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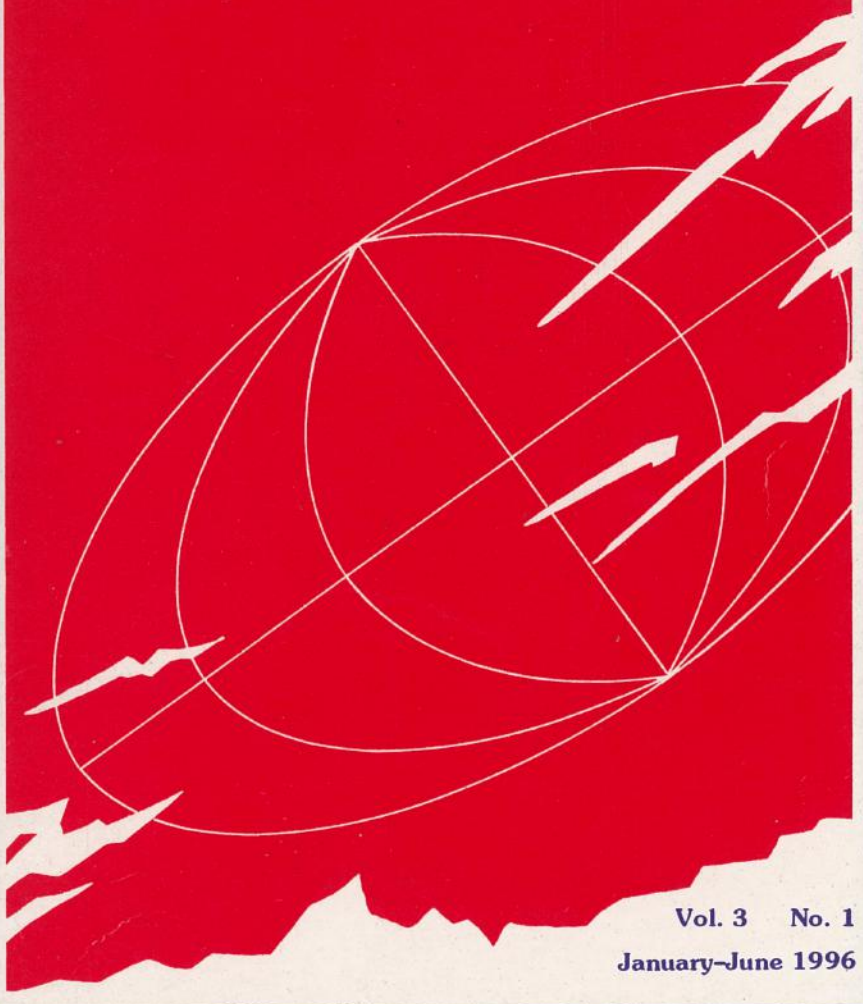

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This journal is abstracted or indexed in **International Political Science Abstracts, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Indian Educational Abstracts**, and also appears in **IBSS Online** (via BIDS-JANET) and in **IBSS Extra** (SilverPlatter CD-Rom).

Female Foeticide Among Vancouver Sikhs: Recontextualising Sex Selection in the North American Diaspora

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This paper examines the recent controversy concerning sex selection among Vancouver Sikhs. The investigation is framed by economic considerations. It locates the alliance of patriarchy, technology and capitalism as the machinery behind sex selective practices in the diaspora. In this view, the service of sex selection becomes a commodity which is marketed in an economy of women. Within this frame, the practice of sex selection in the diaspora has become a site where numerous individuals and organisations have tried to define aspects of Punjabi/Sikh community. The individuals involved in this struggle to speak for the community are varied: Punjabi/Sikh feminists, Punjabi newspaper editors, and the doctor who has motivated this practice with his massive advertisement campaign. This site is constantly impinged upon by representations of the mainstream media which seeks to assert the ubiquity of misogyny of South Asian culture. These bombarding images have affected greatly the positions taken by those within the community. This paper discusses the views espoused by these different agents and attempts to extricate the imagined economy of women that underlies the various positions.

This paper examines the recent controversy about sex selection among Punjabis, and in particular Sikhs, in the Vancouver area. This controversy was ignited by the advertisements for sex determination, which were placed in Vancouver Indo-Canadian newspapers by Dr Stephens of San Jose, California. A Vancouver women's group, Mahila, organised a coalition—Coalition of Women's Organizations Against Sex Selection—to boycott those papers carrying his ads. In turn, members of the community and newspaper editors launched their own campaigns, aimed not at Dr Stephens, but at the women of Mahila and the Coalition.

This is a compelling subject for investigation for three reasons. First, this is an important occasion when Sikh/Punjabi women have extensively

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organised and have endeavoured to engage not only the Sikh/Punjabi communities, but the Canadian and North American public, to reflect upon the needs of Indo-Canadian women. Furthermore, the goal of the Coalition goes beyond pressuring the papers to remove advertisements; it sought to bring the state to recognise the needs of Indo-Canadian women. Previously Sikhs in North America have mobilised to engage the state in other issues such as the wearing of turbans in various vocations and the Khalistan movements. However, these issues, particularly the wearing of turbans, have most critically affected men and the prominent organisers of the movements have been men. Women have not had a public presence in these endeavours.

Second, this issue possesses two major diasporic dimensions: the tensions between the Sikh/Punjabi community and the non-Indo-Canadian community, and the particular ethical space in which this occurrence of sex selection exists. That is to say, this is not a simple translocation of the practice of sex selection from the Punjab to Vancouver. Rather, this discord demonstrates the difficulty that a migrant community has when some practices are criticised by both the host community and vocal proponents from within the community. Hence this issue is a site of tension between the Indo-Canadian community and the Canadian (and American) public. As we will see later, the primary criticism of the Coalition, as articulated in the Indo-Canadian press, is that it confronts aspects of sex selection in a public space that is widely accessible to other Canadians. Hence the Coalition women attract the judgmental gaze of other Canadians to their community, corroborating those images and stereotypes that non-Indo-Canadians are presumed to have. Furthermore, it is clear from statements that Coalition members have made to papers such as the *Vancouver Sun*, that they also wish to avoid substantiating racist stereotypes of Indo-Canadians. This tension reveals the peculiarly diasporic nature of the conflict in that this preoccupation has no antecedent in Punjab. It also reveals the tenuous relationship between the Coalition and the community in which it operates.

Furthermore, this controversy has also become a site upon which assertions about the community are made and challenged by the Coalition members, individuals given voice by the Indo-Canadian press, and Dr Stephens himself. This site is constantly impinged upon by representations in the mainstream media, which regularly asserts that Indians typically seek to destroy their daughters. As alluded to above, many individuals in the community who are responding to the issue of sex selection must also respond to sensationalism or factuality of these mainstream media representations. Furthermore, these representations often shape the arguments

that different people pose. Individuals deploy various labels inconsistently when describing their community: Sikh, Punjabi, South Asian, Indo-Canadian. This reflects the fact that individuals align themselves differently in various contexts. When a person speaks of her/his community, it is hard to discern which community s/he is nominating.

The second diasporic feature is the particular ethical space that sex selection occupies. Unlike in India, where access to abortion is assumed because it is part of the government's population control scheme (and therefore problematic), access to abortion in North America–and in the United States in particular—is a fiercely contested terrain. Since Dr Stephens operates his clinics in the US, very near the Canadian border, the importance placed upon the freedom to choose is central to justifying and defending his practice. Stephens takes advantage of the fact that limits on the freedom to choose abortion have not been consistently determined and/or applied. He relies upon the rhetoric of multiculturalism, specifically moral and cultural relativism, to justify accommodating Sikhs who desire to use his service to sex select. In deploying the multicultural agenda, he professes to be the value-neutral health care provider, which he is expected to be by his professional peers.[2] The ethical space that exists within the conjuncture of these discourses is further framed by the free-market ethic and the control-oriented medicalisation of the conception and birth process in North America. The valence assigned to ultrasound in the US as a means of mediating the relationship between the pregnant woman, her foetus and her physician is an important feature of this ethical terrain.

Third, investigating this issue provides an opportunity to interrogate those structures that support sex selection in this particular community. Some of its consequences are global, others most acutely affect women in North America, or more parochially women of the US. New sex selection technologies are being developed to make the process faster, more accurate and affordable. Furthermore, the globalisation of such technology may have as yet untold consequences. By interrogating the ethical space in which Dr Stephens practices, we also examine the limits of the freedom to choose and who will set those limits, and some of the intentions and consequences of the multicultural agenda. We can also query the role that medicine has come to play in the childbearing process: a role which has increasingly rendered the expectant mother thoroughly dependent upon a battery of doctors which endeavours to orchestrate the perfect birth.

Therefore, this paper possesses simultaneous intentions. It seeks to elucidate and examine the diasporic aspects of this issue. Specifically it will examine the mutually constitutive tensions between the Sikh/Punjabi community and the non-Indo-Canadian community, and the tensions

between the Coalition and the Sikh/Punjabi community. Central to these tensions are the attempts of individuals to connect/sever sex selection to/from the Sikh/Punjabi community. It also questions that ethical space in which sex selection in this community exists. Finally, it seeks to recontextualise sex selection in the diaspora whilst examining the background of sex selection in the Punjab. It firmly demonstrates that sex selection among Vancouver Sikhs is rooted to a panoply of institutions and sentiments that are not specifically South Asian.

To these ends, a brief history of the sex selection controversy is provided in the first section of this paper. The period from May to December 1993 forms the main focus. Sources are newspaper articles, pamphlets produced by the Coalition and advertisements. In essence, these cultural productions provide texts which are read both discursively and non-discursively. Their silence is as illuminating as their articulations. In the second section, the contentious claims made about the Sikh/Punjabi community with respect to sex selection are unpacked. There is a treatment of the arguments put forth by Dr Stephens, the Coalition and the Punjabi press. The arguments made by the Coalition and the editors of the Indo-Canadian press take place in a spectrum of venues, ranging from some highly visible to others virtually hidden from the non-Indo-Canadian public. Within the latter spectrum of privacy there exists a differential willingness on behalf of the speakers to broach aspects of the practice of sex selection. What will emerge from these multifarious articulations are glimpses of a social economy in which women are both commodities and consumers, central to reproducing community and the maintaining of a distinct Sikh community identity. The final part of the paper, contextualises sex selection in Vancouver with respect to the Punjab and North America and draws out the parameters of female sexuality reproducing community that emerged from the material presented.

BACKGROUND[3]

Dr John Stephens is an Australian who received his degree of MB from the University of Sydney in 1967.[4] He currently resides in San Jose, California and operates several sex determination ultrasound clinics. His clinics are located in areas of high Punjabi or Sikh populations: Blaine, Washington; Buffalo, New York; and San Jose, California. His Blaine and Buffalo clinics target Punjabi/Sikhs in Vancouver and Toronto respectively. (Punjabi/Sikhs are a small minority of his San Jose clientele). He is fully licenced in those states in which he practices and he performs no abortions, though he advertises that abortion information is available. His

advertisements are in Punjabi and English and he operates an answering service in Punjabi. The advertisements are placed almost exclusively in the Punjabi community papers such as the *Indo-Canadian Times, The Link, Hem Jyoti* and the *Star of India*. These papers are distributed in various places in Vancouver such as the Punjabi Market and the gurdwaras. He has obtained a mailing list of Punjabi/Sikh residents and mails flyers directly to their homes. He also leaflets cars and stores in the market, particularly at festivals such as Baisakhi.

According to Stephens, he was originally based exclusively in San Jose where he opened a clinic in 1985. He claims that Sikhs began referring themselves and word spread throughout California, Toronto, Vancouver and even England. Then in 1989, he claims that he was approached by several Canadian doctors, some of whom were South Asian or of South Asian extraction. These doctors apparently had been referring Punjabi/Sikh clients to him from various cities. It was their suggestion that all could profit if he established clinics in Canada. He tried to open a clinic in Vancouver but was not allowed to do so by the Canadian medical authorities. The reasons for this refusal seem to vary depending upon the source. In any case, his type of practice is impossible in Canada because advertisements posted by physicians are strictly regulated and his advertisement scheme would fall into the purview of these restrictions. He then obtained a licence from Washington state and opened his clinic in Blaine which services the Punjabi/Sikhs of the Vancouver area. His Buffalo clinic followed, servicing Punjabis in the Toronto area.

It was the advertisement campaign that prompted the community, initially Punjabi/Sikh feminists groups, to respond. The first group to respond and endeavour to organise pressure to end it was the Indian Mahila Association.[5] Mahila is a volunteer organisation which has never been funded by any granting agency. Mahila has operated for 25 years and has addressed a number of women's issues, particularly those of South Asian women. Given the demographics of the South Asian community in Vancouver, this usually means Punjabi/Sikh women's issues. The first protest against Dr Stephens took place in 1990 after he heavily leafleted the Punjabi Market during Baisakhi. As a result the first advertisement was refused in 1990. The success, however, was short-lived and the notices soon reappeared.

In June of 1993, Mahila initiated the Coalition of Women's Organisations Against Sex Selection. This coalition comprises several grassroots and community organisations such as: South Asian Women's Action Network (a nascent organisation), Punjabi Women's Association, Indo-Canadian Women's Association, Vancouver SATH Literary and Cultural

Group. However the Coalition effectively crystallised in the fall of 1993. On 13 September 1993, the Coalition launched a boycott against four Indo-Canadian publications that carried Dr Stephen's advertisements. They were the *Indo-Canadian, Sangharsh, The Link* and *Hem Jyoti*. The boycott was strategic as it requested that election candidates avoid placing campaign notices in the newspapers. On 3 October 1993, a demonstration was held in the Punjabi Market to protest sex selection and acceptance of Dr Stephens advertisements by Indo-Canadian papers. Approximately 250 to 300 people, representing 18 organisations, were present.

In this paper, I generally examine that literature propagated by organisations during this period when the conflict had peaked, paying particular attention to those materials produced by the Coalition/Mahila and the editorials that appeared in the Punjabi press. Where appropriate, I will contrast the narratives found in the Punjabi press with those found in the mainstream press. Dr Stephens has articulated his position in a variety of sources: medical journals, talk shows, articles in mainstream newspapers and magazines, and his advertisements. This paper relies on the printed resources.

Oppositional Voices and Strategic Silences

Because much of this controversy responds to the advertisement crusade of Dr Stephens and the authority with which he claims to explain Punjabi/Sikh culture, the paper initially presents his ideological position. It then analyses productions of the feminist opposition such as statements made in newspaper, pamphlets and Coalition literature. Next it examines the editorials and letters in the Punjabi press, which were reacting to both Dr Stephens and the feminist opposition. Both the feminist organisations and the Indo-Canadian press found themselves responding to the characterisation of sex selection promulgated in the public sphere, by non-South Asians. Examining these productions will throw into relief the anxiety of the Indo-Canadian community regarding its relationship with other Canadians. Subsequently both the literature of the Coalition and the editorials in the Indo-Canadian press anticipate and counter the prevalent stereotypes of their community prefigured to exist in the non-Indo-Canadian population.

Dr Stephens: Villain, Victim or Advocate?

Few people admit to using Dr Stephens' services. This limits the data available to researchers. As will become apparent, he is strangely enough

the only advocate for the decisions of those women who use his service. In the endeavours of the feminist opposition, the needs of those women who do sex select upon seeing Dr Stephens are somehow left out of the picture. Or are they? Because Dr Stephens holds clinic in his Blaine office only once or twice a month—and he has enough patients to sustain this practice profitably—we can safely assume that there is a non-trivial number of women who use his service. Dr Stephens maintains that in his Blaine office, his customers are, with few exception, Sikh/Punjabi. It is impossible however to say what percentage of the women in the Sikh/Punjabi community use his sex determination clinic. However, Sikh/Punjabis are overall a minority in Dr Stephens total practice as Blaine is not his main clinic, but rather a satellite of his San Jose clinic.

The position and function that Dr Stephens has staked out raises several thorny questions. First, What is his authority to speak on behalf of the Punjabi/Sikh community in Vancouver? Why is he less qualified to speak of Punjabi/Sikh values than the editors of a Punjabi paper or women of the opposition? Does being a woman and/or Sikh/Punjabi necessarily give an individual the purchase to speak for any other Sikh/Punjabi woman? Is it not possible that Dr Stephens can and does represent the needs of a segment of Sikh/Punjabi women better than some people in the community? These questions are important because the stakes are high. In the current legal and ethical climate, the Canadian Parliament (as are several states in the US) is trying to limit the use of certain reproductive technologies.[6] Who will come to represent the various needs of women? Can doctors, community leaders, academic experts or feminist organisations speak to all needs of all women? What about those women whose needs are marginalised because their needs are embarrassing, such as the women who choose to sex select? What does this 'choice' mean? As we will see later, Dr Stephens has several tools at his disposal for bolstering his authority in this arena: the pro-choice discourse of North America, rhetoric of cultural and moral relativism and the presumed benign meanings of ultrasound in North America. What emerges is a strange breed of misogyny, anchored to the pro-choice position and cultural and moral relativism, rendered harmless by the social value of ultrasound in North America.

Dr Stephens counters charges of unethical behaviour by asserting what he calls a 'pro-patient' advocacy. In an editorial to the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, Dr Stephens wrote that

> [Sex selective abortion] is an important issue not only from a patients' rights advocacy situation, but also from a genetic counselling standpoint. Until the US Supreme Court changes the patient's/couple's

> First Amendment right to exercise the reproductive option as indicated in the Wade v Roe landmark decision in 1974, we as obstetricians and gynecologists should not make distinctions.[7]

Dr Stephens claims that gender of the foetus is simply another contributing factor that may inform a woman's exercising her right to choose. He argues that since the Supreme Court has not considered sex selection distinctly from Wade v Roe, sex selection is legal. He then makes the move of equating that which is legal with that which is ethical. In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Dr Stephens explains his sex determination service, offered to Punjabi/Sikhs, is no different from those screening services offered to women over 35 who seek to have their foetuses checked for Down's Syndrome.[8] In this article and in my interviews with him, he suggests that sex selection is ethical because it is considered ethical to abort foetuses with sex-linked genetic abnormalities. Since sex selection for disease traits is permissible, so should sex selection for other reasons. Having said all of this, he explains that these are not his personal ethics as he is anti-abortion, but those prevalent in the legal and medical discourses. His job is to follow their dictates.

It is difficult to dismiss his claims that sex selection is part of the right to choose. Although he does allude to a prevalent legal and medical climate which authorises the freedom to choose, he resists personally locating his practice in this discourse. He circumvents the issue by maintaining that he is 'pro-patient.' What does 'pro-patient' mean? He explained to me in an interview in February 1994, that 'pro-patient' means informing the patient to the best of his ability, granting her the autonomy to use this information according to her own ethical standards and supporting her in her decisions. He claims to value and respect the agency of women, even when it reproduces misogyny. He uses the legal and medical ethics of patient agency to justify his practice. Yet he readily acknowledges that his service often translates into sex selection, or more accurately male selection. He accepts no onus for breach of ethics because he does not perform sex selective abortions. Hence he remains immune from prosecution under such laws as those that have congealed in Pennsylvania. Yet, as his own advertisements attest, abortion information is provided. The line in the advertisement that makes this clear is sometimes in English and sometimes in Punjabi. But it is usually (and perhaps always) there.

The courts, the US Congress, and the Canadian Parliament are not the only venues in which the limits of the freedom to choose are being negotiated. In fact, even noted pro-choice organisations such as NOW (the National Organisation for Women), NARRAL (National Abortion and

Reproductive Rights Action League—formerly NARAL), and Planned Parenthood (and numerous others) are having difficulty concurring on the boundaries. In the Illinois NARRAL office a few lesbian women were discussing their unwillingness to have male children and their willingness to undergo female selective abortion. In fact *Ms.* devoted an entire issue to raising sons because of some women's discomfort with the idea of raising sons.[9] Although Dr Stephens indicates that sex selective abortions against sex-linked genetic abnormalities or other disabilities are entirely ethical, various feminist groups are not so comfortable with that position. For instance Illinois NARRAL works with grassroots organisations that deal with the rights of disabled adults. Illinois NARRAL can hardly advocate aborting foetuses diagnosed with disabilities while networking for organisations that support the rights of the disabled. Furthermore, the fracturing of various abortion rights groups in the congressional discussions of the Freedom of Choice Act attests to the polyphonous debate on the limits of choice.

These organisations have frequently been criticised for representing the white middle-class woman, while claiming to represent all women, constituted as a class based upon our 'sisterhood of oppression'. One array of this criticism is the assumed centrality of abortion rights to all women, ignoring class, race, religion, etc. When in fact this is not the case. AWIDOO (African Women in Defense of Ourselves) has expressed that in the African American community, abortion rights are problematic. On the one hand, there is the question of access. It is felt that black women have too much access to technologies to reduce the number of births including sterilisation, abortion, Depo-Provera and Norplant. In this context abortion assumes genocidal overtones. Women of All Red Nations (an organisation for Native American Women) has articulated similar experiences at health care clinics on reservations.[10] At the other extreme, poor women (of all backgrounds) are frequently denied the same coverage for abortion services that women with private insurance enjoy.

Dr Stephens has been able to demarcate an interesting ethical space for himself by exploiting ambiguity and difference. He exploits the fact that while what he does is not inscribed in legal code, it is not illegal. He exploits national boundaries: he cannot operate his type of business in Canada, so he operates across the border. He exploits the ambiguous limits of the freedom to choose: he draws a line within which he circumscribes his own practice. He exploits, maximises, creates perceived cultural difference: he 'outreaches' only to Punjabi/Sikhs who are his exclusive customers in Blaine and Buffalo. Finally, he exploits the general trend to medicalise reproduction and the cultural acceptance of this trend: pregnant

women are patients, sex determination is prognosis, and aborting the unwanted daughter is treatment. Dr Stephens explains that his service provides early diagnosis to facilitate safer and effective treatment. He thereby sanitises this process of sex selection as not dissimilar from any other medical commodity, and nests the procedure within convoluted appropriations of the pro-choice discourse and trends toward cultural and moral relativism.

Dr Stephens also insists that prohibiting his service is not only sexist, as it denies female autonomy in reproductive decisions, but also racist. Dr Stephens writes in a letter to the *Lancet* (medical journal):

> Sir, I have experienced severe censure for providing prenatal diagnosis to a culture that had learned of foetal sex determination of 12-14 weeks by ultrasonic inspection of external genitalia...Indians of Sikh origin—with no encouragement from me since I am pro-life and anti-abortion and all patients are told that—wish to use this technique for their own specific family planning needs. Among these Sikhs, at least one male child is of paramount importance for social, religious, and other cultural reasons. The only value that appears to have an impact on this culture is the economic pressure to have fewer children, who have to be clothed, educated, and raised in a western society that is imposing socioeconomic pressure on families with two or more children.[11]

In the same letter he further explains that 'If young [Sikh] families are given the option of using this technology early in their reproductive careers, they are more likely to have smaller families and families that are appropriately and traditionally balanced, thereby avoiding the tragedy of having many unwanted children while trying for a "wished for gender".' Dr Stephens takes great liberty in making claims about the Sikh community when he says that state interference in the practice of sex selection is 'viewed by the Indian Sikh community as unacceptable'.

In this letter Dr Stephens does several things. First, he displaces the practice of sex selection from the particular patriarchal structures that support it and the modes of reproducing those structures. According to Stephens, sex selection in the diaspora is propelled primarily by economics. (This is certainly the opinion expressed in the numerous conversations that I had with him.) The economic factors are apparently gender-neutral, dependent upon clothing, food, education, etc. No distinction is made between the cost of female and male children. Even when he locates sex selection as a Sikh cultural value, sex selection is a way of procuring that necessary son rather than dispensing with daughters. In the letter, sex selection is the practice of 'traditional cultures' which are not dissuaded

from the practice by living in the West. The implication (however wrong) is that the 'West' does not have such propensities.

Of course, debate on the ethics of sex selection took place within the editorials of the various medical journals, but none of the letters (at least that I found by an intensive MedLine search) questioned the authority of Dr Stephens to make statements about Sikh culture. I feel that he has successfully promoted himself as a spokesperson for 'Sikh culture' because he raises the flags of racism and cultural relativism when he encounters opposition. Dr Stephens demanded of Pamela Fayerman of *The Vancouver Sun*: 'How dare anyone target or discriminate against the preferences of a particular ethnic group. If it was white Canadians who wanted to terminate their pregnancies for the same reason, there would be no questions asked.'[12] He repeatedly states that it is 'cultural arrogance for us to moralise over their customs. Why not oppose people who do pregnancy tests for that matter?'[13] He tries to disarm his opponents by creating for himself the role of the compassionate and understanding doctor who seeks not to impose moral evaluation on another culture's values. But is this not how a doctor is supposed to act towards a client? Surely a doctor is *supposed* to be value-neutral? Taking this perspective, Dr Stephens is not a villain, but an ethical, medical professional. His opponents from the medical and ethical establishment seem unable to challenge his rationale, because they largely seem to accept his authority as an expert on Sikh culture. This is nourished by the prevalent portrayal of South Asians, in the public sphere, as archetypal sex selection users. What has been inadequately addressed are the constructions of sex selection as a practice unique to the 'exotic other' that requires cross-cultural sympathy. His only opposition on these counts comes from the South Asian community.

In the *Buffalo News*, Anil Bansal, who is the president of the Hindu Cultural Society of Western New York, said of Dr Stephens' cultural claims and advertisement campaign that 'It's ridiculous and insulting.... It perpetuates an idea that the modern Indian doesn't subscribe to. He is cashing in on the backward beliefs of the poor and illiterate.... These are not the values one would find in urban India. Unfortunately, they still exist elsewhere in the country.'[14] It seems that Mr Bansal is not only responding to Dr Stephens, but also to other representations that perpetuate this image of India. On the other hand, the 'Indian values' that Mr Bansal seeks to suggest are no less mythological than those of Dr Stephens. The practice of sex selection in India was and remains an urban and rural, cross-class phenomenon. (This will be discussed more fully in the on 'Tangential Economies'.) As we will see later, Mr Bansal's type of reproach to Dr

Stephens is typical of South Asian community leaders response in that they fail to address the issue of sex selection in their community, but rather seek to dispel the image of female-killing Indians.

