetteer as having an unusually good scent and flavor. Perhaps it is this odor that attracts the flies, but it would be difficult to single Malerkotla out as any more or less fly-ridden than other towns in India. The town boasts a large *sabzi mandi*, or vegetable market, which serves as a hub for the distribution of produce from the outlying villages formerly within the borders of the kingdom. It is the last ‘M’ – Muslims – that most clearly sets Malerkotla apart from the rest of the region. As previously noted, it is only here that a Muslim majority remains in Indian Punjab.<sup>523</sup> Indeed many locals claim that this demographic fact is the reason for the relative peace and harmony of Malerkotla. Three reasons are given to further this line of argument. First, some Muslims assert that because Islam itself is a religion of equality, peace, and justice therefore this majority Muslim town resists the sectarian violence that plagued the neighboring regions during Partition and since. Second, as the only Muslim majority region

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<sup>523</sup> There is one other village in Indian Punjab, Manekhpur Sharif, where I have heard there is a significant Muslim population. Most famously, there is the town of Qadian, in Gurdaspur District near the Pakistani border which is the spiritual home of the Ahmadiyya sect. This group believes in the continuation of Prophethood through revelations to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1836-1908). Therefore they are regarded by most Muslims as heretical and are actively persecuted in Pakistan and other parts of the world. The Jamā'at-i Islāmī in particular are vehement in their efforts to obliterate the Ahmadiyya.

Malerkotla has a heightened importance. Just as Kashmir is a crucial symbol of India's ability to govern as a secular state, Malerkotla is a key constituency for Punjab's politicians. The ability to carry this electorate is evidence of a non-sectarian appeal. Unlike Kashmir, however, this high profile has not resulted in violent contestation or oppression to maintain order and loyalty among the population. There are no Islamic extremists on the streets seeking to liberate the besieged Muslim population. Rather, consciousness of their token status both within and without the town itself has generated a socio-political dynamic conducive to coalition building and community harmony. Third, as one young Muslim woman informed me, "Everyone here is a minority." Unable to definitively establish dominance, all the religious groups are equally vulnerable and equally cognizant that their well-being depends on their positive relations with others. This indicates that the lack of clear hegemony actually promotes peace rather than undermine it.

In Chapter One the demographic diversity of Malerkotla was described in detail. Here it suffices to remember that the population of just over 106,000 is generally estimated to be about seventy percent Muslim. Of these, about 2,500 are Shī#as, mostly belonging to the Twelver sect.<sup>524</sup> The major division among the Shī#ī is between the Sayyids and Shaikhs. The former group identify as descendents from the family of the Prophet whereas the latter are descended from Indian converts. Among the Sunni population the terms Deobandi or Barelwi are used to identify the degree of conservatism in the application of Islamic principles. Those that are classed as Deobandi are generally understood to oppose the visitation of tombs and the audition of music, advocate traditional Islamic education and dress, prefer restricted roles for women, and to be interested in making *sharī#a* the law of the land. Those identified as Barelwi are assumed

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<sup>524</sup> The Twelvers are also known as the Ithna Ashari as they believe in twelve Imams, or central leaders endowed with divine wisdom, the last of whom is currently in occultation but will reappear at the end of time. This is the sect of Shī#ism practiced by the majority in Iran and constitutes the majority of Shī#as Muslims worldwide.

to advocate saint worship and the audition of music, advocate modern education (in combination with Islamic studies), be more open to women's participation in public life, and to see *shari'a* as open to modern interpretation and application. The particularly active religious societies in town are the missionary movement known as Tablīghī Jama'at and the reformist social organization the Jama'at-i Islāmī. Both groups are conservative in their outlook and have had considerable impact on the public life of Malerkotla.<sup>525</sup> However, as discussed in Chapter One, the general tone of these groups in Malerkotla is to promote positive inter-religious relations rather than to exclusively advocate for the Muslim community. There is more of a perceivable division between the ethnic Pathans who claim Afghan heritage and the indigenous Muslims who converted, especially from the Khamboj agriculturalist class. The non-Muslim community is fairly evenly divided between Hindus and Sikhs. The Hindu and Jain population have numerous temples and organizations. Political religious groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are not popular in Malerkotla. The BJP has never achieved significant electoral success. The Hindus and Jains are mostly from Aggarwal trading castes. There are few Brahmins. As in the rest of Punjab, most of Malerkotla's Sikhs are Jat agriculturalists with a sprinkling of upper-caste Khatri. The Sikh community is comparatively small locally as Sikhs are a significant majority in Punjab. There are several organizations for Sikh activism such as the Sikh Welfare Association, but as with the other religious traditions in town, there are few extremists.

### **Governmental Regulation**

Both pre- and post- Partition, Malerkotla's government has been dominated by Muslims. Yet the majority of residents claim that the rulers – both monarchs and elected officials – have been overwhelmingly fair and impartial in their treatment of all religious communities. Indeed,

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<sup>525</sup> Anila Sultana, "Muslim Institutions and Organisations in Malerkotla and Their Impact on the Muslim Community," (*Punjab History Conference XXVIII* (1996): 263-70) and her dissertation, "Muslims of Malerkotla."

the most common complaint of bias was that the Muslim monarchs had been partial to the Hindus and negligent of their own partisans. But in general, one of the most common reasons cited for Malerkotla's peace at the time of Partition is the long history of the secular policies of the Nawabs. Some interlocutors give specific accounts of the policies pursued by the rulers, others simply state that their authoritarianism and the presence of a standing army in the kingdom were the key factors. In general, residents cite two events that demonstrate the justice, tolerance, and secularism of the Nawabs. The first is the *haa da naara* through which Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan gained the trust and loyalty of his Sikh subjects by demonstrating that justice supercedes religious affiliation. The second is the behavior of the Nawab and other local leaders at the time of Partition. Though their resources were strained and stretched to the breaking point, the rulers of Malerkotla somehow managed to sustain the incursion of tens of thousands of refugees into the state and to maintain their territorial integrity during the chaos.<sup>526</sup> Subsequent to Partition, the Nawab and his family retained political power locally, dominating electoral offices since Independence.

Although, as we have seen in Chapter Five, misrule by Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan exacerbated local tensions in the late 1930's, community memory suppresses these events. Residents focus instead on Partition when Iftikhar Ali Khan's conduct is universally praised and past conflicts are overshadowed by the golden memory of the *haa da naara* and Sher Muhammad Khan. The successful handling of the Partition crisis established the subsequent quality of politics in Malerkotla in such a way that sectarian and divisive politics are not appreciated or rewarded with electoral victory. Instead, the battle is to establish who is the most secular-minded and who will distribute most even-handedly the resources of the government to

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<sup>526</sup> Malerkotla State Archives, File 1/1-C/47-a/1947, Disturbances and Refugees, 1947.

all communities. In this section I will assess the past and present modes of governmental regulation, especially as it pertains to the various religious communities in Malerkotla.

The ecumenical policies of the rulers have a long track record. Nawabi patronage of non-Muslim sacred sites was quite common. Indeed, even a Hindu interviewee who otherwise seemed determined to undermine the Muslim authorities acknowledged this. He gave an unusual account of the genesis of the land grant given to the Hindu shrine known as Dera Baba Atma Ram claiming that it was Aurangzeb (not typically a hero of the Hindus) rather than to the several Nawabs to whom the credit belongs. In another example, Bhikam Khan (r. 1755-1763) aided Ahmad Shah Abdali in battle against the Sikhs in 1761 during the two devastating campaigns called by the Sikhs the *Wadda Ghalughara* (Great Holocaust) and the *Chota Ghalughara* (Little Holocaust), during which thirty thousand Sikhs were killed by some estimates. Despite this, the Nawab apparently sought to appease the Sikh population in his kingdom and possibly to reduce the animosity of the growing Sikh powers around Malerkotla. To this end, he granted a village called Bagrian to a Sikh. An account of this is given by Inayat Ali Khan in his *Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans* (1884). Khan (the brother of Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan) writes:

He [i.e., Bhikam Khan] being a man of common sense and foresight, perceived that to trust any longer to the aid of the Mogal (sic) empire – tottering on the verge of ruin, which any contingency might occasion – would be to rely on a broken reed, and therefore he resolved upon gaining the friendship of the Sikhs. To achieve this, he gave away the village of Bagrian to a Sikh devotee, forgetting, between hope and despair, the aphorism of the Asiatic sages, that to show substantial favour to one's foes, however poor and humble they may be, is to nourish a serpent in one's bosom.<sup>527</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Khan, *A Description of the Principal Kotla Afghans*, p.8.

Inayat Khan walks an interesting line in his assessment of Nawab Bhikam Khan's gesture. He refers to it as "generosity," and acknowledges that it "subdued the waves of hostility for the time being," but his overall conclusion is that the gift of land was ill-advised. Certainly it is true that throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth the kingdom of Malerkotla became increasingly isolated as the only Muslim kingdom in the immediate region. Fluctuating relations with the kingdoms of Patiala, Nabha, and Jind who bordered the state at one point reduced Malerkotla's territory to little more than the city center. Inayat Khan, as a beneficiary of a royal *jagīr* (land grant) was unsurprisingly critical of any devolution of landed authority to grantees outside the *khandan* (royal clan). The account of this incident does, however, demonstrate a continued effort (building from the precedent of the Haa da Naara) to cultivate goodwill among the non-Muslim populace. These qualities are further emphasized as Bhikam Khan's character is summed up by Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan in his *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin*. He writes:

Nawab Bhikan Khan had inherited almost all the noble qualities of his ancestors. He was kind hearted and benevolent and extended sympathy not only to his own relations but to strangers also, and did not allow any friction to prevail amongst his kinsmen. He followed a policy of toleration and was above the fanaticism so common at that time. He spared no pains in making his people happy and prosperous and made lavish and generous gifts of lands without any distinction of caste and creed. His rule was one of great prosperity and contentment in the history of the State.<sup>528</sup>

Such a glorification must certainly be treated to a hermeneutic of suspicion, but here the value of the assertion of such a sentiment by the last ruler of Malerkotla who supervised both the crisis of Partition and the dissolution of the princely state must be taken into account. Clearly he is making strategic (if possibly spurious) use of the past to find a secular spirit in his ancestor

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<sup>528</sup> Khan, *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin*, p. 61.

whose participation in one of the most devastating battles in Sikh history would otherwise paint him with a very different brush. This rhetorical link generates a history of past ecumenicism, creating a useful resource in the present.

In another interesting incident in Malerkotla's royal history, Nawab Ataullah Khan (r. 1784-1810) took into his employ a Hindu minister, formerly in the employ of Raja Sahib Singh of Patiala State, but with rather disastrous results. The minister, Dewan Nanu Mal, sought and obtained employment with Ataullah Khan but ultimately betrayed him by luring him into battle against Patiala.<sup>529</sup> However, Malerkotla and Patiala quickly restored their relations in their joint efforts to resist the increasing incursions of the Marathas from the south. Immediately following these events Patiala came to Malerkotla's assistance to resist the attack of the Sikh Sahib Singh Bedi (outlined in Chapter Two). After repulsing the Bedi's assault, the Raja of Patiala and his entourage remained at Malerkotla, possibly in order to gain certain territories and to live for a time at the expense of the Malerkotla ruling family. During their stay it appears that a great deal of tension arose between the Sikh soldiers of Patiala and the forces of Malerkotla.

The soldiers started mischief by taking the initiative of injuring the feelings of the Muslims. In the old Dewan Khana, there was a grave of Mian Khawaja Khizar Khan (a martyr in the battle). They dug, having done so exhumed his body. This desecration and inhuman action of the Sikh soldiers infuriated the Muslims.<sup>530</sup>

Nonetheless, it seems that the "Nawab still wanted to proceed with tact and caution," though his nephew (and the rightful heir to the throne) Wazir Khan was outraged. Wazir Ali Khan had earlier led forces to the assistance of Patiala, so he appealed to the Nawab declaring his willingness to sacrifice his own life rather than tolerate such an insult. One of the senior women of the Patiala household, Bibi Sahib Kaur

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<sup>529</sup> Lepel Griffin, *Rajas of the Punjab*, (Delhi; Low Price Publications, 2000 [1870]), pp. 72-73.

<sup>530</sup> Khan, *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin*, p. 80-81.

was a wise and sagacious lady and having heard the stirring speech of Wazir Ali Khan prevented the situation from deteriorating any further. She spoke politely to Wazir Ali Khan who was calm and cool in her presence. She threw the entire blame on the Sikh soldiers and said they were uncultured and rude and that some sort of punishment was being proposed for them.<sup>531</sup>

These efforts apparently resulted in the ebbing of tension and the Patiala forces soon departed.

Certainly occurrences of grave desecrations whether real or rumored have often been instigating factors in inflaming communal tensions. This event at a time when the coalition between Patiala and Malerkotla had defeated an assault on Malerkotla had the potential to undermine their good relations. The Nawab, Ataullah Khan, reportedly gave a village to a retainer of the Patiala state and the situation came to a close. The motivations for the gift are unelaborated in the *History*, leaving us to wonder about the complicated loyalties and alliances between Malerkotla and Patiala. Certainly both kingdoms were interested in stemming the power of Sahib Singh Bedi who had no great respect for either the Sikh or Muslim kingdoms. However, by including this incident in his *History*, the Nawab again sets a historical precedent for conciliation and peace-building among his forebears, thereby claiming this pragmatism and tolerance as his heritage and birthright as much as the crown had been.

From 1809 onwards, Malerkotla was a protectorate of the British Empire. Under their authority, the Nawabs continued to rule with a British resident deputed to supervise and advise the kingdom's management. British records of this period (1809-1947) indicate mismanagement, rampant infighting among the ruling family, increasing debt, insanity, and occasional dereliction of duty on the part of the Nawabs. Also appearing in the records are several occasions of inter-religious and intra-religious contestation, particularly in the 1920's and 1930's. The conflict most widely reported and researched during this period was the execution of the Namdhari Sikhs, or

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid, p.81.

Kukas, who attacked the state in 1872, as discussed in Chapter One. The tragic deaths of the sixty-nine Namdharis captured by the British remains an important aspect of Malerkotla's life today. In the aftermath of this it was made state policy that neither cows nor pigs would be killed within the borders of the state from then on. Perhaps given that this was the second time (the first being Sahib Singh Bedi) that cowkilling was given as the provocation for attacking Malerkotla, the authorities were inclined to obviate future assaults from taking place for the same reason. Namdhari literature places the blame for these events squarely upon the British and does not highlight cow slaughter or any other motivation for attacking the Muslim kingdom.

During the British period the Nawabs of Malerkotla appear to have followed a steady course with respect to the non-Muslim population. Land grants were given, temples and gurdwaras were built, and high-ranking officials were drawn from the elites of each community. In 1907, Ahmad Ali Khan (r. 1908-1947) donated fifty-two *bighas* of land to support the building of the Singh Sabha Gurdwara. Given the increasing influence of the Singh Sabha movement which sought to purify, regulate, and consolidate the Sikh community, this move was no doubt an important gesture to maintain the goodwill of the Sikh citizens of Malerkotla who at that time accounted for the largest segment of the urban population (41% according to the 1891 census).<sup>532</sup> Although he had effectively been ruling for several years due to the deteriorating mental condition of his father, upon ascending to the throne Ahmad Ali Khan pursued numerous projects to maintain the loyalty of all his subjects. He supported the Dera of Baba Atma Ram and during his rule several of the larger Hindu temples were also built including the Kali Mandir and the Gopal Bhavan. The latter temple is in the heart of the old city which was entirely the

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<sup>532</sup> See Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

property of members of the royal family. However, incidents of unrest, dissent, rebellion, and rioting occurred in Malerkotla in this period as discussed in earlier chapters.

Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan (d. 1982) was the last Nawab of Malerkotla state. He inherited the throne in 1947 after his father Ahmad Ali Khan died. He was educated by European governesses and tutors, and took the Cambridge Examination. He traveled broadly and met two British kings George V and Edward VIII. He became Chief Minister and effective ruler of Malerkotla in 1946. Iftikhar Ali Khan, by his own account as well as in the memories of many residents, was instrumental in maintaining peace during the Partition disturbances. He is said to have personally patrolled throughout the city, both publicly and anonymously in order to assess and address the condition of the inhabitants. After Independence, Malerkotla joined PEPSU (Patiala and East Panjab States Union) a body designed to govern the former princely states of Indian Punjab. The Nawab served in the administration of that union. Following the dissolution of PEPSU in 1954, Iftikhar Ali Khan was twice elected as member of the Punjab Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Malerkotla. He married five times but had no surviving children. Two of his wives, Yusuf Zaman and Sajida Begum, served as local MLAs as well in the 1960's and 70's. Under his leadership a number of local educational institutions and hospitals were founded, industry expanded, agricultural reform was introduced, and roads improved. Even after the Nawab's death in 1982, his family has continued to hold authority in the town, and been very influential in municipal as well as state politics. Sajida Begum is a local Congress party leader and activist and also serves on the board that oversees the management of the famous Dargah of Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> However, Sajida Begum recently quit the state party organization in protest over the current Chief Minister, Captain Amrinder Singh's giving the Malerkotla ticket to Razia Sultana instead of to her. "Veterans Resign, Sultana Unfazed," *The Tribune*, January 22, 2003.

