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The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies

The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies
Edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech

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Dedication

(p. v) *Dedicated to the memory of*

Harbans Singh, W. H. McLeod, N. Gerald Barrier, and W. Owen Cole

pioneers in the field of Sikh Studies

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Preface FREE
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(p. vi) (p. vii) # Preface

THE Oxford University Press has been publishing substantial academic texts in their Handbook series of which there are now well over one hundred. These texts are geared towards advanced graduate students as well as research scholars, and often include the world's leading authorities on the respective subjects of each individual Handbook. What make these texts so exciting are their scope and the fact that they often set the pace of the particular field with which they deal. The Oxford University Press handpicked one of the editors, Pashaura Singh, from an international pool of scholars in the field of Sikh Studies, who then selected a co-editor, Louis E. Fenech, to assist him in this project. After going through the review process the proposal for this new research project was formally approved by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press. The present Handbook contains fifty-one essays by a team of international experts in the field of Sikh Studies, integrating the study of Sikhism within a wide range of critical and, in many ways, post-colonial perspectives on the nature of religion, society, literature, art, institutions, gender, diaspora, ethno-nationalism, and revisionist historiography. It will provide a suitably lucid and critically nuanced volume which integrates all of these perspectives into a single framework, an innovation well in keeping with the mandate of the new series of Oxford Handbooks. This volume is being published online first, to be followed by the print edition in 2013–14.

Our foremost gratitude goes to Tom Perridge, Commissioning Editor, Oxford University Press (UK), for inviting us to bring out this timely volume in the field of Sikh Studies. We thank Elizabeth Robottom, Alexander Johnson, Alixandra Gould, and Molly Davis for overseeing this project in both online and print publications. We also acknowledge the support of the Dr Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California, Riverside, Dr Jasbir Singh Saini Trust and the Sikh Foundation of Palo Alto, California. As a matter of fact this volume has been a significant venture for us, and we would like to thank our esteemed authors for their patience and collaboration,

and for accepting our critique of their work in the process of revision with grace and perseverance.

This Handbook is divided into eight parts, covering historical, literary, ideological, institutional, artistic, diasporic, and social expressions of *Sikhi* ('Sikh-ness'), ending with future trajectories. Although the essays are well documented and discuss certain sensitive issues in a scholarly fashion, the interpretations are the responsibility of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the editors, sponsors of the volume, or the publishers. Some contributors withdrew from this project at the eleventh hour for personal reasons. We wish to record our gratitude both to those (p. viii) colleagues who met the deadlines and those who stepped in at short notice to fill unanticipated gaps. Our earnest thanks go to our spouses, Baljeet K. Singh and Christine Fenech, who provided their unflinching support on a number of occasions when we were facing some let-downs. This volume is dedicated to four great pioneers in the field of Sikh Studies—Harbans Singh (1921–98), W. H. McLeod (1932–2009), N. Gerald Barrier (1940–2010) and W. Owen Cole (1931–2013)—with gratitude for their scholarly contributions and admiration for their vision. They have been the trailblazers for new generations of scholars.

Pashaura Singh

Louis E. Fenech

30 April 2013

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Balbinder Singh Bhogal is Associate Professor of Religion and Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies, at Hofstra University, New York. His research is focused at the intersection of various discourses of Continental and Indic philosophy, mysticism and decolonization, translation and hermeneutics. Recent publications are 'Oak Creek Killings: The Denial of a Culture of Oppression', editorial for *SOPHIA* (2012); 'The Hermeneutics of Sikh Music (*rāg*) and Word (*shabad*)', *Sikh Formations* (2011); 'Decolonizations: Cleaving Gestures that Refuse the Alien Call for Identity Politics', *Religions of South Asia* (2010); 'Sikh *Dharam* and Postcolonialism: Hegel, Religion and Zizek', *Australian Religion Studies Review* (2012); and 'The Animal Sublime: Rethinking the Sikh Mystical Body', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2012).

W. Owen Cole is one of the pioneers of Sikh studies in the UK. He has taught at all stages of education from primary school to university, his interests being training student teachers in the areas of multicultural and religious education. He has co-authored *Six Religions in the Twenty-First Century* (Stanley Thornes, 2001), with Peggy Morgan. Most recently he has written *Understanding Sikhism* (Dunedin Press, 2004); *Cole Sahib* (Sussex Academic Press, 2009); and *The Jesus Diary* (2013, published on Kindle), a fictional but serious study of the tradition behind the Christian New Testament.

Meena Dhanda is a Reader in Philosophy and Cultural Politics at the University of Wolverhampton. She was a Commonwealth Scholar and a Rhodes JRF at the University of Oxford. Her publications include *The Negotiation of Personal Identity* (Saarbruken: VDM Verlag, 2008); *Reservations for Women* (ed.) (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2008); and several papers. As a Leverhulme Research Fellow (2010–12) she conducted primary research on Punjabi Dalits, which she is currently shaping into a book: *Caste Aside: A Philosophical Study of Cultural Identity and Resistance of Punjabi Dalits* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014).

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Louis E. Fenech is Professor of Sikh and South Asian History at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of a number of articles on the Sikh tradition as well as three Oxford monographs: *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'* (OUP, 2000); *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: The Court of God in the World of Men* (OUP, 2008); and *The Sikh Zafar-namah of Guru Gobind Singh: A Discursive Blade in the Heart of the Mughal Empire* (OUP, 2013).

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William J. Glover is an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan with appointments in both Architecture and the Department of History. His research explores the imbrication of built environments, knowledge cultures, and urban processes in colonial South Asia. His book, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008) won the American Institute of Pakistan Studies 2008 Book Award. He is the former Director of the University of Michigan's Center for South Asian Studies (2007–9), and former Associate Director of the International Institute at the University of Michigan (2009–11).

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Harpreet Singh is a postdoctoral fellow and a member of the faculty in the Department of South Asian Studies at Harvard University. His dissertation, 'Religious Identity and the Vernacularization of Literary Cultures of the Panjab, 1500–1700', traced the development of Sikh, Islamic, and Hindu discursive traditions in local languages. His current research includes a focus on religious nationalism in modern South Asia. He co-founded the Sikh Coalition—the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the world—in the wake of hate crimes against Sikhs in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 attacks.

Jaideep Singh teaches Ethnic Studies at California State University, East Bay. He founded California's first Sikh Students' Association in 1989 at UC Berkeley, and in 1996 co-founded the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), the first Sikh American civil rights organization. He has published several scholarly and community-oriented pieces about discrimination and Sikh and South Asian American communities. His first manuscript examines three instances of grass-roots political organizing by Sikh Americans prior to 9/11, and his second documents the Sikh American community's intense encounters with domestic terrorism after 9/11.

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Kamalroop Singh has completed his doctorate at Birmingham University. His research focus is on the textual history and manuscripts of *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib*. He has co-authored with Gurinder Singh Mann, *Dasam Granth: Questions and Answers* (Archimedes Press, 2010). He has a number of forthcoming publications and essays. He currently works as an expert linguist for the Crown Prosecution Service in London.

Kashmir Singh has been Professor, Head of Department, and Dean of Law Faculty in Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. His research focus is on law relating to the Sikhs. His publications include *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras* (GNDU, 1989); *Sikh Gurdwara Legislation—All India Perspective* (Singh Bros., 1991); *Commentary on the Sikh Gurudwaras Act 1925* (GNDU, 2004); and *Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Law and Practice* (in press). He contributed to the drafting of All India Sikh Gurdwaras Bill, Pakistan Sikh Marriage Ordinance 2008, and some amendments to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925.

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh is the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies and Crawford Family Professor at Colby College in Maine, USA. She has published extensively in the field of Sikhism. Her books include *Of Sacred and Secular Desire* (IB Tauris, 2012); *Sikhism: An Introduction* (IB Tauris, 2011); *Cosmic Symphony* (Sahitya Akademy, 2008); *The Birth of the Khalsa* (SUNY, 2005); *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent* (1993); *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus* (1995, 2001); *Metaphysics and Physics of the Guru Granth Sahib* (1981). She is on the editorial board of the *History of Religions*.

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Pritam Singh is the Director of Studies of the doctoral programme on economic development at Oxford Brookes University, Oxford. His two recent books are *Economy, Culture and Human Rights: Turbulence in Punjab, India and Beyond* (Three Essays Collective, 2010) and *Federalism, Nationalism and Development: India and the Punjab Economy* (Routledge, 2008), and he has co-edited *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context* (OUP, 1999). He is one of the founding editors of the *International Journal of Punjab Studies* and is on the editorial advisory board of several journals including the *Journal of Punjab Studies*.

Sunit Singh is a PhD candidate in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. His dissertation examines the transnational conjunctures that shaped the quixotically (p. xxii) framed attempt by radicalized Punjabis in the Ghadr Party to spark a socialist revolution in India in the midst of the First World War. He writes on a broad range of issues related to Sikh history and politics.

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Introduction

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The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies
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Abstract and Keywords

This introduction begins with the changing dynamics of the field of Sikh Studies in recent times, passing through 'growing pains' and finally getting academic acclaim with the establishment of eight Endowed Chairs of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in North American universities. The main theme around which the *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* revolves is 'expressing Sikhness' (Sikhi), an inclusivistic tactic which allows the multiplicity of Sikh voices throughout the Sikh world today and throughout the history of the Sikh community (Panth) to be heard without privileging any singular one. Finally, it provides a clear and coherent outline of the volume, putting into context the range and diversity of material covered in various essays.

Keywords: Gurmat, gurbāṇī, Khalsa, Panth, Sikhi, Sikh Studies, Golden Temple Complex, Operation Blue Star, Truth and Reconciliation Commission

As young students of South Asian History during the last millennium it was a rather routine procedure to approach the study of the Sikh tradition as if the image of the tradition conveyed in the very few textbooks dedicated to the so-called World Religions, which deigned to include a mention or two of Sikhism, was a normative one. That is to say, a singular standard Sikhism whose ideal embodiment was observed in the male or female Sikh of the Khalsa, the martial order of Sikhs inaugurated by the tenth Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 CE, who is 'complete' (*tiār-bar-tiār*) with the Five Ks (*pañj kakke*), rejects all forms of caste and gender discrimination, has been administered the initiatory elixir (*amrit*) through the ceremony of the double-edged sword (*khaṇḍe kī pahul*), and who observes the many other sartorial, behavioural, ritual, and dietary restrictions and obligations laid down in the modern 'code of conduct', finally settled upon by Sikh intellectuals in 1950 and known as the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā*.

The sheer hegemony of this image of Sikh identity has been so commonplace since the late nineteenth century that even for many Sikhs themselves such a view of the Sikh tradition and Sikh identity tended and continues to prevail. One hundred years of

constant, ubiquitous snapshots of this sole picture of apparent Sikh orthodoxy with little challenge from within has reified just this vision, an image which predominates if one is to judge from the many virtual Sikh representations on the World Wide Web and actual representation in Sikh organizations: accordingly, this exclusive Sikhism equals the solitary revelation of the Sikh Gurus and this, in turn, is the equivalent of Khalsa Sikhism. Case closed. The same may be said for the history of the Sikhs and their tradition, and the way in which Sikhs have constructed their pasts over the centuries (Murphy 2007; Dhavan 2007), both of which have been collapsed into a singular triumphalist narrative in which all Sikh roads ultimately merge and lead to the construction and subsequent glory of the Sikh Khalsa. After all, was the Khalsa not destined to rule according to Guru Gobind Singh (*rāj karegā khālsā*) and was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom (1799–1849 (p. 2) CE) not subsequently proclaimed to be that of the Khalsa (*sarkār khālsā jī*)? Alternative narratives, instantiated in relics and landscapes (Murphy 2012), or oral and written and the manuscripts in which these were consigned to posterity were, twentieth-century Sikh ideologues opined, the production of ignorant Sikhs or blatant attempts to malign true Sikh history for nefarious ends.

Little were we thus prepared for the great diversity and multiple Sikh narratives that confronted us as we engaged the many, many Sikhs across the world who practised and lived this tradition, or better yet these traditions they often called Sikhism, demonstrating vibrancy, a stunning vitality not often recognized by textbooks and rarely seen by those non-Sikhs (and Sikhs themselves) who merely lumped together as one the entire Sikh community, a public whose members collectively and generally refer to themselves as the *panth* or Panth (pronounced 'punt'). Indeed, judging alone by both textbooks, the authors of which constructed knowledge about religions predominantly upon written texts deemed scriptural (an Enlightenment legacy to be sure), and by outside and some inside observers whose knowledge of everyday Sikh life overall was meagre, a large number of Sikhs were to be best understood as Sikhs who miserably failed at being Sikh! The power and persuasiveness of that remarkable image and its narrative was such, put another way, that Sikhs and others simply ignored the very evidence of their eyes and ears, suspicious of all the plurality exhibited and exercised in the lives of their many fellow Sikhs and the multiple alternative Sikh narratives that informed their understanding of being over time and their notions of the Sikh community. It was a pity that few people took to heart some of the most beautiful examples of the Sikh tradition's commitment to plurality and diversity as found within the sacred Sikh scriptures.

The Sikh Gurus speak to this plurality by repeatedly emphasizing the inexhaustible potentiality of the meaning contained in *gurbāṇī*, the 'utterances of the Gurus'. No matter how much one studies and interprets these sacred utterances, the Gurus often proclaim,

an infinity of meaning remains yet to be fathomed. In this context, the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das asserts:

> *ratanā ratan padārath bahu sāgaru bhariā rām / bāṇī gurbāṇī lāgge tinha hathi chaṛiā rām*
>
> The vast ocean is filled with treasuries containing jewels and pearls. This is attainable by such [people] as are devoted to *gurbāṇī*.
>
> (GGS: 442)

Guru Ram Das thus compares the meaning of *gurbāṇī* to an immeasurable ocean of jewels. Those individuals who dive deeply into that ocean through reflection and meditation find within themselves, and see within others, a treasure trove of gems and realize the true spiritual status of both themselves and additional people. Others who remain on the surface level of that ocean may be dealing only with the literal sense of the sacred utterance, without having any deeper understanding of its meaning. Bhai Gurdas, the predominant seventeenth-century Sikh interpreter of *gurbāṇī*, likewise echoes a similar (p. 3) understanding of the depth and richness of the meaning of the utterances of the Gurus and by extension the variety which permeates the Sikh tradition:

> *taise gurbāṇī bikhai sakal padārath hai joī joī khojai soī soī nipjāvahī*
>
> In the same way [that the ocean is filled with riches], all treasures are contained in *gurbāṇī*. Whatever one seeks from it, the same will one attain.
>
> (*Kabitt* 546).

Singular normative constructions such as those implicitly critiqued in the *bāṇī* ('utterances') of Guru Ram Das and Bhai Gurdas are by no means applied to the Sikhs and Sikhism alone of course, but plague virtually all ideological and (dare we say it) mystical constructs of Indic and of Islamicate origin, constructs fashioned and perpetuated today by both Indians and Europeans and also by people across what we refer to today as the Middle East (particularly when we realize that the fantastical image of India is one also readily discovered within early Islamicate, Arabic, and Persian literature; for example, within Abu'l Qasim Ferdausi's famous Persian epic, the *Shāh-nāmah*). Inevitably, like the members of these other Indic/Islamicate traditions, the Sikh world has had throughout its history and continues to have a fair number of dominant, institutional, regional, national, and local expressions of faith and practice in a constant dynamic, fluid relationship with one another, continually influencing each other and defining and redefining what it has meant and continues to mean to be a Sikh and a member of the Sikh community in different places around the globe. It is worth noting

that at no time in the history of the Sikh people have any of these identities or histories or imaginaries understood as Sikh been seen as ‘in the making’ or ‘fuzzy’ by their constituents. These were serious claims and understandings that galvanized and, more importantly, solidified an individual’s sense of self; one’s impressions of personhood and belonging, of community and other, diachronically and synchronically.

There have to this end been instances, many, in the history of the Sikhs during which Sikh authors and groups have attempted to convey Sikh ideologies and practices and histories in genres, formats, and languages and, indeed, as Anne Murphy has made clear, in relics and other materials (Murphy 2012) that, unlike the physical text of the Sikh scripture(s), or Santbhasha and Punjabi and the predominant styles utilized by authors who write in these two languages, are not often associated with the Sikh tradition; a variety of formats and languages, let us add, that Sikh authors felt in no way uncomfortable or awkward employing: the use of Persian and the Persian *ghazal* (poem with specific metre) and *maṡnavī* (genre of lengthy poem) to cite but one example of many, styles that both Guru Gobind Singh himself employed to remarkable ends and, too, utilized by certain poets within his literary *darbār* (‘court’) such as the famous Bhai Nand Lal Goya (Fenech 2008: 199–276)—a format and language, incidentally, that was also disparaged in some eighteenth-century Sikh literature as the language of those peoples who persecuted the Sikhs (Padam 1991: 77). To this we may also add eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ‘augmented Sikh histories’ in Hindi and Brajbhasha (the latter of **(p. 4)** which was another Mughal literary language, like Persian, though associated with devotion to the Hindu deity Lord Krishna (Busch 2011)) such as the texts of the *gur-bilās* (‘splendor of the Guru’) genre attributed to Koer Singh, Sukkha Singh, and Ratan Singh Bhangu and, too, those Sikh histories in Persian, the authors of which would adopt the style of the well-established Islamicate *tārīkh* or ‘history’, which as Purnima Dhavan notes was in some cases itself adapted to the more standard Sikh *gur-bilās* ‘history’ to form a style of recording the past that was unique for its time, a representative example of which is Khushwaqt Rai’s 1811 *Tārīkh-i Aḥvāl-i Sikhān* (Dhavan 2007). Alongside these histories are Sikh exegetical and commentarial works in Sanskrit and further scriptural commentaries (polemical in some cases) in Brajbhasha such as those by the Udasi Sikh intellectual Anandghan and the Nirmala scholar Santokh Singh (Nripinder Singh 1990: 244–52). Also included is the case of the great twentieth-century Sikh intellectual Puran Singh, who wrote many of his works in what became Modern Standard Punjabi, but reserved his most famous Sikh works in English for a Sikh audience that was more attuned to the intellectual climate and assumptions of British imperialism and colonialism, and the definitions of religion well situated within and perpetuated by these (Puran Singh 1980).

The appropriation of such genres and languages as noted in the case of Khushwaqt Rai's text have in themselves affected the ways by which Sikhs reveal and understand their tradition, their past, and their ideologies; working within alternative frameworks, which as one may expect, predictably enhanced and augmented aspects of the Sikh tradition by and with ideas and standards which permeate the traditions within which such alternative frameworks (different for Sikh authors) are normative and standard. The appropriation of the Persian genres earlier mentioned, for example, could not help but further underscore the affinities between the mystical dimension of Islam, Sufism, the ideology of which was primarily conveyed not only through the charismatic Sufi mystic him or herself, through Persian music and painting, but also through Persian *ghazals* and *maśnavī.* (the ghazals of Hafez Shirazi, for example, or Maulana Rumi's extraordinary Sufi treatise, the *Maśnavī-ye Maśnavī* both of which were very well known in India) and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, laying stress, for instance, on the unity of the divine, his/her/its presence within all hearts, and the committed dedication to the remembrance of the divine (often involving the repetition of divine names) in an attempt to purify the corruptible human self, among others. This in turn marked the Sikh tradition in some less-trained eyes as derivative of, or influenced by, Islam or Sufi ways of being. Actually, in Mughal-period Persian texts Guru Nanak is often noted as *Shāh* Nanak, Shah a title not only bestowed upon actual rulers themselves but also often associated with Sufi spiritual masters in India. More exercised faculties, however, would see the appropriation of these non-traditional genres (indeed, of all genres and styles and languages and, also relics as Murphy makes clear) as intended to accentuate the universal, non-exclusive dimension of Sikh tradition and ideology that we regularly discover in the writings of the Gurus and clearly observe in both the structure of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as Sikh architecture and, also as suggestive of the nature of the (p. 5) divine in Sikh thought. As Guru Gobind Singh so incisively tells us in Brajbhasha, in his *Akāl Ustati* ('In Praise of the Timeless One'):

> *Kahūn ārabī torkī pārsī ho kahūn pahalavī pasatavī sanskritī ho kahūn des bhākhiā kahūn dev bānī* (116)
>
> In some cases (*kahūn*) [You are] Arabic, Torki, and Persian; in others [You are] Pahlavi, Pashto, and Sanskrit. Sometimes human speech; sometimes divine (116).
>
> (DG: 22)

Note that the tenth Guru is not simply here claiming that the divine is described or praised in Arabic, Persian, and by other languages (although that implication is most definitely present), but most significantly that the divine is these languages, both beyond all language and at the same time within and actualized by all languages. Such words as those in *Akāl Ustati* not only sanctify the use of any and all languages, genres, and styles

in singing, speaking, or reflecting upon the praise of the divine but, all together, underscore the divine's unmitigated omnipresence (*sarab viāpak*) and immanence (*jah jah dekhā tah tah tum hai* 'Wherever I look, there You are' according to Guru Nanak (GGS: 25)) throughout all creation and within and throughout all sound and languages, the spoken forms of which are collections of specific sounds: the divine is thus *nād* the 'primal sound [of all language]' (GGS: 2), as well as the articulated *bāṇī* or 'utterance' (GGS: 32), and the *anhad-bāṇī* 'the mystical unsaid', the 'un-struck melody' one 'hears' at the height of the spiritual discipline when one achieves the 'balance' (*sahaj*) that is tantamount to the liberated state (*mokhu*); and the divine is all of these simultaneously (GGS: 21), both *saguṇ* and *nirguṇ*: 'qualified' and 'quality-less' (GGS: 287) respectively in the Sikh imaginary. There is, too, the implication in the *Akāl Ustāti* passage above that the divine is both beyond time and space and that time and space are effectively collapsed within and by the divine as the repetition of the adverb *kahūn*—which may mean both 'some time' and 'some place'—suggests. This focus on the omnipresence of the divine in language and sound likely occupied a number of poets within the tenth Guru's court (*dārbār*) as it appears to be at the very heart of the *ʿArżulalfāẓ*, the 'Exposition of Words' (and grammar) intriguingly prepared in Persian by Guru Gobind Singh's predominant court poet (*darbārī kavī*), Nand Lal Goya.

> *az har lafẓ shod chand māʿnī padīd / az kutab-i lu ghāt-i qadīm-i jadīd*

Every word has numerous meanings all of which are discovered in books old and new (Ganda Singh 1963: 206).

In their more mundane adoption and appreciation of languages and genres that are not traditional, moreover, Sikh authors are, once again, not unique: one is, for example, reminded of the beautiful Sufi romances in classical Hindi (Hindavi) and Brajbhasha which expressed general Muslim and more specifically Sufi ideas through the lens of Hindu yogic traditions, a facet excavated in the intriguingly charming works and (p. 6) translations of Aditya Behl (Behl and Weightman 2000; Behl 2012). And as well we may point to Buddhist thought uttered in Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, Japanese, and Thai and the genres that are more traditional to each of these languages.

To fully give substance to this extraordinary diversity and its various nuances, the multiple ways of being Sikh, of constructing the Sikh community over time, and of reflecting this tradition and its long history through numerous fluid media, we have chosen to structure our critical approach in this Handbook around the theme of 'Expressing "Sikhness"' and to organize this *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* by a handful of the individual expressions of this vast experience, many of which have interacted and coalesced in highly nuanced fashions over the centuries. What we

understand by ‘Sikhness’ goes beyond understanding and refracting the world as the creation of *Akāl Purakh* (the ‘Timeless Being’, or the divine) through the lens of *gurmat* or the ‘Guru’s doctrine’ of course, but entails the many ways of being Sikh, ideologically, ritually, practically, and so on, whether actively or with hindsight.

Although the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* tends to represent the Sikh tradition as a single coherent orthodoxy, as we have implied, the actual situation at the popular, lived level of Sikhs themselves, shows the existence of a colourful diversity within the Sikh Panth. The basis of all of these diverse expressions, however, remains the articulation of Sikhness that is described by the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak, as follows: *sikhī sikhiā gur vīchāri// nadarī karami langhāe pāri//*, ‘I have realized the teachings of *sikhī* through contemplating the Eternal Guru who grants his gracious glance, and by so doing, ferries his servants across [the ocean of existence]’ (GGS: 465). This state of being Sikh cannot be defined explicitly, although the term ‘discipleship’ (*sikhī*) was internally given in the early Sikh tradition. To use Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s terminology, to manifest the ‘teachings of *sikhī*’ is to follow the Guru’s teaching, signifying ‘a transcendent personalist ideal’ of discipleship. Over the centuries the original idea of *gurmat* evolved into ‘the counterpart of the Western (outsiders’) concept “Sikhism” as the total complex of Sikh religious practices and rites, scriptures and doctrines, history and institutions’ (Smith 1978 [1962]: 67). To unpack the essentialist notion of ‘Sikhism’ we will try to look closely at the various expressions of Sikhness within the Sikh Panth.

Such a phenomenon will therefore be reflected throughout this volume not by the word Sikhness, but by the regular use of the more appropriate (and less inelegant) term coined by Guru Nanak for what is generally (mis)understood both within and outside of India, as Sikhism, namely *sikhī* (also *sikkhī* since the ‘kh’ sound is generally elongated in its pronunciation, a fact noted by the *addhak* character in the original Gurmukhi script) and its resistive and very recent hybrid construction *sikhī*(sm)/Sikhi(sm), the latter of which reflects a relatively fresh, post-colonial way of underscoring this diversity which purposefully defies the epistemological binders of Eurocentric categories and their weighty corollaries, in this case Orientalist constructs such as the aforementioned Sikhism. Such an amalgam term both literally and, indeed, visually, disturbs the stillness by which we understand conveniently fashioned labels like Sikhism in a way similar to that were we to employ a combined Roman/Gurmukhi (the script in which Punjabi is usually written) ligature of this phenomenon, for example, the very awkward ‘ਸਿਖ ਇੱਜ’.

(p. 7) Certainly the Sikh tradition’s encounter with Europe and facets of European thought, mainland and otherwise, has had a profound effect on its recent development, almost as significant as its encounter with both Hindu and Muslim traditions no less, shaping the way that Sikhs (and others concerned with the tradition) understand such concepts as monotheism, violence, history, and martyrdom amongst numerous others

(Bhogal 2007). But privileging only this dimension of the Sikh past, as so many contemporary sources unwittingly do, does an injustice to the total diachronic experience of the Sikh individual, the Sikh Panth, and the Sikh tradition.

At this point the adage 'A Rose By Any Other Name' may be here suggested, but the simple fact that has been demonstrated time and again in our postmodern world is that names and labels matter as these, especially when dealing with constructs which are predominantly ideological, immediately make that idea or practice which they are attempting to elicit vulnerable to misunderstandings and misrepresentations. Put another way, ideas and terms fashioned at other times and in other places and languages, in this case fabricated during the particular historical and cultural trajectory stimulated by the European Enlightenment with its very conflicted approaches to dealing with factors uniquely European (definitions of 'religion' and 'secularity' for example and, too, the more tricky distinctions, if any, between them (Mandair 2009)), are very often not well translated onto Indic, or in this case Indo-Islamic phenomena like *sikhī* and will thus often imply features that are not necessarily present within Indo-Islamic conceptual spaces or alter approximations that are.

This critical approach of 'Expressing *sikhī*' not only allows us to envision a tradition that eludes its sometimes benign European captivity but in so doing also acts as an inclusivistic tactic, which allows the multiplicity of Sikh voices throughout the Sikh World today and throughout the history of the Sikhs and their many interrelated traditions to be heard without privileging any singular one. Such an approach allows us to view the extraordinary diversity and fluidity that is the Sikh tradition and to thus excavate a total field of Sikh expression, both masculine and feminine gendered dimensions of the Sikh tradition, effortlessly integrating male and female, text with practice (Nikky Singh 2005; Jakobsh 2003); Sikh narrative traditions with equally significant Sikh landscapes, objects, relics, and other forms of material and popular culture that Sikhs form and with which Sikhs regularly interact individually and collectively (Murphy 2012); the importance of Sikh music with the tradition's ideology as noted in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus; the principal Sikh scripture, the *Ādi Granth* or *Gurū Granth Sāhib* (AG or GGS)—and in certain cases, its 'secondary' scripture the *Dasam Granth* (DG) attributed to the tenth Guru—with the Sikh tradition's many supplementary (often overlapping) sources of authority, that is to say the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)—the organization of Khalsa Sikhs that manages Sikh gurdwaras throughout the Punjab and elsewhere—and the Akali Dal (the predominant Sikh political party in the Punjab), the Akal Takhat (Throne of the Timeless), and/or living Sikh saints (*sants*), *bābā*s, *bībī*s, and gurus and ascetics (*udāsī*s); the diachronic with the synchronic; the historical reverence for the Sikh Gurus, bhagats, bhais, bhatts, and sants with the important role that Sikh *ḍerās* (lit., 'camps' to which disciples come to (p. 8) hear and see a revered Sikh figure)

today play throughout the Punjab countryside and beyond, an importance which has taken a violent turn within the last few years (Baixis and Simone 2008; Lal 2009). As well this approach allows us all the while to keep in mind the role of the Sikh diaspora in all of the above interrelated facets, not so much in the construction and promotion of the Sikh tradition's grand diversity and multiple narratives—although there are certainly many examples of this such as the returning Punjabi migrants noted by Tony Ballantyne (Ballantyne 2006: 66–79) and, perhaps the most readily observable, the Khalsa Dharma in the Western Hemisphere or the 3HO (Happy, Healthy, Holy Organization) variety of Sikh tradition predominantly comprising 'Western' converts to *sikhī*—but rather the oft-vocal denial of this variety on the part of at least some influential diasporic Sikhs and Sikh organizations, often a denunciation that is in part coloured by both contemporary world, national, and regional politics.

The functions performed by the Sikh diaspora, not just in remitting monies back to the Punjab for philanthropic purposes (Dusenbery and Tatla 2009), but particularly in the management and broadcast of both Sikh identity and a specific Sikh historical narrative both abroad and in the Punjab (a role also well perceived in the diaspora's influence in promoting a separate Sikh state as noted by Axel 2001) also gives us pause to examine both our own role—as university-based scholars who too play a part in the production of Sikhness through the perpetuation and teaching (that is, knowledge-construction) of traditions we refer to as Sikh—and that of the state, whether India or the many other nations in which Sikhs have found themselves since the late nineteenth century. As scholars of a tradition in which historical narrative and memory and their interplay perform such an essential role in the construction of Sikh personhood, community, and the Sikh imaginary, a part as profound as that of the teachings of the Gurus (which have modified these narratives and memories and in turn been adjusted by them), it is always good form to keep in mind that what academics write and say about Sikh tradition matters to the Sikh world generally and may find itself within discourses that verge well beyond the academic, especially for a community which today understands itself to express a (now-deterritorialized) sovereignty (Shani 2008) gifted by the tenth Sikh Master, an interpretation that precipitates the claim that Sikhs are indeed a nation living within other nations.

The cold reception given to certain critical academics and their research in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, for example, was partly a spillover from turmoil occasioned by internal dissension among Akali Dal and Congress Sikh politicians in the 1960s and 1970s and the subsequent secessionist struggles and ethnonationalist violence within the Punjab itself in the 1980s and 1990s. And this, in turn, had its roots in earlier disaffection amongst certain groups of Punjabi Sikhs. These critical academics included such luminaries as Fauja Singh whose article on the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadar (d. 1675 CE) was

expunged, post-publication, from the February 1974 issue of the *Journal of Sikh Studies* printed at Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar, and as W. H. McLeod (McLeod 1994), Harjot Oberoi (Oberoi 2001), Piar Singh (Piar Singh 1996), and Pashaura Singh (Pashaura Singh 2000), all of whom respectfully questioned the (p. 9) traditional interpretation regarding the development of the Sikh tradition, hegemonic narratives of Guru Nanak's life, and the gradual production of the text of the Adi Granth respectively. The volume of the vitriolic attacks this scholarship engendered, both in India and abroad, cautioned and silenced many academic Sikh voices forcing them to follow more established and well-known interpretations of Sikh history and tradition in their research and writing. Scholars who failed to fall in line with generally accepted wisdom, especially those academics who were also practising Sikhs, often found themselves picketed and placarded at their place of work or at academic conferences (specialized Sikh conferences such as those at the University of Michigan in the mid to late 1990s and more general ones like the American Academy of Religion's annual conference in 1995 held in that year in Philadelphia) by Sikh groups, groups many of whose members were motivated in part by selfless aims such as 'protecting Sikhism' to be sure, but some of whose leaders may have been encouraged by less altruistic goals, a dichotomy that gradually develops between movements and their leaders that is relatively common worldwide.

This Sikh estrangement from the Indian state which likely prompted, and stood in stark relief as a result of, the harsh criticism levelled against academics originated in response to a number of interrelated factors: promises initially given to ensure Sikh self-determination before Indian Independence in 1947 that were not honoured by the Congress government (Sarasfield 1946), and which were in turn exacerbated in the Sikh struggle for Punjabi *Sūba* ('Province') in the 1950s and early 1960s, in which Punjabi Sikhs took umbrage at the fact that all state boundaries in the new Indian union apart from those of the Punjab were redrawn based on the mother tongue of the majority of residents (Sarhadi 1970); the Indian government's failure to meet Sikh demands after the 1966 grant of Punjabi statehood; and the dismissal of the very legitimate Sikh requests written into the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973 along with the failures incurred by the Green Revolution (Purewal 2000: 52–72), the latter of which helped mobilize the Sikh peasantry most affected by the Punjab's diminishing water table, climate change, and the sustained use of harmful fertilizers, insecticides, and pesticides that allowed initially for much higher crop yields. And, of course, we add to this mix the ill-treatment of Sikhs by the central Congress government up to and during the Asian Games of 1982 held in New Delhi (organized in large part by the Prime Minister's son, Rajiv Gandhi) and the subsequent horrific tragedy of June 1984 codenamed Operation Blue Star, during which the Golden Temple complex and thirty-six other historical gurdwaras in Punjab were invaded by the Indian army, resulting in the death of many militants and army personnel

as well as those deaths of the over 600 innocent Sikh pilgrims who were present at the Golden Temple to honour the *śahīdī diwas* or Martyrdom Day of Guru Arjan and were unfortunately caught in the crossfire. The ensuing Sikh pogroms following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards on 31 October 1984 in retaliation for Operation Blue Star and also the lengthy period of President's Rule throughout the state of Punjab likewise enhanced Sikh antipathy towards the government (an aversion that may have resulted in the destruction of Air India flight 182 from Toronto to Delhi in 1985), which still partially remains as the many well-established (p. 10) politicians and Congress workers who helped engineer the pogroms have not yet been brought to justice, nor have the many widowed or orphaned as a result of the riots yet been as well settled as was initially promised. These are but a few of the many, many tragic events which occurred throughout the Punjab well into the late 1990s. Thus there is an urgent need to start a healing process and adopt measures that provide transparency in terms of what happened and justice in regard to the victims and perpetuators. As a matter of fact 'Truth and Reconciliation Commissions' (TRCs) have been constituted in over twenty countries around the world so as to achieve these purposes. India has yet to convene a TRC or comparable process in order to achieve a closure to the Punjab crisis.

Scholarship, which was critically questioning popular Sikh understandings of Sikh history and literature was, in the light of these frustrations, anxieties, and tragedies thus taken (by many but not all Sikhs) to be a questioning of the Sikhs themselves, of their value as people and citizens, their heroic history and uniqueness, and their place in both India and the world collectively and individually. Academic research that contested long-held understandings was furthermore seen by some quarters as part of a sustained effort by the Indian government to destabilize Sikh society and, in certain extreme post-1984 readings, to thoroughly destroy Sikhism and the 'Sikh Way of Life' itself and eradicate it worldwide, once again heralding the cry that regularly echoed in early twentieth-century Punjab, *Panth khatre vich*, 'The Panth is in danger'. Indeed, for many individual Sikhs such academic questioning was seen as particularly reprehensible and dangerous given the ubiquity of Sikh memory sites throughout northern India, especially within the Punjab and Delhi, and could not help but rally large numbers of Sikhs familiar with traditional narratives of Sikh persecution and ultimate Sikh victory over all oppressors. Needless to say certain individual Sikh organizers were motivated to act against this 'academic onslaught' by what they felt was a genuine threat to their tradition and thus to themselves and their families. Other particularly interested parties within the Punjab (and elsewhere), however, nascent and experienced, saw in championing a critique of academics and attempting to force them to publicly recant or face punishment, a relatively safe opportunity to locally and perhaps nationally enhance group and individual prestige and reputation; after all, most academics were 'easy targets' who could rarely

respond to criticism of their research and their oft-alleged ties to the much pilloried Indian government (justly denounced in some cases) especially those scholars who were either elderly or living abroad—the criticisms against, and the responses of, Piar Singh, Pashaura Singh, and Harjot Oberoi to such censure from ‘concerned Sikh bodies’, for example, were particularly well known, appearing regularly in vernacular newspapers in the Punjab and Punjabi publications abroad. It is likely moreover that the most vociferous critics in India would have been aware of the fact that their reproach of scholarship would not have been as harshly repressed by local and national politicians as would have a severe critique of governmental action and excess. At the same time, a critique in whatever direction would have ensured that such a vocal contingent would not have generally come under militant notice.

(p. 11) Such fears of retaliation were generally not experienced by Sikhs outside of India. In this regard, therefore, Sikhs and Sikh organizations across the globe who and which were horrified and deeply saddened by contemporary Indian events such as the desecration of the Golden Temple, at times in conjunction with Sikhs in the Punjab (especially since Sikh global networks were particularly well established, with nearly 100 years of Sikh migration to North America, Europe, Southeast Asia, and Oceania), launched numerous strategies within their respective countries, many successful, in order to press and secure their claims to self-determination in the light of this conflicted state of affairs (Dusenbery 1997). In some cases, Sikh organizations abroad took up the challenge that they believed critical academics offered, and convened conferences of their own to examine ‘spurious’ historical claims, strongly reaffirm more traditional assertions, and to further condemn both the academics and the North American universities that housed them and in some cases to cast further remonstrations on the Indian government. In other instances, however, different strategies were formulated in the hope that international pressure on India would either get that state to alter what was perceived as its draconian stance towards the Sikhs and human rights or force India to accede to the claim of an independent Sikh country generally referred to as Khalistan (‘Country of the Pure’) and carved out from within India itself. In the United States, for example, Sikh groups had successfully secured the support of Senator Daniel Burton, Republican Congressman of Indiana, to press certain Sikh claims regarding the creation of Khalistan in the American Congress (and to press these even further on a 2005 visit to India). Also, some diaspora Sikhs began to collect and remit money to certain organizations in the Punjab to likewise pursue these goals. Inevitably, this period in the history of Sikh Studies has also had an effect on the very production and understanding of the field and of the Sikh tradition and its people, which has in turn prompted a more keen interest in studies relating to the Sikhs. Such a set of circumstances was profoundly compounded by recent tragedies such as the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on 9/11, which ultimately led to the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi in Arizona,

who was mistaken as an al-Qaeda operative, and, as well, the horrific massacre at the gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in August 2012 by a white supremacist. The need to broadcast and inform the world over about the Sikhs and Sikhism is now, within the context of increasing globalization and its unfortunate corollary, the escalating and interrelated pathologies of 'White Anxiety' and 'White Privilege' especially within the industrialized world, more urgent than ever before and so the papers collected within, and the appearance of, this *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*. Today, such urgency notwithstanding, the situation in India is less anxious politically for the Sikhs, particularly since the prime minister of India as this Introduction is being written happens to be a Sikh, Dr Manmohan Singh, and the Punjab is being ruled by the Akali-BJP government led by Parkash Singh Badal. But it is also much more exciting for those of us involved with Sikh Studies as the current number of endowed Chairs in Sikh and Punjabi Studies in North American universities stands, at the moment, at eight, easily the most prominent field of South Asian focus within the Western academy.

(p. 12) Let us now turn to the Handbook itself. As mentioned, throughout this Handbook the studies are organized according to various interrelated and overlapping expressions of Sikhi, historical, literary, ideological, institutional, artistic, diasporic, and gender and caste specific. It should be noted that these expressions appear in no specific order at all although within each individual section we begin with a more substantial introductory paper followed by more focused analyses. In most instances we have allowed the authors liberty to pursue their ideas without dramatic editorial intervention, a fact which accounts for some of the divergent views both within individual papers and from our own distinctive stances as scholars of Sikh tradition. Our reason for doing so is to make clear the plurality that is well in keeping with the 'ocean of [interpretive] jewels' to which Guru Ram Das and Bhai Gurdas amongst others give voice above. And to this end, furthermore, we have made accommodations within the text for scholars who are also practitioners and can easily operate in both capacities. Gurnam Singh is for example a respected Sikh musicologist as well as a musician while Kamalroop Singh not only explores the intricacies of the tenth Guru's Dasam Granth in his research but is also an expert Sikh martial artist, promoting a resurgence of Sikh *gatkā* ('swordplay') specifically and *śastar vidyā* or martial arts (lit., 'knowledge of weaponry') generally that is currently being debated and taught within the United Kingdom and elsewhere and attracting young Sikhs and others across the globe.

The volume opens with a section on 'historical expressions' of the Sikh tradition. The first essay by Pashaura Singh provides an overview of the first 500 years of Sikh history, stressing the need to explore new ways of knowing the past and to complement historical data with ethnographic study that can illuminate the lived experience of the Sikh Panth. It is followed by Louis E. Fenech's essay on the evolution of the Sikh tradition during the

canonical period of the ten Sikh Gurus and Purnima Dhavan's exploration of the growth of the Khalsa Sikh community from its inception to the foundation of several independent *misal* states in the mid to late eighteenth century. The Sikh kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is taken up by Sunit Singh while the next two overlapping periods of colonial and post-colonial representations of the Sikh past are the focus of Navdeep Singh Mandair and Joginder Singh respectively. The section ends with a highly nuanced consideration and excavation of the very concerns which guided and continue to guide Sikh and other authors who attempt to uncover the Sikh past by Anne Murphy.

The next section on 'Sikh literary expressions' begins with Christopher Shackle's masterly essay on the topic, which offers a survey of Sikh literature from the time of the Gurus until the late twentieth century. The remaining portion of this section focuses on texts deemed seminal in Sikh traditions such as the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth excavated by Pashaura Singh and Robin Rinehart in their respective essays. It also includes papers dealing with the works of famous Sikh authors such as Bhai Gurdas Bhalla and Bhai Nand Lal Goya by Rahuldeep Singh and Louis E. Fenech respectively. Both Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal Goya are the only two Sikh ideologues apart from the poets whose works we discover within the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth whose poetry is assigned the status of *bāṇī* and may be thus sung and read alongside the compositions of the Gurus whenever Sikhs gather to perform *kīrtan*, the congregational (p. 13) singing of hymns that often takes place in a seminal Sikh space such as the gurdwara. This portion also includes an examination of unorthodox 'Sectarian Works' by Hardip Singh Syan, followed by standard pre-colonial Sikh works of the *janam-sākhī* ('birth-narrative'), *rāhit-nāmā* ('manual of code of conduct'), and *gurbilās* ('splendour of the Guru') genres by Toby B. Johnson. Colonial and post-colonial works of Sikh literature are discussed by Tejwant Singh Gill, while Harpreet Singh offers an examination of Western writers who have engaged the Sikh tradition since the eighteenth century. The section concludes with an adroit essay of Michael C. Shapiro who highlights the linguistic and philological elements of Sikh texts, underscoring in some instances usages which are uniquely Sikh and how these convey ideas that are characteristically so.

The section dealing with the 'ideological expressions' of the Sikh tradition begins with a new assessment and description of the collective teachings of the Sikh Gurus by Pashaura Singh. The position of the tenth Sikh Guru is also included within this assessment while the predominant contribution to the Sikh tradition attributed to Guru Gobind Singh, the Khalsa and the *Rahit* ('Code of Conduct'), is singled out in an independent chapter by Louis E. Fenech. Within this paper we discover elements that are further unearthed in subsequent chapters, namely the interaction and intersection of Sikh traditions with other traditions and peoples. W. Owen Cole, for example, explores this interaction in recent times; Virinder Kalra hones the focus with a discussion about religion and politics;

while Giorgio Shani sharpens this focus even more so in his paper on contemporary Sikh nationalism. The section comes to a close with two skilful essays articulating a fresh perspective on the Sikh tradition philosophically, the first by Balbinder Singh Bhogal and the second by Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair refracting Sikh ideas through a more Continental philosophical lens.

The section on 'institutional expressions' begins with Michael Hawley's general examination of Sikh institutions after which we shift to focused studies of the best-known Sikh institutional expressions, that is, the premier Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) by Kashmir Singh and the powerful Akali Dal by Amarjit Singh Narang. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar and Eleanor Nesbitt describe Sikh sects and *ḍerās* ('establishments') of Sikh Sants, in particular the Ravidasias and others in the United Kingdom, both of which offer unique glimpses into intra and international Sikh perceptions of others who claim to be Sikhs. One issue which Takhar confronts that we have seen in regard to Punjabi Radha Saomis is the inclusion of certain groups as 'Sikh' who refuse to acknowledge themselves as such and the issues to which such denials or affirmations give rise. Paramjit Singh Judge shifts the discussion to within India itself examining the many *ḍerās* and their leaders which have of late become a very vocal and visible segment of Punjabi Sikh society. We end with Mark Juergensmeyer's dexterous essay which underscores the global expression of *sikhī* and its many nuances.

The next section is focused on 'artistic expressions' within the Sikh tradition. Although there is no unique Sikh art per se Sikhs have taken to the arts and excelled at these dramatically throughout their history. This is particularly so within the fields of music and musicology, a subject analysed at length in Gurnam Singh's paper on Sikh Music. Although best known for its unique styles of *kīrtan*, congregational singing, (p. 14) there is a more folk and martial dimension to Sikh musicality which we witness in the Punjabi phenomenon of *ḍhāḍhī* ('singer of martial ballads'), the topic of Michael Nijhawan's essay. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh takes up the topic of Sikh art proper, of the *janam-sakhi* paintings and those portraits of the Gurus during the eighteenth and nineteenth century while the history and ritual life of the central Sikh shrine at which many contemporary Sikh paintings are today displayed, the Darbar Sahib ('Golden Temple'), is the subject of Charles Townsend's essay. Sikh architecture is described and analysed in Will Glover's essay which has as its central focus the new, recently opened to the public Khalsa Heritage Complex in Anandpur Sahib. The general materiality of Sikh culture forms the substance of Anne Murphy's article after which we switch to a detailed discussion of Sikh martial arts by Kamalroop Singh and Sikh visual arts, particularly digital Sikh representations by Susan E. Prill. We end our section with the arguments of a co-authored essay by Pritam Singh and Meena Dhanda on the relationship between *Sīkhī* and Punjabi Culture, *Punjābiyāt*.

The section on ‘diasporic expression’ reflects on the global presence of the Sikhs. Darshan Singh Tatla’s masterful survey of the Sikh diaspora which extends worldwide today continues the work he so beautifully prepared earlier in his scholarly career. From this we shift to individual areas of Sikh exploration in mainland Europe, USA, and the UK. Kristina Myrvold offers an examination of striking differences and similarities between different Sikh communities by focusing on such issues as identity processes, general patterns of settlement, institutional building, cultural assimilation and transmission among European Sikhs. Jaideep Singh skilfully contextualizes the history of racial and religious discrimination against Sikh Americans in USA, tracing manifestation of such intolerance from the early twentieth century to the current time. Himadri Banerjee closely looks at another Sikh diaspora of scattered Sikh settlements beyond Punjab within India’s territorial limits. Shinder Singh Thandi competently examines the patterns of migration and settlement in the UK and explores the multi-layered transnational practices of British Sikhs, particularly diaspora–homeland financial relations given their growing importance to Punjabi livelihoods. Verne A. Dusenbery skilfully examines the phenomenon of the 3HO (Healthy Happy Holy Organization) movement, focusing on the frequently contesting assertions of identity by Punjabi Sikhs and Gora (‘White’) Sikhs in North America. The section ends with Cynthia K. Mahmood’s adroit reflections upon ‘Khalistan as a political critique’ of Indian democracy.

The penultimate section of the volume deals with ‘expressions of caste and gender in the Panth’. Caste has been a tricky issue within the Sikh Panth since likely the time of the Sikh Gurus. While ideally Sikh ideology profoundly underscores the casteless nature of the Sikh Panth and as well the uselessness of caste status in matters of liberation from the cycle of existence, only the moribund would claim that forms of caste are not observed amongst the Sikhs. Surinder Singh Jodhka confronts these issues squarely in his essay. While caste continues to be a controversial issue within the Sikh Panth our second issue of gender, surprisingly, is generally not. And this is so because Sikh ideology, particularly as expressed in the hymns of Guru Nanak, makes a point of underscoring the belief that the divine is characterized as both feminine and masculine and by extension, therefore, (p. 15) that women have equal access to liberating knowledge. The reality here also differs from the textual evidence. However, there are within Sikh Studies today a number of potent feminine voices which have intervened in domains not generally reserved for such expressions. We find today for example female *ḍhāḍhīs* (‘singers of martial ballads’) and other musicians, female members of the *Pañj Piāre* (‘Cherished Five’), and female *granthīs* (‘readers’ of the Guru Granth Sahib), and so on. Scholarship has kept abreast of these relatively new trends. Our two authors, Doris R. Jakobsh and Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, belong to the frontline in this well-overdue examination of the feminist dimension of Sikh ideology and new gendered readings of Sikh historical narratives.

The volume ends with a comprehensive essay by Pashaura Singh on new trajectories in the field of Sikh Studies. It makes the case for interdisciplinary approach by adopting a range of methodological perspectives including history, philosophy, hermeneutics, migration and diaspora studies, ethnography, performance studies, lived religion approaches, and aesthetics. It recommends a balance of theory and substantive content that can offer alternative and novel 'readings' of Sikh ways of knowing and being. This volume represents the scholastic experience of three generations of academics working in the field of Sikh studies. It is presented to a wider audience for critical appraisal so that new ways of understanding the Sikh subjects are developed in the future.

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An Overview of Sikh History

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Abstract and Keywords

This article presents an overview of revisionist Sikh historiography by examining some fundamental questions at various junctures in the evolution of the Sikh Panth, both diachronically and synchronically. Moving beyond the positivistic approach it calls attention to the fluid and multi-vocal nature of the Sikh past and present based upon traces of documentary evidence, material culture, group memories, and ethnographic fieldwork.

Keywords: revisionist historiography, Sikh Panth, group memories, diachronic perspective, synchronic perspective, material culture, contesting narratives, ethnographic study

Introduction

Much of the debate in Sikh historiography has revolved around the questions raised by positivist historians trained under the influence of post-Enlightenment modernism. Mostly they have presented historical facts as the telling of a single narrative by addressing the question: 'what *really* happened?' They have consistently maintained that history and documentation could prove the single line of causality. Their constant struggle with available sources was to define a singular methodology as relevant to scholarly enquiry, which can be identified as historical teleology. Such an approach privileges the scholar's 'historically accurate' account over the memories of the followers of a religion and plays down the 'tradition' handed down from the past. As a matter of fact, written documents emerge from the 'struggle of memory against forgetting'. Recent scholarship firmly maintains that historical facts do not lead to one story but, rather, to the interpretation of such facts to create various versions of history and therefore 'critical histories'.

Notably, history is not simply the past; history is process. To understand history is to understand movement—forward over time (i.e., diachronically) or in time (i.e., synchronically). The distinction between oral ('myth') and written ('history') narratives does not relate to their relative 'truth' but their presentation of temporality—the one in a synchronic or atemporal frame of reference of 'time out of time' (Mircea Eliade's *illud tempus*) and the other in a fundamentally diachronic, linear frame of temporal sequence and relation (Graham 1987: 16). A historical account of anything that separates out its elements and traces each back to its source is not so accurate a description of 'what *really* happened' as is one that looks at the same facts but the other way around, and makes intelligible the historical process by which these disparate items from here **(p. 20)** and there were at a given moment creatively put together, to constitute something new (Smith 1993: 80). Thus we need to expand the range of questions we ask in historical analysis: What claims are contestants making about what *really* happened or is happening? From their perspectives, what forces, powers, or agents had the power to act in a particular situation? Who and what caused things to turn out as they eventually did? The answers to these questions may provide different historiographical narratives based upon contesting views of the past. In South Asian Studies we find this kind of revisionist historiography in *The Hollow Crown* by Dirks (1987) and *Textures of Time* by Rao et al. (2003).

Most instructively, tradition is the active enlivening of the present through links with the past. But central to the concept of tradition is memory, especially group memory passed down through the generations. Motivated by shared interest in the past, groups derive roughly consensual group memories from individual memories. Groups shape and reshape these memories intersubjectively through discourse and may communicate versions to successive generations (Gottschalk 2000: 5–6). As group interests change, so can the narratives that reflect them. In other words, group memories vary according to specific strategies of authorization, verification, and transmission that are deliberately adopted to express particular interests (Gottschalk 2000: 7). Group memories frequently offer different narratives of the past. One must acknowledge that history and memory are as much about repression and suppression as they are about creation and recollection. In fact, the control of voices on historical knowledge has always been critical and remains critical in all sorts of settings. As David William Cohen remarks: 'This processing of the past in societies and historical settings all over the world, and the struggles for control of voices and texts in innumerable settings which often animate the processing of the past, this we term the *production of history*' (Cohen 1994: 4). It is no wonder that the powerful erase those out of power from public consciousness and forge the collective memory that they select. Thus historical analysis must allow the multiplicity of voices throughout history to be heard without privileging any singular one.

Recently, Anne Murphy has argued that the Sikh ‘historical’ takes place within an explicitly religious frame in which ‘it is organized around the soteriological teachings of the Gurus and the formation of the community as a central institution of authority in relation to the Guru’ (Murphy 2007a: 351). She underscores the point that ‘the status of history is of particular importance in Sikh cultural life, as historical representation has occupied a dominant position within academic as well as popular discourse about the Sikhs’ (Murphy 2007b: 94). There is, however, an urgent need to appreciate the ways in which the Sikh past was constructed within indigenous texts ‘in terms and categories that are consonant with particular modes of “historical” understanding posited by the texts and traditions themselves’ (Dirks 1987: 57). Notably, the explication of early Sikh texts leads to multiple visions of the past that must inform our understanding of the production of ‘critical histories’, reflecting particular perspectives and counter-perspectives.

(p. 21) Early Sikh History (1469–1708)

The major themes in early Sikh history relate to the formative period of the ten Sikh Gurus, beginning with the life and times of Guru Nanak (1469–1539), who is acknowledged as the ‘founder’ of the Sikh Panth (community). Much of the material concerning his life comes from the *Janam-sakhis* (birth narratives) that were first written down roughly five decades after his death but had begun circulating orally during his lifetime. By working through the voluminous *Janam-sakhi* literature W. H. McLeod was able to extract less than a single page of material which he found historically plausible (McLeod 1968: 146). A central concern for him was what he called the search for the historical Nanak, which, like historical Jesus scholarship, came as a surprise to many readers. Contesting McLeod’s view Gurinder Singh Mann has argued that a sound biography of Guru Nanak is yet to be reconstructed by contextualizing his life within the historical framework in which he lived (Mann 2010: 3–44).

From the available sources Guru Nanak’s life may be divided into three distinct phases: an early contemplative period; a mystic enlightenment followed by years of pilgrimage and debate; and a conclusion in which he and his growing community of disciples established the first Sikh community. Employed as a steward by a local Muslim nobleman, the young Nanak worked diligently at his job in the town of Sultanpur Lodhi situated on the main road that connected Lahore with Delhi. His mind was mostly preoccupied with spiritual matters, and he spent long hours in meditation and devotional singing. Early one morning, while he was bathing in the Vein river, he disappeared without a trace. Family members gave him up for dead, but three days later he stepped out of the water and proclaimed: ‘There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim.’ The significance

of this statement becomes clear in the context of a religious culture divided between the conflicting truth claims of the Islamic and Hindu traditions. Nanak pointed the way towards the common humanity underlying the external divisions. After his three-day immersion in the waters—a metaphor of dissolution, transformation, and spiritual perfection—Nanak was ready to proclaim a new vision. One of his own hymns in the Adi Granth describes his experience: 'I was a minstrel out of work; the Lord assigned me the task of singing the Divine Word day and night. He summoned me to his Court and bestowed on me the robe of honour for singing his praises. On me he bestowed the Divine Nectar (*amrit*) in a cup, the nectar of his true and holy Name' (GGS: 150). This hymn is intensely autobiographical, explicitly pointing out Guru Nanak's own understanding of his divine mission and marking the beginning of his ministry to preach the message of the divine Name. He was then 30 years of age, had been married to Sulakhani for more than a decade, and was the father of two young sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das. Yet he left his family behind to set out on a series of journeys to both Hindu and Muslim places of pilgrimage in India and abroad: 'I have seen places of pilgrimage (*tirath*) on river banks in the nine regions of the earth, including shops, cities, and market squares' (GGS: 156). In the course of his travels he encountered the leaders of (p. 22) different religious persuasions and tested the veracity of his own ideas through dialogue with them.

At the end of his travels Guru Nanak purchased a parcel of land on the right bank of the Ravi river in central Punjab, where he founded the village of Kartarpur in 1519. There he lived for the rest of his life as the 'spiritual guide' of a new religious community. His charismatic personality and teaching won him many disciples, who received the message of liberation through religious hymns of unique genius and notable beauty. They began to use these hymns in devotional singing (*kīrtan*) as part of congregational worship. The first Sikh families who gathered around Guru Nanak at Kartarpur formed the nucleus of the Nanak Panth (Path of Nanak), the community who followed his path to liberation. He defined the ideal person as a *Gurmukh* (one oriented towards the Guru) who practised the threefold discipline of *nām dān ishnān*, 'the divine Name, charity and purity' (GGS: 942). Corresponding to the cognitive, the communal, and the personal aspects of the evolving Sikh identity, these three features—*nām* (relation to the Divine), *dān* (relation to the society), and *ishnān* (relation to self)—established a balance between the development of the individual and the society. Unsurprisingly, Guru Nanak explicitly refers to his path as the Gurmukh-Panth to distinguish it from the Brahmanical, the ascetical, and the Islamic traditions of his day (Grewal 2011: 1). The authenticity and power of his spiritual message ultimately derived not from his relationship with the received forms of tradition but rather from his direct access to Divine Reality through personal experience. Such direct access was the ultimate source of his message and provided him with a perspective on life by which he could fully understand, interpret, and adjudicate the various elements

of existing traditions. He conceived of his work as divinely commissioned, and he required that his followers obey the divine command as an ethical duty.

Guru Nanak's spiritual message found expression at Kartarpur through three key institutions: the *saṅgat* (holy fellowship) in which all felt that they belonged to one large spiritual fraternity; the *dharamsālā*, the original form of the Sikh place of worship; and the *laṅgar*: the communal meal, prepared as a community service by members of the *sangat*, that is served to everyone attending the Sikh place of worship (*gurdwārā*) and that requires people of all castes and conditions to sit side by side in status-free rows—female next to male, socially high next to socially low, ritually pure next to ritually impure—and share the same food. This was the first practical expression of Guru Nanak's spiritual mission to reform society. The institution of the *langar* promoted egalitarianism, community service, unity, and belonging while striking down a major aspect of the caste system. Finally, Guru Nanak created the institution of the Guru, who became the central authority in community life. Before his death in 1539, he designated his disciple Lehna as his successor by renaming him Angad, meaning my 'own limb'. Thus a lineage was established that would continue from the appointment of Guru Angad (1504–52) to the death of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and the last human Guru of the Sikhs.

During the period of Guru Nanak's nine successors three key events took place. The first was the compilation of the Adi Granth in 1604, under the sponsorship of the fifth Guru, Arjan (1563–1606). As canonical scripture, this text provided a framework (p. 23) for the shaping of the Sikh Panth (Mann 2001; P. Singh 2000). The second key event was Guru Arjan's execution by the Mughal authorities at Lahore in 1606, a tragedy that became a turning point in the history of the Sikh Panth (P. Singh 2011: 295–316; Fenech 2010: 75–94). His son and successor, Guru Hargobind (1595–1644), signalled the formal process of empowering the Sikh Panth for defence purposes when he traditionally donned two swords symbolizing the spiritual (*pīrī*) as well as the temporal (*mīrī*) investiture. He also built the Akal Takhat (Throne of the Timeless One) facing the Harimandir (the present-day Golden Temple in Amritsar), which represented the newly assumed role of temporal authority. Under his direct leadership the Sikh Panth took up arms to protect itself from Mughal hostility (Fenech 2008: 87–98). Much of the seventeenth century was, therefore, marked by political and military conflict with the Mughals, culminating with the execution of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur (1621–75), in Delhi, by order of the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), for refusing to renounce his faith in favour of Islam. If the martyrdom of Guru Arjan had helped bring the Sikh Panth together, Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom helped to make the protection of human rights central to its identity (Grewal 2011: 148–9).

The third important event was the founding by Guru Gobind Singh of the institution of the Khalsa (Pure), an order of loyal Sikhs bound by common identity and discipline (Grewal 2011: 190–2). On Baisakhi Day, 1699, at Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh initiated the first Cherished Five (*pañj piāre*), who formed the nucleus of the new order of the Khalsa. These five volunteers who responded to the Guru's call for loyalty, and who came from different castes and regions of India, received the initiation through a ceremony that involved sweetened water (*amrit*) stirred with a two-edged sword and sanctified by the recitation of five liturgical prayers.

There are some important issues that need to be addressed from the perspective of ritual studies with respect to the original Khalsa *amrit* ceremony. Was it really an initiation ceremony? Or, was it the ceremony of enthronement to the exalted status of the Khalsa with its power and authority? A careful examination of the ancient Indic 'enthronement ceremony' (*rajasuya*) reveals that some elements of the original *amrit* ceremony are quite similar (P. Singh 2010: 72, no. 44). But most of the features had principal Sikh components such as the recitations of five liturgical prayers. The 'double-edged sword' (*khāṇḍā*) became the central article in the Khalsa *amrit* ceremony. Three significant issues were linked with it. First, all who chose to join the Order of the Khalsa through the ceremony were understood to have been 'reborn' in the house of the Guru and thus to have assumed a new identity. The male members were given the surname *Siṅgh* (lion) and female members were given the surname *Kaur* (princess), with the intention of creating a parallel system of aristocratic titles in relation to the Rajput hill chiefs of the surrounding areas of Anandpur. From that day onwards, Guru Gobind Singh was their spiritual father and his wife, Sahib Kaur, their spiritual mother. Their birthplace was Kesgarh Sahib (the gurdwara that commemorates the founding of the Khalsa) and their home was Anandpur, Punjab. This new sense of belonging conferred on the Khalsa a new collective identity.

Second, the Guru symbolically transferred his spiritual authority to the Cherished Five when he himself received the nectar of the double-edged sword from their hands (p. 24) and thus became a part of the Khalsa Panth and subject to its collective will. In this way he not only paved the way for the termination of the 'office of a personal Guru' but also abolished the institution of *masands* (deputies), which was becoming increasingly disruptive. Several of the *masands* had refused to forward collections to the Guru, creating factionalism in the Sikh Panth. In addition, Guru Gobind Singh removed the threat posed by the competing seats of authority when he declared that the Khalsa should have no dealings with the followers of Prithi Chand (Minas), Dhir Mal (Guru Har Rai's elder brother, who established his seat at Kartarpur, Jalandhar), and Ram Rai (Guru Harkrishan's elder brother, who established his seat at Dehra Dun). Indeed, abandoning

these five reprobate groups (*pañj mel*) led to the ‘greater awareness of boundaries and a heightened consciousness of identity’ (Grewal 1997: 30).

Finally, Guru Gobind Singh delivered the nucleus of the *rahit* (code of conduct) at the inauguration of the Khalsa. By sanctifying the hair with *amrit*, he made it ‘the official seal of the Guru’, and the cutting of ‘bodily hair’ was thus strictly prohibited. The Guru further imposed a rigorous ban on smoking. In addition, he made the wearing of ‘five weapons’ (*pañj hathiār*) such as sword, disc, arrow, noose, and gun obligatory for Khalsa Sikhs: ‘Appear before the Guru with five weapons on your person’ (G. Singh 1967: 179, 194). This injunction must be understood in the militaristic context of the contemporary situation. McLeod proposed the hypothesis that all the ‘Five Ks’—namely uncut hair (*kes*), a comb for the topknot (*kaṅga*), a short sword (*kirpān*), an iron wristlet (*kaṛā*), and undergarment breeches (*kachh*)—derived from Jat cultural patterns in combination with the developments of the eighteenth century (McLeod 1975: 51). Grewal however contested this view by stating that ‘on the point of 5Ks McLeod’s hypothesis, essentially, does not hold good’ (Grewal 1998: 184). He agrees with McLeod that explicit references to the Five Ks are rather late. But to assume that the Five Ks were introduced in the eighteenth century is wrong. Grewal further argues that it is necessary to make a distinction between the formulation and its substantive prototypes. Undoubtedly, ‘the formulation came later but the substantive symbols were there from the time of instituting the Khalsa’ (Grewal 1998: 303). Instructively, all these five items were there in the eighteenth-century literature in the scattered form. The convention of the Five Ks became evident from the literature produced as a result of Singh Sabha’s new definition of orthodoxy. Although these substantive symbols were already there in the early tradition, their formalization in the late nineteenth century enhanced their value (P. Singh 1999: 155–69).

The inauguration of the Khalsa was the culmination of the canonical period in the development of Sikhism. Guru Gobind Singh also closed the Sikh canon by adding a collection of the works of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the original compilation of the Adi Granth. Before he passed away in 1708, he terminated the traditional line of personal Gurus, and installed the Adi Granth as the eternal Guru for Sikhs, giving another title for the Sikh scripture as ‘the Guru Granth Sahib’. Thereafter, the authority of the Guru was invested together in the scripture (Guru Granth) and in the corporate community (Guru Panth). The twin doctrine of Guru Granth and Guru Panth successfully played a cohesive role within the Sikh tradition during the eighteenth century.

(p. 25) In sum, the contested views of early Sikh historiography revolve around the questions of the evolution of the Sikh Panth in response to four main elements. The first of these was the ideology based on the religious and cultural innovations of Guru Nanak and his nine successors. This was the principal motivating factor in the evolution of the

Sikh Panth. The second was the rural base of Punjabi society. The settlement at the ‘village’ of Kartarpur certainly represented the rural ‘headquarters’ for the nascent Sikh community. It was founded in the midst of a wide expanse of cultivated land that Guru Nanak had managed to purchase for himself. Similarly, the location of Goindval on the right bank of the Beas river was close to the point where the Majha, Malwa, and Doaba areas converge. This may help account for the spread of the Panth’s influence during the period of Guru Amar Das in all three regions of the Punjab. During the period of Guru Arjan the founding of the villages of Tarn Taran, Sri Hargobindpur, and Kartarpur in the rural areas of the Punjab saw a large number of converts from the local Jat peasantry. Furthermore, Guru Tegh Bahadur’s influence in the rural areas attracted more Jats from the Malwa region, and most of them became Khalsa during Guru Gobind Singh’s period. The militant traditions of the Jats apparently brought the Sikh Panth into increasing conflict with the Mughals (and later on with Afghans), a conflict that shaped the future direction of the Sikh movement. The third factor was the conflict created within the Sikh community by dissidents, which originally worked to counter and then, paradoxically, to enhance the process of the crystallization of the Sikh tradition. The fourth element was the period of Punjab history from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries during which the Sikh Panth evolved in tension with Mughals and Afghans. All four elements combined to produce the mutual interaction between ideology and environment that came to characterize the historical development of Sikhism.

Pre-Colonial Sikh History (1708–1849)

The available sources of pre-colonial Sikh history in three languages—Punjabi, Persian, and English—offer multiple perspectives because of the location of their authors in ‘information networks that traversed multiple political and intellectual borderlines’ (Dhavan 2007: 121). For instance, the successive *gurbilās* (splendour of the Guru) texts of this period provide us with contesting views of the institution of Khalsa, its moral vision (*dharam*), and the nature of Sikh political sovereignty. Being closer to the creation of the Khalsa in 1699 Sainapati’s *Gursobhā* (1701–11) presents its moral vision in the light of the normative teachings of the Sikh Gurus, rejecting caste hierarchies within the Panth unequivocally and removing the authority of the middlemen (*masands*) permanently. It envisions the new Khalsa code of conduct (*rahit*) as normative for all Sikhs. Accordingly, the new community and the Guru are seen as one, and the death of Guru Gobind Singh places the spiritual and temporal authority (*jama*) within the collective body of the Khalsa, emphasizing the corporate sovereignty of the Sikh Panth (Dhavan 2007: 114–15).

(p. 26) By contrast, Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Bańsavali-nāmā* (1769) differs radically from Sainapati's text in its exegetical and temporal structures. It employs the Puranic concept of the Kalki Avatar—the last of Vishnu's incarnations, who signals the end of the Dark Age (*kaliyuga*) in the cyclical Indic notion of temporality—to explain the creation of the Khalsa as the final stage of the *kaliyuga*, indicating the inversion of all moral and social orders. According to Kesar Singh, the Khalsa's power is derived from the Devi's blessings, giving the low-caste Sikhs an opportunity to rule and bringing into effect the ending of the fourth cycle of time. In his view the Sikh Jats (*shudras*) who are predestined to rule are also predestined to fall victims to their own ambitions as the final destruction of Vishnu's Kalki Avtar draws nearer. Offering a *shastric* model of caste and kingship, he argues for greater state patronage for Brahmins, such as himself, often ignoring Khalsa criticism of caste hierarchy (Dhavan 2007: 115).

Originating in different political circumstances, the gurbilas texts display complex intertextual relationships, at times referencing each other, at others diverging. For instance, Koer Singh's *Gurbliās Pātshāhi Dasvīn* took shape at a time when Sikh leaders had established sovereignty and the state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was founded. Questioning the Chhibbar narrative of the Guru's ritual worship of Devi and her blessings on the new Khalsa, Koer Singh asserts the Guru's superiority over Hindu gods and goddesses by demonstrating that 'millions of heavens and thrones appear at his feet and millions of wish-fulfilling Gods and Goddesses cannot rival his lotus feet' (Dhavan 2007: 116). In examining three narratives, Purnima Dhavan argues that the '*gurbilas* functioned as the site at which competing narratives of the Guru's life, the origins of the Khalsa community, and its ideas of moral order were articulated' (Dhavan 2007: 115). Similarly, she demonstrates diverse viewpoints emerging from Persian histories (*tārīkh*), reflecting multiple sources and perspectives as *munshis* and *vakils* or agents adept in Persian 'gave new meanings to understandings of the Sikh community, its political institutions, and their origins to a wider non-Sikh audience' (Dhavan 2007: 112). The Persian narratives emphasized the agency of the Sikhs rather than divine will (as envisaged by gurbilas literature) as the main reason for the success of the Sikhs.

It should be emphasized that Sikh identity was visibly sharpened by the institution of the Khalsa (Grewal 1999: 31). Khalsa Sikhs were distinct from 'Hindus' and other religious communities of India. However, all Sikhs did not embrace the Khalsa discipline, and the Sikh Panth was larger than the Khalsa. A considerable number of urban Khatris continued to live as Nanakpanthis who were scattered in large cities throughout India (Deol 2001: 26–9). Udasi Sadhus catered to the religious needs of these people. Moreover, the continuing presence of non-Khalsa Sikhs is attested by the literature of the eighteenth century. For instance, the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* provides us with references to Sehajdhari Sikhs who continued to live as Nanakpanthi Sikhs. They

maintained an identity which was less precise than that of an initiated member of the Khalsa. Most instructively, Sehajdhari Sikhs too were expected to keep their facial hair and whiskers uncut (McLeod 1987: 64, 100, 287). Like the initiated members of the Khalsa they were also expected to wear only turbans on their heads (McLeod 1987: 234 n. 303). Finally, there were those Sikhs who followed the rival lineages of Prithi Chand (Minas), (p. 27) Dhirmal, and Ram Rai. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the Minas lost control of Amritsar to the Khalsa. Although Jiwan Mal (sixth in line from Prithi Chand) re-established the lineage at the village of Guru Har Sahai (named after his son) in 1752, his grandson, Ajit Singh (d. 1813) worked out a close relationship with the Khalsa (Mann 2001: 34). Similarly, the exclusion of the Sodhi family of Kartarpur (Dhirmalias) from the Panth was lifted in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was Vadbhag Singh who was able to win this reprieve with the help of Jassa Singh Ahluwalia.

Interestingly, the observations made by the early Europeans on the contemporary Sikh institutions, manners, dress, and customs offer valuable information on the nature of Sikh society late in the eighteenth century. For the most part they seem to have recorded what they actually saw in their personal encounters with the troops of the Khalsa army. Thus from the historical point of view their accounts constitute an independent witness to the Khalsa tradition in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Almost all the foreign observers are unanimous that following an initiation ceremony the Sikhs refrained from cutting their hair, wore an iron ‘wrist-ring’, and strictly avoided the use of tobacco. For instance, George Forster writes: ‘They permit the growth of hair of the head and beard, they generally wear an Iron Bracelet on the left hand and the use of Tobacco is proscribed among them’ (G. Singh 1962: 79). The Swiss observer Colonel A. L. H. Polier noticed ‘a pair of blue drawers’ as part of the few garments typically worn by the Sikhs whom he observed (G. Singh 1962: 63). William Francklin’s remark may draw our attention to the use of comb: ‘[A] fter performing the requisite duties of their religion by ablution and prayer, they comb their hair and beards with peculiar care’ (G. Singh 1962: 103). One can assume that the sword (kirpan) must have been part of the weaponry worn by Khalsa Sikhs of the eighteenth century, and the comb (kanga) would be concealed in their conspicuous turbans. Thus the five items, now known as the Five Ks, were already there in the eighteenth century, though they were not defined as such.

In a letter written in 1783, George Forster mentioned that all Sikhs did not belong to the military order of the Khalsa. He described the two main categories of Sikhs late in the eighteenth century. On the one hand, there were ‘Khualasah Sikhs’ who did not observe the outward forms of the Khalsa and lacked visible identity. In fact, the Persian word ‘Khualasah’ means ‘to be free’, signifying those Sikhs who were free from external observances of the Khalsa. Forster further mentioned that the boundaries between ‘Khualasah Sikhs’ and ‘the ordinary class of Hindoos’ were quite blurred. ‘Khualasah

Sikhs' were of course Sehajdhari Sikhs. Khalsa Sikhs, on the other hand, were known for their rustic coarseness which clearly distinguished them from everybody else (Forster 1798: 268–9). As Sikhs had become important rivals of the East India Company in the north-western territories of India during the last decades of the eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth century, colonial officials would continue to commission more histories of the Sikhs.

In sum, the Khalsa spent most of its first century fighting the armies of the Mughals and Afghan invaders. Finally, in 1799, Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) succeeded in unifying the Punjab, taking control of Lahore, and declaring himself maharaja. For the next four decades the Sikh community enjoyed more settled political conditions, and with territorial (p. 28) expansion as far as Peshawar in the west, people of different cultural and religious backgrounds were attracted into the fold of Sikhism. The appearance of the Golden Temple today owes a great deal to the generous patronage of the maharaja. Although the maharaja himself was a Khalsa Sikh, his rule was marked by religious diversity within the Sikh Panth. He forged an internal alliance with the Sehajdharis: Sikhs who lived as members of the Nanak Panth but did not accept the Khalsa code of conduct. The Khalsa conceded the religious culture of the Sehajdharis to be legitimate even though, in keeping with the inclusive approach of their sovereign, the latter revered Hindu scriptures as well as the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth, and in some cases even worshipped Hindu images. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, his successors could not withstand the pressure exerted by the advancing British forces. After two Anglo-Sikh wars, in 1846 and 1849, the Sikh kingdom was annexed to the British Empire.

Colonial Sikh History (1849–1947)

With the loss of the Punjab's independence the Sikhs were no longer the masters of their own kingdom. It was in this context that three reform movements—the Nirankari movement, the Namdhari movement and the Singh Sabha movement—emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, each attempting to restore the sense of a distinct spiritual identity to a people whose religious tradition was now just one among a vast array of traditions encompassed within colonial India. The introduction of the British administration into Punjab at the time of annexation in 1849 brought profound changes to Punjabi society. First, the colonial rulers introduced a large measure of bureaucracy and the rule of law, which established a new kind of relationship between the individual and the state. It is no wonder that the 'paternal' rule of the early decades was eventually replaced by the 'machine rule' of laws, codes, and procedures (Grewal 1990: 128).

Second, the British introduced a world view grounded in the secular, modernizing ideology of the Enlightenment. Third, the British sought to cosset and to control the Sikhs through the management of the Golden Temple and its functionaries (Kerr 1999: 153). In this context, the British even sidestepped the dictates of statutory law which required them to maintain 'the separation of secular and religious matters, neutrality in the treatment of religious communities and the withdrawal from involvement in religious institutions' (Kerr 1999: 164). Indeed, for the alien British the need to control the Golden Temple was the greater. Finally, they put a legal ban on the carrying of weapons. This decision was meant to disarm the Khalsa who had fought valiantly against the British in two Anglo-Sikh wars in 1845 and 1849.

Here, it is instructive to closely look at Harjot Oberoi's major arguments in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (1994)—a work that relates to the socio-religious movement among the Sikhs in the colonial period that appropriates an ethnographic approach and a Foucauldian vision of the 'new episteme' fashioned by the Singh Sabha. For him, the Singh Sabha consisted of two components: the Sanatan and the Tat Khalsa. (p. 29) Sanatan Sikhs accepted the authority of the Vedas and Puranas in addition to the Sikh scriptures, thereby believing in incarnations and the ideas of pollution and purity based upon the caste system. The Tat Khalsa, on the other hand, rejected all Hindu accretions prevalent in the Sikh society in the nineteenth century. Applying a social scientific method of analysis, Oberoi argues how the Tat Khalsa, the most influential segment of the Singh Sabha movement, succeeded in eradicating all forms of religious diversity at the turn of the century and in establishing uniform norms of religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Oberoi 1994: 25). As a consequence of the success of the Tat Khalsa reformers, Sikhs in the early twentieth century came 'to think, imagine and speak in terms of a universal community of believers united by uniform rites, symbols and scripture' (Oberoi 1988: 154).

In his analysis, however, Oberoi tilts the balance of evidence artificially in favour of Sanatan Sikhism. There is no doubt that some Sikhs did embrace Hindu practices in the nineteenth century. By projecting this backwards, Oberoi seems to imply that Sikh identity was always predominantly fluid, with free mixing of Sikh and Hindu practices. This is questionable. From as early as the period of Guru Arjan, Sikhs clearly were encouraged to think of themselves as a distinct community. Not surprisingly, J. S. Grewal criticizes Oberoi's view of the Singh Sabha 'as a new episteme arising out of praxis' since it precludes the 'possibility of any meaningful linkages with the past' (Grewal 1997: 73). Further, Oberoi's division of the Singh Sabha into 'Sanatan tradition' and the 'Tat Khalsa' is problematic. There were three strands of thinking represented by three prominent individuals. First, Khem Singh Bedi of Amritsar Singh Sabha supported the centrality of the Singh identity and the significance of the Khalsa initiation, but he also stressed the

idea of divine incarnations, the need for a living guru, and the indivisibility of Sikh and Hindu society. Second, Gurmukh Singh of the Lahore Singh Sabha held the middle position that the activities of the ten Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib serve as the ultimate source of Sikh belief and practice. The Singh identity was the ideal but those who had not undergone the Khalsa initiation were an indivisible part of the Sikh Panth as long as they recognized the Guru Granth Sahib as the 'Eternal Guru'. Sikhs constituted a distinct community and the question of the Hindu–Sikh relationship was a redundant issue. Third, the position of Teja Singh of the Bhasaur Singh Sabha was far more radical. He claimed that anyone who has not undergone the Khalsa initiation should have no place within the Sikh Panth. In his vision of 'orthodoxy' the periphery was to be simply excised, and raising the issue of the Hindu–Sikh relationship was an insult to the Sikhs. In the beginning of the twentieth century 'Bedi and Bhasaur were eventually sidelined' (Mann 2004: 63) and Gurmukh Singh's middle position of the Tat Khalsa achieved general acceptance, both in institutional and ideological terms.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the Tat Khalsa reformers also contributed to two important legal changes. First, in 1909, they obtained legal recognition of the distinctive Sikh wedding ritual in the Anand Marriage Act (1909). Second, in the 1920s they helped to re-establish direct Khalsa control of the major historical gurdwaras, many of which had fallen into the hands of corrupt *mahants* (custodians) supported by the British. The Akali movement began in 1920 as a non-violent agitation. This is **(p. 30)** sometimes described as the 'Third Sikh War' of 1920–5, although it is better known as the Gurdwara Reform Movement. The Tat Khalsa reformers demanded control of Sikh shrines in opposition to the British-supported *mahants* and pujaris. The last gasp effort of the British to manipulate the Sikhs via management of the Golden Temple and its priests proved an ignoble failure in 1919 when General Dyer's invited visit to the Temple failed to pacify the Sikhs. The Akali answer was given in the agitations over the Keys Affair, at Guru-ka-Bagh, at Jaito, and elsewhere. The Akali campaign was finally terminated by the drafting and passing of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, under which control of all gurdwaras passed to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC; 'Chief Management Committee of Sikh Shrines'). The Akalis were the forerunners of the modern political party known as the Akali Dal (army of the immortal). Control of the gurdwaras gave the SGPC enormous political and economic influence. In the course of time the SGPC became the 'authoritative voice' of the Sikhs. As a democratic institution it has always represented the majority opinion. As such, it has laid claim to represent the authority of the 'Guru-Panth', although it has been frequently challenged by Sikhs living outside the Punjab. Having established itself as the central authority on all questions of religious discipline the SGPC published the standard manual of the 'Sikh Code of Conduct' known as Sikh Rahit Maryada in 1950. This manual has ever since been regarded as the authoritative guide to orthodox Sikh doctrine and behaviour.

Post-Colonial Sikh History (1947–)

In 1947 the British withdrew from India and the subcontinent was partitioned to create two independent republics of India and Pakistan. Partition was especially hard for the Sikhs because it split the Punjab into two. Most of the 2.5 million Sikhs living on the Pakistani side fled as refugees; though many settled in the new Indian state of Punjab, some moved on to major cities elsewhere in India. Rehabilitation and settlement resulted in a significant change in the demographic pattern in the Punjab. In 1951 the Sikhs formed about 35 per cent of the total population of the state, while the Hindus represented the majority with over 62 per cent. However, this demographic pattern further changed with the creation of 'Punjabi Province' (Punjabi Suba) on 1 November 1966 as the result of the reorganization of the state into Punjab and Haryana on linguistic grounds. The Sikhs have formed the majority with over 62 per cent in the new Punjab state. Indeed, the first two decades after the partition were marked by the Punjabi Suba agitation of the Akalis and the 'Green Revolution' in Punjab, resulting in heightened political rivalries between the Akali Dal and the ruling Congress Party. Eventually, the Akali Dal was able to wrest political power in the Punjab with the help of the erstwhile Jan Sangh and other allies. Of course the central government at New Delhi would frequently topple their ministry to bring the Congress rule back in the state.

In 1973 the main political party of the Sikhs, the Akali Dal, passed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, demanding increased autonomy for all the states of India. Over the (p. 31) following years, relations with the Indian government became increasingly strained as a result. In an apparent attempt to sow dissension in the Akali ranks, the Congress government encouraged the rise of a charismatic young militant named Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947–84). But this strategy backfired in the spring of 1984, when a group of armed radicals led by Bhindranwale decided to provoke a confrontation with the government by occupying the Akal Takhat building inside the Golden Temple complex. The government responded by sending in the army. The assault that followed—code-named 'Operation Blue Star'—resulted in the deaths of many Sikhs, including Bhindranwale, as well as the destruction of the Akal Takhat and severe damage to the Golden Temple itself. A few months later, on 31 October 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards. For several days unchecked Hindu mobs in Delhi and elsewhere killed thousands of Sikhs.

Virginia Van Dyke (2009) has recently provided a summary of competing narratives of the Punjab crisis. The dominant narrative told by the Akali Dal and supported by many academic and journalistic sources focuses on the malfeasance and vindictiveness of the state, more specifically the Congress Party and Indira Gandhi herself. In this narrative,

the rise of the militant movement was the creation of Congress in 1978. This formation, in turn, successfully destabilized the Parkash Singh Badal government, leading to nearly two decades of strife. In order to defeat the nefarious designs of Congress, so goes the narrative, there is a need for the coalition between the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the Akalis to preserve harmony and reassure the populace of continued peace. This coalition is also necessary in changing the image of the Sikhs as anti-national. In contrast to this view, there are other narratives that focus on the desire of the Sikhs for autonomy or independence. And there are also opposing viewpoints to the argument that the coalition between the Akali Dal and the BJP is a statesmanlike inter-communal alliance to preserve the peace. According to these alternative voices, including expressions from those few and dwindling number of Akalis who do not belong to the Badal faction, the alliance with the BJP is completely self-serving on the part of the both the BJP and Badal and his supporters. These voices are relatively muted due to the widespread desire for peace, and, too, because of structural changes that support the main Akali faction's position (Dyke 2009: 126).

There is still another narrative, however, one that deserves much more attention than it has received to date, namely a narrative highlighting the ongoing *non-violent* dimension of Sikh 'militancy'. The representation of Sikhs and Sikhism in violent and militant images has been pivotal in popular understandings of Sikhism since colonial times. Sikh history is indeed replete with the valour of the Sikh warrior in battle. However, there is less attention to the Sikh warrior in equally and perhaps more demanding non-violent actions. For instance, Paul Wallace (2011) makes the point that the Sikhs are not essentially violent but militant where 'militancy' does not mean violence in actions and reactions alone, but also an aggressive and passionate stand for the cause of their religion and the Gurus. Through a study of the development of non-violent militancy, Wallace argues that public demonstrations and political demands through non-violent means have been more successful than violent ones. Three case studies (of the Gurdwara Reform Movement from 1920 to 1925, the Punjabi Suba movement from 1947 to 1966, and the **(p. 32)** movement against the emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1977) highlight the strengths of non-violent struggles and those of the actors within the Akali Dal. The violence during the 1980s in Punjab, Wallace (2011: 85–101) argues, is now finding ways of closure through non-violent democratic means, moving away from 'anti-centrism' to 'cooperative federalism'. Conflict resolution can be found through measures of democratic process and accommodating the former militants in a peaceful manner, along with initiating transparency and justice through the state structure.

In fact, acts of violence or non-violence are social phenomena that take place at particular historical junctures. They cannot be described as essential features of any community. The Punjab crisis of yesteryear reflected the multidimensionality of violence.

While involvement of Sikh militants in random acts of violence and guerrilla warfare was totally unwarranted and counterproductive, the state allowed the ‘chaos of insurgency to proliferate before brutally and clinically exterminating it almost at will’ (Mandair 2007: 220). Thus one cannot overlook the sheer egregious and unjust acts of the state, killing in the name of order, security, and sheer power, especially when religious militants were the victims.

Over the last century about 2 million Sikhs have left India for foreign lands. Wherever they have settled—in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, East Africa, and the United Kingdom and other European countries, as well as Canada and the United States—they have carried their sacred scripture with them and established their own places of worship. As a matter of fact there are more than five hundred gurdwara*s* in North America and the United Kingdom alone. The histories of diaspora Sikh communities are diverse and colourful. The Sikhs around the globe have been involved in a process of ‘renewal and redefinition’, and that process has only intensified in recent years. Today, the question ‘Who is a Sikh?’ is the subject of often acrimonious debate in online discussions among the various Sikh networks. Each generation of Sikhs has to respond to this question in the light of new historical circumstances while addressing the larger issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Not surprisingly, diaspora Sikhs approach these issues from different perspectives, depending on the cultural and political contexts from which they come. In many cases they rediscover their identity through their interaction with other religious and ethnic communities. New challenges demand new responses, especially in a postmodern world where notions of self, gender, and authority are subject to constant questioning.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need to explore new ways of knowing the past and to complement historical data with ethnographic study that can illuminate the lived experience of the Sikh Panth. In addition to documentary evidence, we must not overlook material culture—artefacts of all sorts such as the weapons of the Gurus, coins, clothing, the Guru’s chariot, and kitchen utensils preserved with the descendants of famous Sikh families—as we try to make sense of the religious life and cultural context of early Sikh community. Moreover, religious communities create memory through the practice of rituals and symbols. As a matter of fact rituals and recitals could bridge the gap between the past and the present where recitals of the past events are not just matters of intellectual exercises but of an invocation and an evocation in which historical remembrances (p. 33) produce subjectivities and create mentalities. Dialogical readings of primary sources along with sectarian literature can enable us to develop a more dynamic historical understanding of the Sikh past. On the whole considered historical judgment based on a nuanced assessment of the often-contradictory evidence must form the bedrock of any historical analysis.

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The Evolution of the Sikh Community

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This paper traces certain facets in the ongoing evolution of the Sikh community. Noting the past contributions to this debate by both W. H. McLeod and Indubhushan Banerjee, the article adds further dimensions by positing the role of Mughal courtly ideology in this growth.

Keywords: evolution, Sikh history, Sikh Gurus, history, Akbar

Let us begin this essay with a brief digression about beginning. An apt endeavour, beginning, especially in the light of the well-excavated topic at hand, the evolution of the Sikh community, a community shaped by its Gurus and their ideology, and its history of how men and women identifying as Sikh over time and with hindsight responded to both the presence of their Gurus and that ideology given the particular circumstances and contexts of their day. Evolution seems to imply simple beginnings and growing complexities as that putative initial organism or idea reacts to certain catalysts.

Yet despite the implications of simplicity, beginnings and origins are anything but; these are intriguing phenomena that are rarely pinpointed and are often deeply enmeshed in ambiguities and quite productive ambivalences; the search for beginnings in evolutions is, as is now well known, often the search for illusions. The same, obviously, is the case for the Sikh tradition. With regard to this phenomenon it seems clear on the one hand that the tradition begins with Guru Nanak, who was born in the Punjab in April 1469 ce, which suggests an origin found in his life and teachings. Yet on the other hand this life and these teachings accord well with certain lives and teachings we also discover in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century northern India, beings and ideas we may loosely describe as Hindu and Muslim; Sant, Bhakti, Nath, Sufi, and so on. Technically this would place the Sikh community's origins at a much further remove than 1469, perhaps to the dawning of the Sant movement, which possesses clear affinities to Guru Nanak's thought (an emphasis upon the formless and ineffable nature of the divine, for example, and the

total disregard for caste status in the pursuit of enlightenment or *sahaj*), sometime in the tenth century. The predominant ideology of the Sant *paramparā* in turn corresponds in many respects to the much wider devotional Bhakti tradition of northern India, particularly Vaishnava Bhakti, ideas of which travelled from southern to northern India and intersected with notions we discover within the *bhakti marg* ('Way of Devotion') explicated by Lord Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) within the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata, much of which predates the beginning of the (p. 36) Common Era. Few Sikhs today would mention these Indic texts and ideologies in the same breath as the Sikh tradition, let alone trace elements of their tradition to this chronological and ideological point, despite the fact that the Indic mythology that sustains so many of these early Indic texts permeates the Sikh sacred canon, the Guru Granth Sahib, and the secondary canon, the Dasam Granth (Rinehart 2011), and adds delicate nuance and substance to the sacred symbolic universe of the Sikhs of today and of their past ancestors. How far must one ultimately go in order to find this beginning? This question in many ways makes the search both profoundly problematic and quixotic.

The term evolution itself not only suggests beginnings and developments from this putative though deceptive initial point, but those elements claimed as significant in evolutionary terms, especially when dealing with cultural or social evolution, are not often unquestioned, without their fair share of the problematic, or ensnared within discourses of power, control, and subordination. To choose the word evolution in this regard in the place of, say, development or some other productive synonym such as growth thus requires some explanation.

Although often distanced from the scientific context from which it ultimately fell into vogue the suggestion of evolution rather than history still continues to privilege the scientific, the factual, the rational, the linear, and a host of other discursive strategies that to a large extent underpinned the superiority of the scientific gaze, historicism, and positivism, all of which came to be wielded as weapons of control and domination by the so-called enlightened proponents of colonialism and all of which became ultimately reified thanks in large part to the European Enlightenment and the spread of these apparently universal ideas through the violence of colonialism. These facets have been well and intriguingly excavated these last few decades by post-colonial theorists. For the Sikh tradition perhaps the most incisive critique of this crushing colonial stamp so far is Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair's *Religion and the Specter of the West* (Mandair 2009). Evolution as the word of choice thus appears to carry more scientific weight (thus tilting towards a more Western epistemology), let us say, than the term history, which unlike evolution, is suggestive of interpretation and bias and socio-politico-economic context rather than scientific positivism and reason. The choice of the term evolution apparently makes the proposed study 'more true'.

Aware of these post-colonial critiques I will nevertheless continue to use this word throughout this essay to suggest the forces and catalysts which Sikhs confronted (whether Sikhs were generally cognizant of these as forces eliciting adaptation or not) and to which they adapted or were made to adapt. As the term evolution has thus far been used in the title of two especially influential twentieth-century books in Sikh Studies (ones which nevertheless read as histories of the Sikh community) we may ask what differentiates the idea of 'The Evolution of the Sikh Community' from that of the 'History of the Sikh Community', the latter topic which has been mined throughout this Oxford Handbook. The distinction has been already suggested in the above discussion, and is a very fine one although not particularly realized through its use in Sikh Studies. A simple division may be to problematize the dualism which notes that Sikhs in their story are on the one hand subjects endowed with agency and on the other material (p. 37) objects who are made to adapt by external catalysts. History apparently is a process that Sikhs themselves have produced whereas evolution suggests a more limited agency, the outcome of forces that have worked upon the Sikhs and which they in turn have worked upon, producing a relationship that is far more complex than, simply put, the response of a biological organism to its environment over time. There is here too the suggestion that the community under discussion is like an organism, and it is the completeness which evolution elicits rather than its parts which history does.

The first work as far as I know to employ this descriptive was Indubhushan Banerjee's seminal two-volume *Evolution of the Khalsa*, the first volume of which appeared in 1936 and the second in 1947 (Banerjee 1972), as Sikhs were striving alongside other nationalist Indians towards Independence from Great Britain. The title here, as with so many other facets in this text that Indu Banga has labelled, in her curiously titled essay, as 'in the service of Hindu nationalism' (Banga 2004), intimates an attempt to view the Khalsa through at least one of the lenses of Indian modernism and nationalism, as in part a precursor or archetype for the Indian Union which loomed large on the horizon at the time, and is very suggestive, ensuring that all Sikh narratives merged into this sole trajectory. In this reading *Sikhi* begins with Guru Nanak and the Khalsa is the end of that story. Indu Banga has underscored the questionable attempt to integrate this narrative into a whole, privileging as it does a resurgent and powerful Hindu direction to Indian history, a nascent Hindu triumphalism, put into play through the efforts of twentieth-century ideologues belonging to groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swaysevak Sangh. Banerjee's work therefore masks as 'science' what is in fact clear bias and interpretation.

Interestingly Banerjee's respected text is rarely coupled with the second, equally as popular (perhaps more so in the twenty-first century) though far more controversial work, which also incorporates this word into its title, W. H. McLeod's collection of five essays

published in 1976 as *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*. It is surprising that McLeod's work is never mentioned in the same breath as Banerjee's since a quick read through the former makes it clear that McLeod's *Evolution* complements and builds upon Banerjee's volumes, with the caveat that McLeod's work rigorously evinces the objective, postivistic gaze of the outsider far more critically than Banerjee's *Evolution*, the latter of which is produced by a very much more involved author committed to the project of nation building, the specific nation in question whose roots and origins are to be found in India's particular 'Hindu history'. For this reason, as Banga also notes, Banerjee simply rejects claims that Sikhism took issue with Hindu thought, a fact Banga underscores by pointing to Banerjee's rather pedestrian claim that

> Sikhism, no doubt, has its start in a protest but it was a protest against conventionalism and not against Hinduism.
>
> (Banerjee 1972: i. 143)

The issue of Hindu nationalism for McLeod is more or less irrelevant as one may surmise through its utter absence in McLeod's five essays. This is not to say that McLeod's work is not problematic.

(p. 38) Perhaps the most glaring issue in regard to the Panth's evolution on which McLeod conjectures is the apparent Sikh turn to militancy, one given much weight by Banerjee too (Banerjee 1972: vol. ii) although McLeod goes into more detail and is more systematic in his explanation. Both scholars base their accounts for this turn on the so-called cultural habits of the Jats, the Indian caste, predominantly rural, which historically contributed the highest numbers to the Sikh Panth likely because of Guru Nanak's strong emphasis on equality and the dignity of hard labour. It was, in part, the gradual though unconscious absorption of their traits coupled with the new drastic turn in Sikh–Mughal relations culminating in the execution of Guru Arjan (d. 1606) which ultimately led Guru Hargobind (1595–1644) and later Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708) to form the martial extensions of the Sikh tradition climaxing with the inauguration of the Khalsa in 1699.

The problems with this thesis are many, not the least of which is, firstly, that it essentializes and homogenizes all Jats and, secondly, provides very little detail indeed about just what are these particular Jat traits apart from rather generic qualities such as a 'straightforward manner…tremendous generosity…an insistence upon the right to take vengeance, and…a sturdy attachment to the land' (McLeod 1976: 11), and even these are not generally supported by contemporary sources. Why Banerjee's claims of 1936 and 1947 were barely noted by contemporary Sikh intellectuals is still something of a mystery though. Perhaps the spectre of the common Indian enemy (if one will) that the British presented as Indians collectively fought for Indian independence may have obviated the

need for these intellectuals to vociferously claim an all-encompassing Sikh–Hindu difference.

The lack of response is still nevertheless surprising since a careful reading of the text makes clear that Banerjee did not consider Guru Nanak in any way unique; he was, as noted, a reformer not the purveyor of a unique dispensation (Banerjee 1972: i. 143–5), while McLeod's text, which more or less trod alongside Banerjee's, unleashed a torrent of opposition, spawning a number of spirited replies, especially Jagjit Singh's *The Sikh Revolution* and his later books which expounded those revolutionary themes (Jagjit Singh 1984, 1999) and just about every work printed at the expense of the Global Sikh Studies network based in the city of Chandigarh. The likely explanation for this vitriol lies in the contemporary political realities of the Punjab in which Sikh political groups were generally anxious in the context of the rise of Hindu nationalism in the late 1970s and 1980s. Surprisingly McLeod's views are far more aligned with the predominant Sikh interpretation that Guru Nanak's message was very much a unique one: Guru Nanak's inheritance was that of the Sant tradition, to be sure, but his uniqueness lay in the way he refracted that inheritance through the lens of his exceptional and charismatic personality. In an earlier article I had mentioned that the issue with McLeod's work for pious Sikhs may be condensed to that of agency and praxis, issues which likewise impinge upon those of evolution (Fenech 2010). For Sikhs generally the evolution of the Sikh tradition follows a singular trajectory worked upon by a singular source. The Guru's ideology, theology, philosophy, all three of which are a part of *Gurmat* (The Guru's Doctrine), was first articulated by Guru Nanak and prepared and refined by the later Gurus, all (p. 39) of whom were Guru Nanak in a later guise according to powerful Sikh traditions. By this token therefore the ideological development and growth of the Sikh tradition came to an end when the last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, died in 1708. Any suggestion of forces shaping the Panth other than the will of the historical Gurus, or the living will of its ideology (well captured in the understanding of the scripture housing the Guru's words as also housing the mystical substance of the eternal Guru) is tantamount to irreverence.

Let us now pick up the story. Whether one agrees with it or not, the statement that the Sikh tradition begins with Guru Nanak is an important one. Guru Nanak was clearly and lucidly the spirit behind Sikh ideology, a fact that is recognized in multiple ways in the unfolding evolution of the Panth, but particularly noted in both the succession hymn of Satta and Balwand (GGS 968)—bards attached to the Guru's court—and, as well, in the fact that all subsequent Gurus whose compositions are included within the Adi Granth refer to themselves as Nanak in the so-called signature (*chhap*) line of their hymns, a detail further buttressed by the use of the scriptural formula *mahallā* followed by a numeral to designate the specific Guru's authorship of a particular hymn or shabad (and so Mahalla 2—M2—for Guru Angad, the second Guru; M3 for Guru Amar Das, the third

Guru; and so on). With this in mind it is no surprise that W. H. McLeod's first academic text, *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*, begins with *Bachitar Nāṭak* 5: 4–6 (the *Bachitar Nāṭak* is the apparent autobiography of the tenth Sikh Guru) which underscores the significance of Guru Nanak in the context of all nine of the normative tradition's successor Gurus (McLeod 1968). One could argue as well that not only do the hymns of the Adi Granth penned by Guru Nanak's successors acclaim the ideology of the first Guru, because of course they understood it to be the Truth, but the sacred canon's entire underlying structure may be interpreted as the celebration and explication in real time of Nanak's message (Fenech 2008). The corollary to such an ideological celebration thus appears to be the religious biographies of the first Sikh Master the *janam-sākhīs*, which manifest the commemoration of that life and, as well, a life guide for those perplexed and unsure of how to truly live the honourable life. Indeed, as one contributor to this volume makes clear, these texts encourage a 'personal connection with the [first Sikh] Guru' (see Toby Johnson in this volume).

Guru Nanak's ideology certainly did not emerge in a vacuum and it is well noted that Nanak as a historical person was born into and was nurtured in a very specific environment, an environment to which he responded both intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically. This may seem straightforward, but there is nevertheless quite some controversy as to what that particular environment entailed. The dominant narrative claims that the northern India of Guru Nanak's day was one of intolerance and brutality in which common folk laboured diligently to uphold a religious and political elite whose sole aim was to exploit those who did not share their own pedigree. Although particularly tenacious, in part because it helps ground one specific (later) understanding of Guru Nanak's ideology, this interpretation does not accord well with contemporary sources, textual or otherwise, for despite the early sixteenth-century raids of the soon-to-be Mughal *pādishāh* Zahiruddin Babur and the taxes levied by Sikander Lodi (p. 40) and his governor in the Punjab, Daulat Khan Lodi, the life of Guru Nanak was lived at a relatively peaceful time during which the initial infrastructure of the great Mughal empire was being laid by the last vestiges of the Delhi Sultanate. As J. S. Grewal has opined, an understanding of Guru Nanak's time as an especially dark one does an injustice to the total message of the first Guru, and to the life of the Guru as a particularly sensitive thinker concerned with everyday injustices and ways by which and through which these may be eradicated (Grewal 1969). This is perhaps among the reasons why Guru Nanak's concerns were not predominantly situated within the domain often stereotyped as mystical, but rather that Guru Nanak spoke of lived truth as of a superior quality to the Truth, the highest truth of all (GGS 62). This ethic of 'socially involved renunciation' (Nayar and Sandhu 2007) is what clearly sets Guru Nanak's thought apart from that of the Sants whose concerns focus instead solely on experiencing the transcendent-yet-immanent nameless divine through spiritual discipline, which to an

extent discounts the world of phenomenal experience (Vaudeville 1987). Nanak's was a very this-worldly mysticism if one will excuse this rather tired description. And it was this ethic which he attempted to implement in founding the town of Kartarpur, the City of the Creator (today in Pakistan), in which Nanak himself is alleged to have laboured and distributed a charity, selflessly, which went well beyond the ordinary. Nanak himself, in other words, embodied the message he had so long been preaching in his own actions, thus living truthfully.

And to this extent as well Nanak emphasized the equality of all believers. Now for many popular sants and bhagats this too was a facet of their teaching, but their understanding of equality did not for the most part extend to women. For Guru Nanak, it did and although the first Guru was not attempting to upend society altogether it is very clear that in matters of liberation women had as equal an access to the divine as did men. Such a response to an intellectual environment in which women were, to be frank, subordinated was near revolutionary as Nikky Singh often mentions (Nikky Singh 1993).

It was all of these qualities that likely attracted followers to him as, too, did his particular ideological stress on the empowering nature of toil and the fact that just such a lifestyle involving labour was a legitimate space in which one could secure liberation from the cycle of existence. Such activities helped further underscore the first Guru's commitment to the humble and the meek, and also his recognition of those groups often marginalized in the society of his day, reflected in part by the Guru's unswerving emphasis upon that humility which counterbalances pride, a focus that so intimately fortifies his hymns. McLeod's claims that Jats only later became a force in the nascent Sikh Panth in the tradition's development, during the time of Guru Amar Das (1479–1574) and especially by the time of Guru Arjan (1563–1606), is therefore questionable (McLeod 1976: 9–11). It is more likely, as Pashaura Singh has suggested, that Jats began to more robustly populate Sikh ranks well into the period of the first Guru, probably during that terminal phase of the first Master's guruship, the Kartarpur period (Pashaura Singh 2010: 54–6).

Guru Nanak thus not only responds to the external stimulus with which he is confronted but that stimulus and its effect on other Sikhs is itself altered by virtue of its contact with Guru Nanak. In regard to the regular narratives detailing the evolution of (p. 41) the Sikh community the contributions of a number of the less discussed Sikh Gurus are often marginalized or subsumed under the heading of simply continuing the inheritance provided by the previous Gurus. This is the case for Gurus Angad (1504–52), Hari Rai (1630–61), and Hari Krishan (1656–64) above all (McLeod 1976 for example). Since the activities of these particular Gurus are not well recorded by contemporaries such paucity of knowledge regarding their lives should elicit little surprise. In fact for Guru Angad, the second Sikh Guru, in particular the predominant 'biography' of his life and activities as the Guru derive from Santokh Singh's massive early to mid-nineteenth-century *Gur-*

pratāp Sūraj Granth which is in turn based on the stories of the second Guru we find in the mid to late eighteenth century *Mahimā Prakāś* texts, the *Mahimā Prakāś Kavita* and the *Mahimā Prakāś Vartak* (Bhalla 1971 and Bajwa 2004).

Although one must approach these works cautiously there are nevertheless some interesting details we may uncover in the light of tacit information retrieved from Guru Angad's hymns. As Surjit Hans has noted, 'the change in the historical situation is amply reflected in the bani of Guru Angad' (Hans 1988: 42). To this end, Hans points to the insecurity that seems to permeate certain hymns of the second Master expressing perhaps the very small number of Sikhs under Guru Angad's care at a time when the second Guru is beset by the contentious claims of Guru Nanak's sons, a development one also finds noted in the second of Guru's hymns (Hans 1988: 43–8). It is perhaps for such reasons that later Sikh narratives of Guru Angad remember him above all for his obedience to Guru Nanak, thus implying that little change was engendered within the Panth on the second Master's part. These are all points that are also brought out in Santokh Singh's narratives.

But there are some issues regarding the evolving nature of the tradition which are absent from the analysis of both Hans and McLeod. The second Guru, for example, continues to understand the divine reality in a way that reflects the contemporary courtly society of the Mughals and that of the intervening Sher Shah Suri dynasty (1540–56). For both the Guru Nanak and Guru Angad monarchy generally, but Indo-Persian monarchy specifically, was the only system of government with which they were familiar, a system not only within the lived experience of these Gurus and all of the subsequent Gurus, but also one explicated in much of the Indic and Islamicate literature with which they were familiar. That this construction did not play a role in the evolving nature of the Sikh community is difficult to sustain.

We find both Gurus responding to royal authority in much the same way for example. All the grandeur and glory associated with monarchy is particularly false if the monarch fails to revere the *nām* (the facet of the divine to which humans attune themselves through the repetition of the name of the divine) and uphold social justice. Guru Nanak not only blesses Babur with sovereignty, but he may have actually met the emperor if we accept more traditional accounts of the first Master (McLeod 1980: 74–80), a meeting initially suggested by the famous *Bābur-vāṇī* ('Verses regarding Babur') of the Adi Granth (GGS 360, 417–18, 722–3). Guru Angad, too, chastises Babur's son, Humayun, following his defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Suri at the Battle of Khanua (1540) after Humayun, having been ushered into the presence of the second Sikh Master, loses (p. 42) his patience (he was kept standing for 46 minutes) and attempts to lash out while the Guru and his Sikhs are absorbed in listening to the performance of *kīrtan* (Vir Singh 1990: v.

1350–2) or while he is playing with children (Bajwa 2004: 62–3). In this case we also find Guru Angad blessing the emperor, reassuring the now-humiliated Humayun that he will regain his lost throne.

Such associations with royalty, at least within the hagiography of north Indian saints, are not altogether uncommon (Smith 2000). Sants and bhagats like the Sikh Gurus appropriate the terminology of royalty to describe their mystical and aesthetic experiences and indeed their more mundane understandings of the 'divine court'. God is the *sacchā pādiśāh*, the true emperor, and meetings of the pious are held in the *darbār* or court. Yet the particular way that Sikhs today worship collectively continues this imperial emphasis and is evocative of these grand stories regarding the interaction of the Sikh Gurus with the Mughal *shāhanshāhs*: Sikhs gather together in the presence or *hazūri* of the great king of the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib, in the pages of which dwells the mystical presence of the Eternal Guru; they collectively worship within the darbar, the most famous of which is the Darbar Sahib also known as the Golden Temple in Amritsar; they hear the music of the *rāgī jathā* ('Group of Sikh musicians') as they approach the kingly scripture over which the royal whisk (*chaurī sāhib*) is reverently waved and the parasol or *chhatrī* erected, both of which connote the scripture's royal status; and they touch the forehead to the ground (*mathā ṭhekṇā*) in front of this, the eternal Sikh Master. A visit to any Sikh gurdwara will abundantly confirm the Sikh debt to Indo-Timurid courtly protocol, etiquette, and comportment. Even today's flying of the Khalsa flag, the Nishan Sahib, may be understood as reflecting Indo-Timurid courtly protocol in which flags and standards played their part in advertising the royal presence whether at home or in transit.

The royal overtones we discover in the narratives of the first two Gurus continue to evolve in the activities of the successor Gurus, especially during the period of Guru Ram Das (1534–81) and Guru Arjan. It is during the time of the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das, however, that scholars first begin to see the adoption of distinctive Sikh features and rituals, which as McLeod noted almost forty years ago, at first suggest a violation of Guru Nanak's supreme emphasis on 'interior religion' (that is, that condemnation of conventionalism about which Banerjee waxes eloquently). Although Guru Amar Das too is noted for his encounters with royal figures (Birbal and Akbar respectively), it is particularly for his apparent innovations that the third Guru is best known: it is Guru Amar Das, for example, who introduces special Sikh pilgrimage sites (*tiraths*) such as Goindwal Sahib; distinctive Sikh holidays and rituals; and, most significantly, a collection of hymns composed by himself, the two previous Gurus, and certain Hindu Bhagats and Sufis whose ideas and compositions generally aligned with those of the Gurus, which today is referred to as either the Goindwal Pothis or the Mohan Pothis (Mann 1996). This

compendium would be ultimately transformed into the Adi Granth under the direction of the fifth Sikh Master and into the Guru Granth Sahib under the tenth.

Such interventions into the ‘interior’ message of Nanak which devalued ‘external’ aspects of religion, ritual, and belief such as tiraths and scriptures were, as McLeod (p. 43) mentions, accommodations to a constituency that was allowed to grow and flourish within a new, far more generous historical context, one ushered into being through the ideologies of the emperor Jallaluddin Akbar (1542–1604), whose affectionate inquisitiveness particularly towards the multifaceted religious and cultural traditions of India are very well documented indeed. As McLeod noted regarding Guru Amar Das’s changes:

> Gurū Nānak had rejected all of these. Gurū Amar Dās, in different and more difficult circumstances, is compelled to return to them.
>
> (McLeod 1976: 8)

The difficult circumstances about which McLeod speaks are those in which Sikh *saṅgats* or congregations are scattered throughout northern India. To ensure that the entire Sikh community continue to be cohesive and remain distinct from all others in the light of the growth of a second generation ‘for whom the bond of personal commitment [to the Guru] is weakening’ (McLeod 1976: 8), therefore, Guru Amar Das makes concessions to his environment by reintroducing traditional customs that are noted as Hindu in retrospect (McLeod 1976: 9).

The dominating presence of Akbar’s court which spans the period of the third to the fifth Sikh Gurus, plays a further role in the gradual evolution of the Sikh community. It is perhaps because of its fame, a grandeur which spreads throughout northern India and well beyond (even to England) thanks again to the generous policies of the emperor, that Guru Amar Das expresses no small amount of concern over the nature of courtliness, opposing that courtly etiquette which was true from that which was false in a vein reminiscent of that in the hymns of his predecessors:

> *andari rājā takhtu hai āpe kare niāu | gur śabadī daru jāṇīai andari mahallu asarāu | khare parakhi khajānai pāiani khoṭiā nāhīn thāun*
>
> Within [oneself] is the king who sits on the throne; he himself dispenses justice. Through the *śabad* of the Guru is the [true] court known. Within [the self alone] is the [genuine] palace, the [true] refuge. There genuine coins are assayed and put into the treasury while counterfeit ones [are cast away and] find no place.
>
> (GGS 1092)

It was likely in an attempt to describe this true courtliness and to serve as a counterpoint to the grandeur of the Mughals that we have the first of the courtly bards (*bhaṭṭ*s) composing hymns in honour of the first five Sikh Gurus, culminating in a series of such panegyrics known as the *Bhaṭṭān de Savāyyīe* (Pashaura Singh 2006: 85–9) which present the Guru's darbar with a spiritual grandeur to rival that of the banal glory of all earthly courts.

But there were as well more mundane concessions to courtly society. Guru Amar Das, once again in the light of the growing constituency of the Sikh Panth, also appoints representatives who occupy *mañjīs* or 'seats' to administer scattered Sikh congregations. Once again this is to serve the function of ministering to a large and scattered (p. 44) community, but there is too an imperial dimension to this decision. These seats are divided into twenty-two, the same number as there are provinces in Akbar's Mughal domains, thus suggesting that manjis refer, in fact, to districts within which Sikh sangats gathered amongst themselves (Fauja Singh 1979: 116–30). These manjis would not only knit Sikh communities together but they also allowed the Sikh community a direct personal link to Guru Amar Das through his representative, serving a function somewhat like that which we discover later in the janam-sakhis and gur-bilas literature. It appears that this innovation was so successful that it was further expanded under Guru Ram Das, becoming the famous (and later infamous) *masand* (Persian: *masnad*, 'seat') system of the Sikh tradition.

Apart from excavating the area where the sarovar ('sacred pool') within which the Harimandir (that would ultimately become the Golden Temple) would be built, Guru Ram Das is also known as the most accomplished Guru in terms of musicology, a point that Surjit Hans discusses at length (Hans 1988: 91–4). Such an understanding rarely finds its way into a discussion about Sikh ideological and cultural evolution, but it nevertheless has an important place, not only in regard to the expanding growth of the Sikh Panth, but especially in the context of Sikh adaptions to the Indo-Timurid courtly model that we have been elaborating thus far. We do discover such models elicited once again in the panegyrics of the bards in which, Pashaura Singh notes, the bards pen 'a disproportionate number of verses in praise of Guru Ram Das' (Pashaura Singh 2006: 86).

Although Guru Ram Das's quantity of hymns within the Adi Granth does not approach that of either Guru Nanak or the former's son, Guru Arjan, he is nevertheless the most musically innovative in terms of the introduction of varying musical measures or *rāgs*, having written hymns in at least thirty different ones, the first Guru to do so, followed by his son, Guru Arjan. One must keep in mind that music and musical innovation also played an important role in the construction of the Mughal courtly person and that during Guru Ram Das's time the Mughal court was graced with perhaps the most famous

musician in the history of Mughal India, Mian Tansen (d. *c.*1589), one of the *navratna* or nine courtly jewels of Akbar. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which the Guru, especially one as conversant with the language and aesthetics of music as Guru Ram Das, would not have been aware of these facets of the Mughal court and the self-fashioning of its courtiers. His great musical innovation in more robustly broadcasting the message of Guru Nanak, which let us recall consistently remained unchanged, may have been in part a response to aesthetic developments we discover at the Mughal court. And this in turn may have also prompted the very bhatts mentioned earlier to devote to Guru Ram Das the Lion's Share of their courtly praise.

With the tenure of Guru Arjan the courtly structure of the Sikh darbar continues and a number of innovations in response to this may be seen: the introduction of the *bhaṭṭ bāṇī* into the Kartarpur recension of the Adi Granth and its previous drafts, for example, the construction of the Darbar Sahib, and too the Guru's interest in manuscripts. As well, it appears likely that Guru Arjan also sponsored the gathering of poets and singers in *kavikuls* or *majālis*, as may be conjectured from references to such gatherings in the (p. 45) *vārs* or odes of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (1551–1636), Guru Amar Das's cousin and the fifth Guru's amanuensis (Fenech 2008: 58–9).

Interestingly, as Pashaura Singh has noted, Guru Arjan is the first Guru whose meeting with royalty we can concisely trace, to 1598, an encounter with the emperor Akbar and his cortege as recorded in the *Akbar-nāmah* of the most eminent Abu'l Fazl Allami (Pashaura Singh 2006: 140). Certainly this extended meeting likely had a major effect for the later development of Sikh manuscriptology. But I would conjecture that it went well beyond merely this. To be sure, Abu'l Fazl's famous chronicle paints a picture of the idealized emperor whose lineage is traced (with luminous overtones from both the Qur'an and Ferdausi's *Shāh-nāmah*) to the legendary Mongol queen Alankuva. One must therefore register its descriptions with much caution as Peter Hardy consistently reminds us (Hardy 1985). Abu'l Fazl, however, also makes mention of Akbar's reputation for invincibility in late sixteenth-century India, borne out in large part by his many thoroughly successful military campaigns over the span of his rule. Not only was he thus the 'tolerant' universal ruler, a Muslim ruler who figured widely in the symbolic universe of certain Rajput groups (Ziegler 1978), but was also a dearly loved figure in the hagiography of the great Hindu bhagat, Sur Das, as we note in the seventeenth-century Brajbhasha *Chaurāsī Vaiṣṇāvan kī Vārtā* of Hari Rai (Hari Rai 1992) and thus by extension by Hindus generally. Akbar may have been all of these things, true, but he was still an active warrior well into his later years as Abu'l Fazl tells us to no end, and likely dressed the part of the glorious martial emperor. Could Guru Hargobind's acquaintance with Akbar and his entourage have left its mark on the young impressionable son of Guru Arjan? We may like to note in this context that like Guru Hargobind, Akbar too did not

write poetry or accounts of his life. Though he may have commissioned these, at least according to later texts of the gur-bilās genre in which figure the prominent *ḍhāḍhī* minstrels of the sixth Guru, Abdul and Natha (Inder Singh Gill 1968: 151).

What this association leads me to suggest once again calls into question or perhaps allows one to more robustly round out McLeod's and Banerjee's claims about the specific cultural traits of the Jats becoming gradually reflected in the Sikh community. An important element of Mughal courtly culture, and let us note again how significant this is to the development of the Sikh community, is serving the emperor in a martial capacity, a type of service which according to certain Islamicate ethical texts known as *akhlaqī* (Alam 2000), in conjunction with other courtly traits, ultimately leads to the perfectibility of the self. One may understand this therefore to somewhat accord with Sikh notions of selfless service and enlightenment through service to the Guru, a point emphasized in later gur-bilas works. I would like to suggest that it was not only the conflict with the Mughals that 'certainly exercised a most important influence upon the subsequent development of the Panth' (McLeod 1976: 12) but that Mughal standards, ways of fashioning the Mughal courtier and Mughal manliness, also played a role in this development. Guru Hargobind's decision to arm the Sikhs therefore was far more nuanced than tradition, McLeod and Bannerjee suggest, a combination of factors that include the apparent Jat proclivity for bearing arms (a theory well in keeping with Dirk Kolff's more recent examination of armed military labour groups (Kolff 2002)), Mughal (p. 46) courtly standards, and as well Mughal pressure on the growing Sikh community generated in part by Jahangir's accession to the throne in 1605.

There are a number of anecdotes concerning the interaction of Mughal authority with the next two Gurus, Guru Hari Rai and Guru Hari Krishan, some favourable—Guru Hari Rai's relations with Dara Shikoh, for example—and others not so—the seventh Guru's banishment of his son Ram Rai (d. 1687), who ultimately became a Mughal courtier, which was likely tied to Guru Hari Krishan's summoning to Delhi by the emperor Aurangzeb, where the young Guru unfortunately died. It is difficult to say what affect these relations had on the evolution of the Sikh community as, once again, sources regarding these interactions must be approached hypercritically but their inclusion suggests how significant Sikh interaction with the Mughals had become by the late seventeenth century, perhaps foreshadowing the emergence of the most significant 'evolution' of the Sikh Panth, namely the Khalsa.

Let us therefore now attend to the Khalsa in this essay. In the two evolution texts noted earlier the ultimate creation of the Khalsa also apparently rests with a decision taken by the tenth Guru's grandfather, Guru Hargobind. The final major point in McLeod's 'Evolution' essay, for example, regards a decision taken by Guru Hargobind and prompted by the Mughals, in this case Jahangir's son, Khurram, better known as the

emperor Shah Jahan: the shift of the Guru's headquarters to the Shivalik Hills, the foothills of the Himalayas. What made this move so significant, according to McLeod, is that the Shivalik Hills were long home to the Shakti or Devi cult (McLeod 1976: 13–14). Shakti refers to power, a specific divine power manifest as the goddess or *devi*. Since the cult of the Devi is associated with sacrifice there is a stress in her narratives and devotional poetry, especially the *Devī Mahatmya* on war, violence, and blood. This apparently was an important influence in the development of the martial ideology attributed to Guru Gobind Singh that finds expression in the many goddess narratives discovered within the Dasam Granth which, in one way of structuring the text, forms the bulk of the tenth Guru's book. According to McLeod,

> The result of prolonged residence within the Śivāliks was that elements of the hills culture eventually penetrated the Jaṭ Sikh culture of the plains and produced yet another stage in the evolution of the Panth.
>
> (McLeod 1976: 13)

This is a persuasive argument, but one which nevertheless requires further nuance. In his conjecture, for example, Hew McLeod does not mention political context. The Shivaliks were also home to many of the Pahari kingdoms, the relatively small states of the Punjab Hills ruled by Rajput warriors, many of which competed amongst one another. Throughout these the imagery of the goddess is ubiquitous as she, in particular, was intimately associated with power and rule. Guru Gobind Singh's emphasis on goddess imagery and its corollary the sword (in the writings of the Guru, for example, the sword is also called *Sri Bhagauti* which too connotes the goddess) has as much to do with sovereign claims as it does with the feminine energy and power that is shakti. **(p. 47)** These ideas of power and rule and the goddess come together clearly in the narratives of the Khalsa and the imagery within the Brajbhasha compositions attributed to the tenth Master.

But here too contemporary sources leave us somewhat wanting. For while the narratives focus solely on Guru Gobind Singh's decisions and uphold the idea that the Khalsa was finalized before the death of the tenth Sikh Master the situation of the Khalsa's evolution takes place predominantly during the turbulent eighteenth century (*pace* Bannerjee), a subject explored lately by Purnima Dhavan (Dhavan 2011), in many ways supplying the answers to the question McLeod posed at the end of his 'Evolution' essay. Here the Khalsa itself evolves and becomes reified as it adapts to the vicissitudes of the times, in which it is in competition with numerous other military service groups throughout northern India. These elements emerge from an analysis of the Khalsa's own written codes of conduct or *rahit-nāmās*, the rules within which at times violate the spirit of the ideology we find expounded within the Guru Granth Sahib.

As the eighteenth century comes to an end we have for the first time Sikh rule over a vastly extended area, the Punjab kingdom of Ranjit Singh. The appropriation of such extensive political power likewise affected the further development of the Sikh community, and demonstrates perhaps best how fluid the nature of the early Khalsa was and how porous the actual term Khalsa was as applied to Sikhs. This was a category which was in fact coherent to those who appropriated it and applied it to themselves, but there were many groups who did not do so, and contemporary sources which reference such groups demonstrate that there was a competition amongst them for this cultural capital. Indeed, even today after the reforms of the Singh Sabha and Tat Khalsa, modern Sikh reform movements profoundly influenced by ideas and understandings of religion and community modified by the European Enlightenment, there are still attempts to define Sikh and Khalsa, a fact which tells us that the Sikh community continues to adapt, to change, and to continue its evolution.

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Abstract and Keywords

This essay traces the growth of the Khalsa Sikh community from its inception during the last days of the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, to the foundation of several independent *misl* states in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the Khalsa in the late seventeenth century replaced the mediating role of intermediaries such as *masands* with the sole authority of the Guru. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, as the province of Punjab entered a period of civil conflict and breakdown in political institutions, the Khalsa Sikhs were able to forge new bonds with Sikh and other communities to establish several *misl* kingdoms. Although the Sikh kingdoms had a diversity of political and administrative frameworks, the historical memory of Guru Gobind Singh's court remained an important cultural framework on which new Sikh courtly traditions were grafted.

Keywords: Khalsa, Guru Gobind Singh, misl, masand, Banda Bahadur, Alha Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Ranjit Singh

THE eighteenth century was the beginning of a historical turning point for Sikhs, a period in which the political structures, social identity, and the way in which the Sikh community perceived itself changed dramatically. At the beginning of the century, the Sikhs were still organized under the leadership of the tenth and last living Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh (d. 1708), whose last years were spent defending his territories, followers, and authority from a variety of internal and external challenges. The Khalsa, a warrior community founded by the tenth Guru in the last decade of the seventeenth century, was still a tiny minority within the larger Sikh community or Panth. By the time of his assassination in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh and his followers had been uprooted from their last fort by the combined forces of the local commander of the Mughal forces and the Rajput rulers of the Punjab Hills. Negotiations with the new Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah, did not yield any concrete gains for the tenth Guru's followers. Khalsa Sikhs in Punjab would soon rise in rebellion, contributing to a widespread civil war that ultimately led to

the replacement of Mughal rule with that of multiple Sikh kingdoms by the closing years of the eighteenth century. The Khalsa thus became the political elite of Punjab by the late eighteenth century, but for much of that period the Khalsa had to work hard to reframe its relationship with the larger Sikh Panth and the myriad social groups in Punjab.

The Khalsa warriors did not become the unitary identity within the Sikh Panth, nor did they seek to establish a theocratic state once they achieved political power. A variety of Sikh groups enjoyed the protection of the Sikh states, as did a number of non-Sikhs. Indeed, the very cultural inclusiveness of Sikh political life appears to have unleashed several discussions and debates in Sikh intellectual circles about the nature of Khalsa Sikh identity and its relationship to the wider Sikh Panth and Punjabi society (Dhavan 2011: 69). While the rituals and markers of Khalsa identity became increasingly more defined over the course of the eighteenth century as a result of these debates, Sikh courts and indeed the Sikh Panth continued to be broadly inclusive, even welcoming, of a diversity of identities and beliefs. Justification of this growing inclusiveness of the (p. 50) Sikh courts was found not only in the long history of South Asian courtly traditions, but also in the way Punjabis wrote and revisited the memory of Guru Gobind Singh. Sikh warrior traditions, by the end of the eighteenth century, became rooted not only in the larger political networks of north India, but also in the cultural practices, historical memory, and texts of the Sikhs.

The Court and Camp of Guru Gobind Singh in History and Memory

As the eighteenth century dawned, Guru Gobind Singh's position in Punjab was reaching a crisis point. The Sikh court at Anandpur had survived numerous attacks from the Rajput rulers whose territories surrounded the Guru's and who viewed the growing power of the Sikh leader with alarm. Fresh infusions of cash, arms, and men from Sikh congregations in the plains had buoyed up Guru Gobind Singh's forces for several years. Starting in the 1690s, Guru Gobind Singh had instructed Sikhs to convey their offerings to his court directly to him, cutting off intermediaries, *masands*, who were suspected of usurping the authority of the Guru. These reforms were the immediate precursors to the creation of the Khalsa, a warrior community that recognized the sole authority of the Guru (Grewal 1990: 75–8). The exact markers of the Khalsa at this early stage are not fully understood, but included abjuring all previous connections to their natal customs, carrying arms, and not cutting hair, even during mourning rituals in which the deceased's family underwent ritual tonsures. These changes allowed the tenth Guru to fully consolidate his claims to

spiritual (*miri*) and temporal (*piri*) power over the affairs of the Sikh community, a policy first articulated nearly a century before by the sixth Sikh Guru, Hargobind.

Starting in 1704, however, the Rajput rivals of Guru Gobind Singh appealed to the Mughal authorities for help. Late in 1705 the joint forces of the Mughal commanders from Lahore and Sirhind, as well as the combined forces of the Rajput rulers of the Punjab Hills, finally succeeded in driving the Guru and his followers from his seat at Anandpur. For several months the Guru and his remaining followers and retinue would move through the south-western region of Punjab—called Malwa—looking for a safe haven. It was here that Guru Gobind Singh would make important contacts with Jat groups who were drawn to the Khalsa in large numbers. His stay in the rugged Malwa terrain would be remembered later as a period of prolific literary production, where the Guru himself assembled the text of the Damdama copy of the Guru Granth Sahib from memory, composed the Persian language *Zafarnama* as a rebuke to the Emperor Aurangzeb, and also attracted to his service a number of poets, including those belonging to an ecstatic heterodox order of Udasi monks (Fenech 2008: 278–80). Even in these reduced circumstances, later texts would note, the Guru continued to rally his supporters, pursued a diplomatic exchange with the Mughal court, and despite his difficulties, did not budge from his original claims of *miri* and *piri* or restrict his patronage and protection to the Khalsa (p. 51) alone. This charismatic leadership, courtliness, and open-handed patronage, even in difficult times, would remain the benchmark against which later Sikh courtly traditions would judge their own claims to warrior status.

When he died in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh left no living heirs. Khalsa Sikhs believed that the last living Guru transferred his own authority to the corporate body of the Panth, and they would also continue to be guided by the eternal authority of the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. This belief affirmed that the Sikh Gurus' claims to a joint temporal and spiritual authority over the affairs of the Sikh Panth would now continue through the efforts of the Khalsa Sikhs. This transition, however, was neither seamless nor easy.

Rebellion and Rule in Eighteenth-Century Punjab

To understand the transition between the period of the Gurus and the rise of the Khalsa kingdoms it is critical to understand the perspective of the peasants who constituted the vast majority of the Khalsa. These peasant groups, such as Jats, belonged to communities that until the late seventeenth century had enjoyed the benefits of agrarian expansion. Many had successfully become part of the relatively prosperous category of proprietors

designated ‘self-cultivating’ or *khud kasht* in Mughal administrative terms. Several others had organized kinsmen to settle uncultivated tracts in the riverine plains of Punjab or had taken over the collection of taxes in newly settled areas, earning *zamindari* (revenue) rights and becoming part of the rural elite of village headmen and tax collectors (Alam 1993: 140). Such upwardly mobile groups were also part of a longer historical process of peasant sedentarization which was accompanied by a shift in religious affiliations that helped integrate such groups with established social groups in Punjab. Jats, like many other sendentarizing groups in the north-west of the subcontinent, appear to have been more attracted to devotional forms disassociated with rigid caste hierarchies. In west Punjab such groups were drawn in large numbers to popular Sufi shrines such as those of Baba Farid, and in the eastern parts of Punjab, Jats were attracted to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus throughout the seventeenth century. Their lavish support for the Sikh Gurus through the donation of cash, arms, horses, and their own military labour, as testified by the letters of the Gurus, would become critically important once the Gurus were forced to relocate to the fringes of the Mughal Empire in the Punjab Hills. Through much of the seventeenth century, as the political situation of the Sikh Gurus grew more precarious, the economic fortunes of the vast majority of their followers, in the Punjab plains and elsewhere, waxed with the rising tide of the Mughal economy.

These gains by the upper layer of Jat peasantry, however, proved to be somewhat fragile as the closing decades of the Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) coincided with brief downturns in Punjab’s agrarian economy, as well as disruptions in important overland (p. 52) trade routes to Central Asia and the silting-up of important ports at the mouth of the Indus. Although many of these dislocations were temporary, their impact on a newly formed group of peasant proprietors and modest zamindars might have been proportionately more severe than those better established zamindars and *jagir* holders who had long formed the upper levels of the Mughal rural elite. During the succession struggles following the death of Aurangzeb, the disorder of administrative bureaucracy at the lower levels also allowed more powerful rural gentry to increase their command over local resources, often at the expense of the provincial government. This was the case as the first major Sikh rebellion, under Banda, broke out shortly after Guru Gobind Singh’s death in 1708.

Banda’s origins remain a mystery—Sikh traditions identify him as a Bairagi monk who was brought into the Khalsa fold when he encountered Guru Gobind Singh during the latter’s travel to Nanded in the south as he sought the camp of Bahadur Shah. Persian sources, mostly derogatory, identify him only as a ‘Goru’, a rebel, and report rumours that people believed the Sikh Guru had returned to Punjab (Grewal and Habib 2001: 108). Banda’s rebellion, which would last until his capture and execution in 1715–16, was the first extensive disruption in the civil and military administration of the province, and

illustrated the challenges facing Mughal control over the Punjab. Although the short-lived administrations of Bahadur Shah (r. 1707–12), Jahandar Shah (1712–13), and Farrukh Siyyar (1713-19) could regain the control of the urban areas of Sirhind, they could do little to police the countryside. Banda and his followers dispersed over this area, quickly creating a parallel authority—levying taxes, raiding towns and trade routes, and claiming sovereignty by striking their own coinage. Attempts to capture Banda failed as he swiftly moved to the safety of the Punjab Hills. Desperate in their attempts to control the growing rebellion, Mughal authorities resorted to marshalling the established rural elite of Punjab to their cause, enlisting groups like the Bhattis, Ranghars, and Qasur Afghans to restore power. While ultimately successful, this policy would eventually have negative repercussions.

Banda's rebellion may have lasted only six years, but it created a legacy of civil disorder that would cast its shadow over Punjab for many generations to come. Soon after Banda's rebellion was crushed in 1715, a host of new rebellions, by the very groups that had helped the state suppress Banda's followers, broke out in Punjab. The Mughal governor, Abd-us Samad Khan, was hard-pressed to find the resources to quell multiple uprisings lead by the prosperous zamindars and peasantry of Punjab. In many cases these groups shared ethnic ties—the Qasur Afghans, the Bhattis, the Ranghars—and many of these had previous experience in the provincial administration and armies of the Mughals (Alam 1993: 184–5, 201). Banda's ability to thwart Mughal authorities revealed to other powerful rural groups the weakness of the provincial regime in Punjab. It also exposed the limited help the Mughal court in Delhi was able or willing to extend at a time when coups and counter-coups continued to haunt the centre, and the rivalry between the Turani (Central Asian) and Irani (Persian) factions seeped into the appointment of provincial officials. Furthermore, the weakness of both the central and provincial government created the perfect opportunity for more powerful Punjabi groups such as the Qasur Afghans and Ranghars to extend their control over lands held by less powerful ones such as the Jats in the Bist-Jallandhar and Malwa area.

(p. 53) The Mughal governor at Lahore could only retain power as long as the more powerful rural gentry aided him in the collection of revenue and cooperated with rural administrative officials. Thus, for much of the period between the 1720s and 1750s, a dysfunctional pattern of government emerged in Punjab. The provincial government could police areas close to the capital city of Lahore, or garrisoned towns such as Sirhind and Jallandhar. To govern in areas further away, they needed the cooperation of the landed and warrior groups of each district. Such groups cooperated only fitfully with the provincial government, choosing to pursue their own interests when it suited them. They could not completely overthrow the provincial government nor did they feel enough of a threat from the centre to comply wholly. Khalsa Sikhs, a group that had only recently achieved a measure of economic and political power, were as likely to view both the

provincial government and their powerful regional rivals with suspicion. For much of the early part of the century, Sikhs were outlaws, pursued both by the provincial government and their regional allies. Only in moments of grave crisis, such as the Afghan attack of 1748, were all parties in Punjab willing to temporarily put aside their differences and fight a common foe.

Origins of the *Misls*—Controversies

The period from 1715 to 1750 is shrouded in mystery, particularly with regard to the origins of warrior bands called *misls*. Some later texts such as Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Guru Panth Prakash*, written in the nineteenth century, suggest that the main shrine at Amritsar became a gathering place for young Khalsa Sikhs. Such sources claimed that mobile bands of Sikhs roved the countryside during this time, raiding urban centres and trade routes and distributing the wealth among other Sikhs. These sources suggest that there was a great deal of cooperation and coordination among the elders present at Amritsar and also make the case for a joint and shared sovereignty among Sikh chiefs (*khalsa raj*). On the other hand, the primary sources from individual Sikh states present a very different picture. As we shall see, such sources document state building efforts such as conquest and revenue collection starting as early as the 1730s for some kingdoms.

Given the paucity of primary documents from the period in question, it is likely that there are some strands of truth to both arguments. It may be that there was a core of Khalsa *dals* present at Amritsar until the 1740s, under the command of different chiefs, although it is not clear what degree of coordination existed between such groups. Some *misls*, however, such as those that were later incorporated into the states of Kapurthala and Patiala, had a parallel origin in areas away from the control of the Amritsari groups. It is undoubtedly the case, though, that Sikh *misls* from the Amritsar area were instrumental in helping individual Sikh chiefs defend their territories from the Mughals and Afghans and their local allies. In any case, by the middle of the eighteenth century, most individual *misls* had begun to follow an independent course of action (p. 54) when it came to administering or taxing the territories they had acquired. Mughal news reports throughout the eighteenth century record occasional joint meetings of the Khalsa Sikhs to discuss common matters of defence against Afghan invasions, settle outstanding disagreements, and plan a strategy for forthcoming campaigns and diplomatic actions. However, these and other primary source documents from the period make clear that such joint actions were reserved for special occasions or emergencies that posed a common threat to all Sikh chiefs (Dhavan 2011: 47–73).

Sikh prescriptive literature from the mid-eighteenth century reflects a gradual softening of the tensions between Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs which appeared to have been more prominent immediately after the formulation of the Khalsa. *Rahit-namas* and other texts from this period show some accommodation towards the natal and marriage traditions of different caste groups within the Sikh community. The core requirements that Khalsa Sikhs carry arms and wear uncut hair, proscribe worship of popular shrines and tombs, and acknowledge the social equality of all castes within the Khalsa remained; however, rules regarding the arrangement of marriages, the preparation of food, and the hiring of non-Khalsa Sikhs appear to be somewhat different in later *rahit-namas* from this period. Significantly, the negative view of hiring non-Khalsa retainers, particularly Muslims, begins to fade from such literature by the late eighteenth century, suggesting that the actual practices of the *misl* kingdoms gradually softened the perspective of some Sikhs. Most dramatically, the rhetoric of *dharamyudh* and the animus against negotiations with Muslim groups such as the Mughals and Afghans also gradually softened in both practice and prescription.

The variety of accommodations reflected in the revisions made to existing *rahit-namas*, or advocated in other genres such as hagiographies, strongly indicate that the pragmatic policy of inclusiveness followed by most Sikh chiefs eventually became accepted by many parts of Sikh society. Resistance to such changes may not have disappeared, but the internal debates among the Sikhs about the acceptability of such practices tended to create consensus rather than division. This was the case not only amongst the political elite within the Khalsa, but also among more modest families in the wider Sikh Panth. Particularly in terms of marriage arrangements, earlier forms of Jat customs continued and, if modified, particularly within the Khalsa kingdoms, frequently adapted customs more prevalent in upper-caste Rajput families (Dhavan 2011: 96–8).

Foundations of the *Misl* States—Conquest, Diplomacy, and Administration

Although most Sikh states did not become fully established until the 1760s, a few, including such states as Patiala and Kapurthala, have longer roots. The founders of these (p. 55) states already had begun the process of carving out territories from which taxes were collected as early as the 1730s and 1740s. A close analysis of the origins of many Sikh states indicates that the transition from collective raids by Khalsa cavalry units (*dals*) to the foundations of individual states by particular families happened fairly quickly. Sikh chiefs such as Jassa Singh Ahluwalia of Kapurthala or Alha Singh of Patiala

may have publicly preserved a respectful stance towards the Khalsa *dals* and the notion of a joint Sikh sovereignty, but brooked no encroachment over their revenue collections or administrative arrangements. The first generation of Sikh rulers participated fully in the political life of the Khalsa, attending the large gatherings at Amritsar during the Baisakhi celebrations in spring and the Diwali celebrations in autumn. Here, details for raids and campaigns were frequently ironed out, issues pertinent to the political survival of the Khalsa were discussed, and embassies dispatched in the name of the Khalsa jointly, as they were when the chiefs campaigned together. But once back in their home territories, the founders of the Sikh kingdoms carefully nurtured their own emerging states and attempted to build lasting family legacies.

In the case of Patiala, the core territories of the founder Alha Singh were close to the ancestral holdings of his Phulkian forebears in the arid lands of south Malwa. His increasing control of lands around Barnala, Sonam, Samana in the unsettled period of the 1730s and 1740s critically brought him command over areas irrigated by the Ghaggar. This slow consolidation of lands north-east of his original home that were more fertile—and hence taxable—continued in the early 1760s. Strategic treaties with the Afghan Emperor Ahmad Shah Abdali and renewed agreements with the Khalsa chiefs secured the area around Sirhind, yielding access to important trade routes along the Delhi–Kabul highway. It was the duties from this trade that helped fund the construction of a fort and palace complex at Patiala, which would later become the seat of the Patiala Kingdoms.

By contrast, many other Sikh chiefs had no such patrimony which they could enlarge. Most were from small villages and holdings around the cities of Lahore and Amritsar. While a few counted village headmen or zamindars among their relatives, none had the affluence of established groups such as the Qasur Afghans, the Ranghar Rajputs, or Manj Rajputs, whose families held important administrative and military posts in Punjab under the Mughals. Moreover, Sikhs in the areas west and north of the Sutlej had to face very different challenges from those in Malwa, such as Alha Singh. The provincial governors of Punjab were still able to send out punitive raids into the areas around Lahore well into the mid-1700s. The disciplining power of the institutional forms of Sikh authority such as the Khalsa *dals* was also stronger in the areas around Amritsar such as the upper Bari Doab and the Bist Jallandhar. Chiefs in these areas could only hold on to power by carefully negotiating with one of the powerful local players. Alha Singh of Patiala could open diplomatic negotiations with the Afghans, Marathas, and the Mughals, in large part due to his strategic location between the territories of these groups, and his ability to play one against the other. Other Sikhs, often located in the thick of Sikh–Mughal or Sikh–Afghan contestations, did not have this option, and appeared disinclined towards such stratagems in any case.

(p. 56) One such individual was Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, who would go on to found the kingdom of Kapurthala. Widely admired during his own lifetime as the epitome of courtliness, bravery, and loyalty, his fame would grow even more after his death. Although his maternal uncle had been the zamindar of a small village, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia's political success stemmed from his strong connections to the older leaders of the Khalsa *dals* such as 'Nawab' Kapur Singh. Already considered a rising leader in his youth, he repeatedly turned down offers of employment and alliances from the Afghans, Mughals, and their local representatives. Although Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, like Alha Singh, spent much time gradually building a core territory in the Bist Jallandhar area, his assiduous efforts in support of other Sikhs won him great acclaim. Substantial portions of his conquests were given away to other chiefs, even some who were not within his own *misl*. He gave generous donations to the rebuilding of the main Sikh shrine at Amritsar after it was blown up by Ahmad Shad Abdali, also building a commercial centre and residential quarters in Amritsar which aided the commercial and civic recovery of the city. Such open-handed generosity allowed Jassa Singh to pursue a diplomatic course that would not normally have been sanctioned by any other Sikh chief in Majha. He was able to persuade other Sikh chiefs to aid the last Mughal governor of Punjab, Muin-ul Mulk, in his raid on Multan. Surviving correspondence with the Mughal court also indicates a sporadic but shrewd correspondence with Shah Alam, the Mughal emperor. In large part, Jassa Singh succeeded in such innovative diplomacy due to his inclusion of other Sikh chiefs in the negotiation process. They, in turn, acknowledged his skills by frequently nominating him to be one of the leaders of the joint expeditions of the Sikhs to Rajasthan, Delhi, Awadh, and the Punjab Hills.

Despite this appreciation of the importance of consensus in Sikh political life, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was quick to protect his territories and status. Yearly tours of the territories he claimed ensured that revenues would be paid directly into his treasury. He was among the first chiefs to post commanders to guard his lands and keep the peace. When threatened with public insults, as when the younger brothers of the Ramgarhia chiefs briefly detained him while hunting, he was quick to avenge this insult by hounding the Ramgarhia *misl* from their lands with his allies. Like Alha Singh, Jassa Singh had a keen understanding of the need to demonstrate control over his territories and subordinates, as well as retaining an independent sovereignty in matters regarding the internal administration of his lands. In the Punjab of the late eighteenth century, signs of weakness or complacency by a chief frequently led to a diminution of his lands and status. Political power was not merely a factor of controlling land and revenues, it also meant the ability to persuade and lead other chiefs—Sikh and non-Sikhs—in coalition, and zealously guarding one's public honour (Dhavan 2011: chs. 4–5).

Such concerns were relevant even to chiefs whose territories never achieved the status of mature states—the Nakkai, Ramgarhias, and even the Bhangi *misl*, which had one of the largest cavalry of any *misl* state. These latter chiefs were parts of *misls* which never fully transitioned to monarchial states. The territories and revenue claims of the *misl* were frequently distributed among the brothers and associates of the chief, sometimes even the administrative duties were parcelled out. This was the case of the three Bhangi (p. 57) chiefs who came to hold Lahore after 1765. The political and administrative structure of the *misl* states had less to do with the size of the territories than the early history of the *misl*. Where strong founders had created viable administrative structures, kept control over these structures in their own hands, and had designated heirs from within their family by the 1760s, a trend towards a monarchial structure persisted until many such states were either absorbed into the growing empire of Ranjit Singh in the early 1800s or sought the protection of the East India Company in 1809. In the eighteenth century, however, such monarchial states were not part of a dominant trend. For most other *misls*, the decentralized political and administrative structures of their states were not a bar to their full participation in the cultural and political life of the Panth. These chiefs were among the most powerful and respected men of their times. Their generous gifts of land and money to subordinates, allies, scholars, and myriad religious institutions buttressed their standing in society. Their prominence at gatherings in Amritsar and Anandpur, or on various campaigns, was undiminished even as some of their allies and neighbours adopted more centralized forms of rule.

The one arena in which such shared power did impact a *misl* was in their ability to limit the fragmentation of authority caused by successions and feuds as the third generation of *misl* chiefs emerged. The precedence of designating heirs within the lifetime of the previous ruler limited succession feuds even if it did not completely eliminate them. Thus, Amar Singh of Patiala was acknowledged as Alha Singh's successor in large part due to his designation as heir within his grandfather's lifetime. But in *misls* where the control of territories and authority could move laterally among the brothers and peer-associates of the chiefs, or further among cousins, brothers, and commanders of their co-rulers, the transition from one generation to the next inevitably further diminished the ability of the *misl* to maintain the affinities and alliances that had joined the original founders and their commanders. The resolving of counterclaims of the new generation inevitably led to feuds and vendettas that became an opportunity for stronger *misls* to intervene and take advantage of the situation. This was the case with the Nakkai chiefs. The succession disputes within this *misl* would allow both Jai Singh Kanhaiya and Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia, whose families already favoured a more centralized command structure, to take control over large parts of the Nakkai territory (B. Singh 1993: 250–6).

As the eighteenth century ended it became increasingly clear that the days of such decentralized command were over. Ranjit Singh's growing control over more territories through matrimonial alliances and conquest increased in the western part of the province, while the East India Company showed increased interest in using the Sikh states on the eastern part as a buffer zone between their own expanding empire and that of Ranjit Singh. As these two emerging powers ground down the smaller states between them, only well-established Sikh chiefs could appeal to Ranjit Singh for a *jagir* or to the Company for treaty rights. Scores of minor chiefs and their families had no choice but to accept the growing reality that their rule as independent chiefs was at an end. Even if such rule had been more illusory in terms of their tributary status to more prominent *misls*, the eroding status of such families was painfully evident when either Ranjit Singh (p. 58) or the East India Company refused to recognize the rights of widows or minor survivors of such chiefs, and the lands, holdings, and status of these minor families were lost. The few lucky families that made a more successful transition to the nineteenth-century period of empires, colonial or Sikh, had to be content with accepting the status of becoming *jagirdars* in Ranjit Singh's court, or treaty-bound allies of the East India Company with greatly reduced powers.

In such circumstances, Khalsa Sikhs who were still among the social elite of Punjab, continued to offer strong patronage to musicians, singers, artists, and scholars. Although most Sikh chiefs lacked the wealth and political autonomy they formerly had during the *misl* period, their continued patronage of important cultural and religious groups and institutions assured that they exercised important influence within Punjabi society. Such cultural activities helped to further cement the relationship between Khalsa Sikhs and other social groups in Punjab. It is from this perspective that one can say that although the nature of Khalsa Sikh identity and power changed dramatically over the course of the eighteenth century, the model of the tenth Guru's court remained an inspiration worthy of emulation for Sikh chiefs and their followers throughout this tumultuous time and well into the nineteenth century.

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The Sikh kingdom established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a transitional state formation without a historical successor. This article relies on contemporaneous accounts of Sikh rule in order to establish the conditions of possibility for Sikh rule on the dissolution of the Mughal Empire, the formation of the Sikh state, and its failure to cope with the fiscal onus of its military expansion in the decade before its formal annexation by the East India Company (EIC) in 1849. It argues furthermore that the socio-economic reforms instituted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which included opening up the Indus to English commerce, displacing feudal levies with a regular army, and generating a labour market for soldiers who collected a fixed wage based on state revenues farmed in cash, in substantial measure adumbrated authoritarian English rule in the Punjab.

Keywords: Maharaja Ranjit Singh, East India Company, Anglo-Sikh wars, annexation, custom

Introduction

It was a midsummer afternoon when a tearful chamberlain came forward to caution the courtiers huddled outside the suite of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to steel themselves for an uncertain future now that ‘the tempest of death’ had arisen over the citadel of Lahore, the capital of an independent Sikh principality (Suri [1839] 1961: 695). Since 1799, when the Afghan suzerain Shah Zaman invested the adroit Sikh chief as the *raja* (ruler) of Lahore, Ranjit Singh had ruled as the autonomous *sarkar* (head) over the defile separating the formidable Afghans to the north-west and the English who were ascendant over the Mughal Empire in India to the south-east. The ambitious chieftain was also victorious in the internecine war that had beset the rivalrous Sikh confederacies, granting himself the title of maharaja to signify the feat (Latif 1891: 353). His anxious ministers justifiably feared the possibility of an intractable war of succession on the death

of the lionized maharaja, or, worse, annexation. Two dispatches were therefore rifled off in haste. One implored Sher Singh to defer to the accession of the elder Kharak Singh, the other informed Henry Lawrence that, though the maharaja was *in extremis*, the entente with the East India Company (EIC)—whose armies barracked across the Sutlej river—held fast. Despite the assurance that the Punjab was secure, the note to the EIC was a desperate ploy, as the ministers had a doubtful hold over either state affairs or the soldiers in charge of protecting the realm. The royal diarist Sohan Lal Suri reports that over the course of a fortnight, in a vain effort to effect a miracle, a coterie of attendants recited prayers, tested new medicines, consulted astrological charts, chanted mantras, infused elixirs with exotics, solicited clerics to confer absolution, offered alms to benevolent deities, fed venerated mendicants, and brought forward both sets of the Sikh scriptures—the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth—in ritual ceremonies for the maharaja to take *darshan* (auspicious sight). However, after a series of paralysing strokes, the once indomitable warrior, whose sybaritic excesses were legend, had turned frail. On 27 June 1839, before dusk, the maharaja—immobilized, unable to express himself in words, (p. 60) cirrhotic, and racked with diarrhoea—was transferred from the mortal to the immortal universe, portending the eclipse of the Sikh kingdom.

For the suddenness of its rise, the brilliance of its success, and the completeness of its overthrow, remarked the administrator-historian Lepel Griffin, the Sikh state of Maharaja Ranjit Singh invites comparison with the example of the French under Napoleon (Griffin 1892: 9–11). Griffin hypothesized that whereas Napoleon, who was once himself a Jacobin, was the creature of the Third Estate in its triumphant revolt over feudal absolutism, the manner in which the Sikhs had ‘crush[ed] [the]spiritual despotism of Brahmanism’ accounted for the rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Yet this invidious comparison obscures the traditional character of Sikh rule; a comparison with the enlightened despotism of Frederick the Great—whose dictum ‘argue but obey’ had so chafed Immanuel Kant—seems more appropriate in light of the autocratic nature of Sikh rule, but still infelicitous, since there was a marked absence of modern civil society in the Punjab. The short-lived Sikh kingdom is therefore better understood as a transitional formation forged on the last embers of the Mughal Empire that was unable to modernize its socio-economic foundations to maintain its ambitious fiscal-military state. More precisely, the socio-economic reforms instituted by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, which included opening up the Indus to English commerce, displacing feudal levies with a regular army, and generating a labour market for soldiers who collected a fixed wage based on state revenues farmed in cash, in substantial measure adumbrated authoritarian English rule in the Punjab.

The Vicissitudes of Fortune in the Mughal Empire (1699–1799)

The crisis, decline, and fall of the Mughal Empire, which culminated in the Battle of Panipat in 1761, conditioned the subsequent rise of the Sikhs in the fertile tract of crown land that formed the Punjab. As the mechanism of effective Mughal administration in the Punjab fell into crisis in the era of the emperor Aurangzeb, partly as a consequence of the collapse of the *subadari* (governorship), the resultant dysfunction catalysed the convention of *ijra*, that is, farmed revenue collection (Sarkar 1964: 259–65; Alam 1986: 39–43). Meanwhile the growing influence of Jat *zamindars* (landowners) within the Sikh fold, particularly in the fraternal Khalsa order founded in 1699, had led the assertive Khalsa into an open confrontation with Mughal revenue collectors. Since 'the charm that had so powerfully operated…[in] the spacious empire of the Indian Moguls…was now broken', wrote the adventurer George Forster, the Punjab now resembled a wide open theatre, 'in which every band of bold adventurers had an ample scope to exercise their courage' (Forster [1783] 1798: i 274).

The outcome at Panipat altered the dynamics that had hitherto frustrated the Sikhs in their aspiration to rule the Punjab. Soon after Panipat, where the Afghan suzerain (p. 61) Ahmad Shah Durrani triumphed over the Marathas who had launched their own bid to claim the Mughal sceptre, the Sikhs wrested control of the fort at Lahore and struck their own coin. That the Sikhs were able to do so in 1765—which made these developments contemporaneous with the granting of the *diwani* (rights to revenue collection) to the EIC for Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa by the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II—evinces the scope of their ambition. The distich on the coin articulated a new claim to Sikh sovereignty: 'Abundance, the sword, victory and help without delay, Guru Gobind Singh obtained from Nanak' (Rodgers 1881: 79). For the radicals within the EIC, the defeat of the Mughal emperor at the Battle of Panipat marked that the possibility of grounding a cosmopolitan empire in India based on commerce was now lost; what took shape after Panipat was an illiberal, mercantilist project of governing a subcontinental empire with all of the instruments of a coercive militarized state that relied on the extraction of revenue from the peasantry (Mill 1826: 170–1). The fact that the EIC fixed a limit somewhat capriciously on its territorial expansion to the outskirts of Delhi nevertheless furnished the Sikhs with the opportunity to complete their conquest of the Punjab.

However the commonwealth of Sikh *misls* (confederacies) that came to rule the Punjab was unlike the formalized Mughal successor states in Awadh or Bengal. The Sikh polity was little more than an imperfect coparcenary system in which altercation between the

chieftains themselves or their rivals—the Rohillas, Gujjars, and Yusafzais—was commonplace. It is difficult to ascertain precisely what socio-economic life in the Punjab was like under the Sikh clans, but what is clear is that in the absence of a stable administration the Sikh chiefs relied on a militia of fleet, well-mounted cavaliers outfitted with matchlocks to obtain a 'surplus' from the land. Although there were some cloth manufacturers in the Punjab as well as a tradition of gunsmithery, which furnished the Sikhs with some of 'the best arms in Hindostan', trade was to remain underdeveloped since 'merchants [feared] going backwards and forwards through the territories of so many independent chiefs' (Browne 1788: p. ix). Through their conquests the Sikhs had won a name as hardened warriors; nonetheless, in the opinion of the French officer A. L. H. Polier, the soldiers lacked the discipline to confront the EIC sepoys or infantrymen (Polier (1780) in Singh 1962: 64). That the Sikhs relied on swift raids launched on horseback instead of artillery, the Frenchman remarked, reflected the nature of their polity. 'It was impossible that this state of things should subsist in Punjab,' Henry Prinsep reckoned, 'any more than it had done in England, France, and the other countries of Europe' (Prinsep 1834: 33). The Sikhs, in other words, had yet to achieve the kind of unified sovereignty that was required to afford full scope to commerce in the Punjab or to discipline the mercenaries who filled the ranks of the Sikh militias. 'Though the ideologist may find something attractive in contemplating such attempts to realize…the dream of universal independence and condition of equality between individuals,' wrote the Secretary to the Governor-General, only a bold speculator 'would assume that any class could find happiness, contentment, or rest, in a country ruled by seventy thousand sovereigns' (Prinsep 1834: 37). It was under the standard of Ranjit Singh that the first ship of state in the Punjab was launched.

(p. 62) The Formation of a Sikh State under Ranjit Singh (1799–1839)

An established historiographical tradition divides the reign of Ranjit Singh into three distinct eras. The first, 1799–1823, encompasses the era when Ranjit Singh claimed the title of maharaja. His ambition to rule over all the Sikh chiefs was nevertheless odious to the rajas south of the river Sutlej who therefore bid the EIC to mediate the threat from Lahore (Cunningham 1849: 209). Despite the fact that a condition of the 1809 entente with the EIC barred Ranjit Singh from possessing the more fertile land south of the Sutlej, the Lahore chieftain had already wrested control of the Sikh capital of Amritsar, before conquering Multan in 1818. The Afghan-controlled centre of Peshawar was made to pay a tribute in 1818. And the hill chiefs of Kashmir were routed on a third attempt in 1819. The decade that followed, 1824–34, marks the era of reconstruction or actual state

formation. This is the era in which territorial expansion slowed, the state reformulated the bulk of its revenue demands in cash instead of kind, and the Sikh army was 'Europeanized'. The Sikh state then vacillated from 1835 to 1839 between eyeing the EIC with suspicion and cooperating with the English to open up trade on the Indus and to restore Shah Shuja to the throne in Kabul. This was also the era in which the maharaja was particularly interested in purchasing arms from the EIC as well as pursuing investments and limited trade with the English.

Although the historiographical literature seldom admits the fact, this schema for periodizing Sikh rule is itself retrospective, motivated as it is by the query: what led to the annexation of the Punjab? Furthermore, vernacular sources such as the chronicles of the royal diarist *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* or the otherwise encyclopaedic *Char Bagh-i-Punjab* written in 1849 by the local revenue officer Ganesh Das offer us a welter of information about the customs of the Lahore durbar, the campaigns that the maharaja conducted, the maharaja personally, and the orders ratified by the state, but are unable to address this historiographical concern squarely. The memoirs of different visitors to the Lahore durbar, particularly the reports filed by English officers, are in fact invaluable sources that, when handled with a critical eye, do offer us a framework with which to analyse the decline in the status of Sikh nobles, the political economy of the Punjab, and the kind of transformations within the Sikh state that foreshadowed English rule. As an example, consider the anecdote, recounted by the Austrian explorer Charles Hügel, who was shown the famed *Koh-i-Noor* ('Mountain of Light') one of the largest diamonds in existence, which Maharaja Ranjit Singh had exhorted from the exiled Afghan Shah Shuja in 1818. The visitor was overcome by the thought that, although spectacular, as an amulet for the maharajah the Koh-i-Noor's full value as capital was going unrealized, unless it was 'transferred from one to another party, like a bank-note or a bill of exchange' (Hügel [1836] 1845: 303). Yet, in pointing to the different valuation of the Koh-i-Noor, Hügel was charitable about the limited world view from the fort of Lahore, instead grappling with what this incident revealed about the sociopolitical foundations of the Sikh state. (p. 63) Even in the abbreviated translation available to us, Hügel's memoirs include a number of other astute observations about the European officers in service of the maharaja, the manufacture of mortars, the '69,500 Sikh lords of the Punjab' who furnished the maharaja with soldiers, and the importance of permitting cheaper English wares to be traded on the Indus.

The alliances of convenience that the Sikh clan chiefs had relied on were formalized by Maharaja Ranjit Singh who partially rebuilt the Mughal institution of granting patronage through *jagirs*, that is, the revenue rights of certain villages. His father Mahan Singh, as head of the Sukarchakia clan, left the adolescent chieftain a sizeable patrimony to build on. He either exploited familial or marital relationships to consolidate a hold on the other

Sikh clans, or subordinated rivals by predatory war or by swapping turbans with the likes of Fateh Singh Ahluwalia to symbolize an alliance with that more important *sirdar* (nobleman). The recipients of *jagirs* were bound to maintain a militia to serve at the disposal of the suzerain, secure caravan routes, collect customs duties, and accommodate royal soldiers stationed in the area. The centre alienated the land, but was nevertheless entitled to a yearly *nazarana* (tribute), which sometimes also included items such as well-bred steeds, falcons, luxuriant commodities like saffron, and slaves (Grewal 1972: 120); the centre also retained the right to seize the land through forfeiture or escheat (Kohli 1918: 76). Shahamat Ali reckons that the revenues of the Lahore state totalled a little more than 30 million rupees in 1838, of which 8,754,590 rupees were alienated in *jagirs* (Ali 1847: 23).

Land revenues levied in kind were the main source of income for the Sikh state, at least until the custom was transformed in the mid-1820s, after which cultivators were generally made to pay in cash (Kohli 1918: 77). The shift to the monetization of land revenue, where assessors in the employ of the state made a determination of the cash value of the crops based on the surveys of the land, was itself necessitated by the growing expense of supporting the ever-growing ranks of the restructured Sikh army. The state hypothetically was now able to formulate a budget based on an estimate of its receipts, but, as the expenses attached to revenue administration rose, the state was forced to rely on the Mughal convention of *ijra* (revenue farming). Over the course of Sikh rule, more and more land came to be leased in this manner, with a corresponding increase in the length of the leasehold. The office of the *ijradar* was also saleable during the period 1835–9 (Kohli 1918: 78; Latif 1891: 365). Throughout the era of Sikh rule the state was reluctant to undertake major improvements, such as ploughing canals to increase the productivity of the land, instead putting the onus on cultivators who were taxed at rates on a scale of one-fifth or one-fourth to one-half or more of the value of their crops, in addition to which the state levelled a number of cesses that had no uniform rate or discernible periodicity (Kohli 1918: 83–5).

The other major source of income for the Lahore exchequer was the excise duties on commodities. As far back as 1783, Forster had noticed the ill-treatment meted out to traders in the Punjab, paraphrasing Adam Smith to the effect that ‘this conduct, [is] inimical to the progress of civilization, and an impediment to the influx of wealth’ (Forster [1783] 1798: i 293). A persisting dispute over the standardization of transit (p. 64) duties collected on the rivers of the Punjab was a hallmark of EIC–Sikh relations (India Office Records (IOR) H/4/1483). Around 1820, the explorer William Moorcroft tried to broker a deal by proposing a formal scheme ‘to establish a fixed scale of duties for the admission of British merchandise’, on which *sarkar* temporized *sine die* (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: 103). The EIC agent at Ludhiana lodged a familiar complaint in a letter to the

Secretary to the Governor-General in 1832, pointing out that commerce in the Punjab had failed to match the amelioration in sociopolitical conditions, as a direct consequence of the exorbitant duties and arbitrary tolls that continued to be exacted from merchants passing their wares through the Punjab (National Archives of India (NAI) Foreign/Secret/ 6–8/9 Apr 1832). He also lamented the fact that the maharajah held a monopoly on certain valuable commodities that were traded in the Punjab. Later, the same frustrated official wrote to Fort William that, as someone unlearned in political economy, the maharaja was fixated on prosecuting new conquests instead of developing internal trade (NAI Foreign/Political/65–79/20 Oct. 1837).

From the first, the maharaja was interested in the innovations in modern warfare, but an ambitious modernization project was undertaken in earnestness only when French mercenaries were hired in the 1820s to restructure the Sikh army and to drill the soldiers to fight in closed ranks. The maharaja had come to be wary of the traditional system of feudal militias, which relied on individual chiefs to field their own men, who often had no more than a musket or a sabre let alone a serviceable steed to ride into battle. He saw this system as an enormous obstacle to professionalizing the army. What the maharaja witnessed in the EIC battalions pursuing Jaswant Rao Holkar to the edge of the Sutlej in 1805 was a system of drill that allowed them to move in tactical formation, a sight that profoundly stirred the maharaja, who then tried to replicate that discipline (Kohli 1922a: 208; Moorcraft and Trebeck 1841: 101–3). Another innovation that the maharaja wanted to replicate was the system of regular pay, rather than relying on feudal retainers, as was the case with the militias that the Sikh *sirdars* maintained. An officer was often entitled to a *jagir*, a share of the spoils, or some other kind of emoluments to enlist in these militias, as the idea of wages was generally unknown (Kohli 1922a: 211). The maharaja thus ventured to substitute the cavalry-based *fauj-i-sowari* with a regular army, or *fauj-i-ain*, based on a skilled infantry and fortified artillery trained by battle-hardened mercenaries. While some of the commanders at the highest ranks were Sikhs, as Sita Ram Kohli documents with incredible care, the drill instructors tended to be ex-officers or deserters who had worked under the Sindhias, the EIC, or Napoleon. The highest officers, native or non-native, were especially resistant to the idea of accepting a fixed wage, preferring the more lucrative *jagirs*, satraps, and the privilege to carry on a side trade on the *sarkari dastak* (under the royal insignia) (Lafont 1986: 46–75). The composite ranks of enlisted men demonstrate that, while in 1813 ‘the bulk of the regulars consisted of Hindustanis, Gurkhas, and Afghans’, the ranks of the new *fauj-i-ain* were ‘filled with Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and Rajputs’, so that ‘three [regiments] were purely Muhammaden’ (Kohli 1922a: 212). Ever suspicious of the EIC’s aim of opening up the Indus and Sutlej to English commerce, the maharaja at first ordered 1,100 stands of muskets from the Delhi magazine, but then modified the order to 50,000 firelocks and (p. 65) 10,000 stands of smaller arms (NAI Foreign/Political/54/22 Aug. 1836). However this kind of militarization

came at enormous costs: on a conservative estimate the expenditures of the new *fauj-i-ain* accounted for 40–45 per cent of state revenues (Hall 1981: 205; Ali 1847: 25). A more realistic total, which factors in the related costs of producing arms, procuring ammunition, and providing for the stables of the cavalry and the animals worked for transport, pegs the calculation closer to 80 per cent of state revenues (Hall 1981: 205). The scale of military expansion, in short, was responsible for precipitating a fundamental transformation in the nature of the state when, on the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, the Sikh nation hurtled into chaos.

The Last Decade of Sikh Rule in the Punjab (1839–1849)

On the night of 27 June 1839, in what amounted to a no-confidence motion, a group of ministers peremptorily framed a document guaranteeing in perpetuity the *jagirs* that had existed under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The ministers explicitly modelled their action on the ministerial checks in the unwritten British constitution. Their aim, in other words, was to reshape the Sikh state with the new maharaja subordinate to them as privy councillors (G. Singh 1955: 69). The official Punjabi *akhbar* (news) narrates the dramatic scene that unfolded at the funeral, where, after pledging troth to the new head of state, the distraught vizier Dhian Singh threatened to immolate himself on the same pyre as the *maharanis* (queens) about to sacrifice themselves as satis (NAI Foreign/Political/12–14/24 July 1839). Yet, in the words of Alexander Gardner, who was to play a fateful role in the ploy by the vizier's party to reduce the successors to the royal throne to a cipher, the 'veil of futurity hid [the course of events] from [everyone's] eyes' (Gardner 1898: 213). The revolution that 'was about to sift the husks from the wheat' forced the ministers to quickly abandon their limited experiments in constitutionalism. An English major likened the chaos that followed to the darkest era in the downfall of Rome or the earliest days of the French Revolution (Gardner 1898: 211–12). After this the soldier-councils formed within the 'French' or modern units of the Sikh army came to play a fateful role in the affairs of the Lahore state.

The first axe fell quickly once Kharak Singh mounted the throne (Gardner 1898: 211–26). His death in the autumn of 1840 was followed in swift succession by that of the young princeling Nao Nihal, which both shocked and left the durbar factionalized. Maharani Chand Kaur claimed the regency for herself in the name of the unborn child that Nao Nihal's wife was expecting, whereas the Sindhanwalia sirdars favoured Sher Singh's

cause, and the *dogra* Rajput faction attempted to elevate the vizier Dhian Singh's own son Hira Singh.

Sher Singh mounted a forceful assault on the citadel of Lahore in the first month of 1841, until the vizier brokered an uncomfortable armistice: Chand Kaur was made the (p. 66) titular head of state, Sher Singh was chosen Badshah, Dhian Singh was retained as war minister (Gardner 1898: 237). The *panchayats* or soldier-councils were now more restive than ever and the English commandant on the Sutlej was set to march on the Sikh capital with 12,000 EIC sepoys to restore order in the name of Sher Singh for 40,000 rupees (Cunningham 1849: 214). The threat of an English invasion led to a repose by the soldier-councils in mid-1841, but their relationship to the Lahore state was completely transformed, and the soldiers saw themselves as their own agency (Cunningham 1849: 215; Gough and Innes 1897: 55). This relative calm 'was taken advantage of to recur to those mercantile objects of which the British Government never lost sight', which was a reduction in the duties on wares passing on land through the Punjab, similar to the settlement on commerce conducted on its rivers (Cunningham 1849: 217). That the Lahore state hesitated on this issue, coupled with its reluctance to offer more assistance when the EIC was forced to beat a catastrophic retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad in 1842, hastened another shift, as whatever stock Sher Singh had with Governor-General Lord Ellenborough was quickly plummeting (G. Singh 1955: 52).

The regicide of Sher Singh at the hands of the Sindhanwalias in 1843 left Maharani Jindan, the mother of the infant Duleep Singh, reputedly the last son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, to rein in the so-called French units. Her first order was to settle the arrears, in addition to which she sanctioned a pay rise as an expedient, but the soldier-councils governing the army were not unsated. However, the annexations since 1823 had contributed little to the coffers in the shape of new revenues for paying off the costs of the growing military state. Charles Hall calculates that in the span 1823–38, the modern Europeanized branch of the services were growing at a yearly rate of about 10 per cent, or from 15,025 soldiers to 35,242 (Hall 1981: 196). However, in the era after the death of Ranjit Singh or 1839–45, the number of soldiers in the French units stretched to 70,721 or almost double the number in 1838, even as the payroll ballooned by 145.9 per cent. On the eve of the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1845 the expenditure on the Europeanized units alone totalled 862,707 rupees a month; compare that with 138,043 rupees a month in 1823 or 350,941 in 1838. General Charles Gough confessed to some concern about the harmful effect on the morale of the EIC sepoys in Ludhiana over 'the very high rate of pay that the Sikh soldiery had exacted for themselves' as well as the 'success which had attended their insubordination', even as the EIC continued to amass soldiers on the Sutlej in anticipation of a Sikh 'invasion' (Gough and Innes 1897: 59). The maharani palpably feared the cupidity of the soldier-councils who had de facto control of the state; she

therefore incited the soldiers to eye the riches south of the Sutlej with the deliberate ambition of provoking war with the English. On 11 December 1845, the Sikhs forded the Sutlej, an action that was tantamount to a declaration of war.

After hard-fought battles at Mookdee, Ferozeshah, Aliwal, and Sabraon, the war was clinched for the English, who reached Lahore on 20 February 1846. The EIC was temporarily satisfied to 'weaken the war-like republic', which was held liable for indemnities in the sum of 1.5 million rupees, while the issue of annexation was shelved. Yet by 1848, the Sikh state was still insolvent while the EIC state was itself in the midst of a financial (p. 67) crisis, when the Second Anglo-Sikh War (1848–9) acted as the final arbiter. The news of the annexation of Lahore in April 1849 reached London a month later.

Conclusion: The Aftermath of Annexation

Between the First and the Second Anglo-Sikh War, the debate on the annexation of the Punjab was a purely English affair in a double sense. For in the absence of a robust culture of vernacular dailies or some other space in the Punjab in which to debate such matters publicly, it was in English newspapers in Calcutta and London that the policy of annexation was contested, primarily by EIC officials on either side of the issue of whether the latest addition to the empire was worth the expense. An editorial in *The Times* on 24 May 1849 exclaimed, 'debt is the natural death of empire', pointing out that the available statistics on the Punjab vitiated the likelihood of an immediate retrenchment since its revenues were sure to fall short of the military expenditures of the occupation. The Lahore state was moreover unable to liquidate the advances that were loaned to it to repay its own debt. Herbert, the same subaltern who had written the satirical 'Brahminee-Bull' dispatches in the *Delhi Gazette* pillorying EIC rule in 1845, likened the rhetoric about the fertile riches of the Punjab to the hunt for El Dorado (Edwards 1846: 303). Ever since the death of Ranjit Singh, Edwards noted, the feverish alarm about the possibility of 'a Sikh invasion of British India' had crested or fallen in accordance with the vicissitudes of which party was in control in London, but had never completely fallen silent (Edwards 1846: 303). Edwards believed that, instead of pressing forward with annexation or a settlement in the Punjab like the one affected in Bengal, the English first should pay closer attention to the areas under the (mis)rule of the EIC; otherwise 'the liberal party of our own island [who] were the authors of every illiberal and ruinous measure towards India' risked the same fate in India that had led them to forfeit the colonies across the Atlantic (Edwards 1847: 232). A hawkish officer pressing the case for annexation pointedly asked: how was it that Englishmen who had come to abhor the

notion of the divine right of kings in England considered treaties with native rajas as inviolable (IOR Tract 823)? He wrote that if the English were to effect a revenue settlement that balanced the concerns of the Jat peasantry—who favoured the rights that came with the implementation of the English revenue system—while promoting the development of ‘industry and capital’, settlement of the restive Sikh nation called for no other ‘safety-valve’. There was also an established labour market for the EIC to exploit; or, putting the matter more plainly, the modernization efforts undertaken by Ranjit Singh had laid the foundations for EIC rule. As a coda: it was only in the 1870s, after piling up debts to creditors in London, that Duleep Singh came to see himself as the eleventh Sikh Guru who, as prophecy held, was to return to reclaim the title to the Punjab (Alexander and Anand 1980 [2001]: 120–1).

(p. 68) Late in life Alexander Gardner, a veteran soldier of fortune in the Punjab, wrote an open letter modelled on the Brahminee Bull dispatches, which had as its fictional addressee John Bull of England. As the self-styled John Bull of India, Gardner recalled an age when England was the radiant centre of cosmopolitan freedom, but had since transformed itself into its opposite. Gardner exhorted the crown—which had since replaced the EIC—to adopt the older, Whiggish vision of governing India through representation in a united House of Commons at Westminster, permitting native officers to serve in the Indian Civil Services, and reshaping the cities in India into ‘our own Manchesters, Leeds [*sic*], Sheffields, and Newcastles’ (Gardner 1898: 282–90). Gardner was thus rejecting in 1876 what had in fact happened after 1849 in the Punjab as well as the shift in attitude towards governing India after the catastrophic experience of 1857. However, instead of putting the Punjab on the course of modernization, the EIC executive board that was formed after annexation outlined a conservative vision of governing the Jat yeomanry based on custom, through an administration paternalistically overseen by semi-autonomous officials. The board held that, if the effort to remake Bengal in the image of Britain by fiat through the Permanent Settlement had failed to transform the zamindari gentry into a capitalist class or, worse, had exacerbated the 1848 financial crisis that had shaken the EIC state, it stood to reason that its radical antithesis should be attempted in the Punjab, which was therefore maintained as a matter of policy as an overwhelmingly agrarian society of Jat cultivators. It was this Arcadian Punjab that was thrust on to the world stage in the latter half of the nineteenth century, first as the labour market from which the English recruited soldiers to subdue the rebellious sepoys in 1857, then as one of the cotton suppliers that continued to feed the mills in Manchester when the American Civil War disrupted the supply of cotton globally.

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Colonial Formations of Sikhism

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the role of colonial encounter in shaping modern Sikh identity. It notes how during the eighteenth century a stereotype characterizing Sikhism as a reformist tradition distinct from Indian religious culture emerged in colonial discourse. The article charts the way in which the putative distinctiveness of Sikhism became a key front in the struggle between two different visions of Sikh identity in the late nineteenth century, one which promoted a catholic view of Sikh culture (*Sanatan dharam*) and the other a narrowly defined tradition (*Tat Khalsa*). The article outlines how this restrictive Sikh idiom became prevalent, and the role of colonialism in mediating its ascendancy; it discusses whether colonialism simply patronized religious chauvinism or supervised its production. Finally, the article sketches the shift from communalized religion to ethno-nationalism in the early twentieth century.

Keywords: Akalis, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Colonialism, martial race, Sanatan dharam, Sikhism, Singh Sabha, Tat Khalsa

In recent years a key debate in Sikh Studies has emerged concerning the way in which British colonialism in India served to redefine the nature of Sikh tradition. The historiography of this debate has largely focused on the vicissitudes of Sikh identity between the 1870s and 1925. During the late nineteenth century movements such as the Singh Sabha mobilized a discourse of reform in order to establish the distinctiveness of Sikhism amidst the thicket of Indian culture, an agenda which culminated in the increasingly strident identity politics of the Akalis. Barrier (1981) has pointed out that this consolidation of Sikh identity coincided with the modernization of colonial Punjab, a period in which the Sikhs came to be embedded within the technical order of imperial culture. While this insertion into the imperial system offered the Sikhs many new opportunities these were strictly circumscribed by the orientalist terms of colonial discourse. Orientalism refers to the way in which the West views the Orient through its own epistemological categories, an encounter which naturalizes stereotypes about the

East, establishing Western notions of superiority and a moral justification for rule. In colonial India the category of religion had a paradigmatic role in the orientalist representation of native identities. William Cavanaugh (2009) notes how the term religion served to discipline the semantic excess of the notion of *dharma*, an act which defined Indian ontology in terms of its 'spirituality' and thus vindicated the exclusion of natives from the exercise of public power. In Punjab the religionizing of the Sikhs involved a similar policing of the term *dharam*. In a seminal work on the development of Sikhism in colonial India Harjot Oberoi (1994) describes how the permissiveness of traditional Sikh belief was purged by radical ideologues with a view to establishing a well-defined religious identity. However, whereas Oberoi attributes this religionization of Sikhism to the ascendancy of a rationalistic idiom within it, recent studies (Mandair 2009, 2011) have pointed out that colonialism, far from simply abetting this trend was at the heart of this act of 'religion-making'.

The earliest colonial account of the Sikhs is that of Major James Browne, an agent for the East India Company (EIC) at the Mughal court in Delhi. In the late eighteenth **(p. 71)** century the EIC was becoming increasingly anxious about the aggressive aggrandizement of the Sikhs in Punjab, a concern which prompted the development of an archive of information about Sikhism. These accounts Ballantyne (2006) notes were important because they served to shape the diplomatic encounter between the EIC and the Lahore Darbar and, following the annexation of the Punjab, helped to orient colonial policy in the province. Browne's account (1788) suggested that Sikhism was fundamentally a reformed variety of the 'Hindoo religion', a view which was consistently rehearsed in British thinking about the Sikhs. In this light Sikhism was seen as a rejection of the vicious customs cultivated by Hinduism such as caste sensitivity and polytheism; where Browne commended the egalitarian nature of Sikh society, Charles Wilkins noted in his essay on the Sikhs of Patna (1788) that their tradition emphasized a belief in 'one God [who was] omnipotent and omnipresent' (Kaur Singh, 2011). Significantly, the spirit of reform which characterized Sikhism was represented by these observers as comparable to the Protestant break with Rome. Sikhism then was mapped onto a particularly Protestant notion of religion; its espousal of monotheism and social equality were emblematic of an austere, progressive creed which the British recognized as like their own.

This sense of cultural affinity was accentuated by what the British imagined was a shared 'martial character'. Even before the Mutiny, British observers at the Lahore Darbar had been impressed by the 'sturdy physique and masculine values' of its Sikh soldiers (Ballantyne 2006), an opinion reinforced by testimonies from the Anglo-Sikh wars (1845–6, 1848–9) which described the Sikhs as fighting with 'courage, ardour and fierceness' (Streets 2004). Following the annexation of the Punjab (1849) influential voices in the military and media urged an army recruitment policy that favoured Sikhs

and Punjabis, an appeal which foundered on anxieties about the loyalty of a newly subjugated foe. However, with the onset of the Mutiny Sikh troops came to play a crucial role in the EIC's military response. During this conflict the Sikhs were noted for their 'hardy [and] warlike' temperament, their 'bravery' in desperate situations and 'above all [their] faithful and loyal' service (Streets 2004). Their martial character invited comparisons with the British Highland regiments whose reputation served as the yardstick for soldierly ability. This link was concretized by accounts of battles in which Sikhs and Highlanders were described as vying with each other to be first in at the assault at Secunderbagh during the mutiny of 1857 which insinuated a shared racial typology defined by daring and exceptional prowess in battle (Streets 2004). This assertion of affinity between the 'martial races' of India and the British served to re-naturalize colonial power, a process of normalization contingent on inveigling these groups into accepting this image of themselves.

Following the Mutiny a gradual 'Punjabization of the Indian Army' occurred as recruitment policy was skewed to favour Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims (Ballantyne 2006). This bias reflected not only the administration's faith in the loyalty of these troops but also the perceived need for soldiers who could measure up to a European adversary in the event of a Russian invasion of the North West Frontier. By 1893 almost 18 per cent of the Indian Army consisted of Sikh recruits, a figure that had risen to 30 per cent by (p. 72) 1914 (Streets 2004). This change in recruitment policy had profound repercussions for the Sikh community. Military service provided a vital source of employment for Sikh farmers at a time when increasing population growth was reducing the viability of plots; the investment of army pay in expanding land holdings helped to make the Sikhs an affluent community (Bingley 1985, [1898]). More significantly the recruitment of Sikhs employed criteriological prejudices which were complicit in shaping Sikh orthodoxy. A key assumption guiding the recruitment of Sikhs was that the militant identity of the Khalsa embodied the true spirit of Sikhism. Not surprisingly the fortunes of the Khalsa became a matter of considerable concern for the colonial regime. Following the Second Anglo-Sikh war John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, was struck by the precipitous decline of the Khalsa, observing that 'the Seikhs of Govind…the Singhs…[who had] joined in their thousands, now desert in equal numbers [to] rejoin the ranks of Hindooism' (quoted in Ballantyne 2006). This anxiety about the decay of the Khalsa pervaded British recruitment efforts, and led to provisions aimed at preserving this identity; all Sikh soldiers were expected to receive initiation into the Khalsa and to strictly observe its symbols and discipline. And, by establishing military employment as a prerogative of Khalsa soldiers the Army served to advertise 'the (economic) advantages of this faith' which, it was hoped, would inspire its reproduction within the Sikh community (Bingley 1985 [1898]).