While Dr Stephens promotes himself as sympathetic to the autonomous female patient who acts with deference to both her own best interest and, what Stephens calls, the values of 'traditional societies', his motives are never uncoupled from his primary motivation, which is running a profitable business. (This sounds crass, but he has stated this clearly both in interviews with me and with various journalists.) He describes himself as a physician and a businessman who is not to judge or attempt to change different cultural or moral values. While he acknowledges the significant profit to be made from the Punjabi/Sikh community to whom he exclusively advertises, he also portrays himself as the victim of enterprising South Asians. In an interview in the *Buffalo News* he stated 'Some say I target Indians. It's the reverse. They target me for my skills'.[15] In another interview he explains: 'What I have found with the Sikh people is that they use me to diagnose sex,...If it is discovered that it is a female, it is always the girl that they want to select to undergo foeticide.'[16] Dr Stephens therefore becomes the victim of exploitation! He also deploys the trope of the ruthless Asian who struggles to the top of the pile.

Dr Stephens deploys two arguments with which he supports his position: patient (women's) agency vis-a-vis the pro-choice discourse and cultural (and moral) relativism. (These are framed by the ethics of the free market and the involvement of the medical establishment in the baby-producing business). Decisions made to restrict sex selective abortions will certainly problematise other reproductive-rights questions. For instance, can one deny women the right to this type of knowledge without invalidating women's autonomy? Does restricting the reasons for abortion inveigh against the current legal climate that supports women's right to choose motherhood? The wholesale acceptance of the cultural/moral relativism argument is problematic. Frequently this argument is used to justify practices that some persons would label human rights abuses.[17] An example of this name-game is genital mutilation, wherein an action is perpetrated on females by other females. Because the practice is constructed as a cultural value, it is uneasily accepted by some, while others remain rigid in their claims that it is a human rights violation. Of course cultural and moral relativism is frequently invoked to justify practices that affect women and men differently. Insufficient attention is paid to the persons stating that these types of practices are cultural values. On the other hand, will disregarding the 'cultural' consideration in sex selection affect other aspects of a multi-cultural agenda, such as the right of Sikhs

to wear turbans in certain professions? In this debate, there seems to be an unqualified agreement in the medical establishment that sex selection is predominantly a cultural value of the 'other'.

There is yet another problem associated with Dr Stephens' deployment of cultural and moral relativism. It has the flavour of colonising the practice of the other. Mohanty writes that 'such reductive cross-cultural comparisons result in the colonization of the specifics of daily existence and the complexities of political interests which women of different social classes and cultures represent and mobilize'.[18] When Stephens claims to represent Sikh interests to the medical field, is he not really incorporating, domesticating and possessing the Sikh voice and agency, constituting Sikhs as the 'other'. Stephens thereby both obtains expert status among his own peers and transforms the Sikh community in the eyes of the medical establishment. In this transformation, it becomes possessed of a static changeless culture whose values and needs are articulated by Stephens. The next section of the paper demonstrates that there is in fact vocal opposition to the construction of sex selection as a necessary cultural value among Vancouver Sikhs and to Dr Stephens' expertise to speak on behalf of Sikhs.

Mahila and the Coalition: A Case of Ambivalent Feminism?

This section examines the Coalition's arguments against Dr Stephens and sex selection. These are in most cases articulated by Raminder Dosanjh. Three areas in which Mahila operates are looked at closely: the mainstream press and news; community outreach and less often the Indo-Canadian press. The claims made in these different arenas are subtly different. Elucidating these differences is a main concern in this section. However, as we examine the arguments promoted by the Coalition, we must constantly ask ourselves whom it claims to represent and how well it succeeds in this mission. What emerges is an ambivalence towards the issue of sex selection, the source of which can be located in the function of the Coalition (particularly Mahila) in the Indo-Canadian community and the different obligations that it must negotiate.

Mahila and the Coalition in the (Very) Public Sphere

In the mainstream press, the Coalition/Mahila engages in both defensive and offensive manoeuvring. It must attempt to dislodge and discredit Dr Stephens' assertions about Sikh/Punjabi/Indian culture *and* it must also fend off sensational accounts in papers and in television documentaries

and exposés that consistently portray South Asians as rabid female foetus aborters. Yet sex selection does occur, so Mahila must contextualise and dislocate the practice from the exclusive purview of South Asians. Presumably, they also want the practice to cease.

Raminder Dosanjh maintains that Dr Stephens' calculated assumption that his potential customers are predominantly from the Indo-Canadian community constitutes a reinforcement of society's negative stereotypes of her community. Furthermore, she stresses the ubiquitous and cross-cultural nature of misogyny and asserts that if there is a higher tendency to male select in the Indo-Canadian community, 'it doesn't make it right'.[19] In *The Vancouver Sun* (in October 1993), she said that Stephens is 'offering a service that caters to society's sex attitudes'.[20] In another interview with the *The Vancouver Sun*, Dosanjh explained that 'the fact is that the devaluation, oppression and violence against women all around the world leads to the sad fact that it is usually female fetuses which are aborted'. Furthermore, 'until Dr Stevens set up his practice we never heard of women aborting female fetuses. We're not saying it's now a widespread problem, we're saying if we don't put an end to the publicity of his services, then the problem will get worse'.[21] In a letter to candidates in September 1993, who might place election advertisements in the papers, she wrote: 'Stephens does NOT advertise in the mainstream press but has confined his "outreach" to South Asian Canadian communities via the select Indo-Canadian press.... Such advertisements tend to create a need where none might have existed'.[22]

In these accounts Dosanjh, as spokesperson for Mahila and the Coalition, makes several moves. First, she attempts to extend conceptions of patriarchy, misogyny, male preference and violence against women from the narrow view that they are specific or more common to Sikh/Punjabi/South Asian communities to a view that these institutions are prevalent throughout all strata of society. In fact, when she does speak of these institutions, she does not refer specifically to the Punjabi community *unless* she is responding to Dr Stephens claims. Thus Dr Stephens does not cater to Punjab/Sikh/South Asian sexism but 'society's sexist attitudes'. The actual *practice* of sex selection is not the preoccupation of Mahila, as articulated by Dosanjh, in this particular public space. Rather, they target Dr Stephens' advertising for it. They contend that Dr Stephens does not exploit a facet of Sikh/Punjabi culture, but rather creates this value in the Sikh community vis-a-vis mainstream stereotypes of South Asians through his extensive advertising campaigns. Dosanjh, in this venue, does not readily admit that there are significant numbers of women that use his service when she speaks of Dr Stephens' assumptions that his

theoretical clientele will be from the Indo-Canadian community. Yet she does know of his thriving business and must explain that if there is a greater tendency to male select in her community, it is nonetheless wrong and a byproduct of Dr Stephens' market-creating acumen. What Dosanjh fails to discuss is sex selection in practice. This silence is not disrupted in the general newspaper accounts. One reason for this becomes apparent when we turn to the press coverage in the community papers.

As the Coalition's efforts were covered in the mainstream press, debate on the issues of sex selection and the boycott proceeded in the pages of the Punjabi/Indo-Canadian press. The editors responded specifically to the boycott against their papers and the revenue lost when electoral candidates refused to advertise. The role of the Indo-Canadian press will be discussed more fully later, but a few remarks are appropriate here as well. In *The Link*, the editor Promod Puri wrote that

> This latest 'campaign' has done more damage to the image of Indo-Canadian women than making any dent on the business of *The Link*, which has taken up women's causes many a time.
> By its foolish one-action stop-ad campaigns, the 'coalition' is labelling Indo-Canadian women as uneducated, backward, not respected by their husbands and in-laws and unable to make their own decisions.
> On our part we strongly believe that the Indo-Canadian community, and women in particular, is a very rationale and progressive group, who can't be coerced by mere newspaper advertising.[23]

Mahila is placed in a situation from which it is difficult to escape. On the one hand, sex selection is a concern for Mahila and the Coalition, as reflected by the grassroots initiative that it launched to discourage sex selective abortions. (This will be discussed later.) However, it is already perceived that the Coalition has tarnished the image of the community by taking the issue to the non-Indo-Canadian community as reflected in Promod Puri's editorial. The conclusion that Promod Puri reaches is that their campaign reflects badly upon Indo-Canadian *women*, not men. This is a tactical accusation perhaps gauged to disrupt any unity or solidarity among women in the community and to disrupt Mahila's (and Raminder Dosanjh's) place in the community. Mahila and therefore Raminder Dosanjh is not a free agent, free of responsibility to its/her community. Any claim that Dosanjh makes on behalf of Mahila and the Coalition reflects upon her community, to which she is responsible. This tends to explain their silence on the question of patriarchal structures that are specific to the Vancouver Indo-Canadian community. They cannot do so without condemning aspects of their community, for which they are

already accused. The only tenable object of their actions is Dr Stephens and his advertising schemes. Nor can they in the mainstream arena address the needs of the women who do use his services. The consequences of going beyond these limits are substantial. If the community rejects their location within the community, Mahila and the Coalition lose all of their power as advocates within the community.

Mahila and the Coalition in the (Less) Public Sphere: The Grassroots Perspective

In their outreach materials that are more or less restricted to the private audience of the Sikh/Punjabi community, Mahila does broach subjects on which it is absolutely silent in the mainstream publications. As we will see, however, their publications reveal a deep ambivalence on the issue of specific patriarchal formations within the Sikh/Punjabi community. In the pamphlets that Mahila and the Coalition have distributed through outreach, there is a picture which depicts a pregnant woman. In her womb is a female child with braided hair, and the womb is being penetrated with a huge hypodermic needle, guided by an enormous spider/tick-like monster. The pamphlets are in both Punjabi (Gurmukhi) and English. What is absolutely striking is that this image does not reflect this controversy which is centred around ultrasound sex determination. Rather, it harks back to the amniocentesis-mediated sex-selection that has only recently been supplanted by the ultrasound method. The use of this graphic suggests that Mahila does not want to lose connection with this previous issue, and relates the two technologies with this graphic.

In this pamphlet it is written that:

> Sex selection means son selection in our male dominated society where women continue to be devalued. The preference for male children is a universal phenomena. Son selection is a direct result of patriarchy. Patriarchy creates the environment in which the raising of daughters is a 'less profitable investment' than the raising of sons.[24]

This pamphlet goes on to reassure the reader that son selection is a 'result of the social and economic disparity between males and females. We must eliminate the economic, social, and cultural bases of son selection'.[25] There is a profound ambivalence in this document. On the one hand, the Coalition possibly alludes to patriarchy with a specific reference to 'our male dominated society'. But to what society does 'our society' refer? This pamphlet does not in anyway condemn the Indo-Canadian community for son-selecting. While it calls for normalising power relations between

males and females, it does not divulge any particular facets of the inequalities other than those that are generic.

This pamphlet further assures the community that the Coalition is trying to *protect* the image of Indo-Canadians, countering Promod Puri's allegations, when it states that:

> Although gender prejudices and feudal values still exist in some sectors of the South Asian community, as in many communities, this racist stereotype of sex selection being attributed to the Indian culture further perpetuates the western image of our culture as backward and primitive.

The pamphlet equates users of Dr Stephens' services as promoters and participants in the propagation of the West's conception of Indians. This pamphlet is not an explicit exhortation against sex selection. Rather by refusing to sex select, one promotes the 'status of South Asian Women'. What remains absent in this outreach pamphlet, however, is a discussion of specific economic structures, such as dowry, that promote the option of sex selection.

In a flyer entitled 'Stop Sex Selection', Mahila specifically addressed some of Dr Stephens' assertions. However, the specifics of sex selection remain ambivalent. This pamphlet is in the form of questions, which are then answered. The first claim that is countered is Dr Stephens 100 per cent accuracy claim. This is a interesting way to begin the pamphlet. Rather than initially appealing to some ethical rationale, the author appeals to the imperfections of the product. What this first claim amounts to is the possibility that a male foetus will be aborted, or that an unwanted daughter will be born. The third question addresses the claim that son selection is limited to certain communities. The flyer explains that son selection is pan-cultural, but that sex selection techniques have been marketed specifically to 'the third world countries in the form of racist family planning programs'.[26] Hence sex selection is a result of the West's racism. In this flyer, the female clients of Dr Stephens are addressed. It maintains that since the advertisement campaign, son selection has become a problem and that enough women are using it that he has doubled his fees and opened a second clinic. Still, son selection is a reactionary artefact of his campaign.

This flyer maintains that by discontinuing the advertisements the practice will spread at a much slower rate. It also defends its discussion of this matter in the mainstream media and fends off allegations that Mahila is defaming the South Asian community. It does so by stating that sex selection is not a South Asian women's issue, but rather of all women. Mahila and the Coalition maintain that they are creating a platform for change and therefore empowering women in their community. This flyer

also seeks to uncouple sex selective abortions from the freedom of choice. The pamphlet asks in a patriarchal society, what choice can women really have?

The Coalition is very much aware that mainstream representations of Indo-Canadians have exerted a profound effect on the stances taken by various individuals at different times and in different arenas. Sunera Thobani, in an article distributed by Raminder Dosanjh, seeks to deconstruct the assertions of South Asian proclivity to son select. She does so by citing several studies that demonstrate the prevalence of son preference in 'white' society. She maintains that racist stereotypes of the Indian culture

> [have] regained credibility through this incident, and hatred of women is considered to be rooted in the 'backwardness' of the culture. This racist stereotype perpetuated both in the mainstream media and in the larger Canadian society, has served to hinder an open discussion over this issue within the Indo-Canadian community. The use that can be made of this stereotyping as a stick with which to beat the whole community has put many of us on the defensive.

What is more to the point in this case is that the use that can be made of such racist stereotyping to the detriment of the whole Indo-Canadian community by intensifying the hostility against immigrant communities that already exists in Canadian society.[27]

What is admittedly at stake is perpetuation of negative opinions about Indo-Canadians. Therefore raising the problematic of sex selection in the mainstream (read non-Indo-Canadian) media, has put the community on the defensive. Perhaps the Coalition should have initiated this controversy solely within the community, it is suggested in the above passage. Yet in this article comes a rare discussion (rare in Coalition literature that Mahila provided me with) of motivations of the community to son select. Thobani explains that some argue that it is best to sex select at birth than to 'give birth to daughters, struggle to bring them up and end by not only losing them in marriage, but often having to pay a substantial dowry in the process'.[28]

However, dowry is not the only consideration. She also alludes to the facts that women are raped, abused, battered and violated. She points to the global poverty of women and severe pay inequity and concludes that 'everybody wants sons'. Thobani's sleight of hand obfuscates the fact that these types of woman-targeted violence are not coterminus with sex selection. Thobani also grapples with questions of women's agency in sex selection. She does not assume simply that women sex select because they see the advertisement and feel pressured. She also seeks to extricate this issue from the freedom of choice discourse. She writes that

> We have also been told that sex selection is essentially a women's 'choice', and that women should be free to 'choose' which sex they will bear. It is interesting that in a world where women have few choices and so little power, we are suddenly told that we have so much 'choice'.

She says that in the coopting of the 'choice' discourse, this 'choice' often means the mother 'chooses' to select a foetus who is her own sex. She writes 'Can anything demonstrate better than this the internalization by women of our devaluation and degradation? I think not'.[29]

Mahila and the Coalition claim to represent the best interests of women in the community and seek to promote solidarity on this issue. Neither Mahila nor the Coalition publicly addresses the needs of the women that use son selection. They are considered victims of coercion, not agents of their own decisions. According to the narrative, Dr Stephens lures them in. Of course, an alternative narrative could suggest that women seek out Dr Stephens. While asserting female agency, we must recall that these decisions are made in a particular context that renders male-selection necessary to mother's well-being. Thus we arrive at Thobani's problem with the freedom to choose to sex select. Mahila and the Coalition seek to homogenise the voices of women in this issue. For instance, in none of the materials that I have procured, have we heard an argument for sex selection or autonomy of the woman electing to abort female foetuses. Yet we know that there is a sizable number of dissenting voices because Dr Stephens' business is thriving. One could make the argument, and in fact several have, that Raminder Dosanjh has only three sons. Her opponents state that since she will not have to experience the expense and agony of raising daughters, they question her ability to sympathise with those distressed women who are not in her situation. In this light, Dr Stephens becomes the only advocate for those women who empower themselves by sex selecting, even as they reproduce this misogynist practice. This tension between different women and Dr Stephens' relationship to this tension reveals how difficult it is to think about agency and resistance meaningfully in the context of this problematic.

Furthermore, the community of women is fractured along other lines as well. Some women have been born in North America, some are long-time residents, others have migrated recently. The women differ in class and perhaps caste background. They have different fluency levels in English, Punjabi and Hindi. Most live in nuclear families, others in joint families.[30] The composition of their families may vary in terms of their residence in Vancouver and their ties to their originating village.

Crucial to Mahila's operation is the vision that the organisation and its

volunteers are firmly situated within the diverse community. Dosanjh explains that she participates in community functions and considers herself held accountable for her utterances and actions. Most of the members of Mahila are married and their families are also participants in the community. It is within the context of 'community' that Mahila operates. They work with women's shelters to maintain facilities and to enhance understanding of particular situations that women of the Indo- Canadian community may experience. As we have seen, Mahila must make compromises on how far it will push an issue. It can only go so far before it begins to be cast as a trouble-maker. Once cast as such, it loses its legitimacy and therefore its advocacy within the community.

Another women's advocacy group for South Asian women, called South Asian Women's Action Network (SAWAN) has already emerged. According to one confidential Mahila source, this group does not locate itself within the community as Mahila does. It comprises women who are away from their families, such as students. My informant seemed sceptical that it would have the same longevity as Mahila or that women would readily use its services. I think that Catrin Lynch's analysis of two South Asian women's shelters is germane.[31] In this analysis Lynch, compares and contrasts the acceptance of two South Asian women's shelters in New York and in Chicago. What she has found is that the acceptance of the shelter by the community, indicated by both the willingness of clients to seek out their services and the social acceptance of women that use the shelter, correlates well with the degree to which the shelter locates itself within the South Asian communities it serves. It will be fascinating to discover which direction SAWAN will take in addressing the issues surrounding sex selection and how their activist trajectories will deviate or conform to that of Mahila.

The Punjabi Press: The Private Sphere

Before examining articles from the *Indo-Canadian* and *The Link* (these are the papers that received the most criticism from the Coalition), I read a series of editorials that appeared in *Watan*, a literary journal in Punjabi.[32] Sadhu Binning, of Vancouver SATH Literary and Cultural Society was one such author, who was a participant in the Coalition. In his editorial entitled 'Sex-Selection and Canada's Indian Community' he was very critical of the community press. He writes of their response to the Coalition's request to cease carrying Dr Stephens advertisements that

> these people consider themselves being something apart from the community, and free from all responsibility. The community in which they are living and earning their living from doesn't get their attention when it comes to responsibility.... [The editors, like the women's organisations] could have asked writers to write articles on the subject.... But they have put the whole responsibility of abortion on the women's organisations.[33]

Mr. Binning further claims that because the papers do not initiate a discussion of Dr Stephens' authority to shape misconceptions of Punjabi culture and his exploitation of these misconceptions, that the papers are themselves collaborators in this process. Furthermore, he affirms the Coalition's stand that the advertisements do promote sex selection in the community and therefore, the papers have a responsibility to refuse them.

In this article, Binning is also critical of the Indo-Canadian press' attempts to divert attention from sex selection to other issues such as the coalition's obtaining and misuse of grants. He is also critical of the papers' attempts to create hostility in the community towards the women's groups. Although much of this article is highly reminiscent of those claims made by the coalition in *The Vancouver Sun*, he does speak specifically of Punjabi culture. He stresses the global nature of patriarchy and son preference, but he also suggests that the editors are possibly motivated by their desires to maintain the status quo in the community. He too seeks to decouple sex selection from 'the right to choose'. In doing so he maintains that women 'choose' to son select because of family pressures stemming from social and economic pressures. He also maintains that Punjabi and Indian societies have had more than a thousand years of son preference, motivated by the view that daughters are someone else's wealth and sons are the means by which a family obtains the wealth of another. He is also critical of those institutions which do not permit Punjabi women to live an independent life, without being defined as mother, sister, wife or widow.[34] It is striking that these topics come up in the Indo-Canadian printed press but not the more general printed media. This reflects, of course, the sensitivity to the non-Indo-Canadian scrutiny informed by the mainstream media and subsequently the diasporic dimension of this controversy.

Binning's criticism does not however prepare the reader for what is found in the Indo-Canadian press. While there is evidence for his assertion that it was trying to divert attention from the issue of their advertising for Dr Stephens by their depictions of the Coalition's 'unscrupulous' behaviour, there were also several editorial attempts at discussing 'sex selection'.

There is no doubt that such Indo-Canadian publications as the *Indo-Canadian Times* and *The Link* attempted to confuse the issues by confabulating insinuations that the Coalition created this controversy to obtain grants and subsequently misused them.[35] But within the editorials and letters to the editors some attempts were made to nominate social institutions that promoted sex selection and son preference while simultaneously asserting the value of women as producers of children and culture. These editorials and letters revealed considerable conflicts of interest. On the one hand, many letters and editorials brought up dowry and sex inequality, but maintained that women were valuable because of their roles as mothers and educators. In some of the letters, the women's groups were accused of maligning the community as all of Vancouver watched, but still charged them with the duty of educating women away from sex selection. Some of these confusing contentions are examined below.

Women's Groups as Defamers of the Community versus Women's Groups as Educators and Reproducers of the Community

As we have already seen in Promod Puri's editorial, some authors felt that the women's groups have shamed not just the community, but Punjabi/Sikh women specifically by their vocal stance against Dr Stephens' advertisements in the non-Indo- Canadian press. It should be observed that in the Indo-Canadian press, the Coalition is called a women's organisation. There seems to be a perception that sex selection and abortion are issues that concern only women, rather than the entire community. Hence, this campaign is labelled the campaign of women. Furthermore, men that participated in the demonstrations were ridiculed. In an anonymous editorial it was written: 'People were laughing at these men.'[36] But it is not clear whether these men were really laughed at or if the editorialist wanted to feminise the male participants—or perhaps both are true.

The efforts and the legitimacy of the Coalition were undermined in several ways in addition to the allegations that members misused grants and the accusations of damaging the standing of Indo-Canadian women. A popular tactic was to assail Raminder Dosanjh's character and motives. In Tara Singh Hayer's editorial of 23-29 September he wrote that: 'Those who do not have daughters, they [*sic*] should they demonstrate in favor of daughters? God Forbid!!' This is in reference to the fact that Raminder Dosanjh has three sons and no daughters. In another letter to the *Indo-Canadian Times*, it is insinuated that Raminder Dosanjh has acquired her position in the Coalition and grant money through the efforts of her

husband, who is an MP.[37] Promod Puri says that 'The 'Coalition' group of Raminder Dosanjh has surfaced again like the seasonal frogs, who in our Punjabi language are called the '*Barsati Daddu*'.[38] He thereby reduces the Coalition to a hobby of Raminder Dosanjh, who apparently has too much time on her hands, resulting, it is insinuated, from her economic privilege. Men that spoke against the papers, like Sadhu Binning, apparently escape the wrath of the editorials. It is women, it seems, who must be put into their proper place.

In addition to character assassination, the editorialists ridiculed the Coalition for its meddling nature. In an anonymous letter to *The Indo-Canadian Times* of 15 September the writer suggests that the 'women's organisations' exacerbate family conflict and force the women to divorce their husbands as a result. The writer then asks: 'If divorce occurs, then what help will the organisations give to the divorced women and their child [*sic*]? Will they get this women [*sic*] married again, make her worthy of a job or leave such a woman to be left in utter confusion?' The author thereby insinuates that the Coalition can only be relied upon to start trouble, but long-term solutions can only be found within the boundaries of the community. This constitutes a warning to those who are engaging in actions that may exclude themselves from the community that there may be no return, and specifically places (or threatens to place) the Coalition outside of the community.

The Coalition was accused of not taking proper initiatives in tackling sex selection in the community. Promod Puri wrote

> We ask this big mouth 'Coalition' if it has ever written, printed and distributed any pamphlet or literature addressing the problem?.... Has it ever visited any of our Gurdwaras, temples or other such gathering places to speak out on the issue and educate the women?[39]

In this passage, it is insinuated that the Coalition is already beyond the pale of the community, a theoretical ensemble of outsiders to the community's gurdwaras. In *The Indo-Canadian Times*, it is asked 'Have there been demonstrations against dowry on the Gurudwara stages?'[40] And in another editorial it is stated, perhaps facetiously, that they should boycott people who celebrate the birth of sons and not the birth of daughters.[41] It is also insinuated that some of the women in the Coalition have aborted their female foetuses. In these editorials, the Coalition comes off as ineffectual, hypocritical and damaging to the community for no clear benefit.

While undermining Dosanjh's and Mahila's legitimacy in the community, the editorials simultaneously assert a more palatable role for the women. (It should be noted that all of these editorials were penned in the

names of men.) That role is educating women. In numerous editorials it is suggested that the Coalition go to the market or the gurdwaras and educate *women.* This is far more productive, in this line of reasoning, then calling public (non-Punjabi) attention to the Punjabi community. As we will see later, even though some of the writers admit that there are contributing patriarchal structures that promote male selection, women are seen as the only route of questioning the practice. It is not suggested that the Coalition go and educate men in the gurdwaras and market. By accepting the roles prescribed for them, by men, the women of the organisations may be received back into the community have assumed the roles of educators of women and children. Community values, of course, become recreated and transmitted through the efforts of women. The role of women as producers of community are now elaborated.

Patriarchal Formations and the Producers of Community

Another move made by the various editorial writers is the framing of community. In the discussion of the Punjabi community, particular social institutions such as dowry and gender roles assume prominence. The culmination of these discussions is the value of women, ultimately inscribed within a particular patriarchal structure, as producers of offspring and community.