## Politics

The princely state of Malerkotla ended in 1956 with the dissolution of PEPSU. Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan first served as the Malerkotla representative to PEPSU, winning 70% of the vote in his first electoral outing in 1952. Although, President's rule, meaning rule by the central Indian government, was imposed on PEPSU in 1953 due to radical political instability, the Nawab came back to win by an even greater margin in the following election of 1954, this time garnering 82% of the vote. In the 1952 election, the Nawab ran as an independent, reportedly in order to avoid the divisive politics of the parties. Once Malerkotla and the other PEPSU states were merged with Punjab in 1956, the Nawab was defeated by the only non-Muslim ever to hold this position, Chanda Singh. Singh served only one term however, and the Nawab regained the office, having joined the Indian National Congress (INC) – a major decision given the INC's anti-royalist politics. His wife Yusuf Zaman was elected in 1962. She served one term, followed by the Nawab's resumption of the position until 1972 when another of his wives, Sajida Begum, was elected. In 1977 a kinsman of the Nawab, Hajji Anwar Ahmad Khan, won the office by a narrow margin, representing the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), a political party typically associated with Sikh ethnic identity and a movement for a separate Sikh nation. Nonetheless, this set the pattern for future elections in which many parties – even sectarian groups such as the SAD – float Muslim candidates in Malerkotla, many of whom then serve in some capacity in the State cabinet. Sajida Begum was reelected in 1980, followed by another Nawabi clansman in 1985, Nusrat Ali Khan with the Akalis. In 1992 a non-Pathan was elected for the first time, Chaudhry Abdul Ghaffar, a local Khambhoj leader with the Indian National Congress (INC). He also served as the Minister for Education during his tenure. 1997 saw the *khandan* back in power with Nusrat Ikhrum Khan representing the SAD and serving as the

Sports Minister for Punjab. The last elections in 2002 brought a non-Pathan woman, Razia Sultana, into power with Congress party. Ms. Sultana is not connected with the ruling family, perhaps signaling a new era in local politics. Nonetheless, the ongoing political power of the Nawab's clan is typical of post-Independence Indian politics. Many former rulers have become high profile politicians holding local, regional and national positions in spite of local agitations to eliminate such states. An excellent example of this is the current Chief Minister of Punjab, Captain Amrinder Singh, the erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala.

*Table 2: Malerkotla Constituency, Punjab State Legislative Assembly Member (1977-2002)*

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

*Source: Election Commission of India,*

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

Election data going back to 1977 demonstrate that the BJP does not do well in Malerkotla. The party has only once even floated a candidate in Malerkotla in 1992 when communal sentiments were at a high in the year that ended with the Babri Masjid's destruction on December 6.

In addition to the electoral politics inside the town, state level politicians also take particular note of Malerkotla. During his tenure the Chief Minister of Punjab, Prakash Singh Badal (SAD) appointed Nusrat Ikhrum Khan to the position of Sports Minister and attended the #Id celebrations for both Baqr #Id and #Id al-Fitr at the #Id Gah. Following the communal prayer with a speech in which he made several promises to establish an Urdu institute in the town and dedicate significant (1,500,000 rupees) to expand the #Id Gah. The Governor of the State Lieutenant General JFR Jacob also visited Malerkotla, taking particular care to attend the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh. As discussed in previous chapters, the local Member of Parliament, Sardar Simranjit Singh Mann, has also taken a special interest in the town. His concern is based on his own personal devotion to Guru Gobind Singh and his commitment to the blessing of the Guru. Mann stresses unity between minority communities against the growing power of the BJP and its allies. Captain Amrinder Singh, the current Chief Minister of Punjab and erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala, has also made frequent visits to Malerkotla, notably his presence at Sajida Begum's 'Id Milan in 2000 where he made reference to the *haa da naara* in an effort to establish rapport with the Muslim community. Each of these politicians seek in some fashion to demonstrate that they are worthy of Muslim trust and support and will protect and uphold the interests of the community. Manifesting a special bond with Malerkotla, even for non-Muslim politicians is thus a key strategy to gain the electorate and prove their ability to govern a multicultural state.

Although the Nawabi and *khalifah* families have dominated state offices, municipal politics better reflect the diverse local population. The Municipal Committee (MC) of

Malerkotla was established in 1908 by the Nawab.<sup>534</sup> It was an appointed body until 1951 when elections were first held. Although there has always been a majority of Muslim members on the Municipal Committee (MC), from 1951 to 1979 the president was a non-Muslim. Since that time Muslims and non-Muslims have served in that capacity. In 2000-2001 the president was Azmat Ali Khan, again a member of the Pathan elite and a descendant of one of the families affiliated to Haider Shaikh's tomb. Many primarily Muslim constituencies elect Hindus and Sikhs to the MC, and vice versa.

In a survey conducted by S.K. Sharma in the early 1980's among Muslim elites in town, it emerged that most were glad that they chose to remain in India rather than depart for Pakistan. Most named Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Gandhi, and Maulana Azad as the most admired politicians. By contrast, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was named by only four of thirty individuals interviewed.<sup>535</sup> Most felt that their security and freedom in India was greater than in Pakistan, an attitude born out by many of my interviews twenty years later. One retired male Muslim schoolteacher declared:

Even today I think our ancestors showed their intelligence that they stayed here. In spite of the possibility of going, they stayed here, this showed their intelligence. Those who went there are less safe. They cannot offer *namaz* in the masjid together. They do not know when they will be attacked. Guards stand outside the mosque, and then only can they offer *namaz*. Thank God we are Hindustani. Even if we want to offer *namaz* at a railway station we can do that if it is the time for *namaz*. We have such freedom in India, that is why our ancestors did the right thing. We are free from the religious point of view. That is why I think that Maulana Azad's theory is right and guided us well and our ancestors accepted this theory and did the right thing. We have relatives in Pakistan but we think we are happier than them.

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<sup>534</sup> S. K. Sharma, "Political Beliefs and Attitudes of a Religious Minority: An Exploratory Study of the Muslim Elite in Malerkotla," in *Political Dynamics of Punjab*, ed. S. C. Wallace (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981), page 43.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

The schoolteacher favorably compares religious freedom in India to that in Pakistan. Even as a Muslim in that Muslim majority (96%) nation, there are divisions and distinctions that indicate a lack of tolerance. The schoolteacher also makes reference to Maulana Azad's opposition to the call for Pakistan. Azad served as President of the Indian National Congress and was a close associate of Nehru's during the Independence Movement. Azad claimed strongly that Muslims as much as Hindus belonged to the land of India. In a speech in 1940 he said:

I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality...Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism. If Hinduism has been the religion of the people here for several thousands of years, Islam has also been their religion for a thousand years. Just as a Hindu can say with pride that he is an Indian and follows Hinduism, so also can we say with equal pride that we are Indians and follow Islam.<sup>536</sup>

This type of nationalist ideology is commonly found among Muslims in Malerkotla and Azad is seen as a hero of nationalist Islam. As mentioned above, residents here feel very much under scrutiny and often go to great lengths to demonstrate their loyalty to the Indian nation, as in the case when during the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan the effigy of then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was burned during a demonstration. These expressions should not be dismissed as 'merely symbolic' as the stakes in being perceived as disloyal are extremely high. This type of overt display of patriotism is required of Muslims in India.<sup>537</sup> Ravaged by violence and scarred by divisive politics, Muslims were and are regarded as a potential fifth column. They are more heavily scrutinized even in matters such as cricket loyalties. They are also required to actively and constantly reassert their allegiance to the Indian state. The effort must be continuous as Hindu nationalist politics have been particularly assiduous in attempting to tar Indian Muslims with a brush of extra-territorial allegiance.

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<sup>536</sup> Find source

<sup>537</sup> As Gyan Pandey describes in his article, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian," in the aftermath of Partition, the consolidation of the nation is a project that necessitated drawing distinctions between who is a legitimate member of the nation and who is not.

In her dissertation about Malerkotla, Anila Sultana surveyed one hundred local residents. Asked why they remained in Malerkotla rather than leave for Pakistan, thirty of those surveyed said they stayed because they were loyal to the Nawab. Twenty-six said they remained out of loyalty to some other local leaders.<sup>538</sup> As Sultana's survey allowed people to choose multiple reasons, it also revealed that the blessing of the Sikh Guru was the single most important reason for staying, and loyalty to the Nawab was the second most popular. In addition many residents remained expecting of a better future in India whereas Pakistan was an unknown quantity. Many Khambhoj residents anticipated land reform to follow closely after independence and they believed their economic prospects were brighter. Another common reason given was love for their homeland and hometown. Interestingly, however, in the earlier survey, Sharma he writes that overwhelmingly those surveyed gave the credit for the general communal harmony in Malerkotla to the people, not the national government.<sup>539</sup> This estimation of the positive role of the people echoes the assessment of J.C. Donaldson, the British officer who investigated the disturbances over *arati/katha* and *namaz* in 1935. It also reflects the way in which that controversy was ultimately resolved through inter-community negotiations in 1940. Both Sultana and Sharma's surveys indicate a combination of reasons for remaining in Malerkotla that range from the spiritual to the material to the political to the practical. Significantly, non-material motivations are as commonly cited as the material. Devotion to a religious figure, such as the Guru, trust in local leadership, and love for the homeland are elements that make life in the town meaningful.

None of these reasons would have counted for anything had the residents of Malerkotla not felt a sense of security. Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in my own research and that of others,

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<sup>538</sup> Sultana, "Muslims of Malerkotla," p. 80.

<sup>539</sup> Sharma, p. 67.

all reported a confidence in the ability of the state to protect them at the time of Partition. In fact, after the Haa da Naara and the blessings of the saint, the most common reason given by residents for Malerkotla's peace at that time was the vigilance and dedication of the kingdom's army in patrolling the borders.<sup>540</sup> This argument is put forward perhaps most forcefully by a former officer in the Nawab's army who was serving in 1947. Faujdar Khushi Mohammad disputes all of the other explanations for Malerkotla's stability during Partition. A longtime member of the Jama'at-i Islami, Khushi Mohammad was instrumental in founding the Islamiyya Girls School, one of the first of its kind to provide a high school education for girls. Like most Jama'at-i Islami members, he opposes the practice of *ziyarat*, and unsurprisingly dismissed the notion that any saint's blessing had protected the town. Similarly, he discounts the prevalent perspective that Malerkotla is safe because it is beloved by the Sikhs because of Guru Gobind Singh's blessing. On the contrary, he said, "if these people [i.e. the Sikhs] had even an iota of the respect they now profess for Guru-Sahib's word, there would have been no need for me and my military colleagues."<sup>541</sup> This perspective is echoed by Maulana Abdul Rauf, the head of the local Jama'at-i Islami, who argued if those places which had done some service to the Guru were spared Sikh violence during Partition, then Macchiwara should have been preserved. After all, Guru Gobind Singh was rescued from Machiwara after escaping from the battle of Chamkaur by two Muslim brothers, Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan, who dressed the Sikh leader up as Uch da Pir and carried him away on a palanquin. Whereas Abdul Rauf credits God and the people of Malerkotla with their safety, Khushi Mohammad gave a more pragmatic explanation for Malerkotla's safety. As Khushi Mohammad put it, "When the first trains came in from the West,

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<sup>540</sup> Ian Copland, "The Political Geography of Religious Conflict: Towards an Explanation of the Relative Infrequency of Communal Riots in the Indian Princely States," *International Journal of Punjab Studies* (Volume 7, no. 1, 1999).

<sup>541</sup> Asit Jolly, "Myth of Maler Kotla" *The Asian Age*, December, 1997.

the blood chilling stories told by the survivors sparked off violent reactions in Malwa (the region of Punjab in which Malerkotla is located). Malerkotla would have been no different but for our Nawab's firmness and maybe the fact that there were hardly any Sikhs living here at the time."<sup>542</sup> For Khushi Mohammad and many other residents, the key to the harmony at Partition was the conscientious behavior of the Nawab and the diligence of his army in following his orders.

The strong role taken by the army at the Nawab's behest is clearly a major factor in maintaining calm in 1947. This also supports the cardinal rule that preventing communal violence or in curbing it when it occurs is the swift and unbiased action of the police. Not only do most riot reports and commissions of enquiry investigating ethnic conflict cite police inaction, bias, or even assistance and complicity as a major problem, but so do most theorists of such conflicts. Human Rights Watch's inquiry into the violence in Gujarat in spring 2002 which claimed possibly 2000 mostly Muslim lives reports that police complicity was evident in a number of ways. First, as evidenced by the title of the Human Rights Watch report "We Have No Orders to Save You," the police often responded to pleas for assistance from Muslims with silence, claims of short resources, or simple refusal to protect the people in their precincts. In one case a former Member of Parliament, Ehsan Jaffrey, called repeatedly for help as a mob gathered outside his home and more and more local Muslims took refuge with him, believing that his political influence would save them. Instead, after over seven hours of calls to the police from various ministers including Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress Party, and in spite of personal police assurances of protection, no help arrived. Ultimately Jaffrey (age seventy-four) offered himself to the crowd as a security for the others. He was hacked and burned to death and

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<sup>542</sup>Jolly, "Myth of Malerkotla."

his home set on fire, killing at least fifty-eight others.<sup>543</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that one of the slogans of the attackers was *yeh andar ki bat hai, police hamare sath hain*, i.e. this is the secret, the police are with us.<sup>544</sup> Furthermore, in many cases the police refused to file First Information Reports (FIRs) on many crimes and many of those filed do not cite any individual persecutors, but rather a general mob which would be immune from prosecution. Police who did attempt to act in a conscientious manner were often transferred.<sup>545</sup> This is just one piece of evidence implicating the state government in Gujarat in supporting the Hindu rioters by providing material assistance, immunity from prosecution, and generating an atmosphere of distrust and alienation between religious communities in the state. All of the commissions of inquiry and reports affirm the necessity of police reform to bring about substantive change in what has become a climate of fear in Gujarat and, indeed, in many other parts of India.

Because of such examples of the failure or refusal of the police or military to intervene to stop inter-religious violence, the example of the effective management of the chaos of Partition becomes a crucial case study. In Malerkotla, not only did the army patrol the borders of the kingdom in 1947, but also they were given explicit instructions to protect the non-Muslim minority population. According to Khushi Mohammad, "we had been ordered to protect non-Muslim property from local attempts at arson or looting."<sup>546</sup> The head of the local Jama#at-i

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<sup>543</sup> The official toll is fifty-nine dead, but other commissions of inquiry such as the Concerned Citizens Tribunal, the People's Union for Civil Liberties, and various magazines and journals such as *Outlook* claim at least seventy were killed in this incident alone. For more on these reports: Concerned Citizens Tribunal (Justice VR Krishna Iyer, Justice PB Sawant, Justice Hosbet Suresh, KG Kannabiran, Aruna Roy, KS Subramanian, Ghanshyam Shah, Tanika Sarkar). "Crime against Humanity: An Inquiry into the Carnage in Gujarat." Mumbai: Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2002. Dr. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, S.P. Shukla, K.S. Subramanian, and Achin Vanaik. "Gujarat Carnage 2002," *Outlook*, April 4, 2002. Human Rights Watch, "'We Have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat," *Human Rights Watch* (Volume 14, no. 3(C) 2002).

<sup>544</sup> Human Rights Watch, p. 22.

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.

<sup>546</sup> Jolly, "Myth of Malerkotla."

Islamī, Maulana Abdul Rauf, otherwise no fan of the Nawab, also acknowledges the positive role played by the ruler during Partition. He says,

When Pakistan was formed, at that time the role of the Nawab was very good. The Muslims gathered here and the Hindus went away due to fear. And the Nawab gave the order that if you break the lock of any place that they have left, you will be shot. And in Sikh villages it was said that if there was any loss of a Muslim (life), the village will be burned. No Muslim dared to break the lock of a Hindu or steal from his house. He controlled the situation in a very good manner. It [i.e. the peace in Malerkotla] may be a blessing or god's power, or the power of the Nawab's law, that whosoever is brutal to another person will be shot. There was no injustice, no banditry.

I never encountered a resident of any religion who contradicted this account. Another Muslim male, a retired schoolteacher, described the time in a similar fashion. He said, "I was 4 years hold. My dad told me about this. From Malerkotla Hindus migrated or ran away, leaving their houses. The Nawab posted police at their houses, but nobody did any damage to their houses or belongings." Many non-Muslim residents of Malerkotla old enough to recall the period substantiate this. The Hindu *mistri* who expressed decidedly anti-Muslim sentiments also recalled the difficult days of 1947 as a time of shared interest among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in preserving the safety in the town. As discussed previously he was criticized by some Hindus for making and selling weapons to Muslims his response to the critique was "there is no difference. If a Muslim dies, then also we will die. If a Hindu dies then also we are sitting between the Muslims." Furthermore, the *mistri* reported the positive role of the Nawab in moving around among the people, being a visible presence, solicitous of people's needs.

At that time of the Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan<sup>547</sup>, my duty was in a tent. We stopped him (i.e. the Nawab) and he asked my name. I [told him], and he said whose son are you? My guru was the Nawab's carpenter, so I gave his name. He said I hope you do not have any problems? Do you need some weapons? I said no, there was no threat. He used to meet us daily.

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<sup>547</sup> The respondent cites Iftikhar Ali Khan as the Nawab although nominally his father Ahmad Ali Khan was still the ruler. From numerous reports, including the widows of Iftikhar Ali Khan, Ahmad Ali Khan was quite elderly and most of the substantive decisions and actions during this time were undertaken by the son.

This is a stark contrast to Iftikhar Ali Khan's father who had tended to hightail it to Simla when the situation got bad. The sense of a shared fate expressed by these older residents is not one of sentimental, nostalgic unity. On the contrary, the respondents all resist otherworldly and popular explanations for Malerkotla's peace. Even the *mistri* acknowledges the Nawab's concern for non-Muslim citizens and his efforts to make sure they had adequate supplies for their defense. The charisma of royalty aside, it appears that the support for the last Nawab and subsequently for his relations who held elective office (including the descendants of Haider Shaikh) was broadbased and consistent.