Although the colonial regime represented its cultivation of the Khalsa as an attempt to ‘keep Sikhism up to its old standard’ (MacMunn 2002 [1911]) recent studies have shown that far from revitalizing a diminished culture this intervention helped to circumscribe the limits of orthodox belief. However, the manner in which official policy influenced Sikh orthodoxy has been a subject of some dispute. Fox (1985) presents an argument which emphasizes the instrumentality of the colonial army in the development of Sikhism; its promotion of Khalsa Sikhism manufacturing a new social identity separate from the Indian religious milieu. This account has been criticized for its highly ‘reductive view’ of colonial intervention (Ballantyne 2006). In contrast Oberoi (1994) notes that the consolidation of Sikh belief was the result of an internal struggle, in which native elites with different visions of religious identity contested the ‘proper’ representation of Sikhism. He suggests that the propagandists of a narrow view of tradition, one which identified Sikhism with the Singhs, were able to use the Army’s official patronage of the Khalsa as leverage in their bid to communalize Sikh identity.

Oberoi places the prejudices of Army policy within the broader concern of the colonial state to modernize the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Punjab; its rationalization of society provided the conditions in which chauvinist ideologues could successfully circumscribe the meaning of Sikhism. A key step in the modernization of Punjab was the establishment of a new administrative structure organized along Western lines with clearly defined executive, bureaucratic, and judicial branches (Barrier 1981). This was accompanied by an emphasis on Western education which was disseminated through a network of Anglo-Vernacular schools with a view to cultivating the skills necessary for the new clerical, legal, and pedagogic occupations needed to support the administration. Christian missionaries also recognized the importance of education as a sphere of (p. 73) influence; this led to the establishment of an array of Mission Schools whose pedagogic ethos was coloured by a proselytizing agenda. The introduction of this new system of education exposed the Sikhs to an intellectual climate in which the value of ideas was governed by their conformity with reason, a milieu which prompted a re-evaluation of native history and traditions in terms which satisfied rational standards. This process of reassessment was spurred by the success of missionizing efforts which had persuaded some Sikhs to repudiate their beliefs as unintelligible; the conversion of a number of Sikh students at Mission High School in Amritsar in 1873 became a watershed moment in this regard (Singh 1999). Sikh fears about the erosion of their culture were also aroused by their encounter with the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj was a reform movement which promoted a rationalized view of Hinduism. Initial Sikh support for its ‘progressive’ ideology foundered on the realization that it was underscored by a cultural chauvinism which saw other Indian traditions as deviant forms of Hinduism; in Punjab this had led to a sustained campaign of conversion (*shuddhi*) among the Sikh population.

Sikh anxieties in the face of these encounters led to the establishment of a movement called the Singh Sabha, which had the ambitious aim of restoring an allegedly lapsed sense of religious commitment among the Sikhs. The first Singh Sabha was formed in Amritsar in 1873 by a group of prominent Sikhs drawn largely from the aristocracy and religious establishment; key figures in this association included Khem Singh Bedi, a direct descendant of Guru Nanak, Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia, a close confidant of the deposed Maharajah of the Punjab, and Giani Gian Singh, one of the foremost scholars of Sikhism (Mandair 2013). The Amritsar Singh Sabha had a conservative view of reform seeing it as a means of shoring up the 'traditional' values of Sikh culture. This traditional view of Sikhism saw it as part of the great diversity of beliefs constituting Sanatan dharam, a religious milieu in which the Vedas was revered along with the Adi Granth as the primary source of authority. Sanatan Sikhs were comfortable with the idea that *gurbani* was a local expression of ancient Vedic teachings, a view which informed their adherence to a Brahmanical social code in which notions of caste and pollution were of profound importance (Mandair 2013). Oberoi (1994) claims that the blurred cultural boundaries of Sanatan Sikhism made it highly tolerant of Sikh sectarianism, cultivating a milieu in which no identity was seen as particularly privileged. He suggests that by 'legitimizing deviation' Sanatan culture served to invigorate the Panth and reduce the potential for conflict between religious communities.

However, dissatisfaction with the Amritsar group's conservative approach to reform led to a more radical initiative by Sikhs in Lahore. The Lahore Singh Sabha was established in 1879 by Sikhs drawn largely from the new urban middle classes who had a shared experience of Western education and employment. Its leading lights included Professor Gurmukh Singh, a teacher of Punjabi at Oriental College and Giani Ditt Singh, who would become the influential editor of the *Khalsa Akhbar* newspaper. The intellectual background of the Lahore group made them acutely aware that traditional accounts of Sikhism failed to measure up to Western ideals of 'religion'. Sikhism seemed to lack any sort of systematic unity, without which the distinctiveness which characterized proper religion could not be established; more alarmingly this deficiency was seen as vested in a suspect (p. 74) representation of God. The shortcomings of Sikhism had been the subject of Evangelical diatribes as early as the 1850s; the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* described Sikhism as cultivating a 'latitudinarian' spirit which was not far removed from the polytheistic doxa of its Hindu milieu (Ballantyne 2006). This opinion contradicted the established view of Sikhism which, from Charles Wilkins (1788) to Joseph Cunningham (1849), saw it as a reformed faith in the same mould as Protestantism. Some years later the work of the German Indologist Ernest Trumpp went much further in elaborating this distance between Sikhism and Christianity. In 1869 the colonial administration commissioned Trumpp to undertake the translation of the *Adi* and *Dasam Granth*. Trumpp's work led to conclusions about Sikhism which seemed to support the aspersions

of the missionaries. In the prologue to his translation *Sketch of the Religion of the Sikhs* (1877) Trumpp acknowledged that the key theme in Sikhism was 'the unity of the Supreme Being'. However, this Sikh 'theology' was far closer in conception to the pantheistic traditions of Hinduism than the monotheistic perspective of Christianity. Without a basis in monotheism Sikhism fell short of being a proper religion, a deficiency echoed in its moral and political traditions. This indicated that Sikhs lacked the potential for national culture, a conclusion which served to justify the logic of colonization (Mandair 2013).

Trumpp's disparaging assessment of Sikhism provided a powerful spur to the reformist aims of the Lahore Singh Sabha. Their agenda aimed to entrench the colonial view of Sikhism which saw it as a key agent of the 'Indian Reformation', its emphasis on vernacular religion instituting a clean break from the priestly tradition of Hinduism. The Lahore group maintained that the distinctive vision of the early Gurus had crystallized in the Khalsa tradition, an objective examination of which would reveal a sophisticated theistic discourse. Its ideologues lamented the fact that this theistic vision had become obscured by sectarian interpretations of Sikhism which took their cue from Vedantic philosophy (particularly the Nirmala and Udasi schools) and by the incursion of retrograde social practices and superstitions from the Hindu milieu. In this light the task of reform came to be defined in terms of a *return* to an original Sikh consciousness, a process involving *both* the consolidation of a specifically Sikh discourse and the erasure of extraneous cultural influences. The proponents of this radical vision of reform came to be known as the Tat Khalsa since, like their early eighteenth century namesakes, they championed the *tat* or true meaning of Sikhism.

A key development in this programme of reform was the innovation of 'a systematic corpus of Sikh literature' (Mandair 2013), which aimed to show that Sikhism contained insights consistent with the Western conceptualization of religion. At the heart of this literary output was an array of exegetical commentaries on *gurmat* which attested to the rational basis of the Sikh religion. Works such as *Gurmat Prabhakar* and *Gurmat Sudhakar*, written by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha in the 1890s, helped to show that Sikhism was a propositional faith, a discourse reducible to a set of essential tenets and amenable to corroboration by textual references. The alphabetical arrangement of these doctrines served to pronounce the systematic nature of Sikhism (Mandair 2013). These initial steps in the codification of Sikhism paved the way for the first true work of Sikh theology, Jodh Singh's *Gurmat Nirnai* (1932). Mandair (2013) notes that this text appropriated (p. 75) a Christian theological schema to expound Sikh teachings; beginning with a proof for the existence of a transcendent God it proceeded to develop a Sikh credo which was distinct from other Indian creeds. In addition to these exegetical works the Tat Khalsa also developed a new historical narrative which aimed to convey the unity of Sikhism.

Previous ‘histories’ of Sikhism, such as the *Nanak Prakash* (1823) and *Suraj Prakash* (1844) by Santokh Singh, were seen as unreliable in view of their Sanatani prejudice (McLeod 1995) and were displaced by an account in which a consistent cultural narrative posited a uniform Sikh identity. The work of Max Arthur Macauliffe helped seal the ascendancy of this version of Sikh history. His monumental study *The Sikh Religion* (1909), written in collaboration with leading Tat Khalsa scholars, reproduced the colonial stereotype of Sikhism within a highly coherent and comprehensive account which remains influential within the Sikh Panth to this day. The Tat Khalsa was also adroit in communicating its intellectual discourse to a broader audience. Bhai Vir Singh’s use of historical fiction to convey an ideal view of Sikh identity in novels such as *Sundari*, *Bijai Singh*, and *Satwant Kaur* was an inspired means of propagandizing the Tat Khalsa message. The circulation of ‘didactic and polemical pamphlets’ was also an effective way of promoting Tat Khalsa views among the Sikh population, a process greatly facilitated by the establishment of the Khalsa Tract Society in 1894 (Barrier 1981). However, these means of influencing popular opinion were eclipsed by the reach of newspapers; contributors to papers such as *Khalsa Akhbar*, *Gurmukhi Akhbar*, and *The Khalsa* consistently represented Sikhism as separate from India’s tangle of traditions.

This body of literature had a profound effect on Sikh attitudes towards social reform. It served to normalize Tat Khalsa discourse, leading to a clear consensus about the necessity and aims of reform. One of main objectives of this reformist agenda was a concern to demarcate the limits of orthodox belief, a process in which the identification of Sikh ideals went hand in hand with a rejection of Hindu ‘idols’. There was broad agreement that the orthodox tradition was underpinned by three key doctrines ‘Guru, *Granth* and Gurdwara’ (Barrier 1981). This *doxa* restricted religious veneration to God and the ten Gurus rather than the living incumbents of sectarian lineages (*dehdari gurus*), it established a canonical tradition which valorized the authority of the *Adi Granth* in a bid to diminish the influence of works such as the *Dasam Granth* with its Sanatani interpolations, and made gurdwaras the focal point of Sikh worship with a view to discouraging visits to Hindu temples and the shrines of popular cults. The Tat Khalsa also sought to show that the practices used to mark religious initiation and life cycle events were quite distinct from those of the Hindus. A key episode in the development of this orthopraxy was the establishment of rites appropriate to the Sikh marriage order. McLeod (1997) notes, that at the time it was common practice to formalize Sikh marriages using a Hindu rite which involved the couple circumambulating a sacred fire (*dhuni*). The Tat Khalsa claimed that this ritual had supplanted a Sikh rite in which the union was solemnized by processing around the Adi Granth. Sanatan ideologues challenged the authenticity of this ‘Sikh’ tradition (*Anand Karaj*) arguing that its origin lay in the practices of the nineteenth century Nirankari sect. However, the opinion of the

Tat Khalsa prevailed, a view ratified by the *Anand* Marriage Act of 1909. Crucially, this official recognition of (p. 76) uniquely Sikh customs provided succour for the idea that Sikhs possessed a unique identity. Similarly, the promotion of Khalsa rites and symbols (the *khanda ki pahul* and *panj kakkar*) as distinctive Sikh traditions provided purchase for the view that Sikhism was separate from Hinduism. This invigilation of initiation practices placed Sanatan Sikhs outside the pale of the true faith; however by qualifying the status of these non-Khalsa elements as *Sehajdhari* (slow adopters of the Khalsa tradition) it became possible to accommodate them within a Panth shaped by the Singhs. This accommodation became vital to Sikh interests in the early twentieth century as population percentages began to dictate colonial responses to native demands for a share in the legislative process.

Although the Tat Khalsa lacked access to the 'time-honoured networks of patronage and support' enjoyed by the Sanatan Sikhs (Barrier 1981) they possessed several advantages which ensured the ascendancy of their view. A key element in their success was the emergence of an exceptional group of provincial and local leaders whose dedication, organizational skills, and prolific propagandizing provided great impetus to the reform movement. Barrier (1981) notes that the Tat Khalsa also gained leverage from their canny use of the 'networks of communication' intersecting 'daily Sikh life'. The introduction of telegraphy and postal services ensured that a uniform agenda could be coordinated 'over time and space', and a modern transport system (particularly railways) greatly facilitated the missionizing efforts of preachers (*parcharaks*) and balladeers (*dhadi jathas*) on the preaching circuit. Regular conferences (*divans*) presented opportunities to review their position and frame plans to consolidate the Tat Khalsa message. Another factor in their favour was their influence over the system of education. The Tat Khalsa helped to establish many new schools; institutions such as Khalsa College in Amritsar (1892) mixed a Western curriculum with instruction in Sikh religious traditions, creating a cadre equally at home with modernity and their Sikh identity (Barrier 1981). This pedagogic vision included provision for female education at schools such as the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala in Ferozepur (1892).

By the late nineteenth century the Tat Khalsa had laid the foundations for a distinctive Sikh identity. Oberoi (1994) argues that this systematization of Sikhism marked a fundamental transformation in what it meant to be Sikh. He suggests that the 'vertical ties' of traditional Sikh society, established via the hierarchical discourse of sects, lineages, and caste, were displaced in favour of the 'lateral relationships' created by the uniform culture of the Tat Khalsa. As this traditional social order declined the *bricolage* of religious traditions it accommodated disappeared; its sectarianism, idolatry, and superstitious practices were displaced by a normative idiom which emphasized scripturalism, monotheism, and Khalsa rites. Oberoi insists that this transformation of

Sikhism was grounded in an *internal* struggle between advocates of a catholic tradition, and the rationalistic strand within it; in comparison the influence of colonialism on Sikh identity was marginal, its intervention limited to acts of patronage in support of the Tat Khalsa cause. However, this view seems to underestimate the complicity of colonialism in 'Sikhizing the Sikhs'. While Oberoi is alert to the Tat Khalsa's efforts to invigilate orthodoxy he is inattentive to the colonial invigilation of this doxa. Mandair (2013) argues that the conditions for this supervision were established by Trumpp's use of a (p. 77) Western conceptual framework to represent Sikh scripture and its teachings. Crucially, by enlisting Trumpp's terminology to contest his conclusions the Tat Khalsa internalized the act of colonial supervision, reducing Sikh orthodoxy to a slavish rehearsal 'of Western-Christian thought'. Oberoi's blind spot regarding the colonization of the Tat Khalsa voice needs to be located within the strategic prejudices of his analytical narrative, particularly its insistence on the inalienable divide between religious and secular estates. This critical idiom *normalizes* the patchwork of personalized pieties that Oberoi refers to as Sanatan dharam; and since the discourse of reform advocated by the Tat Khalsa strays from the personal into a communal register it constitutes a deviation from this 'original' dispensation. While Oberoi's critique of the Tat Khalsa's parochial idiom constitutes a laudable attempt to uncover the plural nature of Sikhism he fails to see that this account is not an objective communication of the facts but an objectification of his own methodological prejudices. Oberoi's analytic rehearses the bias against politicized religions at the heart of Western secular modernity; as such it is plugged into a narrative which stifles dissent to the secular monopolization of public discourse, and ironically reinstates the very parochialization he aims to contest.

By the turn of the century it had become apparent that Sikh interests were being jeopardized by the lack of a unified voice within an increasingly communalized Punjab. This led to closer cooperation between the competing constituencies of the Singh Sabha within a new national body called the Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD). Inaugurated in 1902 it sought to coordinate Sikh affairs in the areas of social reform and political representation. Although this initiative was instigated by members of the Amritsar Singh Sabha its agenda was largely defined by the main concerns of the Tat Khalsa; the input of ideologues such as Bhai Vir Singh, Jodh Singh, and Mohan Singh Vaid was instrumental in shaping this outlook.

For the next two decades the Chief Khalsa Diwan served as the main lobby for Sikh interests. From the outset the Diwan was keen to ensure the 'fiscal stability' of the organization; this provided a strong foundation on which to develop its programmes (Barrier 1981). One of the key tasks of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was to foster the distinctive vision of Sikh identity developed by the Tat Khalsa. The Diwan was quick to recognize the importance of policing references to Sikhism in books and tracts (Barrier

1981); this process of standardization ensured that a consistent image of Sikh identity was reproduced within literature. The CKD's two newspapers, the Punjabi medium *Khalsa Samachar* and the English medium *Khalsa Advocate*, played a pivotal role in raising awareness of this ideal identity. Contributors to these papers consistently argued the case for a separate Sikh dispensation, and its distance from the un-Sikh practices of sectarian traditions (Grewal 1990). The CKD sought to objectivize this sense of Sikh separateness by institutionalizing distinct notions of Sikh space and observance; key milestones in this process included re-consecrating the Golden Temple as a site in which idolatry had no place (1905), and winning approval for the Sikh marriage custom of Anand Karaj (1909). This led to the CKD framing an authoritative statement on Sikh ethics and observance. However, this text, the *Gurmat Parkash Bhag Sanskar* (1915), was seen as overly elaborate and was not widely adopted (McLeod 2003).

(p. 78) Barrier (1981) notes, that the Chief Khalsa Diwan was keen on developing a network of institutions which would support its mission of unifying the Sikhs. Besides assisting established and nascent Singh Sabhas, it set up hospitals and orphanages and oversaw a great expansion in the number of schools. Its inauguration of the Sikh Educational Conference in 1908 provided a forum in which thorny educational issues could be discussed and new initiatives developed. The formation of the Khalsa Biradri was an attempt to equalize social relations between castes to stem the haemorrhage of low-caste members from the Sikh fold. However, its avowed aim of unifying Sikh society carried an undertone of political self-interest. The expansion of the elective principle in Punjab's legislative bodies tended to favour those communities with large populations (Barrier 1981). The CKD recognized the political importance of swelling the ranks with low caste and Sehajdhari Sikhs; however, in a numbers game the Sikhs could never avoid their 'permanent minority status' (Barrier 1981). As appeals to the administration for a reserved electorate of 30 per cent of all seats foundered on objections from the Hindus, the CKD's influence in Sikh society began to dwindle. Critics of the CKD saw this failure as intrinsic to its political posture; its loyalty to the administration obliged it to use constitutional channels and personal contacts to influence opinion. While this cosy relationship had served the CKD well in the past the realities of communalized politics in early twentieth-century Punjab exposed its limitations. This sense of betrayal by the British was compounded by the use of repressive measures to contain civil unrest following the Great War, culminating in the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in 1919. These events convinced the Sikhs that a more radical approach was required to safeguard their interests.

In 1919 a new political formation called the Central Sikh League (CSL) was inaugurated to agitate for Sikh rights. The League sought to complete the communalizing agenda of the Tat Khalsa by establishing control over key Sikh institutions such as institutes of

learning and religious shrines. The CSL was particularly committed to winning control of the historic Sikh gurdwaras. This meant confronting the *mahants*, sectarian Sikhs whose proprietorship over these shrines had been ratified by the colonial administration. The League objected that this sense of ownership gave the *mahants* free rein to embezzle funds and ensconce a permissive religious culture. In contrast to the CKD the League was prepared to use unconstitutional means to address this problem. In 1920 the CSL established the Akali Dal, a militant body enjoined to seize the gurdwaras from the *mahants*. The liberated shrines were to be entrusted to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), an elected board charged with administering the gurdwaras on behalf of the Sikh community. While the Golden Temple and Akal Takht passed into SGPC hands without incident, establishing control over other shrines proved to be a much more vexed affair. The *Akali jathas* sent to take possession of these gurdwaras were routinely assaulted by the private militias retained by the *mahants*. The most egregious of these encounters occurred in 1921 during the attempt to dislodge Narain Das, the custodian of *Nankana Sahib*; over 100 members of the unarmed *jatha* were killed and their bodies burned. These incidents were woven into the martyrological narrative of the Sikh tradition and served to inspire even greater efforts against the *mahants* (Fenech 2000).

(p. 79) The administration viewed these developments with alarm; the Akalis' attack on established rights invited questions about the legal process underpinning colonial authority, and as such came perilously close to sedition. However, the British were acutely aware that suppression risked alienating the vital Sikh constituency in the Army and agricultural heartlands. As a result the British response to the Akali challenge was somewhat disjointed, veering between laissez-faire and vicious intimidation. The tensions between the Akalis and administration came to a head during the Jaito incident. In 1923 the Government of Punjab orchestrated the abdication of Ripudamman Singh, Maharajah of Nabha and a key Akali sympathizer. In Jaito, prayers for his restoration were interrupted by the police, 'transforming (a political dilemma) into a right to worship issue' (Mandair 2013). Over the next two years the Akalis made regular protest marches to Jaito, courting arrest, assault, and death at the hands of the authorities. Crucially, the agitation was championed by the Indian National Congress (INC) who saw it as a key front in the struggle for *swaraj* (self-rule); attempts by the administration to split this coalition were thwarted by nationalist leaders (Malaviya and Jinnah) who drummed up cross-communal support for a Gurdwaras Bill in the Punjab Legislative Assembly (Singh 1990). The ratification of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 1925 recognized the SGPC's right to manage all historic Sikh shrines (Grewal 1990).

Establishing control over these gurdwaras did more than consolidate Sikh identity, and provide political muscle in a dangerously factionalized Punjab. These autonomous Sikh

spaces became powerful symbols of Sikh sovereignty. This encouraged Sikhs to view their separateness from Hindus, not as a mere difference of religious opinion but in terms of a separate national identity (*qaum*). However, the Akalis did not define this nationhood in exclusive terms, but rather emphasized its place within the community of nations that constituted the Indian political milieu (Mandair 2013). The Akalis' notion of a 'communitarian nationalism' chimed with the model of political union espoused by the Indian National Congress; this political affinity helped establish a united front against the colonial administration. In the 1920s and 30s the rise of overtly religious parties, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League, jeopardized the ascendancy of Congress (Mandair 2013). The INC addressed this threat by emphasizing its secular ethos; its claim to represent *all* Indian people delegitimized the political claims of communal parties which were impugned as sectarian and divisive. Not surprisingly the INC's privileging of secular nationalism undercut Sikh aspirations for political autonomy. In response the Akalis floated alternatives which might offer the Sikhs a measure of self-determination (Mandair 2013). V. S. Bhatti's notion of *Khalistan* (1940), advocating the creation of a Sikh-dominated 'buffer state between India and Pakistan' (Grewal 1990), was seen as unviable. A more realistic scheme involved establishing a province called Azad Punjab (Free Punjab); its provisions for power-sharing between its Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim constituencies concomitantly undercut the need for Pakistan and protected the Sikh minority from being dominated (Grewal 1990). Master Tara Singh, the leader of the Akali Dal, argued that this project was not inconsistent with the aims of a secular India. However, in the face of Congress intransigence he accepted Nehru's assurances that the Sikhs would be fairly treated in an independent (p. 80) 'India whose demography and politics was determined by a large Hindu majority' (Mandair 2013).

In 1947 after much acrimonious debate and mounting communal violence, Britain, the INC, and the Muslim League agreed upon a political formula for independence; this involved partitioning the subcontinent into two sovereign states Bharat (India) and Pakistan. The Radcliffe Line separating the two nations divided Punjab into Eastern and Western provinces, prompting a mass exodus of Sikhs and Hindus east to India, and Muslims west to Pakistan. Besides the trauma of displacement from their ancestral homes and lands these migrants were exposed to murderous attacks from pillaging bands; some one million people are believed to have been killed during this period. For the Sikhs these losses were compounded by the forfeiture of some of their most sacred shrines, particularly Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Sikhism. Partition constituted an ignominious elegy for the colonial period.

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Sikhs in Independent India

Joginder Singh

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses heterogeneous beliefs and practices of the Sikhs, their class/caste differentiation and ethnic antagonism, and their moderate and extremist politics in the context of Punjab state. It shows that the Jat Sikhs have appropriated the leadership of Sikh institutions, resulting in competitive and factional politics of the Akali and Congress Sikhs. In response to the hegemonic behaviour of the Jat Sikhs, Ramgarhia, Labana, and Dalit Sikhs are trying to consolidate their ethnic groups and assert their respective identities to underline diversity within the Panth.

Keywords: Akali Sikhs, Congress Sikhs, Sikh militants, Jat Sikhs, Dalit Sikhs, Ramgarhia Sikhs, Labana Sikhs, Sikh religious diversity, Sikh sants and babas

This essay analyses heterogeneous socio-religious and political structures of the Sikh community in the context of post-independence demographic changes. It also analyses their intra-relationship. This exercise has been done with reference to the Sikhs of Indian Punjab since nearly 80 per cent of all Sikhs live here, approximately 19 per cent in other parts of India and 1 per cent outside India. Punjabi Sikhs thus set the religious-political trends which affect, directly or indirectly, the life of all Sikhs. Secondly, a radical transformation has taken place in the demographic and economic status of Indians since independence. The bearings of this transformation on the Sikhs are more perceptible in Punjab. Social scientists working on contemporary Punjab have quantified and analysed these effects on the Sikhs. Thirdly, socio-religious and political polarization among Punjabi Sikhs is more definite and acute than that of the Sikhs outside the Punjab.

Demographic Changes

Sikhs in independent India constitute less than 2 per cent of the total population. In Punjab alone, they comprise the majority. In Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi, Uttaranchal, Jammu and Kashmir, and Rajasthan they hold some numerical significance. In the rest of India, their population is in the thousands. One of the major demographic changes is related to occupational diversification. In Punjab, more than 87 per cent of the Sikh population is engaged in agriculture and its allied activities. In other Indian states, this percentage is as follows: Uttar Pradesh 51.3 per cent; Uttaranchal 47.7 per cent; Rajasthan 49.3 per cent; Haryana 41.8 per cent; Himachal Pradesh 39.9 per cent; Madhya Pradesh 31.5 per cent; while in Bihar, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttaranchal it is 16 per cent. Outside Punjab Sikh workers form a major category (60 per cent) of their population. Yet a marginal section is engaged in household industries (see Table 6.1).

(p. 83)

Table 6.1 Demographic and economic status of the Sikhs

	Population		**Cultivators**	**Agricultural labourers**	**Household Industries**	**Other workers**
States	**(lakhs)**	**(% age)**	**(% age)**	**(% age)**	**(% age)**	**(% age)**
Bihar	0.2	-	15.1	16.7	3.3	64.9
Chhattisgarh	0.7	0.3	7.9	5	2.8	84.2
Goa	970*	0.1	0.9	0.7	0.5	97.9
Gujarat	0.46	0.1	4.7	2.5	1.4	91.4
Haryana	11.7	5.5	41.8	16.4	2.8	38.9
Himachal Pradesh	0.7	1.2	39.9	3	2.2	54.9
Jammu & Kashmir	2.1	2	22.4	1.9	1.7	74
Jharkhand	0.8	0.3	5.2	4.3	2.6	87.9
Karnataka	0.2	0.7	6.3	5.6	4.8	83.3
Kerala	0.03	-	3.2	10.9	1.9	84
Madhya Pradesh	1.5	0.2	31.5	7.4	3.1	58
Maharashtra	2.1	0.2	5.2	5.4	3.7	85.7
Manipur	0.01	0.1	11.4	2.6	2.6	83.4
Meghalaya	0.03	0.1	5.4	4.7	0.7	89.2

Mizoram	326*	-	12.7	-	0.4	86.9
Nagaland	1152*	0.1	8.5	1.2	2.9	87.3
Orissa	0.17	0.04	2.1	1.9	2.1	94
Rajasthan	8.2	1.5	49.3	22.5	1.7	26.5
Sikkim	1176*	0.2	2	0.4	0.1	97.5
Tamil Nadu	0.09	-	7.5	12.4	2.7	77.3
Tripura	1182*	-	1.2	0.2		98.6
Uttar Pradesh	6.8	0.4	51.3	9.1	3.4	36.2
Uttaranchal	2.1	2.5	47.7	16.1	2.2	34.1
West Bengal	0.6	0.1	2.8	4.4	1.6	91.2
U.T. Andaman	1587*	0.4	8.1	1.3	0.9	89.7
Delhi	5.6	4	0.4	0.3	4	95.2
Pudducherry	108*	-	4.5	-	-	95.50

Source: The Mishra Commission Report (2007), National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, vols. i and ii, New Delhi, Ministry of Minority Affairs.

(p. 84) According to the 2011 Census, Sikhs in Punjab form a majority (63.6 per cent). Important Sikh occupational castes are Jat, Saini, Labana, Kamboj, Khatri, Arora, Ramgarhia (Lohar and Tarkhan), Parjapat/Ghumiar, Chhimba, Julaha, and Dalit (Mazhabi). Since independence, agrarian and industrial developments have considerably transformed their activities. Nearly 70 per cent of the planned outlay in Punjab was devoted to basic rural infrastructure including irrigation, power, research, and extension. As a result, agricultural production increased but towards the end of the twentieth century, its growth rate deteriorated. Consequently, the structures of the agrarian castes and land relations too underwent changes. It is observed that the middle and

uppermiddle peasantry constitutes a class of powerful and dynamic farmers while small and marginal farmers face a socio-economic crisis in terms of alienation of their landholdings and indebtedness (Bhalla 1997: 378–9; S. Singh 2009: 45, 89).

The dominant Sikh agriculturists are Jats followed by Sainis, Labanas, and Kambojs. Influential farmers from these castes have captured the control of Sikh socio-religious institutions and political parties. The elites of the minor Sikh agricultural castes, artisans, and Dalits, try to organize themselves and assert their numerical strength to ensure that their voices are heard. For this reason they have formed pan-Indian caste associations which aim to integrate their caste members irrespective of their religious affiliations. This trend has developed on account of radical changes in the social stratification of each caste and social mobility.

In Punjab, the Labana, Kamboj, and Ramgarhia castes have set this integrationist trend. Under Sant Baba Prem Singh Moralewala, the Labanas came into the fold of Sikhism. Sant Moralewala was first succeeded by Bawa Harnam Singh (1950–83) and then by the latter's wife Bibi Jagir Kaur who was an Akali MLA and president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in 1997. At present, she is the head of the Moralewala Dera and patron of Labana schools and colleges (J. Singh 1997). Similarly, the Kamboj Sikhs have organized and affiliated themselves with the All India Kamboj Maha Sabha (1974) New Delhi. A large number of Kamboj Sikhs moreover got themselves affiliated with both the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the SGPC. Prominent among their members have been Atama Singh, Balwant Singh, and Dr Upinderjit Kaur. Among the non-agriculturist castes, the Ramgarhia associations are very active and running socio-religious, educational, and technical institutions. They have organized their counterparts in and outside Punjab. Their associations try to appropriate prominent religious and political leaders, writers, and artists for enhancing the Ramgarhia identity (Kulwant Singh 1999). Yet the Ramgarhia activists are divided in terms of their political affiliations.

Mazhabi and Ravidassia Sikhs are similarly divided. Sikh leaders claim that these Sikhs are a part of the Panth and appreciate services these groups have rendered to it (H. Singh 1997: 75). The SAD and SGPC realize their numerical strength (31 per cent of Punjab's Scheduled Caste (SC) population) and have thus accommodated Mazhabis and Ravidassias in Sikh organizations. A few Dalits have also occupied very important religious and political positions in SAD-led governments. Nevertheless, both communities feel thoroughly alienated because of the discriminatory behaviour of Sikh higher castes, particularly Jats. Such disaffection has forced them to assert their own identity and articulate their political aspirations especially through (p. 85) Congress, Unions, and Khet Mazdoor Sabhas. Recently, they have been responding to the Bahujan Samaj Party (Juergensmeyer 1998: 204–7).

Socio-Religious Establishments and Institutions

There are many Sikh socio-religious establishments and institutions inside and outside Punjab which reflect Sikh religious pluralism. Premier among them is the gurdwara which has been central to the Sikh way of life. Literally, the gurdwara is the Guru's abode, a place of worship and a centre for the religious-political and cultural activities of the Sikh community (Gupta 1998: 4–5). The gurdwaras of *bhagats*, *sants*, *babas*, and Sikh martyrs as well as those of Sikh sects and cults display their own respective motifs, particularly the artefacts and photographs of their founders. Similarly, the structures of rituals of some historical gurdwaras, like Harmandir Sahib, Patna Sahib, and Hazur Sahib, and of the sects vary. Moreover, there are thousands of gurdwaras in India which narrate the growth and development of local Sikh communities, and indicate the density of the Sikh population, caste, and sectarian affiliations at the pan-India level.

Caste assertion is also reflected in the founding of gurdwaras and their control and management. Throughout Punjab, there are hundreds of gurdwaras associated with Jat Sikhs, Ramgarhias, Ravidassias, and Mazhabis. The majority of the congregations belong to these castes that commemorate the anniversaries of their respective holy men and martyrs. A recent survey of Amritsar city gurdwaras reveals this religious diversity. There are 25 historical and 107 non-historical gurdwaras. Among the non-historical, 25 per cent of gurdwaras are based on caste/sect; 20 per cent belong to various *babas*; 8 per cent are constructed in memory of dead personalities; and 47 per cent belong to various Singh Sabhas (M. Singh 2009: 194). The castes to which these gurdwaras belong are Ramgarhia, Kamboj, Bhatra, Jat, Khatri, Mazhabi, Sewa Panthi, and Namdhari (M. Singh 2009: 194).

Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD)

The Chief Khalsa Diwan is one of the premier institutions and has been represented by various Sikh organizations since its inception in 1902. It has played a significant role in accentuating the distinct socio-religious and political identity of the Sikhs. It secured separate constitutional rights for the Sikhs under the Act of 1919. Since then it has made a moderate attempt to protect the political interests of the Sikh community. The CKD has also been serving as a forum for Sikh intellectuals and activists forcefully promoting Punjabi journalism and literature. Its wing, the Sikh Educational Conference (1908),

(p. 86) founded a network of more than 300 educational institutions. After independence, under its new title, the All India Sikh Education Conference, it has continued to establish and run educational institutions. To cater to the aspirations of the Sikhs, it founded Guru Harkrishan Public School, Amritsar and its sister institutions in an English medium throughout Punjab. The CKD has also been running orphanages such as the Central Sikh Yateem Khana (Amritsar), Biradh Ashrams (Tarn Taran); Central Khalsa Hospital (Tarn Taran), Homeopathic Hospital, and Guru Ram Das Allopathic Dispensary, Amritsar. These institutions provide health services to people irrespective of their castes and creeds. They are being funded by donations, state grants, and self-generating resources by the Subsidiary Trust which acts like a banker (H. Singh 1996: 461–5).

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)

The SGPC came into being on 15 November 1920. Legally, it is subordinate to the Indian parliament and judiciary, the former being vested with the power to enact its by-laws or amend them as and when required while the latter ultimately interprets these laws. Moreover, it is the Government of India which conducts the elections of its office bearers. With the connivance of their parties, Sikh politicians (primarily Akalis and Congress Sikhs) have been using the Indian legislature and judiciary for appropriating a space in the control and management of the SGPC since independence (Kashmir Singh 1989: 173–6, 190). Moreover, Congress Sikhs have set the precedent of tampering with the autonomy of the local gurdwara committees and transferring them directly under the control of the SGPC under the East Punjab Act 32 of 1949 (A. Singh 1985: 193). The worst example of tampering with the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 took place on 26 November 1986 when the then Punjab Government promulgated an ordinance to amend this Act and scrapped the local committees of all the notified gurdwaras in the state of Punjab which had an annual income of more than Rs. 25,000/- per year (Kashmir Singh 1989: 190). Although the ordinance lapsed, this move was a step towards the overcentralization of the management of the gurdwaras. Similarly, in order to gain control over the support base of the electorates of the SGPC, both Congress and the SAD made amendments in the definition of a Sikh. As per the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, any Sikh of 21 years of age or older can be enrolled as a voter but only by declaring that he or she is a Sikh, believes in the Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus, and has no other religion.

By implication, this definition excluded the Udasis, Namdharis, Radha Soamis, and Nirankaris. In an ugly contest for the control of the Delhi Gurdwara Management Board,

Congress incorporated an exclusive definition of Sikh identity in the Delhi Gurdwara Act 82 of 1971 which excluded all non-Khalsa and Sehajdhari (non-Kesdhari) Sikhs. The definition of a Sikh in this Act was in contrast to the one implemented in the Sikh Gurdwara Act of the Punjab legislature in 1975 (A. Singh 1985: 199–200). Similarly, (p. 87) the SAD got issued a notification on 8 October 2003 from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government which kept the Sehajdhari Sikhs out of the purview of the Sikh electorates of the SGPC. The Full Bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court has recently quashed this notification and restored the right of the Sehajdhari Sikhs to vote for the election of the SGPC on 20 December 2011 (*The Tribune*, Jalandhar (21 December 2011), 1, 5). The contest over this issue is likely to continue.

The ambition of the SAD to enact an All India Sikh Gurdwara Act has been thwarted by its opponents on the ground that such an act would extend the political support base of the SAD, promote Sikh separatism, and enormously increase the SGPC's annual budget (Kashmir Singh 1989: 298–300). Moreover, such an act would infringe upon the rights of local Sikh *sangats* to uphold their own native *maryada*. Above all, it would induct corrupt electoral practices into the managements of the gurdwaras. The elections of the SGPC are a pointer in this regard.

Sikh *Sants* and *Babas*

The resurgence of Sikh *sants* and *babas* has initiated a powerful discourse in the socio-religious life of the Sikhs of the Punjab. In terms of beliefs and practices, Sikh *sants* and *babas* can be put into the following three categories. The first category comprises those who believe in the concept of Guru Granth Sahib and observe the SGPC's *maryada* fully or partially. The Nihang Singhs, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, and Damdami Taksal have theological differences with the SGPC and have evolved their own *maryada*. All of them observe their distinct taboos of eating and dress codes. The second category comprises the Nirankari, Neeldhari, and the Namdhari Sikhs who believe in the concept of a living guru. For legitimizing their beliefs and practices, they use Sikh scriptures and literature. They have evolved their respective *maryada* and *ardas* (supplication), structures of rituals in regard to birth, *nam-karan*, marriage, and death. Their modes of preparation of *amrit* and initiation ceremony are different. They have their own places of worship and observe distinct dress code and eating taboos (McLeod 2005: 152–4, 176–7, 181–2). But numerically, they are marginal. The third category includes Udasis, Nirmalas, and Sewa Panthis. They are also marginal both in terms of their number and resources. There is a large number of *deras* and *akharas* in India and nearly two dozen of them are in Punjab.

In order to survive in the Punjab, the Udasis and Nirmalas have revived their old tradition of worship of Guru Granth Sahib, *katha*, and *kirtan.* The people, irrespective of their caste and creedal affiliations, respond to their mission.

Sikh *sants* and *babas* have made a niche in the Sikh social order. They have established a large number of gurdwaras, academies, and educational and technical institutions both within and outside Punjab. They have also established dispensaries and multi-specialist hospitals and charitable institutions. They are acknowledged by the people for their religious, educational, and humanitarian services.

(p. 88) SGPC and Sikh *Sants* and *Babas*

The SGPC has become a subservient body of the SAD. Being a political party, the first priority of the SAD is to expand and strengthen its electoral support base. For this reason the SAD is trying to establish a rapport with sects like the Radha Soami and Sacha Sauda. Therefore, it implicitly exhorts the SGPC leadership and *jathedar*s to take stands on the issues which suits the SAD politically. Some of the *sants* and *babas* have been playing an important role in mobilizing the Sikh masses for the success of Akali agitations and militant politics. Congress too has been using *sants* and *babas* for political purposes. The politics of Sant Samaj, however, vacillates from time to time.

However, the moderate Sikh leadership admits that justice has not been done to the people of lower castes. Bhai Nirmal Singh Khalsa alleges that the Dalit Sikhs are often discriminated against in Sikh congregations. He further alleges that some of the *jathedars* do not allow Dalits to take initiation in the same rows in which other aspirants sit. Refusing to tolerate such indignities, Dalits assert their identities and feel proud to have their own places of worship with distinct social, religious and cultural motifs. Some of the Ravidassias took the extreme position of replacing Guru Granth Sahib with their own *Amrit Bani Satguru Ravidass Maharaj Ji*. This antagonized mainstream Sikhs. Recently, the Sikh radicals' attack on the head of Dera Sachkhand Ballan and his deputy in Vienna on 24 May 2009 for allegedly violating the Sikh Rahit Maryada at Ravidas gurdwaras across the world culminated in widespread violence in the Jalandhar Doab (*Ajit* 27 October 2009; 3, 10, 17 November 2009).

Political Polarization

The origin of Sikh political polarization can be traced to the display of secular, liberal, and communitarian forces in the pre-independence period. During this period, Sikhs confronted the complicated problems arising out of these forces: the communal and secular. Their response was divided partly due to the complex concerns and partly due to their vested interests.

Akali Sikhs

The SAD emerged as the independent political party of the Sikhs and was registered in 1926. Its alliance with Congress exposed the Akalis to secular and liberal ideas. As it tilted towards nationalist politics some members shifted their affiliation to Congress. Congress Sikhs successfully contested ten seats of the Punjab legislative in 1946 (Narang (p. 89) 1997: 245). On 18 March 1948, the SAD merged with Congress and all Akali MLAs joined the latter on the pretext of safeguarding Sikh interests in the Constituent Assembly (Narang 1997: 249). This decision allowed Jat Sikh MLAs to secure political and economic advantages from Congress rule. Later in 1950 Master Tara Singh asked the Akali MLAs to resign from Congress; only one out of twenty-three legislatures complied with his wishes.

‘The mass support of the Akali Dal came from the Sikh rural Jat peasantry as well as urban Sikh trading classes and some liberal sections of the Hindu community of various political shades’ (Sidhu et al. 2009: 98). The formation of the Punjabi Speaking Province, the success of the Green Revolution and Sikh militancy further strengthened the SAD’s hold over the Sikh peasantry, trading communities, and artisan classes (Sidhu et al. 2009: 99, 111). Similarly, Akali alliances have also widened its support base particularly when Parkash Singh Badal opened the membership of the Akali Party to non-Sikhs. Since then, several non-Sikhs have been contesting elections on the Akali ticket.

Congress Sikhs

In the post-independence period, Congress emerged as the national ruling party and pursued those policies in the Punjab which suited the vested interests of the Sikh landed aristocracy as well as the middle peasantry. Also, Congress crafted a successful policy of

accommodating Sikh/Hindu elites. Rural Sikh elites joined enthusiastically and formed Congress governments in Punjab till this trend was reversed between 1967 and 1985. During this period, the representation of the Sikhs in the Congress Legislature Party in the Punjab assembly declined from 64.8 per cent to 34.4 per cent. At the same time, the representation of Hindu leaders increased from 33.03 per cent in 1967 to 65.6 per cent in 1985 (Dhami 1987: 27). In the post-Operation Blue Star period, Congress could not reverse the declining representation of Sikhs because it failed to articulate regional aspirations. Congress leadership is predominantly Jat which averaged 37.47 per cent among the Congress MLAs elected from 1967 to 1992 (Kumar 2005: 115). A marginal section of Sikh politicians have joined the Communist and peasant organizations which often form political alliances with the Akalis and Congress (Brar 1989: 106.).

From Electoral to Separatist Politics and Politics of Accommodation

The above-mentioned polarization of the Sikh community determines its political behaviour. Disintegration of its traditional occupational castes and emerging new social groups add complexities to its political behaviour. The SAD under Master Tara Singh's (p. 90) leadership raised the demand of Punjabi Suba. Urban Hindus led by the Jan Sangh felt threatened by the theocratic moorings of such a proposal. They advocated the concept of *Maha* Punjab (Great Punjab). The Punjab Congress, representing Hindus, Sikhs, and SCs, too, opposed Master Tara Singh's concept of Punjabi Suba. In 1960–1, Sant Fateh Singh succeeded Master Tara Singh. Sant Fateh Singh's emphasis on language rather than religion earned him the support of liberal Hindus, Communists, and Socialists. The formation of Punjabi Suba (1966) created almost seventy-five Sikh-dominated constituencies which encouraged the SAD to think in terms of the acquisition and retention of power (Narang 1997: 243–66).

The demographic composition of the Punjab state forced the political parties to adopt different electoral strategies. In rural Punjab Sikhs were in the majority while Hindus dominated in the urban centres. The common support base of the Akalis and Congress in the rural areas did not allow them to form an electoral alliance. Moreover since Congress was supported by all Punjabi communities, it wished to retain its secular identity. But demographic segregation between Hindus and Sikhs suited the Akali–BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) alliance as both partners could retain their socio-religious and cultural identities. The emergence of the BJP as the major partner of the NDA enhanced the political prospectus of the Akalis. Both groups shed their sectarian make-up and formed durable alliances and coalition governments from 1967 to 2012. Only once did the Akalis

form a government independently (1985). Both the BJP and Akalis advocated communal harmony and peace while maintaining their anti-Congress stance. On several occasions the Akali-led governments were toppled either by their own factional politics or by Congress.

Such competitive politics ultimately culminated in communal violence and separatist politics. In the post-Emergency period (1975–7), Congress under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi abandoned the national secular discourse and allowed her loyalists to flare up communalism and separatism in Punjab. The Sikh ideologues had already passed the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 demanding a regional autonomy which could ensure the pre-eminence of the Sikhs. To secure its own ends, Congress floated the idea of Khalistan and Sikh nationhood through Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan and the Dal Khalsa (1978). Giani Zail Singh gave requisite support to the latter (Joginder Singh 2006: 46–7). Both the Congress and the Akalis put Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale onto the centre stage of this politics. He widened the support base of this politics when he appropriated the Darbar Sahib Complex as his platform and delivered fiery speeches against Hindus and administrative personnel. He ridiculed politicians including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and armed his young followers while fortifying the Darbar Sahib. He was joined by some radical intellectuals, retired army personnel, Akali leaders, and *jathedars*. They harped on the theory of the betrayal of the Sikhs by Congress and reiterated that the Sikhs were slaves in what they termed a Hindu state. Soon Punjab was engulfed in the horrific incidents which marked the 1980s and 1990s. Throughout 1983–4 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi held several talks with the Akalis. Publicly she portrayed the Akalis, Sant Bhindranwale, and Sikh militant outfits as communalist and separatist. Simultaneously, to sabotage these negotiations, violence was engineered by vested interests including ministers in her (p. 91) cabinet and members of the Haryana Government under Bhajan Lal. Consequently, several prominent leaders, journalists, and common people were killed in large numbers in Haryana and Punjab in 1984. To trap the Akalis and Sant Bhindranwale in their own extremist politics, she took the political decision of launching Operation Blue Star on 3 June 1984. Her decision was totally devoid of religious sensibility. For several Sikh personnel this operation was a war on the Darbar Sahib complex. The official media and agencies were pressed into service in order to allocate blame for the event to the Akalis, Sant Bhindranwale, and his followers. Congress also organized the Sarbat Khalsa Convention on 11 August 1984 at Amritsar which proclaimed that the Akalis and the SGPC were responsible for these developments.

Operation Blue Star alienated the whole Sikh community. Sikh masses expressed their anguish. Sikh military personnel deserted their army camps and prominent Sikhs returned their medals and titles to the President of India. In a fit of revenge, two Sikh bodyguards of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi assassinated her on 31 October 1984. In

retaliation, Sikh massacres were engineered: 10,000 Sikhs were killed, their property was damaged, and 50,000 were lodged in refugee camps in Delhi. About 20,000 to 50,000 Sikh families fled from their homes in different parts of India and migrated to the Punjab (Khushwant Singh 1999: 385). Their migration added fuel to the fire of Khalistani militancy.

After winning a two-thirds majority in parliament, Rajiv Gandhi avoided a politics of confrontation with the Akalis and signed an agreement known as the Rajiv–Longowal Accord in July 1985 to resolve the vexed Punjab problem and meet Sikh religious aspirations. Unfortunately it deepened the factional politics of Akali-groups and failed to sustain peace. Sant Longowal was shot dead by Sikh militants. Despite this, the Akali Dal Sant Longowal contested the elections of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha on 24 September 1985 and secured 73 seats out of 115 and also won 7 out of 13 seats of the Lok Sabha. The SAD contested elections as the representative of all Punjabis and put Hindu, Muslim, and Christian candidates on the Akali ticket. The electoral verdict was against the protagonists of the communal polarization. The Sikhs refused to go with the extremist politics of the United Akali Dal and All India Sikh Students Federation (Dhami 1987: 17–35).

To establish its hegemonic control of Sikh institutions, the Damdami Taksal, the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), and Sikh militants appropriated the Sikh tradition of calling the Sarbat Khalsa. Under Baba Thakur Singh's leadership, they organized three Sarbat Khalsas at the Darbar Sahib, Amritsar in quick succession on 26 January 1986, 1 November 1986, and 26 January 1987. Their primary concern was to capture the control of the Akal Takhat and SGPC, marginalize the moderate leadership, and legitimize the Khalistan movement. In the process they excommunicated Giani Kirpal Singh, Giani Sahib Singh, Zail Singh, and Buta Singh; installed Jasbir Singh Rode as the *jathedar* of Akal Takhat; and formed the Panthic Committee and Khalistan Commando Force. In the meantime Dr Sohan Singh prepared a draft charter of Khalistan.

The Panthic Committee's fundamentalist preaching put the Barnala government on the offensive and prompted the activities of militants. A counter-offensive was (p. 92) organized by the Singh Sahibans in the form of a Sarbat Khalsa at Keshgarh Sahib on 16 February 1986. It condemned the *burshagardi* ('hooliganism') of the militant outfits and rejected their separatist resolutions. But it failed to contain separatist politics and communal violence for want of the implementation of the Rajiv–Longowal Accord. Meanwhile the extremists installed Darshan Singh Ragi as the *jathedar* of the Akal Takhat who asked Surjit Singh Barnala to dissolve his Longowal Akali Dal. On Barnala's refusal, the *jathedar* promptly declared him *tankhaiya* ('religious offender') and removed him from the SAD's primary membership on 22 February 1987. Barnala was let down by his

colleagues. The prime minister too betrayed him. The Home Ministry dismissed this government in May 1987 and the Punjab assembly was kept in suspended animation. The detractors of the Barnala government, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Parkash Singh Badal, Captain Amarinder Singh, and Sukhjinder Singh, welcomed its dismissal.

The secessionist agenda of the National Council of Khalistan and Dal Khalsa as well as the second fortification of the Darbar Sahib complex prompted the Government of India to launch Operation Black Thunder on 5 May 1988. The operation was executed by the then director general of police K. P. S. Gill. This operation forced the terrorists to surrender. A few of them committed suicide. The Sikh leadership believed that this operation was intended to humiliate the Sikh community (Joginder Singh 2006: 161–70).

The Government of India made up its mind to wipe out terrorism in Punjab and restore democratic processes. The initiative was taken by prime ministers V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar (1990–1) and was thoroughly enacted under Prime Minister Narsimha Rao's government when the elections of Lok Sabha and Punjab Vidhan Sabha were held simultaneously in 1992. The discredited elections brought the Congress government in Punjab under the chief minister, Beant Singh. The chief minister gave a free hand to K. P. S. Gill to smash the terrorist outfits which he did successfully. The ruthless suppression of the terrorists has left a dreadful tale of police excesses, torture, and eliminations (Jaijee 2002). Consequently, there was a sharp decline in terrorist activities. Realizing the magnitude of loss of life and property, the Akalis responded by burying their differences politically. Bhai Manjit Singh, the Akal Takhat *jathedar*, played a significant role in unifying the Akali Dal factions in 1994. They successfully contested the by-elections of Punjab Assembly from Ajnala and Gidderbaha constituencies. Sikh militants subsequently killed Beant Singh in front of the Punjab Civil Secretariat on 31 August 1995.

Meanwhile, the SAD detached themselves from militant politics and entered into an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party for contesting the Parliamentary elections in 1996. Dramatically toning down its Sikh agenda, the SAD forged an alliance with the BJP and contested the elections of Punjab Vidhan Sabha in 1997. Out of the total 117 seats, the Akali Dal won 75 seats and the BJP won 18. The Akali Dal–BJP government successfully completed its tenure for the first time in the history of electoral politics of Punjab. Since then the Akali–BJP alliances have supplanted the politics of confrontation by accommodation and striven for communal amity in Punjab. The competitive electoral politics of the Akali and Congress Sikhs, however, have continued their strong tendency to use socio-religious institutions and play caste politics.

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Representations of Sikh History

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Abstract and Keywords

This article surveys how the past has been represented in Sikh tradition in a variety of forms over the history of the tradition. Sikh historiographical traditions represent diverse influences and contexts, emerging out of the specific soteriological and communitarian concerns of the Sikh community in changing political and social circumstances. Persian, Punjabi, and Braj literary and historiographical representations dominated in earlier periods; in the colonial period, European modes of historiographical production provided a set of models that influenced production in various languages. Historical representation has continued to embody a central form of engagement with Sikh tradition in scholarly as well as popular contexts in the post-colonial period, reflecting but also transforming earlier interests. The representation of the past has thus formed a central but changing commitment of Sikh cultural production over time, from the pre-modern to the modern periods, a dynamic arena for engagement with the past, present, and future.

Keywords: Sikh historiography, Janam-sākhīs, Gurbilās, Bhai Vir Singh, Ajmer Rode, representation, Persian, Braj, Punjabi, rahit, history

WHAT does it mean to write Sikh history? This question has been answered in dramatically different ways in Sikh tradition. In 1898, for instance, Bhai Vir Singh mocked what he perceived as the Sikh neglect of their glorious past:

> Other peoples of the world have made whatever they perceive of their greatness into Mount Meru, and made memorials of them, but praise to the Sikhs, who have paid no mind to [their own] mountain-like selfless service and have paid no mind to their own history!
>
> (2003: 73)

Bhai Vir Singh's admonishment of Sikhs for their inattention to the making of 'memorials'—and his sense of the urgent need to remember and commemorate the past—

are parallel to contemporary calls for history in other places in colonial India, such as the assertion by Bankimchandra Mukhopadhyay in Bengal in 1880 that ‘we must have a history’ (Chatterjee 1993: 76; Murphy 2012: 134 ff.). Such a statement identifies the calling to memory of the past, and the writing of this memory as history, as a politically charged act. Modern Sikh historiography was shaped by this call, and by the need to articulate a history for a community, named within clear boundaries enforced by the colonial state. Much of the historiography we know of today takes shape in this context.

Yet it would be a mistake to view Sikh historiographical production—and the broader call for Sikh history—as solely a product of the colonial period. The representation of the past was a core commitment in Sikh cultural and intellectual production in the pre-colonial period as well as later, and in this sense its importance was only enhanced and reinflected in the colonial period: it was not ‘invented’ *ex nihilo* in the colonial encounter. At the same time, it was deeply shaped by a set of norms and expectations for the representation of the past that adhered to a particular ordering of the ‘modern’, the nation, and time itself that were produced in the colonial context. This complex **(p. 95)** interaction represents one of the ‘points of recognition’ suggested by Tony Ballantyne, a place where colonial and pre-colonial interests met and (at times) reinforced each other, within unequal power relations (Ballantyne 2006: 26), and, as described in the work of Arvind-Pal Mandair, must also be placed within a broader process of translation whereby a seeming dialogic encounter was made monological (Mandair 2009). These tensions—between a long-standing commitment and a newly generated form—persist today in animating the Sikh understanding of the past. There are multiple sources about and interpretations of Sikh tradition that must inform our historical understanding of the tradition itself (explored by Irfan Habib and J. S. Grewal in their study of Persian sources on Sikh history (2001), for example). Our focus here however is the way in which a particularly Sikh historical imaginary has evolved, sometimes drawing on outside traditions, as occurred both before the colonial period and after it (Murphy 2012).

The Telling of the Sikh Past: *Janam-Sākhī* to *Gurbilās*

A specifically Sikh representation of the past is inaugurated with the formation of two major genres that attempt to represent the past of the Guru: the *janam-sākhī*s and *gurbilās*. We can speak of a Sikh historical imaginary in such texts (rather than a Punjabi or South Asian one) in that they are written about the Sikh Gurus and members of the community of followers of the Gurus. This Sikh historical sensibility is organized around

the soteriological teachings of the Gurus and the formation of the community and the canonical text, the Guru Granth Sahib, as the central institutions of authority in relation to the Guru. While this begins early in the tradition, with the foundation of the *janam-sākhīs* or 'Witnessings of the life' of Guru Nanak in the period after his death, the representation of the past becomes a major commitment in the eighteenth century. This makes good sense: it is in the transition from the period of living human Guruship to one where authority came to be located in *granth* (text) and *panth* (community) that the continuing and re-embodied *memory* of the Guru takes on a special significance. Thus we see that historiography develops and changes as the circumstances of the community are transformed, and develops alongside other forms of related literature, such as the *bansāvalināme* and *gurpranālīāṅ,* which are centrally concerned with attesting to the authentic lineage of the Guru and organizing the past around this lineage.

Historiographical works from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century exist in three major languages: early Punjabi and other modern Indo-Aryan languages such as Braj, a vernacular literary language prominent across North India that was 'newly ascendant' at the turn of the sixteenth century (Busch 2011: 6), utilized in the Guru Granth Sahib and Dasam Granth, and the *janam-sākhīs*; Persian, the literature of history, commerce, and court, within and outside of Sikh contexts; and, later, English and Urdu, the latter of which served as the language of administration of the state of Punjab **(p. 96)** under British rule (Mir 2010). Punjabi and Braj played important roles in the formation of a Sikh historical imaginary, from the time of the *janam-sākhīs* to the *gurbilās*; these languages also had vibrant lives in Vaishnava (particularly Braj) and Islamic (particularly Punjabi) contexts (Busch 9). Persian was of course crucial in larger political and cultural spheres; this intensified after it was formally designated as the language of administration in the time of the Mughal emperor Akbar. It later came to dominate the courts of Sikh and other rulers of the post-Mughal Punjab, playing an important and enduring role in the formation of the literary imagination of Punjab and of the Sikhs. Persian literary production is thus relevant to the telling of the Sikh past not only in terms of the literature from outside the Sikh tradition written in the language that documents aspects of the Sikh past (as Habib and Grewal have shown, 2001) but also as an important aspect of Sikh and Sikh-sponsored literary production as well (Dhavan 2011a). In this range of texts, in Persian, Braj, and Punjabi, one sees a particularly strong orientation towards the reconstruction of the Guru in history, providing a vision of the historical imagination among Sikh authors and subjects in the period, in intertextual relation to other works. Such works also share the memorial landscape with objects and sites related to the Sikh past, which serve as the material proof of that past (Murphy 2012; see 'Sikh Material Culture').

The idea of *sākhī* in the sense of a witnessed account is central to the production of the *janam-sākhīs*, which in the words of Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh 'underscore the importance and uniqueness of the birth and life of Guru Nanak in terms of the personal beliefs and proclivities of their authors' (Kaur Singh 1992: 329). The Bālā *janam-sākhī*, a popular version of the hagiography of Guru Nanak, opens with a search by Guru Angad for a Sikh who can 'tell the story of Guru Nanak', and also tell specifically the date of the Guru's birth (*Bhāī Bālevālī Janamsākhī*, 1). Such concerns are more fully developed in the eighteenth century, as will be discussed, but are a continuation rather than an entirely new set of commitments. Indeed, as Purnima Dhavan points out, the later *Gur Sobhā* by Sainapati, an early example of the *gurbilās* genre from the early eighteenth century, was itself a *sākhī* in the eyes of its author (Dhavan 2011b: 40 n. 56), and relates to other kinds of historical accounts available in contemporary devotional traditions, such as the *Bhaktirasabodhinī* of Priyadas (*c.*1700) and the earlier *Bhaktamāl* of Nabhadas (*c.*1600) (Pinch 1999; Hare 2011). As W. H. McLeod noted in his study of the *janam-sākhī*s in 1980, the historical value of these texts is complex; it is most fully found not in their fulfilment of the expectations associated with biography, but in 'the role which the *janam-sākhī*s have played in the subsequent history of the Sikh community', and in 'those elements incorporated within the *janam-sākhī*s which relate to the period of their actual emergence rather than to the earlier period of Gurū Nānak' (12). Their real value lies thus in the 'testimony which the janam-sākhis give to the impact and continuing influence of the Gurū's personality, and even more in the evidence they offer of Sikh belief and understanding at particular points in the community's history' (McLeod 1968: 33). Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh extends such observations, describing how such texts provide a 'portrayal of Guru Nanak's life through an idiom and style reminiscent of allegory and myth' (1992: 329); in so doing, however, they are no less a nascent form (p. 97) of historiography. They function in this mode, in their different versions, as a means of calling into the present the memory of the Guru, framed in relation to the concerns of an evolving present.

Sainapati's *Gur Sobhā* from the beginning of the eighteenth century provides a further developed early vision of the Sikh historical imaginary, exemplary of the genre of literature composed from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the twentieth, called the *gurbilās*: 'the play of the Guru' (Dhavan 2011b: ch. 7; Murphy 2007; Murphy 2012: ch. 3). Until recently it was widely assumed that historical representation did not exist in pre-colonial South Asia; such claims have been refuted by scholars such as Romila Thapar, and later Nicholas Dirks, who called for appreciation of the ways in which the past is constructed within 'indigenous' texts 'in terms and categories that are consonant with the particular modes of 'historical' understanding posited by the texts and traditions themselves' (Dirks 1987: 57; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2001). We see

a particular logic of historical representation in *Gur Sobhā*, at times reminiscent of then emergent European historical imaginaries, and at times distinct. In its *specifically soteriologial* dimension, for instance, the text portrays a separation of the past and present, the evolution of the present out of a past that is *fully past* and no longer present. This sense of rupture is central to the conceit of the text in defining Sikhs in relation to the Guru, and in defining the community so constituted, after the death of the Tenth Guru and the transference of Guruship to the *granth* and *panth*. At the same time, the *panth* is defined in a way that opens up a sense of the past that is not over and done with, but rather continues to operate in the present and on into the future, the presence of the Guru continuing into an always unfolding present and beyond. This initiates a new relationship of the community with its past, a new temporality, and therefore a new historical sensibility, one in which the past is in one sense gone—as is the human embodied Guru—and in another, ever present. In *Gur Sobhā*, then, the narration of religious content within a historical narrative provides a means not only for relating the teachings of the Guru by means of certain past events, but for creating the community itself as the continuation of this past into the present.

The historical sense associated with the Tenth Guru in *Gur Sobhā* is further complicated in literary and other representations that follow in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, building upon the broader orientation that can be seen in *Gur Sobhā*. Chaupa Singh's *Rahitnāmā* represents a primary example of the *rahit*, a genre of literature that features injunctions regarding behaviour associated with the formation of Khalsa. The *rahit* and the *gurbilās* are strongly intertextually related, and both are centrally concerned with the production and continuance of the memory of the Guru (Murphy 2012: ch. 3). One can therefore see a particular justification for the writing of human history and the living power of remembrance within a Sikh historical imaginary, in a mode that does not oppose soteriological and human-derived notions of temporality. The human community becomes the locus of history, as the *panth*: the centre of practice and engagement. We might see this in Weberian terms, as aspects of the routinization or institutionalization of charisma, the institution built upon the leader who is gone; such routinization encourages the writing of this charisma of the past in relation (p. 98) to the present of the community. This Sikh historical orientation is not centred on other-worldly soteriology; it locates the subject of history within a social formation: the community, continuing in relation to the Guru. This speaks to the way in which historical representation constitutes a fundamental constituting principle of the community: that which refers to the past and produces the present. Sikh temporalities therefore contain elements of both rupture and continuance that emerge in the eighteenth century and reach in complicated ways into modernity (Murphy 2007, 2012).

Different social formations of the *panth* with regard to caste in particular shaped the conception of the community as well. The multiple forms and allegiances of the community around the Guru in the eighteenth century account for the diverse forms taken in the representation of the past in relation to the Guru (Dhavan 2011b: ch. 7). In later examples of the *gurbilās* genre, mythological associations of the Guru are further developed, and the Guru is seen to be connected to other religious authorities, particularly but not exclusively Ram; as Kuir Singh writes, some see the Guru and call him Ram, and others see Shankar or Shiva (1999: 15, 18–20, 21, 50). The final chapter of Kesar Singh Chibber's mid- to late eighteenth-century *Baṃsāvalīnāmā Dasāṅ Pātshāhīāṅ kā* also features such elements. Its fourteenth chapter is dominated by extensive puranic elements, such as the story of Sukracarya and repeated tellings of the Ramayana; the Gurus' families (Bedi, Trehan, Bhalla, and Sodhi) are said to descend from the sons of Dasharatha (1997: 241–2, 264–7). These features are interspersed with definitions of being Sikh and the descriptions of the greatness of the Guru. Such broad references can be seen as positioning the Guru in relation to a larger world, which themselves are then subsumed within a vision of the pre-eminence of the Guru. This is particularly visible in Chibber's text, in which puranic elements accompany but are largely separate from references to the Gurus, except for within the genealogy of the Gurus' families. Such references to the Gurus as incarnations of mythological figures, as Rinehart rightly notes, may 'reflect a stage in the ongoing transformation of the concept of avatar in Indian culture' itself; invocation of this status was surely a way and 'effective rhetorical means of conveying the power and status of the Gurus' (2011: 171). Kuir Singh's and Chibber's texts in many ways strongly resonate with aspects of the Dasam Granth, which features extensive mythological references; indeed, a bulk of the Dasam Granth is dedicated to the description of the incarnations of Vishnu and praise of the Goddess (as well as other controversial components; see Rinehart 2011). Rinehart has cogently argued that 'it may be more fruitful to read the Dasam Granth goddess and other "Hindu" mythological material as indicative of participation in the broad realm of Indian culture—dharma in its broadest sense—rather than looking for a solely religious reading of the text and its topics of concern' (Rinehart 2011: 112). Certainly, such references work effectively in articulating forms of temporal as well as religious power. They also constitute a shared narrative 'sourcebook' upon which many religious traditions drew, just as *qisse* or story traditions in Punjab were available across religious boundaries (Mir 2010). Overall the *gurbilās* literature became a means for such 'disparate groups to engage with each other', as well as with the memory of the Guru (Dhavan 2011b: 150). Similarly, the *rahitnāmā* literature defines (among other things) modes of interaction with the past, marked in (p. 99) the present, organized around prescriptions regarding behaviour (Murphy 2012: ch. 3). These prescriptions, too, changed over time, as the distinctions

within the community came to be less significant than those with those outside (Dhavan 2011b: 69). The quest to retain the memorial connection to the Guru, however, persisted.

In Sainapati, the past matters in soteriological terms and is a constituting force in the present in the formation of the community. In the *rahit*, behaviour becomes a means of remembrance, and forms of memory-making occupy an important place in the text (alongside others). We see in such texts a Sikh historical imaginary developing out of the commitment to the memory of the Guru formed within the *janam-sākhī*s. Such Sikh engagements with the past continued through the nineteenth century but came to be deeply inflected by European modes of historical imagination by the end of the century. Arvind-Pal Mandair's (2009) discussion of the production of Sikh theology within the interface between European interpretation and Sikh efforts to respond provides a parallel to what occurs in the realm of historiography. The historical imagination itself lies at the centre of a new modernist imaginary of being Sikh; by the end of the nineteenth century, Sikh historical understandings were thus transformed through the encounter with colonial modernity (Murphy 2012). We must remember, however, that this historical imaginary drew as much on a pre-existing historical imaginary in Punjab, and among the Sikhs, as well as on one developed in conversation with European historiographical traditions and in the colonial context..

The writing of History in a New Political Field

As Tony Ballantyne has described in some detail, 'from the early 1780s, the East India Company built an increasingly dense archive of information on both Punjab itself and on Sikhism' (2006: 39; see Ganda Singh 1962, Fauja Singh 1978). Many of the earliest histories of the region were commissioned by the British agents in Delhi and Ludhiana, partially as a way of gaining intelligence about affairs in Punjab and as a way to settle property and inheritance claims in the part of Punjab under East India Company control (Dhavan 2009: 515). This environment spawned both the writing of new texts and the translation of existing ones: Budh Singh's Persian account, *Risāla-e Aḥwāl-e Nānak Shāh*, was written at the request of his employer, the British resident Major Browne (see discussion of relevant literature, Murphy 2012: ch. 4). Historical and contemporary accounts were written in English by British observers and also commissioned, primarily in Persian, by British power-brokers—and these Persian accounts were used as the basis for later English-language histories of the Sikhs, such as the well-known version by Joseph Cunningham (1849). Others, such as M. A. Macauliffe (1909), utilized the *janam-sākhī*s and *gurbilās* accounts to construct a hybrid vision of the Sikh past, driven by both Sikh historical sensibilities and the exigencies of imperial interests.

(p. 100) The writing of histories in more developed forms in Persian, Punjabi, and Braj (and often a combination of the latter two, or a Punjabi-influenced version of Persian) came to occupy an important place in Sikh centres of power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Dhavan 2011a, 2011b). The establishment of an imperial presence under Ranjit Singh centred at Lahore provided a source of patronage for historical production, as did the courts of Sikh rulers of smaller states in the eastern Punjab which also emerged in post-Mughal Punjab and resisted absorption into Ranjit Singh's kingdom. The acquisition of sovereignty inflected the historical sense of the time, as well as courtly collecting and other memorial practices (Murphy 2012). As Sikh chiefs gained power, they patronized the writing of histories as a 'diplomatic counteroffensive to maintain their autonomy from the encroachments of Ranjit Singh and the East India Company' (Dhavan 2011a: 40). Purnima Dhavan has described 'the attempts of Sikh chiefs and intellectuals to modify the negative opinions of the Company's officials, and the selective manner and cultural filters through which the East India Company received these attempts' (Dhavan 2011a: 46.) A range of texts produced in European languages and Persian attest to this. Examples of the *gurbilās* genre, in particular, played a central role in the representation of the Sikhs to the British (Dhavan 2011b: 165). At the same time, authors—both within court settings and outside of them—presented a version of 'Sikh tradition' that was 'the product of more recent historical events in Punjab', reflecting 'a local response to the growing corpus of colonial documents and histories from Punjab that were quickly becoming accepted by colonial agents as the official record of rule, and also attempts by the more powerful Sikh chiefs to transform their territories into monarchal states' (Dhavan 2009: 517). This was true in Punjabi, but also in Persian. Thus texts written in Persian by *munshī*s or clerks to describe the history of the Sikh community integrated the logic and commitments of the *gurbilās* literature, as well as aspects of Persian histories—without their negative views of the Sikhs (Dhavan 2011a). The writing of history was crucial, but controlled, within transformed power relations under the British. Rattan Singh Bhangu's *Prācīn Panth Prakāś* provides an important example of the ways in which the Sikh writing of the past was formed within colonial power dynamics and in relation to a complex array of historiographical forces: European, Persianate, and Sikh/Punjabi (Dhavan 2009; Murphy 2012). It was written in response to a Persian history that was produced for a British agent, to put forward a Sikh-oriented version of the Sikh past for a Punjabi speaking audience (Dhavan 2009: 521). By the middle of the nineteenth century, history had indeed become a discursive battlefield with multiple participants.

The Making of a Modern Sikh Historical Imaginary

Historical discourse in the post-annexation (1849) period in Punjabi and in Sikh terms is related to a broader discourse on the past found within the colonial public sphere, (p. 101) and a flourishing new print environment, which saw tremendous growth in the number and accessibility of Punjabi-language texts (Mir 2010: 32 ff.). The late nineteenth century in particular was characterized by the explosion of 'tract' literature: cheaply produced literature for a newly emerging readership. Most of these texts were highly polemical in nature, responding to a competitive print environment as well as a competitive ideological one. Newspapers also flourished in the early twentieth century: of approximately 260 newpapers extant in Punjab in 1905, 17 were in Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script, while 198 were in Urdu (Barrier 1992: 201). These numbers demonstrate the relative status of Punjabi and Urdu: Urdu was the official language of the provincial administration, and Punjabi held no formal administrative status (although it was recognized as important in the daily life of governance) (Mir 2010: 60). Yet, as Farina Mir (2010) has shown, Punjabi flourished in this environment, outside of the direct influence of colonial governance. This relative independence from colonial support (and therefore control) enabled Punjabi literary texts to retain a greater connection to pre-colonial interests and forms, exhibiting a form of resilience throughout the colonial period. This is particularly true, perhaps, of the *qissā* literature, but it is also true in some senses of the reformist tract literature, much of which was similarly written in verse.

Within the tract literature, historical inquiry played a prominent role (Barrier 1969: 7). As Tony Ballantyne has observed: 'history writing became a crucial tool for community leaders who crafted epic poems, polemic pamphlets, and commentaries on "scripture" in the hope that by clearly defining the community's past they would be able to cement their own vision of the community's present and future' (Ballantyne 2006: 5). Barrier's survey of the India Office Collections found that 'the earlier tendency to publish scriptural tracts or standard works had given way by the 1890s to emphasis on Sikh history, religion and contemporary problems' (Barrier 1969: 13). Communal publications also grew in prevalence, although as Farina Mir has shown and even a brief examination of the India Office collections reveals, publication of literature accessible across religious boundaries —such as the *qissā* literature—continued unabated and indeed with increasing success through the early twentieth century (Barrier 1969: 14; Mir 2010).

The Khalsa Tract Society was particularly active in producing texts of these kinds, and was a major force in the publication of tracts related to the Singh Sabha movement of the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Barrier 1992: 206 ff.). The Singh Sabha movement was the site of the articulation of multiple visions of what it meant to be Sikh in the period. Competing ideologies arose among the Amritsar and Lahore organizations, as explored at length by Harjot Oberoi, in what he identifies as a conflict between a Tat Khalsa and a 'Sanatan Sikh' perspective on the Sikh tradition. The latter, he argues, was open to an 'enchanted universe' in which multiplicity and hybridity were the norm; the former was invested in articulating a bounded definition of being Sikh that denied commonality, in particular, with Hinduism. Thus, Oberoi argues that an 'older, pluralist paradigm of Sikh faith was displaced forever by a highly uniform Sikh identity, to one we know today as modern Sikhism' (Oberoi 1994: 25). It would be wrong, however, to overstate this displacement. Ballantyne has cogently argued that the history of the migration of Punjabis in the same period, and the production of alternative visions of (p. 102) Sikhness in that context, cannot allow anyone to claim victory for any one way of being Sikh, as multiple identities were also articulated and acted out both in India and abroad during this time of reform and consolidation (Ballantyne 2006: 166–7). The publications that gave voice to these alternative definitions of being Sikh—and the effort to enforce such definitions—thus are a part of a larger, more complicated set of transformations. Overall, there were three main preoccupations in the flowering religious tract literature of the period: managing and defining Sikh behaviour, history, and Gurdwara Reform. The valorization of martyrdom, which animated the movement for Gurdwara Reform in the 1920s, was also an important sub-theme (Fenech 2000).

It is out of this milieu that the call by Bhai Vir Singh, mentioned above, was born, within the urgent need for the narration of the past for the community in a highly politicized religious and political field. The discourse of Gurdwara Reform, which culminated in the passage of the Gurdwara Reform Act in 1925, was deeply rooted in the writing of this history, tying the past of the Sikh community to place in a fundamental sense, within the conceptualization of private property inflected in a new way during the Raj (Murphy 2012). The territorialization of Sikh historical representations was of course tied to a broader nationalist ideology that mapped community or nation to place, one which took shape in a tragically divisive form in the partition of Punjab into the post-colonial states of Pakistan and India. With this, the notion of 'community' was written onto place in dramatic terms. The politics of community formation were then, and in many ways continue to be, tied to the writing of history.

Historiography in the post-colonial period has played a vital role in the articulation of the Sikh place within the post-colonial state of India, as well as in Sikh separatist discourses (Murphy 2007); it has also played an important role in the self-understanding of the Sikhs as a global community. India-based Sikh historians such as Fauja Singh and Ganda Singh, followed by one of the leading historians of the post-colonial period, J. S. Grewal, were

accompanied by Western historians, such as the early and well-known W. H. McLeod—a sometimes very controversial figure—and others such as N. G. Barrier and Louis E. Fenech. Sikh historians based in the West, such as G. S. Mann and Pashaura Singh, have also joined the field, blurring an already illusory distinction—as we have seen—between 'Sikh' and 'Western'. One tension persists in this body of work: between those that locate historical developments within a Sikh-centred frame—in relation to the teachings of the Gurus and the historical development of the community in relative isolation—versus those that look more to contextual factors to understand the history of the community within Punjab and South Asia overall.

While history has dominated as a central field of scholarly engagement with Sikh tradition, new voices on the landscape have emerged both within history and in other disciplines, such as critical theory and religious studies (Balbinder S. Bhogal and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair); anthropology (Navtej Purewal and Virinder Kalra); feminist and gender studies (Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh); among others. While historiography is accompanied and enriched by these approaches, the need for history and memory continues in urgent communitarian as well as scholarly terms: the urgent call to remember the violence of 1984 and the connection of this call to past, present, and (p. 103) future community formations demand that this will be so. For all of these reasons, and because of its complex genealogy in the Sikh context, history will always be dynamic and contentious. The broadening of the field—to view Sikh history in a larger context, and with attention to the insights available from other fields—and a crucial new focus on Persian as a field of study for South Asianists will prove transformative to the field of Sikh historical study in the future.

Into the Past, and into the Future

In 1984, Vancouver-area poet and playwright Ajmer Rode added his own call to history to those that have come before and since: 'jo kaum āpṇā itihās nahīṅ saṁbhāl sakdī, uh mahān nahīṅ baṇ sakdī. ajj mainūṅ āpṇī kaum 'te roṇa āiā hai!' or 'That community that does not care for its history cannot become great. I have come now to cry for my people.' This lament is found in Rode's play, *Kāmāgātā Mārū*, which commemorates the Komagata Maru incident, when a ship full of nearly 400 South Asian would-be immigrants to Canada —most of them Punjabi and Sikh—were turned away from Canadian shores in 1914 as a part of a larger effort in western Canada and the USA to close down immigration from Asia. With these words Rode's character decries not just the incident, however, but also the lack of attention to its history, and specifically the sale and then destruction of the Gurdwara or Sikh congregational centre where opposition to White racist legislation had

coalesced in this period and the small Indo-Canadian community of Vancouver had organized also to fight British colonialism in the form of the Gadar movement. Only recently, in 2012, was a plaque erected to commemorate this location in Vancouver, where an apartment building now stands. While this character's utterance is linked in complex ways to Bhai Vir Singh's earlier appeal for history for the Sikh community, it also addresses a dramatically different context and politics.

The diverse textual and material forms of representation of the Sikh past in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods reveal much about the discursive construction of the Sikh community and individual subjects in different historical contexts. The history so constructed narrates a Sikh claim to the sovereignty of the Guru in constituting the community, and the relationships that comprise that community. Texts like Sainapati's therefore acted in a fashion parallel to that identified by William Pinch for the *Bhaktamāl*, an early sixteenth-century hagiography about *bhakti* saints: to define the parameters of the religious community, who comprised it, and how authority was to be articulated in relation to it (Pinch 1999). This effort to constitute the community in textual form is linked in important ways to visual and material forms of representation that function similarly. The portrayal of the Gurus and other Sikh figures in painting, therefore, is linked to historical commitments articulated in text, and material forms of representation accompany textual forms to express a complicated Sikh historical imaginary. In such material and related manifestations too, the forms and meaning of the representation of the past have changed. Modernity has brought greater emphasis on territory (p. 104) and its link to the Sikh past, bringing historical Sikh gurdwaras to the foreground and masking the expression and link to the past provided through objects related to the Gurus (see 'Sikh Material Culture' and Murphy 2012). As with all such transformations, however, a greater emphasis does not mean erasure, and pre-existing forms of a historical imaginary continue to be expressed in the continuing significance of the 'relic' object as a representation of the Sikh past.

The writing of Sikh history arose to meet specific communitarian and memorial purposes within the Sikh community; it also reflects complex interactions with memorial and historical technologies without specifically Sikh resonances, reflective of broader historiographical traditions in South Asia and, in both the pre-colonial and colonial periods, the world. The Sikh and Punjabi case for example exhibits a broader dynamic in South Asia described by Narayana Rao and colleagues. They have argued that the interaction between South Asian vernaculars and Persian in historical representation exhibits 'complementarity', 'synergy', and 'complex overlap', rather than competition (Narayana Rao et al. 2001: 225–6). Thus, the historical sense in South India investigated by Narayana Rao and his colleagues reflects a broader dynamic, where 'one cannot see the "rise of historiography"…as the result of the transplantation of a model derived from

the Arabic and Persian histories onto Indian soil' (Narayana Rao et al. 2001: ch. 5, 250 for quote). The same can be said of the influence of Western forms of historical representation. In the Sikh case, a particular orientation toward history is framed in the eighteenth century with Persian, Sanskrit, and vernacular referents—including those found within other *bhakti* traditions across North India—and were further solidified with the acquisition of political power by Sikh elites, and the production of historiography within Sikh courts. With the onset of British power intervening in Punjab, in the period of the Lahore State and through annexation, a colonial inflection to the historical was introduced. The historical has achieved a particular power since then, dominating academic as well as popular publishing about the Sikh tradition, continuing earlier commitments to the representation of the past but with new meanings and commitments, as we saw with Ajmer Rode's play. The past acts as the grounds for the present and the future, and it continues to do so; the form of its representation reflects this interaction in dramatic ways.

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Survey of Literature in the Sikh Tradition

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Abstract and Keywords

The article provides an overview of the Sikh literature produced in several languages (Punjabi, Khari Boli, Braj Bhasha, Persian, and English) from the time of Guru Nanak to the present day. The first section describes the Adi Granth as a complex work of literature. The remarkable range of Sikh literature in the seventeenth century is then surveyed, before an account is given of the changes of style and emphasis in the Dasam Granth and the following pre-modern Sikh literature in Braj Bhasha. The final section describes the shift to Punjabi and English as the main vehicles of Sikh literature in the modern period.

Keywords: Sikh literature, Punjabi, Khari Boli, Braj Bhasha, Persian, English, Adi Granth, Dasam Granth, Guru Nanak

General Overview

Sikh history, which has long been a defining feature of Sikh identity, is of course intimately linked with the history of Punjab. But it is misleading to think that Sikh literature is therefore completely to be identified with Punjabi literature. In fact, the literature of the Sikh tradition, while mostly written in the distinctive Gurmukhi script, has embraced works in several different languages. Sikh literature is thus not analogous to literatures based on regional languages like Bengali or Sindhi (Pollock 2003), but to the literatures of other religious communities, as in the closely comparable case of the South Asian Ismailis, who used the Khojki script, similarly derived from local business alphabets, to record their sacred literature comprising texts variously written in mixed forms of Sindhi, Hindi, and Gujarati (Shackle and Moir 1992).

The languages of Sikh literature include several different varieties of new Indo-Aryan languages. Besides some use of Siraiki, the language of south-western Punjab, these principally include Punjabi proper, defined as the language of central Punjab around Lahore and Amritsar; Khari Boli, the language of the Delhi region which is the basis of modern Hindi and Urdu; and Braj Bhasha, the language of the Braj region to the south-east of Delhi. Varying mixtures of different local forms are found in Sikh literary texts, with those of earlier periods naturally showing many archaic features. The most important of these composite literary languages is the scriptural language of the Adi Granth (Shapiro 1987), which has been labelled 'the sacred language of the Sikhs' (SLS). Based mainly on older forms from both Punjabi and Khari Boli, it may be systematically distinguished from modern standard Punjabi (Shackle 2003). Besides all these Indo-Aryan languages, use was also once made of Persian, the former imperial language of India (Alam 2003), which could be written in Gurmukhi. Nowadays of course it is **(p. 110)** English, also introduced into India as the elite language of a colonial power, which is becoming increasingly significant as the international language of the Sikh diaspora.

A notable development since the publication of the last chapter of this kind, offering a survey of Sikh literature for English readers (McLeod 1989: 82–101), has been the increasing availability of usable English translations of earlier classic texts. References to these translations have been provided throughout the chapter, since they allow those who do not know the original languages to get some idea of the content of these texts. But attention will also be paid to the shifting patterns of languages used for Sikh literature, since these are often important pointers to the kinds of text being created.

Approaches to all religious literatures reveal a tension between their academic study as literary texts of an admittedly special kind and their understanding as devotional materials of uniquely encompassing value to community members, as is here symbolized by the dual description of the Sikh scripture as either the written Adi Granth or 'Primal Scripture' or the Guru Granth Sahib, honoured as the living embodiment of the Guru. In the case of Sikh studies, academic study of the first type still has some way to go in comparison with such more developed disciplines as the study of early Christian literature (Young et al. 2004). This is partly because so much basic work remains to be done in terms of the discovery, edition, and close analysis of older Sikh texts. But in understanding the literature as a whole the same general questions have to be faced. These notably include those arising from distinctions between orthodox and heretical literature; from differences between the religious perspectives of authors of earlier texts and those of today; and from the degree to which questions of authenticity and historicity may be more usefully subordinated to explorations of genre and rhetorical intent.

Such issues can only be touched on in an introductory survey of the kind offered here. Rather than seeing literature in the Sikh tradition as having followed a linear

development fitting with a scholarly insider's perspective (Grewal 2011), this chapter seeks to present something of the exuberant variety of Sikh literature in its different developments over the last five centuries. It is organized into four chronologically defined sections, respectively covering the Adi Granth down to its original recension of 1604; the post-scriptural literature of the seventeenth century; the new kinds of literature following from the creation of the Dasam Granth in the early eighteenth century; and the modern literature created from the late nineteenth century onwards.

The Adi Granth

Guru Nanak's poetry constitutes both the beginning and the heart of the *gurbani*, 'the Word of the Guru', which is textually embodied in the Adi Granth (AG), which is the formative text of the Sikh literary tradition. Although Guru Nanak (1469–1539) was a prolific composer of poetry of the highest quality, its basic syntactic units are short half-verses of three or four words whose very succinct expression relies on a complex system of grammatical forms often indicated by final short vowels which were later to be (p. 111) gradually eliminated by phonetic changes. The simplest poetic form is the *shalok* whose verses end with a strong rhyme, and are internally divided into two half-verses, as illustrated in a characteristic example composed in Guru Nanak's typical style which rejects ascetic mortification in favour of loving devotion: *tanu na tapāi tanūra jiuṁ, bālaṇu haḍḍa na bāli // siri pairīṁ kiā pheṛiā, andari pirī samhāli* 'Do not heat your body like an oven, do not burn your bones as fuel. What harm have your head and feet done you? Regard the Beloved within' (AG: 1411). Using longer sequences of rhyming stanzas made up of similar basic units (Shapiro 1995), Guru Nanak generates a wonderful variety of poetry of the most astonishing literary quality which shows him to be a master equally of moving expression in his lyrical hymns and of the clearly articulated exposition of complex spiritual realities in his remarkable longer compositions.

The genres and the language of Guru Nanak's poetry are very broadly similar to those used by the leading north Indian exponents of *nirgun bhakti*, the devotion to a divine being without form, like Kabir and Ravidas (Vaudeville 1993). These general similarities were expressly underlined by the later inclusion in the Adi Granth of the work of these saint-poets, called *bhagats* in the Sikh tradition, as the Bhagat Bani (P. Singh 2003). Guru Nanak's poetry shares with them many distinctive formal features, including a strong preference for a simple style whose language includes elements of the Khari Boli lingua franca, and for the use of simple syllabic metres in easily memorable poetry whose chief genres are the pithy couplet called *shalok* or *doha* (Schomer 1987) and the lyrical hymn, called *shabad* or *pad* consisting of short rhymed verses connected by a refrain. The

Bhagat Bani also includes a small corpus of verse from a different source attributed to the great Sufi saint of the western Punjab, Shaikh Farid of Pakpattan (d. 1261), which is similar in formal structure but different in language, being largely composed in the language of the south-west Punjab which is nowadays called Siraiki (Shackle 1993).

What makes Guru Nanak's poetry stand out is his unique combination of a potent lyricism, typically expressing a passionate yearning for the divine, with a disciplined organizational power manifest in the coherence of his teachings, whether expressed in short *shaloks* or the longer genres which he skilfully adapted or invented. The complementary purpose of the lyrical *shabad* is primarily to open the heart to the reality of inner experience which constitutes the whole point of human existence, although here too there are frequent teaching verses. Designed for sung performance in the temple congregation, and arranged in the Adi Granth according to the musical mode (*rag*) to which these are to be sung, the *shabads* all share the common feature of a thematic refrain (*rahau*) which links the individual verses. In the familiar style of most Indian love poetry, the poet typically speaks as a woman yearning for her beloved. But the use of the imagery and style of local folk poetry gives some of the most affecting of these lyrical *shabads* a notable individuality and freshness, which is seldom rivalled by the other contributors to the Adi Granth. These qualities are notably displayed in, for instance, the *Tukhari Barahmaha* (AG: 1107–10, trans. N.-G. Singh 1995: 153–9), composed in the popular north Indian genre which describes the poet's feelings in the twelve months of the year.

Just as the successful establishment of the Sikhs as an enduring community is rightly attributed to Guru Nanak's powers of organization, so too is his *bani* crowned by a series (p. 112) of magnificent longer compositions whose coherence and power far surpass anything to be found amongst the *bhagats*. Three of these adapt the metrical form of the heroic Punjabi ballad called *var* to produce long poems of instruction, the most famous being the magnificent *Asa ki Var* (AG: 462–75). But the single greatest composition by Guru Nanak is unquestionably his great *Japji*, which is designed for individual meditative recitation as the first item of the daily discipline of observance and which is accordingly placed at the very beginning of the scripture (AG: 1–8). Unlike most of the poems in the Adi Granth, which are each written in a single metre throughout, the *Japji* is an extraordinarily original composition made up of thirty-eight main stanzas, which are notably varied in metre while also being connected into larger units through repetitions and refrains.

Guru Nanak's poetic language, which formed the sacred language of the Sikhs, is an original mixture of archaic Punjabi and Khari Boli. Its catholic inclusiveness is also illustrated by the presence of a quite high proportion of Persian loanwords, including

many key terms of core religious vocabulary (Shackle 1978a). And, as might be expected from such a skilled literary artist, Guru Nanak also made conscious use in some of his poems of deliberate stylistic variations. In some lyrics he uses the language of the south-west Punjab found in poetry of Farid, while in others dealing with Hindu religious specialists he makes a much greater use of Hindi and Sanskritic elements.

The intrinsic beauty of the poetry, the concise grammatical and syntactic expression of its language, and its internal stylistic variation, all make the task of translating it adequately into English a difficult one. While several complete translations of the entire Adi Granth are available, they are on the whole more to be appreciated as cribs to the literal meaning of the original than enjoyed for their own sake. Some idea of the various approaches taken by stylistically rather more ambitious translations may be gained from a comparison of their differently conceived versions of *Japji* (McLeod 1984: 86–93; N.-G. Singh 1995: 47–62; Shackle and Mandair 2005: 1–19).

The emphasis of orthodox Sikh doctrine on the essential unity of all the Gurus and of their *bani* has discouraged the close investigation of internal differences of emphasis and style. All using the same poetic signature ‘Nanak’, the later Gurus certainly reiterate the essence of his teachings as well as many features of his poetic expression, but they also differed in their historical situations and their literary profiles.

Guru Nanak’s immediate successor left only a small number of *shaloks*, but the third Guru Amar Das (1479–1574) composed nearly as much as Guru Nanak himself across the whole range of genres in the same poetic language, with many of his compositions clearly echoing those of the founder (Shackle 1985a). This close adherence to Guru Nanak’s models may in part reflect the advanced age of Guru Amar Das by the time he acceded to the Guruship, but it also reflects more complex patterns of intertexuality generated by the development of the textual tradition. This is well illustrated by the many verses of Guru Amar Das which comment explicitly on the Bhagat Bani, which was already included in the early version of the scriptural text contained in the Goindval *pothis* (Mann 1996). The works of the third Guru also differ from those of the first in being the product of a different time, in which the Guru was now the head of an (p. 113) established religious community with all the possibilities for dissent and schism inherent in that situation. This is reflected in his most important composition, the *Anand* (AG: 917–22, trans. Shackle and Mandair 2005: 89–101), which presents a wonderfully balanced picture of the triple relationship between the Guru, the *bani*, and the Sikhs.

Guru Amar Das’s successor was by contrast a much younger man when he was appointed the fourth Guru. Besides further reiteration of the message and style of the *gurbani*, the poetry of Guru Ram Das (1534–81) is also notable for such remarkable innovations as his

setting of hymns to new *rags* in addition to the set used by Guru Amar Das in exact imitation of those employed by Guru Nanak. His poetic language also develops in new directions, as seen in a fondness for innovative rhymes and in the reinforcement of Sanskritic and Hindi vocabulary at the expense of the Persian component of the language of the earlier Gurus (Shackle 1995: 279).

The poetry of the fifth Guru Arjan (1563–1606) in many respects follows the trends initiated by his father, and uses the same thirty *rags.* His language similarly favours the Sanskritic Hindi style, as notably in his best known composition, the very long *Sukhmani* (AG 262–96, trans. N.-G. Singh 1995: 175–240). But within his vast oeuvre, practically equal to those of all the preceding Gurus put together, he was able to rework most of the genres in which they had written. Even if the effect of individual poems is often less memorably vivid than was achieved by Guru Nanak, the cumulative effect of so many reworkings is to create a powerful sense of the Adi Granth as a homogeneous unity. That this was an important part of the enormous and impressively achieved editorial task of shaping the scripture is equally evident in his integration of the Bhagat Bani through supplying verses which comment on the *shaloks* of the *bhagats* or through his own adaptations of their *shabads*. A further component was introduced into the scripture by the systematic inclusion of the Bhatt Bani, the eulogies of the Gurus, especially Guru Ram Das, composed by their hereditary bards in a particular style of their own.

The same process may be seen at work in Guru Arjan's wholesale recasting of the *vars* of the earlier Gurus. Instead of the traditional linking of the stanzas of the heroic *var* of the folk tradition with improvised narrative passages, Guru Arjan selected individual *shaloks* by his predecessors to comment on the stanzas of their *vars*, so that for example the original stanzas of Guru Nanak's famous *Asa ki Var* (trans. Shackle and Mandair 2005: 34–40) were greatly extended by the addition of *shaloks* by the first two Gurus to create the canonical form in which it is known today (AG: 463–75, trans. Macauliffe 1909: i. 218–49). Guru Arjan also wrote numerous *vars* of his own with *shaloks*, sometimes displaying his astonishing technical virtuosity by writing the *shaloks* in the lyrical style using Siraiki forms or in the archaizing Sahaskriti idiom (Shackle 1985b).

Even though the Adi Granth is recognized to be the first and greatest work of Sikh literature, it still awaits much serious academic investigation. The recent scholarly literature in English has been dominated by discussion of the textual questions raised by the various early recensions (P. Singh 2000; Mann 2001; Deol 2001a). Although some efforts have also been made to discuss the Adi Granth from a literary point of view (Kohli 1961; Grewal 1986; Gill 2007), these have tended to be limited in critical scope. This is in part a consequence of the deliberately populist aesthetic of the Gurus and the Bhagats, which **(p. 114)** makes it awkward to invoke the elaborate schemes of Sanskrit poetics

which are appropriate to the analysis of the contemporary poetry of the *sagun bhakti* poets who wrote in praise of Krishna or Ram (McGregor 2003). In part, too, it is the sheer size and complex editorial shaping of the Adi Granth, along with the variety of its contributors, which have continued to inhibit the development of that serious literary analysis which, along with good translations, is needed for a fuller understanding of its complex literary character and the proper establishment of its comparative and historical importance.

The Seventeenth Century

The literature produced in the century following Guru Arjan's first recension of the Adi Granth in 1604 reflects a whole variety of post-scriptural responses. In place of the older scriptural language, increasing use was made of other languages, ranging from simpler styles of Punjabi for works evidently designed purely for an internal Sikh audience to the elite languages of the Mughal Empire in those apparently conceived for wider audiences. The major imperial language of the day was Persian, used both by outsiders writing about the Sikhs (trans. Grewal and Habib 2001) and by some Sikh authors (Shackle forthcoming). Alongside Persian, Braj Bhasha had become the major north Indian 'cosmopolitan vernacular' (Pollock 1998), whose widespread currency as a medium for *bhakti* verse also inspired its increasing use for Sikh writings.

The first important post-scriptural Sikh author, who wrote in both Braj Bhasha and Punjabi, is the prolific and unimpeachably orthodox Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (Pall 2002), nephew of the third Guru, amanuensis to Guru Arjan during the compilation of the Adi Granth, and most loyal defender and advocate of the sixth Guru Hargobind (1595–1644). An ambition to reach a more universal audience for the teaching of the Gurus underlies the extensive set of short *kabitt* verses which Bhai Gurdas (d. 1637) wrote in Braj Bhasha, using a straightforward style and a purist vocabulary without Persian words.

These verses (trans. Puri 2007) deal with the central spiritual themes of the need for loving devotion and adherence to the teachings of the Guru. Many follow a standard template in which the first lines consist of one or more introductory similes. Although similarly striking similes are equally characteristic of the preaching style of his forty Punjabi *vars* (trans. Puri 2009), the latter are more extended in length and varied in content. Their themes embrace scriptural exegesis, regulations for piously ordered individual and communal life, eulogies of the orthodox line of Gurus and denunciations of schismatics opposed to them, rather copious references to Indian mythology, and the first

recorded examples of Sikh hagiography, notably in the long *Var 1* largely devoted to Guru Nanak.

During the seventeenth century, the oral hagiographic tradition which developed around Guru Nanak's life as a natural complement to the hymns embodying his teachings preserved in the Adi Granth came to be recorded in prose narratives which began to be compiled into a number of written collections called *janamsakhi* or 'birth-witness'. Using prose for the first time in Sikh literature, the bulk of this *janamsakhi* literature is (p. 115) notably popular in character. There is a general preponderance of Punjabi elements in its language, and the style is usually very simple, with abrupt successions of short sentences linked by only the most basic syntactic connectors.

The different *janamsakhi* collections, whose final form can often be dated only to the nineteenth century, draw upon a common stock of pious anecdotes (McLeod 1980a). The typical flavour of their style is easier than the poetry of the Adi Granth to reproduce in English translation, whether of the later *B40 Janamsakhi* (trans. McLeod 1980b) or of the version nowadays considered most reliable, the *Puratan Janamsakhi* (trans. Trumpp 1877: vii–xlv). Short individual episodes, called *sakhi* or 'witness', typically describe the miraculous powers of the Guru, through which he overcomes his opponents who finally submit to his spiritual authority. These are organized to form very loose narratives, beginning with the Guru's birth and early life, including his professional employment, then describing the start of this mission and his travels within Punjab and beyond, before ending with his establishment of the first Sikh centre at Kartarpur and appointment before his death of Guru Angad as his successor. Many episodes include a hymn said to have been sung by the Guru to the accompaniment of his faithful companion, his Muslim musician Mardana, and quite often it is the content of this hymn which provides the kernel of narrative incident.

The loose format of the *janamsakhis* and their popular character made them ideal media for adaptation by the schismatic groups of the period to add their own slant to the life of the Guru. The most popular version of all is the often fantastic narrative of the *Bala Janamsakhi* (trans. Trumpp 1877: xlvi–lxxvi), which purports to be told by one Bhai Bala as another close companion of the Guru, but which was evidently created by followers of Baba Hindal, a would-be rival to the Gurus.

The most successful schismatics, called Minas or 'rascals' by Bhai Gurdas, were those who followed the rival line of Sodhi Gurus founded in opposition to Guru Arjan by his elder brother Prithi Chand (d. 1618), successfully followed by his son Miharban (d. 1640). A large and most interesting literature was created by the Minas which is only now beginning to be systematically investigated (Deol 1998). The best known Mina text is the

very long *Miharban Janamsakhi*, which has a distinctively learned character, both in its style which favours Hindi over Punjabi elements, and in its content which favours scriptural exegesis over popular narrative (Shackle 2008a). Unlike his cousin Guru Hargobind and his immediate successors, Miharban also composed an extensive collection of devotional verse in the tradition of the earlier Sikh Gurus, to whom Prithi Chand and Miharban writing as 'Nanak' considered themselves the legitimate successors. While for the orthodox these compositions are considered 'fake *bani*', they are distinguished in Mina manuscripts with the numerical sigla indicating their self-designation as the sixth and seventh Gurus. Following the style of the fifth Guru Arjan, they too make frequent references to the hymns of the earlier Gurus, as well as introducing a number of interesting new types of poem, some with explicit reference to Islam which may reflect the closeness of the Minas to the Mughal authorities who favoured their claims (Simarjit Singh 2006).

It was only with the ninth orthodox Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–75) that the practice of verse composition was resumed in the main line of Gurus. His fifty-nine *shabads* and (p. 116) fifty-seven *shaloks* were inserted in appropriate places into the Adi Granth, but they are somewhat different from those of the earlier Gurus. Their thematic range is narrower, displaying a marked focus on the evanescence of worldly things in the face of the inevitability of death. They also differ in language, since they are written in Braj Bhasha, marking the start of a decisive alignment of the high tradition of Sikh literature with the wider cultural world of north India.

A similar alignment may be detected in the use of Persian by Sikh authors, of whom much the most significant is Guru Tegh Bahadur's younger contemporary Bhai Nand Lal (*c*. 1633–1712?), a Khatri employed in the imperial administration who later became a noted disciple of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh. Accorded a semi-canonical status similar to that of the works of Bhai Gurdas, Nand Lal's Persian compositions (trans. Bawa 2006) are much simpler than the elaborately mannered Persian poetry favoured in the courtly circles of the day. But they are quite ambitious in scope, collectively embracing several of the main recognized genres of Persian poetry. His best known poems are the short lyrics called ghazals (Fenech 1994), an ever-popular genre whose conventions allow for the richly equivocal expression of feelings of love for both human and divine objects of adoration, in Nand Lal's case typically the Guru. His *Ganjnama* in praise of Guru Gobind Singh and the other Gurus is written in the style of the *qasida* or courtly eulogy, while his finest poem is the *Zindaginama* or 'Book of Life' in which he uses the didactic format of the Persian *masnavi* to explain the teachings of the Gurus using the language of Sufism familiar to a Persian-reading audience.

From the Dasam Granth to the British Conquest

By the end of the seventeenth century, Braj Bhasha had become fully established as a preferred vehicle for courtly as well as devotional poetry (Busch 2011). A decisive shift to Braj Bhasha, along with some use of Persian, is a defining characteristic of the second scripture of the Sikh tradition, the Dasam Granth or 'Book of the Tenth One', containing writings associated with the tenth Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708). While of similar size to the Adi Granth, the Dasam Granth could hardly be more different in character with only a few exceptions. The opening *Jap Sahib*, an elaborate litany of the divine names, deliberately recalls Guru Nanak's *Japji*, and there are a few hymns by Guru Gobind Singh which are of the same type as those of the Adi Granth.

But the great bulk of the Dasam Granth consists of narrative poetry in Braj Bhasha (trans. Kohli 2005). Its traditional attribution to Guru Gobind Singh himself remains controversial (Rinehart 2011), but its elevated tone is clearly connected with the poetic circle of his court (Fenech 2008). Unlike the consciously unassuming style of the older *gurbani*, the narratives of the Dasam Granth deploy the full range of Braj Bhasha poetics (Ashta 1959), including the use of variegated meters in successive stanzas of the same (p. 117) poem and a creative use of Sanskritic vocabulary. The deployment of martial material drawn from the extensive resources of Puranic tradition provides a new literary exemplar for the Khalsa, the new military order which Guru Gobind Singh created to spearhead the transformation of the Sikh community (Deol 2001b).

This part of the Dasam Granth seems to have been originally designed as a whole entitled *Bachitra Natak Granth* or 'The Book of the Wondrous Drama'. Nowadays, however, the title *Bachitra Natak* is now usually taken to refer only to the opening autobiographical account of the Guru's divine mission and his early battles, and the lengthy supporting narratives are reckoned to be independent compositions. Apart from the huge *Chaubis Avatar* describing the incarnations of Vishnu, these notably comprise three poems describing the destruction of demonic hosts by the goddess Chandi, narrated not only in two elaborate Braj Bhasha poems entitled *Chandi Charitra* but also in the Punjabi version popularly called *Chandi di Var,* in which the familiar form of the heroic folk-ballad is used for its original purpose.

The courtly style is equally apparent in the other major component of the Dasam Granth, the enormous collection of 404 stories in multi-metred Braj Bhasha verses entitled *Charitropakhian* (trans. Bindra 2002), whose apparently secular emphasis has rendered

their scriptural status very suspect in the eyes of modern piety, as has that of the much smaller collection of very similar stories called *Hikaitan* placed at the end of the Dasam Granth. Written in the different style of mono-metred Persian verse, the latter seem to represent a conscious attempt to appropriate the other elite literary medium of the period. This is also true of the preceding *Zafarnama* (trans. Shackle 1998b), a Persian verse epistle written in the same metre addressed by Guru Gobind Singh to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, which in spite of some problems is generally understood to be the work of the Guru himself (Fenech 2013).

Outside the Dasam Granth, numerous other writings of similar character are also associated with Guru Gobind Singh, but of these only the large *Sarabloh Granth* continues to enjoy a canonical status which is restricted to the Nihang Sikhs. Besides continuations from an earlier period, like the accretions to the growing *janamsakhi* literature, the Sikh literature of the period down to the British conquests of the 1840s develops a number of new genres. The more ambitious compositions continue the trend of favouring Braj Bhasha, while Punjabi is used for humbler writings, often in a style mixed with Khari Boli Hindi.

At this end of the literary spectrum, the foundation of the Khalsa brought into being the *rahit-nama* genre (trans. McLeod 2003: 261–401), consisting of prescriptive manuals for the Khalsa code of conduct (*rahit*). These humble productions are typically short compilations of rules in unpretentious Punjabi prose. Passages of independent interest occur only in the most extended examples, the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama* (trans. McLeod 1987) and the later *Prem Sumarag* (trans. McLeod 2006).

The higher style of Sikh Braj Bhasha poetry was inaugurated soon after Guru Gobind Singh's death with the *Sri Gur Sobha* by Sainapati, one of the poets of his court. It combines devotional panegyric with a celebration of the Guru's martial exploits. Several other poems, notably including Kuir Singh's 1751 *Gurbilas Patshahi* *(p. 118)* *Das* (Murphy 2012) were composed down to the early nineteenth in this *gurbilas* genre in celebration of the glories of the Khalsa and its founder (Grewal 2004). The range of the verse chronicles which constitute the most notable Sikh literary productions of the period (Dhavan 2011) is not confined to the *gurbilas* poems in the strict sense, but embraces various composite genres like the *bansavali* accounts of the Gurus and their lineage, notably including the *Bansavali Dasan Patshahian ka* composed by Chaupa Singh's kinsman the Brahmin writer Kesar Singh Chhibbar in easy-going Punjabi verse. The heroic *gurbilas* tradition proper achieves its final climax in the long Braj Bhasha poem *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* (trans. K. Singh 2006). This was completed on the eve of the British conquest by Ratan Singh Bhangu, who was rather exceptional among Sikh authors of the

period in belonging to a Jat family who had actively participated in the armed struggles of the Khalsa.

While patronizing numerous now little regarded Persian court histories and poetic eulogies, the period of Sikh political dominance during the first decades of the nineteenth century was otherwise notable for the contributions to the religious literature made by members of the Sevapanthi, Udasi, and Nirmala orders. The catholic tradition of the Sevapanthis which embraced the writings of other religions is illustrated by the *Paras Bhag*, a rendering in plain Hindi prose of the Muslim spiritual classic *Kimiya-e Sa'adat* by al-Ghazali (Horstmann 2009). Udasi writings covered several genres, from Sukha Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi Das*, and the prose *Parchi Patshahi Dasvin ki* by Sevadas, to the late *janamsakhi* called *Gian Ratnavali*. Important commentaries on key scriptural texts were written from an Udasi perspective by the prolific Anandghan, whose Hindi commentary on *Japuji* was vigorously combated in the *Garabganjani Tika* (1829) compiled in Braj Bhasha prose by Santokh Singh (1785–1843), the leading Nirmala author of the period (Shackle 2008a).

It is in Santokh Singh's voluminous poetic writings that the traditional Sikh literature of the pre-British period achieves its final climax. Supported by the rulers of the petty Sikh state of Kaithal, Santokh Singh was given the necessary leisure to compile two lengthy narratives in Braj Bhasha verse which embrace the entire hagiographic tradition, first in his comprehensive retelling of the *janamsakhi* tradition in *Sri Gur Nanak Prakash* (1823), then in his massive *Sri Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* (1843), which at nearly 52,000 verses is indeed a *granth* of a size and scope to invite comparison with the two scriptural books. Popularly known as the *Suraj Prakash* or 'Manifestation of the Sun', this account of the lives of the nine succeeding Gurus opens with an elaborate poetic prelude indicating its poetic ambitions, before bringing together a profusion of more plainly written hagiographic narrative, formally organized into 'seasons' and 'rays'.

Sikh Literature in Modern Punjabi

The final assimilation of the Sikh kingdom into British India in 1849 inaugurated a major set of changes in the literary culture of the region. Persian and Braj Bhasha were (p. 119) replaced by English and Urdu as the new standard written languages. A new education system created a new class of educated intellectuals, and a new public for their work. And the introduction of printing created a quite new infrastructure for the production and distribution of a new abundance of literary materials. These included much Punjabi poetry in popular styles hitherto largely transmitted orally (Mir 2010), thus

gaining new audiences for Sikh authors of verse romances like the Malwa poet Bhagvan Singh (1842–1902).

Much of the more serious literature issuing from the new presses was, however, markedly different in character and style from those of the preceding centuries. The British support for Urdu in Persian script as the main vernacular language of north India came under increasing challenge from the new modern standard Hindi in Devanagari script promulgated by Hindu cultural activists who turned their backs on the old Braj Bhasha tradition (Dalmia 2010), and this was challenged in its turn by the leaders of reformed Sikhism who developed and cultivated a new modern standard Punjabi in Gurmukhi script as an important marker of a distinct Sikh religious and cultural identity (Shackle 1988). In all these new written languages, the powerful model of English prose syntax, visually marked by the adoption of Western punctuation marks, came to exercise an increasingly dominant underlying influence (Shackle and Snell 1990).

Significant changes in literary style thus accompanied these shifts in language use. They took a generation to settle down, as may be seen in the two extended treatments of earlier Sikh history published by the influential chronicler Giani Gian Singh (Sukhdial Singh 1996). Born in 1822, Gian Singh first produced his *Panth Prakash* (1880) in the traditional medium of Braj Bhasha verse, but only a few years later in his *Tavarikh Sri Guru Khalsa* (1892) he had switched over to Punjabi prose, while also overseeing a parallel version in Urdu translation. Other important publications reveal that for a while it was the new standard Hindi which seemed a natural medium to scholars of the period who were supported by the patronage of the Sikh rulers of states like Faridkot, Nabha, or Patiala. Thus the title of the famous pamphlet *Ham Hindu Nahin* (‘We are not Hindus’, 1898, trans. Jarnail Singh 2006) by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha (1861–1938) shows that it was originally written in Hindi before being converted into its familiar Punjabi form, and it was Hindi which was chosen as the language of the first modern commentary on the Adi Granth, known as the *Faridkot-vala Tika* (1904).

The patronage of the colonial state had earlier been responsible for Ernest Trumpp’s pioneering but controversial English translation of parts of the Adi Granth (Trumpp 1877). This can in retrospect be seen to have inaugurated the process of the wholesale reinterpretation of the Sikh tradition by writers associated with the Singh Sabha reform movement (Mandair 2009), which did much to make most of the literature of the preceding period seem obsolete. One of the most notable features of that still ongoing process has been the importance of English alongside Punjabi. This was significantly marked by the appearance in 1909 of Max Arthur Macauliffe’s classic English study of the lives and works of the Sikh Gurus, which has played such an important role both in transmitting the hagiographic tradition preserved by Santokh Singh, as modified to suit

(p. 120) the understandings of the reformists, and in setting the archaizing tone considered suitable for many subsequent translations of Sikh sacred literature.

The writer who did most to establish Punjabi as the language of the modern Sikh tradition was the long-lived Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1955), whose personal circumstances allowed him to dedicate himself to the remarkably productive exercise of his very considerable literary gifts and scholarly skills (H. Singh 1972). He was a prolific writer of tracts on all manner of Sikh topics, and modern Punjabi literature was effectively created by his pioneering Punjabi publications in many genres owing much to English examples, variously including a series of historical novels beginning with *Sundari* (1898), the Miltonic spiritual epic *Rana Surat Singh* (1905) innovatively written in unrhymed verse (Shackle 1998), and several volumes of lyrical poetry composed in a style influenced by the English Romantics (Matringe 2009: 35–84, trans. N.-G. Singh 2008) which was deliberately unlike the traditional Braj Bhasha verse at which his father had excelled.

As a scholar, Vir Singh's achievements were even more formidable. Over the years he produced influential editions of many of the most important Sikh texts of earlier periods, including the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Puratan Janamsakhi*, Bhangu's *Prachin Panth Prakash*, and his still unsuperseded edition of Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash* (1927–35) in a massive 14 volumes, which wraps the greatest pre-modern statement of the Sikh tradition written in Brajbhasha in a modern apparatus of Punjabi footnotes. Vir Singh had earlier combined his literary and scholarly sides in attractive retellings of the lives of the first and tenth Gurus in *Sri Guru Nanak Chamatkar* (1925) and *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkar* (1928), and left a substantial commentary on the Adi Granth whose influential modernist interpretation of the scripture (Mandair 2005) is completely at odds with the older Udasi and Nirmala styles of commentary.

No single Sikh writer of the twentieth century was able to match the all-embracing scale and quality of Vir Singh's achievement. The highly talented Puran Singh (1881–1931) was a prolific author in both Punjabi and English who was drawn back from a restless spiritual search to Sikhism by Vir Singh's example, while his poetic yearnings led him to a particular fascination with Walt Whitman. In spite of his continuing explicit engagement with the Sikh tradition, the sheer variety of Puran Singh's oeuvre foreshadows the way that Sikh writing was to go in many different directions in the twentieth century (Brown 1999: 129–96; Matringe 2009: 85–192).

It is indeed something of a paradox that the successful development of Punjabi as a fully serviceable modern literary medium, which took place alongside the successful construction of a reformed vision of the Sikh tradition, should have so rapidly led to the creation of a modern Punjabi literature which was indeed largely authored by Sikhs and is often about Sikh characters and society (Sekhon and Duggal 1999: 105–382), but

whose inspiration has as often as not come from secularist ideologies (A. Singh 1998). The connection of modern Punjabi literature to the earlier literature of the Sikh tradition is thus for the most part no more explicit than is that of the memorable fiction created by twentieth-century Sikh writers in other languages, like Rajinder Singh Bedi in Urdu or Khushwant Singh in English. While there continues to be a vigorous (p. 121) production in Punjabi of popular literature on religious topics (Nijhawan 2006), the difficulties of writers after Vir Singh in harnessing the styles of more consciously artistic Punjabi literature to the expression of traditional piety are well illustrated in the lengthy poem *Nanakain* (1971), an ambitious attempt to tell the story of Guru Nanak by the distinguished poet Mohan Singh (1905–78 CE) in the style of his wonderfully fresh original lyrics, but which falls rather sadly short of the memorably vivid narratives of the older *janamsakhis*.

It was the scholarly side of Vir Singh which foreshadowed the more impressive production of a growing Sikh literature in both Punjabi and English, whose shaping contemporary influence means that much of it can rightly claim to be as much ‘in’ the tradition as it is ‘on’ it. In the generation after Vir Singh the outstanding figure in this regard was Teja Singh (1894–1958), who displayed a matchlessly elegant prose style in his Punjabi essays, who is remembered for his classic statement in English of the Singh Sabha position in *Sikhism: Its Ideals and Institutions* (1938, 1951), and who was the principal author of one of the most authoritative modern commentaries on the Adi Granth, the *Shabadarath Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (1936–41). Subsequently, particularly after the establishment of the Punjab university system, an ever-growing number of modern aids to the understanding of the scriptures and other older Sikh literature have continued to be produced in Punjabi. Also important has been the number of English translations of the canonical older literature which are now becoming available, partly as the result of the significant expansion of the Sikh community far beyond Punjab to many parts of the English-speaking world.

A summary chapter of this kind can hardly hope to do more than give some idea of the supreme literary significance of the Adi Granth and of the later production of important literary texts in a variety of languages, styles, and genres giving fresh expression to Sikh teachings, ideals, and experience in a way historically unmatched in any of the other arts. Only with the further discovery and investigation of long-neglected pre-modern texts and the increasing scrutiny now being applied to the dominant assumptions of twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy will it be possible for a fully variegated picture of the whole Sikh literary tradition to be properly drawn.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the genesis, evolution, and canonization of the foundational text of Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib. Taking a radically different approach from other contesting views, it offers a theory of 'working drafts' prepared under the direct supervision of Guru Arjan to understand the process of canon formation. It seeks to understand plurality of textual meanings and actual performative practices related to liturgy, ceremonies, and communal solidarity. It examines the ongoing role of the Adi Granth as 'Guru', both as a normative source of authority and as a prodigious living force in personal and corporate spheres of the Sikh Panth.

Keywords: Adi Granth, canon, canon formation, Guru, Guru Granth Sahib, performative practices, scripture, Sikhism, Sikh Panth, textual meaning

Introduction

THE most controversial issue in Sikh studies relates to the making of Sikh scripture, the Adi Granth (Primal Scripture), commonly referred to as the Guru Granth Sahib (The Honoured Scripture as the Guru) to reflect its authoritative status within the Sikh community as the living embodiment of the Guru. Recent research has revealed contesting views of canon formation in the Sikh tradition (Pashaura Singh 2002). The first view is primarily based upon traditional sources. According to its most recent protagonist, Balwant Singh Dhillon, when Guru Nanak lived at Kartarpur on the bank of river Ravi during the last two decades of his life, there came into being a single codex of his writings, which he bestowed on his successor Guru Angad (1504–52). The updating of this early scriptural corpus continued under the care of successive Gurus, through Guru Arjan's 'first' authoritative text to Guru Gobind Singh's 'final' closing of the Sikh canon. Thus a 'mother tradition' of sacred writings had flourished 'under the watchful eyes' of

the Sikh Gurus (Dhillon 1999: 281). Notably, Dhillon discredits all the available pre-canonical sources used by scholars to understand the evolution of the Adi Granth text. His main arguments are based upon the premise that to maintain the traditional view it would be best for the faithful to deny the very existence of early manuscripts by questioning their origins in sectarian trends in the early Sikh community (Dhillon 1999, 2003, 2004). In a spirited debate, Dhillon has clearly set out a 'fundamentalist position' contrary to other scholarly analyses (Shackle 2008: 257).

According to the second related view held by Gurinder Singh Mann, the transmission of the *bani* (divine Word) was a linear process that began with a single source, and then diversified into separate textual strands with minor variations that we encounter in the available manuscripts of the Adi Granth: 'Because these manuscripts grew out of a single source, there are no substantive variations within their contents' (Mann 2001:123). He focuses on the evolution of the Sikh sacred text from the pre-canonical stage, represented by the Guru Har Sahai *pothi* (volume), the Goindval *pothis*, and the (p. 126) Guru Nanak Dev University MS 1245, through the Kartarpur *pothi*, to the final compilation of the Adi Granth by Guru Gobind Singh in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Examining some twenty-seven extant manuscripts produced between 1642 and 1692, he argues for a two-branch picture of the Adi Granth recensions as follows: 'the Kartarpur Pothi began to be copied while still in the process of reaching its final form; a copy of it made in 1605 was taken to [the] Peshawar area where it served as a source for manuscripts that constitute branch 1; the Kartarpur Pothi reached its final form in 1606 and then its copies became the manuscripts of branch 2' (Mann 2001: 82). Mann accepts the authenticity of the Kartarpur volume but maintains that the 'issue of the pothi's contents, however, is open to debate' (Mann 2001: 67). He then offers a hypothesis that originally the Kartarpur manuscript contained all the additional texts of the Kanpur/Banno version. For him, the Kartarpur and the Kanpur/Banno versions represent one and the same thing.

The third view lays emphasis upon the development of 'independent' textual traditions in different geographical areas, flourishing in isolation from one another in the process of repeated copying and correction over generations of scribal activity. They are distinguished especially by different sets of readings, but also by other features including orthographic and grammatical peculiarities. For instance, certain early manuscripts such as Guru Nanak Dev University manuscript MS 1245 and the Bahoval *pothi* display all kinds of variant readings that must have originally come from different oral repertoires of the *bani* used in a singing tradition. The protagonist of this view was Piar Singh who stressed the development of the sacred text through a complex series of manuscripts until eventually it finds finality in the Damdama recension of the Adi Granth. He was primarily driven by the quest to identify the original *bir* (recension) that had been prepared by Bhai Gurdas at the behest of Guru Arjan. He emphasized independent

collections and *sporadic* compilations that throw ‘a flood of light on the proclivities—preferences, insights, and modalities of their compilers’ (Piar Singh 1996: 35). Following a ‘skeptical approach’ in his analysis Piar Singh became obsessed with the idea of rejecting the authenticity of the Kartarpur *bir* through the extensive use of manuscript evidence even though he was not able to get the opportunity to examine that manuscript personally.

The fourth view is presented by Jeevan Deol who has advanced Piar Singh’s hypothesis of independent textual traditions: ‘The earliest manuscripts appear to be independent compilations, including of course the Kartarpur text’ (Deol 2001: 48). This approach is largely based upon the works of scholars working on the oral and written transmission of contemporaneous north Indian devotional literature of both *nirguna* (without attributes) and *saguna* (with attributes) schools of thought. In the bhakti literature, however, there was no check from any central authority against innovative tendencies. It was a common practice among the rural bards and singers to add verses in the names of celebrated bhakti poets. The examples of such textual additions may be seen in the *Sursagar* (Hawley 1984: 35–63) and the various Kabir collections (Hess 1987: 112–41). In fact, no other contemporary or near-contemporary religious compilation can be compared with the doctrinal consistency and complexity of the Adi Granth structure.

(p. 127) In my view the major weakness of these four approaches is that textual problems are dealt with in isolation, without any reference to Guru Arjan’s overall editorial perspective, by means of which he produced an authoritative text of the Adi Granth in 1604. In order to arrive at a more balanced perspective, we need to look at the making of the Sikh canon as the result of a ‘collaborative approach’ based upon the ‘theory of working-drafts’ prepared under the supervision of Guru Arjan. This is an approach that duly acknowledges the role played by other human actors in the complex process of canon formation. In this context, Bhai Gurdas is universally regarded as Guru Arjan’s amanuensis in the making of the scripture. His extended visits to Varanasi and Agra were intended to study the various conventions of Sanskritic learning. His thirty-nine ballads and a series of Braj poems clearly indicate his background knowledge of Indian scriptural traditions and philosophical systems. Moreover, there was Jagana Brahmin, a resident of Agra, who had his own training in the study of Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures. He was a devout follower of Guru Arjan and a scribe of repute of the ‘correct’ copies of the Adi Granth. Thus both Jagana Brahman and Bhai Gurdas were well versed in the various conventions of the Sanskrit, Braj Bhasha, and other Indian literary traditions. In addition, tradition also records the names of four other scribes—Bhai Sant Das, Bhai Haria, Bhai Sukha, and Bhai Mansa Ram—who were equally involved in the making of Sikh scripture. Incidentally, there are at least four different handwritings discernible at different places, although the major portion of the Kartarpur *bir* is by the primary scribe (Pashaura Singh

2006: 135–37). A close examination of early manuscripts reveals that Guru Arjan worked on a number of pre-canonical texts to finally produce a prototype of the Adi Granth in 1604. The process does not seem to involve a linear mode of operation in any way, copying directly from one codex to another. Rather, a number of codices were being used simultaneously during the redaction process to establish the canon. The texts were read and reread frequently to arrive at the final reading.

Formation of the Sikh Canon

The formation of the Sikh canon involved a much more complex process than tradition would have us believe. It apparently 'began in the days of Guru Nanak' (Mann 2000: 23) and continued to evolve over time. In the early Sikh community the writing of *gurbani* (inspired utterances of the Guru) was regarded as a devotional activity. During the last period of Guru Nanak's life at Kartarpur there existed a single codex of his writings referred to as a *pothi* in early Sikh literature, which he bestowed on his successor Guru Angad (1504–52). The updating of this scriptural corpus continued under the care of successive Gurus. In particular, a four-volume written collection appeared as the Goindval *pothis* during the period of the third Guru, Amar Das (1479–1574). The two extant copies of these volumes at Jalandhar and Pinjore provide us with the earliest writings of the first three Gurus and the *bhagats* (devotees) such as Kabir, Ravidas, and Namdev among others. As their structure reveals that the key organizing principle was (p. 128) based upon ragas (keeping in mind the needs of the performing singers or *ragis*), the Goindval *pothis* provided the nucleus for the compilation of the Sikh scripture (Mann 1996; 2001: 47). The Gurmukhi script used in these, moreover, represents an early stage of orthography when vowel signs were not yet fully developed.

Bula and Pandha, the renowned scribe and singer of Guru Amar Das's period, prepared anthologies of devotional literature called *gutakas* (breviaries) and *pothis* for various Sikh congregations (*sangats*). The fourth Guru, Ram Das (1534–81) provided a new musical dimension to the evolving Sikh scriptural corpus by adding eleven new ragas to the existing system of nineteen ragas employed by Guru Nanak for his compositions. Although no manuscript of his works has survived, Guru Ram Das frequently encouraged the professional class of scribes to write *gurbani* for the purpose of distribution among the various Sikh congregations (Pashaura Singh 2008b: 1015).

The making of the Adi Granth evidently owes much to the enormous energies of Guru Arjan who was the principal force behind the process of consolidation of the Sikh tradition, taking place within the larger context of doctrinal and institutional

developments of his times. He updated the existing collection by substantially increasing it and prepared a prototype of the text in 1604. The cultural environment of Mughal India during Emperor Akbar's reign provided the historical context for the creation of a unified scripture for the Sikh Panth. Notably, during Guru Arjan's reign Ramdaspur (Amritsar) had become the central institution of scribal activity, prioritizing a substantial textual tradition. It provided a safe place known as the *pothi mahal* (abode of the books) where the sacred volumes were stored with sanctity. It was parallel to the *kitab khana* (library/atelier) of the Mughal emperors who were following a time-honoured and valued tradition. To have a great library was considered the sign, perhaps even the function, of a great ruler in the Islamic world. Not surprisingly, the cultural environment of the times reflected a world peopled by calligraphers and illuminators, paper makers and line drawers, bookbinders and margin markers; also of librarians and superintendents and inventory keepers (Pashaura Singh 2006: 138). Emperor Akbar's visit to Goindval on 4 November 1598 was indeed the high point of a cordial relationship between the Mughals and the Sikhs. It provided Guru Arjan with a first-hand opportunity to look closely at the accompanying imperial ensemble (*naubat*) and illustrated manuscripts that were displayed as part of the Mughal policy of disseminating information among the people. It is a well-known fact that artists, scribes, painters, and musicians always accompanied Akbar. This display of imperial paraphernalia served as a visible sign of authority. It is highly likely that Guru Arjan made up his mind on this occasion to create a prototype of the Adi Granth for the Sikh community (Pashaura Singh 2006: 137–41).

The writing of manuscript MS 1245 (*c.*1599) had certainly begun immediately after Emperor's Akbar's visit to Goindval. One of the opening folios of this manuscript bore a *shamsa* (sunburst) that had unmistakable links with high Islamicate traditions of manuscript decoration (Pashaura Singh 2006: 139; Deol 2003: 53). It was certainly drawn by an artist who had prior experience in illuminating Persian and Arabic manuscripts in the city of Lahore—the closest location from Ramdaspur, from where the Sikh scribes normally bought paper and other writing material. The existence of textual specialists **(p. 129)** and scribes in turn implied considerable economic resources, including both an organized and wealthy Sikh Panth at Ramdaspur to support such communities of scholars and also wealth to obtain the necessary materials needed for scholarly work, such as properly gathered and prepared sets of paper made in Sialkot and Kashmir, ink, and writing instruments. Ramdaspur had indeed become the hub of preparing and preserving the *pothis* of *gurbani*. The examination of the pre-canonical manuscripts of Guru Arjan's period places them in the following chronological order: MS 1245 (*c.*1599) is the oldest, followed by the Bahoval *pothi* (*c.*1600), the Vanjara *pothi* (*c.*1601), the Bhai Rupa *pothi* (*c.* 1603), and the Sursingh *pothi* (Pashaura Singh 2008b: 1016). All of these documents pre-

date the 1604 Kartarpur *bir*. They provide traces of documentary evidence to build a framework on the process of canon formation.

In spite of Guru Arjan's remarkable editorial achievement in preparing a prototype of the text in 1604, there emerged three different recensions of the Adi Granth in the course of time. The principal reason for this development was due to the unstable situation created by Guru Arjan's execution in 1606 under the orders of Mughal Emperor Jahangir. This event became the turning point in the history of the Sikh tradition, creating a new situation that was conducive to sectarian tendencies within the Panth. The manuscript evidence has brought to light another recension that was prepared in 1610 when Jahangir imprisoned Guru Hargobind in the Gwalior fort. It is popularly known as Lahori *bir* or 'recension' because it was found at a shrine in Lahore. The Lahore recension differs from the Kartarpur version only in its concluding section. It has a different order, sometimes ending with the *saloks* (couplets or stanzas) of Kabir and Farid, and sometimes with the panegyrics by the Sikh bards in praise of the Gurus. In 1642, a Sikh named Banno traditionally prepared another recension of the Adi Granth at Khara Mangat in Gujrat district. The Banno *bir* consists of the Kartarpur text plus some unauthorized additions. It originated at a time when the main centre of Sikh activities shifted from Amritsar to Kiratpur under Guru Hargobind who had to withdraw to the Shivalik hills due to the pressure of Mughal authorities. The central place of Amritsar fell into the hands of Minas (Scoundrels), the followers of Prithi Chand (Guru Arjan's elder brother) and his descendants. In many instances, the later scribes and their groups within the Panth failed to understand the editorial insights of Guru Arjan and struggled with problematic texts. Some of them made some intentional changes in the text to reflect the changed historical situation of the Panth.

In order to prevent the circulation of three different versions of the Adi Granth, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh closed the canon by adding the works of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the original compilation during the last decades of the seventeenth century at a place called Damdama Sahib in Anandpur. This event marked a significant completion of a matrix of revelation for the Sikh community. It was asserted that core truths of the tradition had been established irrevocably, and the documents included in the canon were a witness to these truths in an authoritative way. This process reflected the top-down mode of canonization in the history of scriptural traditions. This final text is popularly known as the Damdama *bir*, a version that provides the text of the modern Guru Granth Sahib. Notably, two manuscripts of the Damdama *bir*, written in *sambat* **(p. 130)** 1739 (1682 CE) and *sambat* 1748 (1691 CE) were housed in the Sikh Reference Library, Amritsar, and were destroyed in 1984 during Operation Blue Star (Pashaura Singh 2000: 224). There still exist a number of manuscripts of this standard Damdama version around Anandpur and Bathinda area, the main centres of Sikh activities in the late seventeenth

and early eighteenth centuries. A rare manuscript of Damdama version prepared in *sambat* 1764 (1707 CE) is preserved at Toshakhana of Takhat Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib Abchalnagar in Nanded, Maharashtra. Another beautiful 'Golden Cover Volume' (*sunahiri bir*) of this version, traditionally prepared by Baba Dip Singh in *sambat* 1783 (1726 CE) at Damdama Sahib in Bathinda, is preserved at Toshakhana of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar (digital copies with Dr Jasbir Singh Mann).

The closing of the canon, however, did not mean that other versions of the Adi Granth went out of circulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a matter of fact the Banno recension was predominant. The revival of the standard text based upon the Damdama version took place during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) who was able to procure the Kartarpur volume for this purpose. He patronized the scribes who made beautiful illuminated copies of this new version, which were sent as gifts to all the Sikh *takhats* (thrones) and other major gurdwaras. Notably, the Maharaja presented a beautiful copy of the Guru Granth Sahib, with two coloured illustrations and finely decorated margins with artwork, to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, which is now in the possession of Baba Sarbjot Singh Bedi of Una Sahib (Pashaura Singh 2000: 228–9). The first printed edition of the standard Damdama version appeared in 1864 that gave a fillip to its universal acceptance. The Singh Sabha reformers sanctified this standard version and set aside all other versions used in earlier centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Adi Granth text even attained a standard pagination of 1,430 pages in total as a result of printing uniformity during the colonial period (Pashaura Singh 2000: 232–3).

The Content and Structure of the Adi Granth

Guru Arjan's prodigious efforts were responsible for the creation of Sikh scripture. He used the best possible words to crystallize the divine message. Indeed, his intention was to create a 'letter-perfect text' for the Sikh community. He carefully directed the whole operation of the recording of the Adi Granth. This is quite evident from his personal approval of the content, form, and organization of the *bani* in particular raga sections, as indicated by the use of the word *sudh* (correct) in the margins of the text. In fact, the use of such editorial directions as *sudh* and *sudh kichai* (make corrections) in the Kartarpur *bir* and other early documents (such as the Bhai Rupa *pothi*) make sense only when we place them in the context of what are normally described as the 'inspection notes' (*'arz-didah*) recorded in the flyleaves of imperial manuscripts prepared during (p. 131) Emperor Akbar's reign (Pashaura Singh 2006: 160–1). In Mughal India there was a well-established tradition of sending the books written by calligraphers and scribes for

proofing by the comparing scribe, whose duty was to compare a copy with the original and correct any mistake. Such a specialist was called the corrector (*musahhih*) who was a man of great ability and learning (Wade 1998: 14). Similarly, a professional class of calligraphers and scribes maintained the manuscripts of *gurbani* at the Sikh court in the Guru's archives (*pothi mahal*). Historically, the *pothis* of *gurbani* have always remained prized and been frequently used as ritual objects, and Sikh scribes have continually worked as carefully as possible to copy them, always holding dear the belief that they were producing as accurate and correct (*sudh*) a text as they could.

Guru Arjan's achievement can be seen from the remarkably consistent structure of the Adi Granth. He devised certain checks and balances which made it extremely difficult for anyone to interpolate extraneous matter in the text without being identified. Each entry in the Adi Granth is numbered and its position is further determined by its raga, authorship, and metrical form. On the whole the Adi Granth consists of 5,871 hymns of carefully recorded authorship. The code-word *mahala* (or simply M) with an appropriate number identifies the composition of each Guru. The works by Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan, and Guru Tegh Bahadur are indicated by M1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 respectively. All the Gurus sign their compositions 'Nanak' in the Adi Granth to stress the unity and continuity with the founder of the tradition. The fundamental message of all the Gurus remains the same that liberation can be achieved only through meditation on the divine Name. Most importantly, the Adi Granth stresses uncompromising monotheism in which there is no place for incarnation or idol worship.

The systematic arrangement of the Adi Granth reveals that Guru Arjan followed a well-defined pattern of organization that was seldom breached. The text of the Adi Granth is divided into three major sections. The introductory section includes three liturgical prayers: (1) Guru Nanak's *Japji* (Meditation) is recited early in the morning; (2) five hymns of the *Sodar* (That Door) text and four hymns of the *So Purakh* (That Being) composition form part of the evening prayer; and (3) five hymns of *Sohila* (Praise) text are recited at bedtime.

The middle section contains the bulk of the material that is divided into thirty-one major *ragas* (melodic patterns) in the standard version of the Adi Granth. Each raga has further subdivisions based on the length of the compositions, beginning with the shorter *pad* genre (usually *chaupadas* or 'four verses'), followed by other poetic forms (*astapadis* or 'octaves', *chhant* or 'lyrical hymn', and other longer works such as Guru Nanak's *Siddh Gost*, Guru Amar Das's *Anand*, and Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*), and ending with the longer *var* or 'ballad'. The hymns in each of these classifications are arranged in such a way that the works of Guru Nanak are placed first and are followed by those of the later Gurus in

the order of their succession. Similarly, the works of the *bhagats* (Bhagat Bani) are arranged at the end of each raga section (Pashaura Singh 2003: 1–41).

The final section includes an epilogue comprising miscellaneous works that could not be accommodated in the middle section. It concludes with Guru Arjan's *Mundavani* (p. 132) and his final *salok* of gratitude, followed by a controversial text *Raga-mala* (Garland of *ragas*).

Interpretations of the Adi Granth

Interestingly, the more canonical a text, the greater amount of attention it receives in its interpretation. It is no wonder that the Adi Granth text has an inexhaustible hermeneutic potential. No matter how much one studies and interprets it, the deeper aspects of its meaning remain yet to be fathomed. Each generation of scholars has tried to unfold its meaning from its own particular angle. Anyone schooled in the history of Adi Granth interpretation can easily identify the intellectual context in which almost any extensive sample of interpretation was produced. In fact, scriptural interpretation has styles that reflect clearly and distinctly the cultures and contexts of individual interpreters, the schools they represent, and the creative worlds in which they worked, including their cutting-edge ideas, interpretive skills, fads, and even erroneous beliefs. There are no predetermined meanings but only actual meanings determined by larger social and political contexts. The least one can say is to assert that narratives are 'meanings in motion'. Indeed, the dynamic nature and plurality of interpretations have remained part and parcel of Sikh tradition throughout its history (Pashaura Singh 2000: 239–61; Shackle 2008: 255–77). The Adi Granth will have future meanings too, meanings which have yet to be determined.

Verne Dusenbery has categorized two different hermeneutic approaches to understand the inspired words of the Adi Granth. One approach places emphasis on the 'meaning' of textual words by following what is called 'dualistic understanding' of language. The dualistic ideology of language 'privileges reference, semantic meaning, the arbitrariness of signifier and signified, and the context-free cognitive qualities of the text at the expense of the sound properties of the words themselves' (Dusenbery 1992: 389). The Singh Sabha scholars adopted this approach to scriptural interpretation that was primarily guided by the rationalistic influence of Western education. It is normally understood to reflect the 'modernist perspective' based on the scientific paradigm of the Enlightenment. The second hermeneutic approach is generally known as 'non-dualistic understanding' of language. It is a 'context-sensitive' approach, and is linked to the

practical efforts of ‘reading, listening and singing’ the hymns of the scripture. Because of its association with performative practices it is called the ‘hermeneutics of praxis’. It recognizes ‘the material as well as cognitive properties of language (especially articulated speech) and refuses to privilege semantico-referential meaning at the expense of other properties that language is thought to possess’ (Dusenbery 1992: 388–9).

Indeed, sonic form itself is regarded as sacred and listening to sacred sound as transcendental. The non-dualistic ideology, therefore, places great emphasis on the sacredness of the ‘sound’ of the scriptural words. According to this approach, the sacred sounds of *gurbani* have transformative power only if they are replicated exactly as they were first enunciated by the Sikh Gurus. That is why the hymns of the Adi Granth are (p. 133) sung in particular ragas in the central devotional practice of *kirtan* (sacred singing) in Sikhism. In devotional singing, the Guru’s hymns gain their full evocative power in the aesthetic experience of both performers and listeners (Pashaura Singh 2008a: 671). The oral experience of scripture has received much attention in recent scholarship. Both scholars and common people are now involved in a process in which they make an attempt to recapture the spirit of ‘personalism’ that has been lost in the transition away from oral/aural language. Not surprisingly, the dualistic hermeneutic approach has come under fire in a postmodern critique of context-free objective scholarship. For instance, A. K. Ramanujan’s critique of Western hermeneutics is a case in point (Ramanujan 1999: 34–51). For a long time, he argues, Western scholarly approaches to South Asian cultural and religious traditions had a tendency to omit the complex structure of performative practices. These approaches were mainly preoccupied with a ‘context-free’ hermeneutic analysis that would not lend itself to ‘context-sensitive’ forms of cultural practice and narrative tradition. However, Dusenbery has demonstrated that the Sikh experience implicitly challenges analytic dichotomies that rigidly oppose oral and written texts, or sound and meaning, or that which foresees an inevitable evolutionary movement between them (Dusenbery 1992: 387).

Scholars and laypeople have successfully applied both dualistic and non-dualistic hermeneutic approaches in actual practice in understanding the message of the Adi Granth. Even the Gurus themselves placed greater emphasis on the understanding of the meaning of *gurbani* rather than the mindless ‘ritualization’ of religious practice. Therefore, both informative and performative practices occupy the central place in Sikh hermeneutics. Each act of hermeneutic encounter with the Adi Granth text is unique, because it is the encounter with the eternal Guru as disclosed in it. Thus, it is the text that illumines the interpreter like radiance, not the interpreter who illumines the text. In order to appreciate this phenomenon, we need to look into Paul Ricoeur’s magical looking-glass theory of textual meaning. He asserts that the meaning of the text does not lie behind it, in the region of intention and ostensive reference, but in front of it in the

space of interpretation (Ricoeur 1981: 141). For the Sikhs, the Guru Granth Sahib is new every morning. As a living force in their lives, it has functioned as an ever-fresh source of timeless truth. While reading it or listening to its contents the Sikhs have heard the voice of Akal Purakh (Timeless Being), the eternal Guru, speaking directly to them there and then. It is no wonder that ritual purity is observed in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. One is actually in the presence of the eternal Guru when one is engaging with the text of the Guru Granth Sahib: to see, to touch, and to hear it.

Scriptural Authority

The Guru Granth Sahib is the basis of the most important Sikh doctrines, rituals, and social and ethical positions (Pashaura Singh 2008a: 659–73; Mann 2008: 41–54). Simply (p. 134) to be in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, or to hear a sentence read aloud from it, makes Sikhs feel that they are on sacred ground. Indeed, the place and function of the Adi Granth as Guru has inspired Sikhs throughout their history in personal piety, liturgy, ceremonies, and communal solidarity. It has provided a framework for the shaping of the Panth and has been a decisive factor in shaping a distinctive Sikh identity. It even enjoys the textual hegemony over the secondary Sikh scripture, the Dasam Granth, which contains the works attributed to the tenth (*dasam*) Guru, Gobind Singh. Thus the ultimate authority within the Sikh tradition, for a wide range of personal and public conduct, lies in the Guru Granth Sahib. In a certain sense, the Sikhs have taken their conception of sacred scripture further than other ‘text-centred communities’ such as Jews and Muslims.

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The Dasam Granth

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the Dasam Granth, a lengthy text with a diverse set of compositions attributed to Guru Gobind Singh. The article describes the contents of the compositions within the text, from those praising a formless god to accounts of the goddess Durga and various avatars of Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, the autobiographical composition entitled Bachitra Natak, and one of its most controversial compositions, Charitropakhian, noted for its often graphic depictions of illicit liaisons. The article notes how accounts of Guru Gobind Singh's life relate to the history of the compilation of the text and controversies concerning its authorship, as well as the different interpretations of the text and its contested status within Sikhism.

Keywords: Guru Gobind Singh, Dasam Granth, Bachitra Natak, Charitropakhian, Durga

Sikh history records that Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708) proclaimed that the Sikh Gurus' teachings, along with other selected compositions, compiled in a *granth* or book, be given the status of Guru. Thus the Guru Granth Sahib, reverently enshrined in gurdwaras, is without doubt of central significance to Sikhs. The role of the Guru Granth Sahib in Sikh tradition underscores the respect Sikhs accord the teachings of their Gurus. What, then, have Sikhs made of another *granth* in their tradition, the Dasam Granth, or 'book of the tenth', attributed to Guru Gobind Singh?

At 1,428 pages in most standard printed editions, the Dasam Granth is just a couple of pages shy of the Guru Granth Sahib's 1,430. Its status in Sikhism, however, has been a matter of some contention. For some, it is a 'second scripture of the Sikhs'; for others, its status as a part of Sikh 'scripture' is highly questionable. Disagreements about what status to accord the Dasam Granth have largely centred on two issues: whether the compositions within the Dasam Granth are in accord with normative Sikh theology, and whether discussions of matters of sexuality may appropriately be included in a text with theological content. Large portions of the Dasam Granth explore episodes in Hindu

mythology. There are, for example, several compositions detailing the exploits of the goddess Durga, as well as accounts of the lives of Krishna, Rama, sections that many Sikh scholars have termed ‘Puranic’ given that they retell tales from the Hindu Puranas. These sections of the Dasam Granth raise the question of how to interpret them. Do they suggest that Sikhs should worship these gods, goddesses, and avatars, suggesting a disconnect with normative Sikh monotheism, or are they there for some other reason? A second major source of debate regarding the Dasam Granth is the content of one of the longest sections of the text, a composition entitled *Charitropakhian*, a series of vignettes many of which describe in rather graphic detail illicit relationships between men and women. This section raises the question of what place such material has in a religious text.

Controversies about some of the Dasam Granth’s content have also led to a debate about the authorship of the Dasam Granth. Given the controversial portions of the text, some Sikh interpreters have concluded that Guru Gobind Singh could not have been the author of those portions of the text that seem out of keeping with normative Sikh (p. 137) theology and particular conceptions of the propriety of addressing sexual matters. Others, however, do consider Guru Gobind Singh the author, and have presented a range of explanations as to why the text includes the content that it does. In addition to concerns about some of the Dasam Granth’s contents, the authorship controversy is further fuelled by the presence of a range of ‘pen names’, such as ‘Ram’, ‘Siam’, and ‘Kal’, found within some compositions, and the fact that Sikh history notes that Guru Gobind Singh, like his father Guru Tegh Bahadur before him, sponsored poets at his court (Fenech 2008). Thus some interpreters have concluded that some parts of the Dasam Granth are more likely to be the work of those court poets than Guru Gobind Singh himself.

Key questions about the exact history and compilation of the Dasam Granth remain. Dates on some of the compositions in the text suggest that it was largely composed in the 1690s and early 1700s. Sikh historical sources from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries do not provide definitive evidence about the compilation of the text. Absent definitive evidence to dispel these controversies convincingly, discussions of the content and authorship of the Dasam Granth continue, ranging from finely detailed scholarly debates about manuscript and linguistic evidence, to heated exchanges online on various Sikh discussion sites. The persistence of these discussions indicates that the Dasam Granth raises key issues for the definition of Sikhi—clearly defining and interpreting the works of the Gurus, and clearly defining the boundaries of normative theology as well as the boundaries of propriety. Also important is the fact that a relatively small number of passages from the Dasam Granth, such as the *Jap Sahib*, parts of the the *Ardas* found within the tenth Guru’s book, and *Benti Chaupai*, are a regular part of daily Sikh liturgy.

Contents of the Dasam Granth

Most of the Dasam Granth is in the Braj language, with a few sections in Punjabi and Persian. The earliest extant manuscripts do not all contain exactly the same sections in the same order, and the titles given to individual compositions within the Dasam Granth may differ as well. While the thematic content of different sections of the Dasam Granth varies widely, there is no immediately evident overarching organizational strategy for the text as a whole. Printed editions of the text, both in the original languages and in modern Punjabi or English translation, do not follow the exact same ordering and do not always include all the sections of the text. The compositions in the text are here briefly described in the order they occur in most standard printed editions.

Jap (Spoken Prayer; derived from a verb meaning 'to pray or to recite quietly')

One of the least controversial portions of the Dasam Granth, *Jap* is often considered Guru Gobind Singh's first work, though the exact date of its composition is not (p. 138) entirely clear. As its title suggests, it may be seen as parallel to Guru Nanak's *Japji*, the opening composition of the Guru Granth Sahib. The 199 verses of the *Jap* offer praise to a formless, nameless, all-pervading god. Many Sikhs know it by heart and recite it daily.

Akal Ustat *(Praise of the Timeless One)*

Akal Ustat is a series of verses praising God, using phrases such as *Akal Purakh* or the Timeless Primal Being or Lord, and *Sarbloh* or the 'Lord of all Steel'. There are verses that explain that this lord takes form in numerous gods and goddesses, and also in Hindus and Muslims. This composition refers most frequently to Hindu mythology (e.g. mentioning God as manifesting as a demon-slaying goddess), with a few passing references to the Qur'an and Muslim practices as well. Many verses criticize an overemphasis on ritual as the best way to gain knowledge of God. A number of Sikh interpreters have concluded that this section is incomplete, and some have speculated that there are parts of this text that are later interpolations or that may actually belong in other parts of the Dasam Granth.

Bachitra Natak *(The Wondrous Drama)*

This is one of the most important and most intriguing compositions within the Dasam Granth. It is in part an autobiographical narrative in which the author (who, depending on one's perspective, may or may not be Guru Gobind Singh) details his ancestry from the time of creation. The author mentions his birth in the Sodhi lineage, earlier members of which include the family of Ram and Sita, hero and heroine of the Hindu epic the Ramayana. The text also describes Guru Nanak's birth in the Bedi clan, his lineage charting back to Kush, one of Ram and Sita's twin sons. The Bedi and Sodhi clans are both part of the *Kshatriya varna* (the so-called 'warrior' or 'princely' caste). Prior to Guru Nanak's birth, the Bedis had fallen on hard times, and the members of the different *varnas* or castes did not perform their traditional occupations. *Bachitra Natak* then explains how the office of guru was passed on to the next eight gurus, noting that the ninth, Guru Tegh Bahadur (Guru Gobind Singh's father), became a martyr in defence of *dharma* (proper religious practice, righteousness in general), giving his life to protect the sacred threads and *tilaks* or forehead marks of Hindus.

Next Guru Gobind Singh explains that he was deep in meditation, absorbed in devotion to God at Mount Hemkunt, when he was ordered by God to take birth in the *kaliyug* or age of iron, which in classical Hindu mythology is the fourth and last era of each cycle of creation when *dharma* is at its weakest. God explained to him that he had created a number of religious leaders, such as Muhammad, but that rather than promoting devotion, they clung to self-interest. He explained that Guru Gobind Singh's charge would (p. 139) be to spread *dharma*. While the text does not use the term 'avatar', the story itself calls to mind texts such as the Bhagavad Gita (part of the epic Mahabharata), in which the god Krishna explains that he incarnates himself in various forms whenever *dharma* is in a state of decline. Confusion of caste responsibilities is a typical example of *dharma* gone astray.

Bachitra Natak is critical of people who take too much pride in their particular religious practices or texts. The text goes on to narrate Guru Gobind Singh's birth in Patna and the nurses who cared for him as a young child, his move to the Punjab and assumption of a leadership role, his hunting expeditions, and a number of battles and skirmishes with local kings in the Punjab. The text covers events up until the late 1690s. Towards the end of this section, the author mentions that God allowed him to recall his previous births.

Chandi Charitra Ukti Bilas/Chandi Charitra II/Var Durga Ki *(aka* Chandi di Var) *(Enjoyment of the Recitation of Chandi's Deeds/ Chandi's Deeds/The Ballad of Durga)*

Bachitra Natak is followed by three different compositions narrating roughly the same events, the exploits of the goddess Durga or Chandi. (These three sections are included in the *Bachitra Natak Granth* section of the Dasam Granth.) The first, *Chandi Charitra Ukti Bilas*, mentions that it is a retelling of the Sanskrit *Markandeya Purana*. Both it and *Chandi Charitra II* depict the goddess Durga slaying the buffalo demon Mahisha as well as a host of other demons. The third composition concerning the goddess, *Var Durga Ki*, or *Chandi di Var*, is in Punjabi, and mentions a connection to the Sanskrit *Durga Saptasati*. The opening verses of *Chandi di Var* are part of the frequently recited *ardas* prayer or petition. Each of these compositions employs finely crafted imagery to narrate the battles between the goddess and the demons, with weapons and the wounds they inflict portrayed with exacting detail. The stories highlight the goddess's role in allowing the gods to maintain the proper order of *dharma* with her ability to vanquish demons that the gods cannot overcome.

The opening line of *Chandi di Var*, 'First I remember Bhagauti, and then I turn my attention to Guru Nanak', illustrates one of the key controversies about the Dasam Granth. The term *bhagauti* is the feminine form of a word for Lord or God, i.e., Goddess [Sanskrit *bhagavati*], so that one might translate the first phrase of this line as, 'First I remember the Goddess'. But many Sikh commentators translate the word *bhagauti* not as goddess, but as 'sword', seeing it as a figurative representation of a more abstract divine power. The interpretation of the word *bhagauti* illustrates the tension over whether the Dasam Granth somehow advocates reverence for or worship of a deity most often associated with Hindu tradition, and shows one strategy Sikh interpreters have used to assert that even the seemingly 'Hindu'-influenced portions of the Dasam Granth may be viewed through a distinctively Sikh lens.

(p. 140) Gian Prabodh *(The Awakening of Knowledge)*

Gian Prabodh begins with a number of verses praising God. A later section includes a conversation between the soul and God, and there are many references to Hindu texts and mythology, particularly the epic Mahabharata. In particular, the stories from the Mahabharata focus on issues of kingship and *dharma*, and the responsibilities of members of the Brahman and Kshatriya varnas. Many Sikh commentators have concluded that this portion of the text is incomplete.

Chaubis Avatar *(The Twenty-four Avatars)*

This lengthy section describes various incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu, including Brahma, Rudra, Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, and the future avatar Kalki. The verses on Krishna and Rama comprise the longest portion of the *Chaubis Avatar*, and both it and the section on Rama include passages frequently cited by Sikh commentators in which the author states that he does not worship Hindu gods. For example, verse 434 of the Krishna section reads, 'I will not first honour Ganesha, nor do I ever meditate on Krishna or Vishnu'. Verse 863 of *Ram Avatar* proclaims, 'The Puranas speak of Ram, and the Qur'an of Rahim, but I don't believe in either of them'. Sikh commentators often cite these passages as evidence that although the Dasam Granth tells the stories of various Hindu gods, it does not advocate their worship.

Brahma Avatar *(The Avatars of Brahma) and* Rudra Avatar *(The Avatars of Rudra, i.e. Siva)*

Here, seven avatars of Brahma and two avatars of Rudra are presented, although both were previously described as avatars of Vishnu.

Shabad Hazare *(literally 'Thousand Hymns'; 'Selected Compositions')*

There are nine hymns in this section, each composed with a particular *raga* or melody, as are the verses in the Guru Granth Sahib. Some of these hymns are thematically similar to poetry about the god Vishnu and his incarnations. The sixth *shabad* is typically understood as Guru Gobind Singh's expression of his grief at losing his four sons. *Shabad Hazare* is not found in the earliest manuscripts of the Dasam Granth (Jaggi 1966: 206).

(p. 141) Savaiye

The title of this composition refers to a particular type of poem. These thirty-three verses praise a god who is beyond the imaginings of Hindu texts such as the Vedas and the Puranas, and beyond the reckoning of the Qur'an as well. The verses challenge those who worship specific avatars or incarnations and who display their religiosity publicly without true knowledge of the mystery of god.

Khalsa Mahima *(Praise of the Khalsa)*

This text is a short passage presented as Guru Gobind Singh's address to a Hindu Brahman priest explaining why alms were given to Sikhs rather than Brahmans after a sacrifice, generally taken to refer to a sacrifice to the goddess at the Naina Devi near Anandpur. It is not found in the earliest manuscripts of the Dasam Granth.

Shastra-nam-mala *(Garland of Weapons' Names)*

The 1,300 verses of this lengthy composition exalt various *shastras* or weapons, describing them as symbols of God's power, created by God so that his devotees may protect themselves. Multiple terms for a variety of types of swords, the discus, arrow, noose, and matchlock rifle are listed and praised. Particular weapons that were used by various Hindu deities in battles against demons are noted, and there are riddles about weapons and their names.

Charitropakhian *(also known as* Pakhyan Charitra, Tria Charitra) *(An Account of Behaviour/Deeds; The Behaviour of Women)*

Charitropakhian is one of the major sources of controversy regarding the Dasam Granth. With over four hundred *charitras* (deeds, behaviour; character sketches), it comprises about 40 per cent of the Dasam Granth as a whole.

The first *charitra* praises the goddess Chandi, and then the following series of *charitras* are placed within a frame story narrated in the second *charitra*. A certain king named Chitra Singh fell in love with a beautiful *apsara* or celestial nymph. The two married and had a son. But the *apsara* later returned to her heavenly abode, and the lovesick king looked far and wide for a human lookalike to replace his beloved wife. After circulating a sketch, he located such a woman and the two wed. But the new wife tried to seduce the (p. 142) king's son, explaining to him that his father didn't satisfy her. Although the son rebuffed his father's new wife's advances, when the king heard what had happened, he first thought to kill his son. However, his ministers advised him that it is difficult to understand the characters of women. The king then decided to put his son in jail, and each morning would have him released and brought to his court to hear a minister relate *charitras* or 'character sketches' illustrating the mysteries of human behaviour, particularly women's behaviour.

The subsequent *charitras* narrate traditional romance tales well known in the Punjab such as the stories of Hir and Ranjha, Sohni and Mahiwal, Krishna and his amorous exploits with the cowherd girls or *gopis*, and Yusuf and Zulaikha. Other *charitras* describe married women, many of whom are members of royal households, who devise schemes that allow their lovers to visit them without their husbands knowing, such as by having their lovers disguise themselves as yogis, sadhus, or fakirs, or by hiding them in cooking pots or rugs, and then sneaking them into the home for trysts. Some of the *charitras* have rather graphic descriptions of sexual behaviour, and characters in these stories also delight in opium, drinking liquor, and gambling.

Charitras 21–3 are sometimes said to relate an incident from Guru Gobind Singh's own life, though this is a matter of some debate. These three *charitras*, set in Anandpur, describe a rich man's wife who attempts unsuccessfully to seduce the ruler of Anandpur, generally taken to be Guru Gobind Singh. The ruler explains that he is an honourable married man, and cannot claim status as a righteous ruler or *dharmaraja* if he is unfaithful. After a complex series of events, the ruler, his honour intact, grants his would-be seductress a pension.

Another significant feature of *Charitropakhian* is the fact that the final *charitra*, number 404, after a detailed account of multiple battles between the gods and various demons (including demons who give birth to Mughals and Pathans), ends with the Sikh prayer known as *Benti Chaupai*, or 'verses of supplication'. Typically this prayer is separated from its context within *Charitropakhian*.

Charitropakhian is omitted from many printed editions of the Dasam Granth on the grounds that it is not suitable material for inclusion in a religious text. Much of the debate regarding the authorship of the Dasam Granth centres specifically on *Charitropakhian*. Quite a few of the *charitras* mention the pen names 'Ram' and 'Siam', and Sikh interpreters who argue that Guru Gobind Singh did not author *Charitropakhian* cite the use of these names as evidence that it is the work of one or more of Guru Gobind Singh's court poets. Those who believe that Guru Gobind Singh did compose it have most frequently asserted that the stories were not meant for a wide audience, but rather specifically as a means for both entertainment and moral edification for Guru Gobind Singh's troops who were away from their wives and families during battle. They also suggest that Guru Gobind Singh himself used different pen names such as Ram and Siam.

Zafarnama/Hikaitan

Zafarnama (Letter of Victory) is a Persian letter to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb which Guru Gobind Singh is said to have composed in 1706. In the letter, he chastises (p. 143) the emperor for reneging on a sworn oath to give the Guru and his family safe passage from Anandpur. Instead, they were attacked. Most commentators agree that this is an authentic composition of Guru Gobind Singh.

Zafarnama is usually grouped with *Hikaitan*, a collection of twelve stories which are of a completely different nature. The *Hikaitan* are stories similar to those in *Charitropakhian* (indeed a few are Persian versions of the same tales). Some suggest that these tales were sent along with the letter because they would be instructive for Aurangzeb; another explanation is that they were grouped together in the Dasam Granth because both are in the Persian language.

As these brief summaries suggest, the Dasam Granth contains a diverse range of compositions. A noteworthy theme that runs through much of the text, however, is that of *dharma* on multiple levels, from the maintenance of cosmic order by the gods (who frequently require the assistance of the goddess to defeat their demon foes), to the propagation of *dharma* by the Sikh Gurus, including Guru Gobind Singh, who in *Bachitra Natak* is expressly created for this purpose. Importantly, the stories of *Charitropakhian*, with their frame story of a king whose minister instructs him and his son on how to deal with women, may also be read as a cautioning treatise on the proper personal behaviour of a leader. Taken as a whole, the Dasam Granth may be read as a courtly anthology exploring the dharmic responsibilities of leaders whose rule includes both a spiritual and a worldly, political component (Rinehart 2011).

Guru Gobind Singh and the Dasam Granth

Sikh commentators have often turned to accounts of Guru Gobind Singh's life as a way to determine whether or not he authored the Dasam Granth. Such accounts as well as chronicles of the early history of the development of the Sikh Panth provide tantalizing clues to the possible origins of the Dasam Granth, though not all Sikh commentators interpret this evidence the same way. Most early sources detailing the life of Guru Gobind Singh agree that in the 1670s, when he was living in Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh's education included instruction in the languages of Braj, Persian, the Gurmukhi script, and, according to some sources, Sanskrit. This is important because most of the Dasam

Granth is in the Braj language, with other portions in Punjabi and Persian, and some compositions such as *Chandi Charitra Ukti Vilas* note their indebtedness to Sanskrit texts.

These accounts also note that Guru Gobind Singh, like his father Guru Tegh Bahadur, maintained what is typically described as a royal court at Anandpur, and as part of his retinue he sponsored court poets, the traditional number being fifty-two. The existence of these court poets is central to arguments about the Dasam Granth, because some Sikh commentators have attributed particular sections to the court poets rather than Guru Gobind Singh.

(p. 144) Guru Gobind Singh stayed in Paonta for several years, from 1685 until 1688, and some biographical sources describe this as a time of great literary composition in his life. For example, Bhai Santokh Singh's 1843 *Suraj Prakash* states that Guru Gobind Singh would spend several hours a day composing or translating (from Sanskrit), poetry on topics such as Krishna's activities as an *avatar* (B. Singh 1999: 384). There are passages in the Dasam Granth itself which make reference to the place and time they were composed; for example, the *Krishna Avatar* section states that its author composed the passage at Anandpur and that it was based on the tenth chapter of the Bhagavat Purana, a Sanskrit text which describes the life of Krishna.

Military conflict with neighbouring kings was a feature of much of Guru Gobind Singh's life. He maintained an army, recruiting soldiers from various places and backgrounds. Guru Gobind Singh by nearly all accounts was well versed in weaponry and apparently often encouraged his male followers to be armed at all times. This ongoing military activity as well as the diverse nature of his army are important for how people have understood the Dasam Granth, which includes a section devoted solely to the description and praise of weapons, as well as detailed descriptions of many battles. Some commentators have also suggested that some of the most controversial portions of the Dasam Granth, which describe men and women engaged in illicit affairs, may have been used as the basis for moral teaching to the Guru's armed forces, and were not intended for general circulation.

One of the most significant events in the Guru's life is his establishment of the Khalsa order in Anandpur in 1699, which provided the basis for subsequent rites of initiation. The rite of initiation into the Khalsa typically involves recitation of certain parts of Dasam Granth such as its opening section, the *Jap*. Exact details on the establishment of the Khalsa vary, but there are some traditions that bear directly on controversies about the Dasam Granth. For example, Kesar Singh Chhibbar's 1769 *Bansavalinama* reports that Guru Gobind Singh worshipped the goddess before establishing the Khalsa. More recently Sikh historians have generally argued that this did not happen, or have explained that rather than actually worshipping the goddess, the Guru was in fact trying

to show the futility of goddess worship and the ways in which Hindu Brahman priests exploited people through the performance of elaborate rituals. Particular thinkers' views on whether or not Guru Gobind Singh actually performed goddess worship tend to affect their analysis of whether or not Guru Gobind Singh was the author of those portions of the Dasam Granth that relate goddess mythology, or whether they should be read as encouraging worship of the goddess.

The Compilation of the Dasam Granth

Sikh history ascribes the compilation of the Dasam Granth to Bhai Mani Singh, some twenty years after Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708. Many sources state that during the turbulent times of conflict with local kings in the area surrounding Anandpur, written (p. 145) material was lost as the Guru and his followers moved or had to flee during battles. It is not clear whether the compositions that now comprise the Dasam Granth were compiled together during Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime, or whether they were meant to be part of a single text. The *Bansavalinama* reports that when Guru Gobind Singh was presented with the possibility of combining the Adi Granth (which subsequently became known as the Guru Granth Sahib) with his own compositions, he distinguished between the Adi Granth and his own work which he termed entertainment (*khed*), and declared that the two should remain separate (Jaggi 1972: 136).

Bhai Mani Singh was responsible for preparing the final version of the Guru Granth Sahib in 1706 under Guru Gobind Singh's direction, which included the addition of Guru Tegh Bahadur's compositions. He later served as the head official at the central Sikh sacred site, the Harimandar Sahib in Amritsar. There is an early Dasam Granth manuscript associated with him, as well as a letter to Guru Gobind Singh's widow Mata Sundari, but many Sikh scholars (e.g. Jaggi 1966) have questioned the authenticity of these documents. Additionally, Sikh scholars have debated the authenticity of opening passages of some sections of the Dasam Granth which state that they are the words of the tenth Guru, typically with a phrase such as *sri mukhvak patshahi das* or 'from the mouth of the revered tenth Guru'. Whatever the exact circumstances of its authorship and compilation, however, multiple manuscript versions of the Dasam Granth were in circulation by the mid- to late eighteenth century, and many Sikhs appear to have taken the text as the authentic work of Guru Gobind Singh, granting it a place of honour in gurdwaras alongside the Guru Granth Sahib.

Interpretations of the Dasam Granth

Historians of Sikhism generally agree that throughout the eighteenth century, there was a wide range of practices among Sikhs, and that in many cases, people combined aspects of Sikh practice with traditions more closely associated with Hinduism. Given that goddess worship is especially popular in Punjabi Hinduism, it was one of the Hindu practices pursued by some Sikhs in the eighteenth century. In such an environment, the goddess mythology components of the Dasam Granth perhaps were seen as less problematic than they would later come to be.

The Dasam Granth became a key focus of the reform movements that arose within Sikhism in nineteenth-century colonial India. Sikhs in different towns and cities established branches of the Singh Sabha, and Singh Sabha reformers typically sought to establish clear distinctions between Hinduism and Sikhism, urging Sikhs to give up practices associated with Hinduism. Kahn Singh Nabha (1861–1938), author of the 1898 treatise *Ham Hindu Nahin* (We Are Not Hindus), presented an account of the Dasam Granth in his 1930 encyclopedia *Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh* that illustrates the concern for defining the status of the text. According to the Dasam Granth entry in *Mahan Kosh* (Nabha 1990: 616), the Dasam Granth was sent to Damdama Sahib after Bhai Mani (p. 146) Singh's martyrdom in 1737. But Sikh leaders were unsure of how to treat this collection of compositions. Some thought it should remain as a single text, but others suggested that it be separated into two parts, one with those compositions of the tenth Guru which seemed in keeping with the sentiments of the previous Gurus, and another containing the remaining sections of the text. But when no consensus could be found, the debate was solved in a way that had virtually nothing to do with the actual content of the Dasam Granth. Matab Singh stopped at Damdama Sahib on his way to Amritsar, where he had heard that Massa Ranghar was defiling the Golden Temple with improper activities. Matab Singh had therefore resolved to kill Massa Ranghar, and he suggested to the leaders debating the Dasam Granth that if he succeeded in his mission, the Dasam Granth should be kept as it was, but that it should be divided if he were to be killed (Kahn Singh Nabha 616). Since he was indeed successful, the Dasam Granth remained as a single text.

Since the rise of the Singh Sabha movement, there have been a number of studies of the Dasam Granth arguing for particular interpretations of its history and authenticity, and many Sikh organizations have established committees to research and make pronouncements on the text, often reaching different conclusions. R. S. Jaggi's 1966 *Dasam Granth da Kartritav* effectively summarizes the major arguments both for and against Guru Gobind Singh's authorship of the text. Among those who consider Guru

Gobind Singh the author of the entire Dasam Granth, it has become quite common to argue for a distinction between Sikh ‘scripture’ and ‘Sikh literature’, designating those compositions within the Dasam Granth focused on Hindu mythology and stories about male–female relationships as most appropriately fitting in the ‘literature’ category. As recently as 2000, in the midst of renewed controversy over the authorship of the Dasam Granth, the Akal Takht issued a directive that Sikh scholars should refrain from public comment on the debate, showing that the challenging issues raised by the Dasam Granth remain both vitally important and potentially divisive for the Sikh panth.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the treatment of Bhai Gurdas's life and works in Sikh Studies up to this point, and opens new lines of inquiry into these classic texts. In particular, some of his compositions reflect the difficulties faced by the Sikh community during the reign of Guru Hargobind in the early decades of the seventeenth century. By helping early Sikhs through these tumultuous times, Bhai Gurdas articulated the ideals of Sikh life for centuries to come.

Keywords: Bhai Gurdas, var, kabitt, Guru Hargobind, Mughals, Sikhi, minas, Gur-sikhs, Braj Bhasha

Introduction

THE compositions of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla (d. 1636) offer a mine of information about the growth and development of the Sikh community during a time of decisive transition. He wrote over 1,500 stanzas of poetry of two types: long Punjabi-language poems known as *vars*, and quatrains in Braj Bhasha, frequently called *kabitts*. Today, Gurdas's compositions serve as authoritative sources on Sikh beliefs and practices. He is one of only two writers outside Sikh scripture whose compositions are approved for recitation in Sikh worship. Today's Sikh community considers his writings to be a storehouse of Sikh ideals, offering definitive ethical statements.

As a historical figure, Gurdas stands among the prominent personalities in the Sikh tradition. Sikh memory portrays him as a travelling preacher of Sikh tenets, an exemplar of Sikh ethics, a trusted adviser to the Gurus, and the scribe of an early Sikh scriptural manuscript, known today as the Kartarpur Pothi. Within seven decades of its founder's death (Guru Nanak, d. 1539), the Sikh community witnessed the fifth Guru's execution (Guru Arjan, d. 1606), and its increased politicization under the sixth Guru (Guru

Hargobind, d. 1644). Several Sikh narratives depict Gurdas as the most important adviser to these two Gurus.

If Gurdas is the tradition's most important exponent, he is also its least understood. One major scholar of the tradition calls him 'genuinely perplexed' by the sixth Guru's actions (McLeod 1997: 35)—though Gurdas was one of the Guru's most trusted Sikhs, and perhaps even his mouthpiece. Another scholar utilizes Gurdas's poetry for what he purports is its silence on the topic of martyrdom (Fenech 2005: 9, 121)—though a close reading of Gurdas's compositions reveals an obsession with the merit that religious persecution reveals in the hereafter. Gurdas's compositions deserve to be treated with greater scrutiny, and conflicting interpretations of his life and personality must be explicated. This essay penetrates the reasons for misunderstanding his project and biography in order to create intellectual space for a new approach to his (p. 148) life and work. Via the critical examination of his writings, we can witness the process by which a religious community crystallizes its perception of other communities in context. This advances the historiography of the Sikh tradition, our understanding of the tradition's self-conception, and our knowledge of its doctrinal, textual, and ritual bedrock.

Bhai Gurdas in Sikh memory

Gurdas's role in Sikh narrative memory goes back to the seventeenth century. The earliest references to him simply relate his role as a scribe. Over time, Sikh texts engaged in a kind of creative myth-making to explain certain aspects of his legacy. This explanatory process caused much misconception about his compositions when scholars in the twentieth century incorporated stories about him from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature without much question as to the latter's consistency or veracity.

When Sikh texts of the late 1700s added amanuensis of Sikh scripture to Gurdas's litany of roles, they also depicted him as a holy man with supernatural religious powers. For example, in an episode from the late eighteenth-century *Mahima Prakash*, Gurdas's prayers help travelling Sikhs to ford a river on the way to Amritsar. Elsewhere, a text depicts that long-deceased poet-saints appear to him, requesting him to include their compositions in the scriptural text he is compiling. A century and a half after Bhai Gurdas's death, Kesar Singh Chibbar's *Bansavalinama* provides an explanation for why the historical record does not register the existence of Gurdas's offspring: he was the victim of a curse, and was to be without issue after calling the Guru's brother and his followers *mina*s (scoundrels) in his writings.

Also in the eighteenth century, Gurdas's poetry itself became the subject of extensive commentary as a normative source for Sikh life. One of these texts, *Sikhan di Bhagatmala*, a commentary on Var 11, adds to the understanding of the importance of his compositions by advancing the notion that the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan, himself declared those compositions to be the authoritative commentary on Sikh scripture. This story, and the understanding of Gurdas's compositions it carries, provides the foundation of the twentieth-century designation of his corpus as the 'key' to unlocking the message of Sikh scripture.

From the early nineteenth century onwards his importance in Sikh tradition continued to grow when Sikh intellectuals directed European observers to Gurdas's *vars* to understand Sikh beliefs and history. In 1812 John Malcolm cited many of Gurdas's poems. Later in the nineteenth century, J. D. Cunningham quoted Gurdas's poetry as part of his treatment of the lives of the fifth and sixth Gurus. The *kabitts* remained highly influential in learned Sikh circles until the mid-nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, these texts were relatively obscure compared to the Punjabi *vars*, which became much more popular.

(p. 149) Gurdas became the subject of independent biographical studies in the early 1900s, when possible dates for his birth were presented for the first time. Between 1910 and 1930, full commentaries on his compositions, as well as a complete index of words in those compositions, began to emerge. As the introductions to these commentaries indicate, he was a well-known historical figure in the early twentieth century. In general, by that time, his Punjabi *vars* had been treated much more extensively than the Braj Bhasha quatrains.

Critical treatments of Gurdas's life and works first appeared in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Also beginning at that time, his corpus was used as a historical source for the reconstruction of early Sikh life. His compositions became particularly important sources for Sikhs' quest to define their tradition in the light of modernity and a new, colonial-period religious awareness. In his defence of the distinct nature of the Sikh tradition, *Ham Hindu Nahin* (*We Are Not Hindus*), Kahn Singh Nabha draws from Bhai Gurdas's *vars* and *kabitts* for support over forty times. This book was first published in 1898, and reprinted multiple times in the early twentieth century. Bhai Jodh Singh's 1911 work, *Sikhi Ki Hai* (*What is Sikhism?*), is a series of exegetical discourses based almost solely on selections from Gurdas's *vars*. Sampuran Singh says he wrote his commentary of Gurdas's *kabitts* during a period of polemical attacks on the Sikh religion (2003 [1927]). He wishes that preachers like Bhai Gurdas would reveal themselves in his day and that his contemporary co-religionists could look at his life to change their ways, and to be the kind of Sikhs who would attract new converts to the Sikh path.

Sikh modernists' renewed interest in Gurdas's compositions resulted in a great discovery that increased the size of Gurdas's extant corpus. Bhai Vir Singh, who had published his grandfather's commentary on the *vars* earlier in the century, found over a hundred more, previously unknown, Braj Bhasha quatrains in disparate manuscripts. In 1940, he published these quatrains in a separate edition, with commentary, and they have since enjoyed widespread acceptance as his own compositions. This publication included 119 poems that were not previously extant, a handful of which closely resemble some of the previously known works. Critical editions of his compositions today have incorporated these poems, bringing the generally accepted total number of Braj Bhasha stanzas to 675.

Based on the eighteenth-century explanations of Gurdas's absence from the Guru Granth Sahib mentioned earlier, twentieth-century commentators gave his compositions an important new title, *kunji*, or key, to the Guru Granth Sahib, further increasing Gurdas's importance within the Sikh literary canon. Bishan Singh's 1911 commentary on the *kabitts* likely provides the first use of this title. In explaining the *kunji* title, Bishan Singh cites this pre-modern tradition: Bhai Gurdas humbly declines Guru Arjan's request to put his writings in the scriptural text, and Guru Arjan blesses his compositions, saying that they will forever bring Sikhs to the fold, for they will be the *kunji* to the scriptures. Assumptions behind the *kunji* title contributed to the general misconception that much of Gurdas's compositions belong to the historical period before Guru Arjan's death in 1606. This prevalent but late-coming title has led to an unfortunate misunderstanding about his period of composition.

(p. 150) Sikhs engaged in the modernization of their religion by utilizing Gurdas's *vars* to support their calling for the religion's exclusivity and its unique identity—a project in which he himself seems to have been engaged during his lifetime. Early in the 1900s, his compositions were a part of the university training of Sikh theologians and preachers. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, the *vars*—and to a far lesser extent, the *kabitts*—became the subject of critical study. Viewed not just as religious texts, but also as landmarks in literature, the *vars* began to enjoy a special place in scholars' configuration of Punjabi literary history. These mid-twentieth-century monographs established a precedent for the studies on his life and compositions, both in terms of their structure and approach. Study of his life and works became ossified by these approaches.

New light on Bhai Gurdas's Impact

It is time to break new ground in researching Gurdas's contributions. It is also important to use new lenses to approach his compositions. We ought to first inquire about the

precise dating of his life and compositions. If narratives about the time period of his writing did not emerge until hundreds of years after his death, can we continue to assume that these narratives are correct? Traditional narratives have apologized for the omission of his compositions from the Guru Granth Sahib, but perhaps a more feasible explanation is that his compositions were not written until after the compilation of the landmark Sikh manuscript, the Kartarpur Pothi in 1604. We have no evidence to challenge his depiction as the scribe for this major work. But neither is there hard evidence that his writings pre-date the manuscript. For if they existed why were they not included? Furthermore, if his writings were not included in the one manuscript for which he was the scribe, why did they not make it into other manuscripts of the time? Though the prevalent view has been that his extant writings were available in the 1500s, internal and external evidence situates his writing between 1604 and 1630. This was a time of political upheaval and sectarian schism: an unprecedented period in Sikh history when the Sikh Guru himself did not write. From research on these primary sources, it may be argued that he did not commence writing the *vars*, the first of his extant compositions, until after the 1606 execution of Guru Arjan. What is today Var 4 is in the first position of early manuscripts (MSS 40 at Javaddi Taksal Library, Ludhiana) of his compositions, and the content of this *var* reflects pressing concerns for overcoming obstacles, deep suffering, and lying low in the face of wrongdoing. These concerns would have been salient during the period after Guru Arjan's assassination, not before it. If this *var* is indeed *about* the events of 1606, then this would buttress Pashaura Singh's argument about the importance of Guru Arjan's martyrdom in early Sikh consciousness (Pashaura Singh 2006).

(p. 151) We must also pay closer attention to Gurdas's high opinion of the Sikh community in the context of the divine plan for world history. Bhai Gurdas inspired his co-religionists to spread the Sikh message so that they could conquer the world (*jag pairi paia*, Var 11:3). Elsewhere he compares bringing new Sikhs into the fold to victory in the game of life:

> Hearing about Sikhi from the Guru, he calls himself 'Gur-Sikh'
> Learning Gur-Sikhi from the Guru, the Sikh tells other Sikhs
> Hearing the Gur-Sikh seeds love in the heart
> The Gur-Sikhs love the ways of Guru and Sikh
> Meeting other Gur-Sikhs, Gur-Sikhs celebrate union
> From four sides, they win all sixteen squares of the game!
>
> (Var 20:18)

Scholars have hardly noticed that Gurdas makes a sustained argument in his *vars* about the community's immanent ascendance and success, which are guaranteed by the

adversity the community has experienced in Guru Arjan's death and the difficulties Guru Hargobind inherited.

With proper dating of the texts in mind, we can see more clearly that Gurdas responded to the need to defend some aspects of Guru Hargobind's leadership (r. 1606–44). He concedes that Guru Hargobind is different from the first five Gurus, but adds that his loyal Sikhs do not see it that way, and continue to hover around his lotus feet like bees:

> He should set camp and sit around, but he won't sit in one place
> Emperors should come to visit him, but the emperor quarters him in a fort
> The community cannot find him home, he runs around fearlessly
> He should sit on a cot contentedly but he keeps dogs to go hunting
> He should write, hear and sing the word, but he does not speak, hear, nor perform
> He should not keep servants near, but sinners are the company he keeps
> Truth cannot hide! Thus engrossed bee-like Sikhs hover around his lotus feet
> He bears the burden and makes it not known!
>
> (Var 26:24)

In the next stanza, Gurdas says that the Guru has built a protective fence around the community, thus explaining his overt political and military stances (Var 26:25). He says that the Emperor-Guru (Hargobind) who was once himself a Sikh of the Guru (Arjan) accepted his Guru's teachings. Guru Hargobind teaches all the holy Sikhs himself; imparting knowledge to members of all four castes while enacting the principle of detachment amidst desire (*maia vich udas*). Up until now scholars who have studied Gurdas have been influenced in their interpretation of these verses by the creative, but inaccurate, interpretations from eighteenth-century Sikh narratives. His own compositions reveal that he is actually highly supportive of Guru Hargobind and sees him as the sixth Nanak who is undergoing untellable hardships.

(p. 152) Expressing Sikhi

An examination of Gurdas's works and his clarification of core concepts of Guru, congregational life, and scriptural word, reveal that he was more than an exegete of Sikh scripture. He was a charged and activated writer with a radical vision of Sikh history in the face of persecution and martyrdom who sang of a triumphant Sikh future. When we take these historical elements into context, his writings are not simply commentaries on Sikh scripture that say all the usual things that good Sikhs should believe, but represent vast new possibilities for understanding Sikh ethics and the community's historical trajectory.

These writings continue to ‘express Sikhi’ and are as relevant as they have ever been. Sikhs today inhabit a world where Gurdas’s vision that Sikhs will be in every land is indeed an ever-present reality. For example, a metaphor for the spread of the community is that of trader and banker: the Guru is the true banker, in whom all can trust; he spreads his wares in all the lands though other merchants sell false goods:

> See the love between master and pupil through the banker and merchant
> The deal starts at one shop, but spreads the world over
> Some exchange mere trinkets, some deal in cash
> Some sell for rupees, some accept only coins of gold
> Some merchants deal in jewels to earn great fame
> Deal on with a reputed banker, and redeem your trust.

(Var 13:20)

The role of his writings in engaging new Sikh experiences must be central if Sikhs are going to be authentic to their tradition. Since he lived through and commented on the first Sikh diaspora (when Sikh traders made their homes in disparate South Asian towns), as well as a huge upheaval in Sikh tradition at the beginning of the seventeenth century, his writings are salient to today’s questions of Sikh sovereignty, spirituality, and expression in the world. Gurdas’s writings not only tell us how the Sikh tradition survived existential challenges, but also themselves constitute one of the mechanisms that brought about its success. Gurdas, himself a major Sikh leader and scribe for a watershed Sikh manuscript, outlines the basic beliefs of the tradition, underscores its key practices, and speaks of Sikh confidence in the face of turbulent times in 1,500 stanzas of his own poetry.