In a letter to *The Indo-Canadian Times* (7-13 October 1993), Jogi wrote that the marriage of a girl has become a prestige issue. This is a very confusing letter, due in part to poor sentence structure with which my translator grappled, and in part due to strained logic. Jogi seems very concerned that girls are meeting and dating boys prior to marriage. He suggests that if the mother teaches the children that this is not proper according to their customs and maintain the custom of an arranged marriage, then the dowry system can be stopped.[42] While he does not say so, one must wonder if perhaps by prestige he implies the intact virginity of daughters prior to marriage. The perpetuation of dowry, according to Jogi, therefore is the result of young girls dating boys and mothers not properly transmitting Punjabi traditions to her children. This letter almost suggests that a family must buy a husband for their, potentially tainted, daughter. It is nonetheless interesting that for this man, continuation of dowry and misogyny in the diaspora are linked to increased likelihood of female promiscuity.

In an article entitled 'Boys, Girls—Beauty of the Courtyard', Sikhpal Singh Kamb writes 'It is a well known truth that behind every successful

man is the helping hand of a woman'.[43] Later he tells an anecdote to dispel the ignorance of those who call woman impure or unclean.

> It was summer season [in Patiala at his friend's house]. In the living room of his house, apart from other things there was kept a radio, which had ample dust on it. I said to him, friend do you clean the dust off the radio? Immediately his cook-book answer came, 'When Raminder is with me, what do I need from the radio? If I am alone then only can I touch this'. On hearing this Rajinder's face lit up with smiles and laughing, shying, happily she left to make tea.[44]

What is remarkable about this anecdote is that his friend was not asserting the domestic role of his wife, but rather the author did. In another section of the same article, the writer hails women as producers of great men. It seems that this author supports the virtue of women only as a mother or wife, who do not have parity with their spouses. The virtue of women therefore is defined through her heterosexual (productive) relationship with a male, her husband.

This sentiment is even more explicit in an article by Gurcharan Singh Dodhar in *The Indo-Canadian Times* (12-18 August 1993). Dodhar quotes the famous *shloka* of Guru Nanak 'why condemn those who have given birth to kings'. Elsewhere he asks '[if] we keep on killing the source of child producing woman; how can we think of growth of a good society?.... Are we not snubbing the aspirations of our son by killing his sister? Are we not the butchers of our supreme producer?' Again, although he tries to assert the equality of women to men, he can do so only by maintaining that women are producers of society, future wives for their sons.

It is thus clear that the range of issues discussed depends on the venue for discussion. In the more mainstream press, a space in which the Coalition operates, the practice of sex selection seems to be a non-topic. Rather, in this public space, Dr Stephens himself, the racism and sexism of his advertisement campaign, and those papers that run them are the topics of concern. We have seen that Mahila is generally non-critical of the Punjabi/Sikh community, except the newspaper editors. Even in their grassroots literature, which is not generally available to outsiders, they maintain the general features of the stance that they adopt in the more mainstream press. This is tactical. Mahila and the Coalition can only go so far before it begins to risk alienating male and female members of the community, in which Mahila operates and in which the various members live.

Moving away from the public space, into one that is more private from the perspective of the Punjabi/Sikh community members, sex selection is

discussed within the pages of the Indo-Canadian papers. While these papers do appear critical of cultural formations that may support and propel male selection in the community, their support for women's parity is farcical. In the end, they support women in their palatable roles as teachers of children and other women, producers of great kings, supporters of husbands, and reproducers of children and community. The bottom line is that deconstructing patriarchal structures is not to be the preoccupation of women. But then again, the women of the coalition do not publicly advocate this either.

Taking a panoramic view of this discursive geography, the diasporic features assume prominence. First, there is the protection of the image of the Indo-Canadians as a successful migrant community. This fear implies the dreaded judgment by other Canadians who are perceived to have racist or ethnocentric inclinations. As we have said elsewhere, this type of concern does not arise in the Punjab in the same way—if at all. We also see the ways in which discourses on the freedom of choice, cultural and moral relativism, and the relationship that has developed between the pregnant woman, a cadre of doctors, and the technology which mediates this relationship, have informed the views expressed by individuals and organisations of the Indo- Canadian community.

TANGENTIAL ECONOMIES

This section of the paper attempts to elaborate some of the interlocking problematics that underlie and promote sex selection in the Vancouver Sikh/Punjabi community. A major concern for diasporic Sikhs is maintaining a Sikh identity. It seems that controlling the sexuality of Sikh women is pivotal in this endeavour. The *izzat* (roughly honour) of the family is crucially dependent upon the chastity of its daughters. This sexuality is a form of capital, the control of which is central to the *izzat* of the family as well as preservation of Sikhness in the diaspora. Women are literally the producers of community.

Sikhs in North America, and elsewhere, are transnational and maintain ties with their originating village.[45] Furthermore, chain migrations and the taking of Indian spouses translate to a continual flux of Sikhs from India. For this reason, we need to relate sex selection in Vancouver to sex selection in the Punjab. It is also useful to examine non-Punjabi/Sikh sentiment toward sex selection because this is not a specifically South Asian phenomenon. Furthermore, Dr Stephens' enterprise is profitable because of the synergistic interactions of patriarchal control of sexual capital and the commodification of motherhood and the perfect child,

providing further impetus to contextualise diasporic sex selection in the West. By exploring the contexts of sex selection in both the Punjab and in North America, we can elucidate the features of sex selection among Vancouver Sikhs that are diasporic in nature. Finally, it is important to examine some of the mechanisms by which the diasporic Sikhs maintain their Sikh identities. What we will find is the central role in which female sexuality is apprehended and controlled by Sikh patriarchal formations. But we will also see that women alter 'traditions' and 'customs' as they reproduce them.

Sex Selection in the Punjab

It is a chilling coincidence—if it is only a coincidence—that the Punjab was and remains notorious for its skewed secondary male to female ratio.[46] This is not to suggest that the sex selection practices in Vancouver are mere transplants of those carried over from the Punjab because the circumstances in which sex selection is embedded differ in substantial ways which are elaborated below.

Prior to the introduction of amniocentesis, the Punjab possessed the lowest female to male ratio (879 females per 1,000 males), while having the highest per capital income among the Indian states. Monica Das Gupta cities this as evidence that poverty is not necessarily an index for discrimination against females. Her paper demonstrates that the low male to female ratio in Punjab is due to selective partitioning of resources, such as, food, clothing and medical care, between male and female children. Despite the fact that in the neonatal period, male mortality is higher than female mortality; female post-neonatal mortality is much higher than male. Between 0 and 29 months, the female mortality rate is nearly twice that of male infants. This data may indicate that behavioural, not biological, factors are operating.[47] She also found that mortality rates differ depending upon birth order. Males born to mothers with surviving sons have a slightly higher mortality than those who are born to mothers with no sons. Females born to mothers with no surviving daughters have mortality rates that are roughly between those for the two situations for male offspring. However, Das Gupta reports a startling increase in mortality for daughters that are born into families where there is one or more surviving daughter. This subset of daughters has a 53 per cent higher mortality rate than the offspring born in the other configuration.[48] Das Gupta also discovered that higher education did not translate into lower mortality for daughters, in fact the opposite effect operated.

Das Gupta maintained that there was little correlation between poverty and discrimination against females. She also disagreed with Bardan's contention that neglect of females is configured by low participation of females in agriculture and income-generation.[49] Female participation in labour in fact coexists with female infanticide. Alienation of women from agricultural labour by the Green Revolution does not imply that their work load has lessened, but rather, has been repartitioned into other labour domains.

Das Gupta argued that structures in Jat (and Rajput) kinship support the practice of sex selection. In these kinship formations, females are considered part of their husband's household upon marriage. Since dowry is the marital practice, females take away financial resources of the family for which there is no reciprocity. Women have no inheritance rights in practice. Furthermore, it is the son that will take care of his parents in their old age and bring in the dowry of his wife. Indeed, to secure her position in the family, a woman must produce a son.

Barbara Miller has disagreed with Das Gupta's analysis. She postulated that the disincentive for Jat farmers to have many daughters is not linked with their role in economic activity but rather to marriage costs.[50] Miller also is struck by the lack of reciprocity between the families of the wife and husband in North India: the wife's family gives and the husband's family receives. (She does recognise that all of North India is not monolithic in its marital practices.) She contrasts this situation with some in the South that are marked by reciprocity between the families. She notes further that in the North, dowry is a means to procure a husband from a good family. Dowry in the South of India is perceived as primarily a gift to the bride for her own welfare and protection.[51] Miller then correlates the different marital practices between North and South India to the differential tendencies to use selection between the two. The former marked by masculine sex ratios and the later either feminine or less masculine ratios.

Most of the above research was written before the introduction and expansion of commercial sex determination and sex selection of the 1980s. Punjab figured prominently in the deployment of this technology. In 1979, in Amritsar, amniocentesis was first used commercially.[52] Punjab continues to have one of the lowest female to male ratios. Recent work done on sex selection reports the same ratio of 879 females per 1,000 males that Das Gupta cited. There do not appear to be more recent figures since the widespread commercial introduction of amniocentesis, chorionic villus sample, and now ultrasound, which has become the first step in sex selection. In the Punjab, as elsewhere, female foeticide has generally replaced female infanticide.[53] It is also necessary to ask about the effects

that the less invasive technique of ultrasound (as compared to CVS and amniocentesis which has substantial risks of harming the foetus) have had upon facilitating female foeticide.

As is the case with the sex selection practices in Vancouver, it is impossible to say who has sex selected, or more appropriately, male selected. In India, it can be said with confidence that sex selection is a practice that spans both rural and urban populations. Similarly, it is not only the 'poor and backward' masses that male select, but also 'educated and middle class' masses as well.[54] Advertisements for sex selection are ubiquitous. Information on sex determination is frequently followed by that on pregnancy termination.

In India, as in Vancouver, women were not unified in their response to sex selection. Much of this debate occurred in *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*. Strangely enough, this debate is absent in *Manushi*, the feminist publication which has carried much debate on the dowry boycott, sati and bride-burning. Writers in *EPW* produced a variety of views. Dharma Kumar, for example, maintained that sex determination was simply another factor that contributed to the mother making an informed decision to carry her child to term and therefore was a manifestation of the right to choose. Dharma Kumar felt that if sex selection was made illegal, then female children would suffer mercilessly. Hence killing the female foetus is more humane than the sustained ill-treatment that a female child will experience. She posed the question: 'Does the birth of lakhs, or even millions, of unwanted girls improve the status of women?'[55]

Leela Dube, however took her to task for this economic analysis of the benefits of sex selection.[56] One can quickly argue, as has been the case in both India and Vancouver, that a woman does not really have the freedom to choose. How is it that if she cannot choose her own husband or how far she will follow her education she suddenly has so much choice to chose the gender of her foetus. It is apparent that there are numerous factors through which a woman must navigate in deciding to keep and give birth to a girl. Dowry, her dependence upon a son, potential marital problems or even violence are some of the factors that women must keep in mind. These considerations will be revisited when we reflect upon sex selection in Vancouver.

Sex Selection: Contexts in the West

This section demonstrates that sex selection and male preferences are not as foreign to the West as is usually thought. Perceived differentials in gender of offspring preference has prompted much of the sex pre-selection

techniques that have been developed in the West. Since Dr Stephens is a participant in this, as are several of his colleagues, and since his service is a product of these perceived sex preferences, we need to examine these preferences and technologies.

First, I will discuss gender preferences in the generic American population. Because, there does not appear to be similar work done in Canada, the American data will have to suffice. This is not entirely unjustified because Dr Stephens' practices are situated in the US, although his Punjabi clientele are largely Canadian. Second, I will examine some of the sex pre-selection techniques that are being popularised and how this phenomenon dovetails with what Wertz and Wertz call the American desire for better, brighter babies.

Wertz and Fletcher report in the *American Journal of Medical Genetics* that geneticists in the US (62 per cent) differed from geneticists of 18 other nations in their willingness to perform prenatal diagnosis for sex selection or refer them to a doctor that would. In that same study, women were more likely than men to say that they would perform prenatal screenings for maternal anxiety or sex selection.[57] This data substantially differs from previous studies that reported in 1976 only 1 per cent of 448, and in 1977, only 21 per cent of 149 geneticists were willing to perform prenatal diagnosis for sex selection.[58] Furthermore, the American data compares interestingly with data on Indian, Canadian and British geneticists which found in 1989 that 34 per cent of American medical geneticists would perform sex determination for sex selection or refer to someone who would. Thirty-four per cent in India, 30 per cent in Canada and 9 per cent in the UK were willing to do the same.[59] Another survey illuminated the American ambivalence towards sex determination and sex selection. Burke reports, after interviewing 34 prenatal genetic counsels in seven American cities, that although they support the woman's fundamental right to choose abortion, they overwhelmingly condemned the use of that knowledge for sex selective purposes. This ideological stance problematised their interaction with their clients who wished to sex select. They dealt with this conflict of interest by out-referring or evoking female autonomy. However their ethical stance was complicated by the fact that 60 per cent of the counsellors would prefer to know the foetal sex during their own pregnancies.[60]

Studies conducted in the United States reveal a gender preference. A survey of 242 undergraduates, for example, assessed the attitudes toward the use of sex-selection technology and their gender preferences for first- and second-born offspring. Of this sample, 31 per cent of the respondents endorsed the use of sex selection technologies. A small subsection of

non-whites were more accepting of these technologies than were the whites. (In this survey, non-white meant Blacks and Hispanics.) There was a significant preference for first-born males among all respondents, with the non-white subset expressing a stronger preference. Students from rural areas had a stronger male preference than did those students from urban areas. The gender preference of the second-born was independent of the first-born, with 54 per cent of the potential users desiring sons as both first and second children.[61]

Another study in the *Journal of Psychology* reported that 22.8 per cent of predominantly rural, conservative American students showed acceptance for the hypothetical scenario of sex determination performed by amniocentesis followed by abortion in the twelfth week of pregnancy. (In reality, amniocentesis cannot be done at this point in gestation.) Still, 17.9 per cent indicated acceptance for methods that were current as of 1984. Male respondents indicated a greater and more consistent approval than did females. Females showed an increasing tendency to support sex selection as the hypothetical situation grew more complicated.[62]

While the numbers of individuals who prefer sons seems small, it is important to remember that sex selection in India is done by the minority as well. At first sight the figure of 8,000 sex-selective abortions in Bombay looks dramatic. But what does that total represent when we do not know the total number of births, total number of abortions and an approximation of the proportion of sex-selective abortion, especially in a city whose population is over 10 million? It is extremely likely that only a small segment of the population is evoking sex selection in India. This is not intended to trivialise the occurrence, as even a low-probability event occurring in a large population produces a significant absolute figure.

At this point, it is possible to offer some conjectures. Sikhs in Vancouver seek to have families with a small number of children, responding to the particular economic environment in which they are situated. As we will see below, sex selection among Vancouver Sikhs is not necessarily aimed at eliminating daughters, but rather at limiting the number of daughters for whom dowries must be paid. We must really challenge the notions that are put forth by individuals like Stephens who actively construct these types of prejudices as those of the exotic other while questioning the conjunction of male preference and sex-selective technologies globally.

The medical establishment is manufacturing conceptual possibilities that capitalise on the preferences and prejudices of all parents who can afford the technology. Sex preferences are catered for by numerous medical options that roughly fall into two categories: post-conception sex

selection and pre-conception sex selection. Dr Stephens' business is representative of the first. But the latter is a blossoming business as well. Couples can have their sperm separated by centrifugation techniques. Another technique boasts that because female sperm run slower than male sperm in one separation technique, the male sperm, having reached the finish line first, can be collected for insemination. Fertilisation can occur in-vitro and the zygote of preferred gender can be selected for implantation. Of course, gender is not the only preference being catered for. Down's syndrome can be checked for with amniocentesis as can gross abnormalities be visualised by ultrasound. In short, the foetus is becoming a product rolling off an assembly line with quality control checks being performed at different points along the gestation period. More and more, doctors portray that they can maximise the potential for a perfect child and parents are increasingly expecting that they can deliver on their guarantees.[63]

Ultrasound is a very important instrument that has come to mediate the relationship between the doctor and the expectant parent. As stated earlier, the utilisation of ultrasound in the doctor–client relationship in North America has a very different trajectory from the utilisation of ultrasound in India.[64] An examination of the different kinds of advertisements produced by Dr Stephens for Punjabi/Sikh and other clients clearly illustrates the social meanings of ultrasound.

In an advertisement intended for non-Asians the main idea is the facilitation of mother–child bonding and relieving maternal anxiety. There is also the presence of the warmly smiling and reassuring face of Dr Stephens overseeing letters from satisfied mothers. One of the letters details the sorrow of one woman whose foetus was improperly diagnosed as a male and died twelve hours after birth. She laments that if she had gone to Stephens, she would have known that she was carrying a girl and could have come to know her better before her early death. She writes of her current pregnancy that she has been relieved to know that it is developing normally and that it is a girl. She can now maximise precious bonding time with her foetus. Another letter expresses relief that this procedure is non-invasive unlike amniocentesis and rejoices in the fact that her girls will call her foetus 'little brother' instead of the 'new baby'. In another letter, Sharlene reassures Dr Stephens that his business is absolutely moral. Apparently, he diagnosed her twin male foetuses with some abnormality, which she then terminated.

The focus of this advertisement is clearly upon the role of ultrasound (and to some extent amniocentesis) to facilitate the developing relationship between the mother and her foetus. Dr Stephens becomes the in-

dividual necessary for fostering this early relationship. In Sharlene's letter, it is boys that are aborted. Stephens conflates abortion for abnormalities and abortion for femaleness. This notice, of course, obfuscates the fact that his services are used explicitly by Punjabis to male select. Sharlene writes 'No one can say what is right or wrong until they have been there!' The reader is invited to either forget the real issue of this controversy, or equate having a abnormal child with having a female child. One is not invited to criticise abortion motivated by the desire to bear only perfect products of conception. In fact, if one were to challenge this supposition, the ballast of Stephens' legitimacy could begin to disintegrate. Of course, the consequences of this query upon other dimensions of the choice debate could be disastrous for the autonomy of the female patient vis-a-vis her reproductive freedom.

In another advertisement targeted at Western clients entitled 'It's a Girl' a picture of a healthy foetus is provided. Again, Stephens invites a client to come to his office and be assured 'that her baby is "normal"'.

In the advertisements for the Indo-Canadian press, there is however no picture of the beaming Dr Stephens, no sonogram of an allegedly female foetus, no mention of mother–child bonding, no mention of the take-home video. In fact, I wonder if Punjabi/Sikh women take the video home with them, and if they do, what that video means to them. Rather, the consumer is guaranteed privacy, that no referral is necessary, that there will be no doctor's report, immediate availability of test results, and 100 per cent accuracy. Stephens prefigures the Punjabi/Sikh client who does not need to see a picture of her developing, normal, perfect little girl in the advertisement. Why is it important that there is no doctor's report, that privacy is guaranteed, and that the results are 100 per cent accurate and available immediately? The lack of a paper trail certainly makes it hard to uncover what percentage of female diagnosis result in female abortions. Is it to be hidden from family members who can later rejoice in the birth of a son, not knowing that it took three abortions to get that son? Is it to be a secret from other community members? Accuracy and expediency translates to the ability to abort only females if desired within the twelve-week limit on abortion in Canada. The line in the advertisement that insures the availability of abortion services is either in Punjabi or in English with the Punjabi translation below it. Furthermore, the relevant information 'What is the child to be born? Boy or Girl?' and 'Information is also given about Abortion Clinic' are rendered in Punjabi along with information on relevant phone numbers to call. With his differential deployment of English and Punjabi, is Dr Stephens anticipating that fewer people will understand this information if it is written in English only?

These advertisements graphically illustrate the ways in which ultrasound is used. The San Jose clinic advertisements utilise the benign meanings of ultrasound that are assigned by most North Americans. Ultrasound is a diagnostic technique that responsible pregnant women are told they should use. It checks for potential malformations of the foetus, which may or may not be corrected in utero, or it reassures the mother of the normal course of development of her foetus. It has the advantage of providing information about the gender of the foetus such that she can go out and buy pink yarn for its blanket. In the notices in the Indo-Canadian press, Dr Stephens taps into the social meanings of ultrasound to the Indo-Canadian community which has the memory of sex determination in India, where sex determination and sex selection are collapsible. It is not coincidental that his notices in the Indo-Canadian press more closely resemble those in such Indian papers as *The Hindustan Times* than they do the advertisements for the San Jose clinic.

What is occurring in Vancouver is the result of the interaction between the expansionist role of medicine in the process of conceiving, gestating and delivering the 'perfect, wanted baby' and permuted gender preferences in the Sikh/Vancouver community. But it should not be forgotten that the medical birth-controlling establishment is not simply responding to 'ethnic communities' but to societies in general. Dr Ericcson's sex-preselection franchise attests to this. He has opened franchised clinics in 46 countries in Europe, America, Asia and Latin America. He announced in a bulletin that of 263 couples, 248 of them wanted sons and 15 wanted girls.[65]

Controlling Sexual Capital and the Maintenance of Sikh Identity

The numerous articles in the Indo-Canadian press attest to the concern about maintaining the Sikh community's status. The women of the Coalition are defamed not so much for broaching the issue of sex selection, but doing so in a space that is accessible to non-Indo-Canadians. By going to the public and asking for state intervention, Mahila corroborates the numerous claims that Asian women are hapless victims in the hands of the Indian patriarch. It is specifically the behaviour of women that solicits criticism from the Indo-Canadian press. We have also seen, particularly in the Indo-Canadian press, that women are constituted as the reproducers of Punjabi culture. However, women are not simply reproducing cultural

institutions, they are also modifying them as well. This may be a source of tension that underlies the practice of sex selection in the diaspora.

Maintaining the system of arranged marriage is a central concern for diasporic Sikh communities as it is intimately bound up with the upholding of *izzat* (family honour). *Izzat* is heavily dependent upon the intact chastity of daughters upon being delivered into their husbands' households.[66] Any tendencies to 'liberalise' are countered by continued arrival of new immigrants into a community that seeks to assert the 'traditional' ways. This continued influx of new immigrants is a powerful way to maintain a Sikh identity.[67]

However, this pattern of recent migrations and maintenance of ties with originating village not only helps to oversee the regulation of female sexuality, but it also allows women to assert surveillance mechanism over male behaviour. The behaviour of men (including his ability to regulate their daughters' sexuality) affects the *izzat* of their families in India. Failure of a father to regulate his daughters' sexuality, in addition to other actions that may disgrace his family, may have dire consequences for future arranged marriages within his family. Hence maintaining *izzat* is central to the structure of the arranged marriage.

Problems arise when Sikh girls attend public schools, where females and males are encouraged to work together. There undoubtedly appears to be greater anxiety about the coming and goings of girls than boys. Margaret Gibson found, for example, in a Northern California Sikh community that boys were encouraged to engage in extracurricular activities, go out with friends after school or see films in the evenings. Girls on the other hand could only rarely meet with girl friends after school. Instead, their social activities revolved around the immediate and/or extended family that lived nearby. This overprotection stems from parental/familial concern for the female child's reputation. One of her informants said of his daughters that 'all our respect is in their hands.'[68] James Chadney has produced similar findings for Vancouver Sikhs. He concludes that because female sexuality is stringently guarded, they marry later than their counterparts in India. Their average age of marriage is very similar to that of non-Sikh Canadians. Thus a family does not necessarily have to sacrifice their daughters' education to ensure her virginity in marriage.[69] Additionally, there is a strong preference that at least one of the marital partners should be from India. Chadney found that of 194 marriages performed under the auspices of the Vancouver Gurdwara from 1951-1972, only 24 took place wherein both spouses were born in Canada. Ninety-nine cases involved both spouses from India. Not all marriages of course take place in gurdwaras. Some families have the ceremony

elsewhere so that alcohol can be consumed. Inevitably, families do not uniformly succeed in handing over a virginal daughter in marriage. Women should not be viewed simply as passive participants in a structure that is imposed upon them from above. Instead, many young women accept the structure, to varying degrees, and alter it as they move within it. Dowry is an excellent example of female reproduction of a cultural practice.

Women as 'Cultural Entrepreneurs': Dowry Transformation in the Diaspora

This paper has assiduously tried to avoid the trap that Mohanty has laid for Western feminists.[70] She admonishes Western feminists who constitute Women as a coherent group on the solitary basis that they have two X chromosomes. By positing such a notion of Woman, a paradigm is set up in which women are exploited and men are the exploiters. She writes: 'Western feminist discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group which is placed in kinship, legal, and other structures, define Third World women as subjects outside social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted through these very social structures.' We have seen that simply being a woman does not imply a certain alignment ideologically with respect to sex selection. Furthermore it has been suggested that 'patriarchy' is not simply imposed upon the woman-victim from above, based upon the male/female, oppressor/oppressed duality. Dowry in the diaspora provides an opportunity to examine female agency in constituting the social structures through which women are also constituted.

The practice of the arranged marriage in Vancouver is accompanied by dowry. In fact, since the early 1980s the practice of giving dowry has been gaining momentum in Vancouver. Ragh Singh Bains of the Immigrant Services Society alleges that some families are paying as much as $60,000 for their daughter's dowry and that the less fortunate are resorting to taking out loans.[71] Similarly, harassment of new brides for insufficient dowry is also increasing in the Vancouver area as demands for dowry are unprecedented in their exorbitance. Bains attributes this increase toward outrageous dowry demands (cars or house down payments) to the increased ties with families in India.

Dowry has a diasporic aspect in that the brides are helping to pay for their dowries. Margaret Gibson reported of a Northern California Sikh community, that while both boys and girls worked while in high school, their earnings were used differently. While the boys' earnings may be used

for recreation or be applied toward family expenditures, the girls' earnings were saved for their dowry.[72] Parminder Bhachu observed women in Great Britain actively participating in their own dowries.[73] She attributes women's increasing ability to renegotiate 'tradition' to their increasing involvement with the labour market which has allowed them to become resource producers rather than resource managers.[74]

Bhachu writes that the Sikh women are 'cultural entrepreneurs who are actively engaging with their cultural frameworks, whilst continuously transforming them.'[75] In this study, she found that brides that did not have their own earning base invariably had a basic 21-item *daajs* (dowry), while earning brides had very elaborate and voluminous *daajs*. The latter dowries were inclusive of higher quality garments than those in the former, personal accessories, and household items (china sets, silver cutlery, electronic entertainment devices). Furthermore, these items were purchased by the brides themselves for their use in the marriage.[76]

Unfortunately, this type of study has not been conducted in the Vancouver Sikh community. It does not seem unreasonable however to suspect that the women in Vancouver are also participating in financing their dowries.