However, recently political power has shifted out of the Nawabi family and the family of Haider Shaikh. The MLA elected in 2002 is Razia Sultana, who won the Congress Party ticket from Sajida Begum, a widow of the last Nawab and a longtime Congress leader. Sajida Begum was reportedly very upset that the Congress ticket was given to someone else and the current Chief Minister, Captain Amrinder Singh, dismissed her from the state party organization. Singh, himself a Congress party member and the erstwhile Maharaja of Patiala, appears to have shown no favoritism to fellow royalty in this case. *The Tribune* reported on January 21, 2003 that Sajida Begum was dismissed because she failed to support the Congress candidate, Razia Sultana, after losing her own bid. The reason for this, according to *The Tribune* is that "Mrs. Sajida Begum, one of the oldest Congresswomen in Punjab, who was a confidant of the former Punjab Chief Minister and the Union Home Minister, Giani Zail Singh, had revolted against the decision of the party to give ticket to Mrs Razia Sultan, wife of a police officer, and 'outsider.'"<sup>548</sup> Along with the decline in Sajida Begum's popularity, two other members of Haider Shaikh's lineage have recently lost their positions. The previous MLA, Nusrat Ikhrum Khan and the

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<sup>548</sup> "Veterans Resign, Sultana Unfazed," *The Tribune*, January 22, 2003.

previous head of the Municipal Committee, Azmat Ali Khan (SAD) were both affiliated with the *dargah* of the saint. Azmat Ali Khan's stewardship was under challenge for a long time, but finally lost his position when Nusrat Ikram Khan lost his own election. This signifies a new era in local politics as the relative monopoly on power of the Nawab's and Haider Shaikh's lineages comes to an end. It also appears that the opening up of the political arena has resulted in an intensification of factional and religious politics in Malerkotla.<sup>549</sup> After Azmat Ali Khan was dismissed, the committee elected a Hindu interim president, Kewal Kishan Jindal.<sup>550</sup> In August 2002, prior to a council vote on a new president, it appears that Jindal was assaulted and Razia Sultana, the MLA, has been accused of ordering the attack that left him hospitalized. An election was held in Jindal's absence that brought Faqir Muhammad to the leadership post, but an outcry in Malerkotla led to another election. Yet another referendum on March 23, 2003 brought M.S. Bholi, another Hindu and Congress Party member, to the position of Municipal Committee President. This is a fascinating situation that in other municipalities could be construed as an inter-religious dispute. However, given the support bases of the various factions that would be a hasty conclusion. In fact, Jindal himself acknowledged several Muslims who supported him at the time of the attack and afterwards.<sup>551</sup> Furthermore, all local religious groups and parties universally condemned Jindal's assault and a citywide *bandh* (strike) was held in protest. Nusrat Ikram Khan, Abdul Ghaffar (another former MLA), the president of the local Truck Union, Ajit

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<sup>549</sup> This is an argument made by both Paul Brass and Stanley Tambiah, that mass politics opens up an arena for competition in which political leaders seek to garner power and support by activating divisive religious identities. See, Paul R. Brass *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1974) and *Theft of an Idol* (1997), Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds* (1996), and van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism* (1994).

<sup>550</sup> Recent developments indicate that Jindal was replaced in August of 2002 by one Faqir Muhammad (not to my knowledge linked to the Nawab or *khalifah* families). Confusing and contradictory reports appear in *The Tribune* from July through August of 2002. See, for example, August 30, 2002 <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020830/punjab1.htm>'14.

<sup>551</sup> *The Tribune*, August 29, 2002, quotes Jindal saying, "I passed out and regained consciousness half an hour later. Some friends — Mr Haleem Farooqui, Mr Des Raj Verma, both councillors, and Mr M. Jamil-ur-Rehman — brought some clothes for me. I pulled myself inside the hall where the meeting was still on and brought the matter to the notice of the SDM who commented that he was "following his orders", he alleged."

Singh, the president of the Sanatan Dharam Sabha, Kamlesh Garg, and Mr K.K. Chopra, president of the local BJP all participated. Abdul Ghaffar, an extremely well respected local figure, told *The Tribune* that the impression that it was a communal dispute was misleading and the issue had much more to do with the proper functioning of democratic institutions in Malerkotla. He pointed out the broad, non-partisan and non-sectarian support in the community for a full inquiry into the attack. Such a breakdown of law and order in which it is possible for the president of the Municipal Committee to be assaulted outside of the Municipal Committee office indicates a disturbing direction for Malerkotla politics. It is also a matter of concern that BJP party leaders in Punjab got involved in the situation, publicly denouncing Razia Sultana and calling for an investigation.<sup>552</sup> However, in spite of all these divisive developments, it must be remembered that in March 2003 this seventy percent Muslim town elected a Congress president to the Municipal Committee who is a Hindu. This may well be a positive sign that although the recent political scene has been nasty, it has not been so because of communal religious sentiment.

Malerkotla's politics reflect the peculiarities of a region regulated by multiple minorities. Especially since the creation of Haryana and Himachal Pradesh out of what was formerly a single state of Punjab, the Sikh community and Punjabi language have dominated the state. This is unusual in a country that is approximately two percent Sikh.<sup>553</sup> The tension between multiple communities, all minorities in some fashion, are thus balanced out to a great degree. However, from studies conducted in other regions it is clear that parity of population does not necessarily

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<sup>552</sup> *The Tribune*, August 20, 2002.

<sup>553</sup> Although Hindus and Muslims also speak Punjabi, the language is especially associated with the Sikh community while Hindi and Urdu are, respectively, associated with the former religions. This association has become even more pronounced since Partition as the Pakistani government has pursued active policies of enforcing Urdu as the national language and the Indian government has adopted Hindi. Therefore Punjabi has become the language of the Sikhs and is almost exclusively written in the liturgical Gurmukhi script whereas previously it was also written in Persian script.

obviate nor exacerbate communal tensions. As Ashutosh Varshney's study *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* documents, violence occurs in some cities with significant Muslim populations and does not in others. Population, therefore, is not the key variable in promoting or preventing ethnic strife. For example, in Hyderabad there is a significant number of Muslims – thirty-five to thirty-seven percent of the population.<sup>554</sup> Muslim cultural dominance in the city as a former princely state has diminished since independence in 1947, but the effect remains. In spite of this situation of relative equality, Hyderabad has experienced several major incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims. Most recent were the riots that scourged the city in December 1990 following the national *rath yatra* (pilgrimage procession) of L.K. Advani (now Deputy Prime Minister) on his way to liberate the birthplace of Ram in Ayodhya. In the wake of his visit to the city to garner support for the building of a temple at the site of the Masjid, over three hundred people were killed and thousands injured.<sup>555</sup> Varshney characterizes Hyderabad as "riot-prone," but his work establishes that contrary to common assumptions among political scientists, high or equal Muslim population in a region is *not* a proximate cause of communal tension or violence in a region. On the contrary, he pairs several urban centers with roughly proportional populations of Hindus and Muslims – one 'riot-prone' and the other not – thereby demonstrating that demographic parity is not a key factor in those cases.<sup>556</sup> Although Muslims are a minority in these cases, in all the sites selected by Varshney, the Muslim population is large enough to be a significant electoral factor.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Varshney *Ethnic Conflict*, p. 172.

<sup>555</sup> Kakar *The Colors of Violence*, p. 51.

<sup>556</sup> Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict*, p. 13.

<sup>557</sup> As mentioned previously, mass politics is clearly a major factor in exacerbating tensions. Proximity to elections, especially in which the minority vote is a key factor is likely to further raise the stakes. See Brass, *Theft of an Idol*, Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, and Steven Wilkinson, "Consociation Theory and Ethnic Violence."

In Malerkotla, although Muslims are a dominant majority with a long history of political authority as well, local Muslims feel strongly that because of their token status that they cannot afford tension to take root. If the Muslim majority fails to maintain the security and satisfaction of the non-Muslim residents, the suspicion of the Muslim community which pervades India at large could quickly take root in Malerkotla. The viability of Muslim custodianship will be called into question. Furthermore, they perceive the scrutiny of the state in numerous ways. Here alone in Punjab were police deployed on the streets during tensions after the Bamiyan Buddhas were destroyed by the Taliban and again after the USA attacked Afghanistan. Here police were sent out during the crisis in Gujarat in spring of 2002. Indeed, the Home Ministry and the local police investigated my own activities as a researcher in this community. Thus the Muslim majority is highly conscious of its high profile status as custodians of the safety and contentment of the non-Muslim minority. This is interpreted by some as a civic responsibility and others as a sacred trust.

Thus Malerkotla as a shared community, much like the shared shrine at its center, contains and inverts contradictory conceptions and regimes of power, creating idealized and critical reflection of a South Asian society in which the lines drawn between religions can be lethal. Although Punjab has not been a "laboratory of Hindutva" as has Gujarat, still the impact of "saffronization" in India has been felt here as well.<sup>558</sup> The appeal of virulent Hindu groups like the Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena is limited, but their presence is increasingly felt in this state that just ten years ago was in the throes of a violent movement to separate the Sikh majority

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<sup>558</sup> The notion of Gujarat, where thousands of Muslims were killed in pogroms in the Spring of 2002, as Hindutva's laboratory comes from a comment by Praveen Togadia, the General Secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Togadia reportedly announced that the events in Gujarat and the subsequent reelection of the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who administered the state during this period testified to the success of an experiment in the laboratory of Hindutva. This was widely reported in the Indian press.

state from Hindu India and create a Khalistan.<sup>559</sup> Although in the 1999 elections only three candidates from the BJP alliance won seats in the national Parliament,<sup>560</sup> the previous election had brought Prakash Singh Badal of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to power as Chief Minister of the State until 2001. Badal aligned the formerly Sikh nationalist party (SAD) with the BJP led group of parties known as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as a strategic move as this front was ascendant on the national level. This alliance led to an internal split within the SAD, resulting in several offshoots from the SAD including the SAD-Mann, formed by Simranjit Singh Mann, the Member of Parliament (MP) from District Sangrur, in which Malerkotla is located. The SAD-Badal's association with the BJP may have cost them the 2001 state assembly elections which brought the Congress Party under Captain Amrinder Singh to power.<sup>561</sup> In spite of this recent development, communal politics have not been absent from the Punjabi political scene. Sikh desire for autonomy has ebbed and flowed since the effective end of the Sikh kingdom with Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death in 1849.

In the late nineteenth century the Sikh sect known as Namdharis, or Kukas, made numerous efforts to free Punjab from British rule, including beginning one of the first non-cooperation movements in Indian history, a strategy later employed with significantly more fanfare and effect by Mohandas Gandhi. The Akali party first came into being in the early twentieth century and led numerous agitations against the colonial powers, several resulting in lethal suppression by the British. During the Independence struggle, Sikh claims for their own nation were advanced by Master Tara Singh, who eventually allied with the Indian National

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<sup>559</sup> Dhaliwal mosque destruction story.

<sup>560</sup> Vinod Khanna (55% of the vote) in Gurdaspur is the only BJP MP currently serving, the other two NDA MPs are from Ferozepur and Tarn Taran. All three districts border Pakistan. New elections will be held in 2004.

<sup>561</sup> Captain Amrinder Singh, the new Chief Minister of Punjab is also the son of the last Maharaja of Patiala, Yadavindra Singh. His main campaigning issues related to agricultural procurement and the World Trade Organization, whose policies he severely criticized.

Congress. Though Master Tara Singh and others had floated a third division to encompass a Khalistan and create a Sikh majority state, this was never entertained seriously at the national level. Partition, especially in the way it ultimately occurred in Punjab, was the last thing the Sikhs wanted. The division of the northwest areas of India occurred in the most traumatizing way imaginable, leaving vast Sikh populations on the Pakistani side as well as Lahore (the capital of the Sikh kingdom under Maharaja Ranjit Singh) and many Sikh holy sites such as the birthplace of Guru Nanak. In India, Sikhs were confronted by the prospect of being absorbed by the overwhelming Hindu majority. Eventually with the creation of the state of Haryana on the basis of language (Haryana being a Hindi speaking region and Punjabi dominating in the western and northern parts of the state), the Sikhs became an absolute majority in Punjab. Sikh security was far from guaranteed, however, as was brutally evident from the gruesome events of Operation Bluestar, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the subsequent anti-Sikh riots in Delhi. It would be difficult to exaggerate the impact of Operation Bluestar on the Sikh community in Punjab and throughout the world. Although few people supported the occupation of the Golden Temple by the Sikh militant Sant Bhindranwale, the outrage and disgust towards Indira Gandhi's decision to attack the Golden Temple and firebomb it, was universal. Similarly though few Sikhs would defend Indira Gandhi's assassins, the impact of the anti-Sikh riots has left indelible scars on everyone old enough to remember. The resulting sense of insecurity and the vulnerability of the Sikhs are not unlike the concerns of other minority populations in India such as Muslims and Christians. Thus the last few elections in Punjab have been extremely interesting as Badal's alliance with the Hindu nationalist BJP proved to be an effective strategy. Also interesting is the 2001 success of Amrinder Singh on a Congress Party ticket – the party of Indira Gandhi.

It is worth recalling the ways in which the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh has been integrated into the political rituals of the town. As previously described, not only do office holders who are related to the saint, such as Municipal President Azmat Ali Khan, MLA Nusrat Ikhrum Khan, or the Nawab, attend the shrine but so do other Muslim residents, non-Muslims and state level politicians. During the year and a half I lived in Malerkotla the Chief Minister came to Malerkotla three times: once for each #Id and once for the Namdhari martyrdom memorial. The governor came one and attended the *dargah*. Nusrat Ikhrum Khan and Azmat Ali Khan were prominent at the #urs of Haider Shaikh, as were several non-Muslim *sarpanches* (heads of village councils) from surrounding villages.<sup>562</sup> Symbolically, no politician from any community can afford to neglect Malerkotla as the only Muslim area in Punjab. This raises the town's profile and increases its leverage at the state level, but does not wholly dissipate the anxiety of Muslims and Sikhs in Malerkotla about living as minorities in Hindu dominated India.

### **Civil Society**

The role of civil society in forging peaceful multicultural societies has most recently been highlighted by Ashutosh Varshney in his work *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*. Varshney argues against four common theoretical orientations towards ethnic conflict: essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and institutionalism. The essentialists argue that ethnic identity "inheres in human beings," and thus "primordial or ancient animosities" lead to conflict in the present. Varshney points out that if these tensions are so fundamental, then why do "tensions and violence between groups tend to ebb and flow at different times, or why the same groups live peacefully in some places but fight violently in others."<sup>563</sup> Instrumentalism as an approach is flawed as, in addition to privileging the role of elites, it does little to explain why manipulation

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<sup>562</sup> Indeed an interesting question which I did not explore would be the degree to which village politicians incorporate shrine visits to Haider Shaikh or wherever into their electoral strategy.

<sup>563</sup> Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict*, p. 28.

of ethnic identity may at one juncture be politically expedient and at another be counterproductive. Constructivism, has been valuable in providing a more nuanced understanding of the contexts, contingencies, and discourses that allow for individuals and groups to coalesce around the focal point of identity. But "by failing to deal with variance across time and space, they have left unresolved the local issues, whose autonomy appears not to be flattened entirely by the larger forces."<sup>564</sup> In particular, Varshney argues, what is lost is what "intervenes between the master narratives and actual violence" and that variable, he claims, is civic life. Institutionalists argue that for ethnic peace and pluralism to exist, institutions – especially political ones – must exist. Varshney sees this school of thought as the most effective in explaining the causes and contexts of ethnic peace or conflict. He regards Lijphart's notion of *consociationalism* as particularly helpful. Consociational theory proposes that compromises between the elite of ethnic groups allow for intergroup consensus rather than competition.<sup>565</sup> Although Varshney applauds the institutionalists, he identifies a problem with their macrolevel approach that does not show local variation. The explanation, and the purpose of the book, is to explain how an understanding of the workings of civil society in a given community will fill the gaps in all the previous approaches. Varshney also complicates common definitions of civil society somewhat by asserting that it is not the wholly modern and voluntaristic entity described by Ernest Gellner. He argues for the inclusion under the rubric of civil society of "ethnic associations that meet the functional or purposive criteria specified by normative arguments" such as "allowing people to come together, making public discussion of issues possible, challenging the caprice or misrule of state authorities, promoting modern business activities," and so forth. This addition of ethnically and religiously based organizations allows (to some

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

extent) for the inclusion of 'traditional' as well as 'modern' social formations to be considered as elements in the makeup of civil society. Ultimately, Varshney identifies the mechanisms for peace or violence as the existence or nonexistence of interethnic engagements and the presence or absence of associational and everyday links between ethnic groups. Areas where civic life is characterized by a high degree of engagement at these two levels tend to be peaceful, whereas those where such links are absent and/or where *intra*-ethnic groups are ascendant tend towards violence. In this dynamic Varshney singles out the formal associational level over the semi or informal everyday as the essential ingredient in maintaining social harmony.

Varshney's insight into the critical role of civil society is important and goes far to shift the discussion of ethnic conflict away from the statist and primordialist debates which have hitherto dominated the field. More problematic is his assertion that while "everyday and informal forms of civic communication may be sufficient to keep peace in villages," nonetheless "they cannot have the same effect in cities. Associational civic engagement is necessary for peace in interethnic urban settings."<sup>566</sup> While I do not disagree with the proposition that associational links are an important element in what he terms the "institutionalized peace system," his account does not further our understanding of the relationship between the everyday and the associational levels of exchange. One must ask whether a society with strong formal associations is possible without a vibrant community life in the streets and homes and shrines of a locale. Indeed, the notion of wholly discrete spheres such as the state, civil society, and the individual/family does not adequately account for the overlapping, fuzzy nature of society. Establishing the primacy of formal associations over informal everyday linkages is a chicken and the egg type question. Varshney's insistence on civil society as a separate and viable category of

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<sup>566</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

social life allows him to create a necessary division between the everyday and other spheres of life. I prefer to conceive of a spectrum of formal and informal links that bind communities publicly, privately, politically, economically, spiritually, and personally. Reducing a link – whether a business contract, a club membership, or a personal friendship – to one set of identifying markers restricts the possibilities for additional significations. For example, Hindu and Muslim neighbors may take great personal pleasure in exchanging gifts on religious holidays, but if they happen also to be business partners? Political rivals? In-laws? It is clear that the linking practice of gift exchange does not belong clearly in any of the neat categories of social life (state, civil society, individual/family) laid out by Varshney, Hegel, Kumar, etc.