For Bhai Gurdas, *bani* (the word of the Gurus) is a core aspect of the Sikh educational heritage, the source of Sikh beliefs and ethics, and each Sikh is responsible for reading, understanding, and teaching it. In the *kabitts* he says that the *bani* itself contains the seed that results in the community’s full bloom. The community continues the divine revelation: the Guru is the manifestation of an invisible seed (*nirankar ekankar*), and the Sikhs are the fruits from that tree (Kabitt 55). He asks Sikhs to build their lives around the *bani*, but wants Sikhs to be driven more by the spirit of the Guru’s words than by the letters (p. 153) of his laws, a fitting perspective amidst the context of communal growth. That is to say, more important than rule-following is the intention and attitude that one brings to one’s actions. The idea that someone would participate in the Sikh way of life out of some kind of compulsion is ludicrous to Gurdas. He scorns the notion that religiosity can be mandated. The true Sikh is the one who acts out of the force of his own love for the Guru (Var 17:14). The *manmukh* (‘self-centred’ heathen) comes to the

congregation, hears the word, but does not put it in his heart, and thereby his attendance gains him no merit (Var 17:6).

For Gurdas, the fledgling Sikh community is an expanding banyan tree:

> The Guru's form is revealed to the Sikh who contemplates his word
> From one fruit, a thousand Sikhs and congregations spread
> Seeing, hearing, believing—the Guru's own are rare in this world
> They merge with feet dust and the whole world seeks their feet
> The Gurmukh Marag [path of the pious] is established, trading in truth they transcend
> Their wares are beyond appraisal, indescribable
> The Guru's word is beloved in the saints' society (Var 29:20)

> Entering earth in the form of a seed, a tree germinates
> A shining sapling spreads its roots and branches
> The tree expands into being and extends its locks [*jattan*, roots] deep
> The locks branch off into the earth's unfathomable depths
> Its shade is deep; its leaves beauteous, its fruits are in the millions
> In each fruit: another seed; such is the enigma of Gur-Sikhs!

(Var 13:18)

In this sense, the ethic of benevolence, and the belief that the Sikh community is a growing tree, inspires practices to grow the community and survive difficult times. The community is a shade-providing banyan, a variety of tree famous for its complex structure of roots and branches, and for the ability to provide deep shade. God himself planted the Sikh 'tree' in history, and it goes on providing shade to the world from seed to root to branch to root.

Bhai Gurdas articulates the need for Sikhs to take care of each other, and posits newcomers as objects of worship. The self-sufficient community is also a continuation of the divine revelation, and a congregation of five Sikhs embodies the divine presence, anticipating the concept of the *panj piare* ('five beloved ones') in the eighteenth century:

> One is a Sikh; Two: a congregation; Five: God himself!
> After 'nine,' add almighty zeros until infinity!
> From twenty to twenty-one, the liberated ones account for the Uncountable
> From town to town there are thousands of Sikhs, millions in each country!
> From each tree: a million fruits, in each fruit countless seeds!
> Enjoying: they are kings; renouncing: ascetics

(Var 13:19)

Gaining converts and expanding the community is one of Gurdas's loftiest goals, to which he dedicates much of his writings. His audience is not the political elite of the (p. 154) time; it is the core and fringes of the Sikh community. He attempts to solidify the core's adherence to the Sikh centre and to Guru Hargobind, as well as the adherence of those on the fringes. Perhaps this is one reason why Gurdas writes in several languages: to create literatures by which Sikhs can expand their base, reach out to larger constituencies, and establish a strong, monotheistic community across northern India.

Gurdas refers to other religious traditions as well. His writings set Sikhs in contrast to the Vaishnava, Shakta, and Shaiva traditions via their strict, anti-iconic monotheism. He berates those who pay allegiance to the Siddhs, or adepts of yoga traditions:

> If you serve not the Great Adept, you will find yourself amidst 'masters' and their disciples
> They'll pierce ears, smear ashes, and bare a staff and bowl
> Roaming from house to house for morsels, sounding horns
> Handing out cups of intoxicants, the Siddhs enjoy Shiva's festivals
> Having initiated twelve ways they now wander on them
> Without the Guru's word they are not redeemed—acrobats doing flips
> The blind push the blind into a well

(Var 15:5)

Bhai Gurdas writes that neither the Hindu paths nor the Muslim religion effectively preach the way of the Lord for they are caught up in egoism:

> Muslims and Hindus set up two ways
> They belong to various law schools or castes, revere gurus or *pirs*
> The pupils are hypocrites, holding fast to teachings
> They know 'Ram' and 'Rahim' but I-me
> [*haumai*] afflicts them
> They go to worship in Mecca, Ganga, and Benares
> This fast and that one, prayer and prostration
> But they can't touch a hair on the pious, who are selfless

(Var 38:9)

He speaks of various Indian religious practices pejoratively, dismissing them as *tantar-mantar*. Coveting and greed are forbidden for Sikhs as beef is for Hindus and pork for Muslims. In his later *vars*, and also in the *kabitts*, he asserts an ethic of gentle tolerance of other religious traditions. He points to a golden rule of religious tolerance: reminding his co-religionists that all people hold their son, trade, and deity-of-choice (*isht*) in high regard (Kabitt 552). He implores Sikh followers to discuss issues of knowledge (*gian*)

with all people, focus on the positive aspects of people, and ignore the negatives (Kabitt 399). All people contain divinity (*Ek Oankar*) in them just as all trees, though vastly different, are full of the same fire (Kabitt 49).

But Gurdas is also clear about his opinion of his group's dominance: since the Sikh tradition's inception, other religions no longer boast power and authority. The religious practices of others are like stars in the dark night, and the Guru is the sun making the stars vanish, a roaring lion making the deer take cover, and a royal hawk challenging (p. 155) little birds of duality and polytheism (Var 5:12). The practices of other religions are rooted in egoism (Var 38:7), but the experience of worshipping with the Gurmukhs (pious Sikhs) is the antidote to this poison (Var 38:16). Sikh devotions, recitation of the divine name, and celebrations supplant the sacrificial rituals of the Hindus (Var 1:16; see also Kabitt 255). The gods of the polytheists are functionaries of the infinite divine being and of the Sikh congregation worshipping through *kirtan* (Kabitt 302). He lists many of the important Hindu practices of the time and says it is only through participation in the holy congregation that one can find the Transcendent Lord (Kabitt 304). The real boons promised by the books, gods, and penances of other religions can be bestowed to the Sikhs, for whom the divine manifests as Guru (Kabitt 543).

Perhaps not unlike the writings of religious virtuosos from other traditions like Nagarjuna, Augustine, or al-Ghazali, Gurdas's compositions are an example of the process by which a tradition builds on the bedrock of foundational ideas, ethics, and rituals in order to sharpen its self-perception and position itself amidst competing traditions. In his compositions, Guru, community, and divine word provide the fundamental institutions for the Sikh community. Guru Nanak minted a new coin, the *Gurmukh Panth* (community of the pious), and his mission was believed divinely sanctioned. All of his successors, through Guru Hargobind, continued the founder's mission, completing what they believed to be the process of divine revelation on earth. Guru Hargobind is an emperor, not only of this world, but also of the spiritual world hereafter.

Gurdas's articulation of early Sikh identity ranks among the highest of his contributions to Sikh tradition. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the clearest exponent of Sikh philosophy and practice wrote during one of the most tumultuous periods in Sikh history. The early 1600s were a crucible that forged the Sikh community into a more finished state. His poetry articulates a level of Sikh self-understanding that had never before been achieved.

No other interpreter of Sikh tradition has had an impact comparable to that of Bhai Gurdas. He clarifies for Sikhs their obligations to the larger community and how they should treat their bodies, their families, and other Sikhs, as well as how they should

regard themselves in relation to the state. His writings attempt to arouse a consciousness of the Sikh community, its widespread nature, and its impending ascendancy. With an unprecedented clarity, he exhorts Sikhs to adhere to normative beliefs and practices. He reminds them of the nearness of the divine in their every action, and their ethical obligations to their religion. He articulates how newcomers should be welcomed into the community and clarifies the meaning of Sikh initiation rituals. He places the burgeoning Sikh community at the crest of Indian religious history, riding an ascending wave of tradition, transcending religious differences through its message, and achieving a pan-Indian presence that is part of the community's mission from God. Sikh modernist activists of the early twentieth century saw this clarity in Gurdas's writings and employed these clarified Sikh principles to scaffold their expressions of modern, normative Sikh life.

Gurdas's writings represent an attempt by an important Sikh to help the community steady its course while enduring tragedies. He writes of finding inspiration amidst troubles. He compares Guru Hargobind's increased politicization of the community to (p. 156) building a protective fence of thorny bushes around an exposed field. Gurdas promises that the entire Sikh community will be liberated in the hereafter and accepted into the divine court. By bolstering the Sikh Guru as the true king and berating the 'false rulers' of the world, Gurdas underscores Sikh sovereignty and the notion that the community does not recognize any other authority. Problems with Mughal authority required legitimation within the Sikh fold. He reminds Sikhs what their religious persecutions meant, and why the stakes were cosmically high. Sikhs were to continue their founder's divine mission in spite of the challenges they faced.

Underscoring the burgeoning community's beliefs would have been important in the face of rival religious and sectarian splinter groups. By controlling the interpretation of Sikh scripture, practices, and history, Gurdas helped Sikhs delimit their boundaries. In his polemics against Vaishnava groups, he berates Sikhs, whose ancestors had converted to the tradition, but who began to worship outside the Sikh fold and reverted to the pre-Sikh practices of their peers. Although the leaders of Sikh splinter groups and their followers (who he calls *mina*s, or scoundrels) are the subjects of Gurdas's most virulent polemics, the author advises that the mainstream community's strategy towards those groups should be to let them believe as they do and to act graciously towards them. Comparison between Gurdas's compositions and the writings of his counterpart in a rival group, Miharban Sodhi (d. 1640), would teach us much about how rival groups within the Sikh fold sought to position themselves in relation to one another. Perhaps future academic studies on Gurdas will also position his writings in the context of early Sikh success and seventeenth-century turbulence.

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The Works of Bhai Nand Lal Goya

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the Persian poetry of the premier poet of Guru Gobind Singh's literary court (*darbar*), Nand Lal 'Goya' (the Speaker) in the light of Sikhism's Islamicate context. In the process of discussing this poetry the article underscores the Sikh tradition's Islamicate inheritance.

Keywords: Goya, Persian, Nand Lal, darbar, Sufi, Islamicate, Rahit, rahit-nama

> *shaʿir-i goyā bish az shīr o shakr; mivah dar hindustān bāshad laẓīẓ*
>
> The poetry of Goya is better than milk and sugar: it is the sweetest fruit in Hindustan!
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 35:7

Of the many dimensions of the many Sikh religious traditions there is perhaps one which garners the least attention, although it is clearly important. This is the Sikh tradition's Islamicate inheritance. Reasons for this general neglect have to do with the focus in eighteenth-century Khalsa Sikh literature upon the persecution suffered by contemporary Sikhs at the hands of those who were generally identified as Muslim. This disregard conflates things and ideas Islamic, elements pertaining to the religion that is Islam and the people recognized as Muslim, with objects and concepts Islamicate, a cultural-linguistic reference to the vast region encompassing Turkey, Western and Central Asia, and India whose common language of administration was Persian. Both Islam and the Islamicate are obviously interrelated but the two categories nevertheless differ. In the many Sikh traditions regarding Bhai Nand Lal 'Goya'—the famous Sikh disciple of the tenth Sikh Master, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708 CE)—and the Persian poetry attributed to him, these two elements come together and overlap with Indic themes.

We begin this essay therefore with a Persian distich or *bait* within Bhai Nand Lal Goya's *Dīvān* which is very characteristic of Sufi (the mystical dimension of Islam) rather than Sikh poetry: a cleverly wrought rhetorical admission of the high quality of one's poetic utterances often appearing, with the poet's sobriquet (*takhalluṣ*), as the ultimate or penultimate distich of the ghazal. Although such a style of utterance runs counter to the profound emphasis on humility before Akal Purakh (Timeless Being) and the community of believers which one regularly comes across in Sikh scripture, particularly within the principal (p. 160) Sikh canon, the Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib (GGS), it should not suggest that our poet lacks modesty. By Nand Lal's time self-praise of this sort had become such a common feature of Persian ghazal poetry that it was understood more or less mechanically as a demonstration of the poet's rhetorical expertise, not a reflection of the poet's pride or arrogance; this is particularly so as one does find many *baits* in which Nand Lal exercises an endearing self-effacement analogous to that of those Gurus and *bhagats* whose hymns are featured in the Guru Granth Sahib (*Dīvān-i Goyā* 30:7). In Nand Lal's specific case, moreover, there is also a Sikh mode of operation behind this Sufi mechanism. Note the following distich:

> *ẓikr-i yād-i ḥaqq kah ū bāshad laẓīẓ; az hamah mivah kah ū bāshad laẓīẓ*
>
> How sweet is the praise and remembrance of God (*ḥaqq*)! It is sweeter than all the fruit [in the world]!
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 35:5

Taken together these two *baits* underscore the textured nature of Nand Lal's poetry as the sweet fruit of remembrance which once bitten leads to even sweeter delights, union with the divine, the ultimate state of equipoise known as *fanā*' (annihilation) in the Sufi experience and *sahaj* (balance; also *vismād*, 'wonder') in the Sikh: Nand Lal's poetry is sweet solely because it leads to the ultimate sweetness. Not only is such an understanding commensurate with the Sikh notions of *bāṇī*, 'sacred utterance', and *simraṇ/japaṇ*, 'remembrance/repetition', but it is also a message which would have well suited a patron like Guru Gobind Singh whom Sikh tradition recalls both for his generosity towards poets and for the focus on such enlightened, liberating themes within the Braj Bhasha, Punjabi, and Persian poetry attributed to his hand. It would also have resonated perfectly with the values of the tenth Master's poetic court (Fenech 2008):

> *ḥarf ghair az ḥaqq nayāyad hīch gāh; bar lab-i goyā kah ḥaqq bakhshandah ast*
>
> Apart from 'Truth/God' no other word will ever come from the lips of Goya because he is 'Truth-offering/God-giving.'

Dīvān-i Goyā 9:5

In this way Nand Lal follows a precedent we see in the Adi Granth: the transformation of poetry from simple ‘utterance’ to ‘the utterance from the beyond’ (GGS: 628).

Much of this also accords with Sufi ideas of salvation and practices which emphasize, too, both the remembrance and repetition of the name of God (*ẓikr*; *dhikr*) and the significance of the word. Such similarities correspond to the affinities between Sufi and Sikh ideas noted below. Yet since Nand Lal’s poetry is not composed in the lingua franca of the Punjab but rather in Persian, and since the Persian ghazal and *maśnavī* with their conventional allusions to the Qurʾan, Hadith, general Islamic lore, and the poetry of other poets are so intimately associated with Islam and the Sufi mystical tradition, one may wonder if the Persian poetry attributed to Nand Lal in which we find all of these established allusions is specifically Sikh in nature.

This is not too difficult a question to answer as the majority of Nand Lal’s Persian works most certainly communicate Sikh themes and ideas. One could argue against this (p. 161) judgement when reading through his two most popular works, both of which are written in a much more generous, inclusively Sufi style. But even these gracious texts creatively and subtly communicate a predominantly Sikh meaning.

There are two distinct types of text attached to Nand Lal’s name. On the one hand, we have Persian texts such as the *Dīvān-i Goyā*. Nand Lal’s *Dīvān* is made up of sixty-one ghazals, nineteen *rubāʿīyāt* (quatrains), and six *abyāt* (couplets). The ghazal itself is a short rhyming ode (AA BA CA…) which is composed of approximately five to fifteen individual *baits* each of which is self-contained and follows a strict rhyme scheme while maintaining a precise end rhyme. In some instances these ghazals draw upon and ‘answer’ (*javāb*) the works of Iran’s greatest poets. In just such an ‘answer’ to Hafez, for example, Nand Lal makes his Sikh leaning abundantly clear (Fenech 1994).

These Persian texts would also include the *Zindagī-nāmah* (Book of Life), a *maśnavī*—a heroic or didactic poem of rhyming couplets—made up of 510 distichs; the *ʿArżulalfāẓ* (Exposition of Terms), also a *maśnavī*, which combines Persian, Arabic, and Indic terms in praise of the divine; and the *Tausīf o Sanā*ʾ (Description and Praise) which is predominantly in prose and likewise celebrates the divine. There is finally the *Dastūrulinshā* (Rule of Epistles) which is in prose, but as a guide to writing proper letters and other epistles it does nothing to elucidate Sikh doctrine.

The Sikh content of these works is evident in clever and artistic ways rather than uncomplicated ones, although there are exceptions to this general rule of thumb, particularly within the two lengthiest of Nand Lal’s works the *Tausīf o Sanā*ʿ, especially

its concluding portion, and the ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ*, the latter of which resounds with *baits* which evoke the works of the Gurus, such as ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ* 128,

> *Az shabadash yakī ḥarf shod āshkār; kah har har harīrā begū bārbār*
>
> On account of his (Guru Nanak's) [mystical] *shabad* a single word becomes apparent which is Hari. Repeat [the word] Hari, Hari again and again,
>
> ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ* 128

and ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ* 95 which echoes Guru Nanak's *Japjī* (Adi Granth: 1),

> *Chah dard dawā jomlah az ḥukm-i ū; chah shāh o gadā jomlah az ḥukm-i ū*
>
> Pains and their remedies all flow from His Hukam; kings and beggars all result from His Command.
>
> ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ* 95

In one instance furthermore the ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ* references Guru Nanak by name (ʿ*Arżulalfāẓ* 127). Other Persian Nand Lal works which are more straightforwardly Sikh are the *Joti Bigās* or The Light Effulgent; the *Ganj-nāmah* (Treasury Book) which is divided into ten parts, each of which deals with one of the Sikh Gurus in the order of their gurushipss (each part furthermore is broken into two sections)—the *Ganj-nāmah* is the only Persian text which begins with an epigraph from the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS: 710)—and the concluding portion of the *Tausīf o Sanā*ʾ, the *Khatimah* or 'epilogue' which is, unlike the *Tausīf o Sanā*ʾ proper, in poetry (twenty-one *baits* in total) and glorifies the (p. 162) Sikh Panth and the Khalsa, drawing upon predominantly Indic elements such as the Hindu gods, the Puranas, Shastras, and the Veda:

> *ʿashr az bahar-i pāsbanī-ye shān; rubāʿ sargaram vaṣaf khwānī-ye shān*
>
> The ten [avatars of Vishnu] exist in order to watch guard over [the *sangat*]; the four [Vedas] are lovingly engaged (*sargaram*) in singing their virtues.
>
> *Tausīf o Sanā': Khātimah* 8

All three of these are easily understood as Sikh works as they venerate the Sikh Gurus and their courts—a fact which likens them to the *Bhaṭṭān de Savvaīe* or Praises of the Bards of the Adi Granth—or speak lovingly of the Panth and the Khalsa (*Khātimah*). Based in part upon manuscript frequency, one can say with some certainty that the two most popular of these Persian texts are the *Dīvān-i Goyā* and the *Zindagī-nāmah* which often appear together in a single manuscript. These are the only texts in which Nand Lal uses

the sobriquet Goya or ‘The Speaker’; the other Persian texts are signed exclusively with the *takhalluṣ* La‘l, that is ‘gem’ or ‘ruby’ (*Ganj-nāmah* 10:2:52).

And on the other hand, we also possess Punjabi and Braj Bhasha texts attributed to Nand Lal which are in a language and a style that are at best pedestrian. These are predominantly *rahit-nāmās* (‘manuals of code of conduct’) and would include the *Tanakhāh-nāmā* (‘Manual of Penances’), one of the earliest recensions of which is known as the *Nasīhat-nāmā* or Instruction Manual (a 1718–19 CE duplicate of an even earlier copy), the *Sākhī rahit kī* usually appended to the text of the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama*, and the *Praśan-uttar* (‘Question and Answer’). The one exception to the rahit-nama style is the above-mentioned and relatively brief Punjabi *Joti Bigās*, a *pra-śastī* text which is composed of numerous terms describing the divine and includes a short lineage of the Sikh Gurus akin to that one finds in *Bachitar Nāṭak* 5 (*Joti Bigās* 27–30). These are the generally agreed-upon Punjabi works of Nand Lal.

The true picture is however rather more generous with numerous unpublished manuscripts attributed to our poet or in which he plays a predominant role. The regular appearance of Nand Lal throughout the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sikh record strongly suggests his importance to the Sikh tradition. And since variations within the Persian corpus of Nand Lal are negligible one may assume that the Persian works had already been ascribed a sacred status early in the eighteenth century, forming the basis for today’s understanding of his poetry. The contemporary *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* which outlines the Khalsa code of conduct accords Nand Lal’s works the very rare status of *bāṇī* (‘sacred utterance’).

We should note that for the majority of scholars the two very different varieties of text (Punjabi and Persian) are regularly understood as the product of the same poet. This seems quite unlikely as one can easily problematize the authorship of the Punjabi works. Firstly there is a harsh attitude towards ‘Turks’ (likely Muslims) generally in these which is diametrically opposed to the one discovered in the *Dīvān* and *Zindagī-nāmah*. The last two works are far more commensurate with the generally benign attitudes towards (p. 163) Muslims we discover in the Guru Granth Sahib and certain texts within the Dasam Granth rather than the hostility confronted within eighteenth-century Sikh literature. Compare the *Tankhāh-nāmā*

> *Mohur turk kī sir dhare loh lagāvahin charan kahai gobind siṅgh lāl jī phir phir hui tis maran*
>
> O Nand Lal ji, Gobind says that anyone who places the symbol (*mohar*) of the Turks on his head (that is, submits to a Turk or calls a Turk master) or touches his foot to iron will forever transmigrate, dying again and again,

(Padam 1991: 57)

with the *Zindagī-nāmah*,

rūz-i jamaʻah mominān pāk bāz; gard mīyā'īnad az bahar namāz

Faithful Muslims (*mominān*) of good countenance gather together on Fridays for the sake of reciting prayers (*namāz*).

Zindagī-nāmah 19

This last *bait* easily conveys the congenial bearing which also informs Nand Lal's *ʻArżulalfāẓ*, the general spirit of which reminds us that the God of the Hindus, of the Muslims, and, by extension, of the Sikhs is one.

yakī firqah hindū muslmān digar; khodā-bīn kah shod hardorā chārahgār

One group is Hindu the other is Muslim. When they became God-discerning both became seekers of the remedy [to their split].

ʻArżulalfāẓ 795

Although attitudes towards others may certainly change over time, such a dramatic transformation strikes one as disingenuous in regard to as sensitive a poet as Nand Lal. This sympathetic attitude in his Persian works coupled with the gentle bearing he displays towards Muslims in Sikh traditions of the eighteenth century thus makes his connection to the Nand Lal rahit-namas difficult to sustain.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, poetry was an important tool in Indo-Islamic India, a way of wielding and demonstrating cultural and symbolic capital which enhanced, sustained, or degraded an individual poet's reputation as well as that of the *darbar* in which he wrote. It seems quite clear that Nand Lal was a member of a court of poets and poetic aficionados, enthusiasts and connoisseurs of both Braj Bhasha and Persian poetry who most likely 'competed' amongst one another affably often within the *majlis* or *kavikul* setting, and if the Braj Bhasha texts attributed to him were composed by Nand Lal these texts would have gone some way to sully a reputation that had taken our poet a lifetime to build, a reputation which may have initially suggested Nand Lal to Guru Gobind Singh. With the long years of courtly clerical work and poetry writing under his belt to which Sikh tradition makes us privy, it seems unlikely that as experienced a poet as Nand Lal would have penned such utterly mediocre texts.

(p. 164) In this light, therefore, the idea first articulated by Hew McLeod that the Punjabi works of our poet are only associated with Nand Lal as a way of enhancing the authority

of these specific texts and have little to do with the Persian poet we know as Nand Lal Goya seems an accurate one. Interestingly, the rahit-nama author(s) likely realized that urban Khatris (the caste to which Nand Lal belonged) who were often employed by the Mughal administration would have certainly known enough Persian to read through and appreciate Nand Lal's poetry; and his association with the pro-Khalsa attitude of the rahit-namas, one may speculate, may have eased Khatri anxiety about the existence of the martial order and encouraged many to join it. And so it appears that the Punjabi Nand Lal works address mid- to late-eighteenth- rather than seventeenth-century concerns. The later 1700s was a time when the nascent Khalsa was attempting to appeal to a much broader base and in which Sikh hostility to Turks/Mughals/Muslims was at its height, something we do not generally see until after the death of Guru Gobind Singh in October 1708.

While the rahit-namas are clearly Sikh texts, one must read Nand Lal's most famous Persian works carefully to extract Sikh meaning as there is a tremendous affinity between the Sufi and Sikh traditions. One such correspondence has already been noted, namely the state of dissolution within the divine. Others would also include the unity and oneness of God, a description of the divine in terms of light, a committed dedication to the remembrance of the divine and a repetition of his/her/its name in an attempt to purify the corruptible human self, the sheer joy of being in the presence of those people committed to the divine, and an ascent to union through a series of stages resulting ultimately in dissolution. Nand Lal's Persian poetry contains all of these themes, and therefore texts such as the *Dīvān-i Goyā* and *Zindagī-nāmah* may be read in part as Sufi texts.

But there are nevertheless clues as to the truly Sikh character of even this most munificent and inclusive poetry. Although it is quite rare for a ghazal or *bait* to exhibit a Sikh disposition in these two texts, it does occur. We find in ghazal 33—perhaps Nand Lal's most famous—the only clear reference to Sikhs throughout the *Dīvān*:

> *shavad qurbān khāk-i rāh-'i sangat; dil-i goyā hamīn rā ārzū kard*
>
> He becomes a sacrifice to the dust of the path tread by the *sangat*, the very same thing the heart of Goya desires.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 33:7

The word *sangat* is not Persian and refers to the Sikh community, a point upon which Nand Lal further elaborates in one distich of his *Zindagī-nāmah* (20). In the previous *bait* (*Zindagī-nāmah* 19) Nand Lal looks kindly upon Muslims who 'gather together on Friday to recite *namāz*', while clearly differentiating his community from them in the *bait* following:

hamchūn dar maẓhab-i mā sādah-sang; kaz moḥabbat bā khodā dārand rang

Likewise, my religious community, the *sādh sang*, meets too and takes pleasure in devotion to God.

Zindagī-nāmah 20

(p. 165) The *Khātimah* likewise elevates the gathering of the faithful, reversing the relationship in the second *meṣrā*ʿ between the king and his *khālṣah* which, in Persian, refers to those lands directly under the ruler's aegis.

ham falak bandah-'i sangatānashrā; ham molak bandah-'i khālaṣānashrā

Even the heavens are the slaves of His *sangats.* Kings, too, are the servants of His Khalsa.

Tausīf o Sanā': Khātimah 1

It is a desire for their company which is echoed, in an interesting mixture of Arabic and Punjabi, in the penultimate bait of the *ʿArżulalfāẓ*:

hū al-satgūrū hū al-nirankārnā; hū al-sādah sangat hū al-yārnā

He is the True Guru. He is the Formless One. He is the true congregation of believers, the *sādh sangat*, and he is the Friend.

ʿArżulalfāẓ 1357

For the most part, however, when Nand Lal speaks about the community of the faithful throughout his major Persian works the term he appropriates is *ṣoḥbat*, often used in Sufi poetry to indicate Sufi gatherings:

ṣoḥbat-i shān khākrā aksīr kard; laṭaf-i shān bar har dilī tasīr kard

Their company (*soḥbat*) has transformed dust into the unguent; their blessings have affected every heart.

Zindagī-nāmah 98

In this one regard the *Zindagī-nāmah* may thus be compared to certain *vārs* of Bhai Gurdas in which a similar emphasis on the community and the congregation and its semi-divine nature is articulated.

The very rare use of Punjabi Sikh terms such as *sādh sangat* or its derivatives suggests the way that the poet wishes the reader to engage his texts. It is these which tip the balance of interpretation towards the Sikh for whenever an ambiguous interpretation presents itself, readers are encouraged to occupy this space with Sikh meaning which gradually comes about through a cumulative reading of the text. Religiously charged terminology in general Sufi poetry, such as *mardān-i ḥaqq* (men of Truth/God), *qalandarān* (ascetics), *sālik* (traveller), *rind* (rogue), *ghārīb* (stranger), *gadā* (beggar), amongst many others, is used not to characterize Sufis in the *Dīvān* and *Zindagī-nāmah* but rather those whom Nand Lal considers pious, the members of his *soḥbat*, the Sikhs. So while individual *baits* and ghazals may appear to express Sufi ideas and attitudes, a cumulative reading allows us to recognize the ultimate meaning conveyed as Sikh.

(p. 166) In some instances, when a term is used in a specifically Sufi light the term's impression is reversed and acquires a scornful effect. Note for example the two readings of *bait* 27:2:

> *fanah paẓīr bovad har chah hast dar ʿālam; nah ʿāshiqān kah az asrār-i ʿishq āgāh and*
>
> Everything in the world is transitory (In the world everything is capable of *fanāh*) [*sic*] except for lovers who are aware of the secrets of love.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 27:2

And, too, observe that of 19:6:

> *khodā bemānad az ghairat jadā o man ḥairān; ḥadīs-shauq-i tow az baskah beshumar āmad*
>
> God remains separate from us on account of His jealousy and I remain perplexed (*ḥairān*). The story of Your Love is endless.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 19:6

*Fanā*ʾ is, again, the ultimate state of annihilation in Sufi thought while Nand Lal speaks of it in terms far less encouraging; and so too *ḥairān* or 'awe' which is often understood as a Sufi state of proximity to the divine. For Nand Lal *ḥairān* symbolizes separation, the bane of all Sufis.

It should be added that this type of symbolic reversal is not uncommon among Persian Sufi poets as well. We find that elements which are generally considered forbidden or

haram by more orthodox ways of expressing Islam are allegorically elevated to the status of beloved objects. And so for example a common description of the Divine Beloved is that of the idol, often coupled with the Brahmin as its archetypal lover, a loving relationship between lover and beloved which stands outside the pale of orthodox Islam, the tenor of which is predominantly iconoclastic. Wine, moreover, has also been deftly reworked in Sufi poetry to become the bliss of intoxicating union with Allah and so the term *mastān*, 'drunk ones', for divinely aware Sufis and *kharābāt*, the tavern, as a symbol of the world itself.

Sufi poetry not only reversed the symbolic nature of these objects, transforming the *haram* into *halāl*, but also poked fun at the very orthodox figures who suspected the Sufis of heresy, reversing the way in which these figures were meant to be understood. The *maulavi*, mullah, the counsellor, and the ascetic therefore are rarely characterized as good, pious, and knowledgeable but, rather, become symbols of derision, religious personnel mired in emotionless, austere, and legal pursuits of the divine. The drunk, the rogue, and the madman on the other hand became the ideals to which the spiritual should aspire. This transformation also appears in poetry of Nand Lal.

> *brahmin mushtāq-i bot zāhad-i fidā'ī khānaqāh; har kojā jām-i mohabbat dīdah am sar shār hast*
>
> The Brahmin longs for his idol; the ascetic devotes himself to the monastery. Everywhere I have looked the cup of love is brimful.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 6:6

(p. 167) As, too, he uses the oft-tried technique of the reversal of personnel, as we see in *bait* 10:4 which dismisses the *nāṣaḥā'*, the monitor who advises Muslims in correct conduct, playing and punning upon 'advice' and 'counsel' or things orthodox and things less so, such as drunkenness:

> *nāṣaḥā' tā chand gū'ī qiṣṣah-hā-ye vaʿaẓ o pand; bazm-i mastān hast jā-ye qiṣṣah o afsānah nīst*
>
> O counsellor! How long will you speak tales of admonishment and advice? This matter is for the intoxicated, not the job of every fool.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 10:4

We have noted that Nand Lal does more than appropriate this style, however, as he augments and adapts this Sufi rhetorical technique to target the very Sufis themselves, replacing the idol or the counsellor with elements and ideas which are more Sufi in

nature such as *fanā*ʾ and *ḥairān*, in one instance transforming the *rāh-i shauq* or ‘way of love’ which often characterizes the Sufi path, as a feature of spirituality that the pious must avoid to achieve true enlightenment (*Dīvān-i Goyā* 48:1). In some cases the ‘pure’ or ‘true’ Sufi is tacitly contrasted with the regular Muslim Sufi in a way reminiscent of Guru Nanak’s juxtaposition of the Muslim and the ‘true’ Muslim’ (McLeod 1968: 208–19):

> *madām bādah kash o ṣūfī o ṣafā mībāsh; tamām-i zahad shav o zand bīnavā mībāsh*
>
> Always drink wine and be Sufi and pure. Wash asceticism away completely and become a helpless rogue.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 40:1

An alternate reading of the first *meṣra*ʿ reads *ṣūfī-ye ṣafā* or ‘[be a] Sufi of purity’, thus obviating the ambiguity of the phrase *ṣūfī o ṣafā*, ‘[be] Sufi and pure’, and indicating that the ultimate ideal is the Sufi who is distinguished from the regular Sufi, the ‘true’ Sufi who is, for our poet, the Sikh (G. M. Singh 1963: 21). In this way perhaps Nand Lal is kindly attempting to persuade his audience of the truth of his own tradition, that of Guru Gobind Singh, and in the process offering them what he feels is a superior alternative to the lifestyle they presently enjoy in a cleverly rhetorical way, working within the very confines of the Sufi ghazal genre itself to gently but critically assess those who first manipulated the time-honoured conventions of the ghazal. In the following *bait* Nand Lal transforms two of the most common Sufi tropes, the character of Mansuralhallaj—the darling figure of the Sufis who spoke the truth aloud and was killed for it in ninth-century Baghdad—and the wine, into symbols of derision:

> *analḥaqq az lab-i manṣūr gar chūn shīshah qolqol kard; kah ārad tāb-i īn ṣohbā kojā jām-i dimāgh īnjā*
>
> If the sound of *analḥaqq* ‘I am Truth’ from the lips of Mansur can be heard as the wine gurgles down the bottle’s neck then is it the inner glow of love (*tāb*) which this wine brings? Where is the cup of intoxication here?
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 4:2

(p. 168) We have certainly implied in all of the above that Sufi symbolism may be easily adapted to convey Sikh ideas which strike a similar chord. But this is of course not always the case. And so perhaps more convincing of the Sikh nature of Nand Lal’s two greatest works are those elements of Sikh belief which do not accord with general Sufi ideas. While the categories and the descriptions may here appear to be Sufi, in other words, the raw material Nand Lal conveys is Sikh. Of course Sufism is made up of many orders,

beliefs, practices, and rituals but there are commonalities between all those traditions which are described by their adherents as Sufi. Nand Lal, for example, reworks the Sufi trope of the insecurity and uncertainty that travellers along the mystical path experience in a direct 'answer' to Hafez's first ghazal. While Hafez and numerous other poets speak of the pain and difficulty involved in living in a world that separates humanity from the divine, Nand Lal offers reassurance:

> *khodā ḥāẓar bovad dā'īm be-bīn dīdār-i pākashrā; nah gardābī-ye darū ḥā'il nah daryā o nah sāḥalhā*
>
> The Lord is always present. See His pure face! Here there is no whirlpool which terrifies, no sea, no shore.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 3:3

This suggests a style which brings to mind one of the most oft-repeated ideas of the Guru Granth Sahib—'wherever one looks God is present'—and reminds one of a technique we also see in the scripture, the juxtaposition of the verses of the Gurus with those of the *bhagats* in order to make the uniquely Sikh position far more clear, a clarity which is particularly sharp in the *bāṇī* of one of only two Sufis whose works are included within the Guru Granth Sahib, Shaikh Farid (Pashaura Singh 2003: 47–75). This lack of insecurity thus allows Nand Lal to eliminate the pain of separation which is very much a hallmark of Sufi poetry and the Sufi path, citing directly the Sikh emphasis on the world as a creation of the divine and God's immanence within it. In such a light, Nand Lal silently asks, how is it possible to feel insecure? The divine is present in this very world. The cure for any such negative 'Sufi' thoughts is therefore simplicity itself:

> *ẓikr-i vaṣafash bar zabān bāshad laẓīẓ; nām-i ū andar dahān bāshad lazīẓ*
>
> The recital of His praises is sweetness on my tongue as His *nām* fills the mouth with delight.
>
> *Dīvān-i Goyā* 34:1

So, while Nand Lal certainly expresses many of the congruities between Sufis and Sikhs, he also exposes their differences. And amongst the most significant of these is the general Sikh acceptance of karma to which Goya appears to be alluding in *bait* 37:5 which seems to commemorate Nand Lal's twilight years:

> *ṣad kārdah kah nayāyad bekār-i tow; goyā bekūn kah bāz beyāyad bekār-i 'umar*
>
> You have done hundreds of things which were not fitting for you, Goya. Do things in such a way that life may return to you.

Dīvān-i Goyā 37:5

(p. 169) One need therefore only open one's eyes to the glory of the divine which surrounds us, attune oneself to the divine through recitation and repetition of the *nām* to eradicate both suffering and insecurity and, in the case of the *bait* above, rebirth. A thorough reading of Nand Lal's work makes these points clear and demonstrates that his poetry is very much situated within a symbolic universe that is Sikh, a universe fashioned from the very substance of the True Guru:

chū shod rūḥ makhtār bīn tā chah kard; az dīvān gītī bar āvord gurū

See what the Master did when He sought to create souls: the [True] Guru brought forth this very world from the [divine] court!

ʿArżulalfāẓ 764

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Sectarian Works

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the sectarian works of the Minas and Hindalis from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. It attempts to display how sectarian savants represented a significant element in medieval and early modern Sikh thought.

Keywords: Minas, Hindalis, early Sikh literati, Sikhi, sakhi, gosht

In the study of early Sikhism during the Sikh Guru period (1469–1708) the term ‘sectarian’ refers to those Sikh sects that believed in an alternative guru lineage that differed from what emerged as the orthodox guru lineage (from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh). While those Sikh sects also had other differences with the mainstream Sikh tradition with respect to their philosophic viewpoints, it was principally their belief in a different lineage of gurus that distinguished them. In historical and literary studies of the early Sikh community these Sikh sects have more or less been ostracized and castigated for their unorthodox beliefs and usually have been portrayed as the ‘enemies’ of the ‘true’ lineage of Sikh Gurus. However in the Sikh Guru period itself these Sikh sects were not defined by retrospective markers of orthodoxy, unorthodoxy, and heterodoxy. Rather they played a significant role in the development of early Sikh society in particular as *littérateurs*.

In the Sikh Guru period there was only one major Sikh sect, the Minas (charlatans). A lesser Sikh sect was the Hindalis (followers of Baba Hindal). The Hindalis’ literary contribution was important, though modest in volume. By contrast, the Minas produced a string of outstanding savants that articulated their ideological position in competition with the mainstream Sikh tradition. The literary works of the Minas represent a valuable and unique insight into early Sikh society and thought. In this survey of sectarian works a chronological approach shall be adopted in order to convey the historical development of each sect and contextualize their specific literary works within the milieu.

The Genesis of Mina Sikh Literature

In a ballad focusing on the offspring of the Sikh Gurus, Bhai Gurdas commented that 'Prithi Chand [Guru Ram Das's eldest son] became a charlatan (*Mina*)' (Syan 2012: 91). The appellation of 'Mina' coined by Bhai Gurdas was meant to be derogatory and it is interesting that Sikh scholars have continued to persist with the term despite the fact (p. 171) that it was meant to offend. However scholars have also referred to the Minas with the slightly less offensive title of *Sikhan da chhota mel* (those who remained with the true Guru lineage for a short time) and more aptly as the *Miharvan Sampraday* (the order of Miharvan). Nevertheless the widespread usage of the term Mina reflects how Prithi Chand and his successors and followers have been marginalized in Sikh Studies.

Prithi Chand is a notorious figure because he rejected the legitimacy of Guru Hargobind's Guruship and instead declared that he was the rightful Guru following Guru Arjan. Biographies of Prithi Chand have frequently emphasized his supposedly avaricious disposition and ardent aim to seize the Guruship from Guru Arjan. Prithi Chand was born in 1558 at Goindwal to Guru Ram Das and Bibi Bhani. In 1560 his younger brother Mahadev was born and in 1563 his youngest brother Arjan Dev was born. Owing to his position as the eldest son Prithi Chand naturally felt he would be named as his father's successor. However Guru Ram Das chose Guru Arjan as his successor. Prithi Chand accepted his father's decision and acknowledged Guru Arjan's authority, but for Guru Arjan's votaries it was at this moment that Prithi Chand initiated a bitter feud with Guru Arjan. It is alleged that Prithi Chand used to taunt Guru Arjan about his wife's inability to produce an heir. When in 1595 Guru Hargobind was born Prithi Chand's enmity towards his brother grew to such an extent that he allegedly attempted to poison Guru Hargobind, but the assassination plot failed. By contrast, Mina sources contradict such a rendition of events and instead state that Prithi Chand was a devout servant to Guru Arjan (Syan 2012: 115).

The birth of Guru Hargobind seems to have dampened Prithi Chand's spirits. So much so that in 1596 he left Amritsar and moved to the village of Hehar, near Lahore. In the latter half of his life he moved to Kotha Guru in the Malwa region of the Punjab. Even after leaving Amritsar it is alleged that Prithi Chand still harboured an ambition to become the Guru and in an attempt to realize his ambition he made pragmatic alliances with the local Mughal agents Sulahi Khan and Chandu Shah. It has been suggested that this alliance was instrumental in causing Guru Arjan's execution.

In 1606 following Guru Arjan's execution Prithi Chand declared himself the new Sikh Guru. However, Guru Arjan's chief votaries, Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Budha, supported the

candidacy of Guru Hargobind indicating that Prithi Chand was not the popular choice. But in Mina sources Prithi Chand or *Sahib Guru* (the eminent Guru) or *Mahala Chhevan* (the sixth master) as he was known was the unquestionable successor to Guru Arjan.

Prithi Chand established an early Mina literary tradition (J. S. Ahluwalia 2010). In his lifetime Prithi Chand had witnessed the making of Sikh scriptures with Guru Arjan's compilation of the Adi Granth in 1604. It has been argued that Guru Arjan was partly motivated to create an authoritative Sikh textual tradition in order to prevent Prithi Chand from establishing himself as the Sikh Guru. Irrespective of why the Adi Granth was complied, Prithi Chand was a devotional poet in the style of the early Sikh Gurus. Prithi Chand's poetry was composed in the *sant bhasha* vernacular prevalent in the Adi Granth and written in the Gurmukhi script. Moreover, Prithi Chand adopted the pen names of *Nanak*, *Nanak Das* (the slave Nanak), and *Jan Nanak* (the slave Nanak).

(p. 172) The poetic compositions of Prithi Chand are sparse and have proved difficult to date and attribute. This is because Mina texts of the seventeenth century were often interpolated by later savants of the tradition. That being said, scholars do believe that Prithi Chand's verses in the composition *Basant ki Var* (Ballad of Spring) are genuine despite the fact that the text was probably complied in the late seventeenth century (J. S. Ahluwalia 2010: 22). The text was a modification of Guru Arjan's identically titled ballad found in the Adi Granth that consists of only three *pauris* (stanzas) composed of five lines each (Adi Granth: 1193). The Mina ballad however divides Guru Arjan's ballad and places the verses at various points in the text. Furthermore, the Mina text wrongly attributes Guru Arjan's verses to Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, and Prithi Chand's grandson, Harji, respectively. The Mina text adds seven *shaloks* (verses) from the Adi Granth and attributes ten *shaloks* allegedly written by Gurus Nanak, Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, and Arjan, yet none of those verses appear in the Adi Granth. Alongside those verses are fourteen *shaloks* by Prithi Chand, one by Miharvan, and one by Harji. The text reflects the Mina desire to create a clear chain of transmission from Guru Nanak to Prithi Chand and thereby legitimize the Mina tradition. The melange of Gurus also highlights how Prithi Chand's literary style attempted to merge with the bhakti flavour of the earlier Sikh Gurus. For example, Prithi Chand attempted to use the imagery of divine grace found in the works of earlier Gurus but without the same burst of creativity:

> He who serves the righteous (*santa di seva*);
> To him comes divine favour (*parvanu*).
> He who takes to heart sacred teachings (*sant mantra*);
> Then his breath becomes fixed (*thir hoi pranu*).
> He who has met the divine his mind is content (*santokh*);
> Only few become righteous (*sant*).

Illusion (*maya*) and infatuation (*moh*) dissipate;
The Lord (*har*) has bestowed this grace (*mant*) on him (1)

(J. S. Ahluwalia 2010: 155)

Aside from the *Basant ki Var* Prithi Chand has no other significant literary achievements. Although it is possible that other verses can be attributed to him due to the high level of interpolation in the Mina tradition no significant work can be assigned to his hand.

In April 1618 Prithi Chand died and he bequeathed his Guruship to his eldest son, Manohar Das, better known as Miharvan, who would provide a textual pedigree to the Mina tradition.

The paltry works of Prithi Chand can be seen as indicative of early sectarian works in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Sectarian writers were disgruntled relatives of the Guru; upset that they had been passed over for Guruship. They attempted to assert their spiritual authority by imitating the poetic style of the Sikh Gurus in prosody and content. As a result, sectarian works do not reveal the internal schisms and polemics that gripped the Sikh community. However following Prithi Chand's death sectarian (p. 173) literature moved away from merely imitating the poetry of the Sikh Gurus and instead developed a literary style focused on story and exegesis.

Explaining Sikhi: The Writings of Miharvan, Harji, and the Hindalis

The intellectual milieu encountered by the next generation of sectarian savants was remarkably different from the milieu of their predecessor. This is because sectarian Sikhs primarily expressed their identity in contrast with the mainstream Sikh Gurus. So Prithi Chand attempted to undermine Guru Arjan's authority by presenting himself as a more enlightened Guru. But the latest generation of savants had to contrast themselves with Guru Hargobind. Guru Hargobind was unlike his predecessors because he famously adopted a regal civility and conceptually fused temporal and spiritual power (*miri-piri*). Guru Hargobind was capable of transforming his lineage in such a direction because he experienced a process of gentrification whereby he became a patrimonial-feudal lord offering his Sikhs spiritual liberation (*mukti*) and employment (*naukari*) (Syan 2012: 90–4). The changes in Guru Hargobind's ethos disrupted for certain Sikhs the well-established court mechanism of service (*seva*) and grace (*prasad*). Bhai Gurdas captured the mood of the Sikh community:

> The previous Gurus used to sit at one temple (*dharmsal*);
> But this Guru [Hargobind] roams from place to place.
> Kings (*patisah*) used to visit the homes of the previous Gurus;
> But this Guru was imprisoned in the Emperor's fort.
> The previous Gurus used to make congregations flourish;
> But this Guru roams the land without any fear.
> The previous Gurus used to sit on their beds and bestow contentment;
> But this Guru keeps dogs for the hunt.
> The previous Guru's used to listen, sing and explain;
> But this Guru neither listens, nor sings or explains.
> This Guru does not keep close to his servants (*sevak*);
> Rather he gives favour to liars and evildoers.
> [Gurdas' reply] The inherent truth (*sach*) cannot be concealed;
> The disciples (*Sikh*) [knowing this] like bees adore the lotus feet.
> The impatient are unknowingly being made to endure [these reforms].
>
> (Syan 2012: 57)

Gurdas emphasized the centrality of devotional servitude to the Guru, but obviously some Sikhs were unhappy with Guru Hargobind's reforms.

Importantly the changes in Guru Hargobind's court created a lucid distinction between him and the sectarian Sikhs. While Guru Hargobind's lineage would continue (p. 174) to maintain an aristocratic comportment, the sectarian Sikhs would continue to maintain the rhyme and rhythm of the pre-Hargobind Sikh court. As a result, sectarian literature became concerned with underscoring their maintenance of 'original' Sikh bhakti values and a conservative sociopolitical thought. In order to express their views sectarian writers opted for narrative prose instead of poetry. The narrative genres of the *gosht* (exegetical discourse) and *sakhi* (anecdote) became popular. The *gosht* narrative was constructed either as dialectic or sermon. In the *gosht* a concept, dilemma, or scriptural quotation would start the discussion and the narrator would explore the quandary and conclude with the correct answer. The most famous *gosht* in Sikh literature is the Siddh Gosht (Discourse with the Siddhs) between Guru Nanak and several hatha-yogic masters (Guru Granth Sahib (GGS): 938–46). But the Siddh Gosht was a poetic composition composed in the *Ramkali* raga; while the *gosht* genre became an exclusively prose format. In contrast, the *sakhi* is an anecdote on an episode in the life of a saint; in many instances the *sakhi* is comparable to a parable in which the deeper meaning of the story is to express an aspect of the divine (McLeod 1980).

In April 1618 the Mina Guruship was bestowed on Miharvan. He was born on 9 January 1581 to Prithi Chand and Mata Bhagvano in Amritsar. Under the tutelage of Prithi Chand and Guru Arjan he received an education in Sanskrit, Persian, Hindavi, Sikh literature,

and Indian classical music. Despite his early attachment to Guru Arjan, Miharvan was devoted to his father and left Amritsar with Prithi Chand to go to Hehar and then Kotha Guru. But in stark contrast with his father Miharvan became a renowned *littérateur*, philosopher, and highly accomplished performer of *kirtan* (Sikh devotional music). Following his accession Miharvan was determined to expand his community with greater vigour than his father and challenge Guru Hargobind's authority. During his reign he travelled across the Punjab and Kangra to preach and win adherents; eventually he settled in the village of Muhammadipur, near Lahore.

Miharvan's literary style would have been reflective of his rhetorical style. Unlike Prithi Chand, Miharvan placed emphasis on delivering sermons to his audiences; he used both the *gosht* and *sakhi* to express his views. In Harji's hagiography of Miharvan he describes how Miharvan used to sermonize:

> Then Miharvan related to the congregation the anecdotes of the saints (*bhagatan kian sakhian*) and the anecdotes of the Sikh Gurus (*guru kian sakhian*), as well as discourses (*katha charcha*) on the incarnations (*auru*) and God's mysteries (*nimati aan*). All heard Guru Miharvan's explanations (*bachni*) and they felt tranquillity (*mahasitalu*). Then all the Sikhs touched his feet and headed home.
>
> (Syan 2012: 59)

The breadth of subjects touched upon by Miharvan is illustrative of his own eclectic interests. The Mina tradition attributes to Miharvan a considerable corpus of *goshts* including *Pothi Sach-khand*, *Pothi Harji*, *Pothi Chaturbhuj*, *Pothi Kesho Das*, *Abhai Pothi*, and *Prem Pad Pothi* (collectively Miharvan's *Janamsakhi* on Guru Nanak); *Goshtan Kabir Ji Kian* (Discourses of Kabir); *Goshtan Guru Amar Das* *(p. 175)* *Ji Kian* (Discourses of Guru Amar Das); *Masle Hazrat Rasul ke* (Life of the Prophet Muhammad); *Bhagatan dian Goshtan* (Discourses of the Devotees of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*); *Nathan Jogian dian Goshtan* (Discourses of the Naths and Yogis); and *Piran Fakiran dian Goshtan* (Discourses of Muslim Saints). Whether or not complete manuscripts are solely the work of Miharvan is dubious, but the Mina tradition would argue that all these works originated from Miharvan's oral sermons to his students and scribes. It is reasonable to believe that Miharvan's oral sermons were the inspiration for all these texts.

Miharvan was the first Sikh writer who fully explored the art of prose: his *goshts* would start with scriptural quotations, he would then apply an anecdote, and finally explain the substance behind the verses. His style was elegant and charming and rich with allegories. While it is difficult to determine whether any of Miharvan's works are solely his or whether they have been refined by later savants of the Mina tradition, it is likely the *Miharvan Janamsakhi* originated from Miharvan's oral sermons. The *Miharvan*

Janamsakhi displays the literary prowess of Miharvan and also his ideological viewpoint. A unique feature of the *Miharvan Janamsakhi* is the narrative frame that discusses Guru Nanak's previous life as the legendary Raja Janak. The story went that when Janak was residing in the heavens, he was moved by the plight of the dwellers in hell. Janak asked God to release the sinners into the heavens and due to his piety he secured their release. However, in the heavens Janak was shocked that the former sinners though free from pain were starving. Janak asked God why the sinners were hungry and God explained that the sinners did not have any virtue and therefore could not feed off their good actions. It was decided by God that Janak would be sent to the world as Guru Nanak and the sinners would be reborn as his Sikhs. Nanak would be responsible for teaching humanity the path towards spiritual liberation. The opening anecdote stresses that Nanak's teachings were centred on 'truth and contemplation, compassion and righteousness, name and charity and cleanliness, gentleness and self-restraint, good works and discernment' (Syan 2012: 85). The image of Guru Nanak as a humble teacher unconcerned with materialism can be seen in the context of Guru Hargobind's reforms as an attack against the temporality of the mainstream Sikh tradition. Miharvan and the Minas wanted to ultimately represent themselves as the embodiment of Guru Nanak's bhakti and they attempted to do this by emphasizing the foundational principles of Sikhism as they saw them.

Aside from his many prose works, Miharvan continued to compose poetry. Miharvan's poetic style was identical with that of the early Sikh Gurus and he used the pen names of *Nanak*, *Nanak Das*, and *Das Nanak*. His poetry however is somewhat miscellaneous and scattered throughout his prose works and other Mina texts. The longest poetic work attributed to him is the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* which we will discuss later.

On 18 January 1640 Miharvan passed away in Muhammadipur. Despite fostering an enclave of supporters Miharvan did not significantly disturb Guru Hargobind's popularity. But Miharvan did transform Mina literary culture by developing the *gosht* genre and establishing a meta-narrative of Mina authority. That legacy would be built upon by his son and successor, Harji.

(p. 176) Harji was in an unusual position when he succeeded his father: he was in control of the Harmandir Sahib. In 1635 Guru Hargobind left central Punjab following a series of local battles with Mughal forces and moved his court to the Punjabi Hills. It appears that Harmandir Sahib was without any appointed custodian and in about 1635 Harji took over the ownership of the temple. Harji as Guru Ram Das's great-grandson had a proprietary claim to Amritsar; hence it is unsurprising that he became the owner of Harmandir Sahib. Harji spent his entire reign at Harmandir Sahib and it afforded him the wealth to expand the Mina corpus and commit to manuscript the writings of his predecessors with the aid

of Miharvan's chief scribe, Kesho Das, who played an influential role in the development of Mina literature.

Harji continued Miharvan's interest in prose and produced the *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* (Discourses of Guru Miharvan). The work details forty-five discourses delivered by Miharvan. The *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* was designed to show the profundity of Miharvan's thought and the legitimacy of the Mina tradition. The discourses probably reflect the sermons Harji delivered at Harmandir Sahib. The text is unusual in the context of seventeenth-century Sikh literature because no Sikh Guru ever wrote a biography of their predecessor. But Harji's ulterior motive for producing the text was to undermine the mainstream Sikh tradition by firstly showing Miharvan's birth with the same grandeur as Guru Nanak's birth as recorded in the *janamsakhis*; secondly depicting Prithi Chand and Miharvan as votaries of Guru Arjan; and thirdly emphasizing how Miharvan was a guru who had been blessed with the power to explain the subtleties of *gurbani* (the Guru's speech). In an opening *sakhi* Harji establishes Miharvan's grace by relating how Guru Nanak had prophesied that Miharvan would be a special guru:

> When Guru Baba Nanak was living (*salamati*) in this world (*sehnsar*). Then one day Guru Angad came to Guru Baba and made this supplication (*benti*). 'O Guru Baba, eternal lord (*patsah salamati*), this word (*bani*) of yours. [This word] God (*parmesur*) himself has spoken and the language is esoteric (*siddhi bhashia*) [i.e. divine revelation]. And in order to understand the meaning (*arthu*) [of this word] is very hard. There are only few with the intellect (*giani*) to understand this. And without knowing the meaning [of the word] one's heart (*manu*) does not become drenched [with devotion]. Moreover, without knowing the meaning liberation (*mukti*) cannot occur. Teacher (*gurudev*) explain this matter.'
>
> Then Guru Baba Nanak spoke 'My fellow (*purkha*) Angada, this is God's (*parmesur*) word (*bani*). When I was travelling (*udasi*), then from my mouth this divine word was revealed. That is why in the world [this word] is hidden. Only a few that know of this and even they do not know. Now I have made you my heir. In your mouth the divine word will sprout. Furthermore, after you, those men who will inherit the word (*shabad ki thapna*). That divine word will become manifest in their mouths. And the seventh Guru after me [i.e. Guru Miharvan]. He [Miharvan] will have God's blessing (*parmesur ki agiaa*) enabling him to make famous the meaning (*arth*) of my divine word. Also he will make famous the meaning of all the words of all the devotees (*bhagata*).'
>
> (Syan 2012: 113)

(p. 177) The *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* can be seen as the central Mina text because it articulated Miharvan's charisma. While Prithi Chand had founded the Minas it was Miharvan who was regarded as the guru that epitomized Sikh bhakti. The *Goshti* also reveals that Mina thought began to develop a strong Vaishnavite imprint and in particular a belief in Krishna. The influence of Vaishnavism on Miharvan's discourses fostered a conservative thought that stressed duty and rank as being cardinal to Sikh bhakti.

The Vaishnavite influence on Harji's thought was significant and he produced a large volume titled the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* (One Thousand Names that Bring Bliss) on the myths of mainly Vishnu's *avatars* (incarnations). The text was a commentary (*paramarth*) of Miharvan's poetic composition the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* that consisted of thirty *ashtapadis* (verses consisting of eight rhyming couplets), though some have suggested the *ashtapadis* were written by Harji. Be that as it may, the *Sukhmani Sahasranama*'s style was influenced by Guru Arjan's well-known composition *Sukhmani* (That Which Brings Bliss to the Mind) that consists of twenty-four *ashtapadis* (GGS: 262–96); and *sahasranama* (one thousand names) literature in which a thousand or more names of a deity are recalled, as in the *Vishnu Sahasranama*. Following Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*, the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* was composed in the *gauri* raga and each *ashtapadi* begins with a *shalok*. The myths in the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* originated from Puranic literature and the largest portions of Harji's commentary are dedicated to Krishna and Ram. The belief in Ram and Krishna was pervasive in Mina literature and often chapters of all works would close with the reader being encouraged to recite 'Sri Ram Krishna Waheguru Miharvan' or a similar formula. In contrast with the mythical works found in the Dasam Granth, the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* was concerned only with bhakti themes and bereft of the Dasam Granth's interest in warfare and sovereignty.

A variety of minor poetic compositions peppered throughout Harji's prose works and three ballads (*vars*) are also attributed to him. Like his predecessors Harji adopted the sobriquet *Nanak* and various modifications such as *Nanak Das*. Furthermore, he is credited with translating the Sanskrit classic *Singhasana-dvatrinshaka* (Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne of King Vikramaditya) into Punjabi under the title *Singhasan Batisi* (Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne)—though it is a matter of contention whether Harji is the author and some have suggested that it is actually Miharvan.

On 17 April 1696 Harji died at Amritsar. Despite being based at Harmandir Sahib Harji was unable to garner a sizeable support base. But Harji did transform Mina thought by constructing a cult of personality around Miharvan, who became the emblem of Mina Sikhism.

Unlike the Minas, the Hindalis are an obscure sect. The Hindalis were the followers of Bidhi Chand, son of Hindal. Hindal was a Jat residing near Amritsar who became a Sikh during Guru Amar Das's reign. Bidhi Chand followed in his father's footsteps and was apparently the chief official at a Sikh temple in the town of Jandiala Guru in Amritsar. However, after Bidhi Chand married a Muslim woman the congregants of his temple abandoned him and so Bidhi Chand established a new *panth* (way) in an effort to undermine Guru Hargobind. Bidhi Chand propagated the view that his father, Hindal, was Guru Nanak's superior and that Guru Nanak was simply a follower of the celebrated (p. 178) *bhagat* (devotee) Kabir. In order to preach their message the Hindalis produced a series of anecdotes on Guru Nanak's life in which Nanak is denigrated and Hindal is elevated. Those anecdotes belong to the *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi* tradition that originated in the early seventeenth century. It is a matter of contention whether the Hindalis produced the original *Bala* text or interpolated an earlier text (McLeod 1980: 15–22). Nevertheless, scholars have noted the caste connection between the Hindalis, who were led by Jats, and the narrator of the *Bala Janamsakhi*, Bhai Bala, a Sandhu Jat and apparent companion of Guru Nanak. An example of the Hindalis' attempt to defame Guru Nanak can be seen in Guru Nanak's meeting with the Emperor Babur in which Babur declares, 'listen Nanak dervish. You are a follower of Kabir' (Syan 2012: 83). Despite their aim to promote Baba Hindal, the Hindalis did not deeply penetrate medieval Sikh society in the manner the Minas did. Rather the Hindalis' most enduring legacy has been in the study of the *janamsakhis* and uncovering the evolution of the *Bala* tradition.

Sectarian literature in the seventeenth century was dominated by the writings of Miharvan and Harji. In response to the growth in temporality of the mainstream Sikh tradition, the Minas produced literary works that enunciated traditional bhakti values of loving devotion to the divine and separating the self from worldly illusion. Gradually the Minas merged Sikh and Vaishnavite bhakti to produce a devotional philosophy that inculcated Sikhs to integrate bhakti within their existing social structure. In contrast, the mainstream Sikh Gurus developed a Sikh bhakti in which Sikhs were empowered to challenge the existing social structure (Syan 2012). Interestingly the *Sukhmani Sahasranama* and the Dasam Granth represent two alternative Sikh interpretations of classical Indian literature and thought in the seventeenth century.

Early Modern Mina Literature

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Minas gradually melted into the background of Sikh society as Khalsa Sikhism became dominant. In the Khalsa 'code of conduct' texts (*rahitnama*) the Minas were regarded as a reprobate group. Nonetheless,

the Minas continued to produce savants and achieve local fame as saints. While Mina savants most probably continued to refine the *goshts* of Miharvan and Harji, most original literature was devotional poetry instead of exegetical prose. Moreover, the Minas continued to define themselves in opposition to mainstream Sikhism, now represented by the Khalsa. The message the Minas continued to deliver was their possession of an essential Sikh bhakti; and in order to emphasise their bhakti roots they commonly referred to themselves as the Nanakpanthis (the followers of Guru Nanak's path).

In 1698 Harji's three sons were evicted from the Harmandir Sahib temple on the orders of Guru Gobind Singh. The sons found refuge in their ancestral villages of Muhammadipur and Kotha Guru. It was however only in the Malwa region that several Mina savants emerged from the court of Harji's great-grandson, Abhai Ram; and the Divanas (the ecstatics), a mystical order that later became a sub-sect of the Udasis. From the Divanas the poet Haria or Haridas produced a large volume of devotional (p. 179) poetry based on key sections of the Adi Granth known as *Granth Haria Ji Ka* (The Book of Haria) in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century another poet, Ram Das, emerged from the Divanas and produced a large corpus of works under the patronage of the Patiala court including an abridged form of the Ramayana, *Sar Ramayan* (1808), and a rendition of Draupadi's tale from the Mahabharata, *Dropati Charitra* (1842). From Abhai Ram's court, Kushal Das produced a volume of devotional poetry titled *Pothi Sahib* (Holy Book) and Darbari Das produced a volume of devotional poetry titled *Pothi Harjas* (Book on the Lord's Praise), both in the style of Adi Granth poetry.

In Darbari Das's poetry he restated the view presented in the *Goshti Guru Miharivanu* that the Minas possessed the 'word' (*gurbani*), while the mainstream Sikhs were worldly:

> [Guru Arjan] gave the book (*pothi*) and rosary (*mala*) [to Prithi Chand].
> On his head [Prithi Chand] he [Guru Arjan] tied his own turban (*pag*). (6)
> To Guru Hargobind was bestowed the book (*giranth*).
> The sword (*teg*) was fastened [on him] and [he was] instructed to form a way (*panth*).
> To Guru Sahib [Prithi Chand] the word (*shabad thapna*) was given.
>
> (Syan 2012: 210)

Darbari Das's sincere belief in the legitimacy of the Mina Gurus failed to gain widespread support; and towards the end of the nineteenth century the Mina literati faded away and along with them Mina Sikhism.

Conclusion

The contrary perspective of sectarian literature evolved from a rather visceral dislike of the mainstream Gurus to a sophisticated critique in which mainstream Sikhism was depicted as being bereft of Guru Nanak's essential bhakti. This evolution is clearly visible in the writings of Prithi Chand and Miharvan; the former was very much a literary imitator, the latter an innovator. For scholars of pre-modern Sikhism sectarian literature provides us with an understanding of the ideas that perplexed the early Sikh literati and an insight into a variant experience of Sikhi in medieval and early modern India. Importantly sectarian literature was not composed in a vacuum; instead it was produced in dialogue with the wider Sikh literati. Through a dialogical reading of pre-modern Sikh texts it is possible to reconstruct the intellectual milieu that embedded the heterogeneous Sikh literati and thereby enriching our historical narratives of Sikhism.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the Sikh literature of the *janam-sakhi, gur-bilas*, and *rahit-nama* genres, all of which were prepared during the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Its purpose is to demonstrate that this literature interacted with the Sikh community in a highly nuanced fashion, prompting through both the reading and contemplation of their contents an encounter with the living memory of the Sikh Gurus.

Keywords: bani, janam-sakhis, gurbilas, rahit-namas, shabad, darśan, rahit

While the Adi Granth is the central text of Sikh devotion and piety, a large body of literature developed to supplement its message. The Dasam Granth and the respective works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal Goya are well-known secondary and tertiary sources included in the canonical literature of the Sikhs. Along with these works, a variety of writings came to address an important feature of the Sikh tradition to which previous texts were remiss in giving sufficient attention. Indeed, the devotional poetry in the various genres found in the Sikh texts noted above is lacking a coherent narrative about the Gurus themselves. Thus while the Gurus' writings are well recorded, this literature accords little attention to presenting who these men were and how they lived as the Gurus to whom all Sikhs are devoted. The primary corpus of Sikh devotional texts, in other words, focus predominantly upon the message of the Sikh Masters but lack the story of who the Sikhs are, individually and collectively, in relation to those great men who were, and still are, their Gurus. To rectify just this situation Sikhs had to develop new genres of literature, and so to this end were born the *janam-sākhī* (birth-narrative) and the *gurbilās* (splendor of the Guru) genres. Each of these new types has played an essential role in the construction of Sikh personhood and in defining the Sikh community in regard to its association with the Gurus. Their approaches to the lives of the Gurus, moreover, are done in a manner designed to address the life stories of the Gurus, to bring the experience of these illustrious men closer both literally and symbolically to those who may not have had the opportunity to meet them. Put another way, these texts allow the

Sikhs to take *darśan* (‘sight’) of their Gurus and savour their mystical presence in highly nuanced ways. In addition to the gurbilas and janam-sakhi texts, we may also note the appearance of the *rahit-nāmās* (manuals of code of conduct), which provide rare insight into the evolution of the Khalsa code of conduct in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The focus on the story of the Gurus (directly in the case of the janam-sakhis and the gurbilas and more indirectly in that of the rahit-namas), and Sikhs’ connections to those stories, is at the heart of these new forms of Sikh literature. The janam-sakhis, (p. 182) or ‘birth stories’, focus on the life, mission, and teachings of Guru Nanak. They are the earliest known forms of Punjabi prose, emerging in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. The gurbilas (literally, ‘the Guru’s delight’) stories do much the same, but with a focus on the lives and missions of the successors to Nanak’s title of Guru, particularly the sixth and tenth Gurus, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh respectively. The primary focus of these genres is to describe the lives and actions of the Gurus and to set their message within the context of their lives, providing a setting for the revelation of their *bāṇī* (‘divine utterance’), their actions, and their lasting tradition. The situation with the rahit-namas (‘manuals of code of conduct’) differs somewhat from that of the janam-sakhi and the gurbilas. The rahit-namas are predominantly texts outlining instruction and behaviour but are also intimately associated with the previous two types since there is the occasional rahit-nama that also devotes sections to stories regarding the Guru (McLeod 1988: 166–70). It is true that the rahit texts spend far less time on the surface dealing with the Sikh encounter with the Guru (although dialogues between the tenth Guru and his famous disciples may be certainly understood as encounter) and may thus warrant exclusion from a discussion on the ‘encounter with the Guru’ theme within the gurbilas and janam-sakhis but, at a more fundamental level, their instruction in the manners, etiquette, and mores of the Khalsa Sikh may be understood as providing an opportunity for Khalsa Sikhs to adopt and enact what we may crudely call *de imitatione gurui* and thus a way of interacting with (and thus intimately encountering) the Guru through mimicry and mimesis.

Sikhs and scholars of the Sikh tradition have used a variety of categories to describe this literature: history, myth, hagiography, homily, manuals of behaviour, religious biography —all of which are applicable, but which are nevertheless incomplete designations. To Sikhs, these stories are the true history of the Gurus, their lives and the standards and etiquette to which they adhered described in detail. These are viewed as the record of the Gurus’ lives and actions passed down through the generations of devout Sikhs and shared throughout the Panth. Interestingly, these texts do not present a necessarily coherent view on the lives of the Gurus. The various janam-sakhi and gurbilas manuscripts (and the rahit-namas too in certain cases) each present their own perspective on the stories

they report, emphasizing different elements and aspects of the Gurus' lives, and providing numerous interpretations of the significance of those lives. It is necessary to discuss these particular characteristics of the major janam-sakhi and gurbilas texts in detail and, though to a less extent, the same features as these appear (though far less often) in the rahit manuals before proceeding to further examination of their role in Sikh life and the Panth.

The Janam-Sakhi Traditions

Janam-sakhis, in general, present the life of Guru Nanak in a standard three-part story—his exceptional childhood and days as a young adult, his travels as a missionary after (p. 183) receiving his call from Akal Purakh ('Timeless Being', God), and his later years settled at Kartarpur, founding the community of believers. The earliest janam-sakhi collections were structured in a specific manner to help lucidly explain Guru Nanak's teachings and reveal his presence and message to their audiences. The common form of a janam-sakhi gives a brief, but personal, account of Guru Nanak on one of his many travels, or while settled at Kartarpur, that illustrates a fundamental Sikh teaching and then relates that account to a specific *shabad* ('hymn') from the Adi Granth. These stories establish the context for shabad recitation and an explanation of the hymn as well. The janam-sakhis in their earliest form and usage could best be defined as exegetical texts, which seek to reflect on and explain the life of the Guru in a specific manner.

The stories collected in the janam-sakhis, in all likelihood, began with family and friends close to Guru Nanak and were spread by these associates to others. Thus, early oral traditions about Guru Nanak presented his life and teachings to audiences who may not have had the opportunity to meet the Guru in person. Despite the traditions about the Guru's far-ranging journeys, these stories were able to travel even farther and faster to reach people in the most remote of areas. The stories about Guru Nanak, and the Sikh teachings included in them, would be a more constant presence in the daily lives of those who did not live near his residence in Kartarpur, or for those many generations who lived after the Guru's death.

The janam-sakhi texts did not appear in the hands of Sikhs out of thin air. The stories of which they give account are derived from earlier oral traditions about the life of Guru Nanak that were popular throughout the Panjab. W. H. McLeod identified a few key constituents that contributed to the formation of the written janam-sakhi traditions. The earliest of these constituents were the 'authentic memories concerning actual incidents from the life of Nanak' (McLeod 1968: 56). Obviously, those Sikhs who met Guru Nanak would remember him and tell others about him. These stories are passed along and

coalesce into a body of received traditions, which also contributes to the compilation of the janam-sakhis. Working in combination with these early memories and ever present in the Sikh community were Guru Nanak's verses recorded in the Adi Granth. This combination of the Guru's verses and his life practices guided Sikh practice, which in turn influenced the formation of the janam-sakhis as 'received tradition or the impulses derived from Nanak's own words' (McLeod 1968: 57). Originally they were called *janam-patris*, meaning birth horoscopes, as they were comparable to horoscopes prepared by Brahmins for children based on the time of their birth. As this early tradition developed into a more robust literary genre, the story (*sākhī*) of the Guru's life overshadowed any comparison to the horoscopes. Thus the more story-focused designation of janam-sakhi took hold and continues to identify this material today. These features provide a personal and intimate connection to the memory Sikhs have for their founder, Guru Nanak.

To these earlier constituents, McLeod adds Bhai Gurdas' *Vār I*. Bhai Gurdas was a nephew of the third Guru, Amar Das, and was a close associate of the next three Gurus as well. He was the scribe who assisted Guru Arjan in compiling the Adi Granth, in 1604. Bhai Gurdas' Vars ('Ballads') are a record of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Sikh **(p. 184)** community and tradition unmatched by any other. Var I is a record, albeit a sparse one, of anecdotes giving a brief outline of Guru Nanak's life. Thus a common and consistent framework for the Guru's life is established by one who was close to the lineage of Gurus and who had intimate knowledge of Guru Nanak's verses through his work with Guru Arjan.

Ultimately certain tellings and retellings of these stories and the specific ways in which these were combined crystallized into a small number of individual traditions. These include the popularly personal and fantastic accounts of the *Bālā Janam-sākhī* and the composite manuscripts known today as the *Purātan* ('Ancient') *Janam-sākhī*. This particular collection of narratives was later promoted by the Singh Sabha reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because it lacked the fantasy elements of the Bala Janam-sakhi. Also part of these historic janam-sakhi traditions are the *Miharbān Janam-sākhī* that is attributed to the leader of the schismatic Mina sect; and the *Janam-sakhi of Bhai Mani Singh*, an eighteenth-century text attributed to a close companion of the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.

The earliest extant manuscript of the Bala Janam-sakhi is dated *sambat* 1715/1658 CE, roughly 120 years after Guru Nanak died. Yet, by asserting that its supposed author, Bhai Bala, was a close friend and travelling companion to Guru Nanak, the Bala Janam-sakhi claims to be an eyewitness account of the Guru's life. Bhai Bala is said to have told these stories about Guru Nanak to Guru Angad, who sought to know his predecessor's birth date. These sakhis were reported to be the personal experiences of Bhai Bala. Bhai Bala's

first appearance as Nanak's companion was in the *Sacha Sauda* ('True Bargain') sakhi. He was not mentioned in any other early janam-sakhi collection, or in any other Sikh writings from that era. Bhai Bala was not even included in Bhai Gurdas' eleventh Var (ballad) which listed prominent Sikhs of this period. While there is no external evidence suggesting that Bhai Bala existed, the stories attributed to him present some of the most popular anecdotes in all of the janam-sakhi traditions. This may be partly due to the text's offering of a personal connection with the Guru through Bhai Bala, and its fantastic depictions of the Guru's spiritual power, which are reminiscent of the Puranas' mythic depictions (McLeod 1980: 21).

The intent of Bala's janam-sakhi has also been called into question by numerous Sikh scholars. Some of Bala's other sakhis have Guru Nanak prophesy the arrival of a greater saint in the lineage of Kabir and Nanak—Baba Hindal. This has led some to question the veracity of the Bala Janam-sakhi as a whole. W. Owen Cole pointed out that the Bala 'manuscript is designed to promote Baba Hindal and Kabir at the expense of Guru Nanak' (Cole 1984: 169). Surjit Hans's analysis led him to label the Bala Janam-sakhis as 'heterodox', because 'the institutions of guruship and sangat are attacked' (Hans 1988: 204). Hans further described how 'the Bala Janamsakhi manages to keep Guru Nanak's spirituality in a low key by making him keep a low profile in the narrative of "wonderful exploits"' (Hans 1988: 205). Despite the 'taint' of the sakhis proclaiming the arrival of Baba Hindal (Singh 2004: 42), the Bala Janam-sakhi became the most popular janam-sakhi collection in the eighteenth century. This may be due to the fact that **(p. 185)** references to Baba Hindal were excised from later copies of the Bala Janam-sakhis. Devout Sikhs and modern scholars have offered a number of theories as to why an apparently heretical tradition could have gained such a following. For instance, it had been suggested that the sakhis referring to Baba Hindal were added later to Bala's account, but those who have studied the extant manuscripts report no evidence to corroborate this (Singh 2004: 43).

The *Purātan Janam-sākhī* was initially thought to be the oldest of all extant janam-sakhi traditions, hence, it was given the name *purātan*, meaning ancient. It presents a more concise and less fantastic story about the life of Guru Nanak. The manuscripts are most likely from the mid-seventeenth century, but were discovered in 1872, and indicate that they were compiled from still earlier sources. Gurinder Singh Mann presented evidence of Puratan manuscripts dating from the late 1580s at a conference in 2009 at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which call into question the full extent of Guru Nanak's travels in the second stage of the janam-sakhi narrative. Despite the incongruities, the Puratan tradition arose to prominence at the behest of the Singh Sabha reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because of its lack of the

prominent fantasy elements of the Bala Janam-sakhi and because it presented a realistic vision of the Guru in line with the modern sensibilities the group sought to promote.

The *Miharbān Janam-sākhī* was authored by Miharban (1581–1640), the son of Prithi Chand, the elder brother of Guru Arjan, who was passed over for the guruship and contested the decision. Thus it lies firmly within the domain of the schismatic Minas' sect. Discovered in 1940, the text is not simply the story of Guru Nanak's life, but a scriptural exegesis as well. Minas' exegesis indicates strong Khatri affiliation, rather than the rising Jat influence within the Panth as a whole. These elements contributed to McLeod's assertion that Miharban Janam-sakhi developed probably much later, possibly late nineteenth century, than the manuscript date of 1828 CE indicated (McLeod 1980: 34). Surjit Hans referred to these differences in the Miharban as reflective of the text's 'sectarian interest' (Hans 1988: 203) and placed his discussion of it (and the Bala Janam-sakhi) within a chapter titled 'The Unorthodox *Janamsakhis*' (Hans 1988: 198)—implying that the others are orthodox texts.

There are other less prominent, or singular, janam-sakhi manuscripts that have been discovered as well. The foremost examples of these are the *Ādi sākhīs*, the so-called first sakhis, and the *B-40 Janam-sakhi*, which is a beautifully illustrated composite text drawing from earlier written janam-sakhi traditions. The B40 Janam-sakhi deserves scrutiny here for while the other janam-sakhis noted above have no official historical record—they were discovered well after their authoring, and we have little to no evidence of when or where these were authored, or how they were used by the community— W. H. McLeod has examined this particular work in detail and noted its uniqueness as it is the only janam-sakhi complete with an identified author and a specific date of composition. But even the B40's scholarly attention, like that bestowed to the other janam-sakhis, focuses on the content and form of their narratives to see common threads and points of departure, or evidence that may suggest the context in which the text was authored and for whom it was intended.

(p. 186) The Gurbilas Literature

Gurbilas texts strive to present and explain the lives of the later Gurus in much the same way the janam-sakhis do for Guru Nanak. Many gurbilas texts harken back to older literary forms, incorporating poetic elements instead of focused prose narratives. These are certainly less exegetic texts, with their focus on the story of the Gurus' lives and their heroic exploits and triumphs as a model for all Sikhs. While Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Baṅsāvalīnāmā Dasāṅ Pātshāhīāṅ Kā* presents the lives of all ten gurus, most other

gurbilas texts focus their presentation on one Guru or other historically significant Sikhs, such as Banda Singh Bahadur or Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak. The most prominent of these individual presentations focus on Guru Hargobind in *Gurbilās Chhevīṅ Pātishāhī*, and Guru Gobind Singh in Sainipati's *Srī Gur Sobhā*, Kuir Singh's *Gurbilās Pātishāhī Dasvīṅ*, and Bhai Sukkha Singh's similarly titled *Gurbilās Pātishāhī Dasvīṅ*.

Kesar Singh Chhibbar's *Baṅsāvalīnāmā Dasāṅ Pātshāhīāṅ Kā* divides 2,564 poetic stanzas into fourteen chapters devoted to each of the ten Gurus, with additional ones on Banda Singh Bahadur, Ajit Singh (the adopted son of Mata Sundari), and Mata Sahib Devan, and closes with a discussion of the state of the Sikh Panth in the early eighteenth century. In this way, the text, dated 1769, lives up to its designation as *baṅsāvalīnāmā*, or genealogy, presenting the entire scope of Sikh history. Its author served as *diwan*, or council, to Bhai Mani Singh and attended Mata Sundari (widow of Guru Gobind Singh). His grandfather and father served as diwans to Guru Har Rai through to Guru Gobind Singh. Kesar Singh Chhibbar's family's proximity to the line of the Gurus granted credibility to his account, and also contributes to his Brahmanical bias. He accepts and portrays the Gurus as incarnations of Vishnu (hence some more mythical elements in his account) and laments the loss of his family's influence to the Jat-led Khalsa.

Though more limited in scope, the gurbilas texts that focused on one person's life are equally important examples of the genre. *Gurbilās Chhevīṅ Pātishāhī* stands out for its depiction of the life of the sixth Guru, Hargobind. Two print editions of this text are available today, presenting it either in 7,793 or 8,131 stanzas. The text is a bit troublesome to place historically, as its author is unknown, and though it is dated *sambat* 1775/1718 CE, details within the text mention events after that date. It even errantly records the date of Hargobind's death in *s*.1695/1638 CE, rather than in 1644. Despite these difficulties, the text goes into great detail about major events in Guru Hargobind's life in twenty cantos. Entire cantos are devoted to his father's compilation of the Adi Granth, his own marriage, Guru Arjan's martyrdom, the construction of the Akal Takht, the battle of Amritsar, and the passing of both Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas.

Sainapati's *Srī Gur Sobhā* (Radiance of the Guru) is a very influential gurbilas text about Guru Gobind Singh from the early eighteenth century. Sainapati was a poet who served in Guru Gobind Singh's retinue and gives testimony that this poetic text was completed in 1701 CE, though details from events as late as 1708 are noted in the text. The text itself has been characterized as part eulogy and part history, as Sainapati's focus is **(p. 187)** praise for his Guru. He praises his skills as both Guru and as a leader in battle. Sainapati presents the Khalsa model as the principle Sikh identity, with Guru Gobind Singh as both its inspiration and prime exemplar. He devotes entire chapters to the ideals and practices

of the Khalsa, and posits the future of the institution in a chapter set after the Guru's passing. In this manner, Sainapati depicts the cultural shift in the Panth stressing the role and prominence of the Khalsa.

Two other gurbilas texts about Guru Gobind Singh are Kuir Singh's *Gurbilās Pātishāhī 10*, and Bhai Sukkha Singh's *Gurbilās Pātishāhī Dasvīṅ*. Kuir Singh was a Khalsa Sikh who served under Bhai Mani Singh. He completed his manuscript in 1751 CE. It is a mixture of poetic forms in both Braj and Punjabi. The text builds from Guru Gobind Singh's *Bachitar Natak* and Sainapati's *Srī Gur Sobhā*, and the direct teaching of Bhai Mani Singh. Again the focus is on Guru Gobind Singh's role as a warrior leading a liberation force against the tyranny of the Mughals. The text gets many dates wrong (including the founding of the Khalsa and the Guru's death), exaggerates the size of opposing armies, and sends the Guru on long journeys to Patna, Kashi, and Ayodhya (during a known short trip south to meet with Emperor Bahadur Shah).

Bhai Sukha Singh was motivated to write his *Gurbilās Pātishāhī Dasvīṅ* after being inspired by a dream about the Dasam Granth. He travelled to Anandpur and gathered oral traditions about the Guru, and consulted numerous texts, including the *Bachitar Natak* and *Srī Gur Sobhā*. The thirty-one cantos on his text focus on the events and causes that led Guru Gobind Singh into battle. Bhai Sukkha Singh elaborated on the founding of the Khalsa and reflected on the political and moral issues at the heart of the Guru's resistance to Mughal rule.

Bhai Sobha Ram sought to present, not the life of a Guru, but one of Guru Nanak's descendants, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi (1756–1834). His *Gurbilās Bābā Sāhib Siṅgh Bedī* sets out the life of the saintly scholar, reformer, leader, and warrior. The text presents his scholarly upbringing and successful military leadership, but with an added flourish most biographers do not discuss—supernatural powers. Bhai Sobha Ram portrays Baba Singh Bedi as not only the descendant of Guru Nanak, but as an incarnation of Guru Gobind Singh, and incorporates part of the Guru's life into his telling of Bedis. This may also have been a technique to affirm the passing of the mantle of leadership to Ranjit Singh, as Baba Singh Bedi played a role in the former's coronation, if he stood in for Guru Gobind Singh, then it could be shown that the Guru himself approved of Ranjit Singh's rule. Whatever the justifications for such embellishment, Bhai Sobha Ram's text provides a good picture of Sikh social life in that period with vivid descriptions of marriage ceremonies, feasts, and songs popular at that time.

The Rahit-Namas

The predominant feature of the rahit-namas is to outline proper Sikh ritual practice, daily conduct, and behaviour and in the process offer Sikhs an arena in which, or a guide (p. 188) through which to emulate the imagined past behaviour of the Sikh Gurus and their foremost disciples to provide, in a sense, the symbolic presence of the Gurus through the imitation of their past manners and deeds, and adherence to their standards. To enhance the authority of such rahit statements the majority of eighteenth-century manuals have been attributed to famous Sikh disciples of Guru Gobind Singh of whom the most prominent is Bhai Nand Lal Goya, the tenth Master's premier Persian poet, the author of at least three such manuals (*Praśanuttar*, *Tankhāh-nāmā*, *sākhī Rahit kī*). These pious Sikhs would include Bhais Daya Singh and Chaupa Singh Chhibbar, to whom the lengthiest of the rahit-namas is attributed, and, as well, to Prahilad Rai a pious Sikh although one who lived well after the death of Gobind Singh.

The narrative sections of these texts, particularly that of Chaupa Singh Chhibbar, can easily be considered brief gurbilas texts. These thus compliment the dominant instruction sections of the work: while the narratives are descriptive and implicitly adoptable, the rahit itself is prescriptive and thus explicitly so. The narrative portions invariably set up the situations in which portions of the rahit may be further narrated with the proviso that these sections also focus upon those themes dear to the author's heart. In the case of Chaupa Singh's rahit-nama for example our esteemed author's narrative lays particular stress upon the selfless service of the Chhibbar brahmin Sikhs within the tenth Guru's darbar in one segment while in another emphasis is placed upon the mid-eighteenth-century situation of the now-compromised Panth with tacit reference to the unfortunately waning fortunes of the Chhibbar family.

The Functions and Importance of Janam-Sakhi, Gurbilas, and Rahit Literature

Despite the historical inaccuracies, exaggerations, and embellishments that riddle many of the texts previously mentioned, they are all important texts depicting how Sikhs have chosen to remember and commemorate their Gurus and their history. In this way, this literature provides a connection to both the lives of the great leaders as presented in these texts, but also to the general story of Sikh history, which each Sikh claims as their

own tradition. This dual function is elaborated upon in a variety of ways by Sikhs and scholars who have examined these texts over the years.

On a practical level, the janam-sakhi and gurbilas texts serve primarily as introductions to the Gurus. While their bani and other writings are recorded in the Adi Granth and Dasam Granth, there is not much biographical information presented. It is hard to know who these men were simply via their poetic compositions. This literature is the key in assembling and presenting the lives of the Gurus and other influential Sikhs to distant audiences. These stories are essential to the course of Sikhism and the general course of their lives must be known in order to realize the trajectory of the spiritual (p. 189) mission which they all share with later generations. The rahit-namas doubtlessly supply another dimension to this knowledge in that these make us tacitly acquainted with the ideal behaviour and etiquette of the Sikh, behaviours believed embodied by the Sikh Gurus themselves.

These stories also depict the practical implementation of the Sikh mission, as embodied by the Gurus. As the Gurus are models of Sikh behaviour, the janam-sakhis, rahit-nama, and gurbilas texts are the blueprints for reproducing and emulating those models, models which as we have noted are articulated point by point within the rahit-namas. Stories about the moral attributes and character of Sikh leaders, and the patterns of their behaviours, serve to inform, guide, and inspire readers to live as these great men did. The janam-sakhi, gurbilas, and rahit texts are meant to convey Sikh tradition—the model of the Gurus' lives that Sikh readers are enjoined to follow. The texts, then, serve not only as a record of their actions, but also as a prescription for its emulation. It is easy to see how Guru Nanak's compassion and Guru Gobind Singh's courage stand at the forefront in these depictions. Sikhs are enjoined by the texts to take these elements into their lives and live fully according to the principles the Gurus set forth.

The story form of the janam-sakhis, setting up an anecdote which led to Guru Nanak's recitation of new bani, helps to coordinate the learning effort of Sikhs. The stories are constructed lessons, tying Guru Nanak's actions to his message. There is little doubt as to the value of these stories, and the gurbilas texts as well, as lessons used to compliment the Guru Granth Sahib's revealed message. These texts thus not only tell us what Sikhs believe but how Sikhs should live, indeed who the Sikhs are. This literature provides the context for and rationale behind the shabad, or helps Sikhs to realize how their own actions can be informed by and derived from the Gurus' inspiration. These texts are, at heart, preaching tools to be used to elaborate upon and explain the Sikh message, in a variety of ways.

This pedagogical concern is reflected in the variety of telling of these stories; each text's author was trying to present a specific vision of the Gurus' lessons. Both the Bala and the

Miharban Janam-sakhi originated in sectarian communities that held slightly different views from the majority of Sikhs who followed the common line of Guru Nanak and his nine successors. In the late nineteenth century, the Singh Sabha movement promoted the use of the Puratan Janam-sakhi in order to excise what they considered to be fantastical and syncretic elements (depicted in the other janam-sakhi texts) from the story of Guru Nanak's life. They even went so far as to use Max Arthur Macauliffe's *The Sikh Religion* as their front for the presentation of their understanding of Guru Nanak to the Western world.

Despite the variety of interpretations and presentations of the Gurus' lives in these texts, it is important to see how all versions of the stories ultimately lead to a similar end—the creation of Sikh tradition. The janam-sakhis and gurbilas texts all create important relationships via a Sikh's belief in the stories of the Gurus while the rahit-namas do so through their implicit claims that all Sikhs must follow in the Guru's footsteps by reproducing their behaviours and standards. First, a direct relationship with the Gurus is fostered for those who did not have the opportunity to meet these (p. 190) great leaders. Sikh readers of these texts come to learn about the Gurus as men who did things. They are shown as members of the community, who worked and lived the Sikh message, just as later Sikhs try to do it. Devotion to the Sikh mission is cultivated through the direct relationship with the Gurus. The teachers in these texts have personalities, habits, and aspirations, in addition to the lessons they pass along through their own writings.

The second major relationship fostered through the janam-sakhis and gurbilas literature is one with Sikh history and the tradition of Sikhs relayed through the centuries that keeps these stories alive and active as influential aspects of Sikhism. There is an implicit acceptance of the stories as the actual depictions of what happened in these figures' lives and communities. Thus, these texts need to be understood as the history of the Sikh community itself, a story that both unites and motivates the Panth to act in accordance with their tradition and faith. Sikhs participate in the story, taking this history as theirs, and striving to embody the goals and mission laid out by the lineage of Gurus. To be a Sikh is to join in the pursuit of the goals laid out by the Gurus, which are conveyed through the stories of their lives and the emulation of their lifestyles. As blueprints for ethical behaviour, they only make sense in the wider context of the Sikh mission laid out in the stories and in conjunction with the primary texts that record the sacred bani. The janam-sakhis and gurbilas texts are, effectively, a programme for Sikh life made clear through the presentation of stories about the Gurus' lives as both models for ethical living and as paths to the goals set out by their lives.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article deals with the treatment of Sikhism and Sikh motifs in contemporary Punjabi literature. It examines such motifs as they have figured in Punjabi poetry, drama, and fiction. Through the adoption of these motifs this literature promotes individuality, integrity, and sovereignty.

Keywords: prem, simran, gian, gurbani, sangat, Panth, khand

THE Sikh tradition has provided the crucial motifs of contemporary Punjabi literature. Heralding the latter's inauguration these motifs have become more diffuse and evanescent with the passage of time. Such motifs have also been affected by economic, social, historical, and ideological changes throughout India. Poetic, fictional, and dramatic, these literary modes are three in number. The sources from which these motifs arose are also three: Sikh doctrine, culture, and history. Aims rising from doctrine have figured prominently in poetry; and although motifs are also drawn from Sikh history and society these designs were secondary and tertiary in comparison. Motifs drawn from history often appear in Punjabi fiction while Sikh society provides for those in Punjabi drama.

I

Sikh doctrine, as a rich source of motifs for poetry, owed its origin to the individual's longing for union with the Divine, so lucidly defined by Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the founder of Sikhism. In the *Mul Mantar* (Seed Formula), the first Guru defined the Divine as one, boundless, true, universal, and eternal. The Divine, transcendent in Being and immanent in Becoming, was formless and bodiless, at the same time present in every particle of the universe. For attaining this union, the human being was required to

cultivate *prem* (love), *simran* (remembrance), and *gian* (knowledge), all three of which Guru Nanak conveyed with the utmost intensity. In *Raga Vadahans*, for example, the human being is ready to cut off his head and offer it as seat for the Lord and headless serve him with full devotion (Guru Granth Sahib (GGS): 558). This was Guru Nanak's definition of human identity: individuality expressed through selfless service to (p. 192) the Lord and those who venerate him. Its intensity, coupled with authenticity, is unsurpassed in the whole of Punjabi poetry.

If the human being's longing for union with the Divine was intense and authentic, the Divine willingly assumed the obligation to safeguard the honour and integrity of the human being. Guru Arjan (1563–1606), who not only compiled the Adi Granth but also composed a major portion of *gurbani* (utterances of the Gurus), emphasized the veracity of this motif. In *Raga Dhanasari*, he contends that the Lord does not let his devotee face any trouble and assumes the obligation to ensure his well-being.

What Guru Nanak defined as identity was further refined by Guru Arjan, who underscored the claim of sovereignty for the human being as an integral part of the community. Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708) subsequently called upon the Divine to assume this responsibility in his stirring composition, *Benati* (Dasam Granth: 1386–8).

This whole project enjoined the human being to embody balance between one's intellectual-cum-emotional and sensuous-cum-sensual aspects. The sensuous-cum-sensual aspects were not false, but recourse to them was denied for their own satisfaction. It is no wonder therefore that the human being's longing for union with the Divine could not be better expressed than through the metaphor of the bride's pining for her groom. Creative in procreative terms, this image was superior to that of the woman's desire for the male, the basis of which generally, in Indic literature, is eroticism. Likewise, integrity was shown to flow naturally from earnest work and mutual help and sovereignty was not subject to compromises.

Sikh doctrine's originality in this sense could not flourish after Sikhs secured political power. The polity of the Lahore kingdom shaped itself on lines prevalent in earlier political systems. In the absence of initiatives advocated in *gurbani* social ills were inevitable. The reforms of later colonial rule engendered a number of changes, which wrought a basic modification in the ethos of the people. Sati was outlawed; standardized school education began; as, too, rail, road, and postal systems were put into place. Thousands of families were also settled upon land brought under cultivation through the newly dug canal system. These innovations imparted a positive sense of worldliness to the Punjabi people.

II

In this environment, the Singh Sabha movement began, the aim of which was to make Sikhs aware of their religious doctrine, history, and culture, as interpreted by their foremost ideologues. Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957) was the predominant mentor of this movement. As his context differed considerably from that of Guru Nanak, it did not warrant the deepening of the Sikh doctrine's originality, which had imparted tenacity, common sense, resistance to oppression, and empathy. It was only logical that Vir Singh sought to adapt to the new dispensation, which he did with all the authority vested in him by the Singh Sabha movement. To this end, therefore, he visualized the Divine as ineffable, the (p. 193) momentary realization of which gave pure aesthetic pleasure, which was both sensuous and sensual along lines similar to those articulated by Guru Nanak. To impart a sense of universality to his understanding, Vir Singh enriched his vision of Sikhism with elements drawn from the eroticism celebrated in Sufism and the pantheism glorified in the romanticism of the English poets. At the religious and doctrinal level, this amalgam converged with the colonial agenda, without being subservient to it.

The effect of Vir Singh's adaptions can be gathered from his novel, *Rana Surat Singh*. Its hero is a young man who bears the same name as this epic. He is a Rajput by birth but converts to Sikhism to marry Raj Kaur, the only daughter of a Sikh king ruling over a hill-state. In the preface, the poet describes Raj Kaur as 'the daughter of a Sikh ruler, darling of her mother who is a Sikh by faith, reared in the company of the Sikh *sanga*t [congregation], wife of a Sikh husband, well-versed in the norms of Sikhism' (Vir Singh 2005: 1). However, at times, Raj Kaur longs to be close to her husband. In such moments, she is unaware of the spiritual core of his being. Surat Singh is a kind ruler concerned with his wife's dilemma and ardently wishes her to rise to spiritual awakening. But the historical situation is very inauspicious. In the plains of Punjab, the Sikhs are facing formidable odds at the hands of adversaries. Upon a call from his brethren, Surat Singh proceeds to the plains. There he gets killed, leaving his wife utterly disconsolate, verging on collapse. After several trials and tribulations, she acquires peace of mind by attending the Sikh *sangat* and hearing the recitation of *gurbani*. In due course, she is able to function as the ruler of her kingdom. She regards this job as nominal. Most of her time is spent in performing religious rituals and listening to the recitation of *gurbani*.

In the aftermath of this epic, Bhai Vir Singh wrote lyrical poems, which he published after more than a decade under haunting titles such as *Matak Hulare* (Coquettish Swings), *Bijlian de Haar* (Garlands of Flashes), and *Lehran de Haar* (Garlands of Riffles). What impelled him to write these lyrical poems was his manifest belief in latent reality. To his mind, human beings living in the world are perennially drawn towards its mystery. The

joy of life lies in experiencing this pull. Humanity's ultimate end does not lie in union. Instead, it is in the aesthetic pleasure that casts a mystical spell on the mind. This is how it is expressed in the poem *Akhian*:

> From a longing to see the invisible
> Are formed these eyes.
> After a moment's vision
> There is again this longing.

This aesthetic pleasure gives no hint at all of the sense of regret that *gurbani* imparts to the absence of union with the Divine. The mystical enfolding of sociopolitical reality held essential in *gurbani* also gets discounted.

Reverence from Sikhs inspired by the Singh Sabha movement was the reward that Bhai Vir Singh earned for his literary output. Just such a reward from literate Sikhs was also earned by his contemporary and friend, Puran Singh (1881–1931). In his early youth, Japan charmed Puran Singh with its aesthetic output, particularly its emphasis on the ambience of natural beauty. Subsequently he came under the aesthetic and poetic (p. 194) influence of Walt Whitman (1819–92) who was a votary of freedom in life and letters. The pantheism of the nineteenth-century Romantic poets also attracted him, along with Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) universalism. Under such a composite light, he turned his attention to Sikhism, not as exclusive doctrine but as inclusive vision. It was from just this all-encompassing revelation, he felt, that scenery, vegetation, landscape, animal life, and the people of Punjab drew their nature and nurture.

Suffused with feelings and emotions from diverse sources, Puran Singh brought out three volumes of poems. He named them *Khule Maidan* (Open Fields), *Khule Ghund* (Open Veils), and *Khule Asmani Rang* (Open Heavenly Hues). Of these, the first one is indeed a major work. It opens with a long poem, *Puran Nath Yogi*, spread over forty pages. It celebrates the role of the mother over that of the beloved and wife. While in *gurbani*, the wife is a metaphor of the human soul pining for union with the husband; here the mother is glorified as one who lights the son's fire to dare the journey towards emancipation. This becomes a symbol of Puran Singh's return to Sikhism from the asceticism that he had earlier embraced. Having completed this return, he begins to see all facets and aspects of Punjabi life through the innocent look of a child or the spontaneous impulse of an animal. The rivers, trees, animals, village folk, women, and heroes and heroines of Punjabi folklore seem to him resonant with the tone and tenor of Gurbani's inclusive vision. Quite evocative are the poems, which have at their centre some rural being, a woman busy in her daily chores, a ploughman or a potter engrossed in his work, a child struck with wonder at the sight of some scene or the expanse of land lying interminably before his eyes.

In these poems, the poet employs mixed metaphor that seeks to award amplitude to a moment, an instant feeling, or transitory situation. The mixed metaphor evokes layers of meanings drawing upon mythology, folklore, and common sense. Crowning them is spiritual illumination reflected from *gurbani*. In the long poems, included in the next volumes, such layers become opaque and repetitive. Instead of ambiguity, it is obscurity that begins to mark the poetic discourse. Such abstruseness gets burdensome in poems dealing with spiritual and transcendent subjects. These concern themselves with the mystery of creation, art, philosophy, meditation, and consciousness. Such subjects dazzle the poetic sensibility so much that nothing emanating even from *gurbani* illumines his intuition. The discord, marking the actual world, begins to overwhelm him:

> My eyes are without sight
> God does not appear to me everywhere.
> Neither in each object
> Covered in countless veils does He seem.
> Only lightning lifts the corner a bit
> Or a flash gives an instant glimpse.
> Rarely does God come into my sight,
> How piteous is my plight!

That God here is synonymous with the Divine is obvious enough.

(p. 195) III

Bhai Vir Singh and Puran Singh were still alive when political turmoil came to the fore in 1920s Punjab. The Singh Sabha movement was pushed into the background by the Akali Dal which jumped into the forefront to liberate the *gurdwaras* from the *mahants* (custodians). A decade back, the Ghadar movement, launched from America against colonial rule, had met with tragedy but its most far-sighted leader, Bhai Santokh Singh (1893–1927), had returned to Punjab, after staying in the Soviet Union, to organize the Kirti-Kisan Party and start the journal *Kirti*. The Congress also had acquired a foothold among the urban Punjabis, along with certain militant organizations, which animated the youth and the rural population. It should elicit little surprise that from the 1930s motifs drawn from Sikh history and society began to figure in Punjabi poetry.

The leading poets at the front of this trend were Avtar Singh Azad (1906–72) and Mohan Singh (1905–78), along with several others of less import. They implemented three innovations under the intellectual hegemony of Sant Singh Sekhon (1908–97). First, they awarded primacy to motifs immanent in Sikh history and sought to glorify this history as

one of relentless struggle launched by the Punjabi people, particularly the peasantry, against domination. Second, they portrayed the Sikh Gurus as world-historical figures intent on sacrificing their all to awaken among the people their sense of identity, integrity, and sovereignty. Third, in place of mystical insights, these poets perceived the Gurus as possessing philosophical and ideological commitments. Due to other concerns for national freedom, political rights, social equality, and openness in personal relationships, among others they could not elaborate upon these innovations so as to imprint them deeply into the common sense of the people. For example, Avtar Singh Azad wrote *Mard Agammara* (Unique Person) and *Vishav Noor* (Light of the World) on Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak. To go beyond reverence and glorification and evaluate them with creative candidness was beyond him. Likewise, Mohan Singh wrote *Nankayan* (Tale of Nanak). Rather than draw his subject matter from Guru Nanak's compositions, he relied upon the *janamsakhis* (birth narratives) composed by the Guru's votaries. So far as diction and metrical virtuosity are concerned, Mohan Singh's works are admirable. However, the philosophical-cum-historical task remained unconsummated. In his first collection, *Saave Patar* (Green Leaves), he had published a poem, *Sikhi*, contending that it had fragmented into several sects. In spite of that, he believed that it would keep on flourishing. As he matured, he renounced this exploration, to content himself with metrical virtuosity and immaculate diction.

The real forte of these poets, particularly Mohan Singh, lay in evoking the immanence of experience. Affiliations, drawing upon history, politics, economy, and society, mattered as much in orienting it as filiations, that is family, education, career, and achievement. Affiliations and filiations exercised their impact upon the sensuous, sensual, erotic, and sexual side of the person's identity, resulting in happiness or sadness, richness or poverty, and prosperity or misery. So far as male–female relationships went, it was the (p. 196) uninhibited longing for union with the beloved upon which the worth of life was measured. Married life and domestic contentment resulting from living with one's partner was taken as a matter of routine, unworthy of admiration and evaluation. The fact that *gurbani* claimed otherwise, did not pose any crisis in their structure of experience and feeling. If ideological guidance came to them from Marxism, then it was Freudian psychology that supplied emotional sustenance at this juncture.

Supplementary to this was the evocation of immanent experience by the female poet. In this regard, the most telling example was provided by the now-iconic Amrita Pritam (1919–2005). For her, waiting, dreaming, and pining for the lover was the essence of a woman's life. Her waiting was eternal for no onus fell upon the lover. Separation was her ontological state, which paradoxically was painful but at the same time was elevating. She perceived the role of the husband as negative for he stuck to a false sense of pride, a worldly honour which motivated him to look at women as essentially inferior and

subordinate to men. Ironically enough, when she came up with a meaningful poem, *Tripta da Supna*, which detailed the dream of Guru Nanak's mother, Tripta, while the first Master was yet in her womb, she was reviled by elderly scholars of Sikhism. To believe that Guru Nanak was in his mother's uterus for nine months and that his mother ardently waited for his birth sounded an anathema to them.

From the 1940s, a group of poets appeared upon the scene resolved to salvage doctrinal motifs from their peripheral stage and restore them again to the centre of poetic discourse in Punjabi. Heading this group was Pritam Singh Safeer (1916–99) who began his career with very powerful poems about human misery, loneliness, and estrangement. As his immediate predecessors had popularized a dialectical-cum-historical ideology, he was impelled to visualize life in this way. Safeer imparted apocalyptic proportions in this visualization, a dread from which only as divine a personage as Guru Gobind Singh could deliver humanity. Since he glorified the tenth Master for his dazzling appearance and not for his humanity, he failed to portray the tenth Master as the deliverer of all humanity. The assertiveness that contemporary women had begun to show in all spheres of life in the 1940s, ranging from the public to the private, disconcerted Safeer a great deal. In this light therefore he tacitly notes that the salvation delivered by the Guru could only benefit men as women seemed, to him, far too enmeshed in a near-profane worldliness. Cancelling love from the domain meditation, he advocated the efficacy only of *simran* and *gian*, thus attenuating the semantic richness of his poetic diction and extenuating its tonal eloquence. So beginning as a problematic poet, intent on visualizing life through the prism of Sikhism, he ended up by embracing eloquence and incantation in place of reflection and self-reflection.

Among Safeer's contemporaries was Gopal Singh Dardi (1917–90) who is known as the first translator of Guru Granth Sahib into English. *Anahad Nada* (Unstruck Melody) was his swansong, wherein his mystical-cum-metaphysical concerns became quite evident. In line with Sikh doctrine, Dardi believed that the universe existed in accordance with the Divine Order. Through *simran* and *prem*, the human being could attune him- or herself to this order. But in modern life, to do so is extremely arduous, gruelling indeed, as worldliness entraps human beings within its mighty tentacles. If (p. 197) the materiality of the world lies in the wide acceptance of Marxism, then its psychological reasons stem from the approval granted to the psychological theory of Sigmund Freud, as an antidote to emotional problems. In his baffled state, Dardi believed that if any good could happen it was possible only by imbibing the constellation of archetypal images and archaic feelings shown universal and eternal in the psychology of Carl Jung (1875–1961).

Jaswant Singh Neki (1925–) has occupied himself with this agenda in a more consistent way. Academically he is grounded in psychology and psychotherapy but his aesthetic and

spiritual interest lies in the scriptural writings relating to Sikhism. The ten collections of poems which he has so far brought out, carry the imprint of this double engagement. From his first volume, *Asle de Ohle* (Behind the Real), suggestive in itself, he has concerned himself with latent reality. As an amalgam of the metaphysical and the aesthetic, it is required neither to transfigure the being nor hide it in bliss. This engagement goes on in his second volume as well but so laden is it with concepts and categories that pontification gets the better of poetic expression. It is in his next volume, *Simriti de Kiran to Pehlan* (Before Memory Fades) that his engagement realizes its lifelong aim of reaching the destination inscribed within the five *khands* (spiritual realms) towards the end of Guru Nanak's *Japu*. Under the guidance of his Guru, i.e. the divine Word, he transfigures into his feminine soulmate in the next volume, *Karuna di Chhoh ton Magron* (After Compassion's Touch) and proceeds towards eternity. Till the end, the poet's involvement with Western disciplines on one hand and the Sikh scriptures on the other remains consistent. But it is only through their mixture that he is able to move forward, not to their synthesis from which a new perception of life and reality may be forged into unity.

In spite of the effort put in by these poets, the motifs rising from Sikhism could not come to the centre of poetic discourse in Punjabi. Rather, they were pushed to the margins because, after independence, the Sikhs had consolidated in the Indian Punjab but they did not feel content with their lot in the Indian state. With myopic leaders in the forefront, the struggle they embarked upon seemed to go against the objectives the country had resolved to achieve for setting up a socialistic pattern of society under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Though the grievances of the Sikhs were genuine they seemed parochial and residual to people outside Punjab. In this situation, poets, particularly settled outside Punjab, were inclined to view motifs drawn from Sikh doctrine and history in existential terms. Haribhajan Singh (1919–2002) was foremost in appropriating Guru Nanak's sojourn to far-flung places for holding *goshti* (dialogues) with the mentors of Islam and Hinduism, to refute their anachronistic views and the presumptions of his contemporaries. To view the ordinariness of the modern person in contrast to the luminosity of Guru Gobind Singh's achievement was another motif that could draw angst from him, couched in a sense of futility. His celebrated poem, *Tere Hazoor Meri Hazri di Dastan* is a memorable piece of writing. Contrapuntal to this was the feeling of bondage that a person of emergent outlook could feel while observing the commands of the Guru. Avtar Pash (1950–88) was such a poet whose poem, *Joga Singh di Swa-prachol* is a text of singular importance.

(p. 198) # IV

Fiction portraying motifs relating to the Sikh society was started by Bhai Vir Singh, who wrote four novels, *Sundri*, *Bijay Singh*, *Baba Naudh Singh*, and *Satwant Kaur*. With the exception of the second, these are historical romances. As he put in his introduction to *Sundri*, his purpose in writing it was 'to confirm the Sikhs in their religious beliefs, to enable them to perform their religious and spiritual duties with felicity'. This applied to all four novels. Writing these in the manner of Walter Scott's historical romances was an incentive provided Vir Singh by colonial rule. At the same time, their execution proved a blockage. They portray Punjab as an environment eternally ordained for the Sikhs. The presence of characters from other communities is contingent on following the dictates of *gurbani*. These dictates do not concern equality, fraternity, and compassion, so poignantly articulated in *the* Guru Granth Sahib. They rest content with mystical and metaphysical rumination forwarding other-worldly concerns.

For this reason, therefore, Vir Singh's novels do not mention the colonial agenda. This is baffling as there is no overt favour to foreign rule in all four. It seems as if the colonial rule is a factor to ignore rather than to resist. To forgo resistance and focus upon prayer, meditation, devotion, and transcendence, is held imperative for other communities residing in Punjab. If a Hindu by embracing Sikhism becomes an integral part of the Sikh community, then a Muslim, by professing Sufism, develops converging parallelism with the interactive whole inhabiting Punjab. These historical romances seem to pursue an agenda for the Punjabi nation that observes only allegorical parameters in the first and the last instance. The ideology of the Singh Sabha of which Bhai Vir Singh was the chief mentor gets visionary interpretation in these romances. Neo-Sikhism forms the edifice upon which these historical romances are raised, an edifice raised upon the site of eighteenth-century Sikh society.

It was left to Master Tara Singh (1885–1967) to portray the political urge neo-Sikhism was impelled/compelled to adopt when, in the 1920s, the anti-colonial struggle took root. As the optimum leader of the Akali Dal, he was in a position to do so. The Akali Dal won accolades even from Mahatma Gandhi for carrying to consummation the valiant but non-violent struggle to liberate the gurdwaras from the clutches of *mahants* actively supported by the colonial government. What this struggle implied for the ordinary pious Sikh is the issue portrayed in his novel, *Prem Lagan* (Devotional Instinct). Being a man of politics, the author chooses to frame his narrative around the life of the 1930s. Lacking in mediation between the personal and the social, he is able neither to turn it into historical novel nor into a rich document of culture. It is a different matter that he aspires for both in partial measure. In his second novel, *Baba Tega Singh* he is better able to depict the

remorse of an elderly Sikh. He did not stand with heroic warrior who, though as old as he is now, fought heroically against the then British government. The message here is that Sikhs are unable to lead respectable lives bereft of the Sikh kingdom in India under British rule.

(p. 199) This was followed by two types of fictional narratives. In his romances, Charan Singh Shahid (1885–1935) laid emphasis upon the ethical stance of his Sikh characters, particularly of the Sikh women. Mohan Singh Vaid (1880–1936) pleaded for the adoption of trade and manufacture by his Sikh characters so as to improve and ennoble their way of living. The wider issues of freedom from colonial rule and ideology required for the purpose hardly find a place in narration and description.

Except for Bhai Vir Singh, none of the writers mentioned above was a great fiction writer. The first great Punjabi novelist was Nanak Singh (1897–1971) but motifs of Sikh demeanour do not figure in his novels. There are memorable Sikh characters in his novels, a few of them deserving to be called great but caste, vocation, nationalism, even anarchism play determining role in their lives. If in Sohan Singh Seetal (1909–98), it is the rural and the feudal background of Majha that moulds his characters in the first instance, then in Gurdial Singh (1933–), it is the Malwa, teeming with poverty, illiteracy, superstition, and misery of several kinds, from which his characters draw their remorse, repentance, and mourning. Motifs drawn from Sikh doctrine, society, and history are not present in determining their lives. They may be visible but their visibility is not of any consequence. This can be said even more confidently about novelists who have succeeded them though due recognition has not yet come their way.

Motifs relating to Sikh history have figured more conspicuously in drama though certain restrictions have been accepted without any demur. For example, to depict the Gurus as dramatis personae is prohibited. This means that they can be known only through the dialogues of their votaries, antagonists, and protagonists. In spite of this, there have appeared plays in celebration of the birth and martyrdom days of the Gurus by several major playwrights. These plays cannot be called historical. They are rather hagiographical, employing religious, biographical material to glorify the Gurus who took birth to salvage humanity or suffer martyrdom in accordance with the Will of the Almighty.

The historical plays of Sant Singh Sekhon (1908–97) are an exception. There are seven of these, in which he grapples with historical motifs, ranging from the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh to the dissolution of the Sikh kingdom in the middle of the nineteenth century. He comes up with insights, which seem anathema to the traditional Sikh historians. According to him, Guru Gobind Singh organized the Panth on militant lines to win political power and set up its *raj* in Punjab between the Satluj and the Attack.

Egalitarian to begin with, it turned typically feudal with no innovation to its credit. The onslaught of the colonial rulers put an end to it. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, an effort was made to revive the glory of the initial motifs of Sikh history by coordinating them with the strategies of Marxism and Leninism but the imperialist tactics did not let them advance in this emergent direction. Thus, Sikh history was made to march from incipient beginning to apocalyptic climax with no end in sight. Sekhon regards Sikh history marked by contraries of rise and decline, success and failure, glory and ignominy. He also believes that its hagiography has put a veil upon the barbarity inherent in it. No wonder certain imaginative insights, like Guru Gobind Singh struggling for political power in the garb of Banda Bahadur, seem to him true though documents and records do not prove them as historical facts.

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'Western' Writers on the Sikhs

Harpreet Singh

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Abstract and Keywords

This article provides a broad overview and a critique of Western scholarship on the Sikhs, from the late eighteenth century to the present. It begins with pre-colonial European ethnography, followed by colonial accounts, and ending with scholarship on the Sikhs in the last fifty years. The assumptions that have shaped the field of Sikh Studies are discussed, along with some of the debates in the field.

Keywords: Western scholarship, early European accounts, East India Company, Orientalism, Sikh Studies

THIS essay reviews the production of knowledge about Sikhs and Sikhī, along with the theoretical assumptions that have contributed to the development of the field of Sikh Studies. It employs the category 'Western' to designate those whose works have been produced with the support of Western institutions of power, such as the colonial state and the Euro-American University. The work begins with a handful of pre-colonial accounts of the Sikhs by European travellers and agents of the East India Company, followed by some colonial ones by Orientalists, and ending with current scholarship.

Pre-Colonial European Ethnography

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century British intelligence on the Sikhs became a matter of urgency in view of their fast-growing political influence in north India. As part of this strategy Colonel A. L. H. Polier, George Forster, and Major James Browne were given special instructions by the East India Company to prepare their reports on the strengths and weaknesses of the Sikhs from a military point of view. For the most part their observations deal with the military order of the Khalsa. As pioneers they set the tone of British historiography on the Sikhs of the Punjab. Although they were severely handicapped on account of the paucity of source material, the difficulty of general

communication with native people, and limited means of collecting information, they made significant observations on contemporary Sikh institutions, customs, and manners. However, the observations of early Europeans reflect a partial view based on imperfect perception. Although their own European biases enter into their descriptions, their contribution is an important one since it is based on actual observation. The early ethnographic accounts in European languages show a great deal of consistency in noting the political organization of the Sikhs, who had made ‘rapid progress’ owing to a distinctive polity based on an egalitarian social organization. An uncertainty about the (p. 202) Sikhs’ relation to Hindus marks most of the early texts, which see the Sikh tradition as a reform movement within the large Hindu tradition. Some accounts stem from an anxiety of the East India Company to take stock of the growing power of the Sikh confederacies (*misls*) that were expanding their rule over the Punjab in the eighteenth century. As the first governor-general Warren Hastings noted in his 1784 memorandum:

> A new source of serious contemplation has arisen from a nearer quarter, namely, that of the Sikhs, a people who from a mean sect of religious schismatics have rapidly grown into the masters of a dominion extending from the most western branch of the Attock to the walls of Delhi…They are by their bodily frame and habits of life eminently suited for the military profession; but this propensity is qualified by a spirit of independence which is a great check to its exertion. Every village has its separate and distinct ruler acknowledging no control, but that of his own immediate community, who in turn yield him little more than nominal submission.
>
> (Hastings 2004: 64)

Hastings’s comments came just a few months after Bhagel Singh of the Karorsinghia *misl* had led 4,000 of his troops into Delhi in 1783. The ruling Mughal emperor Shāh Ālam II not only allowed Bhagel Singh to commence building seven gurdwaras on historical spots but also to collect 37.5 per cent of all octroi duties in the city (Hastings 2004: 64). Alarmed by the Sikh encroachment, Hastings began his intelligence-gathering exercises.

Hastings’s close friend Antoine-Louis Henri Polier, a member of a prominent Swiss Protestant family, was one of the early commentators on the Sikhs. During his eventful career, Polier served the East India Company, the *navāb* of Awadh, and the Mughal emperor Shāh Ālam II. His short treatises on the Sikhs rely heavily on Persian sources such as the *Muntakhabu’l Lubāb*. Like most commentators of this period, Polier notes the egalitarian and democratic ‘government’ of the Sikhs ‘in which…all Chiefs, great or small, and even the poorest and most abject [Sikh], look on themselves as perfectly equal, in all the public Concerns, and in the greatest Council or *Goormatta* of the Nation…everything

is decided by the plurality of Votes taken indifferently from all who chuse to present at it’ (Polier 2004: 80).

For Polier, the political success of the Sikhs is not a mere accident of history, but rather it is to be attributed to Sikh theology and praxis. He bases his opinion on his comparison of Sikh and non-Sikh Jats: ‘But what is more to be admired is that those Seik [Sikh] Sirdars, whose territories border on the King’s were but very lately of the Jauts [Jats] and of their caste and tribe, under which domination had they remained, no one would have thought of them; but now that they have put on their iron bracelet, fifty of them are enough to keep at bay a whole battalion of the King’s forces, such as they are’ (G. Singh 1962: 66).

During the same period, Charles Wilkins provided a highly sympathetic account of the Sikhs in the form of a letter to the secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society in London. Wilkins’s 1781 narrative points to Sikh religious practices that are identical to present-day (p. 203) gurdwara traditions—*kīrtan* (devotional singing); *ardās* (congregational prayer); the distribution of *kaṛah parshād* (sweet pudding) at the conclusion of the service, followed by *laṅgar* (congregational meal) (Wilkins 2004: 295). According to Wilkins, the service commenced with the singing of *kīrtan* and ‘at the conclusion of every verse, most of the congregation joined chorus in a response, with countenances exhibiting great marks of joy…The Hymn being concluded, which consisted of about twenty verses, the whole congregation got up and presented their faces with joined hands toward the altar, in the attitude of prayer’ (Wilkins 2004: 294–5). Accounts such as this one—when read together with early eighteenth-century *rahitnāmā*s (manuals codifying Sikh practice)—help us understand the degree to which Sikh congregational worship had been standardized in the pre-colonial period.

Wilkins was the first to describe Sikh religious practice in some detail and therefore became an important primary source for later writers. In fact, Wilkins’s work continued to inform the policy of Christian missionaries into the nineteenth century. For instance, quoting Wilkins in 1814, one missionary report stated, ‘The success of Nanac shows that the habits and prejudices of the Hindoos are not so immutably fixed as many in Great Britain have imagined. The pacific character of Nanac, and the approach of his doctrines to those of Christianity, are circumstances remarkable and important; and we need more information on the subject, than we now possess, to account for them without the aid of inspiration’ (Wilkins 2004: 293). As the following discussion will show, the problematic assumption that Guru Nanak—the founder of the Sikh tradition—was a pacifist still exists in scholarship today.

Shortly after Wilkins, George Forster, who travelled across Sikh territory disguised as a Muslim horse trader, provided a detailed account of the Sikhs in his letters. His early letters betray an apprehension of the Sikhs, but later ones show that he had developed

considerable respect for his Sikh interlocutors. He refers to them as ‘new and extraordinary people’ (Forster 1798: 291) who ‘seemed to revolt at the idea of servitude’ (Forster 1798: 286). Like Polier, Forster notes the democratic principles along which Sikh society is organized and the institution of the *gurmattā* in which all Sikhs, regardless of their status, have equal voices:

> No honorary or titular distinction is conferred on any member of the state…An equality of rank is maintained in civil society, which no class of men, however wealthy or powerful, is suffered to break down. At the periods when general councils of the nation were convened, which consisted of the army at large, every member had the privilege of delivering his opinion; and the majority, it is said, decided the subject in debate
>
> (Forster 1798: 285–6).

In addition to social organization, Forster also provides an account of Sikh tenets, which, according to him, ‘forbid the worship of images’ (Forster 1798: 267). Furthermore, ‘A book entitled the *Grunth*…is the only typical object that Sicques have admitted into (p. 204) their places of worship’ (Forster 1798: 267). The dominance of the Khalsa identity throughout the narrative is striking. Forster mentions the Khalsa practice of wearing long hair (*kesh*) with ‘iron bracelet’ (*kaṛā*), along with prohibition against the use of tobacco, as ‘regulations’ that were instituted to distinguish the Sikhs from other communities (Forster 1798: 267). In contrast to these earlier accounts, five decades later, *A History of the Sikhs* by Cunningham sees the Sikhs as converts to an entirely ‘new religion’, with a unique theology playing an important role in shaping Sikh subjectivity and material features:

> A living spirit possesses the whole Sikh people, and the impress of Govind [the tenth Guru] has not only elevated and altered the constitution of their minds but has operated materially and given amplitude to their physical frames. The features and external form of a whole people have been modified…in religious faith and worldly aspirations, they are wholly different from other Indians, and they are bound together by a community of inward sentiment and of outward object unknown elsewhere.
>
> (Cunningham 1849: 90)

To the leading Orientalists such as H. H. Wilson who regarded the Sikhs as a Hindu sect, Cunningham responds that the early Christians suffered a similar fate when Tacitus and Suetonius regarded them as a mere Jewish sect (Cunningham 1849: 91). Despite these remarks, Cunningham sees the Sikhs as a part of a civilization that is inferior to the

Christian West. According to him, the Sikhs are successful only because they, unlike other natives, possess qualities that the West has in abundance (Mandair 2009: 180–1).

Colonial Power and Western University as Sites of Knowledge Production

The annexation of the Punjab in 1849 and its subsequent colonization created a new discursive space in which many European Orientalists aided the state in its continued information-gathering exercises, but also played an important role in furthering the aggressive agenda of Christian evangelists in the region. The British commissioned an English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS; the Sikh scripture) with the conviction that in order to understand the Sikhs, it was necessary to know their scripture. The task of translating the Sikh scripture was entrusted to the German philologist Ernest Trumpp, who in the preface to his translation, described the volume as ‘incoherent and shallow in the extreme, and couched at the same time in dark and perplexing language, in order to cover these defects’ (Trumpp 1877: p. vii). Despite Trumpp’s biases, his work was the very first to provide a description of the complex grammatical forms and prosody used in the Sikh scripture.

(p. 205) Trumpp’s work invited strong reaction from both the Sikhs and some Western scholars such as Fredric Pincott, Lepel Griffin, and John J. H. Gordon (D. Singh 1991: 34). The Sikh ruler Rājā Bikaram Singh responded to Trumpp’s work by commissioning the *Farīdkoṭī Ṭīkā*, a traditional commentary on the Sikh scripture. A British civil servant Max Arthur Macauliffe (1842–1913), after being prompted by the Sikhs, took it upon himself to make ‘reparation’ for what he described as Trumpp’s ‘odium theologicum’ (Macauliffe 1909: i. 2). The result of Macauliffe’s sixteen-year labour was his *The Sikh Religion* (1909) in six volumes. Recognizing the lack of English works on the Sikhs, he noted, ‘My translation will practically introduce a new religion to the world, which may derive advantage from the high ethical principles of the Sikh Gurus’ (Macauliffe 1909: i. 7). Macauliffe’s work was more than a mere translation and would become an important reference for scholars.

During this period, there emerged an important intellectual divide in scholarship—represented by the figures of Trumpp and Macauliffe—that survives to this day. On the one hand, one still finds scholars committed to the view that Sikhism is a syncretistic *sant* tradition in which predominant Hindu *nirguṇ* elements have been combined with others that are derived from Nath Yoga. This can be seen in the current edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in an entry by Hew McLeod, arguably one of the most respected

scholars of Sikhism: ‘In its earliest stage Sikhism was clearly a movement within the Hindu tradition; Nanak was raised a Hindu and eventually belonged to the Sant tradition of northern India, a movement associated with the great poet and mystic Kabir’ (McLeod 2012).

On the other side of the divide, one finds scholars committed to an ideology that sees the Sikh tradition as an unchanging essence that largely exists uncontaminated by the Hindu tradition or Islam. This was also Macauliffe’s position, which is no less problematic since it assumes that Sikhism developed in a vacuum, unaffected by social realities. A more realistic perspective that recognizes Sikhism as an independent tradition, but without losing sight of its diachronic evolution through its interactions with both Hindu and Islamic traditions, is largely missing in scholarship.

The construction of the syncretistic *sant* tradition and the problematic placement of Guru Nanak within its ambit have shaped Western scholarship on the Sikhs (N. Singh 2001). Because of the antinomian emphasis attributed to the *sants* and the assumption that they ‘share a pessimistic view of mundane life and family ties, dominated by self-interest’ (Vaudeville 1987: 39), two main characteristics are ascribed to Guru Nanak. First, his was an ‘interior religion’ in which social concerns played a minor role. Therefore, he could not have founded a community; rather, the institutionalization of the Sikh tradition by the later Gurus is inconsistent with Guru Nanak’s message. Second, he could not have condoned the later militarization of the Sikh community and, therefore, we must view this shift as a rupture with Guru Nanak’s message. Furthermore, the Sikh community’s militarization is attributed to the influx of Jats during the time of later Gurus. It is helpful to review these two claims separately in some detail since they continue to shape current scholarship on the Sikhs.

(p. 206) Problematizing Guru Nanak’s ‘Interior Religion’ and Pacifism

A central tenet of the *sant* tradition is its focus on ‘interior religion’ that encourages withdrawal from the world since it is largely focused on individual liberation. According to McLeod, ‘Sant doctrine, with its strong emphasis upon the interior quality of religious devotion, offers no overt encouragement to the emergence of religious institutions or formally organized communities…To be a Sant is to be freed from the institutional obligations of organized religion…For most people, however, actual practice necessarily differs from any theory which seeks to minimize the value of institutional forms’ (McLeod 1987: 229). Instead of questioning the ‘theory’ of *sant* syncretism itself, he suggests that

any institutionalization that occurred was a later ‘innovation’, beginning with the third Guru Amar Das. Accounts such as McLeod’s are able to show a rupture in Sikh doctrine only by underemphasizing Guru Nanak’s creation of a community during his lifetime. The Guru reimagined the role of *dharam* (righteous conduct) within social and political context and invited his subjects to become agents of social change. His verses such as ‘Those who live without honour, whatever they consume is *harām* (forbidden),’ and ‘To take what is the right of another is like a Muslim eating pork, or a Hindu eating beef,’ underscore his insistence on the political rights of the individual (GGS: 141–2).

In addition, Guru Nanak engaged in numerous activities that indicate institutionalization and social change were central to his agenda: his appropriation of royal symbols and terminology (for example, his conception of *hukam*, a Quranic term with royal connotations that he invested with a new religious significance); elevation of a new script, Gurmukhī that helped create a communitarian consciousness; founding of a town and the first Sikh community at Kartarpur (the City of the Creator); and appointment of a successor while alive. As Mann has argued based on early Sikh sources, even the institutions of *laṅgar* (community kitchen) and scripture began with Guru Nanak, who carried around a leather-bound book (*pothī*) of his writings (Mann 2001: 33–40; 2010: 9). This should come as no surprise because near contemporaneous sources such as the *Vārāṅ Bhāī Gurdās* also mention Guru Nanak carrying a book of his compositions (Vār 1:33:3). Textualization is an important feature that distinguishes the early Sikh community from other contemporaneous groups, including Ṣufis writing in Punjabi (Shackle 2012: 17; H. Singh 2012: ch. 5). The production of the 1588 Gurmukhī manuscript of the *Purātan Janamsākhī* in the Pothohar region (Macauliffe 1909: i. 62), within fifty years of Guru Nanak’s lifetime, and the literary production of the *Vārāṅ Bhāī Gurdās* soon thereafter, points to the existence of an institutionalized Sikh literary culture in which textuality occupied a privileged place. Given the usual assumption that Guru Nanak was a *sant*, the use of violent force by his successors against the Mughals and Hindu hill chiefs is seen as a deviation from his teachings. The Guru, however, is not a pacifist, and he legitimizes violent response under certain circumstances. Consider the following verse:

> **(p. 207)** If a mighty person attacks his equal, then the mind is not saddened. But when a powerful tiger falling on a herd of cattle, kills it, then its master must be questioned. The dogs have spoiled and laid waste the priceless country, and no one pays heed to the dead.
>
> (GGS: 360)

Here, Guru Nanak is describing a battle between the ruling Lodhis and Mughal invaders. While he sees the fight between equals as acceptable, he does not condone the killing of civilians. He holds the Lodhis responsible for the misery of their subjects because of their inability to provide an effective military response to Babur’s invasion. Guru Nanak welcomes death for a good cause: ‘Death would not be feared, O people, if one knew how to truly die. The death of brave heroes is blessed, if it is approved’ (GGS: 579). Given the existence of Guru Nanak’s compositions that eschew pacifism, the militarization of the Sikhs under the sixth Guru Hargobind (1595–1644) can hardly be seen as a deviation from the former’s ideology.

Construction of a Jat Warrior Essence

McLeod popularized the view that the ‘growth of militancy within the *Panth*, the political body of the Sikhs, must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems which prompted a militant response’ (McLeod 1976: 12–13). This theory rests on McLeod’s conjecture that ‘[t] he death of Guru Arjan may have persuaded Guru Hargobind of the need for tighter organization, but we find it difficult to envisage a large number of unarmed Jats suddenly being commanded to take up weapons. *The Jats will have remained Jats*’ (McLeod 1976: 12, emphasis added). McLeod —without citing any evidence—locates a violent and unchanging essence in Jat subjectivity, a perspective that can be contrasted with Polier’s somewhat phenomenological discussion shown earlier that posits a dramatic difference in Sikh and non-Sikh Jats owing to the former’s adoption of the Sikh faith. A more serious issue with McLeod’s theory is that—without reference to practices, institutions, or texts that a Jat culture might have produced—he simply wants his reader to assume that a Jat culture existed in the seventeenth century and led to a significant redefinition in Sikh practice. Not surprisingly, McLeod’s assertion remains highly contested by scholars (Mann 2010: 17–20; J. Singh 1985: 85–102), yet it continues to be deployed in current scholarship in different ways, as the following example demonstrates.

Recently, McLeod’s theory has been augmented by Dhavan’s *When Sparrows Became Hawks* (2011), which argues that after the inauguration of the Khalsa, the continued influx of Jats into the Panth resulted in the transformation of a highly exclusivist Khalsa identity in the beginning of the eighteenth century to one that was willing to accommodate non-Khalsa practice: ‘By the mid-eighteenth century, this [entry] meant a growing accommodation of local cultural tradition, creating a hybridized set of Sikh ritual (p. 208) practices and texts’ (Dhavan 2011: 17). Dhavan, like McLeod, however, tells us nothing about this ‘local cultural tradition’ or the specific practices that Jats brought to

Sikhism, except that they were warriors with propensity for violence. While she notes that honour feuds rooted in Jat culture ‘were instrumental in solidifying Khalsa Sikh identity’, she can only point to Varis Shāh’s *Hīr* (1766)—reflecting an Islamic social world of the *qiṣṣa*, a genre conspicuously missing from the voluminous Sikh literature—to generalize the importance of retribution in Sikh society when someone’s honour was threatened (Dhavan 2011: 217 n. 43). Although she assumes that the ‘*gurmatta* [the passing of a joint resolution by a Sarbat Khalsa assembly] mirrored the somewhat more egalitarian social organization of rural Jat society’ (Dhavan 2011: 69), she does not explain how she knows this or if any other Jat community of South Asia evolved an institution like the *gurmattā*. A far more important question that remains unanswered in the work is whether a self-conscious Jat identity existed in the first place and, if so, what were the complex ways in which it changed during its interaction with an evolving Sikh identity. Notably, Dhavan problematizes her own thesis by telling us that colonial census officers had difficulty classifying Jats and Rajputs since their identity shifted based on their occupation (Dhavan 2011: 134).

The various manifestations of the Jat theory used to explain the militarization of the Panth are highly problematic because they deny agency to the Sikh Gurus and/or the normative Khalsa community. A great deal of work is needed to understand better the ways in which the leadership in the Panth—with the help of a literary culture and institutions—shaped Sikh subjectivity and created a community that saw the pursuit of political power and religious practice (*mīrī/pīrī*) as two sides of the same coin.

Religious Boundaries

Like much of Indological scholarship, writing on the Sikhs shows a growing interest in tracing the impact of colonialism on communitarian identities, typically conceived as fuzzy and without defined boundaries before they were solidified by the ‘divide and rule’ policies of the British. The claim regarding the fluidity of religious boundaries in pre-colonial Punjab is belied by even the most cursory examination of sources whose production can be located precisely within the court of the Sikh Gurus. When the fifth Guru Arjan (1563–1606) states that he does not perform ‘the *ḥajj* at the *kābā,* worship at any *tīrath*’, he does not engage in any ‘*pūjā* or *namāz*’, and he is ‘neither Hindu nor Muslim’ (*nā ham hiṅdū nā mussalmān*), he is distinguishing his own practice and identity from those of two religious communities that can be clearly differentiated in the Mughal period (GGS: 1136). In texts such as the *Vārāṅ Bhāī Gurdās*, expressions of a sharply defined Sikh identity are clearly evident (Vār 1:27). For Bhai Gurdas (1551–1636), a person with multiplicity of religious allegiances is like a prostitute who goes around doing

everything and pleasing everyone (Vār 5:8). The *rahitnāmā*s also repudiate the Hindu sacred thread (*jañjū*), the frontal mark (*ṭikkā*), loincloth (*dhoti*), and rituals (p. 209) (*kriā-karam*); prohibit the use of a Brahmin to conduct marriage rites; and forbid the company of and acceptance of favours from *Turk*s, the ruling elite (Padam 2006: 77).

One of the most influential accounts on the colonial period is Harjot Oberoi’s *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (1994), which argues for the existence of relatively fluid social, religious, and individual boundaries (Oberoi 1994: 24). Oberoi reproduces McLeod’s argument that the Sikhism of Guru Nanak was an ‘interior religion’ (Oberoi 1994: 48–9). While McLeod continues to see the dominance of the Khalsa identity well into the nineteenth century, Oberoi sees the emergence of a ‘Sanatan Sikh tradition’ that displaced the eighteenth-century ‘Khalsa episteme’ (Oberoi 1994: 92). Oberoi’s view that ‘the increase in Khalsa Sikhs did not imply a corresponding reduction in the number of Sehajdharis [the Sikhs with cut hair]’ (Oberoi 1994: 90) is not supported by the sources that he himself cites or other primary sources (Grewal 2011: 122–31). For example, according to the *Imādu’s Sa‘ādat* (1808), ‘Out of one thousand, or rather ten thousand persons, one can find only one or two persons who cut their hair. In the language of his [Guru Nanak’s] followers, those who keep the beard are known as *Khālṣa*, and those who are beardless are known as *Khulāṣa*’ (Grewal and Habib 2001: 213). As Cynthia Mahmood has noted in, perhaps, the best critique of Oberoi’s work, the persecution of Sikhs and conflict among religious groups—both of which contributed to a heightened sense of religious identity among Sikhs in the pre-colonial period—is entirely absent from the book (Mahmood 1996: 237–49).

To be sure, the existence of the aforementioned *rahit* and well-defined boundaries does not mean that individual Sikhs never engaged in practices that were proscribed by the normative tradition. We, however, must bear in mind that not every practice performed by a Sikh becomes Sikhism. Only *instituted* practices—practices into which Sikhs are initiated *as* Sikhs—provide the proper theoretical beginnings for a scholar of Sikhism, if methodological nuance is to be achieved.

This brief essay can hardly do justice to the vast body of Western scholarship over a span of three centuries. It has focused on a handful of writers as case studies to discern the broader trends that have shaped the scholarship on the Sikhs. As the preceding discussion has shown, pre-colonial writers noted the democratic nature of the social and political organization of the Sikhs with much interest. Most of them, however, considered Sikhism to be a reform movement within Hinduism. In the colonial period, Trumpp’s work on the Sikh scripture, despite its flaws, exerted a great deal of influence that survives to this day. A large number of writers continue to see Guru Nanak as a member of the *sant* tradition, even though syncretism is hardly seen as a defensible theoretical position to

examine traditions by scholars of religion (Stewart 2001: 269–74). In addition, to explain the turn of the Panth towards militancy, writers have frequently posited the existence of a Jat ‘culture’ without defining culture or providing any historical evidence for the existence of a self-conscious Jat identity in the pre-colonial period. As scholars pay closer attention to both primary sources in original languages and issues of methodology, we are likely to see fresh perspectives that will give us a more nuanced understanding of the Sikh tradition.

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Linguistic and Philological Approaches to Sacred Sikh Literature

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Abstract and Keywords

In this paper it is argued that the reading and interpretation of early Sikh religious literature in its original language needs to be carried out in a manner that pays close attention to details of language, script, metrics, and other types of formal structure. It is claimed that the authors of these texts often composed them in a way such that key doctrinal points are based on or related to specific linguistic, poetic, or structural details. Attention to such details is seen as a form of 'due diligence' that can serve to filter plausible readings of texts from implausible ones. Practical suggestions are made concerning how a student is to acquire the linguistic and philological skills that will enable him or her to read, interpret, and translate early Sikh texts effectively.

Keywords: Ādi Granth, Āsā kī vār, gurbāṇī, Gurū Granth Sāhib, Indo-Aryan, Japjī, mūl mantar, Punjabi, vār

For the student wishing to begin the study in its original language of the body of sacred Sikh literature, referred to within Sikh tradition as *gurbāṇī* and comprised of the Gurū Granth Sāhib (GGS) and ancillary texts, there is a daunting array of skills that need to be acquired. Learning to read and interpret this corpus is difficult. The texts that comprise it are linguistically diverse, being composed in a heterogeneous set of related early New Indo-Aryan dialects. The grammars of these are in many ways distinct from the grammars of the standard modern forms of related New Indo-Aryan languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu, and even from the grammars of other medieval vernacular dialects such as Braj, Avadhī, and Ḍingal. The texts are for the most part in verse and display conventions of meter and stanzaic structure that need to be mastered. Many of their compositions display intricate patterns of formal structure, extending beyond simple grammar and metrics, to complex structures that link verses and portions of verses to one another in creative and virtuosic ways. The texts can be difficult to interpret, with ambiguities of meaning and unclear references frequently encountered. There are difficult and controversial issues to be faced concerning the compilation, redaction, and

provenance of important manuscripts of this body of literature. And of course, there are daunting issues related to the contextualization and interpretation of this literature, whether from historical, cultural, theological, or doctrinal perspectives. Such issues are hardly unique to sacred Sikh texts; they arise, in fact, as integral parts of the analysis, interpretation, and understanding of the foundational texts of the major religious traditions.

It is not my objective here to provide a comprehensive discussion of all the linguistic and philological aspects involved in learning to read and interpret foundational Sikh texts. My primary intention is to familiarize students with the range of issues involved (p. 213) in reading Sikh scripture from linguistic and/or philological perspectives. I describe the tools and skills that need to be mastered for one to engage maturely and intelligently with the texts. I point to specific reference materials that may be of assistance in developing competency. My recommendations are admittedly personal, being based upon my own experience over several decades in trying to acquire a skill set sufficient to experience at first hand the extraordinary depth of wisdom, insight, and creativity found in sacred Sikh literature. In this article, these recommendations will deal specifically with matters of language and script, meter, and formal structure. By no means do these concerns constitute all that is involved in the philological analysis of particular texts. Clearly, matters of textual criticism, exegesis and interpretation, and cultural and historical context play a major role. Nevertheless, close attention to details of language, meter, and structure is not only a prerequisite to learning to read and interpret these works, it is something that can yield insights into them that might otherwise be missed were these texts looked at from non-linguistic perspectives.

Language and Script

Without question, matters of language and script pose innumerable difficulties for virtually all students of Sikh scripture. Difficulties of language exist both for speakers of non-Indian languages and speakers of modern Indo-Aryan languages. The language of early Sikh scripture, and particularly that of the Guru Granth Sahib has been the subject of many studies and grammatical descriptions. Most of these studies have stressed the linguistic heterogeneity of the Guru Granth Sahib comprised as it is of poetic compositions by a multiplicity of authors, drawn from various corners of Indian sacred literature. Some of these studies characterize the language of the Guru Granth Sahib as comprising a linguistic core, that being the language variety in which the majority of compositions by Guru Nanak and the other Gurus were composed, and a number of peripheral styles. The linguistic dimensions of the peripheral styles were mapped in a

series of important articles by Christopher Shackle (1977, 1978a, 1978b), in which he identified three distinct strands, namely (1) a 'regionalizing' variety; (2) a Persianized type; and (3) a Sanskritized form (Sahaskritī), in which an underlying vernacular dialect has been made to take on some of the surface characteristics of Sanskrit. These strata are in addition to the 'core' language of the Guru Granth Sahib, a north-west variety of early New Indo-Aryan, which pre-dates the specific linguistic developments that allow us to clearly differentiate modern Punjabi from the modern standard form of its sister-languages. The linguistic characteristics of this core language have been described by Shapiro (1987a) and others. For beginning readers learning the grammatical fundamentals of this core is not an easy matter, and until fairly recently there were few materials available to assist the student.

Understanding the grammatical and linguistic particularities of this literature is facilitated if one is first familiar with where the language of this body of literature is situated within the overall linguistic history of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European (p. 214) family of languages. Linguists divide the history of the Indo-Aryan language family of languages into three stages, known as Old, Middle, and New Indo-Aryan respectively. Simplifying considerably, Old Indo-Aryan refers essentially to Sanskrit and its earliest stage, known as Vedic Sanskrit or simply Vedic. Middle Indo-Aryan comprises Pali, various varieties of Prakrit, and a language (or set of dialects) known as Apabhraṃśa, which is the latest historical stage of Middle Indo-Aryan and is transitional between Middle and New Indo-Aryan. New Indo-Aryan refers to a set of 'modern' vernacular languages that not only includes such standard languages as Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, but also includes a number of 'medieval' languages or dialects, some of which are trans-regional in scope, such as Braj. The language of the linguistic core can be characterized as being a north-west variety of early New Indo-Aryan. To observant Sikhs, this language is *gurbāṇī*, the use of this term reflecting belief that the language of sacred Sikh scripture is not to be equated with any conventional language, but is part and parcel of a process of divine revelation. To linguists, this language variety cannot be strictly assumed to be an early form of any particular standard New Indo-Aryan language. Many of its linguistic features pre-date many of the linguistic developments that serve to differentiate the modern standard forms of Punjabi, Hindi, etc. In modern standard Hindi, for example, the possessive postposition is *kā/ke/kī*, showing the initial consonant *k-*. In modern standard Punjabi, by contrast, the analogous postposition shows an initial *d-*. In the core language of Sikh scripture, although the most frequent variant has the initial *k-*, variants with *d-*, as well as other possessive postpositions (e.g. *kerā*, *sandā*), also occur. This range of variation is not unique to early Sikh scripture, and is characteristic of early New Indo-Aryan languages or dialects in general.

Even for students who already have familiarity with the linguistic structures of other Indo-Aryan languages, the degree of variation to be found in the core language of the Guru Granth Sahib can seem daunting. There are, to be sure, perfectly understandable historical explanations for this degree of grammatical variation (Shapiro 1987a: 182). The language of the core of the Ādi Granth (AG) represents a stage in the development in the evolution of the Indo-Aryan languages in which the heavily inflected type of grammatical system so characteristic of Old and Middle Indo-Aryan has been reduced about as far as was possible without at the same time totally eliminating the ability of those inflections that remained to express grammatical relations and categories of different types, but where a morpho-syntactic system of the type characteristic of many New Indo-Aryan languages, in which, for example, case relations are indicated not by nominal inflections but by a set of independent postpositions, had not yet fallen into place. A consequence of this state of affairs is that those grammatical suffixes which remained in this language, i.e., that had not fallen victim to the general New Indo-Aryan tendency to eliminate inflectional endings, were called upon to serve myriad grammatical functions.

The type of syntax that we find in Sanskrit and Middle Indo-Aryan languages that basically expressed grammatical functions and relations via endings was transitioning to the type of syntax we find in modern Indo-Aryan languages that expresses such functions to a great extent by independent words. But the transition was not complete at the time the Guru Granth Sahib was composed and, as a result, it displays syntactic properties of the (p. 215) older style syntax as well as of the new syntax. Both styles coexist in the corpus, resulting in a multiplicity of means for getting the same grammatical work accomplished. It also entailed that the same phonetic shapes could constitute several homophonous grammatical markers (morphemes). For example, the suffix *–i* can function as a marker of several discrete grammatical functions: verbal absolutive (e.g. *hoi* ‘having been’ [cf. Hindi *ho kar*, Punjabi *ho ke*]); third person, singular present indicative of verbs ending in vowels (e.g *āi* ‘he/she/it comes’); second person singular imperative (e.g. *tāri* ‘save’), the singular locative case in nominal, adjectival, or pronominal declensions (e.g. *mani* locative, sg. of *manu* n.m. ‘mind, heart’); or a variant of *–o* or *–u* as a direct (i.e. nominative) case marker for some pronominal stems (e.g., *si* ‘he’, *ji* ‘who, which’). A practical consequence of this high degree of homophony is that when reading a particular passage it may be difficult to ascertain, for example, whether a given word is to be construed as an absolutive or third person singular present tense verb form, or even the locative form of a homophonous verb stem.

How then, is a student to go about acquiring the necessary linguistic skills to enable him or her to parse accurately sentences or verses of Sikh scripture as a necessary first step towards interpreting thoughtfully such literature? A century of so ago the task was immeasurably more difficult than it is now. Dictionaries, grammars, and other

pedagogical aids scarcely existed. As a result, it was common practice to piece together linguistic competence from prior knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and New Indo-Aryan languages. In some cases, this competence could be augmented through familiarity with 'medieval' dialects of early New Indo-Aryan, of which the best known were Braj, Avadhi, and early forms of Bangla and Marathi. This practice was hardly satisfactory or effective, since the grammar of the core of early Sikh scripture is quite a bit different from that of Sanskrit or modern Punjabi. While it is undoubtedly true that knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhraṃśa, Punjabi, Hindi, Braj, etc. facilitate the learning of the core language of Sikh religious literature, they are not sufficient. What is also necessary is knowledge of the specific grammatical structures that comprise the language of the core of the Guru Granth Sahib and related texts.

In recent decades, the ability of students to master the grammar of the body of literature has been facilitated by a number of important publications by Christopher Shackle, all of which are indispensable tools for language learners. In 1981 he published *A Gurū Nānak Glossary*, which is a lexicon of all the lexical items found in those hymns of the *Ādi Granth*. In addition, the lexicon contains entries of vocabulary occurring in those couplets by Gurū Aṅgad that are included in longer compositions by Gurū Nānak (particularly in the *vār* genre) and in compositions ascribed to Shaikh Farīd. In addition, each lexical entry provides an etymology of the head lexeme, often with referrals to Turner's *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages* (1966, 1969, 1971) in which the attested or reconstructed sources of the lexical items, as well as cognates in other Indo-Aryan languages, can be found. In 1983 Shackle published his *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs*, which provided the first systematic and pedagogically based introduction to the core language of Sikh scripture. The work is structured in such a way that it can be worked through by a serious student in (p. 216) a semester or two, ideally under the guidance of a suitable mentor. Each chapter in the grammar section contains copious translation exercises drawn from Sikh sacred texts. A comprehensive index locates the sources of each of the passages appearing in one or another of the translation exercises. The *Introduction* has copious notes and commentary, allowing the student to gain a sense of the poetic genres, formal compositional techniques, and metrical patterns employed in this body of literature. When used in conjunction with *A Gurū Nānak Glossary*, the student has access to the tools that will enable him or her to parse texts accurately as the first step of interpreting those texts. For those students who also have access to modern standard Punjabi, additional resources are available, including grammatical studies of Gurbāṇī and specialized indices, lexicons, and concordances. Such tools are invaluable in honing one's command of the linguistic aspects of the early Sikh texts. But I cannot stress enough the fact that advanced competence in this language must be built upon a firm foundation that has been acquired through a systematic pedagogy. To date, at least through the medium of English, the

Shackle *Introduction*, when used in conjunction with his *A Gurū Nānak Glossary*, is the most effective and efficient means for obtaining such a foundation.

Matters of language related to early Sikh scripture are, of course, not restricted to word formation and syntax. It is essential that students also acquire a thorough grounding in the Gurmukhi script in which early Sikh sacred literature is normally encoded. This will of course seem self-evident. Nevertheless, there are properties of the script as is used in standard editions of Sikh scripture that require careful attention if one is to read Sikh scripture linguistically. There are areas of difference between how the script is used in manuscripts of the Guru Granth Sahib *janamsākhī*s, etc. that differ somewhat from how the script is used for modern standard Punjabi. In particular, vowel nasalization, consonant doubling, and the second consonants of clusters ending *–n*, *-y*, *-r*, and *–v* are not consistently indicated in the script. Unfortunately, precisely these features can be of crucial significance in determining the meaning of a particular word or phrase. To give a simple example, the noun ਨਾਉ ‘name, Divine Name’, which Shackle Romanizes as *nāṃu*, shows the form ਨਾਈ *nāī* as one of three possible variants of the oblique singular. The oblique plural of the noun, by contrast, is ਨਾਈਂ *nāīṃ*, with the dot (*bindī*) over the final vowel sign (*bindī*) indicating nasalization. If the *bindī* is omitted, as is often the case in manuscripts and printed editions, it becomes impossible to ascertain whether the form was intended to be a locative singular or a locative plural. Similar ambiguities or difficulties of interpretation based upon variation in the use of particular elements (graphemes) of the Gurmukhi script are not uncommon. There is a general point for the language learner in this state of affairs. The student of early Sikh scripture must learn to be vigilant about what might appear to be small details of script, but are potentially of significance in the interpretation and translation of actual verses of script. This caution holds true both for printed editions of texts and the original manuscripts of texts, in which palaeographic problems of interpretation are ubiquitous.

(p. 217) Meter and Genre

Reading and interpreting sacred Sikh literature from a philologically sound point of view entails playing close attention to many matters over and beyond that of language and script. Given that most of this literature is in verse, it also requires paying attention to poetic form and structure. The reading and interpretation of this body of literature presupposes that the student has at least a rudimentary knowledge of traditional Indian prosody, which subsumes such matters as meter, rhyme, and stanzaics. At the very least, the student needs to be familiar with the principles of traditional Indian scansion, which is primarily based upon syllable length, rather than upon syllabic stress, as is the case in

much English verse. An ability to tally up the metrical length in terms of metrical unit (*mātrā*s, equivalent to *morae* of Western quantitative verse) and to recognize line breaks (*yati*, equivalent to *caesurae* in Western verse) is essential. In the the Guru Granth Sahib a wide variety of metrical, stanzaic, and compositional styles are represented. A somewhat brief introduction to these styles, focusing on the genres of *shalok*, *shabad*, and *vār*, is contained in the Shackle *Introduction* (1983: 159–89). A more extensive treatment of metrical and stanzaic patterns in the the Guru Granth Sahib can be found in Surinder Singh Kohli's *A Critical Study of the Adi Granth* (1961: 65–114) as well as in standard critical editions of the text. There are many reasons why learning to pay close attention to metrical and poet structure is necessary for proper understanding of canonical Sikh texts. Many lines of text can be parsed in different ways depending upon how one places line breaks or how one scans the lines metrically. Attention to formal stanzaic structure is of particular importance in some genres.

The *vār* genre of which there are twenty-two in the the Guru Granth Sahib is a case in point. These *vār*s, of which the best known is that in *rāga Āsā* [*Vār Āsā* (*VĀ*)] (Shapiro 2008 [2012]), can have an intricate structure comprised of verses of two distinct kinds, known as *paüṛī* (literally 'rung [of a ladder]') and *salok*. In a given *vār*, the *paüṛīs* are by a single author and comprise a connected narrative. The authorship of an entire *vār* is ascribed to the author of the *paüṛīs* contained in that vār. Thus the authorship of *VĀ* is credited to Gurū Nānak, who authored all twenty-four paürīs in the composition. Almost all of the *paüṛīs* in *VĀ* consist of five rhymed lines, with the *mātrā* counts of these lines varying within a defined range (Shapiro 2008 [2012]). Prefaced to each *paüṛī* are a small number of *saloks*. These compositions do not a have a fixed number of lines and need not be arranged in couplets. There are several different metrical patterns exhibited in individual lines, of which the most common is 13 + 11 *mātrās*. These *salok*s need not be by a single Gurū. All the Gurūs whose compositions are included in the Guru Granth Sahib composed *saloks*. In the case of *VĀ*, forty-four of the total of fifty-nine *saloks* are by Gurū Nānak, with the remainder by Gurū Aṅgad. Although such matters of metrical form and genre are interesting and important, an understanding of these is only a beginning for the proper understanding and interpretation of texts such as *VĀ*. The role of Gurū Arjan, the redactor of the 1604 (p. 218) edition of the Guru Granth Sahib needs to be noted and analysed. This role has been characterized as follows:

> Gurū Arjan was free to take *salok*s from the collections of sacred compositions that were available to him and attach them to the *paüṛī*s of a vār wherever he felt it to be appropriate. In practice, however, the *salok*s were employed to foreshadow thematic material in the *paüṛī*s to follow, to elaborate on material

> dealt with in previous *paüṛī*s, or to supply material from the here and now, standing in contradistinction to the loftier and more connected discourse in the *paüṛī*s. In a sense, the *salok* provides a running commentary on the theology of the *vār* proper, it comprising an ever-ascending sequence of rungs (*paüṛī*), the internalization of which leads to ever-ascending states of consciousness of higher realities.
>
> (Shapiro 2008 [2012], 247–8)

If this is the case, then it becomes incumbent upon the student who wishes to begin the reading and interpretation of a *vār* to pay attention to matters over and beyond elementary details of grammar, script, and vocabulary. He or she must acquire sensitivity and feel for the role of the redactor in moulding a text such as *VĀ* into the form in which it was transmitted. It must be realized that the *VĀ* that has played such an important and vital role in Sikh liturgy is not just the result of the undisputed poetic genius of Gurū Nānak, but also of Gurū Aṅgad and, to a great extent, of Gurū Arjan who fused compositions by different authors into a single integrated organic whole. Such an understanding regarding the genesis of the *VĀ*, not to mention of the Guru Granth Sahib as a whole, cannot be arrived at without paying close attention to poetic form.

Other Aspects of Formal Structure

Any student who undertakes the close reading of the primary Sikh texts cannot fail to be impressed by the extent to which key texts display integrated formal structures that in one way or another underscore, enhance, reflect, or mirror points that are of religious, moral, ethical, or philosophical significance. For example, it is commonly stated within Sikh tradition that in a sense the entire content of the Guru Granth Sahib is encapsulated in the *Japjī*, which in turn is encapsulated by the *mūl mantar* that stands at the very beginning of *Japjī*, which is even further epitomized in the *ikoṁkār* with which the *mūl mantar* commences. To come to understand, however, precisely what is meant by such statements it is necessary to pay attention to precise aspects of formal structure, many of which, although linguistic in nature, go beyond the limits of formal grammar, vocabulary, and script.

The structural unifying devices evident in key works of Sikh religious literature are many in number. Some of the most important of these include the following: (1) the use of ‘keywords’, each of which begins a succession of lines of text—often these words, which generally have doctrinal significance, are prefigured in earlier verses or echoed in

(p. 219) later ones; (2) the building of verses or portions of verses around words that are etymologically cognate; (3) the use of symmetrical, parallel, or antithetical clause structures; (4) the use of intricate sentence types or clausal connecting devices, including rhetorical questions and complex relative-correlative constructions; and (5) the recurrent use of specific grammatical constructions in a way that may be judged to have doctrinal significance.

Here one may only give the briefest sense of how some of these structural devices work in the context of Sikh scripture. An excellent example can be found in the majestic initial five lines of the first verse of the *Japjī*, which read as follows (Shapiro 1987b):

> *ādi sacu jugādi sacu*.
> *hai bhī sacu nānak hosī bhī sacu*.
> *socai soci na hovaī je socīṁ lakhavāra*.
> *cupai cupa na hovaī je lāi rahā livatāra*.
> *bhukhiyā bhukha na utarī je banā puriyā bhāra*.
>
> In the beginning [of things] there was Truth; at the beginning of time, then too was Truth.
> The truth exists, O Nanak, and ever shall be.
> There is no insight [to be had] by introspection, even if I ponder a hundred thousand times;
> There is no solace in silence, no matter how deeply I meditate;
> Hungry [by fasting] my hunger is not abated, even if I pile on the burdens of [all the] cities of the world.

Even if one allows for alternate readings of the text, the translation provided is inadequate to the task of elucidating how the ‘content’ of these lines is of a piece with the formal structures in which the lines are cast. The three lines have parallel structures of the form ‘X is the case, even if Y’, with the concessive ‘even if’ rendered by the connecting element *je*. Each of them is structured around two or more words that are linked etymologically to a common underlying root. For example, the first of the three lines contains three words, *socai*, *soci*, and *socīṁ*, the first the locative singular of a noun *soca* ‘introspection, meditation’, the second the direct case singular noun *soci*, here having the sense ‘insight’, and the third a first person present tense of a verb *soc-* ‘to think, meditate, ponder’. The use of three etymologically cognates is meant to underscore a paradox, namely a situation in which insight is not to be obtained through a process that one would normally think would lead to enlightenment. A similar paradox is introduced in the next line, in which a direct case form of feminine noun *cupa* ‘silence’ is juxtaposed with the locative form of the same noun. By so doing, the listener is led through an apparent oxymoron to a state of higher understanding. On the surface, the half-line literally signifies that there is no silence to be had through remaining silent. But

by framing the words around two different grammatical cases of the same word, Gurū Nānak causes the careful listener to reinterpret the line indicating that the practice of silent meditation is insufficient to the task of obtaining spiritual liberation. This transition is brought precisely by bringing the listener's attention to the juxtaposition of the two different grammatical cases of the same nominal base. This technique is reinforced in the (p. 220) next line by the presentation of the words *bhukhiyā bhukha na utarī*, literally, 'hungry, [my] hunger doesn't abate' which again are structured around two different grammatical derivatives formed from a single underlying root or stem. Lines 3–5 of this verse then constitute a tightly interwoven nexus based upon a threefold iteration of seeming paradoxes, each of which is followed by an 'even if' clause introduced by the subordinating conjunction *je*.

The formal structural devices that bind these five lines together do not end with the properties just described. It can hardly be accidental that the *socai* of line 4 follows immediately after the phonetically similar *sacu* 'truth' which not only concludes line 2, but is also the word around which lines 1 and 2 are structured and which represents one of the most theologically significant concepts of Sikh scripture. Those two lines, in turn, embody formal binary contrasts concerning time, first in the opposition of *ādi* 'in the beginning' and *jugādi* 'in the beginning of the yugas [i.e., in the beginning of time]' and secondly of the present tense copula form *hai* with the future tense *hosī*.

Moreover, many of the structural features just enumerated are prefigured in the *mūl mantar* with which the entire Guru Granth Sahib begins:

> *ikoṃkār satināmu kartā purakhu nirbhaü nirvairu akāla murati ajūnī saibhaṃ gura prasādi.*
>
> There is but one God, whose name is Truth, the creator, the [supreme] being, [who knows] not fear nor harbours enmity, [whose] form [is] beyond [the realm of] time, not of woman born, self-existent; [and all this is known] through the grace of the Guru.

The iteration of *sacu* surely is an echo of *satināmu*; the noble dichotomy of present and future time in line 2 must be understood with reference to *akāla murati*; and it cannot be accidental that the locative forms *ādi*, *jugādi, socai, cupai* in lines 1, 3, and 4 follow immediately after the compound *gura prasādi* with which the *mūl mantar* concludes and which is noticeably in the locative case. These linkages, lexical foreshadows and echoes, and formal unifying structures cited are hardly exceptional occurrences. Parallel examples are common and pervade much of Sikh sacred literature and clearly are part of the compositional styles of Nānak and other Gurūs. The realizations on the part of a

student that these patterns exist, that they pervade the Guru Granth Sahib and that their existence is part and parcel of the broader organization principles governing the entire compilation of the Guru Granth Sahib can only be arrived at if the student reads the text closely, with an eye towards grammar and related matters, and tries to understand the reasons why particular verses display certain constructions and formal structures.

Initially, it was argued that for the student who begins the formal study of key works of sacred Sikh literature there is a daunting array of skills that need to be acquired. What I have tried to accomplish in this article is to describe some of these skills and to enumerate the ways in which a student's reading and understanding of this body of literature is enhanced by the acquisition of them. It is hardly my intention to imply that reading sacred Sikh literature can only be done 'linguistically'. That would be a (p. 221) gross overstatement. The thoughtful exegesis of works of scripture requires a balance of approaches, a balance that also takes into account matters of history, text criticism, culture, social context, theology, politics, etc. and that examines and weighs past analyses, translations, commentaries, and the like in the process of arriving at supportable interpretations and readings of key texts. But attention to particularities of grammar, script, lexicon, meter and genre, and formal structure must be paid in any event. If such attention cannot be considered the sum total of interpretation, it can and must be considered the 'due diligence' that is to be carried out throughout the interpretive process. Reading with attention to linguistic detail does not alone provide answers to the many thorny problems that inevitably arise during the course of close reading and analysis of fundamental texts. But close linguistic reading can, at the least, provide a filter for separating plausible readings from implausible ones. A sound interpretation, after all, must at the least be compatible with known facts of grammar, script, lexicon, etc. But reading texts grammatically need not be an onerous task. To the contrary, noticing intricacies and patterns of language and structure is a process that can, in the end, facilitate a deep appreciation of some of the most profound and moving texts of world civilization.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the world view of *Gurmat* ('Guru's doctrine'), emerging from the teachings of the Gurus in the Sikh canonical literature. It focuses on certain key terms and concepts, keeping in mind their original sense and their later historical understanding. It explores the five stages of spiritual development, including the ethical virtues to be cultivated in the actual life of an individual seeker. The essay concludes with the evolution of the doctrine of *miri-piri* and the institution of the Khalsa.

Keywords: Gurmat, Gurdarsan, Sikh world view, Dharam Khand, Gian Khand, Saram Khand, Karam Khand, Sach Khand, miri-piri, Khalsa

Introduction

In his classical work, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), Wilfred Cantwell Smith unpacked the essentialist notion of 'religion' as a well-defined system and offered a revolutionary approach to look at the colourful evolving traditions of the world by focusing on the living faith of real people. In the case of the Sikhs, he claimed that over the centuries the original idea of *gurmat* ('Teachings of the Gurus') evolved into 'the counterpart of the Western (outsiders') concept "Sikhism" as the total complex of Sikh religious practices and rites, scriptures and doctrines, history and institutions' (Smith 1978 [1962]: 67). For him, the state of being a Sikh (*sikhi*) is to follow the Guru's teaching, signifying 'a transcendent personalist ideal' of discipleship (Smith 1978 [1962]: 67). As the study of the world religions frequently employed Protestant Christian categories, Smith argued that each tradition must be understood in its own terms and concepts. Thus there is an urgent need to revitalize the concepts and categories of *gurmat*—a term that designates the 'Guru's view or doctrine' that is at the same time a living practice among the Sikhs.

Unsurprisingly, W. H. McLeod realized the need to present the essential features of Sikh doctrine in its own terms rather than exclusively in translation. In particular, he argued that the word ‘God’ is inappropriate as a translation when we move beyond Christian or the Middle Eastern monotheistic traditions. The term which is traditionally used to express Guru Nanak’s concept is *Akal Purakh*, literally ‘the Timeless Being’. Accordingly, Akal Purakh is a very different concept from a range of meanings covered by the English word ‘God’ and if we persist in using the latter term we shall find it very difficult indeed to avoid its distinctive connotations (McLeod 1989: 49). In his first book, *Gurn Nānak and the Sikh Religion* (1968), McLeod had certainly employed certain Christian categories and concepts in his analysis of the ‘Teachings of Guru Nanak’ and when he had this pointed out to him he frankly admitted that ‘some of us take a (p. 226) long time to learn’ (McLeod 1988: 35). Nevertheless, McLeod was a dynamic scholar who was always keeping pace with the latest trends in scholarship. More recently, McLeod’s conceptual schema of ‘Modern Sikh Theology’ has come under the post-colonial critique of Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair’s work *Religion and the Specter of the West* (2009) in which he has taken issue with his major theological arguments by offering a materialist interpretation of Guru Nanak’s teachings and temporal themes in the Sikh scripture (A. Mandair 2009: 240–309, 363–78). In fact, Smith’s critique of the construction of ‘world religion’ as a well-defined system has reverberated in Mandair’s arguments.

This essay intends to explore key terms related to the fundamental teachings of the Sikh Gurus in the canonical Sikh sources. Most instructively, *Sikhi* is intimately linked with the understanding of the nature of *gurmat* in its true spirit. In his *Asa* hymn, for instance, Guru Nanak explains this key term *gurmat* as follows: ‘With the advent of true *gurmat* logical disputation (*hujjati*) is banished. Excessive cunning only brings impurity. The True Name alone removes all such impurity. Through the grace of the Guru one is completely absorbed [in the remembrance of the divine Name]’ (AG 352). Clearly, the philosophical connotation of *gurmat* goes beyond the empirical experience derived from cognitive sense perception. Another related term is *gurdarsan*, the Guru’s world view or philosophical system. In contrast to the prevalent six Indian philosophical systems (*khat darsan*) in his contemporary society, Guru Amar Das beautifully explained in his *Asa* hymn the distinctive nature of the Guru’s philosophical system (*gurdarsan*): ‘The six Indian philosophical systems are pervasive everywhere. But the Guru’s philosophical system (*Gur ka darsan*) is beyond these systems. Liberation and attainment to the supreme state come through the Guru’s system whereby the True One takes abode in the heart, mind and soul (*man*). Through the Guru’s view (*gurdarsan*) the world finds liberation. Whosoever cherishes love and devotion [to the Guru’s view] is liberated’ (AG 360–1). In the Gurus’ teachings, the term *gurdarsan* is used in a highly qualified sense, stressing the point that mystical experience encompasses transcendental reality without snapping its

ties with empirical reality. In modern parlance, therefore, the Sikh world view intends to overcome the frequently encountered ‘religious’/‘secular’, ‘private’/‘public’ and ‘belief’/‘practice’ binaries of ‘Western’ Religious Studies.

Gurmat: The Guru’s View or Doctrine

The primary source of the teachings of the Gurus is the Adi Granth (AG). Its first words are Guru Nanak’s invocation of the Absolute One (*1-Oankar*) in the Mul Mantar (‘Seed Formula’). Its text consists of different epithets of the Divine, all of which are characterizations of the Ultimate Reality derived from Guru Nanak’s works. Each word in the Mul Mantar gains its meaning from its use within the context of the Adi Granth and is thus peculiar to it and has meaning only as part of its discourse. Sikh tradition maintains that one cannot understand the meanings of any parts of the Sikh scripture without testing them on the touchstone of the Mul Mantar. At the same time, one cannot understand (p. 227) the Mul Mantar without an insightful understanding of the Sikh scripture as a whole. The following succinct expression of the nature of the Ultimate Reality provides us with the fundamental statement of Sikh doctrine:

> ‘The Divine Is One’ (*1-Oankar*, ‘One, whose expression emerges as Primal Sound’), the True Name, the Creative Person, without fear and devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the Guru. The Eternal One, from the beginning, through all time, present now, the Everlasting Reality.
>
> (AG 1)

By beginning with ‘One’ (the original Punjabi text uses the numeral rather than the word), Guru Nanak emphasizes the singularity of the Divine. That is, the numeral ‘1’ affirms that the Supreme Being is one without a second, the source as well as the goal of all that exists. This is quite evident from the following statement: ‘My Master (*Sahib*) is the One. He is the One, brother, and He alone exists’ (AG 350). In a particularly striking instance, Guru Arjan employs the cognates of the Punjabi word *ek* (‘One’) five times in a single line of his *Asa* hymn to make an emphatic statement of oneness of the Supreme Being: ‘By itself the One is just One, One and only One, and the One is the source of all creation’ (*eko eku api ikku ekai ekai hai sagala pasare*: AG 379). It should always be kept in mind that the vital expression of the One is through the many, through the infinite plurality of the creation, as is evident from Guru Arjan’s saying, ‘Unity becomes plurality and plurality eventually becomes unity’ (AG 131). This understanding of the One distinguishes the Sikh interpretation of ‘monotheism’ from its interpretation in the Abrahamic traditions (Pashaura Singh 2006: 247–8).

The mystical symbol *Oankar* has its origin in Guru Nanak's lengthy work *Oankar* in the measure *Ramakali Dakkhani*, a composition that gives particular meaning to it. It begins as follows: '*Oankar* ('the Primal Sound') created Brahma. *Oankar* fashioned the consciousness. From *Oankar* came mountains and ages. *Oankar* produced the Vedas. By the grace of *Oankar* people were saved through the divine Word. By the grace of *Oankar* they were liberated through the teachings of the Guru' (AG 929–30). In Guru Nanak's view, therefore, the mystical syllable *Oankar* is the foundational Word (*shabad*) that is the basis of the whole creation of time and space and represents in seed form all scriptural revelation. It provides the means of achieving awareness of higher realities through its transforming power. It should, however, be emphasized that the meaning of *Oankar* in the Sikh tradition is quite different in certain respects from the various interpretations of this word in the Indian philosophical traditions (Pashaura Singh 2006: 247). Not surprisingly, the highly symbolic and liturgically potent expression *1-Oankar* is used as an invocation in the various sections and subsections of the Adi Granth.

It is instructive to note that the most commonly used term for Ultimate Reality is Akal Purakh, 'Eternal One'. Another preferred term among the Sikhs is *Vahiguru* ('Wonderful Sovereign'), a term that does not occur in the works of the Gurus in the Adi Granth. However, its popularity during the period of Guru Arjan may be seen in its usage by the Sikh bards (AG 1402–4). Indeed, Akal Purakh is the central concept in Sikh doctrine, whereas Vahiguru occupies the supreme position in Sikh praxis. Therefore, we (p. 228) will use these two terms interchangeably to refer to Ultimate Reality. In Guru Nanak's thought, Akal Purakh is understood as *Nirankar*, 'the One without Form', and repeated emphasis is laid on the ineffable quality of Akal Purakh's being. In other words, the ultimate essence of Akal Purakh is beyond all human comprehension, far transcending all powers of human expression. However, it should not be construed that Akal Purakh is inaccessible to human understanding. Akal Purakh can be truly known in personal experience by his own grace rather than any abstract or discursive search. In Indian philosophical thought this distinction is between *nirguna* ('without attributes') reality beyond the scope of human thought, and the *saguna* ('with attributes') reality encountered within human experience as the personal creator and governor of the universe. The Mul Mantar illuminates the way Sikh doctrine understands a Divine Reality that is at once transcendent and immanent, personal and impersonal, and both having and not having attributes.

As the creator and sustainer of the universe, Akal Purakh lovingly watches over it. As a father figure he runs the world with justice, and destroys evil and supports good. As a mother figure, the Supreme Being is the source of love and grace, and responds to the devotion of her humblest followers. By addressing the One as 'Father, Mother, Friend,

and Brother' simultaneously Guru Arjan stresses that Akal Purakh is without gender (AG 103). In the Sikh scripture both Hindu and Muslim names of the Supreme Being are commonly employed. They express different aspects of the divine Name. For instance, Ram, Hari, Govind, Jagdish, Madhav, Parameshvar, and so on refer exclusively to Hindu (particularly Vaishnava) names, while Allah, Khuda, Rahim, Karim, and Sahib are of Muslim origin. Accordingly, the manifestations of Akal Purakh may be many, but he alone is and there is no other. Guru Nanak acknowledged the usage of different names across religious boundaries: 'What can the poor Nanak say? All the [devout] people praise the Absolute One. Nanak's head is at the feet of such people [in reverence]. May I be a sacrifice to all Your Names, O True One!' (AG 1168). Similarly, Guru Arjan has given a comprehensive list of these designated names (*kirtam nam*) in contemporary religious traditions associated with different attributes of Akal Purakh (AG 1083). Their meaning and significance in the Sikh context, however, become possible only when they are refracted through the lens of the Mul Mantar. Most importantly, the 'Truth of the Name' (*satinam*) is far beyond these designated names. It points towards the reality that is beyond any given name (Pashaura Singh 2006: 257–8).

As pure Being (*sat*) Vahiguru is an impersonal-Absolute that cannot articulate itself. Thus there is a need for a mystic (Guru/*Bhagat*) through whom the undifferentiated sound of the Absolute becomes differentiated. The Guru is an awakened individual who has a clear vision of the Absolute and it is through him that the Word-Absolute articulates itself. Such a Guru has given up his individual identity based on self-centredness (*haumai*) and is merged with Vahiguru. Indeed, the words he utters come forth spontaneously without any effort on his part. Such words are to be distinguished from words and names produced by human effort. Thus the words of the Guru (*gurbani*) are of a different order of language. They are special revelations (*satinam*) because they refer to something that is real (*sat*). It is no wonder that *gurbani* occupies a unique place in the (p. 229) Sikh tradition. Indeed, this is the philosophical basis of the adoration of the Sikh scripture (Pashaura Singh 2006: 250). In this context, Guru Arjan makes the overt expression of reverence for the written collection of the *bani* in the *pothi*: 'The scripture is the dwelling-place of the Supreme Being' (*pothi parmesar ka thanu*, AG 1226).

According to Guru Nanak's cosmology hymn, the universe was brought into being by the divine order, will, or command (*hukam*). This *hukam* is an all-embracing principle, the sum total of all divinely instituted laws, and it is a manifestation of the nature of Akal Purakh:

> For endless eons, there was only darkness. Nothing except the divine order existed. No day or night, no moon or sun. The Creator alone was absorbed in a

> primal state of contemplation…When the Creator so willed; creation came into being…The Un-manifest One revealed itself in the Creation.
>
> (AG 1035–6)

Elsewhere Guru Nanak describes how ‘From the True One came air and from air came water; from water he created the three worlds [sky, earth, and netherworld] and infused in every heart his own light’ (AG 19). In Sikh cosmology, the world is divinely inspired, the place that provides human beings with the opportunity to perform their duty and achieve union with Akal Purakh. Since ‘all of us carry the fruits of our deeds’, the actions we take during our earthly existence are important (AG 4). As the creation of Vahiguru, the physical universe is real but subject to constant change. In fact, the world is the ‘abode of the True One’ and the ‘True One abides in the world’ (AG 463). It is a lush green garden (*jagg vari*) where human beings participate in its colourful beauty and fragrance (AG 118). Only the Creator (*karta*) knows all the reasons of why, how, and when he brought the universe into being (AG 4). The Sikh Gurus were not concerned with these metaphysical speculations because their focus was on the experience of the glory of Vahiguru, who is fully involved in the day-to-day running of the world. They often assert that creation is an ongoing phenomenon in which repeated cycles of creation and dissolution take place. The Creator makes and remakes the world frequently at his will. Most instructively, Sikh ideas of creation do not have any conflict with the scientific world view of modern cosmology reflecting an expanding universe with the significant improvement that it is derived from the mind of Akal Purakh (Pashaura Singh 2006: 259).

A human person is a microcosm (*pind*) of the macrocosm (*brahmand*) in the Sikh world view. For Guru Nanak, human life is worth a ‘diamond’ that might go for a ‘farthing’ if one does not realize one’s true spiritual nature (AG 156). In his *Suhi* hymn, he proclaims: ‘One is blessed with the rarest opportunity of the human birth through the grace of the Guru. One’s mind and body become dyed deep red (with the love of the divine Name) if one is able to win the approval of the True Guru’ (AG 751). For Guru Arjan, human life is the most delightful experience that one can have with the gift of a beautiful body (AG 966). Indeed, the human being has been called the epitome of creation: ‘All other creation is subject to you, O man/woman! You reign supreme on this (p. 230) earth’ (AG 374). Although the existence of physical deformity and ugliness in the world is sometimes explained as the result of previous actions (*karma*), it is intended for a higher divine purpose which is beyond human comprehension. This situation can, however, change through the functioning of divine grace: ‘The cripple can cross a mountain and the blockhead can become an accomplished preacher. The blind can see the three worlds through the grace of the Guru’ (AG 809–10). Guru Arjan further proclaims that human life provides an individual with the opportunity to remember the divine Name and ultimately to join with Vahiguru: ‘Precious this life you receive as a human, with it the chance to find

the Lord’ (AG 15). But rare are the ones who seek the divine Beloved while participating in worldly actions and delights (Pashaura Singh 2006: 261–3).

Most instructively, the impetus behind ascetic withdrawal in India was directly related to the emphasis on the ‘unreality’ of the world. If liberation is an escape from the worldly cycle, it makes sense that one would reach it through progressive abstention from worldly involvements. That is exactly what a person who renounces the world does when he (or occasionally she) leaves home and family to live in relatively isolated and austere circumstances, sleeping on the ground, restricting the diet, disciplining one’s breathing, and bringing the senses under control—in short, withdrawing from all that might bind one to the world, with the ultimate goal of escaping from rebirth itself (Davis 1995: 13–14). In contrast to this world view, however, the Sikh Gurus stress the value of responsible social engagement within the context of marriage and family. In particular, Guru Arjan likens the world to a beautiful garden (*bhum rangavali*, ‘colourful earth’), emphasizing a positive attitude towards life in the world. This he does in his comment on the views held by the Sufi poet, Shaikh Farid, who regards the world with indifference or a place of suffering. Guru Arjan asserts that just as poison-bearing plants also grow in a beautiful garden, so suffering is an inevitable part of life. Joy and suffering are two aspects of worldly life which makes life worth living. One may find the way through the grace of the Master to accept pain and pleasure with equanimity (Pashaura Singh 2003: 70).

For Guru Arjan, therefore, the phenomenal world mirrors the eternal, reflecting the functioning of cosmic law (*hukam*) through temporal or historical events. In contrast to the emphasis on otherworldliness in contemporary Indian thought, he laid emphasis on a concrete and realist world view, affirming the sense of the historicity of the phenomenal world and social realities. It was through his existential outlook towards the world that he stressed the realization of the meaningful life ‘here’ and ‘now’. He was mainly concerned with practical moral issues in the world. Accordingly, earthly life has a greater value and a deeper significance than any kind of ascetic life pursued for the sake of otherworldliness. However, in order to guard against the temptation to become too worldly and proud of one’s riches, Guru Arjan adds a warning in his comment on Shaikh Farid’s verse as follows: ‘Farid, those who took praise in their greatness, in wealth, and in the pleasures of youth, they went away from the Lord, as bare as a hillock after rain’ (AG 1383). Here, Guru Arjan reminds people of the corrupting influence of power based upon worldly success. What is wrong with riches is their use for selfish ends, for inflating one’s ego and pride, and for destroying others. He seems (p. 231) to be concerned with maintaining a balance between the two extremes of renunciation and worldliness. Throughout his works Guru Arjan rejects not only the ideals of asceticism and self-mortification, but also the indulgence in and love of worldly attractions. Rather, the main

emphasis is placed on moderate living and disciplined worldliness, the two principal ideals which are an integral part of the spiritual path laid down in the Adi Granth (Pashaura Singh 2006: 260–1).

Guru Nanak used three key terms to describe the nature of divine revelation in its totality from the Sikh perspective: *nam* (‘divine Name’), *shabad* (‘divine Word’), and *guru* (‘divine Preceptor’). *Nam* refers to the divine presence that is manifest everywhere around and within us, though most people fail to perceive it because of the self-centred desire for personal gratification. This self-centredness (*haumai*, meaning ‘I, I’ or ‘me, mine’) separates us from Akal Purakh, and is the reason we continue to suffer within the cycle of rebirth (*sansar*). But Akal Purakh looks graciously on human suffering. Thus he reveals himself through the Guru by uttering the *shabad* (‘divine Word’) that will communicate a sufficient understanding of the *nam* (‘divine Name’) to those who are able to ‘hear’ it. The *shabad* is the divine utterance that, once heard, awakens the hearer to the reality of the divine Name, immanent in all that lies around and within (McLeod 1989: 50).