Sex Selection in the Diaspora Revisited

At first sight, it may appear surprising that sex selection has taken root in the Vancouver Sikh community. Sikh women are working, and have been given similar educational opportunities to their brothers. But these 'advances' have their own costs. Throughout their education, girls must interact with boys. Thus extensive surveillance is required to ensure their chastity, which is of paramount importance to numerous other familial structures. Dowry has become a prestige issue in North America. Rather than being abandoned it is apparently flourishing. Even though women are participating in their own dowries, it is clear that they lack the resources to participate fully in revenue-raising. In fact, one could suggest that from a parent's viewpoint it is more stressful to have daughters in the diaspora than in India.

Interestingly enough, Dr Stephens explained to me in an interview that very rarely have patients come to him during their first pregnancy. Having one daughter may not be problematic, if we can take Dr Stephens' authority on this matter. Families, though they do not necessarily want many daughters on whom their family honour is dependent, do require wives for their sons. Additionally, older daughters can assist with childcare and other domestic work. However while people may not think

about it explicitly, it is the trend, according to Chadney's data, that Canada-born children take India-born spouses. Hence if there are imagined shortages of Canada-born women for their sons, there is the potential (and preferred) option of taking a wife from India. Additionally, the wife's family will pay a substantial dowry to obtain a husband in Canada. Hence there is an imagined source of wives for their sons and furthermore, women and their sexuality vis-a-vis their reproductive potential constitute a sexual capital in an economy of culture. Again, while one should not minimize the potential harm of sex selection, one cannot view the practice as an irrational attempt to completely eliminate daughters, but rather as an attempt to limit the number of daughters that can be afforded. But why is it that sex selection persists in the diaspora? Why is the practice of dowry and bride harassment becoming more prevalent than it was in the recent past in the Vancouver community? To what extent are women coopting, altering, or subverting dowry and/or the pressures to limit the number of daughters? What is the potential harm of these practices? These questions require answers desperately.

CONCLUSIONS

As a subject for diasporic studies, this controversy has illuminated some of the types of conflict between an immigrant community and its social environment. In turn, the conflict with its host environment is mutually constitutive of internal conflicts as well. In this case, we have seen the tension between the Sikh community and the Canadian public because this controversy over male selection was divulged in the mainstream media, thereby 'corroborating' its stereotypical representations. Since the Coalition was responsible for directing the judgmental gaze of the Canadian (and American) public to the Sikh community, the community and the Coalition assumed adversarial roles. These mutually constitutive tensions are revealing in several senses. On the one hand, they uncover the diasporic nature of the controversy of sex selection in Vancouver compared to the same controversy in India or the Punjab. The fear of having a 'favoured, model minority' status challenged by a presumed racist and unsympathetic host community, which is so prominent in this debate, has no comparable structure in India. These tensions also reveal that the safe space in which the community can deal with its conflict is really rather limited.

As we have seen, these tensions and conflicts assume prominence when we examine the ways in which the public sphere was used by different individuals involved in this controversy. In the non-Indo-Canadian press and in their own outreach materials, we saw the unavoidable ambivalence

of Mahila and the Coalition. They had to negotiate their desired end, which is the abolition of sex selection, with their obligations to the community in which they live and participate. Furthermore, they had to be cautious, keeping a constant eye on what others were saying about their community in the public sphere. Their silence on such issues as dowry and selective celebrations of the birth of boys is interesting. Are they ambivalent about these practices as well? Are they opposed to these practices but feel incapable of bringing these issues to the scrutiny of the public. The response of the Indo-Canadian press revealed ambivalence of its own. While it made attempts at discussing women's issues and greater autonomy for women, it also lambasted Mahila for striking out an autonomous territory. It managed on several occasions to speak to women's autonomy without discussing the patriarchal structures that seek to keep women in their place.

By examining the practice of sex selection in Vancouver, we are also provided with an opportunity to see the synergism between patriarchal formations among this community, patriarchal and misogynist formations in the host community, capitalism, and the contexts of child-bearing, particularly in the US where child-bearing has become heavily commodified and mediated by a capitalistic medical infrastructure. Perhaps by looking closely at these interlocking structures, we can come closer to asking why it is that dowry, bride harassment and sex selection have developed among Vancouver Sikhs. Similarly, by examining the interaction of the Sikh community and its host community, we can also see the opportunity for resistance and cooptation, as the dowry transformation illustrates.

This controversy is an important moment in the history of the Punjabi community because it is a historic occasion when women have been active and public in endeavouring to bring the state into involvement with the concerns articulated by Sikh women. Women are not however responding in unison. The activities of the Coalition not only reveal the tensions between the Coalition and the community, but also tensions among different women. For some women, whose choices are defended by Dr Stephens, the Coalition is not addressing the real problems which are the pressures that compel women to sex select. This complicates thinking about meaningful resistance and agency. Mahila's representation of women in the public sphere is problematic because it reduces women to easily-swayed objects of patriarchies via Dr Stephens' advertisements. But what is freedom to choose to sex select if it is done to subvert or avoid potential harm to the expectant mother? Mahila's statements tend to portray women as victims of an imposed structure from above, neglecting the ways in which women cultivate and transform culture even as they

reproduce it, as the dowry issue illustrates. For other women, such as those of the nascent SAWAN, Mahila and the Coalition may not be doing enough to criticise the patriarchal structures that uphold and support sex selection. However, will abandoning Mahila's strategy of straining to work within the community so push SAWAN to the ineffectual margins that women will avoid it?

Aside from the location of this controversy as a diasporic topic, it is also significant because it exists in a particular ethical space that needs to be interrogated. Such a query demonstrates the ambivalence and confusion of the American and Canadian publics on the issue of abortion that extends far beyond the simple question of whether or not abortion should be legal, since the prevalent legal atmosphere provides for this right. Rather, it illustrates that there is no homogeneous opinion upon what is an ethical boundary for abortion rights. If we refute Stephens' claim that aborting imperfect foetuses is ethical, can we also refute the claim that sex selective abortions are ethical? Can limiting these types of abortions be situated such that it does not condemn women as incapable of making important decisions. Who should decide what is 'ethical'? This conflict over sex-selective abortions throws into relief how arbitrary our current application of bounding abortion rights really is.

Interrogating the ethical space of this occurrence of sex selection also provides an opportunity to question the multicultural agenda. Is Stephens' professed acceptance of 'another's culture' merely a colonising move? What are the consequences of accepting wholesale the arguments put forth by moral and cultural relativism that justify practices that affect men and women differently. Are some practices such as sex-selective abortions or genital mutilation the practice of 'traditional societies' or human rights violations? Why is it that when similar practices occur in the generic American (or Canadian) publics they are coded differently? Where is the outcry at sperm selection that achieves the same effect as sex-selective abortions? Why was the cutting of Mr Bobbit more appalling and criminal then the genital mutilation of hundreds of thousands of women? While this is a somewhat flippant question, it is not entirely without merit. On the other hand, will rejecting the arguments of cultural and moral relativism in these cases inveigh against other claims put forth in the multicultural agenda, such as the wearing of turbans?

Of course, questioning the ethical space that Dr Stephens has cultivated allows us to draw out some of the features of the mother–foetus-doctor relationship that are really quite recent. Who does this type of relationship benefit? What happens when a technology like ultrasound, that has different cultural and social meanings, is used in two very different ways

depending upon the community to which it is marketed? By recontextualising sex selection in the West, we can see again the ways in which this type of medicalisation of the birth process locks onto prejudices and preferences of not only the Sikh community, but other communities as well. By critically questioning the expansion of this form of medical control into our lives, we can also begin questioning the globalisation of medical technology as well. In short, we realise that sex selection in the Punjab and Vancouver, though very different in some respects, are very similar. And furthermore, sex selection among Sikhs is not so dissimilar from the types of reproductive technology that are utilised by non-Sikhs.

Notes

1. I am greatly indebted to a number of people: J.S. Taylor, Professor Ronald Inden, Raminder Dosanjh, Harji Sangram and Dr. John. D. Stephens. Without their help, this paper would not have been possible. I am also grateful to *Ms.* magazine which ran a small article on this issue in the Winter of 1994. Moreover, the editorial staff of *Ms.* provided me with the initial contacts for this research.
2. See Chapter Two of C.L. Bosk, *All God's Mistakes: Genetic Counselling in a Pediatric Hospital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). I would like to thank J.S. Taylor who provided me with this reference.
3. Unless noted elsewhere, all information in this section is derived from interviews with Dr Stephens, Raminder Dosanjh and Harji Sangram in January, February and March 1994.
4. *Official ABMS Directory of Board Certified Medical Specialists* (New Providence, NJ: Marquis Who's Who, 1994), 3211.
5. Raminder Dosanjh is a prominent spokeswoman and organiser for Mahila.
6. In 1992 the Supreme Court upheld Pennsylvania's extensive restrictions on abortion access. Thus outlawing sex selective abortions.
7. J.D. Stephens, 'Morality of Induced Abortion and Freedom of Choice.' *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 158, 1 (1988), 218.
8. D. Smith, 'Congratulations, You're Going to Have a Boy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1991.
9. Audre Lourde et al., 'Raising Sons: We know our Dreams for our Daughters. What about our Sons?', *Ms.*, 4, 3 (1993), 43-50.
10. AWIDOO representatives spoke at an Illinois NARRAL conference on 26 March 1993.
11. J.D. Stephens, *Lancet*, 337, 8736 (1991), 739.
12. Pamela Fayerman, 'Ads. for Telling Fetal Gender Spark Boycott', *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 September 1993.
13. H.L. Davis, 'Doctor Defends Tests to Determine Unborn Baby's Sex; Denies He Targets East Indians Who May Have Preference for Boys', *The Buffalo News*, 15 August 1993.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
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Interpretations of the Poetry of Bullhe Shah

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The poetry of Bullhe Shah (1680-1758) is well known throughout the Punjab. There has been some debate, however, as to how exactly to determine the source of his religious inclinations. He has been described as a Vedantic Sufi and a strictly orthodox Muslim. This paper considers the varying interpretations of Bullhe Shah's poetry, the possible reasons for the wide range of interpretations, and offers some suggestions as to other ways in which Bullhe Shah's work might be understood.

Bullhe Shah (1680-1758) is one of the most popular poets of the Punjab. His simple, straightforward verse is known to Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and his wide appeal has led scholars to study his poetry. There has been some controversy, however, as to how to describe Bullhe Shah's particular brand of mysticism. He was certainly a Sufi, but some interpreters refer to Bullhe Shah as a 'Vedantic Sufi' or a 'Vaishnava Vedantic Sufi'; others portray him as a strictly orthodox Muslim. This paper explores these interpretations of Bullhe Shah. Why is he known to some as a Vedantic Sufi (and what exactly does it mean to be a Vedantic Sufi) and to others as a purely orthodox Muslim? What is behind these widely divergent interpretations of his poetry? I will begin with a brief introduction to Bullhe Shah's life and works, consider some of the scholarly interpretations of Bullhe Shah, using two famous poems as examples, and conclude with some comments on possible alternative interpretations of Bullhe Shah.

Those who identify Bullhe Shah with terms such as 'Vedantic Sufi' are implicitly arguing for some sort of influence of the Hindu tradition upon the Islam of the Punjab. There has indeed been a great deal of interaction among Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in the Punjab, but the exact nature of this interaction is not entirely clear.[1] Perhaps best known is the discussion about syncretism and Sikhism, where some have suggested that Sikhism

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arose as a conscious attempt to unite the best features of Hinduism and Islam. Scholars such as W.H. McLeod have argued against this claim of syncretism.[2]

Certain problems arise in assessing claims of religious influence and borrowing such as those made about Bullhe Shah. What precisely do we mean when we say that someone was 'influenced' by another religious tradition? What sort of historical evidence is available to demonstrate conclusively that influence or borrowing actually happened? What are the mechanisms through which influence occurs? When we look at situations in which influence or borrowing seem to have occurred, we must also be careful about our own conception of the religious traditions involved.

Often those who have argued for influence and borrowing have done so from the perspective that Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism in the Punjab are essentially separate religions, with clear boundaries and unique systems of belief and practice. This is to some degree a modern idea informed by the discussion of religious identity that has been carried out both in colonial and independent India and Pakistan. We know less about conceptions of religious identity in the medieval period, so it is dangerous to assume modern notions of religious community in looking at religious compositions from an earlier time. This is especially true of the Punjab in Bullhe Shah's time. Sikhism was still taking shape as a separate religious tradition (it was in 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh established the *khālsā*), and there were new converts to Islam (who nonetheless may still have preserved some 'Hindu' practices).[3]

Perhaps most importantly, we must ask what is the purpose behind making claims of religious influence and borrowing. Those who argue for syncretism or borrowing may have certain goals in mind—for example, if Sikhism is shown to be taken from the best of Islam and Hinduism, then it transcends both; if Punjabi Sufi poetry is strongly influenced by Hindu mysticism, then it shows that the Sufis realised that Hinduism was superior, or that Sufism is simply a derivative form of Hindu mysticism.

If we keep such issues in mind when we look at the various interpretations of Bullhe Shah, it becomes clear that his work has been appropriated for varying agendas. Despite the many claims about Bullhe Shah's inspiration and the message of his work, the bulk of the scholarship concerning him gives little attention to the actual content of his compositions.

THE LIFE OF BULLHE SHAH

Not much is known about Bullhe Shah's life. The biographical tradition surrounding him reflects the varying interpretations of Bullhe Shah's

religious inclinations.[4] He was born during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, and would have witnessed much of the turmoil that followed in the Punjab after Aurangzeb's reign ended in 1707. According to most sources, he was born to a Sayyad family in a village near Kasur (now in Pakistan near the Indian border) in 1680.[5] His father, who came to India from Baghdad, worked as a teacher in a mosque. According to some sources, Bullhe Shah was tutored by an Islamic scholar in Kasur, Hadith Ghulam Murtaza.[6] Bullhe Shah had two sisters; neither he nor his sisters ever married.

According to most biographies, Bullhe Shah met Inayat Shah (d. 1735), who was to become his spiritual guide [*murshid*] in Lahore. Inayat Shah was a gardener of the Arain caste, much lower in status than the Sayyads. Bullhe Shah's family was upset when he accepted Inayat Shah as his spiritual guide, but Bullhe Shah was determined to remain his disciple, as described in one of his poems:[7]

Bullhe nũ samjhāvan āīã bhainã te bharjāīã
man lai Bullhīā sāḍā kahnā chaḍ de pallā rāīã
ãl nabī aulād 'alī nũ tũ kiũ likã lāīã
jeh.rā sānũ sayyad sadde dozakh milan sazāīã
jo koī sānũ rāė ākhe bahishtī pīngã pāīã
rāė sāė sabhnī thāī rabb dī āī beparvāī
sohnīã pare haṭāīã te kojhīã lai gal lāīã
je tũ loṛe bāgh bahārã cākar ho jā rāīã
Bullhe Shah dī zāt kīh puchne shākar ho razāīã

Bullhe's sisters and sisters-in-law have come to give him advice.

Consider what we have to say, Bullhe, and let go of this Arain.
Why have you brought disgrace to the family of the Prophet and the descendants of Ali?
[Bullhe replied] Whoever calls me a Sayyad will be punished in hell, but if someone should call me an Arain, he will have swings in heaven.
There are Arains and Sayyads everywhere—it makes no difference to God.
They've pushed away what is beautiful, and embraced the ugly.
If you want springtime's garden, become a servant of the Arain.
Why do you ask about Bullhe Shah's birth?
Be thankful for your pleasures.

Most biographical accounts report that Inayat Shah gave Bullhe Shah instruction in Sufi practices, but the teacher and student became estranged

when Bullhe Shah neglected to follow all the dictates of Islamic law [*sharī'ah*], and Bullhe Shah spent 12 years on his own trying to figure out how to regain the good graces of his guide. He learned to sing and dance, and began to compose his own *kāfīs* or verses. When Inayat Shah heard him sing, he forgave Bullhe Shah and resumed his instruction.

Inayat Shah was a member of the Shaṭṭārī order of Sufis.[8] The Shaṭṭārīs were particularly influenced by the pantheism of Ibn 'Arabī (1164-1240) and were also often well-acquainted with Hindu mysticism. Inayat himself wrote a number of treatises in Persian, and in some of his writings he discussed the practice of *Yoga*.[9]

THE POETRY OF BULLHE SHAH

There is no widely accepted critical edition of the works of Bullhe Shah, although there are numerous collections of verses attributed to him both in Perso-Arabic script and Gurmukhi.[10] Most collections are based upon transcriptions of Bullhe Shah's poems as sung by *qawwāls*; the earliest extant written versions of Bullhe Shah's work are from the late-nineteenth century. Different versions reflect dialectal variations, and perhaps the interpolations of *qawwāls* themselves. Nazir Ahmad, in his 1976 study of Bullhe Shah's work, notes the poor editing in many of the collections of Bullhe Shah's poetry. He cites numerous spelling and grammatical errors, metrical flaws and the inclusion of poems that are known to be the work of other poets.[11] Furthermore, given the lack of surviving manuscripts, it is virtually impossible to determine which poems attributed to Bullhe Shah were indeed composed by him. Ahmad resorted to asking ten Punjabi poets to read 66 *kāfīs* attributed to Bullhe Shah and decide which were authentic.[12] It is thus more precise to speak of a Bullhe Shah tradition, a body of poetry attributed to Bullhe Shah.

It is the *kāfīs* of Bullhe Shah which are most well known. Other forms of poetry are attributed to him as well: two complete and one partial *siharfī* (poems in which each verse begins with a letter of the Persian alphabet), one *bārā māh* (an account of separation from God throughout the 12 months of the year with union occurring at the end), one *aṭhvāra* (a description of seven days spent longing for God and meeting him on the eighth day), a number of couplets, and poems called *Gaṇḍhā* ('knots'; poems which refer to the practice of tying knots in a string to keep track of one's schedule).[13]

The predominant theme in Bullhe Shah's poetry is the pain of separation from God. Like many Punjabi Sufi poets, he drew images from rural life in the Punjab; he often used the spinning of cotton as a metaphor for

preparation for meeting with God, imagining himself as a young girl spinning cotton to prepare her dowry. Bullhe Shah also made many references to the famous story of the romance between Hir and Ranjha,[14] himself assuming the role of Hir, longing for her beloved Ranjha. He spoke of Takhat Hazara, Ranjha's home village, as the place where one would meet God.

Hājī lok Makke nū jānde/asā jānā Takhat Hazāra [15]

Pilgrims go to Mecca, but I shall go to Takhat Hazara.

Many of Bullhe Shah's poems express this idea that true religious experience is found not through outward performance of religious duties, such as prayer and pilgrimage, but through an individual, direct experience (mediated by the spiritual guide). A number of poems express the idea that distinctions on the basis of being Sunni or Shī'ah, or Hindu or Muslim are useless.[16] As will be discussed later, his poetry makes little reference to the technical terms of either Sufi or Vedantic practice; he does make a number of references to Quranic verses and Islamic lore.

INTERPRETATION OF BULLHE SHAH

Bullhe Shah's poetry (as sung by *qawwāls*) is known to many Muslim, Hindu and Sikh Punjabis in both India and Pakistan; he is considered a great religious seeker. To some extent each community has claimed him as its own, leading to widely divergent explanations of the sources of Bullhe Shah's inspiration.

The most influential interpreter of Bullhe Shah in English is Lajwanti Rama Krishna, who published her study of Punjabi Sufi poets in 1938. No one has since attempted a study of Punjabi Sufi poetry on such a scale. Rama Krishna sums up her perspective on the Punjabi Sufis in her introduction:

> Hindu Vedantic thought overpowered their beliefs, Bhagavatism influenced their ideas, and it was a surprising fact that in the Punjab, the stronghold of Islam, Mussulman mystics held the view that save God there was no reality; all else, therefore, became illusion or the Hindu maya.[17]

Rama Krishna classified Bullhe Shah as a 'philosophic' Sufi; by this she meant that he had absorbed the essence of Vedanta, and considered all differences of religion and country to be immaterial.[18]

Rama Krishna considered Bullhe Shah to have passed through three

phases in his life as a mystic. The first phase was the period after his meeting with Inayat Shah and preliminary study of Sufism. She argues that the verse from this phase of his life is 'weak in thought and very commonplace'[19] because 'in this period Bullhe was still attached to his Islamic theological ideas which later on he shook off entirely'.[20] Rama Krishna argues that there is little verse from this period in Bullhe Shah's life, but that 'undue importance is given to this poetry by the Sufis of the orthodox type, because this helps them to save Bullhe Shah from being called a "heretic"'.[21]

In the second phase of his spiritual life, Bullhe Shah assimilated more of what Rama Krishna calls the 'Indian outlook' and resembled an 'advanced type of Sufi' and a 'Vaishnava devotee'.[22] Finally, in the third phase of his life, Bullhe Shah is unique: 'During this time he is a firm believer in Advaita and sees that all-pervading spirit, God, in all and independently of all religions. Like a true Vedantist he does not only see Him in friends and co-believers but in heathens and opponents also'.[23] Thus in Rama Krishna's assessment, Bullhe Shah began his career as a poet as an orthodox Muslim composing uninteresting verse, and under the influence of the 'Indian outlook' he became a vedantin and therefore a superior poet. Rama Krishna gives no indication as to how she determined which of Bullhe Shah's poems came from which period of his life.

A similar interpretation of Bullhe Shah is offered by Sadhu Ram Sharda in his *Sufi Thought: Its Development in Panjab and Its Impact on Panjabi literature from Baba Farid to 1850 AD*. Sharda argues that Vedantic thought had long had an influence on Sufism.[24] He terms Bullhe Shah a 'Vaishnava Vedanta Sufi' although he does not define this term precisely.[25] He argues that even when Bullhe Shah uses Islamic terminology in his poetry, the spirit of the poetry is Vaishnava.[26] He concludes his discussion of Punjabi Sufi poetry with the statement that although the Sufis learned much from the Hindus, the Hindus had nothing to learn from the Sufis.[27]

Although both Rama Krishna and Sharda argue that Bullhe Shah was influenced by Vedanta, neither gives any conclusive supporting evidence for these claims other than their own interpretations of certain Bullhe Shah's poems. A similar tendency can be seen in Surindar Singh Kohli's book on Bullhe Shah. Kohli cites this line of Bullhe Shah's:

Ahd Ahmad vic farak na Bulhiā, ik rattā bhet marorī dā

Kohli gives a literal translation: 'There is no difference between *Ahad* and *Ahmad*, the secret is that of the twist of "M"'. The verse adopts a theme common in Sufi poetry—the fact that *Ahad*, one of the traditional 99

names for God in Islam, is so similar to the name *Ahmad*, or Muhammad, the only orthographical difference being the loop of the letter 'm' or *mīm*. But consider Kohli's extended interpretation of this verse: '*Ahd* is the unmanifested Brahman (*nirguṇa*) and *Ahmad* is the manifested Brahman (*saguṇa*). The twist of "M" is the *māyā*'.[28] There is no hint whatsoever in the original verse of any such meaning—the lines draw upon a traditional Islamic theme. Kohli, however, has taken the spirit of the verse to be Vedantic.

There are numerous other examples of such interpretations of Bullhe Shah. Atam Singh, who translated a number of Bullhe Shah's verses into English, wrote that 'in his philosophy of religion, Bullhe Shah combines what is best in Islam with Hindu Vedantism'.[29] Kuldip Singh similarly argues that Bullhe Shah was a complete Advaitavadi who had reached the state of complete Brahma-knowledge [*pūraṇ braham giānī dī avasthā*].[30] There is also a recent publication of the Radha Soami Satsang which explains that Bullhe Shah's verses are in complete accordance with the beliefs of the Radha Soami sect.[31]

Some scholars of Punjabi poetry have tried to correct this trend towards portraying Bullhe Shah as having been more profoundly influenced by Hinduism than any other tradition. In his article 'Bullhe Shah dā Tasawwuf', published in Pakistan, Trilochan Singh argues that Bullhe Shah was not a vedantin or a 'bigoted Muslim' but that he was simply a Sufi. Trilochan Singh notes the tendency of Rama Krishna and other scholars to make Bullhe Shah into something that he likely was not—a disciple of Sankara's with a loincloth and a topknot [*'langoṭī coṭī vālā Śankarācārya dā Vedāntī celā'*].[32] Trilochan Singh, however, is in the minority among non-Muslim interpreters, and his brief article does not thoroughly explore the issue of Bullhe Shah's actual religious inclinations.