Finally, Varshney's emphasis on the urban environment is determined by his data on the occurrence of ethnic violence that is drawn from a survey of a national English language newspaper, *The Times of India*. There are two problems with this data set. First, given that village and even town level events are not likely to be reported on the national level, rural events of violence are excluded. Second, minor incidents and scuffles, even exchanges of words may be as damaging to the fabric of neighborhood life in both urban and rural settings as killings and larger scale violence might be in another region. The violence itself that is not the variable in these situations, rather the difference lies in the ways in which communities manage these events. The impact of disruptive events does indeed depend upon the very factors that Varshney identifies: the quality and degree of inter-community relations in an area.

An interesting example of violence that had a significant impact on Malerkotla neither made the *Times of India*, nor did it involve loss of life. Yet its importance in local lore as a key moment in communal relations indicates its centrality in the constitution of Malerkotla as a peaceful society. This event of inter-religious violence was the 1992 burning of a temple in the

aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. No one was injured and doubtless the event did not make *The Times of India*, especially at a time when human casualties were making headlines. For most locals, the significance of the event was not so much the burning, but the way in which the community responded. Rather than exploding into further violence or retaliation, the Muslim community paid for the damage and disciplined the youths responsible. Indeed, as Maulana Abdul Rauf, the head of the local Jamaati Islami, explained, this is a common response among Malerkotla residents of all religions. He said

Here sometimes the situation has been bad. Sometimes bad things have happened, but when the atmosphere became bad at time the Muslims themselves asked those Muslims not to do such things, and the Hindus did the same thing to Hindus, otherwise the Muslims would have helped only Muslims and the Hindus help only Hindus. The situation would have deteriorated. Here a lot of such committees were founded of Hindus and Muslims whose main aim was to suppress the bad elements and bad things, we should not help any type of bad element. So that is why the bad people were not successful in their intentions.

Abdul Rauf makes a crucial point about the importance of self-policing on the part of the various religious communities. Without such efforts, externally imposed, coercive measures are less likely to be effective. A prominent Muslim businessman who had contributed a substantial amount to the restitution of the temple also makes this point. He declared that whenever a problem occurs in Malerkotla then the communities themselves discipline the perpetrators.

Abdul Rauf's perspective is echoed by another local Muslim man, a schoolteacher. He confirms that:

Muslims of Malerkotla condemned this burning. Because the Qur'an does not allow it. The Qur'an says that if you are at war, and if somebody hides himself in his religious place, you spare him. So how can the followers of Islam think of putting somebody's religious place on fire? If we will attack or burn other religion's religious places, they will burn our religious places. There will be quarrels and living will become difficult.

The schoolteacher clearly recognizes the importance of mutual respect, and the reality of mutual dependence. He finds a religious basis to justify his assertion that Muslims in Malerkotla sanctioned the violent act taken by members of their own religion. Thus his position gains strength by drawing from a pragmatic understanding of community life and a grounding in his religious faith.

Members of all religious communities remember the event as significant, as a time when the fabric of Malerkotla was tested, but when its integrity prevailed. Through a combination of measures, residents managed the shock of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the unjust retaliation on local Hindu sacred sites. By refusing to harbor the guilty and making reparations for the damage the Muslim leadership preempted any backlash and created space for conciliatory Hindus to come forward. The momentum of these mutual efforts allowed the situation to dissipate quickly and left little room for divisive elements or outside politicians to capitalize on the crime. In an interview with the former Superintendent of Police in another part of India, he explained that intra-community involvement in discouraging disruptive individuals and reporting their activities to the police is a crucial element in controlling communal tensions. In the recommendations offered by commissioned riot reports, such techniques are often recommended as well. Self-policing is an example of Foucault's notion of subjection, realized through techniques of the self and negotiated through strategic games. A legitimate mode of action and behavioral code is certainly being enforced in this event. That its goal is peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious society does not alter the fact that considerable social and moral force is brought to bear through the tactics used by local leaders of all religions. In a large town of over 100,000 this is not merely a matter of the village council or the principal actors meeting and coming to an agreement. The possibilities for multiple readings of the temple damage are many

times increased, as is the potential for outsiders to take up the issue. That such efforts, if they even occurred, were thwarted before they could have an effect demonstrates enormous resourcefulness on the part of the local community. The semi-urban nature of Malerkotla makes it an important case study as the town falls between Varshney's facile categories of urban and rural. Moreover, such acts of violence, which have enormous potential for community disruption, do not appear at all in his account of violent incidents in India since Partition. Although Varshney goes a long way towards including the local, his conclusions retain many of the same prejudices as the institutionalists and constructivists whom he chides. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Gujarat violence in spring 2002 it is clear that pogroms and riots occurred in rural areas as well as the major cities of the state, calling into question Varshney's assertion that ethnic violence is a largely urban phenomenon.<sup>567</sup>

The implications of Varshney's study for my own are several. First, his identification of the "mechanisms of peace" and, evocation of de Tocqueville's "arts of association," do resonate with the structures of peace in Malerkotla. Second, although I would hardly agree that civil society "is the missing variable in available theories," as Varshney asserts,<sup>568</sup> I do concur that civil society is a crucial element in constituting a stable, multicultural community. But by focusing so relentlessly on civil society at the expense of and as discrete from the everyday and the state, Varshney diminishes and undervalues the role of individuals and their everyday

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<sup>567</sup> Surveying *The Times of India* from 1950 to 1995, Varshney and Steven Wilkinson determined that annually less than four percent of riots took place in rural areas and the number of deaths was "miniscule." Varshney asserts that "Underreporting of incidents in rural areas may indeed have led to an underestimation of the rural share, but the difference is simply too large to be entirely an artifact of reporting." Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>568</sup> Whereas I agree with his critique of many dominant interpretations of ethnic violence, his claim that such studies have excluded civil society from their analysis cannot be born out. Indeed, many studies focus on exactly this stratum of society, though perhaps without explicitly labeling it as such or invoking the literature on civil society in their analyses. The work of Gyanendra Pandey, Stanley Tambiah, Partha Chatterjee, Ashis Nandy, Sudhir Kakar and others are all attempting to elucidate the nature of religious and ethnic difference in India and operate within the realms of the state, the individual, the family and that of civil society. Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict*, p. 52.

interactions. Nonetheless, by delineating certain crucial modes of social engagement, Varshney has opened up an arena of study that may be fruitfully explored in Malerkotla.

As framed by Varshney, civil society ultimately is essentially synonymous with the public sphere.<sup>569</sup> In this sphere, autonomous, atomistic individuals are capable of freely associating outside of the influence of state or institutional religion. Although typically reserved for "modern" forms of association, Varshney challenges this perspective and includes non-modern associations, such as those based on religion, the as long as they are not solely focused on issues internal to the religion. In his view, "what is crucial to the notion of civil society is that families and individuals connect with others beyond their homes and talk about matters of public relevance without the interference or sponsorship of the state."<sup>570</sup> In the Indian context (or perhaps in any context for that matter), the exclusion of religiously based organization from the realm of civil society was certainly untenable. However, by retaining the family and individual as the pole opposite the state between which the institutions of civil society mediate, Varshney still fails to account for the ways in which those institutions are largely elite formations. As Partha Chatterjee has pointed out, civil society "is best used to describe those institutions of modern associational life set up by nationalist elites in the era of colonial modernity, though

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<sup>569</sup> Civil society is an elusive category. For Marxist theorists, following Hegel's formulation, it is akin to bourgeois society, and thus is not an arena open to all members of a society or citizenry made up of "atomized self-seeking individuals." Mark Neocleous, "From Civil Society to the Social," *British Journal of Sociology* (Volume 46, no. 3, 1995), p. 396). Far from being independent of the state, civil society is intimately related to the state, and it is in this arena that the movement of history takes place. For Gramsci "between the economic structure and the State with its legislation and its coercion stands civil society – and it is the latter that must be radically transformed if revolutionary change is not to degenerate into 'economic moralism.'" Krishan Kumar, "Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term," *British Journal of Sociology* (Volume 44, no. 3 1993), p.382. For both Marx and Gramsci, civil society is the key to changing the course of history, although Gramsci is perhaps more suspicious of the degree to which the intellectuals operating within the space of civil society are free from the hegemonic force of the state or are capable of doing more than reinscribing its coercive power. The public sphere is an idea developed by Jürgen Habermas. See *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, (Cambridge; MIT Press, 1989).

<sup>570</sup> Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict*, p. 46.

often as part of their anticolonial struggle."<sup>571</sup> As such, most associations typically located within the arena of civil society are efforts to replicate modern, colonial structures of power.<sup>572</sup>

This paves the way for Foucault who is concerned with the arena in which the processes of governmentality are worked out. As discussed above, governmentality is the dual process by which the relations of individuals to the state are regulated both by the individuals within the state and by the state itself. The transactions of the individual moving between spheres, levels, arenas, and milieus of governance must be understood to adequately account for the ways in which a stable plural community is engendered and maintained. It is important to acknowledge that certain continuities of identity pertain as an individual moves between contexts. The efficacy of inter-religious exchanges in establishing linkages on the level of civil society is not independent from the experience of the inter-personal. But nor is the social wholly *dependent* upon the personal. For example, a person may have excellent business dealings and give political support to adherents of multiple religious communities based entirely upon self-interest and have no inter-religious friendships or affinities for other religious shrines. The reverse may also be true. However, in a region where a high degree of shared ritual, narrative, and spatial

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<sup>571</sup> Partha Chatterjee articulates this conceptual move as shifting "from the idea of society as constituted by the elementary units of homogeneous families to that of a *population*, differentiated but classifiable, describable and enumerable." The category of population constitutes "the material of society" and is "descriptive and empirical, not normative." Drawing from Foucault, Chatterjee sees the concept of population as a crucial step in creating governmentality or governability by making "rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of 'policy.'" Chatterjee, "Beyond the Nation or Within?," p. 61-2.

<sup>572</sup> Thus, rather than open up civil society to include non-modern formations as Varshney does, Chatterjee proposes a new mediating term: political society.(Chatterjee (1998), p. 64) Although political society contains "modern political associations such as political parties" these formations do not automatically replicate either the structures of state power or those of civil society. Instead, "elite and popular anticolonial politics, even as they came together within a formally organized arena such as that of the Indian National Congress, diverged at specific moments and spilled over the limits laid down by the organization." Thus political society is an arena that may provide "a site of strategic maneuvers, resistance, and appropriation by different groups and classes," thereby introducing a less determined and deterministic form of social organization that may work outside either the rubric of the modern and the hegemony of the elite. According to Chatterjee, the combination of political and civil society as mediating spaces moves towards a more adequate understanding of the variety of ways in which people as recognition seeking individuals, families, and populations strategically engage with each other and with the state. For my purposes, this additional category only muddies the waters further and proposes yet further levels of discrete institutions.

exchanges take place in an atmosphere of congeniality and peace, it is far more likely that the civil and political societies within that region will develop, endure, and be meaningful. This deeply engaged society is perhaps a fuller articulation of Brass' institutionalized peace system.

In Malerkotla, numerous techniques of governance are designed to maintain a harmonious community life which might be categorized as an institutionalized peace system. However, the assumption that the riot prone remains riot prone and peaceful places remain peaceful due to the combined effects of past historical processes and ingrained systems of peace or violence must be avoided. To do so would be tautological and deterministic. Rather it is possible, as in the case of Malerkotla, to observe how the public reputation for peace post-Partition is not without complications and counternarratives, and histories that demonstrate the multi-level work that sustains peace. In examining the regulatory schemes that structure Malerkotla's political, cultural, religious, economic, and civic life it emerges that in spite of a national atmosphere of religious division, a regional climate of Sikh dominance and a local history of Pathan Muslim authority, that the regulatory systems in Malerkotla are particularly effective and derive their strength in no small part from shared ritual, narrative and spatial communities.

A common approach to communal conflict in South Asia treats tension or violence as not "really" religious but as misidentified or misappropriated struggles for economic resources. This approach thus presumes that where economic competition does not exist, communal conflict will be less likely to occur. As a Muslim majority region, one might expect Muslim dominance in Malerkotla's economic as well as political arenas. This is not the case. In Malerkotla, as elsewhere in India, fewer Muslims are large-scale industrialists, agriculturalists and professionals than Hindus and Sikhs. Although proportionally their percentages are higher

in Malerkotla than in non-Muslim majority regions, still the competition between communities is significant. Of the three large spinning mills, two are Hindu owned. Most of the metal shops and iron businesses are Muslim owned and operated. Sikhs, Hindus, or Jains run the largest and most prestigious schools. The gold and silver market is dominated by Jains, the medical field by Hindus and the agriculture by Sikhs and Khambhoj Muslims. Potential for competition, even hostility, is significant. After all, Malerkotla houses an important *sabzi mandi*, or produce market. It is also the largest industrial town in District Sangrur, with over 2,000 large and small industries operating locally. This represents significant development, as prior to 1947 there was little industry locally, just two steel mills, one cotton gin, one ice factory and three flourmills.<sup>573</sup> Given the post-Partition demography of Punjab, the growth of Malerkotla is a sign that the state and local government as well as local business people were interested in investing in the town's industry and economy. Malerkotla was and is known for a number of cottage industries, especially badge making, embroidery work, and iron goods. Malerkotla's badges are sold all over the world and are purchased by the Defence Ministry and craft export companies. This industry alone is worth two million rupees a year (approximately \$41,000) to the town, but the Delhi based dealers who contract with local shops gain most of the profits.<sup>574</sup> The iron goods produced in Malerkotla are also famous. There is a widespread belief that Muslims are better metal workers and artisans than other ethnic groups, so in post-Partition Punjab, this means that people come to Malerkotla to obtain metalware. During the festivals for Haider Shaikh that draw many thousands of visitors to the town, it is not unusual to see the iron workers from the nearby

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<sup>573</sup> According to Sultana, in 1975 the region was declared 'industrially backward' by the Punjab Government and began to receive subsidies for development. The situation has certainly changed today. Sultana, "Muslims of Malerkotla."

<sup>574</sup> Vikrant Jindal, "This Town Makes Badges Too," *Tribune*, April 5 2001. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010405/punjab1.htm>.

Loha Bazaar (Iron Market) lay out their products of cooking utensils and containers, knives and other implements to sell near the shrine.

Land revenues have also been a major source of income in the state. Late nineteenth century settlement and assessment reports maintain that eighty percent of land holdings were in the possession of Sikh and Hindu *jats* with the remainder held by Muslim and tribal castes. Compared to other regions of Punjab, there is a large population of Muslim Kambhoj cultivators, but the outlying villages of the kingdom are primarily Sikh and Hindu in population. The non-agricultural castes are the Pathans and various *baniyas* (merchants), mostly Aggarwal Jains. The Muslim Pathans were principally *zamindars* (landowners) or in some way related to either the Nawab or the saint, and derived their livelihood through these connections. At Partition, it was this class of wealthier *zamindari* Muslims who left in the largest numbers for Pakistan. Between out-migration and the abolition post-Independence of *zamindari* land rights, the hitherto dominant Pathans experienced a radical shift in numbers and power. In the PEPSU states immediately after Partition, two types of landholders were acknowledged, *ala malik* and *adna malik*. The *ala malik* were the “superior owners” such as the Nawab, the Khawanin (family members), *dakhlikars* (dependent retainers of the Nawab who retained the income but not the ownership of the land), and *maufidars* (retainers who remitted some income to the Nawab).<sup>575</sup> *Adna malik*, or ‘inferior owners’ were the tenants and occupants at will who actually worked the land. In 1954, PEPSU passed the Abolition of Ala Malikiya Act and the Occupancy of Tenants Act through which the *ala malik* were abolished and the tenants and occupants gained proprietary rights. The Khambhoj cultivators were the largest local beneficiaries of this change. It is interesting to note that, upon ascending the throne in 1948, the last Nawab of Malerkotla,

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<sup>575</sup> Sultana, "Muslims of Malerkotla."

Iftikhar Ali Khan, gave a speech in which he promised the imminent end of *zamindari* rights. He professes to have investigated the status of the land owned by the State and the Jagirdars (non-hereditary land revenue holders) and determined that “as a matter of fact the State and Jagirdars have no title to assert this right.” He further decreed that

in the entire interests of the State, the Khawanin and Jagirdars will not have the least hesitation in sacrificing something that will certainly contribute towards sharing greater goodwill of the people so very indispensable for the future interests of the State. I therefore have great pleasure in announcing the termination of this practice from today throughout my State.<sup>576</sup>

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall he was acting preemptively, but nonetheless, such reasoning and public declarations may well have contributed to his later electoral popularity among all classes and castes.

In the 1960's, the Indian government instituted a series of agricultural reforms and development schemes that came to be known collectively as the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution subsidized fertilizers, machines, and irrigation systems and promoted numerous other initiatives that revolutionized the agricultural output of the Punjabi countryside.<sup>577</sup> Malerkotla's experience of the Green Revolution was indeed revolutionary. In addition, more land was arable due to the introduction of tubewells.<sup>578</sup> This was particularly significant as the extensive canalization projects of the British in Punjab never entered the city.

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<sup>576</sup> Khan, *A History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin*, p. 146.

<sup>577</sup> Punjab's population is overwhelmingly rural (70%), but the state represents only 2.9% of India's land under cultivation. Nonetheless, by 1970, the state supplied 24% of the nation's wheat crop. Nowadays, Punjab produces almost 60% of India's wheat crop and 40% of the rice. However, the Green Revolution is not an uncontested success story. Rather the introduction of crop rotations, fertilizers, genetically engineered seeds, and especially tubewells have resulted in a high yield, but are exhausting the environment. The water tables have dropped to alarming depths, the nutritional content of the produce is measurably reduced, and the resulting overproduction leads to bi-annual procurement crises. Much grain goes bad for lack of markets and adequate storage facilities. Many farmers go broke and in some cases have committed suicide, weighed down by debt incurred to acquire the foreign seeds, fertilizers and to sink the ever deeper tubewells.