Traditionally, *haumai* is the source of five evil impulses: lust, anger, covetousness, attachment to worldly things, and pride. Under its influence humans become ‘self-willed’ (*manmukh*), so attached to worldly pleasures that they forget the divine Name and waste their lives in evil and suffering. To achieve spiritual liberation within one’s lifetime it is necessary to transcend the influence of *haumai* by adopting the strictly interior discipline of *nam-simaran*, ‘remembering the divine Name’. There are three levels to this discipline, ranging from the repetition of a sacred word, usually *Vahiguru*, through the devotional singing of hymns with the congregation, to sophisticated meditation on the nature of Akal Purakh. The first and the third levels are undertaken in private, while the second is a public, communal activity. The main purpose of *nam-simaran* is to bring practitioners into harmony with the divine order (*hukam*), resulting in ever-growing wonder (*vismad*) in spiritual life that ultimately leads to a condition of blissful ‘equanimity’ (*sahaj*).

Panj Khand: The Five Spiritual Realms

The process towards mystical union with Vahiguru begins with a meaningful and creative life in the world. As one lives just such a life one begins to gradually ‘ascend’, according to Guru Nanak, through five mystical realms, described in his celebrated *Japji* in a most systematic manner. They are not mentioned anywhere else in the Adi Granth. In fact, these ‘five spiritual realms’ (*panj khand*) provide us with the original contribution of Guru Nanak since they do not occur in the literature of any contemporary religious tradition.

Indeed, Guru Nanak's utterances (*bani*) became the main inspiration behind (p. 232) the *bani* of the later Gurus, who were also responding to the needs of the growing Sikh community in their own historical situation. They reinterpreted the message of Guru Nanak in new contexts and laid the foundation of its living survival. Occasionally, they offer interpretation and elaboration of some important themes of Guru Nanak's *Japji* in their works.

The first stage of mystical experience is known as the 'Realm of Duty' (*dharam khand*). Here, *dharam* represents the law of cause and effect that applies to both the physical universe and moral sense. In fact, Guru Nanak describes this earth as a 'place of earning righteousness' (*dharti dharamsal*). It is the physical existence on this planet where 'time and space' play crucial roles in the form of 'nights and seasons and dates and days', including all the elements—'air, water, fire, and earth'. All the colourful species add to the beauty and wonder of this world: 'In it are colourful beings and their lifestyles; infinite are their Names and infinite their forms' (AG 7). The mystic acknowledges that divine justice is based upon the retributive model, a model which follows closely the laws of cause and effect in both moral and the physical world: 'Each must be judged for the deeds one performs by a faultless judge in a perfect court. Those who are justified stand in glory, bearing upon them the mark of grace' (AG 7). Not surprisingly, understanding scientific laws and discoveries and following ethical rules deepen one's appreciation of Guru Nanak's description of the first stage of mystical experience. For Guru Arjan, the best duty (*dharam*) of all duties is to contemplate the divine Name and perform pure actions (AG 266). In his writings, the process of sanctification of earthly life had advanced farther than what we find in the works of his predecessors: 'The world of earning and enjoying is equally virtuous. One can live by actively participating in worldly affairs and enjoy happiness in earning money, provided one meditates on the divine Name to remove one's mundane concerns' (AG 522).

The second mystical stage is referred to as the 'Realm of Knowledge' (*gian khand*). It is marked by two experiences of awe simultaneously, one by the widening of one's intellectual horizons chiefly due to a developing appreciation of the vastness of creation, and the other by the process of 'dying to the self', resulting in the shattering of one's self-centred pride (*haumai*). Guru Nanak describes this experience as an outburst of a sudden illumination: 'Knowledge blazes in the Realm of Knowledge. Here is where one experiences the music of the divine Word (*nada*), wonderful sights, myriad sports and joy of bliss' (AG 7). The intuitive experience of this knowledge goes beyond any scientific discoveries or information gathered by means of rational thought. The closest parallel description of this mystical stage may be seen in the tenth octave of Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*. Here, he frequently employs the phrase *kaii kot* ('many millions') in place of Guru Nanak's *kete kete* ('many, many') to refer to the infinite greatness of Akal Purakh,

the expansive vastness of creation and the countless creatures who join to honour him in their various ways (AG 275–6).

The third stage is the ‘Realm of Effort’ (*saram khand*) where beautification of human faculties and sensibilities takes place by means of the divine Word: ‘There are fashioned creations of surpassing wonder. None can describe them. Were one to try one would rue the effort’ (AG 7–8). Indeed, the nature of the mystic experience in this realm is (p. 233) indescribable. Nevertheless, Guru Nanak further describes the indescribable: ‘There consciousness (*surat*), reason (*mat*), mind (*man*) and discernment (*budhi*) are honed. There the understanding (*sudh*) of a divine hero or a mystic is developed’ (AG 7–8). On the whole the mental, aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual faculties of the mystic are sharpened in this realm. Throughout this process of transformation the divine Word (*bani*) plays the central role. It transmutes the ‘perception’ (*surati*) into higher intellect (*mat*), emotive reflection (*man*), and discerning intelligence (*budhi*) which in turn is transmuted into ‘self-luminous consciousness’ (*sudhi*) at the apex of mystic experience. It is an experience of mystic unity where the individual self is simultaneously at one with Eternity and temporality. The realized self (*gurmukh*, ‘Guru-oriented’) experiences mystic identity with Akal Purakh, and thus has a ‘vision’ (*darsan*) of the Real. Here, reason is itself a ladder for upward spiritual ascent towards the goal of attaining harmony with the divine Order/Command (*hukam*). Thus Sikh revelation is the apex of reason, making reason and intuitive understanding complementary to each other.

The fourth stage on the mystic path is the ‘Realm of Grace’ (*karam khand*) where the power and authority of the divine Word is established in the life of the mystic. This is the abode of ‘divine heroes and mighty warriors’ who pass beyond error and transmigration. They are in full control of themselves since they have conquered their ‘self’, an achievement that goes beyond the conquest of nations and people. In fact, the saintly people (*bhagat*) of all continents enjoy this ‘Realm of Grace’: ‘They know eternal bliss, for the True One is imprinted on their minds’ (AG 8). Such people speak with the ‘authority and power’ of the divine Word. Guru Arjan’s conception of the *braham-giani* fits well in this mystical stage. Accordingly, the *braham-giani* is the one who possesses an understanding of Akal Purakh’s wisdom and who has found enlightenment in the company of the devout. Such a person acquires thereby an impressive range of virtues, such qualities as purity, humility, patience, kindness, and detachment, including remembrance of the divine Name. By virtue of these qualities, the *braham-giani* attains the state of spiritual liberation in his lifetime, along with the power to confer it on others by means of word and example (AG 272–4).

The fifth and final stage is the ‘Realm of Truth’ (*sach khand*). This is the dwelling-place of the ‘Formless One’ (*nirankar*). It is here where the soul of the mystic finds mystical union with Akal Purakh. Indeed, this is the ultimate climax of the search for Truth, for in this

stage one achieves complete harmony with the divine Order (*hukam*): ‘As the divine Order, so too the deed!’ (AG 8). This condition, however, can be known only through personal mystic experience: ‘To describe it, O Nanak, is as hard as steel’ (AG 8). Here, the divine Word (*bani*) is identified with the ‘Formless One’ (*nirankar*): ‘Hail, hail the *bani*, which itself is the ‘Formless One’ (*nirankar*). There is nothing else its equal’ (AG 515). Thus the divine Word is represented here not as a gross speech but as subtle impulses of sound reverberating forth from the ‘Formless One’. In other words, the divine Word functions as the ‘living voice’ of Akal Purakh that resounds throughout creation. In the ‘Realm of Truth’ there are countless ‘continents, worlds, and universes whose limit cannot be told’. It is no wonder that the divine Word functions in the form of primordial wisdom as a living force and the immediate source of creation. Most (p. 234) instructively, in the description of the ultimate stage there is no mention of the individual identity of the mystic. The main emphasis is on complete harmony with the divine command, an experience through which the mystic becomes an agent of the divine will (Pashaura Singh 2006: 276–9).

Ethical Living

Guru Nanak, as founder, was the central authority for the Kartarpur community. He prescribed the daily routine, in which communal devotions—Nanak’s *Japji* (‘Honoured Recitation’) was recited in the early hours of the morning, and *So Dar* (‘That Door’) and *Arti* (‘Adoration’) were sung in the evening—were balanced with agricultural work for sustenance. He defined the ideal person as a *Gurmukh* (‘one oriented towards the Guru’) who practised the threefold discipline of *nam dan ishnan*, ‘the divine Name, charity and purity’ (AG 942). Corresponding to the cognitive, the communal, and the personal aspects of the evolving Sikh identity, these three features—*nam* (relation to the Divine), *dan* (relation to the society), and *ishnan* (relation to self)—established a balance between the development of the individual and society. For Guru Nanak, the realization of the divine Truth depends upon the ethical conduct of the seeker. In fact, the Adi Granth opens with his *Japji* where the fundamental question of seeking the divine Truth is raised as follows: ‘How is Truth to be attained, how the veil of falsehood torn aside?’ The Guru then responds: ‘Nanak, thus it is written: Submit to the divine Order (*hukam*), walk in its way’ (AG 1). Truth obviously is not obtained by intellectual effort or cunning but only by personal commitment. To know truth one must live in it. The seeker of the divine Truth, therefore, must live an ethical life. An immoral person is neither worthy of being called a true seeker nor capable of attaining the spiritual goal of life. Any dichotomy between spiritual development and moral conduct is not approved in Sikh ethics. In this context

Guru Nanak explicitly says: ‘Truth is the highest virtue, but higher still is truthful living’ (AG 62). Indeed, truthful conduct (*sach achar*) is at the heart of Guru Nanak’s message. For him, the true spiritual life required that ‘one should live on what one has earned through hard work and that one should share with others the fruit of one’s exertion’ (AG 1245).

The central focus in Guru Nanak’s moral scheme involves the cultivation of virtues such as wisdom, contentment, courage, justice, humility, truthfulness, temperance, love, forgiveness, charity, purity, and fear of Akal Purakh (Avtar Singh 1970; Nripinder Singh 1990). In addition, service (*seva*), self-respect (*pati*), sweetness of the spoken word and taking only one’s rightful share (*haq halal*) were regarded as highly prized ethical virtues in the pursuit of liberation within one’s lifetime. These virtues not only enrich the personal lives of individuals, but they also promote socially responsible living. The key element of religious living is to render service (*seva*) to others in the form of mutual help and voluntary work. It must be rendered without the desire for self-glorification or setting oneself up as a judge of other people. The Sikh Prayer (*Ardas*) holds in high (p. 235) esteem the quality of ‘seeing but not judging’ (*dekh ke anadith karna*). Social bonds are often damaged beyond redemption when people unconscionably judge others. The Sikh Gurus stressed the need to destroy this root of social strife through service. They offered their own vision of egalitarian ideals based on the principle of social equality, gender equality, and human brotherhood/sisterhood. Thus, any kind of discrimination based on caste or gender is expressly rejected in Sikh ethics. The Gurus placed great emphasis on the spirit of optimism in the face of adverse circumstances. They stressed the ideals of moderate living and disciplined worldliness in contrast to the ideals of asceticism and self-mortification.

Living by alms or begging is strongly rejected by the Sikh Gurus. Thus, it is not surprising that the Sikh world view differs from the *dharmic* world view of other Indian religious traditions, particularly those based upon specialized virtues to be followed by particular castes as part of their moral obligations. Even the notion of karma underwent a radical change in Sikh doctrine. In the context of the Gurus’ teachings, karma is subject to the higher principle of the ‘divine command’ (*hukam*). In a significant way the law of karma is replaced by Akal Purakh’s *hukam*, which is no longer an impersonal causal phenomenon but falls within the sphere of Akal Purakh’s omnipotence and justice. The primacy of divine grace is always maintained over the law of karma in Sikh teachings, and divine grace even breaks the chain of adverse karma. There is neither fatalism nor any kind of passive acceptance of a predestined future in Guru Nanak’s view of life. He proclaimed, ‘With your own hands carve out your own destiny’ (AG 474). Indeed, personal effort in the form of good actions has a prominent place in his teachings. His idea of ‘divine free choice’ on the one hand, and his emphasis on the ‘life of activism’ based on human

freedom, on the other, reflect his ability to hold in tension seemingly opposed elements. Guru Nanak explicitly saw this balancing of opposed tendencies, which avoids rigid predestination theories and yet enables people to see their own ‘free’ will as a part of Akal Purakh’s will, as allowing Sikhs the opportunity to create their own destinies, a feature stereotypically associated with Sikh enterprise throughout the world. *Gurmat* thus stresses the dignity of regular labour as an integral part of spiritual discipline. This is summed up in the following triple commandment: engage in honest labour for a living, adore the divine Name, and share the fruit of labour with others. The formula stresses both the centrality of meditative worship and the necessity of righteous living in the world.

Although stemming from the reflections of Guru Nanak and his successors, Sikh moral values were not formulated in a cultural vacuum. The Gurus were fully aware of their Indian context of Hindu, Muslim, and Nath traditions. In the social context, for instance, Guru Nanak advocates the virtue of justice in its legalistic sense and makes it the principal characteristic of the ruler and the administrator (AG 1240). He severely condemns the contemporary Muslim jurist (*qazi*) who has become morally corrupt by selling justice and having no concern for the truth: ‘The qazi tells lies and eats filth’ (AG 662). In Punjabi culture, the phrase ‘to eat filth’ referred to ‘unlawfully earned food’ in those days when the qazi used to take ‘bribes’ in order to deprive people of justice (AG 951). Guru Nanak further proclaims that ‘to deprive others of their rights must be (p. 236) avoided as scrupulously as Muslims avoid pork and the Hindus consider beef as taboo’ (AG 141). Here, one can see how Guru Nanak regards the violation of human rights as a serious moral offence on religious grounds, taking into account both the *dharmic* world view of the Hindus and juridical-political world view of the Muslims. The Sikh view of justice is, in fact, based upon two principles: first, respect for the rights of others; and, second, the non-exploitation of others. To treat everyone’s right as sacred is a necessary constituent of justice. A just person will not exploit others even if they have the means and opportunity for doing so (Avtar Singh 1970: 99–101).

The *Miri-Piri* Doctrine and the Khalsa

The turning point in early Sikh history occurred with Guru Arjan’s execution in 1606 by the orders of Emperor Jahangir, an event which empowered the Sikhs to stand for the ideals of truth, justice, and fearlessness more boldly. A radical reshaping of the Sikh Panth took place after his martyrdom. His son and successor, Guru Hargobind, signalled the formal process when he traditionally donned two swords symbolizing the spiritual (*piri*) as well as the temporal (*miri*) investiture. He also built the Akal Takhat (‘Throne of

the Timeless One') facing the Harimandir, which represented the newly assumed role of temporal authority. Under his direct leadership the Sikh Panth took up arms to protect itself from Mughal hostility. This new martial response was like 'hedging the orchard of the Sikh faith with the hardy and thorny *kikar* tree' (*Varan Bhai Gurdas* 26: 25). From the Sikh perspective this new development was not taken at the cost of abandoning the original spiritual base. Rather, it was meant to achieve a balance between temporal and spiritual concerns. Thus, Guru Arjan's martyrdom became the watershed in Sikh history, contributing basically to the growth of Sikh community self-consciousness, separatism, and militancy. Indeed, it became the single most decisive factor for the crystallization of the Sikh Panth (Pashaura Singh 2006: 298).

During the period of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur (1621–75), the increasing strength of the Sikh movement in the rural areas of the Malwa region of Punjab once again attracted the hostility of Mughal authorities. The Guru encouraged his followers to be fearless in their pursuit of a just society: 'He who holds none in fear, nor is afraid of anyone, is acknowledged as a man of true wisdom' (AG 1427). In doing so, Guru Tegh Bahadur posed a direct challenge to Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), who had imposed Islamic laws and taxes on non-Muslims. According to an earliest narrative, when a group of Hindu *pandits* ('scholars') from Kashmir asked for the Guru's help against Aurangzeb's oppressive measures, he agreed to do whatever was necessary to defend their rights to wear their 'sacred threads and frontal marks' (*tilak janju rakha prabh tan ka*, DG 70). A message was sent to the emperor saying that if Guru Tegh Bahadur could be persuaded to accept Islam, the Hindus would convert as well. Accordingly, the Guru was summoned to Delhi, and when he refused to abandon his faith he was publicly executed on 11 November 1675. If the martyrdom of Guru Arjan (p. 237) had helped to bring the Sikh Panth together, this second martyrdom helped to make 'human rights and freedom of conscience' central to its identity.

Most instructively, Wilfred Cantwell Smith remarked that 'the attempt forcibly to convert the ninth Guru to an externalized, impersonal Islam clearly made an indelible impression on the martyr's nine-year-old son, Gobind, who reacted slowly but deliberately by eventually organizing the Sikh group into a distinct, formal, symbol-patterned, boundaried community' (Smith 1981: 191). Tradition holds that the Sikhs who were present at the scene of Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution shrank from recognition, concealing their identity for fear they might suffer a similar fate. In order to respond to this new situation, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, resolved to impose on his followers an outward form that would make them instantly recognizable. He restructured the Sikh Panth and instituted the Khalsa (pure), an order of loyal Sikhs bound by common identity and discipline. On Baisakhi Day 1699 at Anandpur, Guru Gobind Singh initiated the first so-called 'Cherished Five' (*panj piare*), who formed the nucleus of the new order of the

Khalsa. These five volunteers who responded to the Guru's call for loyalty, and who came from different castes and regions of India, received the initiation through a ceremony that involved sweetened water (*amrit*) stirred with a two-edged sword and sanctified by the recitation of five liturgical prayers.

The Khalsa order ushered in another representation of divinity in the form of the burnished steel of the unsheathed sword. For instance, Guru Gobind Singh identifies Akal Purakh with the Divine Sword in the celebrated canto of *Bachitar Natak*:

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

Similarly, the 'divinity' is addressed as 'all-steel' (*sarb loh*) or as the 'revered sword' (*sri bhagauti*), a mode of expression that reveals 'a dark and turbulent presence which is only ever encountered through the convulsive events of battle and love, birth and death' (N. Mandair 2009: 91). In his celebrated *Jaap Sahib* ('Master Recitation') Guru Gobind Singh proclaims: 'I bow to you, the one who wields weapons that soar and fly. I bow before you, Knower of all, Mother of all the earth' (verse 52). Thus the divine Being is a great warrior who wields weapons of all kinds. But before he uses those weapons he has the perfect knowledge of what is right and what is wrong. And, during the battle he does not fight savagely with anger but with the nurturing presence of the mother whose aim is to reform her children who have gone astray.

Following the earlier *miri-piri* tradition of Guru Hargobind, Guru Gobind Singh assumed characteristics of the spiritual leader and of a ruler, who had specific responsibilities to protect righteousness (*dharam*). Not surprisingly, waging battle was part (p. 238) of the *dharmic* responsibility of the Guru. The majority of the narrative of his life is devoted to detailed description of a series of battles. Indeed, Guru Gobind Singh was an able spiritual and political leader who maintained a court at Anandpur, and led an army in many battles throughout his life, some of which are described in the *Bachitar Natak* section of the *Dasam Granth* (DG) (Rinehart 2011: 66–8). His army would retain 'its commitment by steadfastly refusing the temptation to seek concealment in times of danger' (McLeod 1997: 105). Thus in transforming Sikhs into a self-governing warrior group, the tenth Guru set in motion a profound change in the political and cultural fabric

of the Mughal province of Punjab (Dhavan 2011: 3). Most instructively, his army was never to wage war for power, for gain or for personal rancour. As McLeod says, ‘The Khalsa was resolutely to uphold justice and to oppose only that which is evil’ (McLeod 1997: 105).

Conclusion

The inauguration of the Khalsa was the culmination of the canonical period in the development of the Sikh tradition. The most visible symbols of Sikh faith known as the Five Ks—namely uncut hair (*Kes*), a comb for topknot (*Kangha*), a short sword (*Kirpan*), an iron wristlet (*Kara*), and undergarment breeches (*Kachh*)—are mandatory to the Khalsa. Guru Gobind Singh also closed the Sikh canon by adding a collection of the works of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the original compilation of the Adi Granth. Before he passed away in 1708, he terminated the traditional line of personal Gurus, and installed the Adi Granth as the eternal Guru for Sikhs, giving another title for the Sikh scripture as ‘the Guru Granth Sahib’. Thereafter, the authority of the Guru would be invested not in an individual but in the scripture (Guru-Granth) and the community (Guru-Panth). Together, Guru-Granth and Guru-Panth would continue the process of consolidating the Sikh tradition through the eighteenth and subsequent centuries. Consequently, the understanding of the office of the ‘Guru’ has evolved over time to encompass four types of spiritual authority in the Sikh world view: the divine Guru (*Satguru*), the personal Guru (in the lineage of ten historical Gurus from Guru Nanak through Guru Gobind Singh), the scriptural Guru (Guru-Granth), and the community as Guru (Guru-Panth).

In sum, *Gurmat* places explicit emphasis on the ideal of moderate living in the world in which spiritual development and social engagement cannot be mutually exclusive. In recent studies ‘religion’ is not considered a purely interior impulse secreted away in the human soul and limited to the private sphere, nor an institutional force separable from other non-religious or secular forces in the public domain. Rather, all the public-private, religion-politics, and church-state dichotomies have come under the powerful critique of postmodern and postcolonial studies. It has been suggested that such dichotomies, rather than describing reality as it is, justify a certain configuration of power. It is no wonder that Sikh doctrine of *miri-piri* explicitly affirms that religion and politics are (p. 239) bound together. Thus religious issues must be defended in the political arena and political activity must be conducted in accordance with the values of truth and justice.

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The Khalsa and the Rahit

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Abstract and Keywords

The article discusses the origins and the history of both the Khalsa of Guru Gobind Singh and its distinctive way of life and code of conduct (Rahit) as detailed within the historical *rahit-namas*. It problematizes the generally accepted narrative of the Khalsa's and the Rahit's creation.

Keywords: Gur-sobha, Sainapati, Nand Lal, hukam-namas, Khalsa, Rahit, rahit-namas, masands, Baisakhi, gurbilas

With its distinctive physical, sartorial, liturgical, and behavioural regulations the ideal Khalsa—a Punjabi term (*khālsā*) derived from the Arabic *khāliṣ*, 'pure', and the Persian word *khāliṣah*, historically referring to those lands or other things and individuals producing revenue directly for the Mughal emperor and the central treasury—is the order of Sikhs instituted by Guru Gobind Singh traditionally on Baisakhi Day *sammat* 1756 (30 March 1699). The new order aimed, in part, to visibly and symbolically manifest in the person of the individual Sikh and the collective Sikh community the Sikh ideal of the *sant-sipāhī* or the 'saint-soldier', a binary along the same lines of *mīrī-pīrī* (the Sikh idea that secular and spiritual pursuits go hand in hand). What sets adherents of the Khalsa clearly apart from other Sikhs is that the Khalsa follows the Rahit, its code of conduct which details the above-mentioned regulations and which, during the eighteenth century was compiled in a series of texts known as *rahit-nāmās*, manuals of instruction.

What gives these instructions a near sacrosanct status is the belief that they encompass, in many instances, the last Guru's parting words of direction to his Sikhs before his death in 1708, as communicated through the persons of his very close disciples, Bhais Daya Singh, Nand Lal, Prahilad Rai, and Chaupa Singh Chhibbar (to later include one Desa Singh). As the living Guru was, and continues to be, the source of authority in Sikh tradition, the belief that these instructions were issued by him suggest that the standards noted in these were to be normative.

Since the manuals deal almost exclusively with the Khalsa, one may argue as later Sikhs inevitably would that this order manifests the normative Sikh identity. Entry into the Khalsa is thus outlined in these rahit-namas, almost all of which include specified rituals and observances such as initiation through the administration of the 'nectar of the double-edged sword' (*khaṇḍe kī pāhul*), the repetition of distinctive sacred hymns (*bāṇī*) at certain times of day, the donning of specific weapons which would ultimately become the Five Ks—so named as these all begin with the Punjabi letter 'k', *kaṛa* (bangle), *kacchaihirā* (breeches), *kes* (uncut hair), *kirpān* (sword), and the *kaṅghā* (comb)—and the injunctions to both take the identifying name Singh and abide by the Rahit. These commands combine three of the four general elements of the more comprehensive rahit-namas: the first enjoins believers to continue earlier Sikh practice, belief in Akal Purakh, the veneration of the Sikh Gurus, and the acceptance of the Adi Granth (p. 241) as eliciting the mystical presence of the divine; the second comprises rules for personal behaviour which prescribe the things that must be avoided, the four prohibitions (*kurahit*)—halal meat, cutting one's hair, extramarital sexual affairs, and smoking; while the third outlines how Khalsa ceremonies must be conducted. The fourth component prescribes penalties (*tankhāh*) to be invoked in the case of the Rahit's violation.

So significant was the Khalsa to the early Sikh imagination that it was believed to have been often revered by the Guru himself, beliefs underscored in compositions attributed to him such as the *Khālsā Mahimā* (In Praise of the Khalsa), the four verses which appear after the *33 Swaiyye* within the Dasam Granth, the book of the tenth Lord (Dasam Granth: 716), and within the rahit-namas, the *gurbilās*, and other works written by court poets like Nand Lal Goya whose *Khātimah* (Conclusion) in Persian is a testament to the order's glory. The Khalsa in certain texts not only inherited the spiritual mantle or 'robe' (*jamā*) of the Guru but was even metaphysically equated with him, forming the basis of what would become the doctrine of Guru Panth, the mystical presence of the divine within the community of the Khalsa.

Whether initiation into the order was the only way that one could continue to be a true Sikh and express loyalty to the person of the Guru is, however, unknown, as too is whether guruship is invested within the Khalsa solely or within the larger Sikh Panth. The earliest account of the Khalsa, Sainapati's *Srī Gur-sobhā*, which was finalized only a decade or so after the order's inauguration, is not entirely clear in these regards. *Sarab saṅgati ādi anti merā khālsā*, 'for all time the entire *saṅgat* (congregation) belongs to my Khalsa' (5:30), states Sainapati, which may seem straightforward, equating the entire Panth with the Khalsa, but this nevertheless assumes that our author is here using the terms *sarab saṅgati* to reference the entire Sikh Panth and not just those Sikhs immediately present at the gathering. This ambiguity makes it difficult to judge just who

Guru Gobind Singh has in mind when he is made to state that *khālsā merā rūp hai haun khālas ke pāsi*, 'the Khalsa is my form; I [abide] beside the Khalsa' (18:42) (G. Singh 1980: 81, 170).

Notwithstanding Sainapati's glorification of the order it is difficult to determine if he himself was present at the foundational event or if he even chose to subsequently join the order despite the fact that the first chapter (*dhiāu*) of the work begins with the phrase *khālsā bāch* 'the Khalsa speaks' rather than the more common *kabi bāch* 'the poet speaks', a phrase which often graces portions of the Dasam Granth—the inference is based on the fact that it was not, and is still not, uncommon to hear of individual Sikhs referred to respectfully as 'Khalsa ji'. Is Sainapati therefore here referring to himself or the Khalsa collectively? Sainapati's apparent failure to join the Khalsa is a conjecture based on the fact that the name by which he is predominantly known, Chandra Sain Sainapati, fails to include the surname Singh, which is interesting as within *Gur Sobhā* itself the surname Singh is noted as a feature of the Khalsa (5:34) (G. Singh 1980: 4–6, 82). But if he was in fact a member (which seems likely) then this in itself allows us to problematize the nature of the initial Khalsa: Guru Gobind Singh cast a far wider net than tradition assumes, allowing Sikhs who had yet to undertake the initiatory ritual to enter the order. There are after all Sikhs mentioned within the Guru's 'written instructions' or *hukam-nāmās* who lack the surname Singh but are still addressed as Khalsa, such as Bhai Mihar Chand (G. Singh 1985: 168–9).

(p. 242) The tenth Guru certainly inaugurated a single Khalsa. Accounts after Sainapati's imply that the situation would become more complicated and nuanced, and suggest that there was a vibrant diversity not only amongst Sikhs generally but also amongst those Sikhs who, and sangats which, understood themselves to belong to the Khalsa during the eighteenth century, a variety to which the rahit-namas unwittingly attest in their repeated insistence for a unified Khalsa.

Modern Sikh tradition itself speaks of at least two different *khālsās*, the second formed very soon after Guru Gobind Singh's death in 1708: the *tat* or True Khalsa which followed the dictates of the tenth Master precisely and the so-called *bandāī* Khalsa whose members adapted and augmented these principles and instructions with those issued by Banda Bahadur (the Sikh warrior who had led the Khalsa for a short while during the early eighteenth century) amongst which we would include the rallying cry *fateh darśan* (G. Singh 1990: 71). Although both undoubtedly understood themselves as Khalsa it was this latter khalsa which was censured by the tenth Guru's widow, Mata Sundari, in a hukam-nama preserved with the family of Bhai Rupa, and repeated in a famous passage we find in Ratan Singh Bhangu's early nineteenth-century *Srī Gur-panth Prakāś* (Dhillon 2004: 128–47).

Bhangu certainly goes out of his way to castigate Banda and his Khalsa, having Banda himself often harshly criticize the tenth Guru's Khalsa. Bhangu's text may have thus served as the harbinger of later Sikh attitudes towards multiple and differing khalsas and may have even more strongly reinforced the idea of an individual, unadulterated *khalsa*. What should be here noted, however, is that Banda's own hukam-nāmās are ambiguous as to the understanding of his Sikhs forming a separate khalsa (G. Singh 1985: 192–5). This ambiguity may likely stem from the very nature of the tersely written hukam-nama which as its name suggests simply imparts a small number of instructions to sangats and Sikhs mentioned within. As a result the amount of ideology we can extract from these as, too, the image of the historical context in which these were written, is also quite limited.

Such limitations notwithstanding, the hukam-namas are quite useful. From Banda's hukam-namas for example it is clear that the Khalsa and the Rahit are intimately related: *āp vichi piāru karaṇā merā hukamu hai jo khālse dī rahat rahegā* 'My order is that one who follows the Rahit of the Khalsa will ensure that love resides amongst you' (G. Singh 1985: 194–5). We discover within them, moreover, that the term *khālsā* is employed for at least two early Sikh sangats. Guru Hargobind refers to the 'sangat of the east' (*pūrab dī saṅgat*) as the 'Khalsa of the Guru' in one of his undated hukam-namas (G. Singh 1985: 66–7) and so too does Guru Tegh Bahadar likewise describe the sangat of Patna: *paṭṭaṇ dī saṅgati srī gurū jīu dā khālsā hai*, 'the sangat of Patna is the Khalsa of the revered Guru' (G. Singh 1985: 76–7). These make clear that the term was used relatively early in Sikh tradition. Even earlier is Bhagat Kabir's *rāg soraṭhi* 4:3:

> *kahu kabīr jan bhae khālse prem bhagati jin jāni*
>
> Kabir says that those people who become pure, who become khalsa, it is they who know [the path] of *prem bhagati*, of loving devotion.
>
> (Guru Granth Sahib: 655)

(p. 243) But the claims on the part of the two earlier Gurus, like those of Banda, are nebulous as we are not sure as to how the term is being employed here, that is in Kabir's generous sense simply as 'pure' or in the Mughal administrative sense. References to these sangats as khalsa may perhaps be an attempt by the Gurus to distinguish these from different Sikh sangats not designated as such in their other hukam-namas. After all, not all sangats had such direct access to the Sikh Guru but had to rely on intermediaries known as *masands* who also collected the offerings of distant sangats to remit to the Guru. If we keep in mind the Mughal administrative understanding of the term khalsa as entities producing revenue directly for the centre, then we may question whether these more distant sangats which availed themselves of the masands were understood as khalsa in this early period.

This is speculation, but it is a conjecture well warranted for as we look forward to the eighteenth century we discover a relatively diverse Khalsa. We also find an intriguing lack of clarity on who amongst the Sikhs was actually entitled to call themselves Khalsa in the period after 1699. Was it only Sikhs who had undergone the ritual of the double-edged sword? McLeod tells us for example that with these Sikhs we should also include those Sikh congregations which had spurned the masands, implying that these sangats would certainly have possessed members who did not undergo the initiation (McLeod 2003: 38). Sainapati certainly seems to privilege those who have tasted the *amrit* (5:34) although he also claims, somewhat more inclusively, that 'those who will accept the [Guru's] order will become his Sikhs', *mānegā hukamu so te hovaigā sikkh sahī* but not, it may be, his Khalsa—though he does also note that those Sikhs who did 'not accept the command [of the Guru]' will be *bihālsā* 'agitated' or support-less as a result (5:30; G. Singh 1980: 81). In this light it seems unlikely that both Sainapati and as prominent a Sikh as Nand Lal Goya, Guru Gobind Singh's principal courtly poet who also lacked the Singh suffix, would have been excluded from the order. It may be that both Sainapati and Nand Lal simply continued to use their earlier poetic signatures, assuming that all readers would have understood them to be members of the order.

Uncertainty of this sort may be inferred from the earliest rahit-namas, many of which are inconsistent when read against one another and all of which violate certain Sikh precepts we find in the Guru Granth Sahib such as the observance of caste status which is categorically rejected in matters dealing with liberation in the *bāṇī* of the Sikh Gurus but accepted in part in certain rahit-namas—quite an irony when one considers that the Khalsa itself was apparently established in part to merge all castes into one. The Khalsa of the Guru must obey the Rahit, these all state or imply, and while the rahit-namas do agree on a number of points they nevertheless differ on many others, and these variations suggest that there did exist diversity amongst those Sikhs who were a part of the Khalsa.

Today, despite the claims of Sikhs we may label as *amrit-dhārī* (lit., 'bearing the [initiatory] elixir') or 'orthodox' for lack of a better term, predominantly those Khalsa Sikhs within the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) which manages Sikh gurdwaras within the Punjab, a number of Khalsa Sikh identities exist which claim that their version of the Khalsa discipline as enshrined within their unique codes of conduct **(p. 244)** is genuine and by so doing tacitly acknowledge that their Khalsa is the one originally intended by Guru Gobind Singh and imply thereby that all others are pale imitations of it (P. Singh 1996: 149). It is under this umbrella that we may include Khalsa Sikhs who would also identify with the Nanaksar and Akhand Kirtani Jatha traditions and by broadening our definition somewhat by including the veneration of a living spiritual master or guru we may also incorporate the Namdhari Sikhs almost all of whom likewise observe a Khalsa rahit. One may also here involve the Nihang Sikhs who claim that it is

their group which takes the injunctions of the Guru the most seriously, to a degree that few Khalsa Sikhs would regularly observe. Most ‘mainstream’ Khalsa Sikhs who acknowledge the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* (the modern Rahit) do generally see the Nihangs as members, albeit exceptional or extreme members, of the larger Khalsa Panth.

In further attempting to understand the history and identity of the Khalsa and its Rahit, therefore, it is perhaps best to turn to the modern institution, which generally laid down the ideological superstructure around which the later SGPC was erected, the late nineteenth-century reform movement, the Singh Sabha.

The elite Sikhs who formed the Singh Sabha in the 1870s were well aware of the pluralistic and rather fluid nature of both their contemporary Sikh Panth and the Sikh Khalsa. Profoundly influenced by the contemporary European understanding of religion and modernity (Oberoi 1994) with its stress on stable and unique identities and their own versions of a single, genuine Sikh history and religion, these intellectuals came to view the Panth’s diversity with much suspicion and ultimately sought to reduce this multiplicity to a single solitary identity with the Khalsa at its very centre, and to collapse its history, both diachronic and synchronic, to a sole trajectory. In this the Khalsa was supreme and understood to be the ultimate fulfilment of the Sikh Gurus’ collective vision of and for the Sikh Panth. And to this end, its most vocal members began to refer to themselves and their organization in a way which assumed that theirs was the commanding, authoritative voice in matters Sikh and Khalsa.

No longer were they merely Singh Sabha; they were now Tat Khalsa, playing upon the title believed adopted by the earliest Khalsa of the post-Guru Gobind Singh period opposed to what are alleged to be the false or misled Khalsa Sikhs of Banda Bahadur. Past khalsas such as that of Banda, the new ‘orthodox’ Tat Khalsa implied, were not a part of the Khalsa but rather malicious aberrations or inadvertent corruptions of the tenth Guru’s genuine intent (a claim perhaps which drew from Bhangu’s earlier invective), a resolve believed enunciated on that fateful Baisakhi Day in 1699 when he established the order and uttered the early portions of its Rahit which was finalized just before the tenth Master’s untimely demise. In constructing this narrative and streamlining contemporary understandings of the Khalsa itself in the process, Tat Khalsa Sikhs appropriated the same exegetical tools which they brought to bear upon the many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rahit-namas (McLeod 2003) in order to establish Sikh religious boundaries firmly and coherently, certainly useful within the colonial environment in which the Tat Khalsa operated and in which community numbers mattered politically.

With these tools the Sabha expunged material from the eighteenth-century rahit-namas which they deemed both non-Sikh and offensive; and in the process of (p. 245) so doing

ultimately provided a single standard text which all Sikhs could follow, a text which would bring together the more ethical principles of the early rahit-namas which were in consonance with the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib, features of these early texts which Singh Sabha intellectuals retained. Such preserved portions included injunctions like those in Nand Lal's *Praśān-uttar* which correspond to actions prescribed by Guru Ram Das in his *Gauṛī kī vār* 11 (Guru Granth: 305–6) and include rising early in the morning and reciting Guru Nanak's *Japjī* and Guru Gobind Singh's *Jāp*; taking *darśan* of the Guru within the sangat, and listening to *gur-bāṇī* (Padam 1991: 55). It was inevitable that such a 'modern' text would strongly imply the existence of one dominant Sikh identity, that of the Khalsa, and allocate all other ways of expressing Sikh-ness to the margins of the Sikh world.

But Tat Khalsa leaders were not only idealists, they were pragmatic as well. The simple reality of late nineteenth-century Punjab was that few Sikhs had taken the initiatory *amrit* which was, in their opinion, the first step towards Khalsa admission. To accommodate other ways of being Sikh, therefore, the Tat Khalsa had to develop a narrative which allowed for the existence of what were to them, crudely, unfulfilled Sikh identities. The Khalsa as now interpreted by the Tat Khalsa thus became the ultimate Sikh identity to which all others who understood themselves as Sikh aspired. These non-Khalsa Sikhs were thus subsumed under the identifying heading of *sehaj-dhārī* or 'slow adopters' or if they adopted parts of the Khalsa form (but not the full discipline), *kes-dhārīs* or 'hair-bearing' Sikhs. Sikhs they were, but Sikhs who had yet to complete their Sikh journey towards full realization. The result was the *Sikh Rahit Maryādā* which was formally recognized as authoritative in 1950 and continues to be used and debated today, underscoring the dynamic nature of Sikh identity.

The continuing Sikh fascination with the Khalsa is in part a product of the powerful story of the order's creation. Although this narrative is indeed grand, populated with intrigue, drama, and suspense, it is nevertheless one which forms gradually within the crucible of the eighteenth-century Sikh past. Early accounts such as that of Sainapati are somewhat patchy. Sainapati does outline certain rules imposed upon the new order, a nascent Rahit, but mentions nothing about the original initiatory ritual apart from the administration of *khaṇḍe kī pāhal* (5:33). We do as well see the term khalsa appearing regularly within Guru Gobind Singh's hukam-namas, particularly those dated after 1699 which appear to identify as Khalsa those Sikhs who have taken amrit as well as those sangats which avoid the masands, but even here in perhaps the most acceptable of testimonies, that same ambiguity we find in the hukam-namas of both the tenth Guru's father and grandfather persists. It may be that these early accounts fail to mention the order's creation for it was a story well known enough to simply be taken for granted.

This is how Sukkha Singh begins what would become the best known narrative, in the late 1790s:

> At first the men expressed eager curiosity as they took the call to sangats everywhere [to gather on Baisakhi Day]. When all had then gathered at the fair the resplendent Guru called out, 'Is there any loyal Sikh here, devoted in body and spirit, who will (p. 246) offer his head to the Guru?' Having heard the Guru's command the people became agitated and stunned. Three times the Guru issued the call until one selfless Sikh came forward with palms brought together. Having grasped him, the Guru raised his arm to take out his sword. The power of his pure form was dazzling to behold. The Guru took him into a tent. Sword in hand the Guru beheaded a goat in the middle of the tent with a single stroke and blood gushed out. The Lord of the world once again came outside sword drenched with blood and demanded another head. Seeing this several people were perplexed and rushed to hide. Three more times the call was given and three more selfless Sikh came forward and a final one. Guru Dev took the final Sikh's arm and led him away into the tent and from the middle of it an identical mighty blow was heard. As blood dripped from his sword the True Guru brought out the five Singhs unharmed. Shouts of victory sounded throughout the world at their appearance.
>
> (Jaggi 1989: 171–2)

These Sikhs who formed the nucleus of the Khalsa became the Cherished Five (*pañj piāre*), the symbolic archetype of all future Panj Piare, and although little is said about the historical Five today apart from the belief that they all belonged to different castes, narratives about their lives—both their contemporary and past lives—appear to have been often told in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries judging by the many references to them in Sikh manuscripts of the period. While Guru Gobind Singh is proclaimed to be Vishnu's avatar in these, four of the five Piare are the incarnations of one famous Hindu demigod and three Hindu *bhagats* (Lav, Nam Dev, Sain, and Dhanna respectively), the exception being Bhai Himmat Singh who is claimed to be the incarnation of a hunter—*badhak* or *phandak*. Sukkha Singh does forgo these particular descriptions, only mentioning the towns in which the Cherished Five resided (9:28–34; Jaggi 1989: 174); Koer Singh's later *gurbilas* text, however, does not (9:44–6; Ashok 1968: 129). It was perhaps the Tat Khalsa's attempts to purge those elements they considered Hindu which resulted in the erasure of this Panj Piare tradition.

Were only Sikhs of such impeccable spiritual and divine pedigree to be admitted into the order of the Khalsa, it would have remained a small assembly indeed. But the implications in these traditions and so too in the gurbilas texts are that only dedicated Sikhs of pure body and mind who were ready to sacrifice everything for the Guru and the

Panth were required if Sikhs were to continue to survive these most troubled of times. It is quite likely that the gurbilas authors were speaking predominantly to contemporary Khalsa Sikhs, a number of whom belonged to the various militant confederacies known as *misls*, and their leaders the famous *misldārs*. Such thrilling narratives and the morals these conveyed may, like the rahit-namas, have served to constrain the more questionable actions of these famous Sikh chieftains who were sometimes forced to bend to the dictates of realpolitik and fight against fellow Khalsa Sikhs or collaborate with those generally understood to be the enemies of the Panth, Afghans, Pathans, and Mughals (Dhavan 2011: 74–148). Popular Sikh histories today, however, make clear that the Khalsa never did this and had ample opportunity to test their unadulterated mettle against such enemies, and it was this which had secured (p. 247) their future at the end of the eighteenth century with the formation of the independent Sikh kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, known as Sarkar Khalsa ji, the government of the Khalsa. This particular ‘myth of the Khalsa’ continues to profoundly inspire Sikhs today.

Extensively mining the field of traditional Sikh accounts, one discovers a number of interrelated reasons which general Sikh tradition puts forward for the Khalsa’s creation: to gift Sikhs with a specific martial way of life and style to allow them to stand out; to confront the tyranny of the Mughals under Aurangzeb; to merge all four castes into one; and to displace the Guru’s own agents, the *masands* who by the late seventeenth century had become corrupt shells of their former selves. This last issue is not only repeatedly mentioned in Sainapati’s *Srī Gur-sobhā*, but also frequently appears in the tenth Guru’s own hukam-namas. The Guru’s instructions of 6 February 1702 for instance remind his Sikhs to not associate with either the *masands* or their followers (G. Singh 1985: 170–1).

Eighteenth-century accounts such as Sukkha Singh’s imply that sole agency in the Khalsa’s creation rested with the Guru and it was through the Guru alone that the Khalsa became complete and pure. Yet the historical context of the early Khalsa suggests a different approach is required, particularly as early traces of the Sikh past tell us so little indeed about the order’s actual formation and its limits. Guru Gobind Singh did inaugurate the Khalsa to be sure but it likely established its horizons gradually within a very specific historical context in which various realities, ideas, and influences shared by all of the Punjab’s communities were engaged in discourse and dialogue, a discursive encounter through which such elements later to characterize Khalsa norms and observances were refined and ultimately reified. And it is quite likely in this regard that such an encounter also had an effect on the construction of Sikh history, shaping the image of the tenth Guru and his Khalsa as effectively as the tenth Guru and his Khalsa shaped that very history. This encounter is often implicitly noted within the many diverse Khalsa rahit-namas of the period.

The prescription of the Sikh way of life which the rahit-namas communicate begins understandably within the Guru Granth Sahib itself to be soon followed by the *vārs* of Bhai Gurdas and the hukam-namas, all of which basically tell Sikhs what to believe and how to act on those beliefs. Although this material pertains to all Sikhs, the rahit-namas proper are clearly directed towards Khalsa Sikhs. Their martial emphasis, for example, allows us to clearly situate them within the early to mid-eighteenth century. While they all speak of duties, doctrine, dress, rituals, food, and moral observances, they also emphasize the need to engage in righteous warfare and the use and possession of weapons, and the respect that the Khalsa must demonstrate towards them. The period of the early rahit-namas was a time in which armed bands of peasants and disbanded soldiers often roamed the countryside in search of employment and it is likely this which was quite determinative in the description or prescription of the ideal Khalsa Sikh identity. These early rahit-namas attempted to mould out of just such an armed peasantry an ideal spiritual warrior band which could stand alongside other predominantly 'martial clans' such as the Pathan, Afghan, and Rohilla warrior bands of northern India, **(p. 248)** but which could trace its origins to the radiant tenth Guru. Such concerns are echoed throughout the rahit-namas (Padam 1991: 67, 149).

Although the eighteenth-century rahit-namas disagree on many points, on one they are uniformly agreed and this regards the unity of the many Sikh groups who considered themselves to be a part of the Khalsa. All these texts share a vision of the Khalsa's future in which the Khalsa stands unified and supreme, as the principal sovereign not just of India but of the world. And to this end the rahit-namas proffer a number of prophecies, the most popular of which is repeated in many forms throughout eighteenth-century Sikh literature and has as its most common refrain a couplet which is first discovered within the *Tankhāh-nāmā* of Nand Lal:

> *rāj karegā khālsā ākī rahahi na koi / khvār hoi sabh milainge bachahi śaran jo hoi*
>
> The Khalsa will rule and no traitor shall remain / all those who suffer hardship shall find refuge in the Guru's protection.
>
> (Padam 1991: 59)

This in itself is quite suggestive of the composite and nuanced nature of the Khalsa and the existence of differing interpretations of what the Khalsa is meant to be today and what it was meant to be in the eighteenth century by the different groups who embraced it. Competing groups undoubtedly imposed their own meanings on this category and these meanings certainly changed over time but at no point in time did these meanings not matter to those Sikhs who understood themselves to belong to this most glorious order of Guru Gobind Singh.

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Abstract and Keywords

Sikhism reacted to its religious milieu in the womb, as it were. Nanak questioned the Hindu sacred thread ceremony and challenged Muslims whose prayers lacked *niyat*. Sikhs have been respectful to other faiths. Guru Nanak included verses by Hindu and Muslim holy men in his anthology. These are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life for the right of Hindus to enjoy religious freedom. Times of tension cannot be overlooked: the British partitioning of India provoked Muslim–Sikh violence in the Punjab, and in 1984 Operation Blue Star saw Indian troops storm the Golden Temple, followed by the reprisal assassination of Indira Gandhi which led to the killing of thousands of Sikhs by Hindu mobs. The Sikh psyche cannot be understood today if these events are ignored. Nevertheless, wherever Sikhs have settled they are to be found taking part in interreligious dialogue.

Keywords: Keywords: Muslims, Hindus, Naths, Jains, Christianity, Sikh Diaspora, Singh Sabha Movement, Janam Sakhis (B40), World Congress of Faiths, Bhagat Bani

The fifteenth-century Punjab into which Guru Nanak was born was already religiously pluralistic. Evidence of the presence of diverse forms of Hinduism is accompanied by information about Sunni, Shi’a, and Sufi Islam; groups of Nath yogis; and at least one Jain settlement. It is also likely that itinerant ascetics with a variety of beliefs and practices were to be found in the region. Buddhism had become extinct in the land of its birth. Christianity had not yet reached the region. The subsequent pages of this chapter are devoted to interaction with such groups during the Guru period which ended in 1708; in the nineteenth century; and leading finally to recent and current developments worldwide as the Sikh Diaspora establishes permanent global roots.

A religiously plural society need not be indicative of religious interaction, of course. Evidence of separatism in such religious contexts can easily be found today as in times past. It can be intensely sectarian, even in a mono-cultural country. However, Guru Nanak was a person interested in the variety of forms of Hinduism in which he had been nurtured, though sceptical of some aspects of it, and also aspects of Islam and Jainism which he encountered.

Nanak was born into a Khatri *varna* (caste) of Hinduism. When the time came for him to be admitted into his caste through the sacred thread ceremony, *upanayam*, he asked the pandit whether the thread would wear out and grow dirty. When he was told that it would, he questioned the efficacy of the investiture saying that the one *janeu* he would wear should be pure in quality and be permanent (Guru Granth Sahib: 471). His father eventually decided to dispatch him to live with his older sister Nanaki and her husband who was employed by a Muslim in the town of Sultanpur Lodhi.

One day he was at the home of Daulat Khan Lodi conversing with him and the local *qazi* when the time for prayers came. He was invited to join them in *namaz*, but, instead, stood in silence. When asked to account for his apparently rude conduct he replied that the *qazi*’s mind was not on his prayers but on his young colt which he had not tethered. He was fearful that it might fall down into the open well. As for the village headman, he had sent a servant to sell horses in Kabul and was wondering what kind of price they had fetched. Right intention, *niyat*, is an essential aspect of Muslim

prayer. As their minds (p. 251) were not on their devotions it was impossible, so Nanak said, to join them in an act which, he believed, was not acceptable to God (McLeod 1980: 23).

These two incidents contained in the Janam Sakhis about the Guru demonstrate something of his penetrative nature and attitude to religious practices and beliefs. His aim was not to undermine faith but to encourage his audiences not to be seduced into performing rituals thoughtlessly.

During his stay at Sultanpur Lodhi a single event changed Nanak's life dramatically. It was his custom to rise early to bathe in the river. On one occasion he did not return home. His family, Daulat Khan, and many of the villagers sought vainly for him. Three days later he returned. At last he broke his silence and declared that he had been taken into the very presence of the Divine. The importance of this experience cannot be overemphasized and it provides one of the few biographical incidents that are referred to in the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS). He wrote:

> I was once a worthless minstrel, the Divine Being gave me work. I received the primal injunction: 'Sing Divine Glory day and night'. The sovereign summoned the minstrel to the Divine Mansion. I was given the robe of honour and exaltation. I tasted the food of the true ambrosial Name. Those who through the Guru feast on the Divine food win eternal joy and peace. Your minstrel spreads your glory by singing your Word. Nanak says, by exalting the Truth we attain the Absolute One'.
>
> (GGS: 150)

Tradition affirms that Guru Nanak, as he must be known from this moment, uttered a statement which came to be regarded as the essence of his teaching, by the name given to it, Mul Mantar ('Basic Verse'). It stands at the beginning of the Guru Granth Sahib, and the opening of its major sections, though often in an abbreviated form. It reads:

> There is One Supreme Being (God), the Eternal Reality, the Creator, without fear and devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the Guru.
>
> The Eternal One, from the beginning, through all time, present now, the Everlasting Reality.
>
> (GGS: 1)

Guru Nanak's experience is regarded as one of commissioning rather than enlightenment; Sikhs consider him to have been born in a state of spiritual liberation. It indicated God's will for him to act as his messenger, spreading his glory. Bibi Nanaki, his sister, is accredited with being the first person to recognize this, and so the first *sikh* (disciple). She understood his mission and gave Mardana, a Muslim musician from the lowly *mirasi* caste, a rebeck (*rabab*) with which to accompany her brother's message embodied in sacred songs, and the two men set out on their travels.

It has often been the tradition among missionaries to learn the language of the people being evangelized but nothing of their culture or theology. This was not the way of Guru Nanak; in one verse he uses the names Hari, Ram, and Gopal, which belong to (p. 252) Hinduism, and Allah and Khuda, from Islam (GGS: 903). Many passages in the Guru Granth Sahib demonstrate his broad and deep knowledge of the vocabulary and ideas of the traditions he mentions.

Islam

Sometimes it is possible to suggest which community the Guru is addressing from the content of the particular verse; obvious examples are to be found in GGS: 140–1:

> Make mercy your mosque, faith your prayer carpet, and righteousness your *Qur'an*; make humility your circumcision, uprightness your fasting, so you will be a true Muslim. Make good works your *Ka'ba*, truth your *pir*, and compassion your creed, (*kalima)* and prayer.

and

> The Muslim observes five prayers: reciting them at different times and giving them different names. Let these be your five prayers: the first Truth, the second purity, the third petition to God on behalf of all, the fourth upright intent, and the fifth praising and magnifying God. Let virtuous deeds be your utterance of the *kalima*. Only then will you be called a true Muslim.
>
> (GGS: 23–4)

Besides showing awareness of Muslim terminology and practices, these passages demonstrate an attitude of acceptance of their efficacy, but also, and most important, a requirement that they must be performed with sincerity. It seems to have been the formalism that adherents could easily fall into that attracted Guru Nanak's criticism. Here we might recall the prayer time incident described above; in fact in *The B40 Janam Sakhi* these verses are all put together and spoken to the *qazi*, Daulat Khan Lodi, and a gathering of other important members of the Sultanpur community (McLeod 1980: 24–5).

The Guru respected the challenge that Islam presented to the pious believer. He must have experienced it through the life of his friend, Mardana. Five daily prayers, dietary restrictions, Ramadan—to mention only the most important obligations—would be demanding at any time. His interpretation of them must have made them even more severe as he stressed the spirit in which they should be undertaken.

From what has already been written, it should come as no surprise to find Guru Nanak using Muslim terms when referring to God in other sections on Islam.

> Baba Allah is inscrutable. He is boundless. His abode is holy and so are his names. He is the True Sustainer. His will surpasses comprehension.
>
> (p. 253) Allah consults no one when he gives or takes away. He alone knows his decree [*qudrat*], he alone is the doer. He beholds everyone and bestows grace on whomsoever he wills
>
> (GGS: 141)

Because of more recent events which have soured Sikh–Muslim relations it is important to recognize that Guru Nanak and his successors regarded Islam as an authentic expression of spirituality and a way through which one might achieve spiritual salvation.

Hinduism

Formalism was also to be found in Hinduism and attracted the sharpness of the Guru's tongue.

> A fool residing with a pandit may hear the *Vedas* and *shastras*. Like a dog with a crooked tail he remains unchanged.
>
> (GGS: 990)

Meditation on the divine Name (*nam simran*) was what he encouraged, not the mere thoughtless singing of his compositions or others. To use a modern idea, they were not written to provide background music on a long car journey.

> The *Vedas* preach the sermon of devotional service. He who continually hears and believes sees the Divine Light. The *shastras* and *smrtis* impress meditation of the Name.
>
> (GGS: 731, 832)

The varna system was abhorred by Guru Nanak and all his successors. The Panth or Sikh community was open to everyone. Perhaps Mardana again exemplifies this best. The Guru had no time for the *izzat* or pride that accompanied belief in social superiority and would have condemned his friend as ritually impure, a *malecchа* in the eyes of many Hindus. He wrote:

> What power has caste? It is righteousness that is tested. High caste pride is like poison held in the hand; from eating it one dies.
>
> (GGS: 142)

More positively, he advised:

> Recognize God's Light within everyone and do not ask their caste as there is no caste in the next world.
>
> (GGS: 349)

(p. 254) The simple vegetarian shared meal of *langar* enforced the idea practically.

Many religions from Islam to Christianity, including Sikhism and forms of Bhakti Hinduism, have denounced caste but none has succeeded in ridding themselves, let alone India, of it, as many politicians have attempted. There might be an element of realism in one of the Guru's utterances:

> The way of union (with God), is the way of Divine Knowledge. With the *Brahmin* the way is through the *Vedas*, the *Kshatriyas*' way is that of bravery. That of the *Shudra* is the service of others. The duty (*dharma*) of all is meditation on the One.
>
> (GGS: 1353)

Whereas the consequence of the caste system was often social division, Guru Nanak insisted that to have any value it should have a unifying purpose.

Jainism

Guru Nanak described Jains in a passage which may shock anyone who is aware of the debt that Mahatma Gandhi says he owed them for their testimony to *ahimsa*, non-violence towards any living being, or those who know the reputation they have for honesty in their public and private affairs. It will require some explanation but first a verse of Guru Nanak will be quoted.

> They pluck the hair from their heads, drink water in which people have washed, and beg leftovers. They take up their excreta and inhale its smell….they always remain filthy, day and night, and there is no *tilak* on their foreheads. They sit about in groups as if in mourning and do not share in public activities. Brush in hand, begging bowl over the shoulder, they walk along in single file.
>
> (GGS: 149)

Guru Granth Sahib: 149–50 includes many such comments.

Sikhism is a completely community-focused movement. When a group of migrant Sikhs move into a new district one of the first things they will do is establish a gurdwara (‘House of the Guru’), a place where they can meet for worship. Jains, however, whilst they might follow the teachings and practices of their founder, Mahavira, often seem to outsiders, to observe a path of individualism which would appear to have no place in it for serving humanity They do not believe in a Supreme Being, and might be considered to be dualistic. Belief in God is of the essence of Sikhism and its strict monotheism sometimes verges on monism.

Nam, dan, ishnan, ‘meditation, charitable giving, and bathing’, are fundamental to the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors. Though ritual purity was denounced, bodily cleanliness is an essential part of the way of the Sikh way of life. The fact that his (p. 255) personal experience was of individuals, who, in his view, lacked self-respect and a sense of community and had no concept of *seva*, disturbed the Guru and went against a basic tenet of *sikhi*. With the greater understanding that Sikhs have today this should not be regarded as their contemporary view of Jainism.

Nath Yoga (Hatha Yoga, ‘Yoga of Force’)

The Naths or Siddhas were followers of Gorakhnath and practitioners of Hatha Yoga. The Janam Sakhis mention several meetings between the two men even though Gorakhnath lived three or four centuries earlier. (His name may have been adopted by successors who can be found living at Gorakhpur to this day.) This ‘yoga of force’ was extremely physically demanding but the ascetic who reached his goal experienced a state of ineffable bliss or *sahaj*, a term borrowed by Guru Nanak, with Brahman. There are many references to Naths in the Guru’s compositions, the most important being Siddh Gosht, ‘a discourse with the Siddhas’ that is found in pages 938–46 of the Guru Granth Sahib.

Rather than being regarded as the record of a disputation it should be understood as a critique of their beliefs and practices. These were considered unacceptable and even dangerous to spiritual development and the attainment of *mukti*, or spiritual liberation, because their advocates were

leeches, begging upon already poor villagers, filthy, smearing themselves in ashes and going unwashed, and were divided into a number of orders, instead of presenting an example of unified spirituality. Sincere yogis might make great efforts to attain liberation, but this was also achievable through the much simpler, and austerity-free, practice of *nam simran*.

> Only by hearing the Name of the *Sat Guru*, are the way of yoga and the secrets of the body understood. By hearing the Guru's Name, truth, contentment, and divine knowledge are obtained.
>
> (GGS: 2)

and

> By understanding *Nam* one attains *sahaj.*
>
> (GGS: 3)

Guru Nanak may have given more attention to these yogis than to any other single group. An important additional reason for this may be found in a Janam Sakhi narrative. The Guru visited a village in which a yogi, seated and surrounded by the inhabitants, was claiming to tell their futures using his divining bowl. The Guru crept up behind him (p. 256) and removed it. When the mendicant opened his eyes he was outraged to think that someone could have stolen it. A verse in the Guru Granth Sahib reads:

> A hypocrite opens his eyes and holds his nose to deceive the world. Holding it between his thumb and two fingers he says: 'I am beholding the Universe'. Yet he cannot see what is behind his back!
>
> (GGS: 663)

Anyone who has witnessed such a person going around a village will be aware of the extent to which they could terrify the population.

Bhagat Bani ('Utterances of Poet-Saints')

A notable feature of the compilation of scripture undertaken by the fifth Guru, Arjan, is the inclusion of a considerable body of material composed by men who were not Sikhs, in total 5,894 *shabads*. This is known collectively as the Bhagat Bani, or the spiritual writings of members of the bhakti tradition of Indian spirituality. The reason for referring to these verses here is because Guru Nanak seems to have the strongest claim to gathering them in one corpus. The fact that they are not assembled together in Guru Arjan's Adi Granth should ultimately be explained by his editorial considerations (Cole and Sambhi 1995: 212–17).

Guru Nanak set out on his divinely appointed mission without spiritual credentials. He acknowledged no guru and followed no tradition. In this he was unlike the first Christian missionaries, for example, who already possessed a scripture, and gave conscious attention to reinterpreting it. It would have been natural for Guru Nanak to cite verses which his audiences might already have known and which

accorded with the message he preached. In doing so there would be no suggestion of plagiarism but rather an affirmation that he was proclaiming a perennial truth which orthodox and formal religion had hidden from the kinds of villagers who responded to his universal message.

The very existence of the Bhagat Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib is, in itself, a rejection of exclusivism. However, inclusion did not mean uncritical acceptance. In one passage, on page 729, he draws upon a passage from Sheikh Farid, found on page 794. His verse seems more positively to emphasize the salvific and comforting effect of *nam* and avoids the entanglement of transmigration that seems to be in Farid's mind.

At the time of Guru Nanak's death the Panth was large enough for him to decide to appoint a successor, Angad, and diverse enough for at least one popular story about his death to be treasured, though a similar one is told of Kabir.

Knowing that the Guru was dying, his followers began to argue how to dispose of his body. Those from a Hindu background wished to cremate it, those from a Muslim (p. 257) heritage argued for burial. Guru Nanak told them to place a line of flowers on either side of his bed; those whose flowers were still blooming in the morning might carry out the rites according to their custom. When morning came the Sikhs assembled to find that the body had gone and both rows of flowers were in full bloom (McLeod 1968: 57–8).

The Encounter of Later Sikh Gurus with Other Religions

The essence of Sikh teaching relating to interreligious encounter had been provided by Guru Nanak, some of his successors made additional comments but it was historical circumstances that influenced interaction more than philosophy.

Guru Arjan, fourth successor to Guru Nanak, was a contemporary of the Mughal emperor Akbar who was aware of the growing Sikh Panth and had passages from Guru Arjan's recently compiled scripture read to him and heard them with approval. However, it may be that some hundred years after Guru Nanak first began preaching there were Sikhs who still clung to their family traditions to an extent that might make them believe in the efficacy of Hindu or Muslim practices as being equal to *nam simran.* He therefore felt it necessary to state unequivocally:

> I do not keep the Hindu fast (*vrat*) or observe *Ramadan*. I serve only the One who will finally save me. The one World Ruler is my God, who ministers justice to both Hindus and Muslims. I do not go on *Hajj* to the *Ka'ba* or worship at *tiraths*. My body and soul belong to the One and no other. I do not perform *puja* or *namaz*. Taking the Formless One in my mind I make obeisance there to God. I am neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. My body and soul belong to the One called *Allah* by the Muslims, and *Ram* by Hindus.
>
> (GGS: 1136)

This was not a denial of the authenticity of Islam or Hinduism: it was an assertion that the Divine Essence lay within yet beyond both.

Guru Arjan also completed the Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar. A popular tradition that he invited the Sufi Mian Mir to lay the foundation stone of the building may be disputed, but it would have been in keeping with the attitude of the Guru towards people of other faiths.

This idyllic period in Sikh history came to an abrupt end in 1606, after the death of Akbar and the succession of his son Jehangir. There was a struggle for the throne in which Jehangir believed that the Guru had supported his rival. He wrote that this movement was becoming dangerously popular and that unless the Guru converted to Islam it should be suppressed. (This could well have occasioned the response contained in the verse quoted above.) The Guru was condemned to death; he refused an (p. 258) offer by Mian Mir to intercede with the emperor on his behalf, and became the first martyr Guru. His successor, Guru Hargobind, was imprisoned by Jehangir but eventually released, though he refused his liberty unless fifty-two Hindu princes, who were also captives, were freed. This event took place at the time of Diwali. Sikhs, therefore, observe this festival, but, as with any similar occasions, in ways guided by their own tenets.

The ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, also died a martyr. A group of Kashmiri Brahmins were faced with the choice of conversion to Islam, or death. The Guru took up their cause but the emperor, Aurangzeb, offered him, together with his companions, the same choice. All refused and were executed. This event, which took place in Delhi in 1675, is regarded by all Sikhs and many other people of India as the supreme example of a man being willing to die, not for his own liberty, but the freedom of others.

When the Brahmins came to Guru Tegh Bahadur, it is said that his young son, Gobind Rai, suggested that if anyone could help them, his father was that person. On his father's death he was made Guru and is known by the name Guru Gobind Singh. In a composition known as *Akal Ustat* he wrote:

> Hindus and Muslims are one. The same Being is creator and nourisher of all. Recognize no distinction between them. *Puja* and *Namaaz* are the same. All people are one; it is by error that they appear different.... *Allah* and *Abhek* are the same; the *Puranas* and Qur'an are the same. They are all creations of the One.

Developments During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

This was a period of a survival struggle for the Panth. First, it was faced with the power of the Mughal Empire, which put a price on Khalsa Sikh heads. Secondly, it was confronted by a very different threat, the British East India Company. In 1792 Ranjit Singh succeeded his father as the most successful Sikh leader in Punjab and emerged as maharajah of a Sikh kingdom in Punjab in 1801. His kingdom posed no threat to the British until, after his death in 1839, it began to disintegrate as a result of internal rivalries. In 1849 it was annexed. Missionary activity had begun in 1833 and proved very menacing. However, an unexpected and very important consequence was a Sikh renaissance, provoked, perhaps, as much by a Hindu movement known as the Arya Samaj as by Christianity. Initially, it attracted some Sikhs, but when its leader Dayananda Saraswati spoke scornfully of Guru Nanak, its influence evaporated. Christian missionaries sought to convert Sikh intellectuals and in 1873 four students publicly announced their conversion. The immediate response to this success was

the Singh Sabha movement. Reformers galvanized members of the Panth into building schools and colleges and (p. 259) restoring Sikh values. During the period of the Sikh Kingdom and later many Sikhs had reverted to Hindu ways, the distinctiveness of the faith was becoming lost. Absorption into Hinduism seemed to be a distinct possibility. In fact, one of the reasons for Ernest Trumpp, a German scholar, taking an interest in the Gurus and their teachings, was his belief that before the end of the century Sikhism would be no more than a quickly fading memory (Trumpp 1877). Very different in purpose and attitude was Max Arthur Macauliffe who felt it was of great value to appreciate the culture and religion of the Sikhs who were, he considered, potentially strong allies. He retired from government employment and spent the remaining years of his life writing a six-volume study. In addition to biographies of the Ten Gurus it contained an almost complete translation of the Guru Granth Sahib (Macauliffe 1909). Macauliffe was not a missionary but it is important to mention him because he shifted attention from the Sikhs as a martial race, the usual colonial attitude, to the Panth as a religious community worthy of study as a world religion (D. Singh 1999).

In the period immediately before Indian independence in 1947 and for a time afterwards, Sikhs again found themselves in conflict with Muslims as the Punjab was divided almost arbitrarily between India and the new republic of Pakistan. This is not the place to rehearse the story of a settlement that left the former political capital of the Sikhs, Lahore, and the birthplace of Guru Nanak, Talwandi (now known as Nankana Sahib), in Pakistan but it must be noted that it has left Pakistani Muslim and Sikh relations strained from time to time, certainly in Britain where an interfaith gathering focused on Sikhism might be deliberately shunned by Muslims of subcontinental origins.

It is ironic that in 1984, when a Sikh was president of India, the government should send the army to remove the followers of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale from the Darbar Sahib complex in Amritsar. This event has had a lasting effect upon the Sikh psyche and should not be ignored by students of Sikhism or interreligious encounter. A few months later, Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, was assassinated by Sikh members of her bodyguard and riots broke out in Delhi and some other Indian cities in which many Sikhs were killed. The fact that, at the time of writing, the prime minister of India is a Sikh, may convey something of the ambivalence of some Sikhs towards the nation they chose to support at Partition. In this context the rise of the Hindutva movement which seeks to emphasize the predominantly Hindu composition of Indian society and challenge the Ashoka-Nehru concept of secularism (a society in which all faiths are accorded equal respect) has particular significance. The Rashtriya Sevak Sangh is a political organization that campaigns for the assertion of Hindu values as opposed especially to those of the so-called foreign religions, Islam and Christianity. Sikhs are concerned simultaneously at the danger of being placed under a Hindu umbrella. As long ago as 1898 Kahn Singh Nabha published a book to counter this perennial threat entitled *Ham Hindu Nahin.* Significantly, an English translation by a Canadian Sikh, Jarnail Singh, appeared in 1984.

Recent Sikh translations of their scriptures, including one in French by the above-cited author, have increased their accessibility and migration has rendered more easily possible the encounter of Christians and Sikhs. The present author and his friend (p. 260) Piara Singh Sambhi concentrated their studies, at first, on making English readers aware of Sikhism, but, through meetings organized by the Reverend John Parry, a minister in the United Reformed Church, they became involved in dialogue and produced a book (Cole and Sambhi 1993), of which Parry wrote: ‘The book reflects an interfaith dialogue in which those who are involved explore not only the partner’s faith but their own and in doing so deepen the theological search for understanding of the dealings of God and

humanity’ (Parry 2009: 92). Anyone wishing to explore their cooperation, which lasted some twenty-five years, and its effect on the present writer, might read *Cole Sahib* (Cole 2009). In the same year Parry published a study based on a PhD thesis and many years of overseas and British experience (Parry 2009). This impressive volume should be read in conjunction with this chapter. Whereas Cole (1984) is limited to the Guru Period, John Parry traces the course of Sikh–Christian interaction from earliest times, in 1833, to the end of the twentieth century. Much attention is given to a unique poem written by Gopal Singh, a historian, diplomat, and man of devotion: *The Man Who Never Died* (G. Singh 1987). It offers a completely different possibility for engaging in dialogue; one likely to be found agreeable to members of the World Congress of Faiths, in which an individual reflects poetically and devotionally upon another expression of spirituality to the benefit of both. As Gopal Singh has excellently demonstrated, it is a path worth treading by future people of faith who are also people of dialogue.

The example of the Gurus, the Bhagat Bani, the symbolism of the Harimandir Sahib, its four doors open to all people and varnas, the Guru Gobind Singh Bhavan at Punjabi University, Patiala, opened in 1967 by the Muslim president of India, Zakir Hussain, which like the Harimandir Sahib also has four entrances and is intended to be a place where all the world’s major religions should be studied—all testify to the important Sikh ideal of inclusivism. At local levels Sikhs are active in dialogue wherever they live in the midst of other faiths. Positive, disinterested dialogue is one of their most important principles.

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Secular and Religious (Miri/Piri) Domains in Sikhism: Frames for Sikh Politics

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Abstract and Keywords

This article looks at the history of the political party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the context of its relationship with the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The oscillation between religious and secular domains marks the politics of the SAD and this relationship is examined empirically and theoretically. In particular the concept of *miri/piri* is forwarded as a possible explanatory tool for understanding contemporary Sikh politics.

Keywords: Sikh politics, miri/piri, secular, SGPC, Akali Dal, Punjab

It is to Bhai Gurdas (*c*.1558–1637), the companion and commentator on the lives of the first six Gurus that we credit the first expression of the path carved out by Guru Hargobind, 'the master of both the spiritual and temporal world'. Bhai Gurdas does not see this as altering the message of the first five Gurus, rather this is the culmination of their knowledge. Indeed, Guru Hargobind is also considered to have laid the foundations of the Sikh court and the formation of a Sikh polity (Fenech 2000). By constructing the Akal Takht (the immortal seat) in the Darbar Sahib complex in Amritsar, which at the time was a raised platform opposite the Harimandir (God's temple), the Guru was signalling the importance of temporal power in balance with the spiritual.

The various contours through which the Sikh Panth travels to the time of Ranjit Singh have been well covered (Grewal 1998). Yet the underlying need to balance the temporal and spiritual appears at various junctures. To Guru Gobind Singh is attributed the ideal of the saint-soldier (*sant-sipahi*), as Fenech neatly summarizes: 'warriors who, out of love for Akal Purakh and fellow beings, battle and die to destroy tyranny, protect the poor and establish social harmony' (2000: 89). In a more recent intervention, Wallace (2011) rearticulates the foundation of the Khalsa precisely in terms of the value of self-sacrifice which is not necessarily violent, what he terms 'militant non-violence'. Nonetheless,

maintaining balance between the domains of the court of the king and the court of the true king is fraught with difficulty. In Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court, where the political was kept fairly separate from the formally religious, there is the hagiographical story of the Maharaja being summoned to the Darbar Sahib at Amritsar by the Khalsa for some misdemeanour. The fact that Ranjit Singh is willing to respond to this call again shows the negotiations and shifts between temporal and spiritual power. (p. 263) It may be that these narratives were systematized and made into binaries due to the colonial encounter (Mandair 2009) but they still maintain purchase when analysing contemporary institutions founded in the colonial moment.

It is with the establishment of British colonial modernity that the two dominant institutions of Sikh contemporary politics are formed. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) do not only share their honorific titling but also the intimate and uneasy relationship of two Punjabi brothers. Born of the same political mobilizations of the 1920s, they have remained the dominant and pervasive forces in Sikh politics and since 1966 in the wider Punjabi political landscape. This chapter attempts to reflect on their relationship in the light of the notion of balancing spiritual and material power. It is clear that this balancing in the Sikh tradition refers to the practice of an individual as in the cases outlined above but this is also quite distinct from the separation of religion and state that dominates Western secularism. Rather, what becomes apparent is that any attempt at disentangling the SAD and the SGPC always involves some contingent demarcation of secular and religious domains, but this boundary becomes unstable when particular issues arise that confront Sikhs as a political community. Indeed in the era of Indian independence, Sikhs can only be regarded as religious in confrontation with the secular Indian state (Mandair 2011). The emergence of Sikh political formations rests therefore largely on the particular context of mobilization of identity rather than on the question of who is being mobilized, even though this has often been a point of contestation. These issues will be further explored and unpacked by considering the history of the SAD and SGPC.

Colonial Confrontation and Formation

In the Punjab state elections of 2012, the SAD won a second term in office with 35 per cent of the vote which it combined with the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) in a coalition to maintain power over the Indian National Congress (INC) and its allies. Since the formation of the Punjab state in 1966, this was the first time that an incumbent government has been re-elected. Yet the share of the Akali vote, in elections where they have participated, has always been around 30–35 per cent. Even when they have lost

elections as in 2002, they still gained 31 per cent (Kumar 2004). To a large extent the stability of the SAD vote base reflects their deep roots within the rural Sikh community of Punjab. Even though the organization describes itself as 'the oldest regional democratic party' ([www.shiromaniakalidal.org.in]) and has only achieved political power through coalitions, its electoral base can only be understood in terms of what has been called by various analysts, its 'symbiotic' relationship with the SGPC.

The Akali Dal emerged in 1920 as a social movement determined to wrest control of Sikh gurdwaras from existing authorities and to some extent can be defined (p. 264) as a non-violent, anti-colonial movement. Its name, the Army of Akal (the immortal), reflects its proactive stance, and its earliest leaders, Harchand Singh, Teja Singh Samundri, Master Sundar Singh, and Professor Niranjan Singh, all emerged out of existing Sikh organizations frustrated with their toeing of the colonial line (Grewal 1998). The group found its initial expression in a series of publications: *The Akali*, *Akali te Pardesi*, and the Urdu *Akali*. The Akalis were very successful at launching non-violent actions (*morchas*), which were essentially controlling historic gurdwaras (M. Singh 1978). The colonial response was to establish a new organization to manage the gurdwaras. On 15 November 1920, the SGPC was inaugurated for this purpose, though at this stage which gurdwaras were to come under its remit was undetermined. To some extent the colonial state was attempting to take the wind out of the Akali movement by forming a representative committee (the SGPC had 175 members from all over Punjab) but in fact it aided in providing an organizing platform for the Akalis. By 1923, the Akalis were constituted as a political party, the SAD, and along with the SGPC had been declared an 'unlawful association' and a danger 'to the Public peace' (M. Singh 1978).

The Akalis, nonetheless, maintained their agitation which culminated in the infamous Jaito *morcha* in which an estimated 30,000 Sikhs were jailed. The outcome of this was the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 which was a major Akali/SGPC achievement. By handing control of the main gurdwaras to the SGPC, the colonial state had effectively created and guaranteed a democratic Sikh polity. Indeed, as Grewal states: 'The franchise of the Board made it the most democratic institution in the country. As an organization concerned with religious affairs, it was also a unique institution in the world for its adult suffrage' (1996: 59). Indeed, the facts that men and women were allowed to vote and that the elected members were to be drawn by elections from constituencies across the Punjab rightly enable commentators to call the SGPC the mini-parliament of the Sikhs. The colonial state with these concessions once again hoped that the formation of the SGPC would reduce the power of the Akalis and in the first elections to the SGPC in 1926, two separate groups stood: the 'SGPC' and the SAD. The SAD won eighty-five seats with its rivals only securing twenty-six. In essence the symbiosis of the SAD and the SGPC was

established at this point and to some extent the subordination of the SGPC to the political leadership of the SAD was also indicated.

In perhaps the most detailed analysis of the colonial archive for the period 1920–5, Tan (1995) notes that the 1925 bill contained within it a series of measures designed to curtail the power of the SGPC. The British wanted to reassert control in the Punjab after the Akali agitation. Central to these measures was the requirement that the SGPC would not be used as a platform for launching anti-government agitation (Sikh Gurdwaras Act 108[3]). In structural terms the control and management of the gurdwaras were also to be at the command of local committees and subject to state scrutiny where finances were concerned. Though these strictures were meant to limit the power of the SGPC, in fact they provided a secure legal base from which the SAD could vie for political control and leadership of the Punjab. Nonetheless, the British were successful in seeding the politics of factionalism which would come to mark the history of the Akalis. Indeed, by 1927 (p. 265) there were two Akalis Dals and the historic representative body, the Central Sikh League (J. Singh 2011), engaged in political activity.

Due to the nature of the 1925 bill, however, the SGPC in its early days attempted to stay out of the fray and remain focused on activities that were particular to gurdwaras. This is best illustrated by the role that the Akalis played in the Non-cooperation Movement and their general relationship with the INC. Baba Kharak Singh became the SGPC president after the elections of 1926 with Master Tara Singh as the vice-president. Sharp differences emerged between the two in terms of relations with Congress and the general role Sikhs should play in the independence movement (Grewal 1998). Master Tara Singh was much more inclined to support the Congress as demonstrated by the mobilization of Akali *jathas* for non-cooperation activities in Punjab. On the other hand Baba Kharak Singh was more inclined to only participate in political matters when there was a specific issue relating to a gurdwara, such as the case of firing at the Sis-Gang Gurdwara in Delhi in May 1930 (J. Singh 2011). These differing perspectives would recur at various times.

To some extent this democratic franchise meant that the SGPC provided legitimacy to any Sikh political figure. As Wallace notes: ‘The crucial aspect of the internal process within the SGPC…is to gain control of the Akali Dal, and, thereby to maintain control of the SGPC against its challengers’ (1988: 15). This is perhaps why the organization was dominated by one key figure up to 1962, Master Tara Singh. The SGPC elections were first held in 1926, then in 1930, 1936, 1939, 1942 (up until which time the SGPC had a three-year term), 1944 (the term increased to five years), 1955, 1960, 1965, 1979, 1996, 2004, and 2011. Tara Singh was president of the SGPC on seven occasions between 1930 and 1961, serving for approximately seventeen years in total. At the same time he served as president of the Akali Dal and the main interlocutor in relationships with the INC. In

the 1930s he was editor of the *Akali* newspaper and was part of a coterie of Sikh leaders who interchanged their roles between Sikh organizations, creating new ones, merging others, and splitting again (T. Singh 1946). Master Tara Singh played a central role in Sikh politics until 1962 when he was ousted by Sant Fateh Singh in the SGPC elections. Though he attempted to return to Sikh politics in 1966, by this time the SAD was establishing itself as a party of the rural electorate and other leaders such as Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Prakash Singh Badal were waiting in the wings.

Until the formation of the Punjabi Suba in 1966 the SAD was always a minor political player in the state assembly. Its role was often to provide leaders for the INC, the most notable being Pratap Singh Kairon, chief minister of Punjab from 1956 to 1964. Indeed, all of the Sikh chief ministers of Punjab whether Congress or Akali had spent some time in the SAD or a rival Akali Dal. To some extent this demonstrates Sikh hegemony over the politics of the region, though there is of course no necessary connection between a Sikh leader and Sikh interests. In this early period, the SGPC elections were also subject to contestation by other political groups; for example, in the 1960 elections, the Congress and Communists put up candidates (Nayar 1966). Even though the Akalis were always overwhelming winners in these contests, the fact that there were contests at all gives an indication of the role of the SGPC in influencing the overall political process (p. 266) of the state. This influence only translated into state power for Sikhs after the formation of the Punjabi Suba.

Religious and Secular Domains

Until the formation of the Punjabi Suba it was the SGPC with its regular elections, direct appeal to the Sikh Panth, and well-established institutional and organizational base which was the main arena in which Sikh politics was established and contested. However, with the formation of East Punjab, the SAD was able to compete in elections and have the possibility of political power, albeit in coalition. Indeed, the SAD has ruled the Punjab on five occasions since 1967. The analysis of these electoral victories and of the SAD itself has been somewhat tainted by the dominant notion of India as a secular state, in which Punjab itself is seen as an anomaly. Wallace (1988) neatly sums this up as a tension between two political systems, that of the religious and that of the secular. Earlier still, Brass (1974) articulated the choice for the SAD as one between expressing and escalating Sikh demands or broadening its political base. For commentators such as Harish Puri (1988), the fact that the SAD represented capitalist farming interests meant that there was an inevitable push for them to secularize their agenda and to move away from the

SGPC. A similar argument is made by Purewal (2000) in his analysis of the impact of the Green Revolution on the SAD's support.

One way in which the secularization thesis might be examined is by considering the relationship between the SAD and the SGPC in the post-Suba period. This is perhaps best analysed by considering three distinct periods, beginning with the first elections in 1967 up to the separatist insurgency in the early 1980s, the separatist era itself, and then the post-1997 period when the SAD has become politically dominant. Most notable throughout this period is the dominance of Prakash Singh Badal, who has been the primary leader in the SAD since 1970, but unlike Master Tara Singh, never head of the SGPC.

Five elections were held to the Punjab state assembly between 1967 and 1980, reflecting the turbulence of the times (this encompasses the Emergency era in India) but also the shifting dynamics of Sikh politics. The SGPC was under the control of Sant Fateh Singh and the SAD was not able to achieve a majority on its own in the assembly, but neither was the Congress. The necessity of coalition building gave weight to the turbulence. Prakash Singh Badal first came into power as chief minister in 1970 as head of the Akali–Jan Sangh coalition. Educated in Government College, Lahore, he has been in and out of power as leader both of the Akalis and of the state of Punjab ever since then, with a victory in the 2012 state elections confirming his undisputed title as a political survivor. In a sense Badal represents the old school of Punjabi politics in which control of the SGPC as well as alliances was crucial for political success, but he never deemed it appropriate to run the SGPC himself.

In the initial period this was not without tension, the uneasy relationship with Gurcharan Singh Tohra, another towering figure in the Sikh polity, who was SGPC (p. 267) president for twenty-six years (1973–86, 1986–90, 1991–9), reflecting the necessity for the SAD to play both its secular and religious credentials. The political instability that marks the history of the Punjab is well reflected in Sikh politics. The greatest threat to the SAD and the SGPC, however, did not come from internal wrangling or from local political competition in the shape of the INC, Jan Sangh, or the Communists, but rather from the increasingly militant separatist voices and from the Indian state. Much of the analysis of the period of militancy (mid-1980s–90s) relates it to Sikh demands for a separate homeland: the unfinished business of partition; the response of young people to unemployment; the social tensions created due to rapid modernization (G. Singh 2000; Tatla 1999). It can also be viewed as a tussle for power and control over Sikh institutions by those groups who were to some extent marginalized by the power bloc of the SAD and the SGPC. The proliferation of Akali Dals in this period and the exclusion of Badal in favour of other leaders such as Surjit Singh Barnala reflect a crisis out of which it was not clear that the existing institutions would survive. Out of the boycotted elections of 1992,

the Congress chief minister, Beant Singh, publicly equated the SGPC with terrorism and no elections took place to the committee between 1986 and 1995. The Election Commission was also considering barring those parties that were based on religion, which would be a de facto disbanding of the SAD (Grewal 1998). The impact of the period of militancy is pithily summarized by Wallace: 'Deinstitutionalization to the form of the weakening or destruction of existing structures of authority. These included: political parties, the state parliamentary system, and the SGPC system itself' (1988: 37). It should not be surprising that the collapse of the local state would also impact hugely on the SGPC, as the organization relied on those structures when it came to establishing and managing elections.

It is therefore remarkable that, in the 1997 elections following the 1995 assassination of Beant Singh, the Akalis won 75 of the 117 seats in the assembly, routing the Congress and for the first time holding an absolute majority on their own. Indeed this was the first time that the Akali government was allowed to complete a full term of office. The return of Badal as chief minister demonstrated the strength of the old order, despite the years of turbulence. In the first SGPC elections afterwards Tohra was elected president, once again demonstrating continuity. Nonetheless, commentators such as Kumar (2004) noted that the Akalis had shifted their stance from being against the central government, *takht Dilli*, to a more moderate cooperative federalism. Though this view does not sufficiently take into account the way in which Indian central politics was also shifting, it does provide some background to the campaigning for the 2002 elections.

Kumar, the most consistent political commentator on Punjab's elections, further notes a shift in the Akali campaigning of 2002 in that 'politico economic issues (development, roads, bridges, octroi, free power and water, traders' demands,…) replaced the ethno-religious issues like the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, transfer of Chandigarh, anti-Sikh riots or fake encounters (2004: 1519). To some extent this view dovetails with the thesis of increasing secularization which accompanied the formation of the Punjabi Suba.

In the post-1997 election period, the SAD and in particular Badal sought to increase his grip over the SGPC and to some extent minimize its influence. This process began in **(p. 268)** earnest in 1999, with the ousting of Gurcharan Singh Tohra. This was to be expected given the fraught relationship between the two men. However, the replacement of Tohra with Bibi Jagir Kaur, who at the time of her first presidency of the SGPC was a minister in the Akali government (16 March 1999), clearly demonstrated Badal's desire for control. Jagir Kaur herself perhaps reflects the lowest point of the SGPC as she was subsequently found guilty of the murder of her daughter and imprisoned in 2012. Tohra made a brief reappearance as president in 2003, whilst the Akalis were out of government, but was again ousted on Badal's behest. This increasing control over the SGPC, it could be argued, is just a return to the pre-Suba set-up. However, in the context

of electoral victories in alliance with the BJP, it might also be indicative of a distancing of the SAD from the SGPC, in an attempt to broaden its electoral appeal: in the 2012 elections the SAD fielded eleven Hindu candidates (several of whom won). Perhaps of more significance is that this broadening of the SAD takes place whilst the SGPC seems to be narrowing its own constituency.

In the 2004 elections to the SGPC, Sehajdhari Sikhs were registered to vote but not allowed to vote. Who exactly this term refers to is a major source of disputation and contention. Nonetheless, the decision was taken by the general house of the SGPC to not allow Sehajdharis the vote. This designation and in effect this narrowing of the definition of who is a Sikh, in political terms, was not present in the 1925 Gurdwaras Act, which basically applies a very broad and loose self-definition as to who might be a Sikh. Indeed, the question of practice was subsumed by a focus on belief, as Grewal notes: 'A person who professed to be a Sikh could be asked to affirm solemnly: "I am a Sikh and I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus and that I have no other religion"' (1998: 59). This is not the place to rehearse the multiple and diverse debates about membership to the Sikh fold, but rather to note how the SGPC is engaged in a process of narrowing its focus around what it is defining as core Sikh issues and around those who could be defined as core Sikhs. When the Punjab and Haryana High Court declared the SGPC's edicts on Sehajdaris illegal as per the Gurdwara Acts, the president of the SGPC, Avtar Singh Makkar, declared that this would be disputed in the High Court ([www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20111222]).

It could be argued that the SAD's broader base reflects the necessity of engaging with Punjab-level electoral politics, whilst the SGPC's concerns are narrower in terms of the Sikh community. This division would be consistent with seeing the SAD as increasingly secularizing and the SGPC as sacralizing; however, this may be too premature a reading. The actual scope of the SGPC for example, has increased from just managing 100 or so historic Gurdwaras to 111 education institutions, including one university, and providing support to other charitable institutions such as hospitals. This broader range of activities takes the SGPC, at least in terms of service provision, into a much wider public domain. The trend towards secularization of the SAD which is so prominent in the literature requires greater probing, especially in the case of Balwant Singh Rajoana. As part of the team that planned and executed the assassination of Beant Singh, the then chief minister of Punjab, Rajoana is a lingering reminder of the Khalistan movement and the violence that besieged Punjab in the 1980s and 1990s. Rajaona was apprehended in 1996, sentenced to death in 2007, and was due to be hung on 31 March 2012. His case caused widespread public agitation in Punjab and also brought to the fore many issues about (p. 269) the Indian judicial system. What is of most concern, however, is the role that the SGPC and the SAD played in this context. It has to be made clear that Rajoana himself

made no appeal against his sentence and was clear that he did not want the SAD to make one on his behalf. Indeed, he specifically argued that the Akalis should not appeal on his behalf as they had not done their duty to Sikhs more generally. Throughout the public campaign for the remission of his death sentence, he himself has kept his most scathing comments for the Akali Dal and its leaders. At the same time the Jathedar of the Akal Takht and the leading members of the SGPC made the Rajoana case an issue for all Sikhs and successfully called a general strike in the Punjab on 28 March 2012. Prior to this, Sukhbir Singh Badal, president of the SAD announced that Rajoana would not be hung in Punjab as there could be public order problems. The central government then relented and proclaimed a stay of execution. There are many aspects to the Rajoana case that are significant in terms of Sikh politics, not least the latent sense of injustice that Sikhs have against the Indian state, but for present purposes it demonstrates that when the stakes are high enough the SAD plays a key role in Panthic issues and demands. Indeed, in interviews I carried out with senior officials of the SGPC in 2010, the role of the SGPC in political affairs was articulated in terms of a freedom to do those things that the SAD as a political party is not able to do. Thus whilst at some level the SAD appears to be becoming an increasingly secularized, regional party, it is still deeply imbricated through the SGPC in religious affairs.

Secular/Religious: *Miri/Piri*

'[T] he role of the individual Sikh was transformed from a purely spiritual aspirant (*piri*) to that of a spiritual aspirant fully immersed in temporal affairs (*miri/piri*)…the movement toward the immersion of politics and spirituality (or rather, the resistance toward the separation of these two realms) had already begun' (Mandair 2011: 67). Though this narrative is rightly unpacked by Mandair, it is also important to help understand the distinction between the secular and religious domains which seems to dominate the analysis of the workings of the SAD and SGPC in the Punjabi Suba era. For if it is the colonial encounter that provides the basis for a political Sikh identity, it is also that context which gives us the distinction between the secular and the religious. It is the privilege of the state then to decide what is deemed secular and religious in the political domain and in the Sikh case what is legitimate and what is not. Thus a Punjabi Suba is legitimate but a Sikh majority state is not. However, this belies the fact that the SGPC itself was a creation of the colonial apparatus of the state and remains bound to those structures in the post-colonial set-up. In that sense the symbiotic relationship of the SAD and the SGPC precisely mirrors the historiographical construction of *miri* and *piri*, within the framing of colonial discourse. It is therefore impossible for the SAD to engage in secular politics as this would require a decolonization not only of the Indian state, but

also of the basis of Sikh political identity. I have argued elsewhere that this may enable Sikhs to move outside a permanent state of replay as regards the question of identity, but that there is no incentive for the entrenched organization or actors to engage in this process (Kalra (p. 270) 2012). Therefore, despite the tendency to view the secularisation of the SAD as inevitable, this is perhaps too deterministic a viewpoint, and also, given the existing political structures, may not even be possible.

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Sikh Nationalism

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Abstract and Keywords

This article seeks to account for the development of Sikh nationalism as a discourse which 'interpellates' Sikhs as subjects of a 'national' community centred on the Khalsa Panth. Conventional approaches to the study of Sikh ethno-nationalism, based on Western theories of nationalism, regard territoriality to be an inevitable feature of the nationalist discourse. Claims to Sikh nationhood are seen to rest on the existence of a territorially defined homeland in the Punjab. It is argued here, however, that the values upon which Sikh nationhood are based are universal and not confined to a particular ethnic group or territory. In short, the Sikh nation exists wherever Sikhs congregate and maintain the external symbols of the Sikh faith. Furthermore, it is suggested that this notion of 'embodied sovereignty' is more suited to the needs of our globalizing world than the emphasis on territorialized sovereignty upon which the movement for Khalistan is based.

Keywords: nation, nationalism, Khalsa, Khalistan, Sikhism, sovereignty, territoriality, globalization

Introduction

This essay examines discourses of Sikh nationalism in relation to a discourse of territoriality. Conventional accounts of Sikh ethno-nationalism territorialize Sikh identities and, thus, delegitimize the claims to sovereignty embodied in the Khalsa. The *embodiment* of sovereignty through the institution of the Khalsa at Anandpur Sahib in 1699, however, ruptures the narratives of the Westphalian order of territorialized nation states. In so doing, the Khalsa Panth (community) offers an alternative 'counter-hegemonic' conception of popular sovereignty which is more attuned to the needs of de-territorialized peoples living under conditions of *globality*: a conception of sovereignty which can escape the long shadow of territoriality cast by the 'myth of Westphalia'.

The essay will proceed in four stages. The first section discusses the significance of the institution of the Khalsa for modern conceptions of nationalism. Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), by conferring sovereignty on the Khalsa Panth in 1699, undergoing the initiation rite himself, and urging his followers to *embody* the symbols of sovereignty through the 'Five Ks', foreshadowed by almost one hundred years the French Revolutionary slogan that all sovereignty resides in the 'nation'. The next section accounts for the *territorialization of identity* through the 'derivative discourse' (Chatterjee 1986) of nationalism. It is claimed that conventional accounts of ethno-nationalism, as applied to the Sikhs, territorialize Sikh identities and delegitimize the claims to sovereignty embodied in the Khalsa. The third section explores the origins of Sikh nationalism. It argues that nationalism 'interpellates' (Althusser 1971), or constructs, subjects as belonging to a 'nation'. Within the Sikh tradition, this 'interpellation' first arose after the colonial encounter when discourses of the Khalsa became effectively *territorialized*. Sikhs were therefore forced to choose between two competing discourses; that of 'world religion' or 'nation' (Dusenbery 2008). The concluding section examines the ways in which globalization has lessened the importance of territory to (p. 272) modern expression of national identity. It argues that globalization has created space for the articulation of a Sikh conception of sovereignty which is not territorially bound but embodied in the Khalsa Panth (Shani 2007).

The Khalsa: Foundational Myth of the Sikh 'Nation'

Almost a century before the French Revolution, an 'event' took place which, like the Revolution, has become a 'foundational myth'. However, while the Revolution continues to define modern nationalism (Smith 1999, Balibar 1991, Hobsbawm 1994), the impact of the events of 1699 has, until very recently, been confined to the Punjab region of India. At Anandpur Sahib on Vaisakhi day, Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru of the Sikh Panth initiated five volunteers, the *panj piare* ('cherished five'), into the new order of the 'Khalsa'.

The term Khalsa, derived from the Arabic *khalis*, literally means 'pure' but implies spiritual purity. In the Quran, Allah is referred to as *Al-Ikhalis*, the 'purifier' and the term *khalsa* similarly would have been familiar to the followers of Guru Nanak (1469–1539) through the work of Kabir (*c*.1441–1518) and appears in the Adi Granth (AG: 655). Nanak had earlier developed a religious and social philosophy which, although deeply influenced by both Hinduism and Islam, was distinct from both. For Nanak, there was 'only one

Lord, and only one tradition', which encompassed both Hinduism and Islam but which could not be reduced to either. The Sikh concept of God, *Vahiguru* ('Wonderful Lord'), is as the omnipotent and omnipresent transcendent creator and sovereign of the universe who lies beyond human understanding and, in contrast to Islam and Christianity, does not take human form. Nanak conceived of God as the one and the only 'true sovereign' (*Sacha Patishah*) of the world; although the term *Vahiguru* first found in the hymns of Bhatt Gayand, the bard contemporary of Guru Arjan (the fifth Guru), is now more commonplace and used in the Sikh salutation (*Vahiguru ji ka Khalsa ||Vahiguru ji ki Fateh*). However, Sikhism also developed a more temporal conception of 'sovereignty' which was institutionalized through the construction of the *Akal Takht*, the 'throne of the immortal Lord', facing Harimandir in Amritsar. Thus, a distinction was made between 'spiritual' and 'temporal' sovereignties which were posited separately yet embodied in the personage of the Guru (Ahluwalia 1983: 92–7). The dual authority of the warrior-Guru was symbolized by the two swords which were first worn by the sixth Guru, Hargobind; *piri*, signifying spiritual authority and *miri*, temporal authority. In Sikhism, the wearing of the two swords was the sole prerogative of the Guru.

Guru Gobind Singh, however, bestowed the spiritual dimensions (*piri*) of the Guru's authority on the Adi Granth (now the Guru Granth Sahib) which was housed in the Harimandir while, under the doctrine of Guru-Panth, investing all temporal authority (*miri)* on the Khalsa Panth, through the *khande ki pahul* (P. Singh 2000: 11). He sought to **(p. 273)** spiritually cleanse his community by giving his five volunteers *amrit* (sweetened water) stirred with the double-edged sword, the *khanda*, thus conferring the spiritual and temporal authority of the Guru onto the Khalsa. Those who received *amrit* this way became cleansed of their previous identities and were reborn into a 'community of the pure'. For Gurbhagat Singh, the *khande ki pahul* was performed to 'psychologically transform the common folk, make them *Singhs* (lions) and commit them to the new narrative that aimed at countering the symbolic violence of the two hegemonizing grand narratives' of Hinduism and Islam (Gurbhagat Singh 1999: 189–90). By instituting the Khalsa, and then undergoing the initiation rite himself, Guru Gobind Singh acknowledged the (temporal) sovereignty of the Khalsa Panth and submitted himself to its collective will. Thereafter, the Khalsa was to be held responsible for both the protection and administration of the community.

From its very inception, it was envisaged as 'a society for salvation and self-realization, unitarian in religion, vernacularist in culture and democratic in politics' (Uberoi 1996: 74). It was unitarian in its insistence, following Nanak, on the indivisibility of *Vahiguru*; it was vernacularist in its use of a vernacular language, Punjabi written in Gurmukhi script, to record *Vahiguru*'s message as communicated by the Gurus (*gurbani*); and it was democratic in its assertion of sovereignty over the temporal and spiritual domains. 'In the

ranks of the *Khalsa*,' according to Teja Singh, 'all were to be equal, the lowest with the highest, in race and in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes' (Teja Singh 1988: 26). The *dohira* ('verse') *Raj Karega Khalsa* ('the Khalsa shall rule'), introduced by Guru Gobind Singh, appears to suggest that he conceived of the Khalsa, not only as a spiritual fraternity of orthodox Sikhs, but as a sovereign, *political* community which could defend itself and would no longer need the tutelage of a human Guru (Shani 2008: 729–30).

As such the Khalsa foreshadowed—by almost a century—the French Revolution with its declaration that sovereignty resides in the political community or 'nation'. However, unlike the modern Western notion of nationalism, there were no explicitly *territorial* dimensions or limits to the assertion of the sovereignty of the Khalsa. Indeed, the Khalsa Panth can be viewed, in contemporary terminology, as a 'post-Westphalian' community in its assertion of the sovereignty of the transnational religio-political community. Sovereignty is not only *de-territorialized* but *embodied* in the five external symbols of the Sikh 'faith'. For J. P. S. Uberoi, the primary meaning of the five symbols lies in the ritual conjunction of two opposed forces. The unshorn hair (*kes*) is associated with the comb (*kanga*) which performs the function of constraining the hair and imparting an orderly arrangement to it. Similarly, the bangle (*kara*) imparts the same orderly control over the sword (*kirpan*) as the comb does over the hair (Uberoi 1996: 12). For Uberoi, these five symbols of Sikh identity were developed in opposition to prevalent cultural practices in the pre-colonial Punjab and served to construct boundaries between Sikhs and other communities, making Kesdhari Sikhs an easily identifiable group in modern India and the diaspora today.

In short, the 'myth of the Khalsa' with its narratives of martyrdom and self-sacrifice continues to resonate with Kesdhari Sikhs everywhere because it is *embodied* in the (p. 274) Five Ks. The body thus functions as *memory*, reminding the Sikh that he is a member of a *sovereign* religio-political *qaum* ('nation'), the Khalsa Panth; 'that his father is Guru Gobind Singh and his mother is Mata Sahib Kaur, that he was born in Kesgarh and lives in Anandpur'. This is one of the reasons why the Sikh body has become the battleground in the conflict between the Khalsa Panth and the (pseudo-)secular state in India and the liberal-democratic West (Axel 2001). It is the very *embodiment* of Khalsa identity through the Five Ks, involving the *remembering* of the 'forgotten' Sikh tradition of martyrdom and sacrifice that constitutes the political community of the Sikh 'nation'. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia terms the institutionalization of the Khalsa *a* '*nationic* transformation' by which he means that Guru Gobind Singh transformed the Sikhs from a religious denomination into a political community through the baptismal ceremony of the *amrit*, thus ushering in a 'new socio-political order…characterized by the values of equality, liberty and justice, without any discrimination on the grounds of creed, caste,

country, race, sex and social position' (Ahluwalia 1983: 91). The Khalsa here is used as a generic name for Sikh 'nationhood' but the values upon which it is based are universal and not confined to a particular ethnic group or territory. Observing the edicts of Guru Gobind Singh signifies membership of the Sikh *qaum* or 'nation,' thus transforming what Giorgio Agamben terms as 'bare life' (Agamben 1998) into one endowed with dignity and meaning. For Agamben, 'bare life' corresponds to the ancient Greek term *zoe* which expressed the simple fact of living: 'a life which can be killed but yet not sacrificed' (Agamben 1998). This differed from the term *bios* which denoted a life with dignity, endowed with meaning, which was consequently considered 'worthy' of sacrifice. Thus observing the 'Five Ks' for Kesdhari Sikhs transforms a Sikh's life from *zoe* to *bios* and helps keep alive the Sikh tradition of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in the service of the Khalsa.

The Territorialization of Identity: Nationalism as a 'Derivative Discourse'

Conventional Western theories of nationalism, drawing on the particular historical experiences of the French Revolution and the (re)unification of Italy and Germany, conflate 'nation' with 'state' and ascribe a territorial impulse to 'ethno-nationalism'. The territorialization of nationalism is evident in Weber's definition of the nation as a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own—having previously defined the state in terms of its monopolization of the legitimate use of force over a particular territory (Weber 1991). For A. D. Smith, territoriality is a prerequisite for nationalism. He considers nationalism to be primarily 'a political ideology with a cultural doctrine at its centre' (Smith 1991: 74). He defines it elsewhere as 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity **(p. 275)** for a human population deemed…to constitute an actual or potential nation' (Smith 1999: 256). A nation is a named human population sharing a historic *territory*, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy, and common legal rights and duties for all members (Smith 1991). Smith considers the 'homeland' or 'ancestral land'—where 'in the shared memories of its inhabitants, the great events that formed the nation took place' (Smith 1996: 383)—to be particularly important in the formation of national identity.

Applied to the study of Sikh nationalism, this 'ethno-symbolist' approach attributes the development of Sikh nationalism to the coherence of a *territorially* defined ethno-religious community. For Harnik Deol (2000), the origins of modern Sikh national consciousness

(1947–95) lie in the historical roots of Sikh communal consciousness (1469–1947). Similarly, Gurharpal Singh believes modern Sikh identity to be 'remarkably cohesive' having its roots in a Jat Punjabi *ethnie*, 'a sacred text and religious tradition dating from Guru Nanak' (Gurharpal Singh 2000: 87, 78). Viewed from this perspective, the Sikh *qaum* approximates to what Smith terms an *ethnie*: 'a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more elements of a common culture, including an association with a *homeland*' (Smith 1999: 13—emphasis mine). The Sikh *ethnie* shares a common religious tradition which can be traced to Guru Nanak and the establishment of the Sikh Panth; ancestry myths dating back to the establishment of the Khalsa in 1699; historical memories of martyrdom and persecution under successive Mughal, British, and Indian rulers; a common 'sacred' language in the Gurmukhi script; and, most importantly, a common 'homeland' in the Sikh-majority state of East Punjab where the vast majority of Sikhs live. The existence of a common homeland permits the establishment of a Sikh 'political system' based on the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) complex. Central to this ethno-nationalist narrative is the *territorialization* of Sikh sociopolitical identity through partition, the movement for a Punjabi Suba, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, and the movement for 'national self-determination' following Operation Blue Star (1984).

Modernist accounts of nations and nationalism similarly place great emphasis on territoriality. Indeed, it could be argued that, in its rejection of any causal relationship between ethnicity, culture, and nationality, modernism considers territoriality to be *constitutive* of nationality. Gellner's famous *dictum* that nationalism is *not* the awakening of nations to self-consciousness but invents them where they do not exist (Gellner 1983) inverts the conventional Weberian perspective that views the existence of a nation to be a precondition for the establishment of the state. Certainly, the contemporary Westphalian world order is 'legitimized' by the belief that states represent the interest of *their* nations; that is, by *culturally* distinct populations living inside the state's borders. For Gellner, this cultural distinctiveness upon which the state's claim to sovereignty resides is a product of a process of deliberately designed cultural consolidation by nationalist elites which replaced the multiple and incongruent 'low' cultures of traditional agrarian societies with a single, homogenous, codified, and literate 'high' culture which defines and delimits membership of a nation community.

(p. 276) Modernist approaches to Sikh nationalism follow Gellner in attributing the relative cohesiveness of Sikh ethno-national identity to elite or colonial 'invention'. Particular attention has been paid to the activities of the Singh Sabha movement in the late nineteenth century and their elucidation of a Tat Khalsa discourse which became hegemonic in the twentieth century (Kapur 1986, Oberoi 1993 and 1994, Barrier 2004a

and b). For Harjot Oberoi, the religious reformers transformed Sikhism from ‘an amorphous entity…into a homogenous community’ (Oberoi 1994: 420–1). Richard Fox, however, considers this homogeneity to be a result of colonial Orientalism. British rulers, he argues, ‘in pursuit of their colonial interests through means directed by their own cultural beliefs, foreshadowed the reformed Sikh, or Singh identity, propounded by the Singh Sabhas’ (Fox 1985: 10). This contention, however, appears to ignore the existence of the Sikh tradition founded by the Sikh Gurus and enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib centuries before the onset of colonial rule. However, it is post-1984 Sikh nationalism, and in particular the movement for a separate Sikh state, which, to paraphrase Ernest Gellner, engendered the Sikh ‘nation’ (Gellner 1983: 55). Sikh ‘nationalism’ itself is seen to be primarily a reaction to state-led violence and to the ruthless centralization of political power in India by the then prime minister Indira Gandhi (Brass 1991) or is viewed in Marxist terms, as ‘an ideological weapon’ of a Jat ‘Kulak’ class (Purewal 2000) keen to assert their hegemony over the homeland of the Punjab.

Similarly, Benedict Anderson’s influential conceptualization of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ fails to escape from the shadow of territoriality. Anderson considers the nation to be ‘an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently *limited* and *sovereign*’ (Anderson 1991: 5). The nation is *imagined* because ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. The nation is imagined as *limited* because ‘even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations’ (Anderson 1991: 6–7). Three cultural preconditions existed in order for nations to be imagined. Firstly, the replacement of ‘sacred silent languages’ (Anderson 1991: 14) that offered privileged access to ontological truths with vernacular ‘print languages’ as the principal media through which to imagine the community. Secondly, the decline of the dynastic principle based upon the legitimacy of a sovereign deriving from divinity and its replacement by the principle of popular sovereignty. Finally, following Walter Benjamin, the replacement of ‘messianic time’ where past and future coexist in an instantaneous present with a ‘homogeneous, empty time’ marked by temporal coincidence and measured by clock and calendar (Anderson 1991: 24).

For Anderson, the origins of nations and nationalism lie in ‘the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of the human language’ (Anderson 1991: 46). Print capitalism, for Anderson, refers to the creation of mechanically-reproduced secular ‘print languages’ capable of dissemination through the market. These ‘print languages’ laid the basis for national consciousness first in Europe then elsewhere by creating fixed, unified fields of communication below sacred language and above the spoken regional vernaculars. Books and newspapers written in (p. 277) these ‘print languages’ were the

first mass-market commodities in capitalism, designed for consumption in the new ‘domestic’ market. Speakers of regional dialects within a particular territory became capable of understanding one another through articles in newspapers, journals, and books, even though they might find it difficult or even impossible to comprehend each other in conversation. In the process, they became aware of the hundreds or thousands, or even millions of people, who could read their language. These fellow readers, to whom they are connected in print, formed, for Anderson, ‘the embryo of the nationally imagined community’ (Anderson 1991: 44).

Certainly, the introduction of print capitalism in the colonial period influenced the development of a distinct Sikh ethno-religious identity. The number of printing presses increased from thirty in 1864 to over one hundred two decades later (Oberoi 1994: 275). Whilst beforehand, the transmission of Sikh cultural and religious codes was entrusted to an intermediary class of ‘Sanatan’ *gianis* and *bhais* who interpreted the Guru Granth Sahib for worshippers, the invention of the printing press enabled the new religious elite to communicate directly with the literate Sikh ‘masses’. Ian Talbot points out that the number of newspapers and periodicals published in the Punjab rose from 74 to 579 between 1891 and 1941 (Talbot 1996: 15). There was, furthermore, a spectacular increase in the number of books published in the Punjab. By far the most significant was Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha’s *Ham Hindu Nahin* (‘We are Not Hindus’) which, in arguing that Sikhs were not only a Panth but a *qaum*, is considered ‘a declaration of Sikh ethnicity’ (Grewal 1999: 250)—thus, foreshadowing the ethno-nationalist discourse.

Anderson, however, fails to adequately explain the relationship between language, capitalism, and *territory*. If the nation is an ‘imagined political community’, why are there *territorial* limits to the imagination of the nation? Indeed, ‘print languages’ cut across different territorial units in both Europe and the New World (which Anderson considered to be the crucible of modern nationalism). In the Punjab, Punjabi is widely spoken, understood, and read as a *native* language by all three different ethno-religious communities of the Punjab. Why then did Punjabi, written in the Gurmukhi script, come to be appropriated as the ‘sacred’ print-language of the Sikh *qaum* and not by a Punjabi ‘nation’? Similarly, the modern world capitalist economy—which now encompasses the globe—is, and always was, characterized by a single *global* division of labour. Capitalism, by its very nature, is a *de-territorializing* process of resource allocation based on purportedly universal ‘laws’ of supply and demand which, in neoclassical theory, should not be constrained by territorial limits. In the colonial period, the world economy was divided into different imperial ‘blocs’. The Punjab—particularly the canal colonies—was an integral part of the British colonial political economy. Within the colonial political economy of the Punjab, there was no distinction made between Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim ‘markets’. All three ethno-religious communities were fully integrated into the colonial

political economy. How, therefore, can Anderson account for the *territorialization* of ethno-religious identities in the Punjab? In conclusion, a generous reading of Anderson's theory as applied to the Punjab would surmise that print-capitalism merely 'energized' the existing tendencies towards differentiation between the diverse religio-linguistic communities rather than creating a radically different consciousness (p. 278) (Deol 2000: 90). Anderson's theory is thus unable to account for the territorialization of language, of ethno-religious communities, and of the market. Territoriality is *assumed* to be a constitutive feature of nationalism but is not accounted for.

Rethinking Sikh Nationalism

The approach taken to the study of Sikh nationalism in my recent book *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age* (Shani 2007) argues that, in common with other religious nationalisms, it arose as a result of a *dialectical* relationship between the Sikh religious tradition and the colonial state and does not necessarily have to take a territorial form. Following Peter van der Veer, I argue that religious nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was built upon forms of religious identity which pre-dated the colonial encounter and modes of religious communication that were themselves in a constant process of *transformation* (van der Veer 1994: p. xiii).

At this point, a distinction should be drawn between religion as an ideology, where it is used for political purposes, and religion as faith (Nandy 1998). For Nandy, religion as faith refers to religion as a 'way of life, a tradition that is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural' whilst religion as an ideology refers to a 'subnational, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic interests' (Nandy 1998: 322). Religion as an ideology when applied to a territorially-defined (but not *confined*) ethno-religious group as in the case of the Sikhs may be seen as a form of nationalism. The autonomy for elite manipulation of this ideology of nationalism, however, remains heavily circumscribed by popular interpretations of the religious tradition. In other words, the success of what Nandy refers to as religion as 'ideology' is dependent upon its ability to 'interpellate' (Althusser 1971) subjects in terms that they can understand. The story being told must be familiar to them in order to be convincing. For that to occur, the 'national' story must be narrated in the vernacular using idioms which chime with their lived experience.

This perspective differs from modernist-instrumentalist (Brass 1991) and other constructivist (Oberoi 1994) approaches in the degree of autonomy accorded to elites.

Although successive Sikh religious and political elites have played a crucial role in the construction of a Sikh national identity, they may not have consciously done so. Contemporary Sikh political elites, whether moderate Akali or separatist, may well be 'unconsciously' subject to the past cultural choices of their forefathers in the Tat Khalsa movement who helped to define the 'tradition' which they are now endeavouring to defend. The 'unconscious' in this sense may be seen as nothing other than the forgetting of history. This neglect is itself produced by history through the internalization and incorporation of social structures, what Pierre Bourdieu has termed the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).

Sikh religio-political elites have unconsciously helped redefine Sikh identity in the light of new challenges to the Sikh 'tradition' by attempting to construct an orthodox (p. 279) understanding of what it means to be a Sikh. This orthodoxy emerged during the colonial period and was embodied in the external symbols of Sikh identity which gave the Sikhs a distinctive appearance, enabling colonial administrators to classify them as both a distinct 'religion' and a 'race' or 'nation'. Colonial modernity constituted a break from the past and, unable to rely upon a human guru for guidance, Sikhs were forced to consolidate and redefine their faith, which contrary to instrumentalist and constructivist claims, pre-existed the colonial encounter, through organizations such as the Singh Sabhas, and later, the Chief Khalsa Diwan (CKD) and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The SGPC institutionalized Tat Khalsa orthodoxy through the Sikh Rahit Maryada, a code of conduct considered binding on all Sikhs, and in the twentieth century, it, along with the various factions of the Akali Dal, have constituted a Sikh 'political system' (Wallace 1981) which coexists with, and potentially challenges, the state power.

Conclusion: Escaping the Shadow of Territoriality?

Conventional approaches to the study of Sikh ethno-nationalism regard territoriality to be an inevitable feature of the nationalist discourse. This study has shown that this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, the territorialization of Sikh identity through the 'derivative discourse' of the 'nation' essentializes Sikh identity and *disembodies* the Khalsa of sovereignty; in the process reducing the Five Ks to purely religious or cultural symbols. Furthermore, the notion of *embodied sovereignty* associated with the Khalsa is more in tune with the globalizing times than the emphasis on *territorialized sovereignty* which is placed by the movement for an independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan.

Globalization has decreased the salience of *territory* in the construction of individual and collective identities. Identity is no longer exclusively defined in terms of place: where one is from no longer allows us to define who one is. As Scholte points out, 'territorialism as the previously prevailing structure of social space was closely interlinked with nationalism as the previously prevailing structure of collective identity' (Scholte 2005: 225). However one of the significant consequences of contemporary globalization has been to sever the connections between the state—a coercive apparatus of governance defined in terms of its monopoly of organized violence—and the nation—an 'imagined political community' (Anderson 1991)—to the point where 'many national projects today no longer involve an aspiration to acquire their own sovereign state' (Scholte 2005: 228). The *de-territorialization* of nationalism has created space for the reassertion of 'multiple and overlapping sovereignties' (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004). Sovereignty is no longer seen as the absolute and exclusive attribute of territorially-demarcated nation states, but as *plural* and *mobile*. Consequently, it may be possible for the Khalsa Panth to escape the long shadow of territoriality cast by 'the myth of Westphalia' and reclaim (p. 280) the sovereignty believed to be invested in it by Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur in 1699 without the establishment of Khalistan. In so doing, the Khalsa Panth will have profound implications for the study of nationalism and for the contemporary international order which continues to be based on an assumption of congruity between 'nation' and 'state'. This premise has placed territorial constraints upon the expression of Sikh identity and inhibited its development as a 'religious' tradition by particularizing Sikh claims to universality.

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Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspectives on Sikhism

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This essay discusses the context of the formation of 'Sikhism', a term that has served since the nineteenth century to identify Sikh thought and praxis as a world religion. This context arguably extends beyond the historical conditions of an emergent Eurocentric modernity and coloniality to the contemporary discourses of Euro-American postmodernity and postcoloniality. Whilst an examination of this Western contextualization of an Indian praxis is essential to understand the transition from a precolonial sikhi to modern/colonial Sikhism, this study examines this contextualization as both exceeding and disrupting the linear temporality suggested by the prefixes pre- and post- (e.g. precolonial to postcolonial, premodern to postmodern). In response, the essay posits a postcolonial sikhi(sm): that is, a living tradition that reanimates a precolonial sikhi within the Western imaginary and yet escapes the reinscription of the modern/colonial frame.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Postmodern, Colonial Modernity, Tricontinentalism, sikhi, Sikhism, sikhi(sm), Translation, Representation, Pluriversal

Introduction

The relation of Sikhism to postcolonial and postmodern discourse has received little attention within the Western academic discourse. Indeed, the question of the relevancy of these terms to the Sikh religion remains unresolved. Though scholars have applied postmodern *or* postcolonial theory to the study of Sikhism (Gurbhagat Singh 1999), there has been a paucity of works that examine the postmodern *and* postcolonial as inseparable. This essay therefore explores the pre- and postcolonial together with the pre- and postmodern and thereby will entertain the possibility of a counter-discourse to

the colonial/modern conceptualization of Sikhism as a world religion that has often been perpetuated within postcolonial/modern thought.

In order to comprehend the relationship of Sikh 'religion' to post/colonialism and post/modernism it is necessary to further examine the political, economic, and cultural nexus by which colonialism (and neocolonialism) sustained itself. The transformation of precolonial *sikhi* into the modern/colonial Sikhism, a project instigated by British colonialists to define the Sikhs as one party among India's many, was in turn consolidated by the Singh Sabha (1870–1920) which sought the political legitimacy that 'a civilized religion' brought. Such a reading of religion largely mimicked the Protestant model—a monotheistic creed, codified tenets of belief, a canon of scripture, a prophetic history, an emphasis on individual morality, critique of idol worship and empty ritual. Yet whilst the colonial naming of Sikhism as a world religion promised recognition, it also subjected the Sikhs to the disciplinary gaze of the British. By means of nomenclature and census, the British inscribed identities that their subjects were behoved to fulfil, thereby sanctioning themselves—a foreign power—as the only secular authority (p. 283) capable of transcending 'petty factionalism'. Indeed, the colonial construction of Indian modernity, nationalism, and secularity are all inextricably tied to and are formed out of an Enlightenment discourse on 'religion' as unruly emotion. The inscription of religion as a marker of identity under British rule was not discontinued with the creation of the modern, independent nation state but continued under the guise of secular nationalism. Hence the discourses of both coloniality and postcoloniality have marginalized Sikhs through a frame of modernity that has reduced them to the category of religion, a depoliticized realm marked as subjective via processes of internalization and personalization.

This political manufacturing of Sikhism, however, presents a historical and discursive dissonance with the Gur-Sikh imaginary, precisely because the drive to formulate beliefs into a 'systematic theology' is resisted within the tradition itself given its privileging of poetry and music as primary epistemological modes. It will be argued that this dissonance continues beyond the colonial project through regimes of translation and representation, such that in order to imagine the future discursive framework for Sikhs it is necessary to tarry with the double bind of *sikhi*(sm)—where the negotiation of precolonial *sikhi* and modern Sikhism is kept in play. This double bind acknowledges that the past colonial imposition cannot be simply erased by a romantic leap into precolonial times; nor can the construction of Sikhism as a 'modern religion' be sustained for it threatens the sovereignty of *sikhi* by delimiting it into a pacified and de-politicised interiority: *sant-sipahi* ('saint-soldier') becomes merely *sant*.

Problematizing Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspectives

1. The Global Condition of Modern Coloniality

‘Colony’ is a term derived from the Latin *colere*, meaning ‘to cultivate’ or ‘to dwell, inhabit’, which slowly evolved from referencing a dwelling or farm to denote a settlement established in a foreign place. Mishra and Hodge (2005: 378–7) have noted that ‘colony’ came to connote an ‘invasive settlement’, one that involved ‘domination’ and ‘improvement’. Such domination and improvement were primarily driven by the vagaries of economic demands for resources or for commercial self-interest. In short, the economics of colonialism were designed so as to ensure domestic political stability.

The East India Company was clearly situated within a colonial project; however, after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 there was a marked shift in British political involvement in India from the colonial to the imperial. In this shift the ‘peripheral’ colony came under the systematic and bureaucratic control by the government at the ‘centre’. Young has argued that it is precisely this coupling of ideological control and financial gain that differentiates imperialism from colonialism (Young 2001: 17). To assert such ideological (p. 284) control, it was necessary to create and exert control over existing cultural and educational institutions. Furthermore, misappropriations of evolution lent a scientific authority to populist notions of racial and/or cultural hierarchies, thereby lending to the imperial cause a moralizing rhetoric of the White Man’s Burden. As such, the political and economic advantages of imperialism were couched in the rhetoric of universal freedom and liberty, thereby legitimizing the elision of other races and cultures from self-governance. This elision has been aptly termed by Young as the ‘paradox of ethnocentric egalitarianism’ (2001: 32).

The continuation of this rhetoric in neocolonial discourse demonstrates that with the waning of colonial endgames, the political shift from colony to independent nation came to mask a continuing economic imperialism. Neocolonialism denotes an economic system of exploitation that operates upon an unequal system of exchange, wherein the Euro-American centre typically exhausts the resources of the periphery, while at the same time enforcing the consumption of its products by the periphery as politically expedient if not economically obligatory. Independence thus led to a new form of subservience—to the economic system of international capital now managed by indigenous elites—that emerged to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the imperial system. The

ethnocentric egalitarianism of the colonial past indeed continues in today's corporate and industrial military complexes which combine the use of hard, military, and economic power with soft, cultural power (promotion of a Western-styled democracy) to form a governmental precedent through which the 'civilized' and 'developed' world may extract resources from 'underdeveloped' ex-colonies given the promise of liberty and enlightenment (Young 2001: 40).

This continuation of economic domination problematizes the temporal marker of postcolonialism, as though colonialism has come to an end: 'the postcolonial is *post*, that is, coming after, colonialism and imperial [*sic*] in its first sense of domination by direct rule. It is not, however, *post* to imperialism in its second sense, that is of a general system of a power relation of economic and political domination' (Young 2001: 44). This second sense of postcolonialism refers to what Akhil Gupta calls the '*condition* of postcoloniality', whereby the promise of material change (developmentalism, agrarian capitalism, technological innovations) comes to shape economic and political activity, but also the very epistemology and identity of peoples and their cultures (1998: ix, 338).

Along with Gikandi, then, the postcolonial must be understood as a continuing negotiation between the precolonial, the colonial, and postcolonial (1996: 14). Thus, though the attainment of Independence marks a unique juncture in the history of a nation, postcolonialism refers to how that newly emerging sovereignty is nevertheless severely compromised by the economic, material, and cultural conditions dictated by the interests of international capitalism, which remains largely governed by former colonial and imperial powers. It is within such a context that the Sikh struggle for justice should be understood given the governmental atrocities of Partition, Independence, the Emergency of 1975, Operation Blue Star, the Delhi pogroms, and the police brutality of the 1980s (Bhogal 2011b). For many Sikhs, the end of foreign rule in India in 1947 did not and could not augur an end to colonialism for the simple fact that the land of Panjab had (p. 285) been brutally riven. The parting gesture of the British—the carving of a national border between India and the newly created Pakistan—ensured that there was no 'after' colonialism for Panjab in 1947. How can Independence mark an *after* colonialism when the very price of freedom was a permanently fractured land? The wound of partition would have the longest-standing ramifications for Sikhs, culturally, economically, and politically. The festering of this wound continues to manifest an ambivalent relationship to the modern nation state.

2. Recognizing Postmodernity as a Condition of Colonial Modernity

Given the embeddedness of European modernity in colonial and postcolonial history, a postmodern critique of modernity risks being little more than a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism if the voices of the colonized others continue to be elided. One needs to think the post/modern alongside the post/colonial, particularly when examining the history of colonized peoples. As intimated above, the key linchpin between the modern and postmodern, the colonial and postcolonial is a European (Hegelian) discourse of religion *as* history and history *as* religion (Mandair 2009). This logic of subjugation that Hegel introduces through the invention of religion as a generic concept, works to control the threat of the other by fixing their position along a temporal scale of cultural development. Hegel's *Geist* or Spirit manifests in the world through time, such that the expression of Geist represents a temporal development that started in the East but culminated in the West—translating the 'barbarian' (the *geographic other*) into the 'primitive' (the prehistorical other). This shift from a spatial to a temporal logic provided Hegel with an abstract hierarchical mechanism to defuse the epistemic challenge of alternative world views and philosophies—for they merely represented a past and thus outdated mode of thinking. Furthermore, the linking of a movement of time to the development of historical consciousness meant that animism was to be outmoded by polytheism, which in turn was transcended by the higher form of monotheism. Finally, *Geist* manifests in its most developed form (in Germanic Europe) as Critical Self-Consciousness—leaving all colonized cultures permanently encased in backward religion. The overt Christian bias in this discourse relegates other races as 'primitive' in their 'superstition'. Hence this discourse on religion may be understood as providing a racialized logic of coloniality. Europe thus became the world's epistemic centre precisely because of its economic might (via colonization and imperialism). The ability to legislate one's regional view as universal indicates the 'historical' or 'colonial' difference (Chakrabarty 2007 and Mignolo 2006 respectively).

Walter Mignolo (2006) suggests that rather than demarcate a 'linear succession of periods' which obviates the crucial implications of the 'colonial/historical difference', a 'coexistence of clusters' is acknowledged such that alongside the Renaissance and its corresponding early modern period, a darker side—the early colonial period—is recognized. Similarly, the Enlightenment and its modernity are recognized as resting upon (p. 286) its underbelly of coloniality. Mignolo argues that we cannot simply look at one cluster, reading history in terms of the transition from the pre-modern into the modern to the postmodern; instead we must attempt to view the diverse clusters that run through history (2006: vii). The focus on the colonial difference found in postcolonial critiques therefore recalls this 'darker side of Western modernity' (Mignolo 2011) given

that ‘much of the world still lives in the violent disruptions of its wake’ (Young 2001: 4). The development of (post)modernity cannot be understood apart from (post)coloniality.

Postmodernity, both as style and as era (Lyotard 1984; 1992), is often characterized by its critique of modernity’s desire to claim singular universality (or grand metanarrative). It is precisely the loss of faith in modernity’s grand narrative of progress that designates the postmodern orientation. In contradistinction, then, to modernity’s rhetoric of universality, postmodernity is introduced by terms of plurality, multiplicity, fragmentation, indeterminancy, aporia, interdisciplinarity, irony, difference, parody, simulation, hyper-reality, and is further characterized as a ‘shift’ from depth to surface. Thus, though Lyotard laments that the ‘liquidation’ of modernity’s grand narrative (1992: 18) is replaced by the shallow goal of profit, postmodern critique presents a possible opening to the voice of the other, as suggested by Mignolo’s ‘coexistence of clusters’.

In his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Lyotard explores the ‘condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies’. In these societies knowledge is, on the one hand, commodified: to be consumed by a citizenry where the underlying ethos is commercially defined (Lyotard 1984: 4). Tying knowledge to profit rather than the universal good of humanity ensures its commodification into a form of economic power; this transforms education into an instrument for producing the most efficient and competitive workforce. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness of the arbitrary nature of all knowledge systems, and an increased questioning of the very foundations of modern forms and frames of knowledge. Thus, the commercialization of knowledge is tied to an awareness of its arbitrariness such that the keynote of the postmodern condition is ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (1984: xxiv). Therefore, the authority to make legitimate judgments upon any topic depends not upon some transcendental source for all truth, but rather upon the local set of rules that govern a particular discourse. Again, this would suggest that the postmodern would allow the subaltern to speak (Spivak 1988).

However, many have argued that postmodernity does not reflect a transition into a new age that comes after modernity, but actually presents more of the same continued to an even greater intensity, in that the same modern totalizing cultural logic simply adjusts to the economic and political reality of late capitalism (Jameson 1991).

One could reframe these critiques to voice postcolonial concerns. For instance, according to Marshall Berman’s *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), to be modern is to be confronted with radical change that disrupts previous modes of existence (Berman 1982: 15). What could better describe the experience of the colonized? Thus Jameson’s ‘schizophrenic depthlessness’ or even Lyotard’s ‘dehumanizing’ effects of postmodernity are, from this angle, echoes of *colonial* modernity, indicating once again how imbricated

postmodern and postcolonial discourses are. If it is the case that postmodernity is a (p. 287) form of late modern capitalism, then we have to see postmodernity less as a critique of modernity and more as its extension and intensification; more simply if modernity is defined by a critical questioning, postmodernity becomes a form of hyper-criticism. Yet neither engages the very persistence of the condition of coloniality and the reality of the colonial/historical difference.

If it is the case that the transition from pre-modernity to secular modernity is made through a discourse of overcoming religion, then those that argue that 'we have never been modern' given that faith has never been overcome but merely reformulated, provide further evidence that the European conception of religion is central to any conception of modernity (Latour 1993). To elaborate, Bruno Latour (1993) puts into question modernity's hallmarks (a triumphalist science, a progressivist ideology and an addiction to materialism), to argue that the socalled transition to Enlightened critical consciousness is merely a myth. If such hallmarks are themselves understood as grand narratives, then the background of *coloniality* and the *colonial/historical difference* moves into the foreground whenever modernity or postmodernity are addressed.

These critiques reveal the continuity of coloniality and the persistence of translating sociocultural differences within a Western hierarchy of value. In the context of nation states and the nationalization of languages, the status of minority groups such as the Sikhs becomes ever more precarious. Thus the mutually imbricated shifts from modernity to postmodernity and from colonialism to postcolonialism present a story of two kinds of disruption: while the postmodern offers a critique of modernity from within Europe, the postcolonial demands a critique from outside of the Euro-American West.

The key question then is, *how can the postmodern function otherwise than within a series of transformations that merely renew modernity—and thereby continue a form of coloniality*? If the transformation renews and repeats the master-slave dialectic, then the answer lies less in transformation and more in deconstruction and disruption. If modernity is read as a cultivated attitude formed out of a non-listening to the claims of the colonial other, *then* postmodernity can merely intensify this non-listening. In this regard, the idea of a series of transitions or 'overcomings' from pre-modernity to modernity to postmodernity, or from a colonial to postcolonial state, belie the real analytic that requires attention: an obdurate and elusive colonial modernity and the othering of its master-slave dialectic.

There is an undeniable advantage to postmodern thought for it recognizes and tarries with an inescapable *aporia* between finite and particular voices trying to speak the infinite and universal story of the world; this endeavour, at least rhetorically, should be expressed through multiple narratives through an awareness of the fictionality of all

accounts of the big picture or grand narrative. Postmodernity would seem to suggest then that the starting point (not unlike Sikh teachings) is the humility to acknowledge that the truth cannot be captured by logic, and when expressed it cannot but be ambiguous. For Sikhs this is what the power of literature (over philosophy), poetry (over science), music and song (over logic and history) teach us—that reason in the guise of philosophy, science, and history should never be allowed to stand alone as the only or even prime authority (Bhogal 2011c). Justice requires particular and ongoing (p. 288) engagements with others not abstract universal statements. This is partly why the Guru Granth Sahib's (GGS) content is composed of a musical and poetic Word. One returns to the Word only when the full limits of logic are realized and the calculative attitude of the ego is finally loosened into an infinite economy of excess; this excess presents life as an unexpected and unpredictable Gift (Bhogal 2011c, 2011d).

From a Sikh perspective, thinking is feeling, and the non-white, the non-male, nature, the body, the woman, and the animal—may all speak truth to the power of European/ Christian colonization (Bhogal 2012a, 2012b). The self-conscious rational thinking being idealized within European modernity is problematic; 'I think' is not the whole story of the 'I' and the 'I' cannot be reduced merely to conscious activity—the tip of the visible iceberg. Conscious rational thinking has to contend with the subconscious of forgotten and repressed motivations and judgments that lie hidden beneath its surface (Bhogal 2005). Unless we are aware of the obdurate nature of colonial modernity and its historical difference, the modern 'I think therefore I am' completely overlooks the *colonial* dimension where the 'I' is keenly experienced as *not* being self-constituted, but socially made: the colonized and the slave would plead 'I am only when I am heard.'

In order for postmodernity or postcoloniality to allow the possibility of a new epistemic frame to emerge, the scholars engaged in such discourses would need to work to include the voice of the other as pivotal to the ethical challenge of our times. First, one would need to perceive modernity and coloniality as a single process of a *modern colonial world system* (Mignolo 2000). This in turn would then make visible a *coloniality of power* (Aníbal Quijano's term): 'a global hegemonic model of power in place since the Conquest that articulates race and labor, space and peoples, according to the needs of capital and to the benefit of white European peoples' (Escobar 2007: 185). Thirdly, one could then see that central to that power is the reality of a *colonial* or *historical difference* that works to subalternize non-Western forms of knowledge. Contrary to the Habermasian notion of communication free of domination, one sees here only degrees of exteriority to the hegemony of European epistemic modes. However, this is exactly what most Euro-American theorists, if they have any awareness of it at all, seem unwilling or unable to critically engage with: 'that it is impossible to think about transcending or overcoming modernity without approaching it from the perspective of the colonial

difference' (Escobar 2007: 186). Thus, the common solutions that the West keeps returning to (of Marxism, multiculturalism, or a series of 'posts': *post* modernism, *post* humanism, *post* secularism etc.) all ring hollow—for they do not address the key problem of the coloniality of power that spawns the colonial difference. As universalism tends towards totalitarianism, the pluriversal or multiplism, or 'diversality' tends towards interdependent networks. For Sikhs, this shift is always already present and can be clearly seen in the GGS's reading of the one as always many (*ek-anek*; *asank, kai kot, apar*).

However, the incredible success of such modern/colonial constructions such as 'Sikhism' has made it nearly impossible to capture (precolonial) *sikhi* without entering genealogical deconstructions of the formulation of Sikhism. This is primarily because the rhetoric of empire, imperialism, and modernity gained life through practices of (p. 289) translation and representation—whose centre was Christian Europe. That is to say, Europe's Christian identity afforded it a *double location*: having both the privilege 'of being part of the totality enunciated [for example being one of the 'world religions'], and at the same time the universal place of enunciation [Christian Europe] (while being able to make-believe that the place of enunciation was a nonplace)' (Mignolo 2009: 278). Such a double-location reveals the idea of neutral, scientific, or rational objectivity to be highly problematic, especially as it allowed Christian Europe to announce its own regional values of dichotomous and developmental hierarchies to appear as the 'natural order of the world'.

In as much as postcolonial and postmodern thought does not necessarily challenge this Euro-American 'natural order of the world,' it becomes complicit in re-inscribing the subjugation that is an inherent part of colonial modernity. While remaining problematic, postcolonial and postmodern theory may nevertheless facilitate a radical questioning of the politics, methods and (under)theorization of translation—particularly the European transcription of the other under its own construction of 'religion'—should it seriously engage with the critical discourse on the modern/colonial world system that has at its centre the concept of the colonial/historical difference.

The Politics of Translation and Representation

1. From *Sikhi* to Sikhism: Europe's Method of Manufacturing Religion

Two contemporary Sikh scholars, Harjot Oberoi and Arvind Mandair, though they work in and through the Western idiom are nevertheless highly critical of its categories. Their respective works, *The Constructions of Religious Boundaries* (1994) and *Religion and the Specter of the West* (2009), explore the links between language and culture, religion and secularism, as well as nationalism and fundamentalism. Both *CRB* and *RSW* share much in common: both pinpoint the transition in the Sikh tradition occurring during the colonial period's religious reform movements as a discursive field; they attempt to re-understand the Sikh encounter with British hegemony—Oberoi via the dialectic of opposed epistemes of Sanatan and Tat Khalsa Sikhism, and Mandair via a critique of the politics of translation. Both are critical of academic and community discourses on Sikhs and Sikhism; Oberoi attempts to describe the cultural development of the notion of the category of religion as bounded through the paradigm of anthro-history, while Mandair deconstructs the very distinction between secular and religious fields as they apply conceptually to Sikhs. Both share critical attitudes towards postmodern and postcolonial works, as Oberoi employs a socio-historical 'empirico-rationalist' perspective, while (p. 290) Mandair retrieves certain disruptive aspects of postmodern and postcolonial discourse that bristle in the margins of reason and challenge fixed stereotypical representations. Finally both see the making of religion as a political process; Oberoi views it from the distance of an academic historiography, while Mandair further shows how religion is inseparable from the secular such that the supposed objectivity of academic disciplines are found complicit in the power of the colonial state. Despite so much in common, it is this last point about complicity (which is based upon the recognition that postmodernity is a condition of colonial modernity) that makes Mandair's *RSW* a more compelling argument than that which is found in Oberoi's *CRB*.

Although Oberoi examines how in a certain historical moment dialogical methods of reasoning and relations with colonial mechanisms of power forced a shift and fixing of subjectivity, he is limited by his historical method, and the discourse of history as formative of the colonial gaze. In Mandair's detailed (1995) review of *CRB,* he reads both the *religious* Singh Sabha historians and Oberoi's *scholarly* historiographical method as complicit with an 'epistemological gaze' first fashioned by the colonial administration—

wherein religion is accepted as the categorical framework within which Sikhs are prefigured historiographically.

Oberoi formulates the distinction between the two Sikh reformist movements of the conservative Sanatan and progressivist Tat Khalsa indigenous elites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were responding to British Rule, through polarized and essentialized traits where the former Sanatan 'episteme' is an enchanted, *oral*, and ahistorical world of plurality and heterogeneity, brimming with personal and popular traditions, while the latter Tat Khalsa 'episteme' is a *textual*, historical, impersonal, elite, homogeneous, progressive, and modern one bound by locating fixed identities within equally fixed classifications.

Mandair argues that one cannot account for the shift from Sanatan orality to Tat Khalsa textuality via Foucault's concept of episteme, given that Foucault himself in his later works reconceived this mode of analysis to acknowledge how subjects are decentred through the materiality of language. That is to say, the subject is *formed* by structures and institutions of power that are imbued with language, and can only be recognized socially by their overdetermination. As Mandair notes, 'the major effect of this theory is to put the credentials of the *knower* (the epistemologist) in question', and goes on to argue that this is precisely Oberoi's limitation for 'he fails to acknowledge the continuity and interconnection of his own position as an academic with the disparity in power relations between educational institutions in the West and those in previously colonized countries' (225). 'Ironically', Mandair writes, 'the effects of Foucault's work are even more applicable to Oberoi's own discourse as long as it continues to camouflage itself under the liberal humanist motifs of impartial/scientific historiography' (225).

Mandair concludes his paper by asking, 'how are subaltern communities, such as the Sikhs, to *articulate* "religion", "scripture" and "tradition" within the language and categories of a dominant culture?' (1995: 236)—the question has always been about the politics of translation. The Singh Sabha reforms, according to Mandair, are much better understood through an enunciative practice that brings into focus the cultural translation of (p. 291) the sign. 'Hence the situation for the elites was not one of being "at home"in two different worlds, but rather an existential and psychological dilemma of choosing the 'right sign' in order to represent *between* two cultures' (1995: 232). In what language and with what sign can one be recognized by power? Regarding the politics and centrality of translation practices during the colonial era and beyond, it is crucial then to note a slippage from understanding and accepting translation as a method that cannot completely eradicate *aporia*, to translation as a method that can capture and fix meaning through categorical representation. From such a perspective, one begins to understand the secret hermeneutic lever to modernity and the academy as well as the colonial

administration. It is precisely the effects of this discourse, not only within the colonial context of the Panjab where it led to the construction of 'Sikhism', but also how it informs the very *academic method,* that Mandair's *RSW* and Oberoi's *CRB* deviate.

For Mandair, scholarship needs to become aware of how this complicity with the colonial and orientalist archive is repeatedly camouflaged (both by the academic notion of 'disinterested objectivity' and the reformed communities' assumption of 'authenticity and faith'), and argues instead that the 'shift from the *gaze* of the epistemologist to the *sign* as the site of cultural production allows us to alter the subject of culture from an epistemological function to an enunciative practice' (1995: 226). Here Mandair echoes Mignolo's observation about the global centre of enunciation being the Euro-American Christian/Secular West.

Mandair's *RSW* is the only major work in the field of Sikh studies that takes this enunciation seriously and as central to the formation of Sikhism. A précis of its contents will reveal the depth and complexity of the issue at hand. Mandair takes up Fanon's call, and his thesis is a reflection on the consequences of a form of Manichean reasoning, where the Western claim to universality is left unchallenged by the Gur-Sikh difference.

> The natives' challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a treatise on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute…The native…represents not only the absence of values, but the negation of values…he is the absolute evil.
>
> (Fanon 1991: 41)

Mandair mounts a serious challenge to the West by opening the possibility of non-Western others participating in the construction and operation of the voice of universal enunciation. The key difference then between Oberoi's *CRB* and Mandair's *RSW* is that the first operates within Western categories of thought, while the latter perceives this as the key problem that subalternizes Indic and Gur-Sikh knowledge (*gian*). Instead Mandair's *RSW* makes 'an attempt to move beyond eurocentrism by revealing the coloniality of power embedded in the geopolitics of knowledge' (Escobar 2007: 206 n. 6). Alongside Latour and others, Mandair argues that the idea of a radical break within Europe from a religious to a secular orientation is a myth and one that performs a grave dereliction for it ignores the 'essential' *continuity* between different moments in the Western tradition: specifically, the Greek (*onto*-), the medieval-scholastic (*theo*-), and (p. 292) the modern humanist (*logos* or *logic*)' (*RSW* xiii). Mandair argues that this *ontotheological matrix* pervades the colonial context and emerges in subsequent discourses (including the contemporary) across academic, media, and state institutions.

Mandair rethinks the inseparable dichotomy of religion and the secular within key disciplines of the academy: history of religions, continental philosophy, and postcolonial theory. He argues that underlying all three, and tying them together, is a methodology of 'generalized translation', and it is this conceptual matrix that emerged during the colonial encounter between India and Europe. His point is not that there were no precolonial discourses on 'religion', and therefore 'religion' was fabricated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries per se (Masuzawa 2005), but that it is only during colonial times that religion becomes a conceptual category through which the operation of a generalized translation occurs—and one which persists till today. It is this way of conceptualizing and translating religion (language, and subjectivity), through 'the comparative imaginary of the West', which did not exist before colonial times, that forms his target. As has already been noted, Hegel is central to the genesis of this comparative imaginary and way of translating the other through the imposition of a 'mono-theo-lingualism'—that combines a Western monologic, theologic and monolingual methodology—representing the other under a logic of the homogeneous selfsame identity: one people, one language, one religion and a religion of the one, monotheism.

Yet at the heart of postmodern and postcolonial theory is an ethics of translation. There are, broadly, two forms of translation: one hermeneutic (Gadamer) and the other deconstructive (Derrida):

1. *finite* repetition (totalized representation of meaning as the same that excludes contradiction)
2. *infinite* or aporetic (inherently multiple, ambiguous, and refuses to totalize meaning as the same, and hence courts contradictions).

This difference between two forms of translation is significant to Mandair, because the Guru Granth Sahib favours the deconstructive over the hermeneutic. Only the deconstructive allows equal weight and authority to the voice of the other. This frame of difference is used to explore how the voice of the excluded and oppressed comes from beyond a system's epistemological frame as an ethical challenge; this exteriority is not only literally beyond but also internal to the system as its 'blind spots'. *Sikhi* manifests through a notion of the divine Word that was not exclusive, not tied to language, religion, elite learning, or a particular caste, included diverse voices previously silenced by power: the lower castes and the disenfranchised, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Mandair's *RSW* argues that established academic disciplines employ the same *method* of translation and the same reading of religion *as a general concept* in order to enact such silencing. He traces this methodology back to the key shift from the nature of *translation as essentially aporetic* (or deconstructive) to the relatively straightforward nature of *translation-as-representation* (i.e. hermeneutic). He follows Derrida in calling this

translation-as-representation a ‘Theology of Translation’—one that detects an (p. 293) *ontotheological* motor at the heart of the encounter with the other that betrays the particularity of translation with the universality of representation. This theology of translation transforms the ethical and intellectual complexity of translation, or the *aporia* of translation that always resists closure, into the simplicity and power of representation. It operates by assuming the stable transfer of fixed referents across boundaries. Within this theological fold, the other is depoliticized, ultimately falsifying any claim to disinterestedness or impartiality. This theology ‘institutes a division of knowledge that parallels the division of humanity into *native* versus *ethnic*, *host* versus *guest*’, thus granting ‘belonging to some forms of knowledge’ (active researchers) and ‘nonbelonging to others…(passive suppliers of raw data)’ (*RSW* xiv–xv). Mandair thus aims to ‘revive the disavowed memory of contact and contamination between Indian and Western thought and culture that has existed since the early colonial encounters’ (*RSW* xv).

RSW, unlike *CRB*, refuses the invitation to enter the dialogue of the West *without first* renegotiating the *terms of entry into that debate* (Mandair and Zene 2006: 1–2). Despite the ubiquity of the colonial denotation of religion, Mandair (following Derrida) claims that the very force of its repetition could be dissipated ‘at any moment, if one were to suspend belief in the translatability of the term *religio*, by, for example, asking the Derridean question, “what if *religio* remained untranslatable?”’ (*RSW* 422)—a motif that seems to emanate from every page of the Guru Granth Sahib. A key distinction between the Abrahamic and Indic traditions’ conceptions of the Absolute and its relation to the other arguably rests with the necessity of *conversion*—i.e. assimilation that often went hand-in-glove with the violence of European colonization. Within the Gur-Sikh tradition evidenced in the Guru Granth Sahib’s internal diversity, content and structure, the necessity of conversion is denied and along with it, the exclusive ownership of the truth. A whole new set of intersubjective and comparative questions are implied, which in turn secure this Gur-Sikh notion of the sovereignty of multiple centres of enunciation. In order to allow these centres of enunciation their voice, Mandair proposes to theorize translation away from a generalized form of colonially inspired identity (e.g. stereotyped representation) toward ‘a spectral politics of the postcolonial’; that is, towards a new comparativism based on the aporetic difficulty of translation which recognizes the original co-contamination of cultures that can lead to a transformation through the revelation of the other as always already being a part of oneself—where the others’ space of enunciation is not colonized (*RSW* 435).

The universalization of Europe’s regional values (Mignolo 2006: 18–19) was achieved by the systematic and often brutal displacement (if not extermination) of other centres of enunciation and authority. As a result of such Imperial/colonial power, Europe was able to manufacture for the first time hegemony over authoritative knowledge production—

whose metanarrative and epistemic centre was composed of the universalization of the concepts of religion, history, and reason.

Through translation, the precolonial heterolingual space of multiple and hybrid identities and 'religions' was transformed into the monolingual space of homogeneous and now easily divided and conquered identities, marking a move from the complexity of (Sikh) self–other relations to the polarization of the (European) self (p. 294) versus (non-European) other dialectic, otherwise known as the colonial difference. Recognizing this colonial difference, one is ethically obliged to go beyond Oberoi's *CRB* to Mandair's *RSW* given that sociological, anthropological, and historiographic methods are complicit with the past and current repetitions of colonial and imperial power.

2. From Sikhism to *Sikhi*(sm): Tricontinental Decolonization, Aporia, and the Pluriversal

Within the field of Sikh Studies, a key distinction has emerged between works that are cognizant of the complicity with Western epistemologies and actively work within a *tricontinental* frame to catalyse a redress, and those that either are unaware or remain committed to Western forms of knowledge and its strategic exclusions. In an effort to regain or reanimate precolonial *sikhi*, a move away from the colonial modern construction of Sikhism as a world religion needs to be effected. Such a move would involve a critical employment of postmodern and postcolonial discourses that may be able to instigate a transformed *sikhi*(sm). Young's term 'tricontinentalism' may point a way out from Western postcolonial discourse that has been, like its postmodern cousin, too narrowly Eurocentric. Tricontinentalism recognizes a shared history of oppression and a political solidarity between peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (the Global South). It goes further by acknowledging the strategic exploitation of the three aforementioned continents by European and American powers, whilst resisting the temptation to map a totalized counter-narrative across cultures. Following Edward Said, tricontinentalism recovers the agency of the postcolonial subject to 'speak truth to power'. Tricontinentalism 'names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances. It combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality' (Young 2001: 57). In this regard tricontinentalism is 'both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice. It attacks the status quo of hegemonic economic imperialism' as well as 'the history of colonialism and imperialism' (Young 2001: 58). Tricontinentalism emerges when those marginalized by the imperial forces of military, economic, and epistemic domination cohere into a more united intellectual front with a shared understanding of the various

dimensions and strategies of Western governmentality and its political, intellectual, and media hegemony.

In the Sikh case *RSW*'s counter-hegemonic narrative may be classed as tricontinental insofar as it seeks to deconstruct the Western academic and Sikh reformist or Singh Sabha construction of 'Sikhism' as a 'religion'. This is approached by engaging with the paradoxes that the imposition of the concept of religion upon *sikhi* has effected, culminating in an attempt to reclaim or reformulate indigenously inspired epistemologies such that they actively challenge the ethnocentrism of this modern colonial Western (p. 295) discourse, with the aim to re-create *sikhi* within modernity's globalizing condition of postcoloniality as a tricontinental *sikhi*(sm).

The sheer scale and depth of the West's failure on this point of truly acknowledging the colonial difference is often side-stepped by those who want to return to a European logic of non-contradiction otherwise understood within the imperial colonies as the logic of divide and rule. Hence the 'tricontinental' works of Bilimoria and Irvine (2009), Mignolo (2011), and Mandair (2009) provide a crucial bridge in their very refusal of past imperial epistemic paradigms, and in their risk of a genuine new point of departure, as a collective voice from beyond the West even as it originates in the West. Scholars who choose to risk speaking against the grain of Western state, media, and academic governmentality are able to do so because they themselves have been marked by the debilitating effects of the many-tiered violence of colonization. Their *inability to forget* its violence spawns a new vocabulary that promises to retain the memory of their past selves and their past traditions.

The postcolonial/postmodern perspective of tricontinental *sikhi*(sm) calls for a shift from translating the other through fixed representations towards a translation practice that respects the other's difference. This shift can be restated as one that moves from a single centre of enunciation as in a master–slave dialectic towards one that begins with multiple centres of enunciation and authority; viz., from an ontotheological Being to an interdependent 'pluriversal' becoming (Mignolo 2006: 435). This shift allows previously subjugated non-Western knowledges to shape the symbolic or sociopolitical order, and thus participate in the shared but competing expressions of the *non-possessable* universal or 'pluriversal' of public and political space—a shared space that cannot be colonized without the violence of oppressing other 'collateral sovereignties' (Bhogal 2011a).

Today the modern/colonial construction of Sikhism as a religion safely secures Sikhs in a backwardness as well as within a depoliticized space of private worship—coerced to respond to the mantra of modern secularity: where the only acceptable form of religion is one that performs a peaceful, non-violent, and purely subjective iteration. To break open

modern/colonial Sikhism and reinvigorate the repressed precolonial/modern *sikhi*, a temporary postcolonial *sikhi*(sm) needs to be courted, wherein a 'hybrid conceptuality in which European and Asian terms mutually affect and transform each other' (Mandair 2011: 243) is fostered. Such views lead to a redefinition not only of the anthropological project of knowing another, but also of academia, such that scholars listen to, and engage with, if not resurrect, subjugated and aporetic knowledges and epistemologies from their enforced sleep to make them politically active again, so that they may then participate in the 'competition between universals' upon the (first) world stage and thereby shape what the Universal itself can be—i.e. reconfigured as a pluriversal. It is precisely through the 'pluriversal', the 'co-contaminating', and the 'interdependent being-with-the-other' that the Way of the Gur-Sikh gains enunciation and differs so crucially from Christian Europe's 'religion' and Hindutva's '*Dharma*'—for *gur-sikhi* can only be voiced through many tongues and traditions. Hence it is precisely this being-with-the-other-as-oneself that makes the difference between a reified Sikhism (p. 296) (produced by a colonial/modern identity politics of self vs other; Sikhs vs Hindus/Muslims) and a *sikhi*(sm) yet to come, that recalls the tricontinental ethics apparent in the *sikhi* of the Guru period.

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Sikh Philosophy

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the relevance and viability of 'Sikh Philosophy' to the study of Sikhism. The term Sikh philosophy can be regarded as conceptually synonymous with terms central to the Sikh lexicon, such as *gurmat* (the teachings and practice of the Sikh Gurus). It refers on the one hand to internal discourses such as the variety of exegeses of Sikh scripture and related literature. On the other hand Sikh philosophy points towards the possibility of an external engagement with concepts of other cultures, a process that is materialized today not only through modes of public reasoning by Sikh thinkers and exegetes but through the everyday lived experience of cultural encounter of that ordinary Sikhs must undergo. Based on the degree of their repetition in Sikh literature and praxis, as well as their potential applicability to universally human themes, the chapter outlines a selection of key concepts for any future Sikh philosophy.

Keywords: Sikh philosophy, Gurmat, Sikhi, Temporality, guru, nam, shabad, hukam, haumai, karam, biraha

Introduction

WHY 'Sikh philosophy'? What exactly does the term 'Sikh philosophy' designate? It is almost never used by Western scholars of Sikh studies, whose preference has been for the cognate term 'Sikh theology' (McLeod 1990). By contrast one almost never hears of 'Buddhist theology' or 'Hindu theology'. This may be because for Buddhist and Hindu traditions there are indigenous categories (*darśanas* and *śastras* or *dhamma*/*dharma*) that broadly correspond to the Western category of 'philosophy'. Yet the Sikh lexicon also possesses similar categories such as *dharam* (signifying moral order) and especially the term *gurmat* (teaching of the Guru) which can claim correspondence to 'philosophy'. This raises two questions. First, why the preference for 'Sikh theology' in much of modern

Sikh studies scholarship? Second, is ‘Sikh philosophy’ anything other than a secularized version of Sikh theology?

To answer the first question, categories such as *gurmat*, *dharam* etc., took on a theological signification in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Singh Sabha attempt to erect definitive boundaries between an emergent and politically active Hinduism and the Sikh tradition, by constituting *Sikhi*(sm) as an entity that corresponded to the Western definition of proper religion. They did this by reformulating the idea of direct inner experience that is so central to the teaching of Sikh scriptures, in terms of a revelation from a personal God. No doubt there are secondary sources such as the *Purātan Janam-sākhī* which present Guru Nanak’s attainment of spiritual perfection in terms of the revelation model. The Singh Sabha scholars Christianized the *janam-sākhī* version of the Sultanpur experience by formulating extensive written commentaries on Sikh scripture in the form of proofs for the existence of God. The purpose of these commentaries was to ideologically separate what they considered as Sikh ‘revelation’ from the impersonal Vedic revelation based on an eternal cosmic sound. The problem with the *janam-sākhī* /revelation model is twofold, however. First, while Guru Nanak himself says nothing about *this* pivotal experience at Sultanpur, he does say a (p. 299) great deal about how direct experience and spiritual perfection can be attained by anybody and at any time. It is a theme that is repeatedly stressed in the Adi Granth (AG) by his successor Gurus, and their emphasis is not on hearing voices from God, but on changing the orientation of the human mind. Secondly, the Puratan Janam-sakhi is itself not at all consistent about the revelation model. Read closely, one can find strong suggestions of other, non-theological (philosophical) ways of explaining direct experience or attainment of perfection that are far more consistent with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. The emphasis here is on *explaining* or better still *interpreting*, which should give us a hint as to why I prefer the term ‘Sikh philosophy’ over ‘Sikh theology’, even though both have inherent limitations. As a mode of explanation or interpretation Sikh philosophy does not remain in thrall to its ‘original’ context, nor, paradoxically, does it ever lose sight of that ‘original’ context. ‘Sikh theology’ could not do this because it worked within the constraints of the peculiarly Western discourse of ontotheology, whose logic effectively subsumed much of modern Sikh thinking and practice. After its encounter with the West, modern *Sikhi*(sm) could therefore only develop in one direction —culturally, politically, and intellectually.

In answer to the second question, the simple answer is that ‘Sikh philosophy’ is far from a secularized theology. Unlike other disciplines philosophy has the capacity to self-reflexively engage with its own categories in such a way that it is able to refuse the very distinction between religion and the secular that is so entrenched in the Western system of thought. My contention is that there is already a living system of Sikh reasoning and

thought. It is not difficult to show that this indigenous mode of thinking has, and continues, to resist the religion-secular distinction, despite the Singh Sabha's religious apologetic. Many Sikh writers or prominent *kathākars* exemplify this tendency towards the 'philosophical' defined primarily through concepts and categories inherent within the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Because of its inherent self-reflexivity Sikh philosophy has much greater potential for evolving conceptual frameworks for interpreting the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, adapting them to the lived experience of individual Sikhs, to different cultural environments and for conceptually engaging non-Sikh cultures.

But before turning our attention to what these concepts might look like, we need to consider two further objections to the term 'Sikh philosophy'. The obvious one is that philosophy is a Western discipline and therefore unsuited both for the study of Sikh literature and of the Sikh life-world. This may be rebutted on the grounds that philosophy is no more Western than sociology, history, anthropology or other disciplines whose presence is now well established in Sikh studies. In fact the field of Sikh studies can itself be considered a form of ongoing engagement with the West, one that began in the colonial period and whose mark is firmly imprinted in all literature influenced by Singh Sabha scholarship. This encounter with Western thought and its categories is as much a reality for those who think and write in Punjabi as it is for those who write in English. If anything, 'philosophy' provides better access to understanding the framework and mechanisms of this encounter.

A second objection may be that one of the primary sources for Sikh philosophy, the Adi Granth, is not set out as a philosophical treatise or legal codes to be read silently, (p. 300) but as poetry intended to be sung or recited individually or in groups. While the range and power of these teachings are immediately evident to those who participate in devotional practices such as *kīrtan* and *nām simaraṇ*, the aesthetic framing of the hymns in the classical *rāga* and *tālas* of North Indian music, poses some resistance to any formal systemization, for example, in the form of philosophical conceptualization. This is especially the case when we try to render the content of these teachings in modern English, although modern Punjabi is no less problematic. It could therefore be argued that there is nothing to think about since the literature is purely devotional. If so, then surely the term 'Sikh theology' is the most suitable frame whether one likes it or not?

The rebuttal to this argument is relatively straightforward. The source literature is indeed poetic in nature, but there is a vast body of secondary literature that expounds and explicates the teachings of the Adi Granth through *modes of reasoning* that happen to be current in any social context. Moreover, there are well established and vibrant living traditions of oral exegesis of the Adi Granth (often simply referred to as *gurmat vichār*, or *gurbāṇī viākhiā*) that also expound its core teachings, again, using modes of reasoning

that are conventional at any particular time and social context. While these traditions are not doing ‘philosophy’ in the strictly academic sense of the term, they do perform a certain kind of conceptualization that helps ordinary Sikhs to think about, to reflect upon, important aspects of the Gurus’ teachings, and to relate them to the everyday world that they live in, that is to their lived experience. This work of thinking about (*vichār*, *viākhiā*), which inevitably involves forms of public reasoning, suggest that an implicit philosophical endeavour has always been under way since the time of the Sikh Gurus, one that became more explicit in the work of modern Sikh scholars. Sikh philosophy is therefore superior in that it links Sikh subjectivity or lived-experience directly to the task of interpreting Sikh scripture on a daily basis.

The Authority of Experience

Having raised and answered these objections, we are in a better position to gauge what the basic elements of Sikh philosophy might be, including, of course, a possible starting point. The problem of finding a starting point is no trivial matter, for it is connected to the question of authority of a particular discourse, in this case, the discourse of Sikh philosophy. Fortunately the question of authority is fairly well established in the writings of the Sikh Gurus and especially in Guru Nanak’s most important composition, the Japji. As early as the first few stanzas of this hymn, it becomes obvious that it is nothing less than Guru Nanak’s own testimony about the nature of his authority and the direct experience that authorizes it. Thus any discourse going by the name ‘Sikh philosophy’ would have to ground itself in relation to this direct experience and the possibility that others today can experience something similar, here and now. In other words Sikh philosophy would have to locate its authority within an existential as opposed to an epistemological (p. 301) (= transcendental) perspective. Which means that what the Sikh Gurus directly experienced, and what they exhorted their followers to try and achieve, was not the experience of a transcendental deity, but first and foremost, an experience of living within this world—an experience that is strictly within the horizon of life and death, or mortality. This is not to get rid of a personal ‘God’. Indeed reference to a ‘personal God’, who takes infinite names, abounds in the hymns of the Gurus. Rather, it is to suggest that the notion of personal deity is the result of an experience that comes up against the limits of language and should therefore be understood in a radically different way. It means that the object of the Gurus’ teaching (hence the subject matter of what we call Sikh philosophy) is existence itself, and that this existence, which is identical to non-existence, is neither different from, nor the same as, what we ordinarily term by ‘God’. The perspective that I am seeking should not only be suited to Sikh and non-Sikh sensibilities alike (it could not be otherwise), but more importantly it should allow

readers to connect their own lived experiences today to the poetry of the Sikh Gurus, to begin to understand why they felt it necessary to produce such writings, and to apply these to the contemporary world.

Perhaps the best way to explain this is to reconsider Guru Nanak's own testimony on the matter in the first few stanzas of this hymn, where he succinctly outlines the foundational elements of his teaching and any future Sikh philosophy. He begins by elaborating on the nature of the One, which is depicted as a symbol expressive of the nature of reality. His main point about the One is that in order to achieve a perfected awareness of the nature of reality as One, it has to be *experienced* all the time, rather than simply comprehended. Paradoxically, however, the very experience of this One disorients the functioning of what we call 'reality'. The experience of the One reveals a gaping hole in our knowledge of the One. In fact, knowledge and experience cannot be in the same place. To speak about this in conventional language, to bring experience into words, something has to give way. What gives way is our self, or ego, which has to shatter and be reformed but not in the place where it was before. This is the point that Guru Nanak is trying to make in the five stanzas that follow the *mūl mantar*, where he goes on to articulate some of the key concepts that become foundational to Sikh philosophy.

Evidently then, the work of 'Sikh philosophy' cannot simply be located either in the realms of epistemology or ontology in the sense that Western philosophy demarcates these terms. The discourse of 'Sikh philosophy', insofar as we conduct this discourse through Anglophone categories, must therefore be grounded in the encounter between concepts, Sikh and Western, and, as we shall see in the following interpretation of the first five stanzas, it points to a mode of thinking in which conceptuality is intrinsically linked to affect. In what follows I will try to outline how the basic 'philosophical' move made in the first five stanzas—a move which it needs to be stressed is at once affective and conceptual—orients the relationship between *key terms* (such as *hukam*, *nām*, *shabad*, *gurū*, *anhad nād*, etc.) and gives rise to *themes* (such as temporality, the nature of consciousness, action and grace, etc.) within the teachings of the Sikh Gurus that are existential-affective as opposed to merely conceptual and therefore speak to a lived existence.

(p. 302) The One: Experiencing Reality As Univocal

The Japji is recited daily by pious Sikhs and its opening formula, the *mūl mantar* or foundational statement, is repeatedly invoked in shortened form on almost every page of the Guru Granth Sahib. For Sikhs the *mul mantar* serves as a kind of creedal statement

that expresses through rich symbolism the experience undergone by Guru Nanak. Of special importance is the opening phrase *ik oankār* (lit.: One, whose expression emerges as Word) which consists of the numeral 1, a figure that is universally recognizable across cultures and languages and stands for the Absolute. This is followed by the sign *oan* (lit. the unfolding or emergence of the Word), and completed by the extended sign—*kār* which connects *oan* to the next two words in the *mūl mantar*: *sat(i)* (from the Sanskrit *satya* meaning existence or being) followed by *nām* (lit. the Name). The verse following the *mūl mantar* further elaborates the nature of the Absolute One as:

> Repeat:
> True in the beginning, true before time began
> True even now, Nanak, ever will be true.

(AG: 1)

However, an important question arises here. If, as Nanak claims, the truth of this Absolute One can be experienced here and now, what is it that stops each and every person from realizing this *all the time*? What stops us repeating such an experience of the One or of being One? More importantly, *how* could such an experience be repeated?

The answer for Guru Nanak is relatively straightforward. From the standpoint of someone who has actualized Oneness in his or her own existence, the Absolute is One (*ik*) and the One is Absolute. But our normal, everyday consciousness is such that it keeps us fundamentally separated from this One. Our everyday consciousness, which also generates our sense of normality, creates a wall or barrier that prevents us from actualizing Oneness in our lived existence (AG: 24–5, 250). The cause of this barrier is that we are fundamentally deluded about the true nature of Oneness.

What does this mean? What Nanak seems to be suggesting is that the numeral One is not a numeral amongst other numerals. Rather, One is simultaneously the most unique and the most deceitful. One is most unique in the sense that there is no other like it insofar as it names the truth of existence itself (*satnām*); it is a ‘1’ that cannot be owned or appropriated and thereby made part of a series of numbers (1+ *n*). On the other hand, ‘1’ is the most deceitful (AG: 33, 1080). This ‘1’ is the basis of knowledge as calculation which evaluates, measures each ‘1’ against every other ‘1’ and thus sets up a difference between them based on this evaluation. It is the ‘1’ that we regard as everyday normality but which is in fact mediated through the structure of the ego, the self which asserts its being on the basis of individuation (*haumai* or self-attachment as the mechanism **(p. 303)** of a subject which returns the self to self, generating the sense of ‘I am my own self’ or ‘I am self-existent’). This oneness makes ego the prior basis of all relationality. The fundamental problem with this ‘1’ is that it projects itself as an infinite proximity between

the numeral ‘1’ as the signifier of unity and identity, and the word ‘I’ as the signifier of the self’s identity. For Nānak, the correspondence between numeral and word, ‘1’ and ‘I’, is deceitful insofar as it reproduces this self as an identity that sets itself up in opposition to anything that is different. The ego thereby maintains its existence by erecting barriers against the outside world. It sees itself as a subject fundamentally separated from everything else which becomes an object for it. Nanak likens the subject–object mode of relating to delusion (*bharam*) created by duality (*dubidā:* seeing the ‘1’ as two) (AG: 226, 943, 1051).

But the problem, as Nanak sees it, goes much further than the simple assumption that the ego is the source of duality/deceit. For as he explains in the first stanza of Japji, from the standpoint of ego, the Absolute ‘1’ cannot be attained either through conceptual thought or through ritual purity no matter how much one repeats such thinking or ritual. Nor can the Absolute ‘1’ be obtained by practising silent austerities since these too fail to silence the ego’s constant chatter, nor indeed by satisfying one’s innermost cravings. The ego works by routing our experience of the Absolute ‘1’ through all manner of repetition: concepts, rituals, or austerities. Consequently the Absolute ‘1’ always fails to be experienced as such; the nearest we get is to re-present it as an object or an idol to constantly gratify the ego’s desire for permanence. How then does one overcome egotism? How can the ego’s illusory barriers be broken? How does one become self-realized?

Nanak answers this in the first and second stanzas of Japji. The ego’s boundary is broken by orienting the self towards an imperative that is always already inscribed with(in) the self and within the nature of all existence. Nanak’s name for this imperative is *hukam*—a very simple word that ordinarily means literally ‘an order or command’. But is one to recognize this imperative? Where is it located? And if it could be located, how does one go about actualizing it? Nanak’s answer to these questions is deceptively simple. He states:

> O Nanak, to recognize this imperative (*hukam*), for it to take effect,
> Let the ego not say: ‘I am myself.’
>
> (AG: 1)

Let the ego *not say* ‘I am myself’. Notice here how Nanak insists on two things simultaneously: (i) the emphasis on a certain kind of speech (not saying, the need to avoid saying something), and (ii) a psychic structure, the ego or ‘I am’, corresponding to a certain kind of language use centred around self-possession, so that the psycho-linguistic structure in question can be described as an ‘I am my-self’ (*haumai*). But what exactly does this imperative mean: that one should not say I am myself? Is this then an imperative to stay silent, to stop speaking altogether? If so, why would Nanak and other

mystics like him want to say so much, as is evident by how much they wrote? In any case Nanak has already mentioned in an earlier stanza that silence is not the answer to his problem. (p. 304) Rather, what Nanak seems to suggest is that there is a *different way* of speaking. To better understand this, it may be helpful to rephrase the imperative as: 'Let ego *say* I am not' which might then be interpreted as: speak/think/act in such a way that your existence stops revolving around, and therefore inscribing, the psychic formation 'I am my-self', but instead inscribes a different psychic formation: 'I am not'. In other words, the ego must become silent so that one can resist saying 'I am *my*-self' even as ego continues to be formed. For Nanak this silencing of the ego is not to be understood literally. Silence refers to a process of ego-loss, a self-enforced withdrawal of ego at the very moment that the self names itself as 'I' and thus starts to become an origin or absolute centre in relation to all other existing things including others.

So humanity's fundamental problem, according to Nanak, lies in not understanding the nature of the ego and its intrinsic connection to language. Interestingly, though, he suggests that the remedy to this problem also lies in the very constitution of the ego (AG: 466). If, as we have seen, ego constructs itself by a certain kind of language use (in the form of self-naming or the assertion of one's existence as the centre of all reality: 'I am my-self'), Nanak argues that it is also possible for ego to *re*-construct itself by perfecting its relationship to language, thereby perfecting the potential that all humans have for speech/thought/action. A question immediately arises here. How do we go about changing the way we normally relate to language in order to bring about the required change in the constitution of the ego? Note that this is a chicken-and-egg question. For we could equally well ask: how to bring about ego-loss in order to effect a change in our relationship to language?

Answers to these questions are not given directly by the Sikh Gurus. More often than not references to language and ego-loss are woven into the fabric of dense poetic verse. Nevertheless, because of the sheer repetition of these two themes it is possible to formulate the beginnings of a response—a response that will enable us to highlight and briefly discuss some of the leading themes in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. It will be helpful for me to start with the question of ego-loss and rejoin the question of language when we discuss the themes.

So how does one go from ego to ego-loss? Is it even practical or useful to ask such a question? Logically speaking, would it not lead us into self-annihilation? Fortunately there is a time-honoured way of asking this question without falling into the abyss. The way to do this would be to introduce a modicum of self-doubt into the overconfident assertion of *haumai* (I am my-self), so that one asks instead: *Why* do I exist? For Guru Nanak, to ask the question *why* about one's own self, is to have accepted the working of

the imperative (*hukam*) that had been inscribed within the self from the moment it came into existence. Indeed, this *hukam* is inscribed in the very nature of existence itself in the form of a universal law: everything that exists must eventually fall into non-existence. As the law of existence *hukam* governs both cosmos and consciousness at the same time. To recognize and imbibe *hukam* into one's existence in the form of the question 'Why do I exist?', as Nanak suggests, begins the process of decentring the ordinary ego-centric standpoint from where we give meaning to and evaluate all things in relation to our own individual consciousness and our own lives. To recognize *hukam* is to recognize the shortness of life and the ever-presence of death in life.

(p. 305) As the law of impermanence, the inevitability of returning to one's origin, *hukam* is a central category in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus reminding us not only of the mutual imbrications of macrocosm and microcosm, of cosmos and psyche, but also of the ego's confrontation with time. *Hukam* comprises a structure-without-structure around which revolve all other themes in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

Time and Finitude

The recurrent message in Guru Nanak's Japji, indeed throughout the Adi Granth, is to experience Oneness by reuniting the ego with non-ego, by recognizing and imbibing *hukam*—the law of impermanence. *Hukam* reminds us that the very element in which separation and unification can take place is time. Not surprisingly the theme of time is one of the most pervasive in Sikh scripture. However, the Gurus do not treat time as a category or entity distinct from the phenomenal world and from existing beings. The reason for this is that time can only be 'known' as *aporia*, an irresolvable contradiction, where each moment disappears in the very moment that it appears. As such time itself escapes the subjective versus object opposition that is generated by ego-centrism. By itself time is simultaneously subjective and objective.

For example, ordinarily we think of time as a static grid or a screen on which subjects appear to move between set coordinates, e.g. from past to future. From this dualistic perspective, time is perceived as always out-there, someone else's time, but never 'my time'. To collapse this dualism Guru Nanak adopts the well-rehearsed strategy of shrinking the entire passage of human life into a single night, depicting the night's progression in terms of infancy, childhood, youth, and old age (AG: 74).

To the person who refuses to confront the true nature of time as impermanent here and now, the Gurus project the true nature of time as one's own mortality that is always

already there and cannot be deferred. Through this depiction one is existentially confronted with the presence of death here in this very moment of my existence. Reversing our normal everyday understanding, the Gurus show how, from the perspective of finitude, the usual secure optimism of daylight and the waking state turn out to be illusions, whereas night and the dreaming state are better indicators of reality. The nature of time as the ultimate equalizer of fortunes is evident in many hymns which show that if one rises, one must ultimately fall, irrespective of whether that happens in one's own lifetime, as shown by the plight of the princesses who fell victim to Babur's marauding army (AG: 417) or whether it occurs after one's life has been lived, as portrayed in Shaikh Farid's austere verse (AG: 1380).

Time, however, is nothing if not paradoxical. According to the Gurus, it is neither real nor illusory, yet it is both; neither subjective nor objective, yet both. On the one hand time is the matrix in which the self is forged but ultimately trapped. Having forgotten its true nature as impermanent and becoming attached to worldly projects, beauty, youth and wealth; it suffers and grieves when these things are lost. On the other hand given (p. 306) that the locus of one's existence in time is the body, time is a gift. Likening the temporal body to a full blooded mare, the Guru urges man to saddle up and ride life in order to cross the sea of existence (AG: 575).

While ordinarily people lament the passing of time, grieving for things lost, and suffering pain when attachments are broken, the Guru teaches that attachment and suffering result only from the ego's habitual obstruction of the natural flow of time. By accepting time as the essence of our being and seeing every attempt to control time as ultimately illusory like the waves of the sea, which are here one moment, gone the next, one can be released from suffering which the Gurus refer to through the metaphors of the cycle of births and death. But if one learns to cultivate a mindfulness of *hukam* through the practice of constant remembrance of the Name, one can learn to renounce self-attachment as the insidious obstacle to the flow of time. With the obstruction removed the mind is freed from its self-imposed bindings, from its immersion in the cycle of birth and death and from the anxiety of being born into one life-form after another.

Mind, Consciousness, Ego

If all of existence is sustained by *hukam*, the law of infinite finitude, then human consciousness (or mind) too is subject to this inexorable law. But as the Sikh Gurus constantly remind us, humans develop a tendency to resist this natural law. Instead of aligning our consciousness with *hukam*, we become attached to worldly things including

our own egos, in the process increasing the separation of ego from its source. For Nanak this is humanity's fundamental problem. Nevertheless, he suggests that the solution to this problem also lies in the very nature and constitution of the ego. How can this be possible?

To grasp what Nanak is saying here it is helpful to look more carefully at the term *man* which refers to the totality of consciousness prior to its being split through the function of the self-conscious ego, and for which the corresponding English terms would be psyche, mind, memory, consciousness, heart, etc. *Man* (or mind) has two aspects for the Sikh Gurus. There is on the one hand the mind-as-ego which causes the split or separation in the first place. As self-conscious, mind-as-ego possesses a discriminatory awareness, a sense of duality which grasps or rejects something external. Fundamentally, it is that which falsely posits an 'other' (*dūjā*) as the basis of external reference and projects itself as the basis of normative reality. From Nānak's perspective, this mind-as-ego is afflicted by a chronic sickness (*dīragh rog*). This happens to be the aspect of mind that calculates, desires, manipulates, flares up in anger and indulges in negative emotions. It needs to constantly assert and reaffirm its existence by fragmenting, conceptualizing, and solidifying our experience of the temporal world. In fact Nanak refers to the mind-as-ego as *man pardesī*—my mind that has become a foreigner to itself. By creating a defensive boundary around itself it becomes estranged from what Nanak refers to as (p. 307) its true home (*ghar*), its beloved 'object', the mind-as-non-ego, or simply mind-as-other. Yet even though it is the one estranged from its beloved, the mind-as-ego disavows its own estrangement by positing that from which it is separated as stranger, as the other. In other words it projects its own activity and its guilt onto its other. Though separated by ego activity, however, the two aspects are intimately drawn to each other like lover and beloved. Together these aspects comprise a psychic whole.

The split (but ultimately unified) nature of *man* raises questions about the 'standpoint' from which Nanak enunciates and particularly to his signature (the proper name 'Nānak') which accompanies all of his hymns. Who is it that speaks in these invocations? Precisely to whom is Nanak's utterance addressed? Who is the other of Nānak's speech? Is it God? Is it the reader? The answer to both of these must be an emphatic no! Rather Nanak almost always speaks to his own mind, addressing it at times through tender love as when he says 'my beloved mind', at times by cajoling it 'my foolish mind' or at other times beseeching it as a lover beseeches her beloved not to leave her. However, because almost every hymn in the Adi Granth ends with the invocation 'O Nānak' the impression may be given that through the use of his proper name, Nanak is signatory to his own words, that these words belong to the person Nanak, thereby marking them with a seal of authority? Closer scrutiny shows that Nānak's speech is primarily directed to himself, to his own mind. More specifically Nānak's enunciation is invariably directed towards the ego-mind,

and comes from his unconscious mind (the mind which is at home) as a form of supplication which beseeches his conscious ego-mind (the mind which has become a stranger to itself) to join together in union.

If the ego-mind responds to the supplication of the unconscious mind, it can do so only through the gesture of renunciation. By renouncing its self-naming as 'I', it can unite with its (beloved) other from which it has come to be separated. This gesture of withdrawal is deeply traumatic for the ego-mind, for it requires the ego to cross the very barrier which it has erected as its own defence. Such a crossing constitutes a death (ego-loss). However, what is absolutely clear in the Gurus' teachings is that they do not advocate any kind of annihilation of the ego or its repression through excessive discipline, for as Nanak says, the ego contains its own cure (AG: 466: *dārū bī is mahi*)! Its cure is contained within it as its most intimate kernel, namely its beloved other. Because the nature of ego is intrinsically time, the cure involves a struggle not against the world but a struggle to exist within the world while being connected to the Unconscious mind. This struggle, however, can only be waged through the language of love ('Beloved mind, come back to me' etc.). If ego-mind is to come back it must cross its own boundary, and in so doing it must die to itself.

Action and Grace

Once the nature of ego and time are understood to be intrinsically linked, a rather more interesting and complex picture of ethical action emerges than the stereotypical **(p. 308)** opposition between a passive *karma* and an active notion of divine grace. For as Guru Nanak states in the Japji, 'Through deeds we've done we get this garment [of human existence], through grace we reach the door of liberation' (AG: 2). The Punjabi term for *karma*, as it occurs in the writings of the Sikh Gurus, is *karam*. It has three central connotations. First, it means to do, to perform, accomplish, make, to cause or effect. Second, when associated with the term ā*vāgavaṇ* (lit. coming and going, the cycle of births and deaths) it stands for fate, destiny, predestination, transmigration, insofar as all of these result from one's actions or deeds. The third meaning of *karam*, which happens to be derived from Arabic sources, is conceptually synonymous with the terms *nadar* and *kirpa* (implying grace) and the Perso-Arabic term *hukam* (order/command/will/call etc.). Indeed, the difference between the Brahmanic concept of *karma* and the Sikh articulation of it, encapsulated within the linked terms *karam/nadar/hukam*, boils down to very different concepts of time. Accordingly the interlinked notions of *karam*, *nadar*, and

hukam often appear in the same hymn, underscoring the essentially paradoxical unity between them (AG: 898).

In the writings of the Sikh Gurus, the Vedic notion of karma is replaced by the term *hukam*, the imperative that is inherent within the nature of existence. Instead of karma the Gurus speak of *karam*, deeds or actions that are aligned either with or against the working of *hukam*. Existence itself is depicted by the Gurus as an unfolding of the One, a writing (*lekh*) that is held in place by a fabric of space, time, and cause (the so-called three qualities or *tin gun*). The metaphor of writing signifies the nature of the One as a non-static or continually flowing action. Thus any action committed by an individual ego, which by definition is already separated from the One, works against the flow of nature, effectively creating eddies that attempt to freeze the flux of existence. By working against the flow of *hukam*, every egotistical action leaves traces of its signature (*kār*, *karnī*) within the temporal fabric. Instead of simply arising and passing out of existence as would be required by *hukam*, these karmic traces accumulate and prolong the separation between ego and the One.

As the context in which actions are performed, the operation of *hukam* can be likened to the law of conservation of energy, with the proviso that it is not limited to physical nature but includes the non-physical or psychic aspect of sentient beings such as thoughts, speech, desires, and feelings. Thus ‘good’ and ‘bad’ rebirths are not rewards or punishments but are consequences of specific actions. An action is like a seed which must bear fruit either in this life or the next (AG: 730).

What determines the nature of a karmic seed, however, is the nature of a particular action. Moreover, each and every action, even when this action is intentional as in thought, speech, desire, or feeling, is imprinted into the temporal fabric of the self through the work of memory. These imprints are confirmed tendencies which can be regarded as being somewhat like psychic genes. Actions repeated over time turn into tendencies or habits carried by an individual through this life into the next, unless a way is found to secure release from the imprinting process. Indeed there are certain meritorious actions, such as self-surrender, ego-loss, dying to the self, which, if performed, stop the imprinting process (AG: 420).