The attempt on the part of Hindu and Sikh scholars to portray Bullhe Shah as a vedantin has inspired Muslim scholars to offer counter-arguments. Many have argued that Bullhe Shah's ideas come exclusively from the influence of the theory of unity of being (*wahdat-al-wujūd*) of the Spanish mystic Ibn-'Arabī.[33] There has also been debate among Muslim scholars as to whether Bullhe Shah was an orthodox Muslim, or whether he abandoned the following of *sharī'ah*. In the biographical tradition surrounding Bullhe Shah, there are many authors who condemn him for not following the dictates of Islamic law.[34]

Some scholars are clearly offended by the interpretation of Rama Krishna and others and resort to direct attacks. Sayyad Nazir Ahmad, for example, writes of Rama Krishna: 'This expert lady must surely prepare *maṭar pulāo, panīr tikka*, and *sāg kofta*, so it is not surprising that she is

now making Advaita out of Islamic Sufism and placing it before us. It is our bad luck that we can't swallow it'.[35] In his 1982 translation of selected verses of Bullhe Shah, Taufiq Rafat notes that 'the scholarly probing into the origins of Bullhe Shah's mysticism has become a bit of a bore over the years'[36] and argues that no one has as yet done a thorough study of the poet. The editors of recent collections agree that there is still much to be done in the study of Bullhe Shah—such as further attempts to determine the authenticity of verses attributed to him, an attempt to assess his poetical style and a serious study of his mysticism.[37]

Bullhe Shah has not received a great deal of attention from Western scholars. C.F. Usborne, a British civil servant who wrote extensively about Punjabi literature, thought that Bullhe Shah's poems showed 'very little elaboration of thought or imagination'.[38] Annemarie Schimmel, a noted scholar of Islamic mysticism, briefly mentions Bullhe Shah in her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* and notes the tendency on the part of Hindu writers to see Hindu influence in Sufi poetry. She argues that while it is easy to understand why some might see such an influence, nonetheless the poetry is thoroughly Islamic in character, as evidenced by its frequent references to veneration of the prophet Muhammad.[39]

A recent anthology of Indian religious literature includes translations of several of Bullhe Shah's poems by Mustansir Mir.[40] Mir cautions against the tendency to understand Bullhe Shah as influenced by Vedanta, arguing that Bullhe Shah is in fact quite clearly situated within the Islamic tradition. Mir distinguishes between a 'critical' aspect of Bullhe Shah's poetry, in which the poet criticises hypocrisy in religious practice (this aspect of the poetry can be appreciated by the adherents of any religion), and the 'constructive' aspect of the poetry, which is 'decidedly Islamic in structure and detail'. He further argues that Bullhe Shah (and another Punjabi Sufi poet, Sultan Bahu), however antinomian he may seem, is 'orthodox' in belief and practice.[41] While it may indeed be useful to consider further which aspects of Bullhe Shah's poetry seem to transcend contemporary religious boundaries, Mir's assertion of Bullhe Shah's 'orthodoxy' is somewhat less convincing.

In a article in 1988 Denis Matringe discusses Kṛṣṇaite and Nāth elements in Bullhe Shah's poetry.[42] Matringe notes that many Punjabi Sufi poets made use of themes from Punjabi popular culture, which included Hindu traditions. Thus Bullhe Shah makes references to God as *Śām* or as a *yogī* (such references are found primarily in the context of poems which make use of the Hir-Ranjha story).[43] It is references such as these which have been used to bolster claims that Bullhe Shah was somehow more Hindu than Muslim.

Matringe's point that Bullhe Shah drew from popular Punjabi traditions, however, is especially important. Whether Bullhe Shah and his contemporaries identified particular aspects of such popular traditions as specifically 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' is a key question (for example, does the term *Śām* necessarily always refer specifically to Krishna, or can it be a more general term for God, such as Kabir's 'Ram'?). Our current conceptions of Hindu and Muslim identity are largely shaped by notions developed in the nineteenth century reform movements and post-Independence discussions of religious identity. It has been common to conceive of Hinduism and Islam as absolute categories with fixed boundaries; thus reformers in both traditions have sought to purify Hinduism and Islam by removing from them 'foreign' or 'alien' elements. When Hinduism and Islam are conceived as fixed and completely separate entities, any instance in which elements from both traditions seem to occur is somehow aberrant and must be explained.

It is this model of Hinduism and Islam which so many interpreters have applied to the works of poets such as Bullhe Shah. Hence the development of new, poorly defined categories such as 'Vedantic Sufi'. It might be more fruitful to think in terms of a regional, popular culture, whose elements are shared by all inhabitants of the region.[44] This would also open the possibility of considering some of the thematic similarities found throughout Punjabi religious literature (e.g., the denunciation of mindlessly performed ritual found in the work of Bullhe Shah, Guru Nanak and others).

TWO POEMS OF BULLHE SHAH

Some of the controversies over the origin of Bullhe Shah's mysticism can be illustrated by considering two of Bullhe Shah's most famous poems. Rama Krishna's discussion of 'What Do I Know [about] Who I Am?' [*Kīh jāṇā̃ māī kaun?*] demonstrates some of the problems typical of the interpretations of Bullhe Shah. In 'The Ever-New Spring of Love' [*Ishq dī navīō navī bahār*] Bullhe Shah expresses some of his ideas about both Hinduism and Islam. This poem suggests other ways of interpreting Bullhe Shah than simply assigning him to a particular category.

Kīh jāṇā̃ māī kaun? [45]

Bullhā kīh jāṇā̃ māī kaun?
Na māī momaṇ vic masītā̃
Na māī vic kufar dīā rītā̃
Na māī pākā̃ vic plītā̃

Na māī mūsī na far 'aūn
Bullhā kīh jānā̃ māī kaun?

Bullha, what do I know about who I am?
I am not one of the faithful in the mosques
I do not follow the ways of pagans
I am not among the pure or the impure
I am not Moses or Pharaoh
Bullha, what do I know about who I am?

Na māī andar bed kitābā̃
Na vic bhangā̃ na sharābā̃
Na vic rindā̃ mast ḳharābā̃
Na vic jāgan na vic saun
Bullhā kīh jānā̃ māī kaun?

I am not in the books of the doctors
Nor did I [indulge in] *bhang* or wine
I am not among the bad, the intoxicated libertines
I am neither awake nor asleep
Bullha, what do I know about who I am?

Na vic shādī na ghamnākī
Na māī vic plītī pākī
na māī ābī na mai ḳhākī
na māī ātish na mai paun
Bullhā kīh jānā̃ māī kaun?

I am neither in joy nor sorrow
I am among neither the impure nor the pure
I am not of water, or earth
I am not of fire, or wind
Bullha, what do I know about who I am?

na māī 'arabī na lāhorī
na māī hindī shahar nagorī
na hindū na turk pashaurī
na māī rahndā vic Nadaun
Bullhā kīh jānā̃ māī kaun?

I am neither Arab nor from Lahore
I am not Indian, or of the city of Nagaur
I am not a Hindu, or a Turk from Peshawar

I don't live in Nadaun
Bullha, what do I know about who I am?

na māī bhet mazhab dā pāiā
na māī ādam havvā jāiā
na māī apnā nām dharāiā
na vic baiṭhan na vic bhaun
Bullhā kīh jānā māī kaun?

I haven't found the secret of religion
I wasn't born of Adam and Eve
I haven't given myself a name
I am neither settled nor unsettled[46]
Bullha, what do I know about who I am?

avval akhar āp nū jānā
na koī dūjā hor pacān ā
maitho hor na koī siānā
Bullhā shauh khaṛā hai kaun
Bullhā kīh jānā māī kaun?

I know myself as the first and last[47]
I recognise no other
No one is more clever than I
Bullha, who stands as the master?
Bullha, what do I know about who I am?

Rama Krishna uses this poem as a demonstration of what she considers to be Bullhe Shah's 'thoroughly Hindu' pantheism. She suggests that Bullhe Shah accepted the idea of reincarnation and that 'his secret of merging in the universal spirit was based on karma'.[48] However there is no direct or indirect reference to these ideas in this poem; the allusions are primarily Islamic. Bullhe Shah speaks of Moses and the Pharaoh, Adam and Eve, but makes no mention of *karma*. His only mention of Hinduism is in the context of his rejection of all such designations. Yet the poem does not seem to be a ringing endorsement of orthodox Islam either; Bullhe Shah says that he is not 'one of the faithful in the mosques'. He describes his quest for self-knowledge, and the fact that he cannot find that knowledge through the traditional practices of Hinduism or Islam. (It should also be noted that Bullhe Shah juxtaposes 'Hindu' and 'Turk', not Hindu and Muslim, suggesting that his understanding of the term 'Hindu' may not have been as an exclusively religious term.)

The most damaging response to Rama Krishna's interpretation of this

poem, however, comes from those who are familiar with Persian Sufi poetry. Nazir Ahmad points out that this poem is an almost literal translation of one of the *ghazals* of Jalaluddin Rumi.[49] Schimmel notes that the works of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (1207-1273) were well known in the Indian subcontinent and that there were many translations of his works into regional languages, including Punjabi and Urdu.[50] It is reasonably safe to assume, given his background, that Bullhe Shah was familiar with Persian Sufi poetry. He is in fact often called the 'Rumi of the Punjab'. Many of his interpreters, however, have little acquaintance with either the specifics of Persian Sufi poetry or even the most basic ideas of Sufism itself. They therefore assume the influence of Hinduism on certain ideas when in fact there may be basis for these ideas in the Islamic mystical tradition as well. Thus a poem in which Bullhe Shah seems to be notably unimpressed by either Hindu or Islamic practices somehow comes to be seen as an example of ringing endorsement of one or the other.

Ishq dī navīō navī bahār [51]

jā māī sabaq ishq dā paṛhīā
masjid kolo jīūṛā daṛīā
puch puch ṭhākur divāre uṛīā
jitthe vajde nad hazār
ishq dī navīō navī bahār

When I learned the lesson of love
My heart grew fearful of the mosque
Questioning, I reached the walls of the temple
Where a thousand conch-horns sound
The ever-new spring of love

ved qurānā paṛh paṛh thakke
sajde kardīā ghus gae matthe
na rabb tīrath na rabb makke
jis pāīā tis nūr anvār
ishq dī navīō navī bahār

I grew tired reciting Vedas and Qurans
I wore down my forehead performing prostrations
God is not at the [Hindu] pilgrimage site or in Mecca
Whoever has found him [has found] the light of lights
The ever-new spring of love

phūk musalle bhan suṭ loṭā
na phaṛ tasbih 'āsā soṭā

ashiq kahnde de de hoka
tarak halālo khāh murdār
ishq dī navīō navī bahār

Burn the prayer-rug, toss out the water pot
Don't touch the rosary, rod, or staff
Lovers shout at the top of their lungs,
'Give up legal food and eat carrion'!
The ever-new spring of love

Hīr Rānjhe de ho gae mele
bhullī Hīr ḍhūnḍhendī bele
Rānjhan yār baghal vic khele
surat na rahīā surat sanbhāi
ishq dī navīō navī bahār

Hir and Ranjha have come together
But Hir went astray and sought him in the woods
Her beloved Ranjha played beside her.
She did not realise it—come to your senses!
The ever-new spring of love.

In this poem, Bullhe Shah speaks of the empty performance of both traditional Muslim and Hindu rituals. The love that he seeks is not to be found in texts such as the Vedas or the *Quran*. Union with the beloved is found through an immediate, personal experience, flaunting all conventions, a union best expressed through the story of the love of Hir and Ranjha. Bullhe Shah explains his mystical experience as something experienced outside the confines of traditional Hinduism or Islam. The nature of this experience deserves further analysis which goes beyond attributing the greatness of Bullhe Shah's poetry to the influence of Vedanta, Vaishnavism, or orthodox Islam.

CONCLUSION

Many of the authors discussed above who have written about Bullhe Shah have revealed more about their own religious preferences than those of Bullhe Shah's. Authors making claims for or against Vedantic or Hindu influence have done so without defining their terms clearly, without providing concrete evidence that would support claims of influence or borrowing, and have often given misleading translations and interpretations of specific verses. This in and of itself is interesting—what is it, after

all, about Bullhe Shah that is so attractive to members of different religious communities? But is there more to be learned from Bullhe Shah's poetry?

The most difficult question concerns the authenticity of the verses attributed to Bullhe Shah. It is possible that there are poems which suggest some sort of Hindu influence which might not genuinely be those of Bullhe Shah. It is also quite likely that those who have compiled editions of his works may have had their own agendas in choosing which poems to include and which to leave out. Given the lack of surviving manuscripts, it would be virtually impossible to compile a critical edition of the works of Bullhe Shah. Rather than searching for a definitive, authentic edition of Bullhe Shah's poetry, it might be more useful to consider why certain poems are attributed to him, and whether different editions of his work reflect widely different choices in content and theme.

The primary concern of most of Bullhe Shah's interpreters has been to place him within a particular category, whether it be orthodox Islam or Advaita Vedanta. But what did Bullhe Shah actually say about the religious environment in which he lived? What was his perspective on Islam? Although we do not know a great deal about his life, it is probably safe to assume that he had a traditional Islamic education; the numerous references to *Quranic* verses and Islamic folklore in his poetry support this notion. As a disciple of Inayat Shah, Bullhe Shah probably studied Shaṭṭārī texts. Inayat Shah himself is said to have written about Hindu texts and practices; this, combined with the fact that Bullhe Shah surely came into contact with Hindus in the Punjab, makes it likely that he had some familiarity with Hindu thought as well.

The question about what exactly Bullhe Shah might have known about Hinduism, however, is more difficult. While he has been called a Vedantic Sufi and a Vaishnava Vedantic Sufi, we do not know what he might have known about Vedanta or Vaishnavism, or indeed how people in his time might have conceived of and understood those two traditions. Those scholars who have called Bullhe Shah a Vedantic Sufi have not explained exactly what they mean by this term. To what type of Sufism are they referring, and what type of Vedanta? Bullhe Shah's poetry contains virtually no mention of basic Advaita Vedantic concepts such as the eternal soul [*ātman*], universal spirit [*brahman*], *karma*, illusion [*māyā*], or the quest for liberation. Some of the verses attributed to Bullhe Shah use the name *Śām* for God.[52] This does not necessarily make him a Vaishnava, however. Bullhe Shah most commonly addresses God as his beloved in a style typical of Sufi poetry. And although he often speaks of being lost in his contemplation of the Beloved, there seems always to remain a sense of distinction or otherness of the beloved, not the sense of

complete identification that one might expect from the Advaita vedantin depicted by Rama Krishna and others. It is also important to note that when he does speak of union, or a sense of the unity of all things, he uses not a Vedantic term, but the Arabic term, *wahdat*—which is so important in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī.[53]

A survey of the scholarship on Bullhe Shah reveals little consensus as to how to interpret his mystical expression. He has been termed a Vaishnava or a Vedantic Sufi, but there is virtually no concrete evidence to support such claims. Bullhe Shah may well have known something about Vedanta philosophy, but there is no direct reference to it in his poetry. It may indeed be possible to identify in Bullhe Shah's poetry descriptions of his own mystical experiences which seem akin to those of vedantins. This however does not mean that he was therefore definitely influenced by Vedantic thought. Those who claim Vedantic influence have not considered the fact that there are clear precedents in the Sufi tradition for the ideas that he expresses.

The Vedantic interpretations of Bullhe Shah reflect a tendency common among writers sympathetic to Vedanta to appropriate other forms of religious expression as being either debased versions of Vedanta or the product of some sort of Vedantic influence. While there is probably little harm in seeing similarities in experience and description in the mystical poetry of the Sufis, and while in fact in some cases there may truly be influence of some kind, it is not necessarily safe to assume that anytime one sees something that seems compatible with Vedanta that it therefore must have come from Vedanta.

Scholars sympathetic to Islam, however, have themselves placed their own concerns to demonstrate Bullhe Shah's orthodoxy before the need to take seriously the actual content of his poetry. This trend among Hindu, Muslim and Sikh scholars is particularly ironic given that many of those poets beloved by Punjabis of all communities are in fact critical of such religious chauvinism and the danger of being overly proud of one's religious status.

This is not to say that there are no non-Islamic influences on Bullhe Shah. It is clear that some traditions in Indian poetry did influence Bullhe Shah and other Sufis, for example, the poet's imagining himself in the role of a female who longs to meet her male lover.[54] Bullhe Shah's poetry also shows the influence of the folklore of the Punjab—for example, his use of the Hir-Ranjha story and his frequent allusions to spinning cotton.[55] And it may well be the case that Bullhe Shah was sympathetic to Vedantic thought. But there simply is no evidence to back up the claims made by scholars such as Rama Krishna.

The majority of the interpretations of Bullhe Shah are more helpful in understanding the development of community identities and boundaries in the last 150 years or so than they are in understanding Bullhe Shah himself. The fact that Bullhe Shah's poetry has remained popular among Punjabis of different religious communities indicates that a serious study of his work might be a means of discovering common threads in the religious traditions of the Punjab.

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Notes

1. For a discussion of Hindu/Muslim interaction, see Chapter 6, 'The Interaction between Medieval Hindu Mystic Traditions and Sufism' in Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India, Vol. 1: Early Sufism and its History in India to 1600 AD* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978).
2. For a discussion of this issue, see W.H. McLeod, 'The Influence of Islam upon The Thought of Gurū Nānak', *History of Religions*, 7 (1968), 302-16.
3. On the role of Sufism in the process of conversion to Islam see Richard M. Eaton, 'Sufi Folk Literature and the Expansion of Indian Islam', *History of Religions*, 14, 2 (1974), 117-27, and also his *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), especially Chapter 10, 'The Rooting of Islam in Bengal'.
4. Thus some biographical accounts trace Bullhe Shah's gradual acceptance of Hindu or Vedantic thought (for example, Jit Singh Sital, *Bullhe Shāh: Jīvan te Racnā* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1970); others are keen to establish his lifelong faithful observance of Islamic prayer and ritual (for example, Illama Alim Faqri, *Tazkirah Auliye Pākistān* (Lahore: Shabbir Brothers, 1987) 205-20.
5. Others have argued that he was born in Uch Gilanian. See Taufiq Rafat, *Bullhe Shah: A Selection Rendered into English Verse* (Lahore: Vanguard Publications, 1982), 215, and Surindar Singh Kohli, *Bullhe Shah* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1987), 17. Another tradition maintains that he was born in Constantinople. See Kshitimohan Sen, *Medieval Mysticism of India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1974), 156-58.
6. This same scholar is sometimes also reported to have been the childhood teacher of Waris Shah, author of the most celebrated version of the Hir-Ranjha story; many biographies thus link the two celebrated Punjabi authors as classmates. See, for example, Kohli, *Bullhe Shah*, 18. Denis Matringe, in his *Hīr Vāris Śāh* (Pondicherry: Institut Francais, 1988), 15, however, points out that this is quite unlikely, since Bullhe Shah was at least 40 years older than Waris Shah.
7. Punjabi text from Sayyad Nazir Ahmad (ed.), *Kalām-e-Bullhe Shāh* (Lahore: Packages Limited, 1976), 19. For stories about the meeting between Inayat Shah and Bullhe Shah,

26. Ibid., 150.
27. Ibid., 259-260.
28. Kohli, *Bullhe Shah*, 35.
29. A. Singh, *Songs of Bullah*, 1.
30. Kuldeep Singh, *Bullhe Shāh dā Sūfī Anubhav* (Ludhiana: Lahore Book Shop, 1969) 51-52.
31. J.R. Puri and T.R. Shangari, *Bulleh Shah: The Love-Intoxicated Iconoclast* (Amritsar Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1986).
32. Trilochan Singh, 'Bullhe Shāh dā Tassawuf', in Iqbal Salahuddin, *L'alā dīPaṇḍ* (Lahore Aziz Publishers, 1986), 430.
33. Rafat, *Bulleh Shah*, 8.
34. Ibid., 3.
35. Ahmad, *Kalām, lām*. 35.
36. Rafat, *Bulleh Shah*, 8.
37. The Punjabi writer Kartar Singh Duggal is completing an English translation of a selection of Bullhe Shah's *kāfīs* with a critical introduction; it should be published some time in 1996 (personal interview, New Delhi, 14 January 1995).
38. C.F. Usborne, *Bullah Shah: Sufi, Mystic and Poet of the Punjab* (Lahore: Saadi Panjab Academy, 1976), 3.
39. Annemarie Schimmel, 'The Influence of Sufism on Indo-Muslim Poetry' in Jospeh P Strelka (ed.), *Anagogic Qualities of Literature* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 200. For further discussion of this issue, see her *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 386-87.
40. Mustansir Mir, 'Teachings of Two Punjabi Sufi Poets' in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Religions of India in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 518-29.
41. Mir, 'Teachings of Two Punjabi Sufi Poets', 520-21.
42. Denis Matringe, 'Kṛṣṇaite and Nāth elements in the poetry of the eighteenth-century Panjabi Sūfī Bullhe Śāh' in R.S. McGregor (ed.), *Devotional Literature in South Asia: Current Research, 1985-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 190-206
43. Ibid., 197.
44. See, for example, Eaton's discussion of Bengal, *The Rise of Islam*, 273 ff.
45. Punjabi from Faqir, *Kullīyāt*, 44-45.
46. I am here following Rama Krishna, *Panjabi Sufi Poets*, who translates this line as 'my life is neither settled nor unsettled', 59.
47. This line could be understood in more than one way. Rama Krishna translates it as 'Myself I know as the first and the last'. An Urdu translation in Abdul Majid Bhati, *Kāfīā Bullhe Shāh* (Islamabad: Lok Virsa Publishing House, 1987), 36, is *'avval āḳhar āp ko jānū'* implying that the line refers to another, i.e., God—'I know you as the first and the last'. Because *'avval'* and *'āḳhar'* are two of the ninety-nine traditional Islamic names for God it is potentially controversial to translate the line as 'I know myself as first and last' because this is a statement that could be construed as identifying oneself with God, which violates the norms of orthodox Islam.
48. Rama Krishna, *Panjabi Sufi Poets*, 59-60..

49. The *ghazal (Cheh tadhir ai musalmanan)* is found in Rumi's *Diwan-i-shams Tabriz*. See Rafat, *Bulleh Shah*, 223-24, and Ahmad, *Kalām*, 105-6.
50. Schimmel, 'The Influence of Sufism', 192.
51. Punjabi from Ahmad, *Kalām*, 45-46.
52. Kohli, *Bullhe Shah*, 57.
53. See, for example, the poem *'Koī pucho dilbar kīh kardā'*, *Ahmad, Kalām*, 59.
54. Schimmel, 'The Influence of Sufism', 197-98, notes that in classical Arabic and Persian poetry poets generally conceive of the divine beloved as female.
55. There are numerous examples of Sufi folk poems about spinning cotton and other chores normally performed by women; see, for example, Richard Eaton's discussion of Dakhni folk literature, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 157-64.

Back to the Future? The Punjab Unionist Model of Consociational Democracy for Contemporary India and Pakistan

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The mounting ethnic and communal conflict in the Indian subcontinent during the 1980s has stimulated academic interest in Arend Lijphart's concept of consociational democracy as both an analytical tool and a prescription for the advancement of a stable democratic order in societies riven by primordial divisions. This article interrogates the consociational model from the historical perspective of the cross-communal Punjab Unionist Party which dominated the politics of the region from 1923 to 1947. It raises the question whether Punjabi Unionism provides empirical support for consociational theory.

The Indian subcontinent's growing religio-ethnic violence during the 1980s introduced the debate on the consociational model for studying its politics. Even such critics of the consociational 'solution' to ethnic conflict as Paul Brass have admitted that Indira Gandhi's adversarial politics were a causal factor in the growing instability.[1] At the same time, Arend Lijphart, the founder of the consociational prescription of power-sharing for plural societies has seen the turn of events as an opportunity to reinterpret the case of Indian democracy for comparative political theory. He is in the process of undertaking a major study intended to demonstrate that India should no longer be regarded as a 'deviant case for consociational theory', but is in fact an 'impressive confirming case'.[2]

The article is intended as a reflection from Punjab studies on this ongoing debate. It is not written in order to set an agenda or to add to the overabundance of prescriptions for the advancement of a stable democratic order in South Asia. The author's standpoint is that of a historian rather than a trained political scientist. It is hoped however that experts from the

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latter discipline will concur with the paper's starting points that contemporary political processes and trajectories should not be studied in isolation from their historical context and that analytical models must be interrogated by empirical case studies.

The aim of this paper is thus to examine the consociational model in the light of Punjab politics during the final years of British rule. The Punjab provides an important empirical testing ground for consociationalism for two main reasons. First, it was a region which was highly segmented along religious lines. Second, its politics were dominated in the 1930s by the cross-communal Unionist Party. The fact that violent conflict followed the termination of this period of power-sharing further increases its importance as a case study. Before turning to a brief analysis of the Unionist Party, however, it is necessary to examine in more depth the concept of consociationalism and its defining characteristics.

I

Consociationalism as we have already noted is especially associated with Lijphart's studies.[3] According to consociational theory, the maintenance of stable democracy in states riven by primordial divisions depends on elite accommodation. This is institutionalised in such consociational devices as grand coalition, mutual veto, proportionality and segmental autonomy.[4]

For the first two decades after Arend Lijphart popularised the concept of consociational democracy, India seemed to be the exception to his rule that majoritarian systems of politics would result in ethnic conflicts in culturally diverse societies. Moreover, Pakistan's failure to establish a stable democracy appeared to lie with its weak political institutions rather than in an absence of power-sharing systems.

Political developments in the subcontinent during the 1980s however generated interest in the consociational 'solution' to ethnic conflict. In India the 'crisis' of the secular state involved both the rise of majoritarian Hindu communalism encapsulated in such slogans as *'Garv se kaho hum hindu hain'* ('Proclaim your Hindu identity with pride')[5] and of minority 'secessionist' communalism in Kashmir and Punjab. In Pakistan, the ethnic 'sub-nationalism' of Sindhis,[6] and Balochs threatened the integrity of the Punjabi dominated state.[7] The thunder of theoretical debate soon followed the real sound of gunfire in Amritsar and Karachi.

An extensive literature has developed around consociational theory during the past three decades. Critics have claimed that the Swiss 'success case'[8] fails to fit the consociational model. They have also highlighted the 'failures' in the Lebanon and Cyprus, where consociationalism has not

preserved peace and stability.[9] The theory has also been attacked as undemocratic because it depends on elite agreements on power-sharing behind closed doors. This of course begs the question of how 'open' decision-making is in such majoritarian democracies as Britain. Marxists deride consociationalism for its inadequate treatment of the relationship between class and ethnicity.

II

Before attempting to examine consociational theory in the context of the colonial Punjab, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the region was heir to a long history both of conflict and cultural accommodation expressed in the Punjabi language and Sufi spirituality. Any mode of analysis must accommodate itself to the outworkings of this complex reality. To ignore adversarial conflict in order to discover teleological patterns of consociationalism is no less a distortion of reality than to reduce the pluralities of cultural and political expression to the primordialist paradigm of 'communal' history.