<sup>578</sup> This technology in which deep holes are dug down to the water table and water is mechanically pumped up was especially critical in Malerkotla where the British canals skirted the territory. Tubewells replaced the time and labor consuming Persian wheel and allowed for vast tracts to be brought under irrigation. However, the water table in Punjab has dropped dramatically here as in the rest of India and an environmental crisis is imminent.

In combination with the Green Revolution, the abolition of centralized *zamindari* rights in Malerkotla benefited the Kambhoj community most immediately. This class of tenant farmers makes up approximately 40% of Malerkotla's Muslim population.<sup>579</sup> Kambhoj residents today were among those who complained most vocally about the dominance and oppression of the Nawab and the Khawanin. Several interviewees reported that they and their kinspeople had been prevented from learning to read and write. They claim that they were not allowed to sit in chairs when seeking audience with the Nawab or one of the Khawanin Jagirdars. They were not allowed to wear white clothes – this was the exclusive privilege of the Nawab. "The Kambhoj people were given the duty to look after the fields and do farming. The labor class was not allowed to wear the same clothes as the master. Those clothes the master wore he wouldn't wear out of respect for the Nawabs if he was wearing white you didn't wear white." However, with the end of *ala malik* property, the Kambhoj and other lower class Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs became landholders and enjoyed considerable and rapid upward mobility.<sup>580</sup> Through government subsidies and programs they began systems of crop rotation, introduced new fertilizers, and began tubewell irrigation which dramatically increased their production. With the newfound wealth the community began schools, ran for local offices, and took on new civic leadership roles. The Islamiyya High School and the Islamiyya Girls High School were both

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<sup>579</sup> In terms of the caste and class makeup of Malerkotla, the Muslims are roughly divided into six large groupings. The elites are the Pathan Afghans linked to the founder Haider Shaikh and his lineage and associates. These include Yusufzais, Lodhis, Kakkars, and Sherwani clans. There are also a few families of Mughal descent. After these are the Rajputs, a class of higher caste converts from Hinduism. Among these are the Khanzadas, Rangar, Bhatti, Chauhan and Rathore *gotras* or sub-groups. The professional castes include the Kambhoj, Gujjar, Marasi, Lohar, Kumhar, Nai, Dhobi, Dhunia, Julaha, Ansari, and Faqiri groups. Among these the Kambhoj represent nearly 40% of the total Muslim population. As previously mentioned, this caste is the primary cultivating class among the Muslim population and continues to dominate the local agricultural sphere. There are two large groups of Shī'ī Muslims: Sayyids and Shaikhs. The Sayyids claim direct descent from the house of the Prophet (Hussaini, Hassani, Bokhari, Zaidi, Jilani, Jafri). The Shaikh community represents Hindu converts to Shi'ī Islam (Ansari, Faruqi, Qureishi, Siddiqui, Usmani). Many of these family names are shared by Sunni Muslims, and cannot be seen as a clear indicator of Shī'ī identity. However, in Malerkotla only Shī'īs use Shaikh as a surname or second name.

<sup>580</sup> Sultana, "Hierarchical Change."

founded to serve the Kambhoj community in particular. Chaudhry Abdul Gaffar was elected to the Legislative Assembly and became Education Minister during his tenure from 1992 to 1997. Several of the largest local factories are operated by Khamboj, such as the Rashid Brothers, manufacturers of sporting equipment.

Many businesses in Malerkotla are either joint ventures or are highly diverse in their employee structures. For example, one local industry leader whose factories export all over the world calls himself the "most secular man in Malerkotla." A Loha (ironworker) Muslim himself, his chief officers are Hindus and Sikhs, but most of his employees are Muslim (reflecting the local demographics). Of course, that the more skilled positions are occupied by non-Muslims may also be a result of the statistically lower level of education and training among Muslims throughout India. Nonetheless, for this industrialist, his secularism is a great point of pride and he is a member of several local groups such as the Malerkotla Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Rotary Club, all of whose memberships are highly diverse.

In summary, the regulation of Malerkotla involves managing a diverse population and their complex histories. As we have seen, these histories are hardly peaceful up until the Partition of India, yet the virulence of past conflict does not poison the present. The efficacy of governance in Malerkotla since that time is due to the combined self-regulation of the populace and the hegemony of a pluralistic ideal on the political and civil societal levels. Here the coercive force of the community's idealized image of itself is brought to bear on those who sow dissent. In Malerkotla even organizations usually blamed for divisive politics such as the Jama'at-i Islami and the RSS sit down together to further their shared interests. Also important is the way in which these mostly positive relationships penetrate every level of society, not just politics and civil society, but in the neighborhoods and at shrines like Haider Shaikh's *dargah*.

## **The Practice of Everyday Pluralism**

Although theorists like Varshney identify business and civil societal links as crucial to maintaining the peace, some locals dismiss this type of instrumentalist logic. One local schoolteacher (a middle-aged Muslim male) asserted that business connections between communities are not unique to Malerkotla and thus do not necessarily prevent communal disturbances. In order to explain why Malerkotla was a peaceful town he stated, "I think business links are everywhere. I think business does not have any relationship to it. It has occurred naturally. In Malerkotla people don't get caught up in any quarrel." He further asserts that when troubles do occur, they are settled quickly. He says,

As I told you earlier, like in a house, brothers fight momentarily if they have some problem. But with passage of time they think with a cool head and again become one. It is a similar situation here between Hindu and Muslim brothers. If something happens they fight but as time passes they think with a cool head. Everybody realizes their mistakes easily and things return to the same position.

This analogy of Malerkotla as an extended, complicated family is significant and is commonly invoked. The comparison allows for complex realities to exist in which feuds may occur and eventually be repaired, but the common daily irritations of life in a "household" do not usually threaten its foundation. Disparate and opposed personalities and lifestyles may exist, but the residents (like siblings) resolve their conflicts quickly upon reflection. The joint processes of recognition and reconciliation enable the community to affirm each other's identities as unique individuals with particular characteristics and also as equal members of society with legitimate claim to a place. That the community of Malerkotla has also developed an institutionalized peace system in the form of peace committees and intrareligious groups that self-police helps sustain these familial relations. Business, as the schoolteacher said, does not have anything to do with it in the sense that business links alone do not explain the occurrence or non-occurrence of

conflict. As Nandy has illustrated in the case of Jaipur's gem industry, the business links there did not prevent violence from occurring in the wake of the Ayodhya movement, nor did they prevent a gradual erosion of inter-religious relations.<sup>581</sup>

The analogy of the family is extended by Maulana Abdul Rauf. He described the manner in which Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus deal with each other in familial terms. In particular he highlighted the way the Nawabs treated non-Muslim subjects during times of tensions. He declared:

Sometimes people appear differently on the outside than we think inside, but we see in Malerkotla that people have stood by the other communities of people. Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, they have helped each other. When there was Partition of India and Pakistan, at that time Malerkotla was an island, there was no facility for food, so the Sikhs brought food from outside to Malerkotla. And in a similar way, once the Sikhs attacked MK and then Hindu people came forward. As at that time the Muslims were feeble, the Sikhs asked the Hindus, "What is the attitude of the Nawab towards the Hindu girls or women?" So at that time a Hindu *buzurg* (saint) came forward and said that he treats the Hindu girls as his own daughters, and they [i.e. the Sikhs] took their army back and retreated.<sup>582</sup> And when there was brutality against the Sikhs, Muslims helped them. In the Mughal times when nobody could raise his voice against the king, at that time the Nawab helped the Sikhs. If they were corrupt in their hearts, they would have enjoyed the situation and said let the Hindus or the Sikhs die. But no, they came forward to help them.

In this statement Maulana Abdul Rauf expressed the commonly held belief that the community here rallied around each other during the chaos of Partition and at other times as well. He expresses the value of the *haa da naara* not in metaphysical but practical terms, as an example of an anti-sectarian solidarity that characterizes Malerkotla to this day. In response to each successive challenge to the community, they banded together to defend one another. It is significant that the perceived test of the honesty of the Nawab was his treatment of Hindu

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<sup>581</sup> Nandy, et al, *Creating a Nationality*.

<sup>582</sup> This is apparently a reference to when Banda Bahadur attacked Malerkotla, ostensibly to recover the body of Anup Kaur, as previously mentioned in Chapter One.

women and girls. The role of violence against women and the rumors of such violations as features of riots and ethnic conflict has been highlighted by many studies.<sup>583</sup> Again the expression of familial relations is evoked to describe the fatherly benevolence of the Muslim rulers and the intimacy of relations between religious groups.

This acknowledgement that the futures of all communities are bound up with one another is an important element in establishing and maintaining a healthy civic life. It is exactly the opposite fear that takes root in communities that come apart and devolve into violence. In such places the attitude becomes pervasive that one's neighbors cannot be fully trusted. A belief spreads that any social, political, or economic benefits accruing to the other group necessarily mean the diminution of resources for one's own group. A climate of competition and antagonism grows and is given roots by ideologues and sectarian leaders. Through a process described by Stanley Tambiah as focalization and transvaluation, a "triggering event" becomes emblematic of injustice on a broader scale and is identified with group and society-level grievances.<sup>584</sup> Yet even in such degraded situations there are people who recognize the mutuality of community and their shared interest in survival. In *Creating a Nationality*, a study of the movement to destroy the Babri Masjid and build a Ram temple, Ashis Nandy et al. assert that counter to the dominant narrative of communal riots as expressions of the inexorable divisions between religions, simultaneously in any conflict (communal or otherwise) are incidents of reciprocity as the vulnerable of one group were supported or shielded by the other. They write that "there is the mutuality between persons who helped, reassured, protected each other, and shared the moments of immense fear and anxiety. That mutuality was not based on modern, secular ideologies but on

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<sup>583</sup> Brass, *Theft of an Idol*; Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*; Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment;" Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*; Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*.

<sup>584</sup> Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*.

values derived from the same 'primordial' religious sentiments that were mobilized to sanctify the violence of the riots."<sup>585</sup> Nandy and his co-authors attempt to reclaim these fragments of resistance to the overwhelming damage done by violence in a community. Yet the resulting image from Ayodhya, its environs, and other regions to which the central location is one of eroding solidarities, shifting loyalties, and debilitating fear. Yet in Malerkotla, in spite of confronting situations locally, regionally, and nationally which test the fabric of the community, the mutuality retains its integrity and the community remains bound together.

Another factor that contributes to Malerkotla's healthy civic life is that there are numerous associations in Malerkotla for charitable, religious, political, professional, and social service purposes. The representation and leadership within these groups is often quite diverse. In 2001 the presidents of the local Rotary Club, Lion's Club were Hindus and the Bar Association was led by a Sikh. A local professional society, the Printer's Association's executive council consisted of two Jains, a Hindu, and a Muslim.<sup>586</sup> This type of joint membership and leadership is consistent with the type of interethnic associational forms of engagement that Varshney argues are the most significant factors in the reduction of ethnic conflict in communities.<sup>587</sup>

The neighborhoods of Malerkotla are fairly integrated for a town with a seventy percent Muslim majority. Two regions are almost entirely Muslim: Maler and Jamalpura. However, the remainder of the municipality is fairly well distributed. This integration is in no small part responsible for the high level of interaction between neighbors of various religions. I was frequently informed of and often witnessed the types of customs and associations between

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<sup>585</sup> Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality*, p. 149

<sup>586</sup> Source: *The Tribune*, June 15, 2001. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010615/region.htm>

<sup>587</sup> Varshney, "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond."

neighbors that are conducive to positive relations. These include visiting, sending sweets or other foodstuffs at the time of a festival or a family event such as a birth, marriage, or death. A resident again employs the analogy of a family to describe such inter-religious relations in Malerkotla:

In reality, from this we come to know that everybody respects each other's religion. They do not say to each other to adopt this religion. They follow their own religion, and this has maintained the brotherhood. This is what is special about Malerkotla.

At several weddings I attended there were separate arrangements made for vegetarian food to be served. Local charities seek public participation from all religious groups. For example, at a group wedding of seven impoverished couples, the dias was shared by prominent Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains (and one American anthropologist). The event was held at the Hanuman Temple in a hall constructed in memory of the wife of a local Jain cloth merchant and philanthropist. At numerous funeral gatherings and in the homes of the bereaved, neighbors, friends, and associates of all religions were generally in attendance to pay their respects. At cultural events such as *mushairas* (poetry recitations), award events, and conferences members of all religious communities were active participants. In the organization of a local heritage society with which I was involved, there was a deliberate effort to ensure that the leadership and membership would be from as broad a base as possible. Ultimately the president of the organization was Sikh, the vice president was Muslim, and the secretary was a Hindu. A brief survey of office holders in numerous local associations reveals in most (other than wholly sectarian societies such as the Muslim Welfare Society or Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad) there is at least some degree of diversity.

## Conclusion

The regulation of the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh and the town of Malerkotla work in parallel processes. Organized by semiformal and formal regulatory authorities, the validating mechanisms of their authority and the structures of appropriate conduct are enacted by the constituent communities in both arenas. The techniques of governance in operation at the shrine include directives on behavior, physical barriers to certain acts or procedures, and verbal exchanges between the authorities and the devotees. The validity of these techniques is either affirmed through deliberate or unreflective acceptance of the authority of the *khalīfahs* or *chelas* or contested through strategic performances of alternative or oppositional modes of engagement with the saint or the society. As in any regime, the structures of authority and the codes of conduct are often invisible, but are perceivable through the patterns of behavior or consciousness dominating in the region. At Haider Shaikh's *dargah* and in Malerkotla, the hegemony of the institutionalized peace system is manifest in the overwhelming tendency in all spheres of community life towards an engaged pluralism which demands and defines appropriate and accepting conduct from the devotees and the citizenry of all religions and perspectives.

The efficacy of these regulatory techniques is perhaps most readily discernible in the few instances in which people expressed opposition to the governing ideology. For example, once as I walked through the main bazaar in Malerkotla I was beckoned into a shop owned by a middle aged Hindu man. He warned me against blind acceptance of the vision of Malerkotla as a peaceful place, saying that people are often *kapti* – deceitful, insincere, and false. He was miserable here because it is impossible to say anything negative about anyone without being attacked. This clearly indicates the pervasiveness of social censure against any type of gross partisanship or religious chauvinism. Furthermore, the man declined to be interviewed on the

record and did not wish to be recorded. I refer to him here because this was one of the only such conversations I experienced over a year and a half in Malerkotla.

One other moment stands out in which the Hindu *mistri* changed subjects from his story of Haider Shaikh and began to discuss the relations between Muslims and Hindus in town. First he invoked the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. He had earlier recounted the commonly held belief that there is a connection between Malerkotla. Many locals of all religious faiths assert that the ruler of the region prior to Haider Shaikh was a descendent of Bhima, one of the five Pandava brothers who fought for justice and the restoration of dharma against their immorally motivated kinsmen the Kauravas. However, the *mistri* uses his reference to the epic to shift the purpose of his narrative and make introduce a statement about the origin of Islam. Following the Mahabharata war, he claimed that the losing Kaurava, King Dhrtarashtra and his wife Gandhari, went to Mecca. Over time, the Kaurava clan became known as the Quraysh, the clan into which the Prophet Muhammad was born. Thus the Muslim people are descended from the antagonistic people who threatened *dharmarajya*, the rule of order in India. Furthermore, their ritual practices are improperly oriented, a somatic signal of their inherent immorality:

This is our belief, that the Quraysh are from the Kauravas. Those people bow their heads to this side [gestures west]. We are *suryavanshi* [turned to the sun], we do *pranam* [obeisance] to the sun. Now in these countries, the idols of Mahatma Buddha are broken, the idols are broken.

The last remark refers to the destruction by the Taliban in early March of 2001 of the giant fifth-century CE Buddha statues at Bamiyan, Afghanistan.<sup>588</sup> This conversation took place at the same time, and clearly bears some of the anti-Muslim sentiment that arose in the aftermath of the

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<sup>588</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, these events had triggered some incidents of anti-Muslim violence across India and resulted in a great deal of anger against such extreme iconoclasm. In Punjab there were reports from Amritsar and nearby Patiala that pig meat was thrown into a mosque and that the Qur'an had been burned, but no such events occurred in Malerkotla. In Malerkotla these events were marked by a voluntary *hartal*, or closure of business that was observed by all the local businesses, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh. Some members of the Muslim community had proposed a protest march but were discouraged by the local leaders.

destruction. By associating the Quraysh and the Prophet Muhammad with the ruler defeated by the forces of dharma, a clear moral judgment on that lineage is made. This assertion also signaled an increase in a tone of anti-Muslim sentiment in the conversation as a whole.

The reference to the Bamiyan Buddhas led to a general debate over the relationship between Hindus and Muslim in the town. One man asserted vehemently that there was no love between the communities and that the Muslims oppress and shun Hindus in numerous ways: by not inviting them into their homes, complaining about noise from temples, thinking Hindus are dirty, and so on. These assertions brought on an interesting discussion between the four (Hindu and Jain) men present.

Respondent1: If you will construct one *mandir* [temple], these ‘sister fucker’ Muslims get burnt. Have we ever asked them why they offer *namaz* [prayer] five times a day?

R2: We feel good that they take the name of God.

R1: If we use speakers in the temples, the whole area has a problem. All the *mian* [Muslims] of Malerkotla have a problem, they say our children are sleeping, stop it, you are doing *arati* [worship]. Sometimes I say let it go. Sometimes I reply with anger and sometimes with humbleness. Even a degraded asshole *mian* who does not know how to talk has an objection [i.e. to the Hindu prayer].

*mistri*: See, the thing is our Vishvakarma Mandir, a man came there and said, stop the speaker, it is the time of our *namaz*. I said go to Pakistan if you want to offer *namaz*.

R3: Leave it, don’t make jokes.

*mistri*: It is not a joke, it is a matter of right behavior.