As the most meritorious of all actions, self-surrender, requires the intervention of a *satguru* either in person or in Word. The person who surrenders his or her mind to the (p. 309) Guru is called a *gurmukh* (‘one whose being is turned toward the Guru’) who no longer performs actions from the standpoint of ego (AG: 1414).

In contrast to the *gurmukh* stand the self-centred (*manmukh*) who continue to act from the standpoint of ego. The actions of a *gurmukh* arise spontaneously.

The intertwined nature of *karam* and *nadar*, of the *gurmukh* and *manmukh*, is perhaps best illustrated by references in the Gurus' hymns to transmigration and the cycle of births and deaths. Insofar as both the *gurmukh* and the self-willed must perform actions in time, the cycle of births and deaths provides a mythical perspective on time and life which gives rise to sympathy and respect for all living beings. That all existing things are subject to birth, death, and passage between different forms means that everything is absolutely interconnected. This interconnectedness of all existence is the only proper starting point for ethical thinking.

Viraha: The State of Fusion–Separation

An important consequence of the concept of mind as Nanak elaborates it is that it at once refines and negates the monotheistic concept of self/God as a relationship between inside and outside. In Nanak's teaching this relationship is played out as the movement of love between lover (mind-as-ego) and beloved (unconscious mind as non-ego). Monotheism in the strict sense becomes almost redundant in the movement and crossings of love. Or when this love relationship is consummated (fusion), its outward manifestation is as an existence in the world that is radically interconnected to all others. This death of ego-mind, or its capitulation to the embrace of the lover (unconscious mind), is constituted as a realization that our singularity is punctuated by the presence of other existing beings, not simply humans. A fact which opens up the possibility of ethics and politics based on a state of mind that keeps its two halves fused together in a state of balance.

Part of the problem of monotheism is that it remains within a standpoint from which reality is perceived dualistically in terms of either/or oppositions: One/Many, existence/non-existence, form/formlessness, good/evil, etc. Such a standpoint, however, replaces the immediate experience of the One with the dualistic representation of that experience. For Nanak the One cannot be attained by simply annihilating such oppositions or by elevating one term over another. Rather the unity proper to the Absolute must remain a paradox, that is, as the minimal coincidence of self with other. Nanak's term for this coincidence of self and other is *birhā*. Resisting all description except through paradox, *birhā* signifies a link between self and other that exists only in erasing itself. *Birhā* is a point at which self and other touch and fuse but are ever in danger of separating (AG: 637, 1378). In *birhā* separation is the same as union and vice versa. To speak of this state the Gurus invoke the intensely emotional imagery of the virgin bride who anticipates the embrace of her husband on her wedding night, or the wife's longing for her husband's return from a far-off land. Bride, virgin, wife are simply metaphors for a self which is individuated and which pines (p. 310) for the union with the other. The emotion invoked

here is that of intensely painful longing combined with the ecstasy of fusion. The pain signifies the minimal link to the self which cannot be broken for otherwise fusion would mean annihilation of self and world. Hence, self and therefore separation always remain but within ecstasy. Alternatively, the ecstasy of fusion is always there but tinged with the pain of separation. This state of fusion–separation where knowledge becomes non-knowledge is not a metaphysical ideal but a lived reality, a state of liberation, in which the liberated person *instinctively* avoids relating to everything else in terms of subject–object duality. Such a realized person no longer re-presents the Absolute since the conscious distinction between self and other, I and not-I, lover and beloved, *nirguṇ* (non-existence or a being that cannot be predicated) and *sarguṇ* (existence or a being that can be predicated) has disappeared leaving an ecstatic and purely spontaneous form of existence (*sahaj*: literally equipoise).

In the writings of the Sikh Gurus, a person who maintains this state of *birhā* and its attendant balance of separation–fusion, self–other, action–inaction, attachment–detachment in the course of daily life is known as *gurmukh* (literally one whose speech is centred on the Guru-Word, the Unconscious Word, the *satguru*). The *gurmukh* lives in stark contradiction to the *manmukh* (one whose existence is self-centred). The distinction between *gurmukh* and *manmukh* is more than just an ethical one since ‘ethic’ implies some minimal binding to some norm or duty. Rather the distinction implies a freedom from the bindings of the self, which gives rise not to an annihilation of self but to a spontaneity of speech-thought-action. Whether this transition is viewed epistemologically as a shift from duality to Oneness or existentially from *manmukh* to *gurmukh*, the transition itself revolves around the efficacy of the Name (*nām*) which is both the object of love and the means of loving attachment to one’s beloved. The term *nām* names the impossible point of contact between self–other, separation–fusion. Attunement to *nām* constitutes a wordless communication between self and other which corresponds to the primordial love through which all existent things relate to each other before individuation takes over.

In Guru Nanak’s hymns *nām* is not a particular word or mantra. It is inscribed within, yet manifests as speech in which traces of ego are constantly erased as they arise. As the constituting link between interiority and worldly action, *nām* arises involuntarily in the *gurmukh*’s speech through the practice of constantly holding in mind the remembrance of death (*nām simaraṇ*). But *nām* cannot be obtained through self-effort alone. Its attainment depends on the grace or favourable glance (*kirpā*, *nadar*) of a spiritual preceptor or a Guru.

Guru as Word: Śabda, Nām, Satguru

As one of the central terms in the Sikh lexicon, the term ‘guru’ takes on theologico-political connotations that go well beyond its meaning and application in the broader South Asian context, where it is limited to a teacher of worldly knowledge (p. 311) or a conveyor of spiritual insights. In Sikh tradition the term guru automatically incorporates this earlier meaning, referring thereby to the personality of Guru Nanak and his nine successor Gurus. Metaphorically it refers to the same principle of spirituality manifested in all ten Gurus; practically it serves to indicate the authority vested in the name ‘Nanak’. Thus the hymns of the different Gurus in the Adi Granth are cited according to their respective composers as sequential locations (*mohalā*) for the manifestation of the name ‘Nanak’. Just before the death of the tenth Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh, spiritual authority was vested in the Adi Granth (henceforth Guru Granth Sahib), leading to the doctrine of scripture or Word as Guru (*śabda-gurū*).

The logic of this doctrine notwithstanding, the question arises as to who was Nanak’s guru? Who or what was his source of ultimate authority? It may be helpful here to look at several ways in which Nanak himself answers this question:

> *The Word is my guru, my mind attuned to it is its disciple.*
> *I stay detached through the Unspoken Word.*

(M1, *Siddh Gosht* 44, AG: 943)

> I narrate the Word of my Beloved as it comes to me.

(M1, *Tilang* 5, AG: 722)

Elsewhere Nanak says: ‘I myself do not know how to speak, for as I am commanded, so I speak’ (AG: 566). What is interesting here is that despite speaking much, Nanak says categorically that *he* cannot speak, he himself is silent; rather, he claims, it is the Word that speaks not Nanak. As we have noted in the discussions above, in order to be vested with authority, Nanak must silence the speech of his ego (the faculty that says ‘I am’) by renouncing his claim to authority over what is spoken. Nanak’s renunciation of authority is indicative of the fact that his own preceptor was not a human guru but an impersonal principle: the Word (*śabda*) which Nanak also calls *satgurū* (lit. the true authority) a term that implies a personal relation to the Word. Personal or impersonal, only the Word speaks truly about the nature of existence.

As *anhad śabda* the Word itself speaks or resounds without being spoken. This sounds like a tautology but actually indicates a mode of communication in which ego is no longer

from the grasp of ego, words are no longer given value according to their degree of correspondence to things, but instead arise from an internalized mode of speech that occurs between conscious (ego) and Unconscious (non-ego) mind. The unspoken Word arises from a mode of communication in which the mind speaks with itself, giving the impression of a departure from the standards of everyday social reality in which speech is meaningful if it makes sense to everybody. The point of this seemingly impossible communication is to rejoin the two aspects of the dualistic mind separated by ego sense. Devoid of ego-traces the Word that is so minted in the mind appears as an expression of wonder (*vismād*) at the nature of existence, that things exist at all rather than nothing. Just as all creation simply happens without asking why, so the unspoken Word arises without connection to intention, desire, or will.

(p. 312) Thus Guru Nanak's authority, what makes him Guru or *gurmukh*, is derived from the *satgurū = śabda*. But *satgurū* as *śabda-gurū* manifests only when the ego erases its own traces but without annihilating itself. This self-erasure is another name for the love between self and other that enables them to be One even in separation. Thus Nanak's authority is derived from his own experience of the One.

This experience is authoritative in as much as it entails a radical reorientation of consciousness which constitutes what is normally understood as liberation. Thus the liberative reorientation of consciousness that the Sikh Gurus are looking for must happen primarily at the level of language or Word (*śabda*), such that one's ordinary relationship to language, which is based on self-naming where the 'I' is attached to a primary identification to its own image and name, is transformed by its attunement to the Word as *nām* (the Name). *Nām* is the link by means of which all existing things acknowledge their non-existent source, as well as the means by which each self acknowledges its link to its voided other.

Nām: Beyond the Personal and the Impersonal

As the Sikh Gurus articulate it, *nām* cannot simply be reduced to God's Name: it illustrates the paradox of the One and the Many. Throughout the Adi Granth, *nām* serves to replace what is named in other traditions as 'God', whose name is no more than a tool for calling this entity to mind at will. For the Gurus, any 'God' or 'god' that is outside of the ego is to remain subject to the operation of *māyā*, the veil of illusion. Although 'God' is referred to as the highest or ultimate etc., these superlatives still only refer to a highest or ultimate entity which remains within a scale determined by man. Thus *nām* signifies that divinity can only be experienced through the meeting of eternity and time,

absolute and finite. *Nām* is therefore not so much an indicator of transcendental experience as it is of the possibility of all possible experience. The term *nām* is as much theological as it is political. To see how this might be the case, it is helpful to relate our discussion of *nām* to two other terms used by Guru Nanak to refer to his experience of the One: the terms *nirguṇ* and *sarguṇ*.

Nirguṇ: the experience of the divine as ineffable, without qualities, beyond naming, signifies the divinity's detachment or non-existence; hence either 'God' has no Name or God's Name is the signifier of emptiness. *Sarguṇ*: 'God' has infinite names, corresponding to infinite attributes, and insofar signifies absolute fullness, or a full involvement of the divinity in all things. Yet for Nanak these two opposing terms are also the same: *nirguṇu āpi sarguṇu bī ohī* (being absent the same One is also fully present (AG: 287)). So 'God' is beyond, yet 'God' actualizes himself through the relation of equivalence, and therefore substitutability, between all names and things. As there is equivalence between all things, so God's ineffability/absence and his fullness/presence are different aspects of the same formless one: *sarguṇ nirguṇ niraṇkār* (AG: 290).

(p. 313) *Nām* therefore names this equivalential connection (*sarguṇ-nirguṇ*) as an ineffable fullness, which is to say that *nām* is a signifier of emptiness, an empty signifier. So what we regard as an entity called 'God' is better termed *nām*, such that *nām* implies an entity that is involved in the world but is at the same time absent. Only *nām* can signify this impossible relation between absence/presence, non-existence/existence, empty/full, etc. And *nām* can do this precisely because it is part of an already existing discursive network of signifiers, a symbolic order that we call language. *Nām*, in other words, is part of the fabric of ordinary and everyday experience. *Nām* therefore helps us make sense of the divine paradox (*nirguṇ-sarguṇ*) by putting the impossible, the beyond, the absent, to play in the context of finitude (AG: 387). I can only experience the Absolute as utterly empty (*nirguṇ*) if I can project it into the contingent, everyday experience of particulars (*sarguṇ*) and therefore be involved in the world. Consequently *nām*, as experience, is to experience the detachment (*nirguṇ*) while living, speaking, and being involved in ordinary worldly experience (*sarguṇ*). If something is experienced by the mystic, then this experience, if it is not to remain abstract or detached, must actualize itself through attachment to a particular, to that which is finite and, therefore, to contingent events. If *nām* names the mystical experience that desires ultimate fullness, then *nām* must accompany all positive experience. This is also the condition of all authority, of all sovereignty and consequently of the political. Authority or sovereignty is such only if it is radically empty or represented through the empty signifier that is *nām*.

This is why the Gurus prefer *nām*, a term which names the intricate link or experience between self and other. In contradistinction to the 'I' generated by the ego's cravings, which operates an economy of narcissism precisely to gain a return to oneself, hence self-ownership as the beginning of ownership of the other, Name is the only capital that cannot be reduced to the status of a thing and circulated in an economy of exchange. Nanak's instruction in this regard is very pragmatic: one cannot simply escape the economic nature of one's existence in the world driven by the self's desire to make everything its own property. But it is possible to change the very nature of this economy by transforming narcissistic self-love into a love of the Name.

Moreover the Gurus suggest a practice for transforming the ego-based economy of ordinary life in which we accumulate knowledge, exchange entities, transact commerce, reasonable rules, plans and projects, rites and rituals. This practice is *nām simaran*: the constant holding in remembrance of the Name, which goes beyond mechanical repetition to become a spontaneous form of love between self and other. The paradoxical dialectic here between appropriation of *nām* and disappropriation of ego becomes more evident from the etymology of the word *simaran*. Derived from the Indo-European root *sṃr-* (to remember, hold in mind) the term has traditionally been understood to resonate with the Sanskrit terms *mr-* and *maraṇā*, to die or pass away, suggesting that *simaraṇ* is a form of remembrance which automatically lets go or renounces. Stated differently, *simaraṇ* is first of all remembrance of one's own mortality, of the ego's death, remembering which one awakens to the Name. *Nām simaraṇ* is therefore the condition of experience of finitude. Alternatively, the experience of finitude is the condition for the experience of *nām*. Because *nām simaraṇ* is not a metaphysical concept but a (p. 314) concrete sacrificial practice for transforming memory, as that function of mind which weaves time into the structures that manipulate our existence and thinking, it can also be viewed as a way of transforming worldly time and existence. It provides a means for the individual to participate and make changes in the world. *Nām simaraṇ* is as inherently political as it is spiritual. As a result such conceptual dualities as those between religion and politics, mysticism and violence become superfluous. This is evident in the lives of the Sikh Gurus for whom there was no contradiction between mystical experience and the life of a soldier, householder, or political leader.

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Sikh Institutions

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Abstract and Keywords

There are numerous objects, practices, and organizations that could be properly considered under the heading ‘Sikh Institutions’. This entry focuses on the gurdwara (*dharamsala*)—the Sikh institution par excellence and epitome of Sikh sacred space—and a selection of the affiliated institutions that developed alongside it. This article links the gurdwara to notions of *sangat* and Guru, and to the institutions of *langar* and the *nishan sahib*. The article sketches both the identity and historical development of the gurdwara as the nexus of the spiritual, social, and political dimensions of Sikh life. The place of *karah prasad*, *miri-piri*, and the Akal Takht are brought into the discussion.

Keywords: dharamsala, sangat, Guru, langar, nishan sahib, karah prasad, miri-piri, Akal Takht

Introduction

The gurdwara, or *dharamsala*, is an institution intimately associated with Sikh identity and faith. In order to understand the gurdwara as a Sikh institution, three assumptions must be made clear. First, one cannot assume the gurdwara of the present is the gurdwara of the past. Institutions, Sikh or otherwise, are not natural. They do not come into being fully formed. They are the products of a series of historical circumstances, manoeuvrings, and contingencies. In order to understand the gurdwara as an institution, one must account for the origins, meanings, and functions through its historical development. Second, the gurdwara is one element, albeit the central one, in a network of interrelated and mutually supporting institutions. In order to understand the place of the gurdwara, one cannot see it in isolation from other closely affiliated institutions. Inseparable from the gurdwara are the *sangat* (the congregation of the devout), the *sangat*’s relationship to the Guru, the *langar* hall, and the Sikh banner (*nishan sahib*)

which is flown wherever the Guru is present. Third, to understand the gurdwara as simply ‘religious’ space disenfranchises other inherent functions of the gurdwara and its affiliated institutions. Indeed, it is often asserted that Sikhs ‘constitute a distinct religious-cum-social-cum-political-cum-cultural community and that it is either impossible, unwarranted, or ill-advised to attempt to delineate components of this unique Sikh identity’ (Dusenbery 2008: 168). This applies as much to the institution of the gurdwara as it does to Sikh identity as a whole.

The Nanak-Panth and the Pre-Khalsa Period

At the centre of Nanak-panthi faith and identity is the *dharamsala*. The *dharamsala*, the institutional forerunner and conceptual complement to the gurdwara, is inseparable (p. 318) from the *sangat*. At the time of Guru Nanak (d. 1539), Sikhs gathered together in *dharamsala* to sing *kirtan* and to listen to the Guru. The *dharamsala* is where the *sangat* gathered, but more importantly, *dharamsala* is the *sangat* itself. The true Guru (Vahiguru) is present in the *dharamsala* and thus in the *sangat*. The true Guru is present whenever the *sangat* assembles. Therefore, the true Guru is known in *sangat*. But Guru Nanak also speaks of gurdwara. For Nanak, gurdwara is the ‘place’ where the *shabad* is known, truth is praised, and liberation quickened (Grewal 2006: 535). The gurdwara is thus tied to the notion of grace (*prasad*) through which the true Guru is known and through whom one is brought nearer to the ‘door of the Guru’ (gurdwara), the liberated state. J. S. Grewal has argued Guru Nanak’s use of ‘*dharamsala*’ and ‘gurdwara’ are metaphorical. In Nanak’s usage, *dharamsala* is the earth (*dharti*) created by *hukam*. It is the space in which merit is earned, *kirtan* is sung, service performed, and grace (*prasad*) received (Grewal 2006: 534). Likewise, ‘gurdwara’ for Nanak is employed to speak of the ‘abode of the Guru’ (Grewal 2006: 535). From its inception, the *dharamsala*, the *sangat*, and the presence of the true Guru’s grace through *shabad* are bound as single conceptual notion, albeit a metaphorical one in the case of Nanak. One element is not an attribute of another; the presence of one logically implies the presence of the others.

The first century of the Nanak-panth was accompanied by two shifts in the way in which *dharamsala* and gurdwara were understood. First, the two terms were used not just in a metaphorical sense, but increasingly became used in an empirical sense to describe a physical place of worship (Grewal 2006: 534–5). Second, while all gatherings of the *sangat* were *dharamsala*s, the *dharamsala* at which the human Guru was present was known as gurdwara. Thus, the gurdwara was unique among the *dharamsala*s. While the true Guru was present at all gatherings, it was the presence of the human guru that

distinguished the *dharamsala* from the gurdwara. This understanding is confirmed by Bhai Gurdas: the '*dharamsala* in which the Guru is personally present is gurdwara' (Grewal 2006: 536). Thus, by the end of the first century of the Panth, *dharamsala*, *sangat*, *shabad*, grace, and the Guru's presence have come to occupy identical metaphorical, empirical, and cognitive space.

As institutions, the *dharamsala* and the *sangat* are also the locus of an ethical life of humility, honesty, and service (*seva*). Among the distinctive service opportunities among the *sangat* is the distribution of *karah prasad* in the *dharamsala*. The origin, the procedure for preparing, the meaning, and the practice of distributing *karah prasad* among the early *sangat* is unclear. It is not known for certain how exactly *karah prasad* was prepared, nor the precise meaning of its distribution and consumption, prior to the eighteenth century. To be sure, the Janam-sakhis refer to Guru Nanak preparing *degh prasad*. When Mardana consumed that *prasad*, his hunger was thoroughly satisfied. But Bhai Gurdas makes clear that preparing and distributing *maha*prasad (McLeod 2003: 216) was an established and essential practice among the *sangat* and contributed to the unique identity of the Nanak-panthis. Setting aside the question of nomenclature, what is clear is the grace (*prasad*) of the true Guru found empirical and symbolic expression in the distribution and consumption of some form of *prasad* in the early years of the Panth.

(p. 319) The institution of *dharamsala*/gurdwara was accompanied by the parallel institutionalization of the *Guru ka Langar* (the Guru's dining hall). *Langar* provided opportunities for *seva* (service). It was a practical means to challenge established social conventions surrounding caste, and the preparation of and the eating of food. It was a religio-social space in which the *sangat* could live in accordance with the *hukam*. The institutional importance of the *langar* in Guru Arjan's time is confirmed by Bhai Gurdas who explicitly identifies 'grinding corn' and 'keeping the fires burning under the oven' as opportunities for *seva* among the *sangat* in the *dharamsala* (Grewal 2006: 536). However, little is known with certainty about the origins of the Guru's *langar* and its development as an institution. *Langar*-type practices were certainly established conventions among other groups in fifteenth-century India, most notably the Sufis and Nath Yogis (Mann 2004: 27). It also remains a matter of debate as to which Guru institutionalized the specifically anti-caste character of *langar*. The sole reference to *langar* related by the Guru Granth Sahib is from the *Ramkali ki Var* which links the practice of distributing food with Guru Angad and his wife Mata Khivi. But no reference is made to egalitarianism for its rationale. However, W. H. McLeod affirms that while Guru Nanak and Guru Angad certainly maintained *langar*s, the anti-caste character of *langar* was 'evidently present in the time of Guru Amar Das' (McLeod 2009: 121) 'who borrowed from the Sufis the

practice of compulsory commensality or eating together, thereby giving practical expression to the first Guru's ideal' (McLeod 1997: 23–4).

The pre-Khalsa *dharamsala* was also a political institution whose representative symbols became institutions tied to the gurdwara. These symbols, first metaphorical then empirical, underscored the authority of the human Guru and the sovereignty of the true Guru. For Nanak, the *dharamsala* was the earth (*dharti*) created by *hukam*. Kartarpur, the City of the Creator, was conceived as a place of justice where the divine will (*hukam*) is carried out. For Nanak, the true Guru was *saccha padshah*, the true sovereign, whose *hukam* supersedes all temporal authority. Thus, the *sangat* assembled as *dharamsala* in Kartarpur symbolized the establishment of divine sovereignty on earth.

But Kartarpur was also where the Guru (Nanak) was present in the *dharamsala*. As Guru, Nanak's authority in Kartarpur was evident by the fact that he 'used to sit on a [raised] platform made from pieces of bricks on which was spread a mat of dry grass' while a *rababi* would play and sing *kirtan* (Grewal 2006: 538). The construction of the Harmandir at Ramdaspur (Amritsar) as a permanent gurdwara gave further institutional expression to the Guru's authority. At the Darbar Sahib, Guru Arjan sat on a raised platform (*takht*: throne) and beneath a canopy. Bhatts eulogized the majesty of the divine court, the throne, the canopy, the flag, and the fan (*chauri*) comparing the Guru's rule to that of King Janak's (Singh 2006: 123). Moreover, the Darbar Sahib transformed the Panth's understanding of political authority. Legitimate temporal authority was no longer tied to kings, kingdoms, and place, but to rulership, power, and process based on truth, justice, and humility in tune with the *hukam* of the true Guru (Singh 2006: 119–21).

The administrative authority of the true Guru, and by extension the *sangat*, was further institutionalized with the construction of the Akal Takht, the throne of the (p. 320) Timeless One. The Akal Takht's relation to the Harmandir is conceptualized and symbolized as *miri-piri*. Constructed under the supervision of Guru Hargobind, the Akal Takht of the early seventeenth century was the site where the Guru, his courtiers, and the *sangat* could meet to consider issues of justice and strategies of response to Mughal manoeuvrings of the day. The Akal Takht was the locus of *miri* (temporal authority); the Harmandir the epicentre of *piri* (spiritual authority). The Guru was the holder of both.

The authority of the Guru was represented by a flag or banner (*nishan sahib*) which marked the place of the *dharamsala*/gurdwara. The earliest reference to a flag is attributed to Guru Angad, who refers to 'a banner of honour' that is obtained by the grace of the eternal Guru (AG 150). The first Guru with whom a flag is associated, however, is Guru Amardas (Singh 2003), whose 'patience has been his white banner since the beginning of time, planted on the bridge to heaven' (AG 1393). Likewise, the 'banner of

dharam' is held by Guru Arjan (AG 1404). However, the flag has undergone significant changes throughout that history and has developed different forms across the panth. The banner associated with Guru Amardas is said to have been white, though no insignia is noted (AG 1393). Guru Arjan maintained a white banner, though may have inscribed on it 'Ikk Onkar' (Singh 2003), the opening words of the *Mul Mantar* declaring the essential unity of the Eternal Guru. The *nishan sahib* is most popularly associated with Guru Hargobind. Under him, the colour and insignia of the *nishan sahib* appears to have been altered. Guru Hargobind's standard was saffron, a colour borrowed perhaps from the Rajputs and one that became identified with self-sacrifice and martyrdom, particularly in the Khalsa panth. It is quite possible that in addition to 'Ikk Onkar', Guru Hargobind had included two swords, representing *miri-piri*, on his standard (Singh 2003). Patterned banners are also recorded in contemporary paintings and illustrations. As an extension of *miri-piri* and its representation by the Harmandir and the newly instituted Akal Takht, Guru Hargobind installed two *nishan sahibs*. The Akal Dhuja (the timeless flag) or Satguru ka Nishan (the standard of the Eternal Guru) of the Akal Takht flew at a slightly lower height than the *nishan sahib* at the Harmandir, thus affirming the authority of *piri* (spiritual) over *miri* (temporal) (Singh 2003).

Prior to the rise of the khalsa, the *dharamsala*/gurdwara as a working empirical institution was established. It is inextricably linked to the *sangat* whose assembly made present the true Guru in the form of *shabad*. It was through the *sangat* that one received the grace (*prasad*) of the true Guru spiritually, but also empirically in the form of *degh/ maha-prasad*. The *dharamsala*/gurdwara provided the opportunity to live in accordance with the *hukam*. This was done through *seva* such as the preparation and distribution of *prasad* among the assembled *sangat* or in the religio-social setting of the Guru's *langar*. The Darbar Sahib further institutionalized the Guru's association with royalty. Additionally, the temporal and spiritual authority of the Guru is institutionalized in the Harmadir and the Akal Takht and symbolized by the two swords and possibly displayed on the *nishan sahib*.

(p. 321) The Khalsa and the Pre-Colonial Period

The founding and subsequent rise of the Khalsa in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries resulted in a reconceptualizing of the institutions of *sangat*, Guru, and gurdwara. Accompanying this revisioning, the affiliated institutions of *karah prasad* and *langar* began to be codified in the emergent *rahit-nama* literature. The Sikh flag too was transformed to reflect the increasingly normative values of the Khalsa. These

institutional adaptations not only reflected the historical contingencies of the time, but served to sharpen the boundaries between the *sangat* and those outside of it. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the gurdwara, Guru, *sangat*, *karah prasad*, *langar*, and the *nishan sahib* became institutions tethered to Khalsa identity and faith.

With its founding by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, the Khalsa identified itself as the true *sangat*. The earlier, pre-Khalsa notion of the Guru's presence in the *sangat* was appropriated to this new identification making the Khalsa the true *sangat*. The Khalsa was the form of the Guru and the Guru dwelled in the Khalsa as the *shabad bani* (Grewal 2006: 539).

Guru Gobind Singh declared an end to human guruship, conferring the title of Guru on the Granth. In doing so, Gobind Singh bonded the *sangat*, Granth as Guru, and the *dharamsala*. The *dharamsala* became the *asthan* of the Guru (Granth Sahib). It was incumbent upon Sikhs to build and maintain an *asthan* of the Guru wherever 'there are five, seven, 10 or 100 Sikh homes in a habitation' (Grewal 2006: 539). The *prakash asthan* (repository of light) essentially closed the gap between the *dharamsala*s and the gurdwara making the two effectively interchangeable. 'Logically, the *sangat* as the form of the Guru made the *dharamsala* as important as "the door of the Guru" (gurdwara)' (Grewal 2006: 539). The *asthan* was the house (*ghar*) of the Guru and therefore was always present and accessible to the (Khalsa) *sangat*.

In the eighteenth century, the *dharamsala*/gurdwara was the centre of Sikh religious and social life. Though first and foremost sacred space, the *dharamsala* (gurdwara) precincts were expanded to serve a range of functions. The complex now included, among other things, lodgings (*serai*) for pilgrims, and the *dharamsalia* (*granthi*) taught Gurbani and *kirtan* to Sikh boys (Grewal 2006: 541). By the eighteenth century, the gurdwara had become religious, social, political/administrative, and cultural marker of Sikh identity. As J. S. Grewal has observed: 'The importance of the *dharamsala* was epitomized in the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur which, according the the *Gursobha* of Sainipat, as undertaken deliberately to protect the *dharamsala*, among other things. In fact, the *dharamsala* symbolized the Sikh faith as the most visible Sikh institution' (Grewal 2006: 538).

Developing alongside this process of institutional reconceptualization was the codifying of the preparation, distribution, and significance of *karah prasad*. The development (p. 322) and institutionalization of *karah prasad* has been linked in popular memory with the Khalsa, its association with iron, and with the emerging *rahit-nama* tradition of the early eighteenth century. It is highly probable that what Guru Nanak was said to have

prepared as *degh* and what Bhai Gurdas had referred to as *maha**prasad* 'was significantly altered during, or more likely, shortly after the time of Guru Gobind Singh by the preparation of the *prasad* in a *karahi* or iron pan. This linked it to the Khalsa veneration for iron and gave rise to the name *karah prasad*' (McLeod 2003: 216–17).

As an evolving normative tradition, the *rahit-nama* literature reflects the development of Sikh attitudes concerning the preparation and distribution of *karah prasad*. The early texts give considerable attention to its preparation: the purity of the person making the *karah prasad*, the recitation of the appropriate hymns or expressions, and the cleanliness of the utensils and space. The texts are careful to lay out the proper order in which the *karah prasad* is to be distributed, beginning with the person attending the Guru Granth Sahib followed by 'five initiated sons/daughters of Sikhs' (who represent the original *panj piare*) and, finally, to the others. Concerning the distribution of *karah prasad* to the rest of the *sangat*, the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* states that it should be distributed to all without favouritism or discrimination, though a Sikh should not eat *karah prasad* in the company of Muslims (McLeod 2003: 217). The normativity of the Khalsa within the *sangat*, the centrality of Guru (as Granth), and the crystallizing boundaries between the *sangat* and those beyond it (in this case, Muslims) are the key concerns in the process of articulating the institution of *karah prasad* in the eighteenth century.

The religio-social symbolism of *karah prasad* was not, however, to institutionalize equality as the later Sikh tradition affirms. Citing the *Sakhi Rahit ki* attributed to Bhai Nand Lal, W. H. McLeod has suggested that in the eighteenth century, the institution of *karah prasad* 'symbolized…humble submission of the worshipper to the Guru, and the sense of comfort and reassurance which resulted. For this reason *karah prasad* would always be offered to the Guru Granth Sahib before it was consumed' (McLeod 2003: 216). Moreover, 'the frequency and fervor with which the sacrament was observed suggests a cause which lies beyond a concern for equality and which finds an explanation in the need for communicating a sense of blessing and assurance to the worshipper' (McLeod 2003: 217–18). As with the *sangat*, the Guru (as Granth), and the *dharamsala*/gurdwara, the institution of *karah prasad* was reconfigured along Khalsa lines. The values of the Khalsa are thus reinforced to the point that the Khalsa becomes the model for and of the *sangat*. To be in the true *sangat* was to behave as a Khalsa.

The few extant references to *langar* seem to point to two key features of this developing institution. First, the authors of the *rahit-nama* passages concerning the *langar* are occupied with understanding it within the context of the Khalsa way of life. The issue of caste equanimity as a rationale for *langar* practice is absent in the early *rahit-nama*s. Aside from an oblique reference denying brahmans the privilege of having others sit

behind them in *pangat*, the *Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* is silent on the issue (McLeod 2003: 229). However, this lack of concern for caste equanimity may be explained, at least to some degree, by the strong association the text has with Chhibbar brahman interests. Likewise, the *Desa Singh Rahit-nama* makes clear its acceptance of caste (McLeod (p. 323) 2003: 229) while at the same time Bhai Nand Lal, himself likely a Khalsa and with whom Desa Singh discusses *langar* in the text, is lauded in the *Mahima Prakash* and the *Suraj Prakash* for his meticulous and generous *langar* in Anandpur (McLeod 2003: 251 n. 64). While these accounts of the Guru's *langar* should in no way be taken as normative for the tradition as a whole, they point to *langar* as a site of contest and negotiation in the historical process of institution-building. An indirect reference to *langar* in the eighteenth century can also be found beyond the *rahit*. *Tegh* and *degh* appear in the Dasam Granth, but were appropriated by Banda Bahadur in the slogan '*degh, tegh, fateh*' (cooking pot, sword, victory). The expression conveys the message that feeding the poor (*degh*: cooking pot) and protecting the oppressed (*tegh*: sword) are mutual obligations in the Khalsa way of life. But this particular association of *langar* and the *sangat* may ultimately be traced back to Guru Nanak who refers, albeit metaphorically, to both *degh* and *dharamsala* as *dharti* (earth).

Second, the Guru's *langar* was more than a religio-social institution. It also served diplomatic and political functions. While there are hagiographical accounts of the Gurus sitting in *langar* with Mughal emperors, it was in the turmoil of eighteenth-century Punjab that the place of *langar* in the process of political rehabilitation of persons and groups, legitimation of worldly sovereignty (*miri*), and the *realpolitik* of the Khalsa was affirmed.

> Khalsa ceremonies such as *pahul* and *langar* were also resituated as political tools that could be used in the mediation process to welcome back a chief whose transgressive behavior had put him beyond the pale of the community, as was the case when Alha Singh of Patiala formed an alliance with Ahmad Shah Abdali. Entire groups could be rehabilitated into the Khalsa fold, as when the Sodhis of Kartarpur were incorporated into the Khalsa by sharing *langar* with prominent Khalsa leaders at the behest of Jassa Singh Aluwallia.
>
> (Dhavan 2011: 166)

Royal imagery and symbolism continued to be integrated into the evolving institution of the gurdwara through the Guru's banner. With the end of human guruship, the *darbar sahib*/*prakash asthan* became the symbolic court of the Eternal Guru in the form of the Guru Granth Sahib. The symbols and accoutrements of the *darbar* share a close affiliation with, and their continued use in the gurdwara may re-enact, earlier court protocol of the

historical Gurus. In fact, ‘the reverence shown to the [Guru Granth Sahib] corresponds in much detail with that earlier exhibited towards worldly sovereigns…’ (Fenech 2008: 285). The focus of the *darbar sahib* is the *prakash asthan* where the Guru Granth Sahib is installed. Here the Guru Granth Sahib rests on a *manji*, a signifier of its status and authority. The *manji* in turn sits on a raised platform known as the *takht* (throne). It is from the *takht* that Sikhs affirm truth is dispensed (*piri*) and justice administered (*miri*). That the Guru Granth Sahib occupies the *takht* provides continuity not only between the historical Gurus and the Eternal Guru, but the coexistence of the past and the present, of the corporeal and incorporeal, of the political and the spiritual. (p. 324) Rumallas, symbolic ‘royal robes’, cover the body (*saroop*) of the Eternal Guru when it is not being read, or when it is being transported to and from the *darbar sahib* as is done daily in the early morning and late evening. The Guru Granth Sahib sits covered by the canopied *palki sahib*. Above the *palki sahib* is the *chanani*, a second canopy. Seated beneath the *palki sahib* and the *chanani* is the Guru Granth Sahib, whose attendant reverently waves the *chauri* (whisk) over the Eternal Guru.

While *dharamsala* and gurdwara became interchangeable terms, it was the gurdwara at Amritsar, the Harmandir (later and popularly known as the Golden Temple), that rose to prominence as a very important locus of Sikh religious and administrative life in the eighteenth century under an active Khalsa *sangat*. Not only was Amritsar seen as a place of pilgrimage par excellence at which all transgressions could be washed away and where *kirtan* was sung in the Guru’s presence, but it was the site of the Akal Takht where the *sarbat khalsa* would meet to issue *gurmatas*, to resolve disputes, and to discipline those of the *sangat* who had transgressed *rahit* injunctions or had lapsed (*patit*). In addition, the Khalsa *sangat* ‘can take action on behalf of the Guru. Indeed, the *sangat* and the true Guru are one: it can punish and it can forgive’ (Grewal 2006: 539). The Khalsa *sangat* was Guru-panth. The management of gurdwaras associated with the Gurus and martyrs was often claimed as the prerogative of the Khalsa, whereas care and control of smaller *dharamsala*s tended to remain in local hands.

The *nishan sahib* too was appropriated as a particularly Khalsa institution in the eighteenth century. It was carried by Khalsa armies and flew at Khalsa camps. As a symbol of the sovereignty and justice of the Guru, the banner is referenced repeatedly in Ratan Singh Bhangu’s *Prachin Panth Prakash*: at the Battle at Muktsar Sahib (Episode 23), in connection with Banda Bahadur (Episode 27), and in association with Khalsa manoeuvrings at Malerkotla and the Doaba region (Episode 43) [www.sikhmuseum.com; citing Bhangu, vol. i].

Singh Sabhas, British Colonialism, and Beyond

The reconstitution of the Khalsa tradition during the colonial period under the auspices of the Singh Sabhas has been the subject of scholarly scrutiny (Barrier 1995; Oberoi 1994). So too has the category ‘religion’ (King 1999) and the way in which Sikhs were forced to respond in the colonial idiom to modernist (i.e. Euro-Christian) assumptions about ‘religion’ (Mandair 2009). The Tat Khalsa framed Sikh ‘religion’ in terms of belief, doctrine, and exclusivity and articulated an exclusive Sikh identity in the institutions of ‘Guru, Granth, and Gurdwara’. These central institutions were codified in the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*.

The gurdwara and its affiliated institutions are spaces in which Khalsa authority is idealized, equality of the tradition is emphasized, and institutional adaptations are (p. 325) negotiated. At the turn of the twentieth century, control of major gurdwaras was in British hands while smaller *dharamsalas* and shrines tended to remain under the care and management of local *udasis* and *mahants*. This not only undermined the long established commensurability of (Khalsa) *sangat* and gurdwara, but had an adverse effect on the institutions of *kirtan* and *langar* (Grewal 2006: 545). The *Gurdwara Reform Act* (1925) enumerated and turned control of recognized gurdwaras and shrines in the Punjab to the newly established institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

The gurdwara complex itself was expanded to accommodate greater breadth of educational, cultural, and Khalsa-oriented activities. Residential quarters normally used by pilgrims were also used to accommodate crowds celebrating newly institutionalized Khalsa festivals or important anniversaries, known as *gurpurabs* in Sikh parlance. While most gurdwaras had space for teaching and learning, much of this activity now reflected the normative standards articulated by the Tat Khalsa. While smaller gurdwaras may have housed a modest library with a few books, larger gurdwaras ran schools, offered courses in Khalsa history, *gurmat*, and Gurmukhi for members of the community. Educational space is particularly important for Sikhs in the diaspora as it provides a formal link with Sikh culture and learning that may otherwise be absent for second and subsequent-generation Sikhs living outside the Punjab.

The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* clearly ties *karah prasad* to the notion of equality. Indeed, since the Singh Sabhas at the turn of the twentieth century, the institution of *karah prasad* has been interpreted as a practical demonstration of the equality taught by Guru Nanak and by the tradition as a whole since its inception. Unlike earlier *rahit-nama* texts, the *Sikh*

Rahit Maryada is clear: 'No form of preference or discrimination should be observed while [*karah prasad* is distributed], neither between Sikh and non-Sikh nor between high caste and low. No one should despise any member of a *sangat* because of his caste or through any belief in untouchability' (McLeod 2003: 387). *Karah prasad* is therefore a gurdwara institution that Sikhs have come to understand as an expression of equality as taught by the Gurus.

In Sikh diaspora communities, *langar* too is a practical expression of equality, but it is particularly important as it sustains 'traditional and social linkages within a congenial and familiar atmosphere' (McLeod 1997: 261). However, the *langar* and its protocols have been the locus of controversy and adaptation in the diaspora. In many *langar* halls in the diaspora men and women sit together in *pangat*. Traditionally though men sat on one side of the *langar* hall and women on the other. More controversial has been the decision by some *sangat*s to introduce tables and chairs into the *langar* (and in some instances into the *darbar* hall itself for disabled people).

The *nishan sahib*, the symbol of Sikh sovereignty, is transformed and increasingly institutionalized under the influence of the Tat Khalsa. The *nishan sahib* of the nineteenth century did not share the appearance of the standard flown by Guru Hargobind. Rather, the symbols of a sword, cooking vessel, and *kattar* were inscribed on nishan sahibs (Singh 2003) which may have resonance with the eighteenth-century Khalsa slogan '*degh*, *tegh*, *fateh*' (cooking pot, sword, victory). It seems that this evolved into the (p. 326) modern *khanda* insignia, itself a symbol indicative of *miri-piri*, early in the twentieth century when the round cooking-vessel became the quoit (*chakkar*) (McLeod 1997: 214). As a modern Sikh institution inextricable from that of the modern gurdwara, the *nishan sahib* often commands the reverence and respect of Sikhs. It is not uncommon for Sikhs to pay reverence to the *nishan sahib*, the marker of the gurdwara precincts and 'the sign which leads them towards the Darbar of the historical Gurus and of the Eternal Guru' in which truth, justice, and sovereignty have been established (Fenech 2008: 284).

The gurdwara and its affiliated institutions are central to Sikh identity and faith. *Dharamsala*, gurdwara, *sangat*, the presence of the Guru in the form of *shabad* and grace (*prasad*), *langar*, and the 'banner of dharam' (*nishan sahib*) are institutions that can be traced back to the Nanak-panth in Kartapur. The adaptations of these institutions reflect the historical contingencies in which Sikhs found themselves and are linked in various ways to later institutions, concepts, and symbols (e.g. Akal Takht, *miri-piri*, Khalsa, SGPC). The gurdwara then is not merely a 'religious' institution, but functions as social and sovereign space for the *sangat*.

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Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee: An Overview

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Abstract and Keywords

This paper discusses the various stages of Gurdwara Reform Movement leading to the formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and its legal recognition by the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925. The statutory provisions relating to its composition, jurisdiction, powers and functions along with its actual working are critically examined. It incorporates the data personally collected from the SGPC office as regards its budget, Gurdwaras, committees of Gurdwaras, educational, and other institutions.

Keywords: Gurdwara, Gurdwara Reform Movement, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, SGPC, sarbrah, mahant, Amritdhari

THE Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is the premier institution of the Sikhs which is legally authorized, as a representative of the community, to look after the historic and other important gurdwaras situated in the Indian states of Panjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh. Nearly 1,000 religious shrines including Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) and three of the five Sikh *Takhts* (‘Thrones of Authority’) are managed and supervised by it. It also superintended 200 other shrines including important historic and profusely endowed gurdwaras like Nankana Sahib and Panja Sahib before the partition of India in 1947. It is the most important and richest managing committee of gurdwaras. It represents a model for the democratization of religious institutions, being the first democratically elected managing body of any religious shrine(s) in the world.

The SGPC enjoys power and prestige not only within its legally prescribed area but much beyond it. The committee liaises with Sikhs and Sikh organizations all over India and abroad. Its representation in distinct gurdwara managing bodies in India such as the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Nanded Gurdwara Sachkhand Sri Hazoor

Abchal Nagar Sahib Board, Takht Patna Sahib Management Committee, and certain other similar committees is stipulated in the relevant statutes and regulations.

Historical Retrospect

The annexation of the Punjab to the British Empire in the mid-nineteenth century resulted in the further deterioration of gurdwara management. Idols were worshipped, unsavoury literature was sold and licentious songs were sung within the holy precincts. Although (p. 329) non-Sikh *pandits*, astrologers, and officials frequented the shrines the so-called low-caste Sikhs, even initiated ones, were not allowed free entry and worship. The sacred spaces had become dens of thieves, drunkards, womanizers, and pick-pockets. The custodians of the gurdwaras, mostly *mahants*, themselves indulged in these vices. With official assistance, they had become the virtual proprietors of gurdwaras and simply ignored the needs of the general Sikh community.

Gurdwara Reform Movement

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Singh Sabha Movement awakened the Sikhs to purify their religion. The reformers asserted by targeting the anti-Sikh practices. In 1905 they removed the idols from the Golden Temple. Next year they claimed for the community the right to appoint the *sarbrah* (manager) of Amritsar's gurdwaras. Thus the Gurdwara Reform Movement also known as the Akali Movement came into being. The *Akali*, a Punjabi newspaper started in May 1920 by a few well-meaning Sikhs, contributed enormously to the expansion of the Movement. The *Akali* suggested the establishment of a central Sikh representative body to control and manage the gurdwaras. The reformers had obtained the control of a couple of gurdwaras even before the SGPC came into existence.

The Khalsa Biradari, a religious body, initiated some so-called low-caste Sikhs on 12 October 1920. A Sikh gathering inclusive of some teachers and students of Khalsa College took them in procession to the Golden Temple. The *pujaris* refused to accept their offerings (*karah prasad*) and offer prayers for them. After some altercation, it was agreed to seek the *Hukamnama* ('verdict') of the Guru Granth Sahib. The holy Book was opened arbitrarily and a passage underscoring non-discrimination was read out. The *pujaris* accepted the eternal Guru's clear-cut verdict, received offerings, and performed prayers. The Akal Takht *pujaris* fled from their seats on the arrival of the congregation. The

reformers occupied those seats. Then the congregation appointed an ad hoc committee to look after both the premier shrines but not to lay hand to their money or property. Alarmed by the development, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar constituted an interim committee to supervise the Sikh shrines at Amritsar on 13 October. It consisted of nine prominent Sikhs, all reformers, including the *Sarbrah* as its head.

SGPC Constituted. By this time, the Sikhs had made up their mind to constitute a representative central committee. A *Hukamnama* from the Akal Takht called a general assembly of the Sikhs (*Sarbat Khalsa*) at Akal Takht on 15 November 1920 to select a representative Panthic Committee to manage Darbar Sahib and all other gurdwaras. The delegates representing different Sikh bodies were required to be *Amritdhari* (initiated) Sikhs possessing the Five Ks, early morning risers, regular readers of the scriptures, and contributors of tithe (*daswandh*). In an attempt to foil this, the Punjab Governor hurriedly appointed a Managing Committee consisting of thirty-six (p. 330) members to manage the Golden Temple and other gurdwaras, just two days before the Sarbat Khalsa was due to meet. The committee members were authorized to add any number of members to themselves.

The *Sarbat Khalsa*, a gathering of 12,000 Sikh workers and leaders, unanimously resolved to constitute the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee consisting of 175 members to control all the Sikh shrines in Punjab and elsewhere. All the districts of Punjab, some provinces of India, the Sikh princely states, and many countries like Burma, China, Malaya, and America were given representation. All thirty-six members of the government-appointed committee were wisely included and were subsequently elected as members of a subcommittee to carry on the administration of Golden Temple and allied gurdwaras till the SGPC took over. The SGPC thus came into being to pioneer the struggle for gurdwara reform. The influence and prestige of the SGPC increased enormously due to its representative character and its particular agenda. The reformers took over the important gurdwara of Panja Sahib and affiliated its newly constituted managing committee to the SGPC within three days of the latter’s composition. And within a month, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the political organization of the Sikhs, was constituted on 14 December 1920. Both the SGPC and the SAD acted in unison in the struggle for the reform of Sikh shrines. SAD used to execute the decisions of the SGPC by sending *jathas* (‘battalions’) to occupy gurdwaras.

The first meeting of the SGPC took place at Akal Takht on 12 December 1920. All the members were subjected to strict scrutiny by the Cherished Five (*Panj Piaras*). The members confessed their lapses and shortcomings and accepted the pronounced religious punishments. Sundar Singh Majithia was elected as its first president. A subcommittee was constituted to draft the constitution of the SGPC.

The new constitution provided that four-fifths of the SGPC members would be elected by the Sikh voters residing in areas ranging between Karachi to Kashmir and Peshawar to Delhi. The elected members were to co-opt the remaining one-fifth of the members. Seats were apportioned on the basis of the Sikh population residing in the respective region. The Sikh princely states were also given representation, where Maharaja nominated one-fourth of the allotted seats and the Sikh voters of that state filled the remaining seats by election. The SGPC determined the territorial constituencies and conducted the election. Every Amritdhari Sikh, not below 21 years of age and observing elementary rules of Sikh conduct like rising early in the morning, reading the scriptures, donating one-tenth of their personal income could become a voter. With this constitution, the SGPC was registered as a corporate body under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The first SGPC election under the new constitution was held in July 1921. The elected members nominated eminent Sikh personalities. Kharak Singh was elected president in the first meeting on 14 August 1921.

The SGPC adopted the policy of non-violence, strictly instructing *jatha* volunteers to take over gurdwaras remaining peaceful in word and deed and not to react to any violent act of the *mahants* even at the risk of their lives. The first test of non-violence in the movement was passed with the liberation of Gurdwara Tarn Taran, which saw the sacrifice of two lives in January 1921.

(p. 331) *Nankana Tragedy*. An attempt to secure Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, richest of all the gurdwaras, and liberate it from a notorious *mahant* was made on 20 February 1921. All the 150 *Jatha* members were butchered and burnt alive by the *mahant*'s hired goons. Next day, when 2,200 Sikhs marched to free the gurdwara, the authorities relented and the Commissioner of Lahore handed over the keys to the SGPC President. The SGPC did not cooperate in the inquiry and prosecution of the perpetrators of this horrible crime on Mahatma Gandhi's appeal, resulting in mild punishments to the *mahant* and his hired ruffians.

The government proposed the Sikh Gurdwaras and Shrines Bill in response to the success of the SGPC, which the latter rejected for not fulfilling Sikh aspirations. To placate the Sikhs, a formal declaration for 'the withdrawal of government interference in the management of the Golden Temple' and handing over its control to the SGPC was made on 20 April 1921. Such moves of conciliation did not deter the SGPC, which passed a formal resolution of non-cooperation with the government on 11 May and confirmed it on 28 August. The government accused the organization of pursuing political objectives and also of being a Congress-ally. Consequently the government attitude stiffened and it reasserted its control over the Golden Temple and allied gurdwaras.

Keys' Affair. Another Akali agitation began when the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar took away the keys of Golden Temple's treasury from Sunder Singh Ramgarhia, government-appointed *Sarbrah* and Vice-President of the SGPC, on 7 November 1921. SGPC officials and other Sikhs were arrested and prosecuted for discussing the prohibited 'Keys' Affair'. Non-violent Sikh agitation and non-cooperation followed by the SGPC call to completely boycott the Prince of Wales's visit to India compelled the government to hand over the keys to the SGPC President and release Sikhs jailed during agitation on 11 January 1922. The 'First decisive battle for India's freedom', in Mahatma Gandhi's words, was thus 'won'.

The *Guru-ka-Bagh Morcha* ('agitation') began in August 1922. The Sikhs were arrested for cutting wood from gurdwara land on the basis of a back-dated complaint obtained by the authorities from the *mahant* who had already surrendered the gurdwara and attached the property to the SGPC. The SGPC sent a *jatha* daily under the oath of non-violence from the Akal Takht. The *jatha* members and other volunteers were brutally beaten until unconscious. The police atrocities on non-violent Akalis won sympathy and admiration for the latter at the national and international level. Failing to browbeat the struggle, the government extricated itself and released all the 5,605 persons including thirty-five SGPC members in November 1922.

Jaito Morcha. The SGPC passed a resolution in August 1923 to sympathize with the Maharaja of Nabha who was compelled to abdicate by the government. Relations with authorities were thus strained further. In this connection an Akhand Path (continuous reading) of Guru Granth Sahib was disrupted by the police at Jaito. To assert the sanctity of the ritual, *jathas* of twenty-five Sikhs each were sent from Akal Takht after being administered an oath of non-violence. They were brutally beaten on their entry in Nabha state and left in far-flung areas.

(p. 332) Meanwhile, the Punjab government declared the 'SGPC to be an unlawful association' on 12 October 1923 for interfering with the maintenance of law and order and constituting a danger to the public peace. Most of the Sikh leaders including SGPC members, three successive Jathedars of the Akal Takht and others were arrested and prosecuted. After conviction by lower courts the High Court granted relief to many of them.

The Jaito agitation continued, so the SGPC started sending *jathas* of 500 volunteers from February 1924. The bigger *shahidi jatha* (band of martyrs) was fired upon leaving 100 persons dead and 200 injured. Seventeen such *jathas* were sent to Jaito up to April 1925 and all of them were arrested and jailed. Ultimately the government removed restrictions on the performance of the Akhand Path and passed the Sikh Gurdwaras Act in July 1925

recognizing gurdwaras as the heritage of Sikhs. Thus the Gurdwara Reform Movement came to a successful conclusion.

SGPC under Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925

While the Akalis (Sikhs) wanted exclusive control of all the gurdwaras and a strong central body, the government sought to minimize their control and to avoid or at least weaken the central body. In the Punjab Legislative Council, the Sikh legislators insisted upon naming it the ‘Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee’ as this name had acquired respectability but the government, which had declared it an unlawful association, would not concede defeat by naming it as such. As a compromise, the Act used the word ‘Board’ for the central body and provided that the Board could choose its new name by a majority of 3/5 of its members in its first meeting and approval by the provincial government. The government withdrew its order of October 1923 declaring the SGPC unlawful on 13 September 1926, nineteen days before the Board’s general body meeting. The Board unanimously named itself as Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in its first meeting on 2 October 1926. The government took its time to fulfil the statutory requirement to approve the name by notification on 17 January 1927.

Composition. Originally the Act provided for 84 elected, 5 ex-officio, and 12 nominated members; and all these members would co-opt 17 more members from amongst residents of India of whom not more than 4 should be from Punjab. After various amendments in the Act, at present, the SGPC consists of 170 elected, 6 ex-officio, and 15 co-opted members of whom not more than 5 shall be from Punjab. Elected members include 20 Scheduled Castes Sikhs and 30 Sikh women of whom 5 shall be Scheduled Castes. Thus 120 election seats are open or unreserved and the remaining 50 are reserved for Scheduled Castes and women.

Ex-officio members are the Head Granthi of Sri Darbar Sahib and the Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts, namely, Akal Takht Sahib (Amritsar), Keshgarh Sahib (Anandpur), Patna Sahib, Hazur Sahib (Nanded), and Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo). The elected and ex-officio members co-opt 15 members from amongst residents of India of whom at least 10 must be from outside Punjab. Thus the provision allows co-option of 10–15 (p. 333) non-Punjabis. After the co-options, the Central Government notifies that the SGPC has been duly constituted. The co-option of not less than 10 members from outside Punjab lends the SGPC at least the semblance of an all-India character. Only residents of India can be co-opted. To make the SGPC an institution representing the Sikhs throughout the world, it would be ideal if a provision is made to co-opt some members from outside India.

The Government of India in consultation with the SGPC demarcates the whole area into 120 constituencies. Fifty constituencies out of these are selected as double member constituencies, each of which returns two members, one general and one reserve. Each voter of these constituencies casts two votes, one each for general and reserve candidates. Thus 100 members are elected from these double member constituencies and the remaining 70 from the single member constituencies. The States of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh and union territory of Chandigarh respectively elect 160, 8, 1, and 1 member(s) in proportion of their Sikh population.

The membership of the SGPC is unwieldy, resulting in unwarranted interference in gurdwara management and inconvenience to the general public. It should be reduced to 51 or at maximum to 100. Reservations for scheduled castes are not violative of the Sikh principle of equality that denounces the caste system. This protective discrimination is a tool to achieve equality which the Sikh society lacks in reality.

Elections are the bane of gurdwara management as these inevitably introduce corruption, factionalism, and other vices into the system, thus compromising the pious atmosphere. The SGPC has been over-politicized as elections are contested on a party basis. Voters keep in view party affiliation without attaching importance to the merits and capability of the candidates. The candidates are selected on the basis of their loyalty and proximity to the party bosses. Sometimes politicians are adjusted in the SGPC and it is also used as a stepping stone for budding politicians. The SGPC members and office-bearers owe their offices to the party and not to the community. Allegations of election rigging and misuse of government and gurdwara funds and machinery are commonly heard. Sikh tenets giving primacy to sacrifice and humility are often violated. Some better alternative to select honest and dedicated persons of high calibre needs to be devised. Restrictions on SGPC members acquiring membership within legislative bodies and vice versa may be of some help.

Voters. A Sikh, above 21 years of age, residing in a demarcated constituency, who is neither a *patit* (apostate), nor smokes, nor takes alcoholic drink, nor trims/shaves his or her hair (except in the case of Sahajdhari Sikhs) can get himself or herself registered on the SGPC electoral roll. The word ‘Sahajdhari’ was inserted in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act by an amendment in 1959 when the SAD was out of power both in Punjab Legislature and the SGPC. An amendment of the Act in 2003 deleting the words ‘except in case of Sahajdharis Sikhs’, depriving everyone not maintaining unshorn hair from voting rights, has been struck down by the High Court, though the matter is pending in appeal before the Supreme Court.

> Some non-Sikhs have misused the liberal definition of ‘Sikh’ to become voters in the SGPC elections by making a false declaration. Section 2(9) of the Act

> prescribes that (p. 334) one is deemed to be a 'Sikh' on the making of the following declaration: I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus and that I have no other religion.

The amendment of 2003 was an attempt to restrict infiltration of non-Sikhs in the electoral roll.

Qualifications of Members. The Sikh Gurdwaras Act does not prescribe qualifications for the ex-officio or designated members, presuming them to be fully qualified, being holders of high offices. But the qualifications of elected and co-opted members are specifically prescribed. A Sikh of sound mind aged 25 years or above, who is *Amritdhari* (initiated) and is able to read and write Gurmukhi, is qualified to be elected or co-opted as member. But an undischarged insolvent, *patit* ('apostate'), alcoholic drinker and minister or paid servant of any notified gurdwara or of the SGPC cannot become a member. Elected members also need registration on the electoral roll of any constituency.

It may be noted that neither does the Act prescribe any extra or special qualification for the co-opted members nor does any convention exist to co-opt known intellectuals, knowledgeable and dedicated Sikhs, as SGPC members.

Tenure. The members of the SGPC hold office for five years from the date of its constitution or until the constitution of a new body, whichever is later. Thus the Act specifies five years as the minimum term but no upper limit is prescribed. The Central Government conducts the election and it usually delays. After 1965, the elections were held in 1979, 1996, 2004, and 2011 after a gap of 14, 17, 8, and 7 years. A mandatory provision is required in the Act to conduct the SGPC election on schedule.

Meetings. After the election, the Central Government calls a meeting of the elected and designated members to co-opt fifteen members. After co-options, the Central Government notifies the fact of the SGPC having been duly constituted. The date of notification is considered as the date of constitution of the new SGPC. Within one month of its constitution, the Central Government convenes the first general meeting of the SGPC in which the office-bearers and members of the Executive Committee are elected.

After the SGPC election in September 2011, co-options were made and the Central Government notified the fact of SGPC having been duly constituted on 17 December 2011. But the notification was subjected to the decision of the High Court in a pending case relating to withdrawal of Sehajdharis' voting rights. On 20 December 2011, the High Court upheld the right of Sehajdharis who were not allowed to participate in the September election. The Central Government has not convened the first general meeting of the SGPC which the Act requires to be called within one month of its constitution. The Supreme Court of India, during the pendency of appeal against the High Court decision,

has allowed the Executive Committee of the SGPC to continue to function and also to pass the budget. It may be noted that to pass the budget is the privilege of the general body of the SGPC and not of its Executive Committee. The Supreme Court verdict is awaited to know the fate of the election and co-options of 2011.

It is obligatory upon the SGPC to meet at least once a year in its annual general meeting. Other meetings are called by twenty days' notice in writing served on every member. (p. 335) Usually it meets twice a year to elect its executive and pass the budget. Persons in power avoid calling frequent meetings. Some Sikhs proudly use epithets like 'Parliament of Sikhs' for the SGPC but it is not justifiable because there is hardly any fruitful discussion or debate in its meetings.

Ten or more members may demand the calling of a general meeting by written application to the President, and if no notice of meeting is given within fifteen days, the applicants can themselves call a meeting by serving ten days' notice. The venue of the SGPC meetings is Teja Singh Samundri Hall within the Golden Temple complex at Amritsar. The quorum for SGPC meetings is fixed at 31 members amounting to 16 per cent of the total membership.

Executive Committee. The executive committee of the SGPC consists of four office-bearers—the President, Senior Vice-President, Junior Vice Presiden,t and General Secretary—and members numbering between five and eleven. All these office-bearers and members are to be elected by the SGPC members from amongst themselves in its first general meeting and subsequently in every annual general meeting. Takht Jathedars and Head Granthi of Sri Darbar Sahib are not entitled to vote in the executive committee election. The SGPC in its general meeting can pass a no-confidence motion against its executive committee after the expiry of three months from the date of its constitution and elect a new body to replace it.

The executive committee of the SGPC shall exercise all the powers of the SGPC on its behalf except those which the Act expressly reserves to be exercised by the SGPC in its general meeting. The executive committee is competent to make appointments of personnel for the office work and other duties. It is also to determine the number, designations, grades, and scales of salary or other remuneration of these employees. It can also fine, reduce, suspend, or remove any servant. The executive committee can delegate any of its powers to a subcommittee of one or more of its members by a majority of three-quarters of its members present.

Powers, Functions and Duties of the SGPC. Leaders of the Gurdwara Reform Movement had visualized and promised that the statutory SGPC will:

(a) properly utilize the property and income of gurdwaras,

(b) propagate Sikhism to every corner of the world,
(c) educate every Sikh,
(d) open technical and industrial schools,
(e) eradicate unemployment,
(f) root out evils like drinking and litigation, and
(g) open free dispensaries and schools along with gurdwaras in every village.

The community extended whole-hearted support to the movement keeping these lofty ideals in view. Though substantial progress has been made, achievement of all the cherished goals mentioned above is yet to be accomplished.

The Act provides for two-tier management of gurdwaras. The committees of management actually manage and administer the gurdwaras and the SGPC directs, controls, (p. 336) and superintends all the committees. Section 85 of the Act contains a list of gurdwaras for which the SGPC is also the committee of management. Originally in 1925 this list included only the Akal Takht and Takht Keshgarh Sahib and that too at the insistence of the non-statutory SGPC. Subsequent amendments made in between 1944 and 2010 have added around 100 important gurdwaras to the list giving their direct management and control to the SGPC. The SGPC exercises all the powers and performs all the duties of a committee of management in respect of these gurdwaras. Information received from SGPC office reveals that seventy-eight managers are appointed to manage the gurdwaras in this category.

Section 86 and 87 of the Act provide for the management of gurdwaras, not specified in section 85. A committee consisting of five members including one scheduled caste Sikh is to be constituted for every notified gurdwara but the State Government may direct that there shall be one committee for two or more of such gurdwaras. Gurdwara(s) with annual income exceeding one lakh rupees will have the committee consisting of four elected members and one SGPC-nominated member. The number of such committees nowadays is 196.

For gurdwaras having income up to one lakh rupees a year, the SGPC is either to nominate all the five members of the committee or to manage it directly. At present there are 198 nominated committees and seven gurdwaras are being directly managed by the SGPC.

The SGPC is obliged to ensure that the property and income of gurdwaras is properly utilized by the committees in accordance with the law. The SGPC and the concerned committee will consult each other to settle schemes of administration for the proper administration of property, endowments, funds, and income of notified Sikh Gurdwaras.

The Act declares the SGPC to be a body corporate with perpetual succession and common seal. Being a juristic body it can own property and sue and be sued in its own name. It has successfully secured substantial immovable properties of various gurdwaras through persuasion and litigation. The SGPC receives annual contributions from the committees to form its General Board Fund and it fixes the proportion not exceeding 10 per cent of committees' annual income as their contribution. The SGPC is to establish and administer a Research Fund as well as a Religious Fund and will also frame rules for their administration. It also holds and administers a General Trust Fund for religious, charitable, educational, or industrial purposes. Presently, the SGPC runs prestigious institutions like Guru Granth Sahib University, Fatehgarh Sahib; Guru Nanak Engineering College, Ludhiana; Baba Banda Singh Bahadur Engineering College, Fatehgarh Sahib; Sri Guru Ram Dass Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Vallah (Amritsar); Sri Guru Ram Dass Institute of Dental Sciences and Research, Amritsar; Miri Piri Institute of Medical Sciences, Shahbad Markanda; Mata Gujri (an autonomous and postgraduate) College, Fatehgarh Sahib; Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Mumbai; Guru Nanak Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai; Mata Sahib Kaur Khalsa College of Education, Patiala; Shahid Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar; and Gurmat Institute, Guru Kashi Damdama Sahib Talwandi Sabo. Also, there are another two (p. 337) dozen degree colleges, two dozen public schools, two dozen senior secondary schools, three fully-fledged hospitals, and three printing presses under its management. This is in addition to the management and supervision of 941 gurdwaras, almost all of which have provision for free community kitchens and free accommodation for devotees.

The SGPC passes its own budget every year, which amounted to Rs. 580 crores during the financial year 2011–12 and Rs. 666 crores for the year 2012–13. It also scrutinizes the proposed budgets of the committees and may direct them for modification. If any committee does not carry out its directions it may seek the help of the Judicial Commission, a judicial body constituted under the Act. Alienation of immovable property belonging to any notified Sikh gurdwara is possible only with the sanction of the SGPC. The SGPC is authorized to collect dues payable to the notified Sikh gurdwaras left in Pakistan.

The SGPC has powers to appoint persons for the performance of its duties and may also determine their number, designations, grades, scale of salary, and other remunerations. It may also fine, reduce, suspend, or remove any of them. Around 14,000 of its employees are assisting in the performance of its duties.

The SGPC is authorized to discuss any matter directly connected with the Sikh religion. Besides managing religious shrines, it leads the Sikhs in religious, social, and political spheres. It is considered as the highest organization in Sikh religious matters. The courts in India and abroad acknowledge its status by consulting it in religious matters pertaining

to the Sikhs. Because of its all-encompassing command over Sikh affairs, it enjoys tremendous power and clout. It is regarded as the religious representative of the Sikhs and custodian of their interests. The SGPC articulates the problems and demands of the community and endeavours to safeguard its minority status. It represents the community whenever there is any violation of Sikh principles, Sikh symbols, Sikh institutions, or Sikh people anywhere in the world. It contested the restrictions on the wearing of turban, *kirpan*, and *kara* by different governments, institutions, and individuals.

The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* ('Sikh code of conduct') prepared, approved, and enforced by it has acquired recognition from Sikhs all over the world. Publication of this Code in different Indian and foreign languages and its free distribution adds to the credit of the SGPC. Being primarily a religious body, it acts for the promotion of Sikhism through its Dharam Parchar Committee. It runs ten Sikh Missionary Colleges to train teachers, *granthis* ('scripture readers'), and *kirtanias* ('musicians'). It has established eleven Sikh Missions in different Indian states which send preachers to different places to preach and propagate Sikhism. The SGPC publishes the Sikh scriptures and literature for free distribution and sale at concessional rates. Two monthly journals, *Gurdwara Gazette* and *Gurmat Parkash*, are regularly published. The former reports proceedings of the general body meeting of the SGPC and also the monthly and yearly details of SGPC income and expenditure. The latter publishes articles on Sikh history, Sikh philosophy, and Sikh principles.

The SGPC has been a strong force in Punjab politics since its inception. It was with the active support of the SGPC that various agitations against the government were successfully conducted during the Gurdwara Reform Movement and afterwards. After independence, there was agitation to obtain equal benefits for Sikh scheduled castes (1953), (p. 338) the Punjabi Suba Morcha (1960), the agitation against imposition of emergency (1975) and Dharam Yudh Morcha (1982–4).

Despite some frailties and weaknesses, the SGPC is an important and useful organization of the Sikhs. The achievements and importance of the SGPC can be gauged only by visualizing the situation which would have prevailed in gurdwara management had it not been there. Corruption in gurdwara administration and abuse of gurdwara property and funds at present is only a fraction of what these were prior to the existence of the SGPC. It has been successful in securing control and management of the important Sikh shrines for the community and is endeavouring to provide them with clean and efficient administration.

In sum, some recommendations can be made to conclude this essay. Sikhs residing abroad should be given representation in the SGPC; its jurisdiction should be extended to the whole of India; its size should be reduced to half of its present strength; the system of

its election should be replaced by selection through consensus in the holy presence of Guru Granth Sahib; only dedicated, honest, learned, and non-political persons should be elected/co-opted as its members and office-bearers; it should meet quite frequently and discuss community matters dispassionately. By so doing it will facilitate achieving the objectives originally envisaged by the reformers.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article offers an analysis of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the principal Sikh politico-religious organization functioning as a regional political party of Punjab. It delineates the origin of SAD as coordinating agency for the Gurdwara Reform Movement in 1920s and its transformation into a political party to protect and promote Sikh sociopolitical and religious interests before and after independence. It assesses its role in the struggle for the formation of the Punjabi-linguistic state (Punjabi Suba) and as an alternative ruling party in the reorganized Punjab. It also critically evaluates SAD's sociocultural and economic programmes; itsperformance in Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and legislative elections; its relations with Congress, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), and earlier with the Muslim League and the Unionist Party. It points out the challenges SAD faces in balancing its role to represent region and religion, Punjab and the Panth and widespread factionalism in Sikh affairs.

Keywords: Akali, Shiromani Akali Dal, Panth, Punjabi Suba, SGPC, Congress, BJP, Muslim League, Unionist Party

I

THE Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the principal Sikh politico-religious organization and the premier regional political party in the Punjab, was the product not of state politics but rather those of the ‘church’ as manifest in Sikh shrines. It was formed on 14 December 1920 to coordinate and train volunteers to take over gurdwaras during the Gurdwara Reform Movement. The term *akali*, literally God’s devotee, goes back to Guru Gobind Singh’s time and refers to those followers for whom no sacrifice was profound enough to protect religious places (Mukherjee 1985: 108) and guard the helpless (D. Singh 1993: 211).

Traditionally, gurdwaras were a part of the Sikh trinity of ‘Guru, Granth, and Gurdwara’; in the days of Mughal persecution they came to be managed by Udasis known as *mahants*, who believed in the Gurus, but did not conform to outward Khalsa symbols. In due course they started behaving contrary to Sikh traditions and norms and converted gurdwara properties and incomes into their own private assets. With the awakening of the Sikhs owing to education and mobilization provided by various Sikh institutions there emerged protest against retrogression and maladministration in gurdwara affairs. In a large meeting of the representatives of various sections of the Sikhs at Amritsar on 15 November 1920 a 175-member committee known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) was formed for the management of all Sikh gurdwaras. The Shiromani Akali Dal was established as a coordinating agency to raise and train volunteers for action in taking over gurdwaras under the management of the SGPC. The movement was largely modelled on the Congress method of direct action by non-violent means. The government for its part favoured the *mahants*. The movement therefore also became a part of the anti-imperial struggle and turned into a full-scale conflict between the Sikhs and the colonial administration in which 4,000 died, 2,000 were wounded, and 30,000 men and women were jailed (G. Singh 2000: 83). It ended (p. 340) successfully with the enactment of the Gurdwara Act of 1925 granting the SGPC legal authority over gurdwaras.

II

The Gurdwara Reform Movement was successful in achieving unity amongst rural and urban Punjabis and marked the transfer of political leadership from the landed aristocracy to the Sikh middle class. The SAD thereafter became an independent political party superseding the Chief Khalsa Diwan as the main political organization of the Sikhs. Although there were persons in the Akali Dal who looked upon the movement as a part of the larger freedom struggle, the major doctrine of the Dal insisted on the necessity for Sikhs to act as a unified and separate political entity. In the demographic situation of the then Punjab, however, middle-class Sikh interests were similar to those of the Hindus who constituted the core of provincial Congress. The SAD therefore continued to cooperate with Congress, particularly to counter the Muslim League which avowedly stood for Muslim interests. They equally feared the Unionist Party which was organized as a coalition of rural agriculturists against urban interests. The SAD was quite successful in countering the Muslim League as also in projecting the Unionist Party as one which sought to promote Muslim interests under the cover of a secular economic programme. It was thus difficult for Congress to ignore the power and importance of the SAD.

Akali demands themselves also underwent changes during the period 1925–47. The SAD's stand, though at times marked by overtones, in general was based on the adoration of two political deities—Sikh nationalism and Indian nationalism. Both ideas were regarded as indispensable and mutually helpful. While swearing by Indian nationalism, they could not cast off their loyalty to the Sikh Commonwealth or Panth. They never considered it as antagonistic to Indian nationalism (Heeger 1971: 334). In that perspective the SAD mostly cooperated with Congress, but at times negotiated with the Muslim League also. Until 1947 the system of dual membership ensured a harmonious relationship between Congress and the SAD. Both these parties were united against the Unionist Party which represented Muslim, Hindu, and Sikhs feudal classes collaborating with the British. The SAD, however, was bitter about Congress's acceptance of the Communal Award and its opposition to support war efforts. But as the Sikhs were too few and divided, the SAD ultimately contested the 1937 elections alongside Congress.

Here it may be mentioned that before the elections there were only two prominent parties among the Sikhs—the SAD and the Chief Khalsa Diwan. With the advent of provincial autonomy, the Diwan changed its name to the Khalsa National Party. In view of both this and the increasing popularity of the Unionist Party—and in spite of the initial opposition by a significant section of the SGPC—the SAD succumbed to pro-Congress Akalis and joined hands with Congress. As Congress was projected as the party of (p. 341) moneylenders and commercial classes, it required some base in Punjab's rural areas which the Akalis could provide.

To counter the Pakistan Resolution passed by the Muslim League in 1940 which posed a serious threat to the Sikhs, the SAD put forward the Azad Punjab Scheme which proposed carving a new province out of the Punjab (roughly between Delhi and the River Chenab) where neither Muslims, Hindus, nor Sikhs would command an absolute majority. As the proposal did not gather sufficient support, the SAD once again cast its lot with Congress, trusting it to protect Sikh minority rights.

Though Congress and the Akalis favoured contesting the 1946 elections together, they could come to agreement on only four of the thirty-three Sikh seats. The 1946 election results confirmed the cleavage pattern of Punjab politics. Congress continued as the Hindu party as forty of the fifty-one seats it won were Hindu. The Muslim League won seventy-five Muslim seats and the Akali Dal twenty-two Sikh seats. Once again only the Unionist Party, on the basis of rural solidarity, could cut across the communal cleavage, but with only twenty seats.

The SAD considered the proposal from the League on the basis of 25 per cent of cabinet positions and for Sikhs in government services (*The Hindu*, March 1946). But in the absence of any definite assurance from Jinnah as to their position in a United Punjab

under League administration the SAD responded favourably to the Congress offer and the two, along with the Unionist Party, formed a government.

The Akalis, disturbed by the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 1946, entered into negotiations with both the Muslim League and Congress. Talks with Jinnah failed which strengthened the hands of the Congress Sikhs. As the Congress Party accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan, the Akalis decided to boycott the election for the Constituent Assembly and to not participate in the interim government. On this issue, even Congress Sikhs decided to fall in line with Akalis (*The Tribune*, 11 July 1946). The SAD allowed the Sikhs to join the Constituent Assembly and the interim government only after the statement of Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Congress president: 'The Brave Sikhs of the Punjab are entitled to special consideration, I see nothing wrong in an area and a set up in the North where the Sikhs can also freely experience the glow of freedom' (*The Statesman*, 7 July 1946). With the Muslim League's rejection of the Cabinet Mission Plan, the Congress accepted the reality of Pakistan and took the initiative in formally demanding the partition of Punjab. Jinnah, in an attempt to avoid this, once again tried to win over the Sikhs. The talks between the League and the Akalis failed. The division of Punjab thus became a joint Akali–Congress demand as independence and partition became imminent.

III

After independence the Akalis continued to pursue their pre-independence concerns. As J. S. Grewal suggests, these were essentially three: an adequate share in political (p. 342) power, the promotion of the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script, and the protection of Sikh religious identity. All three could be reduced to a single one: the position of the Sikh Panth in free India (Grewal 1998: 74). The SAD's immediate goal was to seek Sikh representation and reservation in the legislatures. To this end the SAD initially merged with Congress in 1948. When the Constituent Assembly rejected outright Akali demands, Sikh representatives responded by not signing the draft Constitution of India. The SAD finally veered round to the view that, in the absence of constitutional guarantees, the only way out for Sikhs was to strive for an area where they would be numerous enough to protect and develop their language and culture. They therefore decided to press for the formation of a linguistic state conterminous with the Punjabi language. The movement for a linguistic state (Punjabi Suba) was at the centre of Punjabi politics right from independence to 1966, and formed the basis of an extraordinary political combat between Congress and the Akali Dal.

The demand for Punjabi Suba was as justifiable as those for other linguistic states raised at that time. The distinction in this case was the desire to have a Sikh majority state.

Within that framework the Punjabi Suba movement became emotional, cultural, and constitutional. The political use of religious symbolism by the Akalis was a significant feature of the agitation. Master Tara Singh, the Akali leader, asserted the Panth's right of self-determination in matters religious, social, and political; he led numerous *morchas* and twice threatened self-immolation to achieve this end. The SAD contested both SGPC and legislative elections on the issue of Punjabi Suba. It held it as a 'question of life and death for the Sikhs' (Shani 2008: 41). The SAD was quite successful in capitalizing on rural and urban Sikh religious feelings. However, in the legislative elections of the 1950s many rural Sikhs voted for Congress and urban Sikhs for the SAD. In view of this difference the SAD, after a 1956 compromise on Punjabi language (the Regional Formula), again merged with Congress, deciding to confine itself to the religious, cultural, social, and economic betterment of the Sikhs (*The Statesman*, 13 October 1956).

By the early 1960s the SAD's orientation changed from urban to rural. Soon the leadership of Master Tara Singh (a non-Jat urban Sikh) was replaced by that of Sant Fateh Singh, a rural Jat. While the SAD contested the third general election primarily on Punjabi Suba, its manifesto, discussed later in this essay, reflected a substantial change from its earlier views on economic issues. After the 1962 election in which the domination of the agriculturist element in the SAD became clear, the party split into the Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh factions.

The Akali Dal stood divided on many issues. The dominant wing was no longer a purely religious party. It was controlled by rich landlords, many of whom had come from Congress. From now onwards the orientation and strategy, as also the government reaction to the Punjabi Suba movement, was based on this changed position. The new leadership was more interested in an end to land reforms and food zones, and state support for capital inputs for agricultural development. It recognized the greater utility of capturing power in the secular political system of the state. But since this class viewed the attack on its interests as coming from the central Congress leadership, it was also interested in autonomy and power at the state level. The demand for Punjabi Suba **(p. 343)** was now projected in that context and finally, after renewed agitations, compromises, and negotiations, the demand was conceded in 1966. The Punjab was reorganized on 1 November 1966 into Punjab and Haryana states with parts going to Himachal Pradesh. The SAD thereafter, though claiming to be the sole representative of Sikhs, began functioning as a regional party for the acquisition and retention of power.

IV

After the reorganization the Akali Dal emerged as an alternative ruling party and a major political force in the state. It has since been working to acquire and retain power through the electoral route, based on its ideological commitments, class and community interests, and sociocultural concerns. Since 1966, the SAD has been in power for almost every alternate period, mostly as a major coalition partner but occasionally on its own. It has forged parliamentary and electoral alliances against the Congress Party, mainly with the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). Given the historical background of its emergence and growth, the demographic and socio-economic structure of the Punjab, and its social support base, the Akali Dal has been exhibiting a mixture of religious fervour and hard-nosed political realism. Being mainly a Sikh party, there has always been a close relationship between the party and Sikh religious organizations (Kohli 2010: 57), particularly the SGPC.

In view of the fact that Sikhs have a slight majority in the state and are not a homogeneous community, the Akali Dal realizes its inability to secure a majority. It has therefore discarded communal stances and stressed instead economic, social, and autonomy issues as a regional party rather than as the representative of a single community. As about 80 per cent of Punjabi Sikhs are Jats and the Akali Dal has traditionally received its support from them, the Dal remains concerned more with the protection of their interests.

In general the mainstream Akali Dal works within the broad democratic constitutional framework of India to secure its commitment to the concerns of the Panth, all of which were formulated in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) adopted in October 1973 and further refined in 1978. Although further socio-economic issues have been added to the Dal’s programme, the core remains the ASR.

The ASR contains seven objectives which aim to establish the ‘pre-eminence of the Khalsa’ through the creation of a congenial environment and political set-up. These include the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab; readjustment of the state boundaries to include certain Punjabi-speaking territories, presently outside but contiguous to Punjab; autonomy for the states of India with the centre retaining jurisdiction only over external affairs, defence, and communication; raising the land ceiling to 30 acres instead of 17.5 acres; subsidies and loans for the peasants; measures to bring about heavy industry in Punjab; enactment of an All-India Gurdwara Act; protection of Sikh minorities living outside Punjab; reversal of the new recruitment policy for armed forces under which (p. 344) the recruitment quota of Sikhs fell to 2 per cent; giving control of the Bhakhara-

Nagal Dam headworks to Punjab; a more just redistribution of Punjab's river waters; giving Punjabi second-language status in other north Indian states; the construction of a larger airport at Amritsar and a stock exchange in Ludhiana; direct relaying of *gurbani* from the Golden Temple; more economic facilities for Scheduled Castes; and various changes in the laws to benefit Sikh women. The working committee of the Dal in 1981 added two new demands to the ASR. These were the halting of reallocation of available waters of riparian Punjab to non-riparian states (as under the federally regulated arrangements, 75 per cent of the river waters of Punjab are allocated to other states) and the recognition of separate Sikh personal law. The Akalis also demanded the reformulation/repealing of Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which provides that Sikhs are Hindus (Cheema 2010: 46; Kumar 2009: 173).

The ASR is a catch-all document with special reference to attract the Sikh community, and favour its farmers. To secure the continued support of the Sikhs the Dal has been projecting itself as the sole political voice on Sikh issues, emphasizing for that purpose that religion and politics go hand in hand. Accordingly the ASR states that the SAD is the very embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the Sikh nation and as such is fully entitled to its representation. It also describes the foremost purpose of the Akali Dal as being the preservation of a distinct and sovereign Punjabi identity, and of building the appropriate conditions in which the national sentiment and aspiration of the Sikh Panth will find full expression. A Sikh 'nation' was thus assumed to already exist, the interests of which were to be exclusively represented by the SAD (Shani 2008: 53). Operating in secular democratic electoral politics while simultaneously insisting on being a Sikh party demonstrates that for the SAD religion is at once its strength and its weakness (Chandra 1993: 138).

Proclaiming its role as a Panthic movement the SAD has not only been able to secure rural and urban Sikh support but also to hold near complete control of the SGPC with its enormous resources. At the same time, because of its emphasis on a mixture of religion and politics, the SAD has been accused of secessionist and separatist ambitions by its opponents, especially Congress. Factionalism within the party has added to this charge. Radical and other factions within the Dal and extremists outside it have all looked for a propaganda platform to keep themselves alive; if one was not available, it was created. Whenever an Akali leader felt that his leadership was in jeopardy, he invariably took up the cause of 'discrimination against the Sikhs', 'danger to the Panth', and so on (Brass 1993: 159). Opponents have also encouraged party factionalism to further intimidate the Dal and weaken it. In the 1980s in particular, the SAD was nearly eclipsed by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale. This marginalization of the Akali Dal as a long-time political voice of the Sikhs was an integral part of the political strategy evolved by a set of Congress leaders including the former chief minister of Punjab and president of India Zail Singh.

To ferment internal factionalism, Sant Bhinderanwale and other disgruntled elements, including fringe supporters of an imagined Khalistan residing outside India, were to be used. The Akali leadership came under attack from these elements both for its failure to safeguard Sikh interests and for using Panthic issues solely for political (p. 345) purposes. Interestingly the Akalis figured prominently in the list of four enemies of the Panth that Bhinderanwale spoke about so frequently. The other three were the Sant Nirankaris whom he called *narkdharis* or denizens of hell; the state, its repressive mechanisms and ideological biases; and the Hind Samachar group of newspapers for its communal and anti-Sikh orientation and writings (Dhillon 2006: 87).

To counter the strategy of the government, the Akalis could have broadened its platform by forging a united front with other political forces in the Punjab on the basis of certain minimum demands. But they failed to innovate and evolve new strategies and instead called the religious struggle *Dharam Yudh* (righteous war). The result was that while the Akali leadership regularly and unambiguously declared that it was opposed to the demand for Khalistan, large sections of the Indian population perceived them as secessionist and supporters of extremism. It was only after the horrific events of 1984–5 that both the Akalis and the Government of India realized the futility and long-term effects of ill-conceived confrontation. Peace was eventually restored in Punjab and the Akali Dal led by Parkash Singh Badal emerged as both the dominant Akali faction and the moderate party representing Sikhs.

V

The mainstream Akali Dal, at present led by Badal, is working more as a regional, pragmatic centrist party than a vocal Sikh organization, though it has not dropped its claim to be the sole Sikh representative. There is also a new breed of party workers who have little to do with gurdwara politics. As memories of Operation Blue Star and anti-Sikh riots fade, and a new generation of youth raised in the peaceful Punjab of the 1990s become voters, secular criteria have taken precedence over identity politics (Kumar 2004a: 1520). The end of militancy and the revival of democratic institutions have witnessed a fresh Akali focus on Punjabi rather than Panthic identity. Visible too is the shift from an anti-Centre stand to one of cooperative federalism, and from the politics of confrontation to peace and Hindu–Sikh unity, platforms mentioned in every Akali Dal election manifesto since 1997 (Kumar 2004a: 1519). The party has also realized that it cannot secure a share of state power, let alone a majority, without the support of the Hindu electorate. Either the Dal must win the direct support of these Hindu voters or it must win the support of a political party which can carry this proportion of the Hindu

electorate. The Dal has now been pursuing both these strategies. It has enrolled Hindus as its members, appointed Hindus as office bearers, and fielded them in elections. It has entered into a long-term electoral understanding with the BJP, primarily a Hindu party. Even after securing a majority on its own in the assembly elections of 1997, the SAD chose to form a coalition government with the BJP. The SAD–BJP coalition also promotes an urban–rural collaboration as the support base of the SAD is predominantly rural and that of BJP urban. These also converge with agriculturist and traders groups.

(p. 346) Of course the economic programmes of the SAD remain amorphous. These accommodate many political attitudes, ranging from neo-liberal, in which the Dal can work with the BJP, to populist socialist in which it can attract landless labourers and the poor. But seen in the proper perspective, especially in the light of Akali agitations, it can easily be concluded that the party has primarily been oriented towards rural reconstruction and is favourable to the farming classes. The pro-farmer image of the Akalis is also evident from its social support and outcomes of opinion surveys.

VI

From the 1920s until today the SAD has been identified primarily as a party of the Sikhs particularly supported by the Jat Sikh landed peasantry. During the pre-independence period the Akali Dal was quite successful in creating among the Sikhs a distinct sociocultural identity. After independence it became clear that Sikhs were not only a heterogeneous community in terms of economic and class interests, but they were also divided on politico-ideological lines. During the 1950s a significant number of rural Sikhs voted for Congress, whereas urban Sikhs looked to the Akalis. The beginning of the 1960s saw a shift in these allegiances, a transformation which was also witnessed at the national level in which peasants grew annoyed with the Congress Party. Reflecting this shift, SAD divided along an urban–rural basis in 1962. Whereas in the 1952 and 1954 mid-term (PEPSU) election manifestos the Dal favoured land reforms and cooperative movement, in 1962 it opposed a cooperative movement. It also said that the Dal would strive for the amendment of the Hindu Succession Act, which was to have seriously impaired the agricultural economy of Punjab (*The Times of India*, 19 November 1961). It also assured suitable steps for a steady supply of water for irrigation and favoured the nationalization of banks and heavy industries (*The Tribune*, 4 November 1961).

From 1967 onwards in almost all assembly elections the SAD in general has secured about 30 per cent of votes polled (see Table 27.1 below). A larger percentage of these seats come from the Malwa region. Some parts of Malwa have greatly prospered and the landed Sikh aristocracy here has acquired a dominant position in Sikh politics. This, as P.

S. Verma (1998: 51) suggests, points to two broad features of Akali politics: (a) an emerging role of the organized landed class, and (b) the strong and stable base of a religion-based party in the present state of Punjab. The big landowners in Punjab, whatever their number, are largely concentrated in Malwa districts. Some large landowners belong to Congress also but their influence over the Sikh peasantry seems to be less significant than those landowners who do not. The Akalis do not wield as significant influence over the Sikh peasantry in the Majha and the Doaba regions where Sikh landholdings are relatively smaller. Survey data also shows that the SAD gets only about 10 per cent of the Hindu vote. Even among Sikhs it fails to attract the Backward Castes and Dalits. Put simply in other words the SAD continues to be the party of Jat Sikhs and to an extent, of Khatris (Kumar 2004a: 1520).

(p. 347)

Table 27.1 Akali Dal performance in assembly elections

Year	Seats	Contested Seats Won	Vote Percentage
1967	59	24	20.5
1969	65	43	29.4
1972	72	24	27.6
1977	70	58	37.4
1980	73	37	26.9
1985	100	73[a]	38.0
1992	58	3[b]	5.2
1997	92	73	37.6
2002	90	41	30.5
2007	90	48	37.0
2012	94	56	34.75

([a]) In the 1985 elections held after the Rajiv-Longowal Accord it was observed that Congress willingly allowed SAD led by Surjit Singh Barnala to win and form a government.

([b]) In 1992, the mainstream Akali Dal led by Parkash Singh Badal and also extremist groups boycotted the elections. The Akali Dal led by S. S. Barnala contested elections in an atmosphere of mass Sikh anger against the Union government’s failure to honour the Rajiv-Longowal Accord.

(Kumar 2004a; Election Commission data; newspaper reports).

The Akali Dal has always achieved an overwhelming victory in the SGPC elections. It has also been observed that SGPC elections have been fought more often on political issues than religious ones. This may be used as an argument that the Akali Dal is the

representative of the overwhelming majority of Sikhs. The Assembly and Parliamentary elections (see Table 27.2 below) clearly show however that Sikhs distinguish between purely religious and secular institutions. About religious matters Sikhs as a community are quite touchy and do not allow interference in their affairs from secular parties.

Throughout its existence the SAD has played a significant role in Sikh affairs. At times it has been caught in a cleft stick, to face the two-prong attack, to keep its mass-support intact and also unite various factions. Thus it finds itself trapped at the crossroads of region and religion. A combination of social, political, economic, and psychic factors makes SAD leaders choose the cultural symbols upon which they can base their claim for Sikh support and make regional cleavages congruent with this in order to gain wider support. Factionalism and power politics within the SAD make some sections use extremist postures. This trend, however, is declining as is visible from the almost total marginalization of SAD (Mann) and other militant groups. Even within the SGPC elections of recent years the SAD highlighted developmental and governance issues rather than strictly religious ones. It is in this context that the Dal is not only forming coalitions with the BJP and other non-Congress parties but also including non-Sikhs in its fold, **(p. 348)** emphasizing that their main demands are indeed the demands of all Punjabis. The SAD thus seems to have reasonably come out of the dichotomy between the increasing need for its projection as a regional party while at the same time working for the protection of Sikh rights and their separate identity.

Table 27.2 Akali Dal performance in Lok Sabha elections

Year	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Vote Percentage
1967	8	3	22.6
1972	2	1	30.9
1977	9	9	42.3
1980	7	1	23.4
1985	11	7	31.2
1989	21[a]	6[a]	35.8[a]
1991	3[b]	0[b]	2.6[b]
1996	9	8	32.9
1999	10[c]	3[c]	32.0
2004	16[d]	8[d]	38.1[d]
2009	13[e]	4[e]	34.2[e]

([a]) This includes the seats contested and won and the vote share of the three main Akali Dals: SAD (Mann), SAD (Badal), and SAD (Kabul).

([b]) In 1991 the SAD (Badal) and radical groups led by Mann boycotted the elections. SAD (Kabul) did not win any seat.

([c]) This includes the seats contested and won and the vote share of SAD and SAD (Mann). SAD won two seats while SAD (Mann) won 1.

([d]) This includes seats contested and won and the vote share of SAD (Badal) and SAD (Mann). SAD (Badal) won 8 seats, securing 34.3% votes; SAD (Mann) did not get any seat, securing 3.8% votes.

([e]) This includes seats contested and won and the vote shares of SAD (Badal) and SAD (Mann). SAD (Badal) won 4 seats, securing 33.85% votes and SAD (Mann) did not win any seat, securing 0.36% votes.

(Kumar 2004a; Kumar and Sekhon 2009).

One of the factors responsible for obfuscating the communal nature of the SAD is that while speaking as the sole representative of the Sikhs, it has not done so by pitting Sikh against Hindu. Its main grievances have been and continue to be against the Union government. In the age of globalization where farmers in countries like India are also concerned with World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, and minority languages and cultures are facing challenges the world over, the SAD as a party representing both farmers and Sikh interests remains relevant and important in national, Punjab, and Sikh affairs.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the issues and implications associated with attempting to provide a homogeneous definition of Sikh identity that encompasses all ‘Sikhs’. The existence of sects or groups which define themselves as Sikhs in one way or another present a number of contentious debates within the global Panth. Sects amongst the followers of the Sikh Gurus have existed from the very early period of the development of the Panth. The diversity in the practical expression of Sikhi prompted the Singh Sabha’s efforts towards establishing a homogeneous Sikh identity which later became synonymous with the Khalsa paradigm. There are some sects amongst Sikhs who adamantly affirm their Panthic identity, such as the Namdharis and Nirankaris. However, there are a significant number of individuals who are actively seeking their total break-off from the Panth in order to assert an independent non-Sikh (and non-Hindu) identity. In this case, the efforts of the Ravidassias and Valmikis are significant.

Keywords: Sikh identity, Singh Sabha, Namdharis, Nirankaris, Ravidassias, Valmikis, Dalits, Sikh Rahit Maryada, sects within the Panth

THE presence of different groups within the Panth (Global Sikh community) challenges the uniformity amongst all Sikhs that was sought by the Singh Sabha and Tat Khalsa movements. Diversity within the Panth dates back to the time of the Sikh Gurus. The efforts of the Singh Sabha and Tat Khalsa were undeniably fuelled by their determination to eradicate internal differences amongst Sikhs by establishing a homogeneous identity. This was only possible, in their opinion, through uniformity in beliefs and practices which implemented the redundancy of the Brahmin and Vedic rituals when performing ‘Sikh’ rites of passage. The Tat Khalsa ideal became the official correct procedure for Sikh practice and belief. These were eventually stated in the *rahit-namas*, the current one being the Sikh Rahit Maryada established in 1950 under the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The Sikh Rahit Maryada accommodates the definition of a Sikh as stated in the Delhi Gurdwara Act of 1971, which affirms:

> ‘Sikh’ means a person who professes the Sikh religion, believes and follows the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only *and keeps unshorn hair*.
>
> (McLeod 1989: 98)

Within the Panth, however, there are a number of groups which continue the line of human Gurus in their refusal to accept that Guru Gobind Singh conferred Guruship to the Adi Granth by uttering the words *Guru Maniyo Granth* (‘take the Scripture as your Guru’). The Namdharis are a prime example of this as they do not recognize either the SGPC or the Sikh Rahit Maryada. Hence, the reforms of the Singh Sabha were not adopted by them. The Namdharis continue to perform the *lavan* (the four circumambulatory hymns of Guru Ram Das) around the *havan* (sacred fire) rather than the Guru Granth Sahib as stipulated in the Anand Karaj Act of October 1909.

Before undertaking an exploration of the diversity evidently present within the Panth, it is important to discuss whether Sikhi has a conformist form from which sects deviate in order to challenge claims of a homogeneous Panth. Until the efforts of the Singh Sabha and the Tat Khalsa, the Sikhs were pretty much ‘free’ to do as they pleased in terms (p. 351) of religiously orientated practices (Oberoi 1997). There was much diversity whereby the followers of the Sikh Gurus could readily accommodate the multiple identities to which they related. It is this blurring of religious boundaries that prompted the Tat Khalsa leaders to seek uniformity within the Panth by eradicating the diversity in practices amongst the followers of the Sikh Gurus. Their motivations however were not solely religious but also challenged the attitude of the British rulers that, due to the apparent decline of the outward identity associated with the Khalsa, Sikhism would eventually be reabsorbed into Hinduism. Their definitions of a Sikh did not allow any room for flexibility. Either one was a Sikh, a Hindu, or a Muslim. There was a concerted effort to clearly articulate the message that Sikhs were not Hindus. Interestingly, Hindu idols were not removed from the *parikarma* (the circumambulatory pathway around the pool of the Golden Temple) until 1905. The Punjab Census of 1855 counted the Sikhs as members of the Hindu faith. This is indicative of the fact that clear-cut boundaries of what constituted a ‘Sikh’ identity were either absent or ignored. Hence, the efforts of the Singh Sabha and later the Tat Khalsa were indeed remarkable. This group of elite, educated individuals utilized the printing press in order to disseminate their ideals as far as possible in the early part of the twentieth century.

Importantly, the ideals of the Arya Samaj, a late nineteenth-century movement which refused to acknowledge the Sikhs as distinct from Hindus, was becoming popular in the Punjab. The establishment of its branch in Lahore in 1877 may have influenced the publication of Kahn Singh Nabha’s influential work of 1897 entitled *Ham Hindu Nahin*

('We are not Hindus') as the authoritative statement that a Sikh identity was not compatible with a Hindu identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Evidently, a backlash was taking place between the Singh Sabha with the ideals of Swami Dayanand—the leader of the Arya Samaj (Takhar 2005: 19). Thus definitions of what exactly constituted the 'proper' Sikh way of life were seen as vital by the reforms instigated by the Singh Sabha and Tat Khalsa leaders. Those Sikhs who did not fit the definitions of a Sikh by the Tat Khalsa were labelled as 'improper' Sikhs; these groups of organized followers who rejected the reforms of the Tat Khalsa eventually became sects or groups which became delineated in one way or another from the reforms introduced. Although the Khalsa paradigm was implemented as the official stamp of a Sikh identity, the Tat Khalsa and associated movements needed to accommodate the large number of Sikhs who cut their hair. The Namdharis raise some important considerations in this respect since although they observe the Khalsa form (albeit through the creation of the Sant Khalsa in 1857) they are nevertheless regarded as a sect due to the defiance of continuing the line of human Gurus to the present day.

In accordance with the Sikh Rahit Maryada, the ideal sought for all Sikhs is to become initiated into the Khalsa. Initiated Sikhs are referred to as Amritdharis, that is, those who have undergone the Khalsa initiation and are thus required to stringently follow the rules and regulations of the Sikh Rahit Maryada. An Amritdhari who fails to follow the Rahit becomes a *patit*, a fallen apostate individual who may rejoin the order of the Khalsa after reinitiation. Importantly, however, not all Sikhs are Khalsa Sikhs, that is, not all Sikhs are initiated. Thus, in appearance, the initiated Sikh would be recognizable (p. 352) by his or her turban. The practice of wearing the turban is becoming increasingly popular amongst Punjabi Sikh and non-Punjabi Sikh females across the globe. However, it is important to note that a significant percentage of Sikhs who are not initiated into the Khalsa nevertheless keep their hair unshorn and wear the turban. The Sikh Rahit Maryada refers to these uninitiated Sikhs as Kesdharis. Thus a Kesdhari may be defined as one who although keeping his or her hair unshorn, is not under obligation to follow the Khalsa Rahit since he or she has not taken Khalsa initiation. Amritdharis and Kesdharis are superficially identical in appearance. Kesdharis who are not Amritdhari constitute a majority in the Panth.

Another expression of Sikhi is by those Sikhs who cut their hair but, nevertheless, define themselves as Sikhs. The Tat Khalsa preferred to designate the label of Sehajdhari ('slow adopters') to this category of uninitiated Sikhs. This highlights very much the implications of the Tat Khalsa's predominant attitude that it is, indeed, the Khalsa paradigm which is the conventional stamp that constitutes one's membership within the fold of 'proper' Sikhs. The external markers that have become synonymous with a Sikh identity have no mention in the Guru Granth Sahib. Tradition notes that Guru Nanak

himself refused to wear the external symbolism reflected through the *janeau* (sacred thread). Therefore, if the ideal human being is personified in *bani* as the *gurmukh*, the 'godly orientated', then the labels of Amritdhari, Kesdhari, or Sehajdhari have no real place in any definition of who is a Sikh. Should one's expression of outward symbolism realistically be indicative of a Sikh identity when bearing in mind that the emphasis of *gurbani* is upon interiorized faith?

On the contrary, however, strict observance of the Khalsa does not necessarily guarantee one's acceptance as a 'proper' Sikh. As will be illustrated, there are various points of deviancy which cause a number of expressions of Sikhi to be regarded as nonconformist despite the strict observance of the Khalsa form. Groups such as the Namdharis, although being Amritdhari, do not follow the Sikh Rahit Maryada as established by the SGPC. A range of questions therefore present themselves in terms of what constitutes, and indeed who has the authority in defining, what is Sikhi and the points of departure which result in the labelling of a particular expression of Sikhi as a 'sect'. The acknowledgement of different sects within the Panth raises many objections from those Sikhs who refuse to accept that anything other than the strict observance of the Sikh Rahit Maryada constitutes Sikhi and thus a Sikh.

The Tat Khalsa's aim to put an end to the plethora of diverse practices and beliefs amongst the Sikhs of the nineteenth century caused a number of established groups to be cast aside as sects in one form or another (Takhar 2005: 15–21). Tat Khalsa reforms were rejected by groups such as the Namdharis who continue to follow the Rahit dictated by Baba Ram Singh. The Nirankari sect of Sikhs was originally a 'mission' through which Baba Dayal Singh aimed at reviving the 'spiritual nature' of the Panth. He placed emphasis on the interiorized nature of Guru Nanak's teachings without any prominence on becoming initiated into the Khalsa. A number of other groups are purposefully voicing their distinction from the Panth and therefore, object to being identified as Sikhs. However, two such communities—the Valmikis and Ravidassias—are also included (p. 353) within this discussion in order to debate the extent to which religious identities are fluid and, indeed, pluralistic amongst those members within these communities who identify themselves as Sikhs.

Nirankaris

In his efforts towards promoting the interiorized nature of Guru Nanak's teachings, Baba Dayal Singh, a non-Khalsa Sikh (1783–1855) and a contemporary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, placed great emphasis on the formless (*nirankar*) nature of God. Following the

triumphs of the Sikh Kingdom, under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a significant number of Sikhs were openly participating in rituals that were more in line with the Hindu way of life rather than in accordance with the teachings of the Gurus as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib (Oberoi 1997). This may be indicative of the fact, as mentioned earlier, that Hindu idols were displayed along the *parikarma* of Harimandir Sahib by Brahmin priests until 1905. According to the Nirankaris, death rites for Maharaja Ranjit Singh in June 1839, including the practice of sati by his queens and maidservants, prompted Dayal Singh to encourage the followers of the Sikh Gurus to refocus on the message of *gurbani*. During the nineteenth century (before the establishment of the Singh Sabha movement) a significant percentage of those who followed the teachings of the Sikh Gurus had not adopted the Khalsa form; indeed, there were many ways one could live as a Khalsa. There was no sense of urgency for Sikhs to regard themselves as distinct from Hindus. Interestingly, it is also during this period that the Namdhari following took momentum in the establishment of the Sant Khalsa by Baba Ram Singh in 1857.

Baba Dayal Singh, in his endeavours to voice Guru Nanak's teachings about the irrelevance of Brahmins in religious rites (through his emphasis on teaching in the vernacular), encouraged his followers to meditate on the essence of the Divine to be found within each human being. Thus he encouraged the practice of *nam simran* which was based on Guru Nanak's concept of the immanence of the Divine which rendered irrelevant external practices such as the performance of rituals. He also encouraged Sikhs to reject idol worship. Furthermore, Baba Dayal Singh encouraged Sikhs to focus on the concept of *nirankar* as contained in the Guru Granth Sahib; hence, his group of followers became known as the Nirankaris.

Due to his popularity in Rawalpindi, Baba Dayal Singh and his Nirankari followers faced opposition from both Brahmins and the Bedi descendants of Guru Nanak. The Nirankaris, despite their insistence of the centrality of the Guru Granth Sahib in Sikh worship, were forced to set up their own places of worship. The largest of their centres at Rawalpindi, known as Dayalsar, became the headquarters of the Nirankaris after the death of Baba Dayal Singh. After the partition of India, the headquarters of the Nirankaris eventually became established at Chandigarh. Nirankaris claim that they instigated the practice of centralizing the use of the Guru Granth Sahib as essential **(p. 354)** during the performance of all Sikh rites of passage. This would, indeed, be in line with Baba Dayal Singh's iconoclastic reforms for the Panth and would hint at the origin of the reforms sought by the Singh Sabha and Tat Khalsa leaders.

The reforms stipulated by the Nirankaris (again very similar to those of the Tat Khalsa) encouraged the followers of the Sikh Gurus to utilize the assistance of *gianis* in their

religious domain, including all life cycle rites, rather than endorse the authority of the Brahmin, the intermediary between the divine and human. Indeed, the leaders of the Singh Sabha movement in Amritsar, in particular Bhai Dit Singh and Giani Thakur Singh, are believed to have been influenced through their association with the Nirankaris. Erecting a partition wall, however, between 'Hindu' and 'Sikh' practices, would have been particularly difficult for those Punjabi Hindu families who followed the custom of raising their eldest son in accordance with the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. This would have meant that the eldest son would have his hair unshorn and would wear a turban of similar style to the Khalsa Sikhs.

The lack of emphasis that Dayal Singh placed on the external symbols of the Khalsa has very often led to the Nirankaris being labelled as a Nanak Panth, despite their efforts to centralize the Guru Granth Sahib in the performance of all Sikh rites. Again, this issue highlights the position of Sehajdharis overall in the Panth. Due to the lack of insistence of the Khalsa form, the Nirankaris did not voice their support for the reforms of the Tat Khalsa and are today referred to as a sect that does not qualify for membership of the so-called 'orthodox' domain of the Panth.

Namdharis

The Namdharis, literally 'one who has the Name [of God imbued in the heart]', are strict observers of the Khalsa form. Indeed, the presence of Mona (shaven) Namdharis is extremely rare. It is the tradition of continuing the line of human Gurus that has resulted in the Namdharis being branded as heretics by the more conservative Sikhs (Takhar 2005: 59–88). Conversely however, it is the Namdhari contribution to Indian independence, coupled with their emphasis on the Khalsa form that has made them more widely accepted by the Panth, especially by the leaders of the Tat Khalsa movement (Takhar 2005: 59). The Namdharis, through their initiatives such as non-cooperation, are counted amongst the eminent freedom fighters against the British Raj in India.

Namdharis refuse to accept that Guru Gobind Singh, having suffered a dagger wound in 1708, passed away at Nander (as is the general belief accepted by the Panth). They adamantly reject the claim that prior to the death of the tenth Guru he vested Guruship in the Adi Granth. Instead the Namdharis affirm that Guru Gobind Singh spent his later life as Ajapal Singh and, prior to his death in 1812, selected Balak Singh as his successor. This view is emphatically disclaimed as having no validity amongst the Panth overall. Ganda Singh, a prominent Sikh historian, further draws attention to the fact that the news of Guru Gobind Singh's death features prominently in the 'Royal Court (p. 355) News, *Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mualla*, of October–November, 1708 C.E. and the *Bahadur*

Shah Nama in a number of places' (1997: 410). Namdharis maintain that in turn Balak Singh selected Ram Singh as his successor. During Baba Ram Singh's exile, his brother Hari Singh took the *gurgaddi* (seat of temporal authority) as 'deputy Guru'. In 1906 he selected his son, Partap Singh as his successor. The line of human Gurus thus continues to the present day, with Guru Partap Singh's son, Jagjit Singh as the 'spiritual head' of the global Namdhari community. His permanent residence at Bhaini Sahib in Ludhiana district, Punjab is also the headquarters of the Namdhari *sangat* worldwide. It is necessary to reiterate that the Namdhari rejection of the Adi Granth as the Guru, and hence the use of the term Guru in its Sikh context for the succession of human Gurus after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, is contrary to the beliefs held by the majority Panth. Hence the Namdharis are a sect within the larger Sikh Panth, but not outside of it.

Namdharis developed a doctrine of religious authority reminiscent of the Shi'i Muslim teaching about the hidden imam. They hold that Guru Gobind Singh was not assassinated in 1708 but went into hiding, and that Ram Singh was his successor as the twelfth Guru. Moreover, Ram Singh is believed to be in hiding and expected to return one day. But these Namdhari beliefs are contrary to historical facts. In addition to the continuation of human Gurus, there are a number of beliefs and practices prevalent amongst the Namdharis which have resulted in their being labelled as a 'sect' within the Panth. Due to their insistence on the belief that Guru Gobind Singh selected a human successor, the bestowal of Guruship to the Adi Granth is outrightly rejected by the Namdharis. Hence the words *Guru Maniyo Granth* are not recited during the Namdhari *ardas* ('congregational prayer'). For Sikhs, the title of Guru is only to be bestowed upon the ten human Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib; no other person no matter how holy is to be referred to as the Guru. In Namdhari places of worship, referred to as *dharamsalas*, it is Satguru Jagjit Singh (either in person or a picture of him) which takes the position of authority on the raised platform. The Adi Granth is placed alongside, but outside, the *palki* (illustrations of Namdhari worship can be found in Takhar 2005: 71, 195–7). Hence Namdharis, in line with their insistence on carrying on with traditional practices from the time of the Gurus, firmly assert that the Adi Granth occupies its position alongside that of the human Guru from the time of its installation in Harmandir Sahib by Guru Arjan. A number of Tat Khalsa reforms are thus rejected by the Namdharis. Following the creation of the Sant Khalsa by Baba Ram Singh in 1857, the Namdharis have their own version of the Rahit, and thus do not recognize the code of conduct of the SGPC. Namdharis insist on observing both a vegetarian lifestyle and one free of intoxicants such as caffeine. It is due to their pacifist outlook that Namdharis do not wear a *kirpan*. The style of tying the turban horizontally (usually white in colour) further characterizes a Namdhari (illustrations can be found in Takhar 2005: 77). The performance of the *havan* (*jag*) which is the traditional fire ceremony before marking a special occasion is also a unique characteristic amongst the Namdharis and one which further labels them as a sect. In

their reforms towards a distinct Sikh identity, the Singh Sabha leaders and later the Tat Khalsa aimed at replacing the Hindu ceremony of *jag* (*yajna)* with the centrality of the Guru (p. 356) Granth Sahib during all Sikh religious rites. Thus, the Namdharis are seen (by the orthodox Sikhs) to be purposefully distinguishing themselves from the overall Panth.

Valmikis

The role, if any, which caste plays within the Panth continues to be a much debated issue amongst both Sikhs and non-Sikhs (Takhar 2012). The egalitarian nature of Sikhi promotes the belief and practice of regarding all individuals as equal, regardless of caste and gender. Importantly, the compositions of lower-caste Hindu and Muslim poet-saints are present as Bhagat Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib. However, in practice, there is often a level of hypocrisy between what is taught and what is actually put into practice. The Valmikis, like the Ravidassias, are two caste-based Punjabi communities. The Valmikis take their name from their allegiance to their caste Guru Valmiki, regarded by his followers as the author of the Ramayana (see Takhar 2005: 124–57). Traditionally, the Valmikis are also referred to as Mazhabi Sikhs, the majority, if not all, belonging to the Chuhra caste. Narratives from members of the Valmiki community highlighting their harsh treatment at the hands of higher caste Sikhs are a major factor in the Valmikis' assertion of a distinct identity from the Panth (Takhar 2012).

A growing number of Valmikis (especially the younger generation) may well object to their being labelled as a Sikh sect, indeed as Sikhs *per se*. Despite a lack of reference to the Khalsa Rahit, however, it is the significant number of Kesdharis within the Valmiki community who give rise to complex issues relating to identity. The efforts of the Central Valmik Sabha in Britain are adamantly promoting a totally distinct identity for the Valmikis; this does not allow for the accommodation of surplus identities as Sikhs nor Hindus. Ongoing research has yielded the fact that the Valmiki disconnection from the Panth is not widely accepted by all Mazhabi Sikhs (Takhar 2012). It is instructive to note that in the United Kingdom, the majority of Valmiki Temples (other than 'Jagat Guru Valmik Temple' located in Coventry) do not house the Guru Granth Sahib and place no emphasis on the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. There is nevertheless a stronger connection with the Panth amongst the older generation especially in the Coventry Valmiki community. For a substantial percentage of its older generation, the Rangretia connection to the Panth which recalls the bravery of Bhai Jaita bringing the severed head of Guru Tegh Bahadur to his son, the child Gobind Rai, must not be overlooked (Takhar 2005: 124).

Ravidassias

A deliberate effort to distinguish its members from the Panth is further highlighted through an exploration of the Ravidassia community (Takhar 2005: 89–123). In line with (p. 357) the Valmikis, a growing percentage of the Ravidassia community, especially the younger generation, would object to being categorized as Sikhs. Collectively the Ravidassias are also referred to as Dalit Sikhs, both intentionally and by non-Dalit Sikhs. The term Dalit is translated as the ‘oppressed and crushed’. Whilst some Ravidassias object to the label of Dalit being used, others maintain that this locution is the preferred categorization over the patronizing label by M. K. Gandhi as *Harijans* (children of God). They believe that the term Dalit paints a more realistic picture of their actual status in Indian society than the perceived notion of equality implied by the term *Harijan*. There are also differing responses and attitudes amongst the Ravidassias as to whether the traditional caste label of *chamar* is to be employed. Many view this term as derogatory since it connotes a strong stigma of pollution associated with the occupation of working with animal hides. Others proudly assert their *chamar* identity, which has become synonymous with a Ravidassia identity. Celebrities from the Ravidassia community, such as the renowned Punjabi female artist Miss Pooja, further add to the credentials of ‘*chamar* pride’ through her lyrics.

The similarity of teachings between Ravidass (referred to as a *bhagat* by non-Ravidassia Sikhs, but as Guru by his followers) and Guru Nanak may well have been the reason for the inclusion of forty-one hymns attributed to Ravidass in the Bhagat Bani (Takhar 2002). There is much tension at present resulting from the replacement of the Guru Granth Sahib with the *Amritbani Shri Guru Ravidass* in a number of Ravidassia *deras* (‘centres’) around the world (Takhar 2012). Currently, although all Ravidassia *sabhas* in Britain house the Guru Granth Sahib, there are mixed opinions as to whether it should be replaced. This further highlights that the actions at Ballan, Punjab, of removing their copy of the Guru Granth Sahib by the Ravidassia leaders at Dera Sach Khand—which is the headquarters of Ravidassia Deras globally—are not accepted by all Ravidassia places of worship. The emphasis being placed on a distinct identity from the Panth is currently occupying Ravidassia discussion forums globally. Mostly, the Ravidassia temples do not have the term gurdwara in their official title boards and do not display either the Ikk Oan Kar or *khanda* emblems. The Ravidassia place of worship in Derby, UK is an exception here. The photograph in Figure 28.1 clearly marks the building as both a gurdwara and a Ravidassia temple.

The greeting *Jai Gurudev* (Glory to Guru Ravidass) is used. Allegations of caste discrimination by higher caste Sikhs is cited as the *raison d'être* for disjoining links with the Sikhs and their religious scripture.



Click to view larger

Figure 28.1

(Photo Credit: Opinderjit Kaur Takhar)

The UK Census 2011 was a turning point in terms of the distinct identity of the Ravidassias. Extensive campaigning from leading activists within the British Ravidassia community raised much awareness through seminars and roadshows for members of the Ravidassia community to cite their religion as 'Ravidassia'—emphatically distinct from Sikhs and Hindus. There are significant numbers of Dalits (some of whom were born into Sikh families) who have also converted to Buddhism and Christianity in the hope of removing the stigma of untouchability—this being despite Indian laws dislodging benefits from Dalits and other scheduled castes who convert to Christianity. Case studies carried out amongst the Dalits who have become Christians, Buddhists, and (p. 358) Sikhs however, highlights that caste discrimination continues despite leaving behind the traditional structure of Hindu society. Indeed, the *bani* and actions of the Sikh Gurus were welcoming of all castes; they emphasized both the practical and philosophical dimension ensuing from their teachings of the immanence of the Divine (Takhar 2002). The recent burning alive in India of a group of Dalits who had converted to Buddhism illustrates too well how the stigma of untouchability remains throughout the Dalit's lifetime, regardless of religious affiliation. The events at Vienna in 2009 which involved personal attacks on a prominent *sant* from the Ravidassia community highlight the political and caste-based tensions that persist amongst Ravidassia and non-Ravidassia Sikhs. Thus currently the emphasis is being placed on one uniform identity for Ravidassias as non-Sikhs. However, this is not so readily applicable or, indeed, attractive amongst all Ravidassias, particularly those who have been born into Sikh families.

There are many other groups, in addition to those highlighted above, within the Panth. However, the degree to which they would be content with the the label of 'sect' or group is debatable. Some show allegiance to particular *sants*, such as the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (Takhar 2005: 38–58) whereas others depart from the prescribed form of

external symbolism as stipulated through the Khalsa paradigm in the Tat Khalsa's narrative of Sikh identity. Others insist on following a unique set of beliefs and/or practices which are viewed as deviant. Increasingly, a non-Punjabi influx (collectively referred to as the *gora* Sikhs) has dramatically altered the dynamics of the significantly Punjabi-dominated Panth. The labours of Harbhajan Singh Yogi in attracting non-Punjabi American followers culminated in the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere in the 1970s (Takhar 2005: 158–78). During the earlier phase of his arrival in the USA, Bhajan channelled his efforts into the formation of his 'Happy, Holy, Healthy (p. 359) Organization' (3HO), a gathering of individuals practising kundalini yoga. Eventually many of his students became interested in Sikhi and took initiation into the Khalsa. It is the practice of kundalini yoga and white tantra that has often caused the orthodox elite to cast doubt on the Sikh-ness of the followers of Harbhajan Singh Yogi. Non-Punjabi Sikhs however, would strongly object to being labelled as the 'other' in the Panth. This had led to a number of heated tensions with Punjabi Sikhs (Takhar 2005: 172–7). There has been much debate as to whether the Radha Soami followers of the Beas Sants should be regarded as Sikhs at all in terms of their religious identity. Nevertheless, the importance of the Radha Soami Sants amongst Sikhs is evident through the fact that both Sehajdharis and Kesdharis are prominent members of the *satsang* of the Beas Radha Soami Sants.

In summary, the practices and beliefs of the organized followings of individual leaders which do not fit into the Tat Khalsa and Sikh Rahit Maryada definition of Sikhi have come to be referred to as sects or groups within the Panth. It is perhaps more reasonable to think in terms of the existence of a variety of expressions of Sikhi; that is, to acknowledge a colourful diversity within the Panth. The many sects found within the Panth further challenges the issue of Sikh identity and thus accentuates further the 'problem' of providing one overall definition which successfully encompasses all Sikhs (Takhar 2005). The Khalsa paradigm was exonerated as *the* Sikh way of life and the Mona Sikh was looked on with despair as a 'slow adopter'. This makes it very clear as to why the term 'sect' is viewed pejoratively by the Sikhs. Any organized practice or belief that did not fit in with the ideals of the Rahit Maryada thus became regarded as a sect or group within the Panth.

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Sikh Sants and Their Establishments in India and Abroad

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Abstract and Keywords

This article surveys, with examples, the phenomenon of spiritual leaders known as *sant* or *baba* and their residential bases (*deras*) and successions. Starting from the fifteenth century, but focusing mainly on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, attention is paid to literary sources, to Muslim and Hindu parallels, and to Sikhs' mixed reaction to recent and contemporary *sants*. The involvement in politics of some *sants* (Sants Fateh Singh, Harchand Singh Longowal, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, for example) is reported. As well as generic features, the distinctive characteristics of Nanaksar-style devotion, of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, and of other groupings are presented. *Sants* are considered in relation to caste (for example two predominantly Ravidassia *deras*), as well as to gender (the fewness of female spiritual leaders), and the influential role in diaspora Sikh communities is mentioned.

Keywords: sant, baba, dera, Nanaksar, Ravidassia, diaspora, politics, succession, caste, gender

Terminology

THE word *sant* usually refers to a spiritual master or saint. Because of its apparent similarity, the English word 'saint' is frequently used to translate *sant* and it is sometimes wrongly assumed that the two words are linguistically cognate. In fact, however, whereas 'saint' comes from the Latin adjective *sanctus* meaning 'holy' (the past participle of the verb *sancire*, to render inviolable), *sant* is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat* (truth, being). Thus, a *sant* is 'a person who knows the truth' (McLeod 1995: 186).

The word *sant* recurs in the compositions of Guru Nanak and other contributors to the Adi Granth, synonymously with *sikh*, *gursikh*, *gurmukh*, *sadh*, *sadhu*, and *bhagat* (McLeod 1987: 255), and refers to 'the company of the saints' (the *satsangat*, righteous congregation). More specifically, during the Indo-Islamic period in north India, a *sant* exemplified what is termed the 'Sant Tradition', a religious movement drawing upon both Vaishnava Bhakti (devotion to Rama and Krishna) and the Shaivite (Shiva-oriented) Nath tradition associated with the mythical figure Gorakhnath. Understanding of the Sant Tradition illuminates the spiritual heritage of Guru Nanak and the fifteenth-century saint-poets Kabir and Ravidas, whose hymns are also included in the Guru Granth Sahib. '[A] non-conformist "counter-tradition" that transcended established religious categories and challenged many of the beliefs and practices of orthodox bhakti' is one scholar's description of the contribution of Kabir, Ravidas, and Nanak (Schomer 1987: 8). The relationship between Guru Nanak and the Sant Tradition is, however, contested.

Not only the Gurus but also unsuccessful aspirants to the *gaddi* ('throne' of Guruship) drew followers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite the ending of the (p. 361) line of personal Gurus in 1708, the ancient master/disciple tradition survived, though the master could never be called a guru (McLeod 1995: 186). Many Sikhs attached themselves to preceptors who had acquired reputations as teachers or exemplars and who eventually acquired the title of *sant* (McLeod 1995: 186).

The present chapter's primary concern is with twentieth- and twenty-first-century individuals who are spoken of as *sants*. In most cases a *sant*'s reputation arises from personal charisma, conspicuous religious devotion, a lifestyle that exemplifies *gurmat* (the principles of Sikhism), and authoritative teaching and leadership. But, while many Sikhs experience reconnection with their faith and intensified commitment through their contact with a *sant*, many other Sikhs are critical of the *sant* phenomenon in general or at least of particular *sants*. Indeed, consistently with Guru Gobind Singh's closure in 1708 of the succession of human Gurus, Sikh critics regard as not only non-Sikh, but also anti-Sikh, any behaviour that suggests that a *sant* claims for himself, or is accorded by his devotees, a Guru-like status. Arguably, too, some contemporary *sants* are not spiritually enlightened (LaBrack 1987: 13).

A *sant* is often addressed by the title *Babaji* (literally 'respected grandfather') in tones ranging from loving respect to dismissive, mocking criticism. Some speakers of Punjabi use *Babaji* interchangeably with the English word 'God' when speaking of highly revered individuals (Nesbitt 2000: 182–6; 2005: 316). *Bibiji* is the female equivalent of *Babaji*, but female spiritual leaders are far fewer in number.

The Punjabi and Hindi word *dera* (*derah* or *dehra*), variously translated as ‘shrine’ and as ‘encampment’ or ‘the dwelling place of a sant’ (McLeod 1995: 70), designates a residential centre, usually in the Punjab countryside (McLeod 1987: 259), established by a *sant* and his entourage, as a place of instruction in Sikh belief and practice. The word is part of several place names, notably Dehra Dun in Uttarakhand in north India, which was so named because Ram Rai, Guru Har Rai’s son, camped there. During the later twentieth century, *deras* in Punjab increased greatly in number and, in general terms, their reputation has worsened, through reports of their political influence and associated outbreaks of disorder.

The name *sant samaj* refers to Gurmat Sidhant Parcharak Sant Samaj (‘*sant* society preaching the principles of the Gurus’ teaching’), a union of *sants* and *deras* formed in the late twentieth century. This body acted in concert in the controversy surrounding the formulation of the Nanakshahi calendar, and in 2011 it forged a political alliance with the Sikh political party in Punjab, the Shiromani Akali Dal.

Sources

Literature on *sants* is largely of a devotional nature, for example Doabia’s (English language) biography of Baba Nand Singh of Nanaksar (1981). Writing by *sants* themselves includes the autobiographies of Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh (Trilochan Singh, trans. 1971), the spiritual master of the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, and of Sant Teja Singh (1992). (p. 362) Bruce LaBrack (1987) provides anthropological reflection on Sikh religious movements, and Mark Juergensmeyer (1982) and Harjot Oberoi (1994) provide historical analyses. Religious studies specialists writing on individual *sant* movements include Joy Barrow on Bhai Jaswant Singh (1999), and Louisa Cox and Catherine Robinson on Mahraz Darshan Das (2006). Eleanor Nesbitt published on ‘the Nanaksar movement’ (1985), and Opinderjit Takhar has reported on two diaspora-based *sant*-led groups, the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, as well as on Namdharis, Ravidasis, and Valmikis (2005). Punjab studies specialist Darshan Tatla analysed the *sant* phenomenon in the UK diaspora (1992). The connection between spirituality, politics, and caste, in the case of the Ravidasi/Ravidassia community, is discussed by Takhar (2005) and Ram (2008, 2009), and Jodhka provides an overview of the twenty-first-century scenario in Punjab (2008). In more popular narrative style, Sarah Lloyd’s *An Indian Attachment* details life in the rural Punjabi *dera* of an autocratic late twentieth-century *sant* (2008). Information about *sants* and *deras* is available from their individual websites.

The Social Context

For centuries Punjabis (and not only Punjabi Muslims) have gravitated to the shrines of *pirs*, Muslim saints, widely accredited with miraculous powers. Like *pirs*, Sikh *sants* often hold sway outside the institutions of the religious mainstream. For centuries longer, the Hindu tradition has consisted of *sampradayas*, diverse groups or 'sub-traditions' characterized by the devotees' veneration of a spiritual master (*guru*). In most cases a succession of *gurus* is venerated, and the *sampradaya*'s scripture and festival calendar distinguish it from other *sampradayas*. Arguably, the Sikh Panth itself originated as a *sampradaya* which has developed into a free-standing religion. Also, the continuing emergence of successions of *sants* within the Sikh community is consistent with the *sampradaya* pattern. However, whereas diversity is less controversial within the older, more extensive Hindu tradition, it is contentious for contemporary Sikhs. For Hindus it is relatively immaterial whether the *sant* is styled *bhagvan*, *swami*, *guru*, or *baba* and there is widespread agreement that a living teacher can bring others closer to union with God (whether understood in personal or impersonal terms) and indeed that such a teacher may be indispensable (Labrack 1987).

Like *pirs* and *swamis*, *sants* meet a psychological need to revere stronger personalities, arguably as a continuation of conditioned reverence for parents (Lloyd 2008: 237). So, many followers are content for a *sant* to initiate the *rishta* (alliance) that will lead to a marriage (Mand 2002) and consult him regarding other personal decisions. In the *dera* community, too, decision-making is abdicated to *Babaji*. In *sant*-led gurdwaras there is no elected committee, but instead the *sant* allocates responsibilities to the *sevadars* (those who serve).

At the same time, as noted already, *sants* are suspect, especially in view of the dominant Tat Khalsa (*tat* = pure, i. e. reformist Sikh) emphasis on Sikhism's separateness (p. 363) from Hinduism. Frequently individual *sants* and their followings echo aspects of Hindu *gurus* and *sampradayas*. Thus, the Nanaksar practice of curtaining the Guru Granth Sahib from onlookers' gaze when food is offered to it, suggests the Hindu practice of drawing a curtain between the *murti* (image of the deity) and those present in the *mandir* (Hindu temple) when food (*bhog*) is offered to the deity. Moreover, when Baba Ishar Singh, Baba Nand Singh's successor, assured his followers that offering food to the Guru Granth Sahib was not idolatrous (unless they believed that the scriptures were simply paper and ink), he adduced instances from the lives of two Hindus, Dhanna and Namdev.

Political Involvement

Under British rule, Baba Attar Singh of Mastuana (1866–1927) played an inspirational role in the reformist Tat Khalsa movement and supported the Akalis' early twentieth-century campaign for the removal of corrupt custodians from the historic gurdwaras. After India gained independence in 1947 some *sants* were political leaders, notably Sant Fateh Singh in the 1960s. Sikh politician Master Tara Singh appointed him to continue the incipient agitation for a 'Punjabi Suba', i.e. a state whose boundaries would demarcate an area in which Punjabi was the majority language, consistently with the demarcation of India's other states on linguistic lines. In 1966 Sant Fateh Singh's campaign was rewarded by the Indian government's subdivision of Punjab into Punjab and Haryana and the allocation of some areas to the Union Territories of Chandigarh and Himachal Pradesh. In this way Punjab became India's one Sikh-majority state.

Another politician-*sant*, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal (1932–85), was president of the Akali Dal (Sikh political party) in 1984 when the Indian army attacked Harimandir Sahib (the Golden Temple, Amritsar) in Operation Blue Star in order to 'flush out' Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his armed followers. In 1985, following his signing of an accord with India's prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal was assassinated.

The even briefer life of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947–84), also honoured by many Sikhs as a *sant*, illustrates the role of *taksals* (q.v.) and the interpenetration of religion and politics. Bhindranwale studied in Damdami Taksal, became an eloquent preacher of Khalsa ideals and the leader of the *taksal*. The ruling Congress Party encouraged his activities, hoping to divide their rival party, the Akali Dal, but did not foresee the increasing violence associated with his supporters' demands for an autonomous state of Khalistan. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale died in Operation Blue Star, and is respected by many Sikhs as a *shahid* (martyr for a noble cause).

Increasingly since the instituting of elections in Punjab in 1937, *sants* have been power brokers. During elections to the Indian Parliament and to the Punjab Assembly, politicians of all parties visit *deras* for 'blessings' (Jodhka 2008: 5) and political support (Ghuman 2009: 56). For example, in election years such as 2012, the head of Dera Sacha (p. 364) Sauda (see below) has expressed support for the Congress Party candidate. Followers' voting is influenced by the *sant*'s preference.

Distinctive Features of Individual *Sant* Groups

Despite many resemblances, *sants* and *deras* also diverge in key aspects: some *deras* centre on a master who is explicitly revered as a living Guru, as in the case of Namdharis, Sant Nirankaris, and Radhasoami (Beas). An increasing number have a particular appeal to a Dalit (Scheduled Caste) constituency (such as Dera Sacha Sauda and Dera Sachkhand Ballan, discussed below). Differences between *deras* include the *rahit* (code of discipline) that devotees are expected to observe, as well as liturgical detail (the form of its Khalsa initiation rite, the *amrit sanskar*, and of the *ardas*, for example). This is especially marked in the case of Ravidassia *deras* (see below). Initiations conducted by the Akhand Kirtani Jatha, by Nanaksar Sikhs, and by Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, include recitation of all forty stanzas of Anand, not just the prescribed six stanzas (P. Singh 1996: 156–7). Moreover, the *panj piare* in Nanaksar gurdwaras prepare *amrit* in a separate room, unseen by the candidates (P. Singh 1996: 156–7). In the UK gurdwara headed by Sant Jaswant Singh, the Sukhmani Sahib is recited continuously, in accordance with his wishes (Barrow 1999), as also in Baba Nand Singh's shrine in Nanaksar, Kaleran (Nesbitt 1985: 69). Conventions regarding the turban differ (its colour, style, and whether it is worn by women), as do parameters around women's conduct (such as whether they may publicly read the scriptures or take part in the annual refurbishing of the *nishan sahib*).

Nanaksar is the name of gurdwaras (in India and the UK and North America) established by followers of Baba Nand Singh (*c.*1869–1943), and of his successor, Baba Ishar Singh (1916–63) (Nesbitt 1985). Baba Nand Singh would humbly sit in meditation in *bhore* (caves in the ground) in Kaleran (Tehsil Jagraon, District Ludhiana, Punjab) so ensuring that he was lower than the Guru Granth Sahib. According to Nanaksar tradition, so powerful was Baba Nand Singh's faith that, in his presence, the artist Bhagat Singh saw Guru Nanak manifest himself from the Guru Granth Sahib. In the Nanaksar gurdwara (or *thath*) in Kaleran, and in the many Nanaksar gurdwaras built subsequently, devotees' visible devotion to the Guru Granth Sahib is greater in scale than in other gurdwaras—involving *rumalas* (covering cloths) the size of bed-sheets and attention in the *sach khand* (the Guru Granth Sahib's overnight resting place) that takes account of seasonal changes of temperature. Many Nanaksar gurdwaras have no *nishan sahib* or *langar* kitchen—instead food is cooked by devotees and brought into the gurdwara. Followers' diet is strictly vegetarian. A major act of worship occurs each full-moon night (*puranmasi*), involving animated musicians and a *kirtan* that reaches its jubilant climax in the singing of the *arati*, during which scent is sprayed and flowers scattered.

(p. 365) Similarly to Nirmala tradition, some male followers are *bahingams* (celibate attendants). They wear a white *chola* (tunic) and a white turban that is wound horizontally around the head. The succession to Baba Ishar Singh is disputed, as Baba Kundan Singh, Baba Sadhu Singh, and Baba Narain Singh all declared them his rightful successor. Consequently, *Babajis* in three separate, competing lineages currently maintain the distinctive Nanaksar *maryada* (discipline and style of worship) and are revered as successor by their followers.

Baba Nand Singh's contemporary, Sant Attar Singh (1867–1927), who restored Gurdwara Reru Sahib (a shrine associated with Guru Gobind Singh), was spiritual guide to Sant Kishan Singh and Sant Ishar Singh Rarewale (1905–75)—another example of intergenerational linkages between *sants*.

Likewise, the Akhand Kirtani Jatha (literally 'unending hymn-singing group', also known as the Bhai Randhir Singh da Jatha) owes its inspiration to the *sant* Bhai Randhir Singh (1878–1961), who had in turn been influenced by Babu Teja Singh (1867–1933) of Bhasaur. Thus, reminiscent of the practice at Bhasaur, Bhai Randhir Singh's interpretation of Khalsa discipline means that women wear a *keski* (small turban), since he deemed *keski* rather than *kes* to be one of the Five Ks. A central practice is night-long devotional singing sessions (*rain sabai*), i.e. *akhand kirtan*. The Jatha's distinctive rite of initiation includes five *amritdhari* Sikhs placing their hands on the candidate's head and meditatively repeating 'Vahiguru'. In addition to maintaining a strictly vegetarian diet, Jatha members must cook with, and eat from, only iron cooking utensils.

Unusually among Sikh groupings, adherents to Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere are predominantly *gora*, i.e. 'white' Sikhs of European ancestry, and most are American. The group is closely related to 3HO (Happy, Holy, Healthy Organization) and, like it, owes its existence to Harbhajan Singh Puri (1929–2004), also known as Yogi Bhajan and Siri Singh Sahib. He taught a strictly vegetarian Khalsa discipline, infused with kundalini yoga, contemporary Aquarian Age ideology, and Native American tradition (notably celebration of the summer solstice). Women, as well as men, wear tall white turbans and he exhorted them to focus on a 'graceful', family-centred life (Elsberg 2003). Yogi Bhajan established the Miri Piri Academy near Amritsar, set up successful businesses (including Akal Security and Yogi Tea), and engaged with politics both in Punjab and the United States. Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere's website, sikhnet.com, is an influential online Sikh presence.

The Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha, too, is diaspora-based: its principal gurdwara is in Birmingham, UK, but its following is Punjabi, not European. Bhai Mohinder Singh, its revered leader, is third in a line beginning with Sant Puran Singh in Kericho, Kenya.

The Jatha is prominent in community service both locally (for example, in 2011 it set up a primary school) and internationally (the regilding of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, and engaging in interfaith initiatives).

Also based in Birmingham, UK is a charitable trust established by Bibi Balwant Kaur (1915–2009) (Purewal 2009). Bibiji was noted for her initiatives in Kenya (providing a crematorium in Nairobi), and in India (assisting in post-Partition refugee camps, and later establishing the Bebe Nanaki Gurdwara commemorating Guru Nanak's sister, as (p. 366) well as running eye camps and facilitating vaccination against polio). She encouraged women's participation in the running of the gurdwara.

The Ajit Darbar, established by Delhi-based Baba Ajit Singh Chagar in the nearby city of Coventry, perpetuates the exorcist tradition of Baba Vadbhag Singh, a relative of the later Gurus (Chohan 2008; Nesbitt 2000). Baba Vadbhag Singh's picture is prominently displayed and devotees believe that he is spiritually present. The *nishan sahib* is reverently circumambulated daily, and when the pennant and cloth covering of the pole are ceremonially replaced each year it is garlanded and perfumed. Devotees meditate on the formula: Dhan Guru Nanak.

Baba Virsa Singh (1934–2007), founder of Gobind Sadan, New Delhi, was inspired in his vision of religious unity by Guru Nanak's elder son, Baba Sri Chand and the subsequent Udasi tradition, and by Guru Gobind Singh—hence Gobind Sadan's mosque, *havan* (Hindu-style sacred fire), and daily recitation of the (Christian) Lord's prayer.

However, the line between Sikh affirmation of other faiths and resistance to blurring interfaith boundaries is a fine one: especially controversial among many Sikhs are *sants* who seem to deliberately blend Sikh and Hindu tradition. Mahraz Darshan Das (1953–87), and his Birmingham, UK-based Sachkhand Nanak Dham (translated as 'true House of God'), angered many by his alleged pro-Government of India political stance during the 1980s. He taught the importance of meditation on Nam (the divine), under the guidance of a living master, and he emphasized a truthful, contented, vegetarian lifestyle. Devotees wear white clothes and red *tilak* marks (a typically Hindu practice) on their foreheads (Cox and Robinson 2006). Sachkhand Nanak Dham's flag has prayer beads around a double-edged sword denoting spirituality and activism (Cox and Robinson 2006).

'[A] ccording to his official biography, Mahraz Darshan Das Jee possessed miraculous powers of healing and initiated followers who could also heal people' (Cox and Robinson 2006). Similarly, Barrow reported the faith of Sant Jaswant Singh's followers in his prayers for healing (1999). Reasons for visiting particular *deras* include individuals' desire for a son, the attractiveness of a discipline that rules out drugs and alcohol (Jodhka 2008: 4), as well as exorcism (see Ajit Singh above) and physical and mental healing.

Devotees often believe their *sant*'s superhuman power includes prescience, and that *amrit* (holy water) from their gurdwara has healing and protective properties. The 'peaceful atmosphere' of *sant*-related gurdwaras and *deras* is often mentioned (e.g. Barrow 1999: 337).

In line with growing ecological concern, it is environmental degradation that particularly concerns Sant Balbir Singh Seechewale, who belongs to a line of Nirmala *sants*, and Baba Sewa Singh, the head of the *kar seva* (volunteer) programme at Khadur Sahib gurdwara in Punjab. Sant Balbir Singh Seechewale's vision is the cleansing of the Bein, the river in which Guru Nanak had his seminal spiritual experience, and subsequently of other polluted rivers. In 2004 Baba Sewa Singh committed to a programme of tree-planting, for which he received a national honour. Both *sants* draw inspiration from the Gurus' teaching and the Guru Granth Sahib's environmental imagery.

(p. 367) Generic Features

Followers' respect for their *sant* is evident in their language (e.g. in English using 'they' rather than 'he' and using honorific titles or *Babaji* rather than the *sant*'s name). Devotees' body language too conveys veneration. Many testify to their personal transformation as a result of the *sant*'s blessing. This manifests in increased peace of mind, and many are initiated with *amrit* and adhere to Khalsa discipline.

Deras may comprise a farm (e.g. Baba Virsa Singh's centres), a school (e.g. Rara Sahib), or a hospital (e.g. Sant Jaswant Singh's in Ludhiana), and may house the memorabilia of a deceased *sant* and sell associated literature and pictures. Examples of venerated relics are Sant Ishar Singh Rarewale's marble bathroom and his UK umbrella, and (at Kaleran) Baba Nand Singh's summer and winter clothes (McLeod 1987: 260). A specific iconography is evident—in Nanaksar tradition pictures of Guru Nanak include a *padam* (mark of divinity) on one foot, and Nanaksar *sants* are depicted sitting upon the skin of an open-mouthed lion, with Baba Ishar Singh being portrayed against a backdrop of snow-clad peaks. Devotees endeavour to visit the *deras*, gurdwaras, and other sites associated with their *sant*, especially for significant dates. In addition to the annual dates commemorated by Sikhs more generally, there are anniversaries (*barasis*) of their line of *sants*. Thus Baba Nand Singh's *barasi* is celebrated on 11 to 13 Bhadra (approximately August).

Many *deras* have become wealthy from offerings (Jodhka 2008: 5) and some hold extensive land, e.g. the Radhasoami Satsang (Beas). They may actively promote business

networking and success (Lloyd 2008: 239), with Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere modelling entrepreneurial achievement.

Caste

The attack in Vienna in 2009 by Sikhs on the visiting leaders of Dera Sachkhand Ballan, Sant Niranjan Dass and his second-in-command Sant Ramanand (who was killed), highlighted two contemporary aspects of the *sant*/*dera* phenomenon: the dynamic of caste and the significance of a more and more widespread diaspora. Dera Sacha Sauda and Dera Sachkhand Ballan, which was established in 1948 as a branch of Dera Radhasoami (Beas) (Baixas and Simon 2008), are the best-known examples of the rapidly growing number of *deras* in Punjab that draw a largely Ravidassia following (see Jodhka 2008; Lum 2011: Ram 2008). Although Dalits' education and economic standing has increased they have continued to experience marginalization and stigma. Unwelcome in Sikh gurdwaras and religious institutions, they have increasingly tended to distinguish themselves from Sikhs by self-identifying as Ravidassias. Underlying tension between such *deras* and Akali Sikhs periodically escalates into violence, in 2007, for example, between Sikhs and *premis* (*dera* (p. 368) devotees) when Akalis denounced Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, the head of Dera Sacha Sauda, for the 'blasphemous' act of performing an initiation ceremony dressed like Guru Gobind Singh.

The focus of Ravidassia *deras* is Ravidas (Ravidass), the fifteenth-century saint-poet from the *chamar* (leather-working) community, who is revered by Ravidassias as Guru, whereas in Sikh tradition he is instead accorded the title of *bhagat* (devotee) and his compositions form part of the Bhagat Bani in the Guru Granth Sahib. *Dera* devotees honour an image of Ravidass. Ceremonies—the content of the *ardas*, for example—and greetings and slogans, as well as their festival calendar, differentiate Ravidassia *deras* from Sikh practice. Particularly since the Vienna attack, Ravidassias have increasingly emphasized that their identity is Ravidassia (or, indeed, Chamar) and not Sikh. Ravidassia centres have been established in cities in Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA (Ram 2009).

Sants in Diaspora

Sants have been visiting overseas Sikhs since the early twentieth century, e.g. Sant Teja Singh visiting gurdwaras of California and British Columbia 1908–11 and administering *amrit* (P. Singh 1996: 153). Writing on the role of visiting Sants among Sikhs of Northern California in the 1980s, Bruce LaBrack commented that local Sikhs' behaviour and attitude towards *sants* were not the same as in India, as the visiting *sant* was valued less for his message than for his function as a cultural representative and as a symbol of the Sikh faith. His presence served to make a statement about the image of itself which the community wanted to present and frequently exacerbated already existing divisions within the community (LaBrack 1987). At the same time, *sant* gurdwaras have become, in some measure, models of religious worship. By a strong emphasis on *nam simran* and hymn singing, and a strict code of religious discipline throughout the week, these new gurdwaras have set a new standard and pattern for others to emulate (Tatla 1992 cited in Nesbitt 2005: 328). Sant Ishar Singh Rarewale visited the UK to preach and indeed died there in 1975. In 1976 Sant Puran Singh (of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha) demonstrated support for the successful Sikh campaign to allow Sikh motorcyclists to wear a turban in lieu of a crash helmet.

The Gender Factor

In relation to *sants* and *deras* three issues stand out: the fewness of female *sants*, some *sants*' insistence on specifically gendered practices, and the experience of women in *deras*. One *dera* is headed by the controversial former president of the SGPC, Bibi (p. 369) Jagir Kaur (Jodhka 2008). Bibiji Balwant Kaur, founder of the Bebe Nanaki Gurdwara and Charitable Trust, remains an exceptional example of inspirational female leadership. Since Mahraz Darshan Das Jee's death, the Sachkhand Nanak Dham has been led by Maharani Pali Darshan Das Jee (1954–) to whom he entrusted this role (Cox and Robinson 2006).

Navtej Purewal draws attention to the fact that women's service is taken for granted and expected to be low profile (2009). Women continue to be expected not to draw much attention to themselves in the gurdwara. Some *sants* restrict women's participation more than 'mainstream' gurdwaras do, while others (Teja Singh of Bhasaur, Bhai Randhir Singh, Yogi Bhajan) promote equality, at least in terms of wearing the turban. *Sants*

attract female devotees no less than male adherents, and on occasion detractors predictably spread rumours of sexual improprieties in *deras*.

Concluding Comments

Sants and their *deras* continue to be significant players in a period of unprecedentedly rapid social and religious change. In many cases subverting the dominant discourse of a cohesive Sikh Panth, that exemplifies and promotes the Tat Khalsa ideals of a distinct religion, *sants* ensure that diversity flourishes and cause official representations of the faith to be contested. Informed discussion of Sikh 'orthodoxy', and of boundaries between Sikh and Hindu tradition, cannot ignore the vitality of minority interpretations of the Khalsa *rahit* and the proliferation of *deras.* Moreover, their popularity ensures recognition in the strategic advances of politicians in Punjab. In the absence of an institutionalized priesthood, and in a predominantly oral tradition, Sikh identity and revivalism have long been inspired by itinerant *sants* in both Punjab and in the global diaspora. During recent decades, often characterized as secular and consumerist, *sants* have continued to draw successive generations of Sikhs into lives of religious commitment, spiritual vitality, and community service.

Also see Sikh Sects and *Taksals, Akharas and Nihang Deras.*

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Taksals, Akharas, and Nihang Deras

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This article describes three Sikh religious institutions, which have ambivalent relationship with the mainstream Sikh institutions controlled and regulated by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). Of the three institutions, the Damdami Taksal has begun to preach the orthodox Sikh tradition which has been ratified by the SGPC through the Sikh Rahit Maryada. Interestingly, the Udasi and Nirmala *akharas* have strong links with the sadhu tradition of India as is evident from their emphasis on Sanskrit learning and practice of celibacy. On the other hand, the Nihang *deras* continue to follow a distinct tradition of worship and practice of Sikhism by insistently remaining at the periphery of the Sikh tradition.

Keywords: Damdami Taksal, Nirmala, Udasi, akhara, sadhu, Bhinderanwale, dhuni, Dasam Granth

CONTEMPORARY studies on Sikh history show a tremendous cognitive shutdown with regard to certain Sikh traditions and institutions, largely due to the hegemonic domination of the present Sikh establishment symbolized by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The existence and visibility of many Sikh religious institutions, which do not fall under the sphere of influence of the SGPC, are not questioned by many, but much less is known about these institutions. Before venturing to speak about these three Sikh institutions, it is important to begin with clarifications of certain concepts. *Dera* is a generic term for the camp of a saintly figure located outside the influence and territory of the social space of a community. Its origin in Punjab could be traced back to the Nath tradition of Gorakh Nath. *Deras* substantially differ from each other in terms of various traditions, beliefs, and practices. Nihang *deras*, for example, cover all the places related to Nihangs (Sikh warriors). The word *taksal* literally means ‘mint’, which is metaphorically used to signify its role of producing, through education, the valuable commodity of *granthis* (readers), *ragis* (‘Sikh musicians’), and *kathakars* (‘exegetes’). The word *akhara* means a place where a person is trained in a certain craft. In popular terms

it is a place where a person is trained to be a wrestler. *Akharas* cover two distinct religious traditions within Sikhism, namely, the Udasi and the Nirmala. Both the Udasis and Nirmalas have highly eclectic traditions bordering on religious heterodoxy.

Taksals, *akharas*, and Nihang *deras* are institutions that are located at the periphery of the mainstream Sikh tradition. This study's framework has three dimensions. The first is the historical/anthropological past of the emergence of these institutions (legends and invented traditions), their development and expansion; whereas the second is an understanding of the content of their construction of Sikh tradition and their relationship with mainstream Sikhism as represented by the SGPC. The third dimension is the organizational structure of these institutions for the purpose of underlining the significance of these institutions in the making of Sikh religion.

(p. 373) Taksal

Taksal is the least mentioned institution in earlier sources. Kahn Singh Nabha (1999) makes no mention of it. As an institution *taksal* traces its origin to Baba Deep Singh, allegedly the founder of the Damdami Taksal under the instructions of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708). Since its mention is not frequent in earlier works, both the history and anthropological past of this *taksal* are intertwined. Apparently, the *taksal* became visible due to the most controversial figure of Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale (1947–84) of the Damdami Taksal located at Chowk Mehta in Amritsar district.

Traditions surrounding the Damdami Taksal (1994) relate the origin of the idea of *taksal* to the period of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708). Accordingly, a Sikh was reciting *gurbani* (utterances of the Guru) and the tenth Guru told him that he was mispronouncing certain words and began to explain to him how the meanings could undergo change as a result. Since there were other Sikhs present at that time, the proper recitation of *gurbani* became an issue of concern. Bhai Daya Singh—one of the *panj piare* (Cherished Five)—approached the Guru to guide the *sangat* regarding the proper reading of *gurbani*. Despite promising to do so, the Guru could not find the time. When the Guru evacuated Anandpur Sahib and took rest (*dam*) at Talwandi Sabo, he decided to fulfil the promise to do so. Since Dhir Mal (Guru Hargobind's grandson) refused to give the tenth Guru's emissaries the original copy of the Adi Granth which he possessed, Guru Gobind Singh dictated the entire *gurbani* in nine months and nine days to Bhai Mani Singh and Baba Deep Singh. Baba Deep Singh, after returning to Punjab from Nanded where Guru Gobind Singh breathed his last, started his seminary at Damdama Sahib in Talwandi Sabo. After Deep Singh's martyrdom there has been a continuous line of successors.

It is interesting to note that the head of the Damdami Taksal did not carry the 'Bhinderanawale' suffix till the time of the tenth head, Baba Bishen Singh Muralewale. The first to do so was Sant Sunder Singh Bhinderanwale, who has been described as a dynamic and charismatic leader, as he initiated a large number of Sikhs into the Khalsa order and encouraged the practice of wearing arms among his followers (Korpal 2001: 16). Sunder Singh hailed from the village Bhinder Kalan, now in Moga district, where he established his headquarters. McLeod (1995) rightly points out that the *taksal* acquired some notice only after Sant Sunder Singh, although it became prominent during the period of Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale. It seems that the successor of Sant Sunder Singh, namely Gurbachan Singh, did not choose Kartar Singh as successor. Kartar Singh left Bhinder Kalan and established his *taksal* at Chowk Mehta, the place where Gurbachan Singh had breathed his last in 1969—though he retained the suffix 'Bhinderanwale'. The *taksal* at Bhinder Kalan had acquired recognition, prominence, and importance in the mainstream Sikh establishment. Presumably, Kartar Singh broke away from the *taksal* at Bhinder Kalan, because he was not nominated as successor. After his death in 1977 Jarnail Singh (1947–84) was chosen to succeed. Consequently, (p. 374) the Bhinder Kalan Taksal lost its prominence. After the death of Jarnail Singh during Operation Blue Star in 1984, Thakur Singh headed the Damdami Taksal till his death.

The *taksal* is primarily a seminary giving training to young apprentices in reading, reciting, and singing *gurbani*. There seems to be no difference in the Sikh code of conduct advocated by the Damdami Taksal and the SGPC. The major activities that the heads of the taksal carried out were singing hymns from *gurbani* and initiating the Khalsa Sikhs. Jarnail Singh Bhinderanawale articulated various issue-based ideas of the *taksal* through his speeches. Three aspects could be identified in the contents of his speeches (Judge 2005). Firstly, he emphasized that a real Sikh resembles his Guru who is our father in terms of dress (*bana*), failing which he is a bastard. Second, he must recite *gurbani*, according to the code of conduct, every day. Third, he must keep weapons. It is important to point out that with the exception of the third aspect, Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale preached orthodox Sikhism. However, if we go by Pashaura Singh's (2004) interpretation of Sikh identity, then wearing weapons was a well-established tradition in the eighteenth century. There is also a reasonable basis of arguing that there has been a shift in the approach of the *taksal*. It is obvious from the history of the Damdami Taksal (1994) that Bishen Singh Muralewale, Sunder Singh Bhinderanwale, and his successor Gurbachan Singh had got their initial education, including the knowledge of Sanskrit, from Nirmala Sikhs. The implications of this information is that the shift to the orthodox Sikhism took place during the period of Gurbachan Singh before which the teaching and interpretation of *gurbani* was largely confined to Nirmalas.

At the organizational level there seems to be no single organization of different *taksals*, implying that each *taksal* is independently headed by its particular *sant* and there could be more than one gurdwara under the control of one *taksal*. A visit to Chowk Mehta reveals the simple life lived in the gurdwara by the trainees as well as the *sant* teachers, including the preparation of food and feeding the cattle. Each independent *taksal* is headed by a *sant* whose suffix indicates his title. There are elderly followers who also claim to be *sant*. The lowest in the hierarchy are the trainees. At most of the places these trainees are guided in the recitation of *gurbani*, but in the Javaddi Taksal near Ludhiana the trainees are trained in *gurmat sangit* (Sikh music). The most important aspect of the organization is the transference of charisma, as the institutionalization of charisma has already occurred. Generally, the successor is chosen by the chief *sant*. Since all *taksals* have not been brought under one authority, the transference of charisma is invariably challenged by other influential *sants* as noted earlier in the case of Gurbachan Singh. It is interesting to note that the spread of *taksals* in recent years is a result of these schisms, which occur at the moment of transference of charisma. It is a process which could be traced back to the times of the Sikh Gurus when they chose their successors.

The evidence available regarding the contribution of the *taksal* in the making of the Sikh religion suggests that the charismatic leaders initiated a large number of people as Amritdhari Sikhs. The most dynamic among them was Kartar Singh who being politically ambitious, as is evident from his opposition to the Emergency, travelled throughout rural Punjab and initiated many Sikhs into the Khalsa order. His successor, Jarnail Singh proved to be more influential in orienting the Sikh movement towards (p. 375) the struggle for Khalistan. At this moment, most of the *taksals* are quietly carrying out their responsibilities of preaching and training young apprentices into becoming *pathis*/*granthis*/*ragis*.

Akhara

The word *akhara* as a signifier can be traced to the Hindu ascetic orders of sadhus. The history of the organized emergence of sadhu ascetics dates back to the time of Shankaracharya in the eighth or ninth century (Ghurye 1953). Since *akhara* essentially means ‘wrestling arena’, its origin in the vocabulary of sadhus is linked with their militancy and martial training. Ghurye observes: ‘It is better to render akhada by the military term regiment’(Ghurye 1953: 103). In the Sikh tradition, *akharas* are connected with the Udasi and Nirmala sects, and while both have their own anthropological and

historical moorings, both as well ‘were in origin a reaction of synthesis to the impact of Islam’ (Ghurye 1953: 142). It is, therefore, important to treat them separately for understanding the Sikh tradition and its close links with the Hindu monastic sects.

Udasi *Akharas*

The anthropological past and history of the Udasi Sampardai are intertwined and its close proximity with present-day Sikhism can be established by the fact that its founder, Sri Chand was the elder son of Guru Nanak. According to Rangeela (2010), the Udasi Sampardai originated from the mythic Sanandan Kumar—the son of Lord Brahama. Ghurye (1953) maintains that the word *udasi* owes its origin to the estrangement of Sri Chand from his father, Guru Nanak Dev. However, the word *udasi* seems to be implying journey, for the various journeys of Guru Nanak are termed as *udasis*. As the *janamsakhi* of Sri Chand claims, he never settled at one place. Neither did he construct any dwelling. Initially, his successors also adopted his name—a practice similar to the Nath Yogis of Gorakh Nath’s sect—but later on the practice was abandoned.

According to S. Singh (1999), in the first half of the nineteenth century Udasi establishments numbered about 250 and the most frequently used term to denote them was *akhara*. The Udasi *akharas* grew in strength during the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, implying thereby that they got state patronage (Oberoi 1994). In the beginning, Udasi establishments were largely located in urban centres. Their spread to villages occurred during Sikh rule. We thus come across a period in Sikh history, particularly after Banda Bahadur and before the emergence of Sikh power, when the Udasis in Punjab were among the few religious sects who kept Sikhism alive at the levels of both doctrine and ritual through the maintenance of gurdwaras. It is equally significant to notice that the Udasi influence spread to different parts of India where it was ideologically connected (p. 376) with monastic asceticism. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Udasi preaching brought a large number of people to the Sikh fold.

Contrary to his father’s emphasis on the significance of social life, Sri Chand propagated renunciation, asceticism, and celibacy. Ghurye (1953) classifies Udasis as reformist and revivalist due to their claim as followers of Sruti by virtue of their worshipping ‘Pancayatana’ (combination of five deities, namely, Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Goddess Durga, and Ganapati). However, their philosophy is monistic Vedanta and they are closer to Shaivite sadhus than Vaishnava ascetics. ‘When one Udasi meets another, the mutual greeting is formed by “Om Namo Brahmane”, Om! Bow to Brahaman’ (Ghurye 1953: 145). At the same time, the Udasis revere the Guru Granth Sahib. The combination of

Hindu gods and the Sikh religious text in the Udasi tradition seems to suggest that it has evolved over a period of time due to many historical conditions.

This becomes clear when we look at how the Udasis related to the Sikh Gurus. Apparently, there was tension between the family of Guru Nanak and his chosen successor, who moved to his native place, Khadur Sahib. However, the eldest son of the sixth Guru of the Sikhs, Gurdita became an Udasi ascetic though he was married. Parallel to the orthodox line of Sikh Gurus, the Udasis have their own line of succession starting from Sri Chand followed by Gurdita. More importantly beginning with the period of Sikh political struggle in the eighteenth century Udasis seem to have significantly contributed to Sikhism in three ways: (1) constructing gurdwaras, (2) managing gurdwaras, and (3) teaching and training young apprentices. Most of the Udasis were scholars of Sankrit and Persian (S. Singh 1999). Udasi *akharas* were thus similar to present-day *taksals* and acted as seminaries.

Organizationally, the Udasis lack any central organization and each *akhara* is independent in terms of its functioning and finances. There are two kinds of structures which give some semblance of coordination among different *akharas*, although the reality of these links is tenuous. These are: *bakhshish* and *dhuan*. The former literally means ‘grant’ and the implication is that those foundations (which are six) have been established as a result of a grant from Sikh rulers. On the other hand, *dhuan* means ‘smoke’ and there are four *dhuans* (implying Udasi centres) at which an uninterrupted *dhuni* (flame) is kept. It seems that certain Udasi *akharas* are under the control of these *dhunis*. In sum, there seem to be two trends in the organizational structure of the Udasis. First, there are *akharas* which are under the control of *dhunis* and secondly, there are some independent *akharas*.

The contribution of the Udasi *akharas* is significant in the making of the Sikh religious tradition till the time of the emergence of Singh Sabha movement. Udasi *akharas* reached almost everywhere and owing to their attempt at synthesizing the Sikh tradition with the Indian Hindu ascetic orders, the Udasis were able to derive tremendous acceptance and popularity during the chaotic years of Sikh armed struggle in Punjab. They were favoured and granted lands during Sikh rule. At this moment, they stand excluded in the Sikh mainstream, but in the Hindu tradition they are part of the aristocracy among the ascetic orders.

(p. 377) Nirmala *Akharas*

The Nirmala *akharas* seem to be performing the functions of a seminary. In comparison to Udasis, Nirmalas have less spread and influence, though both share the monastic and ascetic lifestyle. Interestingly, the Nirmalas have constructed and invented their tradition rather well and they have been able to do so owing to a strong tradition of scholarship in the Sikh and Hindu traditions. They trace their origin from Guru Nanak and use various lines from *gurbani* to establish this claim. Literally meaning ‘clean’ and ‘spotless’ the word *Nirmala* itself occupies the central importance in the claims of the construction of the tradition. The recent works of Nirmala scholars trace their origin from the first Guru (Kotha Guru and Singh 2009; Mansa 2009), but unlike Sri Chand, the Nirmalas have no historical connection with the first Guru. A common tradition claims that the tenth Guru sent five scholars to Kashi to learn Sanskrit, although McLeod (1995) considers this improbable since there is hardly any mention of Nirmalas until the nineteenth century. Ashok (1997) states that after the tenth Guru evacuated Anandpur Sahib, the Nirmalas spread to different places in India, such as Haridwar, Allahabad, and Varanasi, where they established their *akharas*. Since the history of the Nirmalas is ambiguous, certain conjectures can be made. There is the likelihood that the Nirmala tradition descended from that of the Udasis. Such events have taken place. For example, Gulab Dass, before establishing his own sect, had been trained by Udasis and Nirmalas. It may be argued that since Udasis got the patronage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the other Sikh rulers in the Malwa belt patronized the Nirmalas and helped them in establishing as a distinct sect. The Nirmalas are close to Udasis on account of asceticism, celibacy, and Vedantic grounding. They both support unshorn hair and don the saffron robe.

The spread of Nirmala *akharas* is quite impressive and may have resulted as a consequence of the rules set by the various grants bestowed upon the orders by the Phulkian states (Nabha 1999; Oberoi 1994). A careful analysis of these rules indicates that in order to establish themselves through the patronage of the rulers, the Nirmalas came close to the Khalsa tradition which was being constructed in the beginning of the twentieth century. Shastri (1981) underlines nine rules that regulate the *akharas* of the Nirmala *sants*. Two important rules which highlight the similarity and difference between the Nirmala *akhara* and mainstream Sikhism are: All Nirmalas should have unshorn hair and the *mahant* of the *akhara* cannot get married. Other rules govern the management and the inheritance of the property of the *akhara*. The closeness between Nirmala and mainstream Sikhism has proved fragile after the Sikh construction of identity was supported by the state, both the colonial and post-colonial, through enactments. The Nirmala *akharas* have remained important so long as they acted as seminaries and no

other alternative was available. The emergence of the dominant tradition in Sikhism with state support began to erode the intellectual authority of *akharas*, because the construction of the dominant tradition was based on the principle of creating a distinct identity of the Sikhs demarcated from Islam and Hinduism.

(p. 378) The logic of the growth of various *akharas* could be understood from the organizational structures of these *akharas*. All *akharas* are divided into thirty-three main *sampardais* spread in the various parts of north India, each *sampardai* has many chapters under its control. However, the Nirmala Panchayati *akhara* at Kankhal, Haridwar, occupies the most exalted status. It came into existence with the financial help of the Sikh Phulkian rulers all of whom set the rules and conditions in 1918 known as *Dasturul-amal*. These conditions set the tone of the strong intervention of the Khalsa tradition. It is important to note that many prominent Nirmala *sants* in Punjab preached mainstream Sikhism. Outside Punjab, however, the Sanskritic tradition has remained equally strong. Nirmala *akharas* have played an important role in training a large number of Sikhs in religious tradition. The close proximity of Nirmalas with the Khalsa also explains the invention of tradition by the Sikh mainstream which runs parallel to the Hindu tradition.

Nihang *Deras*

Nihang *deras*, like *taksals* and *akharas*, are training centres, but they are confined to the training in martial arts. Nihangs are quite visible but much neglected within the Sikh community. Their visibility is due to their dress and behaviour including their use of certain words with distinct semantics. Within the Sikh community the Nihangs are also the object of pun. Ordinary Sikhs largely treat Nihangs with a great degree of indifference. McLeod (1995) rightly points out that they are identified as the consumers of *bhang* (cannabis) which they call *sukha* and secondly, they have the bad reputation of travelling by trains or buses without buying tickets. The Nihang *deras* have invented a tradition and have recently developed websites. Except for Akali Phula Singh few Nihangs are known to history. Acknowledged as Akalis in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, they had the reputation of being fierce and fearless fighters. The Akalis of the twentieth century bear no historical connection and continuity with the Nihangs.

The history of the Nihangs is a serious problem for any historian. Nabha (1999) identifies three stories regarding the possible origin of the Nihangs. The first is related to the young son of the tenth Guru who wore a loose blue shirt down to the knees and covered his head with a high blue turban. Seeing this the Guru said that such a dress would be

donned by Akalis. The second story is related to the disguise the tenth Guru adopted after he evacuated Chamkaur Sahib in 1705. The third story is that the dress could be traced to Naina Singh Akali, who, according to Kang (1997), was the leader of Nishananvali *misl*.

Nihang *deras* seem to have flourished after independence, because the Nihangs were treated unkindly during British rule. Earlier, they maintained their independent existence but kept cordial relations with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Akali Phula Singh, who was the custodian of Akal Takhat, contributed to the making of the Sikh empire by participating in various battles fought by the Maharaja. At the same time, the Nihangs kept their *deras* fiercely independent. The number of Nihangs declined during British rule, (p. 379) for they lost their importance after the demise of Sikh rule. It is worth noting that their distinctive appearance since the early nineteenth century may have led the Tat Khalsa to adopt elements of their dress in an attempt to perhaps augment the martial character believed to be quintessentially Sikh by the British.

The orthodoxy practised by the Nihangs in their dress makes them an important vehicle of the propagation of Sikh symbols. Their religious practice differs from the SGPC-defined Sikh Rahit Maryada. Along with the Guru Granth Sahib, the Nihangs show equal respect to the Dasam Granth and the Sarab Loh Granth (Kang 1997). In each *dera*, there is a special place earmarked for preparing Sukha. Nihangs in every *dera* have horses and, recently, they also have cars. All Nihang *deras* store arms and keeping these at the *dera* has become normative. The SGPC and other Sikh organizations do not judge the Nihang *deras* from the perspective of the Sikh Rahit Maryada. The Nihangs for their own part likewise do not criticize the SGPC although any undesirable comment by the SGPC on the Dasam Granth or its placement beside the Adi Granth in Nihang-run gurdwaras evokes a sharp response from them. Certain writings found in the Dasam Granth are not in tune with the present mainstream Sikh tradition and some Sikh scholars have commented on the issue by the express desire to purge the Granth from such writings, but Nihangs always react to such issues aggressively. It is interesting to note that the Nihang *deras* did not get involved in the Khalistan movement. In 2001 the author interviewed Ajit Singh Poohla—the then head of Taruna Dal, who noted that there were only two Nihangs, namely Avtar Singh Brahma and Pipal Singh, who joined the ranks of the Sikh militants.

The Nihang *deras* are first divided into four major organizations and then there are divisions within each organization. These four organizations are: Taruna Dal, Budha Dal, Baba Bidhi Chand Dal, and Ranghreta Dal. It is interesting to note that Rangreta Dal is exclusively comprised of Mazabi Sikhs. The most prominent of these four are the Taruna Dal and Budha Dal, whereas Baba Bidhi Chand Dal is almost confined to village Sur Singh —the native place of Bidhi Chand. It is interesting to note that Bidhi Chand was the devotee of the sixth Guru and there are many popular narratives of Bidhi Chand’s bravery

and exploits. Nihang *deras* are also called *chhaunis* (cantonments) and they maintain a warlike culture and standards. Nihangs do not have any central command even within the *dal*. For example, the Taruna Dal is comprised of different independent *jathedars*. It is interesting to note that the name of Baba Deep Singh is also associated with the Nihang Singhs. It is claimed that the division among Nihangs into Budha Dal and Taruna Dal was made by Nawab Kapoor Singh ([www.nihangsingh.org]). The Nihangs are well organized in terms of hierarchy of functions, but a particular *dera* and its associated gurdwaras remain under the firm control of its *jathedar* who never relinquishes his position during his lifetime. There might be the existence of a second in command, but this office rarely becomes functional. There are two broad divisions within each *dal*. One group remains stationary, whereas the other is mobile. The mobile group in the Budha Dal is called the Dalpanth and it joins major festivities across the country. They reach Amritsar on the day of Vaisakhi, Anandpur Sahib on Hola Mahalla, Muktsar on Maghi, and Baba Bakala on Rakharh Punnian. They are most (p. 380) noticeable on the occasion of Hola Mahalla at Anandpur Sahib. It may be mentioned that joining festivals at places linked with the Sikh Gurus is the practice found among all Nihang *dals*.

There is a great degree of general Sikh ambivalence towards the Nihangs and their *deras*. There is no real knowledge but through the construction of the Sikh past by *ragis* and *dhadis* and others involved in the invention of Sikh tradition, they seem to have made sacrifices for the faith and *qaum*. One possible consequence of their relative isolation could be the development of coded language. Sekhon (1997: 229) attributes these different meanings of the words as metaphors of optimism and belief in the inevitable achievement of the goal: ‘Taking a meal of parched gram of necessity a Nihang would describe himself as eating almonds. Even now onions for Nihangs are silver pieces, rupees on the other hand mere pebbles, and a club the repository of wisdom.’

The Nihangs seem to have largely lost their significance for the Sikh community and religion, but they have made two important contributions to show their contemporary relevance. It is largely because of them that *gataka*—swordsmanship—has been popularized both as sport and martial art. Secondly, owing to their veneration for the Dasam Granth, they have been able to stall the efforts of the SGPC to edit and purge certain writings from it. Moreover, they are maintaining the *bana* (appearance and dress) of the ideal Khalsa Sikh. The people in general have a negative perception of the Nihangs, as they are identified as troublemakers. Nihangs have also been involved in land grabbing and murders. Ajit Singh Poohla’s *dera* was allegedly involved in the murder of the family of Joga Singh—the leader of the Khalistan Armed Force—of village Khanpur in Amritsar district. Piara Singh Nihang killed more than a dozen members of the family of Jagir Singh—a Khalistani militant.

Conclusion

All three Sikh religious places are seminaries, which are imparting knowledge and training in different ways and forms to help the apprentice to acquire knowledge, skill, and attitude. All three institutions are distinct in each case. Whereas Udasis continue with the synthesis of the Guru Granth Sahib and Vedantic tradition, the Nirmalas have partly tilted towards the Khalsa tradition while at the same time continuing with Vedantic philosophy. The Nirmala *akharas* show a degree of ambivalence towards the established and dominant tradition at the moment. The learning of Sanskrit is still an important element in the construction of the identity of both Udasi and Nirmala *akharas*. The *taksal* is a seminary which trains the *pathis* and *granthis* and is not engaged in the cultivation of Sikh scholarship along the lines of Nirmala *akharas*, despite the fact that the earlier *taksal* heads got training from the Nirmalas. *Taksals* today adhere to the Sikh orthodoxy constructed by the Tat Khalsa in the earlier years of the twentieth century. Some of the *taksals* venerate the Dasam Granth, yet they recite *gurbani* from only the Guru Granth Sahib. Their veneration for the Dasam Granth takes them close to the Nihang (p. 381) *deras* where the Dasam Granth occupies the highest pedestal. However, Nihang *deras* provide training only in the martial arts, particularly *gataka*. With the exception of the Damdami Taksal no other institution examined here has shown any political ambition for theocracy.

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Global Sikhism

Mark Juergensmeyer

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Abstract and Keywords

Sikhism, like all religious traditions, is undergoing changes in an era of globalization. It was for years a regional religion in South Asia, and then became a world religion in the Sikh diaspora. It is now becoming a global religion where the global Sikh diaspora affects politics in South Asia, and where the Sikh community in South Asia is affected by transnational trends in global affairs. The early twentieth-century Ghadar movement of diaspora Sikhs is an example of the former, and the late twentieth-century Khalistani movement of Sikh separatism is an example of the latter. The transnational Sikh community continues to evolve in the multicultural world of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: global Sikhism, Ghadar, Khalistani movement, diaspora, transnational religion, global religion, religion and politics, multiculturalism

Is Sikhism regional or global? On the one hand, it clearly has regional roots. It is a religious tradition often identified with the region of the Punjab in the north-western area of the South Asian subcontinent. This is an area defined by the land that lies among several rivers that combine to become the mighty Indus (hence the name Punjab—in Farsi, *panj-ab* means ‘five rivers’). Sikhs are not the only religious community in the region—Muslims predominate in the western half of Punjab, now in the state of Pakistan, and Hindus comprise half of the population in India’s Punjab. Yet Sikhism is distinctively Punjabi in that it arose in this territory, its central shrines are in this area, the language of its sacred texts and rituals is classical Punjabi, and the culture associated with the Sikh community—wherever it might be in the world—is Punjabi as well. When one thinks of Sikhism one thinks of the ‘Golden Temple’ (more properly known as the Harmandir Sahib or Darbar Sahib) in the Punjabi city of Amritsar, just as readily as one thinks of the Vatican when referencing Roman Catholic Christianity. To many, Punjabis are Sikhs and Sikhs are Punjabis, and Sikhism would be unimaginable without Punjab as a cultural locus.

Yet Sikhism is also a global religion. ‘Global religion’ in this instance means something different from ‘world religion’. A world religion is a religious tradition that is a significant presence because of the size of the community associated with it, its endurance over history, and its importance within the pattern of the world’s civilizations. Sikhism has long had these characteristics. It has been worthy of being deemed a ‘world religion’ for some time, even though, as I argued in an essay published in the 1970s, it was for a time a ‘forgotten tradition’ in the minds of many observers of the world’s religious scene (Juergensmeyer 1979). In recent decades the expansion of the Sikh community around the world and the commanding public presence of Sikhs both in India and elsewhere make it a ‘forgotten tradition’ no longer.

At the same time, Sikhism is increasingly a part of the transnational fabric of religious cultures that constitute ‘global religions’. The phrase ‘global religions’ refers to religious communities that are spread throughout the earth, the ideas and practices of which are interwoven with other cultures, and whose own practices adapt and change in response (p. 383) to the multicultural environments in which they are found. When Sikhs in British Columbia proudly march through the streets on their sacred days to demonstrate their allegiance to the faith, they are proclaiming, rightly, that Sikhism is a world religion of some stature. When Sikhs in California adapt their social practices to American customs, proudly display the American flag in gurdwaras, and take part in interfaith councils, they are stating, also correctly, that Sikhism is a global religion as well. It is the main point of this essay that Sikhism is a world religion indeed, but one that is increasingly becoming a global religion.

The statistics help to make the case. Though the precise numbers are contested, the Sikh community is said to claim over 23 million adherents worldwide. This makes Sikhism a larger global religious community than Judaism, and like Jews, Sikhs are found everywhere. The Punjab state of India is the only place on earth where Sikhs are in the majority, but over 30 per cent of the world’s Sikhs live outside the Punjab (source for numbers: Census of India and [www.adherents.com]). They live elsewhere in India and are dispersed throughout the major continents. Significant clusters of Sikhs predominate in some regions. There is a large Sikh population in the UK, Canada, and the US, especially in California where there is a century-long tradition of a vibrant Sikh presence in the rural areas of the state’s Central Valley. Sikhs in UK and Canada have increasingly been a part of the multicultural societies of urban regions. In the state of British Columbia in Canada, there is a higher percentage of Sikhs in the population (2.3 per cent) than in India as a whole (2 per cent). In almost all of these cases these migratory Sikhs are people who are ethnically and culturally rooted in the Punjab but who have settled elsewhere. In some cases these expatriate communities are generations old.

The move outward from the Punjab began almost from the beginning of the faith in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sikh communities that are found even today in Afghanistan and Iran are likely descendants of Sikh traders who settled in the regions as early as the sixteenth century. The famous account of Guru Nanak's travels recall that he visited Baghdad; and indeed a gurdwara in that city is said to have been constructed in honour of his visit. It is likely that trade was also a factor in the movement of the Sikhs westward along the overland trade routes from the Punjabi city of Lahore to Kabul and thence to Isfahan and Baghdad. Especially Sikhs from the Khatri merchant caste took advantage of the opportunities that the rich trade routes afforded. Similar trade opportunities took the Sikhs northward along the great Silk routes that connected India to Balkh, now in Afghanistan, and then to the key pan-Asian trade hubs, Bukhara and Samarkand, now in Uzbekistan. From there they travelled throughout Central Asia and beyond.

Later, beginning in the nineteenth century, the Sikhs found other opportunities to settle abroad. Many Sikhs had enlisted as soldiers in the Indian army, and the British government provided an avenue for Sikhs to serve in the military elsewhere in the world under British control, such as Hong Kong and Singapore. In the early twentieth century, opportunities for farming attracted rural Sikhs to Canada and California. In the mid-twentieth century and continuing to the present, Sikhs trained in technical and engineering skills have been lured abroad.

(p. 384) As Sikhs began to live elsewhere in the world, they brought both their faith and their Punjabi culture with them. In time, Sikh communities began to incorporate local customs into their tradition. In the early part of the twentieth century, for instance, many expatriate Sikhs shaved their beards and cut their hair, deviating from the more traditional standard. In California in the early twentieth century, some Sikh bachelors married Mexican women.

Hence, like other religious traditions, the history of Sikhism has been one of dispersion, interaction and transformation, and profound cultural change. Though most Sikhs will assert that the inner core of the tradition's teachings have endured and the heart of their faith has remained intact, immutable through the years, no one can deny that the cultural vessels in which those ideas have been carried have been varied and the outside influences have been considerable.

The scripture of the Sikh tradition is regarded as a unique revelation. Yet the Guru Granth Sahib and the stories of Guru Nanak recorded in early *janamsakhi* literature, indicate an awareness of the Hindu and Muslim communities living in the subcontinent during the Gurus' lifetimes. Echoes of Hindu and Muslim saints appear in Sikh literature.

Sikhs have always lived comfortably with persons of other religious affiliation without losing what is distinctive about their own faith.

In a global era, when people move easily from place to place and take their old religion with them, their beliefs and customs are affected. When people settle in a locale as an expatriate community, some curious things begin to happen to old religious ideas and practices—in some cases these cultural elements become rigid and insular, in other cases they adapt and change. Sometimes this interaction and the resistance to change produces hostility, as Sikh communities have discovered when they have persisted in wearing the turban and other forms of traditional clothing that many of their American and European neighbours have regarded as arcane and sectarian. But regardless of the social tensions that cultural interaction creates, in time a certain amount of acceptance and assimilation occurs.

Some of this social tension is experienced within the diasporic communities themselves. Often it is an older generation of immigrants that is deeply suspicious of attempts to modify familiar customs and cultural practices to suit the patterns of the host society. Disputes have arisen over such matters as the proper clothing to be worn in public, whether dating and marriage outside the community is permissible, whether Sikh men should shave their beards, and whether Sikh women should wear Punjabi clothing and headscarves. The more conservative members think—correctly—that in adapting to the practices and customs of the host society their own culture is changing. The question for the community is whether such changes are superficial as long as the more important aspects of belief and religious adherence are maintained.

The global diasporas of peoples and cultures can transform traditions. Though it is likely that Sikhs will retain certain fundamental elements of their tradition—just as Christians, Buddhists, and Jews have done in expatriate communities that they have established abroad—it is also likely that there will be changes. They will face some of the issues of acculturation and transformation that every tradition has encountered, (p. 385) and raise questions that go to the core of their religion—such as whether outsiders who marry into their communities and convert to Sikhism can be accepted as equals. Increasingly, the developments in the diaspora affect the global community of Sikhs, as the centre of gravity within the community has moved outside the Punjab.

Innovation in the Global Diaspora: The Case of California Ghadar Movement

The term diaspora comes from the Greek word meaning ‘to scatter’, and it referred originally to the dispersion of the Jewish people and their culture, but it is not the only religious tradition in which its members have been scattered far and wide and taken their customs and loyalties with them. Increasingly every religious tradition is a religion in diaspora. Sikh communities are found throughout the world. There are Sikhs in Los Angeles, London, and Hong Kong. The rapid and easy mobility of people has produced expatriate communities of dispersed cultures around the globe.

The historical contexts in which communities emigrated from their homeland and became established in other parts of the world vary. Sociologists speak of the ‘push-pull’ factors: the situations that encourage people to leave, and the opportunities that beckon people to come to a new location. The story of the Sikhs in North America in the early twentieth century provides an interesting case, in this regard, and an example of how the sociopolitical conditions in diaspora have led to new social innovations that affected the global Sikh experience (Juergensmeyer 1977).

In general, the ‘push’ factor in Sikh migration from the Punjab to North America was initially created by communal tensions and oppressive British policies in the Punjab; opportunities for farm ownership and enterprise provided the ‘pull’ factor that attracted rural Sikhs to come there. In Punjab, in 1907, there had been a series of riots and other disturbances over British land rights legislation. The problem had been developing since 1900, when the Alienation of Land Act in India prohibited certain non-farming castes from owning agricultural lands. The Act had the laudatory effect of preventing moneylenders from taking over farmland, but it irritated many middle-income non-agricultural Punjabis who had aspired to develop farmland on their own. When new canal areas opened in the Punjab, government legislation prevented the settlers of these newly irrigated areas from full ownership. Added to these issues were the problems of nature—severe famine, and an epidemic of bubonic plague which allegedly took millions of lives. The climate of hardship and government oppression resulted in a series of riots in the district towns of Punjab in the summer of 1907.

The years of 1907 and 1908 were also the years of the largest number of immigrants to Canada and the United States. Even though not all of the immigrants came from the areas of the riots, the fact of unrest in the Punjab indicates that the emigrants perceived (p. 386) the times to be in a state of flux, an era of political and social change, which often signals the attempts for individuals to seek new opportunities and greater security.

Almost all of the immigrants were from Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana districts of central Punjab, an area dominated by peasant proprietors. The early 1900s was a time of mobility for them; many had migrated within Punjab to the new canal-irrigated colonies in south-western Punjab. Eventually, in the United States, the Punjab immigrants also would be working in newly irrigated farmland. This was in the San Joaquin valley of California, which is geographically much like the area of the Punjab. Initially, in 1907 and 1908, the main destinations of the immigrants were the lumber camps of Oregon, Washington State, and British Columbia in Canada. Many of the first immigrants had come to North America via service in the British army. By the middle of 1908, they had begun building their own gurdwara in British Columbia, and established an investment company of their own, the Nanak Trust Co.

Almost upon their arrival, the new immigrants from Punjab were met with hostility from some of the white residents of Canada and the United States. In most cases, the difficulties were in the competition for scarce jobs; the new immigrants were often willing to do demanding work for less pay. In 1907 there were anti-Asiatic riots in British Columbia, which included hostility against Punjabis, along with both the Chinese and Japanese; the same year, the Punjabis were the specific target of riots in the lumber camps in Bellingham, Washington. In 1908 and later, the riots had moved south to the state of Oregon, and in California, the Exclusion Movement against other Asians also included hostility against the Punjabis. And in 1908, British Columbia effectively ended all new Asian immigrations.