The Punjab Unionist Party was founded in 1923. It dominated politics in the region until the eve of Partition.[10] The last Unionist Premier, Khizr Tiwana, did not step down from office until 2 March 1947. It was only then that a communal war of succession broke out in the region. This made it inevitable that the partition of the Punjab would be the price of Pakistan's creation. The province was partitioned into its eastern and western wings along a line running between Amritsar and Lahore. More than ten million people were uprooted and around a million lost their lives in the ensuing massacres and migrations. I have elsewhere analysed the Unionist Party's development and the reasons for its ascendancy and eventual decline in the face of the Muslim League campaign for Pakistan.[11] I do not want to rehearse these arguments here, but simply to point out five characteristics of its history which appear to accord with the consociational model.

First, the Unionist Party's dominance of Punjabi politics for over two decades demonstrates that parties devoted to intercommunal political accommodation can achieve a large degree of success even in plural societies which are marked by a high degree of ethnic and communal hostility. Despite the Punjab's reputation as the 'Ulster of India' the Unionist Party captured over 68 per cent of the seats in the 1937 provincial assembly elections. Whilst much has been made of the Congress's emergence as an alternative raj following these elections, only in Madras did it exceed this Unionist showing in terms of seats captured. Even in 1946, when the Unionists are traditionally depicted to have been 'crushed' by

the Muslim League they still received over 20 per cent of the total votes polled and were able to exclude the Muslim League from office. Political accommodation could thus pay electoral dividends even in a society like the Punjab which had witnessed a high degree of violence.

Second, the Unionist Party successfully operated such consociational devices as proportionality in recruitment and decision-making. The 1942 pact between the Unionist Premier Sikander and Baldev Singh, the Akali Dal leader, which increased Sikh representation in government departments and endorsed Sikh 'segmental autonomy' provides a classical example of consociationalism at work.

Third, when Sikander Hayat Khan formed his cabinet in 1937, he ensured that all communities were represented. Moreover, the Muslim Premier did not unilaterally select the two Hindus and one Sikh, but only appointed them after consultation with other leaders of their respective communities. This contrasted dramatically with the Congress approach in the seven provinces which it controlled.[12]

Sikander's Ministry in fact bore some of the hallmarks of a grand coalition in keeping with classical consociational theory. The Unionist Party itself contained a 13-strong Hindu Jat wing led by Chhotu Ram. Its Hindu and Sikh coalition partners, the Hindu Election Board and the Khalsa National Party possessed 11 and 14 members respectively. In all, the government accounted for 120 out of the 175 Assembly members drawn from all of the region's communities.[13]

Sikander in his inaugural speech as Premier, reiterated the Unionist Party's non-communal approach. He once again stressed the party's economic programme which consisted of raising the status of the 'backward' rural population. This programme had been chalked out in the 1920s. It consisted of the prevention of land alienation by indebted farmers and the reservation of local government posts for those castes and tribes which had been designated as 'agriculturalists' by the 1900 Alienation of Land Act. This 'Magna Carta' strengthened the cross-communal economic interests of the rural population and provided the social base on which the political edifice of Unionism was constructed. In particular, Sikander announced the establishment of two committees to look into the problems of unemployment and measures for the welfare of the Punjab's peasants and workers.[14] This tone was continued throughout the remainder of his ministry. It again accords with the consociational theory of engineering socio-economic equality between the 'segments' of a plural society.

Fourth, as in other consociational systems, the Unionist Party's institutional arrangements of proportionality, grand coalition, etc., were built upon elite-level cooperation. The formation of the Unionist Party in 1923

resulted from the calculations of both the urban Muslim politician Mian Fazli-Husain and the Hindu Jat leader Chhotu Ram that cross-communal cooperation held out the best prospects for power and their communities' advancement under the political conditions established by the British. The Unionist Party's successive Muslim leaders Sikander and Khizr continued to hold this view, despite Jinnah's increasing drive to consolidate the Muslim community behind support for the Muslim League.

The restricted franchise and hierarchical nature of rural Punjabi society meant that until the eve of the British departure there was no challenge to the status quo of Unionist political accommodation. From the time of Khizr's public breach with Jinnah in 1944, however, a younger Muslim counter-elite emerged which mobilised communal sentiments to undermine the Unionist predominance. Although the Unionists clung on to power after the 1946 elections, Punjab politics were increasingly polarised along community lines. Muslim–Sikh animosities exploded into a virtual civil war when Khizr resigned in March 1947, thereby finally sundering the cross-cutting ties which had preserved the Punjab's unity.

The Muslim League challenge drew its strength from the polarisation which occurred elsewhere in India. It also benefited from the Unionist Party's inability to underpin its elite accommodation with a mass base of support. Critics of consociationalism argue that it is an inherently elitist political approach which depends on deference towards the 'segmental' leaders. The decline of the Unionist Party certainly accompanied the widening of political participation in what was by common consent a politically backward region. But there had been scope for the Unionist elite to establish a broader basis of support in the late 1930s. The economic legislation of this period the so-called 'Golden Acts' which curbed the power of the moneylenders evoked considerable popular support. The opportunity to create an institutional base for the Party was, however, spurned. By the time that Khizr attempted to reactivate its local Zemindara League branches in 1944, the Muslim League had already gained a foothold in the crucial rural constituencies.

Finally, the Unionist case appears to support the recognition of Lijphart and others that political parties and leaders can act autonomously of social forces and communal cleavages even in situations of deep social conflict. Primordialists believe that politics merely reflect existing social cleavages. The Unionist Party and its leaders acted independently of these 'givens'. Both Sikander and Khizr opposed the Muslim League's claim to be the 'sole representative' of Indian Muslim opinion. They also rejected any attempt to impose its vision of the future on the minorities within the Punjab. Khizr remained committed to the Unionists' pluralist vision in the

face of an increasingly personalised campaign against his Ministry Pakistani writers have claimed that he lacked the political imagination t adjust to the new political circumstances.[15] But it was out of support fo the ideal of cross-communal political accommodation, not out of stupidity that he refused to bow to the Muslim League demands.

Khizr still clung to the dream of a United Punjab the day he left office He hoped that his resignation would force the League to come to term with the minorities.[16] Control over the fate of the Punjab's population hac in fact long since passed from Lahore to New Delhi. Neither the Congres nor the Muslim League High Commands would allow their local branche to take actions which undermined their All-India goals. The disinterest a the centre in composing the region's communal differences resulted in it collapse into chaos. In such circumstances the Congress's demand that the Punjab be partitioned became undeniable, although the drama of the Boundary Commission was yet to be played out.

Political developments in the Punjab during the Unionist era thus a least in part bear similarities to the consociational model. Its conception of the importance of elite accommodation, grand coalition and proportionality in recruitment to the public services in securing political stability in deeply segmented societies finds empirical support. It could of course be argued that the Unionist Party's position in Punjab politics was more analogous to the Congress one-party dominant system of the 1950s than to consociational grand coalition, although it operated along these lines internally. Moreover, questions can be raised concerning whether we should talk of a monolithic Unionist 'Party' with coherent ideology and policy aims. Was it in fact a shifting combination of landowners rather than a 'modern' political party? Finally, Unionism never fully encapsulated political life. Urban elites rejected the politics of mediation in favour of those of community long before the Muslim League made inroads into the rural constituencies.

Lijphart of course sees consociationalism as a normative as well as an empirical model. The theory is there not just to provide insights into politics in plural societies but to act as a policy tool. Here the Unionist case becomes even more problematic. The Indian subcontinent today is of course very different to what it was like over 50 years ago. Improvements in communications, the spread of literacy and urbanisation have all proceeded apace. The Indian electorate has become politicised and sophisticated in that it expects parties to 'deliver' on their promises. Politics is more 'issue'-oriented than it was in the Unionist era. Pakistan it is true is lagging behind in some of these respects, but even here politics is less elitist than in the colonial era. General Zia was ultimately unsuccessful in

his attempt to impose a 'partyless' system based on kinship and local influence.

The Unionist Party operated in an environment in which only around 13 per cent of the population was enfranchised.[17] It relied heavily for its support on the local influence of the leading landholders.[18] Writers like Nordlinger and Pappalardo[19] cite such conditions as being ideal for consociational politics. They maintain that in circumstances in which the masses are apolitical and deferentially integrated into patron–client relationships, elites possess the necessary autonomy to allow them to make the compromises which lie at the heart of consociationalism. The greater 'democracy' of contemporary South Asian politics may thus be an obstacle to consociation.

The British moreover had established outstandingly favourable conditions for the emergence of consociation in the Punjab. They had encouraged common rural economic interests and created an overarching 'agriculturalist' identity through the 1900 Punjab Alienation of Land Act. Furthermore, the weighting of the franchise and the reservation of seats in the legislature ensured that no single community interest could dominate Punjabi politics.[20] A fact which the Muslim League discovered to its cost after the 1946 elections. The rural political elites thus found that they had very little to lose and everything to gain by seeking cross-communal compromises.

The conclusion that most of the conditions which encouraged consociation in the colonial Punjab no longer exist is thus inescapable. Moreover, the history of the Unionist Party must increase the concerns of such critics as Van den Berghe that even when consociationalism succeeds this is more a triumph for a 'collusion of class interests between ethnic segments of an elite' than for democracy.[21]

Lijphart and his followers can however draw some optimism from pre-1947 Punjabi politics. Their circumstances reaffirm the ability of elites to act autonomously and creatively even in conditions of extreme conflict. Khizr could have bowed to the vituperative attacks of the Muslim League press, rather than hazarding compromise with its 'enemies'. The Punjab case thus supports the central proposition of consociational theory that motivated elites can engage in successful political accommodation. It also reveals how the powerful lure of office in South Asia, allied with the desire to economically benefit one's community, can provide the rationale for cross-communal consensus.

Notes

1. P. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: 1991), 343 ff.
2. A. Lijphart, 'The Puzzle of Indian Democracy: A Re-interpretation', unpublished draft paper, 1994.
3. The theory of consociational democracy was initially presented in the 1960s. Lijphart restated this and answered his critics in his work, *Power-Sharing in Southern Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). There has been extensive debate over consociational theory. This has centred around the looseness of the definition of consociational concepts and its centrality to the explanation of stability in the 'classic cases' of the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland. For a useful introduction to the debate see, B. Parry, 'Political Accommodation and Consociational Democracy', *British Journal of Political Science*, 5 (1975), 477-505 and S. Halpern, 'The Disorderly Universe of Consociational Democracy', *West European Politics*, 9, 2 (1986), 181-97.
4. For an elaboration of these elements of consociation see, A. Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) and A. Lijphart, 'Consociational Democracy', *World Politics*, 21 (1969), 207-25.
5. The BJP's seemingly inexorable rise to power received a sharp setback in the November 1993 State elections in Uttar Pradesh, but this may prove little more than a temporary reverse.
6. Sindhi grievances centred around such issues as their underrepresentation in the Pakistan army, the allocation of irrigated land to non-Sindhi civil service and military personnel and the fact that they were becoming a minority in their own province. The Movement for the Restoration of Democracy tapped these resentments when it called for demonstrations against Zia's constitutional proposals. The Army had to be called in to quell the popular disturbances which lasted from August to November 1983.
7. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared a state of emergency in Balochistan in 1974 and subsequently banned the National Awami Party of Khan Abdul Wali Khan. It demanded complete autonomy for the separate provinces. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, together with the Zia regime's pouring of money into development programmes reduced separatist sympathies in Balochistan.
8. See, for example, Barry, 'Political Accommodation and Consociational Democracy'.
9. Lijphart himself acknowledges that the consociational system in Cyprus ended rapidly in the 1963 civil war. He nevertheless avers that it still provides the best long-term solution for such a divided country.
10. The Muslim League was never able to form a ministry in the pre-Partition Punjab although Jinnah called this Muslim majority region the 'cornerstone of Pakistan'.
11. See, for example, I. Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), and 'The Growth of the Muslim League in the Punjab 1937-1946', *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 20, 1 (March, 1982), 5-25.
12. I.H. Malik, *Sikander Hayat Khan. A Political Biography* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1985), 49.
13. United Kingdom: House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers 1937-38*, XX1, Cmd. 5589, 'Returns Showing the Results of Elections in India, 1937', 80-93. Cited in S.

Oren, 'The Sikhs, Congress and the Unionists in British Punjab, 1937-1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, 8, 3 (1974), 398.

14. Ibid.
15. See, for example, Syed Nur Ahmad's assessment of Khizr in *From Martial Law to Martial Law Politics in The Punjab 1919-1958* (edited by Craig Baxter from a translation from the Urdu by Mahmud Ali) (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 167.
16. Khizr expressed the hope in his resignation statement that the Punjab Muslim League could come to an agreement with the minorities now that he was 'no longer in the middle'. See, Ahmad, *From Martial Law*, 226.
17. The electorate at the time of the 1946 elections numbered 3.5 million.
18. For details see Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj*, Chapter 6.
19. E. Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); and A. Pappalardo, 'The Conditions for Consociational Democracy: A Logical and Empirical Critique', *European Journal of Political Research*, 9 (1981), 365-90.
20. There were 86 Muslim seats in the 175 member Legislative Assembly. Seventy-five Muslims were returned from rural constituencies, nine from reserved urban seats and there were two 'others' (women, landholders).
21. Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 213.

What is Happening to the Political Science of Ethnic Conflict?

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Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India? Punjab, Ethnic Conflict and the Test for Federalism* (London: MacMillan, 1994; Second Edition, First published, 1986), ISBN 0-333-59444-4, 252pp.; Price £14.99.

John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (eds.), *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation* (London: Routledge, 1993), ISBN 0-415-09931-5, 321pp.; Price £12.99.

The abundance of emerging scholarship on ethnicity provides a tragic parallel to the recrudescence of ethnic conflict in the world today—scarcely a continent remains untouched by it. But this literature, rich in its diversity and complexity,[1] is in serious danger of ending up in an intellectual cul-de-sac of its own making. In spite of determined resistance from instrumentalists,[2] the main thrust of this academic inquiry remains under the magic spell of an approach which suggests that the essence of ethnicity is in the self-definition of its protagonists.[3] If the actor's perception of reality is the exclusive building bloc of his preferred community, then he need look no further than the inner world of which he is, or imagines to be, a resident in order to give concrete shape to the vision he shares (or believes he shares) with others in his situation. Following from this basic assumption, the conceptual categories, units and modes of analysis of the ethnic 'explanation' have departed from the familiar grounds of class, interests, citizenships and other reference points through which the social sciences interpret the world. The ethnic scholars are unwilling or unable to articulate themselves in terms of these basic constructs of comparative politics. They are also not comfortable with the concepts germane to sociology and history such as caste, tribe, region or nation-state and world-systems. As such, specific ethnic movements, while meaningful to

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their proponents, remain morally distant and intellectually inaccessible to those who do not identify with the movement. Under these circumstances, interpersonal communication across ethnic boundaries remains an impossible—and infrequently sought—objective. Political science of ethnicity neither contributes to nor benefits from the political discourses of ethnicity.

This problem of cognition and interpretation is not unique to the study of ethnic identity and conflict. To some extent, it is common to all non-foundationalists.[4] India's Subalterns—the self-referential *marxisant* historians whose original opposition to the dominance of colonial historiography has already become quite a paradigm in its own right—would, for example, have found themselves in a comparable dilemma. But, by staying close to people marginalised by dominant social groups, scholars writing from this perspective have discovered a rich vein of new empirical material to explore.[5] That path of using premodern categories as a heuristic device is closed to the scholars of ethnicity because of their self-proclaimed desire to speak in the name of whole populations rather than specific sections whose marginalisation is amenable to conventional explanation.[6] This has become their mark of distinction—the totem of a new tribe of scholars of ethnicity who are keen to give shape something which they believe exists but whose existence cannot be established in terms of conventional analytical categories. Hence the desperate descent into mystifying abstractions, debilitating narcissism or romantic nostalgia: *I imagine, therefore I am!* How long can a body of serious scholars go on like this?

Those who despair at this state of the art will find some comfort in the two books under review, but for very different reasons. Jeffrey and the team of McGarry and O'Leary represent two different but related approaches to ethnic conflict. Jeffrey is very much the area specialist, *looking out* from within the inner world of Punjab to which he has gained access through years of study. The success of the first edition and now the appearance of a second edition under a slightly different title are testimony to his credentials as an honorary Punjabi. In contrast, ever the comparativists, McGarry and O'Leary are *looking in* to several worlds in conflict through a common framework. But, different as they are, the two books are also complementary. Between them, they contain a range of material within which one can find the theoretical and methodological resources with which to construct a model for the containment of ethnic conflict within the framework of the modern state. It might still be possible to rescue ethnicity from becoming its own explanation.

This review article explores some of the problems raised by ethnic conflict and the solutions suggested by the authors in terms of several

models—consociationalism, multiculturalism, hegemony and catonisation among others—that underpin the two books reviewed here. These discussions, based on Punjab in the case of Jeffrey, and a large number of countries from around the world by the contributors to McGarry and O'Leary, rest on the assumption that ethnicity and conflict can be formulated in general terms. Two issues, theoretical and comparative, are involved here. They are at once distinct and related. Is ethnicity, expressed as a sub-national identity, *sui generis*, always *there*, biding its time, waiting for an opportunity to express itself in the virulent form of ethnic conflict? Or, is it mere talk, a politically convenient self-classification that promptly disappears once the real objective of its leaders, namely, material gratification, is achieved? Further, once we look beyond Punjab, a whole host of new questions appear. Does Punjabi identity transcend the religious divide? Or for that matter, does it provide a general expression for identities based on class, caste and gender, effectively enough for these to be subsumed under a catch-all ethnic category? Is it an instrumental category, or one that actors consider worth pursuing for its own sake, if need be, at the cost of their lives and that of other people?

These are among the many questions that the student of ethnic conflict has to come to grips with in order to bring the field into the fold of mainstream comparative politics. The objective of both books reviewed here however goes beyond the purely methodological, for neither particularly shies off the obligatory policy recommendation. Implicitly in case of Jeffrey, and explicitly in case of McGarry and O'Leary, we are treated to a feast of supply-side politics as well as the more conventional institutionalism. Both offer hope. But, how solid are its foundations?

I

Just in case readers familiar with the first edition of *What is Happening to India?* might take the present edition as so much old wine in an old bottle, two points need to be made at the outset. In the first place, Jeffrey's new *avatar* has added two useful chapters which bring the narrative up to date. There is a useful glossary, but curiously, it leaves out two keywords that have increasingly asserted themselves on ethnic and nationalist discourse; namely *Khalistan* and *karsevak*. In the second place, Jeffrey attempts to examine the implications of the new developments for the general framework that underpinned the first edition. This needs to be seen, ten years since its first publication, in the light of the new political context in which it is ensconced.

Before we analyse the new edition of *What is Happening to India* from

the two points made above, it would be useful to present the contents briefly. The points need to be emphasised because no amount of speculation by the international media or thin description by the generalist can replace the empirical depth of the area specialist and the intuitive feel he has for his case. Good, robustly old-fashioned description is Jeffrey's forte. His narrative retains a strong flavour of Punjab, a unique achievement for somebody who has no primordial links to Punjab. The academic expression of this strong identification had endeared the book to this reviewer at its first appearance. To see how evocative and authentic Jeffrey's description of Punjab can be, consider the following:

> I have often thought of Punjab in terms of sons and buffaloes: a passion for agriculture combined with a culture that emphasises masculinity and hardiness. Indeed, other north Indians, who consider themselves more genteel, will tell you that 'the only culture Punjab knows is agriculture'. But they know it well. The buffalo is a good example. Punjab today is estimated to have more than 2 million buffaloes—huge, shiny black creatures with closely curled horns, each one looking twice the bulk of its longer-horned, hairier cousin farther south... Milk is a cult in Punjab... 'Twice a day he drank milk', wrote a Punjabi judge of a particularly bad but robust character, 'five litres at a time. He liked it as it came from the she buffalo... He would pick up the brass bucket... and drain it in one long draught' (pp. 23-24).

Jeffrey has fleshed out this image of Punjab in several richly informative chapters on the origin and development of Sikhism, particularly the theme of sacrifice as a cultural ideal, the politics of factions, fasts and violence and the material basis of the origin and evolution of the 'romantic' ideal of the Sikh nation in the Sikh diaspora. What remains unclear, however, is Jeffrey's specification of Sikh identity. That it is there, and that it predominates other identities is abundantly clear from the account of the course of Punjab politics leading up to the assassination of Indira Gandhi. ('Class division' Jeffrey says in a quotable quote, 'is everywhere in Punjab, yet rarely in people's minds' (p. 209). Is ethnic identity then the unpredictable *deus ex machina* that chooses the most inopportune moment to undo the toils of nation-builders and captains of agriculture and industry? In all likelihood, Jeffrey would not agree with such an unsatisfactory explanation. The postscript to the earlier edition, dated November 1985, states categorically, 'political decisions, rather than inexorable social forces, determine the form and intensity of ethnic conflict' (p. 206). Though he does not offer a systematic explanation, one nevertheless notices a fond hope in his narration of Punjab's return to democratic

politics that elites—bargaining, cajoling and threatening—can create the conditions of civilised political process. Even Longowal's assassination does not cause Jeffrey to question the place and direction of Punjab politics: 'Longowal became more powerful dead than alive' (p. 207).

It is of course possible to overstate the case for optimism. Jeffrey's introduction to the new edition does not question his cautiously optimistic tone of the 1985 postscript as strongly as it should because the violence that followed the first appearance of the book was far greater, both in the body count and in anything that preceded it. But even then, the violence rarely took the form of Sikh communal violence against Hindus; nor was there any significant mass exodus of Hindus from Punjab because of Sikh resentment at the presence of Hindus in their midst. Some Hindu businessmen left because of terrorism and extortions. But the ties of kinship and social relations that unite Hindus and Sikhs of Punjab held, even at the height of militancy. With this in the background, the restoration of order and normal political process in Punjab following the Assembly election of 1992, remains unexplained in Jeffrey. What combination of *danda* and the surreptitious accommodation of Sikh pride brought about the happy turn of events? Why do the explanations of the rise of Sikh militancy have a little to do with causes of its decline? Jeffrey's explanation of the strength and resilience of India's democracy and her federal process is on the whole satisfactory but could do with more precision in the specific case of Punjab.

Even on the cultural front, Jeffrey's image of Punjab comes across as a shade too romantic and nostalgic and not quite in touch with reality—certainly not of the hardened militants of Khalistan who are ready to 'kill or die' for their cause. Jeffrey's Punjab—its good humoured materialism, its robust optimism, its elevation of rural affluence to a cultural ideal—has lost some of its shine in the gruesome details of the torture, the extortions and violence that characterised terrorism and state anti-terrorism in Punjab at its peak. Rich as it is in details, of Punjab history, the interweaving of its politics and the biographic details of the main actors and the institutional process, Jeffrey's narrative is somewhat sparse in both the descent into the violent rejection of the image and its recovery. But, if Jeffrey is lacking in critical introspection, there is plenty of material in this goldmine of a book with which such an account can be constructed.

II

Punjab provides a common reference point between the two books under review. Readers of Jeffrey will find an interesting contrast in the case study

by Gurharpal Singh of Punjab in McGarry and O'Leary which brings to the study of ethnicity and conflict in Punjab a much-needed comparative framework. The theoretical framework and the article on Punjab provide the bridge that the area specialists of South Asia could take to approach the wider cross-cultural world of ethnic conflict from a variety of regions. McGarry and O'Leary approach ethnicity from the perspective of the politics of ethnic conflict, drawing prominently on its violent presence in Europe since the dissolution of communist power in the USSR and communist regimes of Eastern Europe. ('Ethnic Conflict in the Soviet Union and its Successor States' by Dominic Lieven and John McGarry, and, 'The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia' by George Schopflin.) Their framework extends to the new world ('Canadian Responses to Ethnic Conflict: Consociationalism, Federalism and Control', by S.J.R. Noel), the old world ('Containment or Regulation? The British Approach to Ethnic Conflict in Northern Ireland', by Brendan O'Duffy; 'Spain: Peripheral Nationalism and State Response' by Michel Keating; and, 'Belgium: The Variability of Ethnic Relations' by Maureen Covell), and, residually, the third world ('Malaysia: Malay Political Hegemony and "Coercive" Consociationalism' by Diane Mauzy; 'Burundi in Comparative Perspective; Dimensions of Ethnic Strife' by René Lemarchand; 'South Africa; The Opening of the Apartheid Mind' by Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley; and, 'Balance and Ethnic Conflict in Fiji' by Ralph Premdas). The only area thus excluded is Latin America, but the reader in search of broad cross-cultural generalisations has already enough on his plate to forestall any criticism with regard to a possible ethnocentric bias in the selection of the cases.

The edited collection begins with a substantial introduction which classifies the feasibility and consequences of all the major methods of ethnic conflict regulation. There follows a comprehensive set of case studies from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania which cover examples of relatively benign and amicable relations between ethnic communities as well as ones where domination is enforced. They include examples of the normatively desirable methods of conflict regulation such as federalism and the morally appalling ones such as genocide.

In keeping with editorial policy, contributors have briefly focused on the causes of ethnic conflict to concentrate on the methods used to manage, control or eliminate ethnic conflict in their area of specialist knowledge. In a very useful introductory chapter the editors have spelt out these general objectives of the book; namely to 'develop a taxonomy of eight models of ethnic resolution which maps the empirical forms of macro political ethnic conflict regulation'. The editors are, however, far more

ambitious, and, are not content merely to present a user's manual on how to solve ethnic conflicts, for their 'long-term positivist ambition is to establish whether there are "laws of motion" which govern the forms of ethnic conflict regulation...regularities which enable the "postdiction" (if not to prediction) of the circumstances under which particular strategies for managing ethnic conflict will be attempted, and successfully implemented'. Further, lest they be seen as pursuing the impossible positivist ideal of value-free 'objective' explanations, in the best tradition of contemporary social sciences, the editors make their value premises clear at the outset: 'we also have normative concerns; to evaluate the merits of the different forms of ethnic regulation, and to establish whether multi-ethnic states can be stabilised in ways which are compatible with liberal democratic values and institutions' (pp. 3-4).