R3: Maybe you might have relations with the wrong or bad people. I have relations with good people

This became a genuine and heated debate in the group, as they expressed obvious frustration and hostility towards the Muslim population. It emerged that one man (R1) felt unequivocally that Malerkotla was falsely painted as a peaceful place. The *mistri*'s feelings were mixed, and the other two (R2 and R3) firmly believed that Malerkotla’s reputation as a peaceful town of communal harmony was essentially true. They acknowledge that bad things happen everywhere

and they have in Malerkotla as well, but by and large most people are good. However, no group, religious or political, is exempt from corruption. The respondent R3 expressed the situation thus:

Only two or three percent are bad elements, only two or three percent spoil the whole community, now we Jains have four hundred houses, but only a few give the right way to society. Like those that are not allowing the *munshis* [Jain mendicants] to come to Malerkotla. All the institutions have villainy, there is cheating or swindling in all temples, there is cheating, they are running their own business, all are moneytakers, managers, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) and Deputy Commissioner (DC) are money takers.

He extended this general indictment of society, including the Sikh SDM and the Hindu DC, to express frustration with the political parties, all of who manipulate religion for their own advantage. He characterized the political party of the BJP, for example, as “a cunning party, they take the names of Hindus, but they are against them. They have taken the veil of religion.” All four men nodded in agreement with this assessment.

Ultimately, this exchange brought to the fore a number of counter-discourses to the dominant portrayal of Malerkotla as a zone of peace. This debate allowed both the airing of divisive and contradictory perspectives, and created an opportunity for members of the Jain and Hindu community to find space for themselves in a town heavily dominated by Muslims and Muslim history. Though well versed in, and even proud of, aspects of Malerkotla’s history, their pride is tinged with a knowledge that the Muslims of Malerkotla enjoy a privileged status, not just as previous rulers, but ongoing as the symbolic value of this Muslim constituency puts the town on every state and regional politician’s political map. Thus the ironworker simultaneously praised the miraculous powers of Haider Shaikh and expressed devotion to the saint, but in his narrative, he positioned Haider Shaikh above the Sultan. The respondent R1, who voiced the greatest distrust and dislike for Muslims, was quieted by his friends who attempted to remind him of the pervasiveness of corruption and that most people are good hearted. Such exchanges

show how communities within Malerkotla manage their own identities within the framework of Pathan Muslim dominance and power. Although frustration and hostility is articulated, it is clearly signaled to be inappropriate and efforts at pacifying each other and the other communities are undertaken. This echoes the perspective taken by Abdul Rauf, who asserted that the key to peace was the practice of self-policing within each religious community. In this technique of governance, hostile, extremist, or combative elements within each group are constrained and compelled through methods most appropriate and resonant to that individual or group. By internalizing this aspect of governmentality, the coercive power of the entire community reinforces the dominant identity of Malerkotla and the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh as places of peace.

## Conclusion

Malerkotla is not a utopia. It is not a place where bad things never happen or where people never antagonize one another. It is a place like any other: unique in some ways, typical in others. Because of this, the dynamic of inter-religious exchange within the territory is well-worth our attention. The shared sacred and civic spaces of Malerkotla provide stages upon which one can view the choreography of everyday life in a place where an ethic of harmony prevails. The particular stages I have chosen to explore involve shared narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices that by and large help to promote peace. Although I would stop short of asserting that an "institutionalized peace system" is in place here, there is undeniably a historical, political, and social process in Malerkotla that suppresses divisiveness and rewards conviviality.

In the previous chapters I have attempted to document the ways in which certain key individuals and events in Malerkotla's past have come to shape collective representations of the community's identity as a place of peace. The shared shrine to Haider Shaikh and the shared history of the *haa da naara* together play powerful roles in sustaining a peaceful multi-religious civil society. After not only withstanding but rising above the bloodshed of Partition in 1947, these individuals and events became symbols of Malerkotla's identity, appearing in narratives, memorialized in collective rituals, and idealized as models of good governance. In this way they have become powerful resources in the molding of a peaceful plural society in a region where such places were few and far between. These figures and events blend into the collective imagination of Malerkotla's residents and visitors, intermingling with later happenings such as the peace at Partition. The ethic of harmony that has come to characterize post-Partition Malerkotla rests upon the spiritual power of the founding father, Haider Shaikh and the *haa da naara* protest against the execution of Guru Gobind Singh's sons by the Shaikh's descendent Sher

Mohammad Khan. Without passing judgment on the veracity of the blessings given to Malerkotla by Haider Shaikh or Guru Gobind Singh (due to the *haa da naara*), it is still possible to perceive the profound impact that the shared belief in these blessings has had on the formation of a collective identity in Malerkotla. The coercive force of this collective representation constrains residents to act in accordance with the idea. Regular memorial recollections of key historic figures and events keep these powerful concepts alive and meaningful for the population. The regulation of the shrine and the town reinforces appropriate beliefs and behaviors, generating the institutional structures necessary to support the heterogeneous community.

At shared sacred and civic sites the narrative, ritual, and regulatory aspects of inter-religious exchange are key interactive arenas that, if successfully managed, contribute to peaceful communities. In this dissertation I sought to elucidate this process of exchange by exploring each of these elements. Chapter One documented much of Malerkotla's history, highlighting inter-religious relations since the foundation of the principality in 1454. From that survey it is clear that Malerkotla's past is full of events that could as easily have been the basis for highly antagonistic relations between religions. Yet since the Partition of 1947, when the kingdom did not succumb to the violence that swirled around it, the history of the state has been strategically mined by the community to provide a strong foundation for the perpetuation of peace. The remaining chapters demonstrated how that foundation is constructed through narrative, ritual, and regulatory practices that integrate the shared sacred and civic spaces of Malerkotla.

I began by exploring the narrative element of exchange: the stories people tell and those they have written down. Chapters Two and Three explored accounts of Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla respectively, showing how residents and visitors use these resources to produce a

harmonious identity. These chapters also revealed how these narratives have increasingly emphasized the peaceful and cooperative elements of the past, accelerating post-Partition due to the combined impact of Malerkotla's successful management of the crisis in 1947 and their suddenly high-profile role as the only Muslim constituency in Indian Punjab. This process is further documented in Part Two which addresses the ritual levels of exchange in the *dargah* as well as in the streets and homes of Malerkotla. Chapter Four on the tomb cult explored the ritual practices past and present engaged in by Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus. The delicate balance of these practices is carefully maintained in order to permit contradictory beliefs, behaviors, and theologies to coexist and even interpenetrate. Chapter Five explored the formulaic, repetitive modes of interaction that are central to the ethic of harmony and traditions of the town at large. I also documented ritual conflicts past and present and how they have been managed (by and large successfully) through the combined efforts of community members and leaders. Part Three turned to the regulatory regimes that structure and organize the *dargah* and the town. Chapter Six focused on the two forms of authority at the *dargah* – the *khalifahs* and the *chelas*, Hindu and Sikh devotees who experience possession by the saint's spirit. Chapter Seven discussed the history of authority in the civil and political spheres. It excavates electoral and minority religious politics in Malerkotla and Punjab, demonstrating the careful balance of power that is maintained in order to sustain the tenuous position of this Muslim majority community in a Sikh majority state in a Hindu majority nation. Together these spaces of discursive, ritual, and regulatory exchange constitute a polity characterized by mutual respect and recognition – a functioning plural society.

## ***Wilayat of Peace***

Rather than attempting to separate the religious from the civic or the political, in this dissertation I have sought to demonstrate how deeply interwoven these three aspects of society are. This is reflected in the understanding of many locals and visitors to Haider Shaikh's *dargah*, when they describe Malerkotla as the Shaikh's *wilayat*. This term identifies Malerkotla as the territory under his custodianship and encompasses both spiritual and temporal modes of power, referring to the ability and the authority to protect a particular region.<sup>589</sup> The notion of *wilayat* highlights the delicate balance between the spiritual and the temporal that sustains the collective representation of Malerkotla as a zone of peace. In the preceding chapters I have attempted to present the ways in which the saint and the settlement he founded serve symbolically shape the ethic of harmony that pervades the community. From the narratives people tell to the rituals they perform to the ways they govern their lives, this conceptual structure is embedded in the everyday lives of the community. Understood as *wilayat*, Malerkotla's protectors – known as *walīs* – are those figures whose shadows lie over the town's history and landscape. Haider Shaikh, Sher Muhammad Khan, and Iftikhar Ali Khan are the *buzurganedin*, the pious elders whose legacies continue to be used as resources by community members and leaders. Each ruler is associated with miraculous events: the foundation and preservation of the town, the protest on behalf of Gobind Singh's sons and the subsequent blessing of the Guru, and the success and safety at Partition are all moments which remain part of the active lore and self-imagining of the population. Significantly, though these important symbolic figures and events are open to multivocal representations and interpretations. People interact at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh in

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<sup>589</sup> The Arabic root, و - ل - ي signifies closeness and its derivations encompass meanings ranging from physical proximity, to friendship, to governance. *wilāyāt* in its temporal sense refers merely to sovereign power and governance. A *wālī* can signify both a worldly governor or guardian as well as a holy person or saint. A related term *mutawāllī* denotes a manager of a property, and is often applied to the caretakers of Muslim shrines. J. M. Cowan, ed., *Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1994).

a variety of ways, some tell stories that identify the saint as a warrior, others as a ruler, others as a miracle working *faqīr*. Some bow down to him and his descendents, some ask for blessings upon him or from him, and others visit in order to see and be seen among like-minded folks. Similarly, some are descended from Haider Shaikh by blood, others receive his descending spirit, and others simply respect his piety and legacy. The reasons and ways for visiting the *dargah* are many, but they provide a focused window onto the dynamic of inter-religious relations in Malerkotla. Here in this crowded, enclosed tomb shrine, there is plenty of space for all.

The tomb shrines of Muslim saints function as centers for the concentration and redistribution of the constitutive elements of authority. The rich ritual and narrative repertoires of these sites enable residents and devotees to assume multiple subject positions in relation to the shrine. The multiplicity activates and validates the *dargah* as a collective representation of a place in which an idealized plural society actually exists. This present existence is strengthened by narrative representations of the past efficacy of Haider Shaikh in preserving the peace and harmony of the region. The belief in the ongoing presence and accessibility of the saint's spirit makes the continuation of worship a critical element for residents and devotees. Proper *adab* (etiquette) must be observed in relation to the spirit, but the variant interpretations of what constitutes appropriate behavior or belief are rarely brought into conflict. In this way, the complex ritual and narrative repertoire of devotion and exchange at Haider Shaikh's *dargah* activates the site as a constitutive element in making Malerkotla a *wilayat* of peace.

Among the core of devotees and ritual specialists at the *dargah*, a number of individuals refer to Haider Shaikh as *darbar*, a Persian term evoking the authority associated with the court of a ruler. He is also referred to as *sarkar*, a Hindi term for government and temporal authority. The Shaikh is sometimes declared to be the president of the community of saints buried in

Malerkotla, indicating that he is the first and most powerful among the holy dead of the town. Some call him *badshah*, meaning ruler or emperor. The *mutawalli* caretaker of a much smaller local *dargah* described the Shaikh as the leader of a *rāhanī majlis* (spiritual gathering) of all the buried saints in the region. As the *mutawalli* explained the situation, "when a *majlis* occurs, all come together. These meetings are held, and then he also sits there. Baba Haider Shaikh is the *badshah* of all of them, he is a big *buzurg* [pious elder]."<sup>590</sup> This sentiment was echoed by a member of the *khalifah* family who does not sit at the shrine and rarely goes there himself. But he too asserted the supremacy and power of Haider Shaikh by giving the meaning of the saint's name: "Baba Haider Shaikh is the head [*sadr*] of all. Shaikh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan. The head of religion [*dīn*] and head of the world [*jahan*] also."<sup>591</sup> Such labels indicate that, at least symbolically, the true authority in town is Haider Shaikh, not the former Nawab or the current Municipal Committee. This demonstrates the dual role of the Sufi saint as master of both *duniya* and *dīn*, worldliness and godliness. In Malerkotla, as outlined in Chapter One, these roles *were* in fact joined in the early period of the kingdom, deepening Haider Shaikh's symbolic power of to protect the spiritual lives and the physical security of the region. The modern deployment of such representations of the Shaikh extend this interpenetration to the present. Malerkotla is not a pluralist society in which religious convictions are eradicated. On the contrary, the public exchange of piety is an important mode through which power is displayed.

### **Narratives, Rituals, and Regulations**

As discussed in relation to the narratives of Haider Shaikh and the *dargah*, Malerkotla's foundation by the saint is seen as auspicious and protective not just by descendants, rulers, and Muslims, but by the Hindu and Sikh population as well. His spiritual power, or *barakat*,

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<sup>590</sup> Personal interview, March 8, 2001.

<sup>591</sup> Personal interview, March 3, 2001.

pervades the land, protecting it from malign forces both internal and external. Each religious community finds a way to establish a link to this powerful symbolic figure. Muslims, especially the ruling elite, tend to historicize the saint, glorifying his imperial connections and his role as the pioneer of Islam in the region. Hindus and Sikhs tend to spiritualize him, emphasizing the saint's piety and power over his Muslim-ness or temporal authority. Haider Shaikh's *wilayat* is also extended throughout the town through strategic narrative linkages to other local shrines, through the oral accounts of the foundation and preservation of Malerkotla, and through the ritual embodiment of his spirit for the ongoing dispensation of healing, protection, and blessings. These processes allow Haider Shaikh's entourage of saintly and human assistants to expand his tradition to include non-Muslim figures and elements. This shared labor also contributes to the production and maintenance of peace.

Further, as outlined at the end of Chapter Seven in the conversation in which several Hindus who voiced antagonism towards Muslims were silenced, there is a deliberate suppression of counter narratives to the dominant identity of harmonious coexistence. This suppression occurs orally, as in that example, and through various written strategies. For example, potentially conflicting or antagonistic elements or accounts are incorporated into, and managed by, written histories such as the last Nawab of Malerkotla, Iftikhar Ali Khan's *History*. In dealing with the widespread belief in a pre-existing Hindu kingdom in the area of Malerkotla, the Nawab writes "It is not altogether improbable that according to ancient traditions this is the same village which was populated by Raja Bhim Sen, brother of Maharaja Yudhishtira of the Pandavas."<sup>592</sup> Rather than suppress a powerful Hindu history of the type that in many instances could contribute to animosity and lead to retribution, the Nawab deftly acknowledges this history

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<sup>592</sup> Khan, *A History of the Ruling Family*, p. 3.

and proceeds to recount his own genealogy of authority.<sup>593</sup> By invoking this Hindu past, Khan goes on to incorporate it into the broader historical frame of Malerkotla as a land of peaceful coexistence. The association with the *Mahabharata* does not diminish a grand narrative of Muslim superiority; rather it is one element in the rich and diverse heritage of Malerkotla. It is transformed into a point of pride, not contention.

The tomb itself and the opportunity for exchange and encounter within its confines are also constitutive elements in generating communal harmony. The nature of the rituals and practices that take place in and around the *dargah* outlined in Chapter Four illuminate the ways in which the simultaneity of difference is facilitated by the various ritual specialists and devotees who share the space. These emplaced practices are both the result of the manifest blessing of Haider Shaikh and they are themselves productive of that state of peace. The saint's *barakat* thus emerges in two ways: first through prayers and intercessory powers Haider Shaikh and the other saints in Malerkotla create a kind of force field around the settlement which prevents crises afflicting other areas such as war, terrorism, or natural disasters from touching Malerkotla.

These crucial expressive exchanges occur on a social level and must engage all of multiple "languages" in order for successful recognition to occur. We have seen some of the expressive arts of ritual, narrative, and spatial interactions in Malerkotla. Here we explored the formal and informal exchanges that facilitate recognition. The languages of expressive exchange at the regulatory level range from voting to visiting, from mediating to meeting, and from participating to observing. Thus the notion that plural society can be brought about through

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<sup>593</sup> Indeed it is the manipulation of just this sort of history that materially contributed to the exacerbation of tensions in India over the Babri Masjid. Indeed the extremely popular broadcast of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* on national television in India was a major factor in building Hindu nationalist fervor to the point where the sixteenth century mosque was destroyed on December 6, 1992. This has been thoroughly studied from a number of perspectives. One of the more interesting recent works on the subject is Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*, (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2001).

macrolevel programs, state intervention, or civil societal participation alone is insufficient. To be recognized the languages of love, of art, of selfhood – that is the languages of deepest meaning – must also become intelligible between persons and populations. Second, out of gratitude and respect for their safety and peace, faith in the saint is affirmed and validated. In acknowledgment of their blessings, residents of all religious, social, and ethnic groups come to the shrine and there they encounter each other. Having come for the same purpose, people manifest their devotion to the saint and recognize each other as mutual beneficiaries of the benevolent mercy of God and the saints.<sup>594</sup> One does not need to make a judgment about the metaphysical truth of this assertion to grasp the power of this widespread belief. The peace and unity in Malerkotla is a reality. Whether it is understood as a blessing from the saint or not, it must be cherished and maintained by continuing the traditions of the saints, honoring them, and respecting the others individuals and communities who do so as they are also integral in maintaining the efficacy of this belief. As we saw in the case of one local scheduled caste Hindu politician, he attends the shrine so as to demonstrate publicly that he is not against Muslims or Muslim places in any way. He and others see it as politically and socially advisable to openly participate in the tomb cult. Others express the more credulous view that at the shrine devotees exchange love between each other as they do with the Shaikh. Even those most critical of the

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<sup>594</sup> Charles Taylor, in recent work on multiculturalism in society asserts that in heterogeneous societies the struggle is for *recognition*, and this is an essentially dialogical process. The form of recognition may vary, but the fact of it cannot. Indeed one of the greatest crises of liberal political theory in the face of plural society is to define what constitutes recognition: the acknowledgement of difference and uniqueness or the erasure of difference and enforcement of universal equality. But in order to become fully human, we must first, in Taylor's view, define ourselves. This process is most fully articulated by Taylor in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1989). In order to understand the connection between identity and recognition, we must understand this process' "fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. For my purposes here, I want to take *language* in a broad sense, covering not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the 'languages' of art, of gesture of love, and the like. But we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others. People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. ...The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not monological, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical." Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition,"* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 32.

tradition of *ziyarat* do not directly attack or disparage the saint. The local Jama'at-i Islami and Tablighi Jama'at leaders adopt a quietist approach to reforming the Muslim population. The quality of the community in Malerkotla is such that intolerance and aggressive politics are not well-received.