These events in India, Canada, and the United States were the immediate antecedents to the founding of the Hindustan Association in British Columbia in 1909, a political organization that was concerned not only with immigrant rights but with the British control of India. The Hindustan Association advocated self-rule in India, and was closely allied with the local Khalsa Diwan Society in British Columbia. The formation of this association seemed to be, in part, a response to the labour problems and the racial prejudice encountered by the new immigrants, and it is not unlikely that the context of economic and social tension was relevant to the support of a nationalist movement. During the years of 1907–9, with a great amount of movement from India to North America, the events in the Punjab and the events abroad could not remain isolated in the minds of the immigrant community.

From 1910 to 1913, two other sequences of events appear to be relevant. Restrictive legislation and racial disturbances had turned the focus of Punjabi concern about immigration status away from Canada and towards America. The year 1910 was the last of large migration to the United States; and it was also a year of racial disturbances in both Oregon and California. By 1912, the Sikh immigrant community in California was sufficiently established to begin building its own gurdwara in Stockton. The Punjabis

(along with other Asians) were also sufficiently established as landowners in the rich developing San Joaquin valley farmland to threaten the resident American landowners; in 1913, an Alien Land Law was passed, which limited landownership for most Asians to (p. 387) three-year issues. Later that year, several other organizations were established to protect immigrant rights.

One might think that this concern with the local immigrant situation would make the immigrant community disinterested in politics back in India. But quite the opposite was the case. As several community leaders at the time expressed it, the harsh conditions of government oppression in America made the immigrants even more in sympathy with those in the homeland of India who were resisting the harsh rule of the British colonial government. Thus in a curious way, the two concerns were fused. In 1913, a new movement was established among the Punjabi immigrant community in California that was expressly interested in helping to foment a rebellion against British rule in India. It was called 'Ghadar' (or revolution), and in November 1913, the newspaper *Ghadar* began publication.

During its more active years from 1913 to 1919, the Ghadar movement was a remarkable creation, a fascinating chapter in the history of immigrant communities and at the same time an important moment in the development of India's nationalist movement. It has also served as a model for other movements of nationalist pride that are based in expatriate communities abroad.

The Ghadar movement is remembered in the history of Indian nationalism as one of the first militant efforts to defeat British rule in the subcontinent. In 1915, the movement collaborated with the Japanese (at war with the British during the First World War), and commandeered five boatloads of weapons and propaganda that set sail from the California coast to India where they were to be utilized in fomenting a revolutionary Independence movement. The boats were all intercepted by the British, however, and the vision of revolutionary struggle remained, for a time, a dream. Yet the Ghadar movement has an honoured place in India's history of independence. The first flag for a free India, for instance, flew not in India but above the international headquarters of the Ghadar movement at 5 Wood Street, San Francisco, California.

The Ghadar movement was a genuine expression of nationalist support for a free India, but it also gave a point of identity and a channelling of hostility for a confused and angry immigrant community. One of the early Ghadar leaders explained, some years later, that all they had to do to gather the support of the diasporic Punjabi community was to show how the British control of India was related to the American mistreatment of the community in the United States. Though the majority of the supporters of the movement were Sikhs from the Central Valley of California, centred at Stockton, the leaders of the

movement included Hindus and Sikhs. The masthead of their magazine proudly displayed symbols of the three faiths to show their unity in the cause.

Although the Ghadar rebellion of 1915 was crushed by the British, the movement continued to be a point of identity and involvement for the Sikh community in California; and it had an impact on the politics of the Punjab in India. Many of the returning members of the movement became politically active in leftist politics in the Punjab, where they are credited with founding the state's Communist Party. One of the old Ghadarites in California, Mangoo Ram, returned to the Punjab to establish a movement of uplift for (p. 388) his own caste community of untouchables, the Ad Dharm movement, which for some years played an important role in Indian politics (Juergensmeyer 2009).

The story of the Ghadar movement indicates the global aspects of Sikhism in two ways. It shows that diasporic communities are able to link their local concerns with the course of global politics, and become involved in political dramas on the other side of the world. It also shows that the cultural limitations of a diasporic group are not impermeable, and are subject to innovation and change.

The Impact of Globalism: The Case of the Khalistani Movement

Global politics currents also have a way of affecting local communities. In the era of globalization that developed in the last decades of the twentieth century, the secular nation state increasingly came under assault. In many parts of the world, the unity of colonially defined national boundaries became challenged. In other places the very idea of secular governmental authority was discredited. In the case of the Khalistani movement in the Punjab in the 1980s, both of these elements of global political critique were factors. Interestingly, like the Ghadar movement, the Khalistani movement was supported not only in the Punjab but enthusiastically by Sikhs worldwide within the global diaspora, especially in the UK and the United States.

In Sikhism religion and politics have been linked throughout the ages. The concept of *miri/piri*, of spiritual and temporal power, is represented in the double sides of the blade in the centre of the *khanda* (see Figure 31.1), the central iconic symbol of Sikhism.



Figure 31.1 The Khanda – the central iconic symbol of Sikhism

For this reason religion in the Sikh world has not always been a reliable ally for state power. The same Sikhism that provides for some rulers a supportive ideology has been for others a basis for rebellion. By latching onto the legitimization provided by the image of Sikh rule, some political leaders may think they are harnessing Sikhism's vision of temporal power for their own political fortunes. But it is just as likely that this same (p. 389) Sikhism could be the resource for anti-national or transnational forces that would undermine the legitimacy and support of state power.

The Khalistani movement that developed in the 1980s in the Punjab is a case in point. Religious politics had been imposed on the subcontinent in the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim-majority nation at the ending of British rule in 1947. The partition of the subcontinent split the Punjab in half, with the Sikhs and Hindus occupying the Indian half —but even there, Sikhs were in the minority. In the 1950s Sikh activists spawned a new political movement that called for a redrawing of the boundaries of the Punjab to include only speakers of the Punjabi language, a demand that was tantamount to calling for a Sikh-majority state, and in 1966 the old Punjab state was carved into three to produce Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, states with Hindu majorities, and a new, smaller Punjab with a Sikh majority.

The violent movement that erupted in the 1980s had some ties to these earlier campaigns for Sikh autonomy and political power, but it was in many ways more fanatical, more religious. The movement began during a clash in 1978 between a group of Sikhs and the Sant Nirankaris, a small sect that had splintered from the Sikh tradition and followed its own lineage of gurus. Behind the Sant Nirankari attack was Jarnail Singh (1947–84), a young rural preacher who at an early age had joined the Damdami Taksal, a religious school and retreat centre founded by the great Sikh martyr Baba Deep Singh. When Jarnail Singh joined it, the leader of the centre was a religious teacher who had come from the village of Bhindran and was hence named Bhindranwale. It was a name that Jarnail Singh adopted out of respect when he became the head after his teacher's death. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale found the Sant Nirankaris' worship of a living guru to be

presumptuous and offensive, and in the escalating violence between the two groups, lives were lost on both sides. In 1980 the Sant Nirankari guru was assassinated. Bhindranwale was accused of the crime but never convicted of the act.

Soon Bhindranwale became busy with a new organization, the Dal Khalsa (the Group of the Pure), which was supported by the prime minister's younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, along with other Congress Party leaders, including the president of India, Zail Singh. The Congress leaders supported it because they hoped it would undermine the dominant Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, which has been the Congress Party's rival in the Punjab, but it never succeeded. In fact, the Dal Khalsa became more strident and Bhindranwale was increasingly identified with violent acts. In 1981 the publisher of a chain of Hindu newspapers in Punjab who had been a critic of Bhindranwale was shot dead, and Bhindranwale was implicated. In response to his arrest and the destruction of his personal papers, Bhindranwale turned against the government. Bands of young Sikhs began indiscriminately killing Hindus, and later that year a group of Sikhs hijacked an Indian Airlines plane in Pakistan. The rebellion had begun.

The sermons of Bhindranwale offer clues to his religious sensibilities and their political implications. I have analysed these sermons for my book *Global Rebellion*, where I describe the rise of the Khalistani movement more fully (Juergensmeyer 2008: 115–25). What is impressive about Bhindranwale's talks is his ability to link Sikh history and legend to contemporary politics in a convincing way. In a rambling, folksy manner, he **(p. 390)** called on his followers to maintain their faith in a time of trial, and he echoed the common fear that Sikhs would lose their identity in a sea of secularism or, worse, in a flood of resurgent Hinduism. He evoked the image of a great war between good and evil waged in the present day: 'a struggle…for our faith, for the Sikh nation, for the oppressed'. He implored his young followers to rise up and marshal the forces of righteousness. 'The Guru will give you strength', he assured them.

By 1983, Bhindranwale's power and the fear of it had grown so enormously that Mrs Indira Gandhi had suspended the Punjab government and was ruling it directly from Delhi. Bhindranwale had set up an alternative government of his own in the protected quarters of the Sikhs' most sacred shrine, the Harmandir Sahib (also known as the Golden Temple) in Amritsar. The situation came to a head on 5 June 1984 when Mrs Gandhi sent troops into the sacred precincts in a venture code-named Operation Blue Star. In a messy military operation that took two days to complete, hundreds were killed and wounded, including a number of innocent worshipers. Bhindranwale was apparently also killed in the operation. Even moderate Sikhs throughout the world were horrified at the spectre of the Indian army stomping through their holiest precincts with their boots on, shooting holes in the temple's elaborate marble facades. Avenging this act of desecration, two of Mrs Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards turned their automatic weapons on

her as she was walking through the garden from her home to her office in an adjacent bungalow. The day after she was assassinated on 31 October 1984, over 2,000 Sikhs were massacred in Delhi and elsewhere by angry mobs.

The uprising and the violence continued in the Punjab for the rest of that decade. In 1991, over 3,000 people were killed in the Punjab's triangular battle among the police, the militants, and the populace. Along with the increase in violence was a general collapse of law and order, especially in rural areas of the state. This collapse was due in part to the erosion of idealism in the Sikh movement; increasingly it degenerated into roving bands of thugs. The anarchy in the villages was also caused by the failure of the Sikh movement to achieve its political goals, leaving a cynical and demoralized public in its wake. In that sense the public disorder proved what the Sikh religious nationalists had been saying all along: without a government legitimized by religion, there can be no credible government in the state at all.

The Punjab state government finally gained an upper hand over the militants in 1992. The Congress Party leaders who came to power in the February elections used their mandate to unleash the police in search and destroy missions that literally eradicated the militant network. Several thousand were killed—dedicated revolutionaries, thugs, and innocent bystanders—in what amounted to a government-led massacre. Perhaps more important than the police action, however, was the complicity of villagers in the government's operations. They had had enough of all of the violence and bullying from both sides, especially as the high moral purposes of the Sikh militants had degenerated into gang warfare. Increasingly the villagers regarded them as thugs. The result was a state of calm in the Punjab that most residents had not experienced in over ten years.

The tensions between the Sikh community and the secular government were not completely resolved. The government won the war against the militants not because it (p. 391) persuaded the Sikh masses that it was right, but because the public and the moderate Sikh leadership had grown weary of the militants' posturing. They were ready to accept the restoration of law and order at any cost. A great number of Sikhs—especially in the diaspora Sikh communities around the world—were disappointed at the termination of the struggle. They continue to hope for a public order that gives greater recognition to the authority of their religious community, and many continue to wage their own small wars against the secularism of society, including what they regard as the insidiousness of Western-style scholarship on Sikh history and texts. The ingredients of religious rebellion have remained. As in other parts of the world where Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu religious traditions have provided challenges to the secular state, activists within the Sikh tradition also see its ideas and history as resources in potential religious rebellion.

Thinking About Sikhism Globally

Such are the tensions in Sikhism at the dawn of the twenty-first century. As the cases of the Ghadar and Khalistani movements show, participants in the global diaspora of Sikhism have affected India's political life and Indian politics have been affected by global issues and global actors. And in all aspects of global Sikhism there is a quiet ambivalence between the personal and social dimensions of religion, and a public struggle between Sikh politics that supports the secular state and one that envisages a rebellious religious politics in its place. At the same time there is a growing transnational consciousness of Sikhs around the world—fostered through the Internet and the easy mobility of travel—that transforms the local concerns of both diasporic communities and the Indian homeland.

This contradiction between transnational religion and the religion of nations is overcome in instances where religion is itself the expression of a transnational culture and society. One could say that the early Sikh community is itself an interesting example. Scholars continue to debate the degree to which the formation of the Sikh community in the sixteenth century was influenced by Islam, by Hindu bhakti movements, and by its own original formulations. There is no question, however, about the awareness of early Sikh leaders, including the founding Gurus, towards the religious diversity of the world around them and their hospitability to engagement with people of differing beliefs.

The Sikh community in the centuries after the time of the human Gurus has always found itself in a multicultural environment, whether in the Punjab itself or around the world. For this reason, the message of Sikhism has been refracted through a variety of cultural lenses. As official forms of Sikhism became over time institutionalized, often linked with specific cultural customs and practices, they became able to respond readily to pluralistic cultural settings. Much the same can be said of every organized religious tradition. Yet throughout Sikh history, spiritual movements have emerged that have offered personal forms of religiosity. The mystic teachings of the saints represented (p. 392) in the sacred text of the Guru Granth Sahib continue to be a resource for an emerging transnational Sikh generation that is looking behind the institutional restrictions of the faith to discover Sikhi, a Sikh way of life.

Thus the cultural aspects of Sikhism have become diverse in a diverse cultural world. The various forms of economic, social, technological, and cultural globalization at the dawn of the twenty-first century are the channels for new expressions of religious identity and belief. New opportunities for the global transmission of religion are created through social mobility and the establishment of diaspora communities, and through the ability to

communicate easily the universal ideas of transnational religions to their expanding communities worldwide. As populations merge in plural societies, religions of globalization emerge as well. In an era of shared communication, culture, and ideas, it may be possible to imagine the evolution of a global civilization with its own diversity of globalized religions. Sikhism, with its emphasis on the natural order underlying all differences, could provide one strand of this shared religiosity. As in the past, the Sikh community in the future is certain to adapt as it responds to changes in the world around it.

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Sikh Music

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the place of sacred music in the Sikh tradition. Most instructively, the performance of scriptural hymns (*śabad kīrtan*) in a congregational setting is the heart of Sikh devotional experience. It is a special mode of worship that contains singing and listening to the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. Therefore, the main focus of this essay is to closely examine the historical development of the devotional performance of Sikh *kirtan* in the Sikh tradition.

Keywords: śabad kīrtan, nada, chaunki, raga, Gurmat Sangit, paṛtāl, rababi, joṭīāṅ dā kīrtan, akhaṇḍ kīrtan, dhrupad

Sikh sacred music is an art of spiritual communication through the medium of devotional singing of scriptural hymns (*śabad kīrtan*). Sikhs contemplate *Akāl Purakh* ('Timeless Being', God) and live according to the teachings of their spiritual Masters or *Gurns*. The Sikh *Gurus* and other Indian spiritual Masters revealed their sacred verse (*bāṇī*, 'inspired utterance') which has been inscribed in Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS). To become spiritually enlightened in the journey to attain eternal bliss, Sikhs recite and listen to the *bāṇī* in congregations and perform all religious activities and rituals in its presence.

Guru Nanak in his famous composition *Japjī* clearly highlights music as the most exalted medium of communication: 'If we sing of God and listen to his praises and let divine love arise within, all our suffering will disappear, and we will experience enduring peace within our heart, mind and soul. The utterance of the divine Guru is the melodious vibration (*nāda*). The utterance of the divine Guru is scriptural wisdom (*veda*). The utterance of the divine Guru is all-pervading' (GGS: 2). Here, Guru Nanak clearly maintains that the physical vibrations of musical sound are inextricably connected with the spiritual world of the 'un-struck melody' (*anahad nāda*), a position which is basically in agreement with the metaphysical theory of ancient Indian music. In the framework of

this musical theory and Indic notions of sacred sound, Sikh doctrine maintains that the inspired ‘utterance of the Guru’ (*gurbāṇī*) embodies the divine Word in the form of eternally sounding melodious vibration. This ‘un-struck melody’ (*anahad nāda*) cannot be directly perceived or ‘heard’, although it is the basis of the entire perceptible universe (Pashaura Singh 2011: 113–14).

The central focus in Sikh religion is the mystical meaning of scripture in its intellectual and aesthetic experience, evoked by means of meditating on, singing of, and listening to the sacred hymns. To accomplish this objective sacred verse has been musically composed and arranged. In Sikh devotional experience the communicative power of poetry and music is being used effectively to transfer the spiritual message through the medium of hymn singing or *śabad kīrtan*. The word *kīrtan* is derived from the root *kīrat* (‘praise’), denoting ‘praise of God’, and it evokes the sublime so that the receptive mind (p. 398) can feel the divine presence during the performance. Guru Arjan proclaims, ‘In the dark age (*kaliyug*) singing the praises of God is the principal mode of worship’ (GGS: 1075). Listening to this divine music is as efficacious as performing it, only if one listens to it with a receptive mind in the company of the holy (*saṅgat*): ‘Singing the glory of God in the companionship of the holy people is the supreme act of devotion’ (GGS: 642).

The primary objective of Sikh *kīrtan* is spiritual discipline. That is why it is kept free of secular characteristics that may be in vogue at any given time. Any kind of music that might contribute to the arousal of sensuality has no place in the Sikh tradition (Pashaura Singh 2011: 99). In Sikh parlance mere technical perfection of vocal skill and musical rendering is not considered to be *kīrtan*. In this context, Guru Ram Das explicitly says: ‘Some recite the glory of the Supreme Being in melodious voice; some with musical instruments and some by reading the scriptures, but the Lord is not pleased by these activities without the purity of mind’ (GGS: 450). The performance of *kīrtan* in a congregational setting lifts the devout from the world of desires to that of transcendental bliss and enlightenment: first, by listening to devotional singing one’s aesthetic senses are satisfied; second, the *rasa* (‘aesthetic feeling’) of *kīrtan* delights one’s inner consciousness and offers spiritual nutrition; and finally, one’s soul is transported into the realm of spiritual ecstasy (Mansukhani 1982: 80–1).

Since its inception *śabad kīrtan* is a composite tradition of vocal and instrumental music with the synthesis of classical and regional folk music. Continuous devotional singing can be witnessed in the holy proceedings at various gurdwaras, especially inside the Darbar Sahib in Amritsar. This peculiar devotional style has evolved its own character and conventions as a distinct tradition of music. This musical tradition follows the Sikh tradition of music (*saṅgīt*) set by the Sikh Gurus, and is thus called *Gurmat Saṅgīt*.

The Development of Sikh Musical Tradition—Gurmat Saṅgīt

The development of Sikh music commenced with Guru Nanak and continued under his successors. The latter composed *bāṇī* in various Indian musical measures and singing styles, introduced various accompanying string and percussion instruments, and institutionalized *śabad kīrtan* through training and patronizing the various schools of Sikh music. Guru Nanak initiated the tradition of communicating the spiritual message through his utterances, acting as humanity's channel to the divine: 'As the Word of God descends upon me so do I make it known to people, O Lalo' (GGS: 722). He further reveals the process of this mystical experience in his autobiographical *Majh* hymn:

> I, an insignificant bard, was blessed by the Lord with the gift of his service. He commanded me to contemplate his Name night and day. The Lord called this humble minstrel in his eternal court and blessed him with the robe of honour of his True (p. 399) Name. Since then his True Name has become my ambrosial food. The appetite of those who contemplate his Name under his will is satiated with this ambrosial food. By reciting the inspired lyrics of divine manifestation this bard is spreading the fragrance of divine Love. Says Nanak, by contemplating the True Name I have obtained the Perfect Lord.
>
> (GGS: 150)

This hymn unambiguously testifies to Guru Nanak's own understanding of his divine mission, and it indicates the beginning of his ministry.

During his journeys in the first two decades of the sixteenth century, Guru Nanak was accompanied by the Muslim *rababi* Mardana, who used to play the string instrument called the *rabab* ('rebeck'). The first Guru made four journeys and addressed different people through musical performance. The particular ragas and varying singing styles from different cultural traditions in his hymns are clear evidence of this. In various classical and folk styles, he composed his verses in nineteen ragas and their seventeen raga forms of varied nature and origin. According to Bhai Gurdas's (BG) testimony, Guru Nanak set up a new dharamsala ('hospice') at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan) as the first Sikh religious centre where devotional singing of sacred verses were part of religious worship at that time (BG 1: 27).

The second Guru, Angad (r. 1539–52) composed his verses in *salokas* ('verses') in nine different ragas. He also initiated the famous *śabad kīrtan* performance (*kīrtan chaukī*) of

Āsā dī Vār (‘Ballad in *Āsā* Mode’). Tradition notes that the second Guru also used the *Gurmukhī* script amongst the Sikhs. The third Guru, Amar Das (r. 1552–74) composed hymns in seventeen musical modes and their six raga forms. His most important composition is *Anand Sāhib* (‘Hymn of Bliss’) in *Rāmkalī* raga, which is sung at the conclusion of all Sikh ceremonies.

The fourth Guru, Ram Das (r. 1574–81), founded the city of Amritsar where he built a holy pool. He composed verses in thirty ragas and their twelve raga forms. Along with his other sacred compositions, he also initiated a musically exclusive distinct style of *paṛtāl* (a classical style of variable rhythms). Twenty-four lyrical compositions (*chhants*, hymns of four to six verses) of Guru Ram Das in *Āsā* mode are an integral part of the musical session of *Āsā dī Vār*, recited daily in the ambrosial hours in the sanctum-sanctorum of Harimandar Sahib and all the Sikh gurdwaras. His other important composition *Lāvān* in *Sūhī* mode is recited to celebrate the marriage of Sikh couples.

The fifth Guru, Arjan (r. 1581–1606), secured the religious legacy bequeathed to him by his predecessors. He built the Harimandar (now known as the ‘Golden Temple’) in the midst of the sacred pool as the nucleus of Sikhism, in which devotional singing goes on day and night. He composed his devotional verses in classical and folk forms in thirty major ragas and their fourteen raga forms. Most importantly, Guru Arjan compiled the sacred compositions of his predecessors and other Indian saints in the Adi Granth in 1604, and installed it in the sanctum-sanctorum of Harimandar Sahib as the presiding authority to be venerated. He established eight *chaunkīs* (‘sittings’) of (p. 400) *kīrtan* at the Darbar Sahib, five of which had special significance in Sikh worship. These chaunkis were not periodical musical performances like the fivefold *naubat* (‘musical ensemble’) in the court of Emperor Akbar or the eightfold *darshans* (‘the acts of seeing the divine’) of Vaishnavas, but rather stood for singing the praises of Akal Purakh day and night to symbolize the ever-present divine power (Pashaura Singh 2011: 104). Apart from encouraging *rabābī* singers, such as Satta and Balwand, Guru Arjan also promoted the training of *śabad kīrtan* and the playing of various string instruments.

The sixth Guru, Hargobind (r. 1606–44), had built Akal Takht Sahib in front of the Harimandir and donned the two swords of political and religious authority (*mīrī/pīrī*). He patronized the ballad singing tradition in Sikh music and inspired the bards Nattha and Abdulla to perform nine ballads inscribed in the Guru Granth Sahib. He also patronized Babak who was a prominent singer, as well as a fierce warrior. When Guru Hargobind was put into prison at Gwalior by Emperor Jahangir, two prominent Sikhs, Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas, started the tradition of *Chaunkī Sahib* (also known as *Vārīāṅ dā kīrtan*) as a folkloric chanting of scriptural hymns in the form of a protest march (Santokh Singh

1990: 2659, 2667). During the period of the sixth Guru, a peacock shaped string instrument *tāus* (‘peacock’) was also introduced into Sikh music.

During the reign of both Guru Hari Rai (r. 1644–61) and Guru Hari Krishan (r. 1661–4) learned Sikhs were sent to different places to spread the message of Sikhism through performing *śabad kīrtan*. Along with regular *śabad kīrtan* presentations, Guru Har Rai specially initiated the tradition of discourse (*kathā*) of the divine verse. During the seventh Guru’s period Bhagat Bhagwan, Pheru, and Godan deserve special mention among the prominent preachers and *kīrtan* performers. The tradition of *akhaṇḍ kīrtan* (‘continuous singing’) and the recital of verses in the collective folk manner as *joṭīāṅ dā kīrtan* (‘singing in choral groups’) also emerged at this time.

The ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur (r. 1664–75), is known as a great martyr in the Sikh tradition. Having established a new town, Anandpur Sahib, as a Sikh centre he composed hymns in fifteen *ragas* and their two *raga* forms. He patronized the percussion musical tradition and his own percussion instrument *mridaṅg* is still preserved at Gurdwara Sangīt Mridangavali in Jaunpur city in India (Nabha 1981: 538).

The tenth and last human Guru of the Sikhs, Gobind Singh (r. 1675–1708), made a tremendous contribution to the fields of art, literature, and culture. Along with the creation of the Khālsā, he consolidated the traditions established by his predecessors. He recited his *bāṇī* in various ragas which includes a vast range of metres in his prosodic scheme along with some musical verse (Harbans Singh 2002: 524). A vast treasure of ragas is found in the *Dasam Granth* (DG) and *Sarab Loh Granth*, both of which are attributed to the tenth Guru. He composed his famous Punjabi hymn (*mitar pyāre nū hāl murīdan dā kehṇā*) in *khyāl* style (DG: 711). Before Guru Gobind Singh, *khyāl* existed as an independent style of poetry and music. In the history of Indian music, initially Sultan Hussain Shah Sharki (1458–99) and Amir Khusrau (1254–1324) both contributed to the development of *khyāl*. But it became popular as an independent classical singing style during the period of Mohammad Shah Rangila (1719–48) when Sadarang (Niyamat Khan) and Adarang (Feroze Khan) (*Mahābhāratī* 2011: 551–2) composed *khyāl* in **(p. 401)** various languages of Northern India as well as in Punjabi. Even before these musicians, Guru Gobind Singh composed his *khyāl* in Punjabi, a fact which earned it the title *khyāl gāikī* in Punjab. Before he passed away in 1708 Guru Gobind Singh brought an end to the succession of personal Gurus and installed the Adi Granth as the scriptural Guru, giving it the new title of ‘Guru Granth Sahib’. In this way the Guru Granth Sahib became an eternal source of divine guidance for Sikhs.

Shabad Kīrtan: Text and Musicology

The singing of scriptural hymns is a prime mode of devotion. In the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (‘Sikh Code of Conduct’) *kīrtan* and the text of music has been well defined: ‘In the congregation only the compositions of the Gurus (*Gurbāṇī*) and, for the purpose of elaboration, the compositions of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal, may be performed in devotional singing (*kīrtan*).’ During the process of compilation the hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib were organized according to musical modes called ragas (‘melodies’). In Sikh musicology, therefore, ragas have a vast range of melodic expression. The word raga is derived from the root *rañj*, which means ‘to delight’. The feeling created by a certain raga may produce a specific emotion, with the help of words of the composition (Mahābhāratī 2011: 849–51). Raga has been defined as a definite melodic arrangement of notes. Its fundamental objective is to enchant the human mind and stir the emotions. In the *bāṇī*, the importance and relevance of the ragas has been portrayed based on time, place, and the concerns to be addressed: ‘Of all the musical melodies that one is virtuous, which evokes spirit of the Lord to reside in the mind’ (GGS 1423) and ‘Blessed are those symphonies, reciting which the entire thirst is diminished within’ (GGS 958).

The selection of particular ragas was particularly suited to the nature and expression of the sacred text. This unique feature of *Gurmat Saṅgīt* has been specifically highlighted by scholars. Where in the Northern Indian Musical tradition the *rāga-rāganī* concept is of paramount importance, in *Gurmat Saṅgīt* this division has been discarded and all the musical modes have been classified as ragas. The scriptural hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib have been classified into thirty-one ragas and their thirty-one raga forms. The ragas of Guru Granth Sahib have originated from both classical (*sanātanī*) and folk (*desi*) musical streams. Apart from *Śudh* (‘pristine pure’), *Chhāyālag* (those ragas which are variations of an original and basic raga or a combination of two ragas) and *Saṅkiran* (the melodic blend of more than two ragas) classifications, the ragas from the Southern Indian musical system (*Gauṛī Dakkhṇī, Bilāvalu Dakkhṇī, Vaḍhaṅsu Dakkhṇī, Mārū Dakkhṇī, Rāmkalī Dakkhṇī, Prabhātī Dakkhṇī*) and seasonal ragas (*Rutakālīn*) such as *Basant* and *Malār* are also prescribed in the Sikh scripture. Some of the original raga melodies are valuable contributions towards the development of the Indian raga tradition (for instance, *Mājh, Āsā, Tukhārī, Āsā Kāphī, Prabhātī Bibhās, Gauṛī Guārerī, Gauṛī Mājh, Gauṛī Mālvā*, and *Gauṛī Pūrbī Dīpkī*).

(p. 402) From centuries, the application and preservation of ragas in their pure musical form and their correct intonation has been the basic concern in Indian music as well as in Sikh music. Indian music has a tradition of raga *dhyān* for meditating the image of raga to

keep in mind for performance. A rich tradition of *Rāgamālā* (‘Garland of Ragas’) paintings also existed in the field of Indian paintings. A musical text of seventeenth century, Dāmodara’s *Saṅgīt Darpan*, has described forms of deities for many ragas and *rāgīnīs* (Saṅgīt Mahābhāratī 2011: 845). In the Sikh tradition, however, Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus have described the spiritual significance of ragas as leading to meditation on the deeper meaning of sacred utterances (*gurbāṇī raga dhyān*), evidenced in *Sirī* (GGS: 83), *Gauṛī* (GGS: 311), *Bilāvalu*(GGS: 849), *Rāmakalī* (GGS: 950), *Soraṭhī* (GGS: 642), *Kedārā* (GGS: 1087), *Mārū* (GGS: 1425) and *Malār* (GGS: 1285) compositions. In the repertoire of Sikh musicians (*kīrtankār*) many variations of the thirty-one ragas and thirty-one raga forms are also prevalent (Gurnam Singh 2004: 132–3). The long range of variations in ragas is part of this vast treasure of melodies in the Sikh musical tradition.

Classical and Folk Singing Styles

In the Guru Granth Sahib, the classical singing styles of Indian tradition and Punjabi folk singing styles have been applied to various compositions. The poetic styles in the headings of various compositions are specifically mentioned to highlight their musical nature, structure, and functioning. These musical directions are contemplative, both for the singers and the listeners. For instance, *aṣṭapdī* is a poetic composition comprising eight stanzas. This is an old classical form of *prabandh* (‘fixed form’) composition in vocal music, adhering to a fixed form or set of rules. There are five basic elements of *prabandh: udgraha, melāpaka, dhruvā, sañchāri*, and *abhoga*. A variety of *prabandh* called *sālaga-sooḍa prabandh* formed the basis of the modern *dhrupad* style. The main reason for the decline of *prabandh* was its rigidity in rendering, and this narrowed the scope of improvisation (Mahābhāratī 2011: 821). Poetic text is equally important in the *prabandh* style. The Sikh Gurus have frequently used the *aṣṭapdī* style in their devotional hymns. In particular, Guru Arjan has employed the *aṣṭapdī* form in his celebrated *Sukhmanī* (‘Psalm of Peace’) in raga *Gauṛī* (GGS: 262–96).

In Sikh scripture, *chaupade, tipade, dupade*, and *pañchpade* compositions consist of four, three, two, and five couplets respectively. The singing style of these *pada* compositions is the *dhrupad* of medieval Indian classical music which has four parts *sthāī, antrā, sañchārī*, and *abhog*. In the *dhrupad* style the central couplet is *dhruv (dhruv+pada* or *sthāī pada*) means ‘fixed as pivot’. The sign of *rahāu* (‘refrain’) in *pada* compositions of *Gurbāṇī* functions as *dhruv (sthāī pada)* and all other couplets have the same functioning as other verses in *dhrupad*.

Paṛtāl (‘Changing Beat’) is a distinct classical style of Sikh music. Under the title of *paṛtāl*, fifty-five *śabad* compositions have been prescribed in various *ragas* by Guru Rām (p. 403) Dās and Guru Arjan. In any *paṛtāl* composition, around the basic or central rhythm of the *rahāu* (‘refrain’) couplet all other couplets of *paṛtāl* style hymns are to be sung in variable *tālas* (‘beats’) according to their poetic rhythm and rhyme.

Vār is another folk style which is an old ballad tradition. In his *Majh* hymn, for instance, Guru Nanak refers to himself as a bard (*ḍhāḍī*) for describing his communication with the divine (GGS: 150). Twenty-two *vār* compositions are part of Guru Granth Sahib. The *vār* (‘ballad’) is composed of various poetic stanzas such as *pauṛīs* and *saloks* and these are also an essential part of *shabad kīrtan* performances (GGS: 462).

Chhant is a lyrical quatrain of four or six stanzas, adapted to a folk singing style. *Chhants* are recited at the time of the marriage ceremony in Punjabi culture. Guru Nanak, Guru Ram Das, and Guru Arjan recited their *bāṇī* in this folk style in various ragas. *Chhant* compositions of Guru Ram Das in *Āsā* mode are an essential part of the performance of *Āsā dī vār*. Similarly, his *chhant* composition known as *Lāvāṅ* (‘Circumambulation Song’) is to be sung at the time of the Sikh marriage ceremony,

Ghoṛīāṅ (‘Wedding Song’) is another typical folk singing style related to the Punjabi marriage ceremony, sung to celebrate a wedding. In the Guru Granth Sahib, this folk form has been interpreted and applied in a spiritual manner, and the singing of this style is an important part of *śabad kīrtan* on the occasion of a Sikh marriage ceremony.

Alāhṇī (‘Lamentation’) is a mournful funeral dirge in Punjabi folk culture and is another folk style found in the *bāṇī* to be sung in *śabad kīrtan* in relation to the final rites of death in Sikhism. Similarly, *Mundāvaṇī* (‘Seal’), *Añjulī* (‘Folded Hands in Supplication’), *Saddu* (‘Call’), and other styles of *bāṇī* have a particular relevance. All these classical and folk styles of *bāṇī* are prescribed for *śabad kīrtan* performances.

Shabad Kīrtan Chaunki: The Complete Shabad Kirtan Performance

In Sikh musical tradition, a session of a complete *śabad kīrtan* performance is named as *chaunkī* (‘sitting’). It has the following essential music segments. The first essential element of a *chaunkī* is *shān*, an instrumental prelude which is played on string and percussion instruments. The objective of the *shān* is to attune listeners to the mood and

melody of the specific raga and create a devotional atmosphere to receive the divine Word (*śabad*). The second part of the *chaunkī* is an invocation (*maṅglācharan*). The performer offers a prayer to Akal Purakh by reciting the relevant opening verse related to the subject of *kīrtan* performance. This first part of *śabad kīrtan* is usually composed in *vilambit laya*—slow tempo. The third and most important part of the *śabad kīrtan* performance is singing of various *shabad* compositions in prescribed ragas, appropriate *tālas* and particular styles, usually performed in the classical and semi-classical styles of *dhrupad* or *khyāl aṅg* followed by *śabad rīt* in semi-classical or light music style. In the singing process of these *śabad* compositions, the other musical indications should be (p. 404) completely followed. The last important part of the *chaukī* is considered as *pauṛī*. This is an integral part of the ballad of the Guru Granth Sahib composed in different ragas and folk tunes. *Pauṛī*, a folk singing style, is to be sung in a distinct *pauṛī tāla* of four beats.

The historical development of various sessions and sittings (*chaukīs*) started from the days of Guru Nanak's stay at Kartarpur. According to Bhai Gurdas, '*Sodar* and *Āratī* were sung in the evening and *Japu* was recited in the ambrosial hours' (BG 1: 38). Following his Master's instructions Guru Angad initiated the devotional singing of *Āsā dī Vār* in the presence of Guru Nanak. Most importantly, Guru Arjan established the eight musical 'sittings' (*chaunkis*) of *kīrtan* at the newly built Darbar Sahib to sing scriptural hymns in their actual liturgical context: (1) *Āsā dī Vār dī chaunkī* (early morning); (2) *Bilāval di chaunki* (after sunrise); (3) *Aanad dī chaunkī* (before noon); (4) *Sarang dī chaunkī* (noon); (5) *Charan Kamal dī chaunkī* (afternoon); (6) *So Dar dī chaunkī* (sunset); (7) *Artī/Kalyan dī chaunkī* (night); and (8) *Kīrtan Sohile/Kānaṛe dī chaunkī* (late night). These musical 'sittings' have profoundly shaped and institutionalized the tradition of *kirtan* at Darbar Sahib with the purpose of providing continuous sessions of singing of the praises of Akal Purakh day and night to symbolize the ever-present divine power (Pashaura Singh 2011: 105–13).

Over the centuries these eight *chaunkis* turned into fifteen sessions performed by eight groups of Sikh musicians (*rāgīs*) and seven groups of Muslim musicians (*rabābīs*). In summer and winter seasons, there is a change of sequence of some *chaunkīs* before and after the 'sitting' of *Sodar* according to the changing time of dawn. But the total sessions remain the same. Before the partition of India eight *kīrtan* sessions were regularly performed by Sikh *rāgīs* and seven by Muslim *rabābīs*. But after the migration of these Muslim *rabābīs* to Pakistan, all fifteen *kīrtan* sessions are being performed by Sikhs. From the above *chaunkīs*, some selected *kīrtan chaunkīs* are also being regularly performed in

the gurdwaras across the world. At present, in the daily liturgy of Darbar Sahib, the *kīrtan* sessions are being telecast daily live across the world.

Sikh Musical Instruments

Originally, Sikh *kīrtan* was always performed with string and percussion instruments. Bhai Gurdas confirms that 'with the accompaniment of *mridaṅg* (drum) and *rabāb* (stringed instrument) the praises (of Baba Nanak) are sung in every home' (BG 24: 4). Guru Nanak and his successors promoted the instrumental and vocal tradition of *śabad kīrtan*. In Indian classification of instruments, there are four categories: strings (*Tanti*), percussion (*Avnadh*), idiophone (*Ghan*), and winds (*Sushir*) (Mahābhāratī 2011: 701). But in the instrumental tradition of *Gurmat Saṅgīt*, the classification of music instruments has been made in five categories as string (*Tatt*), leather (*Bit*), metal (*Ghan*), wind (*Sushir*), and clay (*Mukhar*) (Divan 1958: 31).

The Sikh Gurus encouraged the tradition of string and percussion instruments for the authentic presentation of Sikh Music. The *rabāb* was initially played by Mardana (BG (p. 405) 1: 35). A special kind of *rabāb* which was presented by Firanda to Mardana for the odysseys of Guru Nanak came in vogue as the *Firaṅdīā Rabāb* (Gurnam Singh 2008: 20). Another bow string instrument *Sāraṅdā* was promoted in Sikhism by Guru Amar Das (Tara Singh 2008: 12). This instrument has its origin in folk music and many *kīrtankārs* used to play this instrument. Sikh tradition maintains that the *tambūrā* or *tānpūrā* is an Indian instrument which produces a drone, that came into vogue during the period of Guru Arjan who himself used to recite *kīrtan* with this instrument.

Traditionally, the *tāūs* is a bowed string instrument introduced by the Sixth Guru, Hargobind. The use of various string instruments such as the *tambūrā, isrāj, dilrūbā* was also relatively popular during the time period of the tenth Guru. *Mridaṅg, Pakhāwaj*, and *Joṛi* are the traditional percussion instruments used in Sikh music. In contemporary Sikh *kīrtan*, the harmonium has been used along with string instruments. The tabla has replaced the above rhythmic instruments. For the original and correct intonated musicological *kīrtan* performances, all of these traditional instruments have unquestioned significance.

In an effort to revive the usage of string instruments in *kīrtan* performances, Gurmat Sangit Chair and the Department of Gurmat Sangit at Punjabi University in Patiala (India), along with other such institutions, are making serious and concerted efforts

towards the promotion of research, teaching, and training of these instruments. The Shiromanī Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) has also initiated the revival of various Sikh string instruments in the *śabad kīrtan* tradition at the Golden Temple.

From Traditional Training to Contemporary Academics

The Sikh Gurus promoted the tradition of training to shape the ideal *kīrtan* performer. An ideal *kīrtankār* has also been described in the Sikh scripture as one who performs without any kind of greed or ego (GGS: 885). He has to render *kīrtan* with humility. The singer's heart should be full of gratitude and with a feeling of submission to the praise of Akal Purakh (GGS: 158). The essence of the *śabad* is revealed only if the *kīrtan* is performed with these feelings and consonant with the ethos of *bāṇī*. From the time of the first Guru, *rabābīs* and their progeny performed *śabad kīrtan*. Mardana, Shehzada, Satta, Balvand, and Sadu-Madu were all famous *rabābīs* of the Guru period. Guru Arjan also encouraged lay Sikhs to learn music and promoted the training of *śabad kīrtan* particularly with string instruments. Along with the aforementioned *rabābīs*, famous *kīrtan* performers included Dipa, Bulla, Narain Das, Pandha, Ugrsain, Nagori Mal, Ramu, Jhaju, and Mukand. During this early time, *rabābīs* drew from their individual family traditions while other *kīrtan* performers were trained at the Guru's abode. This also marked the origin of the contemporary *taksāl* ('mint') system which is the recognized school for traditionally imparting knowledge of Sikh music.

(p. 406) The Sikh musical tradition has been disseminated primarily through the tradition of Guru and disciple. After the Guru period, some *taksāls* developed as Sikh schools of music such as the Damdami Taksal, Taran Taran Taksal, Daudhar Taksal, Mastuana Taksal, Hargna Taksal, Buddha Jauhar Taksal, Jawaddi Taksal, and so on. Along with these traditional institutions, other Sikh organizations also contributed to the teaching and dissemination of Sikh music. The process of publication of works on Sikh music has also been initiated by some musicians through the musical notation of *śabad kīrtan* compositions which resulted in a rich treasure trove of *Gurmat Saṅgīt* literature during the twentieth century (Jabarjaṅg Singh 2012).

In the contemporary world of music, Sikh music is emerging as a distinct tradition. At the global level, many organizations in India and abroad are today transmitting this tradition with great enthusiasm. Sikh music has now been introduced as a subject in various schools, colleges, and universities of Punjab. In particular, Punjabi University established

its Gurmat Saṅgīt Chair in 2003 and the Department of Gurmat Saṅgīt in 2005. Here Gurmat Sangit is being taught at the graduate and post-graduate levels. Researchers from both India and abroad are pursuing their careers for Ph.D. degrees. The demand for Sikh musicians, *kīrtankars*, and teachers of these subjects from India and abroad is increasing day by day. String and percussion instruments of this tradition are also a great attraction amongst the new generation. Recently, the study of Sikh music has widened its academic sphere from East to West with the establishment of the Chair of Sikh Musicology at Hofstra University, Hempstead, USA, in 2009. This treasure of sacred music may prove to be a path for uplifting society.

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Sikh Cultural Performances

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Abstract and Keywords

This article introduces the relatively novel approach of performance theory to the field of Sikh and Punjab studies. By drawing on select examples of Sikh cultural performances such as *bhangra*, *dhadi*, and *shabad kirtan*, it aims to capture the creative, poetic, and symbolic aspects of such activity while also reckoning with the agency of ordinary social actors and cultural performers, many of whom were for a long time marginalized in Sikh studies' scholarship. Beyond its descriptive focus, however, the categories of performance and performativity generate an analytic that allows readers to recognize the 'spill-over' effects existing between public performances, reiterative social practices such as ritual, and the dynamics of religious and political life.

Keywords: bhangra, cultural performance, dhadi, performativity, poetics, politics, ritual, shabad kirtan

DURING the last few decades, the concept of performance has gained wide currency within the social sciences and humanities. While performance theorists call it an 'essentially contested category', defying any attempt to identify 'performance' with a *singular* idea or conceptual framework, the emerging prevalence of the concept in scholarly work surely reflects a paradigmatic shift. Shaking off the legacy of structuralism the analytical framework has been repositioned in respect not only to the arts, but also to the fields of identity and community formation, the politics of memory, as well as the performative aspects of the social and political. While Sikh studies have so far remained at the periphery of this development, a number of important contributors in the field have started to use the term 'performance' more frequently, albeit without clearly situating it within the theoretical field mapped out by performance studies.

Readers initiated to Sikh studies might raise an eyebrow here, pointing perhaps to the rich heritage of folk and musical traditions—*bhangra*, *jhummar*, *gidda*, *kirtan*, *katha*, or *dhadi* to just name a few—that have long been the focus of this scholarship (Bhatti 2000; Schreffler 2011). They might ask, if we consider the daily rituals that centre on the Guru

Granth Sahib (GGS) as a *performed text*, aren't there enough examples to which the vocabulary of performance would easily lend itself? There are, indeed. And the very understanding of text hermeneutics has acquired a different connotation when assessed against the performative and mystical aspects of *shabad* and *raga* (Bhogal 2011).

Performance *theory*, however, has a somewhat broader focus: While it captures the creative and symbolic aspects of human activity and is interested in acknowledging the agency of ordinary social actors and cultural performers who were for a long time neglected, performance theory further asks after the 'spill-over' effects between public performances, reiterative social practices, and dynamics of political life. Moreover, it effectively challenges static notions of culture (and religion) by highlighting the permeability of cultural and religious boundaries, the indeterminacy of (p. 409) signifying practices in that regard, and it further contests powerful claims to identity and their representations. The trajectory of this article is rooted in this specific emphasis and thus necessarily departs from a more descriptive approach to Sikh cultural performances.

Performance theory covers a wide range of different schools and approaches that cannot be summarized here. Scholars have been interested in the theoretical, pedagogical, political, or literary aspects of performance theory or have attempted to stake out new projects of performance ethnography, which has become a new genre in itself (Madison and Hamera 2006: xxiv). Despite the wide range in vocabulary and theoretical orientations, contemporary performance studies converge on the practice of seeing in performance something beyond mere entertainment. Performances are examined in terms of their generative, agentive, creative, and self-reflexive dimensions. Scholars have turned to performances for their social interactive character as well as to assess their political efficacy: as exercises of authority or as counter-hegemonic forces based on alternative imaginations and subaltern constellations. At the critical intersection of social and artistic movements, performance practices have expanded our notions of the political, blurring the lines between public, private, politics, and the everyday, as well as the distance between performer and audience (Carlson 1996). The 'performative turn' is indeed an effect of the intermingling advances made in artistic, academic, and activist circles and the social movements supported by them. At the intersection of multiple fields, the turn to performance effectively delineates and prescribes the mobilizing power of performative practices in terms of their potential to effect social change and cultural transformation (Bachmann-Medick 2006: 110).

Most commentators in performance studies acknowledge the impact of two—albeit contradictory—theoretical inclinations. The first is the reciprocal influence between speech act theory (Austin 1975) and anthropological theories of ritual (Turner 1969, 1982; Tambiah 1979) that had early on replaced structural and semiotic approaches and

moved the debate in the direction of the generative and transformative dimensions of cultural practice. The second trend is associated with Jacques Derrida (1988) and Judith Butler (1988). Both theorists have broken with the emphasis in speech act theory on speakers' intentionality in singular speech acts and have introduced a concept of the performative as both contingent and productive of subjectivity without necessarily assuming a 'speaking subject'. Derrida and Butler have instead stressed the iterative and citational nature of (performative) acts in which processes of subjectivation become interlaced with norm-setting procedures and discursive regimes (Madison and Hamera 2006: xvi, xviii). In fact, as Butler (1988) has argued, it is precisely because of its *performative* nature that the norm (or the processes of norm-setting) remains unstable and open to change and contestation. Accordingly, performativity is conceptualized—unlike the category of performance—as (quasi-)*eventful* rather than as singular *event*. It generally assumes a different understanding of agency, subject, and voice from those engendered in theories of cultural performance. Nonetheless, Butler's use of 'gender performances' by which she captured the theatricality of processes of embodiment as shared (p. 410) experience and contested site of identity formation (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 39) already points to a possibility of reconciling both terminologies. As Madison and Hamera (2006: xix) also confirm, 'performatives are [now perceived as] significantly and powerfully layered in the day-to-day, yet [also] heightened and embossed in cultural performances. It is in cultural performances where performatives are doubled with a difference: they are re-presented, re-located and re-materialized for the possibility of a substantial re-consideration and re-examination.' This implies a possibility of seeing both concepts as *complementary* in their constitutive role in social experience and cultural transformations.

This complementary model must be taken into consideration when mapping the field of Sikh cultural performances. In the process, we must be cognizant of how the re-presentation of ideas, the relocalization of identities, and the rematerialization of subjectivity work within specific performances and genres. For that purpose, maintaining a strict compartmentalization between the cultural (folk, popular), and the religious (ritual, liturgy) is not very helpful. This is not to deny the specific historical reasons for why such differentiations exist in the first place. For instance, Sikh tradition has over time validated and authorized specific practices (such as *shabad kirtan*) as standing in accordance with the key tenets of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, while others have been relegated to more secular domains of culture. Yet, as I will discuss further, it is precisely at the intersection of these domains and their contestation that we learn the most about the actual significance of cultural performances.

Three key issues associated with the advent of modernity (and more specifically: colonialism) need to be mentioned before entering this discussion. First, Sikh studies

have to deal with a historical legacy of a politics of translation that profoundly affects the core idioms and meanings associated with religious thought (Mandair 2009). Scholars have noted how Indian narrative genres (e.g. *Janamsakhis* or *katha*) and Western traditions of text hermeneutics and historicism have become mutually intertwined, politically resignified, and in many instances also shaped or repositioned the role, understanding, and imaginative scope of various vernacular performance practices (Nijhawan 2006; Mir 2010). Second, the politicization of religious identity in the antagonistic contexts of pre- and post-Partition years has effectively changed the material conditions under which many cultural performers practise (Oberoi 1994). This change in material conditions made it harder for performers to earn an independent livelihood and ultimately also affected the cultural fabric of Punjabi performative traditions prior to and after the event of Partition, especially if we consider hereditary performers such as the *mirasis* (Nijhawan 2006). This has had powerful social implications especially for the 'ecumenical spaces' of cultural and religious performance in which people of different religious affiliation could participate (Mir 2010). Third, with the new dynamics of global migration and new media technologies, practices of cultural performance have become increasingly enmeshed with new forms of sound and image production and their circulation. All three issues have proved crucial in assessing the critical role and significant space of Sikh cultural performances.

(p. 411) Sound, Affect, and the Punjabi Performative

Scholars in ethnomusicology and social history have contributed to our conceptual development by paying attention to the complex history of performance genres and their relationship to *powerful* symbols of cultural identity. This literature has been specifically concerned with the role of *sound* in Punjabi culture and society and, indeed, most Punjabis would readily agree that sound and music are prime venues of cultural meaning-making. Sound is tethered to how individuals orient themselves aesthetically and how they find entry to religious spaces by way of singing and listening to specific kinds of music. Sound circulates on a local, regional, as well as transnational scale and is closely connected to the ways in which people form attachments to places. It is corporeal to the degree that sound both embodies meaning and is embodied by those who seek meaning while being attuned to it: sound carries, mediates, and provides the sensual material through which self and subjectivity emerge.

A good way to start this discussion is by reference to one of the most prevalent and most visible 'icons' of Punjabi performance culture: the *dhol*. In his work on the *dhol*, Schreffler examines how this particular drum has become a major symbol—if not *the* symbol—through which transnational communities reassert their Punjabiness today. Studying the *dhol* requires a multi-sited approach and methodology that makes its presence intelligible with regard to the specificities of sites as different as religious ceremonies at shrines and *bhangra* dance performances in the diaspora. We can delineate in Schreffler's work the social-historical processes as well as performance-specific properties by which cultural meanings 'accrue' to the *dhol*. Schreffler charts out the shifting significance and 'travel' of this key instrument and its rhythmic sound-image from the context of royal patronage —where it had indexed political authority and sovereignty—to a horizontal and localizing trajectory by which it became entrenched within ordinary Punjabi cultural life, to its resignification during the twentieth and early twenty-first century as a central icon for Punjabi identity. In this fashion, Schreffler (2010: 1009) argues, the 'dhol developed from a term with increasingly nuanced meaning to the unifying idea of an expansive sign-complex' which became 'the basis of much of the expressive aesthetics of West Punjabi culture'. If this iconic role can be clearly demonstrated for the *dhol*, studies of other instruments, genres, and contexts suggest that the latter occupy a much more ambiguous place comparatively. Moreover the study of these genres and practices allows us to move from a focus on iconicity and symbolic significance to performative process, the social texts of musical performance, and the politics of affect.

Whereas Schreffler acknowledges the affective quality of the *dhol* in terms of how its sound image resonates a history of migration and separation that is deeply entrenched within social memory, Qureshi's work on the Indian *sarangi* (Qureshi 2000) and Sufi *qawwali* (Qureshi 1986) is concerned with *how* such modes of affect (p. 412) acquire a particular force and political significance. In her work on *qawwali* performers Qureshi argues that the process of cultural performance is essentially *generative* of ideas and emotions, not only with regard to the precariousness of *qawwali* singers' reputation during performance but more importantly in terms of the potentialities and uncertainties of the religious experience and how it is affected through the reciprocal process of singing and listening. The production of tonality and the vocal registers of *qawwali* singers are *also* assessed by Qureshi in their capacity to express the complex processes of social marginalization and religious otherness. In her work on the Indian *sarangi* (Qureshi 2000) Qureshi further demonstrates that the embodiment of social meanings in sound depends on the specific materiality of a performance event (in a particular place, carried by a specific body of performers and listeners) but also modulates and circulates these meanings in disembodied forms through the circulation of affective signs. The sounds of the *sarangi* capture, as Schreffler shows in different ways for the *dhol* as well, an *iconic*

relationship with a particular cultural context. However, Qureshi is more interested in the material conditions and social relations within which sound images signify a specific *gendered* social history. The affective quality of *sarangi* sounds signifies otherness even when the disembodied sound image has accrued a new meaning, such as the ‘voice of mourning’ in the highly masculinist politics of war and violence.

In my own work on the *dhadi* genre (Nijhawan 2006), I examine the shifting parameters under which the politics of affect remain entirely ambiguous, even in those instances where one would expect a high degree of conformity with an authorizing discourse that tries to promote in the *dhad-sarangi* form a particular mode of honouring Sikh martyrdom. Notwithstanding the long association of this specific genre with the history of Sikh martyrdom, this work has carved out the indeterminacy of affect as it circulates through different political venues and social modes of production. Moreover, this indeterminacy is witnessed in aesthetic and performative register insofar as the embodied signs of *dhadi* performance entail a history of otherness. It is also present in the relationship between what performers invest in their repertoires at the level of martyr discourse and the moral commentary they sometimes articulate as a nuanced critique of authorizing discourses.

As both Schreffler and Qureshi have also pointed out, it is important to observe that which has been omitted from official accounts and iconic renderings of particular sound images and genres. These omissions concern not only the ambiguity and indeterminacy of cultural performances; they also reveal a pluralistic field of practices and orientations that was previously deemed threatening to identity politics. What often lies buried in the social text of performative genres such as *dhadi*, but also the *rababi* tradition examined by Purewal (2011), is the hurt associated with the region’s political history of Partition. The 1947 Partition had unhinged patron–performer relations and politicized the fluid zones by which the long cherished sounds and affects had circulated between participants in congregational gatherings and among the various sites of religious practice. Most cultural performers in Punjab were immediately affected by these post-1947 developments and migrations, as repertoires became partitioned and **(p. 413)** performers felt a stronger pressure to affiliate in more unambiguous ways with their new patrons (Nijhawan 2006). As I have argued for the *dhadis*, Schreffler for the Bazigar community, and Purewal for the *rababis*, cultural performers embody ways of identifying and affiliating with both Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh devotional practices and forms of patronage that have only emerged as a problem of otherness in the course of modern identity politics. In this sense, what is captured in performance occasion always exceeds the situational dynamics of performer–audience relations as the citational traces of these disorienting and destabilizing modalities of identification and affect always linger as potential to be retrieved.

Forming Pious Selves through Performance

I would like to turn now to the intersection of cultural and religious performances and to the capacity of particular performance spaces to generate practices of religiosity, articulations of piety, and cultivations of spirituality. Farina Mir (2010) has shown for the Punjabi *qissa* that poetic genres can indeed become formative of diverse modes of religious authority and practice. The *Hir-Ranjha* narrative tradition, squarely embedded within the *qissa* genre, is traced in Mir's work with regard to both the emergence of an important vernacular literature that captures some of the central motifs of the Punjabi emotional fabric and the shared horizons by which these cultural allegories (such as the motif of the separated lovers) become amendable and translatable into Bhakti, Sufi, and Sikh devotional practices. In fact, as I have shown for the *dhadi* genre as well, the emplotment of *Hir-Ranjha* has been a key to how cultural performers intervened to mobilize and appeal to ordinary Sikhs in the Punjabi countryside at critical historical moments. It is in those contexts that the narrative of *Hir-Ranjha* offers allegories for experienced loss and suffering through which cultural and religious significations have become further entrenched. How such notions of shared piety sustain performative communities and continue to offer alternative social imaginations is indeed central to this discussion. It is not simply a question of how to analyse the *discourse* on piety in vernacular texts, as Mir also remarks. Instead, scholars need to pay close attention to how the field of performative practices is resignified, both vertically (in terms of how authorizing discourses have affected the place and meaning of genres) and horizontally (insofar as shifting forms of patronage and the dynamics of performance context have rendered the cultural and religious fabric as always elastic and open).

In the context of modern Sikh religious practices, we have of course witnessed a process of standardization and homogenization of repertoires, liturgies, and rituals, which has also affected the very form and quality of performance traditions such as *shabad kirtan*, *katha,* or *dhadi*, within the gurdwara space. At the same time we see how the (p. 414) transnationalization of the Sikh tradition has expanded the potential role of performances to express experiences associated with the processes of migration and the place-specific dynamics by which Sikh communities have re-established themselves in different parts of the world. Scholars have paid attention to two significant aspects of transnationalization. First of all, there has been a debate within local communities, Panthic organizations, and Sikh scholarship about ritual and ritualization in the Sikh gurdwara. Especially prominent are the examples of *matha tekna*, the commissioning of *Akhand Path* recitations, or the placing of ritual gifts at the 'feet' of the Guru Granth Sahib which religious experts would sometimes consider as 'empty rituals' in contrast to the 'anti-ritualistic' message of the

teachings of the Sikh Gurus (Myrvold 2007: 459). As Myrvold argues, however, much of this debate depends on a negative concept of ritual that is associated with the influence of Hindu ritual practices. In her analysis Myrvold describes rituals alternatively as performative acts through which participants actively assert modes of belonging and togetherness and articulate ideas about the 'doings' of the text rather than just its semantic meaning. From practising *path* to performing *kirtan* or *simran*, Myrvold encourages us to appreciate how ordinary practitioners cultivate an agentive relation to their text as Guru. Notwithstanding this interpretation, there is a clear tendency of withdrawal, especially among the younger generation for whom many of these daily acts and practices of listening to *katha* and *shabad kirtan* in the gurdwara have lost spiritual or agentive connotations and instead become devoid of their religious meaning. Oftentimes this is because youth has not received enough training in the language of the Guru Granth Sahib Or they might simply search for new spaces such as independent *kirtan* assemblies or other informal ways to practise Sikhi. What we see in these and other examples is a changed constellation between everyday practice, religiosity, and new understandings of piety among the youth.

If we take this discussion back to our initial remarks on shared piety, however, there is an important intervention to be made against the 'desire to give back [agency] to pious Sikhs', which is typically a 'religious agency that descends from its sacred origin into a transaction with the worldly domain' (Mandair 2009: 329). In fact, what Mandair points out here in his critique of ethnological work, is not simply that the performance model drawn from speech act theory lacks a sense for the citationality and performativity by which subject positions acquire a specific political connotation, but moreover that by reasserting a transactive relation between human and divine agency, it tends to reinsert 'a fundamental opposition between the religious and the secular' (Mandair 2009: 329). Challenging this opposition is important for at least two key reasons: first, as the new scholarship on 'secularism and religion-making' illuminates (Dressler and Mandair 2011), the religion–secularism binary needs to be interrogated for its political implications. The latter affects how 'Sikh religion' is placed as a monotheistic religion in concert with other world religions. Second, the new work on performance genres repositions notions of text and performativity not as separate realms but as importantly linked to a project that debunks the 'apartheid of knowledges that plays out inside the academia' (Conquergood 2002: 153 in Madison and Hamera 2006: xi).

(p. 415) Poetics and the Performance of the Political

We have taken into account the long legacy of performing vernacular texts in Punjab by drawing attention to the intricacies between specific soundscapes and the affective modalities through which bodies become tethered to powerful ways of identifying socially, religiously, and culturally. We have seen how in their genre-specific articulation and versification these vernaculars are multi-layered, combining song practices with historical narrative, musical recital with poetry, and drama and theatre with political commentary. We then discussed how particular forms of piety necessitate a repetitive performative practice that reiterates subject positions inasmuch as the spaces of cultural performance provide the opportunity for participants to resignify these subject positions. Within the performative space of a *mahfil-i sama* gathering, a *shabad kirtan* setting, or Sufi shrine ritual, people can encounter mystical love and cultivate their sensory organs so that they become ethically formed. Practices of listening, as Mir (2010: 107) and Nijhawan (2006: 191–2) argue, are not only formative of ethical orientations, but also carve out a field of shared religious idioms and articulations of identity.

It is important to note that these shared modalities also apply where poetic performance takes on a political rather than mystical or spiritual character. From the revolutionary Gadar literature (J. Singh 1990) to diasporic poet slams, *bhangra*, and urban music (Kalra 2000; Kalra and Nijhawan 2007), and from the censorship of anti-colonial theatre (Grewal 1979) to controversies around contemporary theatre productions (G. Singh 2005), cultural performances have often formed a critical threshold, mobilizing audiences around issues of justice, gender equity, political action, and sometimes also inviting contentious responses within communities. Jane Singh (1990) shows, for example, how Punjabi poetry and song were at the very core of the discursive and aesthetic repertoire that sustained the revolutionary Gadar movement. Not only did literature and poetry articulate common experience and help to establish emotional ties among members of a then still ‘scattered community’ in the early twentieth-century Americas, it evidently also acquired a forceful political voice that sustained anti-colonial counterpublics. Gadar poetry, Singh argues, ‘could tap into shared experiences and emotions and was, to some extent, a part of the cultural glue that held people together’ (1990: 29). Beyond this ‘glue’ effect, the processes of composition, recitation, and the circulation of this literature also contributed to the political process: first, in the already mentioned social sense of forging an identity around shared political concerns; and second, in the sense of amplifying and intensifying the political messages in such a way that forms of collective action became

feasible where there had earlier been a looser sense of connectedness around shared cultural values.

In Singh's work, Gadar literature is examined in its potential to forge a new anti-colonial consciousness among the listeners and participants of the movement, based on shared nationalist idioms deployed to overcome emerging communal (p. 416) differences on the one hand, and by which one also confronted the racial and xenophobic discourse during those times, on the other. Viewed in this way, the Gadar case forms a precedent for a post-colonial and diasporic politics of performance through which forms of political action and mobilization come to the fore. Of course, the contemporary politics of multiculturalism, along with a crucially changed dynamic of global migration that has positioned Sikhs and Punjabis as a powerful and influential diasporic community, requires a more detailed and context-specific analysis. Revolutionary poetry no longer dominates the scene and in its place the cultural industry promotes emblematic forms of Punjabiness, weaving them seamlessly into models of capitalist consumption and a nostalgic imagery of cultural authenticity that lacks critical reflection. The transnationalization of *bhangra* dance and music is often regarded as the icon of this process, as it reasserts cultural identity through new transnational dynamics of traditionalism and culturalism (Roy 2010).

Virinder Kalra (2000) argues, however, that a more careful consideration of the contextual conditions of sound production and especially the *bhangra* lyrics, which capture social experiences in song form, brings us squarely back into the performance of the political. In fact, we cannot tell the history of modern-day *bhangra* tunes and dance forms, which enjoy great popularity far beyond the global Punjabi community, without at the same time acknowledging the precarious places from which these new songs have emerged and from which new performer–audience circuits have been formed. Whether in the context of working-class mobilizations, where *bhangra* singers have marched and sang alongside workers, or during anti-racist mobilizations in the UK, *bhangra* song and lyrics have addressed the social conditions of migrancy and contributed to modes of collective organization and mobilization across religious and cultural divides (Kalra 2000). Moving in this context from a 'performance of culture' model to a more immediate engagement with *bhangra* lyrics is not intended to reintroduce a realist frame. Rather, as Kalra argues, it is more important that 'the lyrical and song context opens up a new space from which to understand the processes of migration and its implications' (Kalra 2000: 85).

This specific diasporic frame and the transversal politics that unfold in this context have had a particularly crucial role in shaping new, youth-oriented practices of performance. Whereas South Asian youth have generally been at the heart of an advertisement

campaign catered to the mainstream consumption of cultural forms (such as *bhangra*) and promoting the reification of cultural stereotypes and ethnic codes, we also see resistance against this model within youth cultures. For example, in the wake of mobilizations against anti-immigration politics and the emergence of the post 9/11 security state, Sikh youth found in performances a new venue of political engagement (Kalra and Nijhawan 2007). The repercussions could be felt within the institutional structures of gurdwara politics and in relation to national politics in Britain, Canada, and elsewhere. Examples—such as *Behzti*'s staged rape of a young Punjabi woman in a gurdwara setting (G. Singh 2005) or the current mobilizations against female infanticide—demonstrate that Sikh and Punjabi youth are not shy to speak up and show solidarity on a range of controversial topics. The creation of new performance spaces and online productions (p. 417) also demonstrates a new movement among religiously oriented Sikh youth, who claim these venues as the ground for youth-driven campaigns that sometimes merge with larger community interests (such as in the 1984 justice campaigns) and at other times take on a more distant, often humorous, form. It is not surprising that in this context the very notion of performance space has also shifted to web-based formats, such as Facebook and YouTube, where new types of musical and spoken word performers have surfaced and where older genres such as *boliyaan* or *dhadi* have been remixed into new and invigorating urban sound forms and lyrics.

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Abstract and Keywords

Sikh religion is aniconic, and generally the community and the academy have neglected Sikh visual materials. Over the centuries however, there have been sacred and secular works of art produced by Sikhs, and those that were made under Sikh patronage or in territories dominated by Sikhs. Indeed there exist spectacular illustrations of the Gurus, scriptural manuscripts, gold and silver objects, jewellery, coins, weapons, and textiles—in all their regional and stylistic variations. Contemporary artists are making innovative contributions from their global perspective. This chapter offers an overview of the Sikh art world from the early *janamsakhi* illustrations (where it had its genesis) to the modern paintings by Arpana Caur and the Singh Twins. It offers some examples and relates them to their aesthetic, cultural, and historical contexts. As it turns out, Sikh art is becoming a dynamic sphere of interest for collectors, curators, critics, and the community at large.

Keywords: Sikh art, visual materials, janamsakhis, scriptural manuscripts, gold and silver objects, Arpana Caur, Singh Twins

SIKH art is aniconic for it does not exhibit images of any deities, and even the images of the historical Gurus are not displayed in the presence of the sacred scripture. This tendency has been mirrored in the Sikh scholarly tradition, which has generally neglected the physical and the visual. Fortunately in recent years, Sikh art is beginning to gain attention (Murphy 2012 and Singh 2013).

Sikh Symbols

Ikk Oan Kar (see Figure 34.1) and the *khanda* (see Figure 34.2) are the two most ubiquitous visual symbols in the Sikh world. The former, combining mathematical, Gurmukhi, and geometric scripts, spells out Guru Nanak's theological construct of the

One ultimate Reality. The numeral ‘1’ at its outset affirms the unicity of the Divine. The *oan* represented by the first letter of the Gurmukhi script in the centre is the primal vocalic syllable of the Indic languages. The geometric arc above the *oan* gestures a dynamic movement towards a boundless horizon. As the absolute singularity of the Divine is sensuously linked with the transcending arc, spectators are launched towards an all-encompassing infinity. The inherent openness of this image permeates Sikh art, and forges innovative patterns.



Figure 34.1 Ikk Oan Kar



Figure 34.2 Khanda

The *khanda* is the emblem on the Sikh flag, and is becoming a popular form of ornamentation. Here a double-edged sword rises in the centre of a circle with two curved upright swords bordering it on either side. The central sword appears as Mircea Eliade’s archetypal ‘axis mundi’. Connecting the material and transcendent spheres, it is a visual reminder of the tenth Guru’s metaphor for the singular Divine participating in human history. In the Guru’s words, ‘after the primal manifestation of the sword (*khanda*), the universe was created’ (*Var Durga Ki*). At a politically oppressive period of Indian history, Guru Gobind Singh triumphantly carried weapons and even used his *khanda* to prepare the *amrit* nectar during the historic Baisakhi of 1699. Its prototype can (p. 420) be traced to the first Sikh Guru who evoked it as an ethical paradigm: ‘like the sharp edge of a double-edged sword (*khande*), it is an extremely narrow lane’ (Guru Granth (GG): 1028). The double-edged sword represents the destruction of ego, deceit, subjugation, and an opening into a just and liberating mode of existence. Its surrounding circle draws up infinity. The two flanking semicircular swords echo the memory of the sixth Guru (Gobind Singh’s grandfather) who simultaneously carried the swords of *miri* and *piri*—those of worldliness and spirituality.

Altogether, as the central sword rises from the circle, and the two sinuously follow it on either side, they express the intersection of the timeless and time, the infinite and the finite, the sacred and the secular.

The Ikk Oan Kar and the *khanda* visually convey the message of the ten Gurus. These two symbols are used extensively as a form of ornamentation in arts, crafts, and architecture. Both are elaborately inscribed in silk, marble, steel, and gold. They are embroidered on oxen covers and precious canopies; they are embossed on books and on earrings and pendants. Currently however, the *khanda* is taking over, as it is extensively displayed in homes, businesses, wedding cards, ties, tee shirts, phone covers, computer pads…One wonders why the aesthetic force of the foundational Ikk Oan Kar is being eclipsed.

(p. 421) Works of Art

There are numerous works that constitute ‘Sikh art’. These include sacred and secular objects produced by Sikhs, those that were made under Sikh patronage or in territories dominated by Sikhs, and those items that depict Sikh themes. Therefore the category ‘Sikh art’ goes beyond ritual and religious objects commissioned by the community

Janamsakhi Illustrations

The pictorial representations of *janamsakhis* constitute one of the earliest expressions of Sikh art. The narratives about the life of the founder Guru attracted the popular imagination, and invited their visual rendering. Wherever sizeable and influential communities developed, the familiar stories were put in easily identifiable forms for them. These happened to be not only in the religious centres in the Punjab like Amritsar, Anandpur, Damdama, but also in Patna in Bihar where the tenth Guru was born, and in Nanded in Maharashtra where he breathed his last. Patrons from these centres commissioned local artists, and consequently numerous *janamsakhi* renderings have come down from different regions and different periods (Goswamy and Caron 2006: 23–37).

This wide dispersion makes historical documentation difficult for many of the items, but, it offers a fascinating variation. The first Guru is depicted in the Guler and Kangra styles of northern India, just as he is in the eastern Murshidabadi or southern Deccani styles. The artists who painted him came from different religious and ethnic bacgrounds. Hindu,

Muslim, Buddhist, or Jain, they presented the Sikh Guru through their own lens. The stories they chose to paint also depended upon their personal interest, and much was contingent on their individual talent.

The quantity of illustrations varies in the manuscripts. The first extant Janamsakhi is the Bala with twenty-nine illustrations dated to 1658 (owned by P. N. Kapoor of New Delhi). The next illustrated extant *janamsakhi* collection has forty-two illustrations. It is dated to 1724, and is held by Bhai Sikandar Singh of Bagharian in the Patiala district. The next is the *B-40 Janamsakhi* (dated 1733), which has fifty-seven, and is stylistically strikingly similar to the Bagarhian illustrations (shown to the author by Bhai Sikandar Singh, Chandigarh, 17 July 2011). Some of the later versions have over a hundred illustrations (McLeod 1991: 5–6). The quality varies too: some artists are preoccupied with the contents and hastily move the narrative forward, while others linger on subtle details to evoke aesthetic sentiments. The paintings from the Nainsukh family of artists are especially lauded for their refined work.

The *B-40 Janamsakhi* is considered to be very important because it has extensive historical documentation. Besides the date, it records Alam Chand Raj as the illustrator, Daia Ram Baol as the compiler of the manuscript, and Sangu Mal as the patron. (The (p. 422) surname Raj indicates Alam's artisan background. Raj Mistris were masons and bricklayers, and along with the sub-caste of Tarkhans, the carpenters, they have made distinctive contributions to Sikh art and architecture.) Alam Chand Raj seems to be most concerned with the Guru's travels and his meeting with people of different faiths and ethnicities. Over and again in his fifty-seven illustrations, we encounter Guru Nanak engaged in discourse with historical figures popular in the Punjab such as Shah Abdul Rahman, Hajji Rattan, Sheikh Braham, Bhagat Kabir, Gorakhnath, Sheikh Sharaf. He meets with many other Sufis, saints, Siddhas, Naths, and with Kala, the god of death, as well. Alam's brushstrokes transmit the Guru's corporeality as the force that intensifies every*body* he meets. If Shah Abdul Rahman sits with him in a rosy pink outfit amidst flora and fauna (no. 7), it is because the Sufi saint has absorbed the Sikh Guru's radiance! Another intriguing illustration is that of Guru Nanak in conversation with the Sufi Sheikh Sharaf (no. 50), painted as a young black-bearded saint ornately dressed like a bride. The bridal image has been a popular literary trope on the Indian subcontinent. But to literally see that poetic motif is quite something else. By choosing to paint the narrative of a transvestite with the outward signifiers of feminine embellishment, clothing, and jewels, Alam brings into focus socially constructed gender paradigms.

The various *janamsakhi* illustrators highlight Guru Nanak carrying his progressive message to people from different religious and social backgrounds. In different scenarios, he delivers his message about the importance of truth, the futility of empty rituals, the

value of honest work, and the submission to the singular Divine over any other agent. The artists triumph in relaying the impact of his teachings recorded in the Guru Granth. A turbaned and colourfully robed Guru Nanak juxtaposed to the ash-smeared skimpily clad mendicants effectively conveys the importance of active participation in secular life. His image materially substantiates scriptural verses: rather than ‘smear the bodies with ashes, renounce clothes, and go naked’ (GG: 1127), we must ‘wear the outfit of divine honor and never go naked’ (GG: 1019).

The scenes of Guru Nanak performing miracles are existentially important for viewers. The Guru can read minds, he can make crops grow instantly, he can make a mosque turn around, he can cool a monster’s boiling cauldron of oil with a dip of his finger, and so on. But their visual renditions do something more. Rather than miracles displaying Guru Nanak’s supernatural grandeur, they strike upon the inner eye and play upon human imagination. Full of wit and wonder, these are not miracles in the Western semantic sense. The *janamsakhi* scenes wander from the wondrous protagonist to the wonders of bodies on earth—human or natural—and incite viewers to expect the extraordinary events in the daily rhythms of ordinary life.

Guru Nanak’s spiritual power is visually translated by the gentle expression on his face, the profound look in his eyes, and the calm authority he exudes by being positioned as a central figure. His openness is apparent from the inclusive style of his dress and the diverse environs within which he is staged. The visual iconography aurally vibrates with Guru Nanak’s Word as it merges into his Muslim companion Mardana’s *rebab* and flows along landscapes teeming with monkeys, birds, trees, and streams. The effect of the *janamsakhi* paintings is enchanting.

(p. 423) The Portraits of the Gurus

The early portraits of the Sikh Gurus were painted in the courtly Mughal style. With the cultural expansion under Mughal rulers, artists from the Punjab plains and the Pahari areas became trained in the Mughal style of painting and portraiture. Consequently, when they painted the Sikh Gurus, the physical features of the Gurus, as well as their outfits, turbans, and poses end up looking very much like Mughal princes and nobles. Some works have intricate patterns and technical finesse that were characteristic of the Mughal miniatures. Refined portraits of the Gurus were produced at flourishing centres of art like Guler, Kangra, Bilaspur, Nurpur, and Mandi (Goswamy 2000: 43–9).

A set of paintings of the Gurus was commissioned by Ram Rai (b. 1646), the elder son of Guru Har Rai. Known to be the earliest example of the genre of portraiture, this set has

been in the custody of his descendants at Gurdwara Ram Rai in Dehra Dun (Randhawa 1970: 13–20). A painter from the Mughal school did this series as early as 1685, which subsequently served as a model for the murals extant on the walls of the southern gate of the Gurdwara complex (Kamboj 2003: 35).

The mainstream portraits of the Ten Gurus appear in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Gurus are identified on the borders with brief labels in Persian, Gurmukhi, or Devnagri scripts. These too are composed in a provincial Mughal style. Guru Nanak is the most conspicuous figure, and his four successor Gurus from Angad to Arjan are modelled on his image. Their simple garments are those of a religious person, and the rosary held in their hand symbolizes their contemplative nature. The transformation comes with the sixth Guru, with whom an iconography of political resistance and power comes into play (Singh 2011: 164–6).

The next three Gurus (Har Rai, Har Kishen, and Tegh Bahadur) replicate the style of the first five. The pageantry returns with Guru Gobind Singh, and does so with phenomenal grandeur and vigour. He is depicted with all the icons of sovereignty. He rides spirited stallions dappled with ornate decorations and jewelled harnesses. The Guru himself is invariably adorned in royal outfits, precious jewels, elegant shoes, and with a towering aigrette in his turban. The supreme warrior can carry a long, rather startling javelin in one hand and an arrow in another, both of which give the sense of galloping faster than wind. Hunting dogs cavort alongside his stallion. Such portraits subsequently became popular in bazaar art.

Scriptural Manuscripts

Very important expressions of Sikh devotion are illuminated and illustrated manuscripts of the Guru Granth (Goswamy 2000: 37–40). At this stage of research, not much is known about their artists or their scribes or their patrons. Jeevan Singh Deol, a (p. 424) pioneer in this field, distinguishes three types: early manuscripts with *nisans* (from the Persian ‘sign’ or emblem), those with illumination or floral adornment (*minakari* or *bel buta*), and illustrated manuscripts (Deol 2003: 50–67). During the regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, an extensive use of gold was made in the writing and illumination of texts, literally called *sunehri beeds* or ‘golden volumes’. The practice of illuminating or illustrating the scriptural manuscripts disappeared abruptly at the close of the nineteenth century. The printing press took over the production of scriptural copies.

Art in the Sikh Kingdoms

During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799–1849), Sikh art received unprecedented royal patronage, and the Gurus and their message found expression in many different mediums throughout his vast kingdom. There was the construction of magnificent forts, palaces, gurdwaras, mosques, and temples; colourful paintings on a wide range of themes; an enormous production of gold and silver objects; designing of precious jewellery; minting of coins; creation of exquisite arms, luxurious tents, canopies, caparisons, and large woollen shawls which could slip through a tiny ring! (Archer 1966; Stronge 1999; Brown 1999).

Centres such as Lahore, Amritsar, Srinagar, Multan, and Sialkot produced artefacts for the Maharaja and his court. The highlights include the embellishment of the Golden Temple, the bejewelled canopy for the Guru Granth, the golden volume (*sunehri beed*) presented to the Gurdwara at Nanded, the gold throne made by Hafez Muhammad Multani, exquisite jewellery for both men and women, including the legendary Koh-i-noor diamond that the Maharaja very reluctantly got from the Afghani royal family in exchange for rescuing their head, the ruler Shah Shuja (in 1813). There are other memorable items like the gold token with Guru Nanak seated under a tree, and the Mul Mantra in Gurmukhi characters on the reverse (Goswamy 2000*:* 186). Likewise, a sword from the Arms Gallery in the Old Fort in Patiala shows Guru Nanak seated with Bhai Mardana and Bhai Bala close to its hilt, and along the blade are his successor Gurus, seated in the company of their devotees (Goswamy 2000: 70–1). The pluralistic Maharaja is remembered for contributing the expensive silver doors at the temple of goddess Kali, and for paying an inordinately high price for a manuscript copy of the holy Qur’an (Aijazuddin 1979: 30).

The refurbishing of the Harmandir of course was his major accomplishment. He made a huge monetary grant towards it, and invited skilled Muslim architects, masons, wood carvers, and other craftsmen to Amritsar. In the vicinity of the Harmandir, a residence for the artists was built, and so was a mosque. Yar Mohammad Khan Mistri was the technical expert for the gold plating. The Golden Temple of today rises from the centre of the sacred pool, approached by a causeway bordered with marble balustrades. Its exterior marble walls on the lower side are embellished in lapis lazuli, onyx, and other semi-precious stones in the *pietra dura* technique. Its upper parts are covered with plates (p. 425) of gilded copper that shimmer diaphanously in the surrounding waters. The interior of its second storey, with walls and ceiling sparkling with mirrors and coloured glass in kaleidoscopic motifs, opens up in the centre to reveal the Guru Granth enshrined on the ground floor. Arabesque designs flow vibrantly on the walls of the Harmandir,

creating rich borders for deer, lions, cobras, and elephants as they join together to hold flower vases, fruits, and fairies.

Numerous other gurdwaras were embellished by the Maharaja as well, with artists from different religious backgrounds painting their walls. Likewise, spectacular illustrations of the Guru Granth, portraits of the Gurus, and *janamsakhi* depictions were taken up in different parts of his enormous empire. The miniature portraits of the Sikh Gurus regarded as the finest set of paintings in the Pahari style were created under his patronage (Goswamy 1982: 55). Besides the ruler, there were his sons, other aristocratic families like the Sandhawalias and Majithias, and Europeans like General Allard at his court, who enthusiastically commissioned artists. Themes from other religious traditions and mythologies were also produced, and so was erotic art on the walls of his forts and palaces, and in the homes and estates of his nobles. Artists from Guler, Kangra, Kotla, Nurpur moved to the Sikh court at Lahore and Amritsar for patronage, and transformed their techniques to suit the aesthetics of their new clients. The Sikh school of painting flourished in the Sikh kingdom (Archer 1966).

Because of his smallpox and physical handicaps, it is said that Ranjit Singh was averse to portraiture. Nevertheless, artists were wildly enthusiastic about him and his glamorous court. The Hungarian August Schoefft (1809–88) was one of them. Besides *The Court of Lahore* that won him great acclaim, Schoefft painted the Maharaja in the presence of the Guru Granth at the Golden Temple, which proves the literary testimony of an English visitor that ‘the Granth was constantly read to him’ (Aijazuddin 1979: 30). Several other artists portrayed him sitting grandly in his court or riding horses in all his strength and glory. Emily Eden sketched Ranjit Singh sitting in his typical pose with his leg folded under, and she even sketched his horses decorated with precious emeralds. His sons and noblemen are the subjects of several hand-coloured lithographs on paper in *Portraits of the Princes and Peoples of India* (Eden 1844). Eden also palpably conveys the Maharaja’s enthusiastic response to Queen Victoria’s painting that she had done as a gift for him (Eden 1867: 200).

His son and successor Maharaja Sher Singh patronized Shoefft, and his glittering portrait shows him draped in jewels, holding an upright sword, and seated on Ranjit Singh’s golden throne (now at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V.&A.)). Enamoured of Western perfumes and other exotic items, Sher Singh is believed to be the first Sikh pictured with his beard tied. In another work, Shoefft painted Sher Singh surrounded by his council in an elegantly latticed hall in the Lahore Fort. He also painted the young prince Dalip Singh dressed in ornate red outfit with Punjabi golden embroidered shoes and a jewelled sword in his hand, sitting, rather out of place, on a branch of a tree. Shoefft also did sketches of Maharani Jindan (Ranjit Singh’s young wife, mother of his son Dalip Singh, and grandmother of Princess Bamba), sitting confidently on a cushion, resting against a

pillow with her head held high. These paintings are in the Princess Bamba (p. 426) Collection in the Lahore Fort. In 1863, the Englishman George Richmond did an oil painting of a bejewelled Maharani Jindan, which belongs to the Kapany Collection and has been displayed in museums across North America.

The European artists were inspirational for Sikh painters. After Shoefft's huge canvases, their miniature painting style was transformed. Three-dimensional perspective was introduced, and painting in oil became common practice. The earlier Mughal naturalism and Pahari lyricism combined with Western realism added a whole new dimension to the Sikh school of painting. Under Sikh patronage, paintings begin to display a shift from a mythological naturalism to a new realism.

Soon after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, his powerful kingdom was lost to the British. The ensuing nostalgia gave rise to a large-scale production of sets of paintings on ivory. They portrayed the Maharaja, his family members, ministers, warriors, advisers, and other talented men. The clusters of figures in a small oval format evoked the presence of Sikh glory that belonged to the past. With their industry-like production, workmanship of the ivory paintings declined, and other art forms began to emerge in the Punjab, among them lithographs, woodcuts, and photography.

After the annexation of the Punjab, Queen Victoria hosted the deposed Sikh Maharaja Dalip Singh in London, and commissioned painters and sculptors to depict the 15-year-old. During the week he was modelling for the German painter Franz Winterhalter (10–17 July 1854), the Queen sat across with Prince Albert and composed her own sketches of her exotic subject. It was in this week that the young Dalip placed in the queen's hand the Koh-i-noor, the quintessential symbol of her conquest (Axel 2001: 55). The British fascination with Dalip Singh goes on, for in 1999 his bronze statue, sculpted by Denise Dutton, was unveiled by Prince Charles at Thetford. His painting by Winterhalter continues to hang in Osborne House. The elaborate carvings in its Durbar Room were crafted by Bhai Ram Singh, a Sikh artist especially invited from Amritsar. Bhai Ram Singh's architectural designs created a perfect setting for the display of the magnificent collection of gifts given to Queen Victoria by Indian Maharajas and nobles.

The fall of the Lahore kingdom brought to light the splendour of other Sikh kingdoms. After Lahore, Patiala emerged as the most important Sikh kingdom of the Punjab. Just as Maharaja Ranjit Singh is famous for his Koh-i-noor, the maharaja of Patiala is famous for his 'Patiala necklace'. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (1891–1938) who inherited the De Beers diamond, 'nearly as big as a golf ball', had Cartier mount it in a necklace along with his two Burmese rubies. It was last seen intact worn by his son, Maharaja Yadavindra Singh in 1941 (Moonan 2002); its much more slender version was exhibited in *Maharaja*: *The Splendour of India's Royal Courts* (curated at the V.&A. in 2009).

Their ancestor Maharaja Narinder Singh (1845–62), widely regarded as the ‘most enlightened’ ruler of Patiala, was a great patron of the arts. With him Patiala became a cultural hub for painters, poets, musicians, builders, craftsmen, and gardeners from different religious backgrounds and different parts of north India. Eminent artists from Jaipur, from the Pahari regions, and from the Mughal court migrated to Patiala to work on the extensive murals for his forts, palaces, and shrines (Singh 2003: 68–85). The varied artists working simultaneously created eclectic works. The way Maharaja Narinder (p. 427) Singh promoted the arts served as a model for his successors at Patiala, and for the rulers of Nabha, Kapurthala, Faridkot, and Jind. Paintings of the Sikh Gurus, illustrated manuscripts, rich murals, series of royal portraits, and works capturing the unsung ‘lower’ segment of society, were produced all over the Sikh kingdoms. Sikh painters like Kishen Singh, Bishan Singh, and Kapur Singh gained much popularity. The lost glory of the Sikh Raj was reproduced, and the realism of their situation was recorded in gouache, watercolour, and oils.

Twentieth-Century Painters

The cultural and political shifts of the twentieth century generated a new momentum, with many men and women creating exciting works. Among them is Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–41), the most celebrated icon of modern Indian painting. She rejected the orientalized romanticism dominating the Indian art scene, and heralded a modern movement where the individual artist had the freedom to depict reality from his or her own perspective. Her works constitute the core collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi.

S. G. Thakur Singh (1899–1976) created a vast repertoire in oils, pastels, and watercolours, of heroes like Mahatma Gandhi and Sir Sunder Singh Majithia, monuments like the Taj Mahal and the Golden Temple, and landscapes of Ladakh, Bombay, and Udaipur. His seductive painting *After the Bath* won a prize in 1924 at the exhibition of Commonwealth Art in Britain. Sobha Singh (1901–86) painted figures across religious traditions. Having witnessed human violence during his service in the British army, he dedicated his life resurrecting prototypes of peace and love on his canvas. His rich legacy includes images of immortal lovers from the Punjabi folk romances of Heer-Ranjha, Sassi-Punnu, Sohni-Mahival. His portrait of Guru Nanak brimming with spirituality is a great masterpiece, and its prints are found in almost every Sikh home.

Contemporary artists continue to produce beautiful works. Phoolan Rani wrote the life of the first Guru and illustrated it in a series of forty remarkable paintings for the fifth centenary of his birth in 1969. Her female eyes catch the presence of women in the

Guru’s life (Rani 1969). She has received many honours for her works. Arpita Kaur illustrated the *Hymns of Guru Nanak* translated by Khushwant Singh (Singh and Kaur, 1991) The Guru’s spiritual longing, expressed in a wide range of musical melodies, is visually translated in the language of colours. By blending the Punjabi folk tradition with Persian miniature layouts, Aprita creates a modernist style reminiscent of the biblical illustrations of Chagall. Another contemporary artist, Devinder Singh, fuses traditional popular art with modern cubism. For the 2012 Sikh Foundation Calendar he painted twelve great Sikh women—from Bibi Nanaki to Maharani Jindan—engaged in a wide range of activities. Pastel colours dominate the artist’s palette, but the yellows and blues offset by the dark brown and grey hues, render a dramatic quality to the historic scenes.

(p. 428) The internationally renowned Arpana Caur records Sikh history in deep colours and innovative forms that elicit profound reflection. For instance, her *1984* is a traumatic reminder of the historic massacre at the Golden Temple, but for Sikh spectators the severed head in this painting is also a reminder of their ninth Guru’s sacrifice for the freedom of religion in 1675, and of the Five Beloved Sikhs who were ready to offer their head to the tenth Guru during his creation of the Khalsa in 1699. Many of Arpana’s works focus on Guru Nanak, and render a postmodern perspective. On her canvas, a white bearded Nanak, dressed in sheer black, with an orange *mala*, glows brilliantly (displayed at National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi).

In the United Kingdom, the Singh Twins are creating an exciting new genre they call ‘Past Modern’. It is a skilful reworking of the traditional Indian miniature style with their post-colonial diasporic experience in a multicultural England. Their works are hugely popular and elicit a lot of thought. For example, *All That I Am* vividly reproduces the story of their immigrant father. A yellow turbaned Sikh man with a stethoscope around his neck smiles wistfully, with his memories and dreams interlacing his mental cartography. The intricate painting offers a perceptive portrayal of displacement and hybridization, which immigrants across cultures can easily tap into.

While such innovative artists are creating a dynamic momentum into the future, the academy and the community are trying to bring the rich legacy of art and material culture into view. The tercentenary celebrations of the founding of the Khalsa in 1999 generated a number of exhibitions. Among them were the *Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms* curated by Susan Stronge for the V.&A. in London, which subsequently travelled to the Asian Arts Museum of San Francisco, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. In India, B. N. Goswamy put together a comprehensive exhibition entitled *Piety and Splendour* for the National Museum of India in New Delhi. In 2003 the Satinder Kaur Kapany, the first permanent gallery on Sikh art in the West, was inaugurated at the Asian Arts Museum in San Francisco. In July 2004, with the efforts of Paul Taylor, the Smithsonian’s National

Museum of Natural History opened *Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab.* In 2006, B. N. Goswamy and Caron Smith curated *I See No Stranger*, for the Rubin Museum of Art in New York. Its title appropriately reflects Guru Nanak's message of the common human bond. These exhibitions offered large and spectacular displays, and are generating scholarly works, conferences, and more exhibitions within India and abroad. Sikh exhibits were hosted at the History Museum of New Mexico in 2009, at the Chester Beatty in Dublin in 2010, and at the Fresno Art Museum in 2012. A recent volume on Sikh relics, sites, and paintings includes an image believed to be the wooden comb of Guru Gobind Singh—curled with the Guru's hair (B. S. Singh and R. Singh 2012).

Sikh art is at an exciting juncture. Further research into this subject will offer insights into the cultural history of South Asia; an aesthetic appreciation of the works will promote familiarity amongst cultures; its visibility will feed the personal and collective identity of the Sikhs for generations to come.

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The Darbar Sahib

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores the ongoing religious life and history of the Darbar Sahib (aka Harimandir Sahib, or Golden Temple), Sikhism's sacred centre in Amritsar. It begins with a historical overview of the Darbar Sahib from the beginnings of the town of Ramdaspur during the time of the early Sikh Gurus, followed by a period of destruction and contestation, the flourishing of Sikh architectural and artistic embellishments under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's patronage, the British colonial period, the aftermath of Operation Blue Star in 1984, and the modern period. Special attention is given to practices, performances, and daily religious life at the Darbar Sahib, including twenty-four-hour continuous *gurbani kirtan* (devotional singing of the Gurus' hymns), running of the *langar* (community kitchen), and other forms of practice and seva (selfless service).

Keywords: Amritsar, Darbar Sahib, Golden Temple, gurbani kirtan, Harimandir, langar, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Operation Blue Star', Sikh architecture

Introduction

Darbar Sahib means the 'Venerable Court', signifying the sacred court of the Sikh Gurus and the 'Divine Court' of Akal Purakh (God) on Earth. Sikh use of the term *darbar* points to the period when the ten human Gurus 'held court' with their community. Today, *darbar* is applied within Sikh gurdwaras around the world, in that to enter the '*darbar* hall' where Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) is enthroned is to enter into the Divine Court and the presence of God. Thus God as Guru and the Granth Sahib as Guru 'hold court' in *darbars* around the world today. The title Darbar Sahib is especially used to refer to the complex around the Harimandir Sahib in Amritsar, India—Sikhism's sacred centre.

The Harimandir is usually referred to as the ‘Golden Temple’, as its top storeys were covered in gold leaf under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799–1839). It is common for Sikhs to use ‘Darbar Sahib’ and ‘Harimandir Sahib’ interchangeably, though ‘Darbar Sahib’, most accurately, refers to the entire complex of shrines and buildings that surround the Harimandir. The history of the Darbar Sahib can be organized into several historical periods: that of the early Sikh Gurus; the subsequent period of contestation and destruction; the time of Sikh rule; the British colonial period; and the modern era.

The Period of the Early Gurus (1560s–1635)

Although there are multiple legends about the healing powers of the site that would later become the Darbar Sahib, traditional sources agree that Guru Amar Das was drawn to the site and decided to build a small mud hut at the edge of a *sarovar* (pool) for his (p. 431) personal meditation (Patwant Singh 1988: 31). When he became Guru in 1574, Guru Ram Das came to live in this small hut and later began expanding the *sarovar*. The new town surrounding it came to be called Guru ka Chak (Guru’s Town) or Ramdaspur. There are two popular traditions about how the Gurus came to own the land surrounding the *sarovar*, but most historians agree the site was selected by the Gurus themselves and that it was recognized as revenue-free by later Mughal rulers, and even by the British (Kaur 1983: 8).

It is clear the *sarovar* and town were planned by the Gurus as a new place of pilgrimage for the growing Sikh community. In doing so, the early Gurus could look to Guru Nanak’s Kartarpur community as a model. In the context of the nascent Sikh community, establishing such a centre was a ‘logical step forward’ in serving community needs (Grewal 2009: 96). As pilgrims began to visit the Guru and Sikhs came to live near him and aid in the building project, Ramdaspur and its market began to rapidly grow and flourish.

Work on expanding the *sarovar* began in the 1570s and was continued by Guru Arjan who began the project to construct the Harimandir and its causeway (Pashaura Singh 2006: 112). Guru Arjan himself likely envisioned the Harimandir’s symbolically rich design, with a main shrine that appears to float in a pool, seemingly invoking the pan-Indian religious symbol of a lotus blossom rising from under the dark waters. This design also poises devotees to act out crossing the ‘ocean of existence’, a prominent metaphor within Guru Granth Sahib (Pashaura Singh 2006: 114).

Historians agree that the Harimandir was built through donations of money and service (Patwant Singh 1988: 38). Based on this, it is likely that the original structure was of

simple ‘brick and lime [mortar]’ construction (Rai and Singh 2003: 33), with the many embellishments visible today emerging later. However, this simple structure aroused adulation. Guru Arjan, for example, directly addresses the Harimandir and Ramdaspur in the Guru Granth Sahib the first recension of which was installed within the Harimandir very soon after construction completed in 1604.

This period saw a number of developments in Sikh religious practice, such as the daily procession and ‘royal’ treatment of the scripture and the constant singing of its hymns—following patterns likely set by Guru Arjan (Pashaura Singh 2006: 118–19). As Ramdaspur and the Harimandir flourished, they likely drew the attention of the Emperor Jahangir who had Guru Arjan executed in 1606. Guru Hargobind became the sixth Sikh Guru and within the uneasy context of the time introduced the concepts of *miri* (worldly authority) and *piri* (spiritual authority) to the Guruship. He began constructing the Akal Takht (Throne of the Timeless) as a place to carry out his authority over Sikh ‘worldly’ matters. The Akal Takht is directly in front of the Harimandir, and it is said that this spot had been a mound of earth Hargobind played on as a child (Patwant Singh 1988: 57). During Guru Hargobind’s time, the Akal Takht was a simple raised platform, ‘3.5 metres high’ (Rai and Singh 2003: 42) on which he would give sermons and ‘hold court’.

After his imprisonment in Gwalior fort by orders of Emperor Jahangir, Guru Hargobind returned to Ramdaspur in 1619 (his return is commemorated each (p. 432) year during Diwali). Later, an apparent dispute led to the first battle between the Sikhs and Mughals, and in 1635 Guru Hargobind left the Darbar Sahib for Kiratpur and the Shivalik hills, never to return.

Contestation, Destruction, and Rebuilding (1635–1802)

With Guru Hargobind gone, there was a struggle for control of the Darbar Sahib. For the next sixty-one years, control of the site fell to the Mina (Deceitful) sect. Miharvan, the son of Guru Ram Das’s disowned son Prithi Chand, took control from 1635 to 1639, followed by his son Harji from 1639 to 1696 (Grewal 2009: 100–1). This was the beginning of an extended period when the Darbar Sahib was out of the control of the Sikh Gurus. During this time, Guru Har Rai visited the site once, during Diwali in 1651; Guru Har Krishan (1656–64) died at age 8, and was never able to visit; and, according to tradition, when Guru Tegh Bahadur visited in 1664, he was barred entry to the Harimandir by Harji’s priests (Kaur 1983: 24–5). Guru Gobind Singh likewise never had occasion to visit the Darbar Sahib. However, hearing of its mismanagement, soon after founding the Khalsa

(1699), he dispatched Bhai Mani Singh to take control. In 1733, as custodian of the Darbar Sahib, Bhai Mani Singh requested from Zakariya Khan, the governor of Lahore, permission to hold Diwali festivities at the Darbar Sahib. Khan allowed the festival on the condition that Singh pay 5,000 rupees as a tax. However, Khan dispatched troops around the city, scaring away most of the pilgrims, and this meant Bhai Mani Singh was unable to raise the sum. Khan imprisoned Bhai Mani Singh, gave him the option to convert to Islam, but had him executed by dismemberment when he refused (Patwant Singh 1988: 72–3).

After this, the Mughal Empire seized control of the Darbar Sahib and placed Massa Rangar in charge of Ramdaspur. Rangar apparently entertained himself with *nautch* dancers within the Harimandir. This desecration infuriated Sikhs, and in 1740 Bhais Matab Singh and Sukkha Singh sneaked into the complex and beheaded Rangar, escaping before his guards could give chase (Patwant Singh 1988: 75).

Between the 1740s and 1760s, the Darbar Sahib was subject to frequent desecrations and destructions. Ahmad Shah Abdali attacked the site multiple times. One campaign saw Baba Deep Singh lead a group of Sikhs to retake the Darbar Sahib. On the way, the Baba was mortally wounded—traditional sources say his head was severed—but he continued fighting, finally falling when his eyes caught sight of the Harimandir (Kaur 1983: 16, 46–9).

During reconstruction, a number of *bungas* (residences) were constructed around the shrine, many of which came to serve as guest houses, places of learning, and even hospitals (Kirpal Singh 1999: 49). Most sources agree that by 1776 the Harimandir was fully (re)constructed. During the eighteenth century, it is clear the Darbar Sahib **(p. 433)** had symbolically solidified as the ‘rallying centre for Sikh religion and politics’ (Arshi 1989: 27). This point is made obvious by the sacrifices many Sikhs made to protect and maintain control of it.

The Sikh Empire and the ‘Golden Temple’ (1802–1849)

In 1808, Maharaja Ranjit Singh donated 500,000 rupees to begin gold-plating the Harimandir’s upper storeys and install marble work both within it and on its walkway. The maharaja also allowed Europeans to visit the Harimandir. It was at this time that English-speaking travellers first wrote of the site as the ‘Golden Temple’. Much of the gilding and marble work seen today at the Darbar Sahib was completed within the

maharaja's lifetime. After his death in 1839, the beautification continued under his successors. It is in large part thanks to the stability and relative prosperity ushered in by the Sikh kingdom that the Darbar Sahib continued to be embellished.

The British Colonial Period (1849–1947)

In 1849 the British annexed the Punjab. From the beginning, the British were ambivalent about the Darbar Sahib as a religious site, and there were arguments among colonial authorities about whether they should be administering such sites (Grewal 2009: 231–2). By most accounts, the colonial authorities were aware of its central importance for Sikhs, and saw control of it as a key factor in maintaining power over them (Kerr 1999: 88–90). The Darbar Sahib thus became the only religious institution in India that was directly controlled by the British (Grewal 2009: 239).

Upon taking control of the site, the British allowed the existing management to continue, but soon began directly appointing *sarbrahs* (managers). According to the Punjab Administration Report of 1848–50, the *bungas* around the Harimandir were Sikh institutions within which the study of both Gurmukhi and the Guru Granth Sahib were conducted gratis. Students also lived free of charge within them thanks to donations from Sikhs (Kirpal Singh 1999: 48). In 1862 the British demolished some *bungas*, despite Sikh protest, to construct a Gothic clock tower, which was completed in 1874 (Grewal 2009: 240). Many Sikhs viewed this structure as a symbol of colonial power, with its architectural style out of place and its height apparently meant to overshadow the Harimandir. Subsequently this clock tower was pulled down shortly after Indian Independence in 1947 (Singh 1988: 134). Despite the offence caused by the clock tower, the British are credited with installing electricity within the Darbar Sahib in 1898 and extending the canal supplying water to the *sarovar* (Arshi 1989: 50).

(p. 434) In the early twentieth century Sikhs began to protest at what they saw as the corrupt management of the Darbar Sahib by the British-supported *sarbrahs*. These tensions, coupled with outrage surrounding the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919) brought about massive non-violent protests that led to the British declaration in 1920 that control of the Darbar Sahib would be handed over to an elected committee of Sikhs (Kaur 1983: 70). The British reneged, however, when the initial committee was formed. In November 1921, a British representative forcibly took away the keys to the *toshakhana* (treasury). This again triggered a wave of non-violent protests until the keys were returned in January 1922. In 1925, with the official passage of the 'Gurdwara Reform Act', control of the Darbar Sahib (and other Sikh religious sites) was passed to the

democratically elected SGPC (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee), which still controls it today.

During the colonial period, the SGPC began building and renovation projects around the Darbar Sahib. In 1928–9, the *parikrama* was widened, and covered bathing areas for women were installed. In 1931, the Guru Ram Das Sarai was built as a large ‘rest house’ for accommodating pilgrims. During the chaos of Partition in 1947, the Darbar Sahib provided refuge for those fleeing Pakistan.

The Modern Era (1947–)

After Partition, the SGPC managed building projects that continued to transform the area surrounding the Darbar Sahib. In the 1960s, most of the remaining *bungas* were torn down to further widen the *parikrama*, which was also finally completely covered in marble (Kaur 1983: 163, 166), and in 1982, a canal project was completed for maintaining the water level of the *sarovar* (which had once gone almost completely dry during a drought in 1783) (Patwant Singh 1988: 95).

In 1984, armed Sikh separatists led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947–84) took residence within the Darbar Sahib complex. The Indian government responded by sending the army into the Darbar Sahib complex. The military operation that followed—code-named ‘Operation Blue Star’—resulted in severe damage to the Darbar Sahib. Operation Blue Star resulted in the death of Bhindranwale, but also that of thousands of armed and unarmed civilians, many of whom were pilgrims caught in the crossfire. As news and images of the battered Darbar Sahib spread, Sikhs around the world reacted with grief and horror, many seeing the attack as an act of ultimate sacrilege, a sign of contempt for Sikhs on the part of the Indian government, and even an attempt at genocide. The Indian army continued to occupy the Darbar Sahib for nearly three months, as Indira Gandhi’s government had it repaired and the Akal Takht quickly rebuilt. Many Sikhs saw this Akal Takht structure as ‘tainted’, and thus it was torn down in 1986. A new Akal Takht, constructed through *seva* (voluntary service), was completed in 1999.

The events of 1984 are now memorialized yearly at the Darbar Sahib as Ghallughara Diwas (Day of Massacre). Bullet-holes from the attack have deliberately been left on (p. 435) buildings throughout the complex as ‘scars’ reminding visitors of the violence. Though bearing these scars, the Darbar Sahib has remained alive and well in the decades since 1984. The number of yearly pilgrims continues to grow and the SGPC has overseen continuous construction projects within and around the Darbar Sahib.

A Walk Around the Darbar Sahib

Like many large cities in India and around the world today, the streets of Amritsar are full of the dust and din of cars and people. As soon as one enters the main gate of the Darbar Sahib the cacophony of the city outside begins to dissolve. The change in atmosphere is palpable, as *kirtan* (devotional singing) fills one's ears. Standing within this gate, devotees get their first *darshan* (auspicious sight) of the Harimandir, its reflection gleaming brightly in the Amrit Sarovar (Figure 35.1). Once within, they bow deeply towards the Harimandir, many touching their heads to the marble floor. From this spot, devotees begin to walk around the *parikrama* (walkway), keeping the Harimandir to their right. Walking around the *parikrama* from this point, the two towers of the Ramgarhia Bunga and *langar* hall rise high ahead. On most days, hundreds of bathers are taking a sacred bath in the clear waters of the Amrit Sarovar.



Click to view larger

Figure 35.1

(The photograph was taken by the author himself on his own camera during his visit to the Golden Temple.)

Turning the first corner around the *sarovar*, one encounters a large, regal tree, Dukh Bhanjani Ber (Tree that Ends Sorrow) with a small gurdwara underneath it. Beneath its shade is a small platform known as Ath Sath Tirath where devotees hope to enjoy the fruits of pilgrimage to all 'sixty-eight pilgrimage places' of India by bathing in the *sarovar* near this spot. Around the next corner of the *sarovar* is the shrine of Baba Deep Singh, (p. 436) the Sikh martyr who died liberating the Darbar Sahib from Afghan forces. Nearby is Laachi Ber, the berry tree under which Guru Arjan sat to supervise the construction of the Harimandir. At this point in their walk around the *sarovar*, many devotees will turn to the other side of the *parikrama*, and make a donation to the *karah parshad* (blessed food) kiosk, taking *parshad* to the Harimandir, where attendants receive and distribute it as a blessing.

With the Harimandir in sight, devotees pass through the large Darshani Deohri (Gateway to See and Be Seen by God) and onto the causeway leading to the Harimandir. On the

causeway devotees press close together, anticipating *darshan* of Guru Granth Sahib Within the Harimandir, devotees pay their respect to the scripture. Upon the floors of the main shrine, many Sikhs sit for hours, deeply absorbed in meditation and prayer. On the lowest floor, devotees complete a circumambulation around the Harimandir, stopping to visit Har ki Pauri (God's Steps) at the back of the shrine, where many will cup some of the *amrit* ([nectar of] immortality) of the *sarovar*, sprinkling it on their heads or taking a small sip. As devotees leave the Harimandir, they take *parshad*.

Opposite the Darshani Deohri is the Akal Takht and to the right are two saffron *nishan sahibs* (venerable symbols) rising into the sky, recalling Guru Hargobind's coupling of *miri* and *piri*. Behind and to the right of the Akal Takht is Gurdwara Thara (Platform) Sahib, a small gurdwara commemorating the site where Guru Tegh Bahadur is said to have prayed when he was refused entry into the Harimandir in 1664. Rounding the final corner of the *sarovar*, one comes to another ancient tree, Ber Baba Buddha, under which the first *granthi* of the Harimandir, Baba Buddha, is said to have sat and supervised its construction.

Having made a complete circumambulation, most devotees will head to the *langar* (kitchen). Inside the *langar* hall, all visitors eat together, sitting in rows with no regard given to caste, class, race, religion, or other outside distinctions. Leaving the Darbar Sahib, many devotees now bow their face to the *parikrama* once again, bidding farewell to the Harimandir. Many among the thousands of pilgrims who visit the Darbar Sahib each day stay at the several *sarais*/*niwas* (guest houses) near the westernmost gate of the complex.

Architecture and Artistry of the Darbar Sahib

The Darbar Sahib is renowned for its fine and distinctive architecture, which blends Mughal and Rajput styles. One strong example of this is the large 'onion dome'—a typical feature of Islamic architecture—that tops the Harimandir, with a petalled-lotus-blossom design at its base, a quintessential Indian metaphor and architectural motif. Obviously, one of the most striking features of the Darbar Sahib complex is its gold leaf, giving the shrine its common English name, the 'Golden Temple'. The bright, shimmering (p. 437) appearance of a temple bathed in gold was achieved by affixing sheets of embossed gold-plated copper. The original gold-plating from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time lasted 173 years, having been '10–12 layers'. Renewed in 2003, the new plating is '24 layers', which required 'several tons of gold' and 'should last for the next 400 years' (Shankar and Bhatnagar 2004: 108).

The Amrit Sarovar surrounding the Harimandir is 510 by 490 feet, and is 17 feet deep, having ten steps. The Harimandir itself is 40 feet 4 inches square (not including the Har ki Pauri structure at its back) and rises roughly 45 feet from the *sarovar* to the top of its dome (not including its 'parasol' top) on a platform that is 66 feet 4 inches square. The causeway is 202 feet long, and is covered with inlaid marble. The Harimandir also has four doors, as distinct from Hindu temples that usually have one. This is to signify the welcoming of people from all four traditional castes and from all four directions. The Harimandir is also deliberately set lower than the complex's entrance gates, to inculcate a sense of humility. The top of the Harimandir is fringed by small domes around its edges, with ornate *chhatris* (open-air domes) adorning each of its corners. The gold plate on the upper storeys is embossed with floral and geometric patterns. Above the main entrance are bas-relief images of Guru Nanak flanked by Bhai Mardana and Bhai Bala, and Guru Gobind Singh on horseback, and also an embossed plaque commemorating the contributions of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The Harimandir has two main floors. Inside the first is the *manji sahib* (throne) on which Guru Granth Sahib is seated each day. The flooring within is decorated with fine geometric patterns in white marble. Inside each of the four doors, the ceilings open into arches covered in richly embossed gold plating. Above each door, verses from the Guru Granth Sahib are also embossed in gold plate. Most of the second floor is a 'gallery' open to the first floor, giving the first storey an 'airy' feeling and devotees on the second floor a clear view of Guru Granth Sahib and the ability to hear the continuous performance of *kirtan*. Above the second floor is an open terrace and effective third smaller floor, the Shish Mahal (Mirror Palace).

The walls inside the Harimandir are completely covered with lavish decoration. There are several primary artistic media used in the decoration of the Harimandir's walls: *mohrakashi*, *jaratkari*, *gach*, and *tukri*. Throughout the Harimandir, there are hundreds of *mohrakashi* (fresco) paintings. Most of the frescos depict floral and animal motifs, but on a wall inside one of the staircases is a rich fresco depicting Guru Gobind Singh on horseback attended by the *panj piare* (Arshi 1989: 73). The lower parts of the walls of the Harimandir are faced with marble slabs embellished through the *jaratkari* technique of inlaying finely cut precious stones in different sizes, shapes, and colours (Arshi 1989: 69). *Gach* technique involves frying a gypsum paste to the right consistency, applying it to walls, shaping it into forms and patterns, and then, while still wet, varnishing or covering it with gold leaf. This technique was utilized liberally in ornamenting the first floor walls, giving them a textured, 'embossed' look. *Tukri* is the inlaying of small mirrored pieces of glass into plaster, and this technique is most fully on display within the ceiling of the central shrine, the glass pieces glinting brightly within a richly textured and colourful *gach* design (Kaur 1983: 152–3).

(p. 438) Much of the architectural embellishment on the outside of the Harimandir and the delicate decorative work within it dates to the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As this decorative work is now over 160 years old, its pristine condition is a testament to its fine artisanship—and also to the continuous *seva* the community has put into the maintenance and upkeep of such an ornately decorated structure.

In addition to the artistry of the Harimandir and surrounding structures, the Darbar Sahib houses a collection of precious Sikh artworks within the Central Sikh Museum and Akal Takht. The Central Sikh Museum was opened in 1959, and contains paintings of Sikh Gurus and historical Sikh heroes and martyrs, rare manuscripts and *hukamnamas*, photographic prints, and relics. During Operation Blue Star of 1984, several very old murals depicting the Gurus, as well as rare manuscripts containing writing in the hands of the Gurus, were destroyed. Inside the rebuilt Akal Takht is a series of exhibition rooms and a ‘gallery of martyrs’, with portraits of many of those who died in the assault or were executed afterwards by the Indian government, as well as a painting depicting the damaged Akal Takht.

Religious Practice, Performance, and Service at the Darbar Sahib

There are many religious practices and performances that take place on an ongoing daily basis at the Darbar Sahib, as well as various recurring special religious occasions. The centrepiece of daily practice at the Darbar Sahib is the continuous musical performance of the Divine Word. Daily religious practice begins when the gates are opened during the ‘ambrosial hours’ of the morning, between 2.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m.. In this early morning period, *kirtaniyas* (musicians) perform Guru Nanak’s Asa di Var (Ballad [of Hope] in *Asa raga*). This first ‘sitting’ of *kirtan* continues until between 4.00 a.m. and 5.00 a.m., when the morning procession of Guru Granth Sahib from within the Akal Takht begins. GGS’s arrival is heralded by the thunderous booming of the *nagara* (large drums) and trumpeting of the *narsinga* (S-shaped horn). The scripture is carried from the Akal Takht upon the head of one of the *granthis*. This is the *prakash* (shining forth) of the light of the Guru into a new day. Devotees shower the Scripture with flower petals and fragrant rose water. The Guru Granth Sahib is placed on a finely decorated *palki* (palanquin) that has been specially prepared to carry the scripture across the causeway into the Harimandir. As the *palki* slowly makes its way, devotees jostle to have a chance to share in carrying the Guru Granth Sahib Devotional excitement reaches a peak as the Guru Granth Sahib arrives within the Harimandir and is enthroned on the *manji sahib* beneath an

ornamented royal canopy. At this point, the first *hukamnama* (divine command) of the day is taken by opening the scripture at random and reciting the first hymn on that page. After this, Sikhs perform the first *ardas* (supplication) prayer, which is repeated five times throughout the day. From this point, continuous performance of *gurbani kirtan* proceeds throughout the day according to fixed *chaunkis* (sittings), in (p. 439) ragas used by the Gurus deemed appropriate for particular times of day (Pashaura Singh 2006: 119, 124–6). The twenty-four-hour continuous performance of religious music at the Darbar Sahib is a unique feature of Sikhism. Since the hymns of the Gurus are, for Sikhs, the revealed Word of God, their continuous performance marks the continuous divine presence—and listening to *kirtan* is effectively having an 'aural' *darshan* of God's presence. Devotees continue to bathe in the Amrit Sarovar at all times of the day, at once soaking in the purifying *amrit* and 'bathing' in the consciousness-purifying divine sounds of the musically intoned Word of God.

All visitors follow certain etiquette towards the Guru Granth Sahib Everyone who enters the complex removes their shoes, washes their feet, covers their head, refrains from alcohol, tobacco, or intoxicants, and helps to maintain the cleanliness of the entire complex. As a further sign of respect, all visitors bow before the Guru Granth Sahib upon entering the Harimandir. Other practices reflecting the devotion of Sikhs include bowing upon entering onto the *parikrama*, bringing flowers to place before the shrines throughout the complex, and making donations for the community before the Guru Granth Sahib Throughout the day, the Guru Granth Sahib is continuously cared for—being attended to at all times by *granthis*, covered in fine, richly coloured *rumalas* (robes), and fanned with a *chauri* (fan/whisk).

Seva, selfless service, covers a broad range of the practices that devotees perform at the Darbar Sahib. Performing *seva* is itself a devotional act. One can see countless acts of *seva* throughout the day, as almost all of the devotees who visit the Darbar Sahib perform services, small and large; such as continuously maintaining the cleanliness of the *parikrama*, the Harimandir floor, and other shrines. One of the primary *seva* activities Sikhs perform at the Darbar Sahib is working in the *langar*. The Sikh institution of *langar* was carried out by all of the Sikh Gurus, having begun when Guru Nanak would see that anyone who came to visit him was well fed. The working of the *langar* is an absolutely massive undertaking, feeding 40,000–50,000 people on regular days, and well over 100,000 on busy festival days. As many as 3,000 people can be eating at any one time on each of the two floors of the *langar* hall. Almost all of the labour is provided by volunteers.

The Akal Takht, in addition to functioning as a highly esteemed seat of authority for Sikhs, is also the site of religious activities throughout the day. It is common for singers

to perform in front of the Akal Takht, a practice dating to the time of Guru Hargobind. Each evening, the *shastars* (weapons) of the Gurus and early Sikh heroes are displayed to the congregation. *Amrit Sanskar* (initiation into the Khalsa) ceremonies are also regularly conducted in the Akal Takht.

At the end of every day, devotees perform the final Ardas, and a final *hukamnama* is taken. After this, the Scripture is reverently wrapped in fine *rumalas* as the head *granthi* recites Kirtan Sohila (Song of Praise). The *granthi* then carries the Guru Granth Sahib on his head, to be placed again on the *palki* and carried in procession back to the Akal Takht. The *nagara* and *narsinga* are again played to mark the royal procession. Once the Guru Granth Sahib is inside the Akal Takht, the gates of the Darbar Sahib are closed for the nightly cleaning. Devotees clean the inside of the Harimandir, washing its floors with milk diluted with water from the *sarovar*. While the *sevadars* clean the Darbar Sahib, they sing hymns (p. 440) from the Guru Granth Sahib from memory, continuing the twenty-four-hour musical presence of God and Guru.

Certain days see larger crowds at the Darbar Sahib. Many Sikhs believe that bathing in the Amrit Sarovar on these days is particularly auspicious. Of greater importance are *Gurpurbs* (Guru Festivals) which draw large crowds. Other major religious festivals that take place yearly at the Darbar Sahib include Diwali (which Sikhs celebrate as Bandicchor di Diwas), and Baisakhi, commemorating the founding of the Khalsa.

Global Darbar Sahib

Sikhs worldwide wish to remain connected with the Darbar Sahib. This appeal manifests itself in many ways, particularly through pilgrimage. Serving this need, there is now an international airport in Amritsar that is currently expanding. Also, since 1988, ETC Channel Punjabi has cooperated with the SGPC to carry a live global broadcast of *kirtan* and daily prayers from the Harimandir. Through the Internet, many Sikhs also receive the daily *hukamnama* and listen to *gurbani kirtan* live, and a virtual ‘pilgrimage’ is also possible through several websites. The broad embracing of technology for staying connected to the Darbar Sahib points to its continued status as the living heart and sacred centre of Sikhism.

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the Khalsa Heritage Complex, or *Virasat-e-Khalsa*, nearing completion in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab, India. The architecturally ambitious complex combines more traditional museum and library functions with technologically advanced exhibitions that portray the evolution and religious principles of the Khalsa. Sikh history (as an objective record of facts) and heritage (as living principles of the community) are thus both given space at the complex, one of several commemorative projects recently inaugurated by Parkash Singh Badal's ruling Akali Dal party. The article places the complex in three relevant contexts: first, as an exemplary instance of current museum and heritage practices taking place India-wide; second, as a component of a politically charged monument-building strategy currently under way in Punjab; and third, as a new, culturally meaningful building in a Punjabi town replete with significant historical sites and artefacts.

Keywords: Virasat-e-Khalsa, heritage, monument, technology, architecture, Anandpur Sahib, museum, commemoration

At a meeting held in Chandigarh in October 1998, the Anandpur Sahib Foundation (ASF) announced plans to celebrate the tercentenary of the founding of the Khalsa during the following months. Parkash Singh Badal, president of the ASF and chief minister of Punjab, announced that in addition to hosting a range of festivities and religious ceremonies, the Punjab government would shortly break ground on a new building in Anandpur Sahib called the Khalsa Heritage Memorial Complex. At a lavish ceremony held one month later, on 22 November (a day chosen to commemorate Guru Gobind Singh's installation as tenth Guru of the Sikhs), a group representing the *panj piare* ('cherished five') laid the foundation stone for the new building. At the time, Badal expressed hope that the new complex would be completed in about three years. Thirteen years later, in November 2011, the complex finally opened its doors to the public for the first time.

Known as the *Virasat-e-Khalsa*, or Khalsa Heritage Complex (the word ‘memorial’ was dropped from its original title), the building complex was still only partially complete.

The design of the new complex was well under way by the time the ASF first announced the project in 1998. Badal visited Israel in spring 1997, where he encountered the Children’s Holocaust Memorial and Holocaust History Museum (the latter was still under construction at the time) outside Jerusalem. Emotionally moved by these buildings, Badal arranged to meet the person who had designed them, Boston-based architect Moshe Safdie (Dvir 2012). Within a few weeks, Badal had hired Safdie to develop preliminary designs for the Khalsa Heritage Complex. Safdie and his office eventually completed final designs for the project in association with Delhi-based architect Ashok Dhawan.



Click to view larger

Figure 36.1 View of prismatic towers in the eastern portion of the Khalsa Heritage Complex as seen from the western portion, with a bridge spanning reflecting pools in between.

This photograph was taken by the author himself on his own camera during his recent visit to Anandpur Sahib.

The Khalsa Heritage Complex elicited criticism right from the beginning, and continues to do so today. Critics point out that Badal did almost no research on the project prior to hiring Safdie in a non-competitive private arrangement, thereby overlooking potential Indian designers. Others have criticized the enormous cost of the project, (p. 442) including Safdie’s design fee (which is reported to be around US$2 million), particularly in the context of other pressing development needs in the Punjab. The complex does indeed consume enormous resources, from water and electricity—the exhibits planned for the complex are based on laser and fibre optic technology, large plasma screens for use in the exhibitions, and so forth—to land, money (more than US$100 million just for the building and exhibition), and even in the number of historic buildings that had to be demolished to improve site access (Launois (Sat Kaur) 2003). Still others have criticized the project because the designer is non-Sikh, non-Indian, Jewish, North American, and so forth (Rai and Singh 2003).

The complex itself comprises two clusters of buildings separated from each other by a 165-metre-long bridge spanning a stepped series of reflection pools (see Figure 36.1). The western side of the complex houses a museum, library, reading room, exhibition

space, and 400-seat auditorium. Buildings on the eastern side of the complex hold permanent multimedia exhibitions that narrate the history of the Khalsa, from the fifteenth century to the present, in an orchestrated spatial sequence.

On entering the eastern side of the complex visitors are led into a tall, windowless open volume in the form of a pinched cylinder (called the *panj pani* (‘five waters’) representing the Punjab or sometimes the ‘boat’ building) with a walkway at the centre that spirals gradually upward. The walls of this space are covered with brightly painted panels illustrating Punjab’s people, resources, traditions, manufactures, and natural ecology in an impressive tableau depicting life in Punjab in ‘the not too-distant future’. (p. 443) The mural was designed on computers by Orijit Singh and his partners in conjunction with the National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad). Craftsmen, including several movie-hoarding painters from Punjab, transferred and translated the computer designs into painted images on curved Plexiglas sheets. The mural is enhanced by a lighting programme and soundtrack that together condense diurnal and annual seasonal cycles into the time it takes a visitor to circulate from the bottom to the top of the ramp.

At the top, visitors move into a series of exhibition galleries (when completed there will be fifteen galleries in all) that address the life histories of the Gurus, the formation of the Khalsa, and the tenets of Sikhism, all through the use of images, film, written narrative, and an aural soundtrack (delivered wirelessly through an ‘automatic trigger’ headphone system that annotates the viewing experience in Hindi, Punjabi, or English). The official website of the complex describes this portion of the exhibition as ‘telling a story’ that is ‘deeply spiritual, passionate, and emotional’. The exhibitions are organized into a ‘multi-layered communication strategy’ whose goal is to create an ‘immersive’ environment capable of ‘transport[ing] visitors into a different time and space, thereby enhancing their capacity to receive the intended communication’; ‘the visitor to the Khalsa Heritage Museum’, according to its website, ‘will not only leave better informed but will also be emotionally moved’ (Khalsa Heritage Complex website).

When completed, visitors will begin on the upper level and move through a series of exhibits about the lives and teachings of the ten Gurus, where important or moving events in the history of the Khalsa are delivered theatrically through ‘larger than life’ sound, moving pictures, and dramatic lighting effects. The visitor then moves down along a spiral ramp to the lower level where ‘galleries chronicle Khalsa trials, tribulations, and triumphs from Banda Bahadur [d. 1716] up to the immediate aftermath of Partition, when Sikh dynamism transformed the Punjab with its élan, energy, and resilience’ (Khalsa Heritage Complex website). The route culminates in a serene reflective space, where a shaft of light that has been intermittently visible as the viewer circulated through the exhibits terminates in a lozenge-shaped patch of earth. The aesthetic approach in this

part of the complex is thus to draw the visitor bodily into a vivid engagement with the past in such a way as to make the past literally ‘come alive’.

The permanent exhibits were initially designed by artists at the National Institute of Design and completed by AB Design Habit, a Delhi-based design and heritage restoration firm directed by Amardeep Behl. Many artists, scholars, and performers were involved in consulting on and producing the permanent exhibits. Notable scholars involved in the project include J. S. Grewal, Kharak Singh, Kirpal Singh, J. S. Neki, Mohinder Singh, Harnam Singh Shan, Maheep Singh, J. S. Ahluwalia, B. S. Rattan, Pritam Singh, Prithipal Singh Kapur, and others (Bhopal 2005). The ASF, advised by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), retained rights of approval over the exhibits’ final content.

At the time of writing the facilities on the opposite (western) side had not yet opened. Plans for this portion of the complex include—aside from a temporary exhibit space and the auditorium—a museum featuring artefacts derived from each of the ten Gurus and from the nineteenth-century court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839). A separate (p. 444) library and reading room will house both contemporary works of scholarship (books and journals) on Sikhism and archival materials useful to professional scholars, including manuscripts, recordings, and artwork.

Facing one another across a broad valley of reflecting pools, and joined by a long semi-enclosed bridge and walkway, the two halves of the Khalsa Heritage Complex form a sophisticated architectural ensemble. Architect Safdie clad the exterior surfaces of the buildings in light-tan-coloured Gwalior sandstone, a material that blends well with the dry sandstone hills surrounding the town. The exhibition galleries on the eastern half are clustered in two groups of five prismatic volumes, each one capped by a concave stainless steel roof that reflects the sun during the day and site lighting at night. While the architect claims that the number five was chosen to invoke the five Sikh virtues, and that the two clusters of galleries together reference the ten Gurus, the building stands out for its uniqueness rather than for its sensitivity to local context. While the undulating vertical masses of the eastern wing of galleries are said to suggest the medieval fortress architecture of Rajasthan, the building by and large establishes its own architectural context within a self-contained site. Even the connection between the complex and the town of Anandpur Sahib, which abuts the western precinct, is mediated by a perimeter fence and a controlled, lockable entryway.

While the Khalsa Heritage Complex has been described as a ‘wonder’ (*ajooba*) and unique in the material culture of Sikhism, it is instructive to situate the project within the broader context of contemporary India. As an architecturally ambitious, richly symbolic, and generously funded monument championed by acting members of government, the

Khalsa Heritage Complex can be compared with former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayawati's monumental parks dedicated to Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders in Lucknow and other cities, or with the Akshardham complex dedicated to Lord Ram in Delhi, which was constructed by a private foundation (a Gujarat-based Swaminarayan Hindu sect) with assistance from the Bharatiya Janata Party government (completed in 2005). In each of these examples, distinct and assertive architectural forms are used to mark a paradoxically indistinct boundary between religious monument and secular museum; between putatively neutral public space and politically charged communal space. The contemporaneous construction of these and similar other projects across India today is perhaps the leading edge of a more global phenomenon whereby communities previously identified through notions of religious identity and praxis have begun to leverage the secular authority of the museum form in order to assimilate a particular community into the narrative of the nation state. Put more simply, projects like the Khalsa Heritage Complex enable a process whereby the history of a religion and its adherents can be made seamless with a *national* history (Mathur and Singh 2012).

In addition to participating in a pan-Indian—indeed, perhaps global—practice of contemporary museum planning, the Khalsa Heritage Complex also plays a key role in a more sharply delimited monumental landscape focused on narratives and settings particular to the Punjab, and to a version of Sikh history championed by the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) government. Within weeks of inaugurating the Khalsa Heritage Complex in late 2011, chief minister P. S. Badal unveiled a memorial commemorating (p. 445) the 1746 CE massacre of thousands of Sikhs by Mughal forces at Kahnuwan Chhambh near Gurdaspur (the *chhota ghallughara*, or 'lesser massacre'—note that *ghallughara* is often translated as 'holocaust' by Sikhs), and a monument in Chapparchiri marking the tercentennial of a victory by Sikh forces under Baba Banda Singh Bahadur over the Mughal governor of Sirhind, Wazir Khan (the *Baba Banda Singh Bahadar Jangi Yadgaar*). Badal inaugurated a third (incomplete) monument the same month commemorating the massacre of some 35,000 Sikhs at the hands of Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1762 CE at Kup-Rahira village near Sangrur (the *wadda ghallughara* or 'great massacre/holocaust'). Each of these monuments deploy dramatic architectural elements—towers, reflecting pools, landscaped grounds—to help annotate a history of perseverance despite conditions of intense (genocidal) violence inflicted on the Sikh community by unjust 'outsiders'.

In the hands of the ruling SAD party this theme is made to resonate both with early Sikh history in the region and with more recent events where Sikhs were targeted for their religious identity (including the 'Sikh Genocide' or pogrom following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984). Indeed, in early 2012, Badal was criticized for his government's possible involvement in revived SGPC efforts to construct a memorial (or gurdwara) commemorating militant Sikhs killed during Operation Blue

Star (1984) within the precincts of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. The proposed project has led to rancorous exchanges between Badal's ruling SAD and opposition parties in the state, especially the Congress who were in power in 1984. The larger 'monument' strategy within which the Khalsa Heritage Complex takes its place in Punjab thus serves, at one level, as a vivid material reminder of Sikh perseverance and cohesion in the face of communal threats. Such a reminder, when deployed by a majority Sikh government in a multi-religious state, has obvious political overtones—and they inevitably generate controversy.

A final context relevant to the Khalsa Heritage Complex is the town of Anandpur Sahib itself. Renowned as a site where the Sikh Khalsa was inaugurated by the tenth and final living Guru, Gobind Singh, Anandpur is already filled with important commemorative sites and structures. At the centre of the town lies *Guru de Mahal*, where the Guru and his family lived and where his followers built a *dharmsal* and *langar.* This is the reputed place where several Kashmiri pandits came seeking protection from Aurangzeb's army, in response to which Guru Tegh Bahadur made his fateful voyage to Delhi where he was martyred by the Mughal emperor. Gobind Rai, Tegh Bahadur's son, had been installed as Guru Gobind by his father prior to setting off for Delhi, and the spot where this took place, too, is commemorated at Anandpur. Guru Gobind returned to Chak Nanaki from Paonta in 1688 following his victory over an alliance of hill Rajas at the battle of Bhangani (Mann 2009). At the time of his return, the Guru founded a new centre which he called Anandpur, as an annex to Chak Nanaki.

Within a few years, Anandpur became a major centre of Sikh literary, religious, and political activity. Guru Gobind Singh assembled a standing army and fortified Anandpur by having separate fortresses built on five promontories surrounding the town. One of these forts, called Keshgarh, is worshipped as the place where Gobind (p. 446) Singh created the Khalsa by initiating the *panj piare*, and in turn being initiated by them, in 1699. The Guru and his followers finally left Anandpur in 1705 when the combined forces of hill chiefs and Mughal *faujdars* laid siege to the city. The story of his flight and the subsequent capture and murder of his two youngest sons by Wazir Khan at Sirhind mark the end of the Guru's relationship with Anandpur. In all likelihood the town and its fortresses were razed and plundered by Mughal troops, or possibly by the chief of Kahlur, who had allied with them during the siege.

The town was re-established in subsequent years and by 1754 Anandpur was divided between several branches of the Sodhi clan, each of which built their own mohalla in the town, and each of which held ancestral shares in the offerings that accrued to the town's religious institutions. The Sodhis accepted the supremacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the early nineteenth century, and had occasion to avail of his protection and architectural

patronage. During his reign, Ranjit Singh rebuilt the Gurdwara Sisganj in Anandpur, a building that marks the place where Guru Tegh Bahadur's severed head was cremated by the young Guru Gobind (in 1675) (Arshi 1986: 48–9). It was also during the nineteenth century that Anandpur's five original forts were commemorated by building gurdwaras on each of their sites: Anandgarh, Lohgarh, Fatehgarh, Keshgarh, and Holgarh. Other important gurdwaras in the town were built on sites that commemorated important events in the lives of Gurus Tegh Bahadur and Gobind Singh and their families, including the site in *Guru de Mahal* where Guru Gobind Singh was installed as the tenth Guru (Damdama Sahib), the site where the Kashmiri pandits made their plea to Guru Tegh Bahadur (Manji Sahib), the site where Guru Gobind addressed the Sikhs gathered for the cremation of his father (Akal Bunga), and the site where a number of Sikhs were killed during the siege of 1705 (Shahidi Bagh), among others.

In 1923, the newly formed SGPC took over management of Anandpur's gurdwaras and established Keshgarh Sahib as one of its four *takht*s (a fifth *takht*, Sri Damdama Sahib in Talwindi Sabo, was added by the SGPC in 1966 and recognized by the Indian Government in 1999, during the tercentenary celebrations of the Khalsa). In 1925, a *jathedar* was appointed to Gurdwara Keshgarh Sahib and that building along with several others underwent rehabilitation in a process that took place intermittently from the early 1930s on (M. Singh 2002: 74). There were spurts of rebuilding activity in Anandpur in the 1950s–1970s when, for example, the Ranjit Singh-era Gurdwara Sis Ganj was partially destroyed to construct a much larger building on the same site. Anandghar Sahib Fort, which dates from 1689 and was the largest of the five historical fortresses in the town, was rebuilt in its present form in 1930. All remnants of the original building were finally destroyed by the construction of a circular road on three of its sides and a new gurdwara on the southern portion of the site in 1985 (Dilgeer 1999: 18). A deep *baoli* (well) that is probably part of the original fort and was rebuilt by Jassa Singh Ahluwalia in the mid-eighteenth century, still exists on the site but has been 'updated' with marble wainscoting and cladding on its steps (Rai 1999).

The oldest buildings in Anandpur today are probably the dilapidated *havelis* (mansions) and mohalla gates built by one or another of the Sodhi *sarkar*s (chiefs), and the simple stonemasonry Akal Bunga (from which Guru Gobind Singh addressed (p. 447) a large crowd at the cremation of his father) which may still be substantially a seventeenth-century structure (Rai and Singh 2003: 39). Almost every other gurdwara in the town is a mid-twentieth-century (or later) building, and this is true not just in Anandpur but in almost every other town where important, commemorative historical gurdwaras were built. Just as these buildings were deployed to mark significant sites in the history of the Sikh community, their destruction, rebuilding, and remodelling on new lines reflects importantly on how those sites continue to remain important to present-day Sikhs.

Within such a historical context, the question arises as to what role the Khalsa Heritage Complex will play in the vivid and complex material world of Anandpur laying just outside its gates. While it is too soon to predict what the future will hold, there is ample evidence that the complex has already become popular, and is being used in ways its designers perhaps did not envision. On average, it is said, 6,000 people visit the site every day. Importantly, many visitors treat the complex the way they would a place of worship, despite protestations by museum staff. According to one newspaper article, visitors throw coins in the complex's large reflecting pools and often try to remove their shoes at the entrance; when prevented from doing so, 'a majority of visitors leave the footwear in their vehicles, but the practice of throwing coins into the lake continues unchecked' (Vasdev 2012).

These visitors' willingness to extend the protocols governing the use of pious space to a secular institution underscores one of the most remarkable qualities of the Khalsa Heritage Complex, namely the way it seamlessly combines facilities that house and classify objective historical artefacts alongside spaces geared to presenting a more subjective, personal, and dramatic depiction of the past. In this way, the complex challenges a well-established conceptual opposition between those who privilege 'heritage' as the appropriate mode for apprehending the significance of the past, and those who privilege 'history'. The first term—heritage—refers to the past as a quality imminent in the present, something that may take the form of a legacy or inheritance that endures over time. Heritage presupposes continuity through time, therefore, and thoroughgoing connections between past and present experiences. This is why the moving tableaux installed in the eastern galleries work to engage visitors by evoking a sympathetic and visceral response. 'History', conversely, refers to the past as that which objectively happened prior to the present but whose complete recovery is no longer possible. For this reason, history only ever 'recovers' the past as a series of discrete fragments, each of which is subject to objective verification. The historian's work therefore is largely one of interpretation: establishing connections between objectively verified fragments, among which physical artefacts—such as those housed in the Khalsa Heritage Complex museum and catalogued in its library—have long played an important role.

The resolute—and thus far largely successful—juxtaposition of these two dissimilar modes of relating to the past is a defining feature of the Khalsa Heritage Complex. It is also an inherently unstable feature, since differing versions of both heritage and history are continuously being produced by those for whom the past actually matters. The ongoing value and success of the Khalsa Heritage Complex may thus depend on the extent to **(p. 448)** which dynamic changes inherent in Sikh inquiries into the past are able to receive fair expression and competing visions can find space to demonstrate their

relevance. Given the project's incubation within a particular political formation throughout its origin and genesis (in particular, the governing SAD party in Punjab), and given the propensity for this kind of public institution to quickly be embraced by people with goals and intentions that diverge from those of its founders, the onus will be on those who control the project's growth and development in the future to ensure that the Khalsa Heritage Complex remains relevant to all of its intended audiences, and not just to a particular subset or group.

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Sikh Material Culture

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses material culture in Sikh tradition: its forms, meanings, and associated practices. An overview and examples are provided, to give a sense of the wide range of material forms that constitute the memorial and communitarian technologies found in the Sikh material world. Material religious forms include the gurdwara itself and the vocabulary of reverence that materializes around the scripture in that context; 'relic' objects revered for their historical connection to the Gurus and collected in private homes and public institutions; and the generalized 'gift' of the Guru to members of the community, the Five Ks associated with the Rahit or code of conduct of the Khalsa. Core Sikh commitments and practices are expressed through such material forms, and must be viewed in relation to the ideational content of Sikh scripture and practice.

Keywords: Five Ks, weapons, relics, objects, gurdwara, materiality, material religion

If we seek to understand the role of material culture in any religion, we must embrace a wide range of practices and ideas, alongside materiality. For while there seems to be something so solid, so completely 'there' in the object, this is an illusory stability. What an object means—its social life, its agency, and its effect—is determined by a range of non-material forms of expression, actions, and ideas (Appadurai 1986; Brown 2001; Davis 1997; Murphy 2012). Our understanding of material culture (alongside visual culture) enables 'certain possibilities of meaning, certain forms of experience, and certain relations among participants' (Morgan 2005: 4). Belief 'happens' therefore within and through material and visual forms, alongside textual expressions and ideas manifest within them, the 'deep belief' described by scholar of religion and materiality David Morgan: 'it is the history and momentum of embodied practices', he tells us, 'that engage…[a] person in a duty or practice or feeling' (Morgan 2010: 5; 2005: 8). It is through material culture—the 'stuff' of our lives—that we live: in the words of folklorist and anthropologist Henry Glassie, we 'depend on it, take it for granted, and realize through it our grandest aspirations' (Glassie 1999: 1). The innate materiality of our lives

requires attention thus to objects, in intellectual terms, but also to the widest range of practices and ideas that animate these things and make them meaningful.

To argue for the centrality of materiality, alongside the textual traditions that generally occupy the centre of religious hermeneutical work, is not to argue for a single set of understandings of their ontology, nor their social function. Objects often serve a utilitarian function: they can get jobs done. They also can in the most dramatic terms incorporate people into the sacred, through the experience of the object itself and what it represents. Sacred things do this in some contexts as actual embodiments of the sacred, or of particular personalities (saints or founders), such as is highlighted in Gregory Schopen's (1998) recent definition of the 'relic'. Strong parallels between Christian and Buddhist understandings of the living presence of the relic testify to the commonalities that can exist across traditions.

In the Sikh context, we must seek a different set of practices and understandings of the relationship between the material and that which is beyond it than that highlighted (p. 450) by Schopen. We address in this case a range of practices that embrace materiality alongside text—not to its exclusion—and must seek to understand the dynamic conceptual exchange that animates them both (Flood 2009: 9–12, 14). Thus while Schopen (1997, 1998) in his extensive work on materiality in Buddhism has maintained that the material record forces a reconsideration of our understanding of Buddhism as a religion—a tradition that has generally been understood in the Western academy through its textual expressions—the same disconnect does not characterize the role of material culture in Sikh tradition. There has been a general disregard for material culture and related practices in the scholarly literature on Sikh tradition, as Schopen perceived in the scholarship on Buddhism; there is no doubt about this. Such a disconnect however is not visible in the relationship of these objects to Sikh thought and textual practice, as we know them. It is only our scholarly accounting of them and their role that needs to change.

Text and Materiality

The Sikh tradition is centred on the message and way of being-in-the-world experienced and transmitted by the Sikh Gurus and in the performance of the compositions contained in the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. Thus, a core aspect of the being of Sikh experience is a material and atemporal—idea, Word, performance—that which cannot be fixed in time or place. Perhaps *because* of this, the radical alterity of this both communitarian and personal experience outside of the material and temporal world,

material forms also are important in shaping that experience, securing it in this world of now and here. The gurdwara, for example, has acted as a physical space as the doorway to the Guru since perhaps the earliest formations of the tradition: a place available for connection, both to the Guru and to the good company of the community or *sangat*, and to the experience of the Word. At the core of the practice of the Word is the principle and practice of *nām simraṇ*, the remembrance of the Name. The idea of remembrance is of great importance here: that which is already there, known, and reknown. The Sikhs then are a community of memory, formed out of the remembering of the Gurus, and of the remembering of that which forms our being-in-the-world in its most essential, most foundational, already-there sense. Material forms can be understood along such lines as well, joining the community in a memorial network, first and foremost located in the Word, but also in the community, formed in remembrance of the Guru and out of the technologies of self-formation found in remembrance itself.

The dynamic interchange between text as embodiment of the Word and the materiality of religious life is perhaps best expressed in the material culture and practices associated with the Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikh tradition. The text is central, and the physical space of the gurdwara expresses this: the congregation is organized around the text, facing it, and those who recite and sing from it (and other sources) face this congregation, partaking of the Word in common and in celebration. Objects also speak about how the text matters. Thus, the sacred scripture is addressed materially (p. 451) through a royal vocabulary—through the *chaurī* or whisk, which symbolizes the sovereignty of the sacred text and its royal bearing, and the canopy, which also invites reverence for the text in royal terms—and the term *darbār* is used in general to designate its presence, reflecting the general predominance of royal terminology and symbolism in Sikh self-representation, as Louis E. Fenech (2008) has shown. When it is not in use, the scripture is covered with a *rumālā* or square shawl, to protect it, and it lies at rest in the *sukhāsan,* or ‘place of contentment’, before being brought out into the congregation again. The *nishān* Sahib or ‘revered emblem or sign’ flies outside of gurdwaras and reiterates a royal and military theme. Even the physical design of the scripture itself speaks about the history of the tradition in material terms: the design of *gutkā*s or small prayer books, to make the Word accessible widely and also in times of trouble; the construction of large versions of the text with elaborate illumination in times of plenty; and the construction of miniature versions for soldiers, and also as special feats of calligraphy.

The Five Ks

A key example of the ways in which the memory that comprises Sikh communitarian formation is inscribed in the material is the Five Ks, the insignia associated with the Khalsa. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh has noted that the Ks are both sign and symbol, identifying the wearer and also moving the wearer to 'participate in a deeper universal reality' (Kaur Singh 2005: 98). They do not only represent; they shape: they are, as she has observed, a 'way of cultivating the self…concerned with forming an ethical citizen situated within an active social, political, and religious world' (Kaur Singh 2005: 98). This should not surprise us: a wide range of literature has explored how clothing, comportment, and gesture all work in concert in the constitution of the self, the community, and memory alongside the more textualized forces that shape these related processes of becoming (Connerton 1989). These two work in concert: Pashaura Singh has thus described participation in the material as well as spiritual aspects of membership in the Khalsa through the maintenance of the Five Ks as a way of being dressed 'in the word of God' (P. Singh 1999: 155). These five objects are the *kes* (or uncut hair), *kaṅghā* (comb), *kaccha* (undergarment), *kirpān* (sword), and *kaṛā* (steel bracelet). The meaning of the Five Ks has usually been located—in both scholarly and popular discussion—in their symbolism (M. Singh 2000). J. S. Uberoi's (1975) now classic account of the Five Ks as a set of structural oppositions, where for instance the *kes* is a symbol of untamed power, and the *kaṅghā* the form of its control, provides a structuralist analysis of the insignia. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh's (2005: 134) more recent account focuses on the ways the Five Ks work to eradicate gender hierarchy in the community, symbolizing the embrace of the body and the erasure of gendered difference.

The symbolic resonance of the Five Ks is an important aspect of their life in the community and in the making of the persons that comprise it. As a memorial technology, however, the Five Ks function not only in a symbolic sense, but as a kind of exchange (p. 452) between the Guru and the community, mimicking and generalizing the cultural practice of *khil'at*, the formal exchange of gifts between client and patron, ruler and subject, which constituted an important part of community and state formation in pre-colonial and colonial India. Traditionally objects given as a part of this cultural practice materialize a set of relationships—functioning as 'an incarnated sign of sovereign authority', in the words of Finbarr Flood (2009: 76)—and acted in this capacity in both religious and secular settings; they were commonly used in Sufi contexts, as well as Sikh ones. Through the generalization of this practice to all members of the community, 'memory is sedimented, or amassed in the body', a way of inscribing membership and memory together (Connerton 1989: 72). This way of thinking through the functioning of

material culture helps us to see how material practices can themselves constitute meaning—through exchange, and through the relationships and ensuing community that are thus formed—not only in symbolic terms, but in terms of their very materiality and possession of it.

Weapons are related to the Five Ks in many ways, not just as important members of the set (Murphy 2009). Five weapons were designated as a group themselves—and associated with the Khalsa—as early as Sainapati's *Gur Sobha* (written at the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century). Weapons are ubiquitous throughout Sikh religious sites, both symbols and actual tools of a larger warrior culture and a commitment to armed defence and protection. Many also function within the cultural economy of *khil'at*, and as relics that substantiate relationships, as described below. Reverence for weapons was of great importance in the imagination of the Sikh Panth or community in the eighteenth century, part of what Jeevan Deol has called a 'metanarrative' derived from the Dasam Granth (one of the major texts of Sikh tradition, as a whole generally attributed to Guru Gobind Singh and certainly containing a number of works written by him), as the aspirations of the Khalsa community to define itself in relation to history were placed within a framework based on Puranic myth, defining dharma in a mode that was simultaneously religious and political (Deol 2001: 30 ff.). Thus, 'at the centre of Khalsa self-construction lie the worship of weapons and the perception of partaking in the Guru's mission to re-establish dharma, a mission that is itself embedded in a wider cosmological cycle of battles against evil that extends back into mythical time' (Deol 2001: 33, see also 38–9). The *Shastar nām mālā* in the Dasam Granth provides a literary expression of this orientation, in its praise of weapons and association of them with both worldly and other-worldly power: 'You are the arrow, the spear, the hatchet (*tabar*), and the sword (*talwār*) | Who recites your name crosses the fearful ocean' (*Sri Dasam Granth Sahib Ji* 1992: v. 322, l. 4). Here God is named as equivalent to the weapon, and to the many forces of the universe (Indra, the goddess, etc.) that are themselves encompassed by God. The Sikhs were not unique in this regard: William Pinch's work on warrior ascetics in late medieval and early modern South Asia reveals how the worship of weapons formed a 'part of a *shaktiyoga* repertoire that centred on harnessing supernormal forces both within and beyond the human body', and was central to the significant growth of warrior asceticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Pinch 2006: 10, 77). Weapons thus embody and represent justice and power.

(p. 453) The Relic

The exchange of objects through *khil'at* that functions in a generalized way through the Khalsa insignia leads us to another set of objects that comprise Sikh religious culture: relics. This term is not available to us in Punjabi; the objects referred to are most often described as *itihāsik vastūāṅ* ('historical objects') and *shastar vastar* ('weapons and clothes') in Punjabi texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in which lists of them were compiled. Scholars today however tend to use the term 'relic' for these objects, which are collected, (sometimes) displayed, and revered for their connection to the Sikh Gurus and other important persons in the tradition (for use of the term, see M. Singh 2002a and 2002b; M. Singh and R. Singh 2002; B. S. Singh and R. Singh 2012). There is a wide range of objects that we can call by this name: clothing, shoes, chariots, and weapons. Weapons are the most common example of the type, collected and displayed in gurdwaras across Punjab and beyond: they are daily displayed and their history described at the Akal Takhat in Amritsar, for example, as well as at Takhat Sachkhand Sri Hazur Abchalnagar Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra, the *takhat* associated with the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Other objects are found outside of India; the family that possesses the Ganga Sagar, an urn said to have been gifted by the tenth Guru to a family loyal to him, is based in Pakistan and the UK.

Some objects are revered because they have been used by the Guru, others for having been gifted by him. At the village of Chakk Fatih Singhwala near Bathinda, Punjab, the family of Jasbir Singh holds objects of both types: a *mañjī* or cot that the tenth Guru was said to have sat upon; a *tāwā*, or large cooking surface which is said to have belonged to a woman in the family, Mai Desaan, and was used by her to make bread for the Guru; a low chair, said to have belonged to Mai Desaan, and upon which the Guru's wife Mata Sahib Devi sat; and a silk *dastār* of Guru Gobind Singh and other clothing belonging to the Guru and his wife that were given to the family. The remembrance of the Guru at the site today revolves around the service of Mai Desaan; she served the Guru, and is remembered and honoured for this. Objects can thus reveal many things: relationships between the Guru and followers; relationships with members of the Gurus' families (at Manji Sahib in Kiratpur, the embroidery of the sixth Guru's daughter is kept); and the nature of the *saṅgat* or community itself and the service that joined and joins them together around the Guru. The Bhais of Bagrian, in another example, have a collection of objects from the Guru that represent the mandate they were given to provide *laṅgar* to the community. The objects that were gifted by the Gurus, therefore, speak about the relationship of the family to the Guru. They also further reflect the ongoing status of the

family in the community in religious, political, and social terms, as the religious specialists associated with the Phulkian states of eastern Punjab.

These examples reveal a basic pattern that holds for most relics related to the Gurus: private, family-based ownership is common (although certainly not universal). The distinction is an important one: while sites historically related to the Gurus (p. 454) came under panthic or community control in the early twentieth century, many objects continue to be held by private families. They are fundamentally related conceptually, however, to historical sites related to the Gurus, even while they are treated in a fundamentally different way in relation to the idea of community ownership (with some significant debate over that status). Most relic objects were either used by the Gurus and other important persons—such as is the case with most revered weapons—or represent relationships with the Guru, having been gifted by the Guru to a follower, or having been used to serve the Guru—as is the case for the large *tāwā* held in the village of Chakk Fateh Singhwala in Malwa. Through objects the authority of the Guru is expressed, but also the authority and sometimes sovereignty of the members of the community associated with or holding these objects—thus Maharaja Ranjit Singh had a collection of weapons related to the Gurus, as does the Maharaja of Patiala (Murphy 2009; B. S. Singh and R. Singh 2012).

Objects also travel, within a community spread around the globe since the early twentieth century. Fresno, a major city in the southern Central Valley of California, for example, has witnessed two major ‘exhibitions’ of relics in the last two decades. The Nanaksar Gurdwara, which was founded in 1984, hosted the objects. In the late 1990s, the gurdwara played host to the first: the Ganga Sagar (mentioned earlier), owned by the family of Rai Aziz Ullah Khan of Pakistan but based in England (Interviews 2002; McCarthy 1996; Sundaram 1996). Objects from Bhai Rupa were brought in 2000, and received a similar welcome. Objects brought to California in 2000 included the Vairagin or meditational prop of the sixth Guru, a handwritten version of the Adi Granth, *hukamnāme* or orders of the Guru, and the sandals of Guru Arjun Dev and his wife. A cart that also belonged to several of the Gurus was not brought, but its cover was (‘Sacred Trust’, 2000). The community of Sikhs in this region is a significant one: Asian migration to the Central Valley began in the nineteenth century, and both South Asian and East Asian Americans have a long history in the area. The first gurdwara in the United States was in fact founded in 1912 in Stockton, California, by a small group of Sikh immigrants, who were part of a larger Punjabi (and largely Sikh) migration to California and western Canada in the beginning of the twentieth century (Leonard 1992). When anti-Asian legislation was introduced in the early twentieth century in the US—and worsened over the course of the first half of the century—South Asians were at first exempt. Later they were included in these exclusions, and immigration from Punjab ceased in 1924.

Significant personal and cultural connections were not re-established until the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, when immigration resumed (see Coward et al. 2000). It was in this period that the US South Asian community (and with it, the Sikh community) began to take the form it has today, in Fresno as elsewhere; the relic in this context, therefore, makes connections among persons as well as histories, across countries and continents.

Relics will continue to travel, but not without controversy: four years ago, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which governs Sikh gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Prades, planned to reprimand and demand penance from Gursewak Singh Sodhi of Dhilwana Kalan village, in the Moga district of Indian (p. 455) Punjab, for sending relics to Canada from a shrine there without its permission. The relics consisted of the clothes and a turban of Guru Gobind Singh. The SGPC claimed that this had ‘really hurt’ the sentiments of India’s Sikh community (see ‘Indian Sikhs’ 2003; ‘Villagers’ 2003). Issues of control and contested meanings thus accompany objects, another set of interpretation and debates that enliven them in the world. As access to such objects increases alongside human mobility, we will see more dynamic cultural expression in relation to such objects, as well as more controversy about the meaning of such expressions.

The Memorial Landscape and the Structuring of Sikh Experience

Objects shape experience: they do so in relation to the behaviours they engender, the way they shape human interaction with the world. They are symbolic, at times; they are also expressive of other meanings, such as relationships. They relate in general terms to other forms of physical manifestation of religious life and practice, such as the sacred and/or congregational site. This is so in general, across religions—where objects and also images organize ‘spaces of worship and devotion, delineating certain places as sacred, such as pilgrimage sites, temples, domestic spaces, and public religious festivals’ (Morgan 2005: 56)—but is also particularly so in the Sikh case, where the *itihāsik* object (described here with the term ‘relic’) is related in fundamental terms to the *itihāsik* site. This term—*itihāsik* (historical)—links objects to sites that commemorate the lives and activities of the Gurus. Thus, while the gurdwara in contemporary understanding is any site where the Sikh sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, lies in state, a special understanding of the *itihāsik* gurdwara was brought into being in *administrative* terms in the 1920s as a result of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, when Sikhs came into direct conflict with the

colonial state over the control of Sikh sites. These sites were officially designated as Sikh gurdwaras versus non-Sikh *derās* (as the alternative term came to be fixed) after 1925, when the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee was officially recognized as the managing body for gurdwaras proven to be historically linked with Sikh tradition. This designation of one term that is generally used for both objects and sites reflects the conceptual order that links them: both the historical site and object represent relationships in time to the Gurus, and experience of and respect for them constitutes a way of participating in the community in relation to the past, the physical manifestation of the act of memory.

The historical gurdwara landscape thus structures memory, and in so doing helps to constitute Sikh religious experience and its ongoing engagement with the past in the present. Through it visual culture, architecture, and material culture come together with the history of the tradition. We see this perhaps most vividly in the sculpture park at Mehdiana village in Ludhiana district (in the Indian Punjab), where the historical **(p. 456)** paintings so commonly displayed in museums associated with gurdwaras come to life in three dimensions, displaying the sacrifices of members of the Sikh community through history (and particularly in the turbulent eighteenth century). But we see it in general in the way historical gurdwaras are organized to represent the Sikh past across Punjab and beyond. Material and visual culture work to shape individual and community experience in less historically significant locations as well, in local gurdwaras and home shrines. These sites are structured in a particular way and shape, through their material form and the objects that shape interaction with the text and the community, the experience of being Sikh by adherents. The experience of the *laṅgar*, or community charitable kitchen, is for example a deeply physical and material one: in this environment, all sit in status-free lines at the same level, and share in a meal as a community. The materiality of the Sikh religious ethos thus is found in the cups and plates of this meal, designed to serve all, and to bring all together. Although such aspects of material culture seem to be less important than the historical object and site, they shape experience in profound ways, as we have seen in the way the experience of the community and of the text is structured through the material vocabulary of the gurdwara.

Sikh Materialities

To understand material culture, Glassie tells us, is to seek the human, the artful, and the cultural, in our world: to ‘go into the world and find things. They will not let us mistake people for vapours of consciousness. Artefacts set the mind in the body, the body in the world’ (Glassie 1999: 42). There is so much in Sikh tradition that pushes beyond: beyond

the conventional world, the constraints of time and language, to that which is beyond and simultaneously within ourselves. At the same time, however, that insight into the beyond is inscribed on the body through the insignia of the Khalsa and through the objects and practices that make up quotidian embodied existence. The material, therefore, is not forgotten, and the body and its actions are celebrated. Although Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh is probably best known in the Western academy for this view—which, for her, provides for the possibility of the negation of gender hierarchy—this formulation also has a wider acceptance, although not necessarily with the emphasis on gender (T. Singh 2000: 45).

Indeed, we can see that objects form a crucial part of the saying *degh tegh fateh*, which is said to encapsulate core Sikh values: here, alongside *fateh* or 'victory', we have two objects that symbolize central Sikh concepts: *degh*, the cauldron, which symbolizes charity, and *tegh*, the sword, which reflects a long commitment to martial power in Sikh tradition as well as a commitment to justice and the championing of the weak. There is more to material culture in Sikh contexts than these examples, but they serve to provide a sense of the diversity and importance of materiality in the history and continuing present of the Sikh tradition today. Religion is found in what we do and what we touch, as well as what we believe. We might congratulate ourselves, as scholars of religion, for (p. 457) having realized this, but Sikhism as a system of thought and practice has known it—and celebrated it—all along.

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Sikh Martial Art (Gatkā)

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the Sikh martial art called *gatka*, which originated from the need of the emerging Sikh community of northern India (Punjab) to defend itself. The article first examines the Sikh perspective on the art, its techniques, practice, and significance. From this examination gatka is revealed to be only one component of the overall art called *shastarvidiā*, or the 'science of weapons'. There is then a discussion of the origins and evolution of gatka in Sikh history, from the Sikh Gurus to the Anglo-Sikh wars, as well as its relationship to martial scripture, the Dasam Granth. Finally, the article considers the lineage of gatka, contemporary practice, and its revival in the Sikh diaspora. From the evidence presented here it is concluded that the majority of contemporary gatka has become a form of exhibitionism.

Keywords: gatka, Sikh martial art, shastarvidiā, Dasam Granth, Anglo-Sikh wars

Introduction

GATKA is a Sikh martial art and traditionally it is believed that its theory and techniques were taught by the Gurus. It has been handed down in an unbroken lineage of *ustāds* (masters), and taught in many *akhāṛās* (arenas) around the world (Kanh Singh Nabha 1999: 38). One must note that *gatka* was employed in historical Sikh wars and has been thoroughly battle-tested. It originates from the need to defend *dharam* (righteousness), but is also based on the unification of the spirit and body (*mīrī-pīrī*). It is, therefore, generally considered to be both a spiritual and physical practice. Those fortunate enough to have watched a gatka display are mesmerized by the rhythmic movements. The sword turns swiftly in effortless circles with the beat of the drum, swords and shields strike

each other, fast *ḍhol* rhythms resound, and *jaikāre* (war cries) are generously applauded by the martial artists and the *saṅgat* (congregation).

The first sections of this essay will examine the Sikh perspective on the art, its techniques, practice, and significance. We will then observe the origins and evolution of gatka in Sikh history and also discuss some of the common oral traditions of the art. Finally, we will consider contemporary practice in the diaspora. It must be said that an obvious limitation of writing an academic piece on *gātka*, is that one may lose much of the spirit of the art.

The word *gātka* is derived from the Sanskrit root *gatayas* or motion, but the Panjabi word *gātka* normally refers to the wooden stick utilized for the practice. *Gātka* is a style of stick fighting during which wooden sticks are intended to simulate swords, used in training (*kheḍaṇā*). The correct term for the art in which the gātka is used is actually *gatkābāzī*. According to Kanh Singh Nabha:

> *Gatkā* is a three-hand span stick [with a basket hilt], used to teach the first part of *gadā yudh* (club fighting). It has a leather covering. The gatka is held in the right hand and a *pharī* (small shield) in the left, and two men spar against each other. Persian—*Khutkā*.
>
> (Kanh Singh Nabha 1999: 395)

(p. 460) *Gadā yudh* is also a form of weight training, which was once popular in the West, and consists of a series of exercises using Indian clubs (*muṅgalīāṅ*). The clubs were swung and rotated (*muṅgalīāṅ phernīāṅ*) in complex circular patterns, to develop the strength and flexibility of the wrists, elbows, and shoulders, for swordplay. There is a famous incident where a *khutkā* or club was employed by Kripal during the Battle of Bhangani (*Bachitra Nāṭak*, Dasam Granth: 60, verse 7).

Nowadays, it is very common in Sikh circles to use the word *gātka* for all aspects of the Sikh martial art. In actual fact the term that is generally used for the art in historical sources is *shastravidiā*, or the ‘science of weapons’. Therefore, *gātka* is only one *aṅg* or component of the martial art system. There are a number of other components of *shastarvidiā*, which include *bāhu yudh, loh mustī, mal yudh, gadā yudh, shastar yudh, astra yudh*—unarmed combat, iron fist fighting, wrestling, stick/club fighting, weapon fighting, and missile fighting respectively (Dasam Granth: 414). The difference between the performance of *gātka* and *shastarvidiā* has been noted by traditional scholars. Sant Gurbachan Singh Bhindranwale explains that there are two forms of *vidiā*, the first type of which is for show and the second of which is the genuine *vidiā*. He is of the opinion

that the ‘second type of *vidiā* is for the warrior, where a brave warrior adorns himself with weapons and goes to war, and gives the enemies martyrdom and thus attains victory, or gets martyred himself’ (Bhindranwale 1996: 37–8). One is an exhibition art while the other is the lethal practical application or *jhaṭkā-gatkā*. Unfortunately, the majority of contemporary *gātka* has become a form of exhibitionism.

Footwork or *Paiṅtarā*

The basic regime includes a healthy diet and physical exercises like the *sūraj namaskār, bhujaṅg-dand*, and *ūtak-baiṭakh*: sun salutations, Indian press-ups, and squats. *Gātka* is primarily based on a number of different *paiṅtarās* and *asanas*, which are forms for coordinating the whole body and weapons in unison. The first is the *mūl paiṅtarā* which is a simple four-step pattern, and the key to all other forms. The movement requires equal and simultaneous use of both hands and develops ambidexterity. It is a balance and coordination exercise and is to be practised repeatedly. Then there are other *paiṅtarās* based on the tiger, monkey, bull, snake, and eagle that can also incorporate weapons. *Paiṅtarā* is actually more than just footwork as it dictates the strategy of engagement. For example, by moving forwards and backwards, and side to side (*īta-ūta*), an opponent has difficulty in judging the practitioner’s range. This action is known as *pāitā* (Kanh Singh Nabha 1999: 784). This movement is aided by the rhythmic accompaniment of the *ḍhol* or *nagārā* (war drums), which allows the movements to have a natural flow and become second nature. All blocking and attacking methods are based upon the position of the hands, weapons, and feet during the *paiṅtarā*. This forms the *baṅdish* or the repertoire of the warrior, which is *paiṅtarā* (footwork), *hujh* (direct (p. 461) strike), *rokhaṇā* (blocking), *lapeṭaṇā* (twisting), *phaiṅkaṇā* (throwing), *chhīni* (snatching), and *bandesh* (lock/hold).

The Weapons (*Shastars*)

The proper uses of many weapons are taught with special methodologies, and some weapons have their own individual *paiṅtarā*. The basic training starts with learning the *paiṅtarā* and open-handed combat (*bāhu yudh*). The first *shastar* that a student will use is a stick normally made out of bamboo, sometimes called a *marahaṭī*. With this stick the student is taught all the basic physical movements (see Figure 38.1). The most common combination of weapon is the *gātka* and *pharī*, and then after training the student

progresses to the sword and shield (*kirpān* and *ḍhal*). As the *shagirad* (student) advances, (s)he learns about various chambers (i.e. feints) and other misalignment techniques. Instruction in weapons like the *tabar* (axe), *guraj* (mace), the *barchhā* (spear), and finally the *khaṇḍā* (double-edged sword) follows. The Dasam Granth contains descriptions of the usage of the weapons in gātka. In addition, verses from this text are used as invocations to be recited in *gātka* training and displays: *asi kripān khaṇḍo khaṛag tupak tabar aru tīr. saiph sarohī saithī yahai hamārai pīr* (Dasam Granth: 717). The tenth Guru here lists a number of weapons and states that they are his Guru or teacher. *Shastarvidiā* also includes missiles or projectile weapons known as *astra*, for example, the *tīr kamān* or the bow and arrow, and the *chakkar* (quoit). The quoit has a sharp outer edge, and is usually spun and thrown from the index finger (*tajanī*). It is worn on a conical turban (*dastār buṅgā*), neck, shoulders, or on the arms.



Click to view larger

Figure 38.1 On the left Ustad Harnek Singh, and on the right Ustad Jasbir Singh, from the Damdami Taksal, practice *gātka*.

Photograph courtesy of Gurbir Singh Brar.

In *gātka* weapons are classified by their use. For example *mukatā shastras* are released either by hand or from machines like the catapult or bow. *Amukatā* means weapons (p. 462) that are wielded by hand, while *mukatāmukat* are weapons that are both projectiles and weapons wielded by hand (Bhagwant Singh Hari 1991: 1). When we combine weapons with the basic movements of the *paiṅtarā*, they become even more effective. Movements like *maroṛā* (swinging), *hujh* (striking), and *chuṅgī* (leaping) are designed to encompass both the left and right sides of the body simultaneously. Once elementary techniques have been learnt, sparring with *shastars* is introduced, which mainly consists of the shield and sword. The use of live blades in sparring can be very dangerous and requires strict discipline and concentration. The various striking points on the body (*maram*) are taught to the practitioner (there are nine strikes and counters (*vār*) for thirty-three different areas that can be targeted on the body; out of these, eight are major *marams*). Some *shastars* are placed in the *kamarkasā* (cummerbund) or around the *dastār* (turban). When all the moves are combined into one fluid motion, this is known as the *kāl nach* (the dance of death). While dancing with the

sword it teaches the student momentum, especially when supported by the rhythm of a *nagārā* (war drum) (Dasam Granth: 197).

Ritualistic and Philosophical Aspects of Gatka

All martial traditions require a deep respect for weapons. Amongst the traditional Sikh warriors this respect for weapons is known as *shastar pūjā*. Any *gātka* class or performance requires key rituals, which originate from the battle rites taught by the Guru. The weapons must be arranged in certain formations (*shastar prakāsh*). The particular layout called the *gul shastar*, for example, is recorded in the early Sikh *rahit*. Another popular arrangement (see Figure 38.2) is to represent a lotus flower (McLeod 2006: 98). It is also customary that a *jot* and *dhūp* are offered (Satnam Singh 2012). After the *Ardās* the warriors bow to the weapons and salute the arms; this involves physical exercises and *paiṅtarā*, whilst either approaching the weapons or circumambulating them. This is commonly known as the *salamī* or *shastar namaskār*. Certain incantations are recited from the Dasam Granth, in particular the *Shastar Nām Mālā, Tribhaṅgī Chhand*, *Bhagautī Astotra*, and *Chaṇḍī dī Vār*. *Bhagautī Astotra* only appears in early extant Dasam Granths and not in the standard printed edition. There are also war cries like *sat srī akāl* and *gurbār akāl*. Before sparring, both players (*khidārīs*) must do the *fatehnāmā*, or salute each other by ritually crossing and hitting each other's weapons twice. From this ritual we can see that the weapons (*bhagautī*) represent the power of Akal Purakh, and that prayers are recited for protection and inspiration.



Click to view larger

Figure 38.2 Shastars are *prakāsh* in the form of a lotus, in front of both the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth. Gurdwara Nagina Ghat, Hazur Sahib, Nanded.

Photograph by the author.

In addition to imparting defensive skills, *gātka* also helps the individual to maintain a certain level of physical fitness as well as making the mind alert and responsive. To become adept requires a certain code of conduct or *rahit maryadā*, which is to always live while 'remembering death'. The balance of awareness, meditation, and prayer, (p. 463) with healthy diet, exercise, and fighting techniques, consolidates this great martial art. Through disciplined training and ethics, a sense of duty and self-respect is cultivated. Guru Gobind Singh states that 'They alone are truly alive on this earth that remember Hari and are ready to fight for righteousness. […] Let us hold the sword of realisation in our hands and bravely destroy the demon of cowardice.' Being *tyār bar tyār* or ever ready to fight for a noble cause was considered to be *sevā*, and was based on the notion of *Degh-Tegh Fateh*—'Victory of Charity and the Sword' (Dasam Granth: 310, 570).

The Origins and Evolution of Gatka

According to eighteenth-century tradition, Guru Nanak had mastered fourteen subjects including swimming, medicine and yoga, horse riding, and martial arts (Mani Singh 1999: 44–5). The second Guru started the practice of wrestling, which is commemorated by Gurdwara Mal Akhara at Khadoor Sahib; it could well be the case that Guru Angad (p. 464) was following his predecessor's instructions. Later on, the fifth Guru wrote about his victory in the wrestling arena of the Guru Ram Das (Adi Granth: 74). There are metaphors involving *shastarvidiā* in the Adi Granth, for example: 'He is fearless in the

love of the Eternal Hari; he has thrust the spear of the Guru's *shabad* into the mind' (Adi Granth: 1396). The fifth Guru demonstrated his horse-riding skills by pegging with a lance (*nejī bāzī*), when challenged by his future in-laws. He also recruited brave warriors in his retinue, but was eventually executed for not complying with the demands of the Mughal powers (Trilochan Singh Bedi 1994: 124–5, 126). As a consequence the community needed greater protection; this was instituted by Guru Hargobind who donned the two swords of *mīrī-pīrī*. Baba Buddha had previously taught the Guru *shastarvidiā*, and the Guru later went on to command the first Sikh army, the *Akālī Dal*, who were the custodians of the Akal Takht Sahib (Sohan Singh 1999 [1718]: 207–16). According to the oral tradition of the Nihang Singhs, a major style of *gātka* was created by the sixth Guru, and thus called *Chhevīṅ Pātshāh*, and those who learnt this style were a part of the *raṇjīt akhāṛā*. The name of the ninth Guru was Tegh Bahadur, meaning 'brave with the sword'. He fought in many of the battles in the reign of his father. Sikh tradition makes it clear that the ninth Guru was executed for protesting for the religious freedom of the Brahmins of Kashmir in 1675.

His son, Guru Gobind Singh, was born in 1666 at Patna. The Guru had a passion for listening to heroic ballads and having the narratives explained. He hunted and practised fighting arts with daggers shaped like a panther claw (*bāg nakkā*). In 1677 he dictated the *Jāpu Sāhib*, the *Akāl Ustati*, and then the *Svaiyye* (Piara Singh Padam 1989: 94). The Guru's love of weapons is found throughout his compositions in which Akal Purakh is symbolized as the Sword. In an eighteenth-century work attributed to Bhai Mani Singh, the *Sikhāṅ dī Bhagatmālā*, he narrates that the Dasam Granth was created by Guru Gobind Singh so that 'the saints could wield the sword'. That 'the Adi Granth is for *bhagatī* and the Dasam Granth is for war [*shaktī*] for this reason the *yudh mai bāṇī* [martial scripture] was uttered. *Shastarvidiā* was taught and knowledge was imparted' (Bedi 1994: 151). Rattan Singh Bhangu explains to the English enquirer Murray why the Guru decided to transform the Panth in this manner: 'From its very birth the [new] Panth was unconcealed. […] It was a Panth created to fight, its members bearing arms from birth. […] The Supreme Guru created the Panth in order that it should fight! Sovereignty cannot be won without struggle' (McLeod 1990: 71).

We also learn that the Guru recited *Jāp Sāhib* whilst instructing his Khalsa in *shastravidiā* according to one source: 'Guru Gobind Singh after the morning liturgical services, used to supervise the Sikhs playing *gatka (shastarvidyia)* whilst reciting Jap Sahib as its meditational accompaniment' (Neki 2008: 125–6). The metres or *chhands* in *Jāp Sāhib* seem to be intended to produce a rhythmic response in the reader. In relation to the other Dasam Granth compositions used for the Khalsa initiation we find the following verses attributed to the tenth Guru: 'I myself (*Srī Mukh*) communicated the *Chaupaī* and

Savaiye for focusing the minds of my followers and of nerving them for battle' (McLeod 2003: 311). A whole chapter, the *Shastar Nām Mālā Purāṇ* or the 'Ancient Rosary of the Names of Weapons', is dedicated to five important weapons (*panj shastar*). (p. 465) The ratio of the verses dedicated to each weapon, shows us the practical thinking of the author:

Bhagautī (Sword) 1–27
Chakkar (Quoit) 28–74
Bān (Bow) 75–252
Pansh (Noose) 253–460
Tupak (Gun) 461–1318
(Dasam Granth: 717–808)

The 'apocryphal' compositions in the Dasam Granth outline the same battle concepts, for example within the *Bhagautī Astotra* the author states: 'The Great Teacher of the Science of War, the Great Form of Dread: *mahāṅ bīr bidiyā mahāṅ bhīm rūpaṅ*' (Kamalroop Singh and Mann, forthcoming). We can thus conclude that the earliest Sikh sources related to Guru Gobind Singh show that there is a very strong relationship between *shastarvidiā* and the Dasam Granth.

In the *rahitnāmā* of Bhai Chaupa Singh there is a reference to respecting weapons, and that 'An armed Sikh should continually practice the art of weapons (*shastarvidiā*)'. McLeod dates this manuscript to 1764, due to the colophon in a no longer extant manuscript (McLeod 1987: 85, 138). However, Padam (1989) from his examination of manuscripts considers it to be from the court of the tenth Guru. This is likely to be the case as an extant manuscript claims to be copied from a servant of the tenth Guru (Khalsa College: SHR 227 A). We find an injunction, in the *rahitnāmā* attributed to Bhai Daya Singh, to practise the *shabad* and learn *shastarvidiā*: *shabad kā abhiās, shastra bidayā sīkhaṇī* (Padam 1989: 89, 69). The injunction of Bhai Nand Lal records that a Khalsa is one who wears weapons—*Khālsā soi shastra kau dhārai* (Padam 1989: 59). In the *Prem Sumārag Granth* we find 'If any Sikh is attacked all others should be prepared to join in his defense. Thus shall they earn the merit conferred on those who believe in the Sikh faith and they will see Guru Baba Sri Akal Purakh come to their instant aid' (McLeod 2006: 19–20). We can clearly see that self-defence was a feature of the literature written in the court of the tenth Guru.

As Punjab is a crossroads between different areas, this compelled Sikhs to fortify their villages; in an area where water was scarce, wells had to be protected with watch towers and every man 'was a soldier in defence of his paternal acres' ('Murray's Life of Runjit Singh' 1846: 348). George Thomas (1805) narrates that there were instances in which

intrepid Sikh women had actually taken up arms to defend their homes from the haphazard attacks of the enemy, and throughout the contest conducted themselves with a courageous spirit that is highly praiseworthy (Francklin 1805: 113.). After Guru Gobind Singh the teaching lineage of *shastarvidiā* passed to Akali Baba Binod Singh and subsequently to Akali Phula Singh. Colonel James Skinner (1825) records the military traditions of a group devoted to Guru Gobind Singh, called Akali Sikhs:

> All follow the profession of soldiery and are brave, being without peer in the art of musketry and mobile warfare (*chakkar-bazi*). The Akali sect is particularly (p. 466) courageous and warlike. But they are not well-versed in fighting with the sword, and hardly ever perform well in close fighting (*saf-jang*, 'battle in the line'), which requires fighting with sword and spear, and which is called *Ahan-i-sard* 'cold iron.'
>
> (Grewal and Habib 2001: 218–19)

He seems to be referring to the Nihang Singhs who are ardent in their loyalty to the Khalsa, and regard themselves as an elite corps dedicated to its defence and the advancement of its martial ideals. The famous hit-and-run tactics of the Nihang Singh horsemen were noted by George Forster (1798), George Thomas (1805), and Lieutenant W. Barr (1839) in the field who states that '*it is* the custom of their troops to advance and retreat, rally and return to the fight—and a most useful manoeuvre it is' ('Journal of a March from Delhi to Peshawur' 1844: 163, 183). Rattan Singh, whose account is based on contemporary oral evidence, was told by a former veteran that one basic tactic of the Sikhs was: 'Hit the enemy hard enough to kill, run, turn back and hit him again; run again, hit and run till you exasperate the enemy, and then, melt away […] Their entire theory of war is summed up in the word *Dhaī Phaṭ* or two and a half injuries' (Malik 1999: 81). In a crucial battle of the Sikh kingdom, Akali Phula Singh and many hundreds of Akali soldiers fell in the battle against the Afghans in Naushera in 1823, but gave victory to the Maharaja (Prinsep 1834: 138–9). After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the British and Dogras knew it was the perfect opportunity to extract revenge on the Sikhs.

During the Anglo-Sikh wars, contrary to Skinner's account, the British suffered many casualties at the hands of the well-trained Sikh swordsmen. English regulation swords were too straight and blunt, while the Sikh curved blade was far more effective as a cutting weapon. At a cavalry charge in Ramnagar, the Sikhs swooped around:

> In one case a British officer, who was killed in the charge I describe, was hewn in two by a back-handed stroke which cut right through an ammunition-pouch,

> cleaving the pistol-bullets right through the pouch and belt, severing the officer's backbone and cutting his heart in two from behind.
>
> (Forbes-Mitchell 1897: 152)

An Akali on being captured was asked to demonstrate his skill with a quoit:

> seizing the quoit in his right hand, and inserting the forefinger as an axis on which to revolve it, he caused it to rotate rapidly over his head, looking around at the same time for an appropriate mark. Sixty yards off, on a small mound, stood Colonel C—'s favourite milch goat; another instant, and the quoit had quitted the Akali's finger, and the goat lay quivering in death, nearly decapitated
>
> ('Extracts from an Indian Journal' 1858: 611)

(p. 467) After the defeat of the Khalsa army, it seems that *shastarvidiā* went underground. The Khalsa army disbanded and the British Sikh regiments were subsequently formed. Lieutenant Lewin (1859) narrates how he watched the Sikhs hit trees with quoits, from 200 yards, followed by a war-dance (*paintrā*), timed to rhythm, from drums and music, while the Sikhs sang verses and clashed their swords (Lewin 1885: 46–7). *Gātka* had become a ritualized aspect of the new Sikh regiments. It had moved away from a killing art to a defence or display art.

In 1878 a *hukamnāmā* from the Akal Takht Sahib, today in the private collection of Navjot and Preeti Randhawa of Delhi, prescribed the need for Sikhs to undertake *shastarvidiā*. Sometime later, in 1891, Gian Singh wrote about the decline of the *vidiā*:

> Before 1857, many types of weapons and armour were found in every house. The people learnt and taught *shastarvidiā* and became complete soldiers in their own homes. Now nobody even speaks of its techniques and the sons of brave warriors are becoming merchants. To those of us who have employed *shastarvidiā*, it is becoming like a dream. In another fifty years or so people will say it was all but lies.
>
> (Giani Gian Singh 1993: i. 36–7)

There was good reason for the decline as to teach this art publicly in British India was viewed increasingly suspiciously. As this was a part of the disbarment act of the Punjab, many famous *ustāds* were publicly executed by the British. However, Baba Gian Singh 'Rab' still succeeded in training many people to become skilled teachers of *shastarvidiā*, and even wrote a small pamphlet that was published after his death. His last living student, also called Baba Gian Singh, is an exponent of *jhaṭkā gatkā* or *jaṅg vidiyā* (war

arts), and he has taught a number of people in this method. Another famous *ustād* whom Baba Gian Singh ‘Rab’ taught was Gurbax Singh from the village Langeri, in the Hoshiarpur district.

Contemporary Practice

Gatka is very popular amongst the new generation of young Sikhs, and it is well established in the UK and North America. Recently many new *Akhāṛās* have opened in Europe and it seems that new websites and access to videos on YouTube have inspired many young Sikhs to learn this traditional art. Many Sikhs have become proficient in other martial arts like judo and karate, but now there is a renaissance in Sikh martial arts. Nowadays, there are also a number of teachers that claim lineage from the famous ‘Rab’, prominent examples including Baba Pritam Singh, Baba Daya Singh ‘Bhagatevale’, and Baba Nihal Singh Nihang of Harianvelan. The aforementioned *ustāds* have taught many students including Ustad Uptej Singh (Baba Fateh Singh Gatka, *Akhāṛā*, London) and Ustad Manjit Singh (Punjab). ‘Rab’ also taught Ustad Mohinder Singh, the teacher of Nihang Nidar Singh (Ranjit *Akhāṛā*, UK). (p. 468) There are a number of Sikhs from the 3HO organization that also teach *gātka*; these include Nanak Dev Singh (Germany), Gurshabad Singh (Italy), Sada Sat Simran Singh (Malaysia/America), Narayan Singh (Spain), and Kartar Singh (Spain). A new *akhāṛā* has opened under Giani Pritam Singh in Southall, UK known as the Ajit *Akhāṛā*. There are also senior experts who have learnt from the Biddhi Chand Dal like Ustad Pritipal Singh (Southall). Some groups like Shin-Kin have created a new system by mixing other martial arts with *gātka*, and are very popular in the Midlands, UK.