Those looking for a taxonomy of ethnic conflict regulation will be amply rewarded by the theoretical introduction. With exemplary methodological rigour and empirical exactitude, the editors have identified eight models of conflict regulation, which include both conflict management and elimination. The methods of eliminating differences include genocide, forced mass-population transfers (actually an euphemism for ethnic cleansing), partition and/or assimilation and integration and/or assimilation. The methods for managing differences include hegemonic control, arbitration (third-party intervention), cantonisation and/or federalisation, and consociationalism or power-sharing. Unlike biological taxonomies, however, cases of ethnic conflict belong to multiple categories. Thus, the eight modes are found in combination and targeted at the same ethnic groups, or alternatively, different strategies are aimed at different ethnic groups within the same state. Thus the Nazis practised genocide, mass-population transfers and hegemonic control of Jews. Stalin practised genocide, mass-popultion transfers and hegemonic control of multiple ethnic groups (Lieven and McGarry Chapter 3). Yugoslavia under Tito practised elements of control, arbitration and consociation (Schoflin, Chapter 8). Oliver Cromwell offered Irish Catholics a choice between genocide and forced mass-population transfers. They could go 'to hell or connought!'. The USA practised genocide on native Americans, integration of immigrant Europeans and control of black Americans in the deep south. Contemporary Israel practises consociationalism amongst Jews of different geographic origin but control over the non-Jewish population. The strategy of mass-population transfers has been used in the past, and its future use is not excluded. Belgium has practised a combination of consociationalism and federalism to resolve tensions between its linguistic communities (Covel, Chapter 12).

III

To the victims of ethnic violence, each conflagration is unique and particularly horrific. A partisan reading Jeffrey could in fact create this impression. The broad net of McGarry and O'Leary which has pulled together a vast array of examples helps relativise such perceptions. Ethnic conflict, as the grid of cases presented here show, is not the monopoly of any specific culture, geographic region, level of economic development, social and economic class or even, of any historical period:

> Since 1945 there have been genocides perpetrated in the Soviet Union (of the Chechens, the Inbqushi, the Karachi, the Balkars, the Meskhetians and the Crimean Tartars); in Burundi (of Hutu); in Iraq (of the Kurds); in Paraguay (of the Ache Indians); in Indonesia (of the Chinese and the indigenous population of East Timor); in Nigeria (of Ibo residents in the north); in Equatorial Guinea (of the Bubi); in Uganda (of the Karamojong, the Acholi, the Lango, Nilotic tribes and the Bagandans); in Pakistan (of the Bengalis in what became Bangladesh); in Burma (of Muslims in border regions); and in Iran (of Kurss and Baha'is). We therefore still live in a world in which genocide is practised; indeed, in absolute terms the twentieth century has been more genocidal than its predecessors (p. 7).

On the non-specific character of the background from which these movements emerge: 'One observer notes that secessions are demanded both by economically advanced groups (e.g. Basques, Catalans, Ibos, Lombards, Sikhs, Tamils) and by economically backward communities (East Bengalis, Karens, Kurds, Slovaks); and that the secessionist communities can be located in either backward or advanced regional economies' (p. 15).

Having established the generality of the likelihood of the outbreak of ethnic conflict, McGarry and O'Leary next take up the issue of devising solutions to such conflicts. They make an important distinction between ordinary political conflicts which can be solved through political transaction—by striking deals between adversaries, preceded by hard bargaining—and ethnic conflicts which are generally harder to solve. McGarry and O'Leary explain the reason in the following words. 'A final reason why ethnic questions are potentially explosive, and raise the possibility that some people(s) will be tempted to exercise self-determination through secession is simple. Ethnic questions raise relatively non-tradeable issues. Nationality, language, territorial homelands and culture are not easily bargained over. They create zero-sum conflicts, and therefore provide

ideal materials for political entrepreneurs interested in creating or dividing political constituencies' (p. 16).

Though ethnic conflict is frequent in societies that gained independence from colonial rule after the Second World War and, more recently, from communist rule, older, stable, rich democracies are not immune to it either. Immigrants within Western Europe are perceived to pose a sub-nationalist threat. How do these societies cope with such problems in terms of their institutions and the liberal political process of conflict resolution? One response, McGarry and O'Leary suggest, is multi-culturalism, which, while seen by some as the most effective solution, is resented by others: 'many liberal democracies which are managing large-scale immigrations, or multiple recently established ethnic communities, have realised that multi-cultural policies make greater sense than straightforward integration or assimilation strategies. They are abandoning the spirit of classical liberalism to manage immigrants' (p. 21). This is a departure from more established practice. 'In England and France at least in previous generations, liberals had a general bias toward integration/assimilation as macro-political forms of ethnic conflict resolution—at least within the metropolitan cores of their empires' (p. 21). Societies caught in the process of transition where different agencies are responsible for implementing the law relating to multi-cultural policies, are out of step with one another. This explains to some extent the difficulties experienced by the UK and France in their attempts to give a concrete shape to the ideal of a multi-cultural society. Germany is a case apart. The revulsion against Nazi genocide led to the incorporation of the right to asylum in the constitution which, some believe, has made Germany the most popular destination of enterprising immigrants. This resentment has manifested itself in a recent spate of racial violence.

The policy of assimilation of ethnic differences, often associated with Social Democrats in European democracies, seeks to resolve ethnic conflict by eliminating ethnic differences. But, in contrast to the first-generation European immigrants to America, many new immigrants from Africa and Asia to Europe do not wish to lose their identity and acquire a new one. The issue gained salience during the controversy over the incident of the head scarf in France where two Muslim students in a state school asserted their right to cover their heads in there traditional way during lessons.

At issue were two principles basic to French society, namely, the universal rights of man to be different, and, the consensus on the secularism of state schools which is opposed to the display of religious symbols within educational institutions though exceptions are made for

the wearing of the crucifix. The desire of members of ethnic communities to maintain their separate identity which French socialists, committed to the right of individuals to choose their own conceptions of the good, find hard to argue against. This difficulty has led to a normative division of opinion between the advocates of cultural integration (who are accused of intolerance) and liberal multi-culturalists (who are accused of surrendering secularism to Islamic 'fundamentalism'). It is of course easy to pick holes in noble arguments of multi-culturalism and the clientele of 'culture bureaucracy' charged with its implementation, its social workers, and interest groups who live off the munificence of the welfare state in the name of its commitments to the multi-cultural ideal. In the end one is still left with the dilemma faced by liberals who are no longer willing to recite the *mantra* of multi-culturalism as if it were unproblematic, but are not at the same time convinced that multi-culturalism can be derived out of, or could be the basis of a new, revisionist liberalism.

The other solutions, whose implications we shall examine later in this article, are consociationalism, which has the multi-cultural society as its goal but does not give in to multi-culturalism, which believes in 'managing differences rather than eliminating them' (p. 21), hegemonic control (p. 23) and cantonisation (p. 31). The former strives to achieve ethnic peace by keeping their cultural differences intact and encouraging bargaining among ethnic leaders to find political conditions of peaceful coexistence. The latter is based on 'coercive domination and elite cooption'. This strategy, more typical of authoritarian rule, seeks to suppress 'latent divisions between ethnic communities' which could otherwise manifest itself in the context of competition for scarce resources. 'The control was hegemonic if it made an overtly violent ethnic contest for state power either unthinkable or unworkable on the part of the subordinated communities' (p. 23).

Cantonisation, the third solution, is geographic in character. 'Under cantonisation the relevant multi-ethnic state is subjected to a micro partition in which political power is devolved to (conceivably very small) political units, each of which enjoys minisovereignty.... Cantonisation decomposes the arena of ethnic conflict and competition into smaller, more manageable units; it involves a negotiable form of internal secession' (p. 31).

Is one solution morally superior to another? McGarry and O'Leary wisely refrain from taking a position on this particularly vexing question: 'there is no obvious moral hierarchy which enables people to claim that integration is better than partition (or vice versa), unless there is widespread consent for one option rather than the other, where widespread consent

refers to substantial majorities within all the relevant ethnic communities. The merits of partition/secession as against integration/assimilation must be decided by political argument and pragmatic considerations, such as feasibility and estimates about long-run efficacy' (p. 6). While advocates of human rights are welcome to indulge in their fond hopes of international legislation on the issue, my sympathies are with the position of McGarry and O'Leary who offer solutions within the structure of nation-state and the normal political process.

IV

Now that we have had a chance to explore the conceptual and methodological problems associated with the ethnicity literature in general and the two books under review in particular, we can turn to the policy recommendations emerging from them. The consociational solution appears to be favoured by McGarry and O'Leary: 'The best normative case for consociational arrangements is that they involve the self-government of the relevant communities, and they are better than the alternative: majority domination, bloody partition, secessionist warfare and the unthinkable options of forced population transfers and genocide' (p. 36). Having said that, however, McGarry and O'Leary admit that consociationalism is not for everybody. They suggest several cultural and structural pre-conditions, of which the most important is that 'the rival segments must not be unreservedly committed to immediate or medium term integration or assimilation of others into their nation or to the creation of their own nation-state.

Several ideas that are implicit in Jeffrey become more obvious when we look at India's Punjab at the time of Independence. Punjab experienced both large-scale mass migration and communal carnage. But the Punjab that emerged from it became a showcase of peace, prosperity and stability, steadily improving her infrastructure and preparing the ground for the agrarian breakthrough of the 1960s that quickly transformed Punjab into India's granary. The violent turnabout of the 1980s is, therefore, puzzling in the light of this record. The answer to this puzzle lies in a range of factors that include, on the one hand, the attempts by the Congress (I) to break into the electoral base of the Akali Dal by taking advantage of the factional rivalry of Sikh leaders and competitive mobilisation of electoral support on the basis of communal identity and, on the other hand, the ever-vigilant followers keeping their leaders on an ideological short-leash. It may be pointed out here that factionalism and machinations of the Congress party to take advantage of splits within the regional leadership is not peculiar to

Punjab and that by itself could not explain the violent turn of events of the 1980s. There is enough truth in the argument to warrant supplementary aspects, specific to Punjab, particularly those dealing with the threat of assimilation brought about by the steady dissolution of Sikh orthodoxy in the form of food, drink, dress, social ties and the presence of heterodox forms of worship such as the Nirankaris. These developments could possibly not have been noticed in the violent form in which it occurred had it not been for another development that paralleled the Green Revolution, documented by Murray Leaf and Vandana Shiva. They point out how some of the affluence coming to villages through greater profitability of agriculture were being transformed into better communal facilities in the Sikh gurdwaras, the hiring of preachers of better quality, more elaborate religious singing and rituals and greater attendance on such occasions. Thus, while economic growth brought about, on the one hand, a secular trend of assimilation, it created or, abetted the growth of institutional watchdogs of the vulnerable Sikh identity, a well-trained group of religious-political functionaries who had a vested interest in the cultivation and popularisation of a separate identity. Since this identity could not draw on visible differences of race, skin pigmentation, region or historical memories of bitter feud and institutional discrimination (in fact, the argument for a separate identity stood to lose from each of these factors), the attempts to fend off real/perceived assimilation turned quickly to the two factors that are the most efficient basis of imagined communities; namely, politics and religion.

This explanation of the turn of events in Punjab draws on six hypotheses which I have advanced to account for the rise of sub-nationalist movements in South Asia.[7] The explanation most appropriate for the present purpose is the role of perceived difference between the identity that cultural nationalists attribute to the regional population and the values they attribute to the central state. Historically, when perceived value difference exceeds a threshold that the more important among the leaders of the ethnic movement consider acceptable, the solutions favoured by the Indian state in the form of consociationalism at the centre (that is, coopting members belonging to specific communities in the central cabinet with the expectation that they would act as intermediaries between the communities concerned and the central government and multi-culturalism in the form of the simultaneous promotion of national and regional languages) are no longer sufficient to contain ethnic violence. Here, cantonisation, in the form of creation of an arena co-termious with the geographic area inhabited by the community concerned (which gives their identity constitutional protection) has been the most effective solution.

The creation of new States and regional councils, an innovative step that has largely contained the ethnic violence of the Gorkhaland and Jharkhand agitations has become a successful strategy in this respect. However, as Gurharpal Singh points out in his conclusion (McGarry and O'Leary, pp. 101-5), the institutional implications of a cantonal solution for Punjab are complex and their political implementation is fraught with potentially grave consequences.

The cantonisation of Punjab (turning Punjab into a State with Sikh character) is problematic, because there are substantial number of Hindus in Punjab outside the six districts where Sikhs constitute the overwhelming majority. In addition, there are very large numbers of Sikhs in other States of India (40 per cent of the total Sikh population by one estimate) who will probably face some backlash as a consequence of this solution. The other source of resistance to this solution, Singh argues, is likely to come from the leadership of Punjabi Hindus who have argued in favour of bringing Punjab into 'mainstream' Hindu society by declaring Hindi and not Punjabi as their mother tongue in the decennial census.

To infer from the difficulties of working out a solution to the ethnic conflict in Punjab that the 'conflict is increasingly irresolvable' (Singh, p. 101) is, however, questionable. Political developments in Punjab over the past years indicate a level of normalcy that provides a new reference point for Singh's contention of the 'alienation of most Sikh political groups from the State's political process' (p. 105). As a matter of fact, Singh's own conclusion belies his earlier pessimism: 'a separate Sikh state today will have the most negative consequences for Sikhs themselves. But if the movement towards such a state becomes irreversible, it will be because the framework of the Indian Union established in 1947 has failed to provide the political, cultural and religious garantees promised to the Sikhs at Independence by the INC's leadership rather than as a historical realisation of *an inevitable process*' (p. 104, emphasis added). The difficulty lies in the inability of the guarantees to Sikhs and other 'minorities' of India in terms of political, cultural and religious institutions that would be acceptable to both India's secular, democratic constitution and would be seen by the ethnic groups as adequate guarantees of their identity.

There is room to manoeuvre only if the actors involved agree that the eventual shape of institutions is also part of the process of bargaining rather than starting from the promise that the existing institutions provide a sacred, moral boundary to political arguments. Thus specific demands such as banning the sale of liquor and meat in the precincts of the Golden Temple, broadcasting *Gurbani* on All India Radio or the use of Gurmukhi script in official business can be seen both as the thin end of the religious

wedge that will rip the Indian state apart or as the opening gambits in a political game of finding acceptable institutions for all communities that must share the same space in a manner that guarantees peace, order and legitimacy.

A political solution to ethnic conflict can be built only on the basis of a consensus on the moral and cultural basis of the political arena within which the conflict takes place. Beyond the room to manoeuvre that the type of institutional space indicated above, of course, is the presence of the toleration of difference as a cultural value. This is where multi-culturalism comes into the analysis as an independent variable. To explain how multi-culturalism affects the institutional space for communal peace, we can draw on a European example. It is possible for a German cafe owner to refuse to serve a Turkish customer (cafes are considered private property in German law) whereas, similar behaviour in France would lead to fines and imprisonment where a different cultural ethos is translated into different legal practice. Public opinion in Bangladesh is tolerant of atrocities against Chakmas and is outraged against an author who speaks up, even fictionally, in defence of beleaguered Hindus whereas the constitution does not deny the right to equal citizenship to any specific group of individuals. For multiculturalism to be effective, there is a need for a convergence between law and society. No political solution to ethnic conflict would be viable in the long run unless it takes into account these basic building blocks of the society in question.

That is also part of the explanation of the puzzle of the turnabout in Punjab where despite terrorist killings of Hindus there has been no case of communal violence against Hindus nor indeed the exclusion of Hindus from Sikh places of worship. The resources necessary for the restoration of the normal political process are present in Punjab. Jeffrey's analysis, while superbly comprehensive and skillful on the uniqueness of Punjab, does not shed sufficient light on what makes Punjab's politics an integral part of mainstream Indian politics.

This variable character of the intensity and spread of ethnic conflict is among the difficult questions with which the student of ethnicity has to come to terms. In the short run, of course, ethnicity, wielding the magic wand of nation-as-an-imaginary-concept can come in handy as a readymade explanation for everything. That such explanations sometimes have great mass appeal is beyond any doubt. Why that should be so is not difficult to understand. How many of those who have lived through the desperate days of the partition of Punjab could have *imagined* the agrarian and material affluence on both sides of the frontier? Those who have experienced the Punjabi diaspora are entitled to be a little daring about

their imagination because they have seen things happen which were at one point considered unimaginable. For the political scientists working on ethnic identity in Punjab, this must be put in historical perspective. A more systematic account will have to take into consideration both the short-term political calculations and the *longue duree*, the appeal of ethnicity at a particular time and place, and the dissolution of the same appeal for the same people at another time or place. It is not people who are fickle-minded; it is the rational actor who responds to different structure of opportunities at different times. The politics of ethnicity can be understood by disaggregating it in terms of the wishes and actions of the individual actors who are implicated and then placing the same actors in the context of the larger political structure and process within which they are located.

Once we change our methodological perspective and arrive at a compromise between the instrumental/transactional and imaginary/transcendental approaches, the empirical research on ethnic conflict would become a very useful source of new data for comparative politics. In return, the scholarship of ethnicity can then benefit from past and ongoing research in other areas of political science, particularly from state formation in post-colonial societies. We learn from research on these societies how the attempt to introduce modern political institutions into transitional societies sometimes 'freezes' a fluid social process into formal and rigid legal codes and political structures. The phenomenon is known to students of state formation as the transformation of the 'segmentary' state with its fluid authority structures and variable territorial boundaries to the relatively fixed structures, functions, roles and territorial basis of the modern state.[8] A single normative hierarchy, reinforced by the political authority of the modern state, replaces the plurality of values of the traditional society. A single political order is imposed upon competing and sometimes complementary value systems of the traditional society which coexisted within the relatively loose authority structure of the segmentary state. As such, once the segmentary states, trying to acquire the institutional structures of modern states, attempt to gain popular legitimacy through democratisation and nation-building, many of the newly acquired modern structures and attributes become the focus of popular resistance.

This phenomenon is well-known to the students of changing societies which are often faced with political disorder and collapse of modern institutions. The main strength of the two books under review is to show under which circumstances the concept of nation is a contested category, and why the process of national integration is fraught with conflict, both actual and potential. The authors provide a detailed account of this process,

based on empirical research and theoretical reasoning in which ethnicity is used as key explanatory concept.

CONCLUSION

Televised images or Balkan bestiality have blinded the ordinary viewers from the positive sides of ethnicity. We tend to forget the fact that most people find a sense of identity and cultural fulfillment within their own ethnic group. One has got to belong somewhere in order to be a universal man. A confident nation-state need have no angst about letting a hundred ethnic identities bloom; for, once secure in their identity, ethnic groups, rather like the inhabitants of Madras-turned-Tamil Nadu, will reinvent their links to the greater political arena like Tamil Nadu did by reinventing the three-language formula which it had earlier rejected. It is about time, therefore, that a concerted effort was made to restore ethnicity where it belongs—as the basic building block of the modern state and citizenship—so that it is no longer seen as a flight from reason. The authors reviewed here alert us to the urgency of the question and provide theoretical and empirical insights that are indispensable for this purpose.

They also bear good tidings for both the area specialist and the comparativist, locked now for over a decade in an internecine war that has seen the field of comparative politics as a whole decline. The much-maligned and long-suffering area expert, used to being treated as the under-labourer of modern social sciences, and told that in his obsession with cultural specificity, he ignores broader political and theoretical developments outside 'his' area, is entitled to ask: has comparative politics developed to the extent where the area specialist might read it with profit and interest? Seen at their best, Jeffrey, and McGarry and O'Leary provide enough reason to believe that there will be need of, and room for, both types of skills and their specific methodologies in comparative politics in the future.

Political scientists working on ethnic conflict today have a real choice to make. They can 'imagine' things and move with the flavour of the month, only to be discarded by a rival group of leaders, whose cause is espoused by a different set of political scientists at the next turn of events. The other alternative is for the political scientist to stay within the categories of political analysis and seek to understand political acts that deviate from mainstream/conventional behaviour though patient and industrious collection of data and their interpretation in a manner that explains both the ordinary as well as the unusual. This course of action has none of the glamour of the first but has the compensating advantage

of leading to the growth of models that are parsimonious as well as more comprehensive. To do otherwise would be to lose the autonomy and rigour that comparative politics has acquired through the patient toil of its post-war founders. The meticulous fieldwork and skilful analysis of Jeffrey, and McGarry and O'Leary have something salutary about them. Above all, they ought to remind both newcomers and established writers in the field of comparative politics that the lure of the soundbite and the two-minute slot of the audio-visual media, if permitted to become anything more than a side-show, could also become the kiss of death for the political science of ethnicity.

Acknowledgements : I am grateful to Katharina Kadel, Sabine Klotz and Gurharpal Singh for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. However, I alone am responsible for the views expressed here.

Notes

1. Jakob Rossel, 'Ethnic Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict', *Politik und Gesellschaft*, 2, (1995), 117-30, provides a good resume of the recent literature. Also refer to David Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991); and Stanley Tambiah, 'Reflections on Communal Violence in South Asia', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49, 4. (1990), 741-61, for a sample of this rich and complex literature.
2. See Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, and Ernst Haas, 'Nationalism: An Instrumental Social Construction', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 22, 3 (1993), 505-41, for a defence of the instrumentalist approach.
3. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
4. The term applies to those who prefer to describe phenomena in terms of actor's categories rather than in terms of externally determined observer's categories. Class, nation, even the external boundaries of an ethnic group, once codified in a census operation can become 'foundations' on which the political experience of a whole people can be subsumed, even though the people thus described, may not accept the legitimacy of the category. Post-foundationalists repudiate the 'fixing' of phenomenon in terms of 'essence' and 'structure' and insist on the affirmation of the heterogeneity of reality. See Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (Winter, 1994), 335.
5. David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), is a good example of the use of tribal identity as a political resource that underpinned the political movement for the assertion of tribal autonomy and power.
6. By denying any internal differentiation within the ethnic group on the conventional lines

of class, region, generation or caste, the exclusive concern with ethnic identity can also legitimise a political stance that is conservative and implicitly authoritarian. See Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (January, 1992), 166.

7. See Subrata Mitra, 'Rational Politics of Cultural Nationalism: Sub-national Movements in South Asia', *The British Journal of Political Science*, 25 (1995), 65.
8. See Burton Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Subrata Mitra, *The Post-colonial State in Asia* (Hemel Hempstead: Wheatsheaf, 1990).

Book Reviews

Contents

K.K. Aziz, *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1993), xvii and 278 pp. Rs 200 (hb). ISBN 969-402-126-X.

The arresting title of this book reflects the author's awareness that he is the first historian within Pakistan to draw attention publicly to the implications of the 'Islamisation' of the history curriculum in schools, colleges and universities which has been taking place since the 1970s. A compulsory course entitled 'Mutala'a-i Pakistan' or 'Pakistan Studies' has replaced the study of history in the conventional sense, at every stage of the educational hierarchy from 1st to 12th grades, and although 'Islamic', and 'Indo-Pakistan History' may still be studied at BA and MA levels, candidates for most other degrees, including vocational ones such as law and medicine, must also continue to take courses in 'Pakistan Studies'. Pupils of private schools and colleges, studying in English rather than Urdu, are required to submit themselves to the 'Pakistan Studies' 'O' level examinations set by three British university examining boards. Since the syllabus for the private as well as the public sector is set by the provincial governments, and the textbooks commissioned by those governments are then vetted at federal government level, Dr Aziz points out that the 'history of the nation' as taught to impressionable children has reflected for nearly two decades the ideology of the Zia ul-Haq era, and although he does not comment on this, it remains the classroom diet even after 1988. It has been Dr Aziz's concern to draw to public attention, first through a long series of articles in the press (*The Frontier Post*), and subsequently in book form, the implications, as he sees them, of indoctrination through history teaching. He has thus set out, first, to identify, discuss and correct hundreds of errors of fact in 66 textbooks used at all levels from 1st to 14th grades, and then to discuss the dangers inherent in the fostering of myth and ideology in the classroom. It is perhaps a reflection of his very justifiable concern that his 'exposure' of this state of affairs in the press seemed to cause hardly a ripple inside Pakistan.

The book is divided into four chapters, the first of which adopts a 'textbook by textbook' approach to illustrate 'the prescribed myths' favoured by the Textbook Boards. The second chapter is thematic in structure, focusing on some 50 particularly significant and recurring 'errors' for closer examination and correction. Among these, issue is taken with the catchwords usually used to describe the events of 1857, notably

'first war of independence' or 'Muslims' last war for freedom', by pointing out the uneven pattern of regional and Muslim participation, and the 'loyalty' to the British of one of the textbook heroes, Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Aziz admits 1857 is something of a conundrum, as there is no scholarly consensus on the causes and nature of the uprisings of that year, but objects to its manipulation to suit ideological dictates. A second 'error' on which he concentrates in both chapters is the 'myth' disseminated by textbook treatment of Iqbal's speech at Allahabad in 1930:

> Every textbook (federal or provincial or private, Urdu or English) from class 2 onwards (congratulations to class 1 on their escape) asserts that in 1930 Iqbal demanded a separate state for the Muslims.

He might have added that many textbooks published in Britain and America continue to give the same impression. From the Pakistani textbooks he then lists some 20 'variations rung on the distortion', which he classifies into six separate 'errors', ranging from a simple mistake in the date and place to the much more significant distortion of the degree of 'separatism' implied in Iqbal's speech, which in Aziz's view was envisaged in 1930 as consisting of one province within an Indian federation, rather than a separate state or states. (He has elaborated this argument in great detail in the first volume of his *A History of the Idea of Pakistan*, published in 1987.) The Lahore Resolution receives particular attention for similar reasons. This document, 'by far the most important of the entire Pakistan movement', has been misquoted, misconstrued, misinterpreted and distorted by *all* textbooks'. After quoting a selection of the distortions, he then cites the Resolution, admitting that it was 'vague, nebulous' and 'ambiguous'. Nevertheless, the document does not bear, he argues, the interpretations favoured by most of these textbook writers: the terms 'Pakistan' and 'Muslim homeland' were used nowhere, and the grouping of geographically contiguous 'units' was envisaged as constituting 'Independent States' rather than the single 'Muslim state' or 'separate homeland/government' favoured by the textbook authors. The failure of the textbook writers to refer to the original Resolution might be linked to a subsequent 'distortion' to which Aziz pays detailed attention: the treatment of 'the Break-up of Pakistan'. He analyses the alleged 'disloyalty' of the population of the East wing, and the Indian conspiracy through which textbook writers account for the war of 1970–71. His corrections constitute an indictment of the various Pakistan governments from 1947 to 1970, whose attitudes and actions he sees as leading inevitably to the demand for secession, for 'West Pakistanis had created such resentment and hatred among the Bengalis that no other solution was in sight' (pp. 154-56). In a later chapter

he criticises the complete 'exclusion' from many of the textbooks of any discussion of Bengal, from the early nineteenth century until 1947.