The power of the shrine of Haider Shaikh to draw people together is evidenced not only by the local population who articulate their faith in the shrine but also by devotees from outside. The region of Punjab in which Malerkotla is situated was deeply affected by the trauma of Partition. The neighboring princely states of Patiala and Jind were devastated by inter-religious violence and nearly all the surviving Muslims left these regions.<sup>595</sup> Yet such tragedies have not negatively impacted attendance at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh by non-Muslims or non-residents. On the contrary, all local reports indicate an increase in attendance at Haider Shaikh's festivals since Partition. The Sikh rulers of Patiala never discontinued their annual offerings in support of the *dargah*. It is important to note also that especially after 1947, many *dargahs* came under new management and are currently maintained by Hindus or Sikhs. In a highly charged communal environment where Hindus are encouraged to boycott Muslim businesses and where Sikh nationalists are discouraged from attending non-Sikh shrines, it is significant that patronage

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<sup>595</sup> Once an elderly Muslim who had moved to Malerkotla from Patiala at Partition recounted to me a memory of seeing people pulled from mosques and Muslim bodies hung from minarets. For further works on the devastating impact on Punjab of the Partition, and especially on the role of the Maharaja of Patiala in fomenting the situation, see: Ian Copland, "The Master and the Maharajas: The Sikh Princes and the East Punjab Massacres of 1947," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2002), "The Political Geography of Religious Conflict: Towards an Explanation of the Relative Infrequency of Communal Riots in the Indian Princely States," *International Journal of Punjab Studies* (Volume 7, no. 1, 2000), and *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire: 1917-1947*, (New Delhi; Cambridge University Press, 1999); *Disturbances in the Punjab, 1947: A Compilation of Official Documents*, (Islamabad; Government of Pakistan, Cabinet Division, National Documentation Centre, 1995); Anders Bjorn Hansen, *Partition and Genocide: Manifestation of Violence in Punjab, 1937-1947*, (New Delhi; India Research Press, 2002); Ikram Ali Malik, *Hindu-Muslim Riots in the British Punjab (1849-1900)*, (Lahore; Gosha-i-Adab, 1984); Dr. Sir Gokul Chand Narang, *The Plight of Punjab Minorities under the So-Called Unionist Govt.*, edited by Ram Lal Tara, (Lahore; Sunday Times Press, 1941); B. S. Nijjar, *Punjab under the British Rule (1849-1947)*, (New Delhi; K B Publications, 1974); Qalb-i-Abid, *Muslim Politics in the Punjab, 1921-1947*, (Lahore; Vanguard, 1992); Mian Muhammad Sadullah, ed. *The Partition of the Punjab, 1947: A Compilation of Official Documents*, (Lahore; National Documentation Centre, 1983); Amarjit Singh, *Punjab Divided: Politics of the Muslim League and Partition, 1935-1947*, (New Delhi; Kanishka Publishers, 2001).

of Muslim shrines does not at least shift to those shrines managed by non-Muslims or that such pilgrimages do not diminish altogether.<sup>596</sup>

### **Giving Peace a Chance**

Having documented the range of perspectives past and present about Haider Shaikh, his tomb and his town, it emerges that in this community there are several factors that diminish the likelihood of dispute. First, the ownership and identity of the shrine are not in question. Although there is some physical evidence that could be used to challenge the architectural history of the site, and there are oral histories of a prior Hindu kingdom associated with an important Hindu epic, the last five hundred years of Muslim dominance has been of such a quality that efforts to challenge the site's identity have apparently never been seriously undertaken. Although many of the Nawabs seem to have been reasonable men and good leaders, several others appear in the histories as incompetent, even insane.<sup>597</sup> Yet, as surveys after Partition indicate, only a few of the elite Muslims left for Pakistan, while the rest of the population, Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim, remained in part due to their confidence in the Nawab and each other. The ongoing electoral success of the Pathan clan further testifies to a generally positive view of the Nawabs and *khalīfahs* and their role in governing not just the shrine but also the town.

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<sup>596</sup> Indeed, elsewhere in the dissertation I propose that it is exactly this feature that contributes to the growing popularity of Haider Shaikh's *dargāh* among non-Muslims. It is significant that in order to reach the *dargāh* one must come through one of the neighborhoods in Malerkotla that is almost wholly Muslim. Except on a Thursday or a festival day, few non-Muslims would be present in the streets leading up to the shrine. For Hindus and Sikhs coming from outside Malerkotla, this would be an unusual and possibly intimidating experience since for the last 55 years, there have been almost no Muslims in Punjab at all. Thus two generations have come in Punjab who have known few if any Muslims, even as they are surrounded by architectural evidence of their earlier presence in the form of mosques, homes, schools, and *dargāhs*.

<sup>597</sup> See for example a fascinating file on Nawab Ibrahim Ali Khan who appears to have gone quite mad at the end of his life. In the India Office Collection there are a couple letters from a British doctor who had been summoned to evaluate him in which his paranoias are detailed. IOC, R/1/1/696. *Mental Incapacity of Nawab*.

A second factor that reduces the likelihood of communal tensions in Malerkotla is that even in post-Partition Punjab when the previous numeric superiority of Muslims is radically reversed, the majority Sikhs and Hindus do not target this shrine as a painful reminder of an oppressive Islamic past. Quite the opposite is true. Political and social mileage is gained by openly embracing the *dargah* and its legacy, not by challenging it. Also, the political prominence of this lone Muslim constituency brings it special attention from the power brokers of the state. As the largest industrial town in its district, Malerkotla has enjoyed considerable growth over the last years. This also contributes to the third factor; the economic importance of the shrine to the entire Malerkotla community is evident. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims visit the shrine every year and many take advantage of their visit to purchase locally manufactured goods, especially metal ware.

Fourth, the active repertoire of narratives about Haider Shaikh and Malerkotla available to the community and the devotees from outside are wide ranging, non-exclusive and allow for a variety of usages by multiple interlocutors. The stories about Malerkotla told before and after 1947 focus on two symbolic events, the *haa da naara* and Partition. These moments stand out in sharp relief against the backdrop of what would otherwise be the rather unremarkable history of a minor princely state. Each account posits its own theory of Malerkotla's peaceful plural society. Fifth, the ritual life of Haider Shaikh's *dargah* demonstrates an additional level of integration. There is a relative uniformity of practice with variation occurring mostly in terms of degree. For example, most pilgrims approach the base of the tomb directly but their salutations range from simply raising their hands to total prostration, kissing, and pressing one's self to the tomb. Within the ritual space devotees may observe Islamic prayer styles believing that to be appropriate for the worship of a Muslim saint and they may use Islamic vocabulary to describe

their practices and experience. On the other hand, Hindus and Sikhs may employ modes of worship or terms that resonate more with their own traditions. This multivocal and heterogeneous ritual practice creates the necessary conditions for one of the important misrecognized results of ritual exchange as ritual performers inevitably observe and create space for each other, generating grounds for more sustained and engaged dialogue.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the belief in the protective power of the founding father is pervasive among all castes, classes, genders, age groups, and religions. The encounters at the tomb between devotees of all kinds are actively embraced and valued by the majority of residents and visitors. The local political authorities also celebrate the shrine. Even conservative Muslim groups who oppose *ziyarat* do not activate aggressively against the shrine, choosing less confrontational ways of spreading their views and promoting their own variety of secularism. Though their influence has and will likely continue to impact the local population, the tone and quality of their attitude towards the shrine is a significant factor in maintaining a peaceful and active tolerance.

### **Multivocal and Multiconfessional**

Haider Shaikh, his history, his hagiography, his *dargah*, and his territory can be made to fit into everyone's grand narrative of peace, no matter their religion or their orientation within that religion. For some the saint is one example of a pan-Indian process of Islamization. For others he is their progenitor, their Dadaji, whose arrival here is the origin of their own life, livelihood, and faith. For some the Shaikh is a powerful, miracle working saint, whose intercessory powers have brought them health, wealth, and children, as well as peace. And for some he is an important man whose marriage to an Emperor's daughter led to the settlement of the region, and whose legacy of peace and justice must be respected, but not worshipped. The

Shaikh is a chameleon to his interlocutors. He metamorphoses into each account, giving shape and substance to each person's idea of citizenship, devotion, domination, mediation, or heritage. The rituals performed at the tomb represent a range of ideas and behaviors available to the adherents of multiple religions. From the highly Islamic formality of the Ramadan *#urs*, to the efflorescence of people, practices and possessions at the *mela* to the mundane exchanges at the shrine at other times, the space is not only the stage upon which an ideal of openness and pluralism is publicly performed. The site itself, its structure, situation, and the ways in which its built environment is imagined, engaged, and maintained are also resources in generating an atmosphere of expansiveness rather than exclusivity. The fact that even residents who do not patronize the *dargah* often choose to, orient themselves in relation to the saint and the shrine further demonstrates how Haider Shaikh's *wilayat* works. This amorphous quality is possible because people make it so. Haider Shaikh can be anything he is needed to be because no one has tried (at least, no one has succeeded) in making him only one thing. Thus, his tradition, his tomb, and his town are capable of containing multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings and holding them, not merely in passive abeyance, but in active engagement in such a way that contradictions do not lead to clashes and multiplicity does not result in madness.

The present ability of Malerkotla to withstand internal and external stresses to the communal fabric is reinforced by past successes in handling conflicts that arose. As seen in Chapter Five with the multi-layered and complex set of issues that arose over the public audition of *arati* and *katha*, the situation was eventually resolved. But that resolution was primarily the result of efforts by the community members. Later challenges such as Ayodhya in 1992, Gujarat in 2002, and the fallout after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas have been successfully met. In part this has been possible because of the regular memorial observation of symbolic

events such as the *haa da naara* and the peace at Partition. Confronted with a constant droning litany of Malerkotla's peaceful nature, the furor of inflammatory events is readily dissipated.

The work of dissipating such challenges was discussed in Chapters Six and Seven where we saw how potential conflicts are obviated through active efforts of outreach by community leaders, residents, and visitors from outside. The effective regulation of the *dargah* and the town reflect the relations between authorities and the constituent population. The proper functioning of these shared ritual and civic spaces is assured by the cooperation between potentially competing interest groups and by the coercive force of Malerkotla's dominant ethic of harmony.

The events and encounters discussed in Chapters Five and Seven effectively dispel any notion of peace as merely the non-event of violence or as a forced stasis. In the dispute over the public performance of *arati* and *namaz* a very serious division in Malerkotla's community fabric could have taken root. Likewise, the virulent sentiments expressed by some within the Hindu community today could, if allowed, escalate into a much more pervasive and poisonous sentiment. To control these events and exchanges, force is involved, as is compulsion, and even oppression. Oppositional positions and antagonisms are actively silenced both publicly and privately, through the coercive power of the governing regimes of authority. Some of these coercive techniques are institutionalized, such as peace committees, Municipal Committees, community welfare societies, and the owner-operator *khalīfahs* at the *dargah* of Haider Sheikh. Others methods are semiformal, such as the procedures employed by Hindu and Sikh *chelas* in encouraging their clientele to support and patronize the Muslim *khalīfahs*. Their conversational tactics are given strength and a degree of formality, as they temporally and temporarily become vehicles for the voice of the saint. Informal, inter- and intra-personal exchanges also reinforce the positive value on bridge building, conciliation, and inter-religious harmony. As evidenced in

the conversation last cited between several Hindus and Jains, the opportunity to voice opposition is critical, but is actively countered and suppressed. The peace of Malerkotla is by no means devoid of pressure, social controls, and enforcement, but it is also a point of pride and a major aspect of the community's identity. The symbolic power of this identity is an important resource for all the entire community as it has heightened the civic profile on the state level, maximizing Malerkotla's ability to compete for finite resources in terms of government support and political power. The personal value of the community identity is perhaps best expressed by one of the residents who said, "Our forefathers lived together, Hindu Muslim and Sikh. In 1947 Muslims from here did not migrate and lived here in harmony. If some small quarrels occur, later on all become one. Our nature is that we easily go on the same way as earlier, the way of love and harmony."

### **Practicing Pluralism**

In this dissertation I highlight the minor, daily activities that contribute to peace because they are typically taken for granted, both by social theorists and by communities themselves. But the importance of such exchanges, such conscious efforts at inclusion and participation is, I believe, a much undervalued measure of the depth of engaged pluralism in a multicultural society. The role of shared spaces, both sacred and civic, in supporting multiconfessional communities is also a crucial part of the practice of pluralism. As Diana Eck explains, "pluralism requires the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another."<sup>598</sup> In Malerkotla these spaces are numerous, and they are *cultivated*, they are not wholly accidental. At the level of governance, political and civil society, and in everyday contexts, people of all religious affiliations engage in a variety of exchanges from the economic to the interpersonal.

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<sup>598</sup> Diana Eck, "The Challenge of Pluralism," *Nieman Reports* (Volume XLVII, no. 2, 1993), available at [http://www.pluralism.org/research/articles/cop.php?from=articles\\_index](http://www.pluralism.org/research/articles/cop.php?from=articles_index)

They do so not by bracketing their religious identities, but by using their religious beliefs as a basis for such exchange. As in the example of the Jama#at-i Islamī leader who actively sought to build bridges with other faiths, it is clear that one does not have to forsake a strong commitment to one's own religion in order to engage in inter-religious dialogue. Indeed, for a genuine dialogue to take place, retaining one's religious identity is necessary.<sup>599</sup>

Thus relativism, perhaps as much as active intolerance, thwarts genuine inter-religious understanding. A religiously plural society in which the politics of recognition are functioning optimally goes beyond mere tolerance. Tolerance, after all, is "a deceptive virtue. In fact, tolerance often stands in the way of engagement. Tolerance does not require us to attempt to understand one another or to know anything about one another. Sometimes tolerance may be all that can be expected. It is a step forward from active hostility, but it is a long way from pluralism."<sup>600</sup> In Malerkotla, pluralism exceeds the minimum requirements of tolerance. In this diverse region, the politics of recognition occur at every level of society and have sustained the community through numerous times of stress.

This study of the ritual, narrative, and regulatory practices at the *dargah* of Haider Shaikh and the town of Malerkotla demonstrated how shared shrines and shared civic space promote and even generate a dynamic of inter-religious engagement deliberately designed to promote cooperation and discourage discord. In particular, these shared spaces illuminated the ways in which the highly fraught relations between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are carried out on a daily basis through these symbolic zones of exchange. At these sites non-Muslims and

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<sup>599</sup> As Eck points out, "pluralism is not simply relativism, but makes room for real commitment. In the public square or in the interfaith council, commitments are not left at the door. On the contrary, the encounter of a multicultural society must be the encounter of commitments, the encounter of each other with all our particularities and angularities. This is a critical point to see plainly, because through a cynical intellectual sleight of hand, some critics have linked pluralism with a valueless relativism -- an indiscriminating twilight in which "all cats are gray," all perspectives equally viable, and as a result, equally un compelling. The encounter of a pluralistic society is not premised on achieving agreement, but achieving relationship." Eck, "The Challenge of Pluralism."

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

Muslims alike engage Islamic space ritually and discursively, deriving spiritual and political benefit from the inter-religious experience. As we shall see, stories and personal testimonies activate the multi-confessional shrine and town as symbolic identity markers, ritual conflicts are circumvented through dialogue and mutual validation. And finally, regulatory competition at the managerial, proprietary, and political levels is negotiated and managed in both arenas of shrine and town in order to maintain the dominant ethos of harmony. Contrary to the view that shared shrines and multi-religious communities are inherently conflicted, at these places although distinctions between religions are often made, discrepancies are rarely seen as antagonistic or threatening. On the contrary, the multivocality of the shared ritual, narrative and administrative life of the shrines and the town is not only part of the appeal but is also a source of their effective power. Thus, these shared sacred places serve as powerful resources for community building and the promotion of harmonious civil society. As interactive nodes between individuals, religions, genders, classes, age groups, etc., the bodily and discursive practices and experiences at the site are opportunities for the public performance of a community and individual identity characterized by openness and inclusiveness rather than exclusivity and hostility.

## Appendix A: Malerkotla Ruling Family

Ruler	Years Ruled
Shaykh Sadruddin Sadar-i Jahan	1454-1515
Shaykh #Isa	1508-1538
Khan Muhammad Shah	1538-1545
Khwaja Madud Khan	1545-1566
Fateh Muhammad Khan	1566-1600
Muhammad Bayzid Khan	1600-1659
Feroz Khan	1659-1672
Sher Muhammad Khan	1672-1712
Ghulam Hussain Khan	1712-1717
Jamal Khan	1717-1755
Bhikan Khan	1755-1763
Bahadur Khan	1763-1766
#Umar Khan	1766-1780
Asadullah Khan	1780-1784
Ataullah Khan	1784-1810
Wazir Ali Khan	1810-1821
Amir Ali Khan	1821-1846
Mehboob Ali Khan	1846-1857
Sikander Ali Khan	1858-1871
Ibrahim Ali Khan	1871-1908
Ahmad Ali Khan	1908-1947
Iftikhar Ali Khan	1947-1948

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## **Appendix B: *Haa da naara* translation**

Source: Khan, Iftikhar Ali. *History of the Ruling Family of Sheikh Sadruddin Sadar-I-Jahan of Malerkotla (1449 A.D. To 1948 A.D.)*. Edited by R.K. Ghai. Patiala: Punjabi University Press, 2000 [1948], page 35-6.