During this recent revival of the Sikh martial tradition, an important publication recording the art comprehensively has been compiled by Ustad Manjit Singh (Manjit Singh 2005). The School Games Federation of India (SGFI) has incorporated *gātka* as a game in the National School Games calendar of 2012. Punjabi University Patiala has also proposed to the Gatka Federation of India (GFI) that it host the All India Gatka Championship. Recently, the ‘Sikh Martial Art Research and Training Board’ has also begun to grant scholarships to aspiring research scholars of *gātka* (*Punjabi Newsline*, 12 June 2011). Of note is the annual ‘Yudh’ Gatka tournament in the UK, where various *Akhāṛās* send their students to compete.

In the media *gātka* has been shown all over the world including on the famous BBC Show *Desi DNA*. On Indian television there was the memorable performance by Rashpal Kaur

on Zee TV's *Dance India Dance*. The judges were not only taken aback by her performance, but by the fact that she was blind. In 2006, Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall watched Baba Fateh Singh Gatka *Akhāṛā*, where the duchess covered her eyes due to the dangerous feats performed in front of her! ([http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1512953/Surely-that-man-with-the-sword-isnt.-.-.-oh-yes-he-is.html]). There has also been one important documentary, entitled *Deadliest Warrior: Roman Centurion vs. Rajput*, where the Sikh martial arts were simulated by various tests, against the Roman martial arts. There has also been a Discovery Channel programme showing the usage of the *Chakkar*, by the weapons expert Mike Loades, entitled *Weapon's Masters: The Deadly Chakram*, as well as a brief examination of the *Chakkar* on the History Channel.

Conclusion

For practitioners of *gātka*, it is both a martial and spiritual art. We can safely conclude that *gātka* is a component of the overall martial art called *shastarvidiā*. This martial tradition was inaugurated by the sixth Guru; however, if we take hagiographies and oral tradition into account, then the sixth Guru learnt from Baba Buddha who was a student of Guru Nanak. The martial tradition became a formal part of the Khalsa *rahit* created by Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikhs became formidable warriors and they later went on to gain sovereignty with their famous hit-and-run tactics. Later on the Sikhs were defeated by the British and the martial tradition began to decline, and *shastarvidiā* (p. 469) nearly died out. *Gātka* was taken up by the new Sikh regiments, but it became highly ritualized. A small group of *jhaṭkā-gaṭkā ustāds* preserved the art and luckily it continues till today. Sadly, as noted by scholars, the performance version of the art has become popular while *jhaṭkā-gatkā* is quite rare. It would be too simplistic to blame this demise on the British and their activities: it is true that the British hung and imprisoned *ustāds*, but the main cause of the demise is modern firearms. From the accounts presented in this essay we can clearly see that *gātka* has slowly evolved from a battle art to a performance art.

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Oxford Handbooks Online

Sikhi through Internet, Films, and Videos

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Abstract and Keywords

The article discusses representations of the Sikh experience through websites, film, and videos released online or to DVD. While the emphasis is on self-representation, it also refers to images of Sikhs in films created by non-Sikhs. Film, videos, and the Internet provide a space in which Sikhs negotiate identity and engage with issues surrounding Sikh history, religion, and politics. This discourse frequently hinges on the question of how normative the Khalsa identity should be for the Sikh community as a whole, and there is a particular concern about the maintenance of uncut hair by male Sikhs, especially in the diaspora. Films and new media thus serve both descriptive and prescriptive roles in the continuing process of shaping Sikh identity in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Sikh, film, websites, Internet, self-representation, identity, Khalsa

In the past decade, there has been a rapid expansion in the production of films, websites, and videos focusing on Sikhism. In many cases, Sikh history or religious behaviour is the primary emphasis of this material, although in the case of film it may be more peripheral. As access to the Internet has expanded, Sikh websites and online forums have become a virtual *sangat*, or religious community, supplementing and in some cases supplanting more traditional gurdwara-centred worship as the locus of education about Sikh identity and religion. In all three types of media, there is a tension between a privileging of Khalsa identity, particularly as represented by turban-wearing bearded males, and an awareness of internal diversity. In many cases, aspects of Punjabi culture such as *bhangra* dancing are represented as inseparable from Sikh identity and in some cases form a visual shorthand such that Punjabi = Sikh. The increase in the production of feature-length and short films, Internet sources, and videos of all sorts is probably partly a reaction to the targeting of Sikhs in America for hate crimes after 9/11, as well as to the large number of Internet-savvy Sikh youth, particularly but not exclusively in the diaspora.

Sikhi on the Internet

The Sikh presence on the Internet is roughly divided into four segments: informational sites, magazines and blogs aimed at Sikh youth, political advocacy sites (including Khalistani separatist sites), and sectarian sites (such as those dedicated to groups like the Namdhari and Akhand Kirtani Jatha Sikhs). In addition, there are a few dozen ‘apps’ aimed at Sikhs with mobile devices, the majority of which are focused on liturgical use. These websites and Internet resources are generally, but not exclusively, aimed at English-speaking Sikhs, especially those in the North American and British diaspora communities.

(p. 472) The Sikh sacred text, the Guru Granth Sahib, is 1,430 pages in its printed version, and requires ritual acts of respect and a separate resting place. The etiquette concerning the treatment of the Guru Granth Sahib renders it an inconvenient text to carry around for reference, and consequently most Sikhs primarily use hymnals called *gutkas* as portable prayer books. Through the Internet, however, it becomes possible to use the Guru Granth Sahib as a reference volume. While Sikhs traditionally find advice from the Guru Granth Sahib in particular ways such as randomly opening the text in a gurdwara setting and reading the first hymn on the top of the left page, sites such as [www.srigranth.org] allow for directed searching for keywords or specific content within the text. This way of reading the Guru Granth Sahib is in some ways similar to Protestant Christian uses of the Bible as a source for advice. An additional change to Sikh religious practice has resulted from these searchable texts. The extremely popular site Sikhi to the Max, which offers a downloadable search engine, allows gurdwaras to project the words from the Guru Granth Sahib and other liturgical texts, with transliteration and translation, onto a screen ([www.sikhitothemax.com]). This site has found wide use in American gurdwaras, and allows diasporic Sikhs who may not be fluent in Punjabi to follow the meaning of the hymns.

One pervasive theme on Sikh websites is the glorification of Khalsa identity. The Khalsa is a subgroup of Sikhs initiated in the late seventeenth century as part of a militarization of the Sikh community. Khalsa Sikhs, both male and female, wear five items which begin with the letter ‘K’ in Punjabi and are thus called the Five Ks. These are *kes* (uncut hair), *kangha* (a comb), *kara* (a steel bangle), *kacha* (undershorts), and the *kirpan* (a small sword). Male members of the Khalsa wear a turban to keep their hair tidy, as do some females. Khalsa Sikhs, sometimes called Amritdhari (indicating that they have taken formal initiation into the community), represent a minority of Sikhs worldwide but are generally highly regarded by the community and are often held up as an ideal. They are differentiated from Kesdhari Sikhs, who maintain most of the Khalsa regulations but have

not formally joined the Khalsa, and from Sehajdhari Sikhs, who frequently wear the *kara* but cut their hair. Estimates vary, but a high percentage of diasporic Sikhs do not maintain the uncut hair of a Kesdhari or Amritdhari Sikh.

Informational sites such as Sikhs.org are aimed primarily at curious non-Sikhs, but also serve as central locations for thinking publicly about Sikh identity. Sikhs.org therefore features a selection of essays on points ranging from the definition of a Khalsa Sikh to the growing use of English in diaspora gurdwaras ([www.sikhs.org]). It also contains a small archive of historical photographs of Sikhs, probably primarily of interest to members of the community. As of April 2012, Sikhs.org is the first site listed by Google after Wikipedia when one searches ‘Sikhism’, and it is easy to imagine that it would be used by a broad audience. As with many such sites, Sikhs.org presents Khalsa identity as normative, and there is little mention of non-Khalsa Sikhs. The assumption appears to be that all good Sikhs are members of the Khalsa, despite the minority status of Khalsa Sikhs in the community as a whole and especially outside of India. This is of course partially a reflection of the respect given to Khalsa identity in mainstream Sikhism, but it seems to (p. 473) prescribe Khalsa identity for all Sikhs, rather than describe Khalsa Sikhs as a key part of a larger community. Doris R. Jakobsh has explored this phenomenon, which she terms ‘Khalsaism’, in her work on the use of the Internet by Sikhs (Jakobsh 2012).

The network of sites associated with SikhNet.com is similarly Khalsa-centric, for slightly different reasons. SikhNet is administered by members of the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, also known as 3HO, a group of largely European American converts associated with the late spiritual leader Yogi Bhajan (1929–2004). Called ‘Gora Sikhs’ (White Sikhs) by Punjabi Sikhs, this group places a very strong emphasis on Khalsa appearance. This includes the strict maintenance of the Five Ks as well as the wearing of turbans and Punjabi-style clothing (generally made of white fabric) by both men and women. SikhNet serves as a clearing house for news and information related to Sikhism, and is used by many Sikhs of Punjabi heritage in addition to the 3HO Sikhs. The site contains a wide variety of tools for working with Sikh liturgical texts, as well as a number of ‘lifestyle’-related resources such as turban-tying tutorials. Since 2011, it has also featured an online game called ‘Karma: the Ogre’s Curse’ in which the player is challenged to maintain Sikhi through such actions as acting kindly, meditating, and maintaining the Khalsa appearance ([www.sikhnet.com]).

In addition, the SikhNet team maintains a Wikipedia-like site called Sikhiwiki.org. SikhiWiki is, as the name suggests, a Sikh-centred version of Wikipedia. The site serves as a resource for basic information and images about Sikhi. Some of the almost 6,000 articles (as of March 2012) available on SikhiWiki are also available on Wikipedia. The

site also serves as an independent site and doctrinal discussions such as debates about vegetarianism are sometimes carried out through the wiki format ([www.sikhiwiki.org]).

SikhiWiki explicitly maintains a normative Khalsa-centred view. For example, a search on ‘Namdhari’ (one of the larger sects outside of mainstream Sikhism) yields an article with a large disclaimer at the top of the page:

> The article contains information about Sects and cults which evolved during times of gurus or later, having influence of Sikhism. These sects have many different philosophies from Gurmat [the legitimate teachings of Sikhism] or were made to put down real essence of Gurmat. These sects were not formed by any Gurus or Bhagats. If you have any comments, please discuss them here [*sic*].
>
> ([www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Namdhari])

A link then takes the reader to a forum specifically for talking about this particular site. At the bottom of the same page, a more strongly worded warning reads:

> This article may contain Sects or Cults, Fake Babas, Deras, Fake Nihangs, Sanatan Dharmis, Pseudo Akalis & Mahants, Pseudo Intellectuals & Historians, Leftists and agnostic [*sic*] which are not considered a part of Sikhism. The article is just for information purposes.
>
> ([www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/Namdhari])

(p. 474) Normative, Khalsa-centric, Sikh identity is thus unambiguously asserted on SikhiWiki, and one would expect adherents of non-normative Sikh sects to seek alternative sources of information.

In contrast to wide-ranging sites like SikhNet are a number of sites aimed at specific cultural issues. For example, SikhChic.com and TheLangarHall.com both serve educated, diasporic Sikhs, many of whom are not members of the Khalsa. The former is focused on Sikhi in public culture and the arts and the latter on ‘Progressive’ Sikhs. SikhChic hosts the satirical comic ‘Sikh Park’, which uses South Park-like images to poke fun at certain parts of Punjabi Sikh culture. In addition, there are a number of columns about Punjabi/Sikh cultural history, films featuring Sikh characters, artwork and fashion designed by Sikhs, and historical analyses of Punjabi cuisine, music, and humour. The mission statement of SikhChic specifies:

> The definition of ‘Sikh’, for the purposes of our magazine, is unabashedly a broad one, which includes any and all who are of Sikh origin and/or consider themselves

> Sikh. We do not attempt to judge others as to who is a good Sikh and who isn't, or who falls in or out of any particular definition
>
> ([www.sikhchic.com]).

TheLangarHall.com similarly combines community-awareness reports (such as reports of anti-Sikh hate crimes) and reviews of films and comic books ([www.thelangarhall.com]). The site is more politically active than SikhChic and often contains editorials about Punjabi politics and anti-Sikh bias in the diaspora. TheLangarHall is also active on Facebook and reaches a large number of (generally young) Sikhs through that medium.

There are a number of sites such as SikhWomen.com and Kaurista.com which concentrate on issues pertaining to Sikh women (in the latter case, especially younger women). Women are generally underrepresented online, where Sikh identity is equated with Khalsa male identity. One statistical oddity about the representation of Sikh women online is the overrepresentation of turban-wearing women in the images provided by Sikh websites (Jakobsh 2012). Kaurista.com moves beyond Khalsaism to address anxieties facing young (primarily female) Sikhs as they negotiate between different cultural and religious expectations ([www.kaurista.com]).

The tradition of arranged marriage is an important aspect of Punjabi Sikh culture. Historically, this was accomplished through matchmaking networks and later through newspaper advertisements. There are several sites which specialize in Sikh matrimonial (one of which is associated with SikhNet.com), as well as a number of Hindu-oriented sites which allow the user to search for Sikhs or have Sikh-oriented affiliates. Most of these sites feature information such as photographs, biometric data, and caste background for prospective spouses, and the majority of them are free. They appear to be quite popular with middle-class Sikhs and serve as a supplement to, or replacement for, more traditional matchmaking. Profiles are posted either by parents or by the individuals themselves and sometimes feature professional photographs.

(p. 475) The political aspects of Sikh life in India and the diaspora are central to a variety of sites linked to advocacy groups. Organizations including the Sikh Coalition and United Sikhs maintain an active web presence and also may maintain a presence on social networking sites such as Facebook. These types of groups frequently organize petitions and responses to natural disasters and political crises using the Internet. United Sikhs in particular orchestrated a very successful campaign in 2011 for a funding opportunity organized by Chase Bank which was determined by Facebook voting, winning first place and $250,000 for general use ([www.unitedsikhs.org]).

Although support for an independent Sikh nation known as Khalistan has waned considerably since the peak of separatist activity in the 1980s, there are a large number

of Khalistani websites. These seem to be particularly focused on the events surrounding Operation Blue Star, the June 1984 assault by the Indian army on separatists in the Golden Temple complex, which resulted in the deaths of large numbers of Sikh militants, most notably their leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, as well as innocent Sikh pilgrims, and in the destruction of the Akal Takht, the second-most important building in Sikhism. In October 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, and the ensuing retaliatory pogroms targeted Sikhs, particularly in Delhi, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Sikhs. Khalistani sites such as Khalistan.net are replete with graphic photographs of these events, and often feature speeches by Bhindranwale. Additionally, they may feature advocacy and news aimed at Sikh nationalists. For example, Khalistan-Affairs.com compiles news and editorials critical of the government of India (described in one post as the 'world's largest demoNcracy [*sic*]' ([www.khalistan-affairs.com]). The Internet has thus become a place to keep the pursuit of Khalistan in the public eye (Axel 2008).

A number of Sikh sects have a strong Internet presence, including Khalsa-oriented groups like Akhand Kirtani Jatha and Nihang Sikhs, as well as Sikhs who do not follow the normative Guru lineage such as Namdhari Sikhs. The Ravidassia sect, which recently split officially from Sikhism, also has a number of websites. Site [www.Sarbloh.info] serves as a central informational site for Udasi, Nihang, and Seva Panthi Sikhs. Many sectarian sites feature recordings and video of *gurbani kirtan* and of various celebrations. They often specifically outline their differences with normative Sikhism. One Namdhari site features a section called 'Fabrications' which specifically rejects many claims of Khalsa Sikhism, particularly having to do with the creation of the Khalsa and the fate of the Guru lineage after Guru Gobind Singh's death ([www.namdhari.faithweb.com]). Some sectarian sites also feature matrimonial advertisements, which may be especially useful to diaspora Sikhs belonging to minority groups such as Akhand Kirtani Jatha.

Young Sikhs in the diaspora, some of whom may feel disconnected from the formal communities organized around gurdwara politics, often seem to use the Internet to build a virtual community both for formal ritual purposes and for more informal discussions of how to apply Sikh thinking to situations which arise in their daily lives. In so doing, they may circumvent the more traditional means of finding answers to such questions, which assume access to elders and to someone trained in scriptural matters. Issues (p. 476) which may be uncomfortable to discuss with one's elders, such as homosexuality or abortion, can be addressed more freely in the anonymous space afforded by the Internet (Jakobsh 2006). Sites like SikhNet.com and SikhAwareness.com feature forums which offer discussion boards as well as easy means to share pictures, downloads, and other information. SikhSangat.com, which has approximately 1,200 members, also serves as an important place for Sikh youth to discuss a wide range of topics. A discussion of Sikhi on

the Internet would be incomplete without a brief mention of the growing number of Sikh-related ‘apps’ for mobile devices. The most popular types of apps appear to be those directly related to Sikh daily ritual, particularly the recitation of the *nitnem bani* (daily prayers). Apps exist which provide the texts of these prayers, in some cases also including recordings of their recitation. Also available are several ‘apps’ which allow the user to search the complete Guru Granth Sahib. These types of apps generally provide the text in Punjabi, in transliteration and translated into English. They are very popular, although some Sikhs have raised concerns about the ritual propriety of using a phone for religious purposes, as phones are generally carried in a pocket and the user would presumably have other ‘apps’ on the phone which might not pass religious muster. A few ‘apps’ have podcasts about Sikhism or self-quizzes about Sikh history. Although there are exceptions, such as the ‘Turbanizer’ app, which allows the user to add a turban to any photo of a person, for the most part the Sikh-related apps available represent a fairly orthodox and textually oriented vision of Sikhism.

Sikhi in Film and Video

Sikhs and Sikhism are visible both in films for theatrical release and in videos released directly to DVD. Although the primary concern of this article is Sikh self-representation, it bears mentioning that Sikh or Sikh-like characters have appeared in at least a few Hollywood films. In most cases the recognition of Sikhness hinges on the keeping of long hair and turban by a male Sikh. Thus, the character of ‘Punjab’ in *Annie* (1982), played by Geoffrey Holder, a Trinidadian actor with no facial hair, unrolls his turban at the climax of the film to reveal uncut hair. Similarly, much is made of the uncut hair of Kip (Naveen Andrews) in *The English Patient* (1996), which is presented as attractive to the French nurse played by Juliette Binoche. More recently, the Sikh-American actor Waris Ahluwalia has had small roles in a number of films, some of which, like the Spike Lee film *Inside Man*, touch on his appearance as a turban-wearing Sikh.

Of the films featuring Sikhs aimed at a Western audience, arguably none have had the impact of Gurinder Chadha’s films, particularly *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Set in West London, *Bend It Like Beckham* shows a British Sikh family in a sympathetic light and particularly focuses on the youngest daughter’s struggle to negotiate between traditional Sikh values and her desire to do things which other British youth do, specifically play soccer and date a non-Sikh. Her family worries that doing these things will cause her to stray from the values which they hold dear. These sorts of Indian diasporic (p. 477) struggles with identity formation are frequently acknowledged on Indian-American

websites and in films like *The Namesake* (2006), but there are relatively few films in which Sikh characters examine their choices in this sphere.

Sikhs also make appearances in Bollywood films. Historically, Sikh characters were often marginal and presented with comic intent as buffoons or bumpkins. In some cases, Kesdhari Sikh characters are noticeably absent from contexts in which they would be expected, as in the tremendously popular film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* ('The Brave-Hearted Will Take the Bride', 1995). Much of the action of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* takes place in a romanticized Punjab, and many of the characters wear *karas*, indicating an at least nominally Sikh identity, but turban-wearing Sikhs are seen only as extras in the film.

More recently, there has been an increase in the number of positive Sikh characters in Bollywood films, some of them played by non-Sikhs. Action star Sunny Deol, a Punjabi Sikh by heritage, has played Sikh characters in several films, including the high-grossing Partition film *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* ('Revolution: A Love Story', 2001) and the controversial *Jo Bole So Nihal* ('Blessed Is the One Who Raises His Voice for Truth', 2005), which was the focus of violent protests, partially because of its use of a Sikh religious phrase as a title. In *Border* (1997), a film based on the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, Deol played a Sikh major in the Indian Army. Indeed, a large proportion of male Sikh characters in Bollywood films are members of the military or the police. This perhaps reflects the likelihood that Indian audiences outside of Punjab will have encountered Sikhs in military-type jobs. While there is a machismo attached to such roles, they are generally not treated as romantically appealing and it is rare for Sikh males with turbans to be understood as attractive in such films. The 2009 film *Rocket Singh: Salesman of the Year* is something of an anomaly in that it features a Kesdhari Sikh male romantic lead, played by Ranbir Kapoor. The film shows some Sikh religious activities, but religious identity is not the primary concern of the film.

The largest-grossing film with a Sikh main character, *Singh is Kinng* [*sic*] (2008), portrays an accident-prone Sikh named Happy as he bumbles through the worlds of organized crime and romance. The American rapper Snoop Dogg is featured in the title song wearing a turban. The film was received well by most Punjabi Sikhs, although some complained about the poster for the film, in which Happy Singh (Akshay Kumar) is shown with the trimmed beard.

It bears mentioning that there are a small number of Sikh-centric short films and art films produced each year. These are the focus of various film festivals, including the Spinning Wheel Sikh Film Festival and Sikhlens. The locations of these events vary from year to year, but they are generally two or three days long and tend to concentrate on short non-

fiction films. Many of the featured films touch on political and social issues ranging from Sikh identity in the diaspora to drug abuse in the Punjab.

Punjabi-language films, not surprisingly, feature a number of Sikh-oriented themes, and many of them depict Sikh religious and cultural activities in a sensitive manner. There are several Punjabi films with plots which revolve around Sikh family dramas and devotion. Three of these are especially worth mentioning: *Nanak Dukhiya Sub Sansar* (p. 478) ('Nanak, the Whole World is Suffering', 1970), *Nanak Naam Jahaz Hai* ('Nanak, the Name is the Vehicle', 1969), and *Sat Sri Akal* ('True, Auspicious, Timeless', 2008). All feature a Kesdhari Sikh male lead, a great deal of Sikh ritual, and footage of important gurdwaras. The first of these is about the separation of a family during Partition and their eventual reunification. The film has a message of interreligious harmony and at one point the Sikh lead character buys a Hindu image for a Hindu character so that she can worship as she likes. The latter two films both feature splits in families precipitated by manipulative characters and climaxing in a traumatic injury to the male romantic lead which is miraculously cured at the Harimandir Sahib. In both cases, this drama is juxtaposed with deeply pious declarations about the need to have faith and the hazards of egotism. *Nanak Dukhiya Sub Sansar* and *Sat Sri Akal* both show the negative influence of alcohol on the Punjab and the former has a song in which the Sikh lead character states that God exists in the fields and in hard work and so he has no need for intoxicants.

There are also a small number of live-action religious films, including the popular *Bhagat Dhanna Jatt* (1974), which depicts the famous figure by the same name whose compositions appear in the Guru Granth Sahib, and *Sarbans Dani Guru Gobind Singh Ji* ('Guru Gobind Singh, the Great Giver', 1998), which tells the story of the tenth Guru, but avoids the use of actors to portray either Guru Gobind Singh or any of his immediate family members, as a means of avoiding the perception of idolatry.

Animated films on Sikh topics are a recent phenomenon; with the earliest appearing in 2005 (*Sunny the Proud Sikh* and *Sahibzadey* both came out that year). *Sunny the Proud Sikh* is a story about a North American Sikh boy who learns about Sikh history and identity from his paternal grandmother. It addresses the bullying of Sikh boys in school and suggests that the solution to this problem is increased awareness of Sikh history. Sikh identity is explicitly equated with the Khalsa, and Sunny is told that if he doesn't wear *kara* (the steel bangle) and *kes* (uncut hair), he is 'not a Sikh boy'. While the film can be somewhat heavy-handed in its message at times, it has proved very popular with Sikhs in the diaspora, many of whom struggle with the issues surrounding the maintenance of a distinct physical Sikh identity.

Sahibzadey: A Saga of Valor and Sacrifice, produced by Singapore-based Vismaad Films, opens with an exhortation to Sikh boys to keep their *kes*. Originally released in Punjabi with English subtitles and later dubbed into English, *Sahibzadey* ('Princes') is the story of the two youngest sons of the tenth Sikh Guru, who Sikh tradition states were killed by being bricked up alive inside a wall as punishment for their father's refusal to cede to Mughal authority. This film, which has much more sophisticated animation than *Sunny the Proud Sikh*, focuses on the two boys (aged approximately 6 and 9) and their paternal grandmother, Mata Gujri, who recounts many important Sikh martyrdom stories to them in order to prepare them to meet their fate with courage. These stories are illustrated with paintings from the Central Sikh Museum in Amritsar. The script was based on a book released by the SGPC (the central governing body for Indian gurdwaras). Guru Gobind Singh himself is not shown in the film except for well-known representations from Sikh paintings, and the film-makers clearly wanted to avoid showing him as an animated figure. As is traditional in Sikh martyrdom stories, the Muslim (p. 479) and Hindu villains are portrayed as monstrous and immoral, although the film does indicate that Muslim and Hindu villagers are horrified by the execution of the boys. The film hints at but does not show Mata Gujri's death in custody. Vismaad has produced a few similar films since the release of *Sahibzadey*, all of which feature heroic Sikh figures battling the Mughals. All Vismaad films are available on DVD, and they appear to have wide distribution in the Sikh community.

In contrast with Sikh websites, which frequently contain references to the tragic events of 1984, the massacre of Sikhs after Indira Gandhi's assassination has received relatively scant treatment in cinema. One notable exception is *Amu* (2005), a feature-length film which draws on issues of diaspora and identity and on the silencing of traumatic memories of 1984 in Delhi. Particular attention is paid to the approval of riots by high-ranking politicians, but the film's main goal seems to be to humanize these events and reopen a conversation. The Indian censor board objected to all mentions of the Delhi riots in the film and would not allow the film to be released to a general audience, which led the film-maker to release the film directly to DVD.

A more recent historical theme to emerge in films about Sikhs is the treatment that turban-wearing Sikhs have received outside of India since 11 September 2001. Of the films which treat this subject, three bear specific mention. The first, *Divided We Fall: Americans in the Aftermath* (2006) is a documentary by Valarie Kaur focusing on the Sikh American experience immediately after 9/11. The film won several awards when it was released and is one of the only feature-length documentaries on this topic. Two fictional films, one Canadian and the other Indian, deal with North American Sikh questions of identity after 9/11. The first, *Ocean of Pearls* (2008), centres on a Sikh Canadian doctor who moves to America to take a prestigious post at a hospital in Detroit. Once in America,

he finds himself romantically involved with a non-Sikh, faces some discrimination, and comes to believe that his appearance is holding him back both personally and professionally. In the most dramatic scene of the film, he cuts his hair. Near the end of the film, a conversation with his father causes him to reconsider this decision. The Bollywood film *I Am Singh* (2011) takes a significantly less subtle approach to the question of anti-Sikh bias, with caricatures of American skinheads and neo-Nazis and a poster featuring the stripes of the American flag as drips of blood. The latter film represents the first attempt by Bollywood to tackle issues of anti-Sikh bias in America and has received mixed reviews.

Conclusion

Since 2001, Sikh self-representation has proliferated through a variety of media. Building on previously established websites and films, the Sikh community, particularly in the diaspora, has engaged in a wide-ranging public exploration of Sikhi. In addition, the film industry has begun to reach beyond stereotypes of Sikhs and to explore more nuanced roles such as the title characters of *Amu* and *Rocket Singh*. Representations of (p. 480) Sikh culture and religion in the Internet, film, and videos are by their very nature changing at a rapid pace and it is difficult to predict future trajectories. It seems likely, however, that issues surrounding Khalsa identity, particularly the turban, and the competing pulls of Western and Punjabi cultures will continue to appear in all of these media for the foreseeable future.

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Sikh Culture and Punjābiyat

Pritam Singh and Meena Dhanda

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Abstract and Keywords

Punjābiyat or Punjabiness evokes contradictory images of a splintered identity as well as of a potentially powerful economic, political, and cultural force. We focus in this article on the relationship between Sikh culture and *Punjābiyat* to explore this contradictory nature. *Punjābiyat* acts as a unifying force, but not always taking the best elements of *Sikhī*. It temporarily erases the internal tension within *Sikhī* generated by the gap between ideals and lived experience. A constructive relation between *Punjābiyat* and Sikh culture needs to be conceived dialectically. The universal values of equality enshrined within Sikhi can be enlivened by the openness and inclusiveness of *Punjābiyat*. The individualism, conspicuous consumption, and degraded machismo that mark Punjabi identity, in turn, can be tempered by *Sikhī*, alongside various *Sant* traditions. The availability of cultural productions in Punjabi language, to assist in the evolution of this symbiotic relation, is crucial.

Keywords: Casteism, culture, diaspora, equalitarian, identity, language, Punjab, Punjābiyat, Sikhī, sovereignty, symbiotic relation

Introduction

Punjābiyat or Punjabi identity is not an unqualified or unitary idea. It invites examination, interrogation, and exploration, which invariably draw attention to its constitutive contradictory forces. After about seventeen years since the first attempt was made in 'exploring' Punjabi identity (Singh and Thandi 1996), the idea of *Punjābiyat* has acquired more weight and acceptance of views which themselves might be opposed to each other (Jodhka 1997). Increasingly, some of the contests between Punjabi identities are played out in a suppressed realm of Sikh culture, marked by the schism between the ideals of

Sikhī and the practice of Sikhs, evident in the continuation of casteism and patriarchy, both of which are contrary to the central tenets of *Sikhī*. Generally denied or overlooked in mainstream academic writing, with the exception of an excellent study by Mark Juergensmeyer (1982), caste-related contests of identity are now the subject of serious study (Ram 2007; Dhanda 2012, 2014) along with the scrutiny of patriarchy within *Punjābiyat* in Sikh society (Jakobsh 2005). Envisioning Sikh culture in a symbiotic relationship with a wholesome *Punjābiyat* opens the possibility of a dialectical overcoming of the limitations of each, seen in isolation of the other.

The geographic location and the historical making of Punjab including the rise of the Sikh tradition have contributed to the vicissitudes of Punjabi identity (Singh 2010a). As the gateway to India for traders, invaders, and conquerors, the region was repeatedly subjected to annexation, partition, and reorganization. Further, Punjabis have settled abroad in large numbers since the late nineteenth century forming one of the most dynamic of diasporas, albeit increasingly encountering caste-related challenges (Dhanda 2013). Alternating between fragmentation and fusion, Punjabi identity has become extremely complex and multi-layered.

(p. 483) In terms of geographical location, we can categorize four Punjabs: pre-1947 historic Punjab, post-1947 Indian Punjab, post-1947 Pakistani Punjab, and the Punjabi diaspora, augmented by a trans-territorial identity—the global Punjabi identity. The later includes diasporic Punjabis, the Punjabi inhabitants of Indian Punjab, Pakistan Punjab, and the internal diaspora, i.e. Punjabis settled in the other states of India and Pakistan, living away from their linguistic homeland but still within a territorial space and a nation state which incorporates that homeland.

This paper will attempt to fuse together two different but interrelated aspects of Punjabi identity: its historical tribulations and its contemporary aspirations. It first takes up a historical overview of the upswings and downswings in the evolution of Punjabi identity and then analyses the contemporary challenges and opportunities globalization poses to Punjabi identity within the contested field of Sikh culture.

Historical Reconfigurations: The Symbiotic Relation Between *Sikhī* and *Punjābiyat*

Any collective identity encompasses several aspects of ‘culture’. By the concept of ‘culture’ we wish to reiterate Raymond Williams’s explication of it as ‘continuing processes’ rather than ‘received states’ (Williams 1978: 15). The economic life cycle that

sustains and reproduces the community, and through that imparts a unifying character to the community's mode of living is one constituent. Emergence of a common language as the hegemonic mode of communication between the members of the community is another. Forms of articulation of leisure consumption—music, songs, dances and humour, and even the day-to-day manner of living—of cooking and eating of food, daily rituals of cleanliness and performing of sexual activity are all processes of culture. Ceremonies of celebrating birth, marriage, and death are markers of collective identity as are the modes of aesthetic imagination and articulation: embroidery, painting, sculpture, and jewellery. Even conceptions of respect, honour, and humiliation and forms of showing love, affection, solidarity, betrayal, revenge, and hatred, in general, the forms of the relationship between human beings, nature, and God constitute the defining features of a collective identity. Thus patterns of social organization—inter-caste relations, egalitarian or hierarchical relations between men and women, and between young and old—become important subjects for study. Dhanda (2014) examines Punjabi *dalit* identity and Bhachu (1999) examines Punjabi, mainly Sikh, migrant women's identity in just such a spirit of inquiry.

In the political dimensions of identity, the experience and memory of living as a political community with possible aspirations for sovereign self-rule is a competing marker of identity. Punjab's existence as an independent sovereign state for fifty years (1799 to **(p. 484)** 1849) before it was annexed by the expanding British Empire remains an important part of the historical memory of Punjabis as an autonomous political community. The rising organizational and political power of the Sikh community in the late eighteenth century was the key contributor to this achievement of autonomy (Chopra 1960). Ranjit Singh's rule was celebrated by all Punjabis as a Punjabi rule and he is remembered as the 'Lion of Punjab' (Singh and Rai 2009). The later splintering of Punjabi identity has resulted in a contestation of the collective remembrance of Ranjit Singh. On the one hand, he is represented by the Sikh ethno-nationalists as the realization of the Sikh dream of political sovereignty, and, on the other, he is viewed by the Punjabi ethno-nationalists as a symbol of composite Punjabi identity and is celebrated as a secular Punjabi ruler unrestricted by Sikh culture (Singh 2008).

The observation that there are unifying aspects of living together that constitute a community and impart it an identity is not meant to suggest that there are no internal conflicts in the community. However, a broad view of the historical evolution of Punjabi people would suggest that due to several shared 'processes' mentioned here there are solid material and moral grounds to argue the case for a unifying and common Punjabi identity. It is necessary, though, to recognize the counteracting tendencies working against a common Punjabi identity in order to fully grasp the potentialities and limitations of repeated attempts at its reinvention. Three aspects of Punjabi life—religion, language,

and script—can justifiably be named as having played the most critical role in shaping the contestation over Punjabi identity. Although there is some evidence of older roots of distinctiveness of Punjabis as a community (Grewal 1999), the emergence of the Sikh faith in the fifteenth century and its subsequent evolution have decisively shaped the articulation of Punjabi identity. Khushwant Singh (1999: 13–14) has interpreted the rise of Punjabi language and Sikh religion as an expression of the emergence of distinctive Punjabi identity out of an interaction of a large variety of linguistic and 'racial' groups who came to Punjab, settled there, and mixed with the local people.

It is reasonable to argue that the emergence of a distinctive Punjabi culture, Punjabi language, and Sikh tradition, as a Punjabi religion, are different milestones in the evolution of a distinctive Punjabi identity. Sikhism as a distinctive Punjabi religion (Ballard 1999) introduced Gurmukhi as a script of the Punjabi language. This raised the stature of Punjabi language written in Gurmukhi script to a sacred language in opposition to the older sacred languages of Sanskrit and Arabic (Shackle 2003). Geographical location, economic way of life, shared practices, the development of Punjabi language with its own script (Brandt 2012), and the emergence of Sikhism as a distinctive Punjabi religion all contributed in diverse ways to the formation of a Punjabi identity, which made the people of the Punjab region stand out in a distinctive way from the rest of India. We see the emergence of 'religious rebels' (Juergensmeyer 1982) as adding to this distinctiveness by deeply challenging the degeneration of the original anti-casteism of Sikh culture into merely a received glory. The rebels are evidence of the robustness of *Punjābiyat*, which provides the nourishment needed to make Sikh culture a living process.

The emergence of the sovereign state of Punjab in 1799 under Maharaja Ranjit Singh was a moment of crowning glory in the evolution of a distinctive Punjabi identity; it **(p. 485)** appeared to be a teleological culmination of a distinctive national identity eventually achieving a sovereign state of its own, but it can also be seen as the juncture when the revolutionary zeal of *Sikhī* lost its vitality. Hans (2010) cites Charles von Hügel (1795–1870), an Austrian diplomat, explorer, and visitor to the court of Ranjit Singh, for evidence of the emergence of image worship and the reintroduction of caste distinctions in this period.

Colonial Conquest and the Splintering of Punjabi Identity

The disintegration of the Punjabi state in 1849 initiated the process of decline and splintering of Punjabi identity. Punjabi identity faced the toughest ever challenge and threat to its solidity, coherence, and purpose. Punjab experienced heightened and painful dislocation with the economic, political, and cultural onslaught of the most powerful imperialist state of the time. Instead of offering any combined resistance to the expanding military, economic, and cultural power of the British colonial state, the defeated, humiliated, and demoralized Punjabis found themselves scrambling for minor economic crumbs and concessions. Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs got incorporated in large numbers into the imperialist army and Punjabi Hindus into civil services and trading opportunities offered by the colonial administration and economy (Ali 1989). The existing occupational divisions in Punjabi society along religious lines got further reinforced and magnified by this colonial management of Punjabi economic needs, compulsions, and aspirations. These coterminous and overlapping divisions were to play a negative corrosive role in the attempts later on to forge a composite Punjabi identity both during the colonial as well as the post-colonial era. Punjabi Muslims and Punjabi Sikhs became more entrenched into the agrarian economy and Punjabi Hindus into the services sector. The development of the Canal Colonies, one of the most ambitious politico-economic development projects undertaken by the colonial rulers in Punjab, offered tempting opportunities to peasants, soldiers, traders, and professionals. The majority of the peasants and soldiers were Muslims and Sikhs, and the majority of the traders and professionals were Hindus (Omissi 1994; Mukherjee 2005; Yong 2005). The lure of careers and economic gains in the expanding imperial economy left Punjabi identity dislocated, disoriented, and disunited. The economic differentiation along religious identities further magnified the divisive identities. The Punjabi nation that was celebrated in the lyrical poetry of Shah Mohammed for its brave resistance during the Anglo-Punjab Wars of the 1840s against British expansionism (D. Singh 1999) now stood, just a decade later, as a negation of its past glory. The project of composite Punjabi identity was halted by the seemingly unchallengeable imperialist rule.

Late nineteenth century Punjab saw two diametrically opposite trajectories of Punjabi identity. The first, which altered the relation between *Punjābiyat* and *Sikhī* in a complex way, was the fragmentation of Punjabi identity along religious lines triggered by **(p. 486)** religious reform movements amongst Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities. The resistance of the three Punjabi religious communities to the cultural-religious onslaught of ‘imperialism’ in the form of Christianity could, in theory, have become the basis of

Punjabi unity, but in practice, it sharpened religious identities and gave impetus to cultural and economic competitiveness between the three communities (Singh 2008, 2010b). It is important to note here the contradictory nature of globalizing imperialism by acknowledging its contribution in giving birth to a fourth religious component of Punjabi identity—Punjabi Christians—which remains largely neglected in academic discourse on Punjabi identity. The Christian missionaries were the pioneers in the establishment of modern printing techniques and facilities in Punjabi language. Most of the Punjabi Christians were converts from the *dalits*; there is some evidence of upper-caste conversions too. Field visits to Punjab's countryside in the last few years show that Christian Punjabi *dalits* are avid readers of Punjabi newspapers, and certainly are important contributors to the expanding circulation and economic success of Punjabi newspapers (Singh 2012).

The second trajectory, developed in opposition to the fragmentation of Punjabi identity, was in the political-economic domain in the form of the emergence of the Unionist Party in Punjab (Talbot 1996). This party was a class-based political alliance of the peasantry—especially of its elite sections—of the three main religious communities of Punjab. This party tried to invent a third way beyond the demands for India and Pakistan. It toyed with the idea of an independent Punjab. Khizr Hayat Khan Tiwana, a Unionist, who was the last Premier of the unified Punjab opposed Jinnah and the 1947 partition of India from a Punjabi nationalist perspective. As a last ditch effort to prevent Punjab's partition, he tried to tempt the British into accepting his proposal for carving out Punjab as an independent political entity different from both India and Pakistan (Malik 1998; Tiwana 1999). However, the events of 1947 compounded the tragedy of Punjab. If in 1849 Punjab had lost its sovereignty, it had at least kept its united territorial entity intact. In 1947, it lost even this. The partitioning of Punjab into two—West Punjab becoming a part of the Muslim Pakistan and East Punjab becoming a part of 'secular' India (Singh 2005)—was accompanied by the suppression of a memory: of the suffering of horrific violence by helpless victims often in the name of protecting 'culture'. Both *Punjābiyat* and Sikh culture remain tainted by the ignominy of those terrible times; only recently some attempts have been made by Punjabis to revisit the tragedy through the eyes of the survivors (Butalia 2000; see also the remarkable documentary *Rabba Hun Kee Kariye* directed by Ajay Bhardwaj).

Impeded *Punjābiyat* and Forms of Renewal

The emergence of the two nation states of India and Pakistan relocated the two Punjabs within two very different situations. Pakistani Punjab became politically dominant in

(p. 487) Pakistan but at the cost of surrendering regional Punjabi identity (Samad 1995). Indian Punjab, a relatively small state in the Indian federation, saw a vigorous twenty-year battle for the creation of a Punjabi speaking state but remained, politically, a marginal state in the political power dynamics of the Indian federal state in spite of its impressive success in meeting India's food needs (Singh 2008). Indian Punjab faced competing claims of secular Indian nationalism, Hindu nationalism, Sikh nationalism, and Marxist internationalism, all related to each other and to Punjabi identity in a range of contradictory forms (Singh 1997, 2002). The creation of a Punjabi speaking state on 1 November 1966 was a major milestone in the strengthening of linguistically oriented Punjabi identity (Singh 1999) and the claim that this was achieved 'by the militant struggles of the Sikhs alone against the opposition of the Hindu communalist forces' (Sharma 1993: 46) misses the shining contribution of many Punjabi Hindus, such as Seth Ram Nath. *Sikhī* succeeded in reaffirming some of its ties with *Punjābiyat*. This was the first time in its history that the Punjabi language acquired the status of official language of a state—a status it did not have even when Punjab was a sovereign state under Ranjit Singh (Singh 2008). This new Punjab went through rapid capitalist transformation, especially of its agrarian sector triggering environmental degradation and bourgeois degeneration. Sikh revivalism of the 1980s rose as a rebellion against this cultural degradation (Singh 1987) and the more recent environmental initiatives led by Baba Sewa Singh Khadur Sahib and Baba Seechewal have reaffirmed the underappreciated vitality of Sikh cultural and ecological values.

Diaspora and *Punjābiyat*: New Challenges and Opportunities

Silently and slowly, Punjabi identity has been emerging as a force with the growth of the Punjabi diaspora (Singh 2012). *Punjābiyat* remains visibly marked by a degraded machismo and consumerist culture, with undertones of casteism (Dhanda 2009, 2012). The spatial and cultural relocation of Punjabis to the West from the 1960s onwards has opened a new space for the articulation of the common dimensions of Punjabi identity. Parallel to and opposed to this articulation of shared Punjabi identity is the phenomenon of sections of the diaspora becoming major players in articulating sectarian divisions in Punjabi identity (Tatla 1999). The contradictory voice of this diaspora has acquired special significance in the accelerating process of the globalization of the world economy and media (Singh 2012). Due to increased cross-border cultural exchanges facilitated by globalization, the global Punjabi diaspora's imagination has suddenly been fired by the realization of their power as possible catalysts in the making of a global Punjabi identity.

The organization of world Punjabi conferences and the new technological possibilities of instant translations between different scripts of Punjabi language have removed many barriers of communication. Magazines and websites publishing Punjabi literature simultaneously in different scripts and Pan-Punjabi organizations such as the Academy (p. 488) of the Punjab in North America (APNA http://www.apnaorg.com/) are playing a key role in forging common cultural ties of *Punjābiyat*.

The Punjabi diaspora, like all other social entities under capitalism, is highly differentiated. The activities of the intellectual elite of the diaspora in the cause of global Punjabi identity seem to overshadow the mundane day-to-day life of ordinary diasporic existence, which includes socializing in religious places of worship. Cleavages of religion, caste, language, and script have not disappeared; in some instances they have become stronger than they are in the homeland. The conundrum that is faced by diasporic Ravidassias (largely drawn from the Chamar caste) is whether or not to retain their fraternal ties with upper-caste Sikhs implied by their hitherto common worship of the Guru Granth Sahib, the uniquely designated Guru of the Sikhs, or to sever these ties by adopting a separate Ravidassia identity differentiated symbolically through adopting the *Amrit Bani*, a recently popularized compilation of the verses of their Guru Ravidas (Dhanda 2012). The experience of religious socializing gives Punjabi settlers an autonomous socio-cultural space but does not contribute to strengthening cross-religious bonds.

However, *Punjābiyat* has received a massive boost by the popular appeal of Punjabi language and culture in cinema and film music (Punjab Research Group 2010). A shared Punjabi culture gets a resounding celebration, with some leading Bollywood producers and directors (such as Yash Chopra) having found something of a formula for success by including Punjabi cultural themes in a film's narrative (Das 2006). Even the image of the *sardār* has been transformed in this new enterprise of Punjabi celebration: no longer presented as a buffoon, the Singh is now a king, powerful, smart, sexy and glamorous (Singh 2010). Harbhajan Mann has shot into stardom as a lead male actor of many new Punjabi films (Abbi 2012); while in Pakistan, Punjabi films in the genre of *Maula Jat,* representing the brave and rustic Punjabi farmer, have been a roaring success. Sultan Rahi, the star of many films in this genre, has become the most popular cinema hero in Pakistan, and Punjabi cinema has in recent years eclipsed the previously dominant Urdu cinema (Ayers 2008). But unfortunately in both the Punjabs, the success of Punjabi cinema has tended to reinforce the masculine and patriarchal dimensions of *Punjābiyat* and the acquisitive culture of bourgeois consumerism. The original tenets of *Sikhī* have a historic role to play in confronting Punjabi social trends and cultural practices that violate values of egalitarianism and respect for nature.

In the globalizing world of today, the emotional appeal of a common and shared Punjabi identity faces a threat from disruptive religious sectarianism but it could be said that people's linguistic affinities and cultural ties are of such endurable strength and intensity that fissures can be avoided. The Punjabi language has a long history; it has a highly developed literature and is spoken (if not read and written) by many millions of people not only in the Indian and Pakistani Punjab but almost in every continent of the world.

The existence of a Punjabi-speaking state (however limited its powers be in India's federal structure), whose *raison d'être* is Punjabi language, remains a powerful source of strength for the Punjabi language. In spite of the global hegemony of English and the Indian hegemony of Hindi, the Punjabi language in Indian Punjab is flourishing. The (p. 489) continuous increase in the circulation of Punjabi newspapers is one indicator among many of the vibrant vitality of the Punjabi language. Even the Hind Samachar group of newspapers, an Arya Samaj institution that has a long history of anti-Punjabi language campaigns (Banga 1999) has been forced to start a Punjabi daily *Jagbānī in* order to cash in on the growing readership for Punjabi newspapers.

Punjabi language has very little, if any, state support in Pakistan but the indications are that this is likely to change in the future (Ayers 2008). In the Punjabi diaspora, the interest in Punjabi language is certainly on the increase even if it is not phenomenal. *Punjābiyat* is bound to be strengthened by the growth of Punjabi language. This is not to suggest that Punjabi language is the most important marker of Punjabi identity. It is possible that a shared Punjabi culture, which may be difficult to define but very palpable in lived experience, may be the main marker of Punjabi identity. Due to the umbilical relationship between the rise of Sikhism and the raised stature of Punjabi language, it is important not to distort this richly complex relationship by equating Sikhī with Punjabi language and *Punjābiyat*. Rather, a celebration of the inclusive dimensions of *Punjābiyat* —cutting across religious divisions—can nourish the vibrancy of Sikh culture, which has not only played a key role in the continuing growth of Punjabi language, but has much to offer by way of tempering the famed exuberance of *Punjābiyat* that easily slides into an unconstrained rapaciousness in the service of capitalist development. Both Sikhi and *Punjābiyat* have to simultaneously grow and find their limits.

Conclusion

Punjabi identity has a long lineage. It has gone through cycles of fusion and fragmentation. It reached its peak with the emergence of a sovereign Punjabi state between 1799 and 1849. The annexation of this sovereign state by the expanding British

Empire led to a splintering of Punjabi identity. Though during the ninety-eight years of British rule in Punjab there were conflicting tendencies of fragmentation and fusion, the end of colonial rule came with a terrible division of Punjab and Punjabi identity. Punjabis renegotiated their identities in Indian Punjab, Pakistan Punjab, and in diaspora. The diasporic experience has raised the prospect of recovery of Punjabi identity as a global Punjabi identity transcending the barriers of nation states. The intellectual diaspora, the elite sections of the diaspora, and the politically progressive sections of the diaspora inspired by socialist internationalism articulate aspirations for global Punjabi identity. The major section of the Punjabi diaspora continues to rely upon religion as an important mode of organizing social life. This concentration on religion is not without its problems. Sikh culture, for example, is increasingly challenged in recent times to face up to its failures in uprooting caste-pride and gender bias.

New generations within the Punjabi diaspora are however focusing not on religion but are reinventing Punjabi identity through hybrid music and art forms. Within India, the historian Surjit Hans has recently completed twenty years of translation of the entire (p. 490) works of Shakespeare into Punjabi, with the hope that it will bring together the Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu Punjabis. As well, the revolutionary Punjabi *dalit* bard, Lal Singh Dil (1943–2007), born into a Sikh family of Ramdasia Chamars but died a converted Muslim, has had his works recently translated into English, bringing the neglected element of *Punjābiyat*, its thinly disguised yet deep-rooted caste-pride, to a wider readership. Whilst Punjabi language remains an important marker of Punjabi identity, due to different ideological and cultural hegemonies, the development of Punjabi language remains an uneven phenomenon in India, Pakistan, and the diaspora. That Sikh culture would always be enmeshed with any articulation of *Punjābiyat* should be assumed rather than denied. The acknowledgement of this enmeshing dialectically opens the possibility of interrogating lived Sikh culture for its suppressed deviations from the inclusive norms of *Sikhī*, which *Punjābiyat* embodies, whilst offering the normative resources of equalitarian and ecological principles of *Sikhī* to channel *Punjābiyat* away from its obsession with a degraded machismo and an unbridled capitalist consumerism.

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The Sikh Diaspora

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Abstract and Keywords

This article provides a historical account of Sikhs' settlement abroad starting in the colonial era to the contemporary period. While narrating major institutional developments within overseas Sikh communities the article highlights their interaction with host societies and the ways they have retained religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage abroad and kept a close relationship with their homeland, the Punjab.

Keywords: Sikh diaspora, history, settlement, institutions, heritage, homeland, Punjab

THE Sikh diaspora is a rather modern and recent formation. The term was first used by Barrier and Dusenbery in 1986 when they organized a conference on the topic at the University of Michigan (Barrier and Dusenbery 1989). Over a decade later the Sikh Diaspora was much elaborated by Tatla (1999) and Axel (2001) in their research focusing upon overseas Sikh mobilization against the Indian army’s invasion of the Golden Temple in June 1984. Since then, several studies have appeared popularizing the term’s use.

There are, as well, two competing terms: ‘Punjabi diaspora’ emphasizes shared Punjabi language and culture among Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims who have emigrated from the Punjab. In contrast, as a consequence of the partition of Punjab in 1947, overseas Sikhs and Punjabi Hindus abroad are counted as part of the Indian Diaspora while Muslims from West Punjab are designated as part of the Pakistani Diaspora. The studies of such conglomerate categories subsuming distinct regional peoples under ‘national’ labels are increasingly in vogue (Lal 2006). In Indian nationalist discourse, the preferred term is ‘Indian diaspora’ although its constituents are noted grudgingly, while in many host states, Sikhs are treated as part of ‘Indian’, ‘South Asian’, ‘Asian’, or ‘Black’ categories as the context for enumeration demands.

Despite wider use, the debate whether overseas Sikh communities fulfil necessary and sufficient conditions for being labelled a diaspora continues. In a careful appraisal of Sikh

communities abroad, however, Tatla (1999) has argued that there are sufficient reasons to label overseas Sikhs as a diaspora.

Pattern of Migration and Location

Almost all accounts of Sikh migration note the onset of colonial rule in Punjab in 1849 and how it created conditions and overseas locations for Sikhs. With the annexation of Punjab in 1849, a few Sikh rebels were exiled abroad. Bhai Maharaj Singh was sent to (p. 496) Singapore in 1849 and Duleep Singh, the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was pensioned off to England in 1854. In the 1880s, Baba Ram Singh, head of Namdhari sect was also banished.

Migration of ordinary Sikhs, however, began as they were recruited into British Indian regiments after the Mutiny of 1857. Sikhs, along with some others were classified as a martial race and this proved to be the chief means of Sikhs' settlement abroad. Meanwhile the British administration in Punjab had also laid the foundation for considerable inter-district mobility and migration within the province by introducing large-scale canal networks in the sparsely populated western districts of Punjab. Thousands of Sikh farmers from the congested central areas of the province were encouraged to move to these canal colonies where they had access to more land with irrigation facilities for cultivation. Farmers' increased incomes and changed outlook towards migration meant they were ready to exploit new opportunities abroad (Ali 1988). Thus as the news of better overseas prospects filtered down through tales of returning soldiers Punjabi farmers were ready to sail abroad.

If the assisted migration was the initial means for Sikhs going abroad, it also determined their early destinations. Much of early settlement was in the Far East starting with the Malaya Colonies, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, and the Dutch East Indies. Hong Kong proved to be major clearing centre for further migration to other countries notably to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji and later towards the Pacific Coast of North America.

Between 1858 and the First World War, the number of Sikh soldiers increased sharply. Sikhs fought in several areas. The first Sikhs to go abroad were taken out by British officers who recruited them as policemen or soldiers. C. V. Creagh, Deputy Superintendent of Police at Sind, was transferred to Hong Kong in 1866; he recommended Sikhs for the colony's new police force, and in June 1867, 100 Sikhs arrived in Hong Kong, perhaps the first batch of Sikhs overseas. Impressed by their services, the British instituted further recruitment. The first overseas gurdwara was

opened in Hong Kong in 1901, and Punjabis soon dominated the colony's police force, maintaining their position until the 1950s (Kaur 2009).

Sikh entry into Malaya also occurred for security reasons. In 1873, Captain Speedy recruited Sikh soldiers to combat Chinese insurgency among Perak's tin mines. They were subsequently drafted into other government services and formed the nucleus of state security forces following Malaya's passage into British control (Sandhu 1969). As security requirements expanded, the government started recruiting directly from the Punjab. In 1896 the Malay States Guides, numbering 900, almost all Sikh soldiers, were placed under Colonel Walker. A police gurdwara was established in Hong Kong, while in Penang soldiers established the Wadda Gurdwara in 1901. A small contingent of policemen recruited from Shanghai and Hong Kong was sent to Fiji and Thailand. In Fiji they tried their hands in the sugar-cane fields among the many Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims who had arrived earlier (Singh n.d.). Afterwards many soldiers drifted to Australia and New Zealand (Bhatti and Dusenbery 2001, Gabbi 1998, McLeod 1984, Singh, n.d.).

(p. 497) In the 1890s Punjab was opened to agency houses. A Sindhi contractor, Jeevanjee, recruited Punjabi labour for a Kenya-Ugandan railway line. Nearly 10,000 Punjabi men emigrated, of whom over 3,000 were Sikhs, some of whom were Ramgarhia carpenters and craftsmen. After the railway line linking Uganda and Kenya was completed in 1901, some returned and others remigrated during the 1920s. By 1948 there were 10,663 Sikhs in Kenya besides smaller communities in Uganda and Tanzania.

From the Far East, more ambitious men, mostly soldiers, then set out to North America. The movement began in 1900, and by the end of the decade over 10,000 Sikhs had settled on the West Coast, working in California farms, on the Pacific Railways, and various sawmills of British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington (La Brack 1988, Leonard 1992). The Sikh migration to North America coincided with increasingly restrictive immigration policies imposed by Canada and the United States. With thousands of Punjabis waiting to sail towards Pacific States, a major confrontation took place in Vancouver in 1914 when Gurdit Singh chartered the ship *Komagata Maru* from Hong Kong taking 379 passengers on board thereby throwing a direct challenge to the authorities (Johnston 1979). The ship was forcibly returned back provoking a bitter reaction among many Sikhs who found a revolutionary solution to their woes. Aided by some Hindu intellectuals they decided to return and wage a war against the British rule in India. Although they lost the battle before it could begin as the colonial administration in Punjab foiled their planned *ghadar* (insurrection), the returning Sikhs made an inedible impact upon the Punjabi society (Puri 1983). As a result of this exodus from the US and Canada, the Sikh population in these countries dwindled sharply.

Postcolonial Migrations

On 15 August 1947 Punjab was partitioned. Almost two-thirds of the western region of the province with hundreds of Sikh sacred shrines, including Nankana, the birthplace of the Sikh founder, became part of the new Islamic state of Pakistan, while the rest of the province joined a bifurcated India. Punjabis were also diminished in numbers as unprecedented communal riots and ethnic cleansing accompanied the Partition killing over 250,000 Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims. For several million Sikhs, migration meant abandoning larger and productive farmlands of the western region to resettle on the smaller lands of eastern Punjab with vastly diminished resources as most had migrated to western districts only a few decades before (Randhawa 1954). A long process of official resettlement further exacerbated the tragic dislocation.

Uncertain, unsettled, and with shrunken fortunes, many searched for farming lands in neighbouring provinces and those with trade skills headed for Delhi while others explored overseas prospects. Coincidentally, this unsettled period saw the opening of Western countries, especially of the United Kingdom due to an (p. 498) acute shortage of labour for its post-war industrial boom. Both Canada and United States had also reversed their strict immigration rules: the Luce–Cellar Act in the USA removed Asian Indians from the ‘barred zone’ in 1946. Many farmers from congested areas of Doaba mortgaged their lands or pooled family resources and sailed to Britain. Emigrants from the Malwa region joined them a few years later. After further liberalization of immigration policies in the mid-1960s, Canada and the United States became major destinations for Punjabi peasants along with some professionals from the 1970s. In this later period several Middle Eastern countries also started importing labour for construction projects financed through petrodollar surpluses. Peasants and artisans from Punjab flew as contractual labour to Dubai, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iraq, their numbers affected by the erratic demand and political hostilities in the region.

Another political upheaval added to the exodus. In 1981, the Akali Dal launched a movement for the devolution of power from the centre to the Punjab state. The central government’s response was, after protracted negotiations, to send the army into the Golden Temple at Amritsar in June 1984. Officially aimed at flushing out ‘terrorists’, the bungled army action killed Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his associates along with several hundred pilgrims and completely destroyed the sacred site nearby, the Akal Takhat. This action turned the hitherto proud and confident community of Punjab into an insecure and vulnerable minority. Reaction to the army action was swift and led to a decade-long insurrection by militant groups. Two Sikh bodyguards assassinated the Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, on 31 October 1984; as a reaction, anti-Sikh riots

gripped Delhi and some northern cities. Hundreds of Sikhs fled to Punjab, while some Hindus left the province. Punjab temporarily became a safe haven and an effective Sikh homeland. Indian security forces, given unprecedented powers, eventually crushed the Sikh rebellion. In the process, human rights violations occurred on a large scale. Thousands of civilians suspected of abetting terrorism were killed, while abductions, extortions, murders, and forced disappearances were widespread. A new category was now added to Sikh emigration—the refugee, many of whom were assisted by relatives abroad. Refugees were admitted but faced non-acceptance, with a few granted asylum. On the insistence of Indian authorities, several were handed back.

Punjab's political culture and periodic instability and the Sikh peasantry's highly competitive social ethos gave rise to an incipient culture of migration. Every village now has its connections abroad; social status has come to be defined in having a foreign kin (Tatla 2009). Numerous travel agents in Punjab villages and towns are assisting legal and illegal emigration. This flight abroad has witnessed several unfortunate events and scandals. In the last decade, educational visa via IELTS has seen several thousand young men and women going to Australia, leading to some violent incidents there, while the preferred destination of Canada has created its unique social ethos in rural Punjab with convenient reciprocal alliances and hefty dowry payments for Canadian brides or bridegrooms.

(p. 499) The Sikh Diaspora: A Demographic Profile

Of about 1.5 to 2 million Sikhs living today in the diaspora, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States have the largest communities, with substantial numbers living in the Far East, East Africa, Oceania, and the Gulf States, while there are a small number of Sikhs in almost every country of the world. Gathering data for the total population of Sikh diaspora is problematic, as only a few countries (Canada, Britain, Singapore, Australia) list Sikhs in their national censuses. In its 2001 census, the United Kingdom reported 336,419 Sikhs (0.5% of UK population of 58 million) increasing to 389,000 in 2006 mid-census survey. Among Canada's 30 million population Sikhs constituted nearly 1% with 278,415 a steep rise from 147,440 in 1991 and expected to grow even more by the 2011 census, when they are likely to emerge as the largest component of the Indian diaspora. For the United States, precise figures are elusive. Sikhs are counted as part of Asian Indians, who numbered 2,843,391 in 2010 a 70% rise from 1,678,765 in 2001. The Sikh proportion of the Indian population in the United States has continued to decline from the 1960s, when Sikhs constituted a majority of 'East Indians'. Indeed, the first Indian religious place in the United States was the Stockton, California gurdwara, established in

1912. As the emigration of Hindus to the USA has increased sharply, current figures for the Hindu population is put at 2.2 million of 2.8 Indians, while Sikhs are estimated to be around 250,000, although higher figures are also quoted.

For the rest of the world, only rough estimates are available. It seems reasonable to assume that Europe exclusive of the United Kingdom has about 100,000 Sikhs; Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland have about 5,000 to 10,000 Sikhs each; while for Italy, which has seen a major increase in the last five years, estimates suggest 70,000 (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011). In the Asia Pacific some closer estimates can be extracted from various sources. In the 2006 census for Australia, 26,500 Sikhs were enumerated with the present figure perhaps double that number due to recent IELTS migrants. In New Zealand, Indians were numbered 42,408 in the 2001 census; Hindus are listed as 25,293, with Sikhs perhaps as many as 10,000. Sikh communities in other Asian Pacific countries are as follows: Singapore, 12,000; Hong Kong, 5,000; Malaysia, 36,000; Indonesia, 5,000; Philippines, 10,000; Thailand, 12,000; and Fiji, 1,200. In East Africa, the Sikh population has changed greatly. When Kenya gained freedom in 1960, there were 21,169 Sikhs. Most left due to policies of ‘Africanization’. The exodus from Uganda was even more dramatic when Idi Amin expelled Asians in 1972. A majority were accepted by the United Kingdom. Today, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia together have about 10,000 Sikhs, of whom a large proportion is composed of wealthy business families. A small number of Sikhs live in Afghanistan, some turned refugees with the rise of political violence there. Russia, Ukraine, and many of other former Soviet republics as well South American countries have a few hundred Sikhs each. (p. 500) These numbers do not account for the large number of transient labourers in the Middle East or for Sikh refugees, especially in Western Europe and North America; precise figures are buried under various ‘national’ categories. A very rough table of the strength of Sikh diaspora is provided in Table 41.1, with figures’ reliability varying from almost certainty to sheer guesswork.

Table 41.1 Estimates of overseas Sikh communities			
UK 389,000	Canada 278,415	USA 250,000	Italy 70,000
Germany 10,000	France 7,000	Netherlands 6,000	Belgium 5,000
Switzerland 2,500	Austria 2,794	Norway 3,000	Sweden 1,500
Denmark 2,500	Ireland 1,200	Malaysia 36,000	Singapore 9,733
Philippines 30,000	Thailand 35,000	Australia 26,429	New Zealand 9507
Hong Kong 2,000	Fiji 4,674	Indonesia 8,000	East Africa 30,000
Latin America 10,000	Nepal 5890	Pakistan 50,000	Afghanistan 3,000
Middle East 70,000			

Note: Data is derived from many diverse sources, except for Canada and UK figures which are from 2001 Census, all others are estimates, some more reliable than others.

Among these statistical figures, some demographic features are worth noting. The Sikh population of the Far East is relatively stable except for sharp increases in Australia due to student migration from Punjab and secondary migration from Southeast Asia (Bhatti and Dusenbery 2001). Europe and North America are major destinations where primary migration is taking place especially of professionals and many undocumented immigrants. The Canadian Sikh population is increasing fast and its age profile shows a majority of working and reproductive age. Great Britain has almost zero primary migration while the age and family profile approaches that of the host society. In the rest of Europe, Italy has seen large migration recently, while remigration from old centres of settlement to Western countries continues. Across the diaspora transnational Sikh marriages are another source for such relocation.

Socio-Religious Differentiation within the Sikh Diaspora

Historically, Sikhism's distinct appeal lay in claiming the downtrodden, and condemning notions of pollution deriving from caste distinction. Such dissimilarity notwithstanding, Sikhism's interaction with Hindu society has left the distinctive mark of a parallel caste-type structure among Sikhs: Jats who own cultivable land form the upper (p. 501) echelon, artisans occupy the middle strata, while landless labourers reside at the bottom. Such sociocultural differentiation is reproduced through endogenous marriage alliances in Punjab—although the state's positive discriminatory policies have eroded the most rigid restrictive practices of caste.

Overseas this caste hierarchy has been reproduced taking the form of religious expression. In effect, diaspora space has offered each social group among Sikhs space to project their identity through separate gurdwaras. There are for example both Ramgarhia and Ravidasi gurdwaras—the former are among artisans while the latter among Dalits.

Life in the diaspora has also helped reverse the Punjab occupational pattern; Jat Sikhs, who form over two-thirds of the community, have adapted to all kinds of manual labour. Similarly Chamars (landless labourers in Punjab) have shed their low status by utilizing their new-found prosperity to construct exclusive Ravidasi gurdwaras—these are now increasingly called Ravidass Bhawans, assertions of a separate identity. Overseas Chamars, indeed, deserve special consideration as diasporan space has offered them a wider choice and it seems they are in the process of marking out a separate religious identity for its members. Using the memory of past hostility between the Jats and Chamars in Punjab, Chamars have even contemplated leaving the Sikh fold in attempts to assert a distinctive Ravidasi identity (Juergensmeyer 1988, Takhar 2005).

Sants, Sectarianism, and 3HO/ Sikh Dharma

Namdharis, Nirankaris, and Radhasoamis are well established in the diaspora although their combined strength is probably less than 5% of the community. All three see regular visits from their respective heads.

Another feature of the Sikh diaspora is reverence shown to sants, who are traditional preachers in Punjab. There are three kinds of sants; the first are associated with an Udasi lineage, members of which used to manage historic shrines in Punjab. Second are

peasants-turned-sants either through association with a historic shrine or a *dera* or *taksal* (Tatla 1992). The third kind consists of traditional *sadhus* who combine elements of Sikhism with Sufism or Ravidasi or Valmiki traditions and attract followers. Currently there is strong presence of Nanaksar saints in UK and Canada (Nesbitt 1985).

In addition, some diaspora Sikhs pay obeisance to popular deities by donating or maintaining their shrines in Punjab while others employ *babas*—generally Punjabi Muslims known as *pirs* and *hakims*—who practise sorcery, herbal therapy, magic, and occultism, and usually offer their services through advertisements in Punjabi media.

A new variety of Sikh emerged in the late 1960s under the influence of Harbhajan Singh 'Yogi', a yoga teacher, when some 3,000 Americans adopted his brand of Sikhi. Subsequently Yogi Bhajan established a number of ashrams in North America as well as commercial enterprises. As well, Yogi began to promote himself as the self-styled (p. 502) 'Chief Administrative and Religious Authority for the Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere'. Both the United States and Canada accepted baptized Sikh recruits into their armies (Shamil 2005).

Sikh Diasporic Institutions: Gurdwaras

Among the Sikh diaspora, the most important community institution are the gurdwaras. Besides functioning as places of worship, gurdwaras also serve as centres of social, educational, and political activities. As the population of overseas Sikhs has gone up, so have the gurdwaras. For early settlers, the gurdwara provided meals as well as accommodation until they could find alternative means. Railway workers built the first gurdwara at Kilindini, Kenya, in 1892. The Hong Kong Gurdwara followed in 1901, and there was one in Penang in the same year. Canadian Sikhs built a gurdwara in Vancouver in 1907 and another in Victoria in 1912. In 1911, with a generous donation by the Maharajah of Patiala, the first gurdwara was established in London. While there are nearly 180 gurdwaras in Britain, Canada and the United States are not far behind with nearly 100 gurdwaras. All European cities have gurdwaras with Germany having more than 20 while Finland supports just one in Helsinki. In the Far East, Malaysia as the oldest Sikh settlement has 113 gurdwaras scattered throughout the provinces, Singapore has 7, Thailand 17, Philippines 15, while recent Sikh settlement in Australia has more than 20 in its major cities. East African countries have nearly 30 gurdwaras while sparse Sikh residents in Latin America have established nearly 15 gurdwaras there.

Recently, compromises engineered by pioneer Sikh settlers, such as the use of chairs and bare-head attendance, have been fully rejected in favour of orthodoxy. Since the

mid-1970s most gurdwaras are increasingly managed by *Amritdhari* Sikhs. An elected body chosen by adult male and female Sikhs of the area manages the gurdwaras. The management committees provide a base for aspiring community leaders and a place to honour and receive dignitaries from the host society and the Punjab. The prestige and income of major gurdwaras has meant that such elections are keenly contested; elections at the Ross Street Gurdwara, Vancouver; Richmond Gurdwara, New York; and Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Southall are watched with keen interest.

Amritdharis, who constitute the core of the Khalsa Panth, share the faith with *Sahajdharis* and *Monas* (clean-shaven), who constitute a majority in the diaspora. Believing in a sole omnipotent god, disregarding rituals and idols, ideal Sikhs are expected to work honestly, share wealth by giving one-tenth of their income for good causes, recite a set of sacred verses, and join the congregation regularly at the gurdwara. Of course as in any complex community there are varying beliefs and attachments to its ideals.

Daily routines within a gurdwara from sunrise to sunset are remarkably similar across the diaspora locations, all focusing upon the centre of worship, the Guru Granth Sahib. (p. 503) Langar too is regularly served to the needy. Various life cycle ceremonies are also conducted within the gurdwara as also are death rituals with the caveat that ashes may be taken to Kiratpur, Punjab, although immersion in local rivers may also suffice.

The Sikh tradition does not recognize any priestly class but there are those who specialize in preaching its tenets and history who are called granthis, ragis, kathakars, gianis, and dhadis. Although laymen and laywomen can conduct services at the gurdwara, virtually all gurdwaras employ granthis to maintain their daily routine and offer various services. Historically, granthis have come solely from Punjab, although recently there has been some concern at the Punjabi granthi’s inability to comprehend English well. Although Punjab has a training college (Gurmat College, Patiala), most granthis have little knowledge of English and are thus unable to impart Sikh tradition to new generations. Moreover, in view of 9/11 developments, immigration restrictions have become operative upon them also. However, in no country are there as yet locally educated Sikhs prepared to become granthis, as their low status and pay conditions are such as to make it an unattractive occupation.

While the Guru Granth in its original language remains the focus of worship in all countries, an English version was also discussed in English-speaking countries. That such a version could be read was one thing; that such could be accorded the same status as the Guru Granth Sahib was clearly another. This issue was raised by Dr Owen Cole (1982) who was concerned with the lack of comprehension among younger Sikhs. His suggestion that overseas Sikhs place an English version on the same pedestal as the traditional text was, however, too much to contemplate. This issue of nurturing the Sikh tradition

through the scriptural language poses an enduring question for the coming generation of Sikhs in the diasporan locations—with local language screens of translated versions displayed being one solution that has emerged recently.

Centres of Social Services and Mobilization

In the pre-1947 period, much of the social and political activities were gurdwara-based. Early associations in the Far East chose their leaders along regional rivalries—for example, Majha versus Malwa. In North America, the Khalsa Diwan Society was formed in March 1909 in Vancouver inspired by Teja Singh (1877–1965), a Columbia University student turned missionary who then helped in building the Victoria Gurdwara in 1912. Earlier Teja Singh had formed the Khalsa Jatha of the British Isles in 1908 with some Cambridge University students (Anand et al. 2008).

Gurdwaras have been central to all kinds of mobilization from racial discrimination issues to the right to wear turbans to the issue of Punjabi language teaching. Early in 1911, it was Teja Singh, who as representative of the Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver led a deputation to Ottawa in 1911 on behalf of British Columbia Sikhs seeking the removal of (p. 504) the ‘continuous clause’ in Canadian immigration rules (Tatla 2007). The Khalsa Diwan Society played a key role in representing South Asians’ interests to the Canadian government. It also raised $22,000 for *Komagata Maru* passengers to pay for the charter, besides providing funds for the *Gadr* movement. The *Jaito Morcha* agitation of 1924–5 drew support from the diaspora. In 1983, Puran Singh of the Nishkam Sewak Jatha of Birmingham, England, led a large Sikh procession to present a petition to Downing Street for a student’s right to wear his turban. The turban, which distinguishes some male Sikhs, has led to numerous cases of discrimination, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, where employers find Sikhs adding to their colour difference by sporting a turban. From the Sikh point of view, turban wearing is a normal social custom. The denial of jobs or exclusion from other public services to Sikh men on ‘safety’ or ‘appearance’ grounds has been a frequent occurrence and has led to numerous mobilizations, court rulings, and lobbying through human rights organizations. A few such mobilizations have been bitter affairs, for example, Sikh inclusion in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Reproduction of Faith and Emergence of Sikhism as ‘World Religion’

The presence of Sikhs in many countries across the globe has helped to internationalize the Sikh faith as a ‘world religion’. The Sikh diaspora has also internationalized its faith with numerous publications in various languages. Overseas Sikhs have made conscious efforts to be a part of international religious platforms, such as the World Religious Meetings in Chicago, Barcelona, Moscow, and others as well. The third-centenary celebrations of the community in 1999 saw much interest in the community’s artistic heritage. A magnificent travelling exhibition, Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms, was assembled at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, with many items from the Queen’s private collections.

Successful Sikh professionals and businessmen have funded endowments enabling some leading universities to offer Sikh Studies courses and create teaching positions. Such works are becoming possible with Sikh studies established in major Western universities. Sikh studies are also being promoted at the university level. The Federation of Sikh societies of Canada financed the first chair of Sikh studies at the University of British Columbia in 1988. A second chair was financed at the University of Michigan, and the Bindra family endowed the Chair at Hofstra University, New York. In 2000, Nishkam Sewak Jatha of Birmingham, England, funded a lectureship at the University of Birmingham. The Sikh Foundation, led by Narinder Singh Kapany, has financed several courses at the University of California–Berkeley and Columbia University, and funded chairs of Sikh studies at various University of California campuses. The Sikh Foundation has also financed a Sikh section at the Asian Arts Museum of San Francisco.

(p. 505) Pilgrimage to holy shrines, especially Nankana, is now an established practice. Every November over 2,000 Sikhs from various countries join for prayers at Nankana Sahib and visit other sacred places including Maharajah Ranjit Singh’s Fort in Lahore. Hemkunt in the Himalayas is also gaining popularity. In Great Britain, Sikhs pay homage to Maharajah Duleep Singh’s Elveden Estate in Suffolk; there is interest in preserving the *Gadr* inheritance in San Francisco; and the remains of Maharaj Singh in Singapore have been placed within the gurdwara on Silat Road. Traditional festivals, such as the birthday of Guru Nanak, and other dates from the religious calendar are observed in gala shows. On Baisakhi day, which generally falls on 13 April, Sikhs take part in local street processions in many cities; Vancouver sees a colourful parade with Bhangra dancing bands participating in it.

A new generation of Sikh scholars in the West is emerging with potential to undertake serious academic work. Besides launching the *International Journal of Punjab Studies* in 1994 and *Sikh Formations* in 2005, innovative research has been carried on the compilation of sacred scriptures, the Singh Sabha movement, exploring themes of Sikh feminism, theoretical models for understanding contemporary Punjab politics and Sikh nationalism. A Canadian Sikh has translated the Guru Granth into French, and creative fiction has become part of the global Punjabi literature. The Smithsonian National Museum has a small Sikh gallery, and the UK Punjab Heritage Association has contributed to the preservation of Sikh- and Punjab-related arts and collections in the British Museum and various libraries (Stronge 1999). Sat Kartar Khalsa, a follower of Yogi Harbhajan Singh, has recorded melodies from the sacred scriptures. The Malaysian-born Dya Singh, settled in Australia, has combined the Sikh musical tradition with a variety of spiritual and ethnic traditions and has performed internationally accompanied by Dheeraj Shresta and Andrew Clemont. Chris Moony Singh, an Australian convert from Singapore, is engaged in reviving the art of *rebab* hymn singing. The diaspora contribution to liturgical music is becoming notable. For new generation Sikhs who are unable to follow the scriptures, many gurdwaras offer dual language screens with transliteration and translation of hymns.

Linguistic Heritage, Media, and Communication Across the Diaspora

Punjabi as a common inheritance retains special status as the language of sacred scriptures. First-generation Sikhs invariably used Punjabi in their homes; successive generations have grown up in a bilingual environment, with the host society’s language becoming dominant through the school curriculum and education. However, there is a gradual erosion of literacy. As most parents feel concerned about their sons and daughters losing their competence in Punjabi, almost all overseas gurdwaras arrange Punjabi classes. In many countries, Malaysia, Canada, UK, and the United States, residential (p. 506) camps for young pupils have become popular, which besides providing an introduction to the daily lifestyle of a Sikh household, provide some training in Sikh music, language, and religious studies.

New learning materials are becoming available, while many gurdwaras maintain a library of teaching books and materials. Several websites offer instruction in Punjabi language, a course work prepared by Punjabi University is particularly aimed at Punjabi diaspora population. There are related CD packages of encyclopedias including the whole text of the Guru Granth in its 1,430 standard page edition and other selected sacred writings.

Community leaders have often canvassed for more time for Punjabi-language broadcasting by radio and television channels. In Britain, Punjabi-speakers have argued that Punjabi is the second language after English, questioning official patronage of Urdu and Hindi.

The community's concern for the Punjabi language and religious tradition has found strong direction in some countries with the establishment of independent or grant-aided Sikh schools. There are such schools in Britain, Canada, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand which exercise some control over the curriculum. The large settlement of Sikhs in some countries has also seen another response. Some mainstream schools have made provision for the teaching of the Punjabi language and have made Sikhism a part of the religious curriculum for pupils. The UK, for example, offers examination for GCSE and A Levels in Punjabi and Sikhism. A steady stream of pupils have been passing such examinations; over 1,000 at GCSE level and 200+ at Advanced level (Singh and Tatla 2006). In higher education, the University of British Columbia, University of California at Santa Barbara and Berkeley, and Columbia University in New York offer Punjabi classes for graduate students with a language and cultural tour of Punjab every summer.

As part of global communications with the invention of internet and websites, overseas Sikhs have created numerous web-based forums offering discussion groups, matrimonial services, commercial sites, Punjabi fonts, teaching materials, religious hymns to political lobbying. Several radios and TV channels are owned by Sikhs or hired for some hours to broadcast for such viewers.

The Punjabi media is another source of entrainment and information; its history spans almost a century dating to 1907, when *Circular-i- Azadi* was established in Vancouver (Tatla 1994). In the Far East, the *Malaya Darpan* was launched in 1935. In Britain, *Des Pardes* and *Punjab Times* were launched in 1965 and are still in circulation. Literary magazines are produced from time to time; *Basera* began in 1961 in London, and there is *Vatan* from Vancouver. In Bangkok, *Thai Sikh* is published while *Sikh Courier* and *Sikh Messenger* are two English magazines from London with worldwide subscribers. Overseas funds have also supported newspapers in the Punjab, including the *Akali* (Lahore), *Akali Te Pardesi* (Lahore), (Amritsar), and *Kirti* (Amritsar) in the pre-1947 period and more recently, *Desh Sewak* (Chandigarh). Readers can pick a variety of news and views from several Punjabi newspapers and magazines from the internet.

Alongside the Punjabi media, the vitality of the Punjabi language is also reflected through a large corpus of diaspora Punjabi literature published by Sikh writers in (p. 507) various countries. Sikh diaspora literature includes many genres; autobiographies, fiction, and general essays reflecting many facets of community life and its interaction with host

societies. While much of this creative literature is in Punjabi, a new generation of writers are experimenting in English language also. Among them Daljit Nagra (2007, 2011) from Britain has made his mark with two poetry anthologies.

Second and third generation Sikhs are also experimenting with traditional arts, mixing their Punjabi roots with the cultural milieu of new locations. Thus Bhangra has found fusion with many forms of Western music from rock and roll to Bhangra-Muffin hybrid tunes creating a new urban shared cultural space where the Sikh youth intermingle with other South Asians and Blacks (Ballantyne 2006). Some observers have pointed out new identity-formation processes which de-emphasize religious identity through expressions of Punjabi cultural nationalism—Punjabi language and Bhangra and shared popular culture as an ideal among the diaspora. Accordingly such processes are seen as opening up a possibility of broad and more desirable alliance called ‘Punjabiyat’ which might open the ‘segmented and self-enclosed’ Sikh communities towards a more ‘open, liberal and humane society’. Another variant of ethnic identity was advocated by North American Gora Sikhs arguing that they were religiously Sikh but not ethnically Punjabi. A distinction of ethnicity (inherited) and religion (volitional) has led American Sikhs and Canadian Sikhs to try to separate out the Punjabi cultural and Sikh religious aspects of their identity.

Linkages with Punjab and Sikh Diaspora Politics

A major feature of overseas Sikhs is linkages with their homelands. This has meant not only funds transmitted to their kin back home and consolidating familial ties through assisting other members to emigrate etc., but also forging political, social, and cultural ties with Punjabi institutions and organizations. Overseas Sikhs have financed many educational and religious institutions in their native land (Dusenbery and Tatla 2009). As many reports in *Khalsa Samachar* attest, the Khalsa Diwan Society of Vancouver and Malayan Sikhs sent substantial funds to the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar for schools and religious causes including the famous Kanya Mahavidiyala Girls School at Ferozepore. Similarly East African Sikhs have donated liberally to Sikh Educational Conferences and for several Ramgarhia colleges in Punjab. Extensive repairs to historic shrines in Pakistan have been undertaken through such diaspora funds. A modern eighty-bed hospital at Dhahan (Nawanshahar) has been funded through European and North American donations, and so are numerous other institutions scattered throughout Punjab, including a women’s college at Sang Dhesian, a memorial to *Gadr* heroes in Jalandhar City, and a major development project in Kharudi village. Amritsar, as the centre of faith, has

attracted generous donations. In 1995, the Nishkam Sewak (p. 508) Jatha of Britain took the responsibility of renewing the golden plates of the Harmandir with donations across the diaspora. Diaspora Sikh charities such as the United Sikhs, SALDEF, Khalsa Aid (UK), Sikh Najuwan Sabha in Malaysia have responded to various appeals from Punjab and assisted in other causes.

Some of the oldest Sikh communities in the Far East were formally affiliated to the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar by organizing local Khalsa Diwan Societies. In North America, stiff immigration policies and racial discrimination forced Sikhs to form the revolutionary Gadr with headquarters in San Francisco during 1913–18. Blaming British rule in India as the root cause of their humiliation abroad, they set out to Punjab to defeat imperial rule in India. Joined by several Sikhs from other countries, many ghadrites were detained on arrival at Calcutta; several hundred were tried by a special tribunal and given exemplary punishment, including death sentences. Kartar Singh Sarabha was hanged and became a much-celebrated martyr. During the Second World War some Sikhs joined the Indian National Army of Subhash Chander Bose.

In the post-1947 era, Punjab politics has long revolved around three main political groups: the Akali Dal, the Congress Party, and some Communist groups. They all have parallel associations in the diaspora and have provided support to various organizations and causes in the Punjab. In this respect the tragedy of June 1984 deserves special mention as it impacted overseas Sikh communities leading to the formation of several new organizations such as the Babbar Khalsa, International Sikh Youth Federation, World Sikh Organization, Khalistan Council, International Sikh Organization, Sikh Association of America, and California Sikh Youth (Tatla 1999), and established media (*Chardi Kala* in Vancouver; *Awaze Qaum* in Birmingham, *World Sikh News* in Stockton, California). Didar Singh Bains, a millionaire peach farmer from Yuba City, California, financed an office in Washington, DC, where Gurmeet Singh Aulakh became a lobbyist to the US Congress. New leaders sought control of gurdwaras, and the community witnessed several violent clashes, including the murder of two journalists. As the Babbar Khalsa openly called for retribution; its Canadian leader Talwinder Singh Parmar was killed in Punjab. The World Sikh Organization sought the intervention of the United Nations for the ‘Sikh nation’s right to self-determination’. India blamed several states for shielding ‘Sikh terrorists’, and signed extradition treaties with Canada, UK, and some other countries while increasing surveillance through blacklisting hundreds of Sikhs banning their return to Punjab. Canada was singled out as a hotbed of ‘Sikh terrorism’, especially after an Air India flight exploded over the Irish Sea on 23 June 1985, killing all 329 passengers. After eighteen years Ripduman Singh Malik and Ajaib Singh Bagri were charged for conspiracy to bomb the Air India flight, but the judge exonerated them both. Sensational media stories, aspersions, and elaboration through fiction and non-fictional accounts of this tragic event

have unfortunately maligned the whole Sikh community (Tatla 2004). In the post-1984 era, the Sikh diaspora has been portrayed as divided into ‘moderates’ versus ‘fundamentalists’ but this simple and rather convenient portrait belies the complexity of overseas Sikh communities (Nayar 2008).

Certainly, the 1984 tragedy has become a ‘critical event’ forcing many Sikhs to examine the community’s standing in the global world of nation states and to formulate (p. 509) their relationship with the Punjab and post-colonial Indian polity. A major debate has emerged around the need for a sovereign state with various responses, some arguing that Sikhs are a supra-transnational community requiring no anchorage of a homeland or state (Shani 2008), others feeling that Sikhs are a stateless minority among nation states. The elevation of a Sikh to the post of Prime Minister of India has dampened this discourse. This notwithstanding there are many reminders of the vulnerable status of Sikhs abroad amongst which one includes both France’s turban ban and Sikh murders in the aftermath of 9/11. As a result, several Sikh associations have turned their resources away from the pogroms of 1984 to make the public of host nations aware of Sikhs’ separate identity. In America new organizations such as SALDEF, WSC, and the United Sikhs sought dialogue with the US administration especially the police and aviation authority (with regulations to check passengers’ turbans) and the campaign has shifted to seek recognition of turbans, and highlight Sikhs’ contribution to America.

In many countries Sikhs have become visible in public life. In Britain, the USA, and Canada Sikhs are councillors, mayors, and Members of Parliament.

Authority, Consensus, and Direction

Through modern communications overseas Sikhs have developed ever closer links across the globe. As the younger generation are making sense of their heritage, some are questioning orthodoxies. This has meant deliberations over generally accepted wisdom and practice. There is much discussion over websites about many issues including the relevance of 5Ks overseas, the authority of SGPC, or the status of directives from the Akal Takht *jathedars* (Jakobsh 2010, Barrier 2011).

In managing the gurdwaras, disputes between competing local groups usually end up being decided by local legal authorities who appeal to Amritsar to send some written document for such cases. Guidance over timely issues such as abortion and infanticide, inter-religious marriages and divorce, as well as other questions is also sought from the Akal Takhat in Amritsar. As too are issues regarding women’s rights.

Women indisputably participate in all gurdwara activities including reading the sacred scripture and the singing of hymns. While women effectively carry out the daily routine within the gurdwaras, it is nevertheless men who dominate the decision-making process. The new generation of women is rightfully raising the issue of equality both at the theological and the practical level, questioning the excesses of patriarchal values within the gurdwara. This debate extends to social practices of 'arranged marriages' and sex-determination techniques. In 2003, a deputation of women, in a symbolic gesture, arrived in Amritsar to test the equality issue; they insisted upon the right to sing hymns and take part in midnight rituals at the Golden Temple usually reserved for men (Jakobsh 2010).

Overseas Sikhs have also debated the establishment of national associations and international institutional linkages. Apart from the United States, however, where a (p. 510) 'national' organization such as WSC exists this has been unsuccessful. Another contested issue regards gurdwara management: should these be administered by 'elected' or '*sangat*-nominated' managers? In general, some of these issues have arisen as Sikhism is more of a congregational than a bureaucratically hierarchical religion.

Conclusion

Each Sikh community abroad has evolved in response to its local situation. In some instances this has been a rather fluid evolution whereas in others, especially post-9/11, it has not.

In terms of social organization, Sikhs by and large remain wedded to personal alliances as against institutions based upon abstract ideas of the collective good. An excessive pursuit of competitive goals has meant that the process of community building is an end result of factional rivalries rather than a matter of explicit goals and strategies. The net result is that despite local, sectarian, and national influences, Sikhs have been comfortable in developing hybrid identities; thus they describe themselves as American Sikhs, Canadian Sikhs, British Sikhs, Malaysian Sikhs, and so on. In Punjab one often sees Canadian flags on Safaris driven by returning Punjabis.

Over the last century overseas Sikh communities have formed a substantial proportion of the global Sikh population. Despite different trajectories Sikhs remain a well-defined community in every location clearly demarcated from other South Asian communities and the host society. By establishing religious, cultural, and linguistic markers they have gained a measure of legitimacy. Various social groups and sects within the community have used economic wealth and diasporic opportunities to consolidate their traditions and have endeavoured to redefine their group identity vis-à-vis mainstream Sikhism. For

most Sikhs, even as they have settled into new countries, they are still emotionally invested in Punjab, the Sikh homeland. An intimate association between Punjab and the Sikh diaspora and their uncertain status in each country of settlement are keys to understanding the dynamics of overseas Sikhs.

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Sikhs in Mainland European Countries

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Abstract and Keywords

Sikh migration to the European mainland began in the 1970s and increased during the 1990s when the political borders and immigration policies of Europe changed. Today it is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 Sikhs reside across the continent and especially the Sikhs in Southern Europe constitute the largest and fastest growing communities. This article provides a demographic overview of the Sikhs in mainland Europe and their diverse patterns of migration and settlement. Special attention is paid to the social and religious diversity among the European Sikhs and the different challenges they have faced in relation to the diverse cultures and integration policies between the European nation states.

Keywords: European Sikhs, Sikh soldiers, Sikh migration, mobility, transnational networks, multiculturalism, integration, assimilation, secularization, second generation

THE Sikhs in mainland Europe have been a largely unwritten chapter in the international study of the Sikhs, partly because they have constituted fairly small communities here until recently, but also for the reason that academics have primarily focused their attention upon Sikhs in the British context (Cole 1994). Large-scale Sikh migration to the European mainland began in the 1970s and intensified in the 1990s when immigration policies and the political borders of Europe changed. Today Sikhs have settled in most parts of the continent as a growing and visible community. Although European Sikhs have different migration histories and social backgrounds, they have today established more than 100 public gurdwaras across Europe. While making Europe their new home, they have retained links to their places of origin and are interconnected with Sikhs worldwide through a wide range of transnational practices. Their new presence in Europe is also reflected in a growing academic interest and a cumulative number of books on Sikhism and the Sikhs published in different national languages (Igielski 2008; Jacobsen 2006; Myrvold 2008; Paniker 2007). Based on new research on the European Sikhs, this chapter provides a demographic overview of the Sikhs in mainland Europe and their diverse

patterns of migration and settlement. Special attention is paid to the social and economic diversity among the Sikhs and their efforts to maintain the traditions of Punjab and integrate into European society, while being exposed to different challenges depending upon diverse cultures and policies between the European nation states.

History of European Sikhs

The early history of contact between Sikhs and Europeans goes back more than 400 years. In the seventeenth century the Portuguese Jesuit Jerome Xavier wrote about the martyrdom of Guru Arjan in 1606 (G. Singh 1962), and in the following centuries (p. 514) European soldiers, political reporters, and travellers recounted their experiences of the Sikhs (D. Singh 1991, 1999; Madra and Singh 2004). After the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849 many Sikhs were recruited for the army, police, and other occupations overseas; however, only a few made their way to mainland Europe before the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Sikhs visiting continental Europe were apparently 'transient visitors' (Singh and Tatla 2006) moving within the British Empire and nearby countries before returning home. A popular personification of an early Sikh presence in France is the last ruler of Punjab, Maharaja Dalip Singh, who after having spent years in British exile ended his life in Paris in 1893.

Another and quite different presence of the Sikhs in mainland Europe followed the outbreak of the First and the Second World Wars when thousands of soldiers fought for the British Indian Army in Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, and Greece (Omissi 1994, 2007, 2012). In the First World War, 683,149 combatant recruits were supplied from the provinces of British India and during the same period 88,925 Sikhs were recruited to the British Indian Army. The welfare of the Indian forces on the western front became a major concern in Britain where charities were established to provide the soldiers warm clothing, tea, and other comforts. Through this aid the Sikh soldiers were given copies of the Guru Granth Sahib and steel daggers, bracelets, and combs that were produced in Sheffield (Omissi 2012). During the Second World War the Indian Army was one of the largest contingents of Allied forces which participated in campaigns around the globe, including Greece and Italy. Even if it remains uncertain how many Sikh soldiers actually fought and died on European soil, it has been estimated that a total of 83,000 Sikhs laid down their lives in the two world wars (Holland 2005; Thandi 2012).

The sacrifice of Commonwealth soldiers is commemorated both in various war cemeteries across Europe and through the erection of several war memorials. These include the Indian Memorial of Neuve Chapelle in French Flanders that honours Indian soldiers who

fought in Belgium and France (Holland 2005; Omissi 2012). As Sikhs have made Europe their home and have searched for new historical roots here, their contribution to the European war effort has become a part of Sikh collective memory—a memory which established past relationships of trust between Europeans and Sikhs and can be utilized when negotiating positions and representations of a collective self in the present.

Demographic Overview

Attempts to estimate the present European Sikh population are entangled with methodological problems, as population registers and official statistics in most countries do not register people by religion and ethnicity nor include irregular migrants. Contemporary guesstimates would put the total figure at between 150,000 and 200,000 Sikhs in mainland Europe, with an additional 20,000–30,000 Punjabis who are under detention (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011; Thandi 2012). A characteristic feature of European Sikhs (p. 515) is their geographic spread across mainland Europe. Almost half of the Sikh population lives in the urban areas of Western Europe, with the oldest and most numerous settlements in Germany (30,000), France (15,000), the Netherlands (15,000), and Belgium (10,000), and a lesser number of Sikhs in Austria and Switzerland (5,000). In Northern Europe most Sikhs reside in Norway (5,000), Denmark (4,000), and Sweden (4,000), while smaller settlements are found in Finland (600) and Iceland (100). Changing European immigration policies and fluctuating political borders at the end of the twentieth century created new patterns of Sikh migration and settlement. Even if the Sikh migration to Southern Europe is a recent phenomenon, most of the nations with coastlines along the Mediterranean Sea have witnessed a large expansion of the Sikh population in urban and rural areas. Currently the Sikhs in Italy (30,000–70,000) constitute one of the largest and fastest growing communities in Europe, closely followed by the Sikhs in Greece (10,000–20,000). The new migration to the South has also created significant communities in Spain (10,000) and Portugal (3,000–7,000). After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of new borders eastwards, East European countries became more attractive to Sikh migrants. The largest settlements in Eastern Europe are today in Poland (3,000) and European Russia (3,000), while smaller pockets of Sikhs exist in Hungary and the Czech Republic.

The Sikh communities in Europe also comprise an unknown number of ‘white’ (*gora*) Sikhs who have converted to Sikhism for various reasons. While some have adopted the Sikh faith because of religious conviction and marriage, many have been inspired by Harbhajan Singh Yogi, the founder of the 3HO (Healthy, Happy, Holy) organization, and the American Sikhs (Dusenbery, this volume). Especially in Germany and the Netherlands

‘white’ Sikhs have played a vital role in the construction of gurdwaras and in collaboration with Punjabi Sikhs members of the 3HO have organized various religious activities (Holland 2009; Sikhand 2010).

Patterns of Migration

The more large-scale Sikh migration to mainland Europe that began in the second half of twentieth century was conditioned by at least four significant economic and political developments. First, in the post-war period several countries in mainland Europe expanded rapidly and implemented liberal immigration policies to meet labour shortages. In response to this, Western and Northern Europe began attracting a limited number of Sikh students and low- and high-skilled migrant workers from the 1960s (Cloet, Cosemans, and Goddeeris 2012; Ilkjaer 2011; Myrvold 2011). Secondly, post-colonial Sikh migration to Europe was channelled mainly towards the United Kingdom, but when stricter policies were enforced in the 1970s and made primary immigration largely restricted, the Sikhs began to increasingly settle in other parts of Europe. Sikh migration to France, Belgium, and Germany can be partly seen as a side effect of the British policy when migrants, unable to legally enter the United Kingdom, ended up in (p. 516) neighbouring countries intended as transit points (Moliner 2011a and 2011a). Thirdly, the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union opened up the political borders of Europe and made several countries more appealing to migrants. These events facilitated new sea and land routes for regular and irregular migrants from India via Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and the Baltic states into Europe. Fourthly, the continuous enlargement of the European Union through accession of new member states and the development of the Schengen Area with free movement between most countries in mainland Europe (both EU and non-EU states) enabled migrants within Europe to target more unexplored areas, simultaneously as the borders around the Schengen Area tightened and curtailed primary migration.

The post-war Sikh migration to mainland Europe can be characterized as heterogeneous, with each family and community having its own unique migration story to tell, and has contributed to a significant diversity among the Sikhs here. In West and North European countries the first Sikhs were single males who arrived at the end of the 1960s and the 1970s as labour migrants from India and gained residence permits either through work, studies, or by entering into real or pro forma marriages with European citizens. Many of these men embarked on hazardous journeys to find jobs and often became pioneers in exploring new areas of settlement. The first Sikhs in Norway, for example, bicycled all the way from Punjab with the United Kingdom as the final destination. As the last

passenger ship to England for the winter season had already left when they reached Norway, they decided to stay and were offered jobs (Jacobsen 2011). In the 1970s many countries received ‘twice migrants’ who had left India during the colonial period to work in the former British colonies in East Africa. Due to Africanization policies and the backlash against Asian minorities in Uganda in 1972 they resettled as refugees and labour migrants across Europe (Myrvold 2011; Cloet, Cosemans and Goddeeris 2012). While most European countries had restricted their immigration policies by the 1980s, the political turmoil in Punjab after the events in 1984 gave rise to increasing waves of political migrants. The communities in Western and Northern Europe, including Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries, are to a large extent constituted by Sikhs who escaped Punjab during this period and used various strategies for gaining residency permits, such as applying for political asylum or entering into marriage, depending upon national regulations at their destination (Cloet, Cosemans, and Goddeeris 2012; Goel 2007; Gottlisch 2012; Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011; K. Singh 2010). From the 1990s a substantial number of twice migrant Sikhs from Afghanistan also arrived as asylum seekers after having fled persecutions during the Afghan civil war and later the Taliban regime (Bal 2012; Ilkjaer 2011; Myrvold 2011). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Sikh population in Western and Northern Europe has increased considerably with family reunification, marriage migration, and a growing second and third generation. Shortages in labour markets and bilateral agreements with India have also encouraged new primary migration of a rising number of Sikh students and highly professional labourers in primarily IT, telecommunication, and the health care sector (Ilkjaer 2011; Myrvold 2012; Thandi 2012).

(p. 517) Although Indians have been present in Eastern and Southern Europe since at least the 1960s, an intensified migration began in the 1990s when the enlargement of the European Union opened up new entry points. East European countries, especially Poland, became regions for a sizeable and mainly uncontrolled transit migration into Western Europe after the fall of the Communist regimes (Igielski 2011). A great demand of unskilled labour and various regularization operations made the South European countries magnets for a large number of regular and irregular Sikh migrants from India and other parts of Europe. The growing communities in Italy, Greece, and Spain are largely constituted by first generation males, even if family reunification and marriage migration are beginning to create a more equal gender distribution and an emerging second generation (Bertolani 2012; Bertolani, Ferraris, and Perocco 2011; Lum 2011; Papageorgiou 2011). The financial crises in the twenty-first century caused a reverse movement of irregular migrants who escaped economic hardships in the South in search for work and more permanent measures to legalize their status in Western Europe (Cloet, Cosemans, and Goddeeris 2012). The Sikh migration has thus displayed varied patterns

with transnational mobility as a key feature. After having entered the European mainland, the migrants have usually made several transits, detours, and movements between countries in search of opportunities. The extensive transnational networks of the Sikhs have played a crucial role for choices of settlement and instigated chain migration to particular locations, while increasing stability in terms of permanent residency, citizenship, and economic wealth has facilitated new mobility across Europe.

Social and Economic Diversity

Given the diverse patterns of migration, the Sikhs in mainland Europe do not constitute a homogeneous diaspora but, rather, many and diverse diasporas (Thandi 2012; Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011). Over the years, the different social and economic backgrounds of European Sikhs have created both tension and solidarity across various social borders. Most of the Sikhs who migrated to France and Spain, for example, belong to the caste groups of Jat, Lubana, and Ravidassia Chamar and found occupations in catering, clothing, and construction work. The migration experience in these two countries sharpened caste differences that existed in Punjab and resulted in the establishment of different caste-based gurdwaras. Especially after the Vienna killing of the Ravidassia leader Sant Ramanand in 2009, Sikh Chamars in Spain have strongly accentuated their Ravidassia identity (Moliner 2011a and 2011b; Lum 2011). In Northern Europe caste membership seems to have become less significant with migration, perhaps because the Sikhs constitute smaller and socially diverse communities in these countries. Internal dissensions have, rather, revolved around cultural differences between Indian, Afghani, and Ugandan Sikhs and political issues. Both in Norway and Denmark disagreements about the support of Khalistan created internal conflicts from the 1980s onwards. While the Norwegian Sikhs eventually managed to bridge different opinions, the factional tension between the (p. 518) Danish Sikhs led to the closing down of the only public gurdwara in Denmark (Jacobsen 2011; Ilkjaer 2011). Other local communities in Europe have similarly been affected by controversies among both Sikhs in the Punjab and within the global community, and have consequently used different strategies of response.

Sikh migrants across Europe have faced quite dissimilar conditions for their economic and social integration into the mainstream societies, depending upon different and changing national policies of integration. In general, the Sikhs have been successful in finding jobs and establishing themselves as entrepreneurs in a variety of sectors, but these processes have often involved various types of negotiation with local work policies and cultural images of migrants. In several countries they have been stereotyped by the majority society as a people being naturally inclined to engage in agriculture. For this

reason many of the first migrants in Belgium were employed in the fruit-farming sector during harvest seasons while their applications for residency were pending (Cloet, Cosemans, and Goddeeris 2012). Shortages of unskilled labour in Southern Europe have made it possible for Sikh migrants in Italy and Greece to create an occupational profile in the agriculture and agro-processing sectors. The production of Parmesan cheese in Emilia Romagna has by now become an ethnic niche of Punjabis (Barbara, Ferraris and Perocco 2011; Papageorgiou 2011). In Central and Northern Europe the Sikhs have gradually become well integrated into the labour markets by occupying a wide variety of low- and high-skilled jobs, in for example business, education, transportation, industry, medicine, and health, and being self-employed entrepreneurs (Hirvi 2011; Ilkjaer 2011; Myrvold 2011).

A striking difference between Southern and Northern Europe is the labour participation of Sikh women. The majority of female migrants in the Nordic countries seem to choose working careers outside the household because it is considered an asset to the family economy and a means for improving their general well-being (Hirvi 2011; Myrvold 2012). With a largely male-dominated Sikh population in Southern Europe, most Sikh women occupy traditional roles as housewives and only a few engage in different low-skilled jobs (Bertolani, Ferraris, and Perocco 2011; Bertolani 2012; Compiani and Quassoli 2005; Lum 2012a, 2012b).

Cultural Representations and Challenges

Despite social diversity, European Sikhs have invested considerable effort in maintaining the cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions of Punjab by organizing collective worship and establishing gurdwaras wherever they have settled across Europe. Although the history of Sikh places of worship in mainland Europe requires further studies, one of the first gurdwaras was apparently established in Frankfurt by German Sikh converts in the 1970s (Laue 2012). In the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are more **(p. 519)** than 100 public gurdwaras in continental Europe, with the largest number located in Germany and Italy (Jacobsen 2012). The geographical expansion of gurdwaras within the last thirty years demonstrates the dramatic growth of European Sikhs. If the majority of gurdwaras have been established in rented or purchased premises, a more recent trend is to build completely new ‘display gurdwaras’ to serve the religious needs of the congregation, but also to prove the success of the community and represent Sikhism to others in society. The largest gurdwara in this category is probably Gurdwara Sahib Switzerland which was built in the Mughal architectural style typical of gurdwaras in India and inaugurated in 2006 (Jacobsen 2012). In addition to providing a sacred space,

the gurdwaras have become important social meeting places for reconstructing cultural traditions of the homeland, extending transnational networks, and helping each other with practical issues related to immigration. The gurdwaras have also become arenas for disagreements, power struggles, and political conflicts within the communities. The collective place-making has generally contributed to an increasing awareness of the Sikhs and improved their status in a new country by creating spatial visibility and public recognition in society.

Wherever the Sikhs have settled in mainland Europe their religious symbols have made them visible. Given the diverse integration policies between the European nation states, they have received various degrees of state recognition and faced different legal restrictions. In Southern Europe the Sikhs have been forced to relate to strong discourses on the supremacy of a national and Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox identity that have encouraged assimilation (Bertolani, Ferraris, and Perocco 2011; Papageorgiou 2011), while in Central and Northern Europe it has rather been secularism and different attitudes to multiculturalism that have given rise to both political resolutions and disputes (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011; Cloet, Cosemans, and Goddeeris 2012). The beginning of the twenty-first century brought several events that made the Sikhs aware of their vulnerable position in Europe. After the terror attacks of 11 September 2001 in the USA and the increasing Islamophobia that followed, the Sikhs in Europe also stood out as a visible minority and were at many places mistakenly confused with radical Islamic groups because of their turbans (Nijhawan 2006; Cloet, Cosemans, and Goddeeris 2012). When the French government in 2004 passed a law that banned the wearing of ‘ostentatious’ religious symbols in state-funded schools, epitomizing the concept of strict secularism (*laïcité*), it caused outrage among the Sikhs in France. With support from Sikhs worldwide, French Sikhs protested and even reported the French government to the European Court of Human Rights. The conflict illustrated the ability of European Sikhs to mobilize global support, but also demonstrated how protests can be counterproductive. Since the Sikhs in France were ‘unintended victims’ of a law primarily aimed at Muslims, the French authorities were at first willing to negotiate with the Sikhs but decided not to publically abide by their claims because of the constant protests (Thandi 2012).

At different locations in Europe the Sikhs have struggled with several tangible issues related to immigration and integration, such as gaining residence permits and learning the national languages, but have also displayed an amazing ability to adapt themselves to the different cultures and create harmonious relationships with their neighbours **(p. 520)** (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011). In several countries the first migrants had identified cultural similarities and espoused different aspects of the dominant culture that in their view resembled Sikh and Punjabi values. In Poland the Sikhs found a reason to settle

because they thought Polish people shared their appreciation of strong family values and the practice of extended families (Igielski 2011). The Sikhs in Norway have instead emphasized gender equality and the importance of honest and voluntary work as cultural values which they share with other Norwegians (Jacobsen 2011). Seeking cultural similarities has been one strategy to create understanding and make oneself at home in a new location. As a consequence the Sikhs have at many places created distinct images of themselves as being ‘good migrants’ in comparison to other minority groups (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011).

One of the largest challenges in the twenty-first century is perhaps the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity among European Sikhs, especially diversity amongst their children who are born and raised in Europe. The second and third generations represent both a continuance of the Sikhs in mainland Europe as well as the increasing plurality within these communities. Young Sikhs are in general socially integrated into the societies, fluent in several national languages, and invest considerably in higher education while being embedded in a web of transnational networks and identifications. Although the first Sikh migrants have made serious efforts to educate their children in Sikh and Punjabi traditions, second generation Sikhs often experience a cultural divide between themselves and their parents, and begin negotiating traditional notions of home, identity, religion, and authority. Available studies indicate that young Sikhs across Europe are exposed to increasing secularization and, simultaneously, actively engage in processes of redefining the Sikh tradition and creating new interpretations that are shaped by and adapted to their own cultural settings. This has implied a ‘revitalization’ of religion and the creation of specific subcultures in various transnational youth activities, such as Sikh youth camps and devotional music programs organized across Europe. In their local communities as well as on the Internet young Sikhs of different nationalities have also made several attempts to ‘deculturalize’ the Sikh tradition by differentiating religious elements from inherited Punjabi cultural customs (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011, 2012). As the Sikh communities in mainland Europe are growing and new generations are culturally translating their religion to different local and global contexts, the future will most likely entail the shaping of new self-representations and identity constructions that more noticeably than before reflect the multiple belongings of European Sikhs.

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Sikhs as a Racial and Religious Minority in the US

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Abstract and Keywords

This article contextualizes the history of racial and religious discrimination against Sikh Americans, tracing manifestations of such intolerance from the early twentieth century to the current time. The article begins by examining the role of the state in creating and sustaining institutionalized white supremacy through racialized legislation, and detailing the impact of such laws upon Sikhs in the US, as well as those attempting to migrate there. The article then explores the usage and purpose of racial violence against Sikh Americans, along with the racist public discourse that often accompanied such violent attacks. After discussing how Sikh Americans resisted racial and religious oppression and the contributions they made to the building of the West's economy and infrastructure, the article interrogates several forms of contemporary discrimination encountered by Sikh Americans. The article concludes with an examination of the impact of 9/11 on the Sikh American community, and how it responded to the historic challenges of that time.

Keywords: Sikh migration, racism, religious discrimination, legislative racism, Asiatic Exclusion League, American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers, anti-Asian Movement, racial violence, SALDEF

Most early Sikh migrants to the United States originated from the *Doaba* region of Punjab. Groups of several men from a village, sometimes joining with relatives from elsewhere, would often plan the journey together. These village and kinship ties were the glue that sustained pioneer Sikh migrants in the difficult times they would face in North America, after the long, difficult sea voyage.

While small numbers of Sikh migrants trickled in prior to the turn of the century, they began to enter Canada and the US in noticeable numbers in the early 1900s. Approximately 85 per cent of the pioneer Punjabi American migrants were Sikh, with most of the remainder being Muslim. By 1907, agitation for their exclusion resulted in executive restrictions limiting their migration, leading to a series of increasingly restrictive federal laws that banned almost all Asian migration by 1924. This period of racialized, legislative exclusion lasted until 1965.

Upon arrival in the US, Sikhs, along with other Asian migrants, suffered devastating social, political, and economic degradation as scapegoats for the socio-economic ills afflicting the white working class. In response to the demands of these workers and segments of the media, politicians targeted Asian immigrants with racialized legislation that limited their rights based on their immigrant status, and as racial and religious minorities in a nation that conceived of itself as distinctly white and Christian. Legislative racism prevented them from becoming citizens until the 1940s, due to federal legislation from 1790 that limited naturalization to only ‘free white persons’. Gendered legislation—stipulating that the wives of non-white immigrants were inadmissible because of their race—later prevented Sikh women from migrating, with the intent of preventing the formation of a second generation of Sikh American citizens. These legal barriers were extremely effective, as women comprised far less than 1 per cent of California’s South Asian population in 1914, sharply curtailing the ability of the community to regenerate itself.

(p. 525) Other racialized laws prevented Asian immigrants from owning land, subjected their children to segregated schools, and levied discriminatory taxes on them. Among the many ways Sikhs resisted such institutional racism included Bhagat Singh Thind’s legal battle for citizenship that ended in failure in the halls of the US Supreme Court. The nation made clear through such racially imbued laws that Sikh Americans were neither accepted as members of the polity, nor society at large. They were to function only as a permanent, servile labour source, deployed to build the economy and infrastructure of the developing west coast without being granted the rights and privileges of citizenship. Despite significant contributions by pioneer Sikh Americans in many areas of the economic development of the region, the nation refused to bear the social costs of permitting these exploited workers normal lives.

Due to the racism encoded into US law, the first Sikh Americans suffered the numerous torments associated with being an almost entirely male community. Most were separated from families in India for decades, while others stayed single their whole lives. Others married women in the US, primarily Mexican Americans. This racialized restriction was in sharp contrast to laws applying to European migrants, who were allowed to bring their wives into the US on a non-quota basis, and permitted to quickly naturalize and become part of the republic.

In a community largely bereft of women, Sikh Americans formed small groups in which they worked, lived, and socialized. These democratic groupings served as surrogate families. They helped each other to survive, and occasionally even thrive, in a hostile and forbidding land. The leader of each group was often the one with the best command of English. He served as a mediator for the others in representational matters with non-Punjabis.

During the short time of unrestricted migration, from the turn of the twentieth century until 1907, only about 6,000 South Asians entered the country. The total number of South Asians who came to the US during this period was likely less than 10,000—of whom Sikhs represented the distinct majority. But their modest numbers did not protect them from the anti-Asian sentiment prevalent throughout the west coast. Their Asian origin and their racial and religious uniforms engendered fears of a ‘Hindoo invasion’ among the white citizens of California, who, by then, had for decades scapegoated Asian migrants for economic troubles.

Like other Asian immigrants, Sikh Americans were used by employers to prevent all workers from demanding better wages. Forced to work for lower wages than whites performing similar or identical tasks, they endured because most carried the burden of family members in India waiting desperately for their remittances. Despite being the victims of a racialized dual wage scale, Sikh and other Asian Americans were criticized for their apparent ability to ‘subsist on incomes that would be prohibitive to a white man’ (Takaki 1989: 296–7).

As Sikh American workers were hired in greater numbers, white workers responded angrily. White workers, and the politicians who sought their votes, demanded a homogeneous white population, free of the supposedly corrupting influence of Asian immigrants. The migrants came under attack from organized white labour. Samuel Gompers, (p. 526) president of the American Federation of Labor, declared they ‘have no standards by which a Caucasian may judge them’. The Asiatic Exclusion League decried ‘their lack of cleanliness, disregard of sanitary laws, petty pilfering, especially of chickens, and insolence to women’. The League placed blame upon Sikh and other South Asian Americans for the racial violence they suffered from white Americans claiming, ‘in California…the immodest and filthy habits of the Hindoos are continually involving them in beatings…. In all these cases, we may say the Oriental is at fault’ (Takaki 1989: 296–7).

From the time of their arrival, Sikh Americans were clearly distinguishable from the majority, standing out especially because of their distinctive turbans. This highly visible marker, combined with their other distinguishing physical features, made Sikh Americans easily identifiable targets for racist sentiment. Since the Sikh migrants refused to part with their turbans, ‘much of the animosity thus came to be focused on the turban and on a cluster of complaints about cultural patterns that exclusionists associated with the turban’ (Jensen 1988: 45).

Not only did they suffer discrimination in everything from housing to employment to political rights, but early Sikh migrants were described by nativists as racially inferior, unassimilable, and generally undesirable migrants whose arrival presaged a new ‘Yellow Peril’. A racist and inflammatory media exacerbated racialized resentment against Sikh

American migrants among the white masses, producing alarmist articles that raised the spectre of a ‘Tide of Turbans’ inundating the country (Scheffauer 1910: 616–18).

The confluence of these various factors precipitated demands for the exclusion of South Asians, and for reduction of their political and economic rights. Federal authorities moved quickly to curtail immigration from South Asia. In passing this restrictive legislation, the state stigmatized the primarily Sikh, South Asian migrant community as a segment of society whose mere presence was detrimental to the well-being of the nation.

Faced with a harsh reception in the US, many South Asians chose to return home, including about 3,000 between 1920 and 1940. Others were deported, ensuring that the numbers for the community remained very small until the 1970s. Because of exclusionist efforts, nearly 3,500 South Asians were denied entry into the US between 1908 and 1920. The most common pretext for denial by immigration officials, in these hearings with predetermined outcomes, was likelihood to become a ‘public charge’. This is a common refrain in the case files of Sikh men who sought admission to the US through Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, the main port of entry for the vast majority of early Asian immigrants.

Because of their race and national origin, Asian immigrants faced many additional, substantively different obstacles from European migrants. The racialized differences in their experiences began at the point of entry, Angel Island. Entering the country there was prodigiously more difficult than it was for European immigrants at Ellis Island, which represents a place of welcome and acceptance into American life. Conversely, Angel Island symbolized the racialized misgivings much of the nation then held towards immigrants from Asia. Created as a consequence of the first restrictive immigration legislation passed by a nation of immigrants, Angel Island concretized into form and action the intense anti-Asian sentiment sweeping the US.

(p. 527) Asians who sought entry at Angel Island were subjected to close examinations. The migrants were tortuously held for an indefinite time—days, weeks, months—while immigration officials carefully screened them. These often humiliating physical and oral examinations were designed to exclude the migrants, and many thousands were denied entry.

The conditions of the facility further intensified the ordeal, as their housing quarters were unsanitary and vermin-infested, in addition to being wooden firetraps. The Public Health Service Surgeon notes that the water supply was contaminated, and the kitchen infested with flies and cockroaches. Massive overcrowding made matters even worse for the migrants. One dormitory room, with air space for ten men, was crammed with fifty-four bunk beds. Their encounter with the state on Angel Island made clear to many Sikh

Americans that their physical appearance and national origin were far more important factors in their exclusion than any likelihood of becoming ‘public charges’.

Spurred by this toxic national climate of legislative exclusion, white workers deployed racial violence as an instrument with which to reinscribe white supremacy on the landscape of the West. In town after town, from California to Alaska, South Asian Americans were violently driven from the lumber mills by frenzied mobs of white workers. These Euro-American workers were often themselves immigrants, but nonetheless considered themselves defenders of the nation’s long tradition of white supremacy.

Violent reigns of terror by Euro-Americans against Asians, and other peoples of colour, were a prominent feature of life in the Old West. Throughout the entire region, the non-white labourers who built the economy of the West came under attack from white labour, with the collusion and support of white leaders. South Asian migrants too suffered these ravages of racial terrorism. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, many were forcibly expelled from towns throughout the west coast, as white workers consolidated a racial monopoly of jobs.

The worst of these racial expulsions occurred in September 1907 in Bellingham, Washington, in an outgrowth of the town’s yearly Labor Day celebration. The town’s Labor Day parade that year brought together a thousand white union members, who had earlier warned mill owners to discharge all of their Punjabi American labourers by Labor Day. Some of the white workers claimed that Punjabi men had crowded white women off the streets the previous day. In apparent defence of ‘white womanhood’, several Sikh men were beaten after the parade. Numerous instances of violence against the Punjabi Americans continued over the following day and night. The police chief ignored the growing wave of increasingly violent incidents, and by Wednesday evening, an enraged, violent mob demanded satisfaction.

After frightening the police into subservience, the mob of around 500 white men stormed the area of town where the Sikh and other South Asian Americans lived. Battering down doors, the mob threw the belongings of the homes into the street, pocketing any valuables, such as jewellery and money. They dragged terrified Sikhs and other South Asians from their beds, forcing them to flee in their night clothes. Some were injured when they jumped from buildings to escape the rampaging mob. To protect his property from damage, one landlord turned out his four tenants. Those who (p. 528) could not escape in time were beaten and threatened with their lives if they did not leave town.

Faced with such outrage, the mill owners—who had been profiting handsomely from paying lower wages to the migrants—began to turn against their South Asian employees.

Fearing damage to their property, they declared them undesirable and discharged them. The immigrants quickly left town.

The city council, reflecting the general viewpoint in the white community, sanctioned the sentiments undergirding the riot. Even Washington Governor Albert Mead approvingly commented that ‘the Bellingham people adopted the best methods of settling’ the conflict between white and non-white migrant labour (Jensen 1988: 47, 52, 294–5). With such prevailing opinion along the west coast, it is little surprise that Bellingham was only the beginning of organized violence against the pioneer generation of Sikh Americans.

Immediately after arriving in Seattle, some of the Bellingham exiles were violently prevented from boarding a ship to Alaska. Two months later, a similar racial cleansing of Sikh and other Punjabi American migrants occurred in Everett. Finding no help from the local police, South Asians left town. Groups of South Asian men were also prevented from disembarking from ships in three Alaskan ports by white mobs. Eventually, Sikh Americans were forced out of much of the Pacific Northwest by racial violence.

In Live Oak, California, the whites expelled Indians for failing to ‘observe the laws of decency’. Without attempting to have them arrested for violating any law, the town formed a vigilante group to expel the foreigners. The mob gathered, threatened, and robbed them, before forcing them from town. Attempts to obtain justice through the legal system were obliterated by dozens of white witnesses providing alibis for the accused.

Similarly, in late 1911, fourteen armed white men drove eleven South Asian men from their home near Sacramento. The whites claimed that the migrants ‘had been annoying young women in the area’. Although the sons of three wealthy white farmers were arrested and jailed briefly, they were soon released. ‘The San Francisco *Examiner* reported that almost everyone had sided with the young men and had declared that the Indians should have been driven out of the country’ (Jensen 1988: 49, 54–5). In each of these illustrations, racial violence was a successful strategy through which white workers enforced a racialized employment monopoly.

Driven by racialized violence from the lumber industry and railroad work—and understanding that they would not receive protection or justice at any level, most Sikh American pioneers found their way into agricultural work in California. Although the majority of the early Sikh immigrants had come from farming backgrounds and naturally gravitated towards agriculture, working in such isolated areas enabled them to distance themselves from the anti-Asian sentiment so prevalent in urban areas. Working in the fields allowed Sikh Americans to avoid competing with whites for jobs, garnering them relief from the ever-present threat of racial violence.

The narrative of Dr Dalip Singh Saund, the first Asian American member of Congress, illustrates the all-encompassing effects of the white supremacist monopoly of labour encountered by the few Sikh Americans who had access to education. In the (p. 529) 1920s, Congressman Saund earned Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of California, Berkeley. But due to the racist societal prohibitions on his occupational choice at the time, after completing his Ph.D. in mathematics, Dr Saund was forced to take a job as the foreman of a cotton-picking gang. Despite being one of the best educated men in the nation, he later became a farmer in the Imperial Valley, before embarking on a political career by chance.

Despite the limitations they faced on occupational choice and possibility, many Sikh Americans carved a niche for themselves, integrating into California's regional economies at many levels. They helped initiate rice cultivation in northern California, grew grapes and other crops in central California, and moved to the southern Imperial Valley to help establish cotton as a crop in the region. Several began to move up the agricultural ladder despite the racial barriers they faced. Working initially as labourers, many were able to amass enough capital to eventually lease or even purchase their own land, usually in partnership with friends or relatives. By pooling together the resources of two or more men, and cleverly evading the state Alien Land Law by putting land in the name of their US-born children or an agent, South Asian Americans were able to acquire over 88,000 acres of land in California by the 1920s. Others formed corporations with white friends, enabling them to farm their own land.

Some became spectacularly successful, like Jawala Singh, a Sikh who earned the moniker 'the Potato King' for his business success. Despite such success stories, the vast majority of the first Sikh Americans were ill equipped to cope with the situation they encountered in the US. Poorly educated, untrained in any marketable skills, and ignorant of the ways of US society, they quickly became and generally remained an alienated minority near the bottom of the socio-economic scale, never accepted by white America.

While they generally sought to avoid conflict by observing the taboos of white supremacy and focusing on their work, the early Sikh Americans did not accept mistreatment without staunch, multi-faceted resistance. Always, as Sikhs have done throughout their history when confronted with injustice, they fought back against the racist dictates and constrictions imposed upon them. In addition to the successful multi-racial labour strike detailed above, some refused to work at the pace desired by their employers. Through work slowdowns, they equalized wages and the amount of work performed.

One of the more ingenious ways early Sikh Americans resisted their labour exploitation was when the leader of a work gang listed a greater number of workers on a project than

had actually done the work. On other occasions, the gang's leader would conspire with the bookkeeper to extract extra pay for the men.

Another way Sikh Americans resisted racism was through the act of purchasing land when it was illegal for them to do so. By evading laws designed to prevent landownership by non-whites, the migrants broke immoral, racist laws, and advanced themselves economically in a world weighted against them.

At times, Sikhs fought back with self-protective violence. 'In 1910,' for example, 'Indians buying groceries near Woodland (California) were stoned, and when police (p. 530) refused to protect them, they resorted to using ax handles to beat their attackers' (Jensen 1988: 54).

Also arriving at this time was a small group of political refugees from British India, seeking a site to liberate their homeland. They formed a secular, nationalist group that took the name Ghadar (revolution), and provided an outlet to channel the frustration and rage generated by the unremitting bigotry Sikh and Punjabi American workers endured. The Ghadar Party, the vast majority of whose membership was comprised of Sikhs, assumed the formidable task of freeing India from colonial rule, while operating on the other side of the globe. It advocated the immediate removal of the imperialists, going so far as to actually engage in an ill-fated attempt to militarily unseat the British. The Ghadar Party provided the immigrant community with a unified ethno/national identity, as well as a sense of pride that enabled them to stand up to the difficulties of their hostile environment.

Much of the Ghadar Party's activity emanated from the first gurdwara in the US, built in Stockton, California, in 1912. A sacred site to Sikhs, the gurdwara became much more to all South Asian Americans, as the Sikh religious institution's functions expanded significantly in the diaspora. The Stockton gurdwara served as a centre for social, political, cultural, and religious activities for the entire South Asian migrant community. Political discussions were often held there, solidifying its reputation as the most important organization formed by early Sikh and South Asian American immigrants. The gurdwara also served as perhaps the only place these isolated and despised racial and religious minorities felt a sense of belonging, community, and peace in their adopted homeland.

When the racist restrictions in US immigration policy were lifted, Sikhs began to again migrate legally. Due to the requirements imposed by the state, those allowed to enter the nation were among the brightest, most motivated, and best educated members of Indian society. Upon arrival, many entered college, graduate school, medical or professional school, and later entered various prestigious professions.

With significantly more education than the average American, the mean family income for Indian Americans surpassed that of white Americans by the 1980s. Census figures from 2004 showed that Indian American distinguished themselves by ‘reporting top levels of income, education, professional job status and English-language ability, even though three-fourths were foreign-born’ (Watanabe and Wride 2004). By 2010, household income for Indian Americans ($88,538) far exceeded the household income for non-Hispanic white Americans ($54,620). However, when these robust income figures are adjusted for education and the number of workers per household, the racial discrimination still encountered by even highly educated and well-compensated Sikh and other Asian Americans becomes evident. Also among the most common complaints of Sikh Americans in corporate America, including those who do not wear turbans, is the ongoing prevalence of a ‘glass ceiling’ preventing advancement beyond a certain level within an organization.

Also of note is the significant degree of downward occupational movement suffered by many Sikh Americans after migration, often because US employers refuse to **(p. 531)** recognize their educational credentials from abroad. Moreover, widespread discriminatory hiring practices against Sikh Americans limit not only their occupational choice but also their earning potential. Occupational discrimination has precipitated many Sikh Americans shedding their visible religious identity after migrating.

Sikh Americans continue to struggle with constrictions upon their religious freedom, best embodied in the difficulty they encounter in constructing sacred sites. A gurdwara is particularly seminal to religious and community life for a diasporic Sikh, where it is often the only Sikh institution. In recent years, as Sikh Americans have sought to construct sacred spaces that reflect their architectural heritage, they have experienced vociferous community opposition, offering a trenchant reminder of the ongoing limits of their religious freedom. Other limitations to the religious freedom of Sikh Americans include ongoing efforts by the community to force the US military and law enforcement agencies to accept observant Sikhs.

The narrative of Sikh American economic success often overshadows the striking fact that ‘scholarly studies have found both high rates of wealth and high rates of poverty in the community’ (Kolsky 1998). Widespread levels of employment discrimination against Sikhs, as well as the arrival of less educated migrants, have had a notable economic effect on the community. An August 2004 analysis of census explained, ‘there are significant pockets of poverty within the Indian American community…22 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have a higher percentage of Indian Americans living in poverty than the general population.’ The report went on to divulge that Indian American youth suffer high poverty rates, and ‘Indian Americans received considerably less public assistance than the general population,’ both because of a lack of information

available to them, and because they are reluctant to apply for government aid (Indian American Center for Political Awareness 2004: 7).

Since the late 1980s, the Sikh American community has witnessed the influx of several thousand migrants seeking the protection of US asylum law, claiming fear of the widely documented, massive human rights violations by the Indian state against Sikhs. This group of Sikh asylees has been particularly vulnerable to ongoing discrimination and exploitation, due to their lack of English fluency and/or education. Most of these exiles from their homeland are limited to menial and low wage occupations, with minimal job security, benefits, and chance of upward mobility.

To the Sikh American community, 11 September 2001 was a major watershed. During the national hate crime epidemic of historic proportions that followed the attacks, Sikh Americans experienced domestic terror attacks at a rate that exceeded that experienced by any other group in the country. But the country paid little attention to the problems of Sikh Americans; even as it became evident from the pictures of the hijackers and their suspected accomplices that not one of them wore a turban, the attacks against Sikh Americans did not abate in any appreciable way for months. The appearance of a recognizable Sikh had been clearly designated as the ‘other’ in public life. This is verified by how those targeted for hate crimes in the wake of the terror attacks were singled out due to their physical appearance, largely defined by religious symbols, such as facial hair, non-Western attire, and religious headwear.

(p. 532) For one Sikh American, the hate crime epidemic began just moments after the twin towers fell. Walking to work, he was yelled at, cursed, and chased by several men—who somehow identified him as responsible for the attack that had just occurred. The screaming, cursing group forced the young Sikh man to flee in terror, ducking into a subway station to hide, where—in fear for his life—he removed his turban. Yards away, another Sikh American, this one a physician, helped saved the lives of his fellow Americans by setting up and manning the first triage station set up near ground zero. This brave young doctor not only risked his health near the base of the collapsed buildings, but placed himself at risk from vigilante racists who might mistake him for the enemy.

Particularly horrifying for Sikh Americans was the 15 September murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi, in Mesa, Arizona. The first person to die from domestic terrorism after 9/11, Mr Sodhi was a gas station owner who was killed on his business property by a vigilante racist. Much like the epidemic of violent hatred infecting the nation, Mr Sodhi’s murder was largely lost in the broader narrative of the national tragedy. Despite the linkage of his death to 9/11 and the fact that he was killed because of the way he looked, news reports rarely offered the public a photo of Mr Sodhi. As a consequence, this Sikh

Americam has never become a symbol of contemporary hate violence in the US, and is largely unknown to most Americans.

For months after 9/11, Sikh Americans continued to receive verbal and gestured threats, were spat upon, had garbage thrown at them, were run off the road and menacingly tailgated, were shot at with guns, and suffered numerous cases of arson, firebombings, beatings, and murders. It was not until weeks after the terrorist attacks that scattered reports began to appear in the media—after the hard work and outreach of Sikh American community activists— that the vast majority of people wearing turbans in the US were Sikh, and that they were under attack by fellow Americans. Mainstream sources were very late in picking up this vital, and readily available, information. To this day, the historic nature of the hate crime epidemic after 9/11 is very rarely broached in remembrances of that traumatic period in US national history.

Among the most harmful law enforcement policies to emerge from the terrorist attacks is the return of open racial profiling, particularly at airports. In the wake of 9/11, law enforcement officials across the nation detained and mistreated hundreds of innocent Americans because of their appearance. Others were forced off planes by pilots or crew members for the same reasons.

This type of hate violence was not new to Sikh Americans. In the wake of such national and international incidents as the Iran Hostage Crisis, the Gulf War, and the Oklahoma City bombing, Sikh Americans had been targeted for hate crimes by misguided racists who found them to be convenient scapegoats. Due to the intensified threat of hate crimes in the wake of 9/11, Sikh Americans embarked upon a grass roots political mobilization unprecedented in their history in North America. Across the nation, they united to get the message out that they were being attacked, and were still suffering long after the ‘Attack on America’.

This time was characterized by a remarkable rise of grass roots activism in most Sikh American communities. At the vanguard were second-generation Sikh young (p. 533) professionals and college students, who had been raised in the US and understood its mores. Formerly politically inert Sikh Americans vaulted into action. At ground zero, Sikh taxi drivers provided free rides to volunteers in the rescue effort and family members searching for news of loved ones involved in the tragedy. Other Sikh community activists, some just christened with that title, were meeting with top government officials, attending interfaith memorial services, passing out fliers, and giving lessons about Sikhism to anyone who would listen. This was a notable change for the often insular Sikh American community, which has tended to stay within the confines of its gurdwaras.

Organizationally, prior to this crisis, only the non-profit Sikh Media watch and Resource Task Force—now the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF)—worked to serve the community on a national level. And that was largely by default, because of the dearth of other community service organizations working with the marginalized Sikh American community. September 2001 saw the birth of two additional groups, the Sikh Coalition, based in New York City, and another short-lived group in the San Francisco Bay Area, concerned with educating the public about Sikhs and their beliefs. Also emerging on the national and international scene has been United Sikhs. All of these groups devote time to community-level aid, dealing with complaints of hate crimes, racial profiling, and the forcing of Sikh men to remove their turbans at airports without appropriate allowances for cultural sensitivity, religious discrimination, and employment discrimination. These organizations began concerted campaigns to shape the public image of Sikh Americans, and make other Americans more aware of their place in the nation's diverse mosaic. This public relations activity has been coupled with educating the Sikh American community about the daily situations they might encounter, how to respond to them, and what their rights are when dealing with law enforcement.

Over a decade after 9/11, racial discrimination in the job market against Sikh Americans, particularly those who wear their religious articles of faith, remains rampant, and often open. Complaints of school bullying of Sikh American children, racial profiling at airports, hateful comments and slurs, and violent hate crimes continue to flood the offices of the Sikh American service organizations, with no sign of abatement.

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Sikhs Living Beyond Punjab in India

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Abstract and Keywords

This article outlines the history of Sikh migration from Punjab and the community's settlement in different parts of India. It represents the home of three of the *panj piare* and houses two of the five Sikh *takhats*. The process stimulated dialogue with other Indian religious traditions and gave birth to a few regional Sikh groups like Bihari-Sikhs, Dakhini-Sikhs, Jinsi-Sikhs, and Asomiya-Sikhs. Under British rule, Sikh migration attained a new height, introduced Sikhs from Punjab to varied urban opportunities, and exposed them to the complexities of contemporary all-India politics. It is estimated that nearly one-fifth of the total Sikh population reside outside Punjab in independent India. These scattered Sikh settlements underline the emergence of another Sikh diaspora within India's territorial limits.

Keywords: Bihari-Sikh, Dakhini-Sikh, Jinsi-Sikh, Asomiya-Sikh, panj piare, takhats, Sikh diaspora

SIKH settlements beyond Punjab are scattered throughout India. These came into existence through several channels. Some of them grew over centuries and represent the community's drive to migrate for different reasons. A few others owed their origin to different governmental initiatives of the post-Partition (1947) years. These sites are home to two of the five Sikh *takhats* (seats of temporal authority) and four of the five *panj piare* ('Cherished Five'). In total one-fifth of the community's population resides there.

Guru Nanak's *udasis* (travels) point to the dispersion of Sikhs outside Punjab. His successors institutionalized Sikhism so that disciples from far and near could communicate with the Gurus through representatives. Widely circulated *janamsakhis* ('birth-narratives'), the *vars* (long poems) of Bhai Gurdas, and different *hukamnamas* (orders) suggest how the Gurus' visits and their interactive engagements brought Sikhism within reach of local people. With their enthusiasm and support, *sangats* (religious congregations) sprang up in Banaras, Patna, and other places. These were located at main arteries of trade and pilgrimage, accommodated men of dissimilar

religious traditions, and pushed Sikhism's frontier beyond Punjab effectively dislodging the seemingly inviolable assumption that early Sikhs were Punjabis.

In different journeys across India, Sikhs encountered regional beliefs and practices and incorporated some of them into local Sikh practice. Nanakpanthis and Udasis of the early Sikh tradition communicated in different languages cutting across religious boundaries and possibly carried *padas* (couplets) of poet-saints like Pipa, Jaidev, Namdev, and others to Punjab. Their incorporation in Sikh sacred text underlines Sikhism's keenness to share India's other *bhakti* (devotional) traditions that were generally commensurate with the predominant thrust of Sikh scripture as enunciated by the Sikh Gurus. It also suggests a sense of growing 'self-consciousness' among the Gurus' Sikhs without prompting any break with the religious mosaic around them.

The centrality of the Khalsa in the mid-eighteenth century added soldiers and mercenaries to the Sikh presence and envisaged the process of early Sikh state formation. (p. 535) As some central and eastern Punjab districts had welcomed Sikh *misl* (military) leaders with *rakhi* (tax for protection), fellow Sikh militiamen did not take much time to reach the Yamuna-Ganga-Brahmaputra-Kaveri watershed. Some were employed in the armies of native powers or paid a lump sum for their support.

Like other eighteenth-century emerging political authorities, the Khalsa became one of the major contenders for power in Punjab and its adjoining territories. Armed Khalsa Sikhs appeared in Rajasthan, Kashmir, and western Uttar Pradesh and as far as lower Assam in the east and Karnataka in the far south. Their presence was recorded in modern Haryana and Saharanpur district beyond the Yamuna. They were mostly Jats, though men of other castes were also there.

Growing militarization led to other modifications in the transmission of Sikh heritage. It was no longer a community of peasants and traders. There was significant socio-economic differentiation in its ranks. Acquisition of wealth precipitated rivalry among *misl* leaders. It surfaced as some of them were laying claims in and around Haryana, northern Rajasthan, and western Uttar Pradesh. Udasis and Nanakpanthis joined other militarized Sikh groups and felt no discord in combining trade and militarism in their distant journeys, allowing for a certain ambiguity with regard to the nature and definition of the Khalsa order.

With numerous revenue-free holdings along the Yamuna-Ganga river as far as Bihar and scattered *mathas* (religious centres with or without provision for military training) from Pune to Puri, these Sikhs constituted a significant section of the Gurus' followers and thus further augmented eighteenth-century Sikhism's pluralistic nature with numerous, additional overlapping identities. The existence of dissimilar hyphenated groups widened

the process. Scattered from Kashmir to Assam, they were of varying numbers. Each had its local name, viz. Jinsi-Sikhs, Bihari-Sikhs (also called Agraharis), Dakhini-Sikhs, and Asomiya-Sikhs. Such hybridization reflected fresh complexities within pre-colonial Sikhism.

Sikhism's interface with people of disparate socio-religious traditions outside Punjab explains their emergence. They were mostly endogamous assemblages, composed of non-Punjabi rural folk with their roots firmly embedded in a regional sociocultural mosaic. Interventions of such minuscule Sikh clusters, with their distinct language and ritual, stimulated the blossoming of regional diversity in Sikhism. Two specific territorial groups affiliated with two distant *takhats*, viz. the Bihari-Sikhs in Patna and the Dakhini-Sikhs in Nanded, are illustrative of the strength and growth of these regional groups. There Sikhism did not survive as a stagnant faith with its life borrowed from Punjab, but underlined how divergent strands of a lived religion, without demarcating conceptual abstractions of deviating traditions, continue to exist in distant parts of India.

These indigenous groups also had their subgroups. A section of Bihari-Sikhs identified themselves as *Sodhbansis* (Sodhi clan of the Gurus). They may be bracketed with *Singh Agraharis*, though nowhere was it formally acknowledged. Both were predominantly agriculturists with the five external symbols of Sikhism. Sodhbansis again differed from *Munria Agraharis* who were traders and clean-shaven. In Nanded, 'Sikhs (p. 536) of the Khalsa' represented another important local group. They received fresh recruits from Punjab as late as the mid-nineteenth century. Those who arrived later were generally employed in the army of the Nizam (Hyderabad). Their military affiliation facilitated matrimonial alliances with local Sikhs, reinforcing the comparative importance of the older sections of the Dakhini-Sikhs as well as their power over the local space.

These two indigenous Sikh groups simultaneously celebrated the *prakash* ('installation') of the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth before the *sangat*, revered them equally by *arati* (waving lamps) and songs in regional languages accompanied by indigenous musical instruments. The persistence of some of these local cultural symbols and practices, though disapproved in the standard Sikh Rahit Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct) emphasizes how Sikhism beyond Punjab communicates even today in different tunes and languages. Such regional charismas owed as much to their imagined or real link with the last Guru as these do by being enmeshed in native experience and social ethos. Physical distance from Punjab reinforced each *takhat*'s autonomous position. It favoured the uninterrupted performance of its distinct gurdwara practices emphasizing differences from the normative Sikh code of conduct.

British rule gave fresh opportunities for the interactions between Sikhs from Punjab and their distant Indian co-religionists. While colonial modernity stimulated conditions for the

emergence of a well-defined Sikh identity in Punjab, it favoured their recruitment in armed and police forces. As peasant proprietors, they moved in search of recently reclaimed wastelands. Others were called upon to lay railway lines, drive different forms of public transport, and participate in the process of industrialization. The unleashing of these forces generated a large-scale migration among rural Punjabis. They were no longer dominated by Khatri traders, but Jats flocked in larger number and became an important beneficiary of this process. Other non-Jat groups, standing at the lower rungs of the Sikh social hierarchy, like Aroras (the trading caste of western Punjab), Ramgarhias (a composite caste of carpenters, blacksmiths, and masons), and Mazhbis (sweepers) emulated Jat enterprise, though not uniformly reproducing it. Some of these developments introduced Sikhs to varied urban opportunities as well as exposing them to the complexities of contemporary politics at the all-India level.

British census statistics follow migrants' trails and outline how different Sikh castes in their sprinkled Indian locations responded to emigration. Such migrants were not always the poorest section of rural society. They mobilized resources for undertaking long journeys and survived in distant lands for certain months till they were able to remit to their native places. It was nothing uncommon for a Jat landowner to transfer a part of his ancestral holdings and use their asset for undertaking journeys beyond India. Such examples were not unknown among their kinsmen moving towards distant Indian locations.

In the early twentieth century, these sources traced Jat Sikhs in the irrigated areas of Ganganagar district of Rajasthan. The process possibly remained a trickle during the late nineteenth century, but increased dramatically in the 1920s. Irrigation from the Ganga Canal (1920s) stimulated the reclamation of waste lands and contributed to the development of flourishing agricultural settlements. As the Akali message for gurdwara (p. 537) reform (1920s) circulated from Punjab, the Ganganagar peasantry mobilized and rallied under their caste leaders. Inadequate supply from the Ganga Canal provided an important rallying point to forge intimate ties with a section of the Sikh leadership in Punjab. Master Tara Singh, a well-known Akali leader, visited these settlements to champion the cause of the aggrieved peasants (1944).

In a few western Uttar Pradesh districts, the Akali struggle remained an equally powerful message and provided opportunities for large-scale Jat mobilization. Till 1921, local Jats of Saharanpur, Meerut, Rohilkhand, and Moradabad districts were lukewarm in declaring their Sikh identity. The Akali struggle stimulated 'a very intensive campaign' to return them as Sikhs. In 1931, it was 'most successful' among the Pachalda Jats of Moradabad district. Within another decade, the movement had gained additional support and the province reported an almost fivefold increase in the Sikh population since 1931.

The introduction of modern transport facilities led to another wave of Jat migration towards Kolkata. These Sikhs reached Kolkata at the moment that the city both emerged as an embarkation point for going to distant countries beyond India and introduced modern vehicular traffic. Jat-Sikhs drove buses and taxis in numbers, served as cleaners and conductors, and established control over different apex transport bodies.

Here also Jat Sikh arrival coincided with the beginning of the Akali struggle in Punjab. They claimed the status of 'guardians' of Sikhism and sought to impose their definition of a 'true' Sikh over the financially weak Agraharis, even though a section of them had been in the city since the late eighteenth century. Kolkata's radical political climate stimulated the voracity of Punjabi Sikhs and provided it with a nationalist flavour. An alarmed British administration intervened to defend Bihari-Sikhs against the Akalis and turned it into an extended version of the contemporary gurdwara struggle. Punjabi Sikhs, however, failed to achieve their target so long as the colonial administration stood firmly behind Agraharis. They only captured it when British rule was on its way out.

The Akali struggle in its nationalist format was neither present everywhere nor did it receive similar support in other parts of India. Its anti-colonial blueprint was significantly modified in Cuttack (Odisha). It led to the dislodgement of one Udasi *mahant* (followers of Baba Srichand) from his *dera* (sacred space) at Datan Sahib, traditionally associated with the memory of Guru Nanak's visit to Puri. Its plan was possibly outlined by British officials so that some loyal Sikhs could be at the helm of the affairs of the gurdwara, thereby diverting the Akali-led gurdwara struggle from its anti-British track record in Punjab.

Similarly, Akali *satyagrahis* (volunteers committed to non-violence) were not always welcomed by the non-Sikh nationalist leadership outside Punjab. The Vaikom Satyagraha (March 1924 – November 1925) in the native state of Travancore (Kerala) points to how the Akalis were viewed as a 'threat' to local peace. They travelled all the way from Punjab in support of some untouchable castes, struggling for temple entry. Instead of remaining friendly, the Akalis received denunciation in local press. It exposed the Indian leadership's ambivalent attitude towards the Sikhs, including that of Gandhi himself.

(p. 538) Some of these incongruous experiences underlined that the Akali-led struggle outside Punjab had its regional ramifications. As Sikh migration did not occur uniformly throughout India, it provided local British administration and nationalist leadership the opportunity of modifying their pronounced anti- or pro-Akali stand as per local needs and circumstances. In some cases, where sufficient numbers of immigrant Jats were missing, the local bureaucracy even looked towards non-Jat castes for rallying local Sikh support. It offered opportunities for making some regional modifications regarding the relevance and role of gurdwaras in the life of the community outside Punjab.

The early twentieth-century Ramgarhia caste mobilization in Assam provides an interesting illustration. Like Jats, they also migrated, but their destinations as well as the nature of the jobs which they were willing to do were not always identical. As they were linked with technical jobs, Ramgarhias not only reached industrial cities like Jamshedpur and Kolkata, but also went to Assam for laying railway lines—an area missed by Jat migrants owing to the lack of surface traffic. In the absence of Jats, Ramgarhias slipped into the Jat position and claimed the highest social ranking among local Sikhs which was inconceivable in contemporary Punjab. They also set up a few gurdwaras, bracketed these institutions with their caste name, and exercised control through the celebration of *gurpurabs* (festivals associated with the birth of one of the Gurus) and other functions. With firm loyalty to British rule and reluctance to support the Jat-dominated Akali struggle of 1920s, a section of middle-class Ramgarhia leaders learnt the significance of the gurdwara platform in their caste mobilization in Punjab. With the popularity of its message, their counterparts carried it to their new home in Assam. As Ramgarhias were mobilized in the Brahmaputra Valley through their caste-led gurdwaras, it remained a sharp relief to what Jats had so long been doing with the community's sacred space elsewhere in India.

The division of Punjab and the independence of India provided additional direction to Sikh dispersal. It stimulated a large-scale diffusion of Sikh refugees from the districts of western Punjab to different Indian provinces and exposed them to many dreadful experiences. According to one estimate, nearly 2.5 million Sikh refugees were rehabilitated beyond Punjab and it resulted in an overhaul change of the Sikh demographic profile at the all-India level. Generally speaking, they were resettled in those provinces bordering Punjab where Sikhs had settled earlier. One segment of these Sikhs was composed of Jats. They were mostly rehabilitated in rural Haryana (then a part of Punjab), Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. The second group designated the trading and other professional castes. They were accommodated in different urban commercial centres scattered throughout the country. As a result, Sikh peasant refugees were predominantly found in Punjab's adjoining states, but those non-peasant groups had to move to distant locations from Mandi (Himachal Pradesh) to Moreh (Manipur).

While a section of the Sikh peasant refugees paved the way for the Green Revolution in Punjab, their counterparts predominantly residing in adjoining states had an equally impressive record. With their long-standing expertise in modern techniques of cultivation and use of canal water, they served as model to other refugee farmers. They took up the challenges of their new settlements and seized almost every opportunity of changing **(p. 539)** their position. Haryana and Rajasthan accommodated a little over 40 per cent of Sikh population (2001) residing outside Punjab and shared much of the achievements of Punjab peasants.

The message of peasant triumph was reciprocated in Uttarkhand (separated from Uttar Pradesh in 2000). It was initially a territory afflicted with devastating malaria, unpredictable moods of nature, and ravages of wild beasts over which the hill population had virtually no control. Here Jat Sikhs' hard labour and improved framing turned the region into a flourishing agricultural region of the country. Some of these striking agrarian changes had generally taken place at the cost of coercing native hill people, large-scale biodegradation, and ecological imbalance. It precipitated debate regarding its long-term implications, but the success story of those Sikh pioneer farmers who had taken the lead nearly fifty years ago and continued it in the subsequent decades, needs to be mentioned.

A similar tale of peasant success came from Himachal Pradesh as well, mostly from the three *tahsils* skirting Punjab, like Paonta Sahib. A part of the area was traditionally famous for growing valuable fruits. During the post-independence years, it possibly received some degree of recognition. These areas were initially a part of Punjab's envisaged Garden Colony (1950s) and supplied fruits and other products to nearby factories in Uttar Pradesh.

Unlike peasant refugees of Punjab plains that had broad affinities of caste and place of origin in their ranks, their counterparts in Jammu and Kashmir were mostly men of diverse linguistic affiliations who traced their origin to scattered areas of western Punjab. They had also embraced Sikhism from different social backgrounds and on different occasions. A section migrated from Sialkot region and settled in rural parts of Jammu. There were others who came from bordering the Mirpur and Muzafarabad areas of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Another significant number of Sikhs are those who had been there since the days of Sikh rule in Kashmir. It possibly explains the rise of numerous endogamous groups with their sharp divisions with very little social exchange among them. Besides cultivation, some Sikhs were found in the service and transport sectors.

Another distinct trend was Punjabi Sikh migration toward rural parts of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Although no official figures are available regarding the extent of their exodus, reports from across Punjab indicate that peasants were exploring options in these central Indian states. The high price of land and its scarcity in Punjab as against the abundance of cultivable plots, of water resources, and of electricity in Madhya Pradesh had prompted many to emigrate. Some of these heterogeneous peasant aspirants were found in rural tracts of Gwalior, Bhind, and Morena districts and the census statistics (2001) confirm the process of change taking place during the last quarter of the twentieth century (see Figure 44.1).



Click to view larger

Figure 44.1 Indian Sikhs Living Outside Punjab (Credit: Mukul Chand Patra).

The history of Sikh refugees would be incomplete without outlining similar experiences of trading and other professional groups settled in other parts of India. They were predominantly rehabilitated in different urban centres and trading marts along the Yamuna-Ganga plains. In some cases, they were allotted houses, shops, and industrial (p. 540) (p. 541) enterprises which were left behind by Muslim refugees. Otherwise, they were offered vacant space at nominal price or other financial assistance like low rates of interest to set up shops and/or residential plots to build houses.

These small facilities provided them opportunities to once again live together with their kinsmen. The level of urbanization (45.48 per cent) of these people was significantly higher from their counterparts living in Punjab (17.22 per cent). Whereas rural Sikhs outside Punjab are found generally concentrated in areas bordering the state, urban Sikhs outside are predominantly accommodated in nearly all important Indian cities. According to census sources, more than half of the urban Sikh population was found in a number of big urban centres like Delhi, Mumbai, Kanpur, Jamshedpur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Thane, Pune, Jabalpur, and Indore. This urban link gave a small handful of Sikhs a powerful grip over the local economy.

Of all these cities, the rise of Delhi owed much to refugees from western Punjab. Incidentally, Delhi also represents the largest urban concentration of Sikhs in the country (2001). A significant number brought not only their skills, but also some initial capital to begin a fresh life. With their rapid increase of population as well as rise in economic prosperity and education, they were no longer merely small shopkeepers, but moved to varied professions and trades. They added a distinct lifestyle to modern Delhi and their visible presence could be traced throughout the city. In some of the important resettlement areas like Lodi Colony, Punjabi Bagh, Tilak Nagar, and other Trans-Yamuna settlements, they made their presence felt to their non-Sikh neighbours. The powerful

Sikh presence is also reflected through the voice of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC). In 1971, legislation was passed to manage different gurdwaras, and place gurdwara property located within the state of Delhi on a legal footing. With the city's historical gurdwaras under its management and an annual budget of around 50 million rupees, the DSGMC maintains its distinct stand from the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, the Sikh apex body at Amritsar.

Like Delhi, important Maharashtrian urban centres like Mumbai, Thane, Pune, and Nagpur also witnessed the presence of Sikh refugees. Their number steadily increased and in 1991 represented around 6 per cent of the total provincial population. They were overwhelmingly represented in Mumbai and engaged in engineering works, electronics, hotel industry, transport sector, educational institutions, and other professions. An outline of the Sikh refugee's success story is communicated through the community's numerous colourful publications, and the holding of different seminars and directories with the Singh Sabha Dadar often remaining at their front.

While a section of Sikh refugees had shared Delhi and Mumbai's spectacular urban growth, Kolkata's economy did not offer any significant relief to migrants. A small number of them still came forward to settle, but had to operate in a restricted market where competition was extremely stiff and the amount of profit was not sufficiently lucrative. The local administration's engagement with the manifold problems of millions of Hindu refugees coming from East Pakistan made matters worse. In the midst of such difficulties, a small group of Sikh refugees reached the city. The presence of a large number of Sikh transporters in the city possibly prompted them to go for trade in car parts. With **(p. 542)** better education and no permanent ties to Punjab, they remained almost like an endogamous social group within the larger Kolkata Sikh mosaic.

Similarly, those Jat Sikh transporters who were residing in Kolkata for more than a generation found it almost a 'dying city'. They were marginalized by the fast-changing political scenario. Settlements of Hindu refugees in and around the metropolis and their growing politicization prompted local administration to take over the city's surface transport sector in order to provide employment to 'Sons-of-the-soil'. It had been local Jat Sikhs' exclusive preserve since its inception in the early twentieth century. As they were thrown out of their major occupation, the city also lost much of its appeal to many of them. From the mid-1960s onwards, they started moving towards long-distance carriers' trade, but many others looked forward to a new and greener pasturage outside the province.

Local sources suggest that of those Jat Sikhs who frantically desired to leave Kolkata, some journeyed towards Assam which had still been a terra incognita to many of them. With the development of surface traffic, connecting the valley of Brahmaputra and

beyond with the rest of India, it became one of their desired destinations in the north-east of the country. From Beltola, then situated in the outskirts of Guwahati, Jat transporters did not take much time to discover a new terrain of vehicular traffic in north-eastern states like Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Nagaland. Their dominant presence is reflected in the construction of a massive gurdwara building at Beltola, nowadays an integral part of Guwahati's city limits.

The larger segment of Kolkata transporters preferred to travel to Raipur in Chattisgarh, Indore, Jabalpur, and Bhopal (all in Madhya Pradesh). These new centres of trade and communications during post-independence years had already accommodated a sizeable number of Sikh refugees who were predominantly engaged in numerous professions. Local sources confirm the coming of a new stream of Sikh transporters and their steady success. The growing importance of these urban centres as emerging areas of transport industry, situated at the crossroads of different national highways, stimulated the migration of different castes and professions. Their presence increased the size of the local Sikh population. It became more complex, sharply divided and competitive as well as hierarchical.

Sikhs also made their forays in some parts of southern India. Of these four southern states, Bidar, in Karnataka (which figured prominently in the *janamshakhis*), still remains an almost island like Sikh settlement in the state. Sharp divisions between Punjabi-Sikhs and Dakhini-Sikhs did not discourage the former from founding a chain of educational institutions funded by them. Sikh presence is comparatively higher in Andhra Pradesh. In spite of doubt regarding the size of total Sikh population as underlined in census statistics, its capital city Hyderabad was well known to the community since the mid-nineteenth century. Descendants of those Sikhs who had earlier been in the Nizam's army represent an important section of the local Sikh population. Hyderabad's twin city Secunderabad, an important military cantonment, Nizamabad, and Karimnagar are other important urban Sikh centres of the province.

The post-independence Sikh scenario was further diversified by the presence of a handful of Sikh refugees from Myanmar. Following the British annexation (1882), they **(p. 543)** migrated to Burma and engaged in different trading ventures. But they had to leave the land following the nationalization of the country's trade by the military government (1962). Their long residence in Burma led to the birth of a distinct endogamous Sikh group.

This near all-India presence of the Sikhs and their growing socio-economic network with the rest of India underlined their participation in innumerable journeys beyond Punjab since medieval times. With the passage of time, both the social composition of migrants and their places of origin and destination, underwent many changes. It is difficult to chart

each of these passages distinctly owing to their overlapping features. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, these journeys were undertaken by single males from rural Punjab, in the company of their kinsmen.

As womenfolk later on joined them in new homes, their family life as well as social network at the community level was reinforced. It included much of their Punjabi baggage like food, caste hierarchy, and gurdwara-centric religious life with factional politics, social celebrations, print culture, and other things. These provided opportunities of communicating their differences with the host society as well as emphasizing religious traditions to younger generations. As the Sikh population had settled down in the wider space beyond Punjab but within India, they could add a new territorial space in the life of the community.

The long process of dialogue between Sikhs and other Indian communities experienced a setback during the days of Operation Blue Star (June 1984) and especially after the assassination of the country's prime minister (October 1984). The Sikhs suffered a large-scale massacre in nearly forty Indian cities. Such atrocities revived the memory of the eighteenth-century *ghallugare* (holocausts), generated a sense of transnational identity, and intensified a demand for Khalistan on the part of some Sikhs. Sikhs were now projected as secessionists committed to destroying India's territorial integrity. In different audio-visual and print media, the voice of a handful of Sikhs was highlighted as the perception of the entire Punjabi-Sikh community. It led to a sharp deterioration of the relationship between Sikhs and their non-Sikh neighbours.

A new genre of literature that focused upon the recent Sikh tragedy and subsequent Sikh alienation emerged. From a major Sikh settlement like Jamshedpur in Jharkhand, it not only highlighted a sense of new community solidarity, but also voiced in Punjabi a powerful protest seeking to share the pain and humiliation of those Sikhs who suffered at the hands of the state machinery. One Sikh writer who had spent his earlier days in different Indian cities outside Punjab, outlined in Hindi his deep anguish about the way a common Sikh like him was discriminated against and viewed with suspicion by his long-standing non-Sikh friends. He was no less recriminating towards those Sikhs from Punjab who had been equally critical towards their Indian counterparts.

Even one Bengali novelist raised a few fundamental questions regarding how a Sikh refugee, who had repeatedly suffered eviction and moved many times from one Indian district to another in search of home, would be defining his home. In spite of the Punjabi Sikhs' overarching affiliation with Punjab as the *ghar* (home), others argued whether their second or third generation, who had never been to Punjab nor could effectively (p. 544) communicate in Punjabi, would ever identify themselves with Punjab in the same

manner as their forefathers had done in the past. These conflicting perceptions of home and their affiliation with Punjab represent another distinctive marker of these writings.

Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since these days of turmoil. There are already changes in the life of Sikh community and its non-Sikh neighbours. As Sikhs and Sikhism's history of five hundred years had often changed trajectories, some of these recent experiences have made them look forward to the future. During the high tide of the Khalistan Movement, no one ever dreamt of rejecting the link with two *takhats* situated outside Punjab.

With numerous settlements scattered across the country, the emergence of another Sikh diaspora within India cannot be ruled out. At the threshold of a new millennium, the Sikh diaspora within India, though outside Punjab, accommodates more Sikhs than the Sikh diaspora outside India. Unlike the latter, it is not a recent development but grew over centuries since the days of the Gurus. Like their counterparts, Indian Sikhs living outside Punjab continue to recreate a mini Punjab underlining Punjabi lifestyle and many home-from-home experiences.

While emphasizing its surfacing, Punjabi Sikhs' varied links with the rest of India also raise doubts as to whether the proposed All-India Sikh Gurdwaras Act would be appreciated by 'little Sikh traditions' such as those found amongst Asomiya-Sikhs, Dakhini-Sikhs, and Burmese-Sikhs. These 'small Sikh voices' residing in India beyond Punjab prefer to live with their dissimilar gurdwara practices and participate in local celebrations, and seem comfortable with a dual-Sikh identity. They continue to redefine the Gurus' message and may not be all ready to welcome the All-India Sikh Gurdwaras Act. In no small measure, the endeavours of these minuscule Sikh groups contribute to the surfacing of a local groundswell. It makes room for plurality in Sikhism and reinforces its claim to the status of world religion.

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Sikh Migration, Diasporas, and Transnational Practices

Shinder Singh Thandi

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Abstract and Keywords

After a brief discussion on the rapid increase in overseas migration and mobility among the Sikhs during British colonial rule and the consequent phases in the emergence of Sikh diasporas, this article explores the multi-layered transnational practices of the Sikhs. Although political, social, and cultural practices have existed for a long time this article has a particular focus on diaspora-homeland financial relations given their growing importance to Punjabi livelihoods. It is argued that although remittances and diaspora philanthropy remain popular forms of diaspora finance in Punjab and despite its great potential there are considerable constraints in mobilizing additional forms of financial resources. The article ends with a critical discussion on ways to improve Punjab's diaspora engagement so that Sikh diaspora's potential in aiding Punjab's development can be fully realized.

Keywords: Migration, Mobility, Sikh Diasporas, Transnational Practices, Remittances, Sikh Philanthropy, Diaspora Engagement

Historical Context: Empire, Mobility and Emergence of Sikh Diasporas

Given its physical geography and generous agrarian and water resources, Punjab emerged as one of the most developed and prosperous regions in the Indian subcontinent. After its annexation by the British in 1849 Punjab’s strategic importance increased and it emerged as a major beneficiary of the colonial state’s investment in physical infrastructure, canal colony irrigation projects, and military recruitment. The economic modernization of Punjab under colonial rule, the increased competition for resources, and limited forms of democracy generated intense communal consciousness

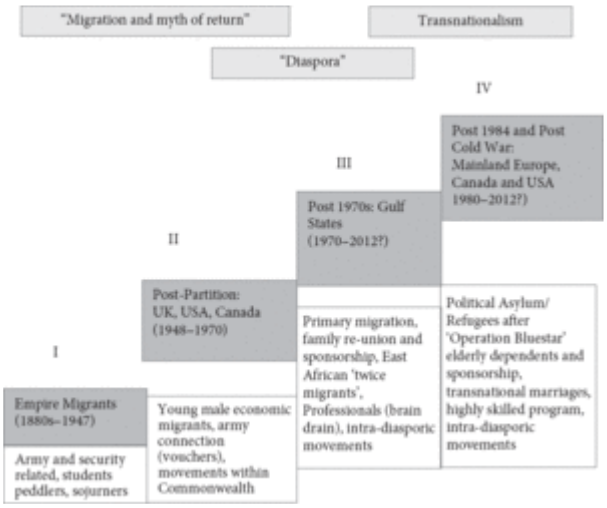
which over time pitted Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs against each other and resulted in further economic, political, and cultural polarization amongst them. The unfolding events of the 1940s, leading to the eventual partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947, also meant the partition of Punjab into east and west Punjab along the Radcliffe line with the latter (Pakistan) Punjab gaining the larger geographical territory (Talbot and Singh 1999). Partition resulted in much bloodshed, dislocation, and mass movements of refugees across borders, with many Sikhs becoming twice migrants after having migrated to the new colonies' towns some decades earlier. The ending of the British Indian Empire in Punjab, after almost a century of colonial rule, left a dual legacy—a legacy of modernization and a legacy of displacement and despair, both of which were to play an important role in the historical evolution of the Sikh diaspora.

(p. 546) Although opinions vary, overseas Sikhs are currently estimated to number between 1.75 to 2 million, around 10 per cent of the total Indian diaspora, estimated at 20 million, and settled in around 75 countries. Sikhs have a long history of mobility and migration, and in the past they moved in line with the changing political, economic, or social environments. Thus, even before the arrival of the British, Sikhs were already scattered over a very wide geographical area, not just of Greater Punjab but in other areas within and beyond British India. However, the modern period of overseas migration is conveniently dated to the annexation of Punjab in 1849. A few decades after this Sikhs became geographically dispersed and this scattering reflected the changing socio-economic conditions in the Punjab (the supply side 'push' and policy factors) and the changing structure of employment opportunities abroad (the demand side 'pull' factors).

Unlike in other parts of India which experienced the indentured labour system, Sikh migration across the waters really starts during the final quarter of the nineteenth century and was very much a product of the growing influence of Punjab and of Sikhs within the British Empire. This influence was manifested in growing military recruitment in Punjab and increased investment in agriculture resulting in significant increase in agricultural prosperity. The majority of the pioneer migrants, largely Sikhs, who went to Burma, Malaya, Shanghai, and Hong Kong came from rural areas, and many of them went abroad either through military postings, police service, or for other security-related operations. According to Omissi, Punjab began to figure heavily in Indian army recruitment by the beginning of the twentieth century, with Muslim Punjabis representing around 14 per cent of the total; Sikhs and Punjabi Hindus together accounted for 26 per cent with *Jat* Sikhs comprising 15 per cent (Omissi 1998: 20).

The first quarter of the twentieth century saw further expansion of this migration to East Africa, mainly associated with development of infrastructure, especially Ugandan railways, and the new trade and business opportunities which this created in neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Tanzania. The East African connection

broadened the socio-economic background of Sikh migrants, especially for the artisan *Ramgariah* community. Overall, with exposure to wider horizons through the imperial connection, the number of Sikhs migrating independently to explore economic opportunities abroad expanded rapidly, especially to Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific coast of North America. However, unlike earlier 'managed' migrations associated with Empire duties, much of this latter independent migration occurred from the *doaba* region of Punjab and did not necessarily fit in with the 'martial races' policy which largely favoured the Sikhs and Muslim Punjabis of the *Majha* region (Omissi 2005).



Click to view larger

Figure 45.1 Historical phases in the emergence of the Sikh Diaspora

Source: The author's own model of periodization.

Unfortunately discriminatory and hostile immigration policies and high travel costs limited the further expansion of this fare-paying migration (Barrier and Dusenbery 1989). Over time however, as favourable conditions emerged in the post-colonial period, the central *doaba* region re-established itself as the dominant region for sending migrants abroad. Thus, the mass movements of the 1950s and 1960s mainly to the UK, (p. 547) Canada, and the USA, to the Gulf States in the 1980s and the more recent movements of the 1990s, both regular and irregular, to newer locations in southern Europe, mainly have their roots in the central *doaba* districts. However, in more recent times the Malwa and Majha districts have also started sending migrants abroad, increasing sub-regional as well as social diversity among the Sikh diaspora. For instance, for *Dalit* and artisan groups, new opportunities in the Gulf States were a major and significant event towards their economic empowerment (Thandi 2012).

In summary, the emergence and geographical spread of the Sikh diaspora was not accidental and occurred in distinct waves, from different sub-regions of Punjab and among migrants from differing socio-economic backgrounds, as circumstances and opportunities allowed. The evolution very much reflected the changing needs of the British Empire during the colonial period and the changing internal and global environments in the post-colonial periods. The geographical spread over this period has

created ‘Sikh diasporas’ which are highly differentiated, at different stages of development and with different degrees of visibility in their adopted homes. Figure 45.1 shows a systematic framework for the periodization and cumulative development of the Sikh diaspora and Table 45.1 provides the estimates of the size of the Sikh diaspora, which confirm its major centres in Europe and North America.

(p. 548)

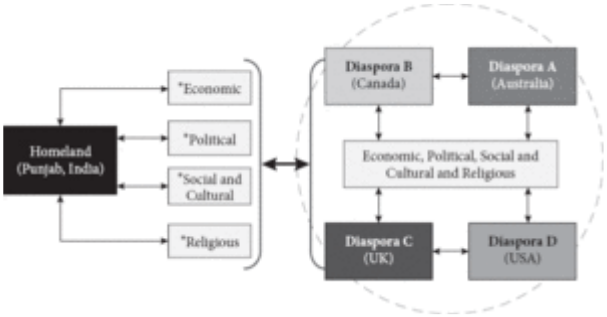
Table 45.1 Estimated size of Sikh diaspora (2012)

Country	**Number of Sikhs**
Canada	450,000
UK	400,000 (336,000 in 2001 census)
USA	350,000
Australia	85,000
New Zealand	15,000
Malaysia	65,000
Singapore	15,000
Germany	45,000
France	10,000 (possibly 15,000 if including illegal)
Austria/Switzerland	5,000
Poland	3,500
Belgium	5,000
Holland	4,000
Denmark	4,000
Norway	4,000
Sweden	6,000
Portugal	4,500
Spain	20,000

Italy	70,000
Greece	40,000
Others—e.g. Africa, Latin America, Asia	150,000
GRAND TOTAL (Sikh Punjabis)	1,751,000
GT (inc. 12.5% potential underestimate)	2,000,000

Source: Author's own estimates drawn from census data and press reports.

Sikh Diaspora's Multi-Layered Transnational Practices



Click to view larger

Figure 45.2 Circulation within Sikh transnational spaces

Source: Adapted from Thandi (2008).

An important characteristic of diasporas is that they maintain meaningful connections with their homeland based on a historical memory. Although these connections emerge immediately after immigration, they develop permanency, deepen, and become multi-layered over time. They range from being exclusive family ties to participation in village, community, and state level associations and which invariably (p. 549) involve engaging in different forms of economic, political, social, religious, and cultural exchanges (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc 1994). All these forms of transnational linkages emerged quickly for the Sikhs as they settled abroad and are presently thriving. The major types of practices involving contemporary Punjab are mapped in Table 45.2. Thus, over time, Sikhs have transformed into transnational agents with various forms of familial, cultural, social, community, and

political connections. For many of these, especially familial, cultural, and community affiliations, the forces of integration are becoming stronger, further binding transnational family and kinship networks.

An important point to register is that with dramatic developments in global travel, in digital media and telecommunications, these transnational networks have been reformed and reshaped in fundamental ways: linkages are no longer primarily *unidirectional* (from diaspora towards homeland) but *multi-directional* and progressively influenced by *intra-diaspora* exchanges within transnational spaces. In other words, Sikhs in Australia or Malaysia connect—at marriages, in charitable giving, in religious affiliations—with those in the UK, USA, and Canada and vice versa and their connection with Punjab is just one dimension of their transnational practices. This fundamental change has important implications for the way homeland governments, community, and philanthropic organizations approach their diasporas. Certainly, since the Sikh diaspora has become truly transnational, so must mobilization strategies, especially for philanthropic projects. Figure 45.2 provides a schematic representation of circulation within Sikh transnational spaces and Table 45.2 provides examples of the type of links under each category. Together they reinforce the point that different forms of diaspora-homeland linkages must be seen as circular flow of resources and that intra-diaspora networks are no less significant and in fact are likely to become more dominant in the future.

(p. 550)

Table 45.2 Typology of Sikh transnational practices

1. Economic
- **a**. Diaspora Finance
  - **i**. Remittances
  - **ii**. Savings with banks
  - **iii**. Foreign direct investment
  - **iv**. Diaspora bonds
  - **v**. Stockmarket investments
  - **vi**. Philanthropic investments

2. Political
- **a**. Linkages between political parties in the homeland and diaspora
- **b**. Diaspora advocacy
  - **i**. Human rights groups
  - **ii**. Role of vernacular press
  - **iii**. Sikh TV and audio satellite channels

3. Cultural and Social
- **a**. Music/Film/Theatre
- **b**. Heritage tourism
- **c**. Art
- **d**. Transnational marriages
- **e**. Sport
- **f**. Philanthropy
- **g**. Medical tourism
- **h**. Journalism
- **i**. Literature

4. Religious
- **a**. Religious philanthropy
- **b**. Visits from SGPC dignitaries
- **c**. Discourses by visiting *Sants* and other religious leaders
- **d**. Visiting *Kirtani Jathas*
- **e**. Dissemination of religious literature
- **f**. Live broadcasts of religious services on Sikh TV and audio satellite channels

(Categories marked by an asterisk* also signify intra-diaspora activities)

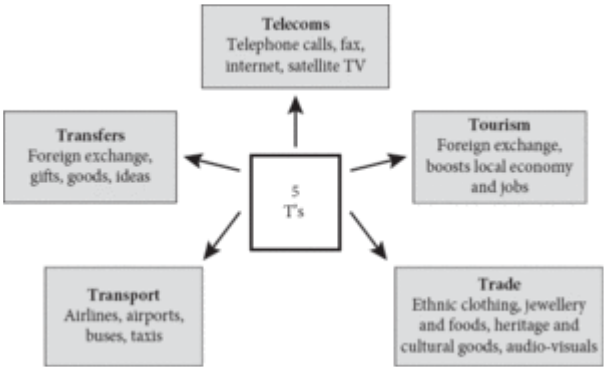
(p. 551) As we can see from Table 45.2 there are several categories and sub-categories which clearly illustrate the myriad forms of transnational practices, both between diaspora and homeland and intra-diaspora as well. Although not an exhaustive list, it captures the main characteristics of Sikh diaspora's multi-layered transnational practices. Given limitations of space, the following sections will focus on some selected aspects of these transnational practices and their impacts on homelands.

Growing Recognition of Diasporas as Agents of Development

Given that diaspora-homeland relations have strengthened during the recent accelerated phase of globalization, growing research acknowledges that a country's diaspora can have a significant political and economic impact on the country or region of origin (Kapur 2010). Considering generally the role of diaporas in their homeland, their impact can be positive and/or negative; for example positive in the economic domain (e.g. through remittances, bank deposits, foreign direct investment, and philanthropy) but negative in the political domain raising national security concerns (e.g. through financial support for separatism, communalism, or religious extremism). Since both effects are simultaneous, illustrating the Janus character of diasporas, at certain times the negative effects may appear to dominate the positive ones, as for instance, during the Khalistan movement in Punjab in the 1980s when overseas Sikhs were often alleged to be funding the separatist movement (Tatla 1999; Thandi 1996). The diaspora's potential to influence its homeland is a function of both its own characteristics and those of the country or region of origin. The potential for a diaspora to act as a development agent or at least a catalyst for change depends on a number of factors, including amongst others its size, its education, its skills, length of migration, and profile of the diaspora. In the latter case, for instance, the diaspora's socio-economic make-up and the diversity and scale of economic and political activities in the 'hostland' become relevant (Faist 2008).

In recognition of the positive roles diasporas can play, the global discourse on impacts of international migration and diasporas shifted from one being about negative 'brain drain' effects towards one of positive 'brain gain' or 'brain circulation' effects (Saxenian 2006). In fact the latest thinking sees diasporas as playing multiple roles in a pyramid-structured ascending order: sending remittances and donations (at the base), undertaking financial investments, contributing to knowledge and innovation and bringing about institutional reform. The higher one goes up this pyramid, the deeper, broader, and more enduring the impact of diasporas (Kuznetsov 2011). Furthermore, we should not assume that different migrant actors are involved in separate types of resource inflows as these often tend to overlap and interconnect. In response, India and Punjab, although rather belatedly, also

now recognize the need to leverage their diaspora to strengthen impacts and design appropriate instruments and policies (Thandi 2000).



Click to view larger

Figure 45.3 Diaspora-Homeland Connections: The 5 Ts Model

Source: Adapted from Orozco (2003) in Thandi (2010).

(p. 552)

The broadest model to capture the diaspora's macro-economic impact is that of Orozco (2003), developed with Latin American experience in mind. He emphasizes the important role of five Ts usually associated with diaspora activity: tourism, transportation, telecommunications, trade, and transmission of monetary remittances. Figure 45.3 illustrates the macro-economic impacts of the five Ts and how each one of the Ts has substantial direct benefits on the economy. This model was adapted and applied to the Punjab context to demonstrate that these direct positive effects were clearly visible in Punjab and how these effects reinforced the micro-level effects of household remittances or village level projects (Thandi 2010). It was argued that it would be difficult to imagine how the prevailing levels of economic activity and consumption patterns in Punjab could have been sustained without the intervention of diaspora finance. For instance according to the World Bank, annual monetary remittances to Punjab were as high as US$2 to US$3 billion, which amounted to a significant 12–18 per cent of Punjab's gross state domestic product (World Bank 2004: 21).

In addition to the diaspora's *direct* effects (as captured in the 5 Ts model) there are also *indirect* effects. The indirect effects result from diasporas playing an intermediary or advocacy role between the sending and host countries in a range of mutually advantageous activities. Many of these effects are also visible in Punjab where diasporas can facilitate a dialogue between the home and host governments and their agencies. The involvement of the Canadian International Development Agency in Punjab is a good case in point as the lobbying by wealthy Canadian Sikh politicians such as Ujjal Dosanjh and Herb Dhaliwal was instrumental in their decision to operate in Punjab, despite (p. 553) Punjab's status as a 'highly developed' state. More detailed macro- and micro-level studies are required to capture the true impacts on the Punjab economy.

Diaspora Finance and Development: Historical Role of Remittances

Diaspora finance, particularly its major component, remittance money sent home by migrants, represents one of the largest, stable and most visible economic impacts of migration on migrant sending economies such as Punjab. According to the latest statistics, India received $64 billion in overseas remittances in 2011 (Ratha and Silwal 2012) but we don't know how much of this entered Punjab. If we assume around 10 per cent (the approximate size of Sikh diaspora relative to total Indian diaspora) comes to Punjab, this would amount to a sizeable $6.4 billion in 2011. Yet we also know this 'official' figure vastly underestimates the total inflow of remittances because large amounts come through informal 'cash' channels such as family, friends, and kinship networks, making it difficult to capture their 'true' developmental impact (Thandi 1994). Recent research shows the steady growth of remittance inflows, a result of better incentives and more favourable changes in the regulatory framework in India (Dusenbery and Tatla 2010; Sahai et al. 2011). This research has also greatly improved our understanding of 'productive' remittance utilization on various infrastructure and philanthropic projects in different villages of Punjab. Further as Levitt (2001) has argued, we need to go beyond the focus on 'tangible' financial inflows alone. *Social remittances* for example—transfer of ideas, values, attitudes, gossip, identities, social capital, organizational and managerial skills and practices—play no less a significant role, but since these are difficult to quantify, they have not received the same attention by researchers in Punjab.

Overwhelming evidence based on empirical studies in Punjab now suggests that family and community remittances play a complex, but vital role at household, community, and regional levels. They have an enormous potential to transform rural livelihoods by providing access to health care and education and by empowering communities whose economic welfare is threatened by the indifference and bureaucratic politics of the local state (Walton-Roberts 2001; Singh and Singh 2007; Thandi 2010). The contribution of remittances is particularly important in the case of Punjab with its continuous and ongoing fiscal crisis and consequent squeeze on budgets for rural development programmes. Thus for Punjab, given its strong, wealthy, and vibrant diaspora, one would expect diaspora finance to have a great potential in providing an alternative source of development finance but in practice there remain considerable barriers to realizing this potential.

(p. 554) Diaspora Finance and Development: The Growing Importance of Sikh Diasporan Philanthropy

The role of diasporan philanthropy—private giving for public good—has a relatively long history in Punjab and there are clear examples of this activity taking place in the 1920s (Verma 2002; Walton-Roberts 2005). However its magnitude, quality, and creativity have become more significant in the last couple of decades (Geithner et al. 2004). It is always difficult to identify the driving forces behind philanthropic funding. My own research suggests that arguments such as civic duty, loyalty to village kith and kin, gratitude, patriotism, sense of identity and belonging are often used by Sikhs migrants themselves to justify donations. Diaspora promoters and donors of sports tournaments often consider their activity as a form of social engineering designed to address the growing concern over the rise of liquor and drug abuse amongst Sikh youth in rural areas. Professional groups donating individually or through their professional organizations may be seen as 'paying back' something to their homeland, a sort of acknowledgement or gratitude for the public subsidy received during their education and training (Thandi 2010).

However, there may also be deeper cultural factors which play a role for a religious community such as the Sikhs. Sikh teachings place an important emphasis on philanthropy, equality, and altruism; cultural values emphasize the importance of *daswandh* or *daan* (sharing fruits of labour), *seva* (selfless service) and *sarbat da bhalla* (welfare of all) and these norms are especially emphasized when raising funding for faith-based philanthropy such as in the building of *gurdwaras* (places of worship) and other religious institutions, in extending help towards their *parivar* or *qaum* (family or ethnic group), in village infrastructure improvements and community facilities, and in showing compassion towards other deprived and underprivileged communities.

Whilst Sikhs have yet to discover their own great philanthropists, there have always been some relatively wealthy Sikhs and organizations that have made large donations in Punjab. In more recent times there have emerged highly committed social entrepreneurs such as Budh Singh Dhahan and Dr Gurdev Gill who initiate and undertake philanthropic work on their own and in their own particular way. However, many of the community remittances currently being mobilized are through the development of hometown or village welfare associations. In fact over the past ten years there has been a rapid growth in the establishment of hometown or village associations in the diaspora which are now performing a number of functions, such as encouraging sports and cultural exchanges and developing low-scale infrastructural development projects in their village

communities—see Table 45.3. These associations, both in the diaspora and corresponding ones in the homeland, are increasingly motivated to take advantage of the upsurge in family remittances and by a desire to offer financial assistance to their homelands.

(p. 555)

Table 45.3 Range of philanthropic activities by Sikhs in their home village/region

Category	**Kind of Activity**
Religion	Gurdwara donations, sarovars, clothes, computers, rest-rooms and guest houses
Health, Environment, and Infrastructure	Hospitals, dispensaries, nursing colleges, eye-camps, veterinary facilities, parks, street paving and solar lighting, bio-mass and gobar gas energy, mortuaries, sewerage and water treatment, vehicles
Education, Sports, and Recreational	Educational institutions, vocational courses, scholarships, libraries, IT equipment and science labs, sports stadiums and gyms and sponsorship of sports tournaments
Investment	Income generating and renewable energy programmes for the community
Other	General fund-raising, clothes, heritage sites, memorial gates, environmental and media projects

Source: Adopted from Thandi (2010).

As noted above, a distinct move towards social investment in philanthropic projects has gained momentum in Punjab over the past decade. There are now numerous villages in Punjab where varying levels of diaspora-funded rural development projects are being undertaken. The three major and successful diaspora philanthropic projects that were studied by this author in Punjab include: (i) Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust (near Banga, district Nawanshahr); (ii) National Rural Development Society, Palahi (near Phagwara, district Kupurthala); and (iii) Village Life Improvement Board (VLIB), Kharaudi (near Mahilpur, district Hoshiarpur) (Thandi 2010; Sahai et al. 2011). Table 45.3 identifies the main types of activities undertaken by village associations in Punjab as identified in research over the past decade.