The third chapter, 'The Road to Ruin', is concerned with the ideological implications of the findings, notably with 'what signals and warnings do the contents of the books send to the nation?' Although it goes without saying, Aziz spells out here the use made of such textbooks by the government-of-the-day in instilling its own values and view of the past into the next generation of adults. Adulation of military government is encouraged by glorification of war and 'struggle', and xenophobia is made respectable by portraying Hindu civilization as inherently 'inferior' and 'bad' (p. 193). The fourth and final chapter continues the same theme with a more explicit exposure of the channels through which the 'Establishment' has used sycophantic teachers and writers to produce texts reflecting these values, as well as the 'errors' and 'distortions' cited in the first two chapters. Appendices list the guilty authors and their publishers. Neither feelings nor reputations are spared.

Dr Aziz has been daring enough to expose, and comment on, the demise of historical scholarship and teaching in Pakistan, and has, in a wide-ranging survey, identified the main types of bias and error. The author, well known for his earlier publications on historical themes connected with the Muslims of the subcontinent during the colonial era, is well placed to take on this responsibility. Those in Britain who are familiar with some of these textbooks through the examination process would probably endorse most of his indictment. Scripts written by candidates fed on such a diet reveal further layers of distortion, presumably created by teachers' classroom glosses on the textbooks, or perhaps, among the more intelligent candidates, by the intellectual confusion of trying to reconcile these texts with other sources of knowledge. A further cause for concern which he does not stress, is the implication of commencing the teaching of the nation's past in the eighteenth century, for apart from an exaggerated emphasis on the Arab invasion of Sind in the eight century AD, these textbooks skim over the 'medieval' era, and virtually ignore the 'pre-Islamic' era except to eulogize the 'Indus Valley' and vilify the 'Hindu' civilizations.

Sadly, however, the tone of the exposure is in parts almost as polemical as the textbooks the author is so justifiably criticising. This is particularly the case when, towards the end of the book, Dr Aziz elaborates on his earlier criticism of the exaggerated praise given to the role of UP province and the Aligarh Movement in the 'Pakistan Movement'. It now becomes clear that the axe he himself is grinding is the almost total neglect in the textbooks of Punjabi, Sindhi and Bengali contributions to the Movement, and the overshadowing of the regional languages by Urdu, the vernacular

of the UP. These omissions are important, alongside the many others to which the author has drawn attention, but would carry more weight among those whose attention he seeks to gain if catalogued rather more eirenically than is the case here. Hearts and minds might be more effectively won by reinforcing the central articles of the indictment (which are many) so that quibbles over miscited dates, some of which are anyway open to argument, might be seen in perspective. (Aziz disputes 14 August as the date of 'the creation of Pakistan'.)

This is, in sum, a timely and daring book, though less likely to achieve the author's goal (the return to objective historical enquiry and teaching) because in his anxiety to expose error and ideological manipulation he has dressed his critique in decidedly purple prose. Rather than causing debate on the issues he has so dramatically raised, it seems that, so far at least, Dr Aziz's concerns are falling on deaf ears.

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Zamir Niazi, *The Web of Censorship*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1994), xix and 236 pp. No price stated. ISBN 0-19-577543-0

The press in Pakistan, with its two main publishing centres in Lahore and Karachi, is well established in terms of the number of titles published in Urdu and in English, and there are journalists with substantial reputations as writers and analysts. Yet the observer cannot avoid feeling that the foundations are weak and that the press's capacity to contribute to a stable democratic order is limited. In this, of course, it does no more than parallel other institutions in Pakistan. The country's periods of 'stability' have been achieved under authoritarian rulers with military backgrounds, while elected governments have usually been in crisis, with survival the main priority. Control over the media has been important for all regimes, and has been achieved through manipulation, coercion and violence, as well as by the direct exercise of government authority, for example, the nationalisation of certain newspapers in the early 1960s and by the imposition of censorship. Proprietors, editors and journalists have often been complicit in these processes, although there have been others who have stood up to the pressures exerted on them and have kept the tradition of a free press alive.

The author of this study, and of other works on the Pakistan press,

Zamir Niazi, is a retired journalist who started his professional career shortly after Independence. His immediate focus here is the early part of the Zia regime, especially the period from 1979 to the beginning of 1982 when the press was subject to direct (pre)censorship. Some measures had been taken immediately after the July 1977 coup, but it was only with the abandonment in 1979 of even the pretence of preparing for elections that full pre-censorship was imposed in October of that year. Under this regime, newspapers had to submit their proofs every night for scrutiny and approval. This was carried out by relatively junior officials in the regional offices of the Press Information Department so that the criteria were crude and often applied heavy-handedly. The press were also sent 'advices' on a more or less daily basis which informed them of which stories were to be handled in specific ways or not covered at all. A further restriction in this period was an amendment in December 1979 (repealed eventually in 1986) to the sections of the penal code dealing with defamation so that the standard defences of truth and public interest were removed.

Niazi gives many examples of the absurdities and contradictions produced by the application of these various measures and of the ways in which newspapers could cope with them. Like their counterparts in India during the censorship imposed during the 1975 state of emergency, editors initially left blank spaces where material had been deleted, although this loophole was stopped. Again paralleling experience elsewhere, seemingly innocuous quotations were used to make political points. Niazi also reproduces 443 of the 'advices' sent to the Karachi newspaper he edited in the February 1980–November 1981 period. It appears that the Press Information Department has destroyed its own copies, so that this book may well represent the only record of the day-to-day work of the censor. It also contains some 22 brief contributions from Pakistani journalists about their personal experiences during this period and their reflections on them. These include a number of revealing anecdotes.

Niazi's book raises major issues, most importantly the willingness of some editors and journalists to internalise the practices of censorship, but its organisation is rather weak and at times repetitive. What is missing is a careful discussion of the position of the press and other media within Pakistan's political system. Such an analysis would undoubtedly contribute to our understanding of the weakness of the country's civil society. But even if this is not the last word on the subject, it is a significant contribution for anyone interested either in the media or in Pakistan politics.

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J.-M. Lafont, *La Prèsence Francaise dans le Royaume Sikh du Punjab 1822-1849)* (Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1992), x and 558 pp. and 15 maps. 200 French francs (hb). ISBN 2-85539-768-5.

History can be a bore, but good history books make wonderful reading. Then one is often bitten by a recurring doubt as to the veracity of a story too good to be true history. This is what a French reader—and a non-specialist at that—is bound to feel when he reads Jean-Marie Lafont's work on the French soldiers in the Punjab, volume 168 of the publications de l'Ecole Française d'Extreme-Orient.

Reading today about early nineteenth century Punjab is fascinating for India watchers. One is in front of two Punjabs, on the one hand the large province which towers above the Islamic republic of Pakistan, on the other the small and rump state, which is a prosperous but sulking part of the Indian Union. How was life in a united kingdom stretching from Peshawar to Jalandhar and Multan and thriving on the eve of its national awakening? How could a Sikh, one-eyed warrior—man of genius as he was—rule over such a vast expanse of territory, over millions of Muslims and Hindus, with horsemen and guns of brass? Why did he call upon knowledge officers of the Napoleonic armies to build his best forces and entrust himself to them? These are some of the questions Professor Lafont started from and tried to answer.

Very well edited and printed, with an admirable index, a thorough bibliography, 15 maps especially designed and abundant notes at the foot of the text—a rare feature nowadays—the 558 pages of this book are a pleasure to use, peruse and read. The language itself is as free of academic or postmodernist jargon as can be wished for.

It tells the story of four soldiers: two Frenchmen, the captain Jean-François Allard, from the ranks, second lieutenant Claude-Auguste Court, from Saint Cyr military academy and two Italians, Jean-Baptiste Ventura from Modena and a Neopolitan, Paolo Avitabile; all demisoldes after 1815 but not resigned to give up. All had travelled through Persia to Hindustan, two at a time, a Frenchman and an Italian each time—Allard and Ventura first (1822), Court and Avitable in 1827. All were eagerly responding to the call of adventure and the lure of wealth. True men of *virtue*, in Stendhal's sense of the word.

In his contribution to the New Cambridge History of India, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, J.S. Grewal mentions the European officers of Ranjit Singh twice, in connection with the introduction of horse artillery in the army (p. 104) and their eagerness to repatriate their earnings to Europe (p. 121). Percival Spear, Wolpert, Kulke and Rothermund, in their respective

histories of India, hardly mention the 'Europeans'. But the main point of Jean-Marie Lafont's work is a challenge to the British historians and their rightful heirs—the Indian and Pakistani scholars—which they will hopefully take up. It can be summed up as follows: the four generals were not merely obedient tools of a powerful master, but active and purposeful agents of a great king. Together with the Diwan Ganga Ram, his son Ayodhya Prasad and his nephew Dina Nath, the Muslim Faqir Azizuddin as well as the Sikh chiefs and vassals, they were the trusted advisers and the loyal jagirdars of Ranjit Singh. Their very presence made the East India Company shiver and watch carefully with good reason apparently. Who knows, nowadays, that Allard was given the command of Peshawar in 1837, to hold the fort and defend the whole kingdom from the Afghan onslaught, conducted in the name of *jihad*? After the death of Allard in January 1839 and the imposition of civil and military honours given to him, Avitabile took over his strategic command until 1843, holding the Khyber Pass at the time of the disastrous Anglo-Afghan war. When the last of the four generals left the Punjab, the kingdom was doomed to fall, undermined by a 'fifth column' of treason and fatal rivalries among affronted clans.

Mercenaries, they were indeed. But with a masterly use of his sources, J.-M. Lafont shows that each of them was more than a soldier of fortune. Allard and Ventura were admitted to the Durbar and took part fully in the policy of the kingdom (p. 183). Ranjit Singh valued Allard's advice so much that he hardly let him go to France in 1835-56, where he was received twice by Louis-Phillipe and had dinner with the royal family. Ventura was held in such high esteem that he was named *qazi* (judge) as well as governor of Lahore, which gave him the third rank at the Court. As for the artillery specialist, General Court, not only did he sponsor Punjabi artists and miniature painters but he conducted on his own geographical and archaeological explorations in the Kabul area and in the North West. According to the author (pp. 325-47), they were among the first Europeans to take a keen interest in the Punjabi and Afghan antiquities.

It is customary to qualify such scholarly work as Lafont's as pioneering in character. One could rather say that, taken together with other recent works by Indian and French scholars, it runs a gauntlet at the traditional British historiography of the European, that is, non-British adventurers in India, thus inciting further research for the greatest benefit of all and of Punjab in particular.

Jean Alphonse Bernard

Nighat Said Khan, Rubina Saigol and Afiya Sherbano Zia (eds), *Locating the Self—Perspectives on Women and Multiple Identities* (Lahore: ASR, 1994), 214 pp. Rs. 300 (hb). ISBN 969-8217-22-3.

This collection is really several books in embryonic form in one cover. As the editors admit in the 'Introduction', 'some of these are completed papers while others are parts of ongoing work such as a Ph.D. thesis or a study. Some are more rooted in an academic tradition while others simply raise an issue of concern' (p. 9). I felt that the resulting unevenness of presentation, length, and styles of exposition and argument did an injustice to the importance of the themes treated. Indeed, I was left with the distinct impression that the editors had simply waited for a sufficient number of papers to arrive and then sorted them into categories as best they could.

On reading the title, I had hoped to gain information, ideas, even clues, as to how social structures, such as law, the education system, the burden of history, religion, ethnic boundaries, the mass media and caste divisions interact with each other and with gender in the Pakistani context. Furthermore, I was hoping that there would be some accounts of investigations in the field which tested hypotheses on women's multiple identity. Only one paper, Nighat Said Khan's 'Identity, Violence and Women: A Reflection on the Partition of India, 1947' went some way towards satisfying this second hope. Nighat's paper also raises issues, particularly methodological ones, which are generalisable to other situations, in many parts of the world, wherever women have been or are caught up in civil war and wars of liberation. She writes:

> The overwhelming memory and perception of Partition is the relentless violence of it. Although we, the researchers, were familiar with it, we were unprepared with the scale and dimensions of it. The pain and horror was not just of what happened but whom it was done by; people that they had lived with and loved. 'Suddenly they turned on us', or 'we knew them', punctuated many of these discussions. The fact that Muslims also did the same was understood as revenge and therefore, at some level, permissible. Women described the violence unselfconsciously but often in the third person. Many said that they had seen the violence but gave details only on instances they said they had heard about. (p. 162)

Nighat and her fellow researchers had to abandon their plan to use oral history and stream of consciousness techniques in interviewing women in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in a more in-depth way about Partition. One of the reasons for this was that they were unable to find a psychologist,

who could help interviewees deal with the memories they were reviving for the research, to commit herself to the work. In explaining this, there is a hint of the structural and personal difficulties which face women researchers in Pakistan, particularly those who are looking at women's issues.

Nighat's paper occurs in the group entitled 'Multiple Identity and Violence'. If I were to choose just one paper from each of the other sections, on: State and ideology; Masculine discourse and women; Circles of captivity and freedom, they would be: Rubina Saigol's on gender in school books as used in state schools in Pakistan; Afiya Sherbano Zia on the reporting of rape cases; and Sheen Farrukh on women and the Mohajir Quami Movement. All these contributions deal with highly topical matters. They accurately cite their sources so that the readers themselves could go to those sources and do their own research. However, they still leave their readership guessing as to the effects of these phenomena on the way women actually see themselves, which could only be established by further research using more ethnographic methods.

Interesting as they were, I felt that the papers on works of literature by, for or about women in Pakistan should have been in another collection entirely. Presumably, their inclusion was part of the editorial collective's desire to be multidisciplinary. I would contend that they would have actually reached a *wider* readership, such as students and teachers of literature, both inside Pakistan and outside, if they were included in a separate volume.

Finally, there was a noticeable lack of any serious study of the impact of satellite television, which is now received in remote villages and watched even by those observing strict *purdah*, on women's lives. Surely, no study of multiple identities in the late-twentieth century is complete without a reference to the globalising tendency of the new technology? Nor was there even any mention of the influence of the rapidly rising rates of female literacy and participation in formal schooling. Taking into account the difficulties of scholarship in Pakistan, particularly for any work which criticises the existing state of society, this book, which is the first of a six-volume series, is a brave start.

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J.E. Llewellyn, *The Arya Samaj as a Fundamentalist Movement: A Study in Comparative Fundamentalism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 288pp. Rs 350 (hb).

Colonial rule in India brought with it the forces of modernisation to which the main religious communities responded by giving rise to various revivalist movements. Founded by the wandering Gujarati Brahmin holy man, Dayanand Saraswati, the Arya Samaj was one such movement which responded to the process of cultural change by offering an interpretation of Hinduism that appealed to large sections of the Punjabi Hindu community as one that suited the new conditions. The vision that Dayanand offered rested on his interpretation of the most ancient texts of Hinduism. For him a corrupted and superstitious Hinduism could only meet the challenge of the new times by regaining its ancient pristine purity. It had to purge itself of the decadent state which had come about as a result of deviation from the Vedas.

Dayanand methodically tackled the ancient texts in his search for the truth and offered an interpretation that in a few years after his death saw the Arya Samaj establish itself as arguably the most important Hindu reform movement in the Punjab. Seen by many of its adherents as a modernist progressive movement, the Arya Samaj is also seen as a fundamentalist one by many. But whereas most writers have looked at the Arya Samaj within a largely Indian context, albeit one that takes into account fundamentalist movements in other religious traditions, Llewellyn while adopting a somewhat similar approach, also departs from it by comparing it with an indigenous one, the Muslim Jama'at-i-Islami and a Western one, the North American Protestant fundamentalist Bob Jones University. Innovative though this approach is, it ultimately suffers from a fundamental weakness. Whereas Kenneth Jones (*Arya Dharm*) and many others have explored the Arya Samaj and the phenomenon of fundamentalism within the context of the material as well as cultural context of the times, Llewellyn's analysis rests largely on the founders of the three movements' reading and interpretation of the scriptures. A number of important questions therefore go unaddressed.

Dayanand Saraswati's interpretation of the scriptures undoubtedly played a key role in the success of the Arya Samaj, but is was not the only reason. Other reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj also offered an interpretation of Hinduism that they felt were more suited to meet the challenge of modernity but failed to find the same level of success as the Arya Samaj. The overemphasis on Dayanand's interpretation of the scriptures also offers an inadequate explanation as to why, despite his Gujarati

origins, his message only really found a receptive audience among Punjabi Hindus and even then only within a section of that community, that is the Khatri trading castes. Any analysis of this kind needs to take the specific materials of the Punjab before Partition into account. How else does one explain the rapid decline of the Samaj in the province after Independence?

Studying the Arya Samaj in comparison with other fundamentalist movements, while being innovative in style, nevertheless serves to constrain Llewellyn's analysis. Comparisons with Bob Jones University can only go so far. It is not easy to imagine Bob Jones accepting many practising Jewish or Catholic students, yet even in the heavily communalised political conditions of pre-Partition Punjab, the Arya Samaj's educational institutions continued to attract Muslim and Sikh students in substantial numbers. The key feature of the Samaj's history needed to be a focus of the study. The Samaj was in reality a broader church than Llewellyn acknowledges. While many may well have been attracted to it by Dayanand's interpretation of the Vedas as one suited to the conditions of modernity, for others the motivation was more complex. The quality of the Samaj's educational provision was and continues to be a major cause for its success. Many prominent Aryas such as Lala Lajpat Rai were as much influenced by the ideology of secular nationalism as they were by Dayanand's interpretation of the Vedas.

This book makes a lively, though not entirely original, contribution to the study of Dayanand's interpretation of the scriptures. It does however, leave a lot more questions unanswered than it addresses. Like many macro studies of its kind, it ends up overlooking the local grassroots complexities of fundamentalism. A shift to a micro approach for an issue of this nature is necessary in order to revitalise the subject.

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Patwant Singh, *Of Dreams and Demons: An Indian Memoir* (London: Duckworth, 1994), x and 206 pp. £16.99 (hb). ISBN 0-7156-2498-9.

This is an autobiographical account of his life by Patwant Singh set in the larger historical context of India from the 1930s to 1990s. It is a fascinating example of weaving the micro-unit of an individual's life into the macro-fabric of a country's history. Autobiography is an important—though at times problematic—source material for constructing the history of a place

and its people. It is an important source for at least two main reasons: one, it provides a self-view of some members of the nation, community, class or profession and two, it provides crucial information and insights about individuals and events which no other source can provide. It is problematic, however, because the material forming the autobiography is self- selected and very rarely does one find an autobiography which is not self-congratulatory. An awareness of the potentialities and limitations of an autobiography as a historical source material can lead to a critically fruitful use of this source material.

By giving us his autobiography Patwant Singh has enriched our understanding of many events and personalities who have contributed to shaping the recent history of India, Punjab and the Sikhs. The book is intended mainly for the international readership. Going by the number of reviews of this book published in India and abroad (including in the *Time* magazine), it would not be an exaggeration to say that it might be the most reviewed autobiography of any Punjabi or even of any Indian in recent times. This aspect itself could be considered as an interesting post-autobiographical aspect of Patwant Singh's life.

Patwant Singh comes from a Westernised upper class segment of the Sikhs who are inspired by the humanistic and egalitarian heritage of their faith. He has had a very successful career as a writer, journalist and architect. He has written extensively for Indian newspapers and his articles have appeared in the United States, Canada and Europe. One of his books, *The Struggle for Power in Asia* (Hutchinson, 1974), had a French edition also. He has travelled widely and has broadcast frequently on radio and television in many countries. From 1957 to 1988, he was editor and publisher of *Design*, an international magazine of architecture, the visual arts and industrial design which had a profound impact on the politics of urban planning in India.

The most interesting aspect of his life story is the changing emphasis and interpenetration of his different identities at different stages in his life: class, profession, religion and nation. The running theme, however, is the inspiration he seems to draw from his Sikh identity. On the first page itself, he describes his experience of going to a convent school in Delhi which predominantly had children from English families and his militant response to jibes at his turban which led him into fistfights even with older children. On the last pages of the book, he recalls the lessons on Sikh history taught by his mother which emphasised courage and valour in resisting tyranny.

Beginning in the 1930s and ending in the 1990s, each chapter covers a decade of his life enmeshed in the life of the country. The story gathers

tragic pace in the 1970s, the decade of Indira Gandhi, with its increasing authoritarianism, greed and corruption, as the idyllic dream of Independent India began to fade after the relative stability of the Nehru era. Indira Gandhi's assassination is put in the perspective of the religious sectarianism and violence engineered against the Golden Temple at Amritsar. This is the most painful period for any Punjabi in the post-Independence period and Patwant Singh describes brilliantly his personal anguish, the trauma of the Sikh community, the courageous sensitivity of some non-Sikhs and the blatant anti-Sikh sectarianism of the 'mainstream' media in India. He follows this up by examining the ill-advised intervention by Rajiv Gandhi in Sri Lanka which led to his murder. He provocatively calls the 1990s the end of the dream and charts the rise of the BJP, the right-wing Hindu party, after the destruction of the Babri mosque at Ayodhya. A child who grew up with dreams in the 1930s finds himself surrounded by demons in the 1990s.

Patwant Singh has been actively involved in a mediatory role in conflict resolution in the troubled affairs of Punjab. He has interacted with all the Indian prime ministers from Indira Gandhi onwards and all the top political leaders of Punjab. His description of some of the encounters with these leaders is of significant historical value. For example, he describes a meeting he had, along with a few eminent Punjabis, with Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India, on 1 November 1984, just a day after Indira Gandhi's assassination. They had gone to plead with him to use his constitutional powers to stop the anti-Sikh carnage going on in Delhi. The President of India, Patwant Singh puts on record, said he did not have the powers to intervene.

Patwant Singh also draws brilliant character sketches of some politicians. For example, he describes Gurcharan Singh Tohra, the president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee as 'a politician to the core, he is the only one among the Sikhs wily enough to outwit a conclave of Brahmins without unduly straining himself'.

Not many eminent Punjabis have written their autobiographies. Patwant Singh's may inspire others to write. And that would be a welcome addition to the literature on understanding Punjab's history, culture and politics.

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Thomas Keneally, *A River Town* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 330 pp. £15.99 (hb). ISBN 0-340-61093-X.

Australia has a number of fine fiction writers, and Thomas Keneally may be the best known of the lot. Author of more than 20 novels, Keneally tells readable tales, promotes an Australian republic and revels in his Irish Catholic background.

Why does this qualify his latest novel, *A River Town*, for review in the *International Journal of Punjab Studies (IJPS)*? Because *A River Town*, set in a country town in northern New South Wales at the turn of the century, has a Punjabi Muslim—Bandy Habash—as one of its chief characters.

As I read the book, and as Keneally put Bandy Habash through his paces, I recalled a Spike Milligan piece where the character turns to the author and says: 'Look at these ears you've written for me! What kind of a writer are you to write me such a rotten set of ears?' The Bandy Habash character is a bit like that.

Bandy Habash, a successful pedlar, provides a foil to Tim Shea, the protagonist, an unsuccessful Irish shopkeeper trying to cope with Boer War jingoism, an outbreak of plague, impending bankruptcy and an unidentified dead girl. (The local policeman, seeking to identify her, carries her severed head round in a jar). Bandy Habash likes fast horses, talks like Peter Sellers ('Oh, Mr Tim, my dear chap ...', etc.), nearly marries Shea's sister-in-law, gets another girl pregnant and converts to Catholicism. His role in the book is to provide Shea, the suspect Irishman, with another victim of the British Empire. ('"We need to circumvent the hatred they [the British] have always had for us," said Bandy like a Fenian. "Your wife and I, Tim, have devised an arrangement".' [p. 310].)

A few readers of the *IJPS* may want to read the novel to discover what a contemporary Australian writer thinks a Punjabi trader might have been like a hundred years ago. Beyond that, readers interested in the remarkable connections between Punjab and Australia will want to consult Marie M. de Lepervanche, *Indians in a White Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), A. T. Yarwood, *Walers: Australian Horses Abroad* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 1989) and Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques and Ghantowns: A History of Afghan Camel Drivers in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
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The University of Michigan seeks candidates for a tenure-track or tenured endowed position in Sikh Studies, beginning in September 1997. This endowed chair is intended to promote the study of Sikh culture, history, literature, philosophy, and religion, which expands the University's teaching and research activities in South Asian civilizations. The appointment may be located among departments that include Asian Languages and Cultures, Anthropology, Comparative Literature, Film and Video, History, Philosophy, and Sociology. Qualifications include a Ph.D. in an appropriate social science or humanities discipline, native or near-native competence in Panjabi, the ability to situate the study of Sikh topics within the broader study of South Asia, and the capacity to link Sikh studies with the theory, methodologies, and knowledge of a social science or humanities discipline. Teaching duties, to be determined by the successful applicant's academic background, will include courses which integrate Sikh studies with a liberal arts discipline and the study of South Asia, and may include the teaching of Panjabi. Materials received by May 1, 1996 will receive first consideration, but applications will be reviewed until the position is filled.

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Forthcoming in 1996

Cloth and Commerce
Textiles in Colonial India

Edited by **Tirthankar Roy**

Textiles were a catalyst in Europe's trade with the Indian subcontinent in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, reflecting not only a new demand for cloth, but also the size and diversity of the handloom weaving industry in the regions that came in contact with Europe. Over the next 200 years the nature of the encounter between foreign trade, markets, and textile production changed dramatically. This volume presents a set of influential essays which contribute to understanding this transition.

Among the specific themes dealt with are the scale of export market expansion, its effects on artisans, especially on production and exchange institutions, the impact of competition between artisans and machinery, and de-industrialization—its extent, timing and limits. Overall this volume explores the relationship between commerce, industry and economic growth in the evolution of the regional economy.

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