O mighty king of the world who on account of thy justice has placed thy throne on the azure vault; may the dappled horse of the skies be ever under thy control because thou hast eclipsed the brilliance of Sun and Moon by the splendour of thy innumerable victories.

The humble and devoted petitioner with all respect due to the grandeur of the shadow of God and to the might of the saviour of the world, most respectfully begs to lay his humble appeal before your most Gracious majesty and hopes from Your Imperial majesty's unfathomable kindness and illimitable magnanimity that the August person of the shadow of God, vice regent of the holy Prophet (Peace [page 36] be on him) in this world, the incarnation of God's mercy over his creatures by sheer magnificence, be pleased to bestow his compassion and forgiveness on the young sons of Gobind Singh the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikh nation. The Viceroy of Sirhind province with a view of avenging the disobedience and disloyal activities of the Guru which might have been committed by him, has without any fault or crime of the guiltless and innocent children simply on the basis of their being the scions of Guru Gobind Singh, condemned these minor sons liable to execution and has proposed to wall them up alive till they die. Although no one dare to raise an objection against the order of the Viceroy whose order is as inevitable as death, yet the faithful servants and well-wishers of Your August majesty's empire deem it most advisable to humbly appeal and bring to Your Majesty's benign notice. May it be said that if in view of certain important political considerations Your Majesty is disposed to inflict suitable punishment on the Sikh Nation for their undesirable activities in the past, it would be quite compatible with justice but your Majesty's humble and devoted servant thinks that it would, in

now way be consistent with the principles of sovereignty and supreme power to wreak the vengeance of the misdeeds of a whole nation on two innocent children who, on account of their tender age and quite innocent and unable to take a stand against the all powerful Viceroy. This sort of action obviously appears to be absolutely against the dictates of Islam and the laws propounded by the founder of Islam (May God's blessings be showered on him) and Your Majesty's humble servant is afraid that the enactment of such an atrocious Act would perpetually remain an ugly blot on the face of Your Majesty's renowned justice and righteousness. It may graciously be considered that the mode of inflicting the punishment and torture as contemplated by the Viceroy of Sirhind can by no means be considered compatible with the principles of Supreme rule, equity and justice.

In view of above considerations Your Majesty's humble and devoted servant most respectfully takes the liberty of suggesting that if your Majesty considers it expedient that the sons of Shri Guru Gobind Singh may be kept under restraint from indulging in disloyal activities, it would be more appropriate, if they could be interned in the Royal capital at Delhi, till they are duly reformed, so as to willingly acknowledge allegiance and loyalty to the throne. In the alternative both the boys may be placed under my care so as to keep a check on their actions and movements and not to allow them to entertain any kind of ideas of sedition or disloyalty in their minds. Although the humble petitioner fears that this humble appeal which is prompted exclusively by the sense of veracity and loyalty to the throne may be deemed as transgressing the limits of propriety, yet the fear of God [page 37] and the urge of faith does not allow the undue suppression of truths. If this humble appeal has the honour of meeting the Royal acceptance, it shall be most fortunate. If however unfortunately it is deprived of the honour of acceptance, still Your Majesty's humble and devoted servant shall have the consolation of having performed the

sacred duty of expressing what was right and just and not having allowed his pen to deviate in the expression of truth.

**Appendix C: letter from the last Nawab, Iftikhar Ali Khan, to M.R. Bhide, Esq. the Regional Commissioner and Home Minister of the PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) dated January 11, 1950.**

My dear Mr. Bhide,

With reference to your enquiry the other day at Patiala I am sending you a detailed statement regarding management, etc. of the Shrine of Hazrat Shaikh Sadarud Din Sadar-i-Jehan situated at Malerkotla.

The Shaikh was the founder of the Malerkotla State and common ancestor of the Ruling Family, was well known for his sanctity and held in great reverence by persons of all castes and creed. Impressed by his piety and bravery Bahlol Lodhi, King of Delhi married his daughter Taj Murrassa Begum to him. The Shaikh died in 1508 and is buried in Maler. His Shrine is held in great reverence by people of all castes and creeds and specially Sikhs and Hindus come from distant places to pay homage and offerings and nazars, even up to the present day.

The management of the Shrine is carried on as a private right jointly by the Khalifas and the Mujawars ever since the demise of the Shaikh without any interference whatever by the State. The Khalifas are also direct descendants of the Shaikh.

There is no permanent dedicated income for the maintenance of the Shrine and the only income which is considered as personal income of the Khalifas and the Mujawars, is from offerings and nazars presented by persons on the occasion of Urs and specially on Thursdays falling in the month of Jeth, with Nirjala Ikadshi.

The income is distributed between Khalifas and Mujawars as follows:-

<u>Class of Income</u>	<u>Share of Khalifas</u>	<u>Share of Mujawars</u>
Cash	Rupees in coins or C. Notes, small coins presented by one person to the total value of one rupee or more provided that in any pice coins are included in the change they will go to Mujawars	Pice, and all small coins in case the nazar from one person is below the value of one rupee
Livestock	all species of animals above goat and sheep	goat and sheep and all other livestock like poultry
Cloth and Jewelry	All woolen and silken cloth All Kilaats of Cotton cloth and Ornaments which are presented with Khilaats. Three pieces of cotton Cloth constitute a complete Khilaat	Any number of cotton cloth pieces falling short of a complete Khilaat and all ornaments presented separately

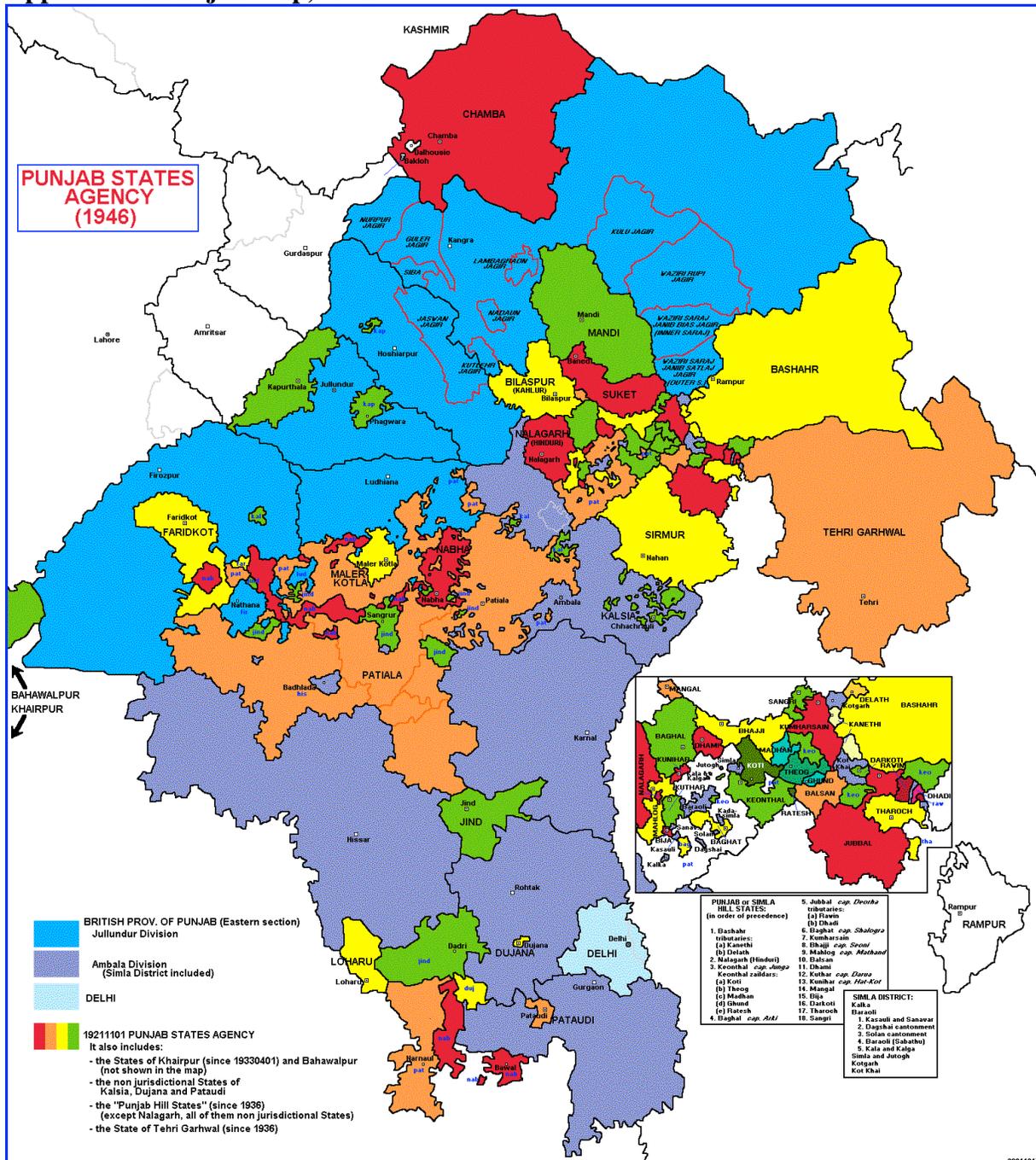
Any other lump sum or lands awarded by any one go to the Khalifas. The expenditure towards repairs of the Shrine and other incidental charges is borne by the Khalifas and Mujawars jointly by contribution at a ratio of  $\frac{1}{4} : \frac{3}{4}$ . A sum of rs 250/- is earmarked for the purpose and is annually deducted from the joint income according to the above ratio from the joint income. Any further sum if and when required is raised by joint subscription at the same ratio. The

expenditure is controlled by the Senior Khalifa of the time. Khalifa Bahawal Khan is at present the Senior Khalifa.

With regards, yours sincerely, Iftikhar Ali Khan"

Source: Punjab State Archives, Dharam Arth, 464/103.

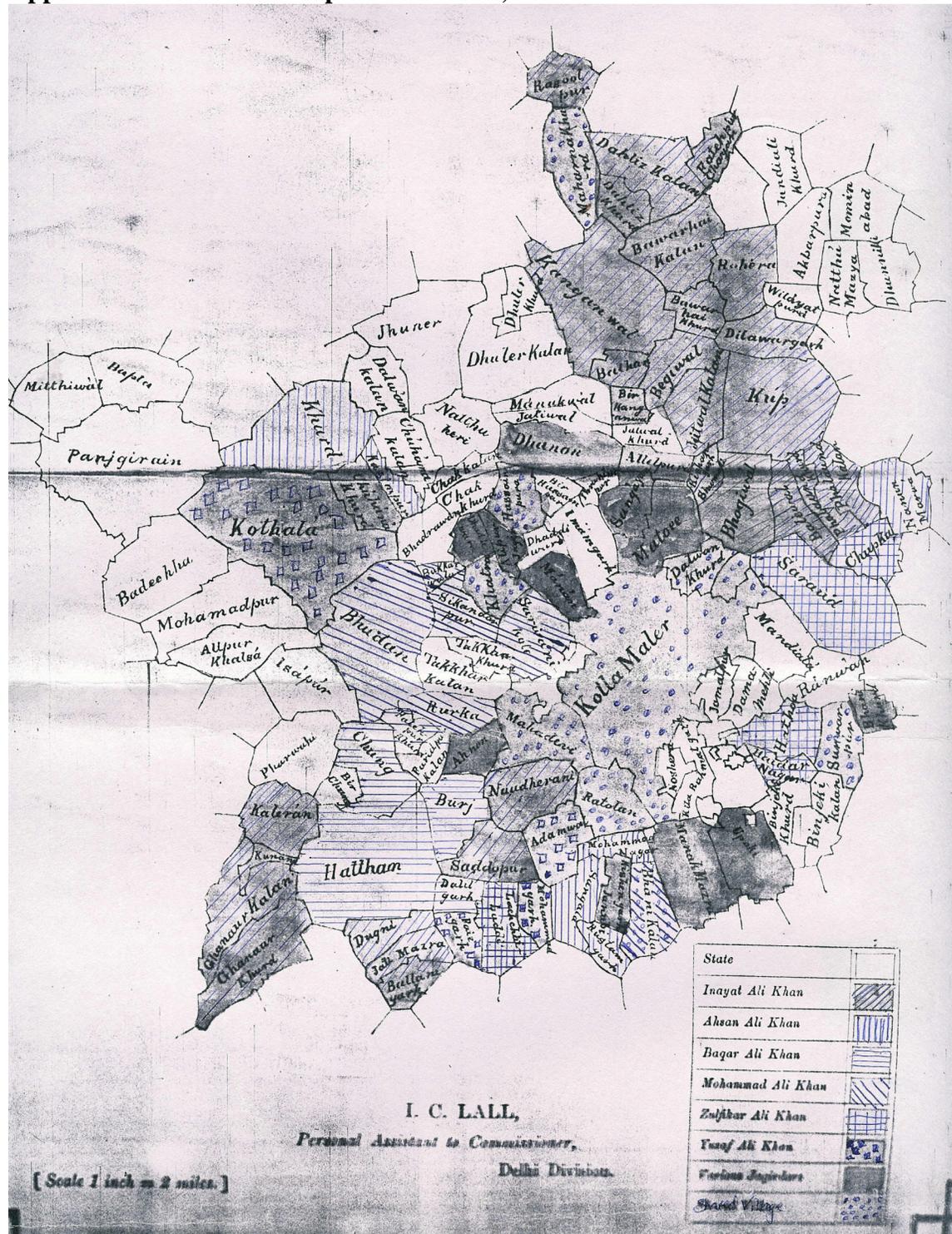
## Appendix D: Punjab Map, 1946



Malerkotla State is the yellow shaded territory in the center, slightly to the left. It is surrounded by the princely states of Patiala and Nabha, and Ludhiana District.

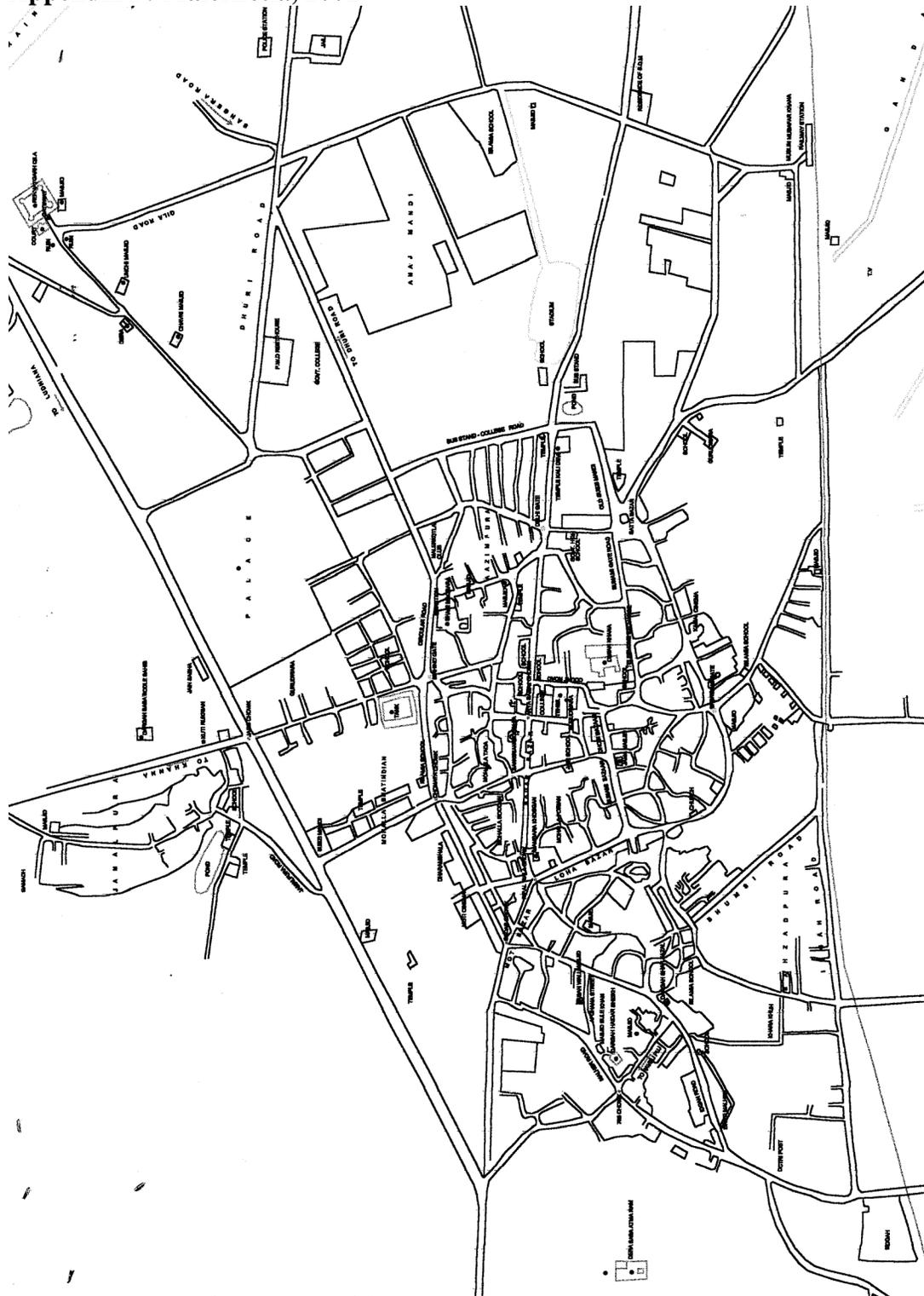
Source: <http://www.terra.es/personal7/jqvaraderey/punjab.htm>

Appendix E: Settlement Map of Malerkotla, 1891



Source: C. L. J. H. Grey, *Orders Passed on the Assessment Report of the Maler Kotla State*.  
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Appendix F: Malerkotla, 2001



Source: Cultural Resource Conservation Initiative

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