Diaspora Engagement: Critical Reflections and Policy Lessons for Punjab

Both India and Punjab now acknowledge the importance of developing pro-diaspora outreach policies and fostering cultural identities in the diaspora. A clearer vision began to emerge after the report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora in 2001 (Singhvi et al. 2001). The inauguration of an annual *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* since 2003 (and its counterpart at the state level), creation of a separate Ministry of (p. 556) Overseas Indian Affairs, and recent decisions to grant dual nationality and voting rights to *some* non-resident Indians are all positive indicators of an evolving policy and significant signs of a shifting stance. However there are still considerable constraints, partly because of previous indifference and partly due to the politicization of previous linkages. Some argue that the most important constraint is the absence of a cohesive Indian diaspora identity amongst India's many diasporas which vary by region, class, caste, and religion and which prevents the Indian diaspora from playing the same kind of role as played by overseas Chinese or the Mexican diaspora in the economic development of their respective homelands (Orozco 2003; Smart and Hsu 2004). This argument would apply equally to Sikhs and Punjab as well. Heterogeneity and diversity within the Sikh diaspora means that state level activities geared towards promoting *Punjabiat* may not appeal to all Sikhs.

In examining and evaluating policies of countries that have successfully leveraged their diaspora, there are three major interrelated lessons that Punjab could learn.

Firstly, there is the important need for creating strong networks of emigrants engaged in the business of diaspora finance, including diasporan philanthropy. At present the most successful forms of development-oriented microfinance projects discussed here come from private individuals or family remittances and from village philanthropic associations and they are leading the way in promoting equitable rural development. Further, in addition to courting only wealthy Sikhs who may have initiated and contributed towards philanthropic projects, there is a need to nurture and strengthen wider networks so that more investment also flows into trade and industry of the region. In India, the Karnataka story of nurturing business start-ups among Silicon Valley diaspora returnees and in developing the technology cluster in Bangalore is an interesting and successful case resulting from a targeted sectoral strategy (Saxenian 2006). However, to date, no such coherent or integrated strategy has been advocated in Punjab in any serious way and, in any case, the prospects of such a strategy emerging in Punjab are not very promising given that an overwhelming majority of the Sikh Punjabi migrants originate from rural

areas, having an agricultural rather than industrial, business, or IT background. Despite the existence of a sizeable number of wealthy and business-oriented diasporan Sikhs, there is still the absence of a critical mass of diasporan financial, social, and cultural capital and this acts to constrain the flow of both the quantity and quality of non-remittance forms of diaspora finance to Punjab. It is also for this reason financial inflows end up in fuelling real estate prices or a consumption-driven economy.

The second element for successful mobilization is that of developing an infrastructure that would facilitate effective communications between the diaspora communities and their homeland. Connectivity offered through the Web provides an enormous potential for leaders in the homeland and diaspora communities to exchange and share information relatively instantly and cheaply. Information sharing can highlight business and investment opportunities and skill shortages, offer databases on diaspora-based and homeland experts, provide progress reports on ongoing or new philanthropic projects, and identify organizations offering opportunities for social and cultural exchange. In Punjab, some token initiatives have been taken to provide this facilitation and (p. 557) connectivity but they remain largely undeveloped, under-resourced, and politicized. As regards the latter, for instance, whenever Akali or Congress politicians have visited abroad, their appeal remains largely confined to their own political party networks.

The third and final element in leveraging the diaspora is to introduce financial incentives and initiate innovative mechanisms for attracting diaspora money. These would include not only liberalization of key sectors not currently open to diaspora residents but also further liberalization of financial flows. Current incentives such as offering matching grants to migrant investments are also part of these strategies but they need to be fully embraced through larger budgetary allocations and dedicated administrators to develop credibility and trust. Further, too often incentives are geared towards ensuring inflows but neglect the fact that incentives are also required for reversal of flows if the migrants deem it necessary. Appealing to the Sikh migrant’s sense of cultural identity or patriotic loyalty will not be sufficient if the migrant’s perception is that the incentives on offer are not transparent or are discretionary and unfair. In certain cases there is a role for offering non-financial incentives, for instance high-profile awards which acknowledge the migrant’s contribution to the economic well-being of the region. The honouring of high-profile individuals at the annual *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* at national and state functions acknowledges this but these honours need to be promoted in a non-politicized and non-partisan way to ensure credibility. The NRI Sabha was a potential vehicle for this activity but its politicization has rendered it relatively toothless given the way political networks operate among the diaspora communities (Thandi and Lall 2011). Further, the continuing perception of Punjab as a state with poor governance, lacking transparency and having a meddlesome bureaucracy means that many potential diaspora-based investors shy away

(Thandi 2000). Given their limited success in leveraging the diaspora, Punjab state's policies can be characterized as either 'rhetorically supportive' or only 'selectively supportive' (Sidel 2007). There is some way for the state to go to build a lasting partnership with the Sikh diaspora based on mutual trust and credibility.

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Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the relationship between Punjabi Sikhs and Gora ('white') Sikhs as it has developed since the early 1970s, when a Punjabi Sikh immigrant, calling himself Yogi Bhajan, initiated an unprecedented conversion of young Americans and Canadians to Sikhism through his Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3H0) and Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. It notes the varied responses by Punjabi Sikhs in India and the diaspora to Gora Sikh claims to Sikh orthopraxy, the substantive issues over what it means to be a Sikh that have divided the two groups at times, and the ideological convergences and contingent collaborations (particularly surrounding religious rights) that have recently begun to characterize the relationship, especially in the Western diaspora.

Keywords: Gora Sikhs, 3HO, Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere, Yogi Bhajan, converts, diaspora, sects, castes

Gora Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma claim entry into the Sikh Panth: Converts without precedent

The Sikh Panth has until recently been composed overwhelmingly of Punjabis drawn to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus or incorporated into the Panth over subsequent centuries. As a non-proselytizing religion, Sikhism has therefore spread beyond its birthplace in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent primarily via the resettlement of Punjabis across the globe. True, at certain moments, some Sindhis and other South Asians have been affiliated at the margins as Nanakpanthis ('followers of Nanak's path') or Sehajdhari ('slow adopter') Sikhs; and individuals of non-Punjabi origins have here and

there become incorporated into local Sikh communities outside Punjab as in-marrying spouses or as solitary converts. But, for the most part, given norms of endogamy and non-proselytization, the Sikh Panth has remained largely a Punjabi affair. It has thus not been uncommon for Sikhs to be characterized as an ethno-religious community.

In the 1970s, however, several thousand young North Americans and Europeans made unprecedented claims to Sikh identity and sought to have their 'conversion' to the Sikh *dharma* ('religion', 'moral duty', 'way of life') recognized by Punjabi Sikhs and the world at large. The vehicle for the would-be entrée into the Sikh Panth of these Gora ('white'; i.e. Caucasian) Sikhs was a spiritual community founded by a Punjabi Sikh migrant to the United States, Harbhajan Singh Puri (1929–2006), also known as Yogi Bhajan (by his early followers), Harbhajan Singh Yogi (by many Punjabi Sikhs), and Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji (the full name and titles by which he was known at the time of his death). Today, the Gora Sikhs who came to Sikhism through his organizations—the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) and the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood (now, simply, Sikh Dharma or, more formally, Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere)—constitute a numerically small but nevertheless important component of the global Sikh Panth. This essay discusses the evolving relationships between Punjabi Sikhs and the Gora Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma over the past forty years and the impact that Gora Sikhs have had on the contemporary Sikh Panth and understandings of what it means to be a Sikh.

The story of how Harbhajan Singh Puri became 'the Siri Singh Sahib' and created Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere can only be summarized here, butmore detailed accounts are available from a variety of sources elsewhere: either sanctioned by his organizations (G. F. S Khalsa 2008; S. P. K. Khalsa and S. K. K. Khalsa 1979; S. P. K. Khalsa and G. S. Khalsa 1979; S. K. Khalsa 1995), or on the organizations' websites (www.sikhnet.com; www.3ho.org; www.yogibhajan.org), as well as those produced by outside scholars (Dusenbery 2008a[1988], 1989a, 1988, 1975; Elsberg 2003; Lewis 1999; T. Singh 1977; Shameel and Balram 2005) or posted by ex-members and critics of his organizations (www.gurmukhyoga.com; www.delphiforums.com/KamallaRose; www.rickross.com/groups/3ho.html).

Briefly, in 1968, Harbhajan Singh Puri, a Khatri Sikh whose family had resettled in New Delhi during the post-Partition exodus from what became Pakistani Punjab, quit his job as a customs official at Delhi International Airport to take a job as a yoga teacher in Toronto. When that job fell through, he relocated to Los Angeles, where he began teaching yoga through the East-West Cultural Center. Now calling himself 'Yogi Bhajan', he proved to be a charismatic teacher. Having found a receptive core of students, he soon established an ashram (spiritual commune) for them. There he taught his 'Kundalini Yoga: The Yoga

of Awareness', offered occasional 'Tantric Yoga Intensives', and imposed upon his followers the structure and discipline of what he called the 'the healthy, happy, holy way of life' (including a strict regimen of yoga-based asceticism; white clothing, consisting, in part, of turbans for both men and women; new 'Indian' names). In 1969, the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) was formally incorporated in California as a tax-exempt educational organization. Yogi Bhajan was soon sending his newly trained 'student teachers' to other cities in North America to teach kundalini yoga and to establish additional 3HO ashrams. During the early 1970s, 3HO members were mostly young, white, middle-class American and Canadian refugees from the counter-culture who saw themselves not as Sikhs but as 'yogis' and 'yoginis', since at this time Yogi Bhajan 'continued to teach about Sikh Dharma in an indirect way' (S. P. K. Khalsa and S. K. K. Khalsa 1979: 119).

Yogi Bhajan had, however, slowly begun to disclose his own Sikh background and introduce Sikh teachings to his closest followers. In 1971, he took eighty-four of them to India, where they visited Delhi and Amritsar. At the Akal Takhat the group was cordially received and Harbhajan Singh Yogi was honoured for his novel missionary work. Returning to North America with what he represented as a mandate to spread Sikhism in the West, along with a new title, 'Siri Singh Sahib' (which he rendered, liberally, as 'Chief Administrative and Religious Authority for the Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere'), he now began to supplement and supplant yogic explanations of 'the healthy, happy, holy way of life' with a more explicitly Sikh account. In 1973 he succeeded in having the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood (later recast in non-gender-specific language as 'Sikh Dharma') legally recognized by the US government as a religious organization.

His own transformation from 'Yogi Bhajan' to the 'Siri Singh Sahib' corresponded roughly with a change from a primarily yogic to a primarily Sikh identity on the part of 3HO members. The change did not happen overnight and was resisted by some; but once convinced by their spiritual leader that what he was calling the 'healthy, happy, holy way of life' was that of an orthodox Sikh, most 3HO members did not hesitate to make a formal commitment to their new religion. And the Siri Singh Sahib provided multiple opportunities for 3HO/Sikh Dharma members to express their commitment, introducing unprecedented Sikh initiations and minister ordinations (conferring the titles Singh/Sardarni Sahib/-a and Mukhia Singh/Sardarni Sahib/-a on his male/female 'Ministers' and 'Regional Ministers' of the Sikh Dharma) in addition to holding the more traditional *amrit pahul* ceremony whereby one becomes a Khalsa Sikh.

In 1974, in honour of the centenary of the reformist Singh Sabha movement, the Siri Singh Sahib brought Sikh dignitaries (Hukam Singh, Gurucharan Singh Tohra, Giani Mahinder Singh, and Surjit Singh Barnala) from Amritsar to visit 3HO's summer solstice gathering and to tour Sikh communities to see 'the rebirth of Sikh Dharma in the West'.

Later that year, he returned with some of his followers to Amristar to celebrate the birthday of Guru Ram Das and 'was honored with the exalted title of "Bhai Sahib" at the Akal Takhat for his dedication to spreading the mission of the Gurus' (Khalsa & Khalsa 1995: 48).

By the mid-1970s, most 3HO/Sikh Dharma members, while still practising yoga, not only had come to consider themselves to be Sikhs but also had come to believe that they were upholders of Sikh orthodoxy in North America, taking to that task with all the fervour and self-assurance that one might expect from new converts. As a result, Punjabi Sikhs in India and in the Western diaspora were forced to come to terms with the anomalous category of 'Gora Sikhs' and to their actual manifestation in the person of North American and European Sikh converts of 3HO/Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere.

Initial reactions to Gora Sikhs from Punjabi Sikhs in India

By the mid-1970s, Yogi Bhajan had secured support from influential political and religious leaders in Punjab. In particular, Giani Mahinder Singh, secretary of the SGPC, Sardar Hukum Singh, president of the Siri Guru Singh Sabha Shatabdhi Committee, and Gurcharan Singh Tohra, president of the SGPC, proved to be valuable allies, providing him with titles and testimonials (H. Singh 1974; H. Singh and G. S. Tohra 1974). The fact that Westerners were being drawn to Sikhism *was* a big deal to Sikh leaders in Punjab, who were eager to assert the relevance of Sikhism as a 'modern' religion in the face of fears about the willingness of the younger generation of Punjabi Sikhs to commit to upholding the Sikh Rahit Maryada (code of conduct) and becoming Khalsa Sikhs. And the fact that the Gora Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma maintained the *bana* (uniform of the Khalsa) and could perform simple *gurbani kirtan* (hymns of the Gurus) meant that the 3HO/Sikh Dharma *jatha* (touring group) could be shown off to Sikhs in gurdwaras across north India. Moreover, some Punjabi Sikh intellectuals held out hope that the existence of Gora Sikhs would serve to widen the appeal of Sikhism on the world stage (Sekhon 1989: 252–3).

But not all Punjabi Sikhs in India were as appreciative of Harbhajan Singh Yogi and his Gora Sikh followers. Yogi Bhajan had enemies among influential Sikhs in Delhi, including former associates at Gobind Sadan with whom he had fallen out. Moreover, some Punjabi Sikh intellectuals were suspicious of the titles that he was claiming and the Sikh orthodoxy of the 'healthy, happy, holy way of life' that he was imposing upon his followers. Thus, for example, the noted Sikh historian and writer Trilochan Singh, after

visiting Yogi Bhajan and his followers in North America and India and reading 3HO/Sikh Dharma publications and secondary material on the group, published an entire book concluding that the group's incorporation of kundalini and tantric yoga practices and misuse and mistranslation of Sikh scriptures was 'anti-Sikh, absurd, and sacrilegious' and that the 'tinkling titles' used by Yogi Bhajan and his followers were 'never known in Sikh history, and [were] repulsive to the mind of every knowledgeable Sikh' (T. Singh 1977: 147).

Early interactions between Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs in North America

While legal authorities and the media in the US and Canada largely took Yogi Bhajan and his followers' claims at face value and Punjabi Sikh leaders in Amritsar sought to use the very existence of Gora Sikhs to revitalize Sikhism in the homeland, Punjabi Sikhs in North America were a more sceptical audience. Punjabi Sikh communities had existed in North America since the early twentieth century; and the number of Punjabi Sikhs in the US and Canada, expanding rapidly with the liberalization of immigration policies in the 1960s, vastly outnumbered the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood's few thousand Gora Sikhs. Thus, when Harbhajan Singh Puri, himself a recent immigrant, claimed the expansive title 'Chief Administrative and Religious Authority for the Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere' and his Gora Sikh followers represented themselves as the true upholders of Sikh orthopraxy in North America, they confronted Punjabi Sikhs who had reason to critically examine such claims.

Those Punjabi Sikhs in North America who actually came in contact with Harbhajan Singh Yogi and his followers had a largely ambivalent initial response to the Gora Sikhs. Early ethnographic accounts of Punjabi Sikh interactions with the new Gora Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma in North American settings (Fleuret 1974; La Brack 1974, 1979; Bharati 1980; Dusenbery 1988, 1989a, 1990) reported that initial receptivity to the converts gave way to increasing discomfort on the part of Punjabi Sikhs. Tensions and misunderstandings were also noted between the two groups by those analysing Indian immigrant religions in North America, and thus coming at it from the Punjabi Sikh perspective (Fenton 1988; Richardson 1985), as well as by those analysing new religious movements in North America, and thus coming at it from the 3HO/Sikh Dharma perspective (Melton 1999; Lewis 2005). And Sikh studies scholars have also tended to characterize the relationship as an uneasy one (McLeod 1989, 1997; Jakobsh 2012).

Agehananda Bharati explained the mixed initial feelings as follows: ‘Punjabis candidly admire the strict Sikh ritual discipline of the 3HO, and grudgingly their teetotalitarian ways. [But] they do not approve of the uniformization of the 3HO, especially the 3HO women; and they resent the superior ways the 3HO displays towards them’ (1980: 249). Dr Narinder Singh Kapany, the founder of the California-based Sikh Foundation and editor of the *Sikh Sansar*, went so far as to publicly call out Yogi Bhajan for his hold over his followers and his and their high-handedness in dealing with Punjabi Sikhs in North America (Kapany 1976).

Who is a Sikh? Ethnosociologies in collision

As I have suggested elsewhere (2008a, 1990, 1989b), the Gora Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma tended to provoke one of two responses from Punjabi Sikhs. One response was to see their idiosyncratic practices (yoga, white clothing, turbans for women, unprecedented names and titles, veneration accorded Harbhajan Singh Yogi, etc.) as reflecting a distinctive *rahit* given to them by their spiritual leader, and thus to treat them like a sectarian group (i.e., ‘Yogi’s Sikhs’ or ‘3HO/Sikh Dharma Sikhs’), residing either within or outside the Sikh Panth (depending upon how alien they considered the deviations from mainstream Sikh practices). The other response was, noting their ritual discipline, to see them as ‘good Khalsa Sikhs’ but to regard them as Sikhs of a different *zat* (genera; commonly, ‘caste’), thus part of the Sikh Panth, but a different kind of person (i.e., ‘Gora Sikhs’) with whom one maintains social distance (as between endogamous castes among Sikhs).

The Gora Sikhs have not been pleased with either of these responses. Although most Sikh studies scholars have treated 3HO/Sikh Dharma as among the sectarian or *sant*-focused groups within the Sikh orbit (Takhar 2005; Nesbitt 2005: 101; McLeod 1989: 118–19, 1997: 202–3; Jakobsh 2008: 402, 2012: 105–11; Mann 2004:101–2), the Gora Sikhs’ self-image from the beginning has been that of orthodox Khalsa Sikhs, and they have pushed back against claims that their practices are inconsistent with Sikhi (the Sikh way of life) or deviate from Sikh orthopraxy. In fact, they consider themselves to be exemplary Sikhs. Moreover, given their understanding of Sikhism as an egalitarian religion, they chafe at any signs of ‘caste-consciousness’ that would suggest that Sikhs can be differentiated as of different kinds (*zat*); and they refuse to consider caste as an organizing principle (G. S. Khalsa 1993). Indeed, from the beginning, they took the offensive in charging the majority of Punjabi Sikhs in North America with being ethnically Punjabi but not religiously Sikh, for failing to maintain the Khalsa *rahit* that Gora Sikhs understood as central to being a Sikh (Kaur 1973, 1975).

Ideological convergence and contingent collaborations in the West

The 1970s and early 1980s could thus be characterized as a period when Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs were attempting to come to terms with one another, with Gora Sikhs finding both allies and detractors from among Punjabi Sikhs in India and in the diaspora for their assertion of Sikh identity.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the political violence in Punjab and the Khalistan movement among Sikhs of the diaspora further affected relationships between Gora Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs, reshuffling alliances and largely sidelining Gora Sikhs. Although Yogi Bhajan and his Gora Sikh followers criticized the Government of India for the attack on the Golden Temple complex in 1984, for its response to the pogrom against Sikhs that followed the assassination of Prime Minster Indira Gandhi, and for human rights abuses against Sikhs perpetrated by state forces in Punjab, 3HO/Sikh Dharma was not active in the Khalistan movement of the 1980s and early 1990s (G. S. Khalsa 1993; Elsberg 2003: 44, 2011: 328–31). Puri's own ties to Congress Party leaders were such that his political allegiances were suspect. But equally a determinant was a belief by his Gora Sikh followers that 'Indian politics' were inappropriately entering into the 'Sikh religious' sphere of the gurdwaras, plus their own lack of a sense of Sikh honour (*izzat*) being on the line (Dusenbery 2008b [1990]). At the same time, from the perspective of Khalistanis, the Gora Sikhs' very existence was something of an impediment to advancing nationalist claims that Sikhs were 'one people' with a shared Punjabi patrimony who deserved a homeland for the Sikh 'nation'. In short, the discourse of the 1980s and 1990s found a significant split between Punjabi Sikh discourses articulated by Khalistanis which emphasized that 'Sikhs are a nation' and Gora Sikh discourses which emphasized that 'Sikhism is a world religion' (Dusenbery 2008d [1999]).

However, by the late 1990s and 2000s, despite the fact that they remained largely separated socially, Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs, especially the new generation of Punjabi Sikhs born and raised in the Western diaspora and the new generation of Gora Sikhs born and raised in 3HO/Sikh Dharma, found areas of ideological convergence and spaces for contingent collaborations around issues of mutual concern, overcoming some of the tensions that plagued the previous generation.

A couple of factors serve to differentiate recent interactions between Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs from those that took place in the 1970s, especially as they involve interactions taking place in the diaspora. One factor has been a more general acceptance of pluralism within the Panth. In the 1970s, Punjabi Sikhs were still strongly influenced by Singh

Sabha/Tat Khalsa perspectives and, especially among Punjabis in North America, suspicious of sectarianism. But, as Eleanor Nesbitt notes, 'The Sikh diaspora has allowed for the development of groupings diversified by caste and by charismatic leadership … Forms of Sikhi that affirm Nirmala, Sevapanthi, Udasi, and Nihang emphases within the Panth, rather than the Tat Khalsa pattern, show signs of developing' (Nesbitt 2005: 102). Thus, the sort of idiosyncratic practices that caused many Punjabi Sikhs to dismiss 3HO/ Sikh Dharma as a suspect sect are less off-putting in the face of so many other groups with their own codes for conduct active today among Punjabi Sikhs.

Another factor working to ease relations between Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs has been the generational transition within both communities. Gora Sikhs in general have become less rigid and censorious in their understanding of what it means to be a Sikh. This is particularly so for the rising generation born into 3HO/Sikh Dharma but with more direct experience with Punjabi Sikhs (especially through their education in India). At the same time, children of the wave of Punjabi Sikh immigrants who came to the United States and Canada since the mid-1960s have come of age in the West, where they have been educated in American and Canadian schools. This has made them more open to North American ways of belonging and ways of being (G. S. Khalsa 1993; Mann 2006; Jakobsh 2008).

Thus, it is not surprising that some of the areas of ideological convergence and activist collaboration between Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikh have been on terms that the Gora Sikhs first broached—polemically in the 1970s (Kaur 1973, 1975) and more respectfully over time (G. S. Khalsa 1993; S. K. Khalsa 2007). For instance, Punjabi Sikhs in the West have increasingly come to accept a key distinction that Gora Sikhs insisted upon drawing between Sikh religion and Punjabi culture. Thus, as Gurinder Singh Mann, focusing on Sikhs in North America, notes:

> For the first time in history, Sikhs have to draw lines between the religious and cultural aspects of the Sikh heritage. The [Punjabi Sikh] children growing up away from the Punjab and the small group of Euro-Americans who have joined the Sikh community have brought this distinction into focus. They prefer to follow Sikh beliefs rather than incorporate cultural aspects in their day-to-day living.
>
> (Mann 2006: 48)

This ideological convergence has meant that the Gora Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs in the Western diaspora have increasingly joined forces to challenge 'caste consciousness' and 'gender discrimination' within the Panth as reflective of Punjabi cultural practices inconsistent with Sikh religious teachings (Jakobsh 2008, 2012; Elsberg 2003, 2010). Thus, for example, Gora Sikhs and diasporan Punjabi Sikhs have fought for the right of

women to perform services at the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar that have heretofore been closed to them. While within Sikh *sangats* (congregations) in the diaspora, besides challenging caste-based institutions and arguing for a greater role for women, they have pushed gurdwaras to introduce religious education, remove 'politics' from the stage, entertain the use of English during services, and incorporate new musical forms (Mann 2006; P. Singh 2013; Jakobsh 2008; Dusenbery 2008c[1992]).

Because they have always thought of their practices as enjoined by Sikh religious duty rather than Punjabi ethnic custom, Gora Sikhs were from the beginning aggressive in asserting their 'religious rights' (e.g., exemption for hard hat requirements; acceptance of Khalsa Sikh *bana* in the armed forces; treatment of the *kirpan* as a religious symbol and not a weapon) with North American courts and human rights officials; and Punjabi Sikhs have been appreciative and supportive of these efforts. Especially since the attacks on Sikhs following the 9/11 World Trade Center bombing (when Sikh men with beards and turbans were mistaken for and attacked as Muslims), Gora Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs have increasingly made common cause in promoting Sikh civil rights in North America. In addition, both groups have sought further involvement in interfaith gatherings and humanitarian activities that would raise the public profile of Sikhs and portray Sikhs and Sikhism in a positive light within the wider society.

From the beginning, the Gora Sikhs have been effective in using the media to promote their Sikh bonafides. And over the years, given their technological savvy, both young Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs in North America have made effective use of the Internet to communicate their visions of Sikhi to multiple publics. 3HO/Sikh Dharma has been particularly effective in using cyberspace to present their understandings of Sikhism, especially through Sikhnet.com (Jakobsh 2008: 399; S. K. Khalsa 2007). Ironically, in the aftermath of the death of Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogi, 3HO/Sikh Dharma has been fractured by factional disputes that have themselves played out on duelling Internet sites claiming to be the authoritative source on Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere (see sikhdharma.org versus sikhdharmaworldwide.org)!

The future of Punjabi Sikh and Gora Sikh relations

The death on 6 October 2004 of the Siri Singh Sahib deprived 3HO/Sikh Dharma of its charismatic founder and spiritual guide. Even in death, he remains a controversial figure —praised, vilified, or regarded ambivalently by present and former Gora Sikh followers, by Punjabi Sikhs in India and the diaspora, and by non-Sikhs with whom he interacted

(Dusenbery 2008a: 42–5). For his Gora Sikh followers, his death has raised numerous challenges; including whether to rally around a successor as spiritual guide or whether to leave 3HO/Sikh Dharma and either depart the Panth or make their own way in the wider world as Sikhs. For their part, Punjabi Sikhs can only wait and see what sort of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere and what sort of Gora Sikhs ultimately emerge. Whatever the case, the precedent of non-Punjabi Sikhs has had—and will continue to have—a significant effect upon Sikhism as a world religion.

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‘Khalistan’ as Political Critique

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Abstract and Keywords

This article explores the rallying cry for a separate Sikh state of Khalistan as a political critique of the Indian state. The violence of the extremists represented more than Sikhs alone; it also in-spired other minorities to believe that assertions of human rights could be linked to calls for a more federal Indian system. The Anandpur Sahib Resolutions of 1973 and 1978 put this senti-ment into words, and established the Sikhs not only as anti-national ‘rebels’ but also as leaders in the broader movement for decentralization of the state. The Khalistani militancy was but the first of an array of rebellions against Delhi, which continue to pop up among peripheral and disadvan-taged groups. This is the dark underside of Indian democracy and economic progress, which the world applauds even as conflict continues to be silenced by a state intent on establishing a posi-tive international reputation.

Keywords: political critique, militancy, violence, Khalistan, Anandpur Sahib Resolution, separatism, human rights, extremism, anti-national, minorities

HAVING conducted twenty years of ethnographic research among Khalistanis both armed and unarmed, leaders and followers, vocal and silent, urbanites and peasants, some things become startlingly clear. Despite the efforts of every kind of scholar and journalist to pierce the epithet ‘Khalistan’ (‘Land of the Pure’) for some more differentiated, clearer, perhaps constitutional idea as to what Khalistan would be like, we remain, two decades later, with an opaque slogan rather than an articulated plan. ‘Let us achieve our independence first,’ we are told; ‘then we will worry about x and y.’ This has been the explanation of revolutionaries the world over during eras of battle; one is to wait until ‘after the revolution’. In the case of Khalistan, however, the revolution having pretty much not succeeded leaves us with the particular quandary of explaining just what it was that all those young lives perished *for*. Orthodox Sikhs believe that they are to either rule or be in resistance. The theoretical model for living as a dignified minority within a nation run by others simply does not exist (though Sikhs lived as a minority for centuries, it was

under great oppression), and Sikh leaders today turn to Western and other Indian political philosophies to think through how to do this. It is now possible to live in India, but to do so with all dignity, without fear, and with the pride of their ancestors? Is the absence of a separate Khalistan today a measure simply of failure, or are there other possible readings?

Certainly, there were aspects of ‘dying for Khalistan’ that were expressive rather than instrumental; Sikhs drew on a long history of martyrdom to render such deaths existentially meaningful whatever the military outcome (Mahmood 1997). But even the diehard among the Khalsa, seeing villages entirely depleted of a male youth class, began to harbour doubts as to the viability of the *sant-sipahi* or ‘saint-soldier’ model. (I was with one leader when a (British) youth rushed up to him, bowed to touch his feet, and said, ‘I want to die for Khalistan!’ ‘No, no,’ said the leader. ‘The time for dying is past. *Live* for Khalistan. Get educated and *do something* for Khalistan’.) This was in 1994; by this time, volunteers for martyrdom appeared almost an embarrassment.

(p. 572) I suggest that the failure of the Khalistanis to ever explain to any outsider’s satisfaction what kind of country they were fighting and dying for was not an indication of their naivete. Many of the top leaders of the movement were quite well educated, and politically sophisticated, too—though this never seemed apparent to outside commentators. But the fact that ‘Khalistan’ was never exactly unpacked as a concept in the subcontinental dialogue gestures towards the notion that ‘Khalistan’ should be evaluated at the level of the rallying cry at which the Sikhs so excel, rather than at the level of an articulated concept or political philosophy. In this paper I consider how this shout—delivered with joy, with agony, with determination, with sorrow—functions as a counter-call to the ‘India’ which also arose as a nation of high ideologues as democracy settled in, vote banks arose, and nationalism became the cover for the corruption that grew around electoral processes (Kumar 2008). By the 1970s, a chorus of peripheral protests arose as minorities and disadvantaged classes began to see that the independence promise of an egalitarian and secular India was not being fully met. Thomas Jefferson, in the United States, distinguished between ‘liberation fighters’ and ‘state builders’, which may offer an obvious definition for the way Khalistanis fought. It was, perhaps, better described along the first than the second axis.

While in 1948 Pakistan had never made clear whether it was/is to be an Islamic state or, rather, simply a homeland for South Asian Muslims, India declared itself ‘secular’ in an amendment to the constitution, but had a de facto overwhelmingly majority of Hindus (hovering around 83 per cent). The law always bended to the secular arc, perhaps, Indian democracy’s saving grace through these many conflicted years. But sociologically the line between Hindu majoritarianism and Indian nationalism grew increasingly thin, until observers heard ‘Hindutva’ everywhere one turned, and saw Hindu leaders openly

challenging anyone who wasn’t a Hindu to be essentially treasonous. (References to Hitler’s ‘solution’ did not help soothe the fears of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians—and Marxists, Dalits, Adivasis—who did not accept the offer of being a ‘hyphenated’ Indian.). India’s centralized economic planning echoed this Hindu-centric social imagination (Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 1996). Long before outright violence broke out between Hindus and various others, civil dialogue around ‘the idea of India’ (Embree 1990) spread into a far more polarized template than the founders could have conceptualized. It would have been unimaginable not only that India’s proud Sikhs would launch a separatist movement, but also that statues of B. R. Ambedkar would become sites of civil violence when Scheduled Caste & Tribe (so-called ‘SC & T’) issues rose up. At the same time as India stunned the world with its nuclear tests, its quadrilateral highway, its high-tech call centres—all well publicized as graduate students and young professionals flooded the world with their expertise and their biases—an ugly underside grew as well, one in which communities fought each other to the death, poverty continued alongside superhighways, and domestic phones kept up not at all with Indian voices answering calls from anywhere in the world (Nussbaum 2007). It is this bipolar India in which the movement for Khalistan developed, and it is above this hubbub that the *jaikara* shouts (‘victory slogans’) of Khalistanis were heard. Lacking a correct reading of what the India of the 1970s, 1980s, (p. 573) and 1990s looked like, most attempts to understanding subsidiary movements like that of Sikh separatists were bound to result in distortions.

Counter-Response and Symbol

We must begin the analysis of Khalistan as symbol with the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) of 1973, and its second iteration in the ASR of 1978 (Singh 1992: 133–41). Beginning the story of Khalistan with the armed militancy emerging in the early 1980s is part of the propaganda that would make of Sikh rebellion only a criminal or terrorist movement. Rather, the rise of militancy was the last, not the first, step in the Sikh assertion of rights that we may label ‘the Khalistan movement’. The chronology that begins with the militancy of the 1980s, however popular with those who fear separatist inclinations and would therefore like to tar all efforts in that direction with the brush of extremism, makes it seem as if there was no thought behind the taking up of guns, when in fact things had reached that level quite late in the development of the movement. One has to look at the development of Sikh political thought long before the moment of Sikh militancy.

There had always been some level of Sikh discontent with the central government in India, seen with most solidity in the Punjabi Suba movement of the 1960s, but present

more or less throughout India’s development as an independent nation. The Sikhs were not the only ones to express unease with, particularly, the level of centralization developing in economic, political, cultural, and even religious spheres. That is why, when the ASR demanded a greater level of federalization in various areas of life, it was supported by other minority groups in the vast subcontinent. Looking back, one can say that this was a high moment for the Sikhs, which they subsequently lost when the armed Khalistani insurgency took up Sikh-only issues. After the first ASR, when Indira Gandhi declared her dictatorial Emergency, it was the Sikhs above all who openly protested in the name of democracy, Sikhs who courted arrest and landed up in jail in the thousands. Later history eclipses this Sikh role, which was entirely peaceful and purposefully democratic, just as it eclipses the similar role of the Sikhs in the Gandhian non-cooperation movement a generation earlier. In fact, the peaceful but costly demonstrations against Emergency rule earned the Sikhs the first time they were labelled ‘anti-national’—a term that has become popular today in counter-insurgency circles.

The story of the ASR is a particularly important one because Mrs Gandhi went to extreme —and largely successfully—efforts to portray it as a secessionist document. In fact, the President of the Akali Dal which had launched the first ASR in 1973 made it very clear that this was not the intent when he said: ‘Let us make it clear once and for all that the Sikhs have no designs to get away from India in any manner…Undoubtedly, the Sikhs have the same nationality as other Indians.’

(p. 574) When the ASR acquired the reputation of secessionism nevertheless, a second ASR promulgated in 1978 put all the Sikh demands in secondary positions, stating as Resolution no. 1:

> The Shiromani Akali Dal realizes that India is a federal and republican geographical entity of different languages, religions and cultures. To safeguard the fundamental rights of the religious and linguistic minorities, to fulfill the demands of the democratic traditions and to pave the way for economic progress, it has become imperative that the Indian constitutional infrastructure should be given a real federal shape by redefining the Central and State relation and rights on the lines of the aforesaid principles and objectives…The climax of the process of centralization of powers of the states through repeated amendments of the Constitution during the Congress regime came before the countrymen in the form of the Emergency (1975), when all fundamental rights of all citizens were usurped. It was then that the programme of decentralization of powers ever advocated by Shiromani Akali Dal was openly accepted and adopted by [many parties]. As such, the Shiromani Akali Dal emphatically urges upon the Janata Government to take cognizance of the different linguistic and cultural sections,

> religious minorities as also the voice of millions of people and recast the constitutional structure of the country on real and meaningful federal principles to obviate the possibility of any danger to the unity and integrity of the country and, further, to enable the states to play a useful role for the progress and prosperity of the Indian people in their respective areas by a meaningful exercise of their powers.
>
> (Singh 1992: 137–8)

As the eighties dawned, the Sikhs were well thought of throughout democratic India for their anti-dictatorial actions, but especially among the minorities, who recognized that a call for federalization as proposed in the ASR would have to be made as a coalition since no single group could, certainly, succeed against the vast political and economic entity that is India. But their protest was put down with stunning and brutal efficiency. So many years after, it is time that we acknowledge outright that the state violence brought to the Golden Temple complex and dozens of other *gurdwaras* (‘Sikh places of worship’) in Punjab in 1984, on a Sikh holy day, were meant not to rout out a handful of barely trained militants, but to nip in the bud what was perceived as a possible revolution in the making. Even Lt. Gen. K. S. Brar, who led the attack, acknowledged that what was feared was a general uprising across Punjab (1993), with people rushing to Amritsar to rally behind the beleaguered militants. Other high-ups in the military, while not going so far, acknowledged that a Special Operations effort could have eliminated the militants much more efficiently—i.e. without such extensive loss of civilian life—than the troops, helicopters, and tanks that fought a pitched battle on the sacred grounds during those hellish days in June. Like the assault on the Davidian ‘cult’ compound in Waco, Texas, the government in going too far managed to create a revolution where before there was only murmured discontent.

(p. 575) Beyond the Local

Let us stop for a moment to move from the local narrative to the wider view, to see the impact that the ASR and the Sikhs’ stance on democracy, followed by the events of 1984 and the nascent Khalistan movement, had on the subcontinent. We all know the impact it had on Delhi, because every manner of journalistic and academic propaganda put out Delhi’s view of things, which quickly became hegemonic. Looking beyond Punjab, though, we can note that it was five years later (1989) that the movement for the rights and independence of Kashmir began with a vengeance. True, insofar as this movement was motivated by Islam (and it wasn’t much, at first—that would come later), the revolution in Iran had a compelling effect on restive Kashmiris. But it was the Sikh model, the Sikhs’

daring to take up the cry of independence that actually affected Kashmiri sentiments on the ground level. My informants among Kashmiri *mujahideen* (fighters) tell me that there were some Kashmiris already with the militant Sikhs at the Golden Temple in 1984, and later it is clear that the two insurgencies were linked through their connections to the Pakistani secret service, and to the parties in Pakistan who armed and trained them. The last of the Khalistani guerilla outfits, in fact, had their home bases in Kashmir (e.g. the Khalistan Zindabad Force). The common Sikh–Kashmiri demonstrations we now see across the diaspora are the more public presentation of this linkage. Both Sikhs and Kashmiris knew from the beginning that any victory of one in claiming independence would weigh heavily in the victory of the other. It was, that is, not only Delhi that realized the domino-like quality of the Punjab–Kashmir situation (Mahmood 1993). That had been built right into the division of India and Pakistan that saw Punjab as India’s land link to Kashmir.

By 1991–2, the insurgency in Punjab was at its height, and the Kashmiri insurgency was just gathering steam (Mahmood 1996; 1999; Pettigrew 1996). In rural parts of Punjab there was virtually a parallel government in operation, and the Khalistanis had so much confidence at that point that they decided, concurrent with the rhetoric of independence, to boycott the elections of 1992 (to the later regret of many). The dramatic optics of the goings-on in Punjab pull our attention away from the wider Indian nation, where there were equal challenges to India’s territorial integrity and secular democratic principles. In the north-east and north-central areas, Adivasis (‘tribals’) in various coalitions were asserting themselves as never before, with some success. (I was doing ethnography in Bihar at the time, and witnessed the Jharkhand movement’s victory in achieving the state of Jharkhand (‘forest land’) carved out of southern Bihar by 2000, seeing for myself the inspiration provided by other separatist movements.) At the same time, Uttar Pradesh was experiencing the grand upheaval around the Babri Masjid and the Ramjanamboomi Temple in Ayodhya. Muslims and Hindus from all over India were involved in the issue, and the government’s commitment to secularism (India’s form of secularism, that is) had never been so sorely tested. Indian society weathered Ayodhya, but Hindu–Muslim tensions increased. We all know the more recent wounds (p. 576) in Gujarat, still provoking calls for accountability in the face of India’s growing culture of impunity (Agnivesh 2002). And just as accusations for the dramatic Mumbai bombings turned immediately towards Pakistan, the indigenous student Islamic movement SIMI (Student Islamic Movement of India) was growing to unprecedented strength.

Security State

India saw well just how important it was to crush any thought of separatism coming from Punjab, because its security analysts recognized that Punjab was the canary in the coal mine as far as the minorities were concerned. And the entire security apparatus developed during the Punjab conflict was applied, wholesale, to other areas like the north-east, through the direct advice of former director general of police for Punjab, K. P. S. Gill. It was he who had invented the ‘Village Defence Schemes’ in which villagers were given arms and directed to kill ‘terrorists’ and it was he who developed the ‘extraordinary police methods’ that made Punjab a synonym for torture, in the asylum courts of the world. Rather than being held accountable, as the India of Nehru and Gandhi might have done, this newly fearful India (Ali 1993) rewarded him with plum postings in the Indian Hockey League, and national marketing as the ‘Super cop’ of India. (One can read his own story in his autobiography, *The Knights of Falsehood,* in which the establishment of a regime of terror in Punjab is turned upside-down as ‘conflict resolution’ and ‘normalization’. He now heads an Institute for Conflict Resolution, publishes a journal by this name, and runs a South Asia Terrorism portal widely read in the policy centres of the world, with little idea as to its origins.)

The resonance of the cry for Khalistan, insofar as it went—and it went further and further as ‘extraordinary’ methods were applied more widely afield—showed that others also recognized Punjab to be the canary in the coal mine. Was the air of this India healthful enough to breathe? A National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was established in 1993 under international pressure, but it could not investigate the military, could not consider cases more than a year old, and had no power to bring anyone to accountability. Recognizing the ultimate impotence of the NHRC, Sikhs started quoting Nehru’s promise to their community outright: that they, too, would be given a place in the new India in which they could breathe the air of freedom. This is a quote that should be heard not only by the minorities or by Hindus and Muslims upset over Gujarat, or now by the Naxalites experiencing their own counter-insurgency across the vast territory they succeed in holding today. The mystique of ‘the world’s largest democracy’ and now ‘India Shining’ can easily distract Indians of every sort from the primary realization that their country has definitively changed. If ‘Khalistan’ is a stand-in for ‘terrorism’ for them, they miss the important political critique for which it stood and stands for many others. The numbers of ‘anti-nationals’ are apparently increasing even as each insurgency is definitively wiped out. Every Indian would do well to take this phenomenon seriously as a challenge to their celebrated democracy.

(p. 577) Finally, we come to grasp why in the world ‘Khalistan’ seemed to be so opaque a concept, all through the days when Khalistanis were looking for allies here and there on the world scene. They seemed to have no coherent world view; they were for the Palestinians on the one hand, but compared themselves to Israelis on the other. Looking back, perhaps it didn’t matter. ‘Khalistan’ was the shout of a feared ending of democracy in India, a claim to take it back and to spread it around, as originally intended, so that the breath of freedom could be breathed by all. As time progressed, it was the diaspora Sikhs who upheld the ‘Khalistan’ chant most intensively; they who actually had no territory at all but continued to dream of a territorial homeland as counterpoint to India-as-homeland (Tatla 1999; Ballantyne 2006; Shani 2009).

Here is where neo-colonial scholarship played a role in the misconceptualization of the Khalistan movement as well. ‘Sikhism’, studied in a field called ‘Sikh studies’, fitted well into the Western institutions of comparative religion, and brought an interesting Protestant hermeneutic to the study of the Guru Granth Sahib and other texts. But ‘Sikhism’ as so studied had little to do with the Sikhi lived by Sikhs. How else can one explain the fact that ‘Sikh studies’ continued to focus its efforts on textual analysis all throughout the period of the worst violence in Punjab, when Sikhs were suffering, killing, and dying right and left but few scholars were actually attempting to make the Khalistan movement a topic of study? Only now, long after the game has been played, are many attempting to look back to try to understand what happened in Punjab. Many in the academy had alienated large sectors of the Sikh population who originally supported them because of their general silence on the suffering going on in Punjab. Today, it is impossible to do ‘Sikh studies’ without considering the fact that over the past two decades Punjab has been torn apart at the roots, and the Sikh population traumatized whether or not individuals supported ‘the movement’. A new Sikh studies now tries to understand the new Sikhi emerging in Punjab and around the globe, subsequent to the chaos and violence of the Khalistan period.

History and Culture

E. E. Evans-Pritchard had noted that history as studied and understood has to actually lead up to the society we see before us; else it is mythic construction rather than history per se (Evans-Pritchard 1962). This insight invites us to a radical reformulation of the history of the Indian subcontinent, which as traditionally formulated looks like it has nothing at all to do with the conflict-ridden society observable today. Any conflict appears virtually anomalous against the backdrop of a classic Brahminic/Hindu society held together by caste as cogs in a gigantic machine, its people enjoying the benefits of

collectivity rather than a competitive individualism as in the West. So thought, at least, the eminent anthropologist Louis Dumont (1981). The harmony of this society was broken up by the ‘invasion’ of the Muslims, which became the before/after marker for every other analysis of India after A. L. Basham’s classic *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey* *(p. 578)* *of the Culture of the Indian Subcontinent before the Coming of the Muslims.* The hegemony of this portrayal of Indian history persists until the present day, so that most Hindus still believe that Buddhism and Jainism arose as peaceable reforms within the umbrella of Vedic society, and manage to include even the Sikhs as some sort of branch of Hindus (as written in Article 25 of the Constitution, which lists Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs as falling under Hindu marriage laws). Nehru puzzled over aspects of his nation’s history during his prison years under the British, intelligently wondering about the ‘enigma’ of Buddhism’s decline in the land of its birth (Nehru 1946). But it is only enigmatic in the way that Sikh rebellion is enigmatic; it declines to recognize the power of the majority community and the uses to which that power is put when threatened by other allegiances.

The Emperor Ashoka as a great Hindu emperor (though he was in fact a convert to Buddhism and is most properly noticed for his launching of Buddhist missionization to Sri Lanka and thereafter across Asia); the reading of Aurangzeb as a vicious Muslim fanatic rather than a pious man who constructed the humble ‘poor man’s Taj’ in Aurangabad from the earnings of his own calligraphy and weaving—these are but two of the many, many historical mistakes popping up in Indian textbooks and tour guides that when tallied up lead India’s citizens to a very misshapen idea of what their country is. Read over the long term, the subcontinent is most accurately understood as the home of a majority Vedic/Brahminic/Hindu society which, over time, faced rebellions from every angle which it put down by a sophisticated combination of pen and sword. This is the repetitive template that allows us to properly read the India of today, as Adivasis, Naxalites, and various religious communities rebel against the Centre with deep passion (Mahmood 1993). Today the Naxalites hold over a fifth of India’s total land mass as some of these disadvantaged and oppressed groups join together; this is a figure completely unknown outside of India, where it may threaten the growth of capitalist markets and the military establishment. The slogan of ‘India Shining’ might well have been devised by Machiavelli himself (Europe’s Kautilya), standing in as it does over the reality of poverty, abuses of human rights, and endemic conflict.

It is this light in which the radical demand for Khalistan must be understood. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who never took up the cry for Khalistan himself, often predicted that if the Golden Temple complex came under attack, the foundation for Khalistan would be laid. This formulation pointed to the responsibility for a rebellion in Punjab at the hands of the government, which is indeed how many Sikhs viewed the situation. Now,

looking back, the human rights group ENSAAF (headed by Harvard lawyers) teamed up with technical analysis firm Benetech to quantitatively analyse the problematic chicken-and-egg question of just who was responsible for the tens of thousands of deaths recorded in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s. Interestingly, the graphed results show the casualties at the hands of Khalistani militants and the casualties at the hands of government forces following each other at an approximately equal pace through most of the time period. But at the end, when the rebels had been definitively crushed (as must have happened, as any analyst could see from the beginning), the levels of government violence remained high as violence stemming from Khalistani groups dropped (p. 579) off (ENSAAF/Benetech 2009). This shows that however the first shots were fired in the give-and-take of Sikh grievance and government non-response, by the end the problem was clearly a violent state labouring on under its own momentum.

Today, the call for ‘Khalistan’ functions as an acid critique of the Indian state. Those who accuse diasporan Sikhs as mouthing an ‘empty’ slogan for Khalistan miss what that has come to mean today; it is no longer a call for the taking up of arms but a critique of an India that has become a nation in which minorities cannot thrive. By saying ‘I am Khalistani, not Indian’, an individual distances him- or herself from the disappearances, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, torture, and custodial rape that every human rights documents acknowledges as marring the portrait of Indian democracy and progressivism that we would all like to see as the real fulfilment of Nehru’s promises. Democracy’s frailties are as apparent in the post-9/11 United States, as abrogation of civil and human rights accompany an emerging mood of national fear. (Let us not forget that Hitler, as well, came to power by the vote.) Democracy itself does not guarantee a sustained commitment to human rights for all.

As post-secular scholars acknowledge the distorted role into which ‘religion’ was cast by a primarily Western, Christocentric model of world views (Masuzawa 2009; Mandair 2009), so too does ethnography have to move from being simply the study of the local and micro, to seeing how the lived experiences of people at ground level serves as critique to overarching political orders. It was the local study of Sikhs living through the violence of the Punjab conflict that led to a critique of the Indian state at the centre, which turned out to be a critique voiced in other locales in other peripheries as well. Sikh studies, as well, will have to broaden its scope from a primary focus on text to a more rounded emphasis on context as well. Guru Granth Sahib, yes, but also those who read and don’t read it, those who read it but also the Gita, those who are ready to fight and those who claim pacifism as the Sikh heritage—all a part of the social complexity in the worlds in which Sikhi is now lived. The gap between the sociology and anthropology ‘of religion’ and the more bibliographically inclined study of the classic texts are now fruitfully being

brought together, from an era whose real and epistemic violence we should all be glad to put behind us.

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Changing Manifestations of Caste in the Sikh Panth

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Abstract and Keywords

The paper begins with a critique of the popular/Orientalist view of Indian society that conceptualizes caste in unitary terms, as a pan-Indian system, organized around the notion of varna hierarchy. Though caste is indeed a fact of life in Punjab and among the Sikhs living elsewhere, the Sikhs' social structure has its own specificity and historicity. Even though ideas of hierarchy and untouchability have been a part of life, the Sikh religious ideology does not support caste-based social divisions. Caste in the Sikh Panth has also seen many changes over the last century. The 'rearticulation' of Sikh identity during the religious reform movements meant a rejection of caste, popularly viewed as a Hindu practice. Democratic politics and economic development have changed caste-based social relations.

Keywords: hierarchy, untouchability, Orientalism, Green Revolution, Ad Dharam, de-Hinduization

Introduction

Caste has been a difficult and complicated subject for the Sikh Panth. While on the one hand there has almost always been an unequivocal denial of the presence and significance of caste in the religious philosophy and practice of Sikhism by the 'Sikh establishment', on the other there is an open recognition and acceptance of it as an aspect of Sikh life and a source of social exclusion. For example, the Sikh leadership at the time of the framing of the Indian Constitution publically acknowledged the presence of caste-based disabilities within the larger Sikh community and pushed for the extension of quotas and Scheduled Caste (SC) status to the Sikhs amongst the ex-untouchable communities of the Punjab. Even the general assembly of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), an elected body of the Sikhs that manages important Sikh gurdwaras of Punjab and Haryana, has seats reserved for the Sikhs from the SCs.

More importantly perhaps, caste-based divisions continue to mark the social and political life of the Sikhs everywhere. From the patterns of village settlements to electoral politics and marriage alliances, the presence of caste is quite pronounced and widely acknowledged in the everyday life of the Sikhs.

But Sikh caste differs from its more classical antecedents. There is a complete absence of the traditional caste-based hierarchical division within the Sikh Panth, along with any superior status assigned to the Brahmin in the ritual hierarchy. Not only is there no formal ritual hierarchy within Sikh religious practice, but very few Sikhs are Brahmins, and even those who are, do not occupy any specific position of authority. Nor is there any specific caste group comparable to the kind of division that the textbook view of caste suggests.

(p. 584) How should we then talk about caste in the Sikh Panth? What are the specifics of caste among the Sikhs? How do the caste-based inequalities reproduce themselves in the region where Sikhs dominate? How do we make sense of Sikh social structure by using the framework of caste as it has evolved?

The ‘Hindu Caste System’: Orientalist Constructs

Caste has been popularly viewed as the traditional social institution of the Hindus of India, a closed system of social hierarchy. Its association with Hinduism gives it a ritual and religious flavour. The most common description of castes invokes the idea of four varnas, around which the social and personal life of a typical Hindu is organized. The ‘Indian village’ was the typical social universe in which the value-frame and social structure of caste was reproduced.

Notwithstanding the pervasiveness of such a view, this modern-day conceptualization draws heavily from Orientalist discourses on India and Indianness. In fact, the history of modern-day theorization of caste begins with Western and colonial engagements with Indian civilization. Categories such as varna, *jati*, or *zat* and the corresponding social divisions and hierarchies of status, have indeed been present in different parts of South Asia for a very long time. Even though ideas of pollution and purity existed everywhere, the order of hierarchy varied significantly, both in form and in substance, across the regions of the subcontinent.

The Orientalist idea of caste simplified the diverse, and often contested, realities of the ‘native’ social order into a neatly marked-out division of groups. Drawn mostly from the

ancient ‘Hindu’ texts, these Orientalist writings theorized caste as a hierarchical system through the idea of varna as a substantive category in which Brahmins were always placed at the top of the order, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Caste came to be seen as the core of Hindu religion both ideologically and socially; caste was a pan-Indian system with little or no variation across regions; and that caste hierarchy has not changed since time immemorial. One of the underlying assumptions of the Orientalist discourse on caste was that the Indian social organization was exclusively shaped and structured by its specifically Hindu religious ethos and ideology.

Although highly problematic, this Orientalist view of Indian society has nevertheless been extremely influential, and, in a sense, continues to be the dominant view on the subject even today. Despite critical differences in their perspectives, a wide spectrum of nationalist leadership during the Freedom Struggle accepted these Orientalist constructs (Jodhka 2002b). Anthropologists soon followed suit: ‘[caste is] the foundational fact of Indian society, fundamental both to Hinduism (as Hinduism was to it) and to the Indian subcontinent’ (Dirks 2001: 41).

(p. 585) In order to understand caste among the Sikhs, we must break away from such perspectives and look at the subject from a historical and non-deterministic perspective, as an aspect of the historically evolving social and material life, which is influenced by religious belief, and, in turn, also influences religious practices. While doing so, one has to also recognize the fact that a sociological understanding of caste needs to be located in the history of a given regional social formation. Since Sikhism originated in Punjab and since most Sikhs live in this region, a sociological understanding of caste and Sikhism will have to be based on a discussion of the regional social formation of the contemporary Punjab.

Caste and Sikhism: The Regional and Historical Context

Notwithstanding their geographical spread across different parts of the globe, more than 90 per cent of all the Sikhs live in India, where they amount to about 2 per cent of the total population. According to the Indian Census of 2001, of the 20 million Sikhs nearly 76 per cent live in Punjab, forming about 60 per cent of the total population, and the remaining 24 per cent live in different parts of India, with their major concentrations being in Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi.

Compared to other communities of the regions, Sikhs are more likely to be living in rural areas. In 2001, for example, Sikhs accounted for 36.6 per cent of the total urban

population of Punjab, while their proportion in the total rural population was nearly 72 per cent. Of all the Sikhs living in Punjab, only around 21 per cent lived in urban centres in 2001, far below the average urban population for the state (around 34 per cent in 2001). However, the Sikhs living outside Punjab are more likely to be urban than their counterparts living in the state of Punjab (nearly 45 per cent). This is also a reflection of the economic and occupational profile of the Sikhs living in Punjab, viz. their association and dependence on the agrarian economy.

As mentioned above, in its ideological self-image, Sikhism is a religion without caste. Not only were the Sikh Gurus 'beyond all doubt, vigorous and practical denouncers of caste' (McLeod 1996: 87), Sikh reformers in the late nineteenth century also used its anti-caste message to establish Sikhism's distinctiveness from Hinduism. For Guru Nanak the aim of salvation was union with God. Since the divine presence was everywhere, it was available to everyone. Logically, therefore, Guru Nanak advocated the equality of human beings in relation to God. As God was omnipresent Guru Nanak also ridiculed ritualism, ascetic practices, and idol worship, promoting in their place a 'this-worldliness'. It was perhaps the emphasis on just such a 'this-worldliness' which ensured that the social and personal world of the Sikh Gurus and subsequently of all Sikhs could not be caste-free. Caste continues despite the numerous innovations, scriptural and practical, ritual and ideological, which aimed to move Sikhs away from the **(p. 586)** Sanskritic/Brahmanical mode of religious practice in which caste status was of much importance.

Though all the Sikh Gurus were Khatris, an 'upper caste' in the local hierarchy, the majority of Sikhs are from 'low' or so-called backward castes. The Sikh movement may well have transformed the social structure of the region with different social groups experiencing social and cultural mobility. Over time, however, particularly after the establishment of the Sikh kingdom under Ranjit Singh, Brahmanical orthodoxy is believed to have once again entrenched itself in the Sikh tradition. The fall of the Sikh kingdom towards the middle of the nineteenth century and the establishment of British rule produced a new dynamic in the region, with far-reaching implications for the caste question.

Among several other new developments, British rule in the region also attracted Christian missionaries to Punjab who wished to spread the message of the Church. Among those who found Christianity attractive were the members of untouchable castes. The first conversion is reported to have taken place in 1873 when a man named Ditt was baptized in Sialkot. 'To the surprise of the missionaries, Ditt was followed by hundreds of thousands of others from lower castes, and Punjab Christianity became a de facto movement' (Juergensmeyer 1988: 181). By 1890 there were 10,171 Christians living in 525 villages of Punjab; by 1911 their number had gone up to 1,63,994; and by 1921 to

over 3,00,000. Most of them came from the Chuhra (scavenger) caste and mainly hailed from rural areas. Given the nature of the rural power structure, ‘conversion to Christianity for these highly vulnerable people was a very risky act of rebellion’ (Webster 1999: 96–7).

Interestingly, the missionaries were hoping to attract the local upper castes. They, the missionaries believed, were the ones with the intellect and moral persuasion required for the Christian faith. The enthusiasm of the lower castes for conversion not only baffled the missionaries but embarrassed them: they saw no sensible or moral reason for keeping the lower castes out, yet feared that allowing them in would sully the Church’s reputation (Juergensmeyer 1988: 184).

The fears of the missionaries were not unfounded. When a newspaper article in the *Tribune* of 19 October 1892 reported that the rate of conversions would soon turn the Punjab into a Christian region, ‘a tremor of fear ran through the upper caste Hindu and Sikh elite’ (p. 181). There was a virtual competition among the religious communities, the Christians, the Hindus, and the Sikhs, to win the untouchables over to their side. It was around this time that the aggressive Hindu reformist organization, the Arya Samaj, made its entry into the Punjab.

The colonial administrative structure had also begun to deploy new categories of social aggregation and classification. The British thought of their populace in terms of religious communities and looked at them accordingly in the process of governance. The role that census enumeration played in converting the fuzzy boundaries into well-defined communities was perhaps most evident in Punjab. As Fox points out, these administrative discourses of British rulers had far-reaching influences on the process of identity formation in the region (Fox 1985). The colonial census thus made the ‘religious (p. 587) communities’ sensitive about numbers, which were ‘generally equated with strength, particularly for employment under the government’ (Grewal 1994: 131).

While the Muslim population remained stable at around 51 per cent during 1881 to 1911 and the Sikh and the Christian populations went up, the Hindu population showed a decline from about 41 per cent in 1881 to around 36 per cent in 1911 (Jones 1976: 324). The conversions to Christianity were mostly from the low castes, most of whom had earlier been recorded as Hindus by the colonial enumerators. The upper-caste Punjabi Hindus viewed the decline in Hindu population with concern. The assertive reformism of the Arya Samaj appeared to provide an answer to this apparent crisis as it offered ‘a progressive ideology based on traditional values’ (Juergensmeyer 1988: 38).

The Arya Samaj not only assailed other religions but also criticized many existing Hindu practices including the observation of untouchability. Its founder, Swami Dayananda,

advocated going back to the ancient Vedic religion and the inclusion of the lower castes into the Hindu society through a process of religious purification, *shuddhi*. Since untouchability was presumed to emanate from ritual impurity, it could be removed through a religious ritual to render untouchables touchable (Pimpley and Sharma 1985).

Though the Arya Samaj initially attacked the so-called foreign religions such as Islam and Christianity, they also began to criticize Sikhism. The assertion of an aggressive Hindu identity by the Arya Samaj had already sparked off a debate on the question of Sikh identity. Sikhs began to assert that theirs was a separate religion and that they should not be clubbed with Hindus (Oberoi 1994). The practice of untouchability or discrimination against the low castes among the Sikhs was attributed to the continued influence of Hinduism on the community. The Singh Sabha movement for the liberation of Sikh gurdwaras from the Hindu *mahants* launched during the 1920s also became a movement for the 'de-Hinduization' of the Sikh religion. One of the main demands of the movement was 'unquestioned entrance to Sikh places of worship' for all (Juergensmeyer 1988: 28). Some members of the Khalsa Diwan tried to create their own 'depressed class movements' to encourage 'low' caste support. The movement was not confined to the liberation of historic Sikh gurdwaras. Its impact was also felt at the local level.

While the Sikh reformers attacked caste, the Sikh leadership, having become aware of the significance of numbers, did not deny the existence of caste among the Sikhs and made sure that the low castes among the Sikhs did not face any disabilities. As a matter of fact the Sikh leadership had to lobby a great deal with the national leadership so that along with the Hindus, certain Sikh castes might also be included in the list of Scheduled Castes for the provision of special benefits and reservations. They were obviously worried that if the reservation benefits were not extended to Sikhs, the low castes among them might declare their religion as Hinduism. Nayar reports that this 'concession was achieved in return for an agreement by the Sikh leaders that no further political demands would be made in the future on behalf of the Sikh community' (Nayar 1966: 238). However, while all Hindu untouchable castes were given the special privileges, initially only four sub-castes of untouchable (p. 588) Sikhs were included in the list and those excluded from the schedule showed little reluctance in declaring themselves Hindus in order to claim benefits (K. Singh 1966: 304).

Punjab also witnessed an influential autonomous movement for a separate religious identity among the Chamars of the Doaba region during 1920s, the Ad Dharam movement. Though its leaders did not wish to identify with Sikhism, they borrowed a great deal from the Sikh religious system, including the worship of the Sikh holy book because it also contained the writings of Ravidas, whom they saw as a fellow Chamar, a community Guru (Juergensmeyer 1988; Jodhka 2009b).

The Empirics of Caste in Sikhism Today

Notwithstanding the presence of caste distinctions in Punjabi/Sikh society, commentators have noticed significant differences that existed in the region. This is clearly reflected in the writings of colonial administrators. Reporting on the problems of the 'low castes' in the province, one observer viewed it more in terms of politico-economic disabilities rather than in terms of their being 'untouchable', as was the case with the rest of India. The *Memorandum Submitted by the Government of Punjab* (1930), for example, observed:

> It would be misleading to attach too great [an] importance to the existence of caste in the Punjab…Not only is it the case that the Brahman has no practical pre-eminence…the distinction is not so strongly marked as to create the political problem found elsewhere in India.
>
> (Nayar 1966: 20)

Another British author contrasting Punjab with the rest of India wrote, 'nowhere else in Hindu India does caste sit so lightly or approach so nearly to the social classes of Europe' (Nayar 1966: 20). Some Western viewers went to the extent of saying that the Punjab was a 'notable exception' to the caste system in India (O'Malley in Nayar 1966: 20).

Interestingly, some professional social scientists, who studied caste in the region, also tended to confirm this. Comparing the disability experienced by the low castes in Punjab with the rest of India, Satish Saberwal writes:

> even if the Brahmins were able to carve a ceremonial place at Ranjit Singh's court for themselves, there is no evidence that they acquired much land or that they were able to enforce the social circumstances that they would have required for maintaining high levels of ritual purity; and therefore the lowest castes in Punjab had to carry only a light burden of ritual impurities, much lighter, physically and socially, than the burden elsewhere in India
>
> (Saberwal 1976: 7)

(p. 589) This did not mean that the idea of untouchability was absent in the region. The intensity might be less severe, to be sure, but ideas of pollution and untouchability had their place both among Hindus and Sikhs (Hershman 1981; Nayar 1966).

I. P. Singh (1975; 1977), who studied a village near Amritsar during the late 1950s, provides a fairly good idea about the nature of caste relations in a 'typical' Sikh village

during the pre-Green Revolution period. Sikhs here were divided into two groups, the Sardars (upper caste) and the Mazhabis (lower caste). The first group included the Jats, Kambohs, Tarkhans, Kumhars, Sunars, and Nais (in the Hindu caste hierarchy, they would all be treated as Shudras and with the exception of Jats, they are all included in the official list of the 'Other Backward Classes'). Though within this cluster, the Jats considered themselves superior to the others, there was no feeling of caste-based prejudice. They visited each other's houses, inter-dined, attended marriage functions, and celebrated most festivals together. In terms of the village settlement also, no demarcation existed in their houses.

However, the Mazhabis, who constituted nearly half of the village population, were treated differently. They lived on one side of the village. They had a separate source of water. During village feasts the Mazhabis sat separately. Since many of them worked as labourers in the fields of the Jat landowners, the latter visited the houses of the Mazhabis, if invited, but they did so as a patronizing gesture. There were also occasions during which untouchability was either not practised or its extent had been declining. Many Jats in the village let the Mazhabis enter their houses and did not consider their touch polluting. One of them had also employed a Mazhabi to clean utensils in his house. As I. P. Singh makes clear, untouchability was also practised minimally among the drinkers in the village since the Mazhabis were the traditional brewers of country liquor in the village (I. P. Singh 1977: 76).

The practice of untouchability was also downgraded in religious affairs, particularly within the village's one gurdwara where both *pangat* and *langar* were observed. The *granthi* here performed all the marriages in the villages irrespective of any caste distinction, unlike the Brahmin priest of the village. The Brahmin priest used to perform rituals for the Sikhs as well until they began appointing their own *granthi* for the gurdwara. But he served only the upper-caste Sikhs.

The Sikh reform movement had a lasting impact on the religious life of the Sikhs in the village. The insistence of Sikh reformers on distancing the 'community' from the Hindus and the legal recognition granted the Anand Karaj Sikh wedding rite, made the village Brahmin priest redundant. Unlike the Brahmin, the Sikh *granthi* could be from any caste. He had been trained at the Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar. *Granthi* among the Sikhs had thus become an achieved, rather than an ascribed, status!

Caste Today

The gradual institutionalization of the democratic political process within the framework of the nation state, with specific legal provisions marking social differences, (p. 590) adoption of Green Revolution technology during 1960s and 1970s, and growing urbanization all set the pace of social and economic change in Indian society. Perhaps the most important of these in rural Punjab was the success of the Green Revolution that led to a complete transformation of the agrarian social structure and village life. Though conceptually the Green Revolution was a 'caste-blind' programme of rural development, it did usher in various changes which had far-reaching implications for the prevailing structure of caste relations in rural Punjab. The agrarian prosperity brought in by the new technology enabled landowning Jats to emerge even more powerful in the regional politics of Punjab, and within the religious institutions of the Sikhs. This change also marginalized the urban upper castes within Sikh institutions and made other smaller caste communities virtually invisible in the state politics.

The process of economic change also generated and sharpened the already existing schisms in Punjabi society. Caste became one such axis of social conflict and competition. Perhaps the most critical of these conflicts was between the dominant Jats and the Scheduled Caste or Dalits.

Today Punjab has the highest proportion of the SCs in the entire country. Together, the thirty-nine SC communities of Punjab make up nearly 29 per cent of the total population of the state, which is close to double the national average of SC population. Notwithstanding the positive effect of Sikhism on the nature and practice of untouchability in the region, the Punjabi Dalits have been quite deprived. Even though they are mostly rural, less than 1 per cent of all the agricultural land is owned or operated by them. In an agrarian society control over land is very critical. Even though the Dalits of Punjab are less likely to be below the national-level poverty line, in relative terms their deprivation is quite stark, and in comparison to other communities, they stand far below.

However, the rural economic change produced by the success of Green Revolution opened up new spaces for them to renegotiate their relations with the dominant castes and rural social structure, eventually leading to a near complete breakdown of *jajmani* relations. Based on an extensive survey of fifty-one villages carried out in 1999–2000, I have argued that these changes could be conceptualized through the categories of dissociation, distancing, and autonomy (Jodhka 2002a).

A large majority of Dalits had consciously dissociated themselves from their traditional 'polluting' occupations. Some of these occupations were no longer identified with any specific caste group in rural Punjab. For example, picking up dead cattle had become a completely commercialized enterprise. The village panchayat generally gave the work on contract to an individual contractor, who could even be from another village or a nearby town. Though most of those involved in this business came from Dalit castes, they were economically well off and often lived in towns. Similarly, some degree of commercialization had taken place in the case of other Dalit or *jajmani* occupations as well. Barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, all now had shops, and they could be from any caste. Many Dalits from diverse caste groups ran barber shops.

The only 'unclean occupation' where a degree of continuity existed was that of scavenging. Even in scavenging, the traditional structure of *jajmani* relations had almost (p. 591) completely changed. The cleaning of drains and toilets or sweeping of houses was mostly done on a commercial basis. In most villages a scavenger was employed for an individual street. Each household in the street paid a fixed sum to the scavenger on a monthly basis. In order to avoid any element of familiarity some of them preferred working in the neighbouring village rather than their own.

There were other areas of village life where the process of dissociation could be similarly observed. While most of the rich farmers of Punjab continued to live in the village, they had all modern amenities available in their homes. Many of these households had begun to employ Dalit women on a monthly cash wage to help with the domestic chores. These women did various kinds of domestic tasks and might work in more than one house. Even the kitchen, considered the most sacred of places within the household, was thus accessible to Dalit women in these prosperous upper-caste households

Agricultural land in Punjab was almost exclusively owned by the dominant castes, Jats and Rajputs, for whom a large majority of Dalits worked as labourers. Some Dalits also worked on a long-term basis with the landowners. Though the traditional variety of attached labour, such as *sanjhis* and *siris*, had given way to more formalized relations, working on a long-term basis with farmers still led to relations of dependency and servitude.

Dalits obviously did not like getting into such arrangements and had been trying to withdraw from employment in agriculture wherever they could. Their attempt to distance themselves from the local agrarian economy largely depended on the availability of alternative sources of employment. In the villages of Doaba, for example, we were frequently told that migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar do much of the work. Local Dalits rarely wanted to work on land. They often preferred going out or bringing work home from neighbouring towns.

Similarly, they had been also investing in building their autonomous cultural institutions, such as gurdwaras and community centres. Though in principle there were no restrictions on Dalits entering Sikh gurdwaras, caste prejudice at the local level seemed to work quite strongly here. Dalits often felt that they were not really welcomed by the locally dominant castes in the village gurdwaras. Their children would be asked to come for the *langar* after everyone else had finished eating or they would be asked to sit in separate queues. In some cases, while the gurdwara management formally invited all the others, Dalits were not even informed about special programmes and festivities. Rarely were they allowed to participate in the cooking and serving of the *langar* in local gurdwaras.

Other significant changes in caste relations in rural Punjab included the declining significance of segregated settlements; although with the growing population and a continual expansion of residential areas, the old settlement structure of the village had, to some extent, been diluted. As the newly prosperous upper castes made newer and bigger houses on the peripheries of the village, Dalit settlements did not remain as isolated as they were before. There were also some interesting cases where upwardly mobile Dalits had purchased houses in upper-caste localities from those who had left the village for towns or had emigrated to the West.

(p. 592) While the intensity of these processes varied across sub-regions of Punjab, they were present almost everywhere. They were most clearly visible in the Doaba sub-region and relatively less so in the Malwa. More importantly, dissociation, distancing, and autonomization also mean a near complete disintegration of the rural social structure and greater fragmentation of communities, which could also trigger intercommunity conflict more easily, unless the process of democratization is institutionalized.

Conclusion

The Orientalist view of caste has been very deeply embedded in the modern Indian self-image. This is partly because, to a large extent, the Indian self-image is itself a mirror reflection of the Orientalist and colonial images of India. The nationalist leaders of the freedom movement and the later modernizers almost completely accepted the idea of Indian tradition as articulated by the Orientalists. The idea of caste is at the core of this notion of Indian tradition. Caste (conceptualized as a Hindu ideological system) is presented as representing continuity and unity of Indian culture and its social structure.

Academic and popular discourse of caste among Sikhs invariably tends to be articulated within this dominant framework where the presence of caste-like divisions are either seen

simply as the failure of Sikh ideology, or as evidence of Sikhs being no different from the Hindus. On the other extreme, some advocates of Sikh identity tend to claim complete absence of caste in Sikhism purely on the basis of scriptural ideology.

An alternative understanding of caste should begin with the recognition of the fact that, as in the case of other structures of social relations, caste identities too undergo change and have never functioned as 'pure ideological systems'. In order to do that, one should separate empirical realities of a region from the scriptural identity of religious communities. Not only should we separate contemporary Indian Punjab from Sikh ideology but we also need to disentangle the practice of caste from Hinduism.

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Gender in Sikh Traditions

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Abstract and Keywords

This article discusses the development of gender construction within Sikh history, based on an understanding that gender ideologies and gendered practices are social constructs that are deeply imbricated in societal and religious structures, ideologies and values. Beginning with the Sikh Guru period through to contemporary Sikh society, central rituals, identity markers, and religio-cultural institutions and practices are examined through an analysis of inclusionary and exclusionary processes based on gender. These include an overview of gender differentiation within the developing Khalsa order, Sikh naming practices, the turban as identity marker, scripture, official codes of conduct, institutional roles such as the *panj piare* (beloved five) as well as religio-cultural codes such as *izzat* (honour). The intersectionality of caste, socio-economic status, geographic locale, and class are also considered in terms of the negotiation of gender identities.

Keywords: gender, gender differentiation, women, Sikhism, ritual exclusion, naming practices, identity markers, turban, panj piare, izzat (honour)

This paper is based on the assumption that deeply imbued gender ideologies permeate all societies and religions, giving meaning to being female and male, and what these sex roles entail. Gender is a wide-ranging social construct with males, females, and other genders constituted relationally, 'imbued with specific meanings, represented in particular ways, and…inserted into caste, class, racism, and other forms of social differentiation and hierarchy (Brah 2005: 154). Theorists increasingly posit that, given the multifaceted character of gender, it is best understood as only one aspect of subject formation.

Within the context of religion, socially defined notions of maleness and femaleness have often restricted individuals to specific and often prescribed actions, roles, rituals, and expectations. Moreover, while religion may be perceived as, *sui generis*, 'an essential and unique deocentric (god-centred) impulse' that cannot be challenged, it can also be

understood as a powerful narrative authored by humans to construct, define, and determine existence (Juschka 2001: 18). From this latter perspective, a gendered analysis of Sikhism allows for questions of ‘how’ social constructions of male and female are constructed throughout its development and as a living tradition. It also entails an examination of agency in the production of gender (I. Grewal 2010: 295).

Laying the Groundwork—The Guru Period

Neither societal mores nor gender were to bar humanity from attaining liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*jiwan mukti*), according to the Sikh Gurus. Whether rich or poor, high or low caste, male or female, the divine light (*jot*) resided within all. Through (p. 595) meditation on the divine Name, being in close community with like-minded seekers, and being graced by the Gurus’ presence, one actively participated in a process of inner transformation and liberation. Beyond this radical message, traditional roles and expectations of women and men within the householder ideal espoused by the Gurus remained largely unchallenged.

In terms of membership into the early Sikh community, initiation appears to have been the same for women and men through the rite of *charan pahul* (nectar of the foot). The Guru—and later, the Guru’s deputy—would dip his right toe into a bowl of water and the water would then be imbibed by the initiate as a symbol of submission to the Guru. This was significant for a society highly focused on ritual purity. The Sikh Gurus did not exhibit attitudes of aversion towards the human body, nor towards sexuality, stances often closely associated with negative attitudes towards women.

The increase in the numbers of Sikhs as well as the institutionalization, politicization, and militarization of the developing Sikh community came with increasingly gendered roles and expectations. This culminated with the creation of the Khalsa during the festival of Baisakhi in 1699 by Guru Gobind Rai. Five males—the ‘five beloved’ (*panj piare*)—answered the Guru’s call to come forward to submit to his authority. These five were initiated into the Khalsa brotherhood through a novel ritual, *khande di pahul*, sword initiation, whereby sweetened water (*amrit*) was stirred in an iron bowl with a double-edged sword (*khanda*) and administered to each initiate along with sanctified food (*karah prashad*). Each of the five, and the Guru who had also received initiation, were given the name Singh (lion), a name associated with Rajput warriors. Early sources also aligned the colour blue with the Khalsa order (Malcolm 1986: 180–5). Militarized names for the Divine, including *Sarab Loh* (All Steel) and *Sri Bhagauti* (Revered Sword), came to reflect the needs and values of the new army of the divine, Akal Purakh *di fauj*. The significance

of the ‘masculine’ *khanda*, as opposed to the *karad*, a domestic, one-edged ‘feminine’ utensil, was indicative of the gendering process involved in creating a new version of being a Sikh.

The institution of the male *panj piare* was also to have significant gendered implications. To this day, with the exception of a small number of marginal Sikh groups, women are barred from inclusion as *panj piare*, given that no women came forward during the inauguration of the Khalsa in 1699. Today, exceptions include 3HO Sikhs, also known as the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. Likely numbering a few thousand worldwide, these converts to Sikhism combine Sikh tenets with kundalini yoga and strictly uphold their own interpretation of an egalitarian Sikh tradition (Elsberg 2003).

The call to arms for the Khalsa in the earliest texts specified the carrying of five weapons at all times (Grewal and Bal 1967: 113–15) and uncut hair, that, by the nineteenth century had developed into the external identity markers known today as the Five Ks or *panj kakar*, since each term begins with the letter ‘k’: *kirpan* (sword), *kara* (steel bangle), *kachh* (short breeches), *kesh* (uncut hair), and *kangha* (wooden comb)—the latter to be kept in place by the turban. Over time, these exterior markers became the dominant signifiers of Sikh identity.

(p. 596) Early prescriptive texts focus for the most part on male identity and ritual life and are either highly contradictory or silent about women’s inclusion into the Khalsa. The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama strongly prohibits the administration of the sword ritual to a woman (McLeod 1987: 186); women are to be initiated by the rite of *charan pahul.* Chaupa Singh also maintains that a Sikh should never be called by half of his name (McLeod 1987: 182) signifying the centrality of ‘Singh’ as for males. Women, on the other hand are simply referred to as ‘Sikhnis’ or ‘Gursikhnis’. On the other hand, the Prem Sumarg prescribes the sword ritual for both men and women (McLeod 2006: 3–6). Gender differentiation however remains clearly in place with regard to normative codes. For males, weaponry, turban, and breeches are clearly prescribed (McLeod 2006: 22); female regulations stress, instead of the traditional blue of the Khalsa, a black skirt and bodice. They are also to study scripture in the company of other Sikhnis and obediently serve their husbands (McLeod 2006: 27). A highly gendered, normative Khalsa identity thus remains strongly in place. Today, the ‘hegemonization’ of the Khalsa male identity continues to have the effect of producing a ‘normative model’ against which all other Sikh identities are weighed, generally through ‘negation or deferral’, becoming the ‘authoritative reference’ of Sikh identity (Axel 2004: 26–60).

The Khalsa as a martial order, with military uniform and ensuing battles, had little relevance for the everyday realities of women. However, exceptions existed. Mai Bhago is known to have taken up arms in the battle of Muktsar. Sources indicate that she did so

either disguised as a man or was given special permission to wear male-specific garb by Guru Gobind Singh (Macauliffe 1990: 220). This narrative highlights an important 'gendering' process whereby specific interactive courses are put in place to ensure that a masculinized identity retains its position of primacy. Clearly, the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, and reinforce gendered divisions have many and varied sources, including ideology, prescriptions, and dress (Acker 1991: 167). Through militarized and masculine external markings and symbols, a gender-based 'theology of difference' contributed to the already established political, cultural, and social gender hierarchy of Punjabi society (Jakobsh 2003: 22–49). The 'sphere of social activity predominantly associated with males encompasses the activity predominantly associated with females and is, for that reason, culturally accorded higher value' (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 7–8).

Gender in the Post-Guru and Singh Sabha Periods

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, independent Sikh political confederacies (*misls*) were organized by the mid-eighteenth century under the leadership of a commanding chief. While traditional gender roles maintained a male-dominated society, a few prominent women from ruling families, including Maharanis Sada Kaur, Aus Kaur, (p. 597) and Jindan, contested the circumscribed roles of the normative Khalsa warrior ethos. However,

> similar to the ways in which the social status of men either through a claim to higher caste, as rulers, or as part of the Khalsa brotherhood was linked to their sense of masculine honour, women in ruling families could use their social status and kinship ties to claim a limited authority in society as 'honourary men'. This was not an option open to non-elite women. Exceptional circumstances allowed women to assume power, however, as soon as the emergency passed patriarchal control was quickly restored.
>
> (Dhavan 2010: 76–7)

As such, the Khalsa code of hyper-masculinity came to be extended ((Dhavan 2010: 72, 76). The turban, for instance, one of the external identity markers of the Khalsa, became increasingly tied to symbols of royalty and honour for Sikh (male) rulers. The turban, then as now, remains as the ultimate male signifier.

While minimal historical precedence exists, a contemporary and novel process of gender identity construction is taking place whereby a small number of Sikh women, largely within diasporic contexts, are donning turbans. Turban-wearing women are easily distinguished from non-Sikhs and may claim a heightened sense of legitimacy vis-à-vis non-turbaned, or the 'not-so-devoted', Sikh women (Mahmood and Brady 2000: 105–6). Others (Mahmood and Brady 2000: 52, 47) are claiming a turbaned identity as an expression of agency and resistance to the religious, cultural, and symbolic capital associated with this 'male symbol par excellence' (Dusenbery 1990: 346–7).

Following Maharajah Ranjit Singh's death (r. 1801–39), the Sikh kingdom became the final arena to be annexed by the British. Similar to other regions in India, reform movements in Punjab were springing up as a new middle class came to re-evaluate their own traditions through the lenses, experiences, and privilege offered by their British education. Among the Sikhs, the Singh Sabha was established in the late nineteenth century. Sabha leadership was almost exclusively male with the exception of women such as Harnam Kaur who was married to a reformer at the forefront of female educational reform (Jakobsh 2003: 144–8). Women increasingly became a primary site of reform. A great deal of attention came to focus on distinguishing Sikh women from their Hindu and Muslim counterparts. Naming practices figured prominently in that when Hindu and Sikh women were given two names, they were often identified as 'Devi' and Muslim women as 'Begum'. As noted, the appellation 'Singh' was central to the Khalsa identity from the late seventeenth century but no female *ritualized* counterpart existed. The Prem Sumarg provides the earliest textual prescription for naming Sikh women; they were to be identified as 'Devi' (McLeod 2006: 31). Sikh reformers apparently rejected the Sumarg's directive, given the name's Hindu connotations.

The name 'Kaur', the Punjabi equivalent of the Rajput term 'prince' (*kanwar*), had come to be loosely affiliated with females in aristocratic Sikh families (Jakobsh 2003: 220). As such, 'Kaur' had political implications that intended to create 'a parallel (p. 598) system of aristocratic titles in relation to the Rajput hill chiefs' (P. Singh 2010: 62). Singh Sabha reformers began an ingenious process of standardizing, legitimizing, and ritually sanctioning the name 'Kaur' through an extensive rewriting of history. Sahib Devan, one of Guru Gobind Singh's wives, heretofore known exclusively as such, was renamed Sahib Kaur by Singh Sabha writers (Jakobsh 2003: 210–31). Ultimately, the Sikh code of conduct, finalized in 1950 as the Sikh Rahit Maryada and upheld today, came to stipulate that the name 'Kaur' be given to Sikh females at birth alongside 'Singh' for male babies (Dharam Parchar Committee 1994: 13).

Many other gendered changes in identity construction took place during the Singh Sabha period. Female initiation into the Khalsa was hotly contested by Sikh factions given the lack of historical precedence and a perceived need to extricate male and female ritual

activity. Prescriptions from the colonial period directed that *if* female initiation was to take place, it was to be distinguished from that of males through the usage of a single-edged sword instead of the normative double-edged sword (Barstow 1984: 228). It was only by the mid-twentieth century that clearly defined, non-gendered injunctions within the Sikh Rahit Maryada were stipulated; namely, women and men were both to be initiated by a double-edged sword.

The reform endeavour in reimagining women's history, role, and status within Sikhism was immensely successful. Singh Sabha modifications, interpretations, and in some cases inventions of Sikh rituals vis-à-vis women and men as having equal access to all normative rites throughout the history of the Sikh tradition have remained largely unquestioned. Indeed, the Singh Sabha meta-narrative of gender egalitarian tenets and practices has come to hold the status of implicit truth (O'Connell et al. 1988: 12) both within scholarly studies and popular media, despite a decided lack of historical evidence (P. Singh 2010: 64; N.-G. Singh 2004: 285).

Gender and Sacred Scripture

Both male and female images and metaphors for the divine were utilized by the Sikh Gurus within the Guru Granth Sahib. Akal Purakh is mother and father, brother and sister, One, transcendent, ultimately beyond gender and beyond all categorization. However, as *gurbani* (utterances of the Gurus) came increasingly to be understood as alternatives to the sacred scripture of surrounding traditions, a parallel prominence came to be associated with the male Guru himself (Jakobsh 2010: 229). While the Gurus refused all intimations of divinity, their message was so closely aligned to the divine that, to their followers, the Sikh male Gurus were understood to be representatives of Akal Purakh. Moreover, while male and female images were utilized, the Gurus' preference in addressing the divine was through the usage of masculine epithets, including 'Master' and 'Lord' (Shackle and Mandair 2005: l). Indeed, the very naming of the Guru Granth Sahib denotes a male perspective; the term 'Sahib' is a masculine honourific title.

(p. 599) Marriage imagery was favoured above all others in describing the delightful union of humanity with Akal Purakh. The 'bulk of Guru Nanak's verses refer to the conjugal relationship. Metaphorically, God is the only True Husband, and human beings are potentially His wives. The soul-wife seeks, or should seek, union with god-husband.... Indeed, she adorns herself only to please her master' (J. S. Grewal 1996: 143). The Gurus freely took on the female voice in seeking to describe their devotion to the ultimate in all its fullness. According to Punjabi scholar Gurnam Kaur, 'God alone is Man, the Purusha

and all other are His bride or female' (Kaur 2004). The Gurus too were 'brides' separated from the Ultimate Man. The centrality of the marriage metaphor fortified a deep perception of God as male.

Gender and the Sikh Rahit Maryada

Another authoritative text is the Sikh Rahit Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct). It outlines definitions for Sikh religious identity, including correct Sikh behaviour and avoidances, proper ways of conducting rituals surrounding birth, marriage, and death, alongside a large number of other personal and community disciplines. The version that has become authoritative for Sikhs today stems from 1950 although it incorporates various earlier codes. While there are exceptions, the Sikh Rahit Maryada attempts to enshrine non-gendered practices and leadership roles. Women and men may serve as *ragis* (musicians) and as readers of scripture (*granthis*) within gurdwaras. However, deeply engrained patriarchal gender constructions have tended to ignore these clearly stated injunctions. Women do not serve as *ragis* or *granthis* within mainstream gurdwaras except within all-women's gatherings and rarely take on leadership roles within gurdwara management committees. As well, women continue to be barred from the institution of the *panj piare.* This prohibits women from contributing to Sikh ritual life in significant ways because the *panj piare* must be present for central Sikh rites and ceremonies. These include initiation rites, leading public processions during *gurpurbs* (anniversaries of the Gurus), and during Baisakhi celebrations honouring the birth of the Khalsa. In some diasporic locales, five women may walk directly behind the *panj piare* in processions (Jacobsen 2012: 27). Marriage and death rituals and praxis are also gender-specific. Females walk behind males in circumambulating the sacred scripture during marriage ceremonies and are prohibited from lighting the funeral pyre of the deceased or even entering cremation grounds, most particularly in Punjab (N.-G. Singh 2000).

Although unequivocally condemned by Sikh Gurus as well as by the Sikh Rahit Maryada, female infanticide played a significant role in substantially reducing the female to male ratio among Sikhs historically (Malhotra 2002: 51). Son preference continues today in Punjab, given increasingly easy access to sex selection clinics. Punjabi Sikhs have among the lowest female-to-male child sex ratios in India (Census of India 2011), with similar tendencies becoming evident within diasporic locales as well (p. 600) (Almond et al. 2009: 7). However, there is a great deal of complexity with regard to both son preference and sex selection practices. Trends towards cultural essentialism in the discriminate interventions of health practitioners in choosing whether or not to disclose the sex of the foetus, dependent on the perceived ethnicity of the parents, are becoming prevalent in

some regions. In assuming themselves to be the ‘protectors’ of the unborn South Asian or Sikh female foetus, health practitioners become ‘imbricated in paternalistic colonial and post-colonial discourses’ (Purewal 2004: 137), leading to disturbing forces of racialization and essentialized constructions of Asians, South Asians, and Sikhs in particular.

Gender Codes and *Seva* (Service) at the Golden Temple

In 2003, a highly contentious issue surrounding Sikh women’s participation in ritual activities at the Golden Temple in Amritsar erupted. The crux of this highly publicized issue revolved around two British Sikh *amritdhari* (Khalsa initiated) women, discriminated against in that they were refused the right to participate in the nightly Sukhasan procession, during which the Guru Granth Sahib is ritually carried to its resting place, because they were women. These women, and others following them, insisted however that their gender was no bar to their inclusion in *all* Sikh rituals and lodged a complaint with the highest authorities within Sikhism. An extensive discourse ensued that led to a critical examination of other examples of discriminatory practices based on gender within prescribed Sikh rituals and lived practices.

The issue surrounding women’s full participation at the Golden Temple is complex. In India and for many Sikhs of the diaspora, the controversy has less to do with gender egalitarian principles than with upholding traditional notions of modesty and honour. For some, the possibility of a woman surrounded by men and jostled in a crowd while balancing the palanquin carrying the Guru Granth Sahib during the Sukhasan ritual could lead to intimations of family dishonour. Prohibitions associated with women’s impurity during menses and thus their ability to pollute that most sacred of spaces also came to the fore (Jakobsh 2006: 189). Highlighting the multi-sited nature of gender, assumptions of class, privilege, and insider/outsider identities also became central to the discourse; the raising of the controversy itself was identified and critiqued as merely addressing the selfish needs of ‘outsiders’, namely, ‘Westernized’ Sikh women. Many women and men continued to insist that specific gender roles in Sikhism had never been an issue for Indian Sikh women (Jhutti-Johal 2010: 245).

Gender regulation in the context of religion is the process by which a community attempts to define, institute, and justify ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ behaviour and roles for its members. It is distinct from ‘sexual regulation’ in that the former is concerned with public roles and practices, while the latter is concerned with the ‘private encounters (p. 601) between individuals, usually involving sexual/physical intimacy’ (Zuckerman

1997: 354). In the case of the Sukhasan ritual, the lines between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ were blurred; notions of honour and of modesty, normatively associated with sexual regulation, were brought to a very public, even globalized, stage through images and petitions circulated on the World Wide Web (Jakobsh 2006: 189).

An important process of gender analysis and critique began to take place, largely led by Sikh women. While the protests and petitions that followed never led to changes taking place, mobilization efforts have led to important consciousness-raising which has in turn led to a re-evaluation of the complex, and for the most part unchallenged, gender codes limiting women’s role within mainstream Sikhism. In this regard, Sikhs are faced with the same hurdles as their counterparts in all other male-dominated religious traditions in challenging deeply ingrained patriarchal values and practices. However, traditionalists as well as some Sikh feminists maintain that while perhaps not upheld, egalitarian principles are intrinsic to Sikhism.

Gender, Religion, and Culture

Within Sikh narratives, distinctions tend overwhelmingly to be made between Sikh culture and Sikh religion in aligning undesirable gendered practices and attitudes. The former is generally perceived as most clearly imbricated in deeply engrained ‘Hindu’ patriarchal gender codes while Sikh religion, at least within textual injunctions, is understood as unequivocally gender-egalitarian. However, distinctions between culture and religion are not universally accepted, religion understood as ‘mediated, administered, lived, contested and adapted by socially situated agents, just like other forms of culture—and in relation to them’ (Bailey and Redden 2010: 3) Moreover, distinguishing between Sikh culture and Sikh religion from a gendered perspective is fraught with difficulties as early religious texts ‘established the basic framework upon which later constructions of Sikh masculinity and honour would be constructed’ (Dhavan 2010: 66). In this regard, two major religio-cultural features—a preoccupation with honour (*izzat*) and a propensity toward hyper-masculinity—have been most closely associated with the most dominant Sikh caste group, namely Jat Sikhs, the traditional landowning caste in Punjab (Singh and Tatla 2006: 182).

Izzat is a complex term that goes beyond the highly simplified term generally translated as ‘honour’ and includes, within the South Asian context, associations of morality, virtue, pride, respect, and dignity (Toor 2009: 243). Within the Punjabi context, *izzat* has been defined as that ‘complex of values regarding what was honorable’ (Pettigrew 1975: 58–9) and is most closely tied to family and community. For Punjabi males, *izzat* has traditionally been reflected individually through wealth, status, and actions, but also

through the behaviour of kin, most especially that of wives, daughters, and sisters. For women, the value generally associated with notions of honour is that of modesty or propriety (*sharam*). Together, *izzat* and *sharam* play an important role in maintaining (p. 602) the traditional patriarchal framework of Punjabi society (Mooney 2010: 160–1). Loss of honour is most closely aligned with female behaviour and can have severe implications in terms of a decline in the family's social standing in the community (Kang 2006: 154–5). For this reason, as in all male-dominated societies, mechanisms of social control are firmly gendered.

Restrictions and overt disciplinary actions surrounding the ideology of *izzat* within family dynamics historically focused on the control of female sexuality in protecting the 'gift' of female purity and virginity until it could be given away at marriage (Das 1976: 15–16). Much of this dynamic remains in place. While ideals of male virginity or purity are simply not part of the discourse of family honour, female bodies, particularly unmarried, are the 'sites on which the dynamic struggles of sociocultural reproduction within Sikh communities are fought' (Hall 2002: 168). Not restricted to Punjab, double standards continue to operate in the social control mechanisms of male and female behaviour within the Sikh diaspora. Females are intricately tied to notions of chastity, honour, and family prestige; these are 'considered to be a woman's *shingar* (ornaments) and she should not lose them at any cost' (Rait 2005: 53). Ultimately, the maintenance of hyper-masculinity intersecting with notions of *izzat* and *sharam* uphold deeply engrained male-dominated attitudes and religio-cultural value systems.

The discourse of 'honour' within world politics has become an important component of gendered and racialized minority politics, largely based on the assumption that minority cultures are more patriarchal than those of the liberal majority and 'sites of aberrant violence' (Volpp 2001: 1185, 1186). Far too easily construed binaries equating gender equality with modernity and 'the West' while aligning overarching patriarchal codes with 'the Rest' clearly need to be challenged (Said 1978). Class, socio-economic status, geographic locales, education (Toor 2009: 245), along with caste affiliations, are significant factors 'in structuring how gender identities are negotiated' all of which contribute to shaping *izzat* (Dwyer 2000: 483). While not discounting the centrality of the trope itself within this discussion of Sikh gendered social codes it must also be cautioned that the complex, layered, and nuanced nature of *izzat* has far too often and easily lead to oversimplified, essentialized, and racialized characterizations of whole communities and Sikhs in particular.

Conclusion

Gender as a multi-sited, intersectional social construct has not received a great deal of analysis within Sikh studies. However, how and why the categories of male and female, subjective and collective have actively been constructed within the Sikh tradition, is crucial in coming to a more comprehensive understanding of the historical development of Sikhism and as a living, vibrant tradition today, in the heartland of Punjab and within diasporic contexts.

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A Feminist Interpretation of Sikh Scripture

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Abstract and Keywords

This article offers a feminist hermeneutics of Sikh scripture as a means of balancing the current patriarchal meaning and application of the text. It is based on Gadamer's claim that interpretation, understanding, and application belong to a single hermeneutic process. The feminist currents permeating the text are explored from the horizon of 1) Sikh theology, 2) spirituality, 3) society, 4) historical consciousness, and 5) personal identity constructed by the Five Ks, the five items of Sikh faith. The article concludes with reflections on ways of accessing the sacred text by both men and women so that gender-justice and equality can be achieved. The sublime textual lyrics are viewed as a powerful resource that reach the inner psyche of the individual and therefore substantially promote the work of social activists, human rights organizations, politicians, and legal advocates.

Keywords: Sikh scripture, feminist, hermeneutics, theology, Five Ks, spirituality, gender-justice

THE Guru Granth, the centre of Sikh life, is a vast literary resource. Starting with the founder Guru Nanak (1469–1539), the Sikh Gurus did not set any explicit rules for their community to follow mechanically; rather, they offered poetic intimations to transform their divisive society by awakening the imagination to the singular Divine. The entire scripture is poetry, which elicits a personal interpretation. However, as history has it, the Guru Granth meant for society as a whole, has been taken over by the elite males in its meaning as well as in its praxis. Because of their one-sided androcentric hermeneutics, the liberating vision of the Gurus has neither been fully understood nor concretized. So if we use feminist lenses, we get a balanced and richer perspective that would be closer to the intention of the author-poets.

There is of course the tendency to denounce a feminist reading. The mainstream rejects such an approach as a Western gimmick, and in Sikh scholarly circles, it is reduced to a tangential lexicon. In reality, though, it basically entails understanding the sacred verse

in its expansive and inclusive imagery, and using that understanding in everyday practices. As Gadamer disclosed so thoroughly, the cognitive and the practical are not different dimensions: interpretation, understanding, and application constitute a singular hermeneutic process (Gadamer 1989: 309). Indeed, a feminist hermeneutics opens up the tremendous potential of the Guru Granth that can empower both Sikh men and women in their private and public lives. The objective of this article is to retrieve its intrinsic force in the horizon of 1) Sikh theology, 2) spirituality, 3) society, 4) historical consciousness, and 5) personal identity.

(p. 607) Theology

The unique configuration of Ikk Oan Kar () has the potential of the radical 'metapatriarchal journey' proposed by the feminist philosopher Mary Daly—to exorcize an internalized father-God in his various manifestations and incarnations (Daly 1978: 1–42). As the inclusive numeral shatters the dominance of male imagery, it creates a space for the Divine to be experienced in other new and important ways. Logically, it does not matter how the Divine is understood in human terms; the One is totally transcendent and beyond all categories. But in the poetry of the Gurus, both female and male dimensions run parallel. The Divine is identified in both genders: 'Itself male, itself is female' (Guru Granth (GG): 1020). Thus we receive a balanced perspective, which is crucial for mental and spiritual health.

Scriptural verses unleash multiple relationships with the Infinite. The first Guru's numerical configuration is ecstatically extended by his successors. Guru Amar Das declares, 'The Divine is itself mother, itself father' (GG: 921). Similarly, Guru Arjan, 'The one is my brother, my friend too is the One, the One is my mother and father' (GG: 45). Rather than an exclusive monotheistic patriarchal God, the Gurus reach out to the Be-ing transcending every binary, every category in personal relations, and passionately embrace that One in numerous relationships. This sense of plenitude strips off patriarchal stratifications and blots out masculine identity as the norm for imaging the Divine. It stretches the imagination, producing new emotions and new ways of interacting in society.

The Guru Granth regularly turns attention to the primal home—the mother's body, the ontological base of every person. It offers multivalent womb imagery. Conceived by different poets with different emphases and in different contexts, it is an extremely fertile ground inspiring a wide range of responses. The womb is celebrated as the matrix for all life and living. However, it also serves as an eschatological expression for the return of

the self into this world. According to Sikh scripture, birth is rare and precious like a diamond, but it can be flitted away for naught. An immoral life generates a negative rebirth, and the mother's womb in that instance is pictured as a scorching and painful mode of being—empty of the Divine. Under positive circumstances, however, the womb is a vital space permeating with the Divine, and the foetus functions as a symbol for cultivating Sikh morality, spirituality, and aesthetics.

The womb (*garbh* or *udar*) is affirmed as the source of life: 'In the first stage of life, O friend, you by the divine will, are lodged in the womb' (GG: 74). Attention is shifted from death and the other-world to the very origins in this world. In contrast with the 'necrophilic imaginary' of patriarchal theology that feminist philosophers have been warning against (Cavarero 1995: 69), the pervasive womb imagery in Sikh scripture affirms life and living in diverse forms. 'You yourself are born of the egg, from the womb, from sweat, from earth; you yourself are all the continents and all the worlds' (GG: 604). The maternal power with her paradigm of natality overturns the male ideal with death as its (p. 608) fundamental paradigm. Indeed, 'the womb of the mother earth yokes us' (GG: 1021). Birth becomes the absolute possibility of orienting humans to the physical world so that they experience fully—body and spirit together—the Absolute within the natural and social fibres of their being.

The womb is the space (*thanu*) where the individual becomes the self, both body and spirit. Even the pervasive usage of *rahime* ('compassionate'—an expression for the Divine) draws attention to her maternal space. In the speculations of the Muslim philosopher Ibn al'Arabi, the root of the word *rahimat* is womb, and the meaning of compassion or mercy is derived from it (Ibn al'Arabi 1980: 29). Similarly, feminist scholars relate the Hebrew word *rachum* (compassion), with *racham*, the word for womb (Trible 1978: 31–59). Sikh scripture continues to resonate with many positive memories of our lodging in the womb, the mother's creative organ: 'in the mother's womb are we taken care of' (GG: 1086); 'in the womb you worked to preserve us' (GG: 177); and 'in the mother's womb you nurture us' (GG: 132).

The Guru Granth honours the maternal space as a social utopia in which the foetus is free from hegemonic designations of class, caste, and name: 'In the dwelling of the womb, there is neither name nor caste' (GG: 324). The Sikh Gurus were acutely aware of their oppressive patrilineal and patricentred north-Indian society in which the family name, caste, and profession came down through birth. So the mother's pregnant body is envisioned as free from '-isms' and social hegemonies. Here the foetus is nurtured by *her* life-giving uterus; it is not suffocated by the father's name, class, or professional ties.

The Guru Granth takes women's genealogy seriously and acknowledges Mother's milk full of biological and spiritual nutrients. Even the recitation of divine name is succulently

experienced as milk in the mouth. The language of the Gurus joins in with the words of contemporary French feminist scholar Hélène Cixous, ‘Voice: milk that could go on forever. Found again. The lost mother/bitter-lost. Eternity: is voice mixed with milk’ (Cixous and Clement 1986: 93). Her milk is a biological necessity, keeping us from dying. So is the divine word (*bani*). By pouring the two together, the Sikh Gurus make knowledge essential for everybody, upper class and lower, Brahmin and Shudra. The textuality of the Guru Granth lies in its physical sensuality—in drinking the words as though they were the mother’s life-giving milk.

The Gurus compare the intensity of saintly devotion to that of an infant’s love for the mother’s milk (GG: 613). In an unforgettable juxtaposition of analogies the Divine is like a ‘cane for the blind’ and ‘like mother’s milk for the child’ (GG: 679). In a tender passage, ‘Says Nanak, the child, you are my father and my mother, and your name is like milk in my mouth’ (GG: 713). Throughout the Guru Granth, the Sikh Gurus unabashedly express their attachment to the Divine through an infant’s attachment to the mother’s breast: ‘My mind loves the Divine, O my life, like a child loves suckling milk’ (GG: 538).

The maternal imaginary in the Guru Granth is palpably accessed; it is not a matter of religious deification, because ‘she’ is not idolized into some distant goddess—an object of worship. It is when the Divine is genuinely imagined as Mother that her positive characteristics begin to filter the mind, and ignite respect for mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. Thus an authentic subjectivity is born. Women are regarded as life and blood **(p. 609)** individuals who partake the qualities and powers of the divine One. They are thanked for their creating and nurturing. The Granthian exaltation, ‘Blessed are the mothers!’ (GG: 28), has the potential to reach embodied women in the community. This respect for the mother is extended to all the mothers from all the species, and so the scriptural imaginary fills humans with pride in their own bodies, and charges everybody, men and women, to relish the Divine in the daily rhythms of life.

As Jewish and Christian thinkers have observed, *hers* is a different model of creation from that of an omnipotent creator who simply makes his creation out of nothing, or even of an artist who admittedly ‘creates’ but does not body forth his/her creation (McFague 1987). In the Mother model of thealogy, a future ‘kingdom’ of God is not awaited nor is its justice concerned with condemning in the future (Ruether 1983). Such theories concretize in the love that flows from the pervasive Granthian maternal symbol to immediate families, to primary communities, and to other species. Since the whole community—of humans and nature—constitutes *her* family, she does not favour humans over nature nor does she favour the immediate advantage of the dominant class, race, and sex. A profound sensitivity to the environment and new ethical paradigms of justice and equality will emerge, when readers recognize the imaginary of a maternal Divine permeating their scripture.

Clearly, it is not in opposition to but pulling towards the Mother that the Sikh Gurus establish their identity. The oceanic experience in her body and of her wisdom, strength, and snuggles melt away any splintered or patriarchal individuality. The verses of the male Gurus resonate with the views of feminist theologians and object-relations psychoanalysts who posit the maternal–infant relationship at the heart of a person's psychological and social development. Instead of the Freudian Oedipal conflict, castration complex, and individuality, feminist theologians (Naomi Goldenberg) and object-relations psychoanalysts (Melanie Klein and D. W. Winnicott), shift the focus to the maternal–infant relationship. Both the*a*logy and object-relations theory 'derive their insights into the matrices that support human life from an image of a woman-in-the-past' (Goldenberg 1995: 155). Sikh scriptural language cherishes the love of the mother, the care of the mother, the caresses of the mother, the trans-verbal communion with the mother. The male Gurus seriously remember her pre-birth and post-birth creativity, and our reading of their verses in turn can help us improve the individual and social fabric of our lives. 'Just as the mother takes care of her children, so the Divine sustains us' (GG: 680). The abundant joy of envisioning the Ultimate is 'like the look between a child and its mother' (GG: 452). When we feel the Divine arms around us—'like a mother tightly hugs her child' (GG: 629)—we cannot but recharge the innermost batteries of our own selves, and renew our relationships with our families, friends, and community.

It is critical that the 'mother' not to be viewed as the only female symbol for the Divine. Sikh scripture offers countless ways of imagining and experiencing the infinite One. Even in one short hymn, Guru Nanak imagines the Divine as the bride in her wedding dress, as the groom on the nuptial bed…as the fisherman and the fish, as the waters and the trap, as the weight holding the net, as well as the lost ruby swallowed by the fish (GG: 23)! In a speedy tempo, his similes and paradoxes free the mind from narrow walls. (p. 610) Male is not the only way to imagine the Divine. Guru Nanak's literary tropes parallel natural phenomena: just as in nature new qualities can be engendered by the coming together of elements in new ways, so too, new semantic juxtapositions and combinations can produce a new *isness*. Is the Divine the dressed-up bride or the groom on the nuptial bed? Breaking out of ordinary linear thought, the scriptural language makes way for a new dimension of reality and being in this world. The Gurus offer readers myriad possibilities of recollecting the infinite One—without letting the mind halt on any one.

Motherhood therefore is one aspect of womanhood, and surely all women are not mothers, and may choose not to be mothers. With the singular stress on the maternal paradigm, woman's creative powers can be misconstrued as an automatic and mandatory process. The 'mother' symbol from the Guru Granth must not be abused to make women into reproductory machines to beget sons! It is important that we do not equate the maternal potential with physical conception or limit the maternal to the domestic world.

As Luce Irigaray says, it is not necessary for women to give birth to children, they can give birth to many other things such as ‘love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things’ (Irigaray 1993: 18). The ‘mother’ as a Sikh theological principle reveals the potential to create—physically, intellectually, emotionally, politically, and spiritually. It shatters the gender roles that assign production to men and reproduction to women; conferring a sense of reality on women’s creativity, it enables everybody to cultivate meaningful relationships with their past and future generations, and with their geological and cosmic community. Half a millennia ago the Sikh Gurus might not have known the empowering potential of their maternal symbol. But it is there. Sikhs in the twenty-first century can actualize it.

Spirituality

Spiritually, the Gurus connect with the female at a very deep level. Throughout the Guru Granth, they identify themselves with *her* in their search for the Divine. Woman is regarded as physically and spiritually refined, so it is in her tone, her mood, her image, her dressing-up that the Gurus express their yearning. They envision the One as a handsome groom, and take on the personality of a bride, totally merging with her feminine feelings and thoughts in their desire for spiritual union. The male–female duality which violates the wholeness of human nature and deprives each person of the other half is overcome, establishing, in turn, the significance of being human. Men and women are united and share their human angst and human hope.

The pervasive bridal symbol establishes a sensuous and palpable union with the Infinite One. The Groom (*sahu*) is known as *agam* (infinite), *agocaru* (unfathomable), and *ajoni* (unborn); he is utterly metaphysical and beyond all sense perception. The bride perceives and proclaims the infiniteness of her Groom: ‘O my Beloved, your limits I cannot fathom’. She is perplexed and wonders how she is going to ‘see’ her True Groom when ‘He has no colour, no garb, no form’ (GG: 945). How is she going to know the (p. 611) unknowable? She imagines him to be ‘a deep and unfathomable ocean full of precious jewels’ and ‘there is no other I’d worship’ (GG: 1233). Cognizant of the singularity of her Groom, she boldly expresses her tenacity.

Ultimately, it is the bride who succeeds in creating proximity to the distant Groom. She is the one to chart out the way that will make the transcendent accessible to human experience. She addresses the impersonal Being in most personal terms: ‘O my handsome, unfathomable Beloved’; ‘my Beloved is the most delicious inebriation’. For her, ‘my loved Groom isn’t far at all’ (GG: 1197). She praises him lavishly:

> My Beloved is utterly glorious, brilliantly crimson,
> Compassionate, beneficent, beloved, enticer of the hearts,
> Overflowing with *rasa*, like the *lala* flower.
>
> (GG: 1331)

The backdrop to this scenario is nuptial union. The red colour, the *lala* flower, the enticing of hearts, the latent joy—all point to their consummation. The bride in this phenomenal world sees her transcendental Groom directly and physically. In her eyes, he is like the *lala* flower. He is dyed deep in glorious beauty; he is mind-bedazzling. He is overflowing with *rasa*. The senses of sight (crimson, brilliant), smell (like the fragrance of the flower), and taste (*rasa*—the juice, the essence) all unite to convey to the reader the bride's complete and thoroughly sensuous unity with her divine Lover. The female is the model to be emulated for spiritual union.

The Guru's expression of unity points in the direction of a more egalitarian and open-ended social structure than the 'Lord' and 'Father' (Tillich 1951: 241), symbolism dominant in many religions. As Jewish and Christian feminist scholars have analysed, the Lord-Father symbol basically upholds a hierarchical, patriarchal frame of reference from which the female experience is excluded. In contrast, the bride symbol in Sikh scripture exalts feminine love. Here equality is the basis of the relationship. The bride, simply by loving, not by fearing, or remaining in awe, or being totally dependent, senses the proximity of her infinite Groom and is then able to share that feeling with her sisters and her friends. Through her intense love, she is able to establish a free and non-authoritarian relationship with the Divine. Her experience has much to offer women who are struggling to free themselves from a Father-Lord symbol that they find oppressive (Christ 1985: 250). Moreover, she does not need any mediators like priests or theologians. The Sikh bridal symbol suggests a freedom from patriarchal mediums; without anyone standing in between, the bride directly and passionately seeks to embrace the Divine.

Of course some feminists may object to the longing bride as a model. They might see an inherent dualism in the relation between the bride and her Groom, and the role of the bride seeking her Beloved may be viewed as restrictive and stifling. In this case we must remember that it emerged in Sikh literature at a point in time and space when the Indian woman was humiliatingly subjugated, so to see *her* as the paragon of physical and spiritual refinement, and hear *her* desire being expressed, is significant. (p. 612) The symbol has to be fully understood and not simplistically read as though women must be dependent on their husbands. That would be a grave distortion. The Granthian bride is dependent only upon the Divine One, and men, women, and the entire cosmos share this dependence. The Sikh scriptural message is not the subjugation of the female to the

male, for her Groom is beyond gender; rather, it is the rising of the individual spirit towards the Absolute. The rich variety of Granthian images reveals the complexity and dignity of the female experience, and loosens the grip of masculine symbols upon the contemporary imagination. She is spiritually refined. Her emotions are strong. Her body is regarded positively. She is the model to be emulated. The lingering effect of such passages produces an emotional strength that helps confront inequality and injustice.

Society

Devotees and scholars profusely cite the Guru Granth for its rejection of caste and class; however, its bold rejection of sexism is barely remembered. Sikh scripture dramatically affirms women's creative and natural processes in the social fabric. Not only are there images celebrating *her* gestation, birthing, and lactation processes, but also a condemnation of taboos surrounding menstruation and post-partum pollution. The Gurus also criticize the institutions of *purdah* (confinement of women) and *sati* (the self-immolation of women on the funeral pyre of their husband). Their passionate poetry replays their empathy, and discloses their intention for society to discard oppressive androcentric codes.

To date our society is horrified at the sight of women's blood—whether it is her monthly period or the blood that accompanies every birth. Considered a private, shameful process, menstruation is equated with being ill or weak. Because of their menstrual periods, women are barred from religious services. As feminist scholars have been reminding us, the disdain for this natural feminine phenomenon has contributed to the low status of women. The Sikh Gurus were aware of the sexism prevalent in their society and denounced taboos against women. The fear of the gaze, touch, and speech of a menstruating woman had been internalized by Indian society for centuries. These deeply rooted negative attitudes to women have seeped into all of India's religious traditions. The Guru Granth dramatically dispels conventional taboos against female pollution, menstruation, and sexuality. Menstrual bleeding is regarded as an essential, natural process. Life itself begins with it. The first Guru reprimands those who stigmatize the garment stained with menstrual blood as polluted (GG: 140). Many scriptural verses celebrate the female body, and affirm the centrality of menstrual blood in the creative process: 'From mother's blood and father's semen' is created the human form (GG: 1022). Here priority is given to mother's blood. Another scriptural passage confirms it: 'From blood and semen is one created' (GG: 706).

(p. 613) Like menstrual blood, blood of parturition is also stereotyped by society as impure and dangerous, and is ritually avoided. The mother giving birth is a biologically natural and organic mode of creation. Yet birth, *every* mother's most fantastic miracle, is deemed dirty, with all sorts of lingering fears of pollution attached to it. In medieval India, any home with a new birth was feared toxic for forty days, and only the performance of elaborate rituals would bring it back to normality. It is quite remarkable how publicly the Sikh Gurus condemned such notions of pollution:

> If pollution attaches to birth, then pollution is everywhere (for birth is universal).
> Cow-dung [used as fuel] and firewood breed maggots;
> Not one grain of corn is without life;
> Water itself is a living substance, imparting life to all vegetation.
> How can we then believe in pollution,
> when pollution inheres within staples?
> Says Nanak, pollution is not washed away by purification rituals;
> Pollution is removed by true knowledge alone.

(GG: 472)

From the Sikh scriptural perspective, pollution is an inner reality, a state of mind, and not the product of any natural birth. Female inferiority is dismissed: 'How can we call her inferior from whom kings are born?' asks Guru Nanak poignantly (GG: 473). The Sikh Guru strongly questioned the legitimacy and purpose of devaluing women on the basis of their reproductive energy. Set upon Guru Nanak's egalitarian vision, Sikh scripture continuously erases negative connotations associated with women's bodies.

It also draws attention to the exploitive customs of purdah and sati. Guru Nanak's passages depicting Babur's invasion carry profound empathy for Indian women. Muslim and Hindu women from different sectors of society are graphically depicted as victims of patriarchal institutions:

> Hindu, Turk, Bhatt, and Thakur women—
> Some have their veils sundered from head to toe,
> Others make crematory their abode.

(GG: 418)

The Sikh Guru's compassion extends to both Hindu and Muslim women—equally for those who practise purdah (Muslim) and for those who practise sati (Hindu). The straight horizontal sequence of his verse bridges any chasms that may segregate women—'Turks, Hindus, Bhatts, or Thakurs'. They are all victims, irrespective of religious or societal hierarchies. With a radically feminist sensibility, Guru Nanak tells us how the veils of Muslim women are ripped from head to toe by the invaders.

Purdah is not just a piece of material with which the Muslim women cover their hair, their faces, and their bodies, but also a bundle of complex norms involving patriarchal (p. 614) control of female sexuality. Initially observed by Muslim elites, the custom soon penetrated the Indian masses. The Guru Granth urges the excision of such artificial social confinements. In an entirely different image the Guru says:

> When she dances in ecstasy,
> How could she be veiled?
> So break the vessel and be utterly free!
>
> (GG: 1112)

Here is an autonomous subject in joyous movements—without any *ghungat* (pan-Indian term for veil). In her ecstasy for the Divine, she has discarded the shackles of immobility and invisibility. Considering its heavily controlled patriarchal social context, the freely dancing unveiled scriptural figure is quite a revolutionary model for spiritual liberation.

Along with purdah, the custom of sati is denounced. Literally meaning pure or good wife, sati in social history is understood as a widow's sacrifice of her life on her husband's funeral pyre. Her characteristic markers are purity and devotion to her husband—alive or dead. Sati was a common practice in Guru Nanak's milieu. Battling against Babur's invasion, many Hindu men lost their lives. Their widows performed their duty (*stridharma*; *pativrata*). Guru Nanak's haunting words, *ikkna vasu masani* ('others make crematory their abode') vividly evoke robust women being lapped by cruel fires. They also raise questions: was this really *her* duty? Who made it normative? How could society have clung to such horrific customs? Displacing ancient norms, the Guru Granth offers a new form of sati that is performed not for the sake of the husband who died but for the infinite universal Husband:

> These are not called *satis,* who burn themselves in crematory pyres
> Says Nanak, know them as *satis,* who die in the shock of separation.
> They are *satis,* who live in harmony and contentment
> Serving their Husband by daily remembering him.
>
> (GG: 787)

Thus the conventional rite of sati is no longer a woman's consignment of her body to the flames of her dead husband. From an external ritual, sati is transformed into an inner experience of love for the Divine, the universal Husband; from cruel death, sati is transformed into a peaceful and harmonious mode of life; from sleep eternal to constant service and remembrance of the singular One. In the Guru Granth, the final test of a

woman's sexual and emotional purity is changed into a lifelong devotion by *both* men and women, at *every* stage of their life.

Such scriptural verses raise questions not only about the past but also about present-day assumptions. What are our values and attitudes towards women? The practice of sati has been illegal since the early nineteenth century, yet tragically, its lethal flames continue to char the psyche of Indian women. Yes, the widow lives, but can her dreary dead existence be called *living?* Indian culture continues to stereotype widows as inauspicious figures who bring death to the husband and bad luck to *his* family by their own bad karma. (p. 615) However young she may be, a widow must not wear bright colours or jewellery or make-up. Ostracized by their society, they are liminal figures, who learn to shun entertainment, and are forced to swallow all sorts of emotional and physical abuse. Do the daughters, sisters, nieces, and wives live as fully or freely as their male counterparts —at *any* stage of life?

Purdah continues to be widely practised as well. Bangladeshi feminist Taslima Nasrin has made 'Let's Burn the Burqa' a global slogan. Even if it is not a literal veil for Sikh women, their life is restricted: marriage and care of children, husband, and in-laws takes priority over the personal. The enlightening lyrics of the Guru poets raise social consciousness and make us self-critical. Their poetic intimations force us to examine: do sons, purdah, female purity, fulfil *religious* and ethical obligations, or are they veils and coverings for individual obsessions and greed?

Historical Consciousness

With a feminist lens into Sikh scripture, historical women begin to emerge in the consciousness. The Sikh Gurus are men as we acknowledged, but their relationship with their mothers, sisters, wives, and women in their community had an impact on their world view. Poetry is not a whimsical fancy; the Gurus were grounded in their concrete domestic and social world. Guru Nanak's feminist sensibility was raised due to his close relationship with his sister Nanaki, mother Tripta, wife Sulakhni, and by women outside his immediate family. The flesh-and-blood mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters who are neglected in Sikh history must be remembered for their role in the Gurus' progressive vision of theology, ontology, and praxis.

The rejection of asceticism in Sikh scripture and the affirmation of the spiritual progress within the normal secular mode of existence could very well be a result of the Gurus' positive personal family experience. Surely a mother like Bibi Bhani and a wife like Mata Ganga would have inspired Guru Arjan (the compiler of the Sikh canon) to affirm:

‘spiritual liberation is attained in the midst of laughing, playing, dressing up, and eating’ (GG: 522). The Gurus would have strongly identified with their mothers for very frequently we hear a vocative for the Mother slipping from their lips: ‘How can I live without the Name, O my Mother?’ (GG: 226); ‘How could I forget That, O my Mother?’ (GG: 349); ‘How do I unite with truth, O my Mother?’ (GG: 661); ‘What virtues will unite me with my life, O my Mother?’ (GG: 204). The verbal embrace from their unconscious suggests the Gurus’ intimacy and respect for their biological mothers.

Sikh scripture does explicitly remember Mata Khivi, the wife of the second Guru:

> Says Balwand, noble Khivi supplies
> Immense leafy shade to people,
> She richly distributes *langar*,
> Her *kheer* drenched in *ghee* is ambrosial!
>
> (GG: 967)

(p. 616) The central Sikh institution of *langar* was important in erasing the hegemonic divisions. For the *langar* meal, men and women irrespective of class, caste, and creed, cook and eat together. With Mata Khivi’s generous supervision and her plentiful supply of mouth-watering *kheer* (rice pudding), the tradition of *langar* became a real feast rather than just a symbolic meal. Her memory recorded in the Guru Granth engenders a wholesome mode of existence. Such mnemonic presence of women creates a balanced view of history. Female protagonists from the past hold enormous possibilities for the present, and for the future of Sikhism. They inspire spirituality, courage, and wisdom.

Personal Identity

As I explored in an earlier work, the personal identity of the Sikhs is constructed from the transcendent textures of the Guru Granth (Singh 2005: 93–137). It was in a period of intense social and political oppression that the tenth Guru created the Khalsa and gave them their external identifications, that of the Five Ks. As I read, these are constructed from the spiritual meaning derived from the Guru Granth. ‘Meaning’, according to psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow, ‘is an inextricable mixture of the sociocultural and historically contextualized on the one hand and the personally psychodynamic psychobiographcially contextualized on the other’ (Chodorow 1999: 2). The everyday articles from Guru Gobind Singh’s culture—something so simple and common as a comb, a bracelet, long hair, underwear, a sword—had great personal meaning for him because they were laden with spirituality in a text that constituted his psychodynamic and

psychobiographic being. The tenth Sikh Guru grew up on the sacred utterances of his predecessors, which formed the core of his daily routine. That he would endow their words with Guruship in the final hour of his life manifests the profound motivational significance they had for him. The metaphysical ideals cherished in his sacred text coincide with the simple items in his sociocultural context, and their 'coincidence' leads to the Five Ks as powerful items of Sikh identity.

Each of them ontologically draws upon the female accoutrements enshrined in the Guru Granth. The female is 'privileged' in Sikh scripture because she is the one who is psychologically and spiritually honed. Her various bodily adornments are imbued with great significance. Her hair is neatly braided (GG: 558), and *her* braids are held together by embroidered tassels (GG: 937). The long hair of women is an expression of the sanctification of the human personality in the Sikh holy writ. She embodies the central scriptural message that the relationship between the individual and the Divine is tightly braided by following her example of love and tenacity. Furthermore, the image of the brutally shorn hair during Babur's invasion recounted by Guru Nanak in his *Babur-vani* hymns must have been absorbed by his ninth successor. What was violated had to be restored. Guru Gobind Singh reacts to the political repression in his own times by reconstructing tragic memories into triumphant hopes: his people evermore were to keep their hair long, untouched by any scissors.

(p. 617) Similarly, the comb receives its religious significance from the sacred text. The Guru Granth extols the female person for the mental tenacity with which she uses her items. We can see the comb in her hands as 'the woman with patience gets her braid knotted' (GG: 359). The poetically charged alliteration of 'ds' in the original evokes a rhythmic application of the comb, its teeth turning and returning, smoothing and arranging her hair. Only after she combs her hair can it be knotted together. Another verse from the Guru Granth further qualifies: 'It is with Truth that the woman braids her hair' (GG: 54). Profoundly captured, Truth is the woman's hands holding her long hair, and with the help of her comb, weaving the different strands together. The *kangha* is not an antithesis to the *kesha*; there is a synchronicity, a close relationship between them. Both together release, redesign, retrieve infinite human potential. The comb is the instrument for attending to oneself, and so combing the hair becomes a self-reflective process, which leads to a life of beauty, imagination, and Truth for both men and women.

The third K, *kirpan*, is not only worn on the body of the Sikhs, it is mentally evoked in Ardas, and it is physiologically partaken both in the *amrit* sipped by the Khalsa and in the *karah prashad* eaten by the Sikh congregation. *Amrit* is prepared by churning the waters with a double-edged sword accompanied by the recitation of sacred verses; *karah prashad*, the warm and delicious Sikh sacrament, is not distributed to the congregation

until it is sanctified by her touch. The sword exerts tremendous influence in the daily life of the Sikh community.

The prototype for this K of the Sikhs is distinctly found in the Guru Granth where the sword is made up of *gur gianu*, literally 'divine wisdom' (GG: 235, 574, 983, 1072). Paradoxically, this sword of transcendent texture is concretely held in the hands (GG: 235, 574). Throughout the Guru Granth it is conceived as an essential instrument for the development of human consciousness. And, importantly, the paradigmatic person utilizing the sword in the Guru Granth is a woman. The female subject heroically fights against her inner propensities: 'by taking up the sword of knowledge, she fights against her mind and merges with herself' (GG: 1022). Sikh scripture greatly values the female for her strength and finesse, because she is the one to direct us to the authentic self that lies beneath superficial differences and conflicts. Not only does she know how to wield the powerful sword but she also triumphs over her hostile opponents. She is a crucial model in Sikh epistemology. By following the way *she* carries and uses her sword, men and women alike can get to know the unknowable One.

The fourth K, the steel *kara,* also evokes the female ornaments and the mode of dressing up treasured in the Guru Granth. Worn by men and women, it is but another endorsement of the scriptural expression of spirituality through women's activities and embellishments. Sensuous poetry and sublime philosophy delineate the Granthian precedent for the Khalsa's bracelet. Like the sword, its material substance is the Divine. As Guru Nanak says, 'By wearing the bracelet created by the Creator, consciousness is held steadily' (GG: 359). The bracelet (*kangan*) is a symbol of dynamic action, and the word action (*kar*) recurs constantly in this line: her bracelet is made (*kari*) by the creator (*karta*) and worn around her hand (*kar*). It is artistically set in the midst of her many spiritual adornments. Essentially all of the female articles and movements are imbued **(p. 618)** with the sacred, and morality is gained through action (*kr)* and by attending to the physical self.

The lamentations of Guru Nanak must have lingered in the psyche of Guru Gobind Singh. Like the shorn hair, the bracelets made of ivory (*dand khand*) worn by the newly wed brides were also broken during Babur's invasion recorded Guru Nanak. Years later, Guru Gobind Singh took the delicate ivory bracelets from his culture and gave them a new syntax; he converted them into a steel/iron bracelet to be courageously worn for ever. The bracelets symbolizing a bride's transitory phase from daughter to wife were made into the *kara* to be worn by both men and women, from birth to death. By constructing the metallurgical *kara* from the metaphysical elements of the Guru Granth, the tenth Guru melted away oppressive hereditary professional attachments, divisions, and hierarchies.

Finally, the *kacha* too is modelled on the metaphysical garments worn by the female figure in the Guru Granth. Not those 'who take off their clothes and go naked like Digambaras' (GG: 1169), but she who 'wears the clothes of Love' (GG: 54) is prized in the Sikh sacred text. As a covering for the genitals, *kacha* becomes a signifier of self-affirmation. Ascetics and celibates from different religious world views opt to wear nothing on their bodies as a sign of 'mastering' their sexuality. The Granth rebukes the example of the Digambara Jains who go literally 'sky-clad:' 'someone clad in wind would only be a proud fool' (GG: 318). Instead, the Guru Granth exalts her who 'wears the clothes of Love' (GG: 54), and presents *her* as the paradigm to be emulated by both men and women. The female model is physically, morally, and spiritually wholesome, and her outfit fully matches her inner feelings. When the synthesis of *bani* and *bana* is actually felt on the body, new reservoirs of energy and enchantment begin to flow in every*body*.

As noted at the outset, there is a lack of feminist hermeneutics. Consequently, the existential correlation between the sacred text and daily life has yet to be made in the Sikh world. Whereas Sikh scripture is radically open, the community has been reticent to acknowledge and implement its innovative ideas. Instead of discovering the new and unique contribution of their Gurus, Sikh men and women in their false consciousness perpetuate the centuries-old values that have been around them historically and geographically. Sikhs are less than 2 per cent of the Indian population, and the weights and veils of ancient codes from diverse Hindu and Muslim traditions, prevail in Sikh ideals and practices. British colonialism provided yet another oppressive layer, which produced a 'hyper-masculine' culture. The Punjab came under the Raj in 1849, and the imperial masters so admired the 'martial' character and strong physique of Sikh men that they recruited them in disproportionately large numbers to serve in the British army. A vigorous new patriarchal discourse with its patriotism and paternalism was thereby attached to the 'Brotherhood of the Khalsa'.

That drive continues on. With the Green Revolution and the enterprising spirit of its people, post-colonial Punjab became the breadbasket of India. Today it is in the ferment of globalization. Contemporary economic and technological priorities have made the patriarchal compulsion for sons even stronger. Parents regard sons as their social security, financial insurance, and religious functionaries who will eventually perform (p. 619) their funeral rites. Sons are deemed essential for carrying on of the family name, property, and land. Gender prejudice has become worse with globalism. Against the threat of modernity, ancient feudal values play out. Women are held responsible to preserve the honour (*izzat*) of their fathers and brothers. Parents with daughters are severely pressurized by dowry demands—be it cash, jewellery, furniture, cars, or property. With the combination of ancient patriarchal values and new globalization, the gender-disparity is deteriorating. In the contemporary reality, daughters are bound to

‘honour codes’, huge dowries are doled out for their marriages, and female foetuses are being aborted in alarming statistics.

The Sikh community is recognizing the gravity of the situation. Men and women are beginning to take steps towards gender-justice. Campaigns geared specifically against female feticide are being initiated by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in collaboration with the Punjab Government and the Ranbaxy Corporation. Political leaders and NGOs are forging important infrastructures for the protection, welfare, education, and employment of girls and women. Women writers, artists, poets, and film directors, are trying to raise social awareness. Along with these important steps, there should also be the disclosure of feminist possibilities in Sikh scripture. The sacred verse has the power to reach the deeply unconscious self, the template of real change; the transcendent lyrics have the potential to open up a vast egalitarian horizon free from sexism, classism, and racism. But they have to be accessed!

A feminist hermeneutics is urgent. Male elites have been the prime exegetes of the Guru Granth, so their perspective is heard in gurdwaras and broadcast around the world through radio and television. Similarly, Sikh scholarship has been dominated by males, with the result that the female images are neglected, sometimes even misinterpreted, and their feminist import is invariably lost.

The existing English translations of the sacred verse end up being androcentric. In fact they betray a colonized mentality. Whereas the Divine is the transcendent, metaphysical One, it is invariably translated into a Western monotheistic ‘God’ and given a male identity. Another tendency of translators is to reduce the robust and authentic presence of female scriptural models into a mere figure of speech (Singh 2007: 1–17). Somehow or the other, ‘soul’ gets latched on to the powerful females, killing their vibrant bodies. A simple *suhagan*, for example, in translation becomes ‘bride-soul’. The term ‘soul’ sturdily appropriated by translators (and exegetes) is utterly inappropriate in the Sikh context. Laden with Jewish-Christian connotations, the soul imposes the mind-body dualism, shifting the attention from the present situation to an afterlife and heaven out there. Feminist scholars have warned us about the terrible consequences of the bipartite ‘body-soul’ framework on the devaluing of bodies, of life on earth, and of female gender and sexuality. In spite of the fact that the original verse does not contain the soul, it is lavishly present in English translations. Its usage dichotomizes the fullness of the Gurus’ experience and vision, and sends misogynistic and ‘misgeophoebic’ messages to readers. New gender-inclusive, female-sensitive translations would promote the vision of the Gurus.

The vital female subjectivity in the Guru Granth is not only marginalized and overturned in its interpretation and translation, but is also lost in its worship. Gadamer **(p. 620)**

rightly reminds us, ‘application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but co-determines it as a whole from the beginning’ (Gadamer 1989: 324). Sikhism has no priesthood, and nowhere in the scripture are men delegated to be the sole custodians of their sacred text and leaders in worship, and yet women are tacitly discouraged from conducting public ceremonies. Women do play an active role in devotional practices at home, but when it comes to leading worship in gurdwaras it is primarily the men. Gender distinctions play a significant role because the superior role and privilege of men in public is unconsciously taken into the home, with the result that male domination is reproduced in the family, home, and Sikh society at large.

As we noted at the outset, the Guru Granth is a book of poetic verse that gives no rules but offers only intimations. Starting with the first, the Gurus used the poetic medium to reach their readers directly and intimately. His fourth successor (Guru Arjan, 1563–1606) put the verses into musical measures so that they would awaken people from their conventional mode of existence, and revitalize their senses, psyche, imagination, and spirit. Just before he passed away, the tenth Guru (1666–1708) hailed the Book as the Guru precisely to reiterate a personal and direct relationship between the individual and the text. It is imperative then that men and women access their scriptural Guru on their own. The Guru teaches without teaching. Even if certain actual phrases may be difficult to comprehend, its universal melodies so strike the spirit that they evoke confidence in the self, the human family, and the Divine. They flush out those fears and phobias relayed via patriarchal hermeneutics.

In the twentieth century Sikh intellectuals tried to formalize the message of the scripture. The Sikh Rahit Maryada (Ethical Code) was published in 1950 by the SGPC. This standard authoritative statement of Sikh conduct developed several rules that would combat female oppression. It categorically states that neither a girl nor a boy should be married for money. Dowry is specifically forbidden. Twice the code makes the point that Sikh women should not veil their faces (12, 18). It prohibits infanticide, especially female infanticide, and even prohibits association with people who would practise it. The Sikh Rahit Maryada allows for the remarriage of widows, and it underscores that such a ceremony must be the same as that for the first marriage—a marked difference from the old Punjabi custom, when a widow was shamefully wrapped in a sheet and carried away to a brother of her dead husband. In traditional Indian families, there is also a superstitious custom that people should not eat at the home of their married daughter—forgetting that the founder Guru himself lived with his married sister Nanaki and her husband! The Sikh Rahit Maryada denounces this custom, which treats a daughter like an object or a piece of property passed to her husband and his family. The community needs to propagate and follow such clearly articulated rules. Sikh families should feel empowered by their ethical code and not be socially pressurized into providing dowries

for their daughter and gifts for *her* and *her* in-laws throughout their lives, or aborting *her* even before she enters this world.

To sum up, the Sikh transcendent imaginary is both male and female, and it is necessary that both men and women together access it. There is no exclusive script prescribed (p. 621) for any class or sex anywhere in the 1,430-page sacred volume. The community must not allow exploitations—from either traditional codes or colonial rule or modern consumerism—to block its egalitarian message. The Guru Granth cannot simply be the external focus of Sikh worship, ceremonies, and rites of passage; it must be internalized, and its interpretation put into practice. When its sacred lyrics reach the individual's depths, the Gurus' message would become an automatic reflex in everyday attitudes, actions, and performances. The cognitive and the practical belong to the single hermeneutic process: an understanding of Sikh scripture is no different from living out the beauty, equality, and the enchantment of the Gurus' word.

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Abstract and Keywords

Reflecting the far-reaching implications of the Oak Creek Gurdwara tragedy for Sikh Studies, this article discusses the emergence of the discipline in the Western academy and sets new trajectories for its future development. For this purpose it makes the case for language training, the location of early manuscripts (*pothis*), fresh translations of influential Sikh works, and new interpretations of available sources. There is an urgent need to move beyond orthodox viewpoints (*doxa*), to adopt the method of dialogical readings, and to follow the interdisciplinary approach to keep pace with the developments in other fields.

Keywords: Oak Creek Gurdwara, Sikh Studies, Punjabi, Guru Granth Sahib, Dasam Granth, pothi, translation projects, doxa, dialogical readings, interdisciplinary approach

Introduction

On Sunday morning, 5 August 2012, a gunman burst into the Sikh Gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and opened fire, killing five men and one woman, ambushing one police officer and injuring three others. During an exchange of gunfire he eventually died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head after he was shot by another police officer. The dominant narrative that has emerged in both media coverage and public discourse since then has been one of mistaken religious identity. It presumes that the killer, identified as a white supremacist named Wade Michael Page, may have shot the Sikhs because he ignorantly believed they were Muslim. To a certain extent, such a storyline seems accurate because hundreds of times since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Sikhs have been the victims of horrific attacks like this. On 15 September 2001, for instance, Balbir Singh Sodhi was shot dead in Phoenix, Arizona, by a self-described ‘patriot’ who mistook him for a Muslim. Again, Surinder Singh and Gurmej Atwal were gunned down by yet-

unidentified assailants during their afternoon stroll in Elk Grove on 4 March 2011. And several other Sikh Americans have felt the wrath of insane hatred, such as 56-year-old Sacramento cab driver Harbhajan Singh, who received multiple facial fractures from two of his passengers on 29 November 2010 (M. Kaur 2012). The perpetrators of such crimes have invariably assumed that because Sikh men wear turbans and have beards they are Muslims, even specifically Taliban. How terrible it is that it has taken the slayings in Wisconsin to serve as a national teachable moment about Sikh beliefs and practices. Yet the 'mistaken identity' narrative carries with it an unexamined premise, implying that somehow the public would have reacted differently had Page turned his gun on Muslims attending a mosque and that 'such a crime would be more explicable, more easily rationalized, less worthy of moral outrage' (Freedman 2012). Thus there is an urgent need to abandon the 'mistaken identity' narrative because it misses (p. 626) the bigger picture of ending violence against all innocent people—Muslim, Sikh, and anyone else—and building a global society without terror.

The second narrative is offered by Mark Juergensmeyer who maintains that the killing spree by Wade Michael Page on the Sikh gurdwara in Milwaukee was an act of Christian terrorism. Accordingly, Page was a member of the skinhead band 'End Apathy' that advertised the evils of multiculturalism and advocated 'white power'. The author contends that it is fair to call Page a Christian terrorist since the evidence indicates that he thought he was defending the purity of white Christian society against the evils of multiculturalism that allow non-white non-Christians an equal role in American society. Like the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and the Norwegian militant Anders Breivik, Page thought he was killing to save white Christian society (Juergensmeyer 2012). However, no evidence has become available so far to show that Page was indeed a pious Christian. This is true of many religious terrorists who use religion only as a cover for their evil purposes.

The third narrative is related to the process of building Sikh institutions in America. Its protagonist, Laurie L. Patton, argues that when one or two Sikhs lived in a town, they may have been the town's 'quirky' exceptions, the strangers that were token symbols of tolerance. But when a community of Sikhs began to gather amongst themselves, and to build buildings, they could easily become different kinds of targets of hate crimes. They became group targets by virtue of the fact that they were, indeed, now no longer an exception, but an integrated thread in the larger fabric of the town. As a result, and especially after a tragedy, each minority religious community that suffers discrimination must pay a cultural tax—the extra burden of educating the rest of the country about its traditions, its rituals, and its cultures. To be sure, this is part of the bedrock upon which American society is built. Minority religious communities should have the right and freedom to represent themselves and their traditions—however, wherever, and whenever

they choose. But something is deeply wrong when the burden remains exclusively on the community itself to conduct all of the outreach, to articulate its values and defend its contributions to the rest of society. And, there is a deep isolation, not to mention exhaustion, in that 'cultural tax'—especially after a tragedy (Patton 2012). It is, however, instructive to underline the fact that the building of gurdwaras is not a recent phenomenon, considering the presence of over two hundred gurdwaras adorning the American religious landscape. Sikhs are actually celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the first gurdwara in Stockton, California that was built in 1912.

The fourth narrative relates to the Sikh response to this unprecedented tragedy, reflecting the collective activities of 'gathering the ashes, washing the floors, rebuilding the knocked down walls and domes, and moving forward' (Mann and Shah 2012). It is based on the Sikh 'spirit of optimism' (*charhdi kala*) in the face of brutal violence, emphasizing healing and forgiveness instead of retribution for the shooting rampage by an army veteran with a white supremacist background. Unsurprisingly, standing in front of a row of people holding signs that spelled 'practice peace', Oak Creek Police Chief John Edwards remarked: 'In 28 years of law enforcement, I have seen a lot of hate. (p. 627) I have seen a lot of revenge. I've seen a lot of anger. What I saw, particularly from the Sikh community this week was compassion, concern, support. What I didn't see was hate. I did not see revenge. I didn't see any of that. And in law enforcement that's unusual to not see that reaction to something like this. I want you all to understand how unique that is' (McGreat 2012). Sikhs around the world have come together in a rare act of unity. They have organized vigils across the country, opening the doors of gurdwaras so that people of different faiths can join them in mourning and solidarity. They have offered prayers for the welfare of all (*sarbat da bhala*): 'In thy will, O Lord, May peace and prosperity come to one and all.' A new generation of Sikh Americans has emerged to provide leadership in the public arena. Emboldened by the legacy of sacrifice, service, and resilience that permeates Sikh history, they are carrying a torch passed on to them by their elders (V. Kaur 2012). Stressing the need to understand the little-known faith of Sikh Americans as an integral part of the history of the United States, Diana L. Eck has remarked that 'it is important to know that Sikhs share three distinctly and deeply American values—the importance of hard work, a commitment to human equality, and the practice of neighborly hospitality' (Eck 2012).

In sum, the kind of national attention that has turned to the Sikh community is phenomenal. It has already made Sikhs and their traditions topics of widespread interest in the media and to the public at large. On 8 September 2012 California Governor Jerry Brown signed law protecting Sikhs and other ethnic groups from workplace bias: 'This bill, AB 1964, makes it very clear that wearing any type of religious clothing or hairstyle, particularly such as Sikhs do, that that is protected by law and nobody can discriminate

against you because of that,' Brown told some 400 Sikhs and supporters at a rally of the North American Punjabi Association on the steps of the Capitol. He also signed SB 1540, which requires the state Board of Education to consider a new history framework for schools that the governor said will include 'the role and contributions of the Sikh community in California' (McGreevy 2012). Brown reiterated that education can blunt hatred, prejudice, and fatal misunderstandings, such as the massacre of Sikhs outside a Wisconsin temple. Thus the positive outcome of Wisconsin tragedy will certainly be reflected in an increased focus on the Sikh tradition in the academy. Let us now turn to the history of the discipline of Sikh Studies and find answers to some probing questions to set new directions. In particular, the questions that need to be addressed here include: Can the Oak Creek Gurdwara tragedy indeed become the turning point in the study of the Sikh tradition as 9/11 triggered the study of Islam and Muslim societies in the world? What are the necessary research languages that should be mastered to study the literature of the Sikh tradition? Is it significant to identify, locate, and preserve the original manuscripts in the Gurmukhi script scattered throughout the various regions of Punjab and some other provinces of India? Is there an urgent need to translate the primary sources in the widely accessible English language? How do we interpret the sources to create a meaningful perspective? Do we need to adopt interdisciplinary approaches in the study of the Sikh tradition to keep pace with developments in other fields of study?

(p. 628) The Emergence of Sikh Studies in the Western Academy

The first North American conference on the Sikh tradition was held in 1976 at the University of California, Berkeley. It was co-sponsored by the Sikh Foundation headed by Narinder Singh Kapany who expressed the view that Sikhs formed a 'fascinating source' for sociological study. The Sikhs, he argued, had demonstrated 'an uncanny capability to retain their identity, beliefs, and traditions' while participating 'most actively' in North American life (Kapany 1979: 208). At that conference it was generally acknowledged that the Sikh tradition was indeed 'the forgotten tradition' in scholarly circles in North America. In particular, Mark Juergensmeyer argued that in world religions textbooks the study of Sikhism was either completely ignored or misrepresented as an example of the syncretistic derivative of Hinduism and Islam. He examined the various reasons for this treatment, and suggested that there are two main prejudices in Indian Studies that function against the study of the Sikh tradition. The first prejudice is that against the modern ages. Many scholars, following the Orientalist perspective, have been more interested in the classical texts of Indian philosophy rather than medieval devotional

traditions. Since the Sikh tradition is barely 500 years old and relatively modern, it has been completely ignored in Indian Studies. The other prejudice that faces Sikh Studies in Indian literature is the prejudice against regionalism. Sikhism is not only relatively modern, but it is also almost exclusively Punjabi. In his arguments, Juergensmeyer made the case for the utility of Sikhism for the studies of religion, particularly textual studies, mythology, social studies, and political thought (Juergensmeyer 1979: 13–23). Since then the study of the Sikh tradition and culture has received some cautious scholarly attention. The mistaken notion that Sikhism offers a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim ideals has been completely abandoned in most recent scholarly works.

The idea of establishing a Sikh Studies chair in any North American university was first conceived by the Sikh Society of Calgary in 1979 at the suggestion of the late Professor W. H. McLeod who was invited to inaugurate the newly built gurdwara at Guru Nanak Centre in Calgary on Baisakhi Day. The aim of the Sikh Society in inviting a Western scholar of Sikh Studies from New Zealand was to build a positive image of the Sikhs in the host society. Professor McLeod inspired the Sikh community to work for the establishment of a chair of Sikh Studies at a Canadian university. He assured them that this kind of programme would give academic respectability to the Sikh tradition within the academy and remove the prevailing ignorance about the Sikhs in a larger social context. The work in this direction had started in 1980, and I myself participated in the fund-raising efforts with much enthusiasm. The Sikh Society handed this project over to the newly formed ‘Federation of Sikh Societies of Canada’ (FSSC) at the All Canada Sikh Convention held at Calgary in 1981. The FSSC made an appeal to the Sikh community in connection with their fund-raising efforts for the establishment of the chair in Sikh Studies on 20 November 1983, long before the 1984 events. As a matter of fact, they had (p. 629) passed the resolution in this regard at the ‘All Canada Sikh Convention 1983’ held at Ottawa on 31 July 1983. They had already entered into negotiations with the Secretary of State, Multiculturalism and the University of British Columbia (UBC) for the establishment of the ‘Program of Punjabi and Sikh Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver’ (FSSC 1985). However, the formal agreement was signed on 16 March 1985, and the first occupant of the chair, Harjot Oberoi, was appointed in 1987.

Here I would like to highlight the significance of internal dynamics as well as external factors for comprehending the processes of change visible within the Sikh community as a result of the tragic events of 1984, incidents that include both Operation Blue Star in June when the Indian army assaulted the Golden Temple Complex and the killing of Sikhs nationwide in November after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Unsurprisingly, the year 1984 became the turning point in the history of the Sikhs in the post-colonial and postmodern world. Some scholars have overemphasized, if not exaggerated, the impact of 1984 events on the different arenas of Sikh Studies. They

maintain that 1984 acted as a catalyst or an overriding factor in Sikh Studies both in India and abroad. For instance, Karl L. Hutterer, Director of the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, presented a position paper in 1986 on 'Why Sikh Studies?', underlining the fact that events since the army attack on the Golden Temple Complex in 1984 have shown that 'Americans almost without exception are utterly uneducated about the nature of Sikh religion and culture'. He made the case that the University of Michigan should be 'among the pioneers to include Sikh Studies in its curriculum'. As a result, the Sikh Studies Association of Michigan signed a formal agreement with the University of Michigan on 23 July 1986 to establish a Sikh Endowment Fund to 'support a position in Sikh Studies in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts of the University, including any chair in Sikh Studies into which it may subsequently be converted' (Singh and Barrier 1999: 18–19).

While appreciating the impact of 1984 on Sikh Studies, one needs to be sure of other issues contributing to its recent growth in the West. The growth of Sikh Studies in the course of the last twenty years needs to be seen also in the context of emerging fields such as Cultural Studies/Area Studies pursued in different Western universities. However, I may add here that it appears similar to what had happened in the USA after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It is well known that 9/11 stimulated the large expansion of studies that deal with Islam or Muslim societies residing in different parts of the world. Thus one cannot rule out the significance of such incidents in history, and the impact of Oak Creek Gurdwara massacre may well provide new impetus for the development of Sikh Studies in North America. Since the early Sikh Studies programmes did originate in the context of the post-1984 events in the Punjab, the initial community response towards these projects was overwhelming. Through these programmes, Sikhs of North America had expected to provide their youth with university-level instruction in their religious and cultural tradition, and to make that tradition accessible to the wider non-Sikh community.

Meanwhile, a small group of Sikh scholars, nurtured in the more traditional Singh Sabha mode of doctrinal interpretation, became busy in the process of scrutinizing (p. 630) all research in the area of Sikh Studies. Any kind of scholarly ideas and interpretations that did not appear to pass the litmus test of the 'authentic representation of tradition' became the target of their polemical attacks. This organized group was able to exercise considerable control over the Sikh press and mobilize public opinion against scholars who were holding Sikh Studies positions (P. Singh 2011: 4). Consequently, Harjot Oberoi resigned as chair of Punjabi and Sikh Studies at UBC in 1997 and shifted his focus to Asian Studies instead. The community support to the fledgling programmes of Sikh Studies at the University of Toronto and the Columbia University in New York came to an end, resulting in the termination of these programmes.

The last decade of the twentieth century may be regarded as the phase of ‘growing pains’ in the field of Sikh Studies. It is, however, instructive to note that the kind of socio-religious controversy surrounding the works of the scholars of the Sikh tradition is not something new. It is surprisingly a frequent phenomenon and happens most of the time in homogenous traditional societies. Thus it is structural and political and is similar to the experiences of scholars working in comparable contexts such as the battles fought in the nineteenth century in Jewish and Christian Studies, when the historicity of both the Jewish Scriptures and the Christian Gospels were questioned. The issues pertaining to South Asian modernization and diaspora provide the key to understanding the true nature of such controversies. There are many conservative followers of Western traditions, too, who do not like much of the academic discourse about their traditions. They have, nevertheless, adapted to the existence of that discourse. Although they may ignore academic discourse as trivial in its disregard of real religious truth, they frequently glean insights from it despite perceived distortions. In the classroom, we often observe that analytic understandings help many contemporary students come to terms with their own traditions and appreciate them all the more in their intellectual development. In the West, Sikh Studies is a new field, and much of the reaction to scholars’ work reflects the Sikh community’s relative lack of experience with the analytic understanding of their tradition. As that experience grows, Sikhs are likely to make adaptations and discoveries similar to those of their counterparts from other religious traditions—often ignoring analytic works as not serious, sometimes appreciating them in part (P. Singh 2011: 4–5).

In the last two decades there has been a steady growth of scholarly literature on Sikhism. The increasing scholarly attention that Sikhs and Sikhism are beginning to receive is a new phenomenon in the academy. Indeed, Sikh Studies is no longer ‘the forgotten tradition’ of the late seventies and is becoming increasingly recognized in undergraduate programmes, as well as being the benefactor of a growing number of endowed chairs in universities across North America. As a matter of fact, there are now eight endowed chairs in Sikh Studies established in North America with the active financial support of the Sikh community. In addition, there are a growing number of scholars in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe whose teaching and research interests are related in some way to Sikh Studies. It is pertinent to note here that my chapters on the Sikh tradition are now included in the latest editions of the following textbooks: (1) *World Religions: Eastern Traditions* (Oxford University Press, 3rd (p. 631) edition 2010) edited by Willard G. Oxtoby and Roy C. Amore; (2) *A Concise Introduction to World Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2nd edition 2012) edited by Willard G. Oxtoby and Alan F. Segal; (3) *The Religions of Canadians* (University of Toronto Press, 2012) edited by Jamie S. Scott; and (4) *South Asian Religions: Practicing Tradition Today* (Routledge 2012) edited by Karen Pechilis and Selva J. Raj. For me it is an honour to be invited to

make these contributions. These textbooks are widely used in Western universities and colleges for undergraduate education.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, therefore, ‘Sikh Studies’ has emerged as a distinct area of scholarship in some of the North American universities. The new chairs of ‘Sikh Studies’ have been part of different university departments such as Religious Studies and Philosophy (University of California campuses at Riverside and Santa Barbara, and Hofstra University at Long Island, New York), Asian Languages and Cultures (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and University of British Columbia, Vancouver), Economics (University of California, Santa Cruz), Music (Hofstra University), and Ethnic Studies (California State University, East Bay). They have generally been funded by wealthy Sikhs in the diaspora. These chairs initially focused on issues of Sikh religion, ideology, and history. However, over the years, they have also begun to explore more contentious and contemporary issues of Sikh identity, culture, and social relations. This expansion of the sub-discipline beyond the study of text and ideology, also points towards a growing confidence of the scholars, the institutionalization of Sikh Studies, and acceptance of Sikhs as an important religious community at global level.

Language Training

In order to examine the original sources related to the Sikh tradition one must master its principal language or languages. A firm grasp of Punjabi is absolutely necessary to penetrate Sikh culture. For learning Punjabi as a foreign language a recent book, *An Introduction to Punjabi: Grammar, Conversation and Literature* (2011), prepared by Gurinder Singh Mann along with a team of his graduate students, is quite a useful manual for North American students. But one must understand that the classical language of the Sikh scriptures is significantly different from modern Punjabi. Christopher Shackle has described it as the ‘Sacred Language of the Sikhs’ (SLS). He further stresses the ‘mixed character’ of SLS, which is the result of drawing upon ‘a variety of local languages and dialects, as well as incorporating a good many archaic forms and words’ (Shackle 1983: p. ii). His two books, *An Introduction to the Sacred Language of the Sikhs* (1983) and *A Gurū Nānak Glossary* (1981), are excellent tools to learn *gurbani* (utterances of the Gurus) and understand its grammatical constructions. These texts provide students with the skills necessary to read Sikh classical literature, particularly the Guru Granth Sahib, and prepare them to gain the original language of the Sikh scriptures. After going through these books they come to realize the inadequacy of the available translations of (p. 632) the Guru Granth Sahib. No translation does justice to the original text and American students do not like the English of Indian scholars.

Working through these texts, they offer different translations of scriptural passages and come to the most appropriate meanings in the end.

The second important language of early Sikh literature is Braj Bhasha which can be described as a kind of old or classical Hindi. No one can hope to have access to the Dasam Granth and much of the literature produced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries without an adequate knowledge of Braj language. For a long time the Dasam Granth and Bhai Gurdas's works in the *kabitt* (quatrain) genre have been neglected within the Sikh Panth due to this linguistic deficiency. In her recent study entitled *Debating the Dasam Granth* (2011) Robin Rinehart has written a captivating account of current debates on the second important text in the canonical literature of the Sikhs. With her proficiency in the Braj language she was able to contextualize the text in the courtly literature of India.

The third significant research language is Persian in which many sources of the history of the Sikh Panth during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are to be found. There is no scope for understanding Guru Gobind Singh's *Zafar-namah* (Epistle of Victory), Bhai Nand Lal's works, and the *Nanakpanthi* section of the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* (1640s) without an adequate knowledge of Persian. With his firm grounding in Persian language and Islamicate context Louis E. Fenech offers a novel 'reading' of the tenth Guru's Letter to Emperor Aurangzeb in his *The Sikh Zafar-namah of Guru Gobind Singh: A Discursive Blade in the Heart of the Mughal Empire* (2013), a work that skilfully illuminates its ongoing relevance in Sikh imagination and opens up new horizons of understanding.

Location of Manuscripts

There is an urgent need to locate early manuscripts scattered in various places and explore innovative methods to improve their preservation, public discovery, and use in historical analysis. Projects may also focus on techniques and tools that will improve the professional performance and effectiveness of those who work with such records, such as archivists, documentary editors, and records managers. Technology is now available to put these documents in digital form for the sake of preservation. In fact, Punjab Digital Library is working in this direction. There are still certain Sikh families and establishments that possess old collections (*pothis*) of Gurbani and other Sikh texts. I know from personal experience how difficult it can be to access family-held manuscripts. When these difficulties are overcome the results can be quite dramatic. Considerable credit goes to Gurinder Singh Mann for having access to the two late sixteenth-century

copies of the Goindval *pothis* that are not easily accessible to scholars for close scrutiny (Mann 1996).

During the summer of 2006, for example, I went to see an exhibition of Sikh sacred objects organized by the family of Bhai Rupa's descendants in the house of Professor (p. 633) Balwinder Singh of Guru Nanak Engineering College at Ludhiana. There I saw a glass box containing an old *pothi* of Gurbani. Anurag Singh was extremely helpful in getting permission from the family to take this manuscript out of its glass box for close examination. I was able to examine the Bhai Rupa *pothi* on 16 August 2006 for about three hours and took photographs of some important folios of this manuscript. The examination of a hitherto unknown manuscript belonging to the descendants of Bhai Rupa/Rup Chand (1614–1709), who was a devout Sikh of the sixth Guru, Hargobind (1595–1644), provided new empirical evidence to understand the process of how the Adi Granth came into being.

The Bhai Rupa *pothi* illuminates the meticulousness with which the Adi Granth was compiled by Guru Arjan who carefully directed the whole operation of recording the Adi Granth. This is quite evident from his personal approval of the content, form, and organization of the *bani* (inspired utterances) in particular raga sections, as indicated by the use of the word *sudh* (correct) in the text of the Bhai Rupa *pothi*. This new data reveals the distinctive contribution of the Sikh case in understanding the process of canon formation. In the Sikh tradition, it is the 'final reading' that is of utmost significance rather than the earlier, rambling reading in the formative stage. A close examination of early manuscripts reveals that Guru Arjan worked on a number of pre-canonical texts to finally produce a proto-text of the Adi Granth in 1604. The process does not seem to involve a linear mode of operation in any way, copying directly from one codex to another. Rather, a number of codices were being used simultaneously during the redaction process to establish the canon. The texts were read and reread frequently to arrive at the final reading. Therefore, the Harsahai *pothi* (sixteenth century), the Goindval *pothis* (late sixteenth century), the Guru Nanak Dev University manuscript MS 1245 (*c*. 1599), the Bahoval *pothi* (*c*.1600), the Vanjara *pothi* (*c*.1601), the Bhai Rupa *pothi* (*c*. 1603), and the Sursingh *pothi* (pre-1604) provide traces of documentary evidence to build a framework on the process of canon formation.

The whole process of canon formation becomes clear if we carefully look at the cultural environment of Mughal India. During Guru Arjan's reign Ramdaspur had become the central institution of scribal activity, prioritizing a substantial textual tradition. It provided a safe place known as the *pothi mahal* (abode of the books) where the sacred volumes were stored with sanctity. It was parallel to the *kitab khana* (library) of Mughal emperors who were following a time-honoured and valued tradition. To have a great

library was considered the sign, perhaps even the function, of a great ruler in the Islamic world. Not surprisingly, the cultural environment of the times reflected a world peopled by calligraphers and illuminators, paper makers and line drawers, bookbinders and margin markers; also of librarians and superintendents and inventory keepers. Most instructively, the use of Guru Arjan's autograph, marginal notes, and other editorial directions such as *sudh* (correct) in the early Sikh manuscripts make sense only when we place them in the historical context of what are described in Persian literature as the 'inspection notes' (*arz-didah*) recorded in the flyleaves of imperial manuscripts prepared during Emperor Akbar's reign. In Mughal India it was a well-established tradition to send the books written by calligraphers and scribes for proofing by the comparing (p. 634) scribe, whose duty was to compare a copy with the original and correct any mistake. Such a specialist was called the 'corrector' (*musahhih*), and was a man of great ability and learning. Guru Arjan placed his autograph in the Kartarpur manuscript and the Bhai Rupa *pothi* much in the same way as a corrector (or in certain cases the Mughal Emperor himself) would place his official impressing seal after inspecting the manuscript diligently.

In the summer of 2002 I examined some important documents in the possession of the late Baba Sucha Singh of Jawaddi Taksal at Ludhiana. In addition to my close reading of the Vanjara *pothi* at that time, I came across a rare manuscript of Bhai Gurdas's *vars* (ballads) in brittle condition, requiring the immediate attention of experts for its proper care and preservation. This manuscript belonged to an Udasi *mahant*, Ramdas of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), whose *dera* (camp) in Punjab was located at Raisar in District Sangrur. The *mahant* willingly gave this manuscript to Sohan Singh of Jawaddi Taksal for its preservation. In my initial reading I was surprised to find a different sequence of the vars. The first three *vars* of Bhai Gurdas were missing in this manuscript and it opened with the present fourth *var*, beginning with the invocation: *oankari akari [kari] paunu pani baisantari dharai* ('Transforming into forms the Eternal Sound [*Oankar*] created air, water and fire'). Evidently, the first three *vars* of the standard version were composed much later, most probably at a time when Sodhi Miharvan of the rival Mina tradition was active in composing the *janamsakhi* of Guru Nanak. Thus this earlier short version of 29–30 ballads (*vars*) may be useful in fixing the chronology of the various compositions of Bhai Gurdas.

I have recently reviewed a work on the Dasam Granth for Oxford University Press in India. It is based upon an actual examination of the earliest extant manuscripts of the Dasam Granth dating from the last decade of the seventeenth century written in 1696 CE and 1698 CE, held at Anandpur Sahib, Patna Sahib, and various other locations in India. In particular, there is one rare manuscript of *Zafar-namah* written in Persian held at

Aurangabad in India. This is the place where the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb actually received the original letter in 1706. The most controversial issue in Sikh Studies is about the status of the Dasam Granth in current scholarship. In the last decade the Dasam Granth debate has become quite nasty. The missionary paradigm adopted by anti-Dasam Granth lobby has resulted in cursing the text and creating much turmoil in the Sikh community. It is no wonder that scholars usually bracket the issue of authorship in their analysis. When one starts with the assumption that 'the question of authorship is as doomed to failure as any search for origins' one is predisposed not to find any convincing answer to the question of authorship. It is no wonder that scholars frequently raise the question of the absence of 'signature line' in the Dasam Granth. But the whole Dasam Granth does not follow this convention because its text falls into a different genre of literature where the author is not interested in putting his name as a signature line. There will be no need to even assert the authorial authority.

In sum, the preservation of extant manuscripts is the need of the times. Most instructively, the facility to digitize historical sources and to share them on the Internet will (p. 635) revolutionize both the process of historical research and the potential for its wider dissemination. When I examined the Kartarpur manuscript (1604) on 14 May 1990 for about five and a half hours I was allowed to take only six photographs of some relevant folios. Although this manuscript was laminated in 1956–7 through a 'preservation operation' (P. Singh 2000: 59–60), there is an urgent need to put it in digital form through modern technology. Currently, a project is in progress at the Punjabi University (Patiala) to preserve the extant manuscripts of the Adi Granth and the Dasam Granth in digital form. Meanwhile, Gurinder Singh Mann has painstakingly collected copies of early Sikh manuscripts both scriptural and historical over the past decades. His personal collection will be of great use for scholars interested in textual work in Sikh Studies. Finally, in a recent development the Bhai Gurdas Library of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (Punjab), has taken an important step in organizing a national seminar on Punjabi manuscripts under the sponsorship of 'National Mission for Manuscripts' to locate, identify, and preserve the extant manuscripts in the Gurmukhi script.

Translation of Early Texts

In this section I do not intend to discuss the issue of how Orientalists used the project of translation as a tool of colonial rule by creating a vision of Indian religions, culture, and society that the colonialists could use to manipulate and control the general public, despite the remoteness of this vision from contemporaneous religious, cultural, and social

realities (Nemec 2009: 762–3). For instance, the British administration was anxious to learn more about the Sikhs, and for this reason Ernest Trumpp was commissioned to translate the Adi Granth from beginning to end. This project was part of colonial agenda, although Trumpp miserably failed in his objective by publishing only an incomplete and imperfect translation of the Adi Granth in 1877. We are also aware how M. A. Macauliffe undertook his monumental work *The Sikh Religion* (1909) in six volumes to 'make some reparation to the Sikhs for the insults which he [Trumpp] offered to their Gurus and their religion' (Macauliffe 1909: 1 vii). Notwithstanding the issue of the politics of cultural translation, I want to make two points with respect to the translation of early Sikh texts.

First, I want to narrate my personal experience of listening to the chief editor of the translation project of New International Version of Bible at the University of Calgary in 1986 in Professor Wayne McCready's class. I am narrating the gist of what the editor shared with us about the minute details of the translation process about two and a half decades ago. Each student was given a newly published copy of the Bible at that time. In fact, the New International Version (NIV) was a completely original translation of the Bible developed by more than one hundred scholars working from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. The translation of each book was assigned to translation teams, each made up of two lead translators, two translation consultants, and a stylistic consultant where necessary. The initial translations produced by these teams were (p. 636) carefully scrutinized and revised by intermediate editorial committees of five biblical scholars to check them against the source texts and assess them for comprehensibility. Each edited text was then submitted to a general committee of eight to twelve members before being distributed to select outside critics and to all members of the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) in preparation for a final review. Samples of the translation were tested for clarity and ease of reading with pastors, students, scholars, and laypeople across the full breadth of the intended audience. Perhaps no other translation has undergone a more thorough process of review and revision. From the very start, the New International Version sought to bring modern Bible readers as close as possible to the experience of the very first Bible readers: providing the best possible blend of transparency to the original documents and comprehension of the original meaning in every verse. Most instructively, the 2011 update to the New International Version is the latest fruit of this process. By working with input from pastors and Bible scholars, by grappling with the latest discoveries about biblical languages and the biblical world, and by using cutting-edge research on English usage, the CBT has updated the text to ensure that the New International Version of the Bible remains faithful to Howard Long's original inspiration (<www.biblegateway.com>).

Now we can look at the available translations of the Guru Granth Sahib. Many scholars realize the deficiency of these translations to do justice to the text in the original. These

works were mostly produced as the result of individual efforts, leading to the following questions: Do we need an international team of experts to produce a standard academic translation of the Sikh scripture to cater to the needs of scholars and the global Sikh community? Is this a doable proposal? If it is, how can we achieve this goal by bringing scholars and community together? The positive response to these questions will provide a new direction in the field of Sikh Studies.

My second point is related to my former graduate student Susan Elizabeth Prill when she was completing her MA dissertation on the works of Bhai Gurdas at the University of Michigan. She came to my office, complaining about her difficulties with the poor quality of translation in the two-volume set produced by Jodh Singh of Punjabi University, Patiala (1998). She was not happy with certain expressions of English usage in the text.

Thus there is an urgent need for fresh renderings of previously translated works. One can justify a retranslation of historically influential work in a number of ways, whether by the outdated quality or the deficiency of earlier uncritical translations or by new discoveries in the field that make it possible to produce a more accurate or better-annotated rendering of the text in question. Indeed, it is of utmost importance that translators be more considerate than the Orientalists were in contextualizing the peculiarly textual vision of contemporaneous religious practice and culture. In other words, unbroken translation requires the translator to honour the intellectual prerogatives and indeed intellectual vision of the author of the original text in question. It is no wonder that translation work can communicate that ‘vision’ to an audience that cannot or will not read the text in original (Nemec 2009: 767–68).

Many influential Sikh works—such as the *janamsakhis* (except the *The B-40 Janam-sakhi* translated by W. H. McLeod) and *gurbilas* literature—continue to remain (p. 637) untranslated and are therefore relatively inaccessible to non-specialist scholars and lay readers alike. These works deserve unbroken renderings in English language for their wider accessibility. W. H. McLeod translated most of the *rahitnama* material in his seminal work *Sikhs of the Khalsa* (2003) and skilfully showed the evolution of the Khalsa Rahit during the last three centuries. His translation of *The Chaupa Singh Rahit-nama* (1987) provides a ready reference for scholars; though its historical context may change soon with new research on the text claimed to be written in 1700 CE. In a similar vein, the dating and intellectual context of *Prem Sumarag: The Testimony of a Sanatan Sikh* (2006) will need further revision in the light of new manuscript evidence. A translation project is under way in which translations and critical editions of the following four early Sikh sources will become available: *Janam Sakhi Babe Nanak di* (ed. and trans. Gurinder Singh Mann and Ami P. Shah); *Vars of Bhai Gurdas* (ed. and trans. by Rahuldeep Singh Gill); *Sri*

Gur Sobha (ed. and trans. Ami P. Shah); and *Textual Sources around 1700* (ed. Gurinder Singh Mann).

Interpretation of Sources

In a recent article Hardip Singh Syan has examined the issue of *doxa* in early Sikh historiography (Syan 2011). He claims that the history of early Sikh tradition has been mostly written from the 'orthodox' angle, supporting the development of modern 'orthodox' community. As a result, marginal Sikh groups such as Udasis, Minas, and others have been labelled as 'unorthodox' and 'heterodox'. This retrospective and teleological analysis of the Sikh past has hindered our understanding of the conflicts which gripped the nascent Sikh community. Hardip Singh has arguably made the case how dialogical readings of primary sources can enable us to develop a more dynamic historical understanding of the Sikh past. For him, the influence of *doxa* in early Sikh history writing prevails in the sense that popular opinion and historical studies do not differ in the substance of their arguments since both argue that the early Sikh movement developed from 'peace' to 'militancy'. This assumption may be true in the case of Khushwant Singh's historical narrative, but it is questionable in the case of J. S. Grewal's historical approach.

Sectarian literature is quite useful in understanding early Sikh history but it should be thoroughly contextualized in the narrative. Notably, a close reading of the Udasi text *Matra* can illuminate the nature of dissensions within the ranks of early Sikh Panth. The Udasis ('withdrawers') trace their lineage to Guru Nanak through his elder son, Siri Chand (1494–1629), who was a lifelong celibate. He considered himself to be his father's rightful successor but resigned himself to the ascetic life when he was passed over in favour of Lehna who became the second Guru, Angad (1504–52), in the mainline Sikh tradition. The Udasis diverged from the early Sikh Panth by their celibacy, asceticism, and leanings towards the Nath tradition. The *Matra* verses elaborate on hatha yoga techniques in a very sophisticated manner. The signature line in these verses always employs the name of 'Nanak' like the authentic compositions of the Sikh Gurus in the Adi Granth. The Udasis were basically itinerant *sadhus* (saints) (p. 638) who delivered their own interpretation of Guru Nanak's message orally among people throughout India.

The recently published *Sodhi Pirthi Chand Di Rachna* (2010) edited by Joginder Singh Ahluwalia provides some interesting details of Mina literature. Prithi Chand (1558–1619) wrote under the code *Mahalla 6* and signed his compositions 'Nanak' to claim the authority of the 'Guru' in competition with the newly appointed Guru Hargobind after

Guru Arjan's execution in 1606. In those uncertain times the community was divided between two rival camps. Guru Hargobind boldly introduced new 'militant' reforms and altered his religious and social appeal for his audience, while Pirthi Chand appeared more like a saint than a nobleman to his followers. The contest between the two leaders was not between 'orthodoxy' and 'unorthodoxy'; instead it was a contest over the role of 'militancy' in Sikh doctrines.

Notably, Pirthi Chand employed folk genres of popular music in his compositions to attract more followers. One should never underestimate the sociological significance of this medium and its message. For instance, the use of folk tunes of *jakari* (tight blow), *durangi* (double jump exhortation), and *lori* (lullaby) to perform the choral singing of his compositions in the Majha region of Punjab is quite revealing (Ahluwalia 2010: 43–4). Note the following two compositions in *Majh Raga*:

> *Majh Mahalla 6//Durangi de ghari gavana//*
> *Kagati ki ehu putari, hari simarilo//*
> *Kahe man kare, hari simarilo//*
> *Bundi paee ehu binasasi, hari simarilo//*
> *Tin kau kia ahankaru, hari simarilo//1//…*

(Ahluwalia 2010: 88)

> Majh Mahalla 6—'Sing to the folk tune of Durangi'
> This (body) is a doll of paper—Remember the Lord!
> Why do you show vanity?—Remember the Lord!
> This will wither away with a drop of water—Remember the Lord!
> What pride can be shown about it!—Remember the Lord!(1)…
> *Majh Mahalla 6//Durangi//*
> *Je jana ehu chhadani, hari chetilo//*
> *Kahe mohu kari, hari chetilo//*
> *Ravani nali na chalai, hari chetilo//*
> *Kahe no ehu sanj dhari, hari chetilo//…*

(*Ahluwalia 2010*: 88)

> Majh Mahalla 6 –'Folk Tune of Durangi'
> Had I known that I will leave this (body)?—Remember the Lord!
> Why do you attach yourself to it?—Remember the Lord!
> This (body) did not accompany (King) Ravan—Remember the Lord!
> Why do you amass worldly wealth?—Remember the Lord!…

The actual performance of these two hymns to the folk tune of *durangi* (double jump exhortation) involves the whole congregation to sing the refrain *hari simarilo* (Remember the Lord!) or *hari chetilo* (Remember the Lord!) in unison following the lead singer's

forceful rendition of the first part of each line. One can easily compare (p. 639) this folk tune with Malkit Singh's contemporary song *Tutak Tutak Tutiya* (M. Singh 2004). Similarly, two hymns in the folk tune of *jakari*—one in *Siri Raga* and the other in *Vadahans Raga*—were performed at the time of exorcism of malignant spirits from the female patients whose shaking heads were given repeated 'tight blows' (*jakari*) during the process. Presumably, Pirthi Chand used to perform the function of the diviner in stark contrast to the roles played by Guru Arjan and Guru Hargobind to impart their teachings of 'divine Name, charity and purity' (*nam dan ishnan*) to the mainline Sikh community. Before his death in 1619 he designated his son Manohar Das Miharvan (1581–1640) as his successor.

Miharvan had been tutored by Guru Arjan in Amritsar and he eventually developed into a remarkable poet and an exegete, composing a vast corpus of literary works in his life. Not surprisingly, Miharvan provided his followers with an intellectual pedigree which enabled them to challenge Guru Hargobind's popularity. In the 1620s both cousins were mature and committed to establishing their spiritual authority over the Sikh community. In this context, Hardip Singh makes the following comment: 'All historical narratives have been written with the opinion that Guru Hargobind was the "rightful" guru and the Miharvan Sikhs, along with other "dissident" groups, were pretenders to the throne—the Miharvan Sikhs were too ignorant to realise their insolence' (Syan 2011: 148). The issue of who was the 'rightful' Guru at that time was a subjective judgement made by the representatives of various sections of the Sikh community. Of course the followers of Miharvan did not regard Guru Hargobind as the 'rightful Guru'. With the help of Mughal authorities they were able to take the control of Amritsar and Guru Hargobind was forced in 1635 to withdraw to Kiratpur in the Shivalik hills due to the pressure of Mughal authorities. This area was beyond the jurisdiction of the Mughal authorities. It was then that the Miharvan group preached their spiritual discourses with the blessings of the Mughal authorities.

Unsurprisingly, W. H. McLeod wrote that the Mina literature suggests that 'this particular group may have been seeking to restrict the Panth's concern to more limited religious aspects of Nanak's teachings, that they were opposed to the wider social concern which increasingly occupied the Panth's interest and which increasingly was being used to define its nature' (McLeod 1975: 43). Here McLeod did not take into account the issue of Mughal interference in the affairs of the Sikh Panth, an issue which is highly significant for an understanding of the complexity of that historical period. J. S. Grewal, on the other hand, regards the Mughal interference in Sikh affairs as highly significant in any historical analysis. It is no wonder that when the Khalsa took control of Amritsar in the early years of the eighteenth century, the Mina sect (i.e. the Miharvan group) became extinct since there was no Mughal support to sustain it. If the movement had internal strength it would have attracted followers. Even their establishment at Har

Sahai survived only because they were able to work out some kind of reconciliation with the Khalsa in the middle of the eighteenth century.

The authors of various *gurbilas* texts provide us with contesting views of the Sikh past. Kavi Sainapati's *Sri Gursobha* was completed in 1711 CE, although its writing may have begun a decade earlier during the period of Guru Gobind Singh. For the author, (p. 640) the Khalsa was not unique in the sense that it was a volunteer 'militant' organization added to a 'peaceful' Panth. The Sikh Gurus had already warriors under their command since the reign of Guru Hargobind. Rather, it was unique in two senses: first, it invited all Sikhs to join the Order of the Khalsa regardless of their background, and second, it had a coherent vision of political sovereignty. All Sikhs were encouraged to become warriors of righteousness (*dharam*) engaged in a struggle against tyranny. Sainapati envisions a Sikh Panth in which the new Khalsa code of conduct (*rahit*) is the normative one for all Sikhs. He is explicit in the rejection of caste hierarchies within the Panth. As Purnima Dhavan remarks, 'The Khalsa's mission for Sainapati, thus, is not the narrow political aggrandizement of one individual or lineage, but a greater spiritual quest in which the spiritual autonomy of the community is prioritized' (Dhavan 2007: 115). In addition to the 'spiritual autonomy of the community', however, the popular slogan—*raj karega khalsa* ('The Khalsa shall Rule')—infused the spirit of 'political sovereignty' among the Khalsa Sikhs simultaneously.

Most instructively, even though the authors of various Sikh narratives were single individuals, they represented the particular interests of their groups within the Sikh Panth. It is important that we keep this point in mind in our analysis. For instance, Sarup Das Bhalla, the author of *Mahima Prakash* (1776), represented the interests of all the descendants of the Gurus because of their distinguished origins. He was prompted by the urgency of the new situation in which the discourse of power politics was at work. Sikhs were rapidly gaining political ascendency in the context of late eighteenth-century Punjab. For him it was the need of the time to start a process of renegotiation in power relationships within the Panth. His narrative therefore reflected the combined strategies of different groups of the Gurus' descendants, deliberately adopted to express their particular interests.

Kesar Singh Chhibbar who prepared the *Bansavali-nama* (1769) was writing from the perspective of the Chhibbar Brahmins. His ancestors were closely associated with the Gurus' court (*darbar*) where they served as *diwans* (ministers). His grandfather, Dharam Chand, was in charge of the treasury of Guru Gobid Singh. Dharm Singh's father, Dargah Mall, had been *diwan* to Guru Tegh Bahadur and his two predecessors. It is no wonder that Kesar Singh firmly believed that only Brahmin Sikhs were entitled to receive state charity, and that was the main reason why he felt unhappy about the prevailing situation

in which their claims were being ignored by the Sikh rulers. He considered his own claims to state patronage stronger than anyone else's, because of the great services of his illustrious ancestors to the Sikh Gurus. Notably, he never missed an opportunity to traduce the Khatris and Muslims who were associated with the Sikh administration. In his view, power and piety did not go together. He was afraid that Khalsa Sikhs would become more engrossed in earthly pursuits and forget about their faith (*sikhi*). It is no wonder that he frequently offered a fatalistic interpretation of the Hindu theory of karma to understand the Sikh past and that he predicted the doom of Sikhism in the near future (P. Singh, 2006: 51). In order to make sense of the contesting narratives of Sikh history, one (p. 641) must understand the intellectual background and the political context of the authors of the *gurbilas* texts.

Interdisciplinary Approach

With much of the foundational scholarship on the Sikh tradition emerging from within the fields of Religious Studies and South Asian Studies, Sikh Studies has shared with these larger fields in often concentrating on textual and historical approaches, sometimes to the extent of softening the focus on—or even overlooking—Sikh practices, performances, and the everyday 'doings' of Sikh lives. The growing turn in Religious Studies towards 'lived religion', 'everyday religion', and other similar paradigms, in part, calls scholars to be aware that 'religions' are at least as much about the things that people do as about the ideas, ideals, and central narratives enshrined within their texts and scriptures. Rather than dichotomize text and practice, we must pay attention to the intersections between Sikh sacred texts and the actual practices of the Sikh community.

Most scholarly works in the past have been focused on issues of Sikh religion, ideology, and history. Recently, scholars have begun to explore more contentious and contemporary issues of Sikh identity, culture, and social relations, reflecting the widening of the area of Sikh Studies. They have begun to question the conventional premises of Sikh Studies, and they seek to go beyond what has been traditionally treated as normatively acceptable. Moving away from hegemonic interpretations and received historiography, they have begun to draw from a range of methodological perspectives including philosophy, hermeneutics, migration and diaspora studies, ethnography, performance studies, lived religion approaches, and aesthetics. Reflecting a balance of theory and substantive content, they call into question key critical terms, challenge established frames of reference, and offer alternative and novel 'readings' of Sikh ways of knowing and being.

There is thus an urgent need to closely look at Sikh religious practice based on anthropological fieldwork and to explore the dynamics of religious practice in everyday life in the context of globalization, Sikh migrations beyond Punjab, and the possible influences of technology on everyday religious life of its members. Frequent attention has been paid in recent years to a phenomenon of 'global' Sikhism 'in diaspora', with less explicit discussion of the variations that exist among and within the contexts of particular cultural and national locations. Thus, even as local specificity is assumed to be critical in the study of a Sikh population, we can discern a corresponding (if perplexing) increase in the discourse about both global and diasporic Sikhism. There is a need to problematize how local experiences confirm and yet complicate notions of global and/or diasporic Sikh belief and practice.

Sikhism has had and continues to have a seemingly unending number of dominant, institutional, regional, national, and local expressions of faith in constant dynamic relationship with one another, continually influencing each other and defining and (p. 642) redefining what it has meant and continues to mean to be a Sikh in different places around the globe. There is thus an urgent need to focus on the theme of 'expressing Sikh-ness' (*sikhi*) by integrating text with practice, an inclusive tactic which allows the multiplicity of Sikh voices throughout the Sikh world today and throughout Sikhism's history to be heard without privileging any single one. Such an approach allows us to view the extraordinary diversity of the Sikh tradition by looking not just at Sikh texts but also at Sikh practices. Most importantly, this approach involves a careful observation of actual Sikh practices not only in its South Asian homeland but also in Sikh communities beyond Punjab around the globe.

In sum, there is an urgent need to make a paradigm shift from the dominant Singh Sabha interpretation of the Sikh tradition to a more inclusive approach, from a positivist and objectivist historical perspective to a more reflexive and interactive scholarship based upon interdisciplinary approach. Through this shift alone we will be able to avoid the trap of 'essentialism' and reimagine the colourful diversity of the Sikh tradition in the twenty-first century at the global level. Most interestingly, the Internet has further exposed this diversity of Sikh life in its global context. No single group can afford to monopolize the debate on any single issue. Surfing through different Sikh websites and discussion groups one can easily realize that there is a need to look at Sikhism from a global perspective. There are multiple ways to approach Sikh topics in various academic disciplines. We must explore new ways of knowing the past and complement historical data with ethnographic study that can illuminate the lived experience of the Sikh community.